It's in the Stars (It's been Written in the Scars/On our Hearts)

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/9130921.

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<td>Supergirl (TV 2015)</td>
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<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Kara Danvers/Lena Luthor, Alex Danvers/Maggie Sawyer</td>
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<td>Kara Danvers, Alex Danvers, Lena Luthor, Maggie Sawyer, Sara Lance, Hank Henshaw</td>
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<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Angst with a Happy Ending, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Slow Burn, The Danvers Sisters Being their Generally Awesome Selves, Lena the Gay and her Bisexual Best Friend, Gay Bars Galore, Really Just Bars in General Galore, Season 2 Alternate Ending, Canon Divergent Post 2x08, Supercorp and Sanvers are Endgame, The Alien Bar of course, SuperCorp, Eventual Smut, Canon-Typical Violence, But not a lot of violence like AT ALL, More fluff than violence, No Lesbians Die, Minor Character Death</td>
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<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2016-12-31 Completed: 2017-08-16 Chapters: 34/34 Words: 204321</td>
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It's in the Stars (It's been Written in the Scars/On our Hearts)
by katevw8

Summary

Kara Danvers was still getting used to her dual identity: CatCo reporter by day, Supergirl by night—or, you know, whenever disaster (or hostile aliens) decided to strike. When Lena Luthor showed up in National City claiming she wanted to transform her notoriously anti-alien family’s company into a “force for good,” Kara wasn’t sure what to believe. Was Lena really as different from her Super-hating brother and mother as she seemed? And why was it that Kara couldn’t seem to stop thinking about her lovely—er, her brilliant—about her?

When she’d moved her father’s company to National City, Lena had hoped to turn over a new leaf both for the embattled corporation and for the Luthor name. But with first Lex sending his goons after her and now their mother doing a convincing stint as the devil incarnate, those plans had flown out the window. At this point, Lena was just trying to weather the latest assault and survive a potential coup by L Corp’s board—oh, and deal with the highly inconvenient crush she had somehow managed to develop on Superman’s cousin.
AKA, slow burn post-Medusa Supercorp with a side of Sanvers. There Will Be Angst but also There Will Be A Happy Ending, Damn It.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Kara couldn’t stop thinking about Lena Luthor. Here she was on Barry's Earth, and instead of focusing on his motley crew of mismatched friends—if you could call them that; she honestly wasn’t sure—or simply pondering the enigma that was the existence of actual alternate dimensions, her brain insisted on returning to the scene at the Port: Lena looking poised and elegant, her green eyes somehow paler than usual as she launched the Cadmus rocket; J’onn lifting his face to the sky while what he—and Kara, too—had believed were lethal spores tinged the air with red; Lillian Luthor’s voice hardening as she accused her daughter of betraying her; and, finally, Lena’s troubled gaze lingering on the police car that carried her mother away, its lights flashing eerily against nearby cranes and shipping containers.

Maybe she couldn’t let it go because something about the scene still seemed so wrong. Was it that she had hesitated at such a crucial moment? She could have—should have—used her super-speed to stop Lena from turning the launch key, but she had been so certain that Lena Was Good™ that she had remained where she was. The fate of the entire alien population of National City had been at stake, and still she’d only stood there, unable to accept what she was seeing.

When Barry and Cisco appeared in her apartment the following day, she’d jumped at the chance to escape her own dimension. Maybe a brief off-world adventure—a working superhero holiday, as she thought of it—would clear her head of her post-Medusa hangover. And yeah, helping a team of metahumans battle the Dominators, a notorious alien race who figured prominently in Krypton’s history, certainly held her attention. Other than the whole evil mind control/trying to kill your friends bit, the operation was more of what she was used to in her work with the DEO: find the bad guys, whip them in one or more battles of varying length and difficulty, and celebrate the straightforward triumph of good over evil afterward.

On stage at the post-Dominator-whooping ceremony back at Barry’s hangar, she held her head high, trying to stay focused on this Earth. But as the new president finished her speech by declaring that everyone up there was a hero, the words Kara had spoken to Lena on their Earth came back to her: “Be your own hero.”

To which, after a long moment, Lena had responded, “You can leave the same way you came in.” And then she’d picked up her tablet, gaze fixed on the screen as if the facts and figures displayed there held far more meaning than anything Kara might have to say.

She remembered staring at Lena, remembered wanting to rip the tablet from her unsteady fingers, to somehow make her see that as a force for good she could be more powerful than her hate-filled mother and brother would ever be. But instead she’d stalked past the other woman and vaulted from her balcony, assuring herself as she flew borderline recklessly back to DEO headquarters that she was only this upset because so many lives were at risk. It wasn’t Lena’s expression—eyes narrowed and lips pursed in defiance—that had set her off. It wasn’t the other emotion, either, she’d seen flit across Lena’s face that made her want to beat the crap out of a car. Lena had shot her that same wounded look at the Port, and now Kara couldn’t seem to unsee the hurt blossoming in her eyes.

The president’s speech ended, and as the crowd applauded the assembled heroes, Kara looked out across the unfamiliar faces and wondered if Lena Luthor existed on this planet. If she did, was she a Luthor at all, or had she instead been raised by her biological parents? Might she have grown into a happier, less lonely person without the murderous actions of her adopted family shadowing her every move? For that matter, did the Danvers exist in this dimension? She was tempted to fly out of the hangar at once to track them all down: to see if Jeremiah and Eliza lived together in a house by the
sea; if Alex had become a well-adjusted, happily gay doctor; if Lena had invented an alternate version of Instagram here on this Earth where apparently the only aliens were the ones Kara had just helped defeat.

She was still fighting the urge to zoom off on the interdimensional equivalent of rubbernecking when Sara Lance, AKA the White Canary—which Kara had to say wasn’t the most intimidating superhero name she had ever heard, though she imagined that was a bit like the pot calling the kettle black—sided up to her and asked if she wanted to grab a drink now that “all of this” was over.

“Oh. Oh.” Kara laughed a little and fiddled with her glasses. “Um, thanks, really, but I should, you know, be getting back to my own world. They’re probably looking for me by now.”

“Didn’t Cisco tell you he can send you back to the moment you left? No one ever has to know you were gone.”

“Yes,” she said. “I forgot. Must have been the mind control thingie. Poof! Drove it right out of my head!”

Sara trailed her fingers along the edges of Kara’s shirt collar. “How about that drink then? What do you say, Supergirl?”

Kara swallowed and glanced down at the other woman’s hand as it dipped lower. Her fingers were slender, pretty in a way, so different from Mon-El’s blunter digits or James’s capable photographer’s hands, and she could feel the heat of their touch through her layers, soft and almost tantalizing as Sara smoothed the wrinkles from her sweater…

She blinked. “No, um, thanks, but I—I can’t. I’m pretty sure you’d rather hang out with my sister, anyway, not me.”

Sara looked intrigued. “Does she have super powers, too?”

“No, nothing like that. It’s just, she came out recently. You know, as gay? Not that I think you’re hitting on me,” she added hurriedly, squeezing her hands together in front of her. “I mean, it’s fine if you are because I’m totally okay with that. I just don’t want to make any assumptions because you know what they say about assuming—”

Sara laughed. “Relax, Kara. This was absolutely me hitting on you. But you know what they say about the queers, don’t you?”

Kara shook her head, hoping her glasses hid her wince. Maybe “queer” was one of those slurs only the members of the targeted minority group were allowed to use.

“Apparently the gay gene runs in families, dontcha know.” And with that, Sara winked and turned away, leaving her to ponder the strange swooping feeling in her chest engendered by the other woman’s pronouncement.

Was there really a gay gene, or was that true only in this dimension? Not that it mattered, of course, since she and Alex weren’t technically related or even, you know, the same species.

Soon it was time to say goodbye to Barry and Oliver Queen, who had come around from his anti-alien stance enough to tolerate a group hug. Cisco handed over his gizmo, the interdimensional extrapolator—with startlingly little instruction—and a little while later, after she’d had a chat with the president but before she could give in to her voyeuristic alt-Earth tendencies, she took a breath and stepped through the portal.
Once again it was like flying without the ability to guide herself, and oh, did she mention there wasn’t any air? Thankfully the transit between dimensions was over almost immediately, and she landed in her own apartment to find sunlight still streaming in her windows, the groceries she’d grabbed on her way home from work and the note she’d left Alex (just in case evil fared better on the other Earth) waiting right where she’d left them.

Quickly she crumpled the note and then burned it for good measure in a metal trashcan she kept on hand for such emergencies because honestly, she had no intention of telling her overprotective sister what she’d gotten up to on the other Earth. With the paper still smoldering, she used her super-speed to prepare a pair of PB&J sandwiches, demolishing the first before she’d finished making the second. She was starving. Seriously, she’d expected better from Barry in terms of provisions. After all, he needed nearly as many calories as she did to maintain his metabolic rate. Though she supposed the dearth of snacks made sense. They _had_ been busy over the last couple of days.

So busy, in fact, that she was left feeling a bit uneasy now that she was alone in her apartment back on her Earth. The real world was still here, and the events of what was technically the night before were still hanging heavily over everything she thought and did. Her little getaway had changed nothing, except to leave her even more confused, if possible. For a moment, she pictured Lena staring accusingly at her, heard her saying, “I thought you were different.” And, “How long before you come after me?”

Lena’s words had reminded her of what Maxwell Lord had once said: that she and her cousin posed a serious threat to Earth; that they and the power they wielded should not be trusted.

And yes, she’d learned in high school civics class that absolute power has a troublesome tendency to corrupt. But, _Rao_, why couldn’t they accept that she and Kal-El meant their world no harm? In fact, they had dedicated their lives to protecting their adopted home and its inhabitants, across multiple dimensions even. She would never willingly—i.e., without the influence of poorly manufactured synthetic Kryptonite or, say, alien brain-melding techniques—hurt anyone, human or alien. Well, unless they deserved it, like the Dominators.

Still hungry, she grabbed a container of ice cream from the freezer and threw herself on the couch hard enough that it creaked. _Whoops_. She should probably be more careful. Alex loved this couch, and a junior reporter’s salary at CatCo wasn’t exactly the big leagues. Alex. Huh. Come to think of it, she hadn’t heard much from her sister today. They had been at the DEO late the night before, filing reports and celebrating J’onn’s and Mon-El’s recoveries, but still, Alex usually checked in on her the day after an operation of Medusa’s magnitude. Where was she? Assuming she hadn’t gone off on her own interdimensional adventure.

One way to find out. Kara reached for her phone.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

It took Alex precisely three minutes to work out that Kara was trying to hide something from her. To be fair, that was three minutes longer than Kara needed to deduce that something had changed with her.

“Pot stickers!” Kara crowed as she ushered Alex into her apartment. “How did you know I was in the mood for Chinese?”

“Call it a hunch.” Alex’s hands were suddenly empty as Kara relieved her of the plastic bag adorned with the name of their favorite Asian restaurant.

“You are seriously the best sister ever.” She set the bag on the kitchen island and then paused. “Wait a minute. There’s something different about you. Are you glowing?”

Alex rolled her eyes, hoping Kara wouldn’t detect the slight spike in her heart rate. “Of course not,” she said, and brushed past to wash up at the kitchen sink.

“There is a distinct glow emanating from you, Alex. What’s going on? You don’t glow. I mean, you glower, sure, but… Were you exposed to radiation? Does J’onn know? Does Mom know?”

“Ha, ha.” She dried her hands on a kitchen towel, resisting the urge to smack her sister. Kara would reciprocate, and chances were she would offer more of a wallop than a whack.

Kara’s head tilted. “Did something happen with Maggie? I swear, Alex, I was only gone for—” She stopped, blinking rapidly like she always did when her mouth moved faster than her brain.

“You went somewhere?” Alex asked, watching as Kara’s arms flailed slightly. “When?”

“Um, I popped out at lunch. Just a quick trip east, not even worth mentioning.”

“East? Does that mean you went to Chicago for pizza and didn’t bring me anything?”

“Right,” Kara said brightly. “I, uh, went to Chicago but your food truck was, um, out of service. Closed for repairs, I think it said. The sign, that is, because of course there would be a sign if it were closed.”

Alex pulled up Instagram on her phone. Honestly, it was a good thing her little sister had all those powers because she couldn’t lie to save her own life, let alone anyone else’s. She scrolled down and stopped, turning her screen so Kara could see it. “Funny, it doesn’t look closed in this photo from TODAY. Let’s try this again: Where did you go, and does it have anything to do with that box lying on your bedside table?”

Mouth open, Kara sputtered incoherently. Then she demanded, “Are you spying on me now?”

“What? Your bedroom literally doesn't have a door. I can see it from here.”

“Oh. Right.”
Alex frowned, noting the way her sister gripped the edge of the kitchen island so tightly that a corner of the wood was in danger of warping. “Seriously, what is going on? You’re starting to legitimately worry me.”

For a moment, Kara tapped her fingers against the island faster than the human eye could follow. “Okay. But can we pause first to appreciate the fact that I am currently in one piece, without so much as a scratch, which is more than can be said for most of the DEO assignments you and J’onn send me out on?”

“Kara Zor-El Danvers…”

Her sister waved her arms in the air, coming dangerously close to Alex’s face. “Everything went perfectly fine! Except, well, maybe there were a few iffy moments. But it wasn’t like I was fighting those aliens alone! Barry was there, and so was Oliver and Sara and—”

“Barry!” Alex shook her head. “So it was him the other night. Which, thank you very much, I was all ready to tell mom I’m queer as a two-dollar bill when he goes and throws off the whole thing.”

Kara blinked at her. “Two-dollar bills are perfectly acceptable tender…” She stopped, Alex’s significant eyebrow waggling apparently sinking in. “Oh, I get it. They’re rare, but they aren’t—”

“—abnormal. Exactly.”

Alex was still new to the whole gay thing, but as a recovering academic, her customary response to something she didn’t understand was to research the crap out of it. One website she’d found had contained a guide to lesbian and gay language that had been particularly useful. A “dyketionary,” as one commenter had called it.

“That reminds me,” Kara said, her brow knitting, “is ‘queer’ one of those terms you can use only if you are?”

“Yes. Now tell me where you really went or I’m calling J’onn. And Mom.”

“Fine, but only if we can eat while we talk. Otherwise I might pass out. I’m not kidding, Alex—I’ve only had two sandwiches and half a pint of ice cream all day.”

They sat kitty-corner on stools at the island, foregoing plates because why make more dishes? As Alex pushed three of the four containers toward Kara, she pretended not to hear her sister’s whispered, “Come to me, my tiny delicious dumplings.” It was significantly harder to pretend she wasn’t furious when Kara confessed that she had spent the past forty-eight hours and some change in an alternate dimension, where she’d joined a team of metahumans and risked her life to save their world—all without informing a single person on her own world.

Fucking Barry. If he ever dared show his face again in this dimension, she was going to kick his ass, superhuman speed be damned.

“That’s it,” she said when Kara finished her story. “You are officially no longer my favorite person.”

“Come on, Alex.”

“No, I’m serious, Kara. I can’t believe you took off without telling me!” Then she paused. Actually, that part made sense. Kara must have known she would use everything at her disposal to prevent such shenanigans, including but not limited to emotional blackmail, imprisonment, and Kryptonite. “Scratch that. I can’t believe you thought you could hide this from me.”
Mouth full, Kara nodded as if to say yes, she had indeed been crazy to ever entertain such a thought.

“You left a note at least, didn’t you?” As Kara nodded again, Alex’s synapses fired. “Oh, that’s why it smelled like smoke in here! I thought maybe you’d tried to cook again. Well, good. You wouldn’t want us arresting some perfectly innocent person and locking them away for the rest of their natural lives, would you?”

Her sister looked up at her quickly. “Lojk hir?”

“Yeah, I got nothing from that.”

Kara swallowed what appeared to be a dangerously large bite and said quickly, “Like who?”

“Maxwell Lord, for one. Why, who did you think I meant?”

“No one.”

But she wouldn’t meet her gaze and she was doing her fast-blink tell again. Why did Kara even bother trying to lie when she knew Alex would catch her out every time? It wasn’t only that Alex had extensive training in the art and science of detecting falsehoods. It was also that Kara had always been the type of person whose emotions were readily apparent, even to complete strangers.

“Who, Kara?”

She lowered her chop sticks. “Lena. Luthor.”

“You don’t have to use her last name. It’s not like there are dozens of potential threats out there named Lena. At least, I hope not.”

“She’s not a potential threat!” Kara’s gaze was suddenly so fierce Alex almost flinched, visions of heat vision dancing in her head. “Hank Henshaw nearly killed her right in front of me, Alex. If I hadn’t been there… Does she actually have to die for you to believe she isn’t in cahoots with the rest of her family?”

The better question was why, each time someone questioned Lena Luthor’s loyalties, Kara immediately leapt to her defense. Alex had known her sister and the L Corp executive were friendly, but she hadn’t realized they were that close. Being tight with James, she could understand; Winn, you betcha. Even Cat Grant made a modicum of sense. But a Luthor?

“Obviously I don’t want her to die,” she said. “But I have to admit, I did believe she was siding with Cadmus yesterday, at least in the beginning. You did too, didn’t you?”

Kara stabbed a dumpling with her chopsticks. “No. I don’t know. Maybe.”

“In the end, though, I think she was only trying to make sure no one got hurt. Maggie said last night that Lena tipped off the NCPD.”

“You talked to Maggie last night? I thought she was out of commission after the attack at L Corp.”

“She was. I stitched her up myself.” Which was definitely not essential information. Apparently sometimes her brain couldn’t keep up with her mouth either, especially where a certain detective who smelled amazing and kissed like a goddess was involved.

“I’ll bet you did.” Kara’s frown eased into a more characteristic smile. “You went to check on her last night, didn’t you?”
“Actually,” Alex said, a melty, goofy grin hijacking her face, “she came to check on me.”

“Alex!” Kara’s grin was nearly as wide as hers. “Did you finally get the girl?”

“I think we got each other.”

She and Maggie hadn’t really talked about what they were doing, but Alex was trying to simply enjoy the moment and go with the flow. It didn’t help that doing so was basically the opposite of every impulse that had ever crossed her conscious mind, but Maggie was worth it. Besides, getting outside your comfort zone was supposed to be a good thing. Right.

“I knew she liked you!” Kara slapped her shoulder, nearly knocking her from her perch. “Okay, so what did she say? Did she kiss you or did you kiss her? And when exactly did all of this happen?”

Alex laughed. Although, in reality, it might have been more of a giggle. “Easy there, Supergirl. We don’t want you hitting your head on the ceiling again.”

Kara rolled her eyes. “I haven’t done that since I was fifteen. Now, come on. Spill.”

Later, after they’d finished enough food to feed a small army and she’d related more details than either of them was entirely comfortable with—“Eww, Alex, I didn’t need to know she wasn’t wearing a bra!”—they moved to Kara’s enormously comfy couch, each armed with her own pint of ice cream.

“And here I thought I had a big few days…” Kara smiled sideways at her. “I told you Mom would be fine with it, didn’t I?”

“I bow to your superior wisdom, oh alien sister.”

“Damn straight. Or, well, maybe not straight per se, but you know what I mean.”

“Yes, Kara, I know what you mean.”

They ate in silence for a little while, TV tuned to a cooking show because while Kara might not be the best cook in the world, or, like, any kind of cook at all, she loved watching professional chefs at work, and Alex loved how involved her sister could become in the on-screen drama.

Tonight, though, she seemed distracted. Alex waited her out, and finally Kara blurted, “Do you know if being gay runs in families? Like, could there be a gay gene, or do you think it’s more nurture than nature?”

“Wait, what?” She hit the mute button and turned so she could see her sister better.

Kara promptly looked down, letting her loose hair hide her face. “It was only something Sara Lance said.”

“I think I’m going to need some context.”

“Fine. But switch first.”

They traded ice cream containers, and then, haltingly, Kara relayed her conversation with a metahuman called the White Canary—which, really? Even “The Flash” was a better title than that. Unflattering name aside, though, this chick sounded pretty badass. Except for the part where she had tried to hit on Kara.

“I’m sorry,” Alex said, wincing on her behalf.
“Why are you sorry?”

“I don’t know. You’re straight. It can’t have been comfortable for you.”

“Do you know how many men have hit on me? Winn actually kissed me—talk about uncomfortable—and I didn’t hear you apologizing for him.”

“First of all, I was surprised he had the guts, and secondly, I’m not a straight man,” she pointed out. And yes, she could see what Kara was getting at, but it was still strange to think about another woman being interested in her little sister.

Kara frowned at her. “You’ve heard of internalized homophobia, haven’t you?” As Alex’s eyes widened, she added, “What? You’re not the only one who likes to do research.”

“I know that.” She hesitated, wondering how to word the question blazing neon lights in her brain. “For the record, I’m not aware of a study that proves that homosexuality is or isn’t a biological trait with possible genetic markers, but that doesn’t mean one doesn’t exist. Also, my sense is that people who come from open and supporting families of origin are more likely to come out earlier in life, but that’s mostly based on limited anecdotal evidence, so I wouldn’t quote me on that.”

“Ah. Got it.” Kara stared at the television again.

“Can I ask: Are you just curious about the genetic thing, or are you asking for a different reason?”

She looked genuinely confused. “What other reason would there be?”

Unlike her sister, Alex had always lied with relative ease, especially where Kara’s well-being might be at stake. “I don’t know. I thought maybe you were trying to say you thought someone else in the family was gay. Like Great Aunt Gertrude. I mean, she definitely has the cat-to-human ratio thing going…”

“Be nice. You know she loves cats.”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying.” Alex waggled her eyebrows again, wondering if Kara would catch the reference.

“What?” And then it clicked, and Kara was shoving her away, but gently, clearly taking care not to hurt her. “Gross!”

And whew, Kara was smiling again, which meant Alex could relax too.

The cooking show dramatics continued, but Alex wasn’t really paying attention. Instead she was thinking about how Kara could have died on Alt-Earth, as she’d called it, and Alex and their mom, J’onn and all their friends—even Lena Luthor—might never have known what had happened to her. Kara’s drive to help others had always been there, but that impulse had put her at risk almost continually since she’d assumed the role of Supergirl. It was so much harder to keep her safe now. Still, Alex didn’t intend to stop trying anytime soon. They had only recently begun to achieve a balance in their relationship, where it was less Alex protecting Kara and more adult siblings being there for each other. The thought of losing her now… Well, it was untenable.

Growing up, their parents had reminded Alex over and over again how much Kara had been through, losing nearly her entire family when her planet was destroyed. While Alex had at times resented the role Kara’s arrival had forced on her—of protector, of second-best, of not-ever-good-enough in their mother’s eyes—she had never regretted the decision that had made Kara part of the family. Their parents had asked Alex before taking her in, had explained in detail what harboring an
alien might mean to their lives, to her future. But it was such important work, they had told her, protecting Kara and helping her grow into her potential. If they didn’t, she could end up being imprisoned in a government facility, experimented on for the rest of her life all in the name of science. Alex had known what her parents wanted her to say, had understood what the right thing to do was. She’d barely hesitated before telling her parents she thought they should do it.

And yes, everything did change, but some of the changes were absolutely for the better. She had gone to Stanford not only because it had an incredible bio-engineering department but also because it was close to home. Two years later, her sister had followed her to Palo Alto. As a freshman, Kara had wanted to live on campus, but she required more food than a university meal plan allowed and, oh yeah, occasionally levitated in her sleep. Dorm life was out, so Alex rented a two-bedroom apartment near campus and stuck around for graduate school, partly because she wanted to and partly so she could continue to keep an eye on her sister. Even after more than half a decade on Earth, there was still so much Kara didn’t know or understand about life on her adopted planet. Alex couldn’t leave her. Fortunately, the Ph.D. program run by friends of their parents meant she didn’t have to.

During their joint time at Stanford, she had watched Kara transform more than the average college student. As a history major, Kara told Alex that she came to understand how violent human beings were, with their endless cycles of war and peace and always, always more war. She became fascinated by the Industrial Revolution and Western Imperialism, by the Holocaust and the decimation of the world’s rain forests, by the Atlantic Slave Trade and the American and French Revolutions. She found human history intriguing, planetary history—“I mean, actual dinosaurs lived right here, Alex, maybe in our own back yard; can you imagine?”—even more so.

Just before they both finished their coursework—Bachelor’s for Kara, all but dissertation (ABD) for Alex—and moved to National City, Kara had confessed that sometimes at night she couldn’t sleep for wondering if humans were destined to ruin Earth the same way her people had destroyed Krypton. Alex hadn’t told her that sometimes at night she lay awake worrying the same thing. Fast forward a few years and her fears had crystallized around a far more personal (and immediate) concern: Would Kara survive long enough to realize her potential, or would she simply vanish one day as she’d done when Lillian Luthor kidnapped her; as she had very nearly done today?

She glanced at her sister, staring into her ice cream container with slightly furrowed brow. Was she thinking about Lena Luthor again? Honestly, Alex didn’t understand what Kara saw in the woman. How could she defend her, especially after the whole anti-alien device fiasco?

“Lena thinks unmasking aliens would make the world a better place,” Kara had reported over dinner the night she interviewed L Corp’s new CEO. “She says some people are just bad, and the only thing you can do is protect yourself. But Alex, I think what she really means is that humans need to learn to protect themselves from aliens.”

Alex had considered reminding Kara of the political views of pretty much Lena’s entire family, but instead she had rubbed her arm and said, “I’m sorry. Not everyone has an alien in the family, you know.”

When Kara only smiled sadly, Alex had briefly debated going to see Ms. Luthor herself for a crash course on basic ethics and the statistics regarding human-on-alien hate crimes. In the end she decided against it, but only because she didn’t want to give a woman with a Master’s degree from MIT and an MBA from Yale any reason to think more deeply about the Danvers family’s connection to aliens. Bad enough Maxwell Lord knew who Supergirl was. They didn’t need a Luthor to discover her identity, too.
A few weeks later, it was as if Kara had completely forgotten that interview when she texted Alex to tell her that Lena had stopped by CatCo—“in person!”—to invite her to a benefit gala for the children’s hospital. Alex had rarely seen her as excited as she was that night, using her super-speed to try on different dresses one after the other. Being called Lena’s “only friend in National City” had seemed to mean something to her. Alex just wasn’t sure what.

Would Kara’s friendship with Lena Luthor prove to be her downfall, or would it turn out be something else entirely? Because sometimes when Kara talked about Lena, she changed. Her face closed, her eyes turned inward, and for the first time in their life together, Alex wasn’t sure what her sister was thinking or feeling. She wondered if Kara even knew herself.

All at once, sitting on her sister’s couch with Kara safe and sound—for the moment—beside her, Alex found herself praying to God, Rao, whomever, that Lena Luthor wouldn’t hurt Kara, purposely or otherwise. She actually sent a plea out into the universal neural network, a big deal for her because her brand of spirituality centered on the breathtaking patterns that could be derived from data; the impossible intricacies of the human nervous system; the incredible variety among alien corporeal forms. She didn’t actually believe in a higher power as such, but at the same time, she had also seen enough to know that some things were hard to explain away. If an action might help and stood very little chance of hurting, why not give it a whirl?

As Kara leaned into her shoulder and snuggled closer, Alex slipped her arm around her sister. It was too bad, really, that Kara’s penchant for analyzing historical trends didn’t seem to carry over into her own life. Otherwise she would know exactly what happened when Luthors and Supers mixed.

Pushing the sense of foreboding away, Alex reminded herself to stay in the moment, to appreciate the fact that Kara was here with her, safe, and that somewhere in the city Maggie Sawyer was maybe, possibly thinking about kissing her again soon.

She could do this. She could—if only the city stayed quiet for just a little longer.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

For a moment, she pictured Lillian Luthor staring at her through the bars of a cage, mouth twisted in disgust as she declared, “I don’t like the idea of you around my daughter.”

The question was, did Lena?

Kara couldn’t sleep. Shortly after midnight, she changed back into her Supergirl suit, took a quick look outside with her X-ray vision (the superhero version of filing a flight plan, she always thought), and took off at maximum speed. It might be dark, but her secret would be short-lived if her neighbors observed her regularly coming and going from the same window.

Away from her building, she slowed and drifted aimlessly over the city. It was lovely to be home, to fly through the evening air, two dimensional buildings and neat streets laid out below her. From this height, the usually chaotic urban scene appeared peaceful, the sounds of traffic and sirens so much quieter than usual. No doubt if she tuned in she would hear alarms ringing, people crying for help, dispatchers directing NCPD officers to crime scenes. But she was trying to accept that she couldn’t be all things to all people. As Alex liked to remind her, she couldn’t save everyone.

Maggie, for example—she’d been unable to stop Hank Henshaw from shooting her. What if he’d killed Maggie and Lena? Alex would never have known how Maggie felt about her, and Lena…

Stop, she ordered herself. Hypotheticals would drive her crazy if she let them. To calm her mind, she called up the opening forms of Min-Nal, the ancient tradition practiced by followers of the Kryptonian deity Rao. She had never managed to reach the exalted state of Rao-Nal, a spiritual enlightenment the ritual’s practitioners were said to achieve through measured breathing and guided visualizations, but she found that the traditional exercises grounded her whenever unanswerable questions threatened to drown out everything else.

Like now. Lately it had seemed like one thing after another—her aunt’s death, Lex Luthor’s attacks, the rise of Cadmus, the assault at the alien bar, Alt-Earth’s battle with the Dominators… She hadn’t realized how much she was struggling until there was nothing left to distract her from the thoughts and images hovering at the edges of her consciousness. A name had been flickering there for weeks, so she was unsurprised when her supposedly aimless trajectory brought her to Lena Luthor’s neighborhood. She only knew where the L Corp executive lived because last night, after she’d asked Winn for the fortieth time to see if the NCPD had released Lena yet, he had stolen her phone and typed in Lena’s address. At work today she’d loaded the address into Google Maps because—well, apparently in case she felt like swinging by.

That wasn’t weird, right? Of course she would be concerned about Lena. After all, she hadn’t gotten a chance to talk to her at the Port. She had wanted to, had pictured tugging her into her arms even though they weren’t the kind of friends who hugged, imagined chastising her for doing exactly what Kara had asked her to do: risk her life and betray her mother in the name of doing the right thing. But as Lillian Luthor was placed in handcuffs and led away, Winn’s words from earlier had echoed through Kara’s mind: “Luthors are good actors. They know how to fool people.” Kara had known that, she had, and yet up until the moment J’onn assured her he was fine, some part of her had
believed Lena capable of helping her mother wipe out the alien population of National City.

When another officer asked Lena to come to the police station to “answer some questions,” she had swung to face him, her gaze briefly settling on Kara. Before Kara could say anything, before she could even nod in thanks or apology, Lena had looked away.

“I’d be happy to,” she told the officer, and followed him to his patrol car, head held high in that regal way of hers.

Kara fully intended to inform the officer that Lena had saved the city and shouldn’t be treated as a suspect, damn it. But Alex was suddenly there, hugging her and J’onn and insisting on checking them over for injury. By the time Kara had placated her sister, Lena was gone. The team headed back to the DEO, and Kara didn’t leave there until after one. It had been too late to check on Lena then, just as it was too late now. Of course, she didn’t actually have to check on her in person, did she? She could do a quick fly-by, make sure Lena was safe, and be on her way with no one else—i.e., Alex, who was significantly less subtle than she thought she was—the wiser.

Lena’s building was the only one on her block whose penthouse offered a 360 degree view. Kara slowed and stopped just out of reach of the roof lights. A cursory examination revealed that the penthouse balconies were empty and the exterior rooms dark, so she drifted closer, scanning the interior until she found Lena in bed, a tablet propped on her lap. She was alone, a fact that was, like, completely irrelevant. Kara focused on the tablet screen, expecting to see Netflix or an Excel spreadsheet. Instead, she realized, Lena had a book open in her Kindle app.

Normally Kara didn’t use her powers to invade other people’s privacy unless it was absolutely necessary. In fact, she had an internal system of checks and balances she followed fairly strictly. But in that moment, she was so intrigued by the sight of Lena Luthor reading in bed that she skipped right over her usual rules. Sneaking a look at someone’s reading material wasn’t a federal crime, anyway. Strangers did it to each other every day on public transport.

Ethical qualms temporarily appeased, Kara zeroed in on the author and title notations at the top of the digital page: Jane Austen, *Lady Susan*. Her eyes widened. Lena was reading the novella that the latest Austen movie, *Love and Friendship*, was based on.

“Aww,” Kara murmured. She adored all things Austen. She loved the books, the movies, the enormous body of retellings out there, some good and some, frankly, atrocious. She’d actually given Alex a copy of one, *Gay Pride & Prejudice*, as a coming out gift. And now here was Lena, reading Austen on her Kindle. That was just—it was so—

She started at the sound of Lena’s phone, sharp in her ears. Through the wall she watched as Lena removed her reading glasses—she looked so smart in glasses, Kara thought; she should wear them more often—and reached for the phone on her bedside table.

“Hello, Chuck. What can I do for you?”

*Chuck.* Who was Chuck, and what was he doing calling at this time of night?

As a low male voice began to apologize for bothering “Miss Luthor,” Kara suddenly saw herself as if from a distance: She was hovering outside Lena’s home, watching her without her knowledge, about to eavesdrop on a private conversation. She was spying on Lena Luthor for reasons that had nothing to do with national security; and what was worse, she was using her super powers—her alien powers, a voice inside her head whispered—to do it.

She shot away at once, training her eyes on the clouds above and limiting her audible range the way
Clark had taught her when she first arrived on Earth. Her mother had warned her that the sun’s yellow light would effectively supercharge her natural abilities, but even with that knowledge, it had taken her years to get a handle on her powers. And yet, she could count on one hand the number of times she had invaded someone’s privacy just because she felt like it.

Stupid, she cursed herself as she flew home. Not to mention immoral, borderline illegal, and just plain creepy. At least Lena had no idea. Trying to figure out what to say if—when—they eventually came face to face was difficult enough without also having to apologize for stalking her.

Back at her apartment, she undressed and crawled into bed. Her mind was racing again, so she closed her eyes and concentrated again on the ancient Kryptonian forms, willing her brain to slow down. But the question bouncing around her head this time wasn’t hypothetical: Why did Lena matter so much? Kara couldn’t figure it out. Right from the start she had found herself drawn to the other woman, despite the fact that Lena was a Luthor and Kara was a Super, and never the twain…

A glimmer of memory sparked, and she grabbed her phone before pulling the covers back up to her chin even though the Southern California night wasn’t that chilly and she was impervious to extreme temperatures. It only took a moment to Google Rudyard Kipling’s famous verse:

Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

In college, she remembered, her English lit prof had said that most people stopped after the first or second line, which meant they missed Kipling’s meaning. The way her prof had interpreted the poem, Kipling was actually saying that where two equals meet, the accidents of birth—nationality, race, economic status—don’t matter. In that case, only character and integrity determine the level of respect each affords the other.

In discussion, the class had expanded the “accidents of birth” bit to include more modern concepts such as gender, sexuality, religion, and disability. When one student proposed “alien status” as an accident of birth, a tense debate had taken place, with a vocal anti-alien minority quick to assert that “ends of the earth” showed Kipling was referring only to human beings. The pro-alien majority pointed out that since the first aliens on Earth hadn’t come out publicly until the twentieth century, Kipling’s sentiments toward those born off-planet could not be legitimately gauged. Meanwhile Kara had sat silently in the middle of the room, trying not to let her discomfort show and wishing she were literally anyplace else. She had been on Earth for years by then, but she’d still worried daily about slipping up and revealing her true nature.

Somehow she thought she probably knew which side of that academic debate the Luthors would have fallen on. For a moment, she pictured Lillian Luthor staring at her through the bars of a cage, mouth twisted in disgust as she declared, “I don’t like the idea of you around my daughter.”

The question was, did Lena?

*             *             *

After her ill-advised midnight reconnaissance mission, she decided it would be best if she avoided both L Corp and Lena’s apartment building. This was harder to accomplish than it should have been. Snapper wanted her to use her “relationship” with the daughter of Lillian Luthor to get a scoop on her arrest, which authorities had announced was a result of a joint FBI/NCPD taskforce that had apprehended Cadmus’s leader before the splinter group could carry out their promised attack. Kara declined the story, trotting out “journalist’s ethics” as an excuse and managing not to wince too much
at the irony. She counter-proposed a story on the rocket-powered spore release, officially being touted as an attempt by city scientists to combat the Zika virus. Local environmentalists were up in arms about the clandestine nature of the action, but frustrated progressives were considerably less dangerous than angry extremists, the DEO and NCPD reps had agreed.

Snapper grudgingly agreed to the topic revision, but then James had to go and remind her that journalist’s ethics were an actual thing, and that they prevented her from knowingly reporting on a government cover-up without reporting that it was, in fact, a cover-up. She couldn’t think of an acceptable reason to back out, especially since the story had been her idea, so the next morning she called in sick to work. When Snapper threatened to fire her for roughly the two hundred and thirty-seventh time since Cat left, Kara let him rant while she Googled “communicable diseases.” At his first pause for breath, she informed him that she had pink eye and that the State of California wouldn’t allow her to go out in public until the antibiotics kicked in.

On a scale of recent lies, it wasn’t the worst. Besides, she figured the images of oozing, pus-filled eyelids spilling across her iPad screen were a fitting metaphor, really.

Halfway through her second pizza and third movie of the day a sound caught her attention, and she poked her head up in time to watch Alex let herself in with the spare key.

“You’re here,” Alex said, sounding more vexed than happy about this turn of events.

“I am. Is there a reason you didn’t just knock?” She paused the movie and uncurled from her pile of blankets. And, oh, it was a bit gloomier than she’d realized with the blinds drawn and television volume down lower than the average human liked.

“You didn’t answer your phone. Why aren’t you answering your phone?”

At the note of panic in her sister’s voice, she sat up straighter. She still sometimes forgot that superheroes didn’t get mental health days. “I’m sorry. It died and I must have forgotten to turn it back on. Did something happen? Do you need me to come in?”

“No, Kara, we don’t need Supergirl. We were worried about you. You can’t just disappear!”

“I’m sorry,” she repeated, coiling back into her blanket cocoon. “I didn’t mean to make you worry.”

Alex pulled out her phone and started typing. “I’m texting the boys. It was all J’onn and I could do to keep them away.”

“You didn’t tell them I went to Alt-Earth, did you?”

“No. But if you ever pull something like this again, I will. Got it?”

She saluted, but it must not have been as snappy as she’d intended because right away Alex sighed and dropped down beside her. “What am I going to do with you?” she asked, pushing Kara’s hair away from her face.

She hadn’t showered this morning—in fact, she couldn’t remember the last time she’d showered—and she imagined her outsides felt as slimy as her insides. She shook her head. “I honestly don’t know.”

“Rough week?” her big sister asked, voice softening.

The gentleness in her tone broke something in Kara, and she slid down until her head was in Alex’s lap. From this angle, the low light reflecting off the brick walls reminded her of the perpetual twilight
of Krypton, generated by the system’s red dwarf star. As this thought filtered through, the tears came, hot and painful, accompanied by sobs that actually hurt her throat. Alex’s hands were soothing, one in her hair and the other on her back, and her voice was quiet in the dark apartment: “That’s it, let it out. I’ve got you. I’ve got you.”

She didn’t say it would be okay, which Kara appreciated. They had both seen too much by now to believe in that particular fairy tale. But with Alex there to shush her softly and smooth back her hair, it was almost like they were back in Midvale and Alex was comforting her after she had botched an English assignment or misread a social cue or simply, deeply, missed her parents. Which, she still did most days even now, despite knowing they weren’t the heroes she had always believed them to be.

When she was all cried out, she sat up next to her sister, pressing her hands against the splotches she knew colored her cheeks. It was funny—her body’s ability to manage her temperature meant that she rarely flushed from heat or cold. But when she got really upset or, say, sobbed uncontrollably, her skin reflected her rare physical discomfort. Maybe that was why she avoided crying.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Alex asked.

She wiped her eyes. “I don’t know. It’s just, everything is so—I don’t even know how—Alex, what am I even doing?”

“Is this about someone or something in particular?” Alex asked, using that careful tone that told Kara she had her suspicions.

Gritting her teeth, she tamped down on the urge to spin into her suit and chuck herself out the nearest window. How was it that her sister always seemed to know what was in her head before she did?

“Maybe,” she hedged. “You know what? I don’t think I do feel like talking. Can we just watch the movie?”

“Oh. Of course. What are you watching?”

She barely hesitated: “Love and Friendship.”

“Again?”

“We can watch something else.”

“No, it’s fine. Better than fine—an uncommonly amiable idea, I dare say.”

Kara felt a smile threatening. She’d sent Alex the link to a Facebook page called “Talk Like Jane Austen” ages ago. “I was starting to think you didn’t use your Gmail account anymore.”

“I only read messages from people I love.”

“So, only Mom, me, and Maggie?”

Alex’s cheeks flushed until Kara was pretty sure they looked like twins. “We’ve been dating for like twenty seconds! Slow it down, speedy.”

“I’m guessing you haven’t packed your U-Haul yet, then.” As Alex stared askance at her, Kara smiled, enjoying her sister’s rare speechlessness. “Not only do I like research, I’m pretty good at it.”

“Apparently. Now start the movie, missy. And turn up—”

“—the volume. I know. I got you, Earthling.”
She reached for the remote, relaxing as the nineteenth century English landscape flickered back across the screen. There was nothing like a well-done period piece to help you forget the turmoil of modern life.

A little while later she said, eyes fixed on the TV, “Thanks, Alex. For coming to find me, I mean.”

“I’ll always come find you, Kara. You know that.”

Alex scooted closer so that their shoulders were touching, and it was just the right amount of contact to make her feel safe. She was lucky to have Alex, she knew. So, so lucky. She wished the reverse were true, but it wasn’t. The things she’d said and done under the influence of Red Kryptonite… Well, there had been an underlying vein of truth to all of it. Alex’s life had revolved around her since she’d joined the Danvers family, mostly to the detriment of her own happiness.

Lately, though, since she’d become Supergirl and started working with Alex at the DEO, they had felt more like equals. She’d been so touched that Alex had confided in her about her feelings for Maggie, even if it made her realize how much their relationship had always been about her. Sometimes it could be good to face painful truths, especially if doing so set you on a better, more honest course. And yet here she was only a short time later, freaking out about her past, present, and future and, once again, leaning on Alex.

She would do better, she told herself. She would snap out of this funk, and she would find Jeremiah and bring him home. It was her responsibility after all; she was the reason he’d gotten involved in the DEO to begin with. Alex had lost her father and Eliza had lost her husband because of Kara’s presence in their lives, and yet they had never blamed her. She had been born on another planet and disrupted their very existence, for Rao’s sake, and still her adopted family had always managed to make her feel loved and accepted. Lena’s adopted family, on the other hand, had tried to kill her, more than once. Poor Lena. She must feel—

With difficulty, she stopped her mind from going down that particular rabbit hole. It wasn’t like she could actually know what was going on inside Lena’s head. The only fact she knew for sure about Lena Luthor was that she didn’t trust aliens. Including, apparently, Supergirl.

Her chin dipped, and Kara let her cheek fall on Alex’s shoulder. She would do better for Alex, she would. Just, maybe not today.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Lena was the other person Kara needed to face. And she would. Soon. Well, as soon as she figured out what to say. The thought of having to look into Lena’s eyes and actually come up with words made her palms itch.

Apparently this was the week for visitors, Kara thought late the following afternoon when she X-rayed her door and discovered her cousin waving at her from the other side. Fortunately, she’d showered that morning and even dressed in something other than sweats, so she didn’t shy away as Clark leaned in to kiss her cheek.

“Hey, cuz,” she said, motioning him inside. “Alex called you, huh?”

He didn’t even look that sheepish. “I was planning to come see you anyway. I heard about Lillian Luthor. Figured there was probably a story the media wasn’t reporting.”

She folded her arms across her chest. “Are you here as an employee of the Daily Planet or as my cousin?”

“Your cousin, of course.” His frown was quizzical.

She waved her hands awkwardly. “Okay. Sorry. Things have been—it’s good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you too.” He leaned against the kitchen counter. “How are you, Kara?”

“Not great, as I’m sure Alex told you. But better today, I think.”

“Seems like you’ve been having a bumpy time of it lately.”

“Maybe a bit.” She couldn’t actually complain about the hardships of superhero life to him, could she? He may be her only living blood relative, but he was also Superman.

“It happens like that sometimes,” he told her. “From what I’ve garnered, it has to do with energy—like begets like most places in the universe, so if you find yourself surrounded by chaos and chaotic people, chances are it’s going to get worse before it gets better.”

Chaotic people—like the Luthors? Lex was the only member of the family who was truly mad. Lillian might be cruel, but she wasn’t insane. She saw aliens as potentially dangerous life forms, not as individuals worthy of respect. Her fanaticism was terrifying, yes, but Kara didn’t think she was technically off her rocker. She was simply committed to doing whatever it took to rid Earth of what she considered to be an alien menace.

“What’s important,” Clark added, “is that you have ways of keeping yourself grounded, and people in your life you can share your feelings with. At least, that’s how I get by.”

“I’m working on the staying grounded part. But in the meantime I have Alex, and she’s pretty amazing. You know, for a human.”
He smiled. “I do know, and I’m very glad you have her.”

She leaned against the counter beside him and nudged him slightly with her shoulder. He didn’t move at all. “I can’t remember if I’ve ever said it, but thank you for bringing me to the Danvers family.”

He stared at her as if trying to figure something out. “Do you mean that?”

“Of course. Why wouldn’t I?”

He pushed his glasses up and rubbed his eyes briefly. “I think part of me has always felt guilty for leaving you with them. I just wanted you to have the chance to grow up among good people the way I did, without having to worry about the fate of the planet or what your place was.”

“I know,” she said. “And I did, mostly. But my experience was so different from yours. I came to Earth much older and already knowing what my place was: I was supposed to look out for you. It’s taken me longer than it should have, probably, to figure out that even though you don’t need my help, there are plenty of other people here who do.”

“I don’t know, I think you figured everything out pretty quickly. At your age, I was still traveling and doing the freelance reporter thing. If you ask me, you’re pretty smart.”

“For a Kryptonian?”

“Um, I’m probably not the best person to ask that one.”

Kara laughed, a little surprised she still could after yesterday. Crying everything out on Alex’s shoulder—er, lap—the night before had definitely helped. She’d woken up this morning feeling considerably less despondent, fully prepared to face Snapper’s wrath. With the pink eye diagnosis still out there, though, CatCo was off limits, so she’d donned the cape and zipped around the city assisting whomever and wherever she could, much as she’d done when she first came out as Supergirl.

No articles got written and no alien threats were thwarted, but it had been one of her better days in recent memory: freeing the cat of a worried little boy from the top of a tall tree; helping a family change the tire on their minivan, even though both moms insisted (and looked like!) they could easily handle it; carrying groceries up four flights for a cute elderly couple; rescuing a little girl’s dog from a busy street after it slipped its lead to chase a squirrel; and a dozen other small gestures that reminded her how fortunate she was to be able to make a difference in the lives of others. Each time she helped someone and they thanked her, the gratitude in their eyes melted a little more of the chill she felt whenever she recalled Lillian Luthor’s stare, or Lena’s accusations, or the fact that her own parents had created a weapon of mass destruction that had killed innocents and could have killed so many more. If not for Lena, who knew what might have happened?

She was the other person Kara needed to face. And she would. Soon. Well, as soon as she figured out what to say. The thought of having to look into Lena’s eyes and actually come up with words made her palms itch. She was so not ready to face that reality. Too bad alcohol didn’t work on her. Alex had gone through a stage where she referred to drinking as the antidote to reality, and Kara could use an antidote right about now.

Actually… “Here’s an idea,” she said, glancing at her cousin. “Do you want to go out for a drink?”

“What?” He stared at her. “Alcohol doesn’t affect you, does it?”

“Not the human kind. The alien kind is a different story.”
Unsurprisingly, Clark took convincing—“I can’t afford to be seen at an alien bar, Kara, and neither can you!”—so she ordered in from Noonan’s and relied on the cheese fries to work their mellowing magic. An hour later they were at the new address Maggie had texted her, and as she offered the password and led Clark inside, she decided this was how Alex must have felt in high school the first time she got them into an R-rated movie.

Clark glanced around as they made their way to the bar. “Wow. We do not have anything like this in Metropolis.”

“That’s what you think.” Mon-El popped up seemingly out of nowhere.

Kara did a double-take. “Wait. You’re behind the bar.”

“You Kryptonians. Always so observant. And you are?” he added, staring at Clark.

One kiss—which she had only allowed to happen because she thought he was dying—and he was acting like they were A Thing. But Mon-El was like family, specifically like a surprisingly sexually-free brother she had caught hooking up with random women on more than one occasion. While she may not have much experience with the opposite sex, or really any type of sex, she wasn’t an idiot.

“This is Kal-El,” she said, smiling to mask her annoyance. He couldn't help who he was. "You know, my cousin? Clark, this is Mon-El, also known as Mike.”

“The Daxamite?” Clark asked.

“Sleeping Beauty himself.”

“He looks different awake.”

“Yep. And with clothes.”

Meanwhile Mon-El was practically vibrating with excitement. “Holy moly! Seriously, it is so good to meet you! I’ve heard so much about you, you have no idea…”

Actually, Kara would wager that Clark probably had a pretty good idea. “Mon-El,” she said, interrupting his worshipful chatter, “focus. Do you remember that rum you dared me to drink?”

“Of course. Giggles sent us those. She was a great girl.”

“Was?” Clark asked.

“She died in the attack. They’re still trying to clean up the old place. No one’s sure if they can remove all traces of the virus, though.”

As in, the genocidal virus her father's guild had created. But she was not her father, nor was she responsible for his actions. Also, unlike certain other people she could think of, the fact that her family members were homicidal maniacs was a well-hidden secret. At least, for now.

“I’m surprised there are this many customers,” she said after a moment.

“Everyone seems to think it’s important not to hide,” Mon-El explained. “I’ve heard people saying that if we allow fear to change who we are and what we do, then the terrorists win.”

“It’s a nice sentiment, anyway,” Clark said. “I don’t mean to sound cynical, but I wasn’t surprised when I heard the news. A bar like this is one of the only social spaces where it can be guaranteed that every person present is either an alien or an ally. With the President signing the Alien Amnesty
Act so recently, there was an inevitable feeling about this attack.”

Kara nodded, thinking of what had happened at Pulse in Orlando not even a year after gay marriage had been legalized. She’d read interviews with more than one gay person who said the same thing Clark had—that it was just a matter of time before someone came after them at the one place they felt free to be themselves. Since Alex had come out, Kara couldn’t help worrying for her safety in a country where so many people still hated anyone who was different.

Not that she didn’t already worry about her on a daily basis. Still, it was a totally different thing for Alex to willingly risk her life in the service of her country. Even though the thought of losing her in the fight to keep Earth safe was beyond traumatizing, Kara respected Alex’s willingness to sacrifice herself. She didn’t have much choice since, essentially, she took the same risks as Supergirl. But to know that her sister could be murdered for no other reason than the gender of the person she loved? That was a far more bitter pill to swallow.

Mon-El glanced between them. “If Earth isn’t safe, why do you stay?”

“Family,” Kara said, glancing at her cousin but thinking of Alex and Eliza, Jeremiah and J’onn. Of Cat Grant, even.

“Our family chose Earth for us for a reason,” Clark said. “I’ve always thought it would be a little like abandoning them if I left.”

Mon-El nodded and looked away, and Kara remembered that he had only recently learned that his entire family was gone and had been for decades. She knew exactly how that felt, only her pain had been blunted by time. His, on the other hand, must seem almost too sharp to even contemplate.

“Can we get back to the weird rum concoction?” she asked, waggling her eyebrows at him. "I'm trying to get Superman drunk."

"Kara!” Clark said, looking around. "You can't just say it out loud like that!"

"It's fine. No one heard us."

"Actually," Mon-El said, "Klee Pan over there seems pretty interested in you two, but he's Klaramarian, so he's probably reading your mind, not listening in."

Clark's eyes widened, and he looked around at the yellow-orange alien in near horror. Klee Pan waved. Although how he could see them was a mystery, given his face was smooth and featureless.

"Mon-El," Kara said. "You're not helping."

“Right. Sorry. So, Aldebaran rum. Deadly to humans but—”

“—refreshing to us. My question is, if I drink it more slowly and stick to one, will it get me as drunk as last time?” Out of the corner of her eye she saw Clark’s eyebrows rise, and it was all she could do not to remind him she used to babysit him.

“No, it shouldn’t. Just whizzed, in my professional opinion.”

Clark pushed up his glasses. “Um, do you mean buzzed?”

Mon-El snapped his fingers. “Buzzed! That's the word. No wonder I've been getting those strange looks.”
Kara shook her head. Just, yeah, so typical. “Two of those, then, please.”

“Coming right up,” he said, and winked at her.

He was quasi-charming, she thought as he opened a case marked with a red skull and crossbones, and it wasn’t like he was unattractive. He’d also made it clear he was interested in her, and as an alien himself, he accepted her for who she was. So why (aforementioned infidelity issues aside) wasn’t she remotely interested in him?

“Your drink, milady.” Another wink and an actual bow. Had Mon-El been watching Regency period films? She barely resisted the urge to roll her eyes.

Drinks in hand, she and Clark made their way to a booth on the far wall. This space was smaller than the original, but better lit and less seedy. There was still a pool table, where a Roltikkon who looked like Maggie’s ex was currently playing against a female humanoid of indeterminate origin.

“She’s Valeronian,” Mon-El said, slipping into the booth on Kara’s side. “Look at us, just a bunch of -Els on Earth hanging out like the friends we totally are.”

“Oh, look, you have a customer,” Kara said, and shoved him out of the booth with her pinkie finger.

“Hey!” He caught himself just before he hit the floor and straightened up. “Fine. But I’ll be back.”

Kara stifled a sigh. She didn’t doubt it.

“So is he…?” Clark trailed off.

“Hitting on me? That seems to be the general consensus.”

“And you? How do you feel about him?”

“He’s a Daxamite,” she said, summing up their entire romantic destiny with a single word.

Her cousin smiled. “Fair enough. I was only checking. Lois heard from Lucy that you and James didn’t work out, so I wasn’t sure if you were open to anything or not.”

“I’m not,” she said quickly. Too quickly, judging by the way Clark leaned away from her. “It’s just, it’s really difficult to have a social life knowing that I have to hide this huge part of myself. I feel like I’m constantly lying. Sometimes I almost wish I didn’t look so human.”

“I know. It’s safer to blend in, but at the same time, people tend to say things in front of you that they otherwise might not.”

“Exactly! Did you and Lois ever talk about aliens before she knew you were, you know, him?”

“Of course. But she was raised to respect people no matter what part of the universe they came from, so it was never really an issue.”

Kara nodded. “It would be easier to hang out with aliens, but turns out I don’t know that many. And as far as I know, there’s no Tinder for off-worlders.”

“Although there really should be.”

“Right? Can you imagine the categories? Humanoid seeking humanoid, non-psionics only.”

“Metahuman seeking G’Newtian, musical skills a bonus.”
“Khund seeks Khund, pacifists need not apply.”

They riffed back and forth a few more times, and then Clark eyed her again. “So, is there someone in particular you wish you didn’t have to lie to?”

She sipped her drink. “What did Alex tell you?”

“Not much. Only that she was surprised how good of friends you are with Lena Luthor.”

She didn’t bother telling him they might not be anymore after the other night. “You’re supposed to tell me to stay away from her, aren’t you?”

“That might be Alex’s endgame,” he admitted, “but I’d rather hear what you think. You must have your reasons for pursuing a friendship with her.”

She rubbed at an old stain on the wooden table, only stopping when her fingernail dislodged a splinter the size of her thumb. “She’s smart,” she told him. “And strong. Brave, too, and ambitious. She has all these plans for her company, and knowing her, she’ll do every one of them.”

“But do you know her, Kara? I mean, really know her?”

She made an irritated sound in the back of her throat, only barely stopping herself from shattering the glass in her hand. “I feel like I do. I smile around her more than anyone else, Clark. Is that strange? I mean, her mom is in charge of Cadmus and her brother…”

“Yes, but Lena’s also just a person, like you’re just a person. You want to be seen for who you are, Kara, not for where you come from. But it sounds like where Lena comes from is just as much an issue for you, maybe just as much as where you were born could be for her.”

And damn it, he was right. Ugh.

She bonked her forehead on the table, unsurprised when it groaned in protest. “That’s more than enough about me for one night. Now, tell me how Lois is doing. And Lucy. How was Thanksgiving with the General?”

They talked about family and the holidays for a while, and it was nice. Until Mon-El came back and tried to join in their conversation again. Then Kara announced it was time to call it a night, and Clark agreed that he should be getting back to Metropolis.

Out on the street he pulled her into a tight hug. “You know, all you have to do is message me and I’ll be here.”

“I know. Same goes for you.”

He leaned away and looked down at her. “Can I give you one piece of advice?”

“Shoot.”

“You already know the right thing to do. Don’t let fear get in the way of living your life.”

“Or the terrorists win?” she asked, meaning it as a joke.

He nodded, his face serious. “Or the terrorists win. Are you okay to fly?”

“If I go slow. You?”
“Fine. Let’s do this again sometime. It was, I don’t know, more liberating than I expected.”

“Deal,” she said, remembering the first time Alex had brought her and the boys to the bar. The old one, before Cadmus killed half the regulars with a virus designed by her parents. She was glad the bar had reopened in a new space. She didn’t think she could ever set foot in the old one again.

And then they were waving one last time and taking to the skies in their matching Super suits. Kara meant to fly home, she really did, but she ended up cruising lazily among the buildings of downtown, pulling loop-de-loops and other silly tricks. Somehow—well, it wasn’t a mystery, was it? —she ended up near L Corp, and before she knew it she was hovering just off the edge of Lena’s balcony, drawn there by the single bright light in among the hundreds of dark windows. Lena was there just as she had been countless other evenings, at her desk with her back to the window, fingers flying over her keyboard. Kara didn’t try to read the screen this time, only allowed herself the comfort of seeing that Lena was alive and well and working just as hard as ever. What had she said the day she’d announced her company’s name change? “I won’t have a life if I can’t make this company a success.”

The thing was, Kara knew what she meant. Before Supergirl and the DEO, she’d felt like she was floating, uncertain of who she was or what she should do with her life. So much had crystallized since she’d saved Alex’s plane, and now, finally, she was sure of what she was meant to do. But sometimes, like now, she wasn’t sure that being a superhero was enough. Shouldn’t there be someone in her life to share the ups and downs with, someone to laugh and cry with, other than her admittedly awesome friends and relatives? Alex literally glowed when she so much as thought about Maggie. Which was great. She so, so deserved to be happy after taking care of everyone else for so long. But it made Kara hope that maybe she could have that kind of happiness in her life, too. That maybe, even, she deserved it.

Inside the office, Lena’s phone rang. She picked it up and looked at the screen, and then, before Kara could move, she turned and looked straight out into the night, her eyes searching. Kara reversed so fast she nearly crashed into a nearby building, and then she shot up into the sky. Maybe it was the Aldebaran rum still in her system, but she swore she could feel her heart racing. It was an alarming sensation, like falling uncontrollably, but exhilarating too because she hadn’t known she could feel like that.

As she flew home across the city, a single thought played through her mind on a loop: “Please, please don’t let her have seen me.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

“Jesus Christ,” Lena murmured, pushing away from her desk. Kara was Supergirl. KARA was SUPER FUCKING GIRL. Now that she had realized the truth, she couldn’t stop picturing it—Kara removing her glasses and undoing her bun, unbuttoning her shirt and, transformation complete, launching into the air in her red skirt and thigh-high boots. Because Kara, who was Supergirl, could fly.

“Fifteen minutes, Miss Luthor.”

“Thank you, Jess.” Lena smiled at her assistant.

As the door closed again, she allowed her face to resume its earlier, less pleasant expression. She needed a drink. More than one drink, actually. But facing down a hostile Board of Directors required clarity and strength, neither of which she could adequately channel under the influence of two fingers of Scotch.

This had not been an easy week. Not only had a cyborg (seriously?) tried to kill her, it turned out he had done so while under her mother's orders. She hadn’t believed that at first, of course. When Supergirl had revealed her mother’s connection to Cadmus, Lena had lashed out. Her father, a businessman and Vietnam veteran, had often said, “The best defense is a good offense.” And while he may have been talking about business and athletics, the philosophy had seeped into their family’s daily life. Luthors were passionate people. Period.

That was why she hadn’t trusted her mother’s icy calm at the Port. Fantastic. Now she would have to worry about death threats from Lillian, too. As if a murderous, world-domineering brother wasn’t already more than anyone needed.

Her week had only worsened with the news that Supergirl was conducting surveillance on her. Two nights in a row now Lena had received calls from the head of her security team informing her that Supergirl was near her building, once at home and once at work. Lena had answered every question the NCPD had thrown her way, and they had seemed satisfied that she had no additional knowledge of Cadmus or of her mother’s involvement with the radical leftist group. The feds clearly felt differently if they were sending Supergirl to spy on her.

That was probably why she hadn’t heard from Kara all week. Her sister, the federal agent, must have warned her away.

Lena sat back, rubbing her eyes as the wheels of her subconscious turned. Kara’s sister was Alex Danvers, who was Supergirl’s close—something. In the wake of the Medusa scare, Lena hadn’t missed the way Agent Danvers had swarmed Supergirl and the other agent, the alien who had transformed into a terrifying creature in order to defeat Lillian’s cyborg henchman.

That same henchman would have killed Lena in the lobby of L Corp if Supergirl hadn’t been there. But Supergirl had been there, and she had used her super-speed to save Lena. “Get out of here,” she’d ordered, and Lena had barely hesitated before vacating the lobby. As she escaped, her mind had replayed the moment she had rounded the corner in time to see Supergirl crash into the logo. For
just a second, the superhero had seemed fallible. And it was that, more than her own vulnerability or
the loss of any remaining affection her mother might have held for her, that Lena kept returning to in
the days following the latest Luthor rampage.

Until that moment, Supergirl had always loomed larger than life, heroic, indestructible. But when
she’d looked at Lena, face contorted in effort as she struggled to rise, she’d suddenly appeared more
like a young girl than the Woman of Steel. Lena had felt something flicker at the back of her mind,
some wisp of recognition, quickly extinguished as the cyborg shifted his attention to her.

Her laptop screen tuned to the company’s latest financials blurred as the memory washed over her,
and all at once her subconscious virtually shouted, Of course! She couldn’t believe it had taken her
this long to work out. Alex Danvers and Supergirl were so close because they were… SISTERS?

“Jesus Christ,” she murmured, pushing away from her desk. Kara was Supergirl. KARA was
SUPER FUCKING GIRL. Now that she had realized the truth, she couldn’t stop picturing it—Kara
removing her glasses and undoing her bun, unbuttoning her shirt and, transformation complete,
launching into the air in her red skirt and thigh-high boots. Because Kara, who was Supergirl, could
fly.

Jess knocked softly and poked her head in again. “It’s time.”

Of course it was. Just—perfect.

As she headed for the door, she passed her Visiting Executive Entertainment Bar, or VEEB as she
liked to call the liquor cabinet hidden in a secret wall panel. When this wretched meeting was over,
she promised herself, she was drinking.

* * *

Surprisingly, the meeting went—shittily. It went like shit. Fortunately, one of the only women on the
board had warned her ahead of time that several of the executives were gunning for her resignation.
Not because of personal or professional misgivings related to her, they were quick to assert, but
because her mother’s arrest had caused the company’s rebounding stock to tumble again. The Luthor
name was toxic these days, as they all knew, so perhaps it would be best if she divested from L
Corp.

It had taken more willpower than it should have not to laugh out loud at their word choice: the toxic
Luthors. If they only knew. But she had managed to curb her mild hysteria and downplay their
worries. By the end of the meeting she’d convinced them to give her more time to right the ship.
Probably she would have fared better if her mind hadn’t insisted on fixating on the stunning
realization that Kara Danvers, the sweet, slightly bumbling reporter who had only recently appeared
in her life, was the most powerful woman in the world. But even as she offered up assurances that
the PR department was working on multiple major human interest stories to counteract the damage
Lillian and Cadmus had inflicted, a question kept rattling around inside her head: How had she not
known? Sure, there was the shock and awe factor that surrounded any superhero, but all Kara did to
hide her identity was change her hair and don glasses, nerdy clothes, and a completely different
persona… Well, actually, that was kind of a lot.

Boardroom crisis averted for the moment, Lena smiled through her teeth as everyone else filed out of
the executive conference room. As soon as she was alone, she stepped outside. This balcony, located
on the opposite side of the building from her office, afforded an unfamiliar view of the city. How
much longer would she even be here? Her mother and brother seemed determined to destroy her
father’s legacy, and she was starting to wonder if there was anything she could do about it. The
board had all but promised that a vote of no confidence loomed in the not-so-distant future if she
couldn’t guide the company out from under the Luthor cloud. Would it really be the end of the world if she failed? For so long she had dreamed of following in her father’s footsteps, of making the one person who had genuinely loved her happy. Since he’d died a few years earlier, she had been convinced that the only way to honor his memory was to return his company to the commercial machine he had created rather than the twisted empire Lex had turned it into. But maybe the task was impossible. Maybe she just wasn’t strong or smart or experienced enough to transform L Corp into a force for good.

She sighed and lifted her face to the sun. After so many years on the East Coast, it was strange to be this warm in winter. Her parents had sent her away to prep school at an early age, bringing her home to California only for summer breaks. Lex had been older, already a teenager when they adopted her, and when he left for college in Texas, their parents hadn’t seemed to know what to do with her. Deerfield Academy in Western Massachusetts had felt light-years away from Los Angeles. She had cried herself to sleep every night in the beginning.

Was that what life on Earth had been like for Kara at first? Everyone knew the Superman myth—that he had been sent to Earth from Krypton and taken in by a human family. His planet had been destroyed, leaving him the lone survivor. But then Supergirl had appeared. No one knew much about her. Lena had wanted to, and she had thought she and Supergirl were growing closer recently. But now she wasn’t sure what was real. Was Kara only in her life to keep an eye on yet another potentially dangerous Luthor?

And then there was Agent Danvers. Kara and Alex Danvers claimed to be sisters, but they couldn’t really be, could they? And yet, there was a bond between the two women that was unmistakable. It made sense now why the agent had seemed suspicious when Lena showed up at Kara’s apartment. She wasn’t worried about her sister associating with a Luthor because she feared for her social standing. She was wary of their friendship because she feared for Kara’s—Supergirl’s—safety. Lex had come up with one crazy scheme after another to lure Superman to his destruction.

No wonder Kara hadn’t been to see her. No wonder she’d only hovered from a safe distance, watching and waiting to see what other secrets Lena might reveal. After all, she had declared her allegiance to her devil incarnate family right to Kara’s face. She had considered enlisting Supergirl’s assistance with her plan, but had decided that the fewer people who knew, the more likely it would succeed. As a result, Kara had no way of knowing that she’d launched the rocket in order to safely destroy Cadmus’s entire stock of the Medusa virus. If she hadn’t, the feds would have taken the virus to a secret lab somewhere for “research” and “safekeeping.” That was a recipe for disaster because there would always be someone—her relatives and their allies, for example—who might try to steal it and put it to use.

A siren sounded off in the distance, and she squinted across the city skyline, looking in vain for a small figure, cape flapping in the wind. For Kara, who was Super-fucking-girl.

Right. Time for that drink.

Jess was on the phone when she reached the office. Lena nodded at her and strode past, her mind elsewhere—Laphroaig or Johnny Walker Blue? Choices, choices…

Behind her, she heard Jess’s voice. “Wait, Miss Luthor—”

But it was too late. She had already opened the door, only to stop as she noticed a figure sitting near her desk, head bent, blonde hair glowing in the sunlight spilling through the window.

“—Kara Danvers is here,” Jess finished. “I’m sorry. You said to let her in anytime.”
Kara glanced over her shoulder and gave Lena a little wave. As if they hadn’t faced off in this very room only days before. As if Lena hadn’t accused her of being little more than a vigilante with a vendetta against the Luthors.

As if Kara hadn’t looked at her like she honestly believed Lena was capable of mass murder.

“It’s fine,” she told her assistant, hearing the tremor in her own voice. “Hold my calls, please.”

“But you have—”

“Hold my calls,” she repeated, watching as Kara fiddled with a button on her pinstriped shirt.

“Yes, ma’am.”

The door closed and they were alone together, and it was almost too much to grasp. Kara was still eyeing her, brow slightly furrowed, and, Christ, was mind reading one of her super powers? But no, it couldn’t be. She took a deep breath and released it slowly, willing herself to remain calm as she crossed to the hidden panel and reached for the nearest bottle. She could do this. She’d fooled her own mother, hadn’t she?

“This is a surprise,” she said without turning around. “Can I get you a drink?”

“Oh. Um, no thanks. Rough day?”

“You could say that.” She concentrated on the clink of ice and swish of soda and Scotch. The routine soothed her, and she took a fortifying sip, closing her eyes as the liquid burned through her. She could do this. Turning, she blinked into the sunlight and offered what she hoped was close to her usual warm smile, the one usually reserved for Kara. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

And, yep, that was the wrong thing to say. Because while she had always enjoyed flirting with Kara, had loved to watch Kara fumble and flush at her oh-so-gay attention, that had been before she realized she was Supergirl. Powerful, striking Supergirl, the hero Lena had had a bit of a thing for ever since they’d met.

The sun was behind Kara and Lena couldn’t make out her features. But then Kara rose and, oh god, she was walking this way. Kara was approaching her, smile hesitant and hands fidgety. Again it was too much, and Lena turned and moved toward the couch. She sat down, kicked off her shoes, and curled her feet under her, setting her whiskey glass within easy reach.

“Can I…?” Kara gestured to the opposite end of the couch. When Lena nodded, she sat down and pulled a notepad and pen from her bag, her movements short and choppy.

And, okay, that was unexpected.

“You’re here to interview me?”

Kara followed her gaze to the notebook in her lap. “Oh! No, sorry,” she said, quickly tucking the pad back in her purse. “It’s just habit.” She kept hold of the pen, though, twirling it from finger to finger almost faster than Lena could follow.

And suddenly all the clues were there: how Kara had said she’d flown to L Corp for that first solo interview; the tension flitting between the Danvers sisters when Lena asked them to get in touch with Supergirl; how she hadn’t seen Kara and Supergirl together at the gala even though they were supposedly friends; the way Supergirl’s warm smile had felt so familiar, so endearing. If they were the same person, that meant that her feelings for the hero also applied to…
“Why are you here, then?” Lena’s gaze narrowed in on Kara’s neat button-down. Cardigans and collared shirts. Brilliant, really—not only did they convey unheroic averageness, they ensured she could change quickly without obstructing her sight even for a second.

“Why…?” Kara cleared her throat, eyes on the cushions between them. Then she looked up, and Lena wondered if the warmth in her gaze might actually be an accidental flare of heat vision. “Because I wanted to see you. I heard about your mother. I was worried about you, Lena.”

Right, a voice at the back of Lena’s mind hissed. Kara was a Super in the employ of the federal government. She was only checking up on her because she—along with her fellow agents—didn’t trust her. And really, who could blame them?

“Why would you worry about me?”

Kara smoothed the wrinkles in her skirt. “Because we’re friends.”

“Are we?”

Kara blinked. “I thought—but you said—” she stammered, gripping her pen so tightly Lena was surprised it didn’t snap.

And, damn it, she hadn’t meant to hurt her. Hadn’t even thought she could. But unless Kara was an absurdly talented actor, that was exactly what had just happened.

“I’m sorry,” she said, resisting the urge to reach out and capture Kara’s hand in her own. “I didn’t mean… I think I’m just having a hard time right now figuring out who I can count on. After all, who would want me in their life now that my entire family has turned out to be violent extremists?”

“I would,” Kara said, leaning forward. “Lena, don’t you realize how amazing you are? You put the welfare of people you don’t even know before your own mother. You did what was right, what was just, even though it must have been incredibly difficult.”

The fact that Kara had called her amazing, the fact that she was looking at her now as if Lena was the sun when in fact she was the one who pulled everyone so easily into her orbit, was—Wait, the voice in her head whispered. And this time, she took notice.

“I didn’t actually mention my involvement, and neither did the media. Which begs the question: How do you know about it?”

“Oh.” Eyes widening, Kara pulled back, and this time the pen really did snap. The resulting mini-explosion of ink dappled Kara’s white and blue shirt with tiny black spots that reminded Lena of a Rorschach diagram. She leapt to her feet, holding the pen out before her. “Crap!” Then she winced. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to curse. I don’t think I got any ink on your couch, though.”

Lena was caught between disbelief at how adorably innocent the superhero before her seemed and the competing awareness of the opportunity being presented her.

“No need to apologize,” she said, rising and heading for the mini fridge. “But you don’t want to let that stain set.”

She pulled a bottle of club soda from the refrigerator and retraced her steps, unscrewing the top as she moved. Her heart was racing from the adrenaline surge—she was maybe, possibly about to unmask Supergirl. Her steps slowed as she neared the spot where Kara was standing completely still,
staring down at her shirt in apparent consternation. And, oh, she really was lovely, her honey-blonde hair in its neat half-bun spilling forward over one shoulder, bottom lip caught between her teeth, eyelashes dark against her cheeks…

Lena paused barely a step away. They had never been quite this close, had they? Since that first day, she’d felt drawn to Kara’s uninhibited smile and apparent kindness. But she had never found the courage to touch her. She was a Luthor, after all, and had learned not to expect affection from any quarter, not even from someone as open and welcoming as Kara Danvers.

Could she do this? Should she do this? But why shouldn’t she? It wasn’t like she was the one pretending to be someone else. Something else.

Willing her hands not to tremble, she took the broken pen from Kara and set it and the club soda on the side table. Then she straightened and moved even closer.

“Here,” she said, her voice low as she reached for Kara’s buttons, “let me.”

Kara’s gaze met hers, but instead of the alarm she had expected, Lena read a question. Then Kara’s hands were trapping hers, firmly but gently, against her chest. Their eyes caught and held, and Lena felt Kara’s breath rising steadily beneath her palms, felt the heat rising from her body, sensed the rhythmic beat of her heart. They were so close, and Kara was biting her lip again, and… Oh. Was she attracted to women? The thought had never actually occurred to Lena before. She had assumed Kara Danvers was straight, maybe even asexual. But the look in her eyes as she stared down at Lena said otherwise.

At least, it would on a human. Unfortunately, Kara Danvers wasn’t human.

The agent at the Port flickered into her mind. Could Kara’s humanoid exterior hide a monster, too? She flinched slightly even as she remembered the files she’d hacked into on the DEO mainframe shortly after Kara had accused her mother of running Cadmus. Someone at the DEO had left such an obvious footprint when they tried—and failed—to obtain access to the L Corp network that finding a back door into the feds’ system had been easy. Their Medusa project files had contained information on Kryptonian biology, enough for her to know that they were definitely not shapeshifters. The only external disguise Kara wore was her eyeglasses.

Those glasses were slipping down Kara’s nose now, and the familiar sight triggered a hundred related images—Kara on that first day in her office with Clark Kent, nodding in understanding as Lena spoke of wanting to separate from her family of origin; Kara seated beside her on the couch listening as she talked about how crushed she’d been when Lex had shown his true, hateful colors; Kara bursting into her office, desperate to save a friend; Kara looking at her as if it were obvious why she had come to check on her—because we’re friends. Then she saw Supergirl rebounding from a missile to the chest to save her from dying in a fiery helicopter crash; Supergirl helping to shore up the children’s hospital after Lex’s men had attacked; Supergirl pledging her belief in Lena’s goodness, entreating her to be her own hero. In whatever form she took, Kara had proven over and over again how good and selfless she was.

Lena stared at her hands, still clasped to Kara’s chest. What the hell was she thinking? Kara wasn’t complex code to be unraveled and parsed. She wasn’t a gadget whose internal parts she could disassemble and tinker with until she understood how they worked. She was a person, and while she may have been born on another planet, she deserved the same respect and autonomy Lena granted her fellow human beings. Despite what the Luthors believed, in spite of what they had tried to instill in her, aliens were people just like everyone else, and most of them were only trying to live their lives in peace.
And, oh fuck. That was it, wasn’t it? She was a biased Luthor, after all.

“God, I'm sorry,” she said, her eyes flying up to Kara’s. “I’m so sorry, really. I should never have tried—”

But before she could finish the apology, she found herself suddenly free. Where Kara’s body had been warm and substantial, the draft of air she left in her wake was cold and empty. Lena blinked against the dizzying sense of loss. One moment they had been so close, and in the next, Kara was already halfway across the room, mumbling something about a meeting at CatCo.

Wait! Lena wanted to call. Stay. Don’t go. But being left was exactly what she deserved, and she knew it. Apparently they both did.

Kara paused at the door just long enough to offer, “I'm glad you’re all right, Lena,” her sincerity and—oh god—her sadness evident in her voice and in the brief look she cast over her shoulder.

And then, just like that, just like Supergirl, she was gone.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Kara leaned against the back wall of the elevator, barely noticing the car’s motion. What the hell had just happened? Except she knew: Lena had figured out she was Supergirl, and Kara had figured out that her feelings for Lena were a tiny bit, potentially… gay.

She closed her eyes as the elevator stopped and more people got on, their voices grating in the enclosed space. How was this even happening? She was pretty sure Sara Lance had said being gay was genetic, not contagious. And yet, only a few months ago she’d been happily straight and Alex had been—well, unhappily repressed. Now Kara had a doomed crush on the daughter of the devil incarnate and her sister was a lesbian in an actual girl-on-girl relationship. And, oh, she wished she hadn’t thought of it like that because now all she could see were two porn star types with long fingernails kissing each other with way too much tongue.

That’s right, Kara Danvers had watched same-sex porn. Only once, back in college, and only because Alex’s boyfriend of the time had left it in their DVD player and she’d thought it was an entirely different film. On a side note, why were porn titles often puns on existing movie names? Talk about misleading.

And, awesome. She was in a crowded elevator in Lena’s building thinking about editorial choices made by the adult film industry. Not where she’d seen her day going when she’d decided to show up at Lena’s office without any prior planning. Although maybe she should have recognized before now where this thing with Lena was headed, given she couldn’t seem to stay away from her. But after the way Lena had reacted to being close to her—she had been frightened, Kara was sure of it—she couldn’t imagine facing her again anytime soon.

When the elevator finally reached the ground floor, Kara lurched slightly. And okay, very funny, Supergirl being knocked off balance just after being knocked off balance. But really, she thought as she dodged the workers installing the new L Corp logo in the lobby, it wasn’t funny at all.

* * *

The first text arrived that evening while she was at the alien bar. Her heart actually skipped when she checked her phone and saw Lena’s name. She only hesitated a moment before opening the message.

Miss Lena Luthor: “I’m sorry about earlier. Can we talk?”

What was she sorry for? Kara was the one who had scared her, not the other way around. All Lena had done was try to get a look at the House of El coat of arms on her Super suit. In her shoes, Kara probably would have done the same. Well, maybe not exactly the same. But she could understand the impulse.

Winn leaned closer. “Is that Alex? Tell her to get her gay ass down here pronto!”
“Her ass isn’t gay,” James said. “Besides, who even says pronto?”

“You, Italian speakers? Of whom there are at least 60 million across the world?”

“That might be true if pronto wasn’t a Spanish word.”

And they were off, bickering good-naturedly as usual.

Kara stared down at Lena’s contact photo, one of the pictures the CatCo photographer had taken for the first article Kara had written. It was stunning, of course. She was stunning, with her green eyes focused off-center, a slight smile curling her lips. She’d been looking at Kara when Brian snapped the shot—a presumably human Kara, not the alien variant who made her breathing shallow and her skin clammy. Kara closed her eyes briefly, reliving the mortifying events of the afternoon. She hadn’t intended to trap Lena’s hands like that. She just hadn’t been sure what to do about the other woman’s determination to see what was under her shirt—or her own sudden, startling urge to let her.

She muted her notifications and went to get another Aldebaran rum. Tonight she needed an honest-to-goodness cure for reality.

*             *             *

The second text was waiting when she turned her phone on in the morning: “Please, Kara? Let me make it up to you.” This time she had to close her fist to keep from replying. Lena was a gorgeous, independent—no. She was a good person who shouldn’t be made to beg, especially not by someone who had lied to her every single day since they’d met.

She’d been lying to herself too, though, if it helped. Probably it didn’t.

When Alex texted her in the middle of an editorial meeting a little while later, she was relieved to have something to do other than journalism, which wasn’t nearly as distracting as being Supergirl. One of the Fort Rozz detainees had escaped and was hiding in the National City armory, and the DEO needed help recapturing the hostile, four-armed brute. The next twelve hours were chaotic, but she was so busy with reconnaissance work and the eventual violent apprehension of the prisoner that she barely even thought of Lena. And by barely, she meant only every other waking moment.

On Friday, exhausted from another sleepless night, she hid out in her windowless office “working” on a story that James mostly wrote for her. Good thing news writing was all about collaboration or she would struggle to complete a single piece.

Texts number three and four arrived one after the other late that afternoon as she was packing up to head home and sleep for the foreseeable future: “Saw you on the news. I’m glad you’re all right.” And then, “I’m here whenever you’re ready.”

Her legs felt weak, but she wasn’t sure if it was because Lex Luthor’s sister knew her identity or because she’d had to use her heat vision on the giant, four-armed fugitive alien. Couldn’t be that last text: I’m here whenever you’re ready.

She sat heavily on her desk chair, tensing as it creaked. This was already her third chair; she couldn’t ask for another one. It held, though, and after a moment she settled more gingerly, phone in hand. She stared at the message thread, mining it for clues. Was it possible Lena felt something for her, too? Kara wasn’t a complete idiot. She knew that Lena liked to flirt, but she’d always gotten the impression she did it mostly to garner a reaction. Because why would she be interested in her? Lena was amazing and accomplished and seven years older, according to her L Corp profile. Lena could have anyone she wanted. And more than likely, she wanted a fellow human.
Honestly, that was probably just as well because Kara had no idea what to do with herself around Lena. She’d never quite been the flirting type. Then again, she hadn’t thought she was the gay type, either. Except she wasn’t gay. Alex talked about her feelings for Maggie as this game-changing revelation, a negation of every heterosexual thought she’d ever had. Kara, on the other hand, had felt like this before. Sometimes she still caught herself wondering if she and James were destined to be together when they were older and she’d gotten better at managing her double life.

This was like what she’d felt before, but different, too, because Lena was unlike anyone she’d ever met. Not seeing her was painful. Right now, this very minute, she wanted nothing more than to launch herself into the sky and drop onto Lena’s balcony, cape fluttering in the wind. Because in spite of being at least a little bit afraid of her, Lena still wanted to see her, too. She just wasn’t sure why.

Did “I’m here when you’re ready” mean what Kara desperately hoped it did, or was it just a welcoming gesture between friends? With guys there seemed to be the assumption that you could always be more than friends, but with girls it was the exact opposite. Maybe she should talk to someone who knew about these things. Alex? But no, she couldn’t tell Alex she had a crush on the only Luthor not currently in prison. Besides, she had a feeling Alex might not respond well to the idea of her suddenly being into girls. As in, “Can’t I have one thing that isn’t about you?” And, in all fairness, Kara’s timing could have been better. But it was Alex’s fault for putting the idea in her head in the first place! She had been fine going about her life not considering half the world’s population as potential romantic partners, and then Alex had “found herself,” and in order to be supportive, Kara had tried to see things from her perspective. Only now she couldn’t seem to stop seeing women in this shiny new, sparkly way.

Maggie, the only other gay person she knew, wasn’t an option either because she would tell Alex. Kara had seen the way Maggie acted around her sister. All Alex had to do was look at her sternly and put her hands on her hips—hers or Maggie’s, either one—and the petite detective cracked faster than Kara did when someone waved pot stickers in her direction.

Frustrated, she shoved her phone in her bag. There was literally no one on Earth she could talk to about Lena. James obviously wasn’t an option because, obviously, and Winn would only say, I knew you were a lesbian! And then she would have to correct him and it would feel exactly like being an alien who could pass for human. Or, maybe not exactly, but close enough.

It wasn’t until she was almost home that an idea occurred to her: No one on this Earth, anyway…

*             *             *

Now that she was dating Maggie, Alex apparently slept in on Saturdays. Or something. Kara didn’t want to think too hard about what her sister might be doing with her weekend morning. All she knew was Alex didn’t show up at her apartment all annoyingly perky from her weekly 10K, sporting a sweaty neck and a box of crullers. Which, darn it, she’d been relying on her sister to distract her from the plan that had begun to take on a life of its own.

Nothing to be done about it now. Clearly this was the universe telling her to go for it. Although not on an empty stomach, of course. She made a quick trip to her favorite bagel shop for a bottle of juice and half a dozen of the doughy morsels of goodness, and if she detoured briefly on her way home and used her X-ray vision to see if Lena was working—she was, because she worked way too much—who would know?

Fortified with plenty of carbs and the cream cheese to match, she returned to the apartment, scrawled a quick just-in-case note for her sister, and pulled on the jeans and sweatshirt she only ever got to wear on weekends. She wouldn’t need the Supergirl suit this time.
Soon she was standing in the middle of her apartment, Cisco’s interdimensional extrapolator in the palm of one hand. Lena would love this gizmo, wouldn’t she? She might even understand how it worked. Maybe they could try it sometime… With her free hand, Kara face-palmed. Clearly it was time to exit this dimension.

Here went nothing. She held her breath and pushed a button, and… silence. Okay, that wasn’t quite what she’d meant by “nothing.” She waited another minute but the device remained quiet. Did it need batteries? Was that the battery compartment on the back? She wasn’t sure she had a screwdriver that small, except—maybe in her eyeglasses repair kit? Of course, finding that would probably be harder than recovering the ornery giant alien had been. She tried to remember what Cisco had told her about the device earlier in the week. And—seriously? Had it really been less than a week since Lillian Luthor had tried to launch the rocket that would kill a thousand aliens?

The extrapolator vibrated, and then she heard it: “Earth-1 calling Supergirl. Are you there, Kara?” Cisco’s voice was faint but audible, maybe even without super hearing.

“I’m here,” she said. “But I’m pretty sure we’re Earth-1.”

“Yes, I’m pretty sure you’re not. How are you? Are you okay?”

“Fine. I just need some answers to, um…” She paused. Her plan appeared to be missing a few steps. “…A mystery. Any chance you could beam me up, Scotty?”

“Beam you up?” Cisco echoed.

“Do you guys not have Star Trek? Geez. You’re really missing out.”

“No, we have it. I was just trying to wrap my head around the fact that an alien superhero would be a Trekkie.”

“It was actually one of the first television programs to offer serious roles to alien actors on our Earth. Totally groundbreaking.”

 “…Right. Of course it was. In that case, energizing.”

Within moments the familiar blue portal opened in her living room. Kara took a breath and stepped through.

S.T.A.R. Labs was still the same as it had been earlier in the week. She didn’t see Barry, but Cisco was waving at her from his spinning chair and Felicity was eating yogurt, her feet up on the control board.

“Hey guys,” Kara said, smiling at them. “I didn’t think you’d be here, Felicity.”

“I’m only here for the tech.” She stood up and offered Kara a hug, the yogurt cup held awkwardly to one side. “Wow, you are really—solid.”

Cisco rolled his eyes. “Which is why she’s called the Girl of Steel. What makes your bone and tissue structure so resilient, anyway?”


“Her superhero name isn’t Superwoman, Felicity. It’s Supergirl. That makes her the Girl of Steel.”

Kara cleared her throat. “Guys, I’m right here.”
“Sorry,” Felicity said. “So. What’s this mystery that needs solving?”

“Um.” She chewed her lip. Maybe honesty was the best policy. What a refreshing thought. “I was actually hoping to get hold of Sara. I mean, assuming you guys can do that?”

“Of course we can.” Cisco was already reaching for a keyboard.

“Do you have a time-traveling emergency?” Felicity’s voice was doubtful. “Because the time ship really isn’t supposed to be used for personal business…”

“No, nothing like that,” she said quickly. “I just, um, need to see Sara.”

“Oh,” Felicity said, watching Cisco type. Then she looked at Kara again, eyebrows raised. “Oh.”

“Not like that,” Kara said. “Well, sort of like that. But not about her.”

“No judgment here, sister.”

“All right,” Cisco said, apparently not having heard a word of their conversation. “We’re in.”

Felicity picked up the com unit. “Star City to Waverider, come in.”

“Hiya Felicity.” Sara Lance’s voice reverberated clearly through the room. “I have to say I wasn’t expecting to hear from you so soon.”

“That makes two of us. But Supergirl is here and says she wants to talk to you. Say hello, Kara.”

“Hello,” Kara said, and waved at the control board.

“Hi… Sorry—what’s going on?”

Kara hesitated, which was a mistake because Felicity took her silence as permission to offer, “She needs to talk to you about a girl.” As Kara stared at her open-mouthed, she added, “What? That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

Cisco scooted his chair back and wandered away, muttering something about how this wasn’t the scenario he’d had in mind when he’d built the extrapolator.

Sara’s laughter cascaded from the speakers. “I knew it! My gaydar is never wrong.”

Felicity squinted. “I don’t think that’s true.”

“Is Barry there? Tell him he owes me a case of Rolling Rock.”

Kara hid her face in her hands, only partially in horror at Sara’s taste in beer. She should have known this would be a terrible idea.

“Don’t worry.” Felicity patted her shoulder. “They bet on everyone’s sexuality. I honestly don’t know what is up with those two.”

It didn’t take long for the Waverider to reach them. Within the hour, Kara found herself in a dark alley with Sara, headed toward an unmarked door. This certainly felt familiar. Only this time, there was no guard or password. They simply opened the door and stepped inside.

Kara glanced around the low-ceilinged room, taking in the rainbow flag on the far wall and the all-female clientele. Her eyes widened.
“Wait, is this—?”

“—a gay bar? Yep. Your first, I take it?”

She nodded wordlessly and followed Sara to the bar. The other woman slid onto a stool, so Kara copied her, observing her nonverbal as she ordered a pair of Rolling Rocks. Kara held back a grimace. It was really too bad the “swill,” as Alex referred to the Pennsylvania beer, existed in multiple dimensions.

The bartender, a tall woman in a leather vest with tattoos and short hair that did a floppy thing on top that Kara admired, smiled at them as she popped the tops on their bottles. “There you go, ladies. Be sure to let me know if you need anything else.”

Sara smiled back, one eyebrow raised. “Oh, we will.”

There, Kara thought. That was exactly the kind of flirting Lena was so accomplished at. But what was the proper response? Humans and Kryptonians had such different communication styles. A dozen years in, she still had trouble figuring out what certain human expressions meant. Looks that should mean something to her often went right over her head, and even when she did manage to correctly parse a flick of the eyes or lift of an eyebrow, she wasn’t always confident in her interpretation.

She sighed and sipped her beer. Probably she would always be hopeless at communicating with humans. Good thing she could fly. That one ability made up for a heck of a lot.

“So who’s the girl you crossed dimensions to talk about?” Sara asked, nudging her. “She must be something to catch Supergirl’s eye.”

Kara hunched her shoulders and ignored the compliment. “Can I ask you something?”

“Isn’t that why we’re here?”

“No, I know. It’s just, how did you know you liked girls that way too?” As Sara gave her a look, she added, “Sorry. Barry told me that, um…”

“I’m AC/DC? A switch hitter? Heteroflexible?”

Kara smiled, feeling her shoulders relax a little. “Yeah. That.”

Sara smiled back. “I think I always knew at some level. But it took a beautiful woman getting into my personal body space and kissing me to make me deal with it.”

Other than the kissing bit, that sounded about right. “And were you okay with it right away?”

“It took a little while, but eventually I decided it wasn’t worth worrying about. I am who I am, and compared with being a time-traveling, undead assassin tasked with saving the world, being bisexual doesn’t seem like that big of a deal.”

Talk about putting things in perspective. Being attracted to another woman wasn’t the most interesting—or dangerous—that about Kara, either.

“Do you want to tell me about the lucky lady?” Sara asked.

“Her name is Lena. She’s smart and she’s pretty and—actually, she kind of reminds me of Snow White. She’s got dark hair and pale skin and an evil mother who, I’m pretty sure, wants her dead.
And me. She definitely wants me dead. She’s the head of an anti-alien extremist group—the mom, not Lena—that kidnapped and tortured me a few weeks ago as part of this plot to kill all the aliens in National City.”

“Hold up.” Sara’s brow furrowed. “You have the hots for the daughter of the leader of an anti-alien group? Like the KKK, only they hate aliens instead of human minorities?”

Kara nodded. “Replace the white hoods and torches with PhDs and laser guns, and you get the picture.”

“Wow. That’s—a lot. Usually the parents don’t want you dead until after you’ve deflowered their daughter. Go big or go home, huh?”

She wanted to make a joke about not being called Super for nothing, but she was too hung up on the deflowering their daughter bit. “No one’s—I mean, it’s not like—I haven’t even—”

“Sorry,” Sara said, and touched her arm gently. “She’s your first girl crush, huh?”

“Yeah. She’s my first girl crush.” And oddly, it was a relief to say it out loud, to admit to someone that she had feelings for Lena Luthor. It made the whole thing seem more real and, simultaneously, less terrifying. Maybe it was the act of naming. Apparently humans weren’t the only ones afraid of the unknown.

“You’ve really never felt like this with any other girl?”

Kara shook her head. Being gay or bisexual had never occurred to her. Of course she’d known such orientations were possible, but she’d never known anyone on Earth or Krypton who was anything other than straight. Besides, it wasn’t like she’d been that close with many people during her lifetime, male or female. James had been the first person outside of her family that she could be fully, wholly herself with. Maybe that was partly what made him so attractive. He looked at her and saw her, all of her, and didn’t run away. In fact, he’d always run toward her. Except, maybe, when she was under the influence of Maxwell Lord’s Red Kryptonite.

“So do you think you want to act on your feelings?” Sara asked.

“I don’t know. I’m not even sure how she feels about me.”

“The only way to be sure is to ask her.”

Kara folded her arms across her chest. “I can’t do that!” What if Lena laughed at her? Or what if she was anti-gay as well as anti-alien? If Kara told her how she felt and it didn’t go well, Lena could tell the press she was Supergirl. Or, worse, she might tell her mother. Even from behind bars, Lillian Luthor was dangerous, just like her son.

Sara nodded. “I get that it feels like that, but you really can. You just have to decide what you’re willing to risk. By the way, are you going to drink that beer?”

“No. Have it.” And she slid it across the bar.

“Thanks. Okay, next question, and this one is important: Do you have anyone at home you can talk to about this?”

“Well, yeah. My older sister.”

“That’s right.” Sara snapped her fingers. “I remember now. She just came out, didn’t she? Wait. Why
are you here talking to me if there’s a gay sister waiting for you back in your dimension?"

“*It’s complicated.*”

Sara laughed a little. “I know how that goes. Is she not your biggest fan?”

“No, she is. That’s the problem. She’s been looking out for me since the day we met. She only came out recently, and now here I am having this major bisexual panic. It feels kind of selfish.”

“You didn’t choose to fall for a woman, did you?”

“Of course not, but Alex is *finally* thinking about what she wants and I don’t want to get in the way of that. She was a teenager when I showed up and hijacked her family. Her entire life changed, and she stuck by me through everything. Even when I wasn’t there for her.”

Sara picked at the label on her bottle. “Did she come out to you, or did you find out on your own?”

“I was the first person she told, other than her girlfriend, of course.” Kara smiled at the memory. The day they’d walked on the waterfront and talked about Alex’s feelings for Maggie was one of her favorites, even if she hadn’t known the right thing to say at first.

“Then don’t you think you owe her the same trust?”

Kara hadn’t thought about it like that. “You’re probably right. I think she already knows, anyway. She always seems to figure me out before I do.”

“Older sisters,” Sara said, shaking her head.

“What’s the deal with your sister, anyway? Barry said she’s a vigilante too? You guys sure seem to have a lot of those on your Earth.”

They talked about their crime-fighting families and their “fucked-up” pasts (Sara’s words, not hers), and after a little while Kara realized why she had temporarily skipped out on her own world. Sara Lance was easy to talk to. She understood what it was like to be different, and not just in terms of sexuality. Like Kara, she had abilities that ascribed moral and ethical connotations to practically every decision she made. Time travel only exacerbated the need to think through every possible outcome of an action, Sara told her.

“Does that mean you’ve never gotten to take the time machine for a joyride?” Kara asked, ridiculously saddened by the thought.

“Officially, no.” But her wink said otherwise, Kara was almost certain.

“Okay. Well, if you were able to time travel for fun, what era would you pick?”

Sara’s head tilted. “The American Revolution, right at the beginning when everyone was all agitated about tea and taxes. What about you?”

Kara’s hands flew up and out. “I don’t know! There are *so many* interesting moments in time. Maybe the library of Alexandria?”

“Ooh, good one.”

“No, I know—the *dinosaurs*. I’ve always wondered if they had feathers or scales, or if they were completely different from what natural historians envision.”
Sara leaned in. “Between you and me, they had feathers. But if you tell anyone I told you that, I’ll have to kill you.”

“You and what army?” Kara challenged, lifting her eyebrow the way she’d seen Sara do earlier.

Sara’s smile changed slightly, but Kara couldn’t quite read it. Just for a moment, she remembered the flustered feeling that had come over her back at Barry’s hangar when Sara had pressed her hand against her collarbone. It was similar to the skipping heart sensation she’d experienced when Lena had reached for her buttons, though nowhere near as intense.

“You know,” Sara said, drifting even closer. “There’s one foolproof way to see if you like girls.”

“What’s that?”

“You could kiss me.”

And Kara thought about it, she really did. But then she pictured Lena, and she couldn’t shake the feeling that kissing Sara Lance would be a little like cheating.

“Thanks,” she said a tad regretfully, “but maybe next time?” And she winked, feeling absurdly happy as Sara threw her head back and laughed. She had a feeling the undead former assassin didn’t laugh like that very often.

They stayed for a while longer, people-watching and sharing stories, and Kara couldn’t help but notice how nice it was to open up about her life with a woman who wasn’t Alex. She’d had to be so careful for so long not to give anything away that might compromise her identity, that somewhere along the way hiding had become second nature. Sara, though, already knew who she was and, what was more, had secrets and a past of her own.

When Kara mentioned that she’d always felt like an outsider on Earth, Sara said, “I’m going to share a secret with you. Most human beings feel like outsiders too, especially when we’re younger.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

And honestly, this made sense to Kara. So much of the hatred she’d witnessed in her time on Earth seemed to be based on fear of people and creatures who were different. She pictured Lena flinching away from her, but this time her heart didn’t hurt quite as much. Then she thought about the text messages she had yet to answer. What had Lena meant when she’d apologized, anyway?

The only way to be sure is to ask her. Well, she’d wanted Sara’s advice, hadn’t she?

She was just starting to think it might be time to head back to her own dimension when Sara challenged her to a shot-drinking contest. Kara tried to explain that her Kryptonian biology allowed her to metabolize alcohol differently, but Sara didn’t seem to care. Apparently she just wanted to get drunk, an impulse Kara had become increasingly familiar with over the last few days.

After her third shot, Sara started to list slightly to one side. After the fifth, she leaned over and asked, her voice barely audible even to Kara, “I just have to know. Does your super speed extend to your tongue?”

“What?” Kara frowned, and then, all at once, realization set in. “Ew! Gross!” And she walloped Sara so hard that the other woman fell off her stool. “Shoot, I’m sorry! Are you all right?”
Sara picked herself up and shook her head. “Don’t even worry about it. I completely deserved that.” She started to slide back onto her stool but Kara stopped her.

“That’s enough, canary girl. I think it’s time we get you back to your ship.”

They were almost to the door when Sara said, “Do you think the suit made you gay? It’s pretty badass, although if I were you I’d rethink the pleats. The cheerleader vibe sort of ruins the whole badass thing. Though maybe that’s what you were going for?”

“Shut up!” Kara shoved her out the door into the alley, and then rushed to catch her as she nearly tipped over. “I’ll have you know I was never a cheerleader.”

“You wanted to be, though, didn’t you?”

“Maybe,” she admitted. There had been a time in her life when she had longed so badly to fit in. She wasn’t sure she’d ever completely gotten over the urge, either. She glanced around the alley quickly, mostly out of habit, and then slipped her arms around Sara. “Hold on,” she added, and lifted them both into the air.

As they flew back to S.T.A.R. Labs, Sara squeezed her waist and said conspiratorially, “I love that you used interdimensional travel to escape your bisexual panic.”

Kara smiled. “I love that you used time travel to visit a gay bar.”

“The perks of being superheroes. Speaking of, this whole flying thing is pretty badass too. Did I mention that?”

“You might have once or twice.”

Kara tried to focus on flying over the unfamiliar city instead of on the soft, curvy woman molded against her. She had always thought girls were pretty, but she’d never noticed how good they smelled or how smooth their skin was. Sheesh. Alex should have told her women were amazing. Of course, that meant she would have had to figure it out sooner herself.

And, crap. Alex was going to kill her when she found out she’d visited Alt-Earth again. Although, really, maybe she didn’t have to know. Kara’s track record at keeping secrets from her sister may not be the best, but she still chose to hope for the best. Because, really, what was the alternative?

The other Waverider team members weren’t thrilled to have their pilot returned to them blindingly drunk, so Kara smiled her apologies, popped into the lab to wave a quick goodbye to Felicity and Cisco, and then opened up a window onto her own world. She had no idea what she was going to do about anything when she got home. She only knew she couldn’t in good conscience hide out on Earth-2 (take that, Cisco), not when she knew her older sister was probably waiting for her to open up about her danged girl crush, already.

It’s time, Kara told herself, and stepped through the portal.
This was the best day of Alex’s life. No, really. Even better than the night Maggie had shown up—was it really only a matter of days ago?—at her apartment and kissed her. This was better because when she woke up this morning, it was to find herself being held from behind by the most beautiful woman she’d ever known. As a bonus, how adorable was it that Maggie thought she was the big spoon?

She lay in bed wide awake for close to an hour, listening to Maggie breathe and watching the room slowly lighten. Normally she would have been up and out by now for her Saturday morning run, but it wouldn’t hurt to miss one workout. Besides, they’d gotten in a fair amount of exercise in the course of the night because last night, Alex Danvers had gotten lucky. Truly, genuinely lucky.

Stirring restlessly, Maggie murmured something unintelligible.

“What?” Alex whispered. But there was no answer.

Detective Sawyer talked in her sleep? Interesting. Though not as interesting as that thing she’d done with her fingers... Alex bit her lip to keep from squeeing. She couldn’t quite believe she was lying here thinking dirty thoughts about the woman she’d been hopelessly in love with for months now. It was... freaking awesome, that’s what it was.

As had been their night. Admittedly, Alex had been self-conscious at first, overtly aware of her limited experience. But women’s bodies were so much nicer than men’s (in her extra gay opinion), and after a slow start she found her groove. Maggie wasn’t much of a talker in bed, but she did let out these delicious little sounds that let Alex know when she’d found a particularly sensitive spot. By their third run-through, she’d finally felt a comforting sense of competency, enough so that the next time they did this, she was pretty sure self-consciousness wouldn’t be a factor.

Which, actually, might be now, she thought as Maggie stretched and began kissing the back of her neck.

“Good morning,” Maggie said, her voice almost a purr.

Alex wanted to say something cheesy like, I’ll say it is, but she also wanted Maggie to keep doing what she was doing—especially now that her hands were getting in on the action. “Good morning.”

“Turn around, Danvers.”

She was awfully bossy for someone so small. On impulse, Alex turned and caught Maggie’s hands, lifted them above her head, and held them in place against the headboard. “That’s Agent Danvers to you,” she said, using her most commanding DEO tone.

And, oh god, Maggie let out one of those little sounds Alex already loved more than she should. She leaned in slowly, drawing out the anticipation as long as she could stand before kissing Maggie soundly.

Yes, this was the best of her day of her life, no doubt about it.

*    *   *
They were still basking in their post-orgasmic glow when her phone went off.

“Sorry,” she said, and reached for the bedside table.

But Maggie intercepted her. “Uh-uh. You have to pay the toll first.” And she pulled her in for another kiss.

Alex rolled on top and pressed Maggie’s fit, compact body into the mattress. She couldn’t get enough of this woman. It was like—

Her phone buzzed again, interrupting her mind’s attempt to wax poetic about her girlfriend’s—were they girlfriends, though? They still hadn’t really talked. Alex was acquainted with Maggie’s reticence to discuss most non-work related topics, but she had thought getting closer might change things in that department. So far, it had not.

She pushed down her existential relationship panic and grabbed her phone. Winn had texted her, which couldn’t be good. Sure enough: “The monitor went off. 8:56AM.”

The monitor…? Oh, shit. “Thx,” she texted back, and leapt out of bed.

“What’s up, babe?” Maggie asked, sitting up as she rushed around the room gathering her clothing.

Alex made the mistake of looking at her. The sheet had gathered at Maggie’s waist, leaving her glorious breasts on full display. Alex’s mouth went dry. Why had no one told her that coming out in her late twenties would give her the hormones of a teenage boy?

“Uh, it’s a Supergirl emergency.”

Maggie started to push back the covers. “Want back-up?”

“No!” As Maggie’s eyebrows lifted, she added more calmly, “I mean, yes, of course, but it’s DEO. It’s classified.”

That was something else she was going to have to figure out: if and when to reveal that her sister and National City’s own personal superhero were one and the same. Maggie had asked a few leading questions about the nature of her relationship with Supergirl, but Alex couldn’t very well confide in someone she wasn’t even sure she was in an actual relationship with, could she?

Maggie shrugged. “Fine.”

“I’m sorry I have to run.” She leaned down to kiss her quickly, aiming for the corner of her mouth. With Maggie still naked, anything else would be downright dangerous.

“Will I see you later?”

Alex stopped in the bedroom doorway and glanced back. Maggie had slipped back under the sheets and was curled on her side now. Her face and voice were neutral, but Alex could see what she couldn’t completely hide: She was worried.

“I hope so. Can I call you in a little while?”

Maggie nodded. “Yes, please.”

Alex waved, and then before she could turn into even more of an awkward, love-struck nerd, she turned away.
Maggie’s belated “Be careful!” reached her just as the outer door clicked closed, and Alex wished she could go back and reassure her that the only one who needed to worry was Barry effing Allen. But she had already dilly-dallied enough. Time to go kick some speedy ass.

The motorcycle ride wasn’t long. Maggie’s building was only a couple of miles from Kara’s, and the bike’s maneuverability and Alex’s DEO credentials meant that things like blocked traffic and stoplights didn’t apply to her. But still, it felt like hours before she burst into her sister’s apartment, gun drawn, fully prepared to shoot if necessary. Maybe even if it wasn’t necessary.

On the couch, Kara looked up from her Kindle, a potato chip in mid-air. “Your gun, Alex? Really?”

“What is he?” she demanded. “Seriously, I’m kicking his skinny little ass this time!”

“Mon-El? I haven’t seen him. Is this about the kiss?” As Alex stared at her, eyes narrowing even more, Kara added, “Not that there was a kiss, because there definitely wasn’t.”

Great. Her hit list had just expanded. “We’re coming back to that one,” she promised. “But no, I meant Barry. Did he come here or did you go there again?”

“What?” Kara’s gaze sharpened. “I don’t—what are you talking—”

“Are you really going to lie to me about this? Again?” She holstered her gun. Apparently she wasn’t going to get a chance to use it. “Let me guess—he needed help defeating more evil aliens. Or maybe you simply managed to make yet another conquest.”

Kara’s face cycled through several emotions before she finally settled on disappointment. “Speaking of lying, I thought you said you weren’t spying on me?”

“Technically, I didn’t lie.”

“You’re such a cop, Alex. What does that even mean?”

“It means I had Winn build a tachyon particle monitor that may or may not be pointed at your building. Which was obviously good thinking on my part.” Self-righteousness recovered, she folded her arms across her chest. “You skipped out again, didn’t you?”

Guilt settled on Kara’s forehead and shoulders. “Maybe.”

“Do you want to tell me why?”

“At some point, yes. But not yet. I’m not ready, Alex. Can you please respect that?”

The pensive, slightly tortured answer momentarily discombobulated Alex. She wavered, shifting her hands to her hips before shoving them into the pockets of her leather jacket. “Well, I guess. Yeah. I mean, are you okay?”

Kara nodded. “I’m fine. I just need to do some thinking on my own. Can you understand that?”

In theory, absolutely. But in reality, Alex was pretty sure she’d never heard Kara say anything like that in her life. Her little sister was someone who figured out what she thought and felt by talking. For every four ideas she came up with, she followed through on maybe one, which had always frustrated Alex. The Danvers were not verbal processors by nature. They were introverts who would rather spend hours staring into a microscope than attend a social gathering. But having Kara in the family had forced them to become more comfortable with verbally expressing themselves. So much so that Alex now found that she preferred honest, straightforward communication over silent
For the second or third time already that morning, she resisted the urge to try to make someone talk—a skill that was definitely near the top of her secret agent résumé. Not that something like that existed, of course, because that would just be silly. Instead she took a breath, allowed the influx of oxygen to boost her prefrontal cortex, and nodded.

“Of course,” she said, walking over to the couch and dropping down next to her sister. “Whenever you want to talk, I’m here, okay?”

At that, Kara closed her eyes and pressed both hands to her forehead. “Unghh.”

Which made as much sense as anything else she’d said this—Wait. Alex’s nose wrinkled. “Why do you smell like Rolling Rock beer?”

“How do you do that?”

“I’m a special ops agent with a degree in chemistry, Kara. Besides, it was the first alcohol I ever got sick on so it’s burned into my brain.” She swallowed, getting queasy even thinking about the near-incidence of alcohol poisoning she’d experienced her freshman year of college. Actually, she’d thrown up for ten hours straight. She was pretty sure she could drop the “near” part of the incident.

“Oh. Well, like I said, I don’t really want to talk about it.”

“All right.”

Alex hesitated, noting how her sister refused to look at her, how her super-strong fingers were slowly unraveling the fleece blanket she’d thrown over her legs. Kara’s forehead was furrowed and her shoulders hunched, and the energy coming off her in waves was jittery and uncertain. It reminded Alex of Thanksgiving dinner when she had been the freaking-out Danvers sister, unable to stay still and unwilling to remain sober. She had worked herself so far up trying to get the courage to tell her mother—and everyone else in the room—who she really was that when Barry pulled his multiverse-hopping bullshit… Well, she’d lost her nerve. She wasn’t proud of that fact, but it didn’t make it any less true. Fortunately, her mother had decided to give her an out. More than an out, really: Eliza had offered her a safe space to be open about who she was. Not only that, she had promised to love her no matter what, just as Kara had done when Alex came out to her.

Remembering the relief she’d felt at realizing she had her family’s unconditional support, she covered her sister’s twitchy fingers and pressed gently. “I’m going to ask you something, and I want you to know that I don’t expect an answer right now. But, well, does this have anything to do with Lena Luthor?”

Kara froze. She was so still and Alex was hoping so hard she hadn’t crossed a line her sister genuinely wasn’t ready for—versus merely being terrified of—that it was like the freaking mannequin challenge. Finally Kara shifted and looked up, her blue eyes nearly as forlorn as the last time Alex had broken into her apartment.

“She’s a Luthor, Alex. I can’t—I don’t even—Damn it. What am I going to do?”

Alex wrapped her arms around Kara and rested her chin on her shoulder. She thought about holding her and telling her she was beautiful, she was loved, she wasn’t alone. Instead she said, “You’re going to keep being your fabulous superhero self; just, maybe a little more fabulous than anyone thought.”

Kara didn’t say anything, so she added, “Think about the costume possibilities! You could add glitter
to the crest. Or, I know, you could be the first superhero to wear a rainbow headband! Maybe Clark would too, you know, in solidarity?"

After a long pause, Kara huffed grumpily, “Bisexual pride is represented by blue and pink overlapping triangles, not your silly gay rainbow.”

Alex laughed softly. “That’s my girl.”

Kara pulled away enough to pummel her arm. “It’s not funny.”

She tilted her head. “It’s a little funny.”

“Fine, maybe a little. I’m serious, though, Alex. You’re not supposed to just let me off the hook.”

“Why not? I’m your big sister. It’s my job to make sure you’re happy. Besides, I don’t get how you would think you couldn’t talk to me about this.” She blinked as a light bulb clicked on in her head. “Wait, did you talk to that Sara girl? The time-traveling vigilante?”

“I don’t think I should answer that.”

Alex’s mouth dropped. “Kara!”

“What? She was great!”

“Meaning she behaved and didn’t try to hit on you again?”

Kara squinted. “Maybe like, half-heartedly?” As Alex’s nostrils flared, she added quickly, “But not really. Mostly she gave advice and let me ask questions.”

“Over Rolling Rock.”

“Yeah. At a gay bar. Have you been to one?”

“No,” she admitted. Great. Just another thing Kara was better at. Super.

“We’ll have to go. Oh, and by the way, this doesn’t mean I’m gay, okay?”

Alex nodded. “Bisexual triangles. Got it.”

Kara watched her for a moment. “That’s really all you’re going to say?”

“What else would I say? I mean, I am gay, you know. That makes me a pretty safe person to come out to.”

“I know. That’s not what I meant, though.”

“What do you mean?”

“Come on, Alex. You literally just came out, and here I am making everything all about me again. It’s like it’s all I know how to do.”

“You’re not making it about you. You’re being you. There’s a difference. Although, I do have to say —” no, you don’t, a voice in her head pointed out—“Lena Luthor might not be the safest person to have feelings for.”

“I know that.” Kara looked down at her lap again, fingers resuming their restless transit.
“I get that you feel something for her, but if she ever found out you’re Supergirl, we could all be in serious…” She trailed off as Kara’s shoulders hunched almost up to her ears. “No, don’t look at me like that. Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Don’t be mad, Alex.”

Don’t be..? She took a breath, but the additional dose of oxygen did nothing to eradicate the red mist obscuring her vision. “You didn’t tell her, did you?”

“No! She is the literal heir to Cadmus. I’m not an idiot.”

“But…?”

“But I think she may have figured it out all on her own.” Kara winced, clearly waiting for her to implode.

Another deep breath, and then Alex nodded slowly. “That’s not entirely unexpected.”

“It’s not?”

“No. I’m pretty sure she hacked the DEO.”

“I thought you said I’m not mentioned by name anywhere on the network.”

“You’re not. I only meant that as a measure of how smart she is. Besides, I’ve seen the way she looks at you. It was only a matter of time.”

Kara frowned. “How does she look at me?”

She really didn’t know? But that shouldn’t have been a surprise. Sometimes Alex forgot that her little sister was an alien living on a planet that didn’t exactly celebrate her difference. Throughout high school and college, she had watched Kara’s self-esteem tank whenever an attack against aliens or the passage of anti-alien legislation made the news. Alex had dealt with her own issues of self-worth—or not dealt with them, to be more accurate. Still, they had been there inside, tainting how she viewed herself and her place in the world. She knew what it was like to feel unworthy of love, and it broke her heart to know that Kara probably felt what she had, times a thousand. Because now not only was she a Kryptonian in a human world, she was bisexual too.

The question was, did Alex tell her the truth, or did she protect her with another lie?

“How does she look at me, Alex?” Kara repeated, grabbing her hand and hanging on a little too tightly.

She didn’t let on that the grip hurt, though. She only squeezed back and said, regretting the words before they even passed her lips, “Like you’re the mac to her cheese. The ketchup to her fries. The sprinkles to her freaking sundae.”

If she was going to tell Kara something amazing and potentially life-altering, employing food analogies seemed like the way to go.

“Oh,” Kara said, her eyes widening. A small smile stole across her lips, and then as Alex watched, quickly bloomed until it officially achieved blinding status. “Really?” she breathed, her voice awe-filled.

Alex nodded and smiled back. “Really. You’re incredible, Kara, and even if you can’t see it, she
obviously does.”

Being related to a superhero was complicated. Of course she couldn’t possibly approve of her baby sister getting involved with a Luthor, but what was she supposed to do, crush her before she could get crushed (hopefully not literally by Cyborg Superman or some other Cadmus lackey)? Even if hope was not a currency the DEO remotely traded in, for her sister’s sake Alex had to hope everything would turn out for the best.

“Are you sure?” Kara asked.

“I’m pretty sure. I can’t believe you didn’t talk to me about all of this first,” she added, even though, duh, this was supposed to be about Kara and not her. “You’ve met that bird girl exactly once, and she doesn’t even live in this universe.”

“Well,” Kara pointed out, “you told Maggie before you told me.”

“That’s different!”

“Really? How?”

“It’s just—it just—” Alex stammered and finally fell back on older sibling logic. “It is, that’s all.”

“Uh-huh. That’s what I thought.”

And then Kara smirked, a very un-Kara like expression, in Alex’s opinion. She wasn’t sure she approved.

“How long were you on Alt-Earth, anyway?”

“Only a few hours. Not long. And don’t worry, I left you a note.”

“I figured as much. Maybe we should check your smoke detectors. Because honestly, I don’t think they’re doing a stellar job.”

“Possibly not. Are you hungry? I’m hungry,” she said, rising from the couch. “I have some bagels.”

“And you’re actually going to let me have one?”

“On one condition—that you make eggs to go with them.”

“Deal,” Alex said.

In the kitchen, they fell into an easy rhythm that reminded her of their Stanford days. Kara might be a crappy cook, but she made an excellent cook’s assistant. In no time at all they were sitting down together at the island, plates piled high with eggs, bacon, and bagels—or bagel, singular, in Alex’s case.

“The eggs to your bacon,” she said.

“The peanut butter to your jelly,” Kara said back, immediately picking up the dropped thread.

“The ice to your cream.”

“The turkey to your stuffing.”

At that one, they both cracked up. Alex lifted her glass of orange juice. “To the Danvers sisters, both
“queer as two dollar bills.”

Kara knocked her glass almost hard enough to break them both. “Whoops! Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Alex said. “I love you, Kara.”

“I love you, too.”

She tried to look thoughtful. “You know, I never thought Lillian Luthor and I could have anything in common.”

Kara looked up quickly. “What?”

“It’s just, if Mon-El touches you again, I might be tempted to shoot him, too.”

“Alex!”

She smiled and scooped eggs onto her fork. Apparently Maggie wasn’t the only borderline sociopath around.

* * *

Alex adjusted her boxing gloves. “My little sister came out to me this morning.”

“I thought you had a Supergirl emergency.”

“False alarm. But Kara texted me and invited me over for breakfast, so I went.” She started to say that Saturday mornings were their tradition, but she didn’t want Maggie to feel pressured by the fact that Alex had willingly given up sister time to stay with her.

“So Little Danvers is gay, huh?” Maggie asked, lacing up one of her gloves.

“Bisexual. Although I’m not so sure about her taste in women.”

Alex bounced on her toes and took a few practice swings near the heavy bag. Maggie had invited her to work out with her at her gym, which at first glance resembled Average Joe’s from Dodgeball. At second and third glance, too.

“You mean Lena Luthor? Yeah, I’m not sure that’s a good idea.”

Alex turned on her. “Wait, you knew?”

“It was pretty obvious, babe. Besides, I’m a detective. I—”

“—detect. Yes, I’m aware.”

“Two in one family, huh?”

Alex paused as a thought occurred to her. “Oh my god, my mom is going to blame me, isn’t she?”

Maggie nodded. “Yep. Now, do you want to do bag work and circuit training, or do you want to spar?”

“Spar.”

“Sweet.”
They warmed up on the bags, and as she watched Maggie practice on the speed bag, she tried to contain her drool. Her girlf—the detective’s cut shoulders were looking fine in a racer back tank, and don’t even get Alex started on her legs and ass in those black compression shorts. It was like she was trying to give her a heart attack.

More like distract her, she realized belatedly when Maggie landed two jabs in a row. But two could play at that game. When they stopped for water and snacks, she stripped off her shirt, leaving only a sports bra and tiny running shorts. Once they started back up, it became clear that she wasn’t the only one having trouble focusing. Maggie zigged instead of zagged at the wrong moment, and Alex’s glove connected with the side of her head harder than she intended. Maggie went down with a sound that Alex definitely did not love.

“Shit,” she said, kneeling beside her. “I’m so sorry! Are you okay?”

Maggie blinked lazily. “I’m fine. Just wanted to get the view from below.”

Sparring half-naked might not be the best plan, but it was pretty fun.

It wasn’t until they had showered—separately, because neither of them could be trusted with the other fully naked in a public space—and were back at Maggie’s apartment that something occurred to Alex. “Fuck—you know what this means, don’t you? It means every single person poses a threat to her.”

Maggie looked up from the newspaper. “Which ‘her’ are we currently discussing?”

“Kara. Before I only had to worry about half the population. Now it’s pretty much any semi-attractive Millenial.” Alex leaned her head back against the couch and stared at the ceiling. She was all for being one’s authentic self, but did Kara really have to date women too?

Maggie nudged her with one of the feet currently resting on her lap. “Why do you have to worry at all? She’s an adult, Alex. She can take care of herself.”

Crap. She was screwing up the lying bit already. Keeping her sister’s identity a secret had been the excuse she’d used so long to hold male partners at a distance, but Maggie was different. For one, she was sharper than the average male science nerd. For another, Alex had no desire to keep her distance. If anything, she wanted to be as close as humanly possible. And yeah, thoughts like those were going to send Maggie running, should Alex ever decide to share them.

“Kara is—different,” she explained. “She’s special. She’s an adult, yes, but she doesn’t always seem to grasp what people are capable of.”

Maggie was frowning as she folded the paper and cast it aside. “Are we talking intellectual challenges here? Because I thought you both went to Stanford. Unless—does she have some kind of traumatic brain injury? I had a buddy on the force who got hit by a car while chasing down a suspect, and—”

“No, that’s not what I mean.” Alex sighed, and then, reluctantly, tried to summon up the cover story her parents had invented shortly after Kara arrived. It combined elements of reality with fiction so that it would be easier to remember, but she hadn’t had to use it in a while. “Before she came to us, she lived in a remote village in South America, where her parents were missionaries. They were old friends of my family’s—”

“Your family was friend with missionaries? As in, religious fanatics?”

“Focus, Sawyer. They were friends, and when Kara’s parents died, my parents became her legal
guardians. She had been home schooled her entire life, and suddenly she was thrown into the California public school system. She had to adjust to a whole new culture—”

“Ooh, like in Mean Girls? Wait, is that movie based on her life?”

Alex opted to smack her own forehead instead of Maggie’s. “No, it’s not based on her life. That’s—whatever. The point is, she’s never been very good at reading people. Our parents asked me to look out for her when she first arrived, and it’s pretty much been my job ever since. Unlike Kara, I don’t have any trouble seeing the worst in people.”

Maggie rested her chin on her knuckles. “Okay, on the one hand, awesome girlfriend material because you’re loyal as hell and selfless to boot, both of which I already knew. But on the other hand, seeing the worst in people? Not exactly the most commendable trait, Danvers.”

Alex stared at her. “You’re still trying to decide if I’m girlfriend material?”

Maggie stared back. Then she sat up straighter, her teasing smile fading. “No, Alex, that’s not what I—”

“Because, just as a thought, maybe mention your doubts on that front before you spend the whole night fucking the woman in question.” She shoved Maggie’s feet from her lap and stood up. “I gotta go. I’ll see you around, Sawyer.”

“Wait.” Maggie scrambled off the couch. “Hold up.”

Alex ignored her. Unfortunately, in the two seconds it took to grab her jacket and bag, Maggie got past her and blocked the door. “Really? Now you’re not letting me leave?”

“Of course not, Alex. Just, don’t go angry. That’s all I’m asking.”

She shoved her hands in her jacket pockets, fists clenched. She felt like she had the day Maggie had tracked her down at Kara’s apartment—wary and skittish, as if she might lash out at any moment. But then she remembered watching the bedroom slowly light up that morning while Maggie lay behind her, breath warm and gentle on her neck, and she forced herself to take a breath, to relax her fists, to try to dismantle the walls she’d erected long before. She didn’t need those walls anymore, did she? They might keep out the people she didn’t want inside, but they also ran the risk of shutting out the few she did.

“Okay,” she said. “I’m listening.”

“Can we sit back down? Please?”

A minute later they were back on the couch, only this time they sat cross-legged facing each other. Maggie hesitated, almost seeming to hold her breath, and then she said in a rush, “I don’t know if you remember how messed up I was over my last break-up.”

Was she serious? Or did she honestly not recall the moment when clueless, baby-gay Alex had demanded how anyone could ever dream of breaking up with her?

“I remember,” she said neutrally.

“Christie said a lot of things when she dumped me. That I was selfish, obsessed with work, insensitive—”

“I know,” Alex interrupted. “I always thought she sounded manipulative.”
“But she wasn’t, Alex. She was right about everything. I wish that wasn’t the case, but it is.”

Maggie’s voice didn’t match the tough persona she usually projected. Her throat bobbed as she swallowed, and Alex could see her pulse throbbing at her neck. It reminded her of the gash on Maggie’s chest she’d sewn up only a few nights earlier. The stitches were still there, and would be for some time yet.

“Hey,” she said, softening. “Look at me.”

Maggie hazarded a glance.

“We are not who our exes say we are. Because if we were, then I would be cold, heartless, and basically asexual.”

She smiled crookedly in the way Alex had always loved. “I can personally attest to that description being a hundred percent off-base.”

Alex reached for her hand. “Who we are when we’re with the wrong person isn’t who we actually are. It’s just a version of ourselves that wasn’t viable for whatever reason. It doesn’t matter if you didn’t recognize it at the time, or if you thought the relationship would work out. That she could be The One. It didn’t work out because it wasn’t right between you, not because you weren’t right.”

“But she wasn’t the first person to say those things.”

“Then learn from it. If you really think you’re insensitive and you want to change, then learn how to be more sensitive. It’s not rocket science. Go to therapy, read a self-help book, practice until you’ve got it down. Although for the record, I think your dedication to the job, to serving the community—both humans and aliens—is part of what makes you so great.”

“You think I’m great, huh?” Maggie asked, both dimples back in place.

Alex rolled her eyes, but she was smiling too. “Duh.”

“Good, because I think you’re pretty great too. But I also think there’s something you’re not telling me.”

Her smile slipped. “What do you mean?” Was she talking about Kara? Did she not believe the cobbled-together back story? Alex had never found it particularly credible herself. Of course a fellow cop would see right through it.

“I mean, you seem anxious about this.” She gestured between them. “I know it’s all new to you, and I want you to know that I understand if you’re having second thoughts. We can totally slow things down if they’re moving too fast.”

She shook her head. “No, they’re not—I mean, unless they’re moving too fast for you?” Alex tried to pull her hand away. Was Maggie breaking up with her already?

“Danvers.” Maggie squeezed her hand tighter. “Front and center, babe. I do not feel like things are moving too fast. But I’ve been out for years and you’ve only been out for weeks. You might not want to settle so soon, you know? You should take your time, see what else is out there. Who else is out there. If you want.” She was looking down as she finished, and Alex could see the curve of her neck, delicate and vulnerable.

“I don’t need to see who else is out there,” she said, and it was true. “I’m almost thirty, Maggie. I’ve been with other people, and I know who I am and what I want. And in case I haven’t made myself
perfectly clear, I sort of, kind of, very much want you.”

“Are you sure?” Maggie asked. “Because I don’t want to pressure you into settling into something you might not be—”

Alex leaned forward and kissed her, swallowing her words. After a moment Maggie relaxed into the kiss, and soon Alex forgot to think as they pressed closer together, hands in each other’s hair, lips moving in synch as if they had been doing this for months instead of merely for days.

When she pulled away at last, it was only so she could smile into her eyes. “I don’t want to hear any of this ‘settling’ nonsense again, Detective. Got it?”

“Yes, ma’am. Loud and clear.”

Alex hesitated. As long as they were being honest… “But you’re not entirely wrong. I have been worried about something.”

“Okay. What is it?”

She turned Maggie’s hand over in hers, staring down at the lines on her palm as if they might yield the answer she was looking for. “I guess I’m wondering what your take is on monogamy. Because the thing is, I’m not sure I’m comfortable with the whole open relationship thing.”

“Well, that’s good to hear, because I’m sort of old-fashioned that way myself.”

“Meaning?” Alex pressed.

“Meaning I don’t like to share.” And just like that, she sounded like Maggie again, the strong, assured woman who had helped Alex realize what her life was missing. “Is that okay with you?”

“Yes,” Alex said, barely restraining a sigh of relief. “It’s great, actually.”

“Awesome.” Maggie slid her thumb across her cheek. “So are we good, Alex?”

“We’re good.”

“Excellent.” And she leaned in to kiss her again.

Maggie was right about one thing: Kara could take care of herself. At least for the time being.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t know, do I need to add chapter summaries at this point? Let me know what you think. Also, more Kara/Lena time is coming soon! Maybe even in the next chapter... ;‐)
Chapter Summary

Sorry this took longer than usual. Work was crazy, the wife and I had a date to see the Indigo Girls (yes, we are that old and that gay) and then, of course, the Womxn's March happened.

But finally, without further ado, I give you... SuperCorp! And a whole lot of Lena backstory, including a friend because everyone deserves a friend. Hope it was worth the wait.

When Lena heard the knock at her door, she almost dropped the plate she was washing. Could it be…? But no, she wouldn’t come up by elevator, would she? Quickly she dried her hands on a towel and started toward the door. But then she remembered that some people could see through inanimate objects, and slowed her pace.

On the other side of the peephole a familiar face greeted her, but it wasn’t the face she’d been hoping to see. It had been stupid to think that maybe, just maybe… Straightening her shoulders, she pinned a smile to her face and opened the door.

“Beatrice,” she said. “I didn’t know you were in town.”

Her best friend’s smile faded slightly. “You’re acting weird. Why are you acting weird? Is this not a good time?”

Lena held the door wide for her. “No, it’s fine. I’m glad you’re here. But, um, how exactly did you get up to the penthouse?”

“Ben, your very sweet doorman, remembered me from last time.”

“Apparently he and I need to have a talk.”

“Don’t scare him. He’s like a hundred years old. Now give me some of that sweetness, sweetness.”

Without waiting for a response, she dropped her bag and enveloped Lena in a spine-crunching, rib-shattering hug.

Lena squeezed back, inhaling the scent of jasmine in her friend’s unruly cloud of hair. Wow, this felt good. She couldn’t remember the last time someone had hugged her. No, that wasn’t true. It had been Beatrice then, too. Only that time Lena had shown up on her doorstep unannounced the week Lex decided to try to kill her.

“How are you?” Beatrice asked as she pulled away.

“Peachy.” She picked up the bag and ushered her friend inside. “Where’s Rowan?”

“Home with Derek and both grandmothers. You know what that means, don’t you?” She wiggled her perfectly tweezed eyebrows.

Lena’s smile was genuine this time. “White or red?”
“Are you kidding? Break out the good stuff. For once I don’t have to worry about my milk jugs.”

Hand on the freezer door, Lena paused. “Does this mean you’re staying for the weekend?”

“Damn straight. Assuming you’ll have me.”

“Oh, I’m always up for having you,” Lena drawled, winking over her shoulder as she unscrewed the top to the vodka. “But definitely not in a straight way.”

“If only.” Beatrice sighed and collapsed dramatically on the couch. “Unfortunately, I am an old married woman. But that doesn’t mean you can’t have fun.”

Lena scoffed. “Like that’s going to happen.”

“It could.”

“So could an asteroid strike that ends all sentient life on Earth.”

“Ah, I see we’re channeling Dark Lena today.”


Beatrice clinked it and offered her customary rejoinder: “To the Luthors.”

“To the Dang Luthors,” they said in unison, and took a drink.

More like the god-damned Luthors these days, really, but Lena kept that thought to herself. She could feel her friend watching her as they sipped their vodka tonics, so she studiously trained her gaze elsewhere. She loved Beatrice, she did. It was just that today she felt closer to the edge than usual. A sympathetic look and a kind word from her oldest friend on the planet would probably make her bawl.

Of course, that wouldn’t be anything new. In the nearly thirty years they’d been friends, they had each seen the other at her worst innumerable times. Beatrice’s mother had worked at Luthor Corp’s LA office, and the two girls had met at a birthday party for another executive’s child. By the end of the party, they’d bonded over their shared love of all things horse, thus beginning a friendship that lasted through prep school, college, and beyond. Lena still maintained that Beatrice was the only reason she’d had any friends at Deerfield after Lex decided to become the world’s most notorious alien hunter, and honestly, Lena had spent more weekends at Smith with Bea than at MIT. If not for Smith’s liberal, lesbian-friendly culture, she may not have come out as early—or as easily—as she had.

Lena was pretty sure Beatrice’s friendship had saved her on more than one occasion; figuratively, of course, not literally like Superg—Kara. Beatrice meanwhile claimed that the Luthor clan’s flair for dramas had saved her from dying of boredom, so they were even.

“I see what you’re doing over there,” Beatrice said.

“What am I doing?”

“That stoic WASP bullshit. Come on, Lee, talk to me.”

Lena let her head fall onto her friend’s shoulder. “I don’t know what to say, Bea. Everything is absolute shite right now.”
“If you had only come to LA for Thanksgiving like I wanted you to…”

“I told you, I had to work.”

And how fortunate they all were that she’d made that decision. Otherwise her mother might have… She shut down the thought. “Might haves” were not helpful. They only made things seem worse than they actually were. What was important was that she had foiled her mother’s plot and now Lillian was in prison with Lex. Well, not with him—even the government wasn’t idiotic enough to place them in the same facility.

“I don’t know,” Beatrice said, reaching for her free hand and tangling their fingers together. “Are you sure Luthor—I mean, L Corp is worth it? You could come home with me and run my label, you know. Just saying, the offer still stands.”

Beatrice ran a small recording studio out of her home in Laurel Canyon, while her husband worked as an entertainment lawyer at Warner Brothers. She’d won a Grammy a decade earlier as a solo artist, but she’d always preferred production work to performing. Now her Grammy nominations were for helping other musicians realize their dreams.

“Be careful,” Lena said, only half-joking. “I might take you up on it.”

“I wish you would.”

Lena closed her eyes. “I have to at least try to save the company. Not that that’s going particularly well. The board is threatening a vote of no confidence if our shares keep falling.”

“It’s kind of hard to shore up the company’s stock when the rest of your family keeps trying to blow up the world.”

“Not the world, Bea. Just the aliens.”

“Do you want to talk about your terrible, horrible, no good, very bad mother?”

“No, I think we covered most of it the other day. Let’s do something fun. Want to go out for sushi and a movie?” That had been their standby date for years before Beatrice got pregnant and Lena moved an hour and a half away.

“We could. But I have a better idea.” And she smiled devilishly.

Uh-oh. Beatrice’s “better” ideas had landed Lena in more trouble over the years than her family's plots. As long as she didn’t end up on Instagram making out with a random woman like the last time Beatrice had dragged her out. She had a feeling the vote of no confidence might come sooner rather than later if she did.

For a moment she pictured Kara in her Supergirl suit, imagined being held in her strong arms and floating in midair over the twilit city… She pushed the though away. Kara hadn’t spoken to her since the incident at her office, and there was no reason to think she would anytime soon.

Or, possibly, ever.

* * * *

She had to admit, Beatrice’s idea ended up being pretty awesome. Declaring that Lena was in desperate need of retail therapy, Beatrice took her shopping along Commercial Street, the Rodeo Drive of National City. It had been a while since Lena had shopped for anything other than
professional clothes, so she actually enjoyed the swanky shops where they were served wine in crystal goblets while they perused.

Afterward they dined at a rooftop restaurant that Lena had heard was booked out for months; apparently being friends with Drake magically opened doors. The view of the city was amazing, though Lena couldn’t help checking for a certain caped figure each time a siren sounded. They lingered over coffee as the night deepened, warmed by heat lamps placed strategically about the deck. Then they caught the elevator back to street level and headed to a speakeasy that Lena had read about in *CatCo Magazine*.

The speakeasy was located above a busy restaurant. To reach it, they had to wind through crowded tables, stop near a locked door, and pick up an old-fashioned telephone. Once Beatrice gave her name, the door clicked and they entered a dark, narrow stairway lined with vintage photos of naked dancers (thankfully all female). The stairs opened up onto a small room with a polished brass bar and vintage furniture. Even the bartender looked as if he’d just stepped out of the early twentieth century. There was no drink list. Instead, the bartender sat down at their table briefly and interviewed each of them about their favorite flavors, and then brought them a custom cocktail based on their answers. In theory, no two drinks were ever the same.

As they tried each other’s drinks and reminisced about different cocktail adventures throughout their lives, Lena treasured the rare opportunity to catch up with Beatrice without Derek or the baby to distract them. Lena loved her godson and missed him terribly, and Derek was a good guy. But going out like this with Beatrice reminded her that she’d had a life before her father died, before she’d set out to rescue L Corp, before her brother and mother had tried to destroy the world. If everything fell apart in National City, she would be okay. She would always be okay—assuming her family didn’t actually manage to kill her.

Focusing on the details of someone else’s life was a welcome change, too. Beatrice’s days were hectic in a completely different way from hers. On top of a job she loved, she had to juggle a baby, a spouse, and clients who were mostly young still and often not making the best decisions about social and professional responsibilities. Fortunately she had family support. Her mother had recently retired from L Corp to spend more time with the baby, her first grandchild.

“She sees him more than she ever saw me,” Beatrice groused.

“Maybe she realizes what she missed out on with you and doesn’t want to make the same mistake twice.”

Beatrice shrugged, but Lena could see how much her mother’s belated shift in priorities grated on her. “Maybe. But what about you? Is there a wife and kids in your future? Or are you going to pour all of your passion into this company and find out later that you have regrets?”

“You know I can’t afford to get involved with anyone right now.”

“That’s just something you tell yourself so you don’t have to risk getting hurt. Not everyone is a cheating ass like Mallory, you know.”

Lena winced at the mention of her ex. Mal had gotten a job in Seattle a year before Lena had relocated to National City. They’d tried the distance thing for a couple of months, but they’d failed. Spectacularly and quite publicly, in fact. On her good days, Lena told herself that moving the family business headquarters was purely a professional decision. Most days, though, she knew she had needed to escape the LA fish bowl, and not only to elude her brother’s twisted legacy.

“I know my instincts lean more toward flight than fight, but think about it, Bea. Lex and my mother
have nothing but time on their hands to plot their potential revenge on me. How could I in good conscience bring some innocent, unsuspecting person into my life, knowing they could become collateral damage?"

Even maintaining a friendship with Beatrice put her and her family in danger—just another of the very good reasons she’d distanced herself from L.A. But even as she reminded herself of these facts, an image of Supergirl flashed into her mind. Supergirl, who was practically indestructible, routinely triumphed over evil villains, and was already Lex and Lillian’s sworn enemy. Supergirl, who was actually Kara, her friend who had seemed about to kiss her the other night.

Beatrice nodded, brow furrowing. “Valid. Still, that doesn’t mean you can’t get laid, you know. You don’t have to get engaged to every girl you sleep with.”

“I’m not like you,” Lena said. “I don’t do casual.” Unless she was really, really drunk and Beatrice was throwing her at randos. Note to self: time to slow down on the cocktails.

“Maybe you should learn because it cannot be good for your lady parts to go this long without sex. Besides, it doesn’t have to be a complete stranger. What about the cute blonde reporter you mentioned the other day?”

Lena waved a hand. “She’s not even speaking to me right now.”

“Which means she was speaking to you at some point. What did you do?”

“More like what did my mother do.”

“Ah.” Beatrice nodded. “The Luthor curse. In that case, what about Supergirl? She can obviously hold her own with your family.”

Lena almost snorted her drink, which would have been really bad given that it contained peppercorn. “Supergirl?”

“You know, the cute blonde in the hot boots? I doubt she has room in her life for anything serious, and besides, I thought you had a thing for her?”

“No I don’t,” Lena said quickly. Too quickly.

Beatrice’s eyes narrowed and then, suddenly, widened. “Cute blonde… Holy shit. Supergirl is the reporter, isn’t she?”

No wonder Kara and the DEO didn’t trust her. She hadn’t even known for a week yet and she was already giving away her identity. In her defense, Beatrice knew her better than anyone else on Earth. Or any other planet.

“You cannot tell a living soul,” she warned her friend. “Not even Derek.”

Beatrice waved a hand. “You don’t succeed in L.A if you can’t keep secrets. Interesting, though. I’ll have to think about this a little more.”

“Moving on… What ever happened with Pink? I thought she was going to work with that young artist you found.”

The distraction worked, and Beatrice was off and running on a tale that involved Pink, a dog walker, and a missing contract.
Lena kept replaying her words, though: *She can obviously hold her own with your family.* Was it possible that Kara was the only person in the world who could safely date her? Then again, “safe” was relative given that her mother had managed to kidnap and torture the Girl of Steel. Anyway, Kara would have to be communicating with her in order for the whole dating thing to occur.

They were just finishing their cocktails when Beatrice held up her phone in triumph. “Found it!”

Lena, who had assumed she was texting Derek, frowned. “Found what?”

“A gay bar hosting ladies’ night. Have you been to the Balcony Club?”

“No, and we are not going there tonight, Beatrice. I’m serious. I’m not interested in meeting anyone.”

That argument rarely swayed Beatrice when she was in find-Lena-a-hook-up mode, probably because she had a fierce aversion to being alone herself. Fortunately, she had never needed to be for long. Since adolescence had gifted her with long legs and large breasts (for an Asian, Beatrice always qualified), men and women alike had fallen at her feet. Back in college, when Beatrice flitted from boy to girl and back occasionally with more than a slight overlap, Lena used to tease her about giving bisexuals a bad name. *What?* Beatrice would say. *I can’t help it that I’m ravishing.*

“So I’ve heard.” Beatrice downed the rest of her drink and stood up. “All right, then. Let’s go get you laid.”

*             *             *

So this was happening. Lena placed her hands on the hips of the woman twerking against her and moved in time to the music pulsating through the club. With the lights flashing and the crowd of mostly women dancing around her, she almost felt like she was back in college, when she and her friends had a standing date at a Boston all-ages club where they would drink and dance for a handful of hours every Thursday night. Or was it Tuesday? It had been ten years. College was starting to recede in her memory.

Beatrice glanced over her shoulder and gave her a huge smile. At least Bea was still in her life—her one constant through all the moves and changes. Lena smiled back and realized that she actually felt happy in that moment. Despite everything, she could still find shining moments of pure joy in among the detritus. Her best friend was brilliant. But then, Lena had always known that.

They had barely been in the club for two seconds when Bea had squealed, “I love this song!” She’d grabbed Lena’s hand and led her out to the dance floor, where they picked their way among the mostly female crowd to an open space in the middle. As soon as they stopped, Beatrice turned and began to grind back against her. Lena couldn’t help smiling. Her former pop star best friend could work it, and they both knew it. Usually when they went out Lena resigned herself to the lesbian version of the white man’s overbite rather than try to keep up.

They danced for half an hour in among the crowd, bouncing off other bodies and each other, and any self-consciousness Lena had felt in the beginning over what she was wearing soon faded. She didn’t mind showing skin, but the sequined halter top Beatrice had picked out for her revealed significantly more side boob than she was accustomed to. Front boob too, for that matter.

At last Beatrice made the sign for a drink, and Lena nodded. She could use some water.

Drinks in hand a few minutes later, they turned to survey the bar area.

“You know what time it is, don’t you?” Beatrice asked. It was quieter here, but she still had to lean
“No,” Lena said warningly. “Don’t you dare.”

Beatrice winked at her. “Don’t worry, I’ll do the heavy lifting. Ooh, she looks cute.” And with that she skipped away, headed for a brunette at a table not far from them.

Admittedly Bea’s target was attractive, but her profile also seemed familiar. She almost looked like—oh, shit. Lena practically jumped off her bar stool and rushed over, but she was too late. She arrived just in time to hear Beatrice say flirtily, “Have you met my friend Lena?”

“Actually,” the brunette said, rising to her feet, “I have. Hello, Lena.”

“Hi, Alex,” she said, forcing a smile. Because this wasn’t awkward or anything.

Just then a smaller woman with long, dark hair appeared and slipped her arm around the DEO agent’s waist. Beatrice looked from the couple to Lena, eyebrows raised.

“Beatrice,” Lena said, “this is Alex, my friend— Kara’s sister.”

“Kara,” Beatrice repeated. “As in, reporter Kara?”

Lena nodded, praying Beatrice wouldn’t give anything away. Like the fact that a Luthor knew a Super’s secret identity, for example.

“This is Maggie,” Alex said, but only because the woman beside her nudged her unsubtly. “Maggie, Lena.”

“Lena,” Maggie repeated. “As in, Luthor?”

Lena tried not to clench her teeth too hard. Her dentist already wanted her to wear a mouth guard at night to prevent further damage. “Yes.”

The smaller woman—Alex’s girlfriend?—noded. “Cool. I’m with the NCPD, and I’ve actually been wanting to say thanks for what you did the other night. It couldn’t have been easy.”

“Oh,” Lena said, her eyebrows lifting slightly. A cop thanking a Luthor made as much sense as a Luthor daydreaming about a Super. “It wasn’t, but I didn’t really have any other choice.”

“Sure you did,” Maggie said. “There’s always a choice. I’m just thankful—and I know a lot of other people are too—” she nudged Kara’s sister again—“that you chose to do the right thing. Right, Alex?”

“Yes. Completely. Thank you.” Alex lifted her cocktail in a gesture of respect before taking a long sip, and Lena found herself wishing that her own glass contained something other than water.

“Kara would tell you the same thing too,” Maggie added, “if you hadn’t just missed her.”

It took a second for Lena’s mind to catch up. Then her gaze snapped back to the smaller woman. “Wait, Kara was here?”

“Yeah,” Maggie said easily. “Until about fifteen minutes ago, anyway.”

Fifteen minutes? That would have been right around when… Lena and Beatrice were wrapped around each other on the dance floor. No, no, no. This was not happening. She grabbed her phone out of her purse and started a new text.
“Kara,” she typed, and then stopped. What the hell was she going to say? She needed to clear her head, a feat that was impossible in a crowded gay bar with Kara’s sister watching her.

“I’ll be right back,” she told Beatrice, not even waiting for an answer. (In her defense, it wasn’t like her music producer friend wasn’t accustomed to schmoozing complete strangers.) Then she maneuvered through the crowd and ducked outside into the cool night. Leaning against the bar’s brick outer wall, she stared down at her phone. Kara hadn’t answered any of her previous messages. Why would she now?

Still: “Hi,” she typed. “I just talked to Alex. I wish I’d known you were here.”

She hit send and then waited, her eyes on the fairly steady flow of foot traffic along the sidewalk. The club was in a busy part of downtown where bars, night clubs, and a couple of comedy clubs drew patrons from city neighborhoods and suburban districts alike. That couple, with hipster haircuts and skinny jeans, probably lived within walking distance. The three men behind them, though? Suburban dads out for a night in the city where they might have once, as younger men, enjoyed simple bachelor lives.

Lena’s life had never been that simple. Just as well—normalcy probably would have bored her.

Her phone’s chime startled her and she glanced down. Kara had responded. KARA had answered. She hadn’t allowed herself to hope, and yet there it was in black and white: Kara Danvers. Quickly she clicked on the new message.

“You seemed pretty happy where you were.”

Maybe it was in Lena’s imagination, but the words seemed to carry a slight, very un-Kara-like bite. Had she left the club because she didn’t want to see Lena, or because she didn’t want to see her dancing with someone else?

The day’s alcohol—and despite her best intentions there had been a lot of it—flowed through her bloodstream and into her fingers: “I would have been happier with you.”

The message app whirred, and then the “Sent” icon popped up, followed almost immediately by “Delivered.” There wasn’t really any way to misinterpret that, was there? She read it over again. Nope. She’d basically just confessed—something to Kara. Now the ball was unquestionably in her court. Again… Lena chewed her bottom lip as she waited for a response, so focused on her phone that she didn’t even register the man approaching.

“Hey, baby,” he said, veering into her personal space. “What are you doing out here all by your lonesome?” He loomed over her, a drunk, aging frat boy in a button-down shirt and pleated (pleated!) khakis, his thinning blonde hair slicked back from his red face.

“Definitely not waiting for you,” she said coolly, and braced herself.

Sure enough he leered and lifted his hand as if to touch her. Before she could intercept his arm and flip him over her shoulder—she hadn’t practiced in a while, but she was fairly sure judo was like riding a bike—a blur of blonde hair, pale skin, and black rayon suddenly appeared between them. And then the frat boy was on his ass on the sidewalk several feet away, gaping up at the new arrival.

“She said she wasn’t waiting for you,” Kara said, fists clenched at her sides and gaze harder than Lena had ever seen.

And, wow. Kara was here in a short strappy dress that incidentally made her legs look fabulous, and she’d jumped in to protect her. Apparently she took the “hero” part of the job seriously.
“I thought you left,” Lena blurted, her tongue nearly tripping over the words.

Kara turned back to her, eyebrows lowering even further. “I did.”

“But…?”

She shrugged, her usually expressive eyes unreadable. “I came back.”

“I’m glad.”

Lena moved a little closer, relieved when Kara didn’t step back. She was so pretty in her short dress with spaghetti straps, her collarbone sharp and delicate at the same time. Usually her outfits kept so much of her body hidden that now Lena felt a little light-headed with all that creamy skin on display.

“Are you okay? He didn’t touch you, did he?” Kara asked, eyes trailing over Lena in a similar appraisal. As her gaze seemed to get stuck on Lena’s cleavage, she cleared her throat and pushed up her glasses. And it was such a familiar, sweet gesture that Lena wanted to—

“You bitch!”

Oh, right. The frat boy had regained his footing and was advancing unsteadily on them. Before Kara could react, Lena stepped around her and delivered a swift kick to the man’s groin. He crumpled back to the ground, both hands cupping his genitals while Lena stood over him. That was what he got for interrupting their almost-moment.

“Go back to the suburbs, asshole,” she mocked.

A crowd had started to gather now, and just as someone pulled out their phone—to record the scene? to call the police?—Lena felt a hand grip hers. She let Kara pull her away from the now purple-faced man and back inside the nearby club, her feet barely touching the ground as they zoomed past the startled bouncer.

“Kara.” She squeezed the other woman’s hand. “Slow down.”

Halfway across the bar already, Kara stopped and let go of her hand. “You shouldn’t have done that,” she said, running her fingers over her neat bun as her eyes flitted around the dark room.

Lena stepped closer again. “Why not? Why should you have all the fun beating up the bad guys?”

Kara stared at her, that same question in her gaze again, and Lena remembered a beat too late that they hadn’t actually discussed the fact that she knew about Kara’s crime-fighting alter ego.

“Lena,” she started, her voice low. But then her eyes focused in the distance, and she stepped back.

Lena knew before she looked what she would find. Sure enough, Alex, Maggie, and Bea were headed their way.

“You came back,” Alex said, voice and eyes concerned.

As Kara muttered something unintelligible to her sister, Beatrice leaned into Lena’s side. “God, I love lesbodrama. PS, your girl is a hottie. I definitely see the attraction.”

Kara’s gaze flew over to them, and Lena inwardly groaned. Super hearing. Awesome.

She cleared her throat. “Kara, I’d like you to meet Beatrice Dang, a friend from LA. She’s visiting for the weekend.”
Beatrice eagerly shook the hand that Kara held out. “You’re the reporter, right? It’s nice to meet you. Lena has told me all about you.”

“Oh. Um, thanks,” Kara said, stumbling in her usual manner. “It’s really nice to meet you, too.”

Beside her, Lena felt Bea’s confusion. This adorable nerd was *Supergirl*, the most powerful woman on the planet? *See*, Lena wanted to say. There was a reason people didn’t just automatically figure it out!

The cop, Maggie, grinned mischievously into the slightly awkward pause. “Bea isn’t just your friend, though, is she?”

Lena frowned, trying to work out what she could possibly mean. Other than that one ill-advised kiss senior year at Deerfield—

“Maggie thought I looked familiar,” Bea explained. “So I had to admit—”

“Wait, are you B Dang?” Kara interrupted. The tightness around her mouth eased suddenly, and she smiled as she practically squealed, “Oh my god, you are, aren’t you!”

Normally Beatrice didn’t appreciate such extreme fangirling, but Lena could tell that seeing Supergirl (even if she was disguised as her geeky alter ego) so excited about meeting her was something altogether different.

“I am,” she said, smiling back. “I take it you’re a fan?”

Even Alex was smiling now. “She had a poster of you hanging on her ceiling back in the day. Actually,” she glanced at Kara playfully, “maybe that was a sign we should have picked up on sooner.”

“Oh, like your affinity for motorcycles and guns?” Kara returned.

If they hadn’t currently been standing in a gay club, Lena might not have believed that the Danvers sisters were teasing each other about being queer. Kara glanced at her shyly, and Lena smiled, trying to tell her with her eyes, *It’s okay. So am I.* In case that hadn’t been blatantly obvious before now.

A sense of lightness began to rise inside her, a steady unfurling of an emotion she didn’t usually allow herself: hope. With Kara standing before her smiling, arms folded awkwardly, Lena could almost see a way forward from this moment. They would drink and laugh together with their friends and Kara’s sister, and then, eventually, Lena would ask her to dance. On the dance floor they would move together in the darkness, the lights illuminating one half of their faces at a time as they drifted closer and closer. Lena would slip her arms around Kara’s neck, Kara would place her hands at her waist, and when the moment was right, Lena would kiss her. They would simply be two women who liked each other, no more, no less. Simple.

But even as this fantasy played out in her head, a series of notifications distracted her. Maggie and Alex were already reaching for their phones, and Kara—well, Kara’s leg was buzzing. Lena watched as the woman she’d been fantasizing about for weeks now reached under her own skirt and came up with an iPhone. Um, yeah. Lena was *fine*. Seriously, no need to worry about her over here at all.

Kara glanced at her quickly again, and Lena bit her lip. She could totally hear her heart rate spiking, couldn’t she? She had a feeling she wasn’t going to like this whole super hearing thing.

Bea was looking around the little group. “I feel like I’m missing something.”
“They have to go,” Lena supplied, her eyes on Kara. “You have a story to cover, don’t you?”

She nodded, eyes flicking briefly to Maggie, who Lena noted was looking between Kara and Alex as if working out a puzzle. And, *interesting*, the police officer didn’t appear to know that her girlfriend’s sister was National City’s own caped hero. Although how much longer that would be the case seemed debatable.

Maggie stepped forward and pulled Lena into a quick hug. “Thank you again for what you did at the Port.”

Startled by the contact, Lena hesitated before hugging her back. “Of course.”

Over the smaller woman’s shoulder she saw Alex roll her eyes at her younger sister. “Apparently she’s a hugger, but only with other gay people.”

“Oh,” Kara said, her hands twisting nervously.

Maggie released her and turned to Bea, and soon the two were embracing and chattering about seeing each other again as if they were the old friends in the bunch. Meanwhile Alex held her hand out to Lena.

“Luthor,” she said, with a firm nod. “Thanks again. Really.”

Somehow Lena managed not to flinch at the use of her surname. Alex’s tone held a note of warning, and as she shook her hand, the grip predictably firm, it occurred to Lena that she and Kara could never be simple.

“Agent Danvers.” She nodded back, her own voice just as serious. She knew why Alex didn’t trust her with Kara. Ironically, it was the same reason she didn’t trust herself.

“We’ll wait for you outside, Little Danvers,” Maggie said, grabbing Alex and pulling her along even though it was clear the DEO agent did not agree with this plan in the least.

*Little Danvers?* What an adorable nickname—and further proof the cop had no idea Kara was a superhero.

Beatrice reached out to hug Kara. “It was lovely to meet you. Unfortunately, I have to pee. I’ll be right back, Lee, okay?”

Lena nodded at her friend, hoping Beatrice could see how grateful she was for the moment on their own. Well, sort of on their own—if you didn’t count the hundred or so other people dancing and talking around them.

“Bea and Lee, huh?” Kara said, and fiddled with her glasses. “That’s so cute.”

“Not as cute as *Little Danvers,*” Lena returned, drifting closer again. She reached for Kara’s hands and held them lightly in her own. Her pulse raced at the contact, and she knew Kara could tell from the way her eyes narrowed as she looked at Lena, her gaze slightly awed, slightly scared, slightly—something.

“You’re the cute one, Lena,” she said softly. “Actually, no. You’re beautiful. I’ve always thought so.”

She breathed in. She hadn’t been wrong, after all—Kara had feelings for her too. *Oh, thank god.* “I know you have to go, but will you call me later?”
Kara blinked and her glow faded slightly. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to. At least, not tonight. Will tomorrow be okay?”

“Of course.” She hesitated. “I’m glad you came back.”

Kara watched her for a moment, and then she nodded. “So am I.” And swiftly, so incredibly swiftly and yet, at the same time, so gently, she pulled Lena into a hug. “I’m a hugger too,” she murmured in Lena’s ear, making her shiver a little. “And not just, you know, with gay people.”

Lena smiled into Kara’s hair, which smelled of mint shampoo and something she didn’t recognize, and let herself relax against the alien body pressing into her. She wasn’t as hard as Lena had expected. Her arms and shoulders were firm but her skin was soft and silky beneath Lena’s touch, warm and smooth and just a touch inhuman. But that realization didn’t scare her this time. Instead she wanted more—more contact, more time, more everything.

“I really do have to go,” Kara said.

“I know.”

But Lena didn’t move. She’d told herself she didn’t need this sense of intimacy, of connection, in her life; that she could be happy on her own. And she could. She genuinely believed that she didn’t need a romantic partner to feel complete. But then Kara Danvers had stumbled into her life with her nerdy glasses and her sunny smile and her badass, thigh-high boots, and now Lena could feel how desperately some part of her had always been waiting for her.

Kara’s phone buzzed angrily again, and they both started.

“Crap.” Kara sighed, and then tightened her grip infinitesimally before pulling back.

“Be careful,” Lena said, finally relinquishing her hold.

“I will. You, too—don’t go fighting any drunk men without me, okay?”

“I’ll try, but no promises.”

Kara shook her head, but she was smiling. And then, slowly, she leaned in until their noses were almost touching. She closed her eyes and lifted her chin infinitesimally, and that was all the invitation Lena needed. She tilted her head and pressed a warm, lingering kiss against Kara’s mouth.

Kara made a slight, surprised sound in the back of her throat, and it took every bit of Lena’s considerable willpower to pull away.

“Be safe,” she said again, and then she pushed Kara’s slipping glasses back up her nose.

“I will.” For the first time since the Port, Kara smiled at her like she used to: widely, happily, truly.

“Kara!” Alex’s voice sounded faintly from the doorway where she was now standing, arms folded, but Kara reacted like she’d been shot. Or, rather, like something that might actually affect her negatively. Lena would have to ask her what that might be later because while she fully believed that Kara wasn’t a machine to be poked and prodded, she also understood now in a non-abstract way how fundamentally different they were.

“Thanks,” Kara said inanely, still smiling as she backed away. “I’ll call you!”

Lena waved, wincing as Kara nearly ran over a pair of women at the edge of the dance floor. At the
last minute she changed courses before turning and racing over to Alex. And then they were gone, and Lena was left looking at the spot where they had just been, knowing it could be the last time she ever saw either—both?—of them alive.

And here was the part of the relationship plan she hadn’t thought out. Kara being Supergirl meant she could (mostly) safely date Lena, yes. But Kara being Supergirl also meant that she was only ever a step away from a missile to the chest or a potentially fatal blow from a vicious cyborg. Kara being Supergirl meant that if they dated, Lena would always have to worry about losing her, and not just in the “what if things don’t work out” way that was endemic to any romantic entanglement. No, she would have to worry about rogue aliens and murderous Kryptonian relatives and every other boogeyman the DEO files she’d hacked had described in unnerving detail.

Lena jumped a little as she felt arms wrap around her from behind. “Wow,” Bea said, resting her chin on her shoulder. “A Luthor and a Super, huh?”

She sighed. “Fuck.”

“I’ll say. Come on, Lee. Let’s get you home.”

As she followed her best friend from the bar, she heard sirens in the distance and sent a prayer up into the universe: Please keep her safe. Please, please, please bring her back to me.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

This chapter is a bit shorter than usual--I've been in bed sick since Monday, so I feel lucky to have written anything at all! Anyway, SuperCorp is happening--though the path to true love is rarely easy, especially in slow-burn fan fiction... The next chapter should be up soon. Thanks for reading!

“Oh my God, Alex, she kissed me! I kissed her! We kissed!” Kara paused, waiting for a response. Unfortunately, she couldn’t really get a good look at her sister’s face seeing as Alex had her motorcycle helmet on. Also, they were in midair, Alex tucked under one of Kara’s arms and her motorcycle under the other. Normally she didn’t let Kara fly her anywhere. After nearly dying in a fiery plane crash the night Kara came out (as Kryptonian, not as bisexual), Alex hadn’t been a fan of flight in general. But tonight there were extenuating circumstances—mainly that in a fit of giddiness Kara had grabbed her and launched into the air without asking first.

“Slow,” Alex gasped. “Can’t… breathe…”

Whoops. She always forgot about G forces since they didn’t affect her. Kara reined herself in.

“I know. And I’m happy for you, Kara.”

“You are?”

“Oh, right.” Kara landed a block short of the address the DEO had reported. “But, um, are you sure she doesn’t already know?”

“Pretty sure.” Alex slung a leg over her motorcycle. “Now go. We’re late enough as it is.”

“Okay. See you!” Kara shot into the air perhaps a bit overzealously, correcting her path as she went. She was just… Lena was just… Wait. What the heck was Mon-El doing?

She landed again and quickly assessed the scene. Only a block or so from the new alien bar, Mon-El was holding a car over his head and shouting in Daxamite. The steady rant was too fast for her to completely understand, but she was pretty sure she heard the phrase “everyone I ever loved.” Her elation faded a little. Poor guy. At least Kara had Kal-El and a few other (albeit psychotic and murderous) Kryptonians. As far as anyone knew, Mon-El was the sole survivor of Daxam.

The Guardian—not again—was nearby trying to reason with Mon-El, while Maggie and a few other NCPD and DEO officers had blocked off either end of the street. Great. Just what the aliens of National City didn’t need right now: a drunken Daxamite engaging in willful destruction of human property.

The telltale sound of a motorcycle grew louder, and Kara watched as Alex stopped near her girlfriend. Maggie was looking at Alex in a way Kara couldn’t quite interpret, so she kept one eye on
Mon-El and the other on their conversation. If it had been anyone else, she would have respected their privacy. But Alex was her sister and Maggie had broken her heart once already.

“This is our rogue alien?” Alex sounded irritated as she pulled her bulletproof vest and other gear from a nearby DEO vehicle.

“We’ve got the street sealed, so unless he’s suddenly gained the ability to fly, he isn’t going anywhere.”

“Any idea what set him off?”

“Nope.”

Even from a distance, Kara could see the tight set of the detective’s shoulders. Apparently Alex could too because she reached out a hesitant hand and touched Maggie’s sleeve. “Hey. Is there a reason you won’t look at me?”

“Gee, I don’t know, Alex.” Her gaze flicked over the DEO agent’s shoulder and settled on Kara for a brief, heated moment. “What could I possibly have to be upset about?”

“Jesus fucking Christ.” Alex made a frustrated noise and unholstered her gun.

Kara recognized that tone. It usually precluded a rash and impatient act. And sure enough, she watched disbelievingly as Alex aimed her weapon at the agitated Daxamite.

“Alex!” Maggie and Kara shouted at the same time.

She lowered her arm slightly. “What? I was only going to wound him. I am an expert mark, you know.”

“I’ve got it!” Kara positioned herself between Alex and Mon-El, shielding him from her trigger-happy sister. Not that she really believed Alex would shoot him. At least, she didn’t think she would.

Maggie seemed less convinced. As Kara advanced toward the distraught alien, she heard the detective comment, “For someone whose sister is an alien, you sure don’t seem to like them very much.”

Sister—so, okay, she’d figured it out. It was only a matter of time. After all, glasses weren’t an actual disguise, as she’d tried to tell her cousin on more than one occasion.

This wasn’t the time for that conversation, though. Kara pushed everything out of her mind except Mon-El, who was weaving on his feet now, car barely held above his head. It was a nice car, too, a Jaguar. Which, good taste, but where would he get the money to pay for a replacement? He would probably end up going back to his old moonlighting work for the local mob, and yeah, she couldn’t have that. Not on her watch.

“Mon-El,” she called, searching through her mind for a Daxamite phrase. It had been a while, and given the strained relationship between the neighboring planets, Daxamite wasn’t a very popular language on Krypton. But it was there at the tip of her tongue, she knew it was. She took a breath and tried, “Mon-El of Daxam, you are not alone. I am with you, my friend.” Or at least, she was pretty sure that’s what she’d said.

The car teetered precariously as Mon-El spun to face her. “Ka—” he started, gazing at her woozily.

She wasn’t expecting the gunshot that drowned out the rest of her name, which meant she didn’t dull
her hearing. The shot echoed painfully inside her head, and she glared over her shoulder at her sister. Alex just shrugged in a way that Kara easily interpreted to mean, *Your boy is lucky I fired into the air instead of into him.*

She turned back and held out her hand to Mon-El, whose eyes had gone wide at the sound of the shot. “Give me the car, Mon-El. It’ll be okay. Let me help you.”

“You can’t,” he said, his voice rawer than she’d ever heard. “No one can because they’re all gone. I left them there and saved myself. I let everyone else just… die.”

And it wasn’t the same for him as it was for her, but survivor’s guilt was awful whether you survived as a teenager or as a full-grown adult. Whether your parents put you in the pod or you willingly commandeered it yourself.

“It’s not your fault,” she said, hand up placatingly as she advanced again. “There was nothing you could have done.”

His face contorted as he stared at her. “You’re right. It was Krypton’s fault. If not for your planet, Daxam would be safe, my parents and sisters would be alive, my nieces and nephews… It was your planet’s fault!”

In situations like this, Kara automatically engaged whatever super-sense she needed. As Mon-El’s shoulders tensed, she could hear the tendons tightening, the creak of his shoulder joint, the slight displacement of the air around the car. By the time he hurled it at her, she was already hovering off the ground at the ready. She caught the car, allowing it to drive her back into the street just enough to absorb its force the way a softball player would field a pop fly. Or, maybe not exactly like a pop fly, but similar.

She set the car gently on the pavement and, before Mon-El could recover his equilibrium, flew to him and pinned his arms to his sides. He thrashed against her, eyes red and damp, but she kept her hold, careful not to hurt him. He wasn’t angry at her, not really. If anyone understood the pull of anger in the face of great loss it was her.

“You are not alone,” she repeated in Daxamite, wishing she could convince him it was true. And then, “We are your family, Mon-El. Please let us be your family now. Please?”

As her voice cracked on the last word, he froze in her arms. And then he was deflating like a football she’d once squeezed too hard, the anger and venom fizzling out of him in a long, painful sob. He buried his face in her shoulder and she blinked back tears as she felt him shuddering against her. And suddenly it all made sense. The constant jokes, the random hook-ups, the way he gravitated to her, the only person he knew who remembered Daxam—these were only attempts to distract himself from the emptiness swirling inside. Everything he had done so far on Earth had been to escape the pain of losing his family and culture, but tonight, it had obviously caught up to him.


She held him as he cried, wishing she could do more. She hated seeing other people hurting. Alex said she possessed super sensitivity, but Kara only knew that she had an innate need to try to help anyone she could. People weren’t born evil. They became that way after something traumatic, something that tore them down, wounded them so deeply they could no longer see the good in themselves or others.

An image flickered in her memory—Lillian Luthor leveling her gun at Mon-El just as Alex had earlier, looming over her in the makeshift laboratory, an almost bored expression on her face as she
purposely inflicted pain of the sort Kara, deprived of her powers, had rarely experienced. What had happened to Lillian Luthor to make her so craven, so cruel? And how had Lena managed to escape her influence?

Maggie and Alex appeared at her side. “Can you make sure he gets somewhere safe?” Maggie asked.

“Of course. I’ll fly him to DEO headquarters right now. He can sober up in his old holding cell.” She lifted the distressed man, shushing him as he protested. “It’s okay,” she repeated as they shot into the air. “I’ve got you.”

Below, she heard Alex say, “I was just trying to end it quickly before anyone got hurt. Him included.”

“Go ahead and tell yourself that, Alex,” Maggie replied. “But I don’t buy it.”

Kara hoped the detective wasn’t too angry that Alex had kept her Super identity a secret. The last thing she wanted to do was cause issues in Alex’s relationship, but they needed to figure out how to manage her presence in their lives on their own, without any interference from her. At least Alex had finally picked someone who wouldn’t let her get away with (almost attempted) murder. The men she had dated in the past had let her walk all over them, but Kara had a feeling Maggie Sawyer had never let anyone walk over her in her life.

That description matched Lena, too, she thought, flashing back to the moment outside the club when the khaki-clad creep had nearly accosted her. Kara had been pacing the block when she received Lena’s text, trying to decide if she should stay or go, and his intrusion had made her decision for her fairly quickly. Which, now that she thought about it, maybe she should be grateful he’d shown up when he did. He’d forced her to act, and Lena… had kissed her. Lena actually had feelings for her, real, solid feelings that made her do things like hold her hands and smile at her as if no one else even existed. Kara hadn’t sensed any fear in her this time. That didn’t mean she wouldn’t ever be afraid of Kara again, of course, but at least for now her feelings seemed to lean more toward adoration than fright.

Or maybe Kara was thinking of her own feelings.

At DEO headquarters, she handed Mon-El off to a male agent who helped him get set for the night while she wrote up a quick incident report. Then she went back to see him in the holding cell where they had first faced off all those months ago, but he was already asleep, brow furrowed even at rest. She squeezed his hand, and then, before he could wake up and read more into the gesture than she’d intended, she skedaddled.

She meant to head home, she really did. But somehow she found herself on a beeline across the city to Lena’s neighborhood. Lena had said to call her later, hadn’t she? A house call counted, surely.

As she neared Lena’s building, she slowed. Inside, she could see the two women sitting on the living room couch facing each other, feet touching as they talked. The realization that Lena had a sister of sorts made Kara happy, and she hovered off the side of the balcony listening to the low hum of their voices for a moment. Maybe she should leave them in peace. What would she say to Lena, anyway? Just thought I’d drop in on you because yes, I am that whipped after one kiss. Alex had counseled her for months to play it cooler with James, claiming that Kara was allowing him to have his cake and eat it too with both her and Lucy in his life. Nothing had ever happened while Lucy was still in the picture, so Kara wasn’t sure what she’d meant. Besides, playing anything cool wasn’t really in her playbook. Alex should know that better than anyone.
All at once she realized that the apartment was quiet, and she refocused in time to watch Lena set her phone down and move toward the balcony doors. She was coming outside. She was coming outside right this second, as if she knew Kara was there.

She backed away from the balcony. She didn’t want to interrupt Lena’s quality time with her friend. Or, like, actually get caught stalking them. Besides, how would Lena explain her presence? Beatrice had seen them together as Kara and Lena. What would she think of Supergirl conducting a late-night fly-by?

Lena stepped outside, leaving the door open behind her. “Hello?”

Kara hovered just out of sight. This was so bad. What had she been thinking?

“I know you’re there,” Lena added, her voice soft. “You’re hard to miss. Usually the largest objects my security cameras pick up are seagulls.”

Security…? Kara closed her eyes tightly. Of course there were cameras. Did that mean Lena knew of all the other instances when she’d been fundamentally unable to stay away? Had she seen her almost crash into the next building over the night she and Clark had gone out drinking? Fricking frack! She turned away, intending to go home, bury herself in a pile of blankets, and never ever show her face again.

But then she heard Lena say, “Please? You have to land sometime.”

And how was she supposed to resist that? Obviously, she couldn’t. No mortal creature could, she was fairly certain. Except maybe some species from the Vegan and Andromedan systems. They weren’t big fans of humans. Neither were Vrang… and, great. She was rambling in her own head.

“I wasn’t listening in on your conversation,” she said as she came into Lena’s view. “I promise.”

“Okay.” Lena smiled easily at her. “I trust you.”

The phrase should have curled inside her like a reassuring wisp of smoke, but instead she wanted to blurt, Why? Because frankly, she hadn’t done much to deserve that trust since they’d met. In fact, she was pretty sure Lena ought to kick her to the curb but was just too nice to do so. Or too accustomed to being treated poorly by the people in her life, maybe? What did it mean that Kara had slipped right into that role herself, doling out favors and demanding them in return, and failing to even thank her when she did something so amazingly unselfish as sacrificing her mother for the sake of a bunch of aliens who hated anyone and everyone with her surname?

She sighed. All she really wanted was to immerse herself in the beautiful dream they’d conjured earlier in the dim light of the gay bar, far from their everyday lives. But there were things they needed to talk about if they were going to move forward. And, by Rao, did she ever hope they moved forward, assuming she hadn’t ruined everything by being the worst super-stalker ever. Alex always said she didn’t have a subtle bone in her body. And while Kara usually replied that that was because her bones had been formed on another planet, she couldn’t disagree.

“Maybe I should go,” she said, still hovering. “I just wanted to check on you. I don’t actually need to interrupt.”

“You’re not.” When Kara stared at her disbelievingly, she added, “Well, you are a little. But it’s fine. Bea and I have spent the entire day together. She doesn’t mind sharing me, do you, Bea?”

Through the open door Lena’s friend gave them an exaggerated thumbs-up, and Kara smiled
reluctantly, still slightly thrown that Lena was friends with her one-time pop idol. “If you’re sure…?”

Lena held out a hand. “I’m sure.”

Kara hesitated one last time, and then she reached out, grasping Lena’s hand as she landed on the balcony. “In that case, hello, Miss Luthor.”

“Hi.” Lena tugged, and Kara was so surprised that she let herself be pulled closer, even allowed Lena to kiss her cheek before drawing back quickly.

“What are you doing?” she whispered, brow furrowed as she glanced over Lena’s shoulder at Beatrice, whose smile appeared conspicuously unruffled. “What about…?”

“Oh.” Lena bit her lip in that way she had that immediately made Kara forget about every other thing. “Bea already knows. Who you are, I mean.”

“What?” Kara dropped her hand.

“I didn’t tell her,” she said quickly. “She figured it out on her own. But it’s okay, she’s great at keeping secrets. It’s a huge part of what she does in LA.”

“Lena!” Kara stepped back so fast her back hit the balcony. “You can’t—I can’t—Alex is going to kill me.”

“I know, and I am truly sorry, Kara. But Alex doesn’t have to know, does she?”

“In theory, no, but it turns out I’m not very good at not telling Alex things…”

Lena squinted at her. “I can totally see that. But there’s nothing to be done about it right now. Come inside with me? You don’t have to stay long if you don’t want to.”

As if that would actually be a thing.

“Okay,” Kara said, and squared her shoulders. She could do this. She could hang out with Lena Luthor, who had kissed her, and B Dang, who wasn’t even bothering to pretend not to watch them. Kara couldn’t blame her, though, because a Luthor and a Super? It was crazy. Dangerous. Foolish. And yet, here she was. Here they were.

Forget Alex. J’onn and Eliza were going to kill her.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

In which Kara and Lena make googily eyes at each other until Lena's pop star best friend decides to leave them to their own devices.

Kara shifted on the couch as Beatrice launched into another story about college-aged Lena, which frankly Kara was having a hard time envisioning.

“So wait,” she interrupted, “girls at your college—sorry, I mean, women—actually run naked across the quad? Like, completely naked?”

“Well, yeah,” Beatrice said, shrugging. “It’s a great stress reliever. Not to mention empowering.”

“The campus scream is awesome, too,” Lena added.

“It wasn’t even your school!” Kara returned her attention to Lena. “Why would you join in?”

“Honestly, alcohol probably had something to do with it,” Lena admitted, smiling sideways at her.

They were sitting close together on one end of the couch while Beatrice occupied the other end, and Kara felt herself flushing as Lena’s eyes lingered on hers. Their thighs were touching and so were their shoulders, and Kara had to keep resisting the urge to slip her hand into Lena’s and… or maybe she didn’t. Why couldn’t they hold hands?

Turning her palm up, she tentatively slid it beneath Lena’s, holding her breath as Lena remained motionless. Then Lena intertwined their fingers and squeezed. Relieved, Kara glanced up at her, immediately caught by the darker gray-green ring around her paler irises.

“You have beautiful eyes,” she breathed, noting the way they briefly widened at her words.

“Thank you,” Lena said softly. “So do you.”

“And on that note,” Bea announced, rising, “I’m going to go text my husband.”

“Oh, sorry,” Kara said, looking up at her. “I didn’t mean…”

“It’s fine. I’m actually really looking forward to a quiet night of sleep without the demon child to awaken me every three hours looking for a boob. Seriously, sometimes I feel like a walking breast.”

Kara tried very hard not to gaze at the body parts in question, but while she might not have been human, she had discovered that she was more than a little gay. And Bea, it should be noted, had very nice lady parts.

Beside her Lena snickered, and Kara quickly tore her eyes away. This was bad. She should not be holding one woman’s hand and checking out the rack on another. The rack? Great, now she was using sexist language. But only in her own mind, right? She hadn’t said any of that out loud? No, she hadn’t. She was almost certain.
Lena released her hand and stood up to hug her friend goodnight. She went so far as to walk her to the hall, and Kara made sure to aim her senses elsewhere to give them a modicum of privacy. It wasn’t all that difficult. In the apartment below, the residents were watching *The Force Awakens*, one of Kara’s favorite movies ever. She got so caught up in the dialogue—Kylo Ren was just about to confront Han Solo!—that she didn’t notice Lena returning until the other woman dropped down next to her again.

“Hi,” Lena said, and reached for her hand.

“Hi.” Kara leaned closer. “Sorry I chased your friend away.”

“I’m not.” She smiled. “I’m glad you’re here. It’s a little surreal, but good.”

“It is surreal, isn’t it?” Kara stared down at their linked hands, noting how pale Lena’s skin was compared to her own. She was cooler, too, and softer, of course—human. Whereas Kara was unarguably alien.

“You look cute in my clothes,” Lena said, resting her chin on Kara’s shoulder.

Lena and Bea had already changed out of their club clothes before Kara had arrived, so rather than change back into the dress stuffed in her purse, Kara had accepted a T-shirt and leggings. Much more comfortable than sitting around Lena’s living room in her cape, and, as a plus, they smelled like Lena’s perfume.

“Not as cute as you do,” she said. “As you look in your clothes, I mean. Or, really, any clothes. Probably in no clothes too…” She trailed off, wincing. Nope. Definitely not cool or collected.

Lena only smiled more and hummed under her breath as she toyed with Kara’s fingers. “So.”

“So.”

She was comfortable, despite the surrealism, sitting here in Lena’s brightly lit living room, their bodies flush on the overstuffed couch. Lena’s office furniture might be modern bordering on severe, but her apartment was done in warm colors and rustic surfaces. Lena matched the decorating style currently, her hair loose about her shoulders, her usually stark CEO make-up washed away to reveal pale pink lips, a few freckles, and laugh lines at the corners of her mouth and eyes. At home she was softer, more relaxed, her Luthor pride nowhere to be seen. She was just Lena, and Kara was powerless to keep from falling even further for her.

“How are you?” Lena asked, her eyes growing slightly serious.

“I’m good. Great even. How are you?”

“Also good and great.” She hesitated. “Should we, I don’t know, talk about everything? Because I haven’t actually seen you much recently.”

Of course it would be Lena who would bring up what was between them because while Kara might be a superhero, her heroics mostly extended to actions, not to the discussion or processing of emotions, which frankly frightened her more than all the aliens from Fort Rozz combined. Lena, on the other hand, was brave and good and understood that sometimes it was necessary to talk about elephants in the room, particularly when the elephant in question had refused to speak to you for days after you had proven precisely how good and brave you were.

“I’m sorry,” Kara said, folding her legs beneath her. “I’m so sorry I didn’t come see you after the Port or, you know, answer your texts after the other day.”
“You came to see me,” Lena said, her eyes again on their hands in her lap. “Maybe not right away, but I knew you were around.”

Kara shook her head. “I’m sorry about that, too. For stalking you. It’s so embarrassing. I can’t believe I did that.”

“I actually thought you were watching me under DEO orders. You know, like maybe the people you work with might not trust me?”

“They don’t distrust you. After all, you’re the reason…” She trailed off, for once thinking before she spoke.

“The reason my mother is in prison?” Lena supplied, her voice surprisingly neutral.

“Well, yeah. But the fly-bys were my idea. Alex doesn’t even know.”

“Look at that. You can keep something from your sister.”

“I couldn’t keep how I felt about you from her,” Kara admitted, trailing her free hand across Lena’s arm and feeling the goosebumps her touch elicited. She could hear Lena’s breath hitch, too, and she tried not to smile at the sensation of power flowing through her. She was used to being powerful. But the way Lena responded to a simple touch? This was so much better. It made her wonder what would happen if she replaced her fingers with her lips—which was something she had never actually thought about doing before, not even with James.

“How **do** you feel about me, Miss Danvers?” Lena asked.

And, oh, right, the power was mutual, Kara realized belatedly, feeling her own system stutter and restart at the question. “Um,” she said, dragging her eyes back up to Lena’s, “I, uh, like you. A lot.” Which, **fantastic**, sounded exactly like something a thirteen-year-old boy would say.

“Well, good,” Lena said, and leaned closer, her breath ghosting over Kara’s lips. “Because I like you, too. Also a lot.”

Kara wasn’t sure which one of them closed the gap. All she knew was that one moment they weren’t kissing and the next they were, all soft lips and warm breath and tentative tongues. Then one of them moaned—was it her? She honestly didn’t know—and the kiss changed from hesitant to urgent, from gentle to hot. Moving on instinct, Kara pushed Lena back against the couch and framed her face with her hands. They fit together perfectly, Kara’s hips pressing against Lena’s, their legs instantly tangling as Lena wrapped her arms around Kara and pulled her even closer. Kara gasped as she felt Lena’s knee slip between her thighs, and then it was like her brain had lost control of her body as she felt her own hips shift and grind into Lena’s softness. Lena made a greedy sound against her mouth and pressed against her, and the movement put pressure on a part of Kara’s body that no one else had ever touched. Kara’s eyes were closed, and she was having trouble focusing on all the different sounds and sensations erupting inside of her, and then suddenly there was cool air between them and she opened her eyes to see Lena staring at her, mouth open, as Kara floated up and bobbed against the ceiling.

“Well, shoot,” she said, and fell back to the couch, careful not to land on Lena.

Lena, meanwhile, covered her mouth with a hand and sat up beside her, eyes crinkling and shoulders shaking with the laughter that Kara could hear just as clearly as the sounds of an off-world battle rising from the apartment below.

“I can’t believe I did that,” Kara said, pulling her knees up to her chest and hiding her face.
Lena leaned into her side and slipped an arm around her shoulders. “At least I already know where you come from. Otherwise, that might have been a bit more shocking than it was.”

“You think?” Reluctantly Kara rested her cheek on her knees so that she could look at Lena. “How did you find out, anyway? Was it in the DEO files you hacked?”

“You know about that…?”

Kara rolled her eyes. “Dude, you left behind a text file called ‘MIT-is-better-than-Stanford.’”

Alex had told her about the file the hacker had planted on the server, her voice filled with grudging respect. Winn, on the other hand, had not been quite as amused. Not, he insisted, because Lena had succeeded in hacking the DEO network whereas he hadn’t made it past L-Corp’s firewall, but because Caltech, his alma mater, was better than MIT and Stanford. Combined.

“That’s hardly conclusive proof that it was me,” Lena pointed out. “I mean, everyone knows that MIT is better. Just look at our mascots. Yours is a tree, Kara. A tree.”

“I don’t even know what your mascot is. Actually, does anyone?”

“It’s a beaver. Tim the Beaver.”

“Tim the Beaver?” Kara snickered. “Are you serious?”

“I’ll have you know I quite like beavers,” Lena said, her voice low and sultry as she bit her lip in that way that had always driven Kara crazy, even before she understood why.

Could individual human beings have more potent fields of gravity than others? Because Kara would have sworn at that moment that she could feel herself being drawn steadily closer to Lena, unable to resist her pull.

“Wait,” Lena murmured, placing her hand on Kara’s chest. “Talking, remember?”

“Whoops. That’s right.” She scooted over so that the temptation to touch Lena wasn’t quite so strong, and leaned her chin on her upraised knees again. “What did I ask you? Oh, yeah. When you knew about Supergirl.”

“You don’t really talk about yourself in the third person, do you?”

“What’s wrong with that? Supergirl is a hero, man. And Kara is a pretty awesome girl as well…” Crap. She couldn’t keep a straight face any longer.

“Oh, thank god, you’re joking. Otherwise this would end up being the shortest relationship in history.”

Kara licked her lips. “Um, relationship?”

“You know what I mean.” Lena glanced down and smoothed a finger over her heather gray leggings.

Actually, Kara didn’t, having never been in one in her life. “Uh-huh,” she said vaguely. “So. Did you know before or after you hacked the DEO?”

“After. Shortly before you came to my office the other day, actually.”

“I thought you were in a board meeting?”
Kara was pretty sure that was what Jess had said because she remembered thinking that it wasn’t very accurate to use the word “board,” a homonym for “bored,” for a meeting that gathered together all the most powerful people within an organization.

“I figured it out immediately before the board meeting,” Lena explained. “I’m not really sure why, except that once I pictured you turning into Supergirl, I couldn’t unsee it.”

“I’m starting to think more people know than don’t.”

“Like who?”

“Well, like you and Bea and Maggie, for starters.”

“Your sister’s girlfriend?”

She nodded.

“So you and your sister are both queer, hmm?”

“I know. I was surprised, too.” What had Maggie told Alex? That she shouldn’t get involved with someone fresh off the boat? Oh, god, what if Lena felt the same way? Or what if she didn’t want to date someone who was—what had Sara Lance called it—AC/DC? Biphobia was real, and fairly prevalent if the Internet was to be at all believed. “You should know, I’m not gay. And, well, you’re the first woman I’ve ever kissed.”

Lena nodded. “Okay. Then you should know I am gay, and you’re not the first woman I’ve ever kissed.”

“Okay.” They regarded each other evenly, and then Kara said, “Your mother kind of tortured me.”

“I know.”

“You do?”

“It was in the files.” Lena closed her eyes, a small V forming between her eyebrows. “That’s one of the reasons I decided to take her down.”

“It is?” Kara asked, inching closer again.

“Of course.” Lena opened her eyes and looked straight at her. “Do you know how many times you’ve saved me, Kara? I only wanted to do the same for you.”

“But the virus couldn’t hurt me.”

“No, but Cadmus could. They did. And I’m so sorry, Kara. If I could change it…”

Kara stared at Lena, her heart stuttering inside her chest as she realized what Lena was telling her—that she had gone after her own mother partly to try to keep her safe.

“Hey,” she said, shifting so that her legs were under her again rather than between them, “it isn’t your responsibility. There’s literally nothing you could have done. You didn’t even know she was involved.”

Lena reached out for Kara’s hand, holding it almost reverently. “I should have known she was up to something. I should have kept a closer eye on her. Her feelings on the subject weren’t exactly a secret.”
“You saved everyone, Lena. That was you. That is you.” Kara slid a finger under her chin and tipped her face up, wanting to see her eyes. “You know what?”

“What?”

Kara took a breath and recited, “You is kind, you is good, you is—”

“Kara!” she exclaimed. “Stop!”

And then Lena Luthor did something unexpected—she giggled. Who knew such a thing was even possible?

“Sorry,” Kara said, feeling her own cheeks ache from how wide her smile was. “I couldn’t help it. You were so upset when I told you about your mother, and all I could think was that I was channeling *The Help*.”

“Which is problematic on so many levels.”

“Just, so many levels.”

Lena paused. “Why didn’t you tell me about her as yourself? Why resort to a fake interview?”

“I wasn’t sure what you knew. But after we spoke, I could tell that you didn’t have any idea what your mother was up to.”

“Did you not...?” Lena cleared her throat. “Did you think I was involved with Cadmus?”

“When?” Kara asked, stalling.

The furrow returned to Lena’s brow. “You did, didn’t you.”

“No, I really didn’t,” she said, wringing her hands nervously. “I told everyone at the DEO that I was sure you didn’t know anything. Ask Alex if you don’t believe me.”

“I’m not going to ask your sister, Kara.” The furrow deepened slightly. “What about at the Port?”

“What about it?”

Lena stood abruptly and moved away from the couch, her back to Kara. “You know. When I said I was a Luthor.”

Kara rose, too. “You wanted everyone to think you were, so yeah, there was a moment when I wasn’t sure whose side you were on. But at some level I knew or else I would have stopped you.”

At that, Lena turned to face her. “I couldn’t figure out why you didn’t.”

She shrugged. “I figured you had a plan, like at the gala. Or I hoped so, anyway.”

“Really? You really thought that?”

“Not consciously,” she admitted. “But afterward it seemed so obvious.”

“Then why didn’t you say anything? You watched me get in that police car and just, drive away.”

“You didn’t seem very much like you wanted to talk to me.” Kara stepped around the coffee table. “Besides, I was scared.”
“Of what?”

“Of you.” She realized how that sounded and took another step closer. “Or I guess, more how I felt about you. I thought I knew you, and then it seemed like I didn’t at all, and that feeling was so—painful.”

“I know.” Lena closed the gap between them and slipped her arms around Kara’s neck, locking her fingers together at her nape. “When I realized you were Supergirl, I felt the same way. Like I hadn’t really known you at all.”

Kara placed her hands on Lena’s hips, squeezing lightly as if to make sure she was real; that they were real. “And now?”

“Now I’m glad there aren’t any more secrets between us.” She leaned back and fixed Kara with her CEO gaze, penetrating and sharp. “There aren’t, are there?”

“No,” Kara said, and shook her head. “Not unless you count Earth-1…”

Lena’s eyebrows lifted. “That sounds interesting. I think I’m going to want to hear about that.”

“Another time,” Kara said, smiling down at her. “Right now I’m going to kiss you, okay?”

“Okay,” Lena said, and smiled back at her.

They were both still smiling as Kara lowered her head and captured Lena’s lips, which made it hard to kiss, honestly. Then Lena shifted so that her hips were rocking into Kara’s, and any hint of a smile on either side fled quickly.

*I’m kissing Lena Luthor,* Kara thought, her eyes closed, and the realization brought on such a delicious shiver that they both left the ground this time. Lena gasped into her mouth and Kara slowly spun them around in midair, easily supporting the additional weight.

“You’re amazing,” Lena murmured against her lips.

“No, you’re amazing.”

“Agree to disagree,” Lena said, and then she was renewing her assault on Kara’s very willing mouth as they floated a foot off her living room floor.

Meanwhile, in the apartment below, the battle for the Star Killer base continued. But Kara didn’t care what came next in the movie. For now she only had room in her mind—and heart—for the very real woman in her arms.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Lena was pretty sure that dating an alien was about as far as you could get from Cadmus’s master plan. AKA, the morning after, in which brunch is consumed and sibling relationships are tested.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this update took so long. Ugh, antibiotics. Yay, Vicodin. That's all I will say.

In other news, I plotted out the rest of the story in more detail (bullet points in Word instead of just approximations trapped inside my head), and we're looking at a dozen or so more chapters. That means it'll probably be somewhere between 80K and 90K words at the end. If I can get and stay healthy, I should be able to eke out two chapters a week, possibly more. Though I should warn you, sometimes the characters and plot get away from me and I go longer/in slightly different directions than originally intended. But buckle up—as mentioned before, the path to true love is rarely smooth... Happy ending? Guaranteed. Angsty journey? Also most assured.

Thanks for sticking with me this far, and for the good-natured responses! I wasn't sure what to expect from my first time writing fan fiction, and it has been a really great and positive experience. Which seems even more important now, given the state of our current world... Go Ninth Circuit Court, though, am I right? Be well, and happy reading!

Lena blinked sleepily, smiling as she felt the weight of the arm around her waist. Then she focused on the hand with its long, slender fingers and professionally manicured fingernails and—wait. Her smile faded. When had she arrived, and how had Lena not noticed?

Rolling over to face the interloper, she reached out a finger. “Wakey wakey,” she murmured, biting back a laugh as the other woman’s nose wiggled Bewitched-style. She brushed the tip of the twitchy nose again. “Come on, bed hog. Wake up.”

Bea frowned, eyes still closed. “Shhhh. Sleeping.”

“How anymore, you’re not. Wake up, Dang!”

Yawning, Bea stretched her arms above her head. “You do realize this is my only day to sleep in for like the next calendar year, right?”

“You do realize I am constitutionally incapable of sleeping in, which you knew when you decided you were afraid to sleep alone, right?”

“Bitch, I’m not afraid!” As Lena just stared at her, one eyebrow raised in challenge, she added,
“Whatever. I can’t help it if your apartment is freakishly silent. I mean, seriously, we’re in the heart of the city here.”

“I had the bedrooms sound-proofed before I moved in. Now come on, let’s get going. We have to meet Kara for brunch in less than an hour.”

Kara. Lena barely suppressed a dreamy sigh. It had been all she could do to let Kara leave the night before, but after walking her to the balcony door and pressing her up against it for a while, she’d finally managed to keep her hands to herself long enough for Kara to fly off in a blur of blue and red, her borrowed clothes folded neatly on the recliner.

“Nine AM brunch on a Sunday?” Bea groaned. “Are you trying to kill me?”

Lena pushed back the covers, stretching in the warm morning sunlight. “We wanted to beat the rush.”

“Right.” Bea’s voice was smug as she sat up and leaned against the upholstered headboard. “More like you’re so whipped you couldn’t wait to see each other. I was a little surprised to find you alone in here last night.”

Lena slipped out of bed so that Bea wouldn’t see her face when she said, “We’re taking it slow.”

But Bea had known her longer and better than anyone else and caught on immediately. “Oh my god, she’s never been with a woman before, has she? She’s a virgian!”

“A what?”

“A virgian. You know, a lesbian virgin?”

“No comment. And that’s not actually a word.”

Lena headed for her walk-in closet. Not only had Kara never been with a woman, but she had never slept with a man, either. While Bea may be one hundred percent trustworthy, Kara had seemed so embarrassed the night before when she admitted to her lack of experience that Lena had no intention of betraying that particular confidence. Like, ever.

“Ingrate,” Bea grumbled.

“Excuse me? What exactly am I supposed to be grateful to you about?” Lena asked as she rifled through the casual side of her wardrobe. Jeans, scoop neck tee, and the cashmere mock turtleneck from Ireland that brought out the green in her eyes. Perfect. And suddenly it hit her: She was going on a date with Supergirl. And, well, Bea.

“If not for me,” her best friend reminded her, “your girl still might not be talking to you.”

Which, she had to admit, was sort of, possibly, maybe true. She poked her head out of the closet. “Thank you, Bea.” And then she threw a soft, pink slipper at the bed. “Now get up! I know how long it takes you to get ready.”

Bea lifted her hands defensively. “I’m up!”

As she showered, Lena replayed the events of the previous night in her mind. Kara had been so sweet—and a natural when it came to kissing girls. The news that she’d never slept with anyone wasn’t exactly a surprise, though, especially after she’d explained how she had spent most of her dozen years on Earth hiding who she was from everyone and everything. It wasn’t until Alex’s plane
had almost crashed that she finally came out as Supergirl.

“I remember that night,” Lena had said, picturing the image that had been shared millions of times online of Kara standing on the wing of the plane she’d managed to set down safely in the middle of National City Bay. “Your sister was on that flight?”

“Yep. She was actually really angry with me for revealing myself, if you can believe it,” Kara told her. They were lying on the couch together by then, Lena pressed into Kara’s side, each toying with the other’s fingers.

“But you saved her and so many other people!”

“I know. She was just worried about me. It’s something of a perpetual state for her, to be honest,” Kara had admitted, her tone rueful.

“But you saved her and so many other people!”

“Yeah, I noticed. That day I showed up at your apartment, I thought she was going to pull me aside and tell me to stay the hell away from you.”

“I’m pretty sure she wanted to. But don’t take it personally. She’s like a grumpy 1950s dad sometimes. Anyway, she couldn’t threaten you in my apartment, what with the whole super hearing thing.”

“Well, yes,” Lena had said, and leaned up to kiss one of Kara’s ears. “I realize that now.”

The ear in question had been tinged with red, and Lena had settled back against Kara’s side, amazed that she could have such an effect on Supergirl, of all people. How had she gotten this lucky—and when would the other shoe drop? Because in her experience there was always a shoe waiting to drop somewhere.

Now she closed her eyes and lifted her face to the hot spray. Decades of training in glass-half-emptiness would be hard to shake. But for Kara’s sake—and her own—she was damn well going to try.

* * *

“I’m so sorry—they just showed up and invited themselves along!” Kara whispered in Lena’s ear as she hugged her on the sidewalk outside the restaurant, the force of her embrace revealing her agitation.

While Lena may have been a bit shocked to receive Kara’s text informing her that Alex and Maggie were crashing their brunch date, she was still floating high enough from the previous night that she couldn’t find it in her heart to care all that much.

Okay, so not literally floating at this point, but only because they were in public.

“It’s fine,” she murmured in Kara’s ear, delighting in the way the other woman shivered against her. “I’m just happy we’re doing this.”

Kara leaned away and smiled down at her, a mildly perplexed furrow pulling her eyebrows together. “Me, too. But, um, this as in Sunday brunch? Or this…?” She gestured between them.

“Both.” Lena tried not to laugh as Kara grew flustered and practically shoved her glasses into her own head. Which couldn’t happen, could it? She was impervious—but only physically. In nearly every other way, Kara was so, so pervious.
“Luthor. Beatrice.” Alex’s voice was neutral. But when Lena glanced at her, she could see the hint of steel in Kara’s sister’s gaze. “Good to see you again.”

Kara stepped back quickly, almost guiltily, and Lena heard Bea snicker under her breath beside her. She knew exactly what her best friend was thinking: Yay, lesbodrama! On the walk over, Bea had reminded her that as a married mother, she had to take her drama the way she took her women—vicariously. And, frankly, Lena had been doing a crap job of keeping her entertained on both fronts.

Maggie stepped forward to pull Lena into a hug. They were about the same size, and Lena found herself returning the gesture with genuine warmth. It was impossible not to like the gorgeous, smart-ass detective.

“Don’t mind Alex,” Maggie said, further endearing herself to Lena. “She sometimes forgets that her baby sister is an actual adult.”

“Hey!” Alex transferred her glare to her girlfriend. But it softened, and a smile lurked at the corners of her generous mouth. “I heard that.”

“That was the idea, babe.” Maggie winked over her shoulder as she moved on to hug Bea.

“An actual adult with super powers, even,” Kara added, frowning at her sister.

Alex gaped at her. “What the hell?”

Kara waved her hand dismissively. “It’s not a big deal. Everyone here already knows.”

“Oh. My. God.”

Maggie slipped her arm through Alex’s. “Breathe. It’s her secret to share, remember? Your words, Danvers.”

“But—so many—they have to—non disclosure agreements…” Alex’s eyes were wide as she looked around the small group, and all at once Lena felt sorry for her. They were all treating Kara’s secret like something of an inside joke, but if her identity were to be known widely, the real danger would be to all of them, the unarguably vulnerable human beings who loved—er, cared about Supergirl.

“We’ll sign whatever you need us to,” Lena assured her. “I hope you know Bea and I don’t take the knowledge lightly.”

Alex narrowed her eyes, almost as if she would be able to see inside Lena’s head if she only squinted hard enough. Then she nodded. “Thank you, Lena.”

Lena nodded back, hoping that the switch from her surname to her first name signaled that Alex was willing to at least try to accept her presence in Kara’s life.

“So how long have you been up?” she asked Kara, wishing she could touch her in some way. But not only did she not want to make Bea feel like a third/fifth wheel, she also wasn’t sure where Kara stood on PDA. If Lena was the first woman she’d ever kissed, she might not be ready to come out publicly for a while. Besides, Luthors didn’t exactly fly below the radar. If Lena were to be seen out and about with a reporter who had interviewed her in the past, questions of a potential conflict of interest were bound to arise. Definitely a conversation they should have sooner rather than later—she didn’t want to cost Kara the job she so obviously loved.

“I got up around seven,” Kara told her. She started to reach out—for Lena’s arm? hand?—but stopped, twisting her own hands together instead.
“Seven?” Bea repeated. “What is wrong with you people? None of you have children. How do you not grasp the enormous privilege you have been given to sleep in on the weekends?”

“Hazards of the job,” Maggie said. “Besides, working out first thing is not only fun but also a healthy lifestyle choice. Right, Alex?”

Beside her, Alex turned a delicate shade of pink that instantly clued everyone else into what sort of work-out Maggie meant.

Or, maybe not everyone.

“Did you guys go to the gym this morning?” Kara asked.

“Totally,” Maggie replied with an impressively straight face as Alex looked anywhere but at her sister.

“Does your girl really not get—” Bea started quietly, and then oofed as Lena’s elbow caught her in the gut.

They were clearly going to have to have a chat about Kara’s super hearing. Fortunately, before Bea could do more than scowl at her, a college kid in an apron paused in the doorway. “Danvers, party of five?”

“That’s us,” Kara said, smiling brightly at him as they headed inside the old brick building.

Lena glanced around the rustic interior with interest. Mirrors and abstract art from local artists lined the exposed brick walls all the way up to the high ceiling, where wooden beams and copper pipes gleamed prettily. The interior was long and narrow and opened out onto a wisteria-lined patio at the back, she discovered as the waiter led them to a table in the center of the patio. It was quieter in the courtyard, away from street traffic. She liked it, she decided, taking a seat between Bea and Kara.

She liked everything about this whole experience. For a little while she could just be herself, instead of Lena Luthor, L Corp CEO and Heir to the Luthor Empire.

It was blood money, all of it. But with her so-called mother in prison, control of the Luthor financial strings would soon fall to her. She couldn’t wait to throw her parents’ cash at deserving groups like the Alien Anti-Defamation Committee and Equal Rights for Off-Worlders, among others. She could only imagine the look on Lillian’s face when she found out. Then again, maybe Lillian had already cut her out of the will, given she wasn’t a genuine Luthor either in blood or in anti-alien fanaticism. After all, dating an alien was about as far as you could get from Cadmus’s master plan.

“I like your sneakers,” Kara whispered when they were seated.

Lena had chosen an ancient pair of green Converse that matched her sweater. “Thanks,” she whispered back. “I like your cardigan.”

Kara was wearing a blue zip-up sweater that somehow managed to appear both conservative and sporty. “Thanks. It’s easy to remove…” She seemed to realize what she’d said and added hastily, “I mean, for Supergirl stuff, not—”

“Hey, no whispering over there,” Alex interrupted from across the table.

Lena remembered what Kara had said about Alex being a grumpy 1950s dad. Yep, she could definitely see the resemblance. She knew a thing or two about how to handle blustering old men, though, seeing as she dealt with them in droves at L Corp.
“I’m glad you and Maggie could make it on such short notice, Alex,” she said, eyes on the DEO agent.

“Oh.” Alex gripped the laminated menu in both hands. “Well, thank you. I was hoping to get to know you a little better. This one here—” she nodded at Kara, who appeared to be holding her breath—“thinks very highly of you, as I’m sure you know.”

“The feeling is entirely mutual.” Lena glanced at Kara with a soft smile, unafraid of letting her adoration show. She wasn’t a Luthor today. She was simply Lena, and Kara, the prettiest, dorkiest, most badass woman she’d ever met, was smiling back at her with a look that Lena suspected perfectly matched her own smitten expression.

“I hate to interrupt the moment,” Bea put in, “but I need coffee. Like, two hours ago.”

“You weren’t awake two hours ago.” Lena reached for Kara’s hand under the table, happy when Kara immediately laced their fingers together.

“Details, my dear,” Bea dismissed. “Now, who has been here before and can tell me what to order?”

As Maggie chimed in with a recommendation for the eggs benedict, Lena pretended to study the menu. In fact she was watching Alex look at her girlfriend, analyzing the way her face and shoulders relaxed, the small smile that eased her previous tension. Interesting. Apparently Lena wasn’t the only one who was whipped.

The restaurant wasn’t crowded yet, so their orders didn’t take long to arrive. Once everyone had some food and caffeine inside them, brunch went swimmingly. Conversation centered mostly on popular culture—television shows, movies, web series, and, of course, the music industry, thanks to their out-of-town guest. Kara was clearly still getting used to the idea of Lena’s best friend being her childhood idol, but Bea was almost as enamored with her superhero status, though she hid her starry eyes better.

Lena wasn’t sure why she’d worried Bea might feel like a third wheel. Throughout the meal, she and Kara chatted easily, often without including Lena. She didn’t mind, not when Kara refused to let go of her hand even to eat. Good thing the Kryptonian was apparently ambidextrous. If not, Lena suspected the situation would have gone a bit differently given the amount of food Kara seemed intent on consuming.

“This isn’t even her first meal of the day,” Alex said after Kara ordered a second entrée and Lena made a laughing comment about her hollow leg.

“Donuts don’t count.” Kara swallowed a large bite of hash browns. “They’re like appetizers for breakfast.”

“One donut might qualify as an appetizer,” Maggie said. “But half a dozen? I don’t think so.”

“Half a dozen?” Bea echoed. “Seriously?”

“Seriously,” Alex confirmed, looking nearly as proud as she sounded.

And Alex Danvers, Lena had to acknowledge as brunch wore on, was pretty awesome, not least for her steadfast affection for her sister. Kara had definitely lucked out with her adoptive family. Briefly Lena wondered what it would have been like to grow up with a family like the Danvers rather than the Luthors, but then she let the thought go. She had spent years in therapy working on issues involving her family of origin. They still came up, but it helped to remind herself that the Luthors had given her every material thing she had ever wanted or needed. Lionel and Lillian had both
encouraged her to follow her passion for science and technology, and her father had even paid for a laboratory to be built in one of their garages for her to tinker around in whenever she came back to LA from prep school or college. She wasn’t home that often. Mostly she spent her breaks with school friends and their families—Lionel and Lillian were both on the road so much with their respective jobs, and Lex was long gone, so it was usually easier to go home with Bea or one of their other friends.

The Luthors may not have been perfect, it was true; but they had taken care of her when she needed a family. Some kids who lost their birth parents ended up in the foster system or in truly abusive families where they sustained wounds that never fully healed. Emotional neglect was shitty, sure, but Lena had been able to find love and comfort in plenty of other places and people along the way. She was incredibly lucky, and she hoped she would never stop reminding herself of that fact.

They lingered over coffee (and an extra side of toast for Kara), talking about children. Maggie had nieces and nephews back in Nebraska she kept in regular touch with, and Bea needed little persuading to share photos and video of Rowan. She even let Kara take her phone and swipe through the images, an action that had Lena staring at her with a single brow raised. Bea ignored her, only smiling as Kara oohed and ahhed over pictures of her son.

On the other side of the table, Alex had her arm around Maggie, her chin on her girlfriend’s shoulder as Maggie scrolled through Facebook apparently looking for a particular picture of her namesake niece. They were really sweet together, Lena thought, watching the way Alex’s nose scrunched up as Maggie laughed at something on the screen. And lovely to look at, too. They seemed to match each other in ways she and Kara didn’t—they worked in the same field, they were both equal parts bravado and poorly disguised fluffiness, they loved their work, and they were really into each other, if appearances could be believed. Kara had told her they had been friends for a while before finally getting together only recently, but the way they acted, Lena would have guessed they had been dating much longer.

“Oh my god, look at you!” Kara practically squealed as she paused on a photo of Lena dozing on Bea’s couch, Rowan asleep on her chest. “When was this?”

“A couple of months ago.”

“Oh, right. Duh, the time stamp.” Kara looked closer at the photo and then glanced up at her, and Lena could see the wheels turning in her head. “Was this right after…?”

“Lex reached out? Yeah. I needed a break from National City, and what better way to get one than by spending the weekend with my godson?”

She stared down at the photo, remembering how safe and loved—and loving—she’d felt with Rowan asleep on her chest, Bea and Derek napping a couple of rooms away on a lazy Sunday afternoon. That was real life. L Corp, on the other hand, was work and family obligation. If it all came crumbling down, she would move on and forge a different path for herself, even if she couldn’t imagine quite what direction that path would take.

“I actually tried to convince her to stay in LA that weekend,” Bea said. “I even offered her a gig managing my label so I would have more time to work with new clients, but alas, she turned me down.”

Kara glanced up from the phone, her eyes on Lena. “You wouldn’t leave L Corp, would you?”

“Not by choice.” Lena noticed all eyes were on her now. “But there is a board of directors, and even though I own a substantial share in the company, I am beholden to their expectations.”
“But you’re doing an amazing job,” Kara said, straightening her broad shoulders. “They’d have to be blind not to see that.”

“What they aren’t blind to is falling share prices. It’s fine, though. I always knew it wouldn’t be easy to shift the direction of the company. Most people don’t like change, especially not those accustomed to a certain level of return on investment.”

“That’s a nice euphemism for greedy as fuck,” Bea said, and the table broke out in laughter.

Their server was going off shift, she informed them a few minutes later, so unless there was anything else they wanted—and here she paused, eyes on Kara, who shook her head quickly—she was leaving their bill. But they should take their time, of course.

Lena reached for her credit card but Bea beat her to it, passing her AmEx and the leather receipt holder back to the server before anyone else could intercept it.

“Don’t try to fight me on this, Luthor,” Bea said. “Or any of the rest of you, for that matter. I’m writing off this entire weekend as a talent acquisition trip.”

“Oh, really? And who would this mysterious new talent be?” Lena asked.

Maggie stood up. “Before you say anything else about defrauding the federal government, I’m going to the restroom.” She waited a second and then added, “Coming, Alex?”

“Oh. Right.” Alex rose. “Bea, just so you know, Kara has a kickass voice. I’m entirely serious.”

“Alex!” Kara stared after her sister, who only stuck her tongue out over her shoulder as she flounced away.

And, yeah, they were definitely family.

“You can sing?” Lena asked, entranced by the idea.

“Yeah, you can sing?” Bea added, leaning in.

Kara shrugged. “A little.”

Bea scooted even closer. “Define a little.”

Oh, hell no. “Back off,” Lena said, punctuating her words with a shove.

Bea assumed a wounded expression that maybe could have worked on someone who hadn’t known her since kindergarten. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m serious.” She levelled a look at her friend. “It’s not going to happen, so don’t even think about it.”

“What’s not going to happen?” Kara asked, toying with the sprig of parsley that was the only foodstuff left on her plate.

Bea sighed. “Lena doesn’t want you getting sucked into the LA music scene.”

“Sucked in…?” She popped the parsley in her mouth and chewed almost absently. “I don’t get it. You haven’t even heard me sing.”

“Celebrities don’t have to be good, they just have to be famous,” Bea explained. “And you, sweetie,
The server returned with her credit card, and Bea pushed the receipt to Lena to figure out the tip. She was an artist not a mathematician, as she was wont to declare.

Kara peered over Lena’s shoulder. “Twenty percent is twenty-six dollars.”

“Ooh, smart and beautiful?” Lena teased, ignoring Bea’s snort at the cheesy comment.

“I’m not—it’s not—I mean, it’s simple math.”

While they waited for Alex and Maggie to return, Bea tried to convince Kara to sing. She refused, ducking her head into Lena’s shoulder, until finally Bea said, “What if I sing with you?”

Immediately Kara sat up straighter, quivering all over like a golden retriever with a squirrel in its sights. “Would you?” She cleared her throat, watching Lena out of the corner of her eye. “I mean, like, yeah, that would be okay. One of your songs, maybe?”

“Yes, you pick and we’ll see if I remember the words, given the massive case of Mommy Brain I currently have going on.” As Lena snickered, Bea flashed her a glare. “It’s a thing, Luthor. Google it.”

And that was how Supergirl and B Dang came to be singing a duet to Bea’s Grammy-nominated ballad “I Don’t Blame You” when Alex and Maggie returned to the table. Lena was recording the whole thing on her phone, though surreptitiously because otherwise she knew Kara would have stopped, but she looked up long enough to see Alex hug Maggie from behind and sway slightly, watching as Kara and Bea harmonized together. And damn, Alex hadn’t been joking—Kara could really sing. Lena had anticipated high and sweet, but instead Kara took the lower parts, her voice warm and full and almost sassy.

When they finished, diners seated at nearby tables broke into applause, and as Lena heard more than one voice commenting on how that was actually THE B Dang, she wondered if she was the only one who had recorded the spontaneous performance. Maybe this hadn’t been the best idea ever—all they needed was for the three of them to be tagged together on Instagram. Lex would find it, and then he would go after Beatrice and Derek and Rowan and Kara…

She took a breath as Alex hugged Kara, and Maggie gave her a high five. Worrying accomplished nothing. Besides, Lex already knew what Bea meant to her. He already knew that she was Rowan’s godmother, and that if anything happened to the Coleman-Dangs… He may not know about her and Kara, but even if (when) he did find out, Supergirl and her DEO agent sister could take care of themselves. To keep everyone safe, Lena’s only real option was to isolate herself completely. But that would be giving Lex exactly what he wanted, wouldn’t it? And yet, everyone she cared about would be safe, so there was that.

Kara glanced at her, smile decidedly cheeky. “So? What did you think?”

“I think you’re brilliant,” Lena said, barely resisting the urge to lean over and kiss her. “Your voice isn’t bad, either.”

“And on that cheeseball note,” Bea said, “let’s jet, my friends.”

Outside, Maggie and Alex said their farewells first and left together, Kara’s gaze trailing after them.
Lena guessed she wasn’t used to seeing Alex leave with someone else, and sure enough, Alex looked back a few times, her forehead similarly furrowed. Then Bea slipped her arm through Lena’s and said cheerily to Kara, “You’re coming back to the apartment with us, aren’t you?”

Lena shot her friend a look, though she couldn’t decide if she was more grateful or irritated with her for extending the invitation Lena had been psyching herself up to offer. Maybe Kara had other plans. Maybe she was sick of them. Maybe she was still hungry and wanted to go home and put on her fat pants and eat a pizza or two. Not that Kara Danvers actually had fat pants, judging from her eating habits.

Kara glanced between them. “Oh. Um, I don’t know. I hadn’t really…” She trailed off, letting her gaze rest on Lena.

“Come with us,” Lena said. “Please? You want to sing with Bea some more, don’t you? I’ll even play the piano…”

“You play the piano?” Kara’s eyes lit up like someone had just waved a plate of pot stickers in front of her.

“Does she play the piano?” Bea repeated exaggeratedly. “She’s only the best keyboardist I’ve ever known!”

“Liar.” Lena elbowed her.

“Yes, that is a lie,” Bea confirmed. “But you do know a ton of songs, some of which aren’t even mine. We used to play for hours, plotting our future in the industry.”

“What happened?” Kara asked.

“Some of us had to grow up,” Lena said.

“Excuse you? Which of us is married with child and which one is married to her job?”

Speaking of… Kara’s phone went off at that moment, and Lena watched her close her eyes and take a breath. Then she checked her screen. “It’s Alex,” she said, her tone apologetic. “I’ll just be…” And she stepped away, voice low as she answered the phone.

Was this how their plans would always end? With Kara called away and Lena watching her go, wondering if she might not see her again? Dating a superhero was—not easy. But then again, neither was dating a workaholic Luthor. This weekend was the most time Lena had taken off from L Corp since October, when she ran away to LA and almost didn’t come back.

“Superhero time?” Bea asked.

“I hope not,” Lena said. “But probably.”

Except Kara was smiling as she turned back, her phone screen dimmed. “It’s okay. Alex just wanted me to tell you thanks again for brunch. She hopes we can do it again soon.”

And, okay, that was pretty much the last thing Lena had expected from the DEO agent. “She does?”

“She does,” Kara confirmed, wide smile warming her beautiful eyes.

Lena couldn’t hide her matching smile. But then she realized she didn’t have to. “Does this mean I passed the sister test?”
“You passed the sister test,” Kara agreed. She started to lean in and then caught herself as Bea laughed.

“It’s official, you two are too adorable for words. Now let’s go make music together, ladies,” she added, wagging her eyebrows suggestively.

Kara looked at Lena, faintly alarmed. “Doesn’t that mean…?”

“Ignore her.” Lena slipped her arm through Kara’s, pulling her away down the sidewalk. “She’s just an old married lady trying to live vicariously through us.”

“I wish I could say that wasn’t true,” Bea said, falling into step beside them. “But, alas, it is. So, Kara, does your squad call themselves the Super Friends by any chance?”

“How did you know that?”

“Um, hello, obvious? I have a suggestion, though.”

Lena braced herself, hoping her body language clued Kara into the crassness that was undoubtedly coming.

“From here on out, you’d probably be better off calling yourselves the Super Gay Friends. Because, let’s face it, y’all seem to have a certain vibe going.”

Kara only nodded regally, her face frozen into a smile that Lena recognized as one of her less comfortable looks. She smiled so much that one needed to study each variation closely to figure out what she was actually feeling. Fortunately, Lena was more than willing to accept the challenge.

“You okay?” she asked, pressing into Kara’s side.

Kara glanced over at her, smile morphing into something far more comfortable as they gazed at each other. “Better than okay,” she said, and then, because she might be a superhero but she was still Kara Danvers, she tripped over a crack in the sidewalk and lost her balance. Lena, walking close to her, lost hers too and started to fall forward. But before she could strike the pavement, Kara had somehow righted them.

“Shoot! I’m so sorry, Lena. Are you okay?”

Bea was sighing exasperatedly beside them, and Lena got it. Kara couldn’t just levitate on a busy downtown sidewalk and hope to preserve her identity for long. But she’d caught Lena before she could fall, and honestly, Lena couldn’t remember the last time someone had looked at her like that—as if she was the most important person in the world.

“I’m good,” she said, and continued down the sidewalk, flanked by her best friend on one side and on the other, the woman who was fast becoming more important than anyone else in the universe.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

In which Kara reflects on the lesbian tendency toward U-hauling.

Lena, as it turned out, had a music room. Not just a space to play music but an honest-to-goodness sound-proofed room that contained a piano, drum kit, music stands, amps, guitars, and assorted other instruments, not to mention recording equipment.

“I know it’s a bit much,” Lena said as Kara stood in the doorway, her mouth open. “There are hungry children in this city, and I have all of this…”

“Please,” Bea said, leafing through a stack of sheet music she’d pulled from the piano bench. “Spare us the white guilt. You work harder than anyone I’ve ever met. Besides, I happen to know how much money you give away every year. Now, what are we going to sing?”

Kara dropped onto the bench beside Lena, watching her pick out chords and melodies from memory. She stared at Lena’s fingers, stroking the black and white keys, and—wow, that feeling was new.

She looked away and tried to distract herself.

“I feel like we’re in a scene from *Pride and Prejudice*,’ she said. “You know, gathered around the pianoforte after dinner at Netherfield, the Bingley sisters singing duets—”

“—while Jane suffers from her cold upstairs?” Lena finished, glancing up to smile at her.

“Exactly.” Kara smiled back and gazed into Lena’s eyes, warm and open and full of a tentative type of happiness she felt resonate inside her own chest. Their brunch date had been delightful, despite the number of people who had insisted on crashing it, and now here she was with Lena back at her apartment again. She could get used to this, she really could.

“More like gay *Pride and Prejudice*,” Bea said, snorting at them from where she leaned against the piano.

“Have you read that book?” Kara asked.

“There’s a gay adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*?” Lena stopped playing momentarily.

“There’s more than one, actually. Some of them are a bit, ahem, smutty.”

Laughing, Lena played the opening chords of Beethoven’s Fifth. “Let me guess—Bingley and Darcy are a couple, right?”

“The one I’ve read is actually more about the ladies,” Kara admitted, touching her glasses as both women glanced at her in surprise.

“Ladies loving ladies in the early nineteenth century?” Bea asked. “Now this I have to see.”

“Which ladies?” Lena asked.
“No spoilers, but Lizzy Bennett is still the main character, so…”

“Is she with Charlotte?”

“Maybe?” Kara laughed as Lena shot her a look. “You’ll have to read it for yourself. It’s not that different from the original, really.”

Lena’s fingers tripped over a chord progression and she sighed, pausing to stretch her hands and wrists. “Like I said before, I’m rusty. I should probably warm up properly if this is going to work. I’m sorry—I know it’s boring to listen to scales.”

“No worries,” Bea said. “But how long has it actually been since you played?”

“I don’t know.” Lena grimaced. “Maybe since before I moved here…?”

“Lena Letitia Luthor!”

“Letitia?” Kara echoed. “Speaking of nineteenth century ladies…”

At that, Lena shot Bea the look Kara privately termed the Luthor Death Glare —chin lifted, eyes narrowed, one eyebrow angled upward. “Seriously, Beatrice Lang Dang?”

“My bad,” Bea said, apparently unperturbed both by the glare and by the revelation of her own middle name. “While you warm up, Kara and I will raid your kitchen. Sound good?”

“Fantastic.” Lena picked out another minor chord progression. “Although I’m afraid there isn’t much food in the house. I was planning to pick up groceries this weekend.”

“Duly noted,” Bea said as she ushered Kara out of the room.

In the kitchen, Bea rifled through beautiful shaker-style cabinets while Kara stood in front of the stainless steel refrigerator. And she’d thought her fridge was woefully empty—Lena’s contained a carton of milk, a bottle of pineapple juice, three containers of yogurt, a six pack of beer, several bottles of unopened white wine, two jars of pickles, a bag of wilted lettuce, a package of moldy cheese, and a bunch of condiments. The dearth of food wasn’t exactly a surprise. Kara already knew that Lena ate dinner at her desk before leaving L Corp most evenings, and Jess, her assistant, had told Kara that she wasn’t all that great about taking a lunch break either.

That would need to change if she was going to date someone Alex affectionately referred to as The Human Vacuum. Huh. New superhero name? Possibly. Better than White Canary, anyway.

She pulled out one of the jars of pickles and let the refrigerator door swing shut. “Can I interest you in a kosher dill?”

“No thanks.” Bea shut the nearest cabinet and leaned against the gray stone counter, arms folded across her chest. “I would like to know something, though.”

“Okay?” she said, and started munching on a pickle, anticipating some variation on the practical questions she regularly fielded: *What happens to your clothes when you become Supergirl? Do bullets ever ricochet off you and hit bystanders? Do you really not ever feel pain?*

Instead, Bea narrowed her eyes and demanded, “What are your intentions with my best friend? Because if you hurt her, I will end you, superhero or not.”
It wasn’t really her fault that the half-eaten pickle she spat out hit the polished wood floor with enough force to dent it. She coughed, having very nearly inhaled the other half, and then grabbed the milk carton from the refrigerator, gulping it down. Only that was an even worse mistake because, as it turned out—and as she probably should have seen coming—the milk was spoiled. Badly.

“Nnnn,” she choked out, looking around wildly. The sink in the island was closest, so she zipped over and spit out the milk, coughing more as she turned the handle and washed the spoiled milk and pulverized pickle bits down the drain. “Oh my god! Gross, gross, gross!”

Bea nearly doubled over in laughter. “Holy shit, you should have seen your face! God, I wish I’d recorded that!”

This wasn’t funny, Kara thought, irritated. And then it struck her. Red Kryptonite Kara would know how to handle this. While the whole Red K experience had been less than ideal, she had learned some things about herself that she had decided deserved additional examination. Like being badass without her suit on, for one.

She straightened her shoulders and stalked threateningly toward Lena’s best friend. “Oh, so you think that’s funny, do you, Dang? Because I’m not sure it’s a good idea to piss off someone who can throw you into space anytime she feels like it.” She stopped in front of Bea, giving her the patented Supergirl smolder.

“Uh, what?” Bea gazed at her quizzically.

“You heard me. Did you know that I pushed Cat Grant off the top of her own building last year?” Kara enquired in the same low, dangerous tone. Some part of her brain recognized that the music trickling down the hall had stopped, but most of it was occupied with letting her eyes heat up just enough that they glowed a tiny bit red.

Bea’s own eyes widened. “I, um, might have…”

“She made me angry one too many times. I suggest you don’t make the same mistake.”

“Uh…” Bea said, and gulped. Loudly.

Hah! Victory. Suddenly Kara grinned and stuck out her tongue. “Gotcha!”

“Jerk,” Bea sputtered. “You suck, Supergirl!”

“I think you mean I’m awesome,” Kara said jauntily. She turned to flounce away but stopped as she realized that Lena was standing near the kitchen island, watching them.

“Damn,” Bea said appreciatively, apparently spotting her as well, “your girl had me going for a minute there.”

“You deserved it!” Kara exclaimed, ready to defend herself. “Making me choke on a pickle. By the way,” she added to Lena, “your milk is spoiled.”

“That it is,” Lena agreed, still looking at her with the same measured gaze.

“All warmed up?” Kara asked, smiling at her. She started toward Lena, but stopped as the other woman took a small step backward. Her smile faded as she turned her senses up. Lena’s heart rate had increased and her breath was coming quickly in what was most likely a fear response. Not again…
“Ready,” Lena agreed, her gaze flicking over to Bea. “You okay?”

“Peachy,” Bea said. “You ready to rock, ladies?”

“Always,” Lena quipped, not meeting Kara’s eyes.

Kara trailed the two friends down the hall as they argued good-naturedly about what to sing. She couldn’t focus on the conversation, though. Lena was still afraid of her. She was frightened of Kara, who would literally rather die than hurt another person. Her stomach tightened uncomfortably, only this time she couldn’t blame hunger pangs or spoiled milk.

“I can’t decide,” Bea was saying as they reached the music room. “What do you think, Kara?”

As they turned to her, Kara felt it: her phone vibrating against her hip. She wasn’t sure if she was more disappointed or relieved to receive Alex’s text notification. Then she focused on the three characters: “911.” In DEO code, if she remembered correctly, that meant headquarters was under attack.

What the hell? Or rather who the hell would attack the DEO? She pictured Alex with her alien gun, J’onn with his Martian strength, Winn with his computer keyboard… She had to go. Now.

“I have to go,” she said, barely glancing at the other two women as she dashed toward the living room, spun into her suit, and jammed her clothes and phone into her bag.

“Wait!” Bea called.

Kara paused, one foot already out the balcony door. It wasn’t like she wanted to leave like this, but Lena had looked at her like she might be a monster, and Alex and the rest of their team could very well be fighting an actual monster at this very moment. Clearly they needed her more. Besides, this was the life she’d chosen. Or the life that had chosen her, anyway.

“It was great meeting you,” Bea said, and stepped closer, holding out her arms.

Kara only hesitated a moment before pulling her into a brief hug. Over Bea’s shoulder she saw Lena standing a few paces away, arms folded, hands clutching her elbows tightly. This was wrong. How had it gone so wrong so quickly?

Bea stepped back and Kara nodded, channeling her superhero alter ego. “Great meeting you too. I’m sorry I have to run. Talk to you soon?” she added, her eyes on Lena.

After a long, oddly terrifying moment, Lena nodded. Kara heard the echo of a question flit between them: How long until you come after me? Then she was racing out the door and flinging herself off the balcony, speeding away from the troubled look in Lena’s eyes just as she’d done last time, trying to outpace her own longstanding fear of never—not ever—being god damn human enough here on this still strange planet.

*           *           *

The emergency was real this time—a sneak attack on the DEO by Cadmus forces led by none other than Lucy Lane’s former colleague, ex-Army colonel and current anti-alien terrorist at large Jim Harper. By the time the assault had been thwarted, the culprits arrested—including a wounded, frothing-at-the-mouth Harper—and the injured treated, the winter sun had long since set.

“I can’t believe Henshaw got away again!” Kara exclaimed as she watched Alex patch up Winn’s ribcage. It was Sunday so he shouldn’t have even been there, but he’d come in to “check some
“code,” which everyone pretended not to know meant playing Overwatch and Titanfall 2 in the DEO’s situation room.

Just as he’d done with Maggie the previous week, the cyborg had seemed to purposely target someone Kara cared about before making his escape. At least it was only another flesh wound. More disturbing was the idea that Henshaw—and therefore Cadmus—knew who she was closest to.

“We’ll get him,” J’onn said calmly, his hand falling on her shoulder. “Now, how are you? You nearly solar flared again.”

“I’m fine,” she groused, and ducked away from the paternal concern she could practically see wafting off of him. “Nothing food and Netflix can’t cure. Call me if you hear anything about Henshaw.”

“You should stay overnight,” Alex said as Kara headed for the door. “Those weapons packed a mean punch. If something else were to happen tonight—”

“Stop it, Alex,” Kara snapped. And then, as her sister stared at her and everyone else became unusually interested in the ceiling or the floor or the dust mites floating in the air, she sighed. She seemed to be apologizing even more than usual today. “I’m sorry. I’m just hangry, okay? I haven’t had anything to eat since brunch.”

“I swear, Kara.” Alex tossed a protein bar at her. “For someone who requires ten times the caloric intake of an average person, you’re a bit too reliant on external food sources.”

“Wait, did you guys do Sunday brunch without me?” Winn asked, holding a hand to his chest in mock offense.

“Hold still. And yeah, we had a girls’ day out,” Alex said, her eyes still on Kara who was devouring the protein bar in record time. “Sorry. No bros allowed.”

While Kara might not always be adept at reading human cues, she could almost always read Alex. And, holy crap. She was going to have to come out to Winn, wasn’t she? James, too. Oh, god, James. She’d told him she needed to focus on figuring herself out, and yet here she was, diving into a relationship with a girl. And not just any girl—the sister of Superman’s nemesis.

Or maybe not. If Lena couldn’t get over her fear of aliens, there wouldn’t be a relationship.

Before that worry could sink its claws in too deeply, she finished the bar and said, “See you guys later.” And then, much as she had done earlier that afternoon, much as she had done for most of her life on Earth, she left without waiting for an answer.

There were plenty of perfectly good restaurants in National City, but she needed a break from regular life. She couldn’t go back to Midvale because if she went as herself, Eliza might find out she had blown through without saying hello, and if she went as Supergirl, someone was bound to snap a photo and upload it to Instagram or Facebook. And then she would not only disappoint Eliza but also potentially expose yet another Supergirl connection to the Danvers clan… And, fabulous, she was referring to herself in the stupid third person. Which made her think of Lena, which made her fingers itch because she had upset Lena and instead of apologizing or saying anything meaningful or even just giving her a hug, she had bolted.

Bag secure on her back beneath her cape, she flew to Palo Alto in a matter of minutes and changed in an alley outside her favorite Italian restaurant. Inside, she ordered several pounds of food from a tired-looking college student who reminded her of herself a handful of years earlier, worried about
grades and friendships and making sure no one discovered she wasn’t as human as (presumably) the next student.

She missed those days. She missed living with Alex and going to class and losing herself in theories about economic systems, political establishments, what the relatively nascent human race deemed “ancient” history. She missed the routine of school life, missed knowing exactly where she would be day in and day out. She even missed listening to pre-DEO Alex wax poetic about whatever science class she was taking. Krypton was eons ahead of Earth in the study of physics and astronomy, and chemistry and biology were so incredibly different on the two planets that Kara had stuck to the humanities. She had been far more intrigued by stories of the peoples she was living among than the idea of slogging through science classes that were so wrong that she wouldn’t have been able to remain silent. The only way to keep her secret, the Danvers had hammered into her head, was to blend in, remain invisible, pass. So that’s what she had done.

As she waited for her order on a bench near a pinball machine she had accidentally broken during her sophomore year at Stanford (Alex, on the verge of setting a new record, had been so irritated!), she eavesdropped on a family at a nearby booth. The parents were a bit older, the dad with thinning hair and nerdy glasses like hers, the mom with a touch of gray, and they treated their two teenaged children, an older girl and younger boy, like adults, challenging their perceptions and assumptions as they discussed the situation in the Sudan and the Syrian refugee crisis and the current rate of climate change. They were only four people in a city of tens of thousands, but they stood out to her because they actually seemed happy and also, no small feat, appeared to care about the world into which they had (she assumed) been born.

Did they know how lucky they were that they had each other? Did they know how lucky they were to live on a planet that, while it was definitely in ecological crisis, wasn’t so far gone yet that it couldn’t be saved? Assuming its residents woke up and decided to save it, of course.

“Kara, your order is ready,” the harried student announced, and she jumped up, mouth literally watering. When you were an alien who had recently battled evil forces, a protein bar only did so much.

Out in the alley she changed back into her Supersuit, made sure the food was situated upright inside the waterproof compartment of the bag Winn had designed for her, and shot off into the sky.

With the promise of food to speed her along, she made the return trip in even less time. The moment she entered her apartment through the usual window, though, she paused. Something was off. She glanced around, trying to figure out what was different, when suddenly it came to her: Someone was talking in the hallway outside her door. After a slight hesitation, she used her x-ray vision to confirm what she already knew. What was she doing here? Except she was pretty sure she knew.

Quickly she deposited the take-out on the kitchen island and changed back into her clothes from earlier. Then she took a calming breath and went to open the door.

Lena was sitting on the overstuffed chair at the end of the hall, embroiled in a phone conversation about L Corp, from the sound of it. As Kara appeared in the doorway, she pushed to her feet. “Sorry—I have to go, Jess. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Kara heard Lena’s assistant wish her luck, and her brow furrowed. Did Jess know about them?

“She’s not an idiot,” Lena said as she approached, answering the unasked question with a wry twist of her unmade-up lips. Her hair was pulled back in a loose bun, and she was still wearing the same jeans and sweater from their da—from brunch. “Apparently I’m not subtle when it comes to you, or so she claims.”
“What are you doing here?” Kara asked, and then winced as she realized how that sounded. She stepped aside. “I mean, would you like to come in?”

“Yes, please.” Lena hesitated, and then brushed past her. “ Seems like I’m always dropping in on you unannounced.”

“The dropping in has been mutual—and far more literal in my case.” Kara closed the door and leaned against it for a moment. “Are you hungry?” she added, not to be polite but because she desperately needed food, and she couldn’t very well consume three entrées in front of Lena without offering her something.

“No, Bea and I stopped at Noonan’s before she caught her train.”

“Oh, right. Then do you mind…” She gestured at the take-out containers stacked on the island.

“Of course not. I can go, if this isn’t a convenient time,” Lena said, and Kara only just heard the tremor in her voice.

“No! It’s fine. Stay. Please.” While Lena set her purse aside and took a seat at the island, Kara busied herself with the food. Only after she’d taken her first bite of what she was happy to report was still the best calzone ever did she ask, “Were you waiting long?”

“Not really. Bea’s train was late. Besides, I had plenty to keep me busy,” she added, waving her phone. “Corporate espionage, don’t you know.”

She didn’t, actually. “So Jess works on Sundays?”

“Jess works more than I do, I think.”

“At’s ’ard t’imagine,” Kara said around a mouthful of salty dough and fresh mozzarella. It was so good, and she could feel her mood improving with every bite. Because of the food, obviously, not because Lena had been waiting for her to get home.

“Speaking of work, did everything go all right after you left my apartment?” Lena’s voice was casual, almost indifferent, but Kara thought her ramrod-straight posture contained more than a hint of tension.

“Yes. Emergency averted, bad guys captured, everything’s swell.”

Not only couldn’t she tell Lena about the Cadmus attack without violating half a dozen DEO regulations, she didn’t want to upset her with the news that the group was still active. J’onn and the others would decide if and when to pull her into the loop. In the meantime, Kara would have to try to make her peace with lying to Lena. Again.

“And you? Are you okay?” Her voice had lowered, and she was doing that nervous lip-biting thing that really wasn’t fair because it made Kara forget about the way Lena had looked at her back at her apartment, made her forget all the reasons she shouldn’t simply lean forward and capture those lovely lips with her own… “Kara? Are you okay?”

“Oh!” She reached for the glasses she wasn’t wearing and then, instead, occupied her hands with the container of linguine she had yet to touch. “Yes, I’m fine. A little bruised but fine. Are you sure you don’t want any of this?”

“No, thanks.” Lena frowned. “I didn’t know you could bruise.”
“Well, I can, especially at this time of year. It’ll fade by morning, though.” The marks would have already been gone by now if she’d listened to Alex and taken a nap in the sun bed, but she hadn’t been able to stand the thought of sitting still, not after the weekend she’d had. They’d had.

“You mean in winter you have less—” Lena started, but then she stopped. “You know what? As interesting as your physiology is, it’s not what I came to talk about.”

“It’s not? No, of course it isn’t.” Kara ate in silence for a full minute, eyes on her multiple dishes, before finally sighing and meeting Lena’s gaze. “What do you want to talk about?”

“I think you know.”

“You mean how I threatened to throw your best friend into space? It was meant to be a joke. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I wasn’t afraid you’d actually do it—”

“Yes, you were.” Kara could feel the crinkle forming between her eyes. “You want to talk physiology, you showed classic signs of a fear response.”

“I know that. And it did scare me to think about you being out of control, but—do you remember how you said you were more upset at the Port because you thought maybe you didn’t know me, after all?”

Kara nodded.

“Well, that’s how I felt walking into the kitchen and seeing you like that. Bea explained the whole thing after you left—she thought it was hilarious, by the way—and I get it. But I think the part that scared me the most was the idea of losing who I thought you were.”

Which made sense, Kara had to admit. After days of pondering the Medusa operation, she’d come to realize that one of the things that had made the events that night so difficult to get beyond was the momentary belief that she had been wrong about Lena’s character.

“I understand,” she said, meaning it. “And I promise, I won’t ever pretend to threaten your friends—or you, for that matter—ever again.”

“I’m really not worried about it. But the next time you have to leave for an emergency, can we agree that you’ll text me as soon as you get a chance? I just want to know if you’re okay.”

“Absolutely. I can totally do that. Again, I’m so, so sorry I scared you today…”

“It’s fine.” Lena reached for her hand. “Although there’s something else that terrifies me about you, I have to admit.”

Of course there was. Kara wanted to pull her hand away, but she forced herself to remain still.

“You see,” Lena continued, tracing the lines in Kara’s palm, “I haven’t felt like this about anyone in a long time. Possibly not ever.”

“You haven’t?”

“I haven’t. I mean, Kara, you’re so—you’re you.”

“What does that even mean?”
“It means you’re remarkable.” Lena’s eyes were alight with something suspiciously akin to adoration. “You are beautiful and kind and sweet, and yet you’re also a hero. An actual superhero, Kara, while me? I’m a Luthor. I basically represent the opposite of who you are and what you stand for. How could I possibly ever be good enough for you?”

“But you’re...” Kara trailed off and pulled her hand back, shoving more food into her mouth and trying to concentrate on the flavors exploding across her tongue instead of the words blinking in all caps inside her head.

“I’m what?” Lena asked, her voice gentle.

“You’re, you know,” Kara tried again, setting down her fork. “You’re human, and I, very obviously, am not.”

Lena leaned forward and took both of Kara’s hands in hers. “That doesn’t matter to me. I know I come from a family where it does, and I know that I probably harbor a certain level of unconscious prejudice against off-worlders. I think it would be hard to be raised in this culture and not. But in every conscious part of my mind, I think nothing but the best of you.”

Kara shook her head, feeling the differences between their skin cells, their tissue structure, their very bones. She could hear both of their hearts beating, and hers was larger, more powerful, louder. They were fundamentally different in every important way. Couldn’t Lena see that?

“So you were born on another planet,” Lena said when she remained silent. “That doesn’t mean that we’re not equals. If anything, you are so much better than I am.”

“Pfft. What? I don’t—what does that even...?”

“You care about people—individual people—more than I ever could. More than that, you believe in humanity, even though we’ve done nothing but let one another—and you—down time and again.”

“That’s not true,” Kara argued. “Most people are inherently good, even those who do bad things. I know they are.”

Lena gave her a small smile. “You always see the good in everyone and everything. It’s one of the things I admire most about you.”

Kara felt tears threatening and pulled back to rub her eyes, not wanting to dissolve into a pink, disheveled mess in front of Lena. “I didn’t know you felt that way. I guess I thought maybe...”

“What, that I was just another Luthor?”

She nodded.

“I can see why you would think that, especially after what happened at the Port. But I hope you’ll give me the chance to prove I’m not.”

“I can do that,” Kara said seriously, hoping it was true. She trusted Lena, she did. But she couldn’t shake the worry that Lena would wake up in a day or a week or a month and realize that Kara wasn’t so remarkable after all. She had fallen from pedestals before. She just wasn’t sure she could handle falling from Lena’s.

“One more thing,” Lena added, squinting at her. “Can we agree on no more running away?”

Kara hesitated, pondering the request. “I can try not to run, but I can’t promise anything. It’s kind of
my go-to move.” She tilted her head to one side. “But… what if I promise to always come back? Would that be enough for you?”

“I think so. At least, it’s a start.” Lena paused, her gaze intent. “It is a start, right? We are doing this?”

“Yes,” Kara said because there was no other answer she could possibly give. She felt her heart beat against her ribs almost painfully and sucked in a breath. “We’re doing this.”

A Luthor and a Super, dating. Holy crap.

Smiling, Lena held a hand out for Kara to shake. “Good.” And when Kara’s hand connected with hers, she leaned across the island.

Kara met her halfway, food momentarily forgotten. The kiss they shared was sweet, chaste almost, but somehow it resonated more deeply inside her than any other kiss she could remember.

“This isn’t how you seal all your business deals, is it?” she joked.

“Only the really important ones.”

“Ha ha. For a minute there,” she added as she returned to her seat and focused on her meal again (she still had one last entrée waiting to be demolished), “I thought you were going to get all The Help on me.”

“It was a definite possibility. But so problematic.”

“For so many reasons,” Kara agreed, grinning at her around a bite of gnocchi, her other favorite dumplings.

“Is that gnocchi?” Lena asked.

“Um, yeah. Do you, uh, want one?” Kara forced herself to ask.

Laughing, Lena shook her head. “No way. I don’t think I want to make you grumpy again so soon.” She pretended to scowl. “I can share my food without getting grumpy.”

“No, you can’t.”

“You’re right. I can’t,” she admitted, pulling another dumpling from the foil container. “Consider yourself forewarned.”

“Alex actually warned me at brunch this morning.”

Kara’s head shot up. “She did? When?”

“I believe you and Bea were discussing your mutual love of George Michael.”

Kara felt her cheeks heat up. So much for not looking splotchy in front of Lena. “Oh, that. He was a musical genius, okay?”

“No argument here,” Lena said, still smiling. She reached out a tentative hand, eyes on Kara’s mouth. “You have a little…” She wiped what was probably a dollop of tomato sauce from beneath her bottom lip, letting her thumb linger. “You are so adorable. You have no idea, do you?”
“I’m glad you think so,” Kara said honestly.

They stared at each other across the island, and slowly Lena’s hand crept up to cup her cheek. As a wave of peace swept through her chest, Kara turned her head slightly and closed her eyes, leaning into Lena’s touch. How could such a small gesture make her feel as if the sounds all around them—from the neighbors above and below, from nearby buildings, from all of the lives in the city she could sense far and near, from the stars and planets whirring through this galaxy and beyond—were suddenly, blissfully silent? Maybe she was just tired from the fight with Cadmus, but for a moment everything seemed to slow and quiet, like a landscape buried in snow. Except not really because Lena’s hand against her face was warm and tender, and Kara could hear her breath and heartbeat carrying on slowly, steadily, within reach.

Then she heard another sound—chewing. Her eyes flew open, and she stared at Lena as the other woman smirked around the remains of what could only be an Italian dumpling.

“I can’t believe you,” she sputtered, but she was laughing, too.

“I told you, I’m a Luthor,” Lena said, shrugging cheekily.

“I’ll have to remember that.” She leaned across the island and kissed Lena more deeply this time, enjoying the taste of butter and nutmeg on her lips and tongue.

Yep, she could definitely get used to this.

After that the conversation drifted to Beatrice and the rest of Lena’s afternoon before moving on to favorite musicians and songs. Lena only rolled her eyes indulgently when she confessed to being an NSYNC fan, which Kara took as a good sign.

She was on the last dumpling when Alex’s contact photo lit up her phone screen. Though she was more than tempted to ignore the call, she couldn’t in good conscience, not when there might be news about Henshaw. Reluctantly she hit the talk icon.

“Hey, sis,” she said, smiling tightly at Lena.

“Are you better now? Did you get some food?”

“Yes, Mom, I’m eating dinner right now.” She hesitated. “And, yeah, I’m good. Lena’s actually here with me.”

“Oh, she is, is she?” Alex teased. “I’m so shocked.”

“Shut up,” Kara said, and then added deliberately, “Tell Maggie hi from us.”

“What? Who says..?”

“Alex. I can hear her breathing next to you.”

“Fine,” Alex huffed. But Kara could tell she wasn’t really irritated. “Anyway, I’m glad you’re okay. And tell Lena hi from us, too.”

“Oh. Yeah, I will.” That was new as well—Alex behaving as if she might someday soon genuinely care about Lena Luthor. Then again, who wouldn’t, Kara thought, gazing at the woman in question.

“Talk to you soon?” Alex asked.

“No doubt. Love you!”
“Love you too. And be safe, Kara.”

In the background she heard Maggie add laughingly, “Don’t do anything we wouldn’t do!”

She hung up quickly, hoping Lena hadn’t overheard the last couple of comments. “So, Alex and Maggie say hi.”

“They do?”

She was pretty sure from Lena’s tone that she thought Kara was just being nice. “They do.” She held up her phone. “Want me to call back so you can hear for yourself?” Please say no, please say no.

“No,” Lena said, smiling. “I believe you. She’s a pretty terrific big sister, isn’t she?”

“She is,” Kara agreed.

Silence settled between them, and Kara thought she detected the ghost of Lex Luthor, a man she had heard much about but never actually met, shadowing Lena. She wanted to say that her family could be Lena’s now too, that Eliza and Alex would adopt her the same way they had adopted Kara, but she couldn’t. Not only was it too soon to make such an offer, she couldn’t speak for anyone except herself.

“You know who else is pretty terrific?” she asked. Lena shook her head and looked down shyly. Kara waited a beat, drawing out the suspense. “Beatrice.”

Lena blinked. “Oh.”

“Just kidding! It’s you, silly. You’re the terrific one.”

“I can honestly say that no one has ever called me silly in my life. Or terrific, for that matter.”

“Idiots,” Kara snorted, and set about clearing her dinner mess, humming under her breath. She was full of fantastic food—not to mention thinking in alliterative sentences—and Lena was here with her. And just like that, life was good again.

“Do you want to maybe hang out and watch Netflix?” she asked when the kitchen was clean. “I mean, assuming you don’t have anything else you need to do.”

Lena set down her phone and smiled up at her. “Netflix sounds perfect.”

It took them a while to agree on a show—Kara didn’t do blood and gore and Lena found rom-coms a bit “saccharine”—but eventually they settled on a remake they’d both heard good things about, One Day at a Time. Kara cued up the show and set the remote aside, leaning back against the cushions. She couldn’t quite believe that Lena was here on her couch, a warm, solid presence beside her. Then Lena reached over and took her hand, and Kara relaxed. This was actually happening. They were actually happening. She, Kara Zor-El Danvers, was dating Lena Luthor. And while she may not have been able to stop her smile at the thought, she did manage to suppress her squee of unabashed delight. Barely.

Later, after they’d binged three episodes in a row and finished off half a pint of ice cream with plenty of cuddling interspersed, Lena stood up and stretched.

“I should probably go. I need to be up early. Monday and all.” She made a face.

Kara squinted up at her. “You don’t have to leave if you don’t want to.” She held her breath. Rao,
why had she said that? They had spent most of the last twenty-four hours together. What if Lena just
wanted some alone time? Then again, she was Lena Luthor. Somehow Kara doubted she would
have a problem asking for what she needed.

Lena’s gaze was unreadable. At least, for her. “I don’t?”

“No. Not because, you know—” and she awkwardly waved between them while Lena lifted an
amused eyebrow “—but because, I don’t know, it would be nice if you stayed.”

“Really?”

“Really. Unless you want to go?”

“No,” Lena said in that calm, decisive way of hers. “I would very much like to stay.”

“Well, good,” Kara said, wondering if her smile looked as ginormous as it felt.

“Good,” Lena echoed, a similarly huge smile revealing the dimples Kara didn’t often get to see.

She had never done this part before with a potential partner—the little domestic things like turning
out the living room lights and brushing their teeth together and negotiating what time to set the alarm.
(Kara liked to sleep later—one of the perks of super speed—but Lena liked to be at work before her
employees, so...) As she lay in bed watching Lena finish getting ready, Kara was struck by a
thought. Was this what gay people meant by U-hauling? Because if so, she totally got it. She wanted
to be around Lena all the time, even if they hadn’t gone out on a date yet. Which reminded her...

“Do you maybe want to go out to dinner with me sometime?” she asked before she could overthink
it.

Lena paused in brushing her hair. “Are you asking me out on a date, Miss Danvers?”

“I am indeed, Miss Luthor.”

“In that case, the answer is yes.” Lena set the brush on the dresser and walked slowly toward the
bed, her movements slow and deliberate, eyes slightly narrowed.

And there was that new feeling back again. And yes, Kara knew she’d said she didn’t want Lena to
stay because of, you know, but a sexy Lena Luthor clad in one of her old college T-shirts, its
stretched-out neck hanging off one shoulder while she gave Kara honest-to-goodness bedroom eyes
in her actual bedroom?

“I thought you’d never ask, Supergirl,” Lena purred, and slipped under the covers beside her.

She was certain she hadn’t ever heard her superhero name spoken quite like that. Not that she was
complaining, because she absolutely was not. U-hauling, she thought as Lena pressed up against her,
warm and soft and smelling of toothpaste and Kara’s skin cleanser, was freaking brilliant. And then
she couldn’t think about anything other than Lena’s lips and skin sliding against hers, her hair falling
over them like a rich, dark curtain that blocked out the entire rest of the planet.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

In which Kara confronts her fears and Alex is awesome yet again.

Kara couldn’t sleep. She wasn’t used to sharing her bed with anyone, not even Alex, for an entire
night. Her last sleepover, she was pretty sure, had been with Sadie, her best friend back on Krypton.
Sadie, of the red hair, blue eyes, and skin the rust of Krypton’s skies. She had died along with all the
other students in their school in Argo City when Krypton’s core exploded. Kara hadn’t thought
about her in years, but now she remembered giggling under Sadie’s covers, a glowing crystal the
only light in the room.

She might not be used to sharing her bed, but she was well accustomed to restless nights. When she
first arrived on Earth, her sleep patterns suffered due to nightmares about Krypton, her family, Sadie
and Augo, her first boyfriend, and their other friends. Now her nights were most often interrupted by
visions of monsters, Astra and Non, or any other number of terrifying creatures she had encountered
since she’d come out as Supergirl. Still, she had saved so many people from so many terrible fates
that it was worth the occasional rough night.

Tonight, though, she wasn’t losing sleep over monsters or nightmares. Tonight her wakefulness was
one hundred percent due to a daydream coming to life right here in her apartment. She lay with her
head on her pillow gazing at Lena as she slept, lit by the faint light leaking in through the living room
windows. Lena’s skin was pale except for the darker smudges beneath her eyes, and her dark hair
spilled across the other pillow. Kara longed to touch it, and all at once she realized she could. Slowly
she reached out and sunk her fingertips into the soft, dark waves, gently carding it through her
fingers.

Lena had dozed off hours before while Kara lay beside her, body still revved up from their make-out
session. Second base—assuming people still called it that—was upper body, right? And what an
upper body Lena had. Full breasts, soft skin, wide nipples that were a slightly darker pink than her
well-kissed lips… Kara had wanted to do more, she had. But when Lena took a breath, connected
their foreheads, and suggested they slow things down, she wasn’t sure what she was supposed to do.
Reluctantly she’d agreed.

Now, in the middle of the night, she was glad they’d stopped. She still wasn’t sure what would
happen if they went all the way. Wait—did people still call it that, too? Rao, how pathetic. Not only
was she a 25-year-old virgin, she was a 25-year-old Kryptonian virgin with the ability to snap a
partner’s neck in the throes of passion. What the hell was Lena even doing with her?

Then again, what was she doing with Lena, a woman so frail that Kara was afraid to sleep because
she might roll over and crush her? Human bodies were incredibly vulnerable—to blunt force trauma,
to bullets, to a thousand different viruses and diseases. How did Clark do it? He had willingly built
his life around Lois, a woman who could and probably would someday break his heart not because
she wanted to but because she, like Lena, was only human.

And, right—that was why she’d never done this before. In the past she’d always had what she’d
believed to be solid reasons for not being in a relationship, but now that she and Lena were involved,
she saw those reasons for what they were: excuses; cowardice. In the beginning, she’d been too busy
learning about her new world to even consider getting close to anyone outside her adopted family. As she’d grown older, she would cut things off before they went too far because she was still mourning the loss of her family, or she hated lying, or she just wasn’t ready. That was why going out with Chris Gustafson her last two years of college had been perfect. A Mormon who didn’t believe in sex before marriage, Chris had never pressured her to do more than make out occasionally. Honestly, he had been an optimal cover for a misfit alien who was still learning how to handle her powers.

A cover—like a beard? No way… Actually, maybe.

She stared up at the ceiling, frowning. Looking back now from her newly altered perspective, she remembered how close Chris had been with Andre, his best friend on the Stanford soccer team. As in, crash in each other’s dorm room several times a week close. She shut her eyes and groaned softly. Chris had been gay, hadn’t he? They were each other’s unwitting beards—she helped him hide his sexuality, and he helped her hide her alien identity. No wonder he hadn’t seemed all that heartbroken when she told him she and Alex were moving to National City after graduation. They were still Facebook friends, and he and Andre, last time she’d checked, were still “rooming” together in San Francisco.

Awesome. Just, perfect. She wondered if Alex knew about Chris. She couldn’t exactly call and ask her right now. She was probably all snuggled up with Maggie at one of their apartments, sleeping comfortably because they were both mature, non-virgin humans who didn’t have to worry about accidentally injuring their bedmates.

Should she rethink this thing with Lena and give Mon-El the Daxam frat-bro a chance after all? At least she wouldn’t hurt him if they slept together. Then she pictured actually kissing him, and while it wasn’t unpleasant, exactly, the image didn’t make her breath catch or her fingers curl into fists. Besides, she didn’t miss him when she didn’t see him, and the feeling he roused in her most frequently was annoyance. In contrast, she thought about Lena all the time, even when they were apart for a few days, and all Lena had to do was smile up at her from beneath those long lashes and Kara felt herself drifting in as if Lena had pointed a tractor beam laced with Kryptonite in her direction. Which wasn’t as improbable as it might sound. L Corp was known for technological innovation, and Lena had spent five years managing an R&D laboratory before ascending the corporate ladder, according to the executive profile Kara had basically memorized—for writerly purposes only, of course.

Even if her attraction to Lena was part of some nefarious, Luthorian plot to destroy Supergirl, Kara was all in. She didn’t seem to have a choice. She had never been as bewitched by anyone, male or female, as she was by Lena.

Beside her, Lena’s heart rate, slow and steady until now, sped up incrementally. Kara glanced at her again, noting the change in her breathing, the way her body had tensed beneath the blanket, the tightness around her mouth. Was her subconscious replaying the helicopter attack? Corben’s attempt on her life? Or had something else risen from her past, a painful memory perhaps from childhood? Lena’s mother figured occasionally in Kara’s own nightmares; she couldn’t imagine what sleeping down the hall from her must have been like.

Tentatively she leaned over and brushed her lips against Lena’s forehead. “Shh,” she murmured, “you’re okay. I’ve got you.”

Lena blinked awake, her eyes widening momentarily as she took in her surroundings. Then she focused on Kara, and the strain in her face eased. “Kara?”

She slid closer and tugged Lena into her side. “I’m here. You okay?”
“All good,” Lena said sleepily, nuzzling into her neck.

A rush of warmth washed over Kara, and she felt herself relaxing as Lena pressed into her side, sighing contentedly. Within minutes she was back asleep, puffing warm breaths of air against Kara’s skin that should have been distracting but somehow seemed soothing instead.

As soon as she was certain Lena’s dreams were untroubled, Kara closed her own eyes. Surely it wouldn’t hurt to sleep just a little…

*             *             *

When she opened her eyes again, the alarm was going off and the space near her body felt cooler. Blinking, she looked up in time to see Lena slip out of bed.

“Come back and snuggle,” she whined without thinking.

Lena turned and smiled down at her, looking sexy and sweet and so, so soft in her bedhead and borrowed T-shirt. “Okay, but just for a minute.”

“Mmm, okay,” Kara said, and sighed happily as Lena crawled back under the covers and returned to her side, resting her chin on her collar bone.

“Isn’t your arm asleep? I have no idea how long I slept on you, but it must have been a while.”

“Supergirl,” Kara said without bothering to open her eyes.

“Excuse me?” Lena sounded amused.

“Paresthesia is caused by nerve compression,” Kara explained, still half asleep. “Your puny human frame could never compress my nerves. Not without Kryptonite, anyway.”

“Paresthesia, hmm?” Lena echoed, her voice dropping. She kissed Kara’s neck and sucked lightly on her pulse point. “Have I mentioned I’m a sucker for nerdy girls?”

Had she just made a sex pun? Kara’s eyes shot open as Lena kissed and sucked her way up her neck and across her chin. Just as their lips were about to meet, she turned her head away.

Lena pulled back. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean—”

Quickly Kara rolled to face her. “No! It’s just, you know, morning breath?”

“I don’t mind if you don’t.”

“Are you sure?” Kara asked worriedly. She had never in her life kissed someone first thing in the morning.

“I’m sure.” Her voice was amused again, though her face remained neutral.

Kara tilted her head consideringly. “Okay, but if you want to stop, tell me, okay?”

“That’s the general rule, isn’t it?” Lena replied, more serious now. “If either of us wants to stop, we say so, agreed?”

She nodded, and then added shyly, “But, um, can we say if we don’t want to stop, too?”

Lena smiled. “Of course. I hope you will.” And then she leaned in, eyes on Kara’s lips.
Morning breath, it turned out, wasn’t as bad as Kara had always believed it must be. At least, not with Lena. Unfortunately, work was still a thing and the clock was ticking. Eventually she lay back, more than pleased with herself as she watched a breathless, disheveled Lena rise to dress in the previous day’s clothes.

“Coffee?” she asked, enjoying the view as Lena fastened her bra, her back to the bed. She wanted to run her lips across her bare shoulders, but she resisted the urge.

“I don’t have time,” Lena said apologetically. “But what are you doing tonight?”

“No plans currently. Why?”

Fully dressed, Lena smiled as she pulled her hair away from her face. “I believe you mentioned something about a date, Miss Danvers.”

Kara stared up at her. “You mean you want to go out tonight?”

Lena’s smile faltered and took on more of a polished quality. “Or whenever. Just let me know what works for you.” She started to turn away.

“Wait. What is that look?” Kara asked, waving at Lena’s face.

“I don’t know what you mean.” Her chin lifted slightly.

In a flash Kara was on her knees on the edge of the mattress, close enough to run her thumb over the corner of Lena’s pursed lips. “Yes, you do. Did I do something wrong? Oh my god, was my breath that bad?”

Lena grasped her hand, kissing her thumb gently. “No, not at all. It’s just—it’s fine to tell me if you want some space. We’ve spent a significant amount of time together this weekend. It makes sense that you would need some time to yourself.”

The hand kisses were a bit distracting, but she concentrated on Lena’s words, her brow clearing as she understood. “But that’s not it. To be honest, I was surprised you would want to see me again so soon. I thought maybe you would want some space.”

“We’re quite the pair, aren’t we?” Lena said, laughing a little as she entwined her arms around Kara’s neck. “Can we start this conversation over?”

Kara held her close, still amazed that she got to. “Please.”

“Kara, I don’t have any plans tonight and would love to see you. Would you like to have dinner with me?”

“Yes! Because as fun as brunch was, I would really like to go on a date with just you this time.”

“Back at you,” Lena said, and bit her lip in the way Kara loved.

And because she could, Kara leaned forward and kissed her again. They had a date. She and Lena Luthor were going on an honest-to-Rao date.

And, crap, Kara thought as Lena went to brush her teeth, she and Snapper were going to have to have a conversation, sooner rather than later. Lena maintained a fairly high profile, thanks to her role at L Corp and her family’s exploits, and that meant Kara needed to come clean about her evolving relationship with a source before Snapper found out from someone else. Now she was glad she’d
invoked her journalist’s ethics in relation to Lena the previous week. That would make her next conservation with her boss on the subject seem less like a bolt from the blue.

A few minutes later Lena kissed her again in the kitchen, the taste of mint lingering on her lips, and they both laughed at their reluctance to say goodbye before Lena touched her cheek one last time and slipped out the door. Kara left shortly after, humming aloud and smiling at everyone she passed as she walked the mile to CatCo. Everything around her appeared slightly blurry—but because she was happy, not because she hadn’t slept well the night before. She didn’t actually require all that much rest. She enjoyed sleeping, don’t get her wrong, but she didn’t need it the way humans did. A cup of coffee after a wakeful night and she was usually good to go. While most substances on Earth barely impacted her physiology, caffeine was like liquid sunshine to her system. When she’d read in the Harry Potter books how chocolate helped the characters recover from a Dementor’s attack, she was pretty sure she knew the exact sensation J.K. Rowling was describing.

At the morning meeting, Snapper assigned her the task of interviewing friends and neighbors of a Jewish girl who had raised thousands of dollars for predominantly Muslim refugees, and even though it was a puff piece, she didn’t mind because it was always nice to write about people who did more good in the world than bad. She wasn’t sure if it was because of her mood, but the contacts she interviewed seemed to be just as enamored with life as she currently was, and the story practically wrote itself.

Lena texted her a few times throughout the day with sweet little notes, and Kara smiled so broadly it would have hurt her facial muscles were she prone to such pain each time she opened a message to find a heart-eyes emoji or a smiley face accompanied by missives such as, “I hope you’re having a good day,” or “Looking forward to tonight!” In her replies, she tried to tone down her usual emoji quotient, but it was a losing battle. Fortunately, Lena already knew she was overly fond of smiley faces because they had been friends before—

Dating. She was dating Lena Luthor. (Cue the dreamy sigh and theoretically pain-inducing smile…) And then the terror set in because she was going out on an actual, romantic date with Lena TONIGHT. As in, only a few hours from now. Holy freaking moly.

On her way home from CatCo, Kara blew into the DEO and blew out again immediately, a woefully indignant Alex squawking in her arms.

“Dammit, Kara!” she sputtered as they landed in Kara’s apartment, “twice in one week? What the hell?”

She released her quickly. “I’m sorry,” she said, even though she really wasn’t, “but Lena is taking me out to dinner tonight and I just really need your help.”

“Dinner?” Alex’s eyes narrowed, and a smile chased away most of her outrage. “Well, you two are moving right along. Wait—did she stay over last night?”

Kara remembered Alex telling her about the first time Maggie stayed the night, and was pretty sure she was channeling similar levels of elation and panic. “Yeah, she did. But nothing happened! Well, some things happened, just not the thing.”

Alex put her fingers in her ears and hummed, “I can’t hear you…”

Kara tugged on her arms, laughing. “Alex, stop! I had to listen to you talk about Maggie not wearing a bra, remember?”

“That was only because she was injured. Hank Henshaw shot her, remember?”
As if Kara would ever forget that moment. She shuddered a little.

“Aw, don’t worry,” Alex said, moving to give her a quick hug. “I should actually thank that cyborg bastard—Maggie said her brush with death was what made her realize she should tell me how she felt.”

“I believe the line was, ‘We should kiss the girls we want to kiss,’” Kara said, air quotes underscoring her playful tone.

Alex smiled her goofy I-totally-love-my-girlfriend-even-if-we-haven’t-said-it-yet smile. “Well, we should. And apparently you’re kissing the girl you want to…?”

She nodded. “I am.” She waited, wondering if her sister would lapse back into her blatant distrust of the Luthor name.

But Alex’s smile was soft as she tugged Kara toward her wardrobe. “Good. Now let’s get you dressed for your date. Where are you going? Dressy or casual?”

“Dressy, I think. She’s sending her driver to pick me up, and she said wear a dress.”

“Oh, she’s sending her driver, is she?” Alex teased. “Aren’t we fancy? Here, try this one. Blue is always a good choice for you.”

As Alex helped her get ready, Kara couldn’t quite put her finger on why the scene playing out between them felt so familiar. And then she remembered—the night Alex’s plane almost crashed, the night Kara became Supergirl, Alex had helped her get ready for that god-awful blind date that would surely go down as one of the worst blind dates in human or alien history. What had she been thinking, letting Kelly from the fact-checking department set her up? She pulled up her hose and paused, picturing Kelly the day she died. Or, rather, the day Kara let her die. The old guilt and rage returned—she had done her best; she could only save two; of course she had picked Winn and James over funny, irreverent Kelly whose sister had just had a baby the month before…

“Hey, where did you go?” Alex asked, sitting down on the edge of the bed beside her.

“Am I crazy?” Kara whispered, blinking back the tears inexplicably trying to flood her vision. “Will I just end up getting her killed? Should I walk away?”

“What are you talking about?” Alex slipped both arms around her shoulders and squeezed as hard as she could, the way Kara had asked her to do when she first arrived on Earth. It had been such a shock to be invulnerable. For a while she’d wondered if she was simply numb from grief and that was why nothing seemed to touch her. But then Clark took her to the Fortress of Solitude and she asked every question she could possibly think of, relieved to focus on the science behind her new reality. Relieved to speak in her native tongue, finally, again.

“I hurt everyone who gets close to me,” she said, her head bowed. “All of you—Winn, James, J’onn, you, Jeremiah—you’ve all nearly died because of me. How can I knowingly put Lena in that position?”

“Hey,” Alex said, smoothing back her hair, “you’ve also saved each of us too many times to count. It’s not your fault that evil exists, Kara.”

“But won’t being with me put her in danger?”

Her sister leaned her cheek against Kara’s hair. “I wish I could say no. But the fact of the matter is she’s already in danger, with or without you in her life. That’s how you met, isn’t it? And what if
you’re the only person who can keep her safe?”

Kara blinked a few times, her guilt and fear receding incrementally. “That—actually makes sense,” she admitted.

“Anyone would be lucky to have you, Kara. Only—” Alex hesitated, and Kara could hear her grind her teeth together briefly. “Are you sure you’re not moving too fast? There’s nothing wrong with taking things slow, you know.”

“We are taking things slow. In theory.” Kara pulled away from her sister’s comforting embrace. “Would you even say that if she wasn’t a Luthor?”

“I would, actually. I don’t want to see you get hurt by anyone.”

“You and Maggie both hurt each other at the beginning, though,” she pointed out, “and look at you now. Anyway, you’re the one who always says pain is the flip side of joy.”

“Mom is the one who always says that.”

“I thought she’s the one who says you can’t spell ‘joy’ without the ‘oy.’”

“That, too.” After a moment, she reached for Kara’s hand. “You’re right, though. Pain is part of life, and you can’t spend your time trying to avoid it. So if you’re happy, I’m happy.”

Was she even capable of being happy? Of course she had moments of joy, like today for example, or the night she’d saved Alex’s plane, or pretty much any time she went flying for fun. But she had long since resigned herself to the notion that maybe she had experienced too much loss to ever truly be happy. Could someone whose entire world had ended ever be entirely content? She hoped so. She wanted to be, but sometimes she wondered if she would ever feel at home anywhere. The few quiet times when it was her, Winn, James, and Alex sharing food and drink and stories, she thought maybe it was possible.

Their group was evolving now, with the addition of first Maggie and possibly, maybe, Lena. What would James and Winn think of Lena? What would they think of Kara dating a woman, let alone a Luthor?

“What time is your ride supposed to get here?” Alex asked, interrupting her spiraling thoughts.

Kara glanced at the clock on her bedside table and jumped up. “Oh, shoot, like in ten minutes. I have to do my make-up, Alex! I haven’t even done my hair yet!”

“Good thing you’re super fast, then,” Alex said, rising beside her and taking her hand. Then she spun her around, nodding approvingly at the way her skirt twirled around her. “Super pretty, too.”

“You think so?”

“I know so. For an alien.”

Kara pretended to gasp. “Jerk.”

“Take it back and I’ll braid your hair the way you like…”

“I take it back! You’re the best sister ever.”

And she was, Kara reflected a little while later as Alex waited for an Uber to take her back to DEO headquarters for the bag Kara had forced her to abandon earlier. Alex was awesome, and even
better, she seemed to have nine lives. Which, for a special ops agent, was a good thing.

Kara closed her eyes and called up the opening forms of Min-Nal, wondering as she did why she couldn’t seem to make the practice a regular habit. Daily study supposedly kept the practitioner’s mind calm and collected even when faced with great danger, but she usually pulled out the exercises only when she was really struggling. Not that she was struggling right now. She was only nervous to a normal degree before her date with a beautiful woman. She pictured Lena’s smile, her expressive eyes, the softness of her skin, the press of her lips…

Stop thinking, she ordered herself, trying to concentrate on her breathing. But it was no use. She was no use. Absolutely none at all.

The buzzer rang and she practically jumped, her eyes flying to Alex who laughed and nodded at the door.

“Come on, Little Danvers. I’ll walk you out.”

“I don’t see why you get to call me that,” Kara huffed, slipping on her fanciest jacket (a navy trench with wide lapels and a thin belt) and grasping her purse so tightly she heard the faux leather protest.

“Because I’m older.”

“Only by a few years. Technically I’m decades older, really.”

“You can’t count your time in the Phantom Zone, Kara.”

“The universe would disagree.”

“And how would you know what the universe thinks or doesn’t think?”

“Um, hello, because I’ve visited more of it than you can ever hope to, pesky human.”

They bickered good-naturedly as they rode down in the building’s slow, creaky elevator, and Kara was grateful for the company. Outside they stopped beside the sleek, black car waiting at the curb and hugged quickly.

“Have a wonderful time,” Alex said, drawing back to smile at her.

“Thanks, Alex, for everything.” Kara tried to impart the depth of her gratitude through her voice and eyes, but she wasn’t sure if it worked or not.

“You’re welcome. Love you, Kara.”

“I love you too. Are you sure I can’t drop you off on the way?” she added as the driver came around the side of the car and opened the back door for her.

“I’m sure,” Alex said. “Tell Lena hello for me, okay? And text me later to let me know how it goes!”

“I will. See you tomorrow?”

“Yes, Kara. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

She slid into the car, feeling slightly silly as the driver closed the door for her. Sheesh—she could lift this entire car and fly it across the city if she wanted. But she only smiled politely and watched through the tinted window as the car pulled away leaving Alex standing on the curb, waving after her.
Alex would be okay waiting by herself, wouldn’t she? The old dread returned, the one that had shadowed her since the moment her parents had placed her in the pod and set it on its course: *Bad things happened to those she loved.* And she knew in her head that it wasn’t her love that caused people to get hurt. A therapist she had seen early on at Eliza’s behest had told her, “You’re not that important in the scheme of things.” But the therapist had believed her to be a human girl raised by missionary parents in South America, and hadn’t known of her super powers or of her status as the last daughter of Krypton, one of the oldest, most advanced civilizations in the universe. If she had, would she still have insisted that Kara wasn’t cursed? Because that’s what it felt like—that anyone she loved was destined to be destroyed.

**How in good conscience could she bring Lena into her life?**

But then she remembered what Alex had said: *What if you’re the only person who can keep her safe?* She pictured Lillian Luthor’s cruel smirk, the photos and videos she’d seen of Lex Luthor with his angry eyes that looked nothing like Lena’s, and Lena herself—so incredibly different from everyone else in her family, just a woman trying to make a life for herself apart from the baggage that came with being a Luthor.

The car slowed, and up ahead she could see Lena standing on the sidewalk outside a Japanese restaurant. She was dressed in the dark red trench coat she’d worn that night at the Port, and Kara felt her heart skip and restart at the sight. And suddenly nothing else mattered, not the loss of her family or the fear and grief she’d lived with ever since; not the fact that she hadn’t been able to save Sadie or her aunt or Kelly, that she couldn’t possibly save everyone who needed saving. What mattered was that Lena was waiting for her, and that they were both committed to this—whatever “this” was.

Not only that, but Kara was beginning to believe that maybe, just maybe, Lena might be the answer to the question she’d been asking herself ever since her pod crashed on Earth and it became obvious that she, Kara Zor-El, would survive the end of her world, after all.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

In which Lena learns that it’s not very easy to date a superhero while running a multi-billion dollar corporation.

Lena sat in business class on a red-eye flight to New York, drinking mediocre whiskey and watching stars blink into being beyond her window. Stupid meeting. Stupid investors. Stupid freaking Luthor —*L Corp*. Why was she doing this again? Why was she sacrificing her own happiness to make sure that her father’s legacy survived? Yes, Lionel had been the only Luthor to truly love her, but that didn’t mean she owed his business aspirations the best years of her life, did it?

If not for a last-minute threat to pull funding, which she was ninety percent certain was only SWM (straight white male) posturing from one of the company’s oldest investment groups, she would have been on a date with Kara tonight. In fact—she checked the time on her phone—they probably would have been back at her place enjoying a nightcap, and Kara might even have had her pinned to the bed by now the way Lena had been dreaming about ever since the weekend.

Assuming Supergirl hadn’t been called away, of course.

Going out on actual dates, she was beginning to think, might not be their thing. They had been trying all week, and somehow they had yet to enjoy a single evening together without one of their phones going off. This wasn’t exactly a shock. Lena ran a company worth billions of dollars and Kara effectively worked two jobs, one of which involved regularly saving the planet. Or, at least, National City. But while she might not be surprised that finding time to be with Kara was a challenge, Lena was frustrated. And yes, she recognized that it was the height of entitlement to sulk over not being able to see her super-hot, super-sweet, girlfr—the woman she was seeing while sipping whiskey in business class, but to be fair, she had never claimed not to be entitled.

God, she was pathetic. They hadn’t even had sex yet and she was already a mess over Kara Danvers. She leaned her head back against the pillow she’d found on her seat when she boarded and closed her eyes. She might be crap at sleeping on airplanes given the whole fear of flying bit, but maybe there were other ways to distract herself…

* * *

48 hours earlier…

Lena stood outside the restaurant, trying not to give in to the nagging worry that Kara had done the straight girl freak-out—*oh my god I spent the night with a woman?!*—as soon as they’d parted ways that morning. She wasn’t sure her anxiety was entirely unfounded, either. Kara had only sent a couple of texts all day (and only in response to Lena’s overtures), and they hadn’t been nearly as full of emojis as usual.

But then the car pulled up and Kara stepped out, a veritable vision in blue, and as soon as she smiled Lena knew everything was all right.

“You look beautiful,” she said, moving to meet her.
“You do too,” Kara replied shyly, and kissed her cheek.

Arm in arm, they walked into the restaurant together. Heads immediately turned, and as the host led them toward their seats in a quiet back corner where the tables were shielded from onlookers by low wooden screens, Lena released Kara’s arm and shifted away.

Kara frowned a little but didn’t say anything until they were seated and the host had retreated. Then she asked, “Are you okay?”

Lena kept her eyes on her menu. “Absolutely.”

She could feel Kara’s gaze on her. “Really? Because you usually only say ‘absolutely’ when you’re not.”

Wait. “What?”

“Adverbs. I’ve noticed that you tend to use them when you want to hide how you feel, or to convince someone of something.”

“I don’t think…” She trailed off. Did she employ adverbs in the manner Kara described? She would have to remember to analyze her own speech patterns—as Kara evidently had. The thought set off a frisson of unease at the back of her mind she wasn’t sure she wanted to ponder too closely.

As if sensing her discomfort, Kara looked down at the table and waved a hand, almost spilling the small vase of fresh-cut flowers between them. “Sorry. Observing how people use language is a writer’s thing. Plus, English is my second language, so…”

“It’s fine.” She smiled hesitantly when Kara met her gaze again. “It’s nice, actually. I don’t think I’m used to anyone paying such close attention.”

“You’re a CEO. Doesn’t everyone pretty much have to give you their undivided attention?”

“Professionally, yes. But personally is a different matter.”

“Oh.” Kara paused. “Why did you pull away back there? And don’t say you didn’t. I have super senses, remember?”

As if she could forget. “It occurred to me that being seen in public together might not be a good idea.”

Kara’s head tilted in the way that reminded Lena of a curious puppy. “Because I’m a reporter?”

“No, although there is that. But more that you might be in danger if our personal relationship were to become widely known.” She swallowed, grip tightening on the laminated menu. “If Lex were to come after you, or my mother again…”

“I’m pretty sure Supergirl would save me.” Kara’s voice was almost cocky now. “Besides, aren’t you getting a little ahead of yourself? This is only our first date. Maybe we should wait and see how the evening pans out.”

Lena gasped slightly as she recognized her own words directed back at her. “You did know I was flirting with you at the gala!”

“It was kind of hard to miss the way you checked me out when I landed,” Kara said.

She was still channeling a more self-assured version of herself than Lena was accustomed to—almost
as if her two identities were blending, finally affording Lena an extended look at the woman who was somehow a confident superhero and shy nerd all rolled into one.

“Is that why you took off again so quickly?” Lena asked. “Because you caught me checking you out?”

“I took off because I had to come back as my normal self.” She paused. “Although I have to admit, I was a little jealous that you looked at, um, the other me like that but not the regular me.”

“I thought you were straight, and as your friend, I didn’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

Well, not truly uncomfortable, anyway. A little flirting never hurt anyone. Besides, half the time she hadn’t been sure if Kara even realized that all the fluttering of eyelashes and biting of lips wasn’t just a normal thing that all platonic friends did. In hindsight, this might qualify as yet another clue she’d missed that her new friend wasn’t human.

Kara lowered her voice. “You thought I was straight but she wasn’t?”

“You have to admit you don’t exactly exude a lady-killer vibe. Besides, I probably would have checked the other you out regardless. That costume doesn’t leave much to the imagination.”

And before her eyes, Kara transformed into the blushing, bumbling woman Lena had gotten to know over the last few months. “I know!” she exclaimed, waving her hands dangerously again. “That’s what I said, too! But Winn insists it’s all about drag. The air resistance kind, not—”

Lena laughed. “I know which type of drag you mean, Kara.”

“Oh, right. You have a degree in chemical engineering and you had an R&D laboratory of your own… I mean, anyway.” She cleared her throat. “The party platter looks good, doesn’t it?”

Lena murmured her agreement and pretended to focus on the menu. Kara had clearly scrutinized more than just her speech patterns. But had she done so as a reporter studying a source or as a woman with a crush? Or—and here Lena allowed her Luthorness a rare appearance—was there another, less forthright motive driving her investigation?

Kara seemed almost relieved that their server chose that moment to approach. Or maybe excited was the better term. Lena had already decided on her order—once she found a dish she liked, she usually stuck with it—so she sat back and watched as Kara asked detailed questions about different items on the menu, clearly charming the young server with her enthusiasm and sweet, genuine smile. By the time they’d finished ordering enough appetizers and entrées to feed a small dinner party, Lena wasn’t surprised that they knew the server’s last name, his favorite sushi roll on the menu, how many siblings he had, and his projected date of graduation from National City University.

“Thank you, ladies,” he said, bowing and smiling as he backed away.

“Thank you, Danny,” Kara returned.

The food arrived quickly, either because of Lena’s name or because Kara had made a conquest of their server—probably both—and it was quiet for a little while as Kara did her usual impression of, as Lena eventually told her, a hummingbird.

“A hummingbird?” Kara frowned around a Japanese dumpling. (Because of course, Lena wouldn’t dream of taking her to a restaurant that didn’t offer some form of pot sticker.) “But they’re so tiny!”

“True. But their metabolism is so high that they have to eat the equivalent of their body weight in
nectar and insects every day just to stay alive.”

Kara swallowed and grinned, eyes shining. “I love that you know that!”

“I love—um, that you love that I know that,” she finished, smiling back and hoping Kara hadn’t noticed her near conversational face plant.

She didn’t seem to. “Did you know that peregrine falcons can fly 240 miles an hour? They’re the fastest living creature on Earth.”

“I thought you were the fastest living creature on Earth.”

“Oh.” Kara’s ears turned pink. “I meant the fastest native creature.”

“Ah.” Lena hid a smile and reached for another piece of salmon nigiri.

The dishes were still coming when Kara’s head snapped up and she looked at the nearest wall over the top of her glasses. After a moment she glanced back, eyes apologetic. “I’m so sorry, Lena. Really.”

She started to ask why, but then she heard it in the distance: multiple sirens from what had to be an entire fleet of emergency vehicles.

“There’s a fire,” Kara explained, head tilted again to one side, gaze unfocused. “A big one at an apartment complex.”

Lena pictured the adults, children, and pets who might at that moment be on the verge of a horrible death, and nodded, trying to project support. “Go. We can do this another time.”

“I’m sorry again,” Kara said as she rose and reached for her coat and bag. “I’ll text you later, okay?”

“Please.”

And then Kara leaned across the table to kiss her cheek, the always surprisingly delicate scent of her perfume lingering even after she was gone.

The waiter seemed almost more disappointed than Lena felt when she called him over to pack up the remainder of the food. Back at home a little while later, she changed into leggings and a sweatshirt and set up shop on her couch, answering emails from L Corp’s Asian subsidiaries while monitoring Twitter in the background for the Supergirl tag. By nine-thirty, National City’s local superhero had helped the NCFD evacuate the complex, put out the fire, and transport the injured to the hospital. It was nearly midnight, though, before Kara finally texted that she was home after detouring briefly to foil not one but two armed robberies along the way. She offered to come over, but Lena had another early meeting and a busy day tomorrow, and frankly her earlier worry about possibly being stood up had left her exhausted—almost as if she were the one freaking out about spending the night with someone…

“Raincheck in the form of Thai food tomorrow night?” she texted as she brushed her teeth.

“Yasssss! But takeout this time at my place?” Kara replied.

“It’s a date. I might have to work late, though.”

“I thought that was my line,” Kara texted back, followed by a string of emojis Lena had no idea how to accurately interpret. Where did one even find an emoji of an alien holding a fishing pole?
She sighed as she blew Kara a kiss via text and signed off, because their age difference, usually a non-factor, was showing. Seven years in Internet time was like multiple decades in human time, wasn’t it? Although in their case, “in real life” was probably a better descriptor than human time.

Their second date started out well, too. Lena arrived at Kara’s loft at the same time as the delivery boy, and proceeded to watch in fascination as Kara and the boy engaged in an animated conversation about the owner of the restaurant, obviously well known to them both. Was there anyone in National City who didn’t love this woman? Random strangers stared at Kara as if she had hung the moon with not even the slightest clue that she was, in fact, their favorite superhero. Lena wasn’t sure how she did it. Her own latent super power had more to do with repelling people than attracting them.

Finally Kara waved after the young man’s retreating figure, closed the door, and turned to smile at Lena. “Hi,” she said, her voice soft.

“Hi.” Lena kicked off her heels and moved closer, winding her arms around Kara’s neck and tugging the pins from her bun.

As her hair fell in loose curls around her shoulders, Kara buried her nose in Lena’s neck for a moment before lifting her head to say almost peevishly, “I missed you.”

The words—and Kara’s mildly vexed expression—buoyed Lena onto her toes where she bounced a few times, humming quietly. “I missed you, too.”

Kara leaned in to kiss her, but it didn’t last long because Lena could feel the way she was practically shaking.

“Did you skip lunch?” she asked, leaning back to frown up at Kara.

“Maybe.”

“I thought I told you to make sure you stopped on your way back to CatCo!” Lena scolded, stepping aside to give her a clear path to the white plastic delivery bags piled on the kitchen island.

“But then I wouldn’t have had as much time with you before your afternoon meeting,” Kara replied, waggling her eyebrows exaggeratedly as she buzzed toward the food.

And really, Lena couldn’t argue all that strenuously with her priorities given the way they’d put the pristine surface of her desk to good use. She was still shocked by the sheer level of unprofessionalism Kara inspired in her, but her assistant’s watchfulness combined with Kara’s super senses ensured their impromptu make-out session wasn’t in any great danger of being interrupted. Besides, the sight of Kara’s well-kissed lips painted in her lipstick was fast becoming Lena’s favorite.

“Remind me why you might have to skip out early?” Kara said when they’d filled their plates and taken seats at one end of the attractively appointed dining room table. There was a vase with plumerias and lilies in the center along with several candles of assorted heights and colors, and Lena barely hid her surprise when she realized that the plates, cloth napkins, and silverware matched.

“I’m expecting a report from an investigator who’s looking into a possible case of industrial espionage,” she explained.

“Meaning, someone outside L Corp broke into the company and stole something?”

Lena nodded, washing down a bite of pad thai with a swallow of red wine. It wasn’t the most sophisticated varietal, as her mother often took pains to point out, but during a semester abroad in Tuscany she had grown to adore a good Sangiovese. Not that Kara appeared to care about such
things, which was a relief after the pretentious social climber types Lena’s job required her to fraternize with.

Kara frowned, the crease between her eyebrows making its first appearance of the evening. “Do you need any help? I could ask Maggie to make a call or two.”

“No!” Lena was faintly alarmed at the prospect. “There are perfectly viable legal channels we can pursue,” she added, and went on to explain the matter in the vaguest of terms—a (nameless) rival firm in Silicon Valley had just released a fuel cell prototype that was remarkably similar to an L Corp product in its final testing phase. Internal reviews would show where the leak had occurred, the appropriate authorities would be notified, and that would be that.

At least, that was how Lena hoped the situation would play out. There was always the chance that the bastards would simply get away with ripping off their tech. That was capitalism for you—still more laissez fair and Wild West than the orderly image projected by org charts and HR benefit booklets.

“Or I could pitch an investigative piece for the Tribune, if you wanted. I’m sure Snapper would green-light it.”

“No,” Lena said again, just as quickly. “This is off the record, okay?”

“Of course. I always assume that unless you tell me otherwise.” She paused. “Actually, that reminds me. I don’t think I can, um…”

“Use me as a source anymore?” Lena supplied.

“Right. And, uh, I’m going to have to tell Snapper why, according to the CatCo handbook.”

“There’s a CatCo handbook that deals with this sort of thing?” she asked, gesturing between them.

“More of a code, but yes, there’s a section called ‘Acting Independently’ that discusses conflicts of interest. ‘To avoid questions of unprofessionalism, employees are expected to reveal potentially compromising situations as early as possible,’” she recited in a satirical tone, punctuating the statement with a cheesy “We can do it!” swing of her fist.

Huh. Apparently journalism was less Wild West and more ethics-oriented than the paparazzi’s general conduct would suggest.

“So you’re saying that our circumstance isn’t all that unique.”

“It would seem not.” Kara hesitated. “Are you okay with me telling Snapper about us?”

Lena waved a hand. “I’ve been out since high school, Kara. I think the better question is are you okay telling him?”

Kara nodded, the motion almost faster than Lena’s gaze could follow. “Absolutely. I mean, who wouldn’t be proud of dating you?”

Lena could think of quite a few people. She was pretty sure Alex Danvers and every other relative and friend of Kara’s could, too.

Her eyes narrowed. “Hold on. You said absolutely. Does that mean you’re not okay with it or you are?”
Kara laughed, nearly spewing fried rice, and clapped a hand over her mouth while she finished chewing. Finally she said, “Don’t worry, I only use adverbs when I’m excited about something. Which is basically all the time, according to Alex,” she added, rolling her eyes.

“Why the hesitation about telling Snapper, then?”

She shrugged, looking down at her plate. “You said the other night you were worried about people finding out, so I guess I wondered…” She trailed off and took a huge bite of noodles, her eyes on the window over Lena’s shoulder.

Lena had watched her do this same move the other night to avoid a potentially difficult—painful?—question. For a moment she considered taking Kara’s plate away, but it wasn’t like she could functionally prevent her from doing whatever the hell she wanted—a simultaneously intoxicating and sobering realization, now that she thought about it.

“You wondered…?” she prodded gently.

“If you were, I don’t know, embarrassed maybe,” Kara finally mumbled.

“Embarrassed?” Lena repeated. “Why would I ever in a million years be embarrassed at people knowing we’re together?”

“Because, duh.” Kara waved at Lena, the crinkle in her brow back again. “You have multiple degrees and a handful of patents to your name, and oh, did I mention you run one of the largest tech firms in the world? You went to boarding school, for Rao’s sake, while I’m basically a cub reporter whose greatest responsibility up until a few months ago was getting Cat Grant’s coffee order. How could you not be embarrassed?”

“Are you serious?” When Kara ducked her head, Lena reached across the table to take her hand, the skin taut and warm and gleaming almost with that other-worldly quality she hadn’t noticed when they first met. “Kara, you may be just starting out professionally, but that’s nothing to be ashamed of. Besides, you are not your career. You are a wonderful person who inspires a shockingly slavish amount of loyalty in almost everyone she meets. Me included, in case you hadn’t noticed. And while Stanford might not be MIT, it is a decent little school in its own right.”

Kara stared at her, lips quirking, but Lena could still see the doubt in her eyes. And honestly, it had never occurred to her that Supergirl might worry she wasn’t good enough for anyone, let alone a Luthor.

“Have you ever considered you might be biased?” Kara asked.

“About Stanford? No.”

“Lena! About me,” Kara insisted, the crease between her eyebrows finally easing.

“Oh, about you. Absolutely,” Lena sassed.

Then she leaned across the table and, at the same time, tugged on Kara’s hand, urging her forward so they could meet halfway, mouths fitting together in an increasingly familiar fashion. She savored the way Kara kissed her, the press of her lips both eager and modulated as if she was trying her best not to overpower her when, really, Lena didn’t think she would mind being overpowered one bit.

Chivalrous, she thought, candlelight sparking against her closed eyelids. That was another Kara quality she hadn’t seen coming.
And then, just as the kiss began to deepen into something more fervent than controlled, Lena’s text alert sounded.

“Fuck,” Kara groaned against her lips. Then her eyes shot open as Lena pulled back to smile bemusedly at her. “Sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize,” Lena told her. “It’s not like I wasn’t thinking it.”

She sat back and checked the text from Jess. The investigator had discovered actionable evidence. Did Lena want to meet with her team to discuss next steps? The project leaders were still in their lab, and L Corp’s chief counsel was presently eating dinner at her desk as per usual…

“I’ll be there in fifteen,” she replied. Then, thumbs flying, she texted her driver about the change in plans. He answered with an ETA of four minutes. Clearly he’d followed her instructions not to go too far.

When she glanced up again, Kara was watching her, eyes resigned in the flickering candlelight.

“You have to go, don’t you?”

Lena nodded and rose. “I do. Thank you for dinner. Maybe one of these times we’ll actually get to enjoy dessert.” And though she hadn’t meant it in any sort of lascivious way, Kara’s eyes narrowed and dropped to her lips.

“I hope so,” she said, the slightly lower timbre of her voice more reminiscent of Supergirl than girl reporter.

Lena couldn’t help it—she licked her lips, watching in delight as Kara’s eyes widened and her hand shot up to adjust glasses that weren’t there. Laughing softly, she rounded the table to press a kiss to Kara’s temple. She smelled sweet, of mint and lavender and that foreign scent Lena was beginning to think might be Krypton-related because she had only ever detected it on her. Kara lifted her chin, and Lena very nearly responded to the open invitation. Instead, she ran her thumb across her lower lip.

“I’m afraid if we start we won’t be able to stop,” she admitted, her voice low.

“That’s kind of the idea.” Kara gazed up at her with the brilliant smile that should have been the final clue that Supergirl and her alter ego were one and the same.

“Kara Danvers, who knew you could be so diabolical,” Lena teased.

“I can be diabolical! Why does literally no one believe that I can be diabolical?”

“Because, my darling, you can’t.” To escape the temptation of kissing away Kara’s pout, she turned and headed for the coat rack. “I would delay this meeting if I could, but everyone else is already waiting.”

“I understand,” Kara assured her, rising to join her beside the door. “You have people who rely on you, and you don’t want to let them down.”

“Exactly.” She slipped into her coat and shoes, picturing Stacy and Chuck, the project leads who had been working on this design for three and a half years. Of the assorted members of their team, from the assistant programmers and graphic designers to the engineers and market analysts. They had all worked so hard on this product, and now it might be ripped away at the last minute? She owed it to them to do everything in her power not to let that happen.

Kara handed Lena her purse. “We’ll try this whole date thing again, okay?”
“Promise?” she asked, and then winced, hoping that Kara had missed the slight waver in her voice. And, damn it, her voice had always given her away, ever since she was a child being schooled by Lillian in the art of the stoic Luthor façade, so different from her biological mother’s warm hugs and frequent smiles. She’d never known her biological father—at least, not officially—but she remembered her mother as the bright sun her young self had revolved happily around.

Kara gazed at her for a long moment before pulling her into a warm hug. “Of course. You’re not getting rid of me that easily, okay? Unless, I mean, you want to.”

Lena held on tight. “That’s the last thing I want.” She hesitated before whispering against Kara’s hair, “Kiss me goodnight?”

Kara answered by pushing her against the door and holding her in place by the belt of her trench coat. The kiss wasn’t as hungry as earlier that day in her office, but it was deep and sincere and passionate, just like Kara herself, and Lena didn’t want it to stop. Why hadn’t she turned her phone off before dinner? But she couldn’t, no more than Kara could. People were counting on them, and they couldn’t pretend otherwise.

She slowed the kiss down, the mood shifting from sexy to slightly sad. She could feel it—Kara didn’t want this to end, either. And it was ridiculous, really, how attached Lena had become in such a short time to this one person, this amazing woman whose arms were solid and strong and heart-stoppingly tender around her.

She pulled away at last and leaned her forehead against Kara’s, just for a moment. “Text you later?”

“Please.” Kara smiled wistfully. “One of these days we’ll have more time together, right?”

“I hope so,” Lena said, purposely echoing Kara’s earlier response. And then she was pressing one last kiss against the corner of Kara’s mouth before turning and slipping out of the apartment. Her steps were smooth and measured as she walked away down the hall, her heels clicking against the tile floor, but her mind was still back in the loft with Kara. Kara, who somehow still didn’t seem to realize she was and always would be far too good for Lena.

She was nearly done hammering out a plan of attack with Bridget, L Corp’s salty chief counsel, when Kara texted to say goodnight. Lena sent back a string of kisses and red heart emojis, ignoring Bridget’s confused stare. Whatever. Technically she was a Millennial too, even if she didn’t fit the usual stereotypes.

They’d texted again first thing this morning about trying again tonight, and then this stupid trip had cropped up last minute, and now here she was alone on this plane regretting every career decision that had led her to this point. Except that if she hadn’t taken over at Luthor Corp when Lex was finally caught and imprisoned, if she hadn’t moved the headquarters to National City and changed the company’s focus—not to mention name—she might never have met Kara.

Fine. Maybe being CEO of her father’s company wasn’t all bad, after all.

When Kara had heard she needed to be in New York, she’d said that if there had been a feasible way she could fly Lena to New York herself—a way that didn’t, say, involve G forces and air pressure crushing her “puny human frame”—she would have done it first thing tomorrow morning. In which case tonight’s date could almost certainly have contained an overnight component. And, despite her fear of most forms of flying, Lena thought she could probably make an exception for Supergirl, especially if it meant they could spend the night together.

Lena smiled slightly, remembering how adorably innocent Kara had looked when she’d invited her
to stay over a few nights earlier. “Not, for, you know,” she’d said as she’d gestured between them. And yet, she had proven herself significantly more assertive in bed than Lena had expected. She wasn’t sure why she’d been surprised; the girl was a literal superhero. Kara appeared to approach sex the same way she did food—open curiosity when the menu item was new followed by enthusiasm bordering on obsession when she discovered something she really, really liked. And Lena’s body, it seemed (*hallelujah!*, fell firmly in the category of things Kara liked.

“You’re so soft,” she’d said as they lay in bed, cupping Lena’s breasts and rubbing her cheek against both nipples in a way that soon had Lena trying to grind against Kara’s fabulous abs. When she released the moan trying to crawl out of the back of her throat, Kara had smiled up at her and asked, “Do you like that?”

“You could say so,” Lena had replied, her voice thick as her hands clenched and unclenched, the sight of a half-naked Kara—*Supergirl*—lying on top of her almost too much.

“Good,” Kara had said, and returned her attention to the flesh still trapped in her warm, strong hands.

And, yeah, reliving those memories while trapped in a metal cylinder with a hundred and fifty strangers was not the best idea Lena had ever had.

She grabbed her phone and switched off airplane mode—it couldn’t *really* make them crash, could it?—and pulled up her messages app.

“Please tell me you got called in to an emergency,” she wrote, and waited.

Less than a minute later the reply came: “If by emergency you mean a Danvers sisters night bingeing on pizza and *OITNB*, then yes. Yes, I did.”

Lena smiled. “Sounds like a good night. Is she still there?”

“No. Maggie booty-texted her a little while ago. And while it's always fun to hang out with Alex, not quite what I had in mind tonight.”

“Oh, really, Miss Danvers? And what did you have in mind?”

“Honestly, Miss Luthor, I was hoping for a repeat of Sunday night.”

Lena swallowed and glanced around the dark cabin before looking back at her screen. “So was I,” she wrote. “I wish we were in your bed right now, in fact.”

There was a brief pause, and she imagined Kara holding her phone away from her chest, her face scrunched up, before marshaling the courage to type, “What would we be doing if we were?”

“Whatever you want,” Lena replied.

She’d had sex for the first time in high school, and she could still remember how intimidating it had been to have another person naked beside her under the sheets. How foreign to have someone else touching and kissing parts of her body she’d never even seen herself. She didn’t want to rush Kara. Well, let’s be honest, she did. She just didn’t want Kara to *feel* rushed or to do anything she wasn’t absolutely ready for. Kara choosing her as her first sexual partner felt like a gift, and Lena didn’t want to do anything to make her regret that choice.

Three dots appeared, and then the message popped up: “I think I’d like to touch you. What do you like?”
The question was straightforward and a little bit wise, which, in many ways, summed up the person Lena thought she was finally getting to see beneath the multiple costumes Kara assumed on a daily basis.

And this was yet another situation she had never anticipated: sexting with Kara Danvers from an airplane six miles above the earth, the light of the Milky Way beyond her tiny window brighter and more beautiful than she’d ever seen it. But then, she thought as her thumbs moved rapidly and her teeth worried her lower lip, she could probably grow to love doing just about anything with Kara Danvers.

Now, if only they could manage to find a solid chunk of time to be together in person. Lena didn’t want a long-distance relationship with someone who lived in the same city. She wanted to spend as much time with Kara as she could, as much time as they could carve out of their jobs and the commitments they owed to so many other people. Because when it came to Kara, she couldn’t escape the nagging worry that there might not actually be enough time.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

In which Kara comes out to someone other than Alex. Inadvertently, of course.
#ThatPeskyAldebaranRum

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alex heard Kara before she saw her. Supergirl’s boot heels made a very specific sound, and Kara’s gait when she wore her superhero suit was usually self-assured bordering on overconfident. It hadn’t always been that way, of course. When she first started moonlighting as National City’s own superhero, she had continued to walk the planet quietly and unassumedly, the way their parents had coached her. Those first weeks and months after Kara revealed herself was not a time Alex particularly liked to recall. In hindsight, she could acknowledge that encouraging Kara to stay hidden, to downplay who she really was might have had something to do with her own fear of jettisoning a very different kind of closet.

Not until the DEO brought her in and began training her did Kara start believing in her own right to take up space. Now she held herself more proudly even without the suit, and Alex could see that for her adopted sister, integrating her powers into her daily life was far healthier than pretending to be something she wasn’t.

Funny how that worked.

Today Kara’s stride as she stomped down the stairs to the DEO’s central command center was… well, cranky. Alex glanced over her shoulder, and sure enough, there was the crinkle.

“Gee, whatever could be wrong, Supergirl?” she asked, lifting a mischievous eyebrow.

She knew exactly what was bothering Kara—Lena had been called out of town on business Wednesday night, and now today, Friday, her connecting flight home from O’Hare had been delayed by a winter storm.

“Nothing,” Kara harrumphed, stopping beside her. The look she gave Alex was almost threatening, or as close to threatening as her sister could manage without the assistance of Red K.

Alex rolled her eyes, hoping that the gesture would adequately convey how categorically NOT in danger Kara was of being outed by her big sister. Teasing, on the other hand, was a sibling’s sacred duty.

“Supergirl,” Winn said without looking away from his many computer screens, “I can hear how hard you’re glaring at Alex from here.”

“Anyway,” Kara paced away so quickly that her cape snapped when she whirled around to face them. “I’m done at CatCo for the day. Is there anything going on here? Any rogue aliens loose? Thinking of getting loose? Or maybe about to accidentally escape their holding cells…?”

“Supergirl, I’m surprised at you,” Alex said mildly, feigning disappointment for J’onn’s benefit even
though he was conferring with Vasquez and didn’t seem to be paying attention to their conversation. “DEO resources are intended to protect Earth from dangerous aliens, not to entertain superheroes.”

Kara sighed dramatically. “Fine. What about a pile-up on the freeway, or maybe an anti-alien protest to monitor, or, I don’t know, a prison riot to put down?”

Alex bit back a smile. She hadn’t seen her sister this riled up since Lucy had first come back to town and Kara’s pining for James had amped up significantly, supercharged by a healthy dose of jealousy.

Before anyone could respond, Kara paused, eyes widening. “Oh, that reminds me. Winn, Lena mentioned there’s been an uptick in chatter about her mother, possibly signaling that Cadmus might be planning something. I was supposed to mention it to you yesterday but I completely forgot.”

Winn spun his chair around to face her, looking like he might actually cry. Or was that his I’m-hungry-and-I-ate-the-last-bag-of-Wasabi-Funyuns look? Alex couldn’t be sure.

“Oh, first of all, how does Lena know about the uptick, and B, why would she think I wouldn’t?” he demanded.

“Oh.” Kara’s crinkle deepened as she stared at her friend.

Alex watched with interest to see how she would try to dig herself out of this one. Her money was on an apologetic ramble resulting in a sulky, grumbling Winn, and really, it was too bad Maggie wasn’t here to take that bet.

“Well, there was the whole hacking fiasco,” Kara pointed out. “You didn’t even make it past the L Corp firewall, Winn.”

Oh, snap. Right for the jugular. Apparently she’d been hanging out with Lena Luthor too mu—Alex caught herself. It wasn’t fair to blame Kara’s uncharacteristically direct behavior on the Luthor heir. Yet.

“Lena Luthor knows about that? Great.” He tilted his head back and gazed mournfully at the ceiling. “Now I can never show my face outside of this building again. I’ll have to move into one of the containment cells for the remainder of my sad, pathetic life.”

“It’s not that big of a deal.” Kara’s voice wasn’t its usual kind self in the face of a friend’s distress. “So she’s smarter than you. Get over it.”

Winn and Alex stared at her, and even J’onn and Vasquez, who had been leaning over a map a few feet away, glanced up at Supergirl’s decided lack of empathy.

“That was just mean,” Winn said. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say Lena Luthor is rubbing off on you.”

Somehow Alex managed not to choke on air at Winn’s unfortunate turn of phrase. Seriously, where the hell was Maggie when you needed her?

Kara stared at him, a flush slowly creeping up her neck, which was interesting because Kara’s Kryptonian nervous system only overheated when her emotions ran especially high. Which meant—oh, fantastic. Her little sister had it bad for Lex Luthor’s little sister. What an absolute mess.

She meant to change the subject, she really did. But when she opened her mouth, what came out was, “I’m sure Lena hasn’t been rubbing off on Kara in a bad way, though.”
Kara’s eyes narrowed and then glowed, and Alex flinched back instinctively at the sign of her sister’s heat vision igniting. Then she cursed under her breath as Kara’s eyes went back to their normal blue.

“Not at all,” Kara said, her smile smug. “I’ll be sure to tell her you think so.”

J’onn snickered and Alex fired off a glare in his direction. Did he know about Kara and Lena? Probably. When Alex had felt compelled to tell him about her relationship with Maggie since the two agencies often worked closely together—and because he was her and Kara’s space dad, as Maggie liked to tease her—his response had been to remind her that he was psychic. Then he’d hugged her and told her that he was happy for her. Alex supposed that when you were a different species entirely from everyone you knew and cared about, gender variation probably didn’t seem all that important.

One of the screens in front of Winn flashed, and he said, “Um, guys…?”

Kara and Alex both stepped forward eagerly, sibling rivalry forgotten. There was an emergency, which meant they might get out and see a little late afternoon action. Better yet, Alex might even get to try out one of the newly confiscated alien weapons. Boo-yah, baby!

“What do you have, Agent Schott?” J’onn asked as he and Vasquez approached the monitors.

“Not sure yet,” Winn said, typing furiously, “but it looks like we might have a hostile alien detected on the South Side.”

“Give me the coordinates,” Kara said, practically buzzing in place.

“I’m working on it,” Winn muttered. “Geez, you Danvers sisters are demanding.”

Kara grinned at Alex, who grinned back and leaned into her side, noting how her sister generously gave way so that Alex wouldn’t simply bounce off. That was the Kara she knew and loved, the girl who had always worried more about her impact on other people than how she might be affected herself. Maggie said it was a family ethos, a big word for such a small person, Alex had teased her. But she knew what her girlfriend—I have a girlfriend! Maggie Sawyer is my girlfriend!—meant. Their parents had taught her and Kara to always think of the bigger picture surrounding their actions.

“It’s at Baker Plaza on South and Main,” Winn announced. “And it looks like—ew, are those tentacles?”

“Go ahead, Supergirl,” Alex said, nodding at Kara. “We’ll be right behind you.”

Kara nodded back, her blue eyes solemn. “Be careful, Alex.”

“I always am.”

Kara smiled a little, and then she was gone, the crack of her cape reverberating through the room in her wake.

At some point, Alex had realized that telling Kara to be careful didn’t help. The effects of adrenaline on the Kryptonian nervous system were difficult to regulate. When he was in town a few months earlier, Clark had told Alex and Eliza that it had taken his brain years to learn how to automatically limit his adrenaline response. Until Kara’s autonomic nervous system figured out how to limit hers, she—and the DEO, by extension—were simply along for the ride.

“Let’s go,” Alex said to Vasquez.
The other woman nodded grimly. “Let’s do this.”

As they jogged off, Alex was pretty sure she heard Winn call after them, “Bye bye, girls. Have fun storming the castle!”

* * *

“Another Aldebaran rum for the lady,” Mon-El said, flourishing his arm dramatically as he set Kara’s second drink of the night before her.

Kara gave him her patented *I’m-so-incredibly-uncomfortable-right-now* smile, which caused Alex to give Mon-El her patented secret agent evil eye. But he was apparently either too enamored with Kara—a total possibility—or too new to Earth to pick up on either expression. Fortunately Winn and James both did, and after a brief and faintly impressive nonverbal interchange, they jumped up and led Mon-El away purportedly to teach him the rules to darts. By which Alex assumed James would be doing the teaching while the other two provided comic relief.

Beside her Kara released a breath. “Oh, thank god. I never know what to say to him.”

“What about, ‘I like you but I’m not interested in a relationship with you’?”

Kara laughed shortly. “I don’t think he’s interested in a *relationship* with me either, Alex.”

Which—right. “Okay. Then what about ‘I have a girlfriend so back off’?” she tested, watching Kara closely.

Her face fell, and she swirled the rum around in her glass so quickly that it created a whirlpool in the center. “How do I know if I have a girlfriend, though?”

Alex reached over and squeezed her forearm. “You guys haven’t had the talk yet?”

“No.” Kara pursed her lips. “We’ve barely seen each other since we decided to try dating.”

“I thought she spent the night on Monday?”

“She did. But mostly we just slept.”

“In the same bed?” When Kara nodded, Alex couldn’t help asking, “Did you actually sleep?”

“Not at first. But then, I don’t know, she had a bad dream and snuggled up against me, and it was like she was some kind of human-powered sedative. Like, she hugged me and all of a sudden I was waking up hours later, better rested than usual.”

“Wow.”

“I know, right?”

As far as Alex knew, Kara had never shared her bed with anyone, not even Chris, her college boyfriend. Or, as Alex and her mom had always referred to him, *The God-damned Mormon*. They had both been thrilled when he moved to San Francisco after college, thereby releasing Kara from his sphere of influence. Not that he’d been a bad guy. He was actually pretty sweet, and a good cover for Kara within the confines of campus social life. It was just that in addition to being a devout Mormon—a religion not known for its progressive social views towards women and minorities—Chris had also been, well, gay.

They’d debated more than once whether or not to clue Kara into her boyfriend’s sexuality.
Ultimately, though, they’d decided to let her figure it out on her own. With a caveat—if Chris had shown any interest whatsoever in getting into Kara’s pants, Alex had promised her mom, she would intervene immediately. It never came to that. Mostly he treated Kara like a good friend he liked to make out with every once in a while. And Kara, still getting used to her new life, had seemed fine with that.

“You and James never spent the night together, did you?” Alex asked.

Kara glanced over to where James was scowling at the two shorter men, both of whom had dissolved into giggles. “No. We barely even kissed. Except when I was on Red K…” She stopped. “But no. There’s been no one in that way, Alex. You know that.”

“It seems like Lena might be someone,” she said carefully.

“Yeah, but I don’t—I’m not even sure if I can with her.”

“What do you mean?” Alex asked, frowning.

The files on Kryptonian physiology were by no means complete, but human and Kryptonian reproductive systems were similar in both design and practice. Despite the fact the now extinct alien civilization had viewed sexuality mainly as a function of reproduction, there shouldn’t be any functional reason Kara couldn’t have sex with whomever on Earth she wanted to.

“I mean…” Kara paused and then took a long, deep swallow of her alien drink. “What if I lose control and hurt her?”

Perhaps not a strictly functional reason, but a fairly compelling one, certainly. “Is that why you’ve never been with anyone?” she asked, reaching across the table to cover Kara’s hand.

Kara shrugged. “One of the reasons. There are just so many.”

Alex ticked them off in her head: The fact that she’d lost everyone she’d ever known at thirteen. The fact that she was one of the last of her kind. The fact that she had settled on a planet that wasn’t welcoming to off-worlders. The fact that she would have had to come out as an alien to any potential partner combined with the fact that American culture didn’t exactly encourage the cultivation of a deep, trusting connection before hopping into bed with someone.

“But you’ve, you know, taken care of yourself before, right?” she asked. As a scientist, she saw sex as a biological process—a freaking awesome one, now that she’d landed a caring partner, but a process just the same.

Kara recoiled, almost knocking over her glass in her haste. “Alex! I can’t believe you just asked me that!”

“Come on, Kara. It’s a natural biological—”

“Don’t you dare say process!” Kara held up a slightly wavering finger and pointed it at her. “It was bad enough having this talk with Eliza after you left for college. I don’t need to have it again with you!”

Alex knew the talk Kara was referring to. And while she could see now that their mother’s approach to the sex talk had been grossly heteronormative, Eliza had provided some very good information and allowed Alex plenty of room for follow-up questions. Not that she’d wanted to ask any because, ew.
“Then you know that it’s perfectly healthy, right?” Alex pressed. Now that she was so happy in her own body, she couldn’t help wanting everyone else around her to be, too. She had read online about the proselytizing stage some people went through after they came out, but that wasn’t what this was, she was sure. She just wanted Kara to be happy. More than anyone, her sister deserved that.

“Yes, Alex.” Kara appeared to grip her glass tightly. “And because you’re apparently not going to drop it otherwise, allow me to assure you that I am nowhere near as repressed as the average Kryptonian, thanks to being raised in California. Satisfied?”

“Well, yes,” she admitted.

At that moment, Maggie walked in and stood surveying the room until she caught sight of them. Alex watched her approach, thrilled as ever to see her but slightly disappointed that the topic of conversation would necessarily shift. Despite Kara’s claims to the contrary, Alex knew that her sister had long struggled with the divergent sexual mores of ultraconservative Argo, her Kryptonian hometown, and liberal Northern California.

“Maggie, thank god,” Kara said, and sprang to her feet. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

“Hi?” Maggie cast Alex a questioning look as Kara engulfed her in a slightly unsteady embrace. Then she yelped. “Hey, keep your hands where I can see them! Your sister is the only Danvers allowed to get to second base.”

“Oh, sorry,” Kara said, pulling away quickly. Then she paused, head tilted slightly. “I knew people still used that analogy.”

Maggie gave Alex another quizzical look and she shrugged, tipping her thumb and head back to mime drinking.

“I saw that,” Kara said, almost tripping as she slid back into the booth. “And I will have you know, I am amazing at holding my alcohol. So much better than you feeble humans.”

“Is it me,” Alex asked Maggie, ignoring her sister, “or have there been more anti-human remarks lately from this one?”

Maggie leaned down to brush her lips against Alex’s cheek, hand cupping her shoulder. “It’s you, babe.” But she winked as she slid in beside her, smile warm and comforting just like the press of her body.

Alex had dreamed about this sort of thing—of sharing a drink with the people she loved most on a quiet Friday night while the Earth turned and the stars blurred overhead. Now that it was happening, now that her new normal involved a relationship with Maggie Sawyer that not only her family but also all of their friends supported, she was even happier than in her daydreams. Because how could you dream accurately about true happiness if you had never truly felt it?

If only they could find Jeremiah and bring him home… One daydream at a time, she reminded herself. It was inevitable that Cadmus would show themselves again. And when they did, the DEO would be ready.

“So what’s up?” Maggie asked once the waitress had delivered her beer.

“The boys are playing darts.” Kara waved to the far end of the bar.

“And Kara is pining for her lady love,” Alex added.
“Pining? What! Pfft. As if!”

“Lena get delayed by the storm?” Maggie asked.

Alex nodded. “She’s currently stuck in Chicago, which at least means my little sister won’t be disappearing on us every five minutes ‘to check work email’ or ‘to go pee.’” Kara’s gaze flew to hers, and Alex smirked. “Did you really think I wouldn’t figure out what you were up to the other night?”

“Ooh,” Maggie said, “you mean when she kept stepping out on Danvers Sisters Night to check on Lena’s flight?”

Kara sputtered for the second time in less than a minute. “I didn’t—I wouldn’t—”

“Save it,” Alex said. “I know you kept an eye on her plane until it landed. You aren’t exactly subtle, Kara.”

“Fine,” Kara responded after a moment. “Yes, I was keeping an eye on Lena’s plane. But I made sure to track it from a distance, you guys. No one ever saw me, not even Lena.”

“I should hope not.” Alex’s eyebrows arched in amusement. “I can just see you with your future children. You’re totally going to hover outside their elementary school all day long, aren’t you?”

“Talk about helicopter parenting…” Maggie added, grinning.

Alex laughed and kissed her girlfriend’s nearest dimple because she could. “Good one, babe.”

Meanwhile Kara’s eyes were wide as she glanced between them. “I can’t have children, Alex, you know that. Humans and Kryptonians are different species.”

“You can have children without bearing a child,” Alex pointed out. She wanted to add that one of the beautiful things about being with a woman was that you got an extra womb in the bargain, but it was way too soon to tease Kara about something so domestic. Hell, it was too soon for Alex to say such a thing within a square mile of Maggie.

“Whatever.” Without warning Kara stood up and very nearly staggered, managing to take a small chunk out of the back of the booth as she steadied herself. “I have to pee,” she declared, enunciating each word carefully. “By which I mean, actually pee.”

“Do you need help?” Alex asked, half-rising.

But Kara glared her back into the booth. “Supergirl does not require assistance relieving herself. Unless her cape gets stuck. Which it rarely ever does. Only like five times total maybe? IDK. I don’t really remember.”

“Did she just use an acronym instead of real words?” Maggie asked Alex.

“I’m afraid so. She is part of that younger generation, you know.”

Kara stomped her foot. “Alex Danvers, don’t make me tell Maggie about your middle school crush on Nick Lachey!”

Alex closed her eyes and exhaled slowly. Antagonizing drunk Kara had not been the wisest of ideas. How did she even remember that guy’s name? “Wouldn’t want that, would we?”

“Exactly.” And with that, Kara turned and walked carefully across the bar, her head held high.
“You had a crush on Jessica Simpson, didn’t you?” Maggie asked, sipping her beer.

“How did you know that? And please don’t say anything that involves the word ‘detect.’”

Maggie laughed. “I kind of had a thing for her too. So Kara’s really drunk, huh?”

“What clued you in?”

“Honestly, I think it was the talking about herself in the third person. Although the nearly falling over was a close second.”

“A close second?”

“It’s Kara,” Maggie said, as if her point were obvious.

And, yeah, it sort of was.

On the table in front of them, Kara’s phone simultaneously buzzed and lit up. Alex didn’t mean to read the text notification. It just didn’t occur to her that in spite of the many lectures Kara had endured from, well, pretty much everyone, her phone still wouldn’t have a lock screen or password protection. Which was just so like her sister…

Wait. The text said that Lena was on her way home from the National City airport. Like, right this minute.

“I thought Lena was in Chicago?”

Alex stared at her girlfriend. “Seriously, Maggie? You’re a cop.”

“Like you didn’t read it, Agent Danvers.”

“She’s my sister. The law only applies to non-relatives.”

Maggie squinted at her, half-smiling. “Nice try, but that’s bullshit and you know it. Now, do you want to tell Kara that Lena’s back, or can I?”

A blur across the room suddenly materialized into Kara standing beside the booth. “What did you just say?”

Super-hearing really was the worst.

Alex waved at the offending phone, its screen dark again. “Check your texts. Apparently Lena found a way home from Chicago. And, PS, you really need to learn to protect your phone better.”

“Lena’s home? I swear to Rao, you better not be joking, Alex…”

She rolled her eyes and pulled up Lena’s text, holding it up for Kara to see: “I just landed at National City—friends in high places, dontcha know ;-)—and will be home within the hour. Call me?”

“Oh my god! She’s really back?” Kara twirled in place, threw out her arms, and began singing the lyrics to “I’m in a New York State of Mind.”

Maggie leaned in. “Well, that was unexpected.”

“Not really,” Alex said. “Although the singing in public part is new. I’ve tried to get her to do karaoke but she was always too shy.”
“You know what they say: Nothing like alcohol from the Alpha Tauri system to loosen a girl up.”

Alex laughed. And let’s be clear—she did not giggle, no matter what anyone else thought. “You’re a nerd, Sawyer.”

“I’m not the only one,” Maggie replied, nodding exaggeratedly at a still-singing Supergirl.

Not for long, though—she only made it through the chorus once before announcing that she was going to fly to Lena’s apartment so that she could be there when she got home. Alex and Maggie exchanged an alarmed look and, as one, reached for Kara to prevent her from super-speeding away. She frowned but didn’t shake them off, even though her puzzled gaze clearly communicated, *WTF my dudes?*

Alex tried to sound calm instead of mildly panicked. “There’s no way you can fly right now, Kara.”

Maggie chimed in, “Seriously, Little Danvers, the NCPD has guidelines that cover alien activity while under the influence.”

Which, yeah, Alex was pretty sure was a crock. So was Kara, judging by her snort of utter disbelief.

“Even if they didn’t,” Alex said, “you signed a DEO contract that explicitly states you won’t risk yourself or anyone else. What if some innocent got hurt because you weren’t paying close enough attention?”

*Bingo,* she thought as Kara’s shoulders dropped. When in doubt, appeal to her compassionate nature and disproportionate sense of duty. That, or threaten to tell J’onn and Eliza, which definitely would have been Alex’s next move.

“No, you’re right, of course,” Kara said, sliding back into the booth. “I wasn’t thinking. I just really missed her this week.”

Kara’s pout was so off-the-charts adorable that Alex almost offered to take her to Lena’s herself. But she and Maggie hadn’t spent a ton of time together the last few days—Danvers Sisters Night had been followed by Sixth Precinct Poker Night—and she really wanted to hang out at the bar with Maggie and their friends a little longer. Nights out like this were fewer and farther between than she liked.

“You know,” Maggie said, “Lena does have a driver who could probably be enlisted to pick you up.”

“I don’t want her to know I’ve had too much to drink,” Kara fretted. “She’ll totally know I was pining over her.”

“Then just ask her to come hang out,” Alex suggested. “You said earlier you wished she was here, and this way you’ll have time to sober up.”

Kara squinted at her. “Only if you agree to keep me from acting like an idiot. And no teasing, okay? That rum is…” She trailed off, blinking blearily.

Alex smiled at her younger sister. “Deal.”

For the next couple of minutes Alex and Maggie sipped their beer and chatted easily about their days while Kara scowled down at her phone, typing a text—or trying to, anyway. Finally she groaned in frustration and practically flung the device at Alex.
“Will you type it? Pleeeease? I think my thumbs are swollen. Stupid rum.”

Dutifully Alex transcribed the message Kara dictated inviting Lena to the bar—minus half the rambling and most of the smiley faces. Not even twenty seconds later Lena’s reply popped up, thankfully with only one, perfectly respectable emoji: the heart-eyed smile. “ Wouldn’t miss it. See you v. soon!”

Honestly, Alex wouldn’t have been able to take the business woman seriously anymore if she’d indulged in the same level of emoji porn that Kara did.

“She’s on her way,” Alex said, sliding the phone back to its owner.

“She is? Yay! I can’t wait to see her!” Kara glanced around the bar, and suddenly she gasped. “Wait, is this a terrible idea? She’s a Luthor and this is an alien bar…”

“She’s dating you,” Alex pointed out. “I doubt she’s anywhere near as anti-alien as the rest of her family.”

Kara looked at her oddly. “I’m more worried that she might not be safe here now that everyone knows Lillian is the head of Cadmus.”

Oh, right. They were discussing Lena’s safety, not how she felt about the alien masses. That did make a bit more sense.

“She should be fine, given that most of the aliens in the city know she’s the one who saved their asses from the Medusa virus,” Maggie said.

Alex turned to stare at her girlfriend. “And how do they know that? It’s not exactly common knowledge.”

“I didn’t leak it,” Maggie said, holding up her hands. “But this community is connected, Alex. Besides, they’re not stupid. They recognize an attack when they see it, even if humans don’t. Lena’s sort of a hero among the aliens of National City, to be honest. You could definitely pick a worse place to bring her on a date, Little Danvers.”

“A date?” Kara winced. “This isn’t… Oh, god, it is, isn’t it? It’s totally a date.”

“Here’s a question,” Mon-El said, coming to a stop next to the booth. “What is totally a date, Kara?”

Alex glanced up as Winn and James flanked the Daxamite. “Hey, guys,” she said, forcing her voice to sound casual. “How was the darts lesson?” Maybe the other two hadn’t heard Mon-El’s question. Maybe if they just ignored it…

But no, James was frowning, his eyes on Kara, who wasn’t helping matters as she stared straight ahead like a startled rabbit that believed if it just remained perfectly motionless, the predator stalking it would vanish.

“Darts were fun. But back to what Kara was saying,” Mon-El said. “Are you here looking out for a mate?”

“Not on the lookout, exactly,” Kara admitted, pushing up her glasses. “I might have already found one?”

As Mon-El smiled delightedly, Alex realized that he thought Kara was going to confess her undying love to him at any moment. For the second time that week, she felt sorry for the guy. He was sexist
as hell and treated women like objects, but underneath the frat boy machismo he seemed more lost than anything. Sometimes she caught flashes of sorrow in his face and eyes that reminded her of Kara when she’d first arrived on Earth, and yeah, she wouldn’t wish that kind of pain on anyone.

The table was silent as certain glances were exchanged and others were studiously avoided. And, geez, why did all of Kara’s guy friends have to develop feelings for her? Why did they insist on confusing friendliness for attraction? Except she knew it wasn’t that simple. Part of the problem was that her sister didn’t always seem accomplished at distinguishing between the two herself.

“I didn’t know you were interested in anyone,” James said finally, his deep voice tinged with a hint of emotion Alex couldn’t quite identify as he stood looking down at Kara.

“Um.” Kara looked at Alex, eyes begging for help. “It’s really new. Alex is pretty much the only person who knows.”

“Who is it?” Mon-El asked, looking and sounding like a kid who had just been told Santa was bringing him a puppy. Well, a human kid, anyway. An alien kid probably had zero illusions about what actually went on at the North Pole.

“Guys,” Maggie said, her voice firm, “Kara will tell you when she’s ready, okay? Until then, give the girl some space. How about some refills? And personally, I could use a game of pool. Any takers?”

Alex squeezed Maggie’s thigh as her girlfriend pushed out of the booth, hoping she would correctly interpret the message: Thank you, you’re amazing, I love you. Or, well, maybe not the last part because Alex hadn’t actually spoken those three oh-so-loaded words aloud yet.

Kara’s head shot up suddenly, eyes narrowed as she stared at nothing. Then she refocused on Alex, biting her lip nervously.

Alex lifted her eyebrows. Is she here?

Kara nodded and glanced at the door, waiting.

And then Lena Luthor walked into the alien bar, elegantly casual in her signature red trench, a form-fitting black sweater dress, and, for once, flats. For a moment it was like a scene from a movie as all sentient life in the bar paused, and Alex actually thought she heard a record scratch before she realized it was only in her head. Then Maggie, who was halfway to the bar with Mon-El, detoured to give Lena a warm hug, and normal activity resumed.

Lena responded just as warmly, but Alex could see her gaze roving the bar even as she stepped back and nodded politely to Mon-El, who stared at her with a slightly confused look on his face. Finally she spotted Kara, and her entire being perked up like a sunflower under a morning sky. (And yes, such thoughts were a bit more poetic than Alex Danvers usually indulged in, but love is beautiful, okay?)

Kara openly squeed as Lena spotted her—which might have been a function of the amount of rum currently swimming through her bloodstream—and Alex couldn’t help but smile at the joy on her sister’s face. Winn and James, on the other hand, stared at her as if she were a stranger. Then James glanced from Kara to Lena and back again, his eyes widening.

“No. No way,” he said, shaking his head. “You can’t be serious.”

Before Alex could react, Kara stood up and gave him what passed for a glare. “Excuse me?” she said, keeping her voice low.
He spoke quietly too, but his voice was fierce. “She’s a Luthor, Kara.”

“I’m aware of that, James.”

As she rose to offer her sister moral support (at the least), Alex glanced toward the bar. Maggie had somehow maneuvered Lena so that her back was to their side of the room and was chatting her up determinedly. She cast her girlfriend another round of silent thanks, folded her arms across her chest, and fastened her own glare on James.

Predictably, he was still fixated on Kara. “You can’t—I mean—Kara, come on.”

“No, you come on. You don’t get to tell me who I can and cannot date.”

He shook his head. “She’s Lex’s sister. How can you be sure this isn’t just part of some long con her family is playing on you?”

Winn squeaked slightly. “Dude, that’s…” He trailed off, apparently unable to find the right word.

“Incredibly ugly,” Kara finished for him, her gaze heavy with disappointment. “Lena is a good person, James. She doesn’t deserve your prejudice.”

“I’m the prejudiced one?” he repeated, his voice rising slightly. “That woman grew up in the same household as the man who, if you’ll remember, pretended to be your cousin’s friend even as he was plotting the best way to murder him. Her own mother kidnapped you and wants to kill all the aliens on Earth, especially you and Clark, and you’re calling me prejudiced?”

While all of that might be true, it was a low blow to chuck at Kara. If James was trying to rain all over her bisexual pride parade, he was doing beautifully.

And yet, in the face of his open hostility, Kara only drew herself up more proudly. “That woman, as you called her, is one of the strongest people I know because she has remained genuinely good despite the family that raised her. And if you’re truly my friend, you will treat her with the respect she deserves. If you can’t do that, then I don’t know, James. Maybe I never knew you at all.”

He looked from Kara to Alex, his gaze incredulous. “Alex? Are you honestly telling me you don’t have a problem with this?”

She lifted her chin and declared, “I trust my sister. If Kara says Lena is on our side, then I believe her.” Which, you know, was mostly true.

Beside her, Kara sucked in a breath, and Alex followed her gaze. The subject of their discussion was making her way across the room, her gaze a bit less happy now as she focused on the obvious stand-off. Kara brushed past James without another word, hurrying to meet Lena. As soon as she reached her, she wrapped Lena up in a tight embrace. They stood like that holding onto each other for longer than was strictly friendly, eyes closed, smiles enraptured again.

Apparently coming out to friends at alien bars was a Danvers sisters thing, seeing as that was how Alex had done it too. She’d been grabbing a drink with Winn, James, and Kara at the old alien bar shortly after The Most Ill-Advised Kiss Ever™ when Maggie stopped by their table, ostensibly to make sure everything was “okay” between them. As enamored with Maggie as ever, Alex had stupidly assured her they were fine and then returned to her friends. The humiliation at being rejected was still so raw, and she hadn’t actually known if she and Maggie would ever be okay again.

Lost in overthinking the painful exchange, she had barely noticed Kara’s nervous look before Winn announced, “I know I said the other day that it wasn’t like you were into that detective chick, but I
totally take it back.”

“Yeah,” James had added, smirking. “You are so into her.”

After a panicked moment, Alex had waved her hand, faking nonchalance. “Yeah, well, I’ve been friend-zoned, so can we talk about something else?”

“Friend-zoned?” Winn echoed. “Gee, I wouldn’t know anything about that. What about you, James?”

“Hey!” Kara had protested. “I’m right here, you know!”

And that had been that. No shock, no horror, nothing negative at all. Too bad the same couldn’t be said for Kara’s experience.

“Hey,” Alex whispered, grabbing James’s arm and squeezing hard. “You need to back off, Olsen. I am not about to let you ruin her shot at being happy because you can’t handle how things turned out.”

He frowned at her. “I want Kara to be happy too, you know.”

“Then act like it.”

“I am, Alex. I’m being realistic, okay? I have significantly more experience with the Luthors than either of you. In order to be happy, she has to still be alive.”

And, crap, she didn’t actually have anything to say to that. She exhaled in frustration and released him, glancing over at Kara to see if she’d been listening in. But Kara was rambling about something or other, if her flailing arms were anything to go by, and as Alex watched, Lena tucked a strand of loose hair behind Kara’s ear and smiled up at her, face aglow with obvious affection.

If Lena was pretending to be into Kara as some sort of complicated con, then she deserved a freaking Oscar.

“Everything okay?” Maggie murmured in Alex’s ear as she and a clearly disheartened Mon-El rejoined the group.

“I think it’s sort of a wait and see situation,” Alex answered, letting her fingers glide over the soft skin of her girlfriend’s wrist as Maggie handed her a bottle, glass still cold from the cooler.

“That good, huh?” Maggie commented, her brow lowering as she surveyed James.

Just then, Kara caught Lena’s hand and tugged her over to where they were all standing.

“Hi, Lena,” Alex said.

Kara gave her a grateful look. “Lena, you remember Alex and Winn.”

Lena nodded as greetings and smiles—some more forced than others—were exchanged. Just when Alex was beginning to wonder if her sister planned to ignore James entirely, Kara added, “And this is James Olsen. James, this is Lena.” Her smile faded slightly as she met her ex’s gaze, and even Alex wondered what he might do.

After a moment, James nodded at Lena. “It’s nice to officially meet you, Ms. Luthor.”

If Lena noticed the stress he placed on her last name, she didn’t let on. “Please, call me Lena. It’s
nice to meet you as well. I’ve been a fan of your work for a very long time, Mr. Olsen.”

“Call me James,” he said, the tension in his shoulders easing slightly. “I have to admit, I didn’t think I’d hear such praise from anyone in your family.”

Kara visibly pricked, but Lena’s hand was still in hers and Alex was guessing that had something to do with the way Kara calmed down again almost immediately.

“I can imagine,” Lena said, smiling wryly at the photographer. “And I admit, you’ve captured us at our worst a time or two, but you were only doing your job. Besides, as the last Luthor standing, I’m hoping that trend is over for good.”

“Of course,” James said. “I think many of us in the media share that hope as well. Don’t we, Kara?” Kara stared at him through narrowed eyes. “Right.” She turned and smiled at Lena. “Would you like a drink?”

“Sure. Whatever you’re having is fine.”

“Oh,” Kara said, and pushed up her glasses, “I think you should probably have something else. My drink isn’t meant for, you know, humans.”

Lena’s eyebrows rose, and for the first time since she’d arrived, Alex saw her look around the bar more closely. Her eyes widened as she took in the occasional blue skin, cheek gill, and neck frill, and Alex held her breath, waiting for her reaction.

“I see,” she said, her expression seemingly fixed on neutral.

“If this okay?” Kara asked, her brow creased. “We could always go someplace else if you wanted.”

Alex’s stomach dropped on her sister’s behalf, because if Lena Luthor had a problem being at an alien bar… But then Lena smiled softly at Kara and shook her head. “Of course not. I was just surprised. I’ve heard of underground establishments like this, but as you might imagine, I haven’t had the pleasure of experiencing one before now.”

“Well, then, allow me to accompany you to the bar,” Kara said, her mood recovering quickly. She held out an arm. “Milady?”

And Alex wouldn’t have admitted it to anyone (except maybe Maggie), but she fell a little in love with Lena as she slipped her arm through Kara’s, her face transforming into the smile that Maggie had taken to calling “For Kara’s eyes only.”

Maggie elbowed her and Alex laughed. She was powerless to resist cheesy secret-agent humor, no more than she could keep from lusting after the weapons they recovered from the scene of rogue alien attacks. Fortunately, Alex had found a woman after her own heart. As, it appeared, had Kara.

“I thought this was an alien bar,” Winn said as soon as Kara and Lena were out of (human) earshot.

“What are you talking about?” James looked slightly annoyed with the shorter man, as per usual.

“It just seems like women come in here, hang out for a few weeks or months, and suddenly they’re gay.”

“Baby, I was born this way,” Maggie said, grinning.

“So was I.” Alex leaned her cheek against her girlfriend’s shoulder. *Whew.* Watching Kara come out
not only as a woman-loving woman but also as a Luthor-loving Super had been nearly as draining as coming out herself.

“What do you say, babe?” Maggie’s voice was soft. “Partner pool? We could take on Kara and Lena.”

Kara was terrible at pool, as it required patience and a delicacy of touch she hadn’t bothered to develop, but Lena—she was a mystery yet to be solved. “Count me in.”

“Awesome. How about if we win, your sister has to sing karaoke at the Balcony Club’s next karaoke night?”

“Ooh, I like the way you think, Sawyer,” Alex said, kissing her dimple again.

“Right back at you, Danvers,” Maggie said, slipping her arm around her waist and tugging her toward the bar where Kara was still arm in arm with Lena Luthor.

As Alex and Maggie approached, Kara let go briefly to pay for Lena’s drink. Lena watched Kara from under her lashes as Kara counted out the change, her entire being exuding adoration, and Alex couldn’t help but be happy for her baby sister. From the looks of it, she had finally found someone who might, possibly, treat her the way she deserved.

Assuming she wasn’t secretly plotting the best way to bring down the House of El, of course.

* * *

Later, as she rode home on Maggie’s bike, arms loose around her girlfriend’s waist, Alex closed her eyes and pretended she was flying. Almost immediately, though, the image of Kara zooming across the country to check on Lena’s flight popped into her mind. She had teased her sister about the clingy behavior, but now she pictured Kara’s face again as she’d hugged Lena, that entirely unguarded moment when she’d closed her eyes and every single person watching could see the desperate flash of relief as she gathered Lena into her arms. On the back of Maggie’s bike, with the stars and moon standing sentinel overhead, Alex remembered who Kara Zor-El was and what she’d lost before ever setting foot on Earth: namely, everyone and everything.

Kara was resilient. Most people were, Alex had learned in her nearly three decades of life, and those who weren’t—well, they tended not to survive. Enough time had passed now for Kara to grieve her early losses and build a new life. But Lena was different, Alex could see that. She and Kara had started out as friends, and no matter what the reality was regarding Lena’s allegiance to her adoptive family, Kara only saw what her heart allowed her to. Not that that was new. It was just that in the past, the people she’d invited into her life hadn’t been better trained in subterfuge and sleight of hand than your average secret agent. Or, say, related to sworn enemies of the Supers.

She closed her eyes and leaned her helmet against Maggie’s narrow but strong back. They were lucky, so lucky, to have found each other. Lucky that they could spend most nights together, that they could wake up most mornings together, that neither had a sibling—and now possibly a parent—trying to kill them. That last one, honestly, Alex had never expected to hold up as a relationship goal. But then Kara had brought Lena into their circle, and Alex couldn’t help but wonder about the woman who she sometimes thought looked nearly as haunted as Kara.

One thing was certain: Kara Zor-El and Lena Luthor were about as star-crossed as it got, and Alex only prayed their story wouldn’t end in tragedy.
I created a YouTube playlist called Supercorp Meets Glee, in case anyone is interested. It's basically Glee songs sung by Melissa Benoist that I thought applied in particular to this fic. You can find it at http://bit.ly/supercorp-glee-YT
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

In which Kara and Lena grow closer. (Just as in canon, “closer” in this case is not a euphemism for smut. Sorry!)

“Do you mind if I grab a quick shower?” Lena asked, carrying her bag toward the hall. “I hate how the smell of diesel fuel clings to everything.”

“Of course. Take your time.”

Just before she disappeared down the hallway, Lena smiled over her shoulder. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“The feeling is entirely mutual,” Kara said, trying to tone down the radiance of her answering smile. But she couldn’t, not when she could practically feel the individual molecules of joy flooding her system.

Lena laughed a little, perhaps recognizing her own words again, and then she was gone.

Kara dropped onto the couch where she and Lena had made out the previous weekend, relieved when the sudden movement didn’t make her head spin. She was (she hoped) mostly sober by now, thanks to the many cups of coffee Alex and Winn had plied her with. Which was good—she needed to be fully in control of her powers if she and Lena were going to be remotely intimate.

The memory of Chris’s nose gushing blood after a slightly overenthusiastic kiss their junior year came back to her, and she closed her eyes. Fortunately, soccer season had already ended. If he’d had to miss even a single game because of her, she was pretty sure the relationship would have ended on the spot. He’d loved soccer more than anything. Except, maybe, Andre.

As the sound of the shower filtered through the penthouse, Kara inhaled deeply, eyes still shut. Lena’s perfume, rich and earthy, lingered on the cushions, and she could smell fresh flowers, probably in the kitchen judging from the scent trail. Lena’s home was better put together than hers, somehow both more homey and more sophisticated at the same time. She wouldn’t have guessed it at their first meeting, but that description fit Lena, the person, as well. The usual doubts rose: Why would someone like Lena want to be with her? What were they even playing at? But then she remembered the feeling that had suffused her entire being the moment Lena walked into the bar, and she knew the surge of joy had had nothing to do with alcohol.

She opened her eyes and took in signs of the apartment’s owner: a pair of slippers peeking out from under the coffee table; a sweater hung over one arm of the recliner; a knit wool blanket that Kara knew came from Lena’s favorite region of Ireland. She couldn’t quite believe she was here, in Lena’s home, waiting for her to emerge from her shower where she was currently standing under the hot spray (naked), washing every inch of her soft (naked) skin... And, sheesh, why did Kara suddenly feel like she was channeling Mon-El?

Speaking of the Super Friends… She slid lower on the couch as she recalled the reception Lena had received at the bar. Winn had been his usual sweet self, but James had regarded her with
unapologetic suspicion while Mon-El had sulked like a—well, like a guy who had suddenly realized that the girl who told him no actually meant no. Thank goodness Alex and Maggie had invited them to play pool, even if she and Lena ended up losing two out of three. It wasn’t Lena’s fault. Far from it—she was practically a pool shark, as Maggie had commented approvingly. The perks of growing up a nerd with an actual billiards room, Lena had confessed. So no, their losses had nothing to do with Lena’s skills and everything to do with the fact that Kara kept getting distracted by the way Lena’s dress clung to her curves. When she pushed up her sleeves and bent over the table, sighting coolly down the cue stick, Kara felt herself flush a particularly deep red. Alex had noted immediately and teased her about the temperature in the bar. When Lena glanced back at them, smirking, Kara had quickly looked away and mumbled something about the well-known effects of Aldebaran rum on alien physiology.

By the time they’d returned to the booth, Mon-El had left to hit on a girl at a nearby table and Winn had finished giving James a stern lecture about judging people for who they were, not who their relatives might be. When James tried to argue, Winn pointed out that Kara’s parents had created the genocidal virus that had killed dozens of National City aliens, and Winn’s father had killed more than a few innocent people. Yet James accepted that they were their own people, didn’t he? James had had no reply to that, which Kara knew because she might have, sort of listened in. And yes, eavesdropping on friends’ conversations was a morally ambiguous practice—or, you know, downright unethical—but she had invited Lena into the figurative lions’ den. It was her duty to determine just how many lions there were in the den and how sharp their teeth were, wasn’t it?

Lena herself had acted like she didn’t actually see any lions, and given that she routinely helmed galas and press conferences, she had probably faced down more hostile crowds. Either way, she smiled and schmoozed and charmed Kara’s friends, and despite the shaky beginning, even James had seemed grudgingly entranced by the time the evening ended. The only dubious moment—other than James pulling out the condescending big brother routine—had come when Lena had chosen to tell a somewhat questionable joke.

They had just returned to the booth after the pool showdown, and honestly, Kara wasn’t even sure how the topic of humor had arisen. All she knew was that with the encouragement of the table, Lena was soon launching into her “favorite joke of all time,” the one she said she’d used to break the ice in board rooms and ball rooms alike.

“A tourist walks into the restaurant at the top of the Empire State Building and orders a drink,” she’d begun, her voice confident, a smile pulling at the corners of her mouth. “He strikes up a conversation with another man seated at the bar, and soon the other man is telling him that the Empire State Building has a feature that only locals know about: If you jump out the bank of windows facing east, the wind is so intense that it carries you back up and in through the restaurant window.

“Naturally, the tourist refuses to believe the story until the other man offers to prove it, and then he watches in amazement as the New Yorker falls from the window and reappears a moment later. Not just once, but twice.”

At that point, Kara began to think she might know where this was going. Across the table she saw a twitch of recognition in Winn’s expression too, and he widened his eyes at her. She isn’t really…?

Kara could only shrug helplessly and wait for the punchline.

“Not wanting to pass up the opportunity to tell his friends back home about his big city adventure,” Lena continued, “the tourist downs his drink, walks to the window, and steps out—and promptly falls to his death. Meanwhile, back in the restaurant, the bartender shakes his head and says, ‘Anyone ever tell you you’re a mean drunk, Superman?’”
Lena sat back, that same small smile tugging at her lips, and the booth was silent. Kara could hear James’s inhaled breath... of outrage? Or was he trying to hold back a laugh? Winn looked like he might faint, and Alex was watching Kara, her face lined in concern.

Then Maggie—AKA Guardian Angel Detective Sawyer, as Kara was beginning to think of her—laughed out loud. “Oh my god, that is fantastic! I can’t believe I’ve never heard that one before. Kara, have you?”

“No.” Kara glanced around the table. Alex was smiling at her girlfriend now, James was biting his lip in a way that meant he was in fact trying not to laugh, and even Winn was smiling in a semi-shocked way. “But, I mean, alcohol doesn’t affect us, so it’s not really all that realistic...”

“Says the drunken Kryptonian.” Maggie rolled her eyes.

“That’s not my fault! Mon-El kept bringing me drinks, and I didn’t want to be rude.”

“What did I do?” Mon-El asked, popping up again nearby as seemed to be his habit.

“You got Little Danvers drunk.”

“That was not my intent,” he said, but Kara was pretty sure no one there actually believed him. As the table remained quiet, he added, “Lena, I understand congratulations are in order.”

Kara watched Lena look up at him. “You mean for making it home tonight? Yes, it was hit or miss for a while there.”

“No,” Mon-El said with the air of one stating the obvious. “I mean for mating with Kara.”

Lena glanced at Kara, who said, her voice low, “Yeah, he’s not exactly from here. As in, Earth here.”

One eyebrow lifted slightly, and Lena nodded. “Ah. In that case, thank you, Mon-El.”

“I wonder, might I join the two of you sometime?”

The reaction around the table would have been funny if Kara hadn’t felt like crawling under it and never emerging. Winn sputtered, Maggie snorted, Alex reached for her gun, and James looked even more alarmed than he had when Lena first appeared.

“Man,” he said, throwing his beer bottle cap at the Daxamite, “you can’t just say something like that! Jesus, Mon-El.”

The alien frowned, his expression more confused than upset. “What do you mean? On Daxam we believe the more the merrier. Is that not how things are done on Earth?”

“No, it absolutely isn’t!” Winn said.

As Maggie walked Mon-El through an explanation of the comparative rarity of open and polyamorous relationships in contemporary America, Lena leaned into Kara’s side.

“At least one of us is drunk enough for this conversation,” she murmured. Then she lifted Kara’s drink and sniffed the contents.

Panicked, Kara grabbed the glass from her hand, nearly spilling the remainder of the rum. “I told you, it’s not for humans, Lena! It could kill you.”
“I wasn’t going to drink it. It has a distinctive fragrance, though, doesn’t it?”

“I think that’s the ‘poisonous to humans’ part you’re noticing,” she’d replied, more snippy than intended. She couldn’t help it—her heart rate was doing the thing it only ever seemed to do around Lena. Rao, it was like the woman had a death wish.

Now as she sprawled across Lena’s couch, she wondered if the alien bar was really the best place to hang out. How neglectful of her was it to take the people she cared about most to a place where one wrong move could kill them? And yes, she knew it was silly to worry about Lena being accidentally poisoned, just as it was silly to obsess over her airplane safety. But it wasn’t like she could just turn off her brain. She had never done any of this before—actively dated while living a double life as a reporter by day, caped superhero by night. It was a bit complicated, especially with Alex working for the DEO and Winn and James taking up the vigilante mantle.

Which, by the way, rude that everyone assumed she hadn’t figured out who Guardian was. Like, hello, she used to fantasize about adopting a puppy with James and she had super senses. Did they really think she wouldn’t recognize his eyes? His heartbeat? The way he moved? His voice beneath the digital scrambler? She’d kept her silence, though, because it felt slightly hypocritical of her to out someone else’s secret identity before they were ready to share.

And now in addition to everyone else she cared about, most of whom insisted on throwing themselves in harm’s way at any opportunity, there was this whole other person whose life was becoming increasingly entangled with hers.

The water shut off, and Kara waited, biting her lip as her mind cycled through image after image: Lena, frightened and shaken after the drone attack on her helicopter; Lena on stage in the park near L Corp, backlit by orange flames and black smoke; Lena, drinking Scotch on her flight to New York while Kara trailed the airplane nervously, ready to react at the first hint of trouble. At the bar, when Lena had explained that Jack Spheer, a friend from MIT and the head of an up-and-coming biotech firm in Chicago, had loaned her his private jet, Kara had ignored the flare of fear at the realization that Lena had flown out of Chicago in the middle of a snowstorm without telling her. But now that anxiety came crashing back. If something had happened to Lena’s plane, she wouldn’t have been able to save her. She wouldn’t have even known until it was too late.

Lena appeared in the hallway, rubbing her hair with a towel. She was dressed in leggings and a flannel shirt, and with her skin free of makeup and her hair tousled and damp, she looked more like an NCU co-ed than a powerful corporate executive.

“Hi,” she said, smiling at Kara.

“Hi.” Kara touched her glasses and fiddled with the pocket on her jacket.

“You’re still wearing your jacket,” Lena observed, stepping farther into the room.

“Oh. Yeah.”

Lena stopped in front of her, smile losing its original star quality. “Are you not staying?”

Gah, she was so bad at all of this. Instead of answering the question, she responded with one of her own: “Do you want me to stay?”

“I wouldn’t have invited you here at midnight if I didn’t.” She dropped her towel on the coffee table. “I don’t understand. Did something happen?”

“No, of course not.” She frowned a little, focusing on a sound in the distance. Was that a siren?
“Don’t lie to me,” Lena said, folding her arms across her chest.

“What? I’m not.”

“Right.” She shook her head, looking less like the warm, caring woman Kara had gotten to know and more like someone who relied on coldness as a defense, authority as protection. “You know what? I’m more tired than I realized. Maybe you should just go.”

Kara stood up and moved toward her, arms held out conciliatorily. “No, you’re right. I’m sorry. I’m just being weird and awkward as usual.”

Lena tilted her head. “Is this about the Superman joke? Or were you not ready to come out? Because I told you, I would have been fine keeping it—”

“God, no!” Kara gripped Lena’s elbows carefully. “I was so proud to tell them! Are you kidding?”

Lena shrugged and looked down, her eyelashes dark against skin tinged pink by the shower. “No. I’m not exactly the kind of person you bring home to the family.”

“Actually,” she said, “you’re the only person I’ve ever wanted to bring home to my family.”

Lena looked up, startled.

“As you know, I dated this guy Chris for two years in college, and we never spent a single holiday together? Not spring break, or Thanksgiving. We didn’t see each other at all the summer we spent apart. We had separate friends and separate interests and separate everything. And I thought, that’s just the way I’m built.” She shook her head, smiling in what felt a little like wonder. “And then you came along, and suddenly I can’t get through a single day without wanting to see you. I hide things about myself like it’s my job—which, I guess, it is. But this? You? I don’t think I could hide it if I wanted to. And, to be clear, I don’t.”

As she spoke, Lena had slowly loosened in her grasp, her muscles and tendons becoming softer beneath her fingertips. Her gaze was more perplexed than hurt when she asked, “Was he gay? Your college boyfriend?”

“He said he was Mormon, but…”

“Right. Okay. So if you’re not ashamed of me and I didn’t push the envelope too far with the Superman joke—”

“Well, I don’t know about that part…”

“Seriously, though.” Lena uncrossed her arms and slipped her hands into Kara’s. “Do you want to tell me what’s really going on? Because apparently I’m not very good at guessing.”

She couldn’t really tell her she’d gone all crazy stalkerish again, could she? She cleared her throat. “It’s just, I wish you had told me you were flying back tonight.”

Lena frowned. “Okay. I’m sorry. I only wanted to surprise you.”

“I don’t like surprises,” Kara said, her voice loud in the quiet apartment. She blinked down at Lena, who was staring up at her with a look Kara couldn’t read. Had she frightened her again? Fricking frack. “Wait, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to yell.” She started to pull away, but Lena held on as tight as humanly possible.
“It’s okay, Kara. That wasn’t actually yelling. Trust me. Besides, I don’t break easily. If I did, I wouldn’t still be here.”

Kara rubbed her thumb against Lena’s wrist almost absently. The skin there, so thin that she could see veins and tendons even without her X-ray vision, was also the softest.

Lena squeezed her hands. “So is there a reason why you wish I’d told you I was flying back? Other than not liking surprises.”

“Yes.” Kara hesitated, and then she moved back to the couch, tugging Lena along with her. When they were seated, she rested her chin on Lena’s shoulder, took a calming breath, and said, “I, um, might have followed your plane to New York.”

She felt Lena go still. “What?”

“I took breaks from Sisters’ Night with Alex to check on you, and then after she left I followed you the rest of the way.”

“But we texted for half of that flight!”

“I know. I’m good at multi-tasking.” She smiled into Lena’s shoulder as she felt a breath of laughter rattle the smaller woman’s frame. “I know that sounds creepy. I swear, I’m not trying to stalk you.”

“And yet…” Lena pushed back gently until they were face to face. “Honestly, I think I get it. But do you want to tell me why you think you felt compelled to do that?”

Kara blinked. So much of the time she acted on instinct or emotion, and rarely did anyone call her out. Alex was pretty much the only person in her life who regularly asked her to analyze herself and come up with an explanation for her behavior, and even then all she had to do was turn up the pout and her sister folded.

She shrugged. “I don’t know.” Then, as Lena stared at her, expectant gaze unwavering, she realized that wasn’t true at all. She sighed and looked down, chewing the corner of her lip. “Your brother already tried to kill you once in an air crash, and I almost lost Alex that way too. Lex is still out there, even if he’s been quiet lately, and now your mom…”

“Probably hates me as much as he does,” Lena finished, her voice that mix of frailty and assumed indifference that always made Kara’s chest ache.

“Probably hates me as much as he does,” Lena finished, her voice that mix of frailty and assumed indifference that always made Kara’s chest ache.

“Meaning?” she asked, a frown pulling her brow taut.

“Meaning they don’t have to try very hard to hurt you. Which, I don’t know…” She shook her head and looked away.

“Yes, you do.” Lena rubbed her thumb over the back of Kara’s hand.

She took another breath, closed her eyes, and admitted, “I don’t know what I would do if something happened to you. What I might be capable of.”

“I feel the same way,” Lena admitted.

Kara’s eyes flew open. “You do?”

She nodded. “You’re basically the only person I’ve met in recent years who hasn’t seen fit to doubt
my moral compass, usually quite loudly and to my face. I am a firm believer that we all have both dark and light inside of us. If my brother or mother hurt you again—well, I’m not sure I would be able to live up to your view of me.”

Kara’s jaw clenched. “It’s so unfair that people would rather see you for who your family is than who you are.”

“It is unfair, but that’s just the way people—well, humans operate.” She shook her head. “I know my brother has said that aliens can’t be trusted because if you turn against humanity we don’t stand a chance. And there is some truth to that, as you and I have discussed—argued—before. But lately the more I think about it, the more I realize that human beings have done far more damage to ourselves than aliens have probably even thought of doing.”

It was true, at least in this dimension where Dominators didn’t seem to be an issue. Humans were fairly brutal—to each other, to other species, to the planet they called home—and always had been, as far as written history was concerned. Kryptonians had followed a similar historical arc, as had many other civilizations Kara had studied growing up. The battle between good and evil, greed and generosity, cruelty and kindness was literally universal.

“Even Lex,” Lena added, her voice dropping and taking on that sad timbre Kara had noticed appeared anytime Lena so much as thought of her brother, “has done more harm to humans than any alien.”

“Which is sort of my point,” Kara said. “He’s dangerous, Lena. He almost killed Superman so many times.”

“Yes, but whether I’m human or not, whether you’re human or not, we’re all vulnerable.”

“Some of us more than others, though.”

“True. Some of us more than others.” She paused. “If being nearby in case my plane experiences engine failure or someone launches a ground-to-air missile at it—”

Kara felt her eyes widening because, Rao, that had actually not occurred to her and why had that not occurred to her…?

“—makes you feel better, then you have my blessing. Because, to be honest, I like having you look out for me. You’ve saved my life already more than once. I only hope I get the chance to return the favor.” She stopped and pulled back slightly. “Wait. I didn’t mean that how it sounded.”

Kara forced the air out of her lungs in one long exhale. “It’s okay. If and when your mother and brother find out we’re together, we just might need to save each other.” She paused. “Everyone always thinks the symbol on my chest is S for super. But do you know what it really means?”

“It’s your family crest, isn’t it?” She smiled slightly as Kara stared at her. “Don’t look so surprised. Our families are like the Montagues and the Capulets—intertwined whether we want them to be or not.”

“I definitely want us to be intertwined.” Kara leaned in so that their lips almost touched. Lena’s laugh sent a puff of warm air across her skin, and Kara tried not to preen too much. “Do you know it isn’t really an S?”

“It’s an L in your language, isn’t it?” She pressed a sweet kiss to Kara’s lips. “Like L Corp.”

“Like Lena,” Kara countered, and kissed her a little deeper, a little longer. Then she murmured, “Our
“Stronger, Together.””

“Ooh,” Lena murmured back. “I think I like that.”

The next kiss picked up where the previous one had left off, and Kara could feel her temperature fluctuating, her heart rate stuttering, even her breathing accelerating just as it had done the night they made out at her apartment. And it was odd—she’d only felt these particular sensations in response to fear or adrenaline before. Now that she was neither scared nor in the middle of a violent fight, she wasn’t sure how to react.

Lena pulled away after a moment. “What’s wrong?”

“Noth—” Kara only just stopped the automatic lie. “Actually, would it be okay if we got ready for bed and just, I don’t know, snuggled?”

“Of course,” Lena said, and smiled her old smile, the one that made Kara feel like she was the most amazing person in the world, or possibly the only person in the world.

They were in Lena’s massive, comfy bed a little while later, Kara the big spoon to Lena’s little, and she was just dropping off when she heard it: a cacophony of sirens in the distance, calling out to her.

“Seriously, National City?”

“Hmm?” Lena stirred drowsily against her.

“I have to go,” Kara murmured, sliding out of bed.

Lena rolled over to gaze up at her as she dressed. “Are you sure you’re okay to fly?”

“Bet that’s a sentence you never thought you’d say. But yeah, I’m fine.” She paused. “I can’t believe you told my friends a drunk Superman joke.”

Lena’s smile was sleepy but still managed to retain a wicked edge. “Gotta keep you on your toes, Super.”

Kara laughed a little. “Somehow I doubt you’ll have any problem there, Luthor.”

“Come back and sleep beside me later?” Lena’s eyes were hopeful in the faint light from the bathroom. She had confessed she didn’t like to sleep in complete darkness, and with a family like hers, Kara couldn’t blame her.

She hesitated. “It might be really late. Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“Okay, then. I’ll be here.” The if I can went unspoken, but she was pretty sure they both heard it. She leaned over to kiss Lena’s forehead, steeling herself to keep it brief when all she wanted was to crawl back into bed and wrap herself around Lena’s warm, breathing body. “Sleep tight.”

“Be careful.”

“Always.”

She winked jauntily, feigning a lightness she didn’t feel, and then in the blink of a human eye she was out on the living room balcony leaping into the night, honing in on the sirens and the cries of terror, setting aside herself and her own feelings—and Lena’s, too—to go where she was needed
I wish we could have just one normal night, she thought as she raced among the low-hanging clouds, drops of condensation beading on her hair. But that wasn’t entirely true. She wanted to help as many people as she could, to make a difference in this life that she had been granted, even as she yearned for a lifetime of quiet nights with the people she loved. What was it humans liked to say? The grass was always greener. And even though they hadn’t really had grass on her part of Krypton, she thought she understood.

Still, given that a lifetime of normal nights with Lena was unlikely ever to happen, she thought she would probably settle for even just one.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

In which Lena accompanies Kara on an adventure she can literally say she never even imagined.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lena hit the speaker button on her cell phone and carefully lifted the comb and flat iron, angling the hot surface away from her face. No need to revisit the Hair Straightening Incident of 2000. She still had the scar that certain classmates had teased her about for years for its unfortunate resemblance to a hickey.

“You really don’t know where she’s taking you?” Bea’s tinny voice echoed in the spacious, slate-tiled bathroom.

“No. She’s been sneaking around all week, though, and seems pretty pleased with herself.”

After their handful of doomed dates, they had finally managed to complete a dinner out the previous Sunday. Unfortunately, an LA-based gossip rag had posted a photo of them the following day making heart eyes at each other across the table, with the caption, “Luthor Heir Romances Cat Grant’s Former Assistant.” Luckily, the photo had posted after Kara met with James and Snapper Carr to discuss the situation, so she didn’t end up losing her job. Still, since then, on the rare occasion they’d had time to spend together, they’d hidden out in one or the other’s apartment.

Now it was Friday again, and Kara was plotting to whisk her off to an undisclosed location. Which was fine. Good, even. Really. Except that Lena had never been particularly fond of relinquishing control, and now that the paparazzi had the scent—thank you, Mother, for reviving that particular fact of Luthor life—she wondered if any destination, however remote, would be truly private. Lena might be used to being in the public eye, but Kara relied on anonymity to keep her civilian and superhero lives separate. When Lena reminded her of this fact, Kara had merely winked and told her not to worry. At least, not for this one night.

“Not knowing is driving you crazy, isn’t it?” Bea asked.

“Yep.”

“What’s the dress code?”

“Business casual, but she said I should wear pants, so…” She paused, trying to come up with a way to word what she meant without revealing too much. Bea may be safe, but no phone line was one hundred percent secure.

“So you think she might take you somewhere on a bus?” Bea asked slyly.

“Exactly.” Lena was glad now that she had told Bea about Kara’s infamous “I flew here on a bus” line, even though her best friend had laughed long and hard at her failure to pick up on the obvious slip.
“Damn, Lee. You’re taking my demand for vicarious thrills far more seriously than I would have expected.”

“Excuse me, I do what I can for my friends.”

“Right—’cause that’s why you’re dating her. For your friends. Send me updates, okay?”

“I’ll try, but no promises. What are you up to tonight?”

It was Derek’s turn to cook, so Bea and the baby were “chilling with some books” in the living room. I.e., Bea was trying to read Dr. Seuss board books to Rowan while he was trying to pry said books out of her hands and chew on their yummy, shiny corners.

“Aw, I miss my little guy,” Lena said, pausing in applying her lip liner. Even though she knew Bea and Rowan were safer without her presence in their lives, she still missed the hell out of them.

“How’s the teething going? Did you try any of the tips from my assistant?”

“The one about freezing washcloths has been a godsend. Thank her for me, will you?”

“Of course.”

Jess had a niece only a few months older than Rowan, and the adoring auntie had been only too eager to pass on baby-wrangling tips. Talking about her sister’s child was one of the few topics that could get Jess to drop her professional mask, Lena had learned.

“However,” Bea added, “I think it’s safe to say that my nipples will never be the same. Speaking of which, I’ve been thinking. You should totally come to LA for New Year’s. Oh, and bring Kara so that we can double-date.”

“How does us double-dating have anything to do with your nipples, or do I even want to know?”

“Um, hello—my breasts look good, even if they hurt like a bitch, and we haven’t been out together in too long.”

“We literally went out last weekend.”

“It wasn’t LA so it doesn’t count. Now what do you say. Are you in?”

“Ummmm.” She blotted her lipstick and checked her reflection. She was ready. Now if only they could get away before yet another emergency cropped up in one (or both) of their domains.

“What does ‘ummm’ mean?” Bea sounded worried. “You better not be messing this up already, missy.”

“I’m not!”

“I’m serious, Lee. I like this girl. And more importantly, so do you.”

“I know that. I was only going to say that it’s difficult for Kara to get away from work even for a night. You know…?”

“Oh, that’s right,” Bea said, picking up on her cue. “Those reporters, always chasing after ambulances and fire trucks.”

“Exactly.” Or, really, the emergency vehicles usually ended up trailing her, but close enough.
“I’m sure her boss can spare her for one night.”

Lena wasn’t sure of that at all, but she made an agreeable sound anyway as she busied herself with putting away her make-up. If all went well, she wouldn’t want to bother later. They had continued to progress in the intimacy department, and Lena was hoping that Kara’s blushing hints at spending the night ahead together meant what she thought it did.

A sound from the living room caught her attention, and she called, “Kara?”

“I’m here…” Kara’s voice carried faintly down the hall.

“I gotta go, Bea. Give the boys a kiss for me.”

“Give your girl a kiss for me. And have fun, sweetie.”

“I will,” Lena promised. “Ciao, bella.”

“Ciao, bellissima!”

Lena stored her phone and lipstick in her bag and headed toward the living room, low-heeled boots in hand. “Now do I get to know where you’re taking me?” she asked playfully, knowing Kara would be able to hear her from any corner of the apartment.

“Actually, about that…”

Noooo…. “I jinxed it, didn’t I?” Lena said as she rounded the corner into the living room. “I was just thinking—wait, what’s that?”

Kara was standing before her looking lovely—and frankly, excessively gay—in a blue button-down tucked into dark green fitted slacks, an open box clutched in both hands with a device of some sort peeking out.

“Hello to you, too,” she said, smiling at Lena. “You look great.”

“Sorry. Hi! And so do you, as always.” Lena stood on tiptoe to kiss her cheek lightly, careful not to brand her with lipstick. “Now back to the mystery box, please.”

Kara laughed and pushed up her glasses. “Yes, ma’am. Right. Do you remember how I mentioned Earth-1 once, and you said you wanted to hear more about it? I was thinking maybe I could do one better and take you there. If you wanted, I mean. Obviously, there’s no pressure but—”

“Are we talking multiverse theory?” Lena interrupted. “As in, parallel universes complete with multiple parallel Earths?”

She nodded. “We are.”

“No shit?” Lena stared at the device Kara held between them.

“No shit,” she agreed, only stumbling slightly over the curse word.

“Is that—is that a miniature particle collider? The only one I know of is in a tunnel that’s close to twenty miles long! Where did you—how did they—what would even—”

“Oh my god, breathe!” Kara said, laughing again. “At first I couldn’t tell if you were a good excited or a bad excited, but now I’m just worried you’re going to pop a blood vessel.”
Lena tried to contain her enthusiasm; she really did. But somehow she found herself literally hopping around Kara, gesticulating wildly with her hands as she rambled half to herself and half to her amused girlfriend—person—Kara about string theory and two-dimensional membranes and the theory of relativity, until finally Kara held up a hand and said, “Do you want to try it out or not?”

Abruptly Lena froze. “Like, tonight?”

“Well, yeah. Every other date we’ve gone on has either been interrupted or ended up online, which, as you said, I can’t afford if I’m going to keep up my double-life shenanigans. I thought this might be a way for us to have some time off from our regular lives. What do you think?”

What did she think? Lena folded her arms across her chest, trying to comprehend what Kara was offering. She was accustomed to studying a new theory for months or years, monitoring its incremental progress through peer-reviewed research journals, and then gathering data for additional months or years before finally launching a project of her own. And even then there was almost guaranteed to be years of clinical research and trials, some of which were bound to fail (often spectacularly) before the project achieved even a modicum of success. Assuming it ever did. She was used to the slow, deliberate pace of scientific research and development, was comfortable with that pace, even, and here Kara was asking her to accept a controversial theory as scientific fact and launch herself between dimensions all in the same evening? Worse, in the same hour?

Then again, Kara had been born on a planet dozens of light years away and had spent decades in a timeless region of the universe that human science had never even theorized about before traveling to Earth via means Lena’s mind couldn’t begin to comprehend, so, yeah. Seemed about right.

“I think I’d feel more confident if you could give me a little more information,” she said at last.

“Of course.” Kara set the box on the coffee table and sat down on the couch, crossing her ankles and folding her hands in her lap. Something about the attempt to take up as little space as possible reminded Lena of herself growing up. “What would you like to know?”

Lena blinked away the familiar despair that any recollection of her childhood triggered and focused on the queries percolating in her brain. “I guess my overarching question is how does it work? From a practical standpoint, not a theoretical one.”

For the next few minutes, Kara briefed her on the device’s operation, providing detailed descriptions of her previous trips to Earth-1 along with assurances that they could return to the exact moment they left so that on their Earth, it would be as if they had never left at all. Also especially encouraging was the fact that the device’s inventor was fully human—as opposed to alien or metahuman—and had managed to travel between dimensions multiple times without any adverse effects. And yet, despite the device’s previous successful trials, Lena wasn’t entirely comfortable with the limited analysis Kara provided. What little data she possessed derived from fewer than a handful of uses all under similar circumstances, which really wasn’t making Lena—an MIT-trained scientist whose belief in rigorous testing bordered on religious faith, for fuck’s sake—feel the sort of confidence one would hope to have when being asked to cross the barriers of time and space at a moment’s notice.

On the other hand, Kara had been so excited all week, and now as Lena interrogated her about the detailed workings of the so-called “interdimensional extrapolator”—and really, was nomenclature ability that limited on Earth-1?—Kara’s shoulders were drooping more and more and her pretty blue eyes were losing their earlier glow of excitement. And even though everything inside of Lena was screaming out against the idea of becoming a poorly-designed physics experiment, she couldn’t deny that the idea of being the first human being in their dimension to jump between universes was electrifying. Terrifying, but thrilling too.
Besides, you only lived once, and since her family seemed especially keen on not letting her live much longer, what did she really have to lose?

“Okay,” she said as Kara’s stomach growled loudly for the second time, “I’m in.”

Kara blinked and sat up straighter. “What?”

“You heard me.” Lena forced herself to smile, resolutely ignoring the urge to hyperventilate. “Let’s get the hell out of Dodge. Or National City, as the case may be.”

“Really? Are you sure?”

“Absolutely,” Lena said, projecting a confidence she didn’t remotely feel as she stepped into her boots. “Are you kidding? This is legendary date material.”

Assuming they survived. Not that she could tell anyone if they did. Either way, Bea was going to be so pissed.

“Okay, then,” Kara said, and stood up. It was her turn to vibrate with excitement, only she looked more like a giant golden retriever while Lena, clad in black leather pants, a black Balmain jacket, and a white cotton camisole was pretty sure she more closely resembled a wannabe rock star.

“Okay, then,” Lena echoed, feeding off Kara’s sudden burst of energy. “Wait, do we need to leave a note in case something goes wrong?”

At least her personal effects were in order, thanks to her brother’s timely reminders of the potential brevity of life. Were she to die in a freak physics accident tonight, Beatrice, Rowan, MIT, Smith College, and a dozen of her favorite charities—including several recently added “bleeding heart” non-profits that catered to alien refugees—would be significantly better off.

“No need,” Kara said. “Alex knows where we’re going. She helped me plan, actually.”

“Aw, that’s sweet.”

Kara rolled her eyes. “Sweet is one word. She had Winn build a tachyon particle monitor and point it at my building so she could keep track of my comings and goings. I told you she’s a worrier.”

“Oh.” Lena quirked an eyebrow. “Well, I suppose worrying about a younger sister’s safety is a tad more conventional than, say, attempted sororicide.”

Kara snickered, and then stopped. “Sorry, am I supposed to laugh at that…?”

“You’re absolutely meant to laugh at that.”

“Oh-oh.” She shook her head. “You said ‘absolutely’ again. That’s like the second time in thirty seconds.”

“I was being genuine this time,” Lena assured her. “Dark humor is essential, as far as I’m concerned. I mean, if I can’t laugh at having a homicidal brother, what can I laugh at?”

Kara’s smile gentled in that slow motion way that always took Lena’s breath away, and they stood staring at each other. They were so different, Lena thought not for the first time, and yet Kara’s lightness of spirit perfectly complemented her own darker qualities. Besides, underneath the outer sunshine, she knew, were layers upon layers of sorrow, grief, anger. She had seen glimpses, and wondered how long it would take for Kara to feel comfortable enough in their relationship to reveal
herself fully.
The spell broke when Kara’s stomach growled again. Loudly.

“I think I should probably attend to that or I might pass out,” she said apologetically.

“Can that actually happen?”

“Not literally. More sort of figuratively.” Her gaze narrowed. “Last chance. Are you sure you want to do this? It’s not too late to order in and watch Netflix…”

“I’m sure.” Or, at least, as sure as she would ever be. “Let’s do it. Let’s boldly go where no human—from this Earth, anyway—has gone before.”

Kara beamed at her. “Are you a Trekkie? How do I not know that about you?”

“It’s kind of a requirement at MIT. My freshman year roommate had a life-sized cut-out of Picard. Engineering nerds do not mess around.”

“We’re totally talking more about this at dinner.” Kara lifted the device from the box and held it out. “Now, would you like to do the honors?”

Lena swallowed hard, butterflies darting spasmodically about her midsection. “Okay,” she said, and reached out. “Just tell me what to do.”

“Oh, I will,” Kara said, her voice more suggestive than Lena would have thought she could make it.

“Is that right?”

“Absolutely,” Kara said, and winked at her.

And suddenly the butterflies had more to do with the beautiful woman smiling at her than the fact that they were about to defy the known laws of the universe. Well, their universe, anyway.

“Press here.” Kara’s voice was soft this time, calming.

And Lena, who didn’t usually skip scientific steps or trust stupidly pretty people—or, really, anyone who wasn’t named Beatrice—pressed the button Kara had indicated.

“See you on the other side,” she said, her voice trembling only slightly.

“See you there,” Kara agreed as the portal she’d described opened up right in Lena’s living room.

So much for texting Bea during the date. I love you, B Dang, she thought, and then she took Kara’s offered hand and stepped through the waiting portal.

* * *

Earth-1 didn’t look, smell, or feel any different from their Earth. If it weren’t for the fact that they were in a much colder city that didn’t seem remotely familiar, she might have wondered if the device had even worked.

The transit itself was odd and jarring to her all-too-human body and brain, but didn’t last long enough to impart serious damage to either. They emerged, for lack of a better term, in an alleyway that could have been any alley in any city in their universe, and Lena watched as Kara tucked the extrapolator in her bag and led the way to a nearby restaurant. They were seated at a table by a
window overlooking Central City, and after ordering the usual minor feast, Kara leaned forward across the narrow table, offering Lena her hand.

“So what do you think?”

“It’s weird,” Lena said, fitting her palm to Kara’s, “but not overwhelmingly so.”

“It feels like home, doesn’t it?”

“It does, but different too because it’s like we’re in the middle of one of those self-imposed unplugged evenings. You know, the ones where people go on social media to tell everyone how they’ll be cutting themselves off from any and all forms of technology?”

“In theory that sounds great, but in practice I feel like it would give me hives.”

Lena laughed. “Me too. As much as I hate my phone at times, the idea of being that out of touch is terrifying.”

Kara squinted at her. “What about what we’re doing right now?”

“It’s different, though, because time back there is sort of paused. It’s not like we’re missing anything. Or being missed, for that matter.” Lena glanced out at the city before looking back at Kara. “Honestly, I think I’m mostly just relieved that Jess—and Alex—can’t reach us here.”

Kara’s expression smoothed out as she smiled. “It is kind of amazing, isn’t it?”

Lena shook her head, holding tightly to Kara’s hand. “You’re kind of amazing. I can’t believe you brought me to another dimension for dinner.”

“I just thought you could use the break.” Her gaze was earnest. “You don’t have to look over your shoulder here, Lena. There aren’t any aliens on this Earth, which means no anti-alien terrorist groups. There’s no Luthor-Super feud, no crazy family members, no Cadmus. You’re safe here.”

“You are too, though, right? No rogue aliens, no Kryptonite, no Luthors to come after you…”

“Right. And no distractions,” Kara added.

“Promise?”

“I promise. Central City has its own superheroes. They don’t need me.”

Not tonight, anyway, which was more than enough for now, Lena decided as their server delivered their wine.

“To a night without interruptions,” she said, holding up her own glass.

“I’ll drink to that.” Kara’s smile was sweet and happy as they clinked glasses and sipped. “So, tell me about your Star Trek obsession. Original or Next Generation?”

“Both,” Lena said, and they were off and running on their shared obsession with television shows and movies that had “Star” in the title.

One of the things she loved about Kara was how easy it was to be with her. Kara might occasionally show signs of social awkwardness, but she was such an engaged listener that Lena rarely felt awkward herself. Judging from the assortment of friends and admirers she’d managed to collect in her dozen or so years on Earth, Kara was one of those people who made everyone around her feel
special. How she’d remained single for so long was an honest-to-god mystery.

“So I know you haven’t been—intimate—with anyone before,” Lena said carefully as they started in on their entrées. “But it sounds like you’ve at least gone out with people here and there.”

Her mouth full, Kara only nodded.

“So who was the last person you dated?”

“Oh,” she said, coughing a little. She looked down at her plate, appearing to examine the veritable mountains of noodles and garlic shrimp.

“I’m sorry,” Lena said. “We don’t have to talk about exes. I’m just being nosey.”

“No, it’s fine.” She took a sip of wine. “It was James. Olsen. Well, Mon-El kissed me but I didn’t kiss him back, so that doesn’t count.”

James Olsen? She leaned away from the table. It made sense, actually. Why wouldn’t Superman’s best friend fall in love with Supergirl? Even without the Kryptonian connection, they would make a pretty great couple on paper—they were both attractive and personable, they worked in the same field, and they weighed in on the same side of the all-important good versus evil question. It also explained why James had been so upset when Lena showed up at the bar the other night. Personally, she’d found him a bit arrogant, but she also understood why he might not want to let down his guard around a Luthor. He had witnessed her brother’s meltdown up close and personal. In fact, his testimony at Lex’s trial had been particularly damning—something else he and Lena had in common.

“Why didn’t it work out?” she asked. “If you feel like sharing. And again, no pressure if you don’t.”

Kara moved her fork around her plate. “It’s okay. It’s not a secret or anything, unlike most of the rest of my life. I, um, sort of ended things before they could really get going.”

Lena tilted her head. “You must have had your reasons.”

“I did. I just wasn’t ready for a relationship with him,” Kara admitted. “I’m not sure he was ready, either. He and Lucy had been together for so long—”

“Lucy?”

“Lucy Lane. You know, Lois Lane’s little sister?”

“Lucy Lane is Jimmy Olsen’s ex?” Lena released a breath. “And I thought lesbian relationships were incestuous… How long were they together?”

“Four years.”

“That’s a long time.”

“It is. That’s part of the reason I broke things off. He went directly from her to me, and even though I’d had feelings for him for a while, it just didn’t feel right.” She hesitated. “In a way, also, I think maybe we were too different. I don’t mean race, because that wasn’t an issue for either of us, but just, I don’t know. Other things.”

“What other things?” Lena asked.

“It’s hard to put into words. James is an awesome friend, he really is, and he’s been great to me. But sometimes there’s this dynamic between us, like, he’s so much older and wiser—not to mention,
human—so he assumes that his take on things is more valid than mine. Like sometimes he thinks I don’t know what I’m talking about even when I do, and when we were dating, I ended up doubting myself. Not a lot, I mean, usually he’s so great. But enough that it felt like I was losing myself more than was healthy, probably."

Did she treat Kara that way? Maybe. At times it was hard to remember that the unassuming, slightly bumbling persona she projected wasn’t the real Kara. Or, at least, not the complete Kara.

“Not to point out the obvious,” she said, “but I’m also human and quite a few years older than you…”

“Yes, but you don’t try to give me advice I haven’t asked for, or act like I should listen to you instead of my own instincts. You challenge me and respect me in a way that I don’t always feel he does.”

“I told you that you should be a reporter,” Lena reminded her, wondering as she did why she was actively trying to sabotage herself.

“You only said you thought I would make a good reporter. That’s not the same as telling me I should be one.”

Lena smiled and shook her head. “You don’t miss much. I’ll have to be careful what I say around you, won’t I?”

“I get the feeling you’re careful what you say around everyone, including me.” Kara shrugged, a slight furrow marring her brow. “If anything, I hope that changes with time.”

She was so candid, so open—so unlike most people Lena knew.

“Yes, well, I suppose his loss is my gain,” she said, reaching for her wine glass.

“Mine, too,” Kara said, smiling at her before loading her fork with pasta and seafood and jamming it into her mouth.

Lena laughed at the sheer size of the bite and picked more daintily at her own grilled salmon salad.

“What about you?” Kara asked. “What was your last relationship like?”

“Good. Pretty lowkey, actually. At least, until the very end.”

“What happened? If you don’t mind me being nosey.”

Lena told her about Mallory and the move to Seattle, tempted to say that neither of them had been very good at distance and leave it at that. But Kara had been honest with her, so she swallowed her pride and admitted that they had tried to make a go of it, but Mal had gotten involved with someone else shortly after relocating, a fact Lena had learned from TMZ at the same moment everyone else in their circle did.

Kara stared at her, food momentarily forgotten. “Are you serious? Who even does that?”

She looked so outraged that Lena had to take her hand and rub it soothingly to drive the tension from her muscles, the fire from her eyes. She was used to having Bea on her side, but Supergirl too? They would make quite the formidable team. Mallory had better hope she didn’t show her face in their joint presence anytime soon.

A little while later, after the waiter had brought them coffee but before their dessert order arrived,
Kara reached into her bag and pulled out an envelope.

“I feel like we’re on a choose-your-own-adventure date,” she said, sliding the envelope across the table. “At this point, we can either go home, stop for a drink at a bar I know, or use these. Your call.”

Lena’s first thought was airplane tickets, but the return address stamp on the envelope read Pantages Theater in L.A. Frowning a little, she reached inside and pulled out two tickets—to Hamilton. Holy crap. Kara had somehow gotten them tickets to the Tony award-winning musical whose soundtrack had been playing on loop on Lena’s phone for the past couple of months—and in her brain too, thanks to its blasted catchiness. As if on cue Lin-Manuel Miranda’s voice began to sing at the back of her head, I’m laughing in the face of casualties and sorrow...

“You haven’t seen it already, have you?” Kara asked.

“No,” she admitted. “I meant to but never found the time. I figured I would just see it when it went on tour.”

“So you’re choosing…?”

“The show, of course!” She smiled across the table. “We can have a drink anytime, Kara, but Hamilton? I mean, it’s Hamilton!”

“I thought you might say that.” Kara’s answering smile was a tad sheepish. “The thing is, there’s a wee, tiny, slight catch to that plan.”

Lena looked closer at the tickets, her frown returning as something caught her eye. “I don’t understand,” she said, glancing back up at Kara. “These are for next August, but it’s December here, too, right?”

“Right. That’s where the catch comes in.” As Lena stared blankly at her, Kara cleared her throat and said, “It’s possible I might have some friends who can get us to the show. As in, tonight.”

“To the show. The one that happens in August.”

Kara bit her lip. “Correct.”

She couldn’t possibly be saying what she seemed to be saying, could she? Kara had not just told her that time travel was not only possible but an actual option they could exercise this very night, should they choose to avail themselves of its fourth-dimension altering capabilities. There was No. Fucking. Way. Because if that’s what she was saying, then Lena was pretty sure her brain would short-circuit on the spot.

“Or,” Kara added, fiddling with her fork, “we could just grab that drink and head home? I mean, whatever you prefer.”

“Let me get this straight,” Lena said. “First you bring me to an alternate dimension so that we can enjoy an evening away, unplugged from all of our responsibilities, and after wining and dining me with your lovely company and this delicious food, now you’re telling me that the next item on our date’s agenda is Hamilton in L.A, but only if we get there through time travel. Is that about it?”

Kara glanced around nervously, but Lena had already made sure there was no one close enough to hear their conversation. At least, not without super hearing. “Um, yeah. That’s about it. But, you know, the time travel component of the date is totally optional. As was the interdimensional journey, to be fair.”
“Oh, of course. I didn’t mean to imply that you kidnapped me.”

“I would never do that,” Kara said sincerely. “Unless it was to save your life.”

“Duly noted.”

Lena lifted her wine glass and knocked back the remainder of its contents. Really, what had she expected? She was dating an alien superhero from a planet far, far away. Of course their outings would involve multiverse theory and time crystals—assuming the function of the time machine in question was in any way related to the recent discoveries on their Earth regarding time-translation symmetry.

And wouldn’t she like to know the answer to that question?

She took a breath and focused on Kara, who seemed like she might not be breathing, either. “You know what? I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I think I’d like to meet these friends of yours.”

Kara perked up again. “You would?”

“Yes. I’m not committing to anything, but I would be interested in hearing more.”

Because who was she kidding? Even if they stayed right here on Earth-1, she wasn’t about to pass up the chance to see a real, live time machine.

“Totally,” Kara said, nodding almost too fast. “I completely get where you’re coming from, and whatever you decide, I fully support it. The tickets aren’t going anywhere, you know. We could always use them a different time.”

“Right,” Lena agreed, brightening a little because she hadn’t really considered that. But of course, with the ability to time travel, the actual date of the show was unimportant, wasn’t it? What a freeing concept. Her time was so regimented, she could barely find enough of it to see Kara.

Twenty minutes later, Lena followed Kara into a building whose sign read “S.T.A.R. Laboratories.” Inside, the cast of characters Kara introduced her to was colorful, to say the least. They spoke quickly in snarky asides, relying on inside jokes and dark humor—which, obviously, Lena could appreciate. Also, they clearly adored Kara, something else Lena could fully get behind. Earth-1 was definitely growing on her.

Kara, meanwhile, kept trying to change the subject as the cadre of nerds fell all over each other telling Lena how Supergirl had almost singlehandedly saved their Earth from a race of aggressive alien invaders.

“Come on, guys,” Kara said, tugging on her shirt collar, and Lena wasn’t sure if she was more uncomfortable with the heaps of praise or with the idea of Lena learning that her worst alien fears had been actualized on an alternate Earth. “I was just one of the team, you know that.”

A good-looking guy with a five o’clock shadow and semi-permanent frown lines snorted. “Accept the praise, Danvers. You know we couldn’t have beaten them without our secret alien weapon.”

Kara smiled at him, and Lena sighed inwardly. The girl seemed to have no idea of the message her blinding smiles sent. Apparently on Krypton, flirting wasn’t really a thing.

She was still inwardly face-palming when a blonde woman breezed into the lab, her smile a bit cocky for Lena’s taste. “Hey, Supergirl. Supergirl’s friend.” She paused, looking Lena over critically. “So this is the woman, Kara?”
Lena, who tried not to overtly bristle at the other woman’s overly frank appraisal, glanced at Kara.

“The woman?”

Her gaze was apologetic. “I’ll explain later.” Then, to the blonde, she added, “Sara, this is Lena. Any chance you could give us a tour of the time ship?”

_Time ship._ Really? God, what had her life become? A couple of years ago she’d been running her own lab at Luthor Corp and slowly rising through the ranks, just as she—or was it Lionel?—had long planned. And then Lex had publicly revealed himself to be the madman behind the long string of anti-Superman incidents that had resulted in almost too many innocent deaths to even consider. Since then Lena had been scrambling, struggling to keep the company afloat and her own head over water.

The decision to escape LA had brought her to National City, where Kara Danvers had ambled into her life with her sunny smile and adorable sweater sets that hid the heart of a hero and oh, by the way, the House of El family crest. Now nothing was as she’d expected or planned, and she wasn’t sure how she felt about that. All she knew for certain was that time was slipping away, one second at a time, another minute gone, then another.

But that wasn’t really all she knew. At the end of the day—this day, any day—she would give up her money and title, her penthouse with its incredible views, her cars and driver and helicopter flights (especially those) to see Kara Danvers smile at her like she was doing now: nervous and excited, anxious and happy.

They were doing this, weren’t they? Visiting alternate dimensions and future time periods for their own personal entertainment? Over the years, Lena had witnessed other wealthy people use their privilege for a variety of over-the-top adventures, from base-jumping off Swiss mountain peaks and heli skiing in New Zealand to kiteboarding in Hawaii and ziplining in the Virgin Islands. But time travel? As far as she knew money couldn’t buy the opportunity to experiment with quantum states of matter. At least, not yet.

“Ready?” Kara asked, holding out her hand.

“You betcha,” Lena said, and wove their fingers together as they followed the blonde from the lab.

Almost as soon as their palms touched, the thoughts and images whirling through her mind quieted and the racing of her heart slowed. She glanced over at Kara and found her looking back, smile calmer now.

“You okay?” she asked, her voice low as they emerged from the building and started toward the parking lot.

“Yeah,” Lena said. Then she leaned into Kara’s warm side. “Thank you for all of this.”

“You’re welcome. I just really wanted tonight to be special.”

“It is. But do you know why it is?” Kara shook her head, and Lena tugged her even closer. “Because I’m with you. That’s really all it takes.”

“Aw, that’s so sweet, and I totally agree. But the sciencey stuff is pretty fun too, isn’t it?”

Lena laughed. “Yes, Kara, time travel and interdimensional hops are totally fun.”

The blonde glanced over her shoulder. “You two are disgustingly adorable. Jesus, Supergirl, I can’t believe you ever thought you were straight.”
Kara sputtered a little under the bright lights of the massive parking lot, but to be honest, neither could Lena.

When they stopped in the middle of the parking lot, Lena glanced around, frowning. Then Sara hit a button on a small device and the time ship suddenly wavered and flickered into view.

Holy shit. It was real.

“Last chance,” Kara said, spinning around and backing away from her in Sara’s wake.

“I’m not throwing away my shot,” Lena said, steeling herself to follow.

“Good one,” Sara said, nodding approvingly over her shoulder. “Let’s go, ladies. Time waits for no—oh, no, that’s not true at all, is it?” And she winked as she disappeared into the ship.

Lena closed her eyes just for a second. What did she have to gain and what did she have to lose? Right. She opened her eyes and moved forward, feeling Kara’s gaze on her. “Raise a glass to freedom,” she said, smiling at her favorite superhero.

“Something they can never take away,” Kara returned, and kissed her temple. “Come on! This is my first time on board, too!”

“Wait, what?” Lena stopped, watching as Kara danced excitedly ahead of her into the time ship.

“Don’t worry, it’ll be fine!” Kara called, her voice echoing as she vanished from sight.

The lyrics continued to play in Lena’s head exactly as they’d been doing for months now, ever since she’d discovered the album on Spotify:

I may not live to see our glory
But I will gladly join the fight
And when our children tell our story
They’ll tell the story of tonight.

Assuming they lived long enough to have children. Separately—she meant separately, of course, because she refused to be That Lesbian™ who fantasized about having children with the woman she’d been dating for less than two weeks! Even if the woman in question was the most beautiful person she’d ever met, inside and out, and had managed to plan the most interesting, mind-blowing date she had ever experienced and had done so without the influence of sex. Which was, in Lena’s book, really saying something. Then again, the night wasn’t remotely close to being over. What if they time-traveled, dimension-hopped, saw Hamilton, AND had sex for the first time all in one night?

Obviously she would have to marry Kara Danvers. There was really no other proper response to such a perfect date. And, oh god, she was That Lesbian™, wasn’t she? Before images of Kara pregnant and glowing could solidify in her mind’s eye—she would be sooo fucking beautiful—Lena followed her onto the ship.

Here we go, she thought as the sights and sounds of Earth-1, circa late 2016, disappeared behind her.

Chapter End Notes
Okay, that was seriously fun to write! Hope y’all enjoyed their choose-your-own-adventure date, too. For those interested in a layman’s explanation of multiverse theory, check out http://www.npr.org/2011/01/24/132932268/a-physicist-explains-why-parallel-universes-may-exist


And on a very, VERY different note, the inspiration for Lena’s date-night outfit is here: http://wantherstyle.blogspot.com/2013/09/what-she-wore-rosie-huntington-whiteley_27.html
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

The continued interdimensional dating adventures of SuperCorp. Note: There are serious spoilers for the musical Hamilton forthwith, so if you haven’t heard the soundtrack or seen the musical (and if you have seen it, more freaking power to you), proceed with caution!

Time travel wasn’t what Kara had expected. Lena managed the rolling, shaking roller coaster ride like a pro, but Kara, Super-effing-girl who had logged more intergalactic miles than anyone present, vomited. She actually threw up during her date with Lena, which was definitely not part of the plan.

Lena was sweet, though, and held her hair back as she coughed up nearly whole shrimp and a frightening amount of red bile thanks to the wine they’d had with dinner. At least Sara had tossed her a motion sickness bag just before she threw up; otherwise Kara might have vomited all over her own shoes—and possibly Lena’s, too. And then she would have died of embarrassment, a still (aargh) virgin superhero gone before her time.

“I’m so sorry,” she choked out, trying to put distance between herself and Lena once the ship landed and they’d unlatched the seat restraints. She was actually dizzy, like, what the frick? She was Supergirl. She didn’t get dizzy or nauseated. She had a stomach of steel, damn it.

“You don’t have to apologize,” Lena said, stroking her back soothingly as Kara blinked against the strange unsteadiness engulfing her. “It’s not like you could help it.”

And while that might be true, it was such an unfamiliar feeling that Kara could feel tears threatening. She was accustomed to being nearly invulnerable, and now the discomfort and pain dancing along her nerve endings felt completely out of proportion to what other, normal people probably felt. The last time she’d been vulnerable to pain and illness like this had been—well, it had been when Lena’s mother had shot Mon-El and forced her to blow out her powers. She glanced at Lena, but where Lillian Luthor had exuded cold disgust, her daughter’s eyes were lit by warmth and obvious affection. Even in the face of vomit.

“I probably should have warned you about the potential side effects of time displacement,” Sara commented, stopping a few feet away. “But hey, good work with the barf bag! Raiding that airline supply warehouse was definitely one of my best decisions ever.”

“Don’t worry, Supe,” Snart, AKA Captain Cold, added as he slid out of his seat. “Rory here tossed his cookies on his first ride, too.”

“At least I didn’t fall on my face like Haircut,” the Heat Wave rumbled out, staring pointedly at Ray Palmer, AKA Atom.

Palmer smiled. “It’s true. Our first jump didn’t agree with my inner ear.”

Lena turned to Sara. “Do you have someplace she can get cleaned up?”

“Sure. My quarters should do the trick.”
Lena offered to go with her, but Kara had recovered enough to stumble alone to the captain’s suite where she washed her face, gargled with mouthwash, and repaired her makeup in what felt like slow motion but was probably just normal human speed. By the time she emerged a few minutes later, she felt a thousand times better. She also felt hungry, a familiar discomfort she would take over nausea any day.

Sara was leaning against the wall in the corridor a little too close to Lena’s side for Kara’s liking, if she was being honest. The unimpressed look on Lena’s face was reassuring, though, as was the way her expression changed when she saw Kara. She pushed away from the wall and checked Kara over, concern evident in her scrutiny.

“Are you okay? Because we can always head home if you’d rather,” she offered. “As you said, the tickets aren’t going anywhere.”

“No, I’m fine.” Kara smiled at her and took her hand. “Really. Anyway, the night is young and we have a show to see!”

“Are you sure?” Lena asked, searching her face.

“Completely. I’m actually a little hungry.”

The crew basically lived on this ship. They had to have something in the way of snacks that she could, you know, borrow. But before she could ask, Lena pressed something into her hand—a something that felt and looked an awful lot like one of her favorite protein bars.

Lena smiled at her obvious surprise. “Alex texted and said I should probably bring snacks.”

“Alex? As in, my sister? Texted you?”

“Yes, Kara. Your sister and I text sometimes. Now eat up. The theater waits for no one.”

Surely Lena Luthor hadn’t just quoted High School Musical. Like, there was no dimension in which such a thing could happen, was there? Kara tore open the wrapper and stuffed half of the protein bar in her mouth, hoping that hallucinations weren’t another potential side effect of time travel.

Sara chatted Lena up about L Corp while Kara watched suspiciously and made short work of the protein bar, and then it was time to go.

“You kids have fun,” Sara said, her hand lingering on Lena’s shoulder.

Briefly Kara considered laser visioning her hand, just a little, but she still struggled at times to control the amplitude of the heat wave, and Sara was doing her a solid with the whole time travel/Hamilton tickets thing…

While she was still debating, Lena picked up Sara’s hand and dropped it between them. “Lechery doesn’t become you, Lance,” she said, but smiled so flirtatiously that Kara was pretty sure Sara didn’t realize she was being insulted. At least, she hoped not seeing as the former assassin could be a bit prickly and they were dependent on her good graces to get back to their own time.

As Lena slid her arm through Kara’s and tugged her toward the ship’s entrance, Kara called over her shoulder, “See you back here in a few hours?”

Sara gave her a thumbs-up, which Kara took to mean they weren’t about to be abandoned nine months in the future. She wasn’t even sure the extrapolator would work if something happened to the Waverider and its crew. What if they ended up trapped on this future Earth where aliens weren’t a
thing and Lena didn’t know anyone? What if—but she stopped the next alarmist thought, took a
breath, and glanced over at Lena. They were together and they were about to see Hamilton. Life was
good if she would only let it be.

They stepped out into Los Angeles, circa August 2017, the summer sun a ball of orange hanging on
the distant horizon.

“Kara,” Lena said, her calm voice belying her elevated heart rate, “are we on a roof?”

“Oh. Um, yeah, we are.” Whoops. She definitely should have prepped Lena on this part of the plan,
knowing as she did the other woman’s fear of heights.

“Why are we on a roof, Kara?”

“Because there isn’t an empty lot anywhere close enough for Sara to stream the show.”

Sara had picked this specific night for their date because there was a crew filming Hamilton tonight.
The Waverider team was helping not only out of the goodness of their hearts but because they could
piggyback off the video stream and watch the show from the comfort of their lounge. Gideon, the
onboard AI, would record the stream, and that way they could replay the show anytime they wanted.

“Of course they’re bootlegging it,” Lena said after Kara had explained. “I’ve only known them a
little while, and yet that makes so much sense.”

“I’m going to have to fly us down,” Kara said apologetically, and opened her arms. “Trust me?”

Lena nodded without hesitation. “Always.”

Kara tamped down the warm tingly feeling that bubbled up at this declaration and wrapped her arms
around Lena. Almost immediately she felt dizzy again as the smell of Lena’s perfume clouded her
mind. And if she took a little extra time to float them down into the stand of palm trees and bushes at
the back of the theater, it was only to make sure Lena was comfortable. Not because she wanted to
hold her as long as possible.

“You can open your eyes now,” she said, still aware of the soft press of Lena’s breasts against her
own. “You doing okay?”

Lena’s eyes fluttered open, and Kara could hear her breathing settle as she took in the dark
vegetation around them. “I’m good,” she said. “Though I can’t quite believe we’re here.”

“Neither can I,” Kara admitted. This evening had taken a team effort to plan, from Cisco and Barry
to Sara and the Waverider crew. Speaking of… “I guess we should make sure the tickets work
before we get too excited, though. Rao knows what Sara did to get them.”

“I’m sure they’re perfect,” Lena said.

They were still standing close together, eyes on each other’s faces in the dim parking lot as car horns
beeped on nearby streets and tractor trailers roared along the 101 only a couple of blocks away. Then
a very different sound broke into Kara’s consciousness: the Hamilton orchestra’s final round of
tuning.

“We’ll know soon,” she said, and floated them quickly to the entrance, their feet hovering only
inches above the ground.

Their seats were in the very center of the balcony’s front row, and they dropped into them just as the
curtain was rising. Lena gave her an excited grin and took her hand, squeezing it tightly as she turned her gaze to the stage. And then the orchestra played the strident, familiar opening chords that always reminded Kara of Beethoven’s Fifth, and she heard Lena’s breath catch even as her own chest suddenly felt tight and goose bumps rose on the back of her neck. The lights hit the stage and they both cheered along with the rest of the audience, and then the crowd settled in as the actor playing Aaron Burr recited his opening lines.

Kara shook her head a little, shifting closer to Lena. They had made it. They were actually in the future watching Hamilton at a theater in LA.

How lucky they were to be alive right now, indeed.

*             *             *

The show was… an experience. Somehow it managed to be everything she’d hoped for and nothing she’d expected. Though she loved old Fred Astaire movies, this was the first time she had ever attended a Broadway musical in person, and now she wondered what other delectable human experiences she’d been missing out on.

It went too quickly, of course, as it was always going to do. She sat beside Lena in the beautiful Art Deco theater with its red carpeting and red seats under intricate gold ceiling panels, in the center of which rested an enormous chandelier that rivaled the crystalline light fixtures of Krypton, and she wished she could slow time down, disturb the translational symmetry of the fourth dimension to make this night, this show, this collection of moments last.

The musical itself was nearly as complex and lovely as the theater’s interior, evoking laughter, tears, and sighs of appreciation from the audience with its rousing score and imaginative recasting of the American Revolution through a modern lens. As she’d already known they would, a few of the lines hit a bit close to home. She felt Lena hunch her shoulders when Hamilton declared that he imagined death so much that it had grown to feel more like a memory:

When’s it gonna get me?
In my sleep? Seven feet ahead of me?
If I see it coming, do I run or do I let it be?

She could see the tears in Lena’s eyes and held tight to her hand, struggling inwardly against her own helplessness in the face of Lena’s sociopathic brother. Lex had been quiet for a while now, but that didn’t mean he had given up his vendetta. The fact that he could get to Lena even though he was behind bars, the idea that he could have her killed at any moment, the knowledge that there might come a time when Kara wouldn’t be there to save her, those were the things that would drive her insane if she let them.

Sometimes—and she wasn’t proud of this, but there it was—she fantasized about crashing through the roof of the maximum security prison where Lex was currently being held and simply ending the threat he represented with her own two hands. Or possibly her own two eyes. Heat vision would do the trick without her ever having to touch him. She fantasized about killing him, and then she pictured Alex’s reaction, or J’onn’s. She imagined Lena’s face when she learned that Kara had turned into the very monster Lex and Lillian insisted humanity needed protection from. An argument that Lena herself had said was worthy of contemplation even as she eschewed her family’s violent, extremist tactics.

Would killing Lex make her a monster? Before she’d started working for the DEO, she would have
said yes with resounding certainty. But her view of the fixed nature of right and wrong had become skewed in the past year, warped by the things she had witnessed and, in some cases, done. Sometimes people were just bad, and there was nothing you could do but learn to protect yourself. Lena had said as much, citing her brother as evidence. At what point did violence become justifiable, if at all? Was murder immoral if it prevented the deaths of innocents? Before she became Supergirl, she wouldn’t have even asked those questions. The answers had seemed obvious, immutable. Now, though, she wasn’t sure what she believed.

She heard Eliza’s voice in the back of her head: “The difference between a hero and a villain is that a hero puts the welfare of the collective above her own. You have so much power, Kara. If you decided to privilege your own needs and desires above those of others, no one on Earth would be able to stop you. I know it’s a lot of responsibility, but with great power comes great responsibility. Never forget that.”

This was the danger in someone like her trying to have a normal life. She would always be tempted to bend the rules, to quash her moral code, to ignore her own convictions to protect the people she loved.

Still, what was the right thing to do in this situation? Would Eliza even know? If Lex killed Lena, Kara would lose her; and if Kara killed Lex first, she would also lose Lena. Either way she lost, but at least in the latter case Lena would still be alive, a voice in her head whispered. Even if Kara ended up in a DEO cell for the rest of her days, even if Lena never spoke to her again, she would stay alive, and wouldn’t that be enough?

*That would be enough,* Kara repeated inside her head as the actor on the spot-lit stage crooned the same words to Alexander right before George Washington called him back for the final showdown of the American Revolution.

She knew how the story ended, of course. Even without listening to the soundtrack for the last few months, she’d known of the duel that had taken Alexander Hamilton’s life. But until she’d started listening to Lin-Manuel Miranda’s addictive soundtrack she hadn’t known about the other duels in his life—the one during the Revolutionary War where he and Burr served as seconds for opposing rivals; the one where his son died defending his father’s honor on the very field where, only a few years later, Alexander would fall to Burr’s pistol shot.

Such a waste, Kara thought, resting her head on Lena’s shoulder as Alexander and Eliza mourned the loss of their eldest son. Why did humans kill each other so needlessly and ceaselessly? No wonder they couldn’t trust her or Clark. People on Earth were in a constant state of potential conflict, both as nations and as individuals. In Hamilton’s case, according to Miranda, his genius was the root of his downfall. He was too passionate, too opinionated, too smart for his own good. Burr, who counseled Alexander throughout the show to “talk less, smile more,” couldn’t stand watching a “bastard, orphan, son of a whore” surpass him, so he challenged him to a duel. And that was how one of the most brilliant of America’s founding fathers died—because of pride, ego, status. Brothers in arms became political rivals and, eventually, personal enemies. Finally, someone had to die. Or didn’t have to, really, but died nonetheless.

Had her parents known of humanity’s long, bloody history before they selected Earth? Had Clark’s? Why couldn’t they have been sent to a more peaceful planet where they could have lived safely among other Kryptonians, ambassadors and ex-patriots who, for whatever reason, weren’t on Krypton when the core exploded? Maybe she should try her mother’s hologram again, or go back to the Fortress of Solitude. Conversing with an AI was tricky; you had to come up with exactly the right question. Clark wasn’t much help in this area, either. He didn’t have enough context to know there were right and wrong questions.
Beside her Lena sniffled, and Kara tuned back in—to the actors on stage, to the hushed crowd intent on the tragedy unfolding before them, to the beautiful woman gripping her arm, eyes awash with tears. Was she thinking of Lex, another boy who had been lost too young? For Lena, the Luthors loomed larger than almost anything else in her life, just as for Kara, everything always led back to Krypton.

Somehow she doubted that would change for either of them anytime soon.

* * *

“So what did you think?” Kara asked, leaning against the railing beside Lena, their arms barely touching. They were back on their own Earth—number 38, Cisco had informed them, in homage to the year aliens had first been detected living among their human counterparts—back at Lena’s apartment drinking wine and taking in the lights of National City from the living room balcony as they unwound from their night out.

“I think you’ve ruined me for future dating experiences,” Lena said.

Kara bumped her hip gently, careful not to send her (or her glass of wine) flying. “I think I can live with that.”

She smiled into Lena’s eyes, and all at once she remembered Sara’s comment from earlier. Seriously, how had she not known sooner that she was more than a little bit gay? She’d felt starstruck that first afternoon when she and Clark went to question Lena about the accident on the *Venture*, a response that had only intensified on subsequent interactions. At the time she’d chalked it up to Lena’s confident presence rather than her attractiveness or the matching interest in her gaze.

As time passed, however, the sense of awe she felt around Lena had morphed into respect and then liking as she realized how brilliant and driven—and brave—the other woman truly was. It helped that they had so much in common. They were both women trying to make a name for themselves in male-dominated fields; orphans who had been adopted into families with powerful older siblings; and people whose identities set them apart from nearly everyone around them. Even after the gala, when she caught Lena checking her out and knew she was flirting, she still hadn’t realized that her own feelings went beyond the normal bounds of female friendship.

But the question remained: How had she not seen it? In hindsight, it seemed glaringly obvious that she’d had a thing for Lena Luthor since almost the first moment they met.

“Thank you for taking me to *Hamilton*,” Lena said, leaning into her side.

“You’re welcome. It was pretty great, wasn’t it?”

“Incredible, really. What was your favorite part?”

“Ooh, that’s a tough one.” Kara paused, considering. “I think I liked the theme about Alexander never feeling like he had enough time. How it was a miracle that he’d even made it to adulthood, and how that sense shaped his drive to accomplish great things with the second chance he’d been given.”

Lena leaned her chin on her upturned palm. “Wonder who that reminds me of,” she said, lifting an eyebrow at Kara.

“I was just thinking the same thing.” And she lifted her own eyebrow at Lena.

“We really are quite the pair.” And then she sang, her voice low and melodic, eyes on Kara’s, “*Every day you fight like you’re running out of time*…”
“Write day and night like you're running out of time,” Kara sang back, picturing Lena at her desk at L Corp, working to shift the Luthor legacy from murdering world domination to a force for good.

They chatted idly as the air slowly cooled around them and Kara nervously pondered what the rest of the night might have in store. It had been close to midnight on Earth-1 when they made the hop back to their own dimension only to discover that the evening was barely underway at home. Which was kind of nice, really, except that she was exhausted. Turned out flying, interdimensional hopping, and time travel—not to mention vomiting up an entire meal—took a lot out of you. But she didn’t want to cancel the potential sex part of the date, especially since it had been her idea. She’d done that before, and she couldn’t help but worry that Lena was going to grow bored or frustrated (or both) with her if she kept ducking the issue. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to have sex with Lena. She was almost positive she did, particularly if the way she got worked up every time they made out was any indication. It was just that it never seemed like the right time to deal with the momentous nature (at least in this culture) of losing one’s virginity.

Also, she wasn’t quite sure what constituted losing your virginity if, like, intercourse wasn’t involved. Did lesbians consider a non-self-service orgasm good enough? Or did it have to include fingering or even, maybe, simultaneous oral sex, like in that movie about the color blue she had watched (thankfully, by herself) shortly after Alex had come out? Oh god, what if Lena wanted to use a strap-on? She wasn’t sure she was up for anything other than the fingers option. Even mouths on certain areas seemed way too intimate for where she was currently at.

Kara tried not to sigh out loud. Poor Lena. She was for all intents and purposes dating a high schooler when it came to sex, which would have been perfectly fine had she not been a sophisticated thirty-something with previous significant others. Kara was so far out of her league, it wasn’t even funny.

Fortunately, Lena didn’t appear overly concerned with getting her into bed. At the moment she actually seemed more interested in rehashing the science of their assorted travels and debating various questions the evening had given rise to: Had her mother died young in that part of the multiverse? What were the Luthors like on Earth-1? And if there was no Superman or Supergirl, did that mean Krypton still existed? It was tempting to go back and look for their families, they agreed, even as they acknowledged that the people in that dimension were no more related to them than any stranger here was. Less, even, because their paths would never, without scientific intervention, cross.

“Tonight must have taken quite the planning,” Lena commented.

Kara felt herself flush, which was still a surprising feeling though not as startling as, say, puking on the Waverider. “I was Cat Grant’s assistant for three years, you know. Compared to getting Lakers tickets for her, this was nothing.”

“Right,” Lena said in a tone that indicated she wasn’t buying that argument in the least.

Kara smiled, glad she was beginning to learn Lena’s nonverbals. “Okay, so even if it was a bit of work, you’re more than worth it. With everything you’ve been through, you deserve a thousand nights like tonight. Except maybe, you know, without the vomit.”

“So do you,” Lena said, nudging her shoulder. “Your life hasn’t exactly been easy either, Kara.”

“No, it hasn’t. But I honestly believe Nietzsche got one thing right—you know, the whole ‘That which does not kill us, makes us stronger’ adage? Also, I had Alex and Eliza. You lost your mom and ended up with a mentally ill brother and an adopted mother who wouldn’t know what love was if it fell from the sky in front of her.”
Inexplicably, Lena looked amused. “Wait, why are we arguing about this? It’s not a competition. Besides, I own three homes, Kara. I’m not exactly suffering.”

“Three? I knew I was dating you for a reason.” She waggled her eyebrows, pleased when Lena laughed in that free, open way Kara rarely got to witness. “Seriously, though, I’ve met Lillian. All the money in the world couldn’t make me be okay with her as my mother.”

“You know,” Lena said, her eyes focusing on the distance, “I mostly feel sorry for her. She comes from this cold, WASPY, Orange County family who probably didn’t ever hug her or tell her they loved her, and then she had to watch as her only child went insane.”

“He wasn’t her only child,” Kara pointed out.

“You know what I mean.”

And yes, Kara did know. She knew that Lillian Luthor had never once allowed Lena to feel safe or a sense of belonging, and yet somehow Lena still sought out her approval, still longed for her love. What she didn’t understand was why the Luthors had adopted her in the first place.

“The point is,” Lena added, “I might not be able to forgive her for what she’s done, but I don’t think she’s completely unredeemable.”

Kara shook her head, picturing Lillian Luthor’s cold, detached gaze as she struck her in the face to test whether or not her powers had truly been drained. “You’re more generous than I am.”

“She tortured you, Kara. I don’t think anyone expects you to empathize with her.”

“It’s not that she tortured me. People who hurt others are usually in pain, and given the amount of pain she’s inflicted recently, she must be hurting quite a bit. But she’s so intelligent, and yet somehow she has decided that what she believes is more important than what anyone else thinks or feels. More than that, she’s willing to sacrifice anyone and anything to achieve her goals.” She paused. “Even you.”

Lena shied away from her. “At some level, though, I think she does care about me. In her own way.”

“I’m sure she does. Enough to not want me near you, anyway.” _Doh_… She blinked rapidly. That was not what she’d intended to say.

Lena’s eyes narrowed. “What do you mean?”

“No, I mean, just that she hates the Supers. Everyone knows that, right?”

“Did she say something to you?” As Kara fidgeted, nearly dropping her wine glass, Lena added, “She did, didn’t she? Let me guess. She added a homophobic slant to her xenophobic rant.”

That actually rhymed… Kara shook her head. “It was nothing like that. She only told me she didn’t like the idea of me being around you. Oh, and she asked me what I am to you.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I said I was your friend.”

“Good. If she’s following the news then she knows I’m dating reporter you, but we still need to be careful so she doesn’t connect the dots.”

Kara waited a little while before asking, “So is she? Homophobic, I mean?”
Lena swallowed more wine, staring straight ahead. “Yep.”

“Was Lionel, too?”

“Yeah. In fact, that’s the reason we weren’t close when he died. We’d barely spoken in years.”

“I’m sorry,” Kara offered, and slipped a tentative arm around her shoulders, tugging her closer.

Lena glanced at her, smile edged with pain. “So am I.” She hesitated. “Do you want to know something really sad?”

It was an odd way to phrase a question, Kara thought, almost as if she was trying to predispose the listener to say no. “Okay.”

“I think Lionel was my father,” she said, running a fingertip along the edge of her wine glass. “As in, biologically.”

Kara blinked. “Really?”

“It would explain so much. My mother worked at Luthor Corp before she became pregnant with me, and then she mysteriously retired and ended up with this ridiculously generous pension. Besides, I apparently look just like Lionel’s mother. One of his uncles came to visit from Scotland right before I started at Deerfield, and he stopped when he saw me and clutched his chest and said, ‘Veronica?’ I’d always wondered, or hoped, maybe, but that day sort of confirmed it for me.”

“And he never told you one way or another?”

“Nope.” She shrugged, squinting out at the city. “Maybe he thought there would be more time. He was only sixty-eight when he died.”

“That is really sad.”

“Told you,” Lena said, smiling a little.

Kara set her glass down and wrapped her other arm around Lena, hugging her as tightly as she dared. Lena moved one of Kara’s hands to her chest, holding on as if Kara were the only thing keeping her from floating off into the night sky.

They stood like that for a little while until Lena finally gave her hand a squeeze and said, “I know the night isn’t exactly over, but would you be okay with going to bed early? Just to sleep?”

How awesome was it that Lena had asked this time, not her? Because in addition to her more generalized worries about sex, Kara would prefer not to have to worry about whether or not her breath smelled like vomit the first time they slept together.

“I would be totally fine with that,” she said.

“Great.” Lena kissed her cheek. “I love—um, our date tonight,” she fumbled, not meeting Kara’s eyes.

“Same here,” Kara said, her cheeks flushing again as she wondered what Lena had been about to say. Was it I love you? It had to be, didn’t it? But then why had she stopped? Maybe she sensed Kara’s hesitation. Because despite the over-the-top date she had planned for them tonight, she couldn’t help the terror that sometimes still swept over her when she realized just how enmeshed in her life Lena was becoming.
Wine glasses in hand, they headed inside together. As they deposited the glasses in the kitchen, Kara felt a familiar pang tightening her stomach. Dang it. She was legitimately starving. Another reason to avoid future puking episodes: It left her stomach feeling like it was about to cave in on itself.

“Do you mind if I…?” she asked, nodding toward the refrigerator.

“Go ahead,” Lena said, an indulgent if tired smile on her face. “I’m going to take a quick shower, okay?”

“Of course!” Kara bobbed her head nervously. She was definitely not thinking of Lena in the shower, eyes closed, steam rising around her luscious shoulders and even more luscious breasts. Definitely, absolutely not.

“You know, Kara,” Lena added, smirking over her shoulder as she disappeared into the hall, “you could always join me…”

Kara simultaneously choked on air and sighed. Lena Luthor was going to be the death of her, one way or the other. Or, well, hopefully not literally…

She gazed into the refrigerator and nearly gasped. Where had all this food come from? There was a pre-cooked chicken (organically fed, free range, according to the label), tons of sandwich fixings, a veggie and hummus tray, and six kinds of cheese in the dairy drawer. The crisper was similarly jammed with grapes, cherries, oranges, and apples. She peeked into the freezer—chock full of ice cream! Lena had gone grocery shopping for her. Actually, Jess, her assistant, had probably done the shopping. But either way, Lena had ensured that her kitchen was stocked with Kara’s favorite foods.

It took her less than five minutes to make two chicken breast sandwiches and devour them along with an apple and a bag of potato chips. She washed everything down with a tall glass of milk—not sour this time; she checked. Much, much better, she thought as she cleaned up after herself. One of the worst parts of her capture by Cadmus had been the day without food she’d been forced to endure.

Even before she reached the master bedroom, she could hear Lena in the shower, her voice barely audible over the sound of the spray. Inching closer, Kara allowed herself to lean against the partially open bathroom doorway and hum quietly along in harmony as Lena sang in clear, lovely tones:

We don’t need a legacy
We don’t need money
If I could grant you peace of mind
If you could let me inside your heart.

Oh, let me be part of the narrative
In the story they will write someday
Let this moment be the first chapter:
Where you decide to stay
And I could be enough
And we could be enough
That would be enough.

For the Hamiltons, had it been enough, though? They’d weathered the storms of eighteenth century political intrigue, his cheating, the loss of their son, their daughter’s descent into madness, everything life threw at them until he’d left her alone early one morning to meet Aaron Burr on a dueling ground
in New Jersey. After his death Eliza had gone on another fifty years organizing his papers, telling not only his story but those of the men he’d served with, supporting him in death as she’d supported him in life.

What did she and Lena have to look forward to? Could they ever hope to have anything resembling a normal life? It wasn’t like they could bring a child into the chaos and violence that followed them. All they had, all they could ever have, was each other. Would that be enough? Could either of them be enough for the other?

The water shut off and she heard the drip of water on the tile floor, listened to Lena towel off her body, focused her super hearing on Lena’s quiet singing as she went about her post-shower routine. Then Lena paused.

“Kara? Are you still here?”

She moved away from the doorway. No need to add this moment to the long line of stalking incidents. “I’m here.”

“Good,” Lena said, and Kara could hear the smile in her voice.

She couldn’t help smiling back as she stripped down to boy shorts and a tank top and slipped beneath the covers. “Come to bed,” she called, hoping Lena would hear the pout in her voice.

Lena poked her head out of the door. “Hey, no pouting on Perfect Date Night!”

“Sorry,” Kara said insincerely.

“Sure you are.” Lena stared at her, scolding look morphing into a sweet smile. “I like having you in my bed.”

“I’d like being in your bed more if you were in it, too.”

“Who knew Supergirl could be so demanding?” She turned away. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

Good, Kara thought, and closed her eyes to wait.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

In which Kara and Lena finally (FINALLY) get it on. Notice the new rating (mature) and tag change above. If smut isn’t your thing, you might want to skim/skip this chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Wait. Let me get this straight. You guys still haven’t boned?”

Lena winced and held the phone away from her ear. This was why she hadn’t wanted to tell Bea about their… issues in the bedroom. Not that there were issues, per se. They just hadn’t slept together, which was, you know, totally fine. Although Lena was getting a little tired of her own hands. Also, it was becoming increasingly difficult to actually get anywhere with herself. She was worked up a majority of the time, but it was as if her body was on strike, and the terms were Kara’s hands and/or mouth or no orgasms. Which was—well. It was fairly vexing, to be honest.

“Not for lack of trying,” she told Bea, putting her feet up on the coffee table. She had just gotten home from a work trip to Las Vegas and was expecting Kara to swing by at any moment. “We were really close the other night.”

“Don’t tell me. She got called into work?”

“Uh-huh,” Lena said, because it was easier than telling Bea the whole truth.

They’d been making out half-naked in her bed the night before she left for Nevada, and in theory everything had been fine. But she could tell something wasn’t right. Kara was going through the motions, her mind clearly elsewhere. Despite the fact that she’d been dreaming of this scenario all day—Kara shirtless and leaning over her in the half-lit room, *swoon*—Lena had forced herself to pull away.

“Are you all right?” she’d asked.

“Oh, of course.” Kara had smiled and started to move closer again.

But Lena stopped her with a hand to her supple, incredibly firm… to her chest. “No, really. What’s going on?”

Kara stared at her for a moment, and then her smile slipped and she flopped onto her side. “I want to, Lena, I swear I do, but I’m afraid my phone is going to ring at a really crucial moment and then the first time will be totally ruined!”

Lena wanted to say that it wouldn’t be *ruined*, that Kara was placing far too much importance on her first time. But then she remembered a similar fixation at sixteen after she discovered she was the only one among her friends who had yet to be “deflowered,” as Bea had called it. How much worse would it be at twenty-five, especially if you were dating someone older and more experienced?

“There’s nothing wrong with going slow,” she said. “It’s okay to not be ready, you know.”
“But I am! I am beyond ready, trust me.”

Lena had felt her eyebrows rise as her mind prodded her to ask in a low and sultry tone, How ready? But it wasn’t the right moment for her sex kitten side to kick in, no matter how sexually frustrated she might be.

“In that case,” she’d said instead, forcing her voice to remain even, “maybe don’t put so much pressure on the first time? It’s not going to be perfect. It might not even be that great, although I’d like to think it won’t be terrible.”

“I’m not—it doesn’t have to—” Kara sighed. “Am I that obvious?”

“Maybe a little, but also I remember how I was about my first time.”

“Wow, you can remember that long ago?”

Lena pretended to gasp. “Just for that, I’m kicking you out of my bed.”

Kara gazed at her with a startlingly sex-kittenish look of her own. “No you’re not.” She dragged her fingernails lightly up Lena’s ribcage, eliciting a very real gasp this time.

“No,” she agreed, and bit her lip in the way that had always made Kara blush. “I’m not.”

“Maybe we should practice some more.” Kara kissed her way along Lena’s jawline. “You know, for science.”

But before she could voice her assent to this plan, Kara’s phone had buzzed in the telltale way it had of alerting Lena that she was about to be left to her own devices. Literally—Kara had barely left in a swirl of cape and boots when Lena reached for her bedside drawer, hoping that her trusty vibrator would relieve at least some of her semi-permanent sexual tension.

Kara had offered to come see her in Las Vegas, but not only did Lena want to be at the top of her game to present on a panel called “The Business of Technology,” she was also worried about the press getting wind of her presence. They weren’t hiding their relationship, but Kara visiting her in the conference hotel for what looked suspiciously like a booty call would have been the opposite of maintaining a low profile.

“I don’t know, Lee,” Bea said now, uncharacteristically hesitant.

“What don’t you know?” Lena checked her phone notifications, but there were no new texts. She hoped Kara hadn’t gotten waylaid by some new emergency.

“Well, you know that some people are asexual, right?”

Lena paused. “Right, and obviously that’s a totally valid orientation. But I don’t think she is.”

“Why not?”

“For one thing, she’s a little obsessed with my cleavage.”

“Oh, right,” Bea said, and Lena could practically hear her nodding. “You do have some damn fine boobage.”

“Who exactly are you talking about your cleavage?”

Lena glanced up to find Kara in the balcony doorway, hands on her hips like the Supergirl of old,
crinkle on full display. And, interesting, she hadn’t thought Kara could look that irate. It was kind of hot. Of course, that could just be her hormones talking.

Still, macho displays of jealousy were not to be tolerated, let alone encouraged, so she merely rolled her eyes at Kara and said into her phone, “Speak of the devil—Miss Hangry herself just arrived. Give the boys a kiss and I’ll talk to you soon, okay?”

“Okay,” Bea said. “And good luck!”

Lena shut off her phone and shot Kara a skeptical look. “Did you skip lunch again?”

“No,” Kara said, looking slightly mollified as she moved into the living room. “Was that Bea?”

“Yes. But even if it wasn’t, I can speak about my body to anyone I please, Kara. It’s my body.”

“I know, but you’re my girlfriend,” she said, more grumpy than domineering.

Lena blinked. “I am, am I?”

Kara stopped in the center of the room, staring at her with uncertain eyes. “Oh. I thought—I mean… are you not?”

Lena rose and walked toward her, keeping her expression neutral. “I don’t know. Am I?”

Kara huffed out a breath. “Why are you even like this?”

“Like what?”

“Dramatic.”

Lena stopped in front of her. “Says the woman wearing the cape and thigh-high boots.”

“Okay, superheroes have to wear superhero suits. It’s, like, part of the code.”

“Really?” she drawled. “Is that in the CatCo handbook too?”

Kara closed the space between them suddenly, pulling Lena against her. But her touch was gentle, almost tentative, despite the speed with which she moved. “Lena,” she said, “come on. Are you or aren’t you?”

She reached up and kissed the corner of Kara’s mouth. “That depends. I haven’t exactly been asked.”

“Oh, for Rao’s sake! Lena Luthor, will you be my girlfriend?”

She pretended to think about it. Then, as Kara’s lips started to form one of her trademark pouts, she laughed. “Yes, of course. I would love to be your girlfriend.”

“Good answer,” Kara said, and leaned in to kiss her. Then her phone buzzed and she pulled away, groaning. “No, no, no!”

“You just got here,” Lena said, not bothering to keep the disappointment out of her voice.

“I know. Fuck! I mean, sorry.”

More like no fucking, Lena thought as Kara checked her messages. Not that she would ever say such
a thing to her girlfriend. Her girlfriend. She sighed a bit dreamily, then shook her head at herself. Kara was right. She had clearly regressed to the emotional equivalent of a teenager.

“I have to go,” Kara said glumly, tucking her phone into her suit’s hidden pocket.

“Come over later?”

“I’ll try.” She hesitated. “Hey, have you unpacked yet?”

“Mostly. Why?”

“Just an idea.” She started to back away. “I’ll text you if I get stuck.”

“Sounds good. I—” she stopped before the words could escape. They seemed always to be on the tip of her tongue now, threatening to unleash their potential damage on the world. Or, at least, on her relationship with one noticeably skittish Kryptonian. “I’ll see you later. Be safe.”

Kara scoffed. “‘Safe’ and ‘fast’ are oxymorons, Lena.”

And then she was gone in a blur of blue and red, so fast Lena wasn’t even sure she saw her fly away.

* * *

She reappeared the same way a couple of hours later, startling Lena as she lay on the couch streaming *The Walking Dead* on her Kindle. Kara wouldn’t be caught dead watching a zombie show, she had announced seemingly unironically, so it was Lena’s go-to on the rare occasion she was by herself and not working on L Corp matters.

As Kara strode in through the balcony door, Lena paused Netflix. “I take it you dealt with the emergency?”

“I did, but they didn’t even really need me,” she said, clearly affronted. “J’onn—I mean, the team was perfectly capable of handling it without me. In fact, I told them that in the future they’re going to have to take on more of the hero stuff. I’m of no use to anyone if I burn out.”

“Excellent point.” Lena nodded appreciatively at Kara’s apparent ability to set boundaries on her work commitments. She should probably borrow a page from that book herself. Someday. “Well done, Supergirl.”

“Thanks. Now, go pack your bags,” Kara ordered.

“Excuse me?”

“We’re getting away.” She seemed to notice Lena’s unimpressed look and added, “I mean, sorry. Would you like to go away with me? Oliver has a house on a lake near Central City where we can stay for a few days. Felicity says it’s beautiful.”

After two days in sleazy Vegas with hordes of former frat boy businessmen checking her out with their bold eyes and, in some cases, wandering hands, Lena thought that being alone with Kara in a beautiful spot where no one could reach them sounded like the best early Christmas present ever.

She smiled up at Kara. “Yes, please.”

“Oh, good,” Kara said, smiling back. “Then we should probably go soon before my fricking phone rings again…”
Lena rose and started toward the hallway. “Is this a hanging out with Sara Lance and the Earth-1
crew kind of getaway, or the stay in all weekend type?”

Kara fidgeted slightly and then met her eyes. “Stay in, I think. If you don’t mind.”

Oh, she didn’t mind at all. “Perfect. I’ll be right back,” she said brightly.

“Do you mind if I make something to eat really quickly?”

Lena paused at the edge of the living room. “Of course not. I told you, you don’t have to ask.”

“In that case…” She sped off to the kitchen, no doubt to demolish half of its contents.

As she headed toward her bedroom, Lena made a mental note to have Jess restock more frequently.
Who would have guessed how much Supergirl would eat? An X-rated image flashed in her mind
and she tamped it down quickly.

Soon, if she was lucky, she wouldn’t have to fantasize anymore.

*             *             *

The house, it turned out, was easy enough to find despite its prodigious remoteness. The caretaker
had left the outside lights blazing so that Kara would be able to see it from a distance, and what a
sight it was. Even Lena, who had grown up accustomed to luxury, hadn’t quite been prepared for
their getaway. Oliver’s house looked more like a conference center than a private residence, and the
lake? The Queens owned it and the thousand or so forested acres surrounding it, too. The house was
reachable only by air or boat, and the only other structure on the lake, according to Felicity, was the
caretaker’s cabin located a quarter mile away around a bend in the shore, loosely connected to
civilization by a dirt road.

“Wow,” Kara said as she landed them gently on the flagstone patio. She glanced back at the GPS
unit she’d borrowed from S.T.A.R. Labs. “It says this is it.”

Lena removed her helmet and stared around in appreciation. The house sat a little ways from the
water at the top of a slight rise. Night had already fallen, but the nearly full moon shimmered across
the surface of the lake. It was so different from National City, where her office and apartment
windows opened onto building after building, each affording a glimpse into the lives of hundreds or
thousands of strangers. Here they were alone in the dark, unfamiliar landscape, completely and
irrevocably on their own, and the feeling was so strange that she shivered a little.

“Are you okay?” Kara asked immediately, rubbing her arms through the thick flight suit Cisco had
loaned her.

“I’m fine,” she said for the tenth time since they’d left Central City. Honestly, it had been exciting to
fly with Kara. A little frustrating being pressed up that tightly against her and not getting a single kiss
in, but Kara had insisted she wear the helmet that went with the suit. Just to be safe.

“Shall we?” Kara gestured toward the building.

“We shall.”

Inside, Kara poked through the cupboards while Lena read the caretaker’s note with phone numbers,
Netflix login info, and Wi-Fi passwords. Idly she wondered if network protocols were the same on
this Earth.
“There’s a ton of fresh food,” Kara reported, popping her head out of the refrigerator. “How did
Oliver manage that?”

“Pretty sure it wasn’t Oliver.” Lena held up the second note on the counter.

Kara squinted and read it from across the room, a party trick that never failed to amuse Lena. “Aw,
Barry is so awesome!”

Even Lena, who usually took a bit longer to warm up to people—and they to her, unless she was in
schmooze mood—had liked the gangly metahuman immediately during their first trip to Earth-1. Given
the affectionate way he’d interacted with Kara, she wasn’t surprised to see that he had gone
on a shopping run (quite literally, more than likely) for them.

“Do you think he knows…?” Kara started, and then stopped, face flushing brilliantly in the way
Lena had only witnessed a handful of times.

“Knows what?” She set the note back on the counter and strolled deliberately toward Kara.

“You know,” she said, watching her approach.

“That we’ll be sharing a bed?” Lena suggested, nudging Kara backward until she bumped up against
the refrigerator door. “Or that we’ll be doing this?”

She slipped her arms around Kara’s neck and tugged her head down. Kara obliged, hands eager on
her hips as the kiss deepened. Lena moaned against her lips, weeks of longing welling up in her, and
Kara’s fingers tightened on her for a moment almost painfully. But Lena didn’t care. Just then she
wanted Kara any way she could have her.

Suddenly Kara lifted her and carried her out of the kitchen into the great room, where a constellation
of hallways presented itself. Kara stopped kissing her long enough to squint at the layout—she was
using her X-ray vision, Lena realized with a start—and then they were moving almost faster than
they’d flown. In a matter of moments Kara had pushed open a door and was crossing plush white
carpeting that glowed in the moonlight pouring through the large picture windows facing the lake.
Before Lena even realized what she had in mind, Kara had levitated them both onto the king-sized
bed on the far side of the room.

“Is this okay?” Kara asked, her voice taut with an emotion Lena didn’t recognize.

“It’s more than okay,” Lena said, pulling her down on top of her. She inhaled at the sensation of
Kara’s toned body, still clad in her Super suit, sliding against her already raw nerve endings.

And then they were kissing again, and the house was silent except for the humming of the appliances
and the thrumming of Lena’s heart, which was probably furious enough to drive someone with
super-hearing a little bit crazy.

* * *

“If you lose your virginity in a different dimension, does it count? Or are you still technically a virgin
on your own Earth?”

Lena shifted onto her side and propped her head up on one hand, considering the question. “I think
once you’ve lost your virginity you’ve lost it, no matter what dimension you happen to be in. After
all, your physical self remains constant wherever you go.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Kara said, rolling onto her stomach and squeezing the pillow in her strong
Lena watched her in the moonlight. Kara didn’t look happy. She didn’t look unhappy either, exactly, just maybe a bit disappointed. Lena, on the other hand, felt fantastic, the maddening itch she’d been living with finally ably scratched. Kara had been just what she’d expected in bed after their weeks of build-up—intensely interested in exploring every inch of her body and learning what turned her on the most. She’d been a bit tentative here and there, but she had clearly enjoyed the sensation of making love to her. However, when it was her turn, she’d tensed up, and no matter what Lena did, she’d remained awkward throughout. Lena wasn’t even sure she’d had an orgasm, which, honestly, wasn’t how she’d hoped this night would go.

Fortunately, they had all the time in the world they currently occupied, if they wanted it.

“Can I ask you something?” she enquired delicately. She knew enough about Kara and the Kryptonian attitude toward sex to know that she had to approach this discussion carefully.

Kara hummed into the pillow.

“What was it like the first time you flew?”

After a moment, Kara lifted her head and gazed at her, the crinkle crinkling. Lena could see the moment she made the connection because her brow smoothed. “Clumsy. Kind of terrifying, actually.”

“What about learning to ride a bike?”

Kara rubbed the back of her neck as she did her adorable hemming and hawing thing. “Um, I don’t actually know how. I tried a few times, and, well, let’s just say that bikes and I are better off apart. Far apart. Really, everyone is better off without me on a bike.”

“Right.” She would definitely need to get that story from Alex at some point. “But do you see my point? Sex is like anything else. It takes practice to learn what you and your partner like, how you fit. But with a little time and patience, and a whole lot of communication, it gets better. I promise.”

“But I totally don’t know what I’m doing. Aren’t you getting bored with having a clueless wonder in your bed?”

“I wouldn’t call you clueless in the least. Inexperienced, yes, but experience isn’t everything. It’s like music—someone can be technically proficient and yet lack passion. But you, my sweet, more than make up for your lack of experience with passion. You are probably the least selfish person I have ever been with. And with a little time and practice, you’ll feel more comfortable and less self-conscious about being on the receiving end, too.”

Kara shook her head, and Lena could see the crinkle reforming. Obviously they couldn’t have that. This was their idyll, their chance to be themselves away from everything that sought to break them apart. She leaned over and kissed Kara, who rolled onto her side and returned the pressure, hesitantly at first and then more enthusiastically.

Lena placed her hand on Kara’s waist, feeling her tense up slightly. She sucked on Kara’s tongue, focusing all of her attention on the kiss. After a little while, Kara relaxed against her, remaining so until Lena slipped one leg between hers. Almost immediately Kara stiffened. Lena kissed her until she was once again calm and pliant, and then she pulled away.

“It seems like you might be having a hard time relaxing,” she said softly, smoothing her thumb against Kara’s cheek. Her skin was silkier than the high thread count sheets they were currently
tangled in.

“I know. I’m really sorry.”

“You don’t have to be sorry,” Lena chided. “But you do have to be honest with me. Is this too much? Are we going too fast?”

“No! No, I swear, I wouldn’t have invited you here if I didn’t want to be with you like this.”

Lena believed her. Not only was Kara not very good at lying, there wasn’t any reason for her to lie about this. “Then what is it? Do you even know? Or do you need some time and space to figure it out?”

Kara sighed. “No, I know. I was sort of hoping I wouldn’t have to tell you, but obviously that’s not working.”

She sounded so uncharacteristically downcast that Lena held her breath. Had she been assaulted at some point? But no, she was Supergirl. Unless it had happened on Krypton? Or maybe she was asexual and just hadn’t wanted to tell her for fear of losing her. Honestly, Lena wasn’t sure what she would do if that were the case. She loved Kara, but she loved sex, too. How would that even work?

“Look. I’m having a hard time letting go because I’m afraid I’m going to hurt you.”

Lena blinked. “Oh. Okay. Well, that’s a pretty common concern. I worry about hurting you, too.”

“No—” She made a frustrated noise. “Not like that. Not in any human way.”

Lena frowned. “All right. In what way, then?”

Kara closed her eyes. “Like, in the moment. My moment. I’m afraid I might lose control and accidentally break your hand. Or worse.”

And that, Lena could admit, hadn’t occurred to her. “Could that actually happen?”

Kara’s eyes snapped open. “I break things all the time without meaning to. Do you know how many phones I went through as Cat Grant’s assistant? Human bones are more fragile than you think. I have to be so careful with the criminals I bring in. If I lose focus for even a second, someone could get really hurt.”

“Is that why you’ve never slept with anyone?” Lena asked. She pictured a young Kara holding herself away from anyone who showed interest, setting aside her own potential happiness in order to protect the people around her.

She nodded. “Chris was the perfect boyfriend because he didn’t want to have sex with me, so I didn’t ever have to worry about hurting him. And I still managed to break his nose once, just by kissing him too hard.”

“Okay.” Lena nodded, thinking quickly. “I’m going to ask you something personal. Is that okay?”

Kara stared at her. “I’m in bed with you naked and you just had your fingers inside me. What could possibly be more personal?”

She smiled a little. “Have you ever masturbated?”

“Oh.” Kara buried her face in the pillow and said, her voice muffled, “More personal, check.”
Lena tried not to laugh, but it was impossible faced with the adorable idiot in front of her. She kissed Kara’s shoulder, feeling her shake with laughter in return. “Well, have you?”

“Yes, Lena, I have gotten myself off. Quite a bit in fact, especially of late.”

With a little cajoling and a lot of kissing, Lena managed to extract from Kara her favorite method of self-stimulation—lying on her stomach and rubbing against her own hand, sometimes with penetration and sometimes not.

“So, never on your back?”

“No really. I have a hard time, you know, finishing if I’m on my back.”

While it wasn’t unexpected that Supergirl would meet the exact definition of a top, it was a tad surprising to think of Kara Danvers as one. As a reward for her honesty, Lena kissed her deeply and dragged Kara’s hand up to her breast, smirking as she felt Kara’s sharp intake of breath. Then Kara pushed her onto her back and held her arms above her head as she had her way with her again, and Lena forgot about anything other than Kara’s insistent lips and faster-than-human fingers. She was a lucky woman, indeed.

When Lena came back down, Kara was still flushed and breathing hard, as worked up as she’d ever been during their make-out sessions. Lena reached out and traced her jaw with her thumb, and then murmured, “Would it be okay if I tried again?”

Kara nodded without hesitation, eyes wide and unblinking.

They kissed, and Lena licked into Kara’s mouth, swallowing her moan as she maneuvered her onto her back. She took her time exploring Kara’s lips and tongue as her hands drifted downward. Slowly she rubbed her thumb in teasing circles around Kara’s nipples, applying the tiniest bit of pressure to the stiffening skin as she kissed her way along Kara’s jaw. Kara was still tense, but not nearly as nervous as the first time, so Lena sucked and bit her way down Kara’s neck to her collarbone.

“You are so beautiful,” she said, gazing up at Kara.

“So are you.” She smiled a little, and Lena felt her relax even more.

Encouraged, she lowered her mouth to Kara’s breast and bit gently at the dimpled flesh, smiling as she felt Kara’s hips jump and roll beneath her. As she slathered the small, taut breasts with attention, alternating lips and teeth with thumb and palm, she slipped her leg between Kara’s and pressed, barely able to contain her own moan as she felt the wetness pooling on her thigh. Kara wanted her, that much was certain. They just needed to figure out a position that worked.

When they had reached the point where Kara was groaning and clutching at Lena’s hair, fingers clenching and unclenching in an obvious bid for control, Lena slid back up her body and murmured in her ear, “Roll over.”

“You mean…?” Kara asked, her voice rasping.

“On your belly,” Lena confirmed, shifting onto her side to give her room.

Kara licked her lips and then complied, turning her head so that she could see Lena.

“Doing okay?” Lena asked.

She waited until Kara nodded. Then she ran her hand down Kara’s spine and over the firm curve of
her ass, pausing to cup her gently. Kara gasped and closed her eyes, and Lena just barely slipped a finger through her folds, collecting the moisture she found and spreading it around.

“Still okay?”

“Uh-huh,” Kara murmured.

“Good.”

With her near hand, she took Kara’s wrist and pulled it down, tugging it into place so that she could touch herself the way she did when she was alone. Kara’s eyes flew open and she seemed about to protest, but then Lena pressed Kara’s palm against her clit as she feathered her own knuckles over Kara’s opening, and the other woman’s eyes drifted shut again.

“Lena…”

“This way you can let go without having to worry about me.”

Kara hesitated. But then she bit her lip and nodded.

“We can stop at any time,” Lena added, pressing open-mouth kisses along her shoulder. “Just say the word.”

She nodded again, and then gasped as Lena released her wrist and shifted on top of her, pressing her breasts against her back. She hadn’t really intended to, but she couldn’t stop herself from rubbing against her girlfriend’s goddess-like body even as she angled her leg between Kara’s. Slowly she began to pump into her, using her thigh to control the motion.

“Holy shit,” Kara murmured, and then Lena felt her grind into her palm, tentatively at first but then harder as she seemed to realize she really couldn’t possibly do any damage to Lena in this position.

“You okay?” Lena asked again, kissing every inch of skin she could reach.

“So good,” Kara managed.

Responding to her cues, Lena began to push into her a little deeper, her finger now fully coated with Kara’s hot wetness.

“More,” Kara panted, her hips moving faster.

“Another finger?” Lena clarified, trying to maintain her focus on Kara’s pleasure even as she felt her own control slipping.

“Yes. And harder. Please, Lena…”

The feel of Kara practically frantic beneath her was intoxicating. Lena slipped a second finger into her as requested, taking a few seconds to let her get used to the sensation before pumping slowly into her. But Kara was having none of her hesitation now. She bucked back against Lena, and it was all she could do to hold herself in place. She ground her thigh down harder, driving her hand deeper as Kara moaned into the pillow, her hands clenched in fists against the mattress.

“Harder,” Kara gasped again, and Lena was a little bit worried until she remembered that this was the Girl of Steel. If anyone could take being fucked hard, it was her.

She redoubled her efforts, biting Kara’s shoulder as she pumped her fingers into her, using her leg to increase the pace and pressure even as she rubbed against Kara’s ass, now slick with her wetness and
their mingled sweat. They moved in rhythm together, and it wasn’t perfect but it was so effing hot, and Lena couldn’t remember ever being turned on as much as she was now as she fucked Kara from behind, the bed creaking beneath them but (so far) holding.

And then, just as Lena didn’t think she could hold off her own orgasm another second, Kara came hard and fast beneath her, shuddering silently through the waves Lena could feel pulsing around her fingers. She let go finally, riding Kara for a last few strokes before collapsing against her back, breath stuttering and heart racing as her body slowly, slowly spiraled down for the third time that night.

When she had recovered the power of thought, Lena pressed her cheek against Kara’s smooth skin. She was so still that it almost seemed like she wasn’t breathing. “Are you okay?” Lena asked, carefully extricating her fingers.

Kara didn’t flinch the way most human women did when Lena pulled her fingers out, and she filed this fact away with the others she’d collected that night. She only sighed and stretched, careful not to dislodge Lena from her back. “No, I’m not okay.”

Fuck. Lena levered herself off Kara and to one side, trying to see her face. Had it been too much, too fast? Had she hurt her after all?

“Hey,” Kara said quickly, turning over and pulling Lena close, “I didn’t mean it like that. I just meant, well... you’ve ruined me for future sexual experiences, that’s all.”

Lena tilted her head, a smile beginning to form. “Is that so, Miss Danvers?”

Kara quirked an eyebrow at her. “It is indeed, Miss Luthor.” She shook her head, and her voice grew softer. “Thank you. I couldn’t have—I never—just, thank you.”

“You’re welcome, but you really don't have to thank me.” She leaned up and kissed Kara’s cheek, her hair forming a dark curtain around them. She almost said the waiting words then, she really did. But somehow she thought Kara might react better if they weren’t curled around each other in post-coital bliss. So instead she said, “I’m glad your second time wasn’t terrible, at least.”

“Far from it,” Kara said, and pulled Lena against her side. “Is it okay if we go to sleep now?”

“Of course.”

“Even if we don’t brush our teeth?”

“I think our teeth will survive one night without fluoride, Kara.”

“Good,” she said, practically purring as she kissed Lena’s hair.

Lena pulled the covers up over their shoulders because even though Kara ran hot and wouldn’t get cold no matter how low the temperature dropped, she was only human.

She was almost asleep when she thought she heard it: “I love you, Lena.” But in the morning when she awoke to an empty bed and the smell of coffee and bacon drifting through the strange house, the unfamiliar landscape outside hidden under a covering of fresh snow, she had to wonder if maybe, after all, she had only imagined the whispered confession.
Um, okay, *blushing* over here. I hope that was okay, friends!
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

In which the honeymoon period commences on Earth-1.

Chapter Notes

Hi all. Sorry for the slight delay. I took time out to redo some plotting, and it looks like this story is going to go closer to 30 chapters, which is significantly longer than the original 90K I estimated. Sorry/you’re welcome, depending on how you feel about that news. Anyway, happy reading!

Kara sipped her coffee and stared out the window above the sink. Overnight the outside world had turned into a winter wonderland, sunlight sparkling off new-fallen snow, each flake a separate and distinct crystalline work of art that she could see if she focused her super-vision narrowly enough. She loved snow, even if she didn’t see it very often in Southern California. The fact that at some point last night the clouds had moved in, deposited their perfect, tiny creations, and then moved on to allow the sun to show their work at its best felt like it was just for her. She had awakened this morning feeling changed, lighter somehow, and looked outside to find the world similarly transformed.

“The snow may never fall till after sundown,” she sang softly, altering the iconic lyrics to fit her own purposes. “By eight the morning fog must disappear. In short, there’s simply not a more congenial spot for happ’ly-everaftering…”

Her voice seemed loud in the quiet house, and she let her words trail off. When she’d first crept out of the bedroom, careful not to wake Lena, she’d been stunned by the silence blanketing the property. It reminded her of the Fortress of Solitude, except that here beneath the mantle of snow she detected the fast, faint heartbeats of birds, rabbits, mice, and other rodents. She could also hear the flutter of wings as cardinals and other winter birds flitted from tree to tree; the occasional thud of snow dropping from the edge of the roof or a nearby tree branch; the creak of ice that had formed overnight at the edge of the lake.

Another pair of heartbeats caught her attention, and she aimed her X-ray vision around the bend in the lake to where the caretaker was moving about his cabin, feeding logs into a wood stove as a black and white dog paced at his heels. What would it be like to live this far from everyone and everything with only an animal as company? She had spent her entire life among people. Even in her studio in National City she was surrounded by a city’s worth of humanity whose lives she could tap into anytime she felt lonely. Although, honestly, listening in on other people’s conversations usually only made her feel more alone, a sensation she instinctually avoided.

Before finding her own place in National City, she’d lived with Alex practically ever since she’d arrived on Earth. True, Alex hadn’t always wanted her around, but even in the old days when Kara embarrassed her without meaning to—without even trying—she’d known Alex had her back, as
humans put it. Maybe that was why Kara wanted to call her now, to share how amazing Lena was and how incredible she’d made her feel. Alex had long worried about her self-imposed celibacy. She didn’t say she thought Kara _should_ have a boyfriend; after all, her experiences on that front hadn’t been especially notable. But she’d made it clear that she worried Kara was holding herself apart from anyone who might care about her as a form of penance—which, Alex had insisted, she most definitely did _not_ owe the people of Krypton.

“Are you sure you’re not isolating yourself out of survivor’s guilt?” she’d asked after Kara broke things off with Adam the previous year.

“Of course not,” Kara had replied as she’d jammed yet another piece of pizza into her mouth. She wasn’t. At least, she was pretty sure she wasn’t.

Months later, when Kara told her what had happened with James, Alex had hugged her and whispered, “You don’t have to be alone forever, you know. Your parents would want you to be happy.”

She wondered now if her parents would want her to be happy with Lena Luthor. Would they approve of her relationship with a human woman? The sister of the man who’d tried to kill their nephew? The daughter of a woman who wanted to drive all aliens from Earth? Then again, they could probably empathize with Lillian Luthor’s goals, perhaps even her methods.

Ultimately, it didn’t matter what her parents would have thought because they weren’t here. Not that that fact had ever kept her from trying to live up to what she imagined their expectations might be.

She was so focused on the world outside the house that the arms that appeared around her waist were more than a bit startling. Only years of training kept her from flinging the person they belonged to across the room.

“It snowed,” Lena said, her voice slightly raspy.

“It did,” Kara confirmed, leaning back just a little into her warmth.

“I swear it’s like Camelot. You know, it only rains after sundown.”

Kara laughed a little. “You know Camelot?”

“Of course. I was a total musical theater nerd at Deerfield. I only joined choir because of Bea, but I would have continued with it even if she’d graduated early to become a pop star like she was always threatening.”

And Kara could only shake her head because seriously, was there nothing Lena Luthor couldn’t do?

“Good morning,” her girlfriend added more softly, pushing aside her messy ponytail to kiss the back of her neck.

“Good morning.” Kara turned and smiled as she rested her arms on Lena’s shoulders. Her dark hair was tousled and loose, and she was dressed in sweat pants and a faded MIT T-shirt. Clearly she’d found the bags that Kara had set in their room earlier.

“I missed you when I woke up,” Lena said.

“Sorry—I just wanted to let you sleep in. You don’t get to very often.”

“True. In that case, thanks.” She paused. “Couldn’t you sleep?”
“Nope. Stupid metabolism. I wish a certain amazingly brilliant scientist would develop a delayed-release type of food.” She nudged Lena meaningfully.

“As much as a certain brilliant scientist might want to pursue such a project,” Lena said, shrugging apologetically, “the reality is that with only you and Superman as potential consumers, it wouldn’t be likely to yield positive marginal values.”

“Sometimes I forget that you’re a business genius, too.”

“Pretty sure my board members and investors would disagree with that assessment.”

“Only because they’re complete and utter idiots.”

Lena smiled. “Did you ever consider you might be biased?”

“Absolutely.”

And then, unable to resist Lena’s smile, she lowered her head and kissed her. She tasted of toothpaste, and the blend of coffee and mint made Kara deepen the kiss, licking into Lena’s mouth the way she’d learned the other woman liked during their many make-out sessions.

After a moment, Lena pulled away and drew in a breath. “Okay, I think I need nourishment before we start round two.”

Kara felt her face warm. “Oh, no, I mean, I wasn’t trying to…”

“No?” Lena winked at her and headed for the refrigerator. “Pity. I was.”

Unbidden, memories of the previous night came back to her: Lena moaning and tugging at her hair as she lavished her breasts with attention; the feel of her, hot and wet, as Kara slowly pushed two fingers into her; the speed with which Lena had come the first time, arched against her and murmuring her name. Kara hadn’t realized it was possible to bring a woman nearly to orgasm merely by sucking and kissing her breasts. She was pretty sure that would never work for her. Then again, maybe Lena would surprise her. She had certainly managed to do so the night before.

“How are you this morning, anyway, other than in dire need of sustenance?” Lena asked, her head in the refrigerator.

“Good,” she all but croaked as a particularly vivid memory of Lena draped over her back set up residence in her mind, complete with sound, scent, and other unmentionable sensations. She squeezed her legs together, trying to relieve the sudden ache blooming there. What was wrong with her? One admittedly incredible orgasm with another person and suddenly she was a sex addict? Or maybe she was just a Lena addict. That seemed entirely possible.

Lena let the door swing shut and eyed her with a predatory gleam. “Really?” she asked, her voice low and suggestive.

“Um, yes?” Kara cleared her throat quickly. “Although I feel like I should thank you again.”

“I already told you, you don’t have to thank me.”

“Oh,” she said with a flirty wink she couldn’t quite believe she managed to pull off, “but I do.”

Lena laughed. “In that case, you’re welcome. Again. So is there any food left, or did you finish it all?”
“Excuse you! There’s a plate warming in the oven, although now I’m not so sure you deserve it.”

“I take it back!” Lena said, flashing her widest smile.

Apparently, Kara reflected, it was indeed possible to lose one’s breath from a single look. Even for a Kryptonian.

Lena pulled the plate of pancakes and bacon from the oven, set it on the nearby island, and pulled up a stool. “Smart, sexy, and a good cook?” she commented, looking up at Kara from beneath her lashes. “Be still my beating heart.”

Kara perched on a stool facing her and nudged a fork and napkin across the island. “Alex would disagree with you on several counts. But yes, in general I am proficient in breakfast food preparation, especially where Bisquick is involved. That’s probably why I end up eating breakfast for dinner so often, especially at the end of the month when my food budget is, um, compromised.”

“Does the DEO not pay enough to keep you fed?” Lena asked, pouring a liberal amount of real maple syrup over her short stack.

“In theory they do. But you may have noticed I have a tiny, little, very minor weak spot when it comes to take-out…”

“I may have noticed. I guess you’ll just have to have dinner at my place more often in the future.”

“Really?” Kara asked, feeling a thrill of excitement at the thought that Lena wanted this, them, to continue into the unspecified future.

“Really. We can’t have National City’s hero going hungry, now can we?” she asked, lifting a lazy eyebrow.

“Right. Of course not.”

As Lena busied herself with an impressively large bite, Kara sipped her coffee and gazed at the woman before her. She was make-up free, her hair almost shockingly unruly—was this what the term sex head meant?—and there were holes in her T-shirt. She looked about as far from her intimidating CEO persona as one could get. Which woman was the real Lena Luthor? But then Kara realized that was like asking which was the real Kara Zor-El Danvers—a problematic question that relied on a false binary. She was herself, and sometimes she felt more like a Kryptonian and sometimes more like a Danvers.

Now, though, she wasn’t thinking about who she was or where she came from. Now, at this moment, she was enjoying the sight of Lena Luthor eating the pancakes and bacon she’d made for her, the peace of the outside world muffled in snow, the sense of freedom at being far from everyone and everything.

The lyrics to “The Story of Tonight” from Hamilton popped into her head: “Raise a glass to freedom, something they can never take away.” Here, in Oliver's house on this alternate Earth, there were no cries for help pulling her in multiple directions. There was no need to hide her identity to protect her family or friends. She could simply be herself here, and so could Lena.

At that moment, it was hard to imagine ever wanting to go back.

“Not bad,” Lena commented. Then she paused, smirking. “For an off-worlder.”

Kara almost spewed out her coffee because, honestly, a Luthor teasing a Super about being an alien
The day stretched ahead of them—as many days as they wanted, actually—with no threat of interruption. It was an astonishing realization, one that Kara almost didn’t trust fully. There was always something on the verge of drawing her away from CatCo, from game night, from Lena.

Still… “Dude, we can do whatever we want,” she announced as they cleaned up the breakfast dishes together, her washing, Lena drying.

“Dude, no kidding!”

“I’m serious. Do you know how long it’s been since I had nothing to do?”

“Since before you came out as Supergirl?”

Well, more like since the last time she’d had to spend a few days under the sunlamps recovering from some near-calamity or the other. But no need to bring down the mood with such an admission.

“What about you? When’s the last time you had a vacation?”

“Before Lex was arrested,” Lena admitted, turning away to stow the frying pan a cupboard.

Another topic to avoid. They certainly seemed to have more of those than the average newly-together couple.

“Right.” Kara pursed her lips. “So, what do you want to do first?”

“You,” Lena said, returning to place her hands on Kara’s hips and breathe hotly against her lips. And just like that, Kara felt another wave of arousal rush through her already sensitive body. Momentarily she pictured lifting Lena onto the kitchen island, tugging down her sweats, and… But no. This was Oliver’s house. Having sex on exposed eating surfaces would be downright rude. Fortunately there were plenty of other locations to choose from.

“I think that could be arranged,” she said, and lowered her mouth to Lena’s.

They kissed until they were both dizzy from the lack of oxygen, and then Lena led her to the master bathroom where they ended up taking a shower together in the largest steam shower Kara had ever seen. With tiled walls, dual shower heads, and a gray boulder that functioned as a seat (which they put to excellent use, Kara seated with Lena straddling her as the steam rose about them, her face pressed into what was fast becoming her favorite place in any world—her girlfriend’s cleavage), the shower in the master bath looked like something out of a CatCo magazine article. They’d considered using the Jacuzzi tub instead, but as Lena gripped her shoulders and rode her fingers, Kara was just as glad they hadn’t taken the extra time to fill the tub.

Still wet (in more ways than one), they stumbled back to the bedroom where Lena paused only long enough to restrain her hair before pushing Kara back onto the bed and crawling on top of her. Again they used the previous night’s approach—Lena on top of her, breast to breast, teasing her mercilessly until she was practically begging before whispering the same command as before: roll over. Kara practically took out her girlfriend in her haste to comply. Soon Lena was pressing into her from behind, and this time, Kara managed to hold off her orgasm longer. With effort, she kept the insistent waves at bay, focusing instead on the sound of Lena’s breath growing more and more ragged; on her heart rate climbing impossibly high as she rubbed against Kara; on her bit-back moans, short and sharp, as her own orgasm overtook her in a series of jerks and gasps.
“Damn it,” Lena huffed a moment later, still lying on top of her all warm and damp and pleasantly heavy, “you were supposed to come first.”

“I win?” Kara managed, her voice strangled. She closed her eyes and shuddered as Lena began to move into her again, harder and faster this time the way she hadn’t known she liked until the night before, and soon she couldn’t help but fall into her own all-encompassing orgasm.

“You win,” Lena agreed smugly, kissing her way up her back.

No wonder humans were all, like, sex-addictive and such. When you were with someone you trusted and who knew what they were doing, it was amazing. So much better than anything she’d ever managed to accomplish on her own, that was for certain.

After another shower—safely on separate ends of the huge enclosure, this time—they finally got dressed and explored the house. Kara’s admiration for the property only grew as they discovered an actual theater room complete with stadium seating, a game room filled with all manner of entertainment, and a server room that rivalled the DEO’s. This last bit, Kara remembered, had been designed with Cisco and Barry in mind. Unsurprisingly, they were huge gaming nerds, just like Winn.

Like Lena too, apparently, Kara realized when her girlfriend jumped in place and clapped her hands. She whispered the words yet again to herself: my girlfriend. She wasn’t used to them yet. Wasn’t sure she ever would be, either.

“Have you played Titanfall 2?” Lena asked, eyes intent on the array of servers and massive screens in the windowless room.

“Um, no? I’ve seen Winn and James play, though,” she added hastily as Lena gave her an incredulous look.

“We are definitely coming back to this,” Lena promised, lingering in the doorway until Kara dragged her off to explore more.

An attached garage almost as big as the house revealed a deck in pieces and an assortment of lake toys stored away for the winter, including several boats of varying sizes. There was also a pair of four-wheelers, which Kara caught Lena gazing at wistfully.

“Don’t tell me you know how to ride those things?”

Lena shrugged. “One of my properties is a sheep farm in Ireland. Four-wheelers kind of come with the territory.”

Kara gaped at her. How had none of her Internet stalking—er, professional research for purely professional purposes—turned up this fascinating tidbit? “An Irish sheep farm? Are you joking?”

“It belonged to my mother’s cousin—my real mother, not Lillian. When he and his wife died, there was no one left to work it. All of the kids had jobs in the city by then. But my mom grew up visiting the farm every summer, and, I don’t know, it sort of felt like the last connection I had to her. So I bought it and leased it out. There’s a lovely family living there now, and I visit every so often to see to repairs and just generally soak up the atmosphere.”

“At which point you ride a four-wheeler.”

“Of course,” Lena said, grinning over her shoulder as she ducked back inside the warm house. “Best way to get around on a farm.”
Kara stood on the garage landing another second, picturing Lena in jeans and flannel traversing the Irish moor—did they call it that in Ireland?—on the back of a four-wheeler, her dark hair flying behind her. How was it that the more she learned about Lena Luthor, the more she wanted to know?

The pièce de resistance of the property, they soon agreed, was not the wood-paneled great room with its massive stone fireplace and rustic exposed beams but rather an outbuilding situated a hundred paces from the patio where they’d landed the night before. Lena hadn’t packed boots, so Kara floated them both over the snowy path to the small, cedar-shake cabin, only releasing her once they were on the covered deck.

“It’s beautiful,” Lena murmured, her voice slightly awed.

“I’ll say.” Kara nodded, taking in the three hot tubs built into the deck, covers still on; the outdoor showers on either end of the building; the hooks built into the outside wall for towels; the benches and Adirondack chairs arranged across the deck; and, lastly, the gorgeous, unimpeded view of the lake and winter sky spread out before them. The sides of the deck that didn’t face the lake were lined with evergreens that provided another layer of privacy to the already secluded estate.

Inside the cabin they found a sauna, coals glowing in one corner of the cedar-paneled room. Felicity had said that the caretaker visited the property daily to make sure it was ready at short notice for any visitors. Obviously he’d been by this morning while they were otherwise occupied. For a moment, that realization gave Kara pause. She hadn’t noticed his arrival or his departure, so wrapped up in Lena had she been. But then again, he’d traveled by foot, judging by the human and canine footprints in the snow, and he hadn’t gotten closer to the house than this. Still, it was a bit disconcerting to realize that when Lena was around, her focus narrowed so completely that sounds that would normally at least garner a corner of her brain’s attention simply didn’t register at all.

Probably she shouldn’t let on as much to Alex.

“Want to come back tonight and watch the moon rise?” Lena asked as they headed back out onto the deck.

“Why, Miss Luthor,” Kara said, turning and wrapping her arms around Lena, whose cheeks were pink from the cold air. “I didn’t know you were such a romantic.”

Lena slipped her arms inside the sheepskin-lined jacket Kara had found in the hall closet, burrowing closer. “Only for you, Miss Danvers. Only for you.”

Her nose was cold too, Kara noted, and her lips—no, those were warm as they hovered over her pulse point teasingly. And Rao, how did she do that? Suddenly Kara wanted her again, the desire a slightly more languid ache this time. Was that even possible? How often did humans have sex, anyway? On Krypton, sex education had centered on practical matters. She had been too young to be matched by the system with a future partner yet. Even though she and her first boyfriend Augo had “dated,” they’d known they would probably end up with other people. He had been bound for the Military Guild and she for the Thinkers Guild, so it was unlikely they would have even stayed in touch. Other than kissing a few times, they’d mostly held hands and watched the sunset together on their dates, which consisted of hiking to the top of Mount Farris outside the city limits or walking on the shore of the Andalean Sea.

Meanwhile, in the last few weeks, Kara realized as Lena nuzzled her neck, she had spent more time kissing Lena than she’d spent kissing all of the other people she’d dated previously, combined. That should shock her, shouldn’t it? The idea of being so close to someone, especially to a defenseless human, should terrify her. Yet somehow it didn’t. Maybe because they were here in the middle of nowhere on an Earth that wasn’t their own, with time and space temporarily paused, she felt relaxed,
unafraid. Happy, even.

Her stomach growled, and Lena laughed, her frame shaking slightly against Kara’s. After a moment, Kara joined her. Apparently no matter what Earth she was on, some things didn’t change.

* * *

They spent the rest of the day eating and playing pool, darts, and Monopoly. Later, Lena taught her how to play chess and, her favorite new game of all, *Titanfall 2*. She was a little bummed about that, to be honest—for so long she’d teased Winn and James for their teenage-boy fixation on video games. Now she realized the attraction. Video games were freaking awesome.

“How did you get so good at this?” Kara asked at one point.

“You didn’t think I was actually working all those late nights at L Corp, did you?” Lena asked, looking away from the screen just long enough to spare her a curious glance.

“Wait. What?”

“I was an R&D nerd long before I started following in my father’s footsteps, Kara. My old team had some epic network battles back in LA, and after I moved, we set up semi-weekly game nights, since you don’t have to be on the same network to play most games these days.” Suddenly an armed, mechanized spider appeared onscreen, and her eyes sharpened. She leaned forward, working the player controls furiously. “Not on my watch, bucko!” And then she cackled evilly as the spider robot exploded.

Kara blinked, trying to decide if she was horrified by Lena’s momentary resemblance to certain notorious members of her adoptive family or simply turned on by her fierce badassery. Really, she decided, it was a toss-up.

She shook her head. “No wonder Winn loves you.”

“Winn loves me?” Her face softened for another split second before the angry warrior look returned.

“How could anyone not?” Kara asked, watching Lena out of the corner of her eye to see if her expression changed. But it didn’t. Maybe she really had been asleep when Kara let that particular trio of words slip out. All day she’d been waiting to see if Lena would bring it up, but she hadn’t, and now Kara wasn’t sure whether she should be relieved or worried.

After an early dinner—“‘Let’s call it ‘first dinner,’ shall we?’ Lena said teasingly—they undressed and pulled on fluffy bathrobes, and then Kara floated them to the spa studio, as Lena had christened it. She was big on nomenclature, Kara had noted, which made sense given her scientific training. This was a trait that Kara, who often relied on quantifying the world around her in order to understand it better, could definitely appreciate.

On the deck, she pulled back the covers on all three hot tubs and they tested the temperature—two were hot and one was lukewarm. They chose the medium warm tub so that Lena wouldn’t get too hot, and then took turns disrobing and stepping down the stone steps into the slate-tiled tub. Kara knew it was silly to be shy in front of a woman she’d had sex with twice in the past twenty-four hours, but she couldn’t help being grateful that the jets obscured her body as she settled on a bench that ran the length of one side. Lena seemed less self-conscious as she descended into the tub and took a seat just out of reach, and really, Kara thought, why would anyone with breasts like hers ever feel unsure of herself?

*A boob man*, she realized. Supergirl was a total boob man. Who would have thunk?
Night had long since fallen, but stars and the waxing moon were out again. Lena pointed out the Milky Way, and then asked, “Where would Krypton be?”

“There.” Kara indicated the spot she had located the night before while flying across the cold, moonlit sky. “If it still exists in this part of the multiverse, Krypton is 27.1 light-years from Earth in the southern constellation Corvus.”

“The Crow?”

“Exactly.” She smiled sideways at Lena, noticing how pretty she looked under the lights against the black and white landscape and the warm, brown wood of the deck. “I actually… I’ve always wanted a tattoo of the Crow, to remind me where I come from.”

“Crows are fascinating,” Lena said. “Did you know that some crow species are capable of not only tool use but also tool construction? They actually have an encephalization quotient equal to some non-human primates.”

“Which is why they’re considered to be among Earth’s most intelligent animals,” Kara recited. She remembered the hummingbird factoid Lena had offered up at their first date and tilted her head to one side. “Why do you know so much about birds?”

“I don’t know. I’ve always been fascinated by them, ever since I can remember. They’re just so free, you know? They can simply fly off anytime they wish…” She stopped and glanced at Kara. “Sorry. Sometimes I forget you can do that, too.”

Kara wanted to tell her that it was more than okay that she forgot she could fly because maybe that meant Lena didn’t always see her as an alien; maybe Lena sometimes saw her for who she was rather than what she was. But instead she just hummed softly and watched the breeze ripple across the surface of the lake.

“The snow makes it finally feel like Christmas,” Lena commented a little while later.

“I know. I can’t believe it’s only a few weeks away.” She paused, wondering if she should ask Lena about her plans. Was it too early in their relationship to invite her home to Midvale for the holidays? Aargh. It would have been really useful to have a bit more experience on the relationship front right about now.

“What was winter on the East Coast like?” she asked, chickening out as she was wont to do.

“Cold. And not just the weather. People in New England have a well-deserved reputation for standoffishness. I definitely prefer the West Coast.”

“At least you got away for a little while. I’ve never lived anywhere else.”

“Except, you know, another planet.”

“Right.” She smiled a little, cupping the swirling water between them.

“You must have traveled, though. My flight couldn’t have been your first time going to New York.”

“It wasn’t,” Kara conceded. “But day trips—or night trips, as the case may be—aren’t really traveling, I don’t think. I’ve never spent a night at a hotel in my life. The only time I don’t sleep in my own bed is when I get stuck at the DEO.” A memory popped into her mind. “Except once. My first winter here, the Danvers took me to Lake Tahoe during winter break. We had such a good week. It was the first time I thought I might be okay, you know, after everything.”
Lena drifted closer and reached for her hand. “Did you ever go back? As a family, I mean?”

She shook her head. “No. After Jeremiah disappeared, Eliza just…” She trailed off. She’d occasionally gone back to Tahoe on her own, trying to recreate the sense of belonging that had been missing since he’d “died,” but it had never felt the same. Jeremiah was a crucial member of the Danvers family, and without him, nothing had ever seemed quite right.

If she had felt that after such a short time in the family, she could only imagine how Alex and Eliza must have felt. The old guilt began to rise, and she pushed it down with difficulty. It wasn’t her fault Jeremiah had disappeared. It wasn’t, it wasn’t…

Silence fell over the deck again, and Kara sighed, leaning back against the rough stone wall of the tub. Even here it was impossible to escape the past completely.

“So, Jeremiah,” Lena said, squeezing her hand. “Cadmus has him, huh?”

Kara didn’t bother asking how she knew. “Yeah.”

“And he didn’t willingly join them?”

“No.” Kara turned her head slightly, eyes narrowed.

“I’m sorry,” Lena said, holding her gaze. “I just, I don’t know. It’s been almost ten years, Kara. That’s a long time to be held against your will.”

It wasn’t like she hadn’t thought the same thing. But to hear someone else say it, someone from outside the family, someone whose last name was Luthor… She stopped herself. That wasn’t fair. They couldn’t afford to think in polarizing terms like that. Otherwise, this thing between them would never work. And she wanted it to work. She really, really did.

“I know how it looks, Lena, but I can’t give up on him. I just, I can’t.”

Lena stroked her hand. “I know,” she said softly, leaning her chin on Kara’s shoulder. “And you don’t have to. You know it’s one of the things I love about you—your faith in other people no matter what.”

One of the things she loved? It wasn’t quite the confession she was hoping for, but Kara would take it.

The conversation shifted then. Lena asked what it was like to go to Stanford (without taking a pot shot against the West Coast school), and Kara told her things she had never told anyone, not even Alex. Especially not Alex, who would have worried and tried to make everything better even though nothing could be done to remedy Kara’s legitimate sense of difference. Lena, though, she could tell about waking up in mid-air and crashing to the floor night after night, almost overwhelmed by disappointment each time she realized she was still on Earth. She could tell her about all the times she’d messed up in seemingly small ways—“Oh, you mean like telling someone you flew to their office on a bus?” Lena teased, and she nodded. Exactly like that.

She could even tell her about the literature class when the guided discussion got out of control and the anti-alien and pro-alien contingents nearly came to blows while she slid lower in her seat and tried to focus her hearing on another class, on a group of students playing Frisbee on the quad, on anything at all that might distract her from the reality of having her rights and the morality of her presence on Earth debated right effing in front of her.

Lena listened, her eyes soft and slightly haunted, tightening her grip on her hand when Kara fell
silent. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry that happened to you. Thank you for telling me.”

And it was amazing to open up, she discovered. Incredible to be listened to, to be seen by someone other than her sister who didn’t judge her for being different, who accepted her for who she was and where she came from. All at once Kara understood what Alex had been trying to tell her all these years—that keeping herself separate from everyone else didn’t prove how strong she was. It only made her lonely. A feeling that Lena, she knew, had more than passing experience with.

“What about you?” she asked. “What was it like to be sent off to prep school when you were so young?”

“Oh,” Lena said, her brow furrowing slightly. “Actually, it was my idea. Beatrice was going—her father’s a legacy, like three generations’ worth—so when she got ready to leave for Massachusetts, I asked Lillian and Lionel if I could go too. They agreed readily enough. Lillian was more than happy to see me off. Lionel less so, I think, but he told me he knew I would be happier there. I didn’t understand at the time, but I think he could see where Lex was headed.”

“So Bea’s family is from the East Coast?”

“Her father’s family. Her mom is French Vietnamese and grew up in Paris. They met at the Sorbonne when Bea’s father was doing a post-grad year in politics. He was some sort of foreign investment banker. He wasn’t around much.”

“French Vietnamese,” Kara repeated. “That makes so much sense!”

“Doesn’t it?”

“She must have been happy to have you with her in Massachusetts.”

“I think we both were. She’s an only child, and she’s always felt like more of a sibling than Lex.”

“Did you like Deerfield?”

“I did. It was a relief to be away from that house. And also, I loved living at a school where the teachers and administrators genuinely cared about us. I learned so much there. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve come to recognize what an amazing opportunity it was. At the time, though, I think I was more just enthralled with the idea of being on the opposite side of the country from Lillian.”

“Was she really that bad?” Kara asked, and then wondered why she sounded so surprised. The woman had literally tortured her and tried to kill every other alien in National City. She wouldn’t have stopped there, either, given the chance.

“Yes,” Lena said shortly, and it was Kara’s turn to squeeze her hand. At the pressure, she took an audible breath and closed her eyes, and soon a small smile graced her lovely lips. “I’ve always tried to remember how lucky I am that at least I knew happiness before going to live with Lionel and Lillian.”

“You mean with your real mom?” Kara asked, remembering how Lena had told her that Lionel may or may not have been her biological father.

“Yes,” she repeated, her voice warmer now. “Looking back, those few years with her taught me that love was warm smiles and open hands and absolute kindness. The Luthors tried to teach me a different kind of love, one based on performance and transactions, on ideology and the politics of difference. But I was never much of a disciple. I’ve always seen the world more in gray than in black and white, and in their view, ‘the cause’ leaves little room for gray.”
“They do seem a bit… fanatic,” Kara admitted carefully, remembering how her own walls had shot up without her meaning them to the second Lena questioned Jeremiah’s motives.

“You think?” She exhaled a long, slow breath. “I’m just so sorry for what they’ve done. For the people they’ve killed, the families they’ve destroyed. For the grief they’ve caused you and your cousin, too.”

“You don’t have to apologize, Lena. I told you before, you haven’t done anything wrong.”

“It’s hard not to feel tainted by the things your family does, though. Especially when everyone looks at you like they’re waiting for that same violence to suddenly manifest in you, too.”

“I know what you mean,” Kara said.

But did she really understand? No one had ever accused her of being capable of mass murder, although after the Red K incident she had definitely met her share of terrified citizens. But their fears were justified, given that she had become the sort of threat that had driven Lex and Lillian to extremism. The out-of-control alien force that even Lena, by her own admission, sometimes worried about.

Was that worry why Kara didn’t want to tell her about her own family’s connection to the Medusa virus? Then again, did she even need to tell her? After all, she had read the files on the DEO mainframe. Probably she knew as much as Kara did about the virus’s genesis.

She closed her eyes, trying to push down the anxiety suddenly rising in her mind. She just wanted a break from everything. Was that too much to ask? But even as the question flashed through her mind, she could almost hear J’onn intoning one of his nuggets of Earthly wisdom: No matter where you go, Kara, there you are.

Thanks a lot, Confucius. Really helpful there.

“You okay?” Lena murmured, her body warm and solid on the stone bench beside her.

“No,” she admitted without thinking. It was true, but she hadn’t meant to tell Lena. This was their chance to escape, to be happy together away from the dangerous reality they faced on a daily basis. But just because they had left Earth-38 didn’t mean they hadn’t brought it with them.

Apparently Lena realized that too, because her kiss was sad. At least, for the first few seconds. Then Kara pushed into the center of the tub, carrying Lena with her, and the kiss became what most of their kisses seemed to become—needy, hungry, a tad desperate. And Kara found herself thinking that if Lena Luthor really was going to be the death of her, at least it would be a sweet death.

The sweetest, in all probability.
The next couple of days passed in a haze of sex and gaming, with the occasional healthy activity thrown in. They soaked in the hot tub on the deck each night, where Kara continued to reveal bits and pieces of her past no one else had seen. Like how she used to wish she could be human until she blew out her powers just in time for the earthquake that struck National City the previous year, and now she never, ever wanted to be without her powers again. Or how she used to fly up to the very top of the stratosphere and stare up at the stars, wondering if there was any place in the universe that might feel more like home. With borrowed boots and other snow gear from the front closet, they took snowy walks on a trail that wound beneath stately evergreens perched on the shore of the lake. During one such trek, Lena admitted she wanted to visit every single national park in America before she died, so they made plans to go to the Redwoods, the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Zion, Yosemite—even if they had to come to this dimension to do it. Maybe, Kara thought, they would even get the chance someday.

Between meals they played strip pool, strip darts, strip poker—really, anything that would get them naked. Lena started calling their time away a “sexcation,” which Kara had to agree was accurate. They made out (among other things) for hours in the in-room Jacuzzi tub, in their king-sized bed, before the fire in the great room. It was like a drug Kara couldn’t get enough of—which Lena explained was an apt description given the impact of orgasms and endorphins on brain chemistry. When they weren’t naked or preparing food or slouched in front of computers trying to deliver tricky payloads, they were talking endlessly, sharing stories of their lives before they met, before they became Danvers or Luthors, before assorted educational and work experiences molded them into the adults they now considered themselves to be. As fond as she was of verbal communication (according to her sister), Kara was sure she had never spoken to anyone she wasn’t related to this much in her life. On Earth, anyway.

When she told Lena this midway through day two, her girlfriend laughed. “Welcome to your first woman-loving-woman relationship, macushla. Oversharing and oral sex are kind of the hallmarks of lesbian love.”

Kara blushed because she still wasn’t quite ready for the whole mouth-on-genitals thing, though she thought she could picture someday trying it. “Ma-what now?”

“Macushla. It’s an Irish term of endearment.”

“Aww.” Suddenly Kara sat up on the great room couch, clapping her hands together. “Wait, does this mean we’re in the part of the relationship where we get to have pet names?”

Lena laughed again and set her Kindle on her lap. “Yes, Kara, we can have pet names. Am I sensing you have a specific one in mind?”
“Maybe.” Kara paused, intending to build the suspense. But she couldn’t really wait, so she blurted, “Dumpling!”

“Dumpling?” Lena bit her lip, but not in the sexy way Kara was accustomed to.

“What? Don’t you like it?”

“No, of course I do! Don’t pout, sweet girl.”

“You should be honored,” she said, a little grouchily.

“Oh, I am,” Lena replied, giving her a smoldering look that Kara thought might be, though she wasn’t sure, a tad mocking.

Either way, she launched herself on top of Lena, tossing the Kindle to the side as she murmured, “Come to me, my delicious dumpling…”

Lena clearly tried not to laugh, and failed miserably. After a second, Kara joined her. Earthlings. There was no accounting for them.

* * *

On their third morning on Earth-1, while lying in bed between first and second breakfast, Lena told her about a photo of her biological mother that she’d kept in a locket growing up, almost like a talisman to ward off the cold permeating the Luthor household. Whenever she’d felt stripped bare by Lillian’s gaze, or Lex had one of his fits that in hindsight had clearly been precursors of mental illness, she would wrap her hand around the locket, close her eyes, and picture her real mother’s smile. As she grew older, she wasn’t sure if she remembered her actual smile or merely the version captured on film.

Kara could hear the distress in her voice as she admitted this last bit, and said, “Even if you only remember the photo version, it’s still her though, isn’t it?”

“I guess so. I hadn’t really thought of it like that.” Her head tilted. “Do you have anything like that to remember your parents by?”

“Um.” Kara wondered if it was too soon to tell her girlfriend that there were holographic versions of her parents floating around at the DEO and the Fortress of Solitude. Yeah. Probably too soon. “Kind of? I landed with a type of photo album in my pod, except it’s AI-based, and the way you access the content is through a neural connection. Once the connection is established, the chip recreates actual experiences recorded on the device. Like what you would call advanced virtual technology, but deeper, if that makes sense.”

Lena’s eyes were wide. “Are you talking about a neurotransmitter? My lab in LA was doing some work on connectionist systems and artificial neurons, but nothing to the level you’re describing.”

Kara smiled, because of course she should have guessed that her super-nerd girlfriend would grasp the scientific principles underpinning the Kryptonian device. “If you play your cards right, Luthor, I might let you take a peek. It’s in the DEO, though, and Alex would have to vouch for you…”

“So I better not hack the network again or do anything else to piss off your sister?”

“Not pissing off Alex is kind of a life goal in general, isn’t it?”

“Good point,” Lena said, and leaned forward to kiss her for approximately the two hundred fifty-
second time during their “long weekend” away.

Not that Kara was counting.

* * *

“We should go back; we should, right?” they said to each other the following morning. But then again, they reasoned, it had taken a few days to truly unwind from their crazy, dangerous lives. They shouldn’t go back just when the vacation felt like it was getting started, should they?

Of course, there were other circumstances—and people—to consider. When the food finally started to run out, Kara used the land line to check in with Felicity.

“Just wanted to see if maybe we were overstaying our welcome,” Kara told her after exchanging the usual pleasantries.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Felicity said. “It’s not like anyone even knows you’re here. Besides, the house would just be sitting there empty.”

“Are you sure?” Kara turned on the speakerphone so that she could make herself a sandwich with the last of the bread. “Even if we’re not in the way, we can’t exactly pay you back for the food. Which, incidentally, is running out. Maybe we should just go home. We should, shouldn’t we?”

“That depends. Are you having a nice vacation?” Felicity asked, her voice tinny in the high-ceilinged room.

“It’s wonderful,” Kara admitted, smiling dreamily.

“Do you miss home?”

“No,” Lena practically shouted from the great room where she was reading a long-neglected title on her Kindle.

Felicity laughed and said, “Then don’t go. We can always send more food. S.T.A.R. Labs is picking up the tab, so you don’t have to worry about that.”

“But—”

“But nothing. It’s the least we can do after you saved us from a hostile alien invasion purely out of the goodness of your Super heart.”

“You guys paid for our dinner last time. Besides, I only helped with the Dominators.”

“Even if that were true, which it totally isn’t, I’m sure we can spare you the additional vittles,” Felicity said. “We still owe you, anyway. We barely fed you during the whole superhero team-up, in case you’d forgotten.”

While Kara had not forgotten, she didn’t think it would be polite to tell Felicity that.

“Okay,” she said finally. “If you’re sure…”

“I’m sure. Now hit me up with your food order.”

Two hours later, Felicity called back to warn them that Barry would be there in a matter of minutes. They had just enough time to make themselves and the house decent before the doorbell rang. After their days sequestered alone in the woods, it was nice to see another person, Kara had to admit.
Barry helped unload the food, filling them in on Earth-1 gossip as they worked. A new president very few people actually seemed to like or trust had somehow been elected, and most Americans who cared about justice and science (not necessarily in that order) were extremely concerned about the next four years. Kara and Lena were sympathetic but they couldn’t truly empathize, not when their president was a warm, intelligent woman who cared about women, children, and minorities—including off-worlders.

After a quick “snack” and a less quick game of *Titanfall 2*, Barry hugged them and wished them all the best on their interdimensional vacation. Then he sped away, leaving them once again to their own lazy devices.

* * *

Another day went by, with forays into new sexual territory and even more conversation. Over dinner on the fifth night, the discussion drifted to trust issues. Neither trusted easily, they admitted. Lena explained what her childhood had been like in a family that operated within a transactional relationship system, as her old therapist had called it. This meant she had been trained to operate from a tit for tat, favor for a favor perspective. She was still trying to break out of the mold, she told Kara, but she wasn’t always successful.

In turn, Kara explained about her own family’s early betrayals—how her mother had used Kara’s relationship with her aunt to arrest her own sister, who was only trying to save their doomed planet; how her parents had both actively covered up Krypton’s impending destruction for reasons Kara still didn’t fully understand. She thought again about telling her about the Medusa virus, and again she hesitated. But Lena was looking at her across the kitchen island with such an open, encouraging smile, with such obvious caring and warmth that Kara put her fork down, dabbed her mouth with her napkin, and took a breath.

“Remember how I said I know what it’s like to be disillusioned by your parents?”

Lena nodded. “Pretty hard to forget our first fight.”

Kara paused at that. “We had our first fight before we even started dating, didn’t we?”

“Yes, and if you had told me that night that we would end up here, like this…” She shook her head and took a long swallow of wine.

“It still boggles the mind, doesn’t it?”

“Completely. So what parental disappointment were you referring to?”

She blinked, trying to buy time. Why was she so reluctant to tell Lena about the Medusa virus’s genesis? Was it that she didn’t want to betray her parents, or was it that she didn’t want to burden Lena with her sorrow? Another false dichotomy—she could feel both concerns at the same time; they weren’t mutually exclusive.

“I think I’ve mentioned that my father was a scientist,” she finally began, encouraged to continue by Lena’s nod. Throughout her explanation, Lena’s eyes remained focused on hers, her expression attentive and nonjudgmental. When Kara stumbled a bit describing the scene when she confronted her father’s hologram at the Fortress of Solitude, Lena reached across the table and took her hand, thumb rubbing the underside of her wrist gently.

Confessing her family’s shortcomings was uncomfortable and sort of awful, but at the end of it Kara felt lighter somehow, and Lena looked so pleased, smile soft and eyes a bit shinier than before, that
she realized being vulnerable wasn’t the same as being weak, which was how she’d viewed it somewhere in the back of her mind.

“You already knew all of that, didn’t you?” she asked, unsurprised when Lena nodded again.

“I did. It was in the DEO files. But that doesn’t change the fact that you trust me enough to share that part of your history. Thank you, Kara. Seriously.”

She wanted to roll her eyes and deflect, deflect, deflect, but she made herself hold her girlfriend’s gaze. “I do trust you, Lena. I always have, even when other people thought I shouldn’t.”

Lena laughed a little. “I know. I’ve always trusted you too, even when the people around me told me not to.”

“I guess we have that in common.”

“What—stubbornness? Pride? Refusal to listen to the counsel of others?”

“I was going to say the wisdom to listen to our instincts even in the face of overwhelming opposition…”

“Ooh, I like your take better.”

“Well, I like you better, so I guess we’re even.”

“I should have known a Super would be uber-competitive.”

“Says the woman who almost cried when I beat her at pool this morning.”

“You got lucky, and you know it!”

“I’ll say,” Kara said with a slow, Lena Luthor style wink. She was rewarded with an uncommon Lena Luthor blush. Although with all of their bedroom activity, Kara was becoming more and more accustomed to seeing her overheated.

“Eat your dinner,” Lena said, her voice lowering suggestively. “You’re going to need your stamina tonight, Supergirl.”

Speaking of being overheated… Kara shoveled the chicken and rice casserole into her mouth in double-time. She didn’t plan on going to sleep early that night.

A few hours later, as they lay in bed naked and sated, Lena brought the conversation back to Krypton, as she’d been doing all week.

“What were the attitudes like there in terms of sexuality?” she asked. “I’ve heard a little, but not much.”

“You’ve probably heard that Kryptonian culture associates sex with reproduction, right?” When Lena nodded, she continued, “The science guild was the most powerful guild on the planet. Technology on Krypton had advanced to the point where prospective parents could select for the biological traits and intellectual capabilities they wanted in their future offspring.”

“Eugenics,” Lena said, her brow lowering slightly.

“Not just eugenics, but full-on genetic modification. Kryptonian scientists didn’t only have the capacity to select for traits; they actually improved certain systems and eradicated others. They
thought of it as a method of accelerating the natural process of evolution.” She paused and smirked. “I should probably come with a GMO warning label myself, heh heh.”

Lena’s brow was still furrowed. “So your parents…?”

Apparently Lena didn’t appreciate her science humor. Whatever. It was funny. She was funny.

“My parents wanted me to be able to decide for myself between science and the legal field, so my brain is equally balanced between numeric, verbal, spatial, and logical reasoning. That’s not uncommon for children marked for induction into the Thinker Guild.”

“And that’s where you would have ended up? The Thinker Guild?”

“Probably. It was the primary guild of the House of El for tens of thousands of years.”

“Tens of thousands of years?” Lena shook her head. “And here I thought Massachusetts was old because it had been inhabited since the 1600s.”

“Humans really are only just starting out, you know. Anyway,” she added, circling back to Lena’s original question, “the closest comparison to a similar approach to sexuality here is probably the Victorian era—repressed on the surface, and yet beneath the staggering repression, all sorts of impulses and emotions. Not exactly the healthiest of cultures to grow up in, as you might imagine.”

“And then you landed in twenty-first-century America,” Lena said. “Talk about going from one extreme to the other…”

“I know, right? I went from being told not to have sex before marriage to eighth grade in California, where some of my classmates were already hooking up.”

“Only some of them?” As Kara gave her a look, she added, “Boarding school, remember? There were chaperones, but it always felt a little more like Lord of the Flies than Harry Potter.”

“That sounds intense,” Kara said, stroking Lena’s bare arm and feeling the silky hairs shift away from her fingertips almost as if their bodies possessed opposite magnetic polarity.

“It was.” Lena hesitated. “Do you think being a child in such a sex-negative environment contributed to your, er, late blooming tendencies?”

“Likely. But also, when I was younger I had less control over my powers. I didn’t stop growing until my first year of college, so it was dangerous to get too close to anyone—both for the other people and for me.”

Lena nodded. “That makes sense. I can’t imagine what it must have felt like having to grow up hiding who you were.”

Kara considered her girlfriend. “Isn’t being gay a little like that, especially in a homophobic family?”

“Sort of. But when you’re queer, you’re usually less worried about what strangers will think and more concerned about the people who are supposed to love you unconditionally. In your case, you had a family who loved you but it was everyone else you had to worry about.”

“Being from another planet isn’t the only reason I stayed, you know, so long.”

“It’s not?”

“No. I actually used to wonder if I might be asexual.” She paused when Lena made a face. “Hey, it’s
a valid identity!"

“No, of course it is,” Lena said. “I didn’t mean it like that. I just am really glad that you’re not—for selfish reasons, obviously.”

“Oh. Well, yeah, me too.”

She reached out and palmed Lena’s breast, feeling the soft skin respond to her touch, hearing the quickening of Lena’s breath and heart, sensing the immediate spike in her core temperature. Honestly, she was really, really glad that she didn’t have to miss out on this feeling, too.

*             *             *

On the morning of the sixth day, Kara looked out the window over the kitchen sink and realized that the lake had completely frozen over. The ice had been spreading slowly, encroaching on more and more of the water’s surface each day, and now the lake appeared as a wide expanse of ice, dusted white in places from the previous night’s snowfall. It really was like Camelot, Kara thought, smiling as she sipped her coffee.

Their walk that day took them down the path that meandered along the shore. Halfway around the lake, they reached a patch of ice where the snow had been blown away, revealing a dark gray, uneven surface. Lena promptly took off her community gloves, as she referred to them, and dug around at the base of an evergreen until she pulled up a handful of rocks, crowing triumphantly.

“What are you going to do with those?” Kara asked, hands resting in her jacket pockets so that Lena wouldn’t accuse her later of having fingers made from “actual blocks of ice.”

“This,” Lena said, smiling over her shoulder as she stepped closer to the lake and let loose one of the plundered pebbles.

The stone landed with a distinct plink-plink and skittered across the patch of uncovered ice in front of them, the strange noise it made reverberating across the lake and back. Kara winced at the unexpected sound, but it didn’t hurt, exactly. It was just like nothing else she’d ever heard.

“You try,” Lena said, handing her a small rock.

So she did, careful to reign in her super strength, and they laughed as the same strange sounds echoed around them.

“Pretty awesome, right?” Lena asked, cheeks red and hair tucked beneath a wool beanie that Kara was thinking of bringing back to their Earth because she wasn’t prepared not to see Lena in it again.

“You are,” she agreed, and pulled Lena toward her, hugging her close as winter clouds drifted sluggishly overhead.

She almost thought she imagined what came next as Lena kissed the side of her neck and whispered, “I love you too, you know.”

She didn’t say anything, just clutched Lena tighter as a wave of joy swept over her followed almost immediately by a wave of terror of equal or greater amplitude. What was wrong with her? She’d been half-expecting and fully hoping to hear the vow—because that was what it was, really—so why did it feel like it had landed with the force of one of Draga’s punches? She pulled back and stared at Lena, frozen in place. Other than the Danvers, no one else on Earth had ever told her they loved her.

Lena squinted at her. “Kara? Are you okay?”
She shook her head.

“You’re not okay?”

She shook her head again. Why was this so hard? Why was she standing here in this perfect winter wonderland with Lena in front of her, safe and relaxed (although less so by the second), and yet in her head she was picturing Lena in the damaged helicopter, in the park framed by explosions, in the lobby of L Corp about to be struck by the new logo she’d only just had installed? It was like the night she’d introduced Lena to her friends—afterward, she couldn’t seem to stop seeing her in danger, dying, dead.

Pain bloomed in her chest, and she backed away from Lena abruptly, rubbing the front of the sheepskin jacket. It was like a giant fist had seized her lungs and now she couldn’t seem to draw in enough air. She looked around wildly. Had something tracked them to this dimension? Was there a hostile alien or a Cadmus agent lurking around the bend in the trail? But no, they were still alone except for the caretaker, who was currently splitting wood in the clearing beside his cabin half a mile away.

Lena reached for her arm. “Kara, look at me.”

At first she ignored her, but then, reluctantly, she turned her head.

“I think you’re having a panic attack,” Lena said, her voice calm. “Focus on my voice. I’m going to sing and I want you to as well, okay?”

She nodded, dimly aware of her heart racing, of her body trembling as if she had just carried an airplane on her back.

“Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright…”

Kara joined in, her breath gradually regulating as she sang the familiar tune, heartbeat slowing as she stared into Lena’s eyes. By the time they reached the final, “Sleep in heavenly peace,” the fight or flight reaction had faded mostly, along with the irrational sense of fear that had flooded her system.

“Better?” Lena asked, pressing her arm.

She nodded. Embarrassment crept up her throat, hot and cloying. “I’m sorry,” she choked out as the silence enfolded them again.

“You don’t have to—”

“Stop.” Kara cut her off, eyes burning. She didn’t think she could stand to hear Lena say it even one more time. “I can’t—I can’t do this.”

“Kara…”

“Just—” She shook her head and looked across the lake, away from the hurt in Lena’s eyes. “I just need some air. I’ll see you back at the house, okay?”

She was already a foot off the ground, but she hovered restlessly, waiting until she heard her girlfriend’s quiet, resigned, “Okay.”

The ground fell away at a vicious pace as she flung herself into the sky. Normally flying was the one thing guaranteed to remedy (or at least momentarily render moot) whatever had gone wrong in her life. But lately every time she’d flown, Lena had been in her arms, body pressed close, heartbeat
racing in what Lena assured her was good excitement, not terror. *Great.* Even flying felt different—less than—without her.

Snatches of song lyrics flashed in her mind:

> I loved you once in silence
> And misery was all I knew
> Trying so to keep my love from showing
> All the while not knowing you loved me too.

And from another *Camelot* favorite:

> And could I leave you
> Running merrily through the snow?
> Or on a wintry evening
> When you catch the fire’s glow?

What was she doing? Why was she freaking out? Except it wasn’t a mystery. She’d said before she didn’t know what she might do if anything happened to Lena, but that wasn’t exactly the truth. Alex claimed she hadn’t been herself under the influence of Red K, but that wasn’t true, either. She’d been her very worst self, and now here she’d gone and built her life around a frail human who was even more shadowed by death than she was.

She speeded up, pushing herself until she heard it—the reverberating crack off in the distance that meant she had broken the sound barrier. She checked the sky for aircraft and rerouted her path accordingly. Pushing herself even harder, she flew faster and farther than she had in weeks, away from the lake house, away from Lena, away from Central City, away, away, away.

Higher and higher, she climbed steadily until she’d neared the limit of Earth’s atmosphere. Then she stopped and simply floated for a while, gazing toward the Corvus constellation. She tried to find Rao, the red sun of her youth; tried to find Krypton with its rust-colored sands and pale crystalline fortresses; but even her super vision was no match for the light years that separated her from her home planet. Would she go there if she could? It would be like the Black Mercy all over again, except real this time, a potentially permanent solution to a lifetime of never fitting in. This corner of the multiverse was just as tangible as her own, and even if her family on Krypton viewed her as an interloper, a stranger, she could still live there, couldn’t she? Still join the guild she was designed for, take up the specialized work her brain had been tailored to. Couldn’t she?

But even as she imagined a normal life on Krypton under a red sun that didn’t infuse her with super powers, among people who would view her as one of them rather than as an off-world freak, she knew she couldn’t go back. Earth had changed her. Alex and Eliza had changed her. Lena had changed her the most, altering her mitochondria as surely as the radiation from the yellow sun did. Possibly even more radically.

*Lena.*

More *Camelot* lyrics echoed in her mind, because that was the super-efficient method her brain usually chose to reveal epiphanies to her clueless consciousness:

> The way to handle a woman is to love her,
> Simply love her, merely love her,
> Love her, love her.

With one last glance into deep space, Kara turned and began to fly back to Earth, the green and blue
blur of oceans and land masses slowly sharpening into recognizable features and an entire spectrum of colors. As she neared Oliver’s estate, she wasn’t sure how much time had elapsed. Enough for Lena to come back and feed the fire in the great room; enough for her to be cuddled up on the couch under a red tartan blanket, Kindle forgotten in her lap as she stared into the flickering flames.

“Hi,” Kara said, pausing uncertainly in the kitchen doorway.

Lena glanced over her shoulder. Her heart rate speeded up, and Kara could hear her slight intake of breath. But she didn’t say anything, only watched and waited.

“Can I join you?” she asked, reaching to push up glasses that weren’t there.

“Suit yourself.”

She dropped onto the couch a full cushion away from her girlfriend. At least, she hoped she was still her girlfriend. They were still together, weren’t they? Not that Kara would blame her for breaking up with her after… She took a breath to stop the panicky internal ramble. “So.”

“So.”

“That happened,” she tried, unsurprised when Lena gave her a dubious look. “Sorry. I know that sucked.”

“Sucked?” Lena shook her head. “I can honestly say that no one I’ve professed my love to has ever reacted by trying to get as far away from me as humanly possible. Or should I say inhumanly possible?”

Kara looked away, focusing on the fire. Lena had been in love before? But of course she had. She was older and human and had been doing the relationship thing for more than a decade.

The breath Lena released vibrated with frustration. “This is why I waited to say it back, Kara. I thought you weren’t ready, and obviously I was right.”

“You weren’t, though,” she said, turning to meet Lena’s gaze head on. “I am ready.”

“Could have fooled me. Oh, wait. You did.”

Kara frowned. She had never been confident in her ability to judge sarcasm. Did it mean what she thought it did or, in fact, the complete opposite? “Don’t do that.”

Lena’s eyebrow lifted dangerously. “Don’t do what?”

“Tell me I don’t feel what I know I do. I’m perfectly capable of interpreting my own emotions.”

“Says the woman without even a modicum of self-awareness.”

“That’s not fair! Just because I don’t react to something the way you think I should doesn’t mean I’m not self-aware.”

“Right.” Lena threw off the blanket and stood above her, arms folded across her chest. “Because telling someone you love them and then running away when they say it back is clearly a sign of emotional maturity.” The firelight glowed in her hair like a halo, and her eyes were fierce. She had never looked so much like a Luthor as she did in that moment.

Kara could feel the angry energy rolling off her girlfriend, and she took a calming breath, trying to resist the seductive pull of the fight. Lena wasn’t actually angry, she told herself. Mostly she was
hurt, and humans often used anger to cover their pain. Kara had learned this particular lesson from observing Alex over the years, although she hadn’t ever shared that fact with her sister. Somehow she thought being analyzed would only make Alex angrier. Or more hurt. Or some other human emotion that Kara hadn’t quite got the hang of yet.

But this she could handle. She hoped.

She stayed seated and opened her arms slightly, adopting a non-threatening pose. De-escalate, she reminded herself. When she first started working with the DEO, J’onn had taught a three-day workshop on best practices for interacting with a variety of species, including humans. She still used the methods he’d taught her almost daily. Except with Snapper—her boss was so belligerent that she rarely bothered. Lena, however, wasn’t belligerent. She was kind and generous and patient, and right now she was hurting because of something Kara had done.

“Look,” she said, keeping her voice soft. “I’m sorry. I got scared. I got scared and I did what I always do, which is take off. Literally.”

Lena blinked and chewed on the tip of her thumb, gazing down at Kara. “Okay…”

“And you don’t deserve that. You’re right, I did tell you I loved you. Because I do, Lena. I love so many things about you. But sometimes when I look at you all I can see is your helicopter falling, or Corben aiming a gun at you, or Hank Henshaw trying to kill you. It’s absolutely terrifying.”

Lena sat back down beside her, gripping her hand. “I get that, Kara. I’m scared too. You’re on the news all the time fighting aliens three times your size, and I know for a fact that the public only sees the tip of the iceberg. I’m just as terrified of losing you.”

“No, you’re not!” As Lena leaned away from her, frowning, Kara clutched her hand. “I don’t mean—I’m sorry, it’s just….” She struggled to find the words.

“It’s just what?”

“I lost everyone,” she said, looking up into Lena’s eyes. “I don’t think you can understand. I lost everything I ever loved. My family, my friends, my house, my school, everything. I thought I knew what my life would be like, and then one day, with no warning, it all ended. Thousands upon thousands of years of history was just gone, obliterated in a matter of minutes, and I didn’t even get to say goodbye.” Her eyes blurred with tears, and she felt more than saw Lena shift closer.

“You’re right.” Lena pressed a kiss to her temple and hugged her against her side. “I can’t understand what that feels like. I lost my mother and my home, but I didn’t lose my planet. I still have LA and Ireland. I still have an entire world’s worth of people I belong to. So no, I can’t understand what it feels like to be you. But I can at least be here for you, if you’ll only let me in.”

“I’m trying,” Kara said, burying her face in Lena’s shoulder. “I really am. I’m trying so hard, Lena. But your brother… and now your mom…”

Lena’s hand was gentle in her hair, the other steady on her back. “I know, sweet girl. But I’m pretty tough. And I have you and Alex and the DEO looking out for me. We’ll figure it out. We’re the good guys, and the good guys always win, right?”

“No always,” Kara mumbled as she wrapped her arms around Lena’s waist. “Not on Krypton. Everyone died, and there was nothing I could do. And now I have all these powers, but what if I can’t save you?”

“What happened to Krypton wasn’t your fault, Kara. And if something happens to me it’s because
my brother is insane and Lillian is a vindictive sociopath—neither of which is your fault, either. Unless you have some powers I don’t know about…?”

This reminded her so much of the therapist she’d seen in high school—“You’re simply not that important, Kara”—that she laughed a little. “Well, I am a Super,” she said, leaning back a little to look up at her girlfriend. “Aren’t I supposed to have a God Complex?”

“In your case, I believe it would be a Goddess Complex. Not that I’m saying it isn’t deserved, but even you can’t control who lives or dies.”

“Who tells your story.” As Lena gave her a look, Kara added, “What? I can’t help it if you keep speaking in Hamilton lyrics.”

“Admittedly, Lin-Manuel Miranda is a genius.” She used her thumb to wipe away Kara’s tears, her gaze growing serious again. “I’m sorry I said you have no emotional awareness. You were right, it wasn’t fair. I was just angry.”

“Thanks. But you told me once to tell you if I needed to take space, so I did and you still got mad.”

“I know, but—”

“No buts,” Kara interrupted, surprised by her own tenacity. “You said you love me. Did you mean you only love the parts of me that are like you? Because I’m not like you, Lena. I will always be different. And part of that difference is how I process things.”

Lena nodded earnestly. “I get that, Kara, I do. And you’re right, I did say it was okay for you to take space when you need it, and I meant that. Honestly. But can you also try to understand my perspective? I told you I loved you and you disappeared on me. So while it’s okay that you needed space, actually taking it at that precise moment really hurt me.”

Kara sighed and leaned her head against Lena’s shoulder. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“I know. It happens. I’m sure it’ll happen again, probably on both sides. That’s what people in relationships do.” Lena’s lips brushed her forehead. “Where did you go, anyway?”

“To space.”

There was a pause, and then she felt rather than heard Lena laughing. “Of course you did.”

It took Kara a second to recognize the irony. Then she started laughing too, only then the strangest thing happened—she felt her face twist and the tears were back and in the space of a single breath her laughter morphed into a sob, and then another, and then she was clutching at Lena’s sweater while she cried in great, gasping breaths. Lena just held her, swaying her slightly side to side and murmuring unintelligible words of comfort and caring.

The storm of tears faded eventually, and Lena tugged and pulled at her until they were stretched out together on the couch, Kara’s head pillowed on her chest, Lena’s lips in her hair as she hummed Christmas carols and Broadway show tunes and foreign-sounding melodies that Kara thought probably came from Ireland. They lay together for an indeterminate time until, all at once, Kara realized that the hard, frozen ball of fear and pain she’d carried inside ever since the day her parents sent her away had finally, without her even noticing, begun to melt.

She pushed herself up slightly and looked into her girlfriend’s eyes. “Hey.”

“Hey.” Lena eyed her quizzically.
She cleared her throat of lingering tears and said, deliberately and slowly, “I love you, Lena Luthor.” Lena blinked, brow furrowing. “Is this a test? Like, are you going to fly away again if I say it back?”

“Nope.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Promise?”

“Promise.”

“Okay, then.” She stared at Kara intently. “I love you too, Kara Zor-El Danvers.”

The wave of joy wasn’t quite as intense this time, but neither was the corresponding wave of fear. Kara held Lena against her body and slowly levitated them both into the air, higher and higher until they were hovering among the polished wooden beams of the great room’s slanted ceiling.

Lena gasped as Kara shifted them upright, and then she laughed, tightening her grip around her neck. “I can’t believe you!”

“What? I didn’t say I wouldn’t fly,” Kara pointed out, grinning down at her. “I only said I wouldn’t fly away.”

“You writers and your semantics.” She shook her head, but she was smiling.

Kara spun them around, but slowly so that Lena wouldn’t be frightened. “You know you love my… semantics.”

“I do,” Lena said, and leaned in to kiss the sensitive spot behind Kara’s ear. “I really do.”

Kara closed her eyes and surrendered to the sensation of Lena’s lips and tongue against her skin, and for a moment, for a truly blessed period of time, the real world where Lex and Lillian wanted them dead and the citizens of National City couldn’t seem to keep from hurting each other almost ceased to exist.

* * *

That night after dinner as they sat together in their favorite hot tub watching the moon rise over the frozen lake and listening to an owl’s call echo through the forest, Kara felt it.

“It’s time to go home, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Almost,” Lena agreed, snuggling closer.

*But not quite.* Kara rested her cheek on her girlfriend’s hair and kept on playing with the soft strands of her ponytail as the lake ice creaked quietly below them and the stars of Earth-1 shifted incrementally overhead.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the fluff. One and a half more fluffy-ish chapters and then shit starts to get real. Oh, and M’gann will be joining the cast in the next chapter, so that’s something to look forward to if you like Miss Martian as much as I do.
Also, I envision the great room in Oliver’s house to look something like this: https://st.hzcdn.com/simgs/59b1982a011ab772_8-5783/traditional-living-room.jpg. And the hot tub/sauna building is based on a real-life resort, Doe Bay on Orcas Island (https://doebay.com/amenities/soaking-tubs-and-sauna/), which has been my go-to getaway for more than twenty years now. I actually wanted to have this chapter set there, but Central City and Washington State are really, really far apart, so I “settled” for a nearby fictional fancy lake house instead. ;-}
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

In which Lena tries to be happy. Really.

Chapter Notes

Hi guys. This one was supposed to be fluff, and part of it is. But the other part is dark. Sorry—as the summary says, Lena is trying to be happy. But she is a Luthor, after all...

Lena gazed at the design plans on the conference room projector screen, only half-listening to her robotics team’s latest update. The “Super Soldier” was an old project of Lex’s that she had retained on the condition that the team find a way to ensure that the AI chip at the literal heart of the design—located in the robot’s chest cavity for easier engineering—be fitted with numerous fail-safes not previously prioritized by “management.” Oh, and also that its name be changed before the final prototype stage.

Her R&D chief, Jenny Bartlett, was asking the questions they’d agreed on earlier that morning and typing up notes on the responses, so Lena let herself tune out slightly, her eyes on the city skyline. Jenny had been her number two back in LA and was better suited to running the research division than she’d been. Honestly, Lena would rather be in a lab experimenting with low carbon steel samples, or at her computer poring over research on differential speed rolling processing, or out in the real world giving a prototype a trial run. She missed the days when she ran her own lab with a trusted team of engineers. Lex had always been the one firmly on the CEO track; he was supposed to manage the company, not her.

Still, at least she wasn’t running their father’s enterprise into the ground. Over the past few weeks, L Corp’s stock numbers had been quietly rebounding. Her mother’s transfer to a higher security facility had gone without a hitch, too, and since Lex had been placed in solitary and his guard rotation changed, the attacks on Lena’s life had halted. Despite the fact that her mother’s trial was looming in the near future and her brother probably still wanted her dead—although she couldn’t help thinking that if that was really the case, she would have been so long before now—Lena was cautiously (dare she say it?) happy.

And yet, she couldn’t shake the sense of time slipping through her hands like water; the feeling that something wicked was coming this way. Maybe because when your last name was Luthor, it almost always was.

An image of Kara smiling at her in bed that morning, sunlight turning her sleep- and sex-tousled hair honey-gold, drifted into her consciousness, and she couldn’t help the dreamy look that would likely seem out of place to anyone who might notice. It wasn’t only that she was having marvelous sex with an honest-to-goddess superhero (with the emphasis on goddess), though admittedly this fantastical development had positively impacted her brain chemistry. But her growing happiness also hinged on the fact that she was falling more deeply in love with Kara by the day.
Their incredible week at Oliver Queen’s house had been followed by a relatively calm period back in their own dimension. The weekend after their vacation, she’d been busy with the L Corp holiday party followed by her first Super Friends Game Night. She’d been more nervous for Game Night than for the work party, at which she and Kara had danced and schmoozed and made out in a dark corridor of the downtown theater the company had rented out for the event. A handful of photos of them showed up on Instagram, two of which were picked up by the same LA gossip site as before, but Lena wasn’t as worried this time. She and Kara were an official couple now, and if they intended to stay that way, public appearances would be a necessity. Besides, she enjoyed having Kara at her side looking smart-sexy in her glasses and form-fitting blue dress. And though she was aware that her internal monologue came across as a tad—okay, quite a bit—fangirlish, she couldn’t stop thinking, Supergirl loves me.

Not even James’s low-key suspicion at Game Night could burst her happiness bubble. He wasn’t jealous, she didn’t think; more envious, if she had to bet. She couldn’t blame him. Kara was incredible, so incredible that he had apparently accepted a role in her life as a friend without hesitating. In his shoes, Lena would have done the same—anything to keep Kara in her life.

Everyone else at Game Night was more welcoming, even Alex who Lena had been somewhat worried might give her the evil eye for deflowering her little sister because real talk: Grumpy 1950s dad types are usually sexist assholes. Fortunately, Kara’s Earth sister’s semblance to that particular twentieth century stereotype didn’t extend to shotgun weddings or shovel talks. She actually hugged Lena tightly in greeting and murmured in her ear, “Be careful with her, okay? She’s not as invincible as she acts.”

Lena hugged her back and whispered, “I will. I promise.” And if her eyes had gotten a little brighter than usual, she wasn’t the only one. Kara, busy setting out party napkins for the many, many, many snacks, had beamed in their direction, clearly listening in on the exchange.

Winn had seemed excited to see her again, thereby giving credence to Kara’s claim that he “loved” her, and chatted her up about her R&D years at Luthor Corp and her onetime supremacy in the Combat Robot League Championships.

“Wait, what are you talking about?” Alex had asked, honing in on their conversation.

Before Lena could stop her, Kara jumped in to brag, “Lena was captain of a robotics design team in college that won consecutive national championships!”

While that was a fact that any semi-inspired social media stalker could find, there was a reason she’d left it off her official company bio. And deleted any reference to it on Facebook. And blocked anyone who tweeted anything Combat Robot League-related to her account. Because really—a Luthor winning a national championship based on building a robot that could destroy any and all other robot challengers?

In her defense, she’d had no way of knowing at the time that her brother would one day develop robotic technology that would kill actual people.

Winn sounded nearly as proud as Kara. “You should have seen their entry the first year they won. It totally revolutionized robot combat.”

“Robot combat?” Alex’s eyes had narrowed. “How so?”

“He’s exaggerating,” Lena tried to say, but Winn was already off and running about MechaDeath, the robot Lena and her engineering buddies had spent nearly every night for three months perfecting. She had actually been pretty proud of that little guy, with its combination of miter saw, grinding
wheel, armored exoskeleton, and lightweight, high-efficiency internal combustion engine (ICE) that they’d developed specifically for the competition. They’d sold the ICE schematics to a GE subsidiary shortly after the competition, and that was how Lena made her first million, completely independently of the Luthor name. Lionel had been so proud that he’d actually hugged her, momentarily forgetting how “abhorrent” he found her “chosen lifestyle.”

Ah, the good ole days, before Lex went off the deep end and their dad died probably still wondering what he’d done to deserve such disappointing offspring.

“MechaDeath?” Maggie repeated, smirking in a way that Lena understood meant this little gem was never, ever going to die if the detective had anything to say about it.

Winn nodded. “Brilliant, isn’t it?”

The detective only lifted an eyebrow, and Lena channeled an image of her as the captain of her high school softball team, pretty and smart and a little bit cruel to the kids and hometown she couldn’t wait to leave behind. She didn’t know if Maggie had even played softball, but the chances seemed relatively high.

Once the games began, Lena and Kara proceeded to demolish pretty much everyone at nearly every game, so all in all she considered the evening a success. There was a reason the Luthor family motto was, “Don’t get mad, get even.” Or as close as you could get to that sentiment in Latin, anyway.

She stayed behind “to help clean up,” a somewhat flimsy excuse she was pretty sure they didn’t need, judging from the poorly concealed eye rolls when Kara stuttered it out. The door had barely closed behind Alex and Maggie when Kara started apologizing for James: “He just needs time. I promise, he’ll be better.”

“It’s okay,” Lena had assured her, placing the leftover napkins in an armoire near the dining area. “He has good reason to be wary of my family.”

“Yeah, but not of you.” Kara paused in putting away the few remaining food items. “Maybe I should uninvite him until he can behave better.”

“Please, don’t do that.” Lena crossed the room and stopped in front of her. “He’s just worried about you. I can’t fault him for wanting to take care of you.”

“I’m not some damsel in need of rescue,” Kara declared, her face darkening.

“Honey, that’s the last thing anyone would ever call you.” Lena slipped her arms around Kara’s neck and tugged her head down for a kiss, sucking on her bottom lip until her shoulders lost their rigid shape.

“All right,” Kara said a few minutes later after Lena had kissed the anger well and truly out of her. “He can keep coming to Game Night. I guess.”

Lena had only smiled and pulled her toward the bedroom, more than ready to be done talking about CatCo’s CEO.

Now another weekend was approaching and Lena still hadn’t asked Kara to LA for New Year’s. She would soon, she assured herself, tuning back in to the meeting as the project lead began to describe the most recent trials they had run the AI chip through. It was just, winter holidays had never been her thing, not since her mother had been killed by a drunk driver on her way home from the mall on Christmas Eve. According to Lionel, the toy store had called because the doll Lena had asked for from Santa, previously sold out, was back in stock, so her mother had asked a neighbor to
babysit for an hour.

“I’ll be back soon, sweetie,” she remembered her mother saying with a smile and a kiss. And then she was gone, suddenly and irrevocably. Lena had spent the next week in temporary foster care until the Luthors returned from a holiday trip to Paris, and then she’d moved in with them just in time for the new year.

All at once Lena realized that Jenny and the robotics team lead were looking at her expectantly. “I’m sorry, my mind was on marketing metrics. Could you repeat that?”

She pushed away the thoughts of drunk drivers and solitary holidays and made herself focus on the meeting as Jenny rephrased the issue at hand. There would be ample time to forget about L Corp—and everything else on this world, really—during her date with Kara later that night.

* * *

“We should make this a regular occurrence,” she announced as she and Kara strolled hand in hand through Central City a few hours later.

“Absolutely,” Kara said, smiling over at her. When Lena just looked at her, she laughed. “No, really! Adverbs mean I’m excited, remember?”

She looked so adorable with her hair pulled back in a pretty barrette, her camel-hair trench open to reveal a neat button-up tucked into low-slung trousers, that Lena simply had to stop on the sidewalk and kiss her. Kara squeaked briefly in surprise before moving to return the press of her lips. Only in her eagerness she stumbled slightly and nearly fell, and though Lena tried not to, she couldn’t help giggling. Kara drew back, a mock scowl on her face, but she couldn’t maintain it and was soon grinning down at Lena, eyes shining on the nearly empty city street.

“I love you,” she said, her voice sure.

“I love you, too,” Lena returned, just as certain, and looped her arm through Kara’s as they walked on.

The night was cold and clear just like it had been during their lake house retreat, but Lena was warm in a knit cap, scarf, gloves, and down jacket she had dug out for their interdimensional date. They’d opted for Chinese at a place Barry swore by, paying their bill with a S.T.A.R. Labs credit card that Cisco had handed over earlier with an exaggerated flourish. Kara seemed slightly uncomfortable by the continued “charity,” as she referred to it, but not uncomfortable enough to stay in their own dimension where their varied work commitments could—and often did—end date night prematurely.

With no phones to go off, no potential assailants, and no victims in need of rescue, dinner had been a more relaxed affair than any other meal they’d shared since their previous sojourn on Earth-1. As Kara demolished her usual three entrées and Lena got deliciously tipsy on half a bottle of Beaujolais, they’d talked freely, easily, just as they’d done at the lake house. Their conversations in this dimension were definitely different, Lena decided. Without the threat of interruption—or the siren call of social media—they could raise whatever topic struck them and delve as deeply as they were inclined.

Tonight’s main topic of discussion had hinged on Lena learning that Kara didn’t have a driver’s license.

“Is this because of what happened when you tried to ride a bike?” she’d asked, smiling teasingly at her girlfriend. At Game Night, Alex had been only too happy to relate the story of fourteen-year-old
Kara flying a ten-speed into the side of their parents’ house when she panicked and forgot how to work the hand brakes.

“Hey! I told you, we didn’t have manual brakes on Krypton. But yes, it was mostly because of that. At least, that was Eliza’s reasoning.”

Lena’s eyes narrowed at her word choice: Eliza’s reasoning. “Not yours, though?”

Kara glanced up from her plate of pot stickers and moo shu pancakes. “Not—I mean, I didn’t want me destroying their car, either. An automobile is just a wee, tiny bit more expensive than a bike to replace.”

Lena nodded and busied herself with her sweet and sour chicken. She had discovered that Kara would sometimes fill a space if she left it open for her.

“But also,” Kara added, “I kind of get claustrophobic in closed or, like, small spaces?”

“You do?” Lena couldn’t keep the surprise out of her voice.

“Yeah.” She ducked her head and started arranging the food on her plate into complex geometric shapes. “I told you I was stuck in the Phantom Zone for a while, right?”

“Right.” Twenty-four years, in fact, which—Lena shuddered. If such a thing ever happened to her, claustrophobia would probably be the least of her mental issues.

“I think it’s because of that. At least, I don’t remember feeling that way before.”

“But you said you weren’t conscious when your ship was in the Phantom Zone.”

“I wasn’t. At least, not for most of it. I was in a controlled state of stasis, my vitals slowed for the trip to Earth.”

And while that sounded like something out of a novel, Lena was becoming accustomed to such statements from her off-worlder girlfriend. “Most of it—what does that mean?”

Kara bit into a dumpling and chewed slowly, her eyes downcast. “Every once in a while the pod’s computers would wake me up for whatever reason—maybe to test my vitals? I don’t really know—and I would be conscious for a short period, unable to move or communicate even through the neural implant, with no knowledge of how much time had passed. Before I could recover enough to ask the on-board AI any questions, it would put me under again and that would be it. Until the next time, anyway.”

Lena reached for her hand, disturbed by the image Kara had painted. She had been so young, cast away from everything she’d ever known, floating alone in a section of space where time wasn’t supposed to progress. And yet, apparently it did somehow, given Kara’s hazy memories.

“I woke up for the final time right before I landed on Earth,” she added. “The first indication I had of how much time had passed was when Superman showed up at the landing site.”

“How did he even know about you?”

“The Fortress of—” She stopped, blinking rapidly.

“It’s okay.” Lena gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. “I’m Lex’s sister, remember? I know about the Fortress of Solitude.” She even knew generally where it was located, though she didn’t think she
“Of course you do,” Kara said, her sigh nearly undetectable. “Anyway, the Fortress computer picked up a signal from my pod and alerted him, so he was waiting for me. He was wearing our house crest, but even so I didn’t believe him when he told me who he was.”

“You had no idea how long you’d been trapped in the Phantom Zone?”

“None. I didn’t even know I’d been there at all. But then Kal El took me to the Fortress of Solitude, and we stayed there long enough for me to learn English and study some of Earth’s history and customs. It was a strange period—he had only discovered recently that Krypton had ever existed, while for me, Krypton had only recently ceased to exist.”

“How did you learn English?” Lena’s foot was tapping against the floor in quadruple-time as she imagined the technology that had to be present in Superman’s Arctic lair. Maybe Kara would take her there…? But no, she couldn’t ask such a thing. It would have to be freely offered.

“From the AI that landed with Kal-El. It functions the same as the neurotransmitter I told you about.”

“Your ‘photo album’?” Lena asked, practically salivating at the idea of getting a peek at the advanced alien tech.

Kara’s smile told her she knew exactly why her heartbeat had suddenly ratcheted up. Damned super hearing.

“Exactly. It’s how Kal-El learned Kryptonian too, only his Kryptonian is really formal because he never got to practice with the living language. My English started out the same way, but then I went to high school here and got exposed to a broader vernacular. I still sometimes struggle with the occasional idiom, though.”

“And yet you know it’s called an idiom, which is more than the average native English speaker can probably say.”

“I think learning a language requires that you know more about it than the average native speaker.”

Lena nodded. “I thought the same thing when I was learning Mandarin.”

“You speak Mandarin?”

She lifted an eyebrow. “Just another thing you don’t know about me, my sweet.”

“Hey,” Kara said, pulling out the pout, “I thought we said no more secrets?”

“We did,” Lena agreed, “but I have to maintain my air of mystery somehow.”

Kara rolled her eyes affectionately and turned her attention back to her meal. Lena watched her eat in silence as her own mind worried away at a particular question. Finally she voiced it: “If Superman is your cousin, why didn’t he raise you himself? Or at least help you find a home closer to Metropolis?”

“To protect me,” Kara said.

Okay, Lena thought, but… “Wouldn’t you rather have lived near him?”

“It was too risky. If his enemies had found out about me, they might have used me to get to him. Which, obviously, wouldn’t have ended well for either of us.”
Enemies like Lex, for example. As someone currently involved with a Super, Lena could see the logic in that argument. But still, something seemed off. Maybe it was Kara’s too-bright tone or the resolute set of her shoulders.

“Honestly, growing up with Alex and Eliza was far better for me than living with a twenty-something boy. Eliza is an excellent cook, and you know where my priorities lie…” Kara smiled, but Lena could tell it was her brave, making-the-best-out-of-a-shitty-situation smile. She did that a lot—tossed out a smile when she was obviously hurting. Lena wondered if it was a conscious response or merely a habit.

“It must have been difficult, though,” she said, squeezing Kara’s hand again, “living with people you’d never met instead of with an actual family member. He was the one person on Earth who might have been able to understand what you were going through.”

Kara watched her for a moment, and then she shrugged, the smile slipping. “It was difficult. Especially after Jeremiah disappeared.” Something flashed in her eyes, and she looked down again. “Alex was sixteen and I was fourteen, and Eliza sort of retreated into her work for a while, leaving Alex and me to parent ourselves. Which of course we did badly. Alex always says we were our own well-intentioned but woefully ignorant teen mothers. I think that’s one of the reasons we’re so close.”

“You must have done something right—look at the two of you now.”

“Maybe. Still, sometimes I wonder what it might have been like to grow up with emotionally available parents. Do you know what I mean?”

“Do I.” Lena nodded shortly. “I told you before that Deerfield was more William Golding than J.K. Rowling, right? Our activities on- and off-campus were strictly regulated, but we boarding students could be a bit wild at times after the day students went home.”

“Wild how?”

As in sex and drugs and sneaking off-campus at all times of day and night. “Just normal teenager stuff,” she said, shrugging.

But Kara pressed, probably wanting the spotlight off her own past, and Lena eventually obliged with stories about smoking pot on rooftops and making out with both boys and girls she’d known for years but who suddenly became attractive toward the end of their Deerfield career.

“Who was the first person you kissed?”

Lena took a generous sip of wine. She had wondered if Kara would ask that. “Um, I don’t really remember…”

Kara scoffed. “I am a superhero, Lena. I can easily spot a lie.”

“Easily seems like the wrong word. Alex taught you, didn’t she?”

“Whatever. That doesn’t change the fact that we both know you don’t want to tell me who your first kiss was with. Do I know them? Wait, it wasn’t Bea, was it?”

“No,” she said quickly, and then added just as Kara’s brow was clearing, “Bea and I didn’t kiss until senior year.” Crap. She hadn’t meant to tell her like that. Stupid wine.

The crinkle returned instantly. “Seriously? Did you guys—were you, like… an actual couple?”
“No! We were single at the same time for like thirty seconds and we were at a party imbibing excessive amounts of alcohol. It was definitely not our best moment.”

Kara’s eyes were still narrowed. “So you’re saying this isn’t one of those in love with your best friend forever stories where you’ve been harboring feelings all this time and one day down the road she’s going to get divorced, and you’re going to confess your feelings and move in together and adopt babies from war-torn countries and live happily ever after?”

And, just, wow. Who would have thought Kara’s ability to spin abandonment fantasies would rival her own? Although, well, it did make sense, she supposed.

She reached across the table and gripped both of Kara’s hands. “No,” she said, holding her gaze steadily. “I promise that the only person I’m in love with is you.”

A shadow passed over Kara’s face, momentarily making her seem fragile, haunted even. Then she relaxed slightly and nodded, looking back at Lena just as steadily. “Okay.” She paused. “Then who was the first person you ever kissed?”

She released Kara’s hands and reached for her wine. “You’re not going to like it.”

“Is it a celebrity, or someone I know?”

“Someone you’ve—encountered, shall we say.”

“Wait.” Kara leaned away from her. “It’s not Roulette, is it? Please tell me it’s not her.”

“What can I say?” Lena shrugged. “I went through a bad girl stage. As in, I wanted to date a bad girl, not be one myself.”

“But you said you never liked her.”

“I didn’t like her, not really. I just thought she was hot. I was fifteen, okay?”

Kara shook her head at that, obviously disappointed in Lena’s teenage taste, and her self-righteousness—so reminiscent of her egotistical cousin—irked Lena so much that without thinking she shot back, “Why, who was the first person you ever kissed?”

“Augo,” she said after a moment, not looking up as she speared a pancake with her chop sticks. “He was one of my best friends when we were younger. He died with everyone else on Krypton. At least, I assume he did.”

Lena winced. And yes, she was an idiot. An absolute, total jerk. “I’m sorry,” she said, the irritation fading as quickly as it had arisen. “I didn’t mean… Clearly I’m a jackass.”

“No, you’re not.” Kara gazed at her across the table. “I’m sorry too. I shouldn’t have judged you. I didn’t know Veronica then, or you for that matter. Every villain has an origin story. Who am I to say she doesn’t have a good reason for who she is now?”

Which was closer to the truth than Kara realized. But it wasn’t Lena’s story to share, so she guided the conversation from Roulette’s origin story to those of other villains Supergirl had recently fought. There were, unfortunately, a lot.

“Hey,” Kara said now as they walked through the strange city, Lena tucked against her side.

“Heeey,” Lena said back, enjoying the heat Kara radiated. It was like traveling with your own
personal human-shaped heat lamp. Or, Kryptonian-shaped, anyway. How did she convert the sun’s radiation into energy? Lena’s inebriated brain couldn’t begin to imagine how the process worked. She would have to remember to ask sometime, preferably when her tongue didn’t feel a tad too large for her mouth.

“I know we said we might go to that bar I know here,” Kara said hesitantly, “but, um, what would you think about going back and meeting Alex and the others at the alien bar instead?”

At that moment, Lena would have rather stayed as far away as possible from Kara’s scary sister and all the annoying boys who loved her. But could she say that? More importantly, should she say it? “The alien bar?” she repeated, trying to buy time.

“It’s just, this friend of ours, M’gann, is finally coming back. You don’t know her, but she’s really great and I didn’t realize when we made plans that she would be releas—er, back tonight.”

“It sounds like kind of a big deal,” Lena said, watching Kara closely.

She nodded eagerly. “It is. Even J’onn will be there.”

“As in, Cyborg Superman’s twin who can turn into a giant—” She stopped before the word monster could make its way past her lips. Kara would probably not like it if she disparaged the alien she and Alex both looked up to so much. Unfortunate then that the creature he’d turned into the night Lillian tried to kill every off-worlder in the city still sometimes shadowed her nightmares.

Although maybe spending time with him in the form of the man Kara and Alex loved would help in that arena. It was at least worth a shot.

Before she could say as much, Kara nodded, lips pursed. “But he was sick that night at the Port. He won’t ever turn into that form again.” She stopped, opened her mouth again, and then shook her head. “You know what? Never mind. I can totally see M’gann another time.”

Lena was tempted to agree with her. But Kara was always so worried about how everyone else felt that Lena knew for her to ask to change their date plan must mean this Megan person—alien? Probably; it was The Alien Bar, after all—had to be pretty important to her. Knowing that, Lena couldn’t deny her the chance to be part of the welcome crew. God only knew what terrible fate the woman had been “released” from.

And sure, technically they could do both. But it had been a long week, and while Kara might not need much sleep, Lena definitely did.

“It’s okay,” she said, tugging Kara into a nearby alley. “Let’s go back. I would love to meet J’onn and your other friend.”

Kara brightened. “Really? Are you sure it wouldn’t ruin our date?”

“I’m sure. Unless—you are still planning to come home with me tonight, aren’t you?”

“Absolutely,” Kara said, smiling down at her.

“Good.” Lena pressed a kiss to the corner of her mouth. “In that case, home, James.”

“Wait—James who?” Kara glanced around, clearly perplexed, even as she drew the extrapolator from her bag.

“Never mind,” Lena said, laughing, and hid her face against her girlfriend’s collar bone for the short,
odd journey home.

*             *             *

As she and Kara entered the alien bar just behind Alex and Maggie, Lena very clearly heard Lillian’s voice in the back of her head: “An alien bar? Haven’t your lifestyle choices already brought enough shame on this family?”

Apparently not, she decided as she shook hands with J’onn, who was waiting with the boys at their usual booth. His grip wasn’t as firm as she’d expected, which was nice. She was used to men trying to intimidate her with a crushing handshake, but the DEO director only pressed her hand gently as he smiled down at her.

“Miss Luthor,” he rumbled in a deep voice, “it’s very nice to meet you. Officially, that is.”

“You as well,” she said, smiling back politely. He stared at her a few seconds longer and then nodded in an oddly satisfied way, his gaze shifting immediately to Alex, who was watching the exchange with feigned disinterest. Kara, meanwhile, glared at both of them. Lena wasn’t sure what it all meant, but when Maggie grabbed her arm and pulled her toward the bar, she went willingly.

“He can read minds,” Maggie said conversationally.

“What?”

“J’onn. Or the Martian Manhunter, as they sometimes call him. M’gann!” she added, smiling broadly at an African American woman behind the bar.

Lena was still trying to absorb the information that Kara’s father figure was a Martian who could read minds. Oh god, she hadn’t been thinking about Kara naked, had she? It was a valid concern, given how frequently her mind was occupied by such thoughts. Also, did “Manhunter” really need to be part of the man’s title? She couldn’t help thinking that from a branding perspective, the nickname could use a bit of tweaking.

M’gann stepped out from behind the counter to hug Maggie, and Lena watched the embrace with interest. Did that mean she was queer? But no, she remembered: Maggie liked to hug aliens, too.

“And this is Lena Luthor,” Maggie said, her smile oddly proud.

Lena tried not to flinch at hearing her last name dropped so casually in a space that was meant to be a safe harbor for the aliens of National City. The other woman turned to give Lena an appraising look, and then, slowly, held out her hand. Lena took it, feeling the coolness of too-smooth skin. So not human, definitely. She wondered briefly what M’gann was, and then decided just as quickly that it was none of her business. Hard to keep the curiosity from flaring, though, even when you meant well.

“It’s nice to meet you, Lena Luthor,” M’gann said. “I understand we have you to thank for saving the city from Cadmus.”

“I only did what anyone else in my shoes would have done,” she said, smiling a bit grimly at the reference to her mother’s genocidal tendencies.

“I don’t think that’s true at all,” M’gann said, frowning.

“I agree,” Maggie added, her eyes serious for once.
And then a blur materialized before them and Kara was giving the bartender an enthusiastic hug.
“M’gann! It’s so good to see you here instead of—”

“Someplace else?” Maggie interrupted, giving Kara an elbow paired with a semi-exasperated look.

Kara and secrets were like oil and water. Not only did they not mix, but the secrets always rose to the top.

“Right,” Kara said. “Anyway, did you meet Lena?”

“I did,” M’gann said sagely, glancing between them.

“Good.” Kara took Lena’s hand, her mouth straightening into a determined line. “So, we’re dating.”

M’gann’s expression didn’t change. “I heard. I believe congratulations are in order?”

“Oh. Well, yeah. Thanks. But wait, how did you hear?” Kara sounded peeved. “You’ve only been ou—I mean, you just got back.”

“Mon-El works here, remember?” Maggie said, nudging her.

Which, right. The Daxamite floozy, as Kara had once referred to him in a tone that sounded like she wasn’t really joking. Apparently there was some bad blood between their people, even though Daxamites were technically descended from Kryptonians, or some such thing. Lena felt like maybe she didn’t have the entire story. She also felt like it sounded like something out of Star Trek. Then again, most interplanetary drama probably did.

M’gann was working, but she promised to join them for a round a little later. Lena helped carry drinks back to the booth and settled in beside Kara, content to follow her lead as the obviously tight-knit group celebrated the return of one of their own. There was plentiful alcohol, a pool tournament—won by Alex and Maggie—and a darts challenge—also won by Alex, whose skill with throwing “sharp, pointy things” was “legendary,” according to her sister. As the night wore on, Lena smiled and chatted and generally enjoyed herself more than she’d thought possible when Kara first proposed coming back early. She liked Kara’s friends, she realized. They were smart and funny, and she didn’t find her attention wandering as it did when she tried to socialize with work colleagues.

Her father had once told her that combat brought people together in a way nothing else could, and at one point toward the end of the evening she found herself wishing she could be a genuine part of this group of amazing people. But then she realized what it would take for that to happen, and she quickly rescinded the wish. She would be just as happy never to hear from her mother or brother ever again, even though she knew—she knew—that was too much to ask. She shivered, caught up in the sense that the lull they were experiencing now, this wonderful period of calm, couldn’t possibly last.

Kara chose that moment to lean into her, arm pressed against the swell of her breast, thigh touching hers under the table. Lena drew in a breath and then rolled her eyes slightly as Kara glanced over, her cocky grin indicating that she’d heard Lena’s inadvertent reaction to her proximity.

“Go ahead and smile,” she whispered, purposely letting her breath tease the delicate shell of Kara’s ear. “We both know who’ll be begging whom later, don’t we?”

As M’gann, J’onn, and Mon-El turned to stare at them in amused shock—or excessive delight, in the Daxamite’s case—Lena realized that whispering sweet nothings in your girlfriend’s ear wasn’t something you should do in a bar that catered to aliens with unspecified super powers.
Kara hid her flushed face in Lena’s shirt, groaning slightly.

“Sorry,” Lena murmured, and pressed a kiss to her hair.

“No, you’re not.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Can we go home now?”

“It’s your call.” Lena smiled across the table at Alex who was watching them with a mostly pleased expression. Although that could just be because she and Maggie had trounced them at pool once again.

“In that case, I call soon.”

Not soon enough, Lena thought. But then again, she never felt like anything was soon enough when it came to Kara.

* * *

“Are you really not getting a Christmas tree?” Kara asked, her chin on Lena’s shoulder as they sat on the couch drinking ginger tea.

They had both been too “intoxicated,” as Kara quaintly referred to it, to go to bed immediately, and with the ceiling spinning each time she shut her eyes, Lena’s desire to get into Kara’s super suit had sadly waned. Temporarily, she hoped.

“What do you call that?” Lena asked, waving at the potted Norfolk pine on the balcony that she had draped with a string of mini white lights and topped with a rustic metal star.

“Um, are you familiar with Charlie Brown?”

“Just because I don’t believe in killing trees in the name of a man who lived two thousand years ago and obviously suffered from delusions of grandeur…”

Kara snorted, and Lena was pretty sure she heard the word lesbians muttered in an exasperated tone. Then her girlfriend straightened up. “Actually, speaking of Christmas, there’s something I wanted to ask you.”

And, oh god, Lena really didn’t want to hear the question because either (A) it was the invitation she had been both anticipating and dreading the last week; or (B) it wasn’t, which would be arguably as bad. But either way the question was coming, so she tightened her hands around her Smith College Alumna mug and waited.

“I know we haven’t been together very long,” Kara said, managing to sound as if she were reading aloud from a teleprompter, “and I know you haven’t met Eliza yet, but I was wondering if you might want to come home with me for Christmas. I can only take a couple of days off, but Alex is bringing Maggie, and I thought maybe, if you wanted, since you don’t have—not that I’m saying you would otherwise be alone, but—”

One day Lena thought she might let Kara ramble on indefinitely just to see how long she would go. That day was not tonight.

“Can I think about it?” she asked. Which was—definitely not the plan. She was supposed to tell
Kara she had a work trip she couldn’t possibly avoid and then invite her to New Year’s in LA, apologizing profusely all the while. Her subconscious mind apparently had other plans.

Kara blinked. “Oh. Um, of course. Yeah.”

“It’s just, I have a work trip that week I’m not sure I can get out of. Besides, my mother died right before Christmas,” she found herself admitting. “It isn’t my favorite holiday.”

She bit her lip to staunch the flow of words. Bea calling her The Gritch—a cross between Grinch and bitch—at least once each holiday season was reminder enough to be careful to whom she confessed her Scrooge-like tendencies.

But Kara didn’t seem horrified by the revelation. She only frowned a little and reached for her hand. “I’m sorry, Lee. I didn’t know that.”

“It’s fine. It was a really long time ago.”

“Right.” The crinkle deepened.

Kara appeared to be the opposite of convinced, which made perfect sense given the conflicting statements Lena had just lobbed at her: I don’t like Christmas because of my mom, but also It was a long time ago. Obviously she was not sober enough for this conversation. She blamed Maggie and her incessant need to bet on anything and everything. The diminutive detective was nearly as skilled as Bea at getting other people drunk, and that was saying something.

“I’m sorry,” she tried again. “I didn’t mean—I guess I’m also worried what your mother will think of me. You know, as a Luthor.”

“Eliza is the one who taught Alex and me that everyone should be judged on their own merits.”

“Are you sure she meant even people with my last name?”

As the comment settled between them, Lena winced, wishing she’d refused that second screwdriver. Who would have thought the alien bar would have fresh-squeezed orange juice?

Kara plucked at a loose thread on a couch cushion, easily pulling it free. “I think so, yes. Or I hope so, anyway.”

She’d known Kara couldn’t answer that question definitively, she really had. But even so, Lena’s stomach tightened at the way her girlfriend refused to meet her gaze.

“It’s been a long day. Maybe we should talk about this tomorrow.”

“Yeah, okay.” Kara paused, her shoulders hunched. “Do you still want me to stay over?”

“Of course.” She held her mug against her chest. “Do you still want to stay over?”

Kara swallowed and nodded, eyes fixed on the tiny Christmas tree on the balcony, white lights shining against the dark night. And all at once, Lena remembered that even though Kara might walk through the world with a perpetual smile and genuine caring for nearly everyone she met, this wasn’t really her world.

“Thank you for inviting me, Kara,” she said softly. “I appreciate it, really.”

“You’re welcome,” Kara said, but she sounded stilted, the words clipped and formal.
This was why Supers and Luthors didn’t mix. In a different dimension they could be Kara and Lena, but here at home the path forward was laced with emotional—and literal, probably, knowing her adopted family—minefields. Why hadn’t she simply told Kara she would love to accompany her home for Christmas and then faked a work emergency at the last moment? Yes, they had promised to be honest. But surely that didn’t mean hurting each other when a white lie would be kinder, did it?

“It’s late,” Kara said eventually. “We should probably try to get some sleep.”

“Okay,” Lena said, and that was that.

But it wasn’t okay, she thought a little while later as they lay in bed together but apart, Kara curled on her side facing away. It wasn’t okay because Kara couldn’t predict her mother’s reaction, and with Lillian in prison, Lena didn’t think she could take being rejected by Eliza Danvers on the anniversary of her own mother’s death. Alex still looked at her sometimes like she worried Lena might lure Kara to her destruction, and Lena couldn’t blame her. She worried that herself, in dreams mostly when her conscious mind relinquished control and her inner fears surged to the surface. Or sometimes when she awoke in the middle of the night and couldn’t get back to sleep right away, she would run through worst-case scenarios in her head, imagining how she would defend Kara against Kryptonite-laced swords or any of the bevy of anti-Super weapons she knew her brother had manufactured and stashed in hidden bunkers around the world. She hadn’t been able to unencrypt his old Luther Corp files yet, but when she did, the DEO would be the primary beneficiary of her detective work.

In the meantime, there were the holidays to get through, again. This tension now lying like a physical barrier between her and Kara was why, ever since high school, she had always escaped the holidays by taking ski trips or European vacations with Bea and their friends. Christmas trees and holiday music only reminded her of everything she’d lost. The night before Christmas wasn’t the start of a beloved holiday tale for her. It was the last day of a good life she could barely remember. The last day she’d seen her mother alive.

She’d been little, but there were parts of that day she’d replayed so often she was sure she would never forget. When the police cruiser had pulled into the driveway, she’d immediately worried that something had happened to her mother. That morning while playing on their front walk she had stepped on a crack, and as the two policemen knocked on the door, she’d crossed her fingers and prayed to the God she’d still believed in that her mother’s back wasn’t broken. As it turned out, it wasn’t. The head-on collision that the drunk driver had walked away from had broken her mother’s neck, not her back. In her nearly five-year-old brain, Lena had reasoned that it couldn’t be her fault. The rhyme very clearly stated that “your mother’s back” would be broken, not her neck.

And yet it had been her fault. Her mother had died on her way to buy a present Lena had requested, which meant she’d died because of her. Or at least, that was how it had always felt. She knew intellectually that the only person to blame was the driver who chose to get behind the wheel after drinking three martinis at lunch. An accountant with two previous DUIs and one count of vehicular assault on his record, Martin Graylon had been sentenced to ten years in prison for killing her mother. A single decade. That was all her life was deemed to be worth. To make matters worse he’d been released early—for good behavior, of course—after only serving seven of the ten years.

Christmas with the Luthors had never been the most uplifting of experiences, but it was what had happened her senior year of high school that had cemented her aversion to the holiday. Back in LA over winter break, knowing it was her last chance as a legal minor, she’d tracked down her mother’s killer in an industrial neighborhood in Van Nuys and sat outside his crummy condo watching him through the curtainless windows. From hacking the county court records, she knew that Graylon had lost everything when he went to prison: his house in Glendale, his job, his family. Shortly after the
trial, his wife had divorced him and moved back to the Midwest with their two children. His life had been ruined, too.

But had he paid enough? Lena didn’t think so. Seven years in prison was nothing. Meanwhile, because of this stranger’s selfish decision to drive drunk, her mother had missed out on so much and she had endured a childhood with Lillian Luthor. What might their lives have been like if her mother had lived? A futile question, and yet it had haunted her to the point that, on the cusp of adulthood, she’d sat in her father’s car on a dark street on Christmas Eve, the metal of Lionel’s pistol slowly warming in her hands as she contemplated killing Martin Graylon. The minutes had ticked past, adding up to one hour and then two. When Graylon finally turned off the TV and headed upstairs, she knew she had to make a decision: Act now or forever hold her peace.

She could have opened the car door, crept up to the condo, found her way inside through an unlatched window. She could have climbed the stairs quietly, her heart pounding, safety off. She could have surprised him in his bedroom and shot him twice in the head, or any of half a dozen other bloody scenarios. She could have run back outside and escaped down the street before anyone even realized what had happened. She knew she could have. But instead she’d placed the gun back in the glove compartment, started the Volvo’s engine, and turned toward home. He wasn’t worth ruining her own life over. Because even if she’d gotten away with it, even if she’d been found not guilty because of her age and Lionel’s money, she would have had a man’s death on her hands. Fantasizing about killing someone was one thing. Actually doing it? Completely different.

Besides, his life had already been in shambles. He was by himself on Christmas Eve, sitting in a beat-up recliner methodically draining a six-pack while the lights of the television flickered ghoulishly across his face. He would probably suffer more alive, if you could even call it that, slowly drinking himself to death.

No one knew about her plot to kill her mother’s murderer, not even Beatrice. She had never told a single soul how close she had come to executing Martin Braylon. What would Kara, with her fixed moral compass, her exaggerated sense of right and wrong, think if she knew? Would she look at Lena differently, or would she not be able to look at her at all?

No more secrets, they’d said, but Lena wasn’t sure she believed that was possible. Or, even if it was, advisable.

Kara twitched in her sleep and moaned a little, and Lena moved closer, slipping an arm around her waist and whispering soothing words into the warm skin of her neck. Was she dreaming about Krypton exploding? A giant alien throwing her into the side of a building? Her aunt dying at her sister’s hands? Or, like Lena, was she now plagued by dreams of some calamity befalling the woman she loved?

What were they even doing? How would this ever work? Supers and Luthors didn’t mix. They were like oil and water, too—one would always have to rise above the other.

Kara’s breathing paused, and Lena knew she was awake.

“Are you okay?” she whispered.

“No,” Kara said as if she was commenting on the weather.

The plainness of the confession made Lena blink. After everything they’d been through together, she still sometimes forgot how straightforward Kara could be. “Do you want to talk about it?”
“No,” Kara repeated, and turned to face her, movements slow and controlled. When she stopped, their faces were only inches apart, and Kara drew a finger across her forehead, down her nose, to her lips. “You’re okay.”

“I’m okay,” she confirmed, her breath catching a little at the feel of Kara’s touch.

They lay watching each other in the dim light from the bathroom, and Lena could feel the heat rising in waves from Kara’s skin, her eyes, her mouth. In the dark she always seemed less human, more alien. But that realization no longer startled her. It made her feel closer to Kara than anyone else she’d ever dated. As if what they had together was as special and unique as Kara was.

“I want to kiss you,” Kara murmured, eyes on her lips. “Is that all right?”

“Of course,” Lena said, and leaned forward to meet her halfway.

This, she thought as Kara leaned over her, slipping her thigh between Lena’s and pressing her weight slowly, carefully down upon her, this was why they were together. Because Kara made her feel more, want more than anyone else ever had. Because what they had together was special and deserved a chance. Because they deserved a shot at happiness just as much as anyone else. Didn’t they?

“I love you,” Kara whispered, tattooing the words into her flesh with her lips, tongue, teeth.

Lena gasped the words back, her hips already moving restlessly: “I love you too.” Then Kara pushed her sleep shirt aside, and Lena stopped thinking of anything other than the woman whose hands and mouth already seemed to know all of her secrets.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

In which Alex tries to look out for her sister.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for sticking with me this long, folks! The action starts to ramp up in the next chapter, which will be from Maggie's POV. My plan is to take the characters through the beginning of February or so. Should be fewer than 10 chapters left now... Happy reading!

“For an officer of the law, you sure do have a thing for cheating,” Alex grunted, trying to catch her breath as she fished out her apartment keys. Once again her girlfriend, who was shorter and nowhere near as fast, had beaten her up the stairs.

“Says the pot to the kettle,” Maggie snorted, following her inside. “Besides, I can’t help it if the old ‘Is it a bird, is it a plane, it’s Supergirl!’ line actually worked. I mean, come on, Alex.”

As she paused, considering employing her favorite method to remove Maggie’s smug look—i.e., pushing her against the door and kissing her senseless—a voice sounded from the unlit living area.

“Except in this case, it wasn’t a line.”

Maggie’s gun was in her hand so quickly that Alex felt a surge of pride even as she easily disarmed her girlfriend. “Easy, babe. It’s only my sister.”

Kara moved into the light, smiling smugly. “Geez, Maggie, trigger happy much?”

“Good timing, Kara,” Alex said, and held up her hand for a high-five.

A humanoid blur preceded the crack of skin on skin. Maggie flinched, which made Alex and Kara laugh.

“Zip it,” she grumbled, heading for the refrigerator. “Jesus. You two should come with a warning label.”

“Did you tell her we always say that?” Kara asked.

“Nope. Apparently it’s just that obvious.”

They high fived again and earned an eye roll from Maggie. Then she paused, hand on the refrigerator door. “Do you need some sister time? I could call one of the guys…”

“No,” Kara said, twisting her hands in front of her. “I was kind of hoping to talk to both of you. If that’s okay?”
Alex nodded encouragingly at her sister. “Fine with me. Maggie?”

Her girlfriend shrugged and looked into the fridge, but Alex could see the pleased smile she tried to hide. “Sure. You betcha.”

Maggie handed out beers all around—which was so sweet, watching her play host—and they settled in the living room.

“So,” Alex said when Kara chugged half of her beer and then stared at the floor in front of her arm chair. “Is this Lena-related, by any chance?”

Kara looked up at her quickly. “How did you know?”

“Well, you did ask to speak to both of us,” she said, nodding to Maggie who was curled up at her side, close but not too close out of respect for Kara. She had caught them in a somewhat compromising position one night when she appeared unannounced at the window. While Alex had found the situation amusing, her girlfriend and sister had definitely, in no uncertain terms, not. In fact, Kara and Maggie had come up with a text alert code in order to avoid future such occurrences.

“Right. Good point.” Kara chewed on her lip and frowned down at her phone where it lay on her lap. “The thing is, I kind of invited Lena home for Christmas. Without, um, checking with Eliza.”

Alex and Maggie exchanged confused glances. Kara had come up with an entire coming-out plan, and showing up in Midvale with her surprise girlfriend was not one of the pre-approved steps.

“I thought you were going to tell Mom about Lena at Christmas?” Alex asked.

“I totally was. And then last night I drank too much—seriously, you guys need to stage an Aldebaran rum intervention next time we’re out!” She shook her head. “Anyway, we went back to her place, and next thing I know I’m inviting her home with us. I gave her this whole speech that I don’t even remember coming up with.”

“How did she respond?” Maggie asked.

“At first she said she might have to work—”

“She what?” Alex’s anger rose swift and hot. The woman had literally just promised to tread carefully with Kara’s heart, and now here she was a week later prioritizing work over all else?

Kara frowned. “It’s complicated, Alex. Her mother—her real mother—died at Christmas. I don’t know the whole story yet, but it’s definitely a sensitive subject. Besides, you judging someone for working too much seems a bit hypocritical, don’t you think?”

“She’s got you there, babe,” Maggie commented, taking a swig of her beer.

And yes, Alex could acknowledge that her heightened mama bear instincts could create difficulties at times. She lowered her voice and said, “I’m sorry. Please continue.”

“We talked more today, and I think the real issue is that she’s worried about how Eliza will react. She dated a woman in college who was just coming out and apparently the family was really awful to them both. Plus, Alex, you have to admit that you haven’t been the most supportive of our relationship…”

She scoffed. “What are you even talking about? I’ve been completely supportive.”
Kara exchanged a look with Maggie, who shook her head. “No you haven’t.”

“I totally have!”

“Really? Because from where I’m sitting, asking your psychic co-worker to read your sister’s girlfriend’s mind to make sure she’s not a member of a terrorist organization does not qualify as supportive,” Kara said, her voice channeling Eliza’s I-am-deeply-disappointed-in-you tone.

Alex felt her shoulders begin to cave. With an effort, she straightened them. “I didn’t ask him to read her mind. That was his idea.”

Kara folded her arms across her chest. “So you tried to talk him out of it? Told him that Lena isn’t like the rest of her family and can be trusted without a doubt?”

Alex tried not to squirm. She had been trained to withstand the most brutal forms of torture; it shouldn’t be this easy for her younger sister to break her. “Well, no, not exactly. She is the literal heir to Cadmus, Kara. You said so yourself.” As The Crinkle threatened to make an appearance, she held up a hand. “Okay, you’re right. I should have stopped him. But it’s not just her family. Before Medusa, Lena expressed some questionable sentiments of her own. Remember the speech she gave you about the anti-alien detection device? J’onn and I just want to keep you safe, that’s all.”

“I don’t need you to keep me safe from Lena, Alex. She is probably the best thing to happen to me since I landed on Earth. I just don’t understand why you can’t see how kind and generous and good she is.”

They were even then because she couldn’t understand why Kara didn’t recognize that no matter how good Lena was, she was still a Luthor. Being close to anyone in that family was dangerous, especially for an off-worlder. But how did you make someone see something they didn’t want to?

At her continued silence, Kara shook her head. “Maybe coming here was a mistake.” She set her beer on the coffee table and started to rise.

Alex felt Maggie cast her a disbelieving look, but she stayed frozen in her spot on the couch. She hadn’t been prepared for Kara to fall for Lex Luthor’s sister, and now that they were in an actual relationship, she wasn’t sure how to maneuver the intricacies of a situation that, to her, seemed destined to end in disaster.


Kara hesitated, her eyes on Alex who only looked down, peeling at the label on her beer bottle. The longer Kara and Lena were together, the harder it would be to pick up the pieces, wouldn’t it? Maybe it would be better for everyone if they broke up sooner rather than later. And by everyone, she meant Kara.

“It’s fine,” Kara said. “I shouldn’t have just dropped in.”

“Of course you should have,” Maggie said, her voice soft but firm. “Can I ask you, though, is this really about Lena, or are you more worried about how Eliza will react to you being bisexual?”

Alex glanced from Maggie to her sister, realization dawning. Of course Kara would be nervous about possibly being rejected by the only mother she’d known on Earth. Why hadn’t Alex figured that out herself?

“Both,” Kara admitted, dropping back down on the chair. “I know it’s silly because she was great about you, Alex, but what if she’s uncomfortable and takes it out on Lena?”
“I can’t see her doing that. Can you?”

“Not really. But when we were growing up I always did what I was supposed to. Except that time I took you flying, and look how *that* turned out.”

“What? Nobody got hurt. That little joyride is actually one of my favorite memories from when we were younger.”

“Nobody got hurt?” Kara’s look was incredulous. “Eliza basically admitted that our *little joyride* led to Hank Henshaw recruiting Jeremiah for the DEO!”

“Is that what you thought she was saying?” Alex shook her head. “Kara, they started tracking you the moment your ship entered our solar system. They didn’t find you because we went flying. They found you because that’s what the DEO does.”

“No, Alex…”

“Yes, Kara. Trust me on this one, will you?”

Kara bit her lip and looked down, smoothing a wrinkle from her pants. “Even is that is true, you heard Eliza. Jeremiah only agreed to work with them to protect me.”

That was just plain *wrong*. “Kara, they had their sights set on him long before you showed up. I’m serious—Hank Henshaw would have gotten him one way or the other. You were a pawn in a game that’s so much larger than just our family.”

Maggie made a soft sound and nudged her, and Alex rose. When she dropped down next to Kara’s chair, though, her sister sunk into her arms a little too enthusiastically and knocked them both over. A moment later they were floating in the air, and Kara was depositing her back on the couch where she rested her head on Alex’s shoulder in a gesture that reminded her of a cat that desperately wanted your attention but would bolt at the slightest misstep.

“Thanks, Alex.”

“You’re welcome, Kara. And I really am sorry about not fully trusting Lena. Watching out for you is a habit I can’t break overnight.” Even if she’d wanted to, which definitely wasn’t the case.

“I know that, but we’re supposed to be taking care of each other now, remember? And that means giving each other room to make mistakes. Not that I’m saying you’re a mistake, Maggie,” she added, leaning forward to give the other woman a sweet smile. “You’re lovely and obviously good for Alex, and I’m not only saying that because you trust Lena.” She paused. “Which, you do, don’t you?”

“I do,” Maggie admitted. “She’s proven herself in my book. It would take something pretty drastic to change my mind at this point.”

“Fine,” Alex said. “I will suspend my suspicion of Lena indefinitely. Happy now?”

Kara rolled her eyes. “Who wouldn’t be with that rousing declaration?” She hesitated. “Eliza already knows I’m friends with Lena. Do you think maybe you could check in, see how she feels about her, maybe put in a good word or two? But don’t tell her we’re together, obviously!”

“I wouldn’t,” Alex assured her. “And yes, I’d be happy to run reconnaissance on our mother.”

Kara wrinkled her nose. “When you put it like that… But really, thanks, Alex. It would be a relief to
know where she stands on all of this before I subject Lena to another suspicious Danvers woman.”

Alex bonked her on the shoulder, but gently so that she wouldn’t bruise her own hand. “I’ll do better, okay?”

“Okay.”

“I love you, Kara.”

“I love you, Alex.” She jumped up, smiling. “Thanks for the talk, guys. I’ll see you later, okay?”

They rose beside her, and Kara allowed herself to be hugged. Or at least that was how it seemed to Alex. Normally her sister was the one forcing everyone within arm’s reach into a cheerful embrace, whether they wanted it or not. Kryptonians didn’t give or receive physical affection easily, she remembered her father saying in the beginning when Kara had shied away from contact. But by the end of the first year, she had relaxed and was seeking out touch as a form of solace. Alex had asked her about it in college, and she had explained that the physical contact kept her grounded. Otherwise she felt like she could drift away at any moment.

The drapes were still fluttering when Maggie turned to hug her, leaning back to peer into her face. “You okay, Alex?”

“Fine,” she said, still staring at the spot Kara had launched herself from.

“You’re an amazing big sister, you know it?”

“I think you’re probably a better one,” Alex said, finally focusing on her girlfriend. “Thanks for being here, Maggie.”

“Of course. None of this is easy. And when you add in the whole Romeo and Juliet dynamic…”

“You see that too?”

“I think everyone with eyes sees it.”

“That’s partly what worries me—the parallels between the two of them and all the great tragedies in the Western literary canon.”

“I wouldn’t say all the tragedies…”

Alex smiled a little, captivated as ever by Maggie’s dimples. “You’re adorable, you know that?”

“So I’ve been told.” She paused. “What would you say to asking Eliza to come to town this weekend for a pre-Christmas family dinner? Maybe Lena would feel safer meeting Eliza here.”

“Hmm,” Alex said, focusing in the distance as she considered the suggestion. It made sense, actually. It made a lot of sense.

“And maybe before dinner you could, you know…?”

Alex stared at her blankly. “I could what?”

“Maybe tell her about Kara and Lena? I know what your sister said, but giving your mom some time to process everything before they meet might be the wiser course. Because you know the second your mom sees them together, she’s going to figure it out.”
“She totally is, isn’t she?”

“Yep.”

And while Eliza had responded beautifully when Alex came out, it seemed likely that the clues had been more obvious in her case. Besides, Alex might not be sure how their mother would react to Kara dating a woman, but her response to the Luthor part of the equation was easier to predict.

“I mean, assuming you can both keep a secret from Kara, that is,” Maggie added.

“Are you kidding? The word ‘secret’ is literally in my job title. Besides, the only Danvers who has trouble keeping secrets—”

“Is Kara.” Maggie nodded. “So do you think asking Eliza to visit is a good idea, then?”

“I do, actually,” she admitted.

“Hey, don’t sound so surprised!”

“I’m sorry,” Alex said, smiling down at her. “I meant you’re brilliant. Not to mention incredible, amazing, show stopping, spectacular…”

Maggie’s grin was teasing. “Did you just quote Lady Gaga?”

“Maybe.” She winked.

“That’s it. You’ve officially graduated from Baby Gay to Full-On Queer.”

“Full-on—is that a hint about something you’d like to add to our bedroom repertoire?” Alex drawled, delighting in the flustered mess her girlfriend almost immediately dissolved into.

“What? No! Or, well, I mean, if you wanted to…”

“I could be interested.”

“Really?”

“Really.” Alex began to back her toward the bedroom side of the apartment. “Although for now I wouldn’t mind the old-fashioned way.”

Maggie’s hands grasped at her hips. “I think that could be arranged,” she said in a high, breathy tone that always surprised Alex even as it made her feel like bragging to the world, *I did that. That was totally me.*

They’d planned to make dinner together, but food could wait. Right now there was clearly a more pressing matter to attend to.

* * *

Alex wiped down the kitchen counter for the third time and then looked around the apartment for even the slightest hint of dirt. From her mother she’d inherited a propensity to clean when she was stressed. Seeing as her work kept her both highly stressed and too busy to come home often, her apartment was usually spotless. Which meant that right now, as she waited for her mother to arrive, she had little to occupy her. Even the refrigerator was clean and sparkling thanks to the DEO’s battle with an alien parasite a few weeks earlier. Kara and J’onn had both been touch and go for a while, and when she wasn’t at their side, Alex had been right here cleaning her kitchen to within an inch of
its life. Or maybe of her life. It still wasn’t clear in her head.

The buzzer rang, and Alex took a deep breath. Here went nothing.

A minute later her mother walked through the unlocked door, emanating the quiet, calm power that had always seemed to elude Alex. Her own energy was more of the fast-twitch variety, with short bursts of action followed by restless down periods. She couldn’t remember anymore if she’d always been that way or if the DEO had simply molded her into the type of agent they needed.

“Alex, sweetie!” her mother said, dropping her bags and opening her arms wide.

“Hi Mom,” Alex said, and stepped into the familiar embrace. Her mother still smelled the same, of old-fashioned cold cream and tea tree shampoo, and if she closed her eyes, Alex could pretend she was back in their house by the sea getting ready for dinner, and her dad would be there too, and Kara…

That was where the fantasy always broke down. In reality, Kara had been at her most fragile when their dad was still at home. The only time period that all four of them had been happy concurrently was before Krypton exploded, and Alex didn’t feel right conjuring the time before Kara joined their family. It felt too much like wishing she was gone, and given the risks she faced each time she took on a power-sucking parasite or alien-hating humans, Alex tried to avoid such thoughts. She wasn’t superstitious, but she’d seen a lot of things during her time at the DEO that she previously would have sworn were impossible. Who was she to say that pissing off the gods wasn’t an actual thing?

“Where’s Kara?” her mom asked, gazing around the apartment as if she might suddenly materialize.

“She’ll be over later,” Alex said.

Supergirl was currently downtown at the National City Boys & Girls Club giving a talk to at-risk youth. The idea of Kara interacting with kids whose families were three or four generations deep into the cycle of urban poverty had struck Alex as perhaps not the best idea, but Maggie had insisted that Kara knew better than anyone how difficult it could be to maintain a positive attitude in the face of loss and fear. Besides, while she might be the post powerful woman in the world, she was also a member of a feared and hated minority, another commonality she shared with many of the kids in the intervention program.

“Oh. Okay,” Eliza said, watching her with a scientist’s observant gaze.

“Would you like some tea? I have that blueberry green blend you like.”

“That would be lovely,” her mother said, and came to lean against the granite island while Alex filled the kettle.

They were quiet for a moment, and then, as she pulled the loose leaf tea from a cupboard and set it beside a pair of mugs, Alex said, “Actually, I wanted to talk to you about Kara.”

“I thought there might be something.” Eliza maneuvered onto a stool and set her elbows on the counter. “Did something happen? Has she been injured again?”

“No, nothing like that,” Alex said quickly. “It doesn’t have anything to do with the DEO, actually. Well, maybe a little.” Given that Lena was Lillian Luthor’s daughter, Kara’s love life did have something to do with the DEO. At least, peripherally. Alex hoped it would remain that way.

“So it’s personal then.” Her mother perked up slightly. “Is she dating someone? Is it the boy from Daxam, Mon-El? He certainly seemed to take a shine to her.”
“Yes, she’s dating, but—”

“I really liked him, you know. He was so respectful, asking me all about my research. Did you know Kara thought he was hitting on me?” She threw her head back and laughed.

Mon-El hitting on her mom? *Ew.* And, also, of course he would.

“That’s because he was trying to ingratiate himself,” Alex said impatiently. “Mon-El is an overgrown frat boy from a planet of overgrown frat boys, so you should be glad that no, Kara is not dating him.”

When he wasn’t demonstrating everything that was wrong with his home planet, Alex actually liked Mon-El. Except for the kiss he’d stolen when he was supposedly dying. That was a dick move. But in his defense he’d been pretty out of it, so Alex supposed she would give him a pass this once.

“If it’s not him, who is it?” She brightened even more. “Is she back with James? Oh, I hope so. I never understood why she broke it off with him. He is such a wonderful man, and he’s been a loyal friend to Clark all of these years.”

On this, Alex and her mother agreed. In fact, she would have given up the use of her left hand if it meant that Kara and James—wait, scratch that. Now that she was gay she kind of needed her hands. Both of them.

Before her mother could launch into her Danvers-Olsen fantasy wedding, Alex held up a hand. “It’s not James.” She bit her lip. “It’s not actually a man at all.”

Her mother blinked, and oh, that was where Kara had picked up the habit. How had she never made the connection? Maybe because she didn’t see her mother confounded very often.

“She’s dating an alien? Is that what you’re telling me? Why all the drama, Alex? Your sister is from off-world herself, and we have always been progressive when it comes to alien rights. I don’t see why—”

“Jesus, Mom! She’s dating a woman, all right? A human woman.” Might as well rip the Band-Aid off the rest of the way. That was what Eliza had always preached. “She’s dating Lena Luthor, and it’s pretty serious.”

Eliza’s jaw dropped. “Lena Luthor? Are you joking?”

“No, I’m not *joking,*” Alex said, folding her arms across her chest.

She was tempted to tell her mother that implying to her lesbian daughter that her other daughter’s queerness was somehow a laughing matter was not cool. But then she remembered her own reaction to the idea of Kara dating Lex’s kid sister. The news took some getting used to, which was the whole point of having this conversation. She needed to give Eliza time to process without feeling defensive.

“Wow,” her mom said after a minute, passing a hand over her face. “Talk about *déjà vu*…”

Before Alex could ask what that meant, the electric kettle reached boiling point and emitted three high-pitched beeps. Glad to have something to keep her hands busy, she turned away to deal with the tea. By the time she had leaf-filled infusers steeping in each mug, her mother had composed herself.

“I knew they were friends, but *dating?* How long has this been going on?” she asked as Alex pushed her mug across the island.
“A month or so.” More if you counted the week-plus they’d spent on Earth-1, but the existence of Barry and Cisco’s interdimensional extrapolator was on a need-to-know basis, and this definitely did not qualify. Bad enough that Kara treated the device like her own personal dating app. J’onn had suggested they take it into DEO custody, but Alex had argued that then there would be an official record that could find its way to Cadmus—or, potentially worse, a different federal agency.

“Lena Luthor,” Eliza repeated. “Alex, do you think a relationship with a Luthor is a good idea?”

“I’m trying to support Kara,” she said valiantly.

“Which means you don’t,” Eliza interpreted, frowning.

“No, it means I have difficulty curbing my naturally suspicious nature,” Alex corrected. “I genuinely believe Lena is good for Kara. They have a lot in common, if you think about it, and I’ve never seen Kara smile as much with anyone, not even James. Besides, she’s really growing into her own, and Lena’s at least partially to thank for that.”

“Huh.” Eliza smiled ruefully. “I feel like I should write a parenting manual for humans who adopt alien refugees. I know I could use a resource to refer to right about now.”

“I can see the chapter title now: ‘When Your Super-Powered Child Falls for Her Archnemesis’s Sister.’”

“Or ‘Puberty and Powers: Ensuring Your Off-World Child Doesn’t Melt the Neighborhood Bully’s Face Off.’”


They laughed together, and Alex realized how nice this was. She and her mother rarely had a chance to bond over potentially happy things. Normally when they discussed Kara, the conversation was saturated with gloom and doom.

“How’s she eating?” her mom asked. “Any improvement on that front?”

“She still swears the four food groups are Chinese food, pizza, ice cream, and cake, so…” Eliza sighed. “I suppose she’s just as clumsy as ever?”

“Actually, I think all the DEO training has been good for her coordination and balance. Plus now that she’s got someone indestructible to spar with, she doesn’t have to hold back like she did after we got rid of the Kryptonite.”

“Do you mean J’onn?”

“No, Mon-El. Kara is convinced she can turn him into a superhero.” She barely restrained her derisive harrumph.

Her mother pursed her lips. “Well, if anyone can inspire him to serve the greater good, it’s Kara. And you’re sure there’s no chance of the two of them…”?

“Mom!” And just like that, the good feeling dissipated. “That’s not okay. You wouldn’t say that if Lena were male, would you?”

“I most certainly would! The issue isn’t that Lena is a woman, honey. It’s that she comes from a family that would rather see Kara and everyone like her deported—or dead. I was here for the
Medusa virus fiasco, if you’ll recall.”

“Oh, you mean when Lena infiltrated Cadmus and foiled their plot to kill every alien in the city? That time she sacrificed her own mother to save J’onn and M’gann and a whole bunch of other people she’d never met? That fiasco?”

“I…” Her mom’s shoulders slumped. “I don’t know. Maybe you’re right. With you, I always wondered if you might be gay. But Kara? I simply didn’t see this coming.”

At that moment, Alex wished she could text Maggie a giant hug. She’d been right about this whole scenario and the damage it could cause to their family. Which, honestly, shouldn’t have been a surprise—Maggie was intelligent and sensitive (though she would deny it until she was blue in the face), and had been out for more than a decade. When it came to lesbian life experience, her data sample was far more varied than Alex’s.

“I have to ask you, Mom: Can you be okay with this? Because Kara wants to introduce you to Lena, and maybe even bring her home for Christmas. If you’re not comfortable with any of that, then you need to tell me now so that I can figure out how to minimize the collateral damage.”

Eliza nodded. “I can try, Alex. You know I would never want to hurt Kara. She’s already been through so much.”

“Trying isn’t going to hack it. Lena has been through a lot, too. She lost her mother and was adopted by the Luthors when she was only four, and since she took over the family business and changed its direction, her brother has tried to kill her more than once. That’s actually how she and Kara met.”

“I know. To be honest, that’s exactly why I worry about Kara getting involved with her. I don’t trust Lex, or Lillian for that matter. She tortured Kara. Who’s to say she won’t try that—or even worse—again?”

“Well, she is in prison, for one thing.”

Eliza regarded her steadily. “You and I both know that’s not likely to be the case for long. For her or Lex.”

Alex knew she was right, but she also understood that there wasn’t anything constructive she could do about the unknown future other than choose to not worry about it. “Since Medusa happened, we’ve developed contingency protocols for a variety of scenarios. If that helps.”

Her mother stirred her tea and tested the temperature before taking a careful sip. “I wish I could say it did.” She paused. “When is Kara coming over?”

Alex checked her phone. “A half hour or so.”

“Okay, then.” She nodded resolutely. “It sounds like I have half an hour to get used to the idea. Why don’t you tell me a little more about Lena.”

“That I can do,” Alex said, exhaling in relief. Because as prepared as she was for Lex and Lillian Luthor to break out of prison, she had zero contingency plan for her mother refusing to support Kara’s relationship. Thankfully, it appeared she wouldn’t need one.

Whew.
Maggie’s text alerted them approximately ten seconds before Kara blew in through the open window and all but tackled Eliza in a hug.

“Oh my god, you’re here! I thought we weren’t seeing you until Christmas Eve!”

Eliza touched her cheek. “I felt like seeing my girls, and it’s such a short trip down.”

“Right.” Kara glanced from her to Alex and back again. “Let me just get changed and we can chat.”

“Sounds perfect,” Eliza said, releasing her. “I want to hear what you’ve been up to since Thanksgiving.”

In less than a minute Kara had changed into casual non-Super clothes and was poking her head out of the bathroom door. “Alex, could you come here for a second?”

“Um, yeah.” She smiled tightly at their mom and joined Kara in the bathroom, holding a finger to her lips to remind her how voices echoed in the tiled room. “What’s up?”

“Did you talk to her about Lena?” Kara whispered.

“You could say so.” “Yeah.”

“And?”

“She seems okay. I told her Lena had joined us for Game Night, and she said it was nice that you had a friend outside CatCo and the DEO,” she invented.

Kara squinted at her. “Really? Eliza said that?”

Alex nodded. That was totally something their mother would say. Kara couldn’t be suspicious of that.

“And you didn’t tell her about Lena and me?”

Kara was watching her closely, and for a moment Alex regretted teaching her the most common tells humans give when lying. She willed her heart rate to remain slow and steady and forced herself to hold her sister’s gaze. “I told you I wouldn’t, Kara.”

If her sister noticed this was a dodge, she didn’t comment on it. Instead she hugged her quickly. “Thanks, Alex.”

“You’re welcome. Now can we get out of the bathroom, please?”

Eliza was scrolling through her phone as they approached. “Sharing beauty secrets?” she asked without looking up.

“You know it,” Alex said heartily. But hopefully not too heartily. “Kara, how was the Boys and Girls Club this morning?”

“Those kids are amazing,” Kara exclaimed as she glanced around the kitchen. “I’m serious, they’re like the definition of resiliency.”

“Pizza’s on the way,” Alex said, easily interpreting her sister’s distraction. Kara loved food not only for its nutritional value and sweetness content but also because it gave her something to do with her hands when she was nervous.
“Oh. Thanks, Alex,” she said, flashing her a grateful smile. “I was so excited to see you, Eliza, that I flew straight here.”

Eliza reached into one of her bags and pulled out a tupperware container. “I might have come prepared.”

“Ohmygodisthatbananabread?”

Alex watched in amusement as her sister took the package their mother held out, tore off the foil, and jammed half the loaf in her mouth.

“Don’t worry,” Eliza said in a whispered aside as she pulled out another loaf. “There’s more where that came from.”

“I heard that!” Kara said, grinning back and forth between them.

Eliza reclaimed her seat at the kitchen island. “So, Kara, I’m all caught up on Alex’s life. What’s new with you, honey?”

“Me?” she stuttered around a mouthful of banana bread. Her gaze flicked to Alex and back to their mother. “Um, not much, really. I mean, you know, CatCo and writing and the DEO and so on and so forth.”

“Well, there’s something. You have positively bloomed since I last saw you.”

“Bloomed? Like, um, a flower? Because you know I’m plant-challenged, what with the whole heat vision-freezing breath-impervious to temperature trifecta, ha ha.”

Jesus, she was so awkward it was painful to watch. Her spazziness alone should have given away her non-humanness on a daily basis; it was nothing short of a miracle that her secret identity remained remotely intact. Although who would expect the Girl of Steel to react like a total and utter freak whenever she got panicky? For that matter, who would believe that Supergirl panicked?

“Alex was telling me all about Maggie,” Eliza tried again, her smile encouraging. “What about you? What ever happened with the boy from Daxam?”

“Mon-El?” Kara scoffed. “Nothing, unless you count the time he proposi—” She broke off and jammed more bread in her mouth. “This is really good. Did you change the recipe? I feel like it’s a little more cinnamon-y or something.”

“I added pumpkin pie spice.” Eliza glanced at Alex, who shrugged subtly. “So no Mon-El, but is there someone else in your life, sweetie?”

“Um…” Again Kara eyed Alex, who offered what she hoped was a reassuring smile.
“There is, isn’t there?” Eliza pressed.

Kara stared at Alex. “Seriously, did you…?”

Alex faked offense. “What? Do you really think I would?” She shoved a bite of their mother’s famous banana bread into her mouth, hoping it would keep Kara at bay.

No such luck: “Frankly, yes.”

“Well, whoever it is, they obviously agree with you,” their mother said blithely. “So who’s the lucky man? Or woman?” She gestured at Alex. “Your sister here has taught me the importance of not making heterosexist assumptions.”

That was a bit much, Alex thought, watching Kara. But her sister only nodded and said, “I am seeing someone. A woman, actually. You know how much I always try to be just like Alex, heh heh!”

The joke was unexpected. Alex watched their mother blink a few times. “I see. And who’s the lucky lady?”

Alex couldn’t remember the last time she had heard her feminist mother use the term *lady* other than in a sarcastic tirade about sexist male scientists who complained about women invading “their” field. But it wasn’t every day you learned your alien child was dating the daughter of a notorious alien murderer, either.

“Someone who started out as a friend,” Kara admitted.

Alex recognized this sentence from Kara’s official coming-out plan. *Yes!* Alex’s scheme—well, Maggie’s, really—was coming to fruition.

Eliza clapped her hands. “Is it Susan Vasquez from the DEO? Because she’s always struck me as the woman-identified type with that hair and her bearing and all of that.”

Only Alex’s years of training prevented her from spewing out her bite of banana bread.

“No!” Kara paused. “Although, you’re right. Vasquez does have that lady-loving vibe going on, doesn’t she, Alex?”

Alex nodded, trying not to grit her teeth at the ridiculous nature of this coming-out conversation. Kara would hear the sound and know something was up—although it kind of seemed like she already did.

“Should I keep guessing?” Eliza asked, sparing a glance at Alex.

“Sure,” Kara said, also eying Alex out of the corner of one eye.

*Wait.* They were fucking with her, weren’t they? Alex folded her arms and glared between them. She tried to be a good sister and this was the thanks she received?

“Lucy Lane?” Eliza suggested. “I remember you seemed very enamored of her when you first met.”

“What? No! I mean, she’s straight. I just thought she was really, really pretty, that’s all.” She cleared her throat. “You know, that’s probably enough guessing. It’s Lena. I’m dating Lena Luthor.”

Eliza allowed her eyebrows to rise in feigned surprise. “Ah. She was my next guess.”

Kara turned to glare back at Alex. “Gee, I wonder why that could possibly be, Alex. Or should I say,
“Sweetie!” Eliza interrupted their staring match by sliding from her stool and enveloping Kara in a motherly embrace. “I’m happy for you, really. You seem more at peace with yourself than I’ve ever seen you, and if Lena is a part of that, then I wholeheartedly approve.”

Kara hugged their mother back. “You do?” she asked, visibly deflating.

“Oh of course.” Eliza pulled back and kissed her forehead. “I was here for the Medusa attack, remember? Lena is the one who took down Cadmus single-handedly.”

“She is,” Kara agreed. “She doesn’t share her family’s views, not at all.”

“Obviously not, if she—that is… Does she know where you’re from, honey?” Eliza asked delicately.

That was the wording their parents had settled on to refer to Kara’s alien refugee status. They had been big proponents of acting in private as you would in public. That way there was less likely to be an inadvertent slip that would get Kara—and the rest of them, by extension—in trouble.

Kara nodded, smiling a little. “She figured it out on her own. She’s brilliant that way.”

Eliza smiled back. “I don’t know if it’s possible, but Kara, I would love to meet her while I’m here this weekend—if you think it’s appropriate. It sounds like you two are pretty new.”

Kara glanced at her sister. “This was all your idea, wasn’t it?”

Alex shook her head. “No. Seriously, Kara.”

“This was my idea,” Eliza chimed in. “If you care about her, she must be very special. That goes for Maggie, too,” she added, glancing at Alex. “Maybe we could all have dinner together tonight?”

“That might work,” Kara said. “If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure, sweetie. Alex?”

“I’ll ask Maggie,” she said as if dinner together hadn’t been her amazing girlfriend’s angle all along.

And then it hit her—Maggie was going to meet her mother. As in, today. Somehow she’d been so caught up in the Luthor-Super drama that she had failed to note that small, trifling detail. What if her mom didn’t like Maggie? Eliza had always been a stickler for education, and Maggie had bypassed college, opting instead to move to Metropolis and look for a job. She’d told Alex she’d been recruited into the academy by a friend of a friend—“We need more police officers like you,” he kept saying, by which Maggie was pretty sure he’d meant women of color. Working at Home Depot had barely paid her rent, while police work offered guaranteed pay raises and excellent benefits. Plus she would get to carry a gun and a badge. What self-respecting lesbian wouldn’t love that, really?

And yes, Maggie had put herself through night school over the years, eventually earning a Bachelor’s in Criminal Justice from Metropolis City College. But in a family where three of the members had PhDs and the fourth was a certified genius from another planet, non-traditional degree pathways weren’t part of the narrative.

Whatever. Maggie was beautiful and intelligent and a badass. She couldn’t help that her parents had refused to help with college. Which, honestly, still seemed a little fishy to Alex. Maggie had told her that they didn’t value education the way the Danvers did, but she sensed there was something else going on, especially given that Maggie wasn’t planning to see her father or siblings over the
holidays. At some point, she would have to get to the bottom of the Sawyer family story.

While Kara texted Lena about dinner, Alex sent Maggie a message: “Danvers family rescue mission successfully deployed & executed. You free for dinner tonight?”

The reply came almost immediately: “Hells yes! Does this mean Lena is coming too?”

Alex glanced at Kara. “Hey. Is your girl in?”

“Yep. Is yours?”

Alex nodded, pretending not to see the slightly uncomfortable look that passed over their mother’s face as they discussed their girlfriends in her presence. “All set.”

Eliza smiled, and it almost even reached her eyes. “Wonderful. Sounds like a plan.”

The doorbell rang, and Kara grabbed the money on the counter. “Finally! I was ready to fly out and track them down.”

While Kara dealt with the pizza delivery guy and their mom set out plates and napkins, Alex texted Maggie: “Family dinner is confirmed. Repeat, we are a go. Five pm cocktails. Don’t be late.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Maggie wrote back with a flirty wink. Then she added, “Woo hoo! Operation Parental-Meeting Buffer complete!”

Alex blinked at her phone. Seriously? Was that what all of this had been about? But no. Alex would have bet a whole gallon of vegan ice cream that Maggie was only trying to protect her tough image.

“I see you, Sawyer.”

“I should hope so,” Alex fired back, turning off her phone screen. If only it was as easy to shut off the blush working its way up her neck.

“Oh my god,” Kara said, nudging their mother as she set the pizza boxes on the counter. “Look at Miss Heart Eyes over there.”

“You should talk,” Alex fired back, turning off her phone screen. If only it was as easy to shut off the blush working its way up her neck.

“You should talk,” Alex fired back, turning off her phone screen. If only it was as easy to shut off the blush working its way up her neck.

“I see you, Sawyer.”

“I should hope so,” Maggie texted back, and then followed with a line of hearts in a veritable rainbow of colors. 

Aww… They still hadn’t exchanged *I love you* yet, but Alex was pretty sure they were close. And in the meantime, the emojis made her feel a little melty inside.

“Oh my god,” Kara said, nudging their mother as she set the pizza boxes on the counter. “Look at Miss Heart Eyes over there.”

“Except, you know, Super-sized,” she added, snickering at her own humor.

Alex and her mom only shook their heads. While Kara was a lot of things, comedian was not on the list.
“Whatever,” Kara grumbled. “Lena thinks I’m funny.”

“Does she, though?” Alex dead-panned.

“If she does, then you should hang on to that girl,” Eliza put in.

Kara laughed again and ducked her head, and Alex flashed their mother a grateful look. She nodded back with a matching expression, and lunch continued, the pizza dwindling steadily as the light shifted outside the apartment’s wall of windows.

When their mother excused herself to “freshen up,” Alex braced herself for the verbal assault she thought must be coming. But the look Kara turned on her was more amused than betrayed.

“What?” Alex asked, half-smiling back.

“I should have known you’d tell her.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yes you do. And you know what’s funny?”

Alex shook her head and started to transfer soiled wax paper and empty pizza boxes into the bins under the sink.

Kara swallowed one of her trademark gigantic bites and said, “I might have done the same thing on your behalf.”

“Wait, what?!” She spun away from the sink and stared at her sister, who was watching her with a sheepish grin.

“You know, at Thanksgiving?” As Alex’s mouth dropped open, Kara added, “What? You were a mess at dinner, and she pulled me aside afterward all worried about you. You know I suck at lying, Alex. You tell me that all the time!”

Alex gazed out the window, not really seeing the neighboring buildings as her mind connected the dots. No wonder Eliza had seemed so certain she was gay that night in the lab. Kara had already told her.

“What was her reaction?” she asked, glancing back at Kara.

Her sister’s eyes narrowed slightly. “How did she react to me dating Lena?”

Alex’s eyebrows rose and then settled. “Fair enough.” They regarded each other for a moment, and then Alex moved toward her, arms open. “Thanks for looking out for me, Kara.”

Her sister slid off her stool and launched herself at Alex, nearly bowling her over. “Thank you for looking out for me!”

“What are sisters for?”

She held Kara close, body reassuringly warm and solid, and remembered the night Kara had come out to her. Or, more accurately, the night she’d made Kara come out. Back in high school, she never would have thought that their lives would lead to this place. Would anyone they’d grown up with have believed both Danvers sisters would end up queer, badass, alien-fighting heroes? But they were happy, or getting there anyway, and their mother loved them. Who cared what other people thought?
“Can this be a family hug?” Eliza asked as she crossed the room toward them.

“Of course,” Alex and Kara said in unison.

They held out their arms and their mother embraced them, and even though Alex thought of her missing father as she always did at moments like this, mostly she managed to breathe deeply and appreciate the uncommon moment of peace.

Too bad it never lasted long.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

In which Maggie and Lena meet the parent.

When Lena Luthor showed up at Alex’s apartment looking amazing in sleek black pants and chunky heels, Maggie realized she hadn’t adequately thought through this plan. Now instead of merely being on the hot seat with Alex’s mother, she was going to be compared to a powerful woman with multiple degrees and an affinity for science. Seriously, what had she and Alex been thinking? A sophisticated lipstick lesbian would always satisfy parental expectations better than a sporty, ornery cop from the Midwestern sticks.

Then Kara, trailing Lena by half a step, had hugged her to the point of nearly squeezing all the air from her lungs while simultaneously thanking her in a high-pitched tone that either meant she was nervous as fuck or already drunk on alien booze. And yeah, Maggie would take that over the occasional uncertain glance Kara still levelled at her when she thought no one was looking.

Eliza accepted the hand Lena offered, and surely that had to mean something. She’d pulled Maggie into a warm hug as soon as she crossed the threshold, Alex fidgeting in the background, but with Lena she merely shook her hand and smiled politely.

“It’s lovely to meet you,” Lena said, her voice a low, professional rumble that Maggie had never heard on her. If she was covering nerves, she was doing so ably.

“You as well,” Eliza said, her eyes shifting from Lena’s face to Kara’s hand on her elbow. Then her expression softened as she glanced up and seemed to notice Kara’s anxious gaze. “I’m glad you could make it on such short notice. I’m sure with your busy schedule it isn’t easy to carve out personal time.”

“I wouldn’t have missed it. Besides, in this crowd I’m probably the least likely to be called away at any moment.”

“The first time I met Lena,” Maggie put in, trying to lighten the slightly strained atmosphere, “your daughters and I left her in the lurch when an alien decided to go on a drunken car-tossing spree.”

“Well, at least that doesn’t sound as dangerous as some of the other operations you girls have been involved in.”

“No,” Kara agreed. “Mon-El was just having a really bad—” She stopped as Alex sent her a half-exasperated, half-amused look. “Shoot. I’m not supposed to talk about that, am I?”

“Mon-El?” their mother repeated. “I see.”

Alex bumped Maggie slightly with her hip as she headed into the kitchen, laughing awkwardly. “Speaking of drunken outbursts, can I get anyone a drink?”

Her eyes rested on Maggie for a second, and she easily read the message: *Thanks for the diversion.* She nodded back. If being Lena and Kara’s buffer was going to make Alex look at her like that, then it was worth any discomfort she might accrue on her own behalf. Anyway, it was better than...
spending the evening obsessing over how she looked, what she said, how she came across. Parents of past girlfriends had rarely liked her. She was too flippant, too gay, too brown for the white ones, too white for the brown ones. That was one way dating off-worlders was easier: They were often here without their families.

Her longest relationship, encapsulating five of the eight years she’d lived in Metropolis, had eventually crumbled under the weight of the unceasing disapproval of her human girlfriend’s parents. One weekend while Emily was away on a “family trip” that included her two brothers’ girlfriends, neither of whom had been in the picture as long as Maggie had, she’d taken out her hurt and anger at Emily’s refusal to stand up for their relationship by getting drunk and going home with a random girl. She’d felt sick about it the next day—and most days after that for years, actually. She would never have believed she’d be capable of such behavior. But what was done was done. She’d told Emily the night she got back from Hawaii, and though they’d tried to repair the fractures, their relationship had ended a few months later.

Alex was different, though, Maggie thought, watching as her girlfriend and Lena went to work with bottles of alcohol, juice, ice, and a cocktail shaker. She hadn’t known when she told Alex they could only be friends just how different from Emily she would turn out to be. In fact, she hadn’t fully grasped how comfortable Alex was with her newly realized identity until the night of Cyborg Superman’s attack on L Corp. In the wake of the Emily fiasco, Maggie had vowed never again to date a queer newbie. Alex was the only woman who had ever tempted her to break that rule.

A good decision, she thought now as Alex delivered her margarita. Maggie took a sip and pretended to dither. Then Alex bumped her hip again and she smiled. “Not bad, Danvers. Your technique is definitely improving.”

“Don’t sound so surprised, Sawyer.” Alex stole a quick kiss before backing away, eyes wide as if she couldn’t quite believe the ballsy move.

That made two of them.

A quarter of an hour into the first ever Danvers Dyke Dinner Extravaganza, Maggie still wasn’t convinced Kara hadn’t stopped by the alien bar on her way over. The more hyper Kara behaved, though, the calmer Alex got, an automatic balancing act between the sisters that she caught Lena watching, too—when she wasn’t sucking up to Eliza.

Although sucking up was possibly too crude a term. What did business executives call it? Schmoozing. That was it: oozing charm while you made the other person believe you found them utterly fascinating. In this case, Lena was probably just trying to distract Eliza from her last name. Maggie knew Lena was nothing like the rest of her family, but perhaps she was more open to the idea of the apple falling far—like, really, really far—from the proverbial tree and then rolling even farther away because that was what she’d done herself. She still spoke to her three older sisters, and they even visited occasionally. But she hadn’t seen her father since her mother’s funeral a decade earlier. If her mother had lived, things might have turned out differently. But she hadn’t, and so they hadn’t.

Eliza tried to be equitable, Maggie could see that. But her attention kept returning to Kara’s girlfriend as Lena and Alex mixed margaritas and Kara set the table for dinner. Even as Eliza asked multiple questions about life as a detective in National City and appeared to listen to the answers, her gaze would wander to the kitchen before snapping resolutely back to Maggie. And she got it, she did. Lena was probably the center of attention in any room she entered. But Maggie would be lying if she said it wasn’t a little disappointing.

The first part of dinner continued in the same vein. Eliza, Alex, and Lena discussed their research,
which was a bit higher than Maggie’s pay grade. She might be in the NCPD science division, but the three women at the table could have taught her college biology class, she was guessing. Normally she didn’t mind Alex getting all caught up in nerd talk, but she would have appreciated the save right about now.

When the overture came, though, it came from Kara: “Isn’t L Corp in talks with the NCPD about developing a law enforcement application for the exoskeleton tech? Maggie, do you know anything about that?”

“Actually, I do,” she said, tamping down her surprise at Kara’s friendly smile. She’d fully believed Kara might not ever forgive her for breaking Alex’s heart early on. “The new armor will better protect our officers against alien weaponry, which we think will help improve response time and outcomes in alien-on-human crime and vice versa. Understandably, some of our men and women on the front lines can be a bit twitchy when it comes to off-worlders and their weapons.”

“That’s one of the reasons we decided to partner with the NCPD,” Lena put in. “With the recent increase in human-alien interaction and the tension surrounding the President’s Alien Amnesty Act, this seemed like a win-win for the city.”

“We’re also piloting a community action program with L Corp to improve human-alien relations in the region,” Maggie added.

“I had no idea L Corp or National City were so progressive.” Eliza glanced between them. “I would love to hear more about the program.”

For the next few minutes, Maggie and Lena took turns describing the initiative that other cities across the country—and even the globe—had expressed interest in adopting. This, of course, was right up Eliza’s alley, as Kara had undoubtedly known when she guided the conversation in that direction. Not only did Maggie get to talk about a cause dear to her heart, Lena got to demonstrate that she didn’t hate aliens, either personally or professionally. A win-win for the Danvers sisters, really.

They lingered over coffee and tiramisu, which Kara had produced with a wink in her direction. Apparently Alex had told her sister of her affinity for the Italian treat.

And what a treat this particular baker’s rendering was. “Oh my god,” Maggie practically gasped after her first bite, glancing at Kara. “Where did you find this?”

“Little Italy.”

“Little Italy,” Maggie repeated, feeling herself frown but unable to halt the response. “As in…?”

“New York, babe,” Alex said, smiling.

*Of course.* Maggie glanced at Lena, who laughed and shook her head, eyes soft as she gazed at Kara.

“What?” Kara asked. “I had an hour to kill.”

At the head of the table, Eliza set her palm flat on the table. “My god, Kara, how many people are we up to now?” As her daughters exchanged guilty glances, she added, “I understand that you can’t lie to everyone in your life, but keeping your identity secret is as much to keep others safe as it is to protect you.”

“I know,” Kara said, ducking her head.
Lena reached for her hand and murmured something Maggie didn’t quite catch, and this time the eyes the youngest Luthor turned on Eliza were more wary than deferential.

“And you,” Eliza added, gaze shifting to her older daughter, “I thought you understood. The more people who know, the more of a target you become, Alex. If certain people knew that Supergirl had a sister…” Her eyes flicked to Lena, whose chin rose stubbornly as she returned the look.

“You can’t expect us to live the way we did as kids, Mom,” Alex said, her tone more biting than Maggie would have expected. “We’re adults now, and a life lived in fear is a life half-lived.”

Maggie sucked in a breath, recognizing the proverb her maternal grandmother used to say. Alex loved to press her lips against the words tattooed across her rib cage: Vivir con miedo es como vivir en medias.

“Besides, Kara gets to decide who to have in her life and who not to,” Alex added, giving her mother a significant glare.

She was referring to Mon-El as much as she was Lena. Maggie knew this because Alex had called earlier to vent about how her mom kept trying to push Kara toward the Daxam douchebag, as they had christened him. Eliza, Alex had ranted, was being “super homophobic” about the whole thing, supporting a relationship with a sexist jackass over a decidedly lesbian Lena Luthor. That call had surprised Maggie. She knew there was history there, years of Alex feeling like she could never measure up to her mother’s expectations. Since she’d been on the scene, Alex and Eliza seemed to have largely moved past that old dynamic, but that was the thing about family. History, particularly the painful kind, rarely stayed buried.

“To be fair,” Maggie said, “Kara hasn’t told that many people. Only, what, Winn and Lucy Lane? And they both work for the DEO in some capacity, right?” Kara nodded, her small smile grateful. “The rest of us figured it out when we got close to her and Alex. Otherwise I’m sure we would be just as clueless as everyone else.”

“I agree. I didn’t figure it out until I’d been around her in both capacities,” Lena said, her hand still covering Kara’s. “Unless someone spends a significant amount of time with you in both roles, I don’t think they’d see it.”

Kara smiled into Lena’s eyes, and Maggie chanced a glance in Eliza’s direction. And suddenly she didn’t feel nearly as insecure as she had earlier because the set of Eliza’s shoulders and mouth fairly screamed the fact that she didn’t want Kara to be holding hands with Lena Luthor. No matter how pretty Lena was or how much money and power she possessed, Eliza was afraid of her. And Maggie got it, she really did. Lillian and Lex Luthor were dangerous nut jobs with a massive vendetta against aliens, not to mention the money and smarts to carry out their assorted nefarious plots. But she didn’t think Eliza was being fair to Lena, or to Kara, for that matter.

Then again, she didn’t have children, so maybe she couldn’t understand what it would be like to be Romeo’s (or Juliet’s) mother.

As Maggie watched, Eliza took a breath and released it, her shoulders lowering, her expression growing more pensive than critical.

“You’re right,” she said finally, and all eyes in the room shifted to her. “You can’t live in fear, and I don’t want you to. I want you to be happy, and honestly, you seem to be. Both of you. But you’re still my daughters and I still worry every single night that I’m going to get a call from J’onn or someone else at the DEO informing me that I’ve lost one of you. Worse, that I’ll have to see the video footage of your deaths repeating on the national news over and over again.” She stopped to
swallow, her eyes glassy with unshed tears. “I love you both so much, and I am so proud of the women you have become. I truly am. But I can’t help worrying about you. That’s something a mother can never completely turn off.”

“But Alex and I are watching out for each other now,” Kara said earnestly. “We have each other’s backs, Eliza.”

“I know that, sweetheart. But that just means you fly into trouble together instead of alone.”

“Nobody’s asking you to turn off your worry,” Alex said. “We wouldn’t expect that. But you do need to respect our decisions—and that includes the people we decide to bring into our circle. You told me once a long time ago that adopting Kara would mean making sacrifices, and it has. But inviting her into our family has also added so much depth and color—at least, to my life. Kara and I get to save people’s lives on a daily basis, Mom. Do you have any idea how empowering that is?”

“No,” Eliza admitted, shaking her head. “I have spent my career focused on the micro level of alien life. But that was my calling, and this is obviously yours. Both of yours. I’m trying to be supportive, girls, I really am. I just won’t ever be perfect at it. No parent ever is.”

“We don’t need you to be perfect,” Kara said, more solemn than Maggie was used to as she laced her fingers with Lena’s and held up their hands a little. “We just need you to be okay with everything. Or, if you really can’t, then at least pretend to be. Because you’re right—what we do is dangerous, and it would be terrible to leave things on a bad note.” She swallowed and looked down, and Maggie wondered if she was thinking of the aunt she’d lost the year before, her mother’s twin who Alex had killed to save J’onn. Eliza glanced down at their intertwined hands. For a moment the room was quiet, almost as if they were all holding their breaths. Then she nodded and glanced up at Kara. “I can do that. Or I can try, anyway.”

Her eyes swiveled to Lena, whose chin was lifted again in the willful pose Maggie associated with the Luthors. Their gazes locked, and the room was silent again, and then Lena nodded back. Maggie thought she heard a collective sigh as Kara and Alex exchanged a look that appeared to be equal parts relief and nerves. Hardly unexpected for the Danvers sisters—they seemed more comfortable using guns and fists to deal with their problems, an impulse Maggie was somewhat acquainted with herself.

“Well, now that the tiramisu is well and truly killed,” she said, rising and beginning to clear the table, “what do you guys think about some board games?”

“I could definitely use a game or two,” Alex said heartily, joining her. “Kara? Are you in?”

“Duh. Prepare to be demolished! I mean, figuratively,” she added with an apologetic glance at their mother. “Not literally, of course, because I wouldn’t—”

“It’s okay,” Eliza said, smiling. “I think we all knew what you meant, sweetie.”

The group voted for Monopoly, which, to be honest, was Maggie’s least favorite. As the youngest in her family, she’d always lost badly at that particular game, and could remember more than a few evenings that had ended with her chucking the board across the room and being sent to bed early, her father’s voice still ringing in her ears. But whatever. Tonight wasn’t about her. Besides, she had grown and matured. Really.

Once they got the game set up, conversation drifted to the Danvers family Christmas Eve tradition of
eggnog and—Monopoly. Awesome.

“You might see a side of Alex you haven’t before;” Eliza told Maggie. “She has a bit of a competitive streak. I’m still not sure where she gets it from.”

It was almost funny that Alex’s mother would think Maggie had yet to pick up on her daughter’s competitive nature. A healthy respect for winning was something they shared, although Maggie was pretty sure she accepted loss with a tad more grace. Actually, she was fairly certain everyone else in the world was a better sport than Alex Danvers.

“I can’t wait,” Maggie said, meaning it.

Even if she had to suffer through hours upon hours of Monopoly, Christmas with the Danvers would sure beat spending it working the shifts no one else wanted, wondering if this was the year her father would finally call and extend an olive branch.

Kara murmured something to Lena who shook her head, and there was a moment of uncomfortable silence while everyone seemed to process that Lena was the only person present who wouldn’t be in Midvale for Christmas.

After a moment, Eliza closed the dice in her fist and said, “Lena, what do you have planned for the holidays?”

“Work mostly, and then Kara and I are going to LA for New Year’s.”

Eliza’s brow rose. “That sounds glamorous. What about Christmas, though? Will you not be able to take any time off?”

Lena shrugged and reached for her coffee mug. “I’m not quite sure yet.”

“Well, if you don’t have any other plans, I hope you’ll consider joining us.” As Lena gazed at her, startled, Eliza winced. “I’m sorry, I know you two haven’t been together very long. It’s not my place to extend the invitation, is it?”

Maggie pinched Alex’s thigh under the table, which she intended to mean, Damn, your mom is good! That or, Damn, your mom is an excellent liar and don’t get any ideas about lying to me, Danvers. Probably it was the latter.

“It’s fine, Eliza,” Kara said, smiling. “Actually, it’s a kind offer.”

Lena’s eyes were wide and vulnerable in a way Maggie was sure very few people had ever witnessed. “Very kind,” she agreed. “I’ll look at my schedule and see what I can do.”

“Of course.” Eliza’s smile was more genuine now. “I really do hope you can join us.”

Lena inclined her head, and the game of Monopoly continued. No one seemed especially shocked when Lena beat the snot out of everyone. Cranium was a bit closer, though Kara and Lena took that one, too. Alex was getting sulkier by the minute, so Maggie proposed Netflix. There was a recent documentary about NASA’s foray into faster than light travel thanks to the input of a handful of friendly off-worlders… The three scientists in the room immediately jumped at the idea.

While Alex got the documentary cued up and Eliza excused herself to the restroom, Maggie wiped down the table and counter not far from where Kara and Lena were washing the dishes. She drifted closer, trying not to seem like she was eavesdropping.
“There’s no pressure,” Kara was saying, her voice low and comforting in what Maggie found to be a tone more reminiscent of Supergirl than Kara. “But if you’d like to come with us, we’d love to have you.”

“Are you sure?” Lena asked, and Maggie read so many signs of vulnerability in her body language that she couldn’t quite believe the woman before her was the same Lena Luthor who ran press conferences and had somehow earned the confidence of a large number of old, white men whose stock payout depended on her guidance of the L Corp ship.

“Positive. A couple of days in Midvale and they’ll love you as much as I do.”

_Love?_ She’d already told Lena she loved her? That was fast. Then again, Maggie hadn’t met Alex until later, and there was the whole Earth-1 thing…

At that moment, Kara smiled sideways at Lena and pressed a kiss to her temple. Her eyes caught Maggie’s and she frowned, the look communicating her clear displeasure at being spied upon. Which, hypocritical much?

“Busted, Detective,” Alex murmured in her ear, one hand wrapping around her waist as she tugged her away from the kitchen.

“Not before I got the dirt, though.”

Predictably, Alex waited all of two seconds before nudging her. “So? Were they talking about Christmas?” she whispered, as if that would prevent her Super sister from listening in.

“Yep. Kara was encouraging her to make the trip.”

“Oh, good! I hope she does.”

“So do I.”

Alex glanced at her, eyebrows raised. “Let me guess—you like the idea of a buffer for the holidays?”

“That, and it would be nice to have another mature lesbian around instead of the Danvers Baby Gays.”

“Another? Right. Because you’re the epitome of maturity.”

She smiled easily. “Glad you’re finally seeing the light, Danvers.” Then she caught her breath as Alex’s hand slid lower, gripping her hip hard as her lips dipped and captured hers in a brief, searing kiss.

“You know it,” Alex said, and stepped away, flashing her a smug smile.

“Gross,” Kara called from the kitchen. Then she choked on air as Lena pressed a kiss against the corner of her mouth.

“Smooth, Little Danvers,” Maggie said, cracking up at the look on Kara’s face.

“You should talk, Sawyer,” Kara groused back, but the delivery was ruined by the beatific smile spilling across her face.

Not only did they look happy, Maggie thought as Eliza rejoined the group and the movie commenced, but she was pretty sure they genuinely were. Even Lena had appeared to loosen up as the evening went on, her smiles increasing in number and radiance. Now, with each couple
occupying one end of the couch and Eliza perched in the arm chair that was shockingly comfortable for all its boxy appearance, they looked the picture of lesbian contentment. She leaned into Alex’s side, their legs tangled on the chaise lounge under a blanket. Alex radiated warmth, and as a bonus she smelled of lime juice and tequila, salt and tiramisu—some of Maggie’s very favorite things.

Alex was her favorite person ever, she decided. And to think she’d come so close to ruining things before they’d even started…

“What are you thinking about?” Alex whispered, reaching over to smooth the lines in her forehead.

“How some rules are meant to be broken.”

“Detective,” she pretended to gasp, “I’m shocked.”

“No, you’re not,” Maggie said, and wound their fingers together.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Kara start to throw a handful of popcorn at them and then pause, reconsider, and shovel it into her mouth instead. Damn, Kryptonians could eat.

Maggie refocused on the screen, dividing her attention between the television and the feel of Alex pressed against her, of their palms fitting together perfectly. She was a lucky woman, truly, madly, deeply lucky.

And yeah, it was nice, with Kara and Lena snuggled nearby and Mama Danvers taking it all mostly in stride, surrounded by newly gay feels as she was. Nice but also, if Maggie was being honest, a little bittersweet given the shit show that had been her own coming out experience. From her vantage point, Alex’s earlier anger with Eliza seemed a bit entitled. She couldn’t help wanting to say, “Dude, you have an awesome mother. She hugged you and told you she loves you and that it’s okay you’re gay! Your sister had your back the whole time! Focus on the positive here.”

Because she, Magdalena Ignacia Sawyer, hadn’t had any of that when she came out.

Then again, she didn’t have Alex’s history of well-intentioned maternal interference and occasional emotional neglect, either. Her own mother may not have reacted perfectly to the news that she was gay, but she had loved her without reservation. She had accepted her refusal to wear dresses, her insistence on playing baseball with the boys, her all-out revolt during the planning of her Quinceañera. It was her father who had struggled to accept who she was. But each time Maggie ran to her room and threw herself on her bed, sobbing after the latest installment of, “Why can’t you be more like your sisters? Why can’t you be normal?” her mother would come to her and hug her and smooth her tears away and tell her that she was perfect just as she was, and one day her father would grow to understand that too.

“He’s the one that needs to change, Mija, not you,” her mother would tell her. “I’ll help him grow as much as I can, but I can’t make those choices for him, no more than he can make your choices for you. But I promise you, we will get there.”

Then she’d died just before Maggie graduated from high school, “collateral damage” in a botched convenience store robbery, and now she didn’t even call her father when she went home once a year on her mother’s birthday to lay flowers at her grave. Each spring she hoped it would be like a scene from a movie, that he would be at the cemetery entrance waiting for her and would give her a film-worthy speech of apology and acceptance. But then the months ticked past and it was just her alone again at her mother’s graveside for a quiet hour or two before she headed out to see her sisters and her nieces and nephews for far too brief a visit. Her heart broke a little less each year, which might, she knew, be the only progress she ever made with her father. She couldn’t change his choices any
more than her mother could, no matter how much she wished she could.

She glanced at Lena, seated cross-legged on the couch beside her. From Alex, she knew that Lena’s biological mother had died too, and it was pretty clear what kind of mother Lillian Luthor had been; in Maggie’s experience, terrorists rarely made good parents. After a moment, Lena looked away from the screen and met her gaze questioningly. Maggie waggled her eyebrows a little, uncertain what she meant by the gesture: *Can you believe we’re sitting here all together like this right now?* Or maybe, *A non-homophobic parental reaction, like, WTF?* Or even just, *This is nice, isn’t it?*

Because it was nice. All of it.

Lena smiled and nodded slightly, so whatever she had managed to communicate, it must have been positive.

The movie went on, and Maggie played with Alex’s fingers and told herself that this, their new normal, would last long enough to feel more like something she could trust and less like a dream she would, at some point, have to wake up from.

*             *             *

Apparently sharing dinner with their girlfriends’ mother over the weekend meant she and Lena Luthor were now on texting terms. At least, that was what Maggie initially thought when the text from an unknown number dinged her cell late Monday afternoon.

“Maggie, this is Lena Luthor. Could you call me on this number as soon as you get this?”

Maybe she wanted to talk about Eliza’s invitation to Midvale. Or maybe she was kicking around gift ideas for Kara and considered Maggie a potentially friendly resource. Either way, Maggie stepped out into the hall at the precinct and hit dial.

“Maggie,” Lena said, her voice shaky.

*Shit.* Not a social call, obviously.

“Are you okay? What happened?”

“My *brother* happened.” Lena’s bitterness carried easily across the air waves. “Again.”

“Are you injured?” Maggie checked her jacket pocket for her bike keys.

“No, just a little shaken. But—do you think you could come to my office?”

“No, just a little shaken. But—do you think you could come to my office?”

“On my way,” she said, shooting off a quick text to Alex as she jogged outside. “Is there a bomb or an active shooter or anything? Do I need to get a team over there?”

“It’s nothing like that. The threat has been… neutralized. I’d just prefer not to get the authorities involved until we know a little more.”

That didn’t sit well with Maggie, like *at all,* but she figured she had a better shot at talking Lena into police involvement in person. Assuming Alex didn’t claim jurisdiction, of course.

“Is Kara on her way?” she asked.

“*No!*” Lena sounded momentarily panicked. “Please don’t tell her. I don’t want her to worry. Alex either.”
Maggie threw a leg over her motorcycle and glanced at her phone screen, still open to the text she’d just sent: “Lena needs us. Pick U up in 5?”

“Umm…” Her phone dinged again. Alex had sent back a thumbs-up.

Lena sighed. “You texted them, didn’t you?”

“Just Alex. Sorry.” She typed a quick addition: “Don’t tell K!”

“It’s fine. I’ll see you soon. And, Maggie? Thanks. Really.”

“No problem.”

Alex was waiting for her outside DEO headquarters, helmet on and weapons present and accounted for. Maggie couldn’t help but admire her as she pulled up to the curb. Her girl looked good in SWAT gear. She looked good without the gear, too, but Maggie could admit that the thigh holster was a nice touch on an already fine woman.

She’d barely slowed the bike when Alex was hopping on and gripping her around the waist, and then they were off, zipping quickly through city traffic while Maggie shared what little she knew and Alex muttered impatiently behind her. If they’d been on her bike, there would have been much detouring across sidewalks and running of red lights, but Maggie believed traffic rules were meant to be followed, generally speaking. Besides, they could see that L Corp was intact, no smoke or flames billowing from Lena’s office on the top floor. Whatever Lex had done, it wasn’t outwardly visible.

Lena texted Maggie directions to a private section of the L Corp parking garage, and soon they were in an elevator being whisked to the penthouse. Armed guards—former special ops agents, if she had to bet—had greeted them both at the garage entrance and at the elevator, and Maggie had to admit that Lena’s private security detail certainly appeared robust. How had Lex gotten to her?

Another guard greeted them when they stepped off the elevator, helpfully pointing them toward an open doorway halfway down the corridor. As they walked, Maggie chanced a glance out the window-lined hall and had to suppress a shudder at the sight of neighboring skyscrapers lit prettily by the waning sun. Heights were not her favorite. She preferred to work with her feet planted on terra firma.

“I got you,” Alex said softly, bumping against her shoulder.

“Babe.” When Alex looked at her quizzically, she shrugged. “One of my sisters is an ’80s pop fan.”

Before Alex could ask which sister, they were ducking through the double doorway into a spacious ante-room. An Asian woman rose from a massive desk equipped with dual monitors and half a dozen separate desktop file organizers.

“Detective, Agent.” She nodded at them and waved at another set of double doors. “This way, please.”

And, yeah, the L Corp executive suite where Lena spent the majority of her days—and half her nights, according to Kara—was a far cry from Alex’s homey apartment where last they had met. Actually, Maggie was pretty sure Alex’s entire apartment would fit in this suite with room to spare.

Lena was standing behind a shiny white desk when they entered, gazing out the window. She looked cool and unruffled in a checkered skirt and black blouse, sleeves rolled to the elbows, hair gathered in a sleek bun. But as she turned to face them, Maggie noticed the pale, taut skin around her eyes and mouth.
“Thank you, Jess,” Lena said, voice still nearly as shaky as she’d sounded on the phone.

As soon as the assistant closed the doors, Maggie felt Alex tense beside her, undoubtedly preparing to unleash a torrent of words aimed (consciously or not) at allowing her to gain control over the situation. But before Alex could say anything, Maggie stepped forward to embrace Lena.

“Hi,” she said, hugging the other woman tightly. In the past few weeks she’d begun to think of Lena as a friend, and the relief she felt at finding her unharmed was huge. “I would ask how you are, but you said this is about your brother, so…”

Lena softened in her arms and laughed a little. “So obviously I’ve had better days,” she finished.

“Exactly.”

Alex followed Maggie’s example, brow furrowed as she hugged Lena. Then she pulled back, hands still clasping her shoulders. “Are you okay? Really?”

“I’m fine,” she said, and Maggie was glad to see a little of her color returning as Alex released her. “Thanks for coming so quickly, both of you. And thanks for not calling Kara. I don’t want to ruin her Christmas with something like this.”

“I really don’t think…” Alex started.

Maggie silenced her with a look. “Of course,” she said, pulling out her phone and selecting the recording app. “Now, do you want to tell us what happened?”

“Um, could you not record this?”

Maggie glanced up from her phone. “Can I ask why?” Alex moved restlessly beside her, and Maggie shot her another Chill, Motherfucker look. She should have known better than to bring Alex along on a case that involved Kara even peripherally.

“Because I need this to stay quiet. That’s why I called you instead of your colleagues.”

“Yeah, that’s not how police investigations work.” But she shut off her phone and slid it back into her jacket pocket. “You’re just going to send us away if we don’t play by your rules, aren’t you?” Lena lifted one of her model-perfect eyebrows, and Maggie sighed. “Fine. We’ll do it your way—for now. So what did Lex do this time?”

Lena crossed to a blank wall panel and pressed a hidden button on the underside of a nearby bookshelf. The panel parted on an invisible seam to reveal a mini-bar.

“I had a meeting a little while ago, and when I went to pour a glass of Scotch for my guest, imagine my surprise when I smelled this.” She held out a half-full tumbler.

Maggie leaned closer, catching the scent almost immediately. Alex did the same and they exchanged a look. Aldebaran rum. Intoxicating to aliens, but plain old toxic to humans.

“I don’t suppose your guest was from off-world, by any chance?” Maggie asked.

“No, but he was a friend of my father’s and a vocal opponent of Lex’s—before being fired by my dear brother a few years ago, that is.”

Her voice had lost some of its shocky quality and now matched the dark, heated look in her eyes. For the first time Maggie could see bits of Lex in her.
“No one actually drank the rum, correct?” Alex asked.

“Correct. I had my assistant page me with an emergency and ended the meeting on the spot. Then I texted you.”

Good thing Kara had started dragging Lena to the alien bar. Wait, the alien bar… She froze. *Damn it.* No wonder she hadn’t wanted Alex or Kara to know about this.

“Do you think your brother meant to harm you?” she asked, ignoring Alex’s puzzled look.

Lena eyed her steadily. “No.”

“So it was a warning, then?”

She moved back to her desk. “More like a reminder that he can get to me anytime he wants.”

And anywhere. Only a few places in the area sold Aldebaran rum. Cadmus must have had the original alien bar under surveillance before the Medusa attack. More than likely they were watching the current bar as well, which meant Cadmus knew that Lena Luthor had been spending time there with Kara Danvers, her girlfriend who drank Aldebaran rum, a known alien intoxicant.

Maggie glanced at Alex, noting the way her eyes suddenly narrowed. Cadmus knew Kara wasn’t human, which meant there was a good chance they knew she was Supergirl too. Or, at least, the Luthors did.

“God damn it,” Alex ground out. “I—told her—”

Maggie wasn’t sure if it was her glare or well-placed elbow that silenced Alex this time. She stared her girlfriend down for an extra second before turning back to Lena, who was watching them with a tired, almost defeated slump to her shoulders. “Is there anything else? Have you received any threatening phone calls or emails, or even snail mail?”

Lena didn’t look away, exactly, but her eyes flickered like she wanted to as she paused, fists clenching at her side. She folded her hands in front of her and answered, “No. Nothing.”

Beside her, Maggie felt Alex rise onto the balls of her feet. Quickly she asked, “Is there any other information you feel you can share with us?”

Lena reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a small device. “Only that my head of security found this on a routine sweep.”

Alex stepped forward and took the device from her, turning it over in her palm. “I’ve seen tech like this before. It’s Russian, I think.”

“Lex had ties to an organized crime syndicate in St. Petersburg,” Lena said. “That’s how I know this was him and not my mother—she tends to be a bit more selective about the company she keeps. Besides, Lex enjoys irony, and planting lethal alien rum in my office is just a touch ironic, don’t you think? Considering.”

She waved toward the balcony, and Maggie glanced out, automatically checking for a blue and red figure racing the sunset. But the twilit sky was hazy, lights flicking on and off in neighboring buildings like the fireflies she’d grown up with in Nebraska. She missed fireflies, missed how you could turn onto a country road at night and nearby fields would light up in response to the passage of your vehicle’s lights over the long grass. She’d always wondered what message her headlights were transmitting, what response an entire field of insects might reply with. They didn’t have fireflies here,
or whooping cranes or pronghorns or prairie chickens, as far as she knew. But as a bonus, there were significantly more queer people, aliens, and people of color. That was a trade-off she thought she could probably live with.

“All right, then,” she said, moving closer. “I think we have enough to get us started. We’ll see what we can turn up, okay?”

“Okay.” As they hugged, Lena whispered so quietly Maggie barely heard her, “I think it’s an inside job. Check my security team.”

She felt Lena’s hand slip into her jacket pocket and squeezed her a bit tighter. “Got it,” she whispered. Then she stepped back and offered a reassuring smile. “We’ll be in touch soon.”

Alex hugged Lena again, and then they were on their way out of the office, leaving her framed against the reddish-orange light of the setting sun, the room awash with what looked like the glow of a distant fire.

Maggie may have broken more rules than usual on the way back to the DEO, but the increased speed didn’t keep Alex from ranting. Maggie only caught bits and pieces, for which she was immensely grateful: “I knew this would happen!” And, “Didn’t I say nothing good would come of this?” And, “Fucking Romeo and Juliet bullshit.” And, “Kara was happy for like, ten minutes, and now this happens…”

Before the bike was properly parked, Alex was already stalking away, helmet under her arm and curses falling from her lips as she searched her pockets for her key card. Finally she found it, and Maggie followed her into the building and up the stairs, trying not to get sucked into her almost visceral rage. As they neared central command, Alex was still going off on “Lex effing Luthor” and “the whole GD anti-alien movement.” Briefly Maggie wondered if she should try to talk her down.

“I mean, seriously, how do they not realize that most of these people are refugees looking for a safe harbor?” Alex practically spit out as she leaned into the retinal scanner. The panel flashed green and they pushed through the heavy door, nodding to the pair of agents guarding the DEO’s main ops floor. Then Alex glanced at her and frowned even harder, which Maggie wouldn’t have thought possible. “Wait, what does that face mean, Sawyer?”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged. “I guess I’m just having a hard time reconciling this version of you with the one who was all ready to shoot up the old alien bar a few months ago.”

“Oh. That.” Alex cleared her throat as they crossed the elevated walkway. “Well, I guess I just needed to be educated.”

“In more ways than one,” Maggie said.

Alex rolled her eyes, but she was blushing slightly as she held her out hand. “I know Lena slipped you a thumb drive. Hand it over so Winn can take a look.”

“I figured you noticed.” She fished in her jacket pocket and pulled out the drive, but she didn’t offer it to Alex immediately. “Do you really think bringing Winn in on this is a good idea, though? Lena seems pretty keen on not telling Kara yet, and he isn’t exactly…”

“Good point. How about Vasquez? Her poker face is even better than mine.”

“You mean Susan ‘Lady-Loving-Vibe’ Vasquez?”

Alex snickered. “That’s the one.”
“She sounds perfect,” Maggie said, and followed Alex down a cement corridor.

At least if they had to investigate the attempted murder of Kara’s new girlfriend they could do it together. Maggie could keep a secret just fine when she had to, but she was glad she wouldn’t have to with this. Secrets were a crappy way to start off a relationship.

Alex tracked down Vasquez with little difficulty, and she agreed to help unravel the “attack.” Then they checked in with J’onn—“He can literally read minds, Maggie; of course we have to tell him”—and got the go-ahead from him to work the case. Maggie shared Lena’s theory that it had been an inside job, and soon they were in a small room not far from the DEO’s server farm, sifting through the data Lena had provided.

Maggie had always enjoyed the aggregated beauty of police work. When executed correctly, careful investigation revealed numerous snapshots that could be assembled, one at a time, to form a broader, clearer picture. Alex, she’d always thought, was more about the flash and bang of DEO ops. She seemed happiest when the dogged pursuit of evidence resulted in a confrontation with a suspect and a chance to use one of her many weapons, half of which were literally out of this world. Their differing approaches made them a good team—Maggie accruing data and snapshots, Alex building the bigger picture, each listening to and incorporating the other’s viewpoint as necessary. Add in Vasquez’s mad techie skills, and they had a badass crime-fighting team even without Kara’s super powers.

Lesbians. We get the job done.

It helped that Lena had given them everything they needed. The thumb drive contained contact and biographical data on every member of her security team, most of whom were, as Maggie had suspected, former Navy Seals and Army Rangers. Also helpful was working with a legit black ops group. Maggie was used to waiting hours or days to obtain a judge’s permission to investigate a suspect’s private data, but DEO agents didn’t seem overly concerned by privacy matters or the American legal process. Susan simply started infiltrating bank accounts and cell phone records without even being asked. Maggie could see how that freedom would be important when the target was an alien with laser vision or even a metahuman who could convert her body into electricity and travel via electric cable, but law enforcement agencies ran the risk of becoming all-powerful, despotic organizations if they were allowed to operate without oversight or restrictions.

Still, she had to admit that the investigation ran considerably more smoothly—and quickly—without the usual legal hoops to jump through. Time always seemed to flow faster when she was working an active investigation, but this—this kind of speed was unheard of. They worked steadily, pausing only to have dinner delivered, and within just a few hours they had a pretty good idea who the mole on Lena’s security team was. By ten they were sitting in a car outside the suspect’s house, and by eleven-thirty they were back at the DEO interrogating him in a holding cell. Maggie had never been involved in an operation that was so fast and efficient—and so thoroughly unconstitutional.

He confessed readily, something else that didn’t typically happen in mainstream police work.

“Was anyone hurt?” he asked, his voice anxious even as he regarded them with flat, resigned eyes.

“No,” Maggie answered. “Miss Luthor discovered the poison before anyone could drink it, so you’re only looking at attempted murder charges. Still, you committed a felony. You’re facing serious time, Blake. Do you want to tell us why you did it?”

“I would like to tell you, but I can’t,” he said, his eyes the same dull gray as he stared straight ahead, shoulders stiff, fists clenched.
“Let me guess,” Alex said, entering the conversation for the first time. Her voice and eyes were softer than Maggie would have expected, and she watched Alex, intrigued by this tactic. It seemed the opposite of her usual manner: Punch (or, preferably, shoot) first and ask questions later. “You were contacted by an intermediary whose face you never saw and given a set of instructions you were told to follow, and if you didn’t, a loved one would die.”

The perp’s eyes widened just a hair, but it was enough. He remained silent, though.

“And then you wiped the security tape so that there would be no record,” Vasquez put in, “and altered the server log.”

He looked at Vasquez, gaze a little less blank, but she only smiled coolly.

L Corp’s security had multiple fail-safes built in, including a remote back-up server that only Lena and the head of security team knew about. Maggie and friends knew this because the thumb drive had contained the back-up server’s IP address and current password. Earlier, while combing through the remote logs, Alex and Vasquez had put their heads together. Maggie was pretty sure she’d heard something about a permanent back door into the system, but she’d plugged her ears and hummed to herself. The less she heard about such (blatantly illegal!) activities, the stronger her relationship with Alex would be. Besides, Lena Luthor was a certified genius. All she had to do was switch to a different back-up server and the DEO’s “permanent” back door would be useless.

The suspect never did tell them why he’d done what he did. But they didn’t need him to. They had worked out the who, when, and how, the most crucial elements, and now Lena could rest easier knowing that her security team was no longer compromised. Probably.

It wasn’t quite one AM when Maggie dialed Lena’s number. She expected it to go straight to voicemail, but Lena picked up on the second ring.

“Hi, Maggie,” she said quietly.

“Hi. Is Kara there?” Maggie asked.

“No. I told her I had an early meeting in the morning. What did you find?”

Maggie filled her in, and they made a plan to transfer the perp into her security chief’s custody.

“Are you okay?” Maggie asked once the plan was set.

“Yep. Just another day in the life of a Luthor.”

Maggie paused. Her mother used to say that lies breed faster than rabbits. “You don’t have to do this alone, you know. You could call Kara…”

“No. I told you, I don’t want her to know.”

“Hiding this from her will only make it worse when she finds out. And she will find out, Lena.”

“I know because I plan to be the one to tell her. Just, not until after Christmas. She’s so excited about everyone being in Midvale together, Maggie. Did you know this is the first time she and Alex have brought anyone home?”

Maggie glanced over at her girlfriend, currently racing Vasquez to see who could finish a banana the fastest. “Alex might have mentioned it.”
“I don’t want my family to ruin the weekend. Please? Just until next week.”

She sighed. “Fine. But don’t blame me when this blows up in your face.”

“It won’t,” Lena said, sounding confident.

*I hope not,* Maggie thought after they hung up. Because while she didn’t doubt that Kara would excuse Alex for hiding something of this magnitude from her, she was only just starting to feel like Kara had forgiven her for trouncing so thoroughly on Alex’s heart in the beginning.

They didn’t need Vasquez’s techie skills any longer so she headed home, title secure as banana-eating champion. Despite Alex’s sulking—I *swear her banana was smaller*, etc.—the prisoner transfer went smoothly, and then Maggie drove them both back to Alex’s place. Like Kara, Maggie lived farther out of the downtown corridor in a small apartment complex near one of National City’s many parks. One of the perks of dating Alex was that her commute time was cut nearly in half on the mornings after she stayed over.

It was almost three by the time they crawled into bed together, and Maggie was the good kind of exhausted that came after she worked a successful case. Lena was safe (for now), and her security team would hand the man over to the authorities first thing in the morning, or so she had promised. Maggie intended to hold her to that promise.

She also intended to sleep late and go in to work mid-morning, but her body clearly had other plans. She woke early, grouchy and poorly rested, and stumbled to the kitchen to make a pot of coffee. Her mother’s voice kept coming back to her: *Lies breed faster than rabbits,* Mija. Maggie had learned that the hard way, and yet here she was sitting on a slippery slope of untruths that were bound to blow up sooner rather than later. She was about to spend two days with Alex’s family. The topic of her own familial relationships seemed like a given.

“What are you doing awake?” Alex asked, yawning as she came up behind Maggie and slipped her arms around her waist.

“Couldn’t sleep.”

“You okay?”

Maggie could feel Alex’s voice rumbling against her back. She closed her eyes, wishing she could rewind the clock, go back to that day in the bar and undo the lie that she was now faced with unraveling, word by painful word.

“No.” She made herself turn to face Alex. “We need to talk.”

Alex blinked, forehead wrinkling. “That sounds ominous.”

“It’s not. At least, I hope it isn’t. The outcome is sort of up to you.”

“What the hell, Sawyer?” Alex’s earlier softness was noticeably absent as she reached for a mug. “I’m not nearly caffeinated enough for this.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

Maggie looked down. She knew she was being dramatic, but she hadn’t slept much and Lena, who she had grown to really like over the past few weeks and viewed as an ally of sorts—possibly even a future sister-in-law? Shit; she was getting way ahead of herself especially given the talk they were about to have—could have died, could still die at any point at the hands of her asshole family. And
that… that was a little too close to home. Because while Maggie was obviously still very much alive, in her father’s eyes she wasn’t.

“You’re dead to me,” he’d said to her the last time they spoke, channeling Pacino, his favorite actor of all time. “Until you repent your immoral lifestyle, you are no longer my daughter. You are no longer welcome in this family.”

So, yeah, she was feeling a little dramatic. Apparently it ran in the family.

“Are you breaking up with me?” Alex asked as she stirred sugar into her coffee.

“No.”

“Did you cheat on me?”

“No! Jesus, Alex.”

“Jesus, Maggie,” she echoed, cupping her mug in both hands. Their eyes met, and Alex frowned. “You look like you haven’t slept.”

“Probably because I haven’t.”

“Small girl,” Alex said, sighing, and reached for her hand.

Maggie let herself be pulled to the couch, where they sat down facing each other. Alex crossed her legs, blew on her coffee, and gave her a questioning look. “What’s going on, Mags?”

She took a breath and let it out slowly, wishing she’d thought to do yoga before waking Alex with the scent of brewing coffee. Yoga always calmed her, made her feel in control. Even when she wasn’t.

“Remember how I told you that my parents were supportive when I came out?” she asked. When Alex nodded, she added, “The thing is, they weren’t. Like, at all.”

Alex’s frown was back. “I don’t understand.”

Maggie launched into the familiar story, the narrative she had devised to contain and delineate the first worst moment of her life: “I had this friend when I was fifteen, Elisa. We’d hang out in her parents’ basement watching horror flicks and smoking cigarettes. She was the first girl that I knew that I liked in a way that was different, and I thought she liked me, too. So on Valentine’s Day, I put a card in her locker declaring my feelings and asking her to the dance. God, I was so stupid! I honestly thought…”

She stopped and shook her head, staring down into her coffee mug. “Anyway, Elisa gave that card to her parents and they called my parents, and that’s how I was outing. My dad kicked me out and my mom—she didn’t even try to stop him. I went to live with my aunt in Lincoln for the rest of high school. When my mom died my senior year, I thought maybe… But it didn’t happen. My father hasn’t spoken to me since the funeral. It’s like in some way he blames me for her death, even though I was hundreds of miles away.”

Alex had set her mug aside by now and was rubbing Maggie’s forearms, her touch soft and soothing. “I’m sorry, sweetie. That must have been so awful.”

Of course it had been, but why wasn’t Alex angry with her? She’d lied to her for months now about something fairly major. So why was Alex looking at her with such compassion?
“Just—” Alex’s hand slid down to grasp hers. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t want to scare you. Here I was telling you that who you are is okay, pushing you to come out to your family. I couldn’t tell you that you might lose them, possibly forever.”

“But I already knew I could lose them,” she said, looking genuinely puzzled. “Why do you think I waited so long to accept this part of myself?”

“I just wanted it to be better for you. And, I guess, it’s easier sometimes to pretend that my life didn’t blow up because I’m queer.”

Alex’s brow cleared. “You don’t tell people about your family.”

She shook her head. “No.”

“Not even past girlfriends? What about Emily?”

“Emily knew.”

In fact, she was one of the reasons Maggie didn’t tell people. Or her mother was, anyway. When Emily’s older sister got married, their mother asked Emily the morning of the ceremony if Maggie could sit at the back of the church, away from the family—as if she didn’t know the symbolism of asking a brown-skinned person to sit in the back. Emily would have gone along with it, Maggie was fairly certain, but one of her brothers got wind of the request and went to bat on Maggie’s behalf. She ended up sitting beside Emily with the rest of the family, but the experience had rattled her deeply.

The following morning, Emily’s mother had stayed in her bedroom with a “sick headache.” When she asked to speak to Maggie alone she went readily, thinking that the older woman was going to apologize for the back of the church comment, that they could smooth things over, that it wasn’t too late to right the listing ship of their relationship. If she would just listen to Maggie, would only give her a chance… But Emily’s mother had no intention of doing anything other than what she did, which was tear Maggie down with a smile on her face, manipulating her so completely and terribly that it took her months to fully understand what had happened. I know my daughter, and I can tell that she doesn’t really love you; she’s only with you to spite me; I’m so sorry that she has allowed you to believe that you could ever be enough for someone as talented and brilliant as she is; I know her better than anyone, better than you do obviously, so believe me when I tell you she doesn’t know what she wants; it’s only a matter of time before she goes back to dating men; you poor thing, I feel so sorry for you; how awful that your own family has rejected you; how terrible that your mother is dead and you have no one.

Maggie had left that bedroom feeling worse than at any other moment since her mother had been shot. And yes, in hindsight she shouldn’t have taken that hateful woman’s words to heart, but she had hoped that Emily’s family might accept her as one of their own. She had opened herself to Emily’s mother without understanding the consequences, and to be rejected in such an insidious, intentionally hurtful way had sent her spiraling. Which was ridiculous and weak and—well, just another thing she didn’t like to talk about.

Soon after she and Emily broke up, Maggie shot a suspect and ended up in department-mandated therapy. She was okay with the shooting; it was a good shot, if ever there could be one. But she wasn’t okay with the way things had ended with Emily, or—and this, the therapist said, was more to the point—how things had gone with her throughout the relationship. In therapy she realized that she had picked Emily for her inability to truly commit to their relationship. Emily’s refusal to stand up for her, for them, had satisfied the part of her that had internalized her father’s disgust. She had stayed in
a relationship with someone who wasn’t ready to be wholly herself because, deep inside, that was what she’d thought she deserved.

Not that she could tell Alex any of this, not even with the way she was gazing worriedly at her now, not even with the way she was holding Maggie’s hand in both of hers, fingers stroking her skin almost absently. They hadn’t been together long enough for Maggie to reveal the softest spot on her underbelly because even though she trusted Alex, she didn’t truly know her yet. Or her family, for that matter.

“You know you can tell me anything, right?” Alex asked. “I won’t judge you, Maggie.”

“I know,” she said, and mustered a smile. “Thank you for not being angry.”

“Of course. I get that you were protecting me, but you don’t have to. I’m pretty tough, in case you hadn’t noticed.”

“I may have noticed.”

She half-smiled and then, because she could, leaned forward and kissed Alex. Almost immediately a warm fluttery feeling of peace settled over her, and she blindly set her mug on the coffee table so that she could tangle her hands in Alex’s hair and pull her closer. The past didn’t matter and the future was still unknown. That left only now, and for now, this was enough. Alex was enough and maybe, if she was lucky, Maggie could be enough, too.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

In which Kara, Lena, and some other folks celebrate Christmas in Midvale.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay! Mother's Day, my wife's birthday, and the last (I sincerely hope) family cold of the season... Anyway, thanks as ever for sticking with me. Happy reading!

To Kara, December on Earth had always seemed magical. Colored lights, carol-singers, happy children—what wasn’t to love? It helped that Christmas was the lone Earth holiday that resembled anything they’d had back on Krypton: Rogavrrigehdzeht, the day when Krypton was farthest from their sun. Their year had taken longer than Earth’s—142 days longer, to be precise—which was one of the reasons she aged at a different rate than humans did. Moreover, Krypton’s axis of rotation had been less severely tilted than Earth’s (only 14.7% relative to its orbital plane versus Earth’s 23.5% tilt), which meant their seasons had been less pronounced. But just like on Earth, as the days in Argo City grew shorter and the sunlight weaker, the citizens of the region celebrated a month-long festival that culminated in a holiday marking the Kryptonian equivalent of winter solstice.

Growing up in Midvale, she’d enjoyed Easter with its theme of rebirth and, of course, its abundance of chocolate bunnies. She’d always loved Thanksgiving, too, and not just for its focus on consuming enormous amounts of rich food. Thanksgiving’s emphasis on family reminded her of zehdh, or “belonging,” one of the main virtues of the Girod, the moral code the Planetary Federation had adopted to promote peace on Krypton after the last great war. But despite the stiff competition from chocolate bunnies and an entire day set aside to celebrate eating, Christmas had always been Kara’s favorite. When she’d learned of its pagan origins, she’d gladly made the Danvers family’s holiday traditions her own. After all, it was the closest she would ever come to Rogavrrigehdzeht and her memories of happier times.

This December should have been even more special because it was her first holiday season with Lena. It had started out well, to be sure, with their extended vacation on Earth-1 followed by Lena (and Maggie) meeting Eliza. But then, a few nights after the big family dinner, she landed on Lena’s balcony to find the door locked—which she realized only after she turned the handle.

The screech of shattered metal fractured the quiet night, and from across the apartment Kara heard Lena’s sharp inhalation as her heart skipped and restarted almost violently.

“Sorry! It’s just me,” she called out, removing her Supergirl boots and heading for the kitchen. She’d gotten stuck at the DEO in a workshop on long-range planning—so not her thing—and now she was starving to death. Well, not literally. But close. “Why was the balcony door locked?”

Lena’s heart was still racing as she paused and said, “I didn’t realize you were coming over tonight.”
“Oh.” She froze in front of the refrigerator, and then in a flash she was in the doorway of Lena’s bedroom, mayo jar still in one hand, cheese tray in another. “I thought—did you not want me to come over?”

“No,” Lena said a little breathily from where she sat in bed, laptop on her lap board, glasses slipping down her nose. She closed the laptop with a snap and smiled up at Kara, but there was something not quite right about the scene.

“No, as in you don’t want me here, or…?” Kara trailed off.

“No, as in I do want you here, I was just surprised. I thought you had a training session?”

“I left early. It was more for the J’onn and Vasquez types, anyway, not the—um, people like me.”

“You mean the punch-first, ask-questions-later types?”

She lifted the tray so that she could use her super breath to suck in a few slices of cheese. “You’ve been talking to Maggie, I see,” she commented around a mouthful of gouda.

Lena’s heart rate ratcheted up again. “No I haven’t.”

Kara stared at her. “I was just joking. You know, because Maggie always calls Alex and me Hothead Paisan? Which, by the way, I’m still not sure what that’s a reference to.”

“Seriously?” Lena picked up her phone and said, “Okay, Google, who is Hothead Paisan?” And then she waited, smirking at Kara in a way that told her she was only just holding back a most un-Luthor-like guffaw.

“According to Wikipedia,” her phone’s disembodied voice announced, “Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist is an alternative comic by Diane DiMassa that features the title character wreaking violent vengeance on male oppressors.”

“Hold on. Homicidal lesbian terrorists?” Kara refrained from stomping her foot, but only because it would have put a hole in Lena’s very expensive Italian floorboards resulting in repairs that she was pretty sure would not be covered by the DEO’s Supergirl Collateral Destruction Fund. Plus she might have dropped the cheese tray, and obviously she couldn’t have that. “That’s not even remotely accurate. I mean, hello, I’m bi! Besides, we’re the good guys. We don’t kill people.”

Lena was biting back a smile, but still she managed to lift an eyebrow in her trademark silent challenge.

“Okay,” Kara amended, “I don’t kill people. Alex is—well, anyway. Do you want a sandwich or not?” The question came out more grumpily than she’d intended, but she had excessively low blood sugar, and Lena should know better than to rile her up when she was hungry.

“I already ate. But thanks anyway.”

“Let me guess—that kale quinoa salad I saw in the fridge?” She shuddered as she moved away. “So gross.”

“So healthy,” Lena corrected, her words accompanied by the click of her computer snapping open. “I have to keep some food in the apartment that you don’t like. Otherwise I would starve.”

“I heard that,” Kara called from the kitchen.
“I know,” Lena replied, her voice taking on the distracted quality that meant she was already refocused on her work.

A little while later Kara sped back in and settled on the bed beside her. “Whatcha working on?”

Lena closed her computer again and stared at her over the top of her glasses. “Are you honestly bringing crumbs into my bed, Kara Zor-El Danvers?”

“Oh, right.” She jammed all four cookies into her mouth at once and chewed quickly. “Sorry.”

“I guess I can forgive you.” She set the computer on her bedside table and gave Kara a coy look. “That is, if you kiss me…”

“Hmm.” Kara pretended to consider the offer as she swallowed the last bit of cookie. Then, before Lena could get too fake-outraged, she leaned in—careful of the nose, Danvers—and kissed her. It was her heart’s turn to race as Lena wasted no time in deepening the kiss, sucking on her bottom lip before slipping her tongue into Kara’s mouth.

“Yum,” Lena murmured against her lips, “M&M’s. My favorite.”

“You’re my favorite,” Kara returned, and pushed Lena deeper into the ridiculous pile of pillows she kept on her ginormous bed.

It wasn’t until later, as Lena slept beside her, that Kara remembered how Lena had snapped her computer shut not once but twice as soon as Kara came near. How the balcony door had been locked for the first time in—well, ever, as far as she knew; how Lena’s heart had raced and raced and raced… as it was doing now in her sleep. Lena flinched and cried out a little, and the sound was like a shard of Kryptonite pressing into Kara’s skin. She was already spooning Lena, but she tightened her grip, mindful of the fragile human bones whose brittleness she could practically feel.

“Shh, zhueiao,” she whispered, the Kryptonian endearment slipping out. “It’s okay. I’ve got you. I’m here.”

Lena stilled in her arms, and Kara could tell from the tension in her muscles that she was awake. But neither of them said anything, and soon Lena was relaxing again, rigid body softening, breath steadying, hand on Kara’s arm across her waist loosening its tight grip.

Nightmares, Kara thought, adding the word to her growing mental list. Maybe it was nothing, and maybe it was something. Good thing Lena had already agreed to come to Midvale with her for Christmas. Otherwise there was no way she could leave her alone this weekend, not with the Luthors gunning for her.

The Luthors. Was that what this was about? For a moment Kara pictured stealing into the prison in the cover of darkness, moving so fast she was almost invisible, and taking care of the very dangerous loose threads who shared Lena’s surname. She wished she could; she really did. But she didn’t want to be that person, the avenging angel from another planet who thought she was above the law. A central tenet of the Girod was the pairing of truth with justice, hope with synergy, peace with restraint. Those virtues along with a handful of others had been taught to all Kryptonian schoolchildren, and adults had sought to reflect each in their work and relationships. The virtues of the Girod guided Kara even now, particularly in her work as Supergirl. The “no killing” code she strove to live by derived directly from the Girod, and had been an essential part of Kryptonian culture during the peaceful golden age Kara had been born into. After centuries of conflict, the Planetary Federation had done away with war and conflict. They had even outlawed the death penalty, choosing instead to banish the worst criminals to the Phantom Zone.
That was how Astra, Non, and their cronies had become one of the biggest threats Earth had ever faced. Kelly’s face flashed into her mind, eyes blank and empty under the influence of Myriad. And yes, Kara knew she couldn’t save everyone. But she had chosen not to save Kelly, and that was the part that haunted her. She had saved Winn and James because she cared more about them. As a direct result of that choice, Kelly had died horribly, violently, her vulnerable human body pulverized by her fall from CatCo’s balcony. Had she been aware at all as she plunged toward her death? Had there been any part of her brain that belonged to her, that could only scream silently as Non forced her to kill herself? Except that she hadn’t killed herself. Kara had done that for her.

That was the real reason she had broken things off with James, not the “we’re better as friends” excuse she’d given him or the “he can be condescending at times” reason she’d offered Lena. Both of those statements were true, but the fact was that she hadn’t been able to picture building a relationship with him, not when they both still worked on the very floor from which Kelly—and he and Winn—had fallen. She still remembered the terror of seeing him step out into nothing, the split second when she thought she might not be able to save him. It was too much—too many perilous emotions to negotiate. She couldn’t continue on with him as if nothing had happened when in reality, she’d let their co-worker, their friend, die so that he might live.

Lena whimpered again in her sleep, and Kara sighed, holding her close. No more secrets, they’d vowed. In the world they lived in, some things were easier said than done.

* * *

In the morning, Lena was already in the kitchen when Kara got up. She’d only fallen asleep a few hours earlier, and given that today was the shortest day of the year and the sky was just barely beginning to lighten, she was impressed she could even walk, let alone talk at the same time.

“Happy solstice,” she muttered, stumbling toward the counter.

“Happy solstice,” Lena said, her voice slightly surprised as she glanced up from her tablet where she was probably reading the Financial Times or the Wall Street Journal or some other duller than dull tome. “Is that… was that something you celebrated on Krypton?”

Oh, right. She sometimes forgot that the majority of Americans viewed winter solstice as mere words on a calendar. “Sort of,” she said, and poured herself a cup of coffee. Lena always had the good stuff that she couldn’t afford. Or, she could afford it, but then she’d have to give up something just as important, like ice cream or pizza. “Are you okay, by the way?”

“Totally.”

Adverb alert… “Really? Because you had nightmares again last night.”

Lena glanced down, toying with her faux leather tablet case. “I’m sorry. Did I keep you awake?”

“A little. What were you dreaming about?”

“The usual,” she said vaguely, shrugging as she stepped past Kara to set her plate and mug in the sink.

“Which is?” she pressed.

“Family stuff.” Lena kissed her on the cheek. “I have to run to a meeting. Will I see you tonight?”

“If you’re lucky,” Kara huffed out.
“I’m always lucky,” she said, her voice low and silky. “Although last night I was especially so…”

Kara breathed in deeply, trying to control her nervous system’s uncontrollable reaction to Lena whenever she decided to flirt. *Stupid, traitorous body.*

Lena kissed her again, closer to her mouth, and it was all Kara could do not to lift her onto the counter and check to see what kind of underwear she was wearing beneath her business-chic pencil skirt. Then again, she could be super fast… But even as Kara processed the thought, Lena was slipping away to finish getting ready for work.

Quickies and the tearing down of secrets would have to wait until tonight.

Except that they didn’t see each other that night. Kara had surveillance work to do on a group of Cadmus-aligned extremists who, according to the infamous “chatter,” were planning something big. But the group had clearly expected her because they met in a location that seemed impervious to her super vision and hearing. Great—another alien device or substance. Did they really not see the irony in their continual reliance on off-world technology?

By the time the meeting broke up and she delivered her intelligence report—at least she was able to provide details such as descriptions of group members and license plate numbers—Lena had texted to say she was going to bed early and would catch up with her the following day.

But they didn’t see each other then, either. At the last minute, Lena had a prototype test come up—“I can’t get out of it, Kara; the specs are due by the end of the year and most of the team will be out of town all next week”—and afterward she needed to pack for their trip. Even though packing for a weekend couldn’t possibly take long and Kara could be at Lena’s place in minutes, she agreed to stay at her own apartment again that night. She was being silly, she knew, given that they were about to spend the next forty-eight hours together, but she missed Lena. Her other friends weren’t around to distract her, either—Alex and Maggie had left that afternoon for Midvale, Winn and Mon-El had gone home with James for the weekend, and J’onn and M’gann were dating, which—yuck, third wheel. Clark and Lois spent the holidays with the General each year, so even her sole blood relative on Earth was unavailable. Briefly she considered popping out to Midvale, but Alex had said she was excited to have “bonding time” with Eliza and Maggie, and Kara didn’t want to get in the way of that. She was alone, it was the night before the night before Christmas, and she was starting to wonder if Lena was avoiding her.

There was one way to find out, of course. She could seek her out from a distance, check up on her… Kara slapped her forehead and plopped down on the couch, reaching for the remote. She was not *that* girlfriend, she told herself sternly, flipping through her Netflix watch list. She was not the kind of person who used her powers to invade other people’s privacy without a compelling reason. On its own, insecurity was not compelling. More pathetic, really.

She squashed the unethical voice in the back of her head and stared determinedly at the television while the opening scene of *Death Comes to Pemberley* filtered onto the screen. It was a bit dark, admittedly, but at the moment it fit her mood perfectly.

P.D. James’s sequel to *Pride and Prejudice* took her through to midnight, and then she had packing, cleaning, and a few hours of sleep to prevent her from giving in to the stalkerish urges that somehow only Lena had ever inspired in her. Finally it was Christmas Eve morning and Kara was psyching herself up for the journey to Eliza’s house in the back of Lena’s town car. But when she showed up at Lena’s apartment a little after ten, Lena was just pulling on a flight suit like the one Cisco had loaned her on Earth-1. Kara looked a little closer. Exactly like the one from Earth-1, in fact.

Was that what all the mystery had been about? God, she hoped so. A secret flight suit project was
just so preferable to the devious Luthorian plots knocking around the back of her mind.

“Felicity offered to share the design of their anti-g pressure suit,” Lena said, smiling almost shyly at her. “Do you like it?”

“Do I like it? It’s amazing.”

“I wasn’t sure if it would be ready in time for Christmas, but we finished the prototype testing last night.”

“That was the prototype you were testing?”

She nodded and twirled around, showing off the suit that left very little of her luscious figure to the imagination. “Merry Christmas! I mean, I know it’s for me, but it’s for you too. So that we can go flying together.”

“It’s perfect,” Kara assured her. Then a thought occurred to her. “But Lena, you hate flying.”

“I don’t hate flying with you.” She stepped forward, the flight suit rasping slightly. “Besides, I know you don’t really like being trapped in a ‘tin can,’ as I believe you called it.”

Technically Kara had been referring to an airplane, but seeing as most human conveyances felt like tin cans to her—trains, airplanes, elevator cars, actual cars… “Are you sure? This trip is a lot longer than the one to the lake house.”

“I’m sure. I was actually hoping we could go a little faster this time. I had the suit augmented slightly and a custom helmet made. They should be able to withstand significantly higher G forces than the one at S.T.A.R. Labs.”

Of course she had. Because if there was something that could be made technologically more advanced or simply more efficient, Lena Luthor could be counted on to try.

“Oh, and one other thing,” she added, eyes half-lidded and mouth forming the half-smirk that typically preceded a comment intended to make Kara blush. “I had a harness made from a paraglider, so it’ll be like we’re tandem flying.”

“Are you really, really sure?” Kara asked, ignoring the butterflies her girlfriend’s flirtatious smile generated.

“Positive.” Her voice lowered and lost the flirty tone. “It’ll be fun to fly home with you, Kara. Honest.”

And that was how they made the trip to Midvale, with Lena exhorting Kara to greater speeds and even faster accelerations along the way so that she could test her pressure suit design. Because she was a sucker for science, and Kara was a sucker for her.

According to various instruments built into the suit, their maximum speed reached 691 miles per hour, just under the speed of sound, and max acceleration topped out at close to 4 Gs. That explained why the 90-mile trip took them less than thirty minutes, which was just as well, really: Flying tandem with Lena pressed against her front was a tad, well, sexier than Kara was used to.

At the speeds they were going, the coast was upon them suddenly, and Kara heard Lena gasp inside her helmet as they sped toward the ground. Whoops. She tried to land gently as much for the wellbeing of Lena’s knees as for the sake of the paved driveway that wound up the hill to the house. Back in the day, she’d done quite the job on assorted Danvers property items. And by back in the
day she meant college, possibly her first year at CatCo. Last Christmas? Whatever.

Lena took off her helmet and shook out her hair, which to Kara looked gorgeous as usual. “Why did we stop down here?” she asked. Then she tried to take a step and nearly toppled over.

Kara caught her easily, biting back a laugh. “Um, because of that. Sorry we landed so hot. I sort of lost track of where we were.”

Lena smiled up at her even though she looked a little green at the edges. “I would have said you always land hot, babe.”

_Babe_? That was a new one. She was beginning to think this flight suit might be the best Christmas gift ever.

Once Lena had recovered a bit, they started up the drive hand in hand.

“So this is where you grew up,” Lena said, surveying the scene.

“Yep.” Kara tried to see it through her eyes. It was no Luthor mansion, but Kara had always found the house by the sea picturesque. Probably her warm feelings had more to do with the people who lived there than the architecture, though.

They were halfway up the drive when the front door opened and a pair of familiar figures stepped onto the porch. Kara drew in a breath. She hadn’t known they were coming. She started to let go of Lena’s hand, almost by reflex, but stopped herself. If he didn’t already know, he would soon enough.

Beside her, Lena stiffened as the pair approached. “Is that Lois Lane? And—wait. _Clark Kent_?”

Kara winced as she witnessed the exact moment that her girlfriend glommed onto Superman’s secret identity.

“Of course,” Lena breathed. “No wonder you and he… the interview… God, I’m such an idiot. How did I not see it sooner?”

“The glasses _are_ pretty convincing,” Lois said, stopping before them. She hugged Kara and then thrust out a hand to Lena. “Ms. Luthor. It’s nice to see you again, particularly under the present circumstances.”

“Indeed, Ms. Lane. How fortunate that no one is on trial this time,” Lena said coolly as they shook hands.

Kara hunched her shoulders at Lena’s chilly demeanor. This was definitely not how she’d seen the weekend with her family starting.

“Kara,” Kal-El said, his voice slightly amused as he held out his arms.

Relieved that he wasn’t yelling at her about Luthors and Cadmus—yet—she startled into action and hugged him. “What are you doing here?” she whispered at a level only he would hear, clapping him on the back for good measure.

“Spending the holidays with family,” he replied just as quietly. Then he held out his hand to Lena. “Ms. Luthor. It’s good to know Kara has someone as accomplished as you looking out for her these days.”
For a moment, Lena just stared at his hand, and Kara froze. What if she refused to shake her his hand? Admittedly, Lena’s brother did have some substantial history with Superman, but wasn’t that mostly water under the bridge at this point?

Apparently Lena thought so too because just as Kara was narrowing in on the physiological process that led to hyperventilation, Lena shook his hand. “Kara has all sorts of people looking out for her, it would seem.”

It kind of sounded like she was hinting at the fact that a heads-up might have been nice, so Kara cleared her throat and said, “It’s great to see you guys, but, um, Eliza didn’t mention you were coming.”

“That’s because Alex invited us.” Lois gestured toward the house. “I’m sure everyone is excited to see you both. Lena, can I call you that? You must tell me about your flight suit. How fast does it let you go? Any chance I could convince you to share the design…?”

Lena fell in beside her, and Kara followed even though she really wanted to pin her cousin against the nearest tree and demand to know why Alex had invited him—and what she’d told him about Lena. Although she supposed this explained the odd conversation she’d had with her sister at the DEO a few days earlier.

“Have you told Clark about Lena yet?” Alex had asked while they waited for Winn to pinpoint some intel on the Cadmus-aligned group.

“Sort of?”

“Kara,” she’d said warningly.

“What? He knows we’re close.”

“The sleeping in the same bed, sharing bodily fluids kind of close?”

“Ew, Alex!”

“Answer the question, Squeamish McGee.”

Kara had rolled her eyes. “No—not exactly.”

And, “Kara,” she’d repeated, sighing in that annoying big sister way she had.

Well, he obviously knew now. Which was fine; Kara had been dreading the conversation even though he’d been the one who counseled her to not let fear get in the way of living her life. The part that bothered her most was that Alex had promised to try to be better about Lena. Was she really so worried about having a Luthor in their mother’s house that she’d called in reinforcements?

Apparently she was. Kara heard the extra voices before she spied their owners on the other side of the kitchen wall. What the hell were they doing in Midvale? They didn’t even celebrate Christmas. It was as if Alex—and Eliza?—were anticipating an all-out Cadmus attack. Which, not cool, Danvers clan. So not cool.

“Hey, Kara,” Maggie said, hugging her as soon as she stepped through the kitchen doorway.

Eliza was doing a little Christmas Eve day baking, Kara realized, inhaling the scent of cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. Pumpkin pie, her favorite pie ever, which was saying something. She almost forgot about Lena—flying made her that hungry—until her girlfriend nudged her and Kara followed
her line of sight to where the pair of Martians were standing in their human forms, chatting amiably with Eliza.

“Did you know they were coming?” Lena murmured.

“Nope,” Kara said, giving the $p$ an extra pop.

While Maggie hugged Lena, J’onn and M’gann waved. Then Alex wrapped her arms around their shoulders and pulled them toward Eliza and the five—five!—mouth-watering pumpkin pies cooling on the counter.

The pies were awesome, and they didn’t distract her in the least from her ultimate goal, which was—wait, what was it? Oh, yeah: to ask her sister why their childhood home resembled a Last Sons and Daughters Of convention. Like, possibly tomorrow, but more likely after they got back to National City. Christmas was special and this was Lena’s first time visiting Midvale, and if Alex still didn’t trust her, honestly Kara would rather not know.

At least, for now.

*             *             *

Lena appeared to take the presence of Superman and the Martian Manhunter in stride. She was quieter than Kara was used to throughout the day, but she seemed more thoughtful than uncomfortable that evening as she watched Eliza dish out brisket and potato latkes, their traditional Christmas Eve dinner.

Alex explained to their visitors, “We’re culturally Jewish on Mom’s side but not religious, which means we get to pick and choose which holidays to celebrate.”

“It’s all about the food,” Eliza added.

“Naturally,” Kara said, eliciting laughter from around the table. Lena, who was sitting beside her, smiled and reached up to smooth a crumb from the corner of her mouth. The intimacy of the gesture made Kara forget briefly how to breathe, let alone eat.

After a surprisingly lively dinner—J’onn and M’gann even regaled them with a Martian holiday tune, the high and low notes of which Kara suspected only she and Clark could hear—the group bundled up and grabbed flashlights for the traditional Danvers Christmas Eve walk on the beach. Alex and Maggie wandered ahead while Kara, arm in arm with Lena, purposely dragged her feet.

“How are you doing so far?” she asked when the others were out of human earshot. “Is all of this too much? Do you need a break?”

Lena laughed and squeezed her fingers. “It’s fine, Kara. The Dangs used to have an actual party on Christmas Eve, so this is fewer people than I’m used to, believe it or not.”

Kara believed her. Not only did she seem as composed as ever, but she had smiled and laughed throughout the day. A bunch of aliens and their friends probably weren’t as intimidating as the L Corp board of directors, judging from some of her work stories.

“Are you sure you wouldn’t rather be with Beatrice tomorrow? I could fly you to LA if you wanted.”

“Are you kidding?” Lena stopped and tugged on her hands until they were facing each other, the beach mostly dark on either side of them, the ocean a dull roar in the background. “There’s nowhere
I would rather be than here with you, Kara.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Lena replied, reaching up to smooth the crease from her forehead. Then she stood on tiptoe to kiss her almost chastely. Kara leaned into the kiss, hardly believing that they were doing this on the beach where she and Alex used to play soccer and volleyball with their friends, where Jeremiah used to play the guitar beside a bonfire, where Kara used to lie in the sand by herself in the middle of the night, staring up at the stars and willing herself to stay awake so that the nightmares wouldn’t surface.

Lena pulled back just enough to press their foreheads together. “I love you.”

“I love you more,” Kara said.

“Not even possible.”

Kara wrapped her arm around Lena’s shoulders and they began to stroll along the beach again. Just ahead, the flickering of flashlights reminded her of all the other Christmas Eve walks she’d taken here. In years past, she’d wondered if she would ever find a Lois Lane of her own. Funnily enough, though, it hadn’t occurred to her that her future partner might be a woman. And yet here they were, and though it felt almost like a jinx, she was pretty sure she was happier than she could ever remember being since before the night her parents rushed her to the launch site at the edge of the wild and roiling Andalean Sea.

Quietly she began to sing “Silent Night,” her favorite Christmas carol, smiling in the darkness as Lena pressed even closer. It wasn’t until she reached the end of the first verse that Kara felt Lena’s shoulders heave. Immediately she stopped and tried to catch her eye, but Lena was hiding her face in the sleeve of Kara’s fuzzy fleece, shoulders still trembling.

“Hey, what is it, Lee?” she asked, struck oddly helpless. She could tow a spaceship into outer space but not, apparently, handle her girlfriend crying. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“You didn’t,” Lena said, lifting damp eyes to her. “Really. It’s just, my mother used to sing that to me every night before bed, even when it wasn’t Christmas.”

“Oh.” Kara wiped her tears away and pressed her lips to her forehead. “That’s really sweet.”

Lena nodded and drew in a breath. “Also, today’s kind of the anniversary of her death.”

“Today?” Kara echoed. Her mother had died on Christmas Eve? Her mother had died on Christmas Eve. “Oh my god, Lena, I’m so sorry. I wouldn’t have sung it if I’d realized.”

“No, that’s not…” She shook her head. “Is there any way… Could you, maybe, sing it again?”

Kara blinked a few times in rapid succession. “Oh. Well, yes. I’d be happy to.”

She started over, letting her voice rise above the sound of the ocean and the echo of laughter in the distance, and they stood together in the dark by the wide sea as Kara sang of mothers and children and heavenly peace. And for a while, as long as she was singing to the stars and the rising sliver moon, the rest of the world seemed almost too far away to even matter.

Back at home a little while later, the taste of salt still on their lips, they sat cross-legged on her twin bed, backs to the wall, and talked quietly as the night deepened beyond the window. Lena told her about the day her mother died, about how she’d always blamed herself even though she knew
rationally that it wasn’t her fault. She described how she’d stayed stuck in anger for much of her childhood and early adulthood, stoking her rage against the drunk driver who had struck her mother’s car on the way back from the mall. Then she paused and Kara could tell that she was holding something back. She knew the signs—she herself was a master at the art of keeping things hidden, despite what everyone else thought of her secret-guarding capabilities. But she didn’t push. When Lena was ready, she would tell her.

Instead, she filled the silence with the story of the last time she’d seen her parents. She told Lena how she’d started to step into the pod only to rush back to give her mother one last hug, not fully realizing it would be the last one forever and ever even though she knew, she knew in her head that she would never see her parents again. Up until that moment, she had never experienced loss. Technology on Krypton was such that people didn’t often die of disease anymore, and the Planetary Federation had outlawed weapons of all propulsion types—projectile, laser, anti-matter, and so on. Sudden death occurred, but it was so rare that before that day, Kara hadn’t known a single person who had died. And then, somehow, everyone she knew—except Kal-El—was gone in the terrifyingly short time it took a planet to self-destruct.

Lena reached over and took her hand, and just like that the still-jagged edge of her grief softened and smoothed out. It was like magic, Kara thought, marveling at how one person’s touch could have such an immediate effect. And not just one person, but a person who had been born almost twenty years after she had, on a planet dozens of light-years from her own. The odds of them finding each other were so small, so incredibly minute, and yet here they were together in this house overlooking the ocean. She looked up into Lena’s eyes and saw a shade of her own incredulity there, as if Lena couldn’t believe they’d found each other, either.

A light on her bedside table caught her attention, and she smiled. “Merry Christmas, Lena.”

Lena followed her gaze to the clock: 12:03 a.m. She closed her eyes for a moment, and then she smiled back. “Merry Christmas, Kara.”

They kissed, but it was more comforting than passionate, soft and slow and steady like the rhythm of the nearby tide, and Kara would have sworn her heart was as wide and open as the night sky. She might be mostly impervious to fluctuations in temperature, but this was the warmest she’d ever felt on Earth.

After a bit, they resumed their conversation, neither seeming to want to end the night on the memory of loss. Somehow they got on the topic of the story Alex had told at dinner about Kara bringing home stray animals when they were younger. Lena had asked what kinds of animals, and Alex had helpfully supplied details: “Cats, dogs, baby birds, even a pair of baby possums once. But it wasn’t just animals, it was people too. She would befriend kids no one else would talk to and make them feel like they were the most amazing people in the world.”

“So?” Kara had defended herself around a mouthful of latkes. “I know how it feels to not fit in. Besides, I seem to recall I wasn’t the only one who was nice to the outcasts at our school, Alex.”

“Pfft. Whatever.” Alex had rolled her eyes, but she was smiling.

“Looks like you guys are still bringing home strays and outcasts,” Maggie had joked, gesturing around the table, and the room had gone momentarily silent.

Now Lena giggled. “Oh my god, your mother’s face! I thought she was going to choke for a second.”

“I know,” Kara agreed. “Lois meanwhile literally spit out her food, which is funny because she’s
probably the least tactful person I know.”

Lena merely gazed at her, eyebrow rising and lips quirking in the glow from the galaxy nightlight. Kara couldn’t believe Eliza had kept for her all these years.

“What?” she asked. “I can be tactful.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I can!”

“Right. So,” she added, “Clark Kent is your cousin. It seems so obvious now.”

“I kind of thought you already knew. The first time we met, you made a comment about how he had ‘steel’ under his Kansas exterior.”

Lena gasped slightly. “You’re right! It’s like I knew at some level but hadn’t consciously put the pieces together.”

“Thanks for being nice to him, by the way. And Lois, too.” Kara had noticed Clark and Lois both watching Lena throughout dinner, but she wasn’t sure if their curiosity was more professional or personal. She’d known Lois for most of her time on Earth, and the older woman had occasionally given Alex a run for her money in the mama bear department.

“Why wouldn’t I be nice to them?” Lena asked. “Lex was the one who went after Superman, not the other way around.”

“I meant because of the last conversation we had. You know, about Clark leaving me here in Midvale?”

“Oh, that.” She shrugged. “Now that we’re here, I see that this really was a better environment for you to grow up in. I can’t even imagine how overwhelming Metropolis would have been when you were just discovering your powers.”

Kara smiled. “I’m glad you’ve seen the light.”

Lena lifted a hand and traced the contours of her smile. “You do that a lot, you know.”

“What?”

“Smile when we’re talking about sad or painful things. You don’t have to do that with me, you know. I don’t need you to make the hard things seem lighter if they’re not.”

She didn’t do that, did she? Kara wanted to argue with her, but it was still the night before Christmas, still the anniversary of Lena’s mother’s death. Instead she took a breath and nodded. “Okay. I’ll work on it.”

“Okay,” Lena echoed. Then she yawned.

Reluctantly Kara said, “Tomorrow’s going to be busy. We should probably get some sleep.”

“Probably,” Lena agreed.

A little while later, they were lying side by side on the narrow bed when Lena asked sleepily, “Will you sing it again?”
“Of course.”

Kara hummed the refrain and then began to sing “Silent Night” once more while Lena’s breathing grew steadier and her body heavier. She was asleep before Kara even started the second verse, but she sang it anyway because she knew that hearing was one of those senses that never really turned off; that even if she didn’t realize it, Lena’s brain was recording the sound of Kara singing her mother’s favorite lullaby on a quiet, lovely Christmas Eve a stone’s throw from the ocean.

When she finished the song, Kara pulled a quilt over them and closed her eyes, but her mind returned to Lena’s comment about her tendency to smile through painful moments. A distant memory flickered, a conversation she’d had with Eliza when she was struggling to adjust not only to a foreign culture but also to the horror of being the new kid in eighth grade. Eliza had told her that most awkward social moments could be smoothed over with a smile. While Kara had generally found that advice useful, an unfortunate side effect of all the smiling—she’d felt socially awkward pretty much 24/7 in her early days on Earth—was that she’d unintentionally conveyed feelings that she didn’t necessarily have. Human girls, she’d finally realized in college, only smiled that much when they flirted, a lesson that might have been helpful for Eliza to include as an addendum to her advice on human social interaction.

If what Lena said was true, another potential side effect was that she’d learned to distance herself from anything too painful. Hide who you are, the Danvers had taught her since the day she arrived on Earth. And so she had, even from herself. Somewhere along the way hiding had become second nature. Usually Alex was the only one who ever saw through her. Now, it appeared, there was someone else in her life who could see what was real and what wasn’t.

But she wasn’t the only one who had made a lifelong habit of hiding in plain sight, she thought, watching Lena as she slept, eyelashes a dark smudge against the even darker circles beneath her eyes. Whatever she’d held back about her mother’s death was her secret to keep. The thing that had made Alex turn the Danvers residence into Superhero Central, on the other hand? Not so much.

After Christmas, Kara promised herself, pressing her cheek against Lena’s silken hair. One more day away from reality couldn’t hurt, could it?

* * *

The next morning, Kara awoke in her teenage-hood bedroom with Lena in her arms and sunlight just beginning to wash the sky outside a pale gray. She lay there drowsily anticipating the day ahead. And sure, she might have been thinking mostly about the turkey and mashed potatoes and stuffing, the cooked carrots and fresh cranberries and homemade biscuits, but she was also thinking about her family and friends, okay? Although there were only two pumpkin pies left, and anyone who thought they were getting a piece was going to have to go through her.

When the clock flipped to seven o’clock, she began to blow gently in Lena’s ear, trying not to giggle as her girlfriend flinched sluggishly away from her. She blew again, careful not to activate her freeze breath. The goal after all was to annoy, not maim.

Eyes still closed, Lena lifted a hand and flicked her in the face.

“Ow!”

“Whatever. Impervious.”

“Not completely,” Kara complained. “I think you might have damaged my eye. Seriously.”
At that, one eyelid flicked upward and Lena regarded her. Then it fell shut again. “Liar.”

Kara laughed. “Merry Christmas to you, too, Scrooge.”

“I resemble that.” But she didn’t budge, merely continued to doze beneath the quilt Eliza’s mother had made for Kara shortly after the Danvers had adopted her.

She loved Lena, she did, but frankly she was being boring. It was Christmas morning, for Pete’s sake.

“Wakey-wakey!” Kara crowed. “Time to see if Santa came!” And she levitated out of bed and over to her desk.

“Kara, darling,” Lena said, rolling over and cradling the extra pillow to her chest, “I hate to break it to you, but there is no Santa Claus.”

She pretended to gasp. “Take it back, you—you blasphemer!”

Lena shook her head. “I can’t. The fact is he’s simply a corporate creation designed to boost retail sales at the end of the fiscal year.”

“Huh,” Kara said, pulling her favorite well-worn Stanford hoodie on, “good to know. I guess you don’t want this gift with your name on it then.”

She held up the small box, snickering as Lena bolted upright, eyes laser-sharp in on the gift box. A moment later Lena stood shivering before her in a tank top and boy shorts, rubbing her arms and batting her eyes.

“For me?” she enquired.

“Maybe.” Kara swallowed, suddenly nervous now that the moment was upon her. Alex had assured her that the gift wasn’t too much too soon, but as Lena’s eyes narrowed slightly, assessing the shape and size of the box, she wondered if Alex “UHaul” Danvers was really to be trusted in matters of lesbian love.

One way to find out.

Lena pulled on her green cashmere turtleneck—See? Not such a Scrooge now, am I?—and they returned to the bed, mimicking their poses from the night before, bare legs touching beneath the quilt still warm from their combined body heat. Kara gnawed on her lip as Lena lifted the lid and gazed down at the piece of jewelry inside.

“It’s a locket,” Kara said unnecessarily.

Lena smiled softly and opened the necklace, her breath catching as she saw the miniature photo inside. It was of the two of them cuddling on Lena’s couch, staring giddily into each other’s eyes. “When…?”

“Beatrice took it that first night. I didn’t realize, either, until she emailed it to me.”

“Sneaky,” Lena said, shaking her head. “Both of you.”

“It’s not just a necklace.”

“What do you mean?”
“If you turn the knob while it’s open…” She leaned in to demonstrate, and the photo slid aside to reveal a button.

“I don’t understand…” Suddenly her eyes flew to Kara’s. “Wait. Is this like Superman’s signal watch?”

“You know about his signal watch?” Kara demanded.

“Sorry,” Lena said, wincing at the probably apoplectic look on Kara’s face. “It was in Lex’s files.”

She considered asking what else was in Lex’s files, but, right, Christmas. “Yes,” she confirmed, “it’s like Superman’s signal watch in that it emits a high-frequency, ultra-sonic signal that only Clark and I can hear. But I had Winn pattern the emission to be different from Clark’s so that we would be able to distinguish between the two.”

“Can’t have Supergirl rescuing Lois Lane, now can we?” Lena asked, smirking at her.

“Or Superman rescuing Lena Luthor.”

“I should hope not.” She held the chain out to Kara and turned slightly. “Will you…?”

“Oh course.” Kara fumbled with the clasp before getting it closed without breaking even a single loop on the delicate chain. Boo-yah. “There you go.”

Lena turned back to smile up at her, hand on the locket. “Thank you. I love it.”

“Good.” Kara reached for glasses that weren’t there and settled for pushing back a few loose strands of hair. “Merry Christmas, Lena. I love you.”

“I love you too, Kara.”

Lena would have kissed her then but Kara backed away, claiming morning breath. By the time they’d gotten dressed and brushed their teeth, the rest of the house was stirring. They ran into Alex and Maggie in the hall outside the bathroom, and Alex immediately zeroed in on the locket.

“Nice necklace, Luthor,” she said, voice scratchy from sleep.

Lena tucked her arm through Kara’s and smiled. “Thank you.”

“Way to go, champ.” Maggie punched Kara in the shoulder and then winced and shook out her fingers.

“Thanks,” Kara said. And, “Sorry.”

“Nope, that was totally my bad.”

Lena tugged slightly on her arm and they headed for the stairs. In the living room, they tiptoed past J’onn and M’gann sleeping on the floor feet to feet—Martians, seriously—and made their way to the kitchen where Eliza was already dressing an enormous turkey.

“Merry Christmas,” Kara said happily, Lena chiming in belatedly on the second word.

“Merry Christmas, girls.” Eliza half-turned, pausing with her arm wedged inside the turkey’s ass. “I promise, this isn’t what it looks like. Or, well, I guess it is, actually.” They laughed, and then Eliza waved them closer, arm still inside the bird. “Give me a hug. It’s Christmas, after all!”
They hugged her, one on either side, and Kara kissed her cheek noisily before backing away.

“Can we help?” Lena asked.

“Aren’t you lovely to offer, dear! Why don’t you have some breakfast first, though, and then I’ll dole out the cooking assignments.”

“Sounds good,” Lena said, returning Eliza’s cheerful smile with a shy one of her own.

Kara pointed at the bag of potatoes on the counter. “I’m in charge of carrots and potatoes,” she told her girlfriend. “Super speed comes in handy for peeling vegetables.”

“Nice,” Lena said, and leaned up to kiss her cheek.

Kara thought she would have been embarrassed for Lena to kiss her in front of Eliza, but instead she only felt the usual giddiness that this amazing, incredible woman loved her so much that she didn’t care who knew. Gah. Christmas and Lena. Who knew life could be this good?

This time, she didn’t even notice the jinx. Not, at least, until they were midway through breakfast and Alex strode into the kitchen. Kara was about to offer her a cup of coffee when she realized that her sister’s mouth was drawn into a straight line. Their eyes met and Kara’s heart literally sank because, crap, something had clearly happened, something of the not-good, official DEO emergency variety. Damn it. She closed her eyes, trying to delay the inevitable. She should have known this was too good to last. For real, didn’t Cadmus—or whoever was causing chaos this time—know that it was freaking Christmas?

Beside her, Lena dropped her fork. The clatter made Eliza glance up from the turkey, her welcoming smile immediately slipping.

“What is it?” Lena asked quickly. “Alex, what happened?”

“Maggie got a call. An NCPD officer shot and killed an unarmed alien early this morning during a routine traffic stop. The alien projects are erupting, and the police chief is concerned that more innocent people could be hurt. The city could really use an appearance from Supergirl.”

Was that all? Kara had fully expected to hear that Lillian and Lex had broken out of jail, or that the Cadmus-aligned extremists had set off a bomb on a crowded city street. But alien riots? That was easy. She could calm the masses and be back before the turkey had even finished roasting.

“I’m on it,” she said confidently, swallowing the last bite of her fourth bagel. She gulped down a glass of orange juice and rose. “Where do they want me? At the projects?”

Alex nodded. “Lena, can Maggie borrow your flight suit?”

Lena gave Alex a long look. “Is this really a good idea? Kara and Maggie flying out of here all on their own?”

Kara stared between them. WTF? Since when did Alex and Lena discuss special ops strategy?

“Actually,” Alex said, nodding, “that’s a good point. Why send one Super when you can send two? I’m sure Clark would be willing to pitch in.”

“You can ask him if you want,” she said, frowning at Alex. “I’m going to get changed. Lena, can you get Maggie squared away?”
Lena nodded, not quite meeting her eyes. “Of course.”

And—well, that was weird, wasn’t it? She didn’t have time to dwell on the odd exchange, though. Right now she had to get ready to fly back to National City with her sister’s girlfriend strapped against her… No. Nope. No way was Maggie using Lena’s harness. Kara would just have to be sure not to drop her from a thousand feet up. That would definitely ruin Christmas, no doubt about it.

When Maggie and Clark were ready, they walked out to the driveway where the rest of the crew had already assembled. Lena looked worried, Alex slightly less so, and Lois barely at all. Right there in front of everyone, Lena hugged her close and kissed her. On the lips this time.

Kara felt her face turn the color of her suit and studiously ignored Lois’s teasing whistle. “I’ll be back soon,” she murmured, cupping Lena’s cheek with her hand. “Don’t worry, okay?”

“Too late.” Lena tried to smile, but for once her composure failed her.

“Is there something else I should know…?” Kara asked.

Lena hesitated, but then she shook her head. “No. Just be careful.”

“I will,” Kara said, swallowing back a sigh. Having a personal life as a superhero was challenging. She would have to ask Clark how he and Lois maintained balance—assuming they did. “You ready, Sawyer?”

Maggie released Alex. “Ready, Little Danvers.”

“Call if you need back-up,” Alex ordered, glancing between them. “J’onn and I can be there in less than an hour.”

“This is police business,” Maggie said. “Not fancy federal black ops territory. Got it, Agent?”

Alex smiled reluctantly. “Got it, Detective.”

Before they could get any cheesier, Kara hugged her mother, sister, and girlfriend one last time, got a good grip on her sister’s girlfriend, and lifted off. As she and Clark flew away (like the down of a thistle), she couldn’t resist exclaiming before they drew out of sight, “Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!”

The sound of Lena’s snort of laughter stayed with her all the way to National City.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

In which Kara finds out about her girlfriend’s most recent near death experience from someone other than her girlfriend.

Christmas had come and gone, and Kara and Clark had only made it back to Midvale briefly to eat Christmas dinner and rally the troops. In the wake of the short-lived riots in the projects, a masked assailant had used an alien weapon to kill a police officer, renewing tension and fanning the flame of alienophobic causes. The DEO suspected the cop killing was actually a Cadmus execution because the officer who had been targeted was, according to Maggie, a vocal alien sympathizer. So far, though, they hadn’t been able to uncover any evidence tying the murder to the splinter group.

Even with the curfew the mayor and city council had instituted in National City, the DEO and NCPD were hard-pressed to chase down the multitude of threats. The week between Christmas and New Year’s was exhausting in a way Kara hadn’t experienced since Myriad. Sirens went off practically every hour, and between the DEO and CatCo, she was on duty 24/7 first foiling violent outbursts and then writing stories about the events. L Corp was similarly slammed. When Lena wasn’t working with local authorities and NGOs to mitigate the growing chasm between humans and aliens, she was at her home computer sifting through Lex’s old files, trying, she told Kara, to find something to tie the current unrest to the Luthors. As a result, they had barely seen each other all week, and Lena had cancelled their New Year’s Eve trip to LA. There was just too much going on, she’d said.

Now, the last day of the old year, Kara couldn’t escape the sense that things were spiraling out of control. Overnight it felt as if the city had become dangerous, their existence precarious. Cell phone and email chatter about violent responses to aliens had spiked since the Christmas Day Riots, and the authorities seemed to constantly be one step behind the extremists. Instead of preventing attacks, they were stuck putting out fires left and right. All of these small uprisings felt like some sort of prelude. The question was, the prelude to what?

“Aargh,” she groaned, leaning against the table near Winn. “What ever happened to peace on Earth, goodwill to men?”

“Well, technically I think the Luthors would argue that those lyrics only apply to humans, so…” Winn trailed off, frowning.

“What?” Kara glanced over his shoulder but saw only a screen full of characters that might as well be Egyptian hieroglyphics for all that she could decipher their meaning. Maybe the language program in the Fortress of Solitude could be augmented to include computer languages. They wouldn’t take long to learn, and talk about a handy skill to have in both of her jobs…

“It’s nothing.” He flicked a sideways glance at her. “I thought you were going to Lena’s?”

“I am.” Lena was making her dinner tonight and Alex was doing the same for Maggie. Then, assuming the city didn’t melt down in the meantime, they were going to meet at a lesbian-friendly bar for a drink with a few of Maggie’s gay friends before ringing in the new year with the Super Friends at Kara’s apartment. They had kicked around watching the ball drop at the alien bar, but when the
The specter of the Medusa virus had stubbornly raised itself in Kara’s mind, she’d pouted until she got her way. A lesbian-friendly bar felt unsafe too, given Orlando and the wave of violence currently sweeping National City, but she’d agreed to go anyway, hoping that Supergirl wouldn’t have to put in an appearance. As Mon-El had put it, if she allowed fear to change what she did, then the terrorists would win. That, or her loved ones would stay alive and she wouldn’t have to worry about them…

“Well then,” Winn said, his voice overly hearty, “you better get going before another emergency pops up.” He smiled at her and then looked back at the screen, shoulders hunching slightly.

The humans in her life actually appeared to believe she was oblivious to the looks that had been flitting between them of late, but while she might not be an expert at reading human expressions, she wasn’t an idiot. Clearly they were hiding something from her, and honestly, it was getting a bit old. Time to implement Project WWAD (What Would Alex Do). First up, exploit the weak link.

“You’re right,” she said, keeping her eyes on the screen so that her usual tells wouldn’t give her away. “It’s been non-stop around here lately. I’m just glad Alex finally told me what happened last week. I knew there was something going on when the cavalry showed up for Christmas in Midvale.”

Winn’s eyebrows shot up. “She told you? Does Lena know?”

“Oh, of course,” she said, hoping her shrug looked genuine. “They told me together. You know, since it was their thing to tell.”

She winced inwardly. Surely this fishing expedition was entirely transparent. And to anyone else at the DEO, it probably would have been. Fortunately, Winn wasn’t anyone else.

“Well, you don’t know how glad I am to hear that,” he said, visibly relaxing. “I hated not telling you, but Lena didn’t want her brother’s latest scheme to ruin the holidays.”

So there was some sort of Luthorian plot in the works. Why hadn’t they told her? With difficulty, she took a breath and pushed down her rising anger—at Lex, at Alex and Lena for covering it up, at Winn even for lying to her. “Do you know the details? They were just starting to fill me in when that explosion happened near the high school.”

“Oh, sure. Lena wasn’t really in all that much danger, I don’t think. Did they tell you she smelled the rum?”

“The rum,” she repeated, frowning. Then she realized: Aldebaran rum. Lex had tried to kill Lena with alien alcohol. Her lips felt almost frozen, but she forced the words out: “They did tell me that part. I just didn’t hear where or when.”

“He sabotaged her office mini-bar the Monday before Christmas. It was an inside job, as far as we can tell. Alex and Maggie think Lex coerced someone on her security team. They got the guy and he confessed, so that’s good. It’s lucky she recognized the scent. Otherwise she and the dude she was meeting with might have…” He stopped and peered up at her. “Kara? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” She smiled—because, of course, that was what she had trained herself to do when she was upset or hurt, or simply so full of anger and fear that she couldn’t tell one from the other. “I have to go, Winn. I’ll see you tonight, okay?”

He nodded. “I’ll be there. Happy New Year, Kara.”

“You, too.” Then she was forcing herself to walk at a normal speed to the balcony where she launched herself into the sky. She knew she shouldn’t fly to Lena’s apartment like this, knew she should take time to calm down, to gain control over emotions already elevated from too little rest and
too much tension, but all at once she needed to see Lena, to make sure that nothing had happened to her since their last text exchange a few hours earlier. Needed to touch her, to hold her, to let her know that it absolutely wasn’t okay to keep things like god-damned assassination attempts a secret.

As she wove between skyscrapers, she felt tears prick her eyes and blinked them away angrily. It was stupid to cry, stupid to feel sorry for herself and Lena, caught up in a narrative they couldn’t control. She slowed as she approached Lena’s building. Through the walls she could see her in the kitchen, singing along to the Indie holiday station on Pandora as she made dinner. She was beautiful and vibrant, dancing barefoot around the granite island, hair loose, glasses slipping down her nose. Kara blinked, relief coursing through her. She’s okay. But another thought followed immediately: For how long? Even now, Lena could just as easily be cold and still, her heartbeat silenced, empty body buried beneath the Earth’s surface. Or consumed by flames, her spirit and ashes rising together into the dark sky, because hadn’t she said once that she planned to be cremated when she died?

Oh, god, when she died…

Kara dropped a few feet in midair. How could they have kept something so important from her? She could have gotten Lena killed a hundred different times in the past week. She’d separated her from the safety of the group during their Christmas Eve walk, something she definitely wouldn’t have done if she’d known about Lex. She’d slept through the night in her childhood bedroom without bothering to make sure someone kept watch. She’d left Lena alone—completely alone—all week, too concerned with the safety of others and her own need to grab a few hours of sleep between missions. How could they not have warned her?

As she hovered outside, she saw Lena pick up her phone and fiddle with the screen. Then she glanced up at the wall where Kara hovered just out of human sight—but not out of range of the security cameras.

Stupid, Kara berated herself, and landed on the balcony. She could speak a dozen languages from five different planets, and yet she couldn’t remember the presence of a simple security camera?

By the time she reached the kitchen, Lena was leaning against the counter waiting for her, brow slightly furrowed. “Were you on the phone?” she asked as Kara stopped in the doorway.

“No.” She fidgeted slightly, trying to stay calm. Or maybe become calm was more accurate, since she definitely hadn’t felt anything close to calm since Winn had told her about Lex.

Lena’s frown deepened. “Then why were you hovering outside? And why are you still in your suit?”

“I—” She stopped and paced toward Lena, then detoured to the granite island. Too agitated to sit, she toyed with the cushion on one of the stools.

“Kara…”

“I know about Lex,” she blurted, all but glaring at Lena.

“Oh. I see.” Lena’s expression smoothed out as she folded her arms across her chest.

Defensive posturing, Kara thought, remembering her early DEO lessons. She tried to run through J’onn’s de-escalation tips—stay calm; speak in a low, modulated tone; don’t stare the other person down—but the sound of her own heart beat thumping in her ears drowned out nearly everything else. Oh, I see? Was that seriously all she was going to say?

She took a breath, but the extra oxygen didn’t prevent the combined weight of her anger and hurt
from rushing along her nerve endings. “You know, when we said no more secrets, I thought we both meant it.”

The whoosh of air that escaped Lena’s lips sounded to Kara like the embodiment of exasperation. “I was going to tell you, honestly. I just didn’t want to ruin Christmas. Is that so wrong?”

A voice inside Kara’s head insisted that it wasn’t wrong at all, that it was noble and sweet, even. But then the image of Lena reduced to ashes—like her parents, like her friends, like the entirety of Krypton—flickered before her, and she bit out, still glaring, “Well, you ruined it anyway. I knew you and Alex were hiding something!”

Lena’s raised eyebrow and pursed lips were easy enough to read. And she was right; while Kara may have suspected there was something going on, she hadn’t actually known. Still, the sheer amount of derision contained in that lone eyebrow made Kara’s body grow so hot that she almost couldn’t breathe. Then she felt it—the winnowing of her eyesight that happened just before her heat vision engaged. Lena’s flinch was barely perceptible, but even with her vision compromised Kara noticed it. She shut her eyes, fists clenching. This was why she didn’t let herself get angry, why she smiled constantly and tried to keep people at a distance. Because if she felt too much, if she lost control, her eyes fired literal laser beams at anyone unlucky enough to get in the way.

Her arms fell to her sides and she took a step back, nearly tripping over her cape. Her stupid cape, the sign of superherodom that she and Winn had argued over. Why had she listened to him? Why had she become Supergirl at all? Alex had been right. She should have kept her true self hidden. Then she wouldn’t be here in this apartment with everything she loved once again in danger of going up in flames.

Lena must have sensed a shift in her because her brow lowered as she held out a placating hand. “Kara, I promise I was going to tell you. I just didn’t want my family coming between us.”

“It’s a little late for that, don’t you think?”

“It doesn’t have to be.”

She shook her head, blinking quickly. “I don’t need to be protected, Lena. I’m not a child. I’m freaking Supergirl, for god’s sake!”

“I know you are.” She looked away, murmuring half under her breath, “That’s what I’m afraid of.”

Kara froze, arms in mid-flail. Afraid. After all this time, after everything they’d said and done, Lena was still afraid of her.

The next thing she knew she was in mid-air dodging buildings. She didn’t remember leaving Lena’s kitchen, didn’t remember passing the pathetic little Christmas tree in its lonely pot, didn’t pause to think or breathe or even blink until she was out of the city, away from everyone and everything threatening to break her. She went up and up and out and out until she was thousands of feet above the desert, where there were no lights and no sound and, best of all, no human beings. She landed at the top of a rise and collapsed onto the hard earth, lying on her cape, arms folded beneath her head. Out here, hundreds of miles from the nearest city, the dark sky arced overhead, constellations piercing it like tiny pinpricks of light. She found the Milky Way easily, and Mars and Venus, too. Mercury, Jupiter, and Saturn had already set, but there was Uranus, and if she squinted hard… Yes, there it was. Neptune.

She sighed, relaxing into the compact dirt as the silence settled over her. Or, not silence exactly. Just like on Krypton, the desert in Southern California was alive with insects and other creatures of the
dark, ones that slept through the heat of day and rose only after the sun had long since set. The sounds and shape of the land rising around her reminded her of home. That was why she often escaped to Death Valley when she needed a break—not only was it quiet out here, but it was just familiar enough to soothe her. If the desert had been any more similar to home, she suspected she would have avoided it whenever possible.

At the thought of the home she would never see again, the tears she’d pushed back earlier returned. This time she let them fall. She was so tired of controlling herself, of worrying about the impact her powers could have on the people she loved. Maybe she should ask Cisco to find an alternate Earth that had mastered intergalactic travel and emigrate to a red-star system where she wouldn’t have to work so hard to keep herself in check. Or maybe she should ask Sara to take her a few hundred years into Earth-1’s future—Krypton still existed in their universe; by then they should be able to send her home, shouldn’t they? Of course, who knew if any Earth would still exist in the future? There were so many ways for a planet to die—asteroid strikes, solar events, core disturbances, hostile aliens, comets, and so on and so forth and so on… The seven billion plus humans currently playing out their lives on this planet weren’t even pinpricks in the fabric of the universe.

Which meant, by extension, neither was she.

The tears kept coming until finally, eyes closed, she called up the ancient forms of Min-Nal and meditated herself into a state that passed for calm. Then, wearily, she picked herself up and lifted off into the sky, drifting aimlessly beneath the sliver moon and a million flickering stars. Now what? Clearly she couldn’t just hide out in the desert; it was New Year’s Eve and she had friends and family waiting for her. Still, the thought of facing Lena was nearly as appalling as the idea of ringing in the new year without her. Alex. Clearly, she needed her big sister. Admittedly it was a fairly major date night, but Maggie could deal.

She turned and headed back to the city, leaving behind the lonely desert and the small towns where only a few lights shone against the dark expanse of the winter’s night. In contrast, Alex’s apartment was awash with light, the gas fireplace on, half a dozen candles flickering in the dining area where Alex and Maggie were currently eating dinner, hands linked, voices slightly raised. Wait, were they fighting? Kara paused in mid-air outside, concentrating. The teasing challenge in their voices alerted her to the fact that they were only bickering in what Kara had accidentally overheard Winn call “the lesbian cop version of foreplay.” And, ew, but accurate.

Fortunately, their clothes were on and they weren’t even kissing—scratch that. At least their hands were still above the table—damn it! She took her phone from her bag and texted Alex: “Incoming.” Through the wall she saw her sister pull back and reach for her phone.

The curtains billowed around her as she blew in, crossed to the bathroom, and changed back into regular clothes. Then she sped past the surprised couple and deposited herself on the couch, pulling a blanket up to her chin and glaring into the fire.

“Um, hi, Kara,” Alex said.

“Hi,” she grumbled. “Sorry to interrupt,” she added after a moment.

“No worries,” Maggie answered. “Can I fix you a plate? Home-made quesadillas…”

Kara shook her head. “No thanks.”

She could almost hear the gaze they exchanged. Suddenly Alex and her girlfriend were both dropping onto the couch, one on either side of her, and enfolding her in a hug. Maggie squeezed hard, the way Alex always did when Kara was in a mood like this, restless and upset and struggling
to name the darkness trying to overtake her. That meant they had talked about her, which was faintly alarming, but right now the press of their warm bodies and the weight of their arms looped over her shoulders represented the opposite of alarming. They were the only things keeping her from giving into the urge to fly up and away again, faster and faster until she blew hole after hole in the sound barrier.

Alex rested her chin on Kara’s shoulder. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No. I’m mad at you.”

“About…?”

“How could you not tell me he tried to kill her, Alex?” She meant to be harsh, but her voice, still rough from tears, came out all plaintive and whispery.

“For one thing, we don’t actually know who was behind the hit.”

“But Winn said—”

“Winn?” her sister repeated, and shook her head. “Of course. I’m seriously going to have to have a talk with him about the sharing of privileged information. Yes, Lena thinks it was her brother, but we don’t have solid evidence one way or the other.”

“So it could be anyone?”

Maggie leaned forward to exchange a look with Alex. “It’s probably Lex,” she said, her arm briefly tightening around Kara’s shoulders. “Right, Alex?”

“Probably,” Alex admitted. “It is consistent with his MO.”

“How did you know about it?” Kara asked, glancing at Maggie.

“She actually called me first. She was trying not to involve you or your sister at all.”

Which was so like Lena—always worrying about ripple effects. In a way, it was kind of awesome that she had reached out to Maggie. She didn’t trust easily, so the fact that she trusted Alex’s girlfriend? Definitely some kind of awesome.

“There was no real need to involve you,” Alex added. “It was an open and shut case. No one got hurt and we had the perp in custody only a few hours after the attempt.”

“But I could have—”

“What,” Alex interrupted, “obsessed about your girlfriend almost dying? Stayed awake all night on Christmas Eve waiting for an attack that never came? It’s not like we were in danger. We had half the Justice League with us and the rest on speed dial.”

Kara perked up a little at that. “Really?”

“Really. Lex Luthor’s prejudices extend beyond aliens, you know. Turns out he isn’t a fan of the costumed crowd in general.”

Kara forced herself not to smile at Alex’s casual reference to their planet’s assorted superheroes. This was not funny. She was angry here, damn it.

“You still suck,” she said, but her delivery was ruined as Alex poked her ear and she giggled
reflexively. She should never have admitted that Kryptonians had ticklish spots. “Stop it! I’m mad at you, remember?”

Alex held up her hands. “Sorry. Mope away.”

“I’m not moping. You guys lied to me about something really big. I get to be angry about this, Alex.”

“No, you’re right. I’m sorry. I really am. Lena wanted to tell you on her own time, and I was just trying to respect that.”

Kara stared hard at her sister, but she couldn’t find any indication that the contrition Alex projected was anything other than sincere. “Fine. I guess I forgive you. But don’t do it again, okay?”

“Sure. I mean, I’ll try.”

Which wasn’t exactly what she wanted to hear. At least Alex was upfront about the limits to her honesty.

“Where’s Lena now?” Maggie asked.

Kara bit her lip. “Um, at her place. I think.”

“You didn’t just take off on her on New Year’s Eve, did you?” Alex asked.

“Maybe? I know. I’m such a jerk.” She slid lower on the couch and covered her face with her hands.

“Why didn’t you guys warn me how complicated dating a woman would be?”

Maggie’s laugh was soft. “It may be complicated, but it’s worth it.”

“I just…” She trailed off as tears welled up once again. Why couldn’t everyone see what a mess she was? They looked at her like she was this innocent, happy-go-lucky child half the time, when in fact she had seen more of the universe, more death and destruction and innate evil than most of them had ever dreamed of. Except J’onn, M’gann, and possibly Mon-El. But her human family and friends? They acted like they needed to protect her from the harshness of humanity when all along, she understood the blackness of human souls better than they did.

What was it Lena had said? That everyone possessed both light and dark? Lena, who had smiled at her with wonder in her eyes as the opening chords of Hamilton rang out; who had bravely extolled the virtues of the Next Generation in the face of Kara’s purist stance; who had designed a flight suit for Kara’s Christmas present even though she hated to fly. Lena, who claimed to love her and yet had lied to her. Except maybe those two statements weren’t as diametrically opposed as they seemed. On Krypton, dishonesty was viewed in the same black and white, fixed lens through which the planet’s inhabitants viewed everything else. But on Earth, people believed in “good lies,” untruths offered to protect someone else. This was one of those cases, wasn’t it?

“I love her so much,” she admitted finally.

“But…?” Alex asked, her voice gentle.

“No buts. I just love her.”

“Terrifying, isn’t it?” Maggie asked.

Kara glanced sideways, unsurprised when Maggie held her gaze. “Completely. I can’t lose her too. I
just… I can’t.”

Maggie nodded. “I know what you mean. Whenever I see Alex throw herself a little too enthusiastically at danger—”

“Excuse you,” Alex put in, peering around Kara to mock glare at her girlfriend. “I do not throw myself at danger.”

“Yes you do,” Kara and Maggie said in unison, and Kara even managed a watery smile.

“When she does that, I want to snap my fingers and pause everything, rewind, go back and rewrite the events that led to that moment. But we can’t do that. We don’t have that kind of control. The only choice we have is whether or not to keep moving forward.”

You have no control, Kara thought, who lives, who dies, who tells your story. Stupid Lin-Manuel Miranda. Why were his lyrics so applicable to her life?

“We’ll do what we can to protect her, okay?” Alex said. “I promise.”

“We can’t be there all the time. You’ve said it yourself—we can’t save everyone.”

“No,” Alex agreed, “we can’t. But that doesn’t mean we stop trying, does it?”

Reluctantly she shook her head. “I guess not.” The room was quiet for a moment, and Kara focused on the music coming from the speakers. “What are you guys listening to, anyway?”

“The Indigo Girls,” Maggie said.

“Oh my god, you are so gay,” Kara muttered, trying not to laugh as she realized Maggie was wearing a flannel shirt and jeans with an honest-to-goodness wallet chain.

“Told you,” Alex said, snickering.

“You did, but I had no idea.”

“What? Their harmonies are amazing,” Maggie insisted.

The sight of Alex gazing indulgently at her super-gay girlfriend reminded Kara suddenly of the woman waiting—she hoped—for her across town. “I have to go,” she said, rising.

“You definitely do,” Alex agreed, waggling her eyebrows suggestively at Maggie.

“Ew, Alex!” But Kara was laughing as she delivered the requisite line.

They hugged her and kissed her cheeks while she simultaneously thanked them and apologized for interrupting dinner. A moment later she was spinning back into her suit and departing in what she knew probably looked like a blur to their average, everyday human vision.

As she flew back to Lena’s part of the city, the chaotic fight or flight energy gone at last from her system, she told herself she should be happy that her girlfriend and sister were on good enough terms to conspire behind her back. Besides, Alex was right. The Danvers home might not exactly be the most secure location ever, but with two Supers and two Martians, not to mention Alex and Maggie? The odds had most definitely been in their favor.

A secure location. An idea sparked in her mind. Earth-1 was nothing if not secure, and it wasn’t like Lena could stop her from taking her to S.T.A.R. Labs and asking Barry to look out for her until they
figured things out here. Of course, there was nothing Kara could do to stop Lena from breaking up with her, either, which she was pretty sure would be the end result if she abandoned her girlfriend in another dimension.

Lena was still in the kitchen, glasses on her nose, tablet open to the same recipe as before when Kara paused outside her apartment. For some reason the sight reminded her of the evening back in November when she’d spied on Lena for the first time, unreasonably thrilled that she was reading Jane Austen on her Kindle. So much had happened since then, and yet she was still running at the drop of a hat, still stuttering forward and back again in this relationship they had both said they wanted.

Before Lena’s security firm could notify her again, Kara entered the apartment, kicked off her shoes, and changed back into normal clothes. Then she speed-walked to the kitchen and paused in the doorway.

Lena glanced up from the stove, her gaze unreadable.

“Sorry,” Kara said, biting the inside of her lip. “I should have texted. Can I—can I come in?”

“Of course.”

They were still gazing at each other across the room when the buzzer went off. Lena switched it off and hesitated. “Are you staying for dinner?”

“I would like to. Is that okay?”

“I invited you, Kara. That hasn’t changed.” Without waiting for a response, she turned and reached for a pair of well-worn oven mitts on the counter.

Rehearsing her apology in her head, Kara set the table while Lena dished up salmon, mashed potatoes, French bread, and asparagus. The food smelled amazing, and Kara could no more stop her stomach from growling than she could keep herself from bolting at the first hint of trouble, apparently.

Lena carried their plates to the table and they took their usual seats. As she unfolded her napkin, Lena’s face was blank, forehead smooth, but Kara could hear the nervous thrum of her pulse, see the tension lining her shoulders. She hated that Lena constantly hid what she was feeling. And yet, it was her fault she felt she had to.

“I’m sorry I took off,” she said quietly.

“It’s okay. You came back.” Lena smiled a little, but Kara could see the resignation in her eyes, the oh, right, this again, behind the words she offered.

“It’s not okay. I shouldn’t have gotten so angry. You were in a difficult situation and you only did what you thought was best.”

“I lied to you, though! You have every right to be upset.”

“You would have told me if I hadn’t found out on my own, right?”

Lena nodded. “Let me guess: Winn?”

“Not, like, necessarily.”
“Right.” She gave Kara a tired smile and reached for her fork.

“I really am sorry about before,” Kara repeated, trying to ignore the heavenly scent of baked salmon drifting up from her plate. Food could wait. This was important. Lena was important.

Lena watched her across the table. “Apology accepted. As long as… you won’t do it again, will you?”

She scrunched up her face. “Like, you mean, tonight?”

Lena reached out and flicked the back of her hand where it rested on the table. But instead of pulling back afterward, she wound their fingers together. “I’m sorry, too. I didn’t want to lie to you. I really thought I was choosing the lesser of two evils.”

“Apology accepted.” Kara glanced down at their joined hands. Lena was so fair, so soft, while she was darker and definitely not soft. Their bodies were designed for such different things.

“And I’m sorry my family are such whack jobs,” Lena added.

“That’s not your fault. If we were responsible for the actions of the people closest to us…” She shuddered a little, picturing her mother and Fort Rozz, her father and the Medusa virus, Astra and Non and Myriad.

“Maybe not, but it is some fairly large baggage to bring into the relationship.”

Kara scoffed lightly. “Um, yeah, it’s not like you have a corner on oversize emotional baggage.”

“True. What a pair we are—you have abandonment issues and I have a family with vendetta issues. It’s not exactly the best combination, is it?”

“Well, when you put it like that…” Kara cracked a smile, relieved when Lena returned it.

Lena squeezed her hand. “I told you before I’m tough and I meant it. I’m not going anywhere anytime soon, okay?”

Kara tightened her hold on Lena’s hand. “You don’t know that, though. You have no idea what will happen in the future. None of us do.”

“You’re right,” Lena agreed. “But do you remember I told you once that I don’t believe in letting fear rule us?”

She nodded, biting her lip.

“Well, I meant it, Kara. I love you. I love that you’re brave and selfless and a big old nerd. I love you even though you refuse to see the genius of the Next Generation. I love you despite the fact you went to Stanford. I even love that being with me sometimes scares the bejesus out of you, because if it didn’t, I would know you don’t care half as much about me as I do about you.”

Kara looked over Lena’s shoulder, focusing on the shiny tray that contained the other half of the salmon Lena had baked. “Is that what you meant earlier when you said you were afraid? Being with me because I’m Supergirl?”

“Absolutely.” She frowned, and then her face shifted again. “You didn’t… Did you think I meant I was afraid of you?”

She looked down, pushing the food around on her plate. “No! I mean, well, maybe, I guess.”
“Oh, sweet girl…” Lena released her hand long enough to walk around to her side of the table and drop suddenly into her lap. “I am not afraid of you. Are your powers sometimes intimidating to me as a, what do you like to call me, puny human? Yes, I’ll admit they are. But am I afraid of you, Kara? No. Never. I know you wouldn’t hurt me.”

That made one of them. “And you’re not going to lie to me again, right?” Kara pressed. “Not even to protect me?”

Lena hesitated. “How about I agree not to lie about the big things?”

“Lena…” Sneaky humans and their damned flexible morality.

“I know how that sounds. It’s just, I’m not sure I can promise that. Can you promise me you won’t do something I don’t want because you think it might keep me safe?”

Kara hesitated, remembering her recent urge to stash Lena on Earth-1 until some undetermined future date. “Okay, I see what you mean. How about we agree—no hiding things unless there are extenuating circumstances that involve protecting each other?”

“Like not ruining our first Christmas together?” Lena asked, running her fingers along the back of Kara’s neck.

She smiled—Lena thought they would celebrate more Christmases together. “I see what you did there, Luthor.”

“You can’t admit I was right, can you?”

“Maybe.” Up until the riots, Christmas had been pretty great, and she could admit that if she’d known about the poisoning incident, it probably wouldn’t have gone nearly as well. “Fine. You win. It was the right decision.”

“Damn straight it was.” Lena leaned in and kissed the corner of her mouth before extricating herself from Kara’s arms.

“Easy there. No one likes a poor winner. Just ask Alex.” She waited until Lena was back in her own seat to scoop up a huge bite of salmon and mashed potatoes and jam it—holy Rao, finally—into her mouth. And, wow, it tasted as good as it smelled. Possibly better. “Mmmm,” she practically moaned. “This is amazing.”

Lena’s smile reminded her of Alex’s earlier. “Good. Happy New Year, Kara.”

She swallowed the bite and smiled back. “Happy New Year, Lena.”

They ate slowly—or Lena did, anyway—chatting about their days and any developments in the aliens vs. humans stand-off. Lena watched with her usual amused smile as Kara put away a veritable mountain of food, but over dessert, her expression turned more thoughtful. While Kara ate her third slice of Noonan’s famous cheese cake, Lena propped her chin on her hand.

“Would it even the playing field if I told you something about myself that I haven’t mentioned before now?”

Humans and their annoying obsession with even playing fields. On Krypton they hadn’t worried about such things because their culture had evolved to the point where they lived peacefully under a single government, with few divisions. But she knew that fairness was something Lena spent a good deal of time worrying about, so she nodded. “Couldn’t hurt.”
“Okay. Let’s see.” Lena tapped her chin for a second. “I’ve got it. In first grade I laughed so hard I peed my pants and everyone except Beatrice called me Pee-Lee for the rest of the year.”

Kara tried not to, but she couldn’t help the snicker that escaped. “That’s so sad!”

“And yet amusing at the same time, obviously. Just for that, now you have to tell me one of your embarrassing secrets.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. “I’m a slob sometimes? Alex hates it. I leave my clothes on the floor even though I could clean it up in like two seconds.”

Lena smiled a little. “That doesn’t sound so bad. I cheated on a high school chemistry test once because Victoria dared me to, but I felt so awful that I barely even looked at the cheat sheet.”

“Aww, poor Little Luthor. You can’t even be bad when you try!”

“That nickname is not happening.”

“I don’t know. If Supergirl can be Little Danvers, I think you can—”


“We shall see… Oh! I have one. Believe it or not, I don’t like helping everyone. Sometimes I wish I didn’t have to rescue sleazy men or conservative people who say things like ‘God meant Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve.’”

Lena nodded solemnly. “I fully support your right to judge the people you rescue.”

“And sometimes I use my powers for evil,” she confessed. “Like the first time I took you to the alien bar—I totally eavesdropped on Winn and James that night.”

“They were talking about me, weren’t they?” Kara nodded, and Lena added, “You were being chivalrous. I think that’s allowed.”

“Chivalrous, huh?” she repeated, smiling a little.

“My hero,” Lena said, her voice teasing.

Kara finished the last slice of cheesecake and leaned back in her chair. “Oh my god, that was sooo good. Why don’t you cook every night?”

Lena shrugged. “Not exactly time, is there?”

“Good point.” Kara bit her lip. “I really am sorry about earlier. I shouldn’t have come over when I was so upset.”

“No, I get it. You were hearing about it for the first time so it probably felt like it had just happened, in a way.”

She tilted her head. “I think you’re right.”

“It’s okay to get upset, Kara. You feel how you feel, and like we talked about before, you get to take time and space if you need it. I can’t promise not to be hurt, but I can promise to let you go.”

“Really?” Kara stared at her. “That’s it? You forgive me for taking off again just like that?”
“I lied to you after telling you I wouldn’t, and besides, you were only gone for fifteen minutes.”

“Here’s the thing—I love you, which you totally already knew,” Kara said, holding Lena’s gaze. “But what you might not know is that I’ve never loved anyone as much as I love you, which means I’ll probably keep freaking out, especially if someone tries to hurt you. But you have my word that I’ll always come back to you, okay?”

Lena nodded. “Okay. And I love you too, you know.”

Kara leaned across the table, closing the space between them. “Can I kiss you?”

“Please,” she whispered, reaching up to hold Kara’s cheeks so gently she almost couldn’t feel her touch at all.

Kara realized that she must look a sight, face mottled and eyes bloodshot from her earlier crying jags, but then she decided that what she looked like didn’t matter as Lena’s eyes closed and their lips touched. She sighed, feeling their breath intermingle, and then Lena pressed closer and licked up into her open mouth, and she forgot to breathe at all. Lena was soft and warm and smelled of cooking oil and lavender body wash, and her mouth was hot and insistent against hers. Kara let herself get swept into the kiss, and the heat that rushed through her veins this time was the good, familiar kind she had become increasingly accustomed to the longer she and Lena were together.

They would be okay. Lena would be okay. There simply wasn’t any other scenario Kara was willing to accept.

*             *             *

Later, after they had drunk champagne and socialized at the lesbian-friendly bar, after they’d rung in the start to an entirely new year at Kara’s apartment with the whole Super Friends crew, after they’d fallen into bed at one-thirty in the morning, hands and lips moving eagerly across bare skin, Kara pulled Lena against her under the sheets and sighed.

“Happy new year, my little dumpling.”

Lena laughed softly and kissed her shoulder. “Happy new year, my little alien.”

“I have to tell you something,” Kara said a few minutes later, somewhat surprised by the pronouncement herself. She blamed the bottles of champagne she had imbibed over the course of the night. The alcohol didn’t affect her the way a certain alien rum that should now forever go nameless did, but the bubbles definitely did something to her brain, she was sure of it.

“Good or bad?” Lena’s voice was drowsy.

“Not the best, probably. Depends on your perspective. Promise you won’t be mad?”

“How do I know I won’t be mad if I don’t know what you’re going to tell me?” Lena asked, infuriatingly reasonable despite the amount of champagne she had consumed over the course of the evening.

Kara made an irritated noise. “Forget it.”

“Hey, don’t be cranky, space girl.”

Lena poked her in the ear, and even as she giggled uncontrollably, Kara reflected that this was yet another human who could clearly not be trusted with Kryptonian biological secrets.
“Stop!” she gasped, too weak from sex and laughing to do more than bat at Lena’s hand.

“I’ll stop if you promise to tell me…”

“Okay, I promise!”

It took another round of tickling, this time involving her belly button, before Kara finally admitted, “I thought about taking you to Earth-1 earlier and leaving you there. You know, until I could make sure you were completely safe.”

Lena was quiet. Then she said, “Kara, you can’t do that!”

“Duh. You’re still here, aren’t you?”

“I’m no damsel in need of rescuing either,” Lena said, using the phrase Kara had previously invoked.

“You kind of are, actually.”

“No, I’m not.” Lena rolled on top of her and peered into her eyes. “You know that, right?”

“Umm…” Kara looked into her eyes, taking in the beautiful pale green irises that changed color depending on the lighting, her clothing, her mood. They were as ephemeral as Lena herself was, a quality that simultaneously fascinated and worried Kara. “I think we should agree to disagree on this one.”

Lena shook her head and rolled away, turning her back to Kara.

“Lena,” she wheedled, scooting closer.

“Whatever,” Lena said, but her voice was languid and not unhappy, and Kara was pretty sure she was only teasing.

She wrapped her arms around Lena’s soft frame and pulled her close, spooning her. Lena did need to be protected, whether she wanted to admit it or not, just like Kara sometimes needed protecting too. They were lucky they had each other to depend on.

“I love you,” she whispered, pushing aside Lena’s thick hair to rest her chin on her shoulder.

“I love you too,” Lena whispered back, folding her arms over Kara’s.

The sound of revelry drifted up from the streets, but that wasn’t why Kara couldn’t fall asleep. Every time she closed her eyes, a rush of chaotic images swept over her. So she stayed awake, her chin nestled into Lena’s shoulder, and tried to make her mind blank and calm until, after a while, Lena offered up another secret to the warm, comfortable darkness: “I thought about shooting the man who killed my mother. I even went to his condo with a gun my senior year at Deerfield.”

Kara could feel how tense Lena had grown in her arms, barely breathing, her limbs rigid. “You didn’t shoot him though, right?”

“No. I watched him get drunk in front of his television and then I drove home.”

“Cool.”

“Cool?”

“No, it is. I mean, it’s totally understandable why you would fantasize about killing him. I’ve had
similar thoughts.” Kara hesitated. “I’m not proud of it, but I’ve actually considered paying your brother a visit.”

“You have?”

“Yeah. More than once, actually.”

“Please don’t,” she said. “I know he’s terrible, but he’s still my brother.”

“I won’t,” Kara promised.

“Good.”

It wasn’t good, not any of it. Except maybe the part where they trusted each other enough to share such truths.

The night wore on, and Kara found herself wondering if she would be able to keep her word. Killing Lex went against everything she believed in, but if Lena hadn’t recognized the scent of the alien rum, if she had consumed enough to send her system into shock or, worse, had actually died at her brother’s hands, would an intangible moral code be enough to stop Kara from tracking Lex down and ending his life? She was pretty sure she knew the answer to that question, and it definitely wasn’t good.

Before she’d become Supergirl, she’d viewed revenge through a theoretical lens as something of a primitive motivating force. The human Bible’s Old Testament preached an eye for an eye, and Kryptonians had codified retaliation back in the days when the planet was routinely threatened by both global and interplanetary conflict. Then the Girod had come along and “civilized” Krypton, and the planet had moved away from the idea of retribution and toward the practice of negotiation and compromise. Kara would have liked to believe that her lifelong commitment to ideals such as peace, truth, and justice would win out over a base emotional need to avenge an act of violence against someone she loved. She would have liked to believe this but she didn’t, not when she walked through this world perpetually supercharged. Not when her attachment to her human family and friends—and now her very human girlfriend—grew with each passing day.

Lena had been joking when she referred to herself as puny, but there was too much truth to the statement for Kara’s peace of mind. Visions of broken bones and ruptured blood vessels dancing in her head, she closed her eyes and gathered Lena closer. Slowly, incrementally, Lena’s heartrate and breathing evened out as Kara held her, senses attuned to the sounds of the still celebrating city beyond her windows.

Lex wouldn’t get to his sister tonight, that much was certain. Not on her watch.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

In which Lena realizes two minds are better than one.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone. Thanks for reading this far. I’m thinking five or six more chapters. Of course, given how much I’m enjoying writing this, that probably means ten more… ;-) I have a few things going on in my life, including a deadline coming up at the end of June, so my updates might be a couple of weeks apart, but they will come. Thanks again for sticking it out. Leave a comment if you get a chance. They make my day every time. Happy reading!

Lena knew her mother was up to something, and not only because her cyborg henchman was still on the loose. She’d read books about narcissistic parenting, emotional blackmail, transactional affection, and other psychological categories that applied in varying degrees to her family of origin. She had become accustomed to Machiavellian machinations and life or death drama, used to the viewpoint that prison was perhaps more of a temporary setback than a guarantee of long-term containment. Frankly, she had never expected her brother to remain behind bars this long. She wouldn’t be surprised to learn that his current prison term was part of a larger plan, one that likely included the very public deaths of a pair of very prominent aliens.

“I just wish I had a normal life with normal problems,” she complained to Bea on the phone a few days into the new year.

“Bitch, don’t lie. You would be bored off your ass in half a day.”

Valid. “What about a less dangerous life, then?”

Bea’s voice softened. “Now that I could get behind. When are we going to see you? Rowan misses his auntie.”

“I miss him too,” she admitted, swiveling her office chair to stare out at the twilit sky. “Not for a little while, though.”

“Do you really think she’s plotting something?”

Lena laughed shortly. “Come on, Bea. Don’t you?”

“Probably.” She paused, and when she spoke again, her voice was low. “Be careful, Lee. I couldn’t—I wouldn’t…”

“Hey, it’s okay,” Lena said, wishing she could pull her best friend into a reassuring hug. “It’ll be okay. You know me. I over-worry about things I can’t control.”
“Yeah,” Bea said, and sighed. “I know. You tell Lillian if anything happens to you, she’ll have the Dangs to deal with.”

“Those are fighting words, girl,” Lena teased.

“Dang straight.”

“That’s not what she said…”

Bea laughed quietly, her voice rougher than Lena had heard in a while. “Go run your business. But keep me in the loop, okay?”

“I will,” she vowed, and then wondered as they hung up if that was a promise she could keep. Because she knew her mother was up to something; she just didn’t know what.

Whenever Lillian had dropped into her life unexpectedly—and it was usually a surprise because she rarely called first—Lena had always struggled to shore up her reserves of anger, relying on bitterness to protect her from her own vulnerable child’s heart that insisted on beating hopefully just beneath the surface. She was old enough now to have separated completely from Lillian, to have distanced herself from the person who had wielded so much power over her formative years. Lena had lived away from the Luthor mansion now longer than she had resided in it, and as such she had a much clearer view of Lillian’s tools of psychological torture, as she and Lex had jokingly called their mother’s habit of pulling them close and then pushing them away. Despite the fact Lex had been the Golden Boy, he had suffered nearly as much as Lena. More, possibly, because while she had fading memories of her biological mother to cling to, Lillian was Lex’s real/only mother.

Lex’s relationship with their father had been just as complex and equally as fraught.

“You’re too sensitive,” Lena remembered their father saying, shaking his head as Lex would dig his heels in about something that seemed on the surface inconsequential. “Buck up, son. Sensitivity only makes you vulnerable to exploitation.”

Lionel didn’t mean to be cruel to Lex. He was just away so much that he barely seemed to know how to interact with his children. Or, even, to care much if he did. If Lena ever had kids, she would cut back on the amount of time and energy she expended on work. Not completely—sacrificing her sense of independence and accomplishment seemed to her the antithesis of good parenting—but enough so that her children wouldn’t have to wonder if they were loved; if they mattered to their parents at all other than as extensions of themselves.

It still surprised her sometimes that she could actually see herself one day having children. Under the right circumstances, of course. Obviously not now with Lex and Lillian still on the anti-alien warpath, but hatred could only sustain a person so long. She hoped.

As teenagers from dysfunctional families, she and Bea had sworn they would never have children.

“I don’t want to fuck them up the way my parents fucked me up,” Bea would say as they lay on the roof of the science building, sharing a joint and taking turns gazing at the stars through the powerful refractor telescope Lena had convinced Lionel to donate to the school’s Astronomy Club.

“Me, either,” Lena had agreed unreservedly.

Somewhere along the way, though, she had stopped wishing quite as unequivocally for a childless future. The first step toward healing had occurred when she took a sociology elective her sophomore year at MIT that focused on American family structures, and suddenly found herself understanding the Luthors so much better. Not every role fit them perfectly, but some were almost too close. She,
for instance, had functioned as the family scapegoat for Lillian’s pain, the physical manifestation of her husband’s emotional and physical infidelity. Lex, meanwhile, was the child she poured her love and attention into, molding him into what she viewed as the best of herself and Lionel combined. Which was odd, Lena had always thought, given that Lillian didn’t seem to like Lionel very much.

“I don’t even know why she married him,” Lena would tell Bea after yet another stilted family dinner where Lillian sniped verbally at her husband and Lionel all but fell asleep at the table.

“Can you imagine our parents young and in love?” Bea would ask, and then they would laugh so hard they would snort beer from their noses.

Not that they’d spent the entirety of their youth smoking and drinking. Just, you know, the good bits.

That same college class helped Lena recognize that Lillian had picked Lionel not because she thought he would be different from her own workaholic father, but because his single-minded focus on work and the attendant absence from their family’s life matched what she had grown up with. Lillian, Lena came to understand, had gravitated to Lionel because he answered some deep-seated need of hers to be emotionally neglected by the people who were supposed to love her most. Being ignored and unloved was comfortable, familiar for Lillian. But at the same time, her unresolved grief over being taken for granted by those closest to her made her unpredictable, swinging from rage one moment to coldness the next.

Lena and Lex had both lived in fear of setting Lillian off. Or rather, they had both feared their mother would lash out at Lena, because of course the Golden Boy could do no wrong in Lillian’s eyes. That was one of the reasons Lena began to absent herself from the mansion at an early age. She hated being the cause of bitter, semi-violent fights between Lillian and Lex, who was determined to stand up for her no matter the cost. Spending days and nights at Bea’s and then leaving California altogether for boarding school was easier than walking on eggshells at the Luthor home. She almost always stepped wrong and cracked the shells, no matter how carefully she treaded.

Under their mother’s tutelage, Lex had grown to hate Lionel over the years, joining Lillian in the area of snarky sneak attacks that only made Lionel pull away more. Underneath the hatred Lex maintained, though, was the same hopeful child’s love Lena couldn’t seem to completely erase from her own heart. When Lionel died suddenly of a heart attack at his desk, not to be found until the next morning, something in Lex had cracked.

“It’s over,” he’d told Lena as they sat on Lionel’s favorite bench in the garden behind the mansion after the memorial service. His tie was loose, his hair mussed, his eyes strangely empty. “It’s done.”

“What is?” she’d asked, eyeing the half-empty bottle of Scotch in his grip.

“Our story. His story. It’s over, and it ended with him disliking and being disliked by both of his children. He died not liking us, Lena, and now we can never change that. He will forever be dead, and we will forever know that he died thinking that we didn’t love him.”

Lena couldn’t argue. Even at his worst, Lex had always had a knack for seeing and speaking the truth. He—and Lillian by extension—weren’t even that wrong about the alien menace facing Earth. Kara had told her about the Dominators, how they had invaded Earth-1, how they existed in this dimension, too. And if not the Dominators, she’d admitted to Lena late one night in bed at Oliver Queen’s house, there were other aggressive races out there capable of intergalactic travel. Just because Earth was currently viewed as a backwater outlier by the rest of the universe didn’t mean it always would be.

What Lex, Lillian, and Cadmus had gotten so badly wrong was their approach to Earth’s planetary
defenses. Painting an entire group of people as evil for the actions of a few made no logical sense. It would be like saying all Christians in America should be monitored and followed because members of the KKK called themselves loyal followers of Jesus Christ. Not only was such an approach unfair to the millions of innocent, non-cross burning Christians in the country, it was also impossible from a logistical standpoint.

Killing or banishing all aliens was definitely not the right way to combat a demonstrably evil few. She wasn’t sure what was, but she at least knew the wrong approach when she saw it. Besides, there was an entire universe of threats lurking out beyond the Earth’s atmosphere: asteroids, black holes, electromagnetic storms, dark matter, and comets, to name a few. Add to those all of the localized threats, many of them caused by humans—nuclear apocalypse, chemical weapons, greenhouse gases, rising ocean temperatures and acidification, overpopulation, potential pandemics—and the outlook became even grimmer. Their planet was one of millions, its future fate unknown and unknowable. For all anyone knew, this year just beginning could be Earth’s last. Shouldn’t humans spend their time loving the people they loved and doing what they could to improve Earth’s—and, by extension, humanity’s—chances at survival?

But instead of working on green technology innovations or methods of delivering clean water to global communities in need, Lena was forced to think about her mother and brother and their extremist views, to wonder what their next move would be in this real-life chess match she seemed to have no choice but to play. They knew Kara was Supergirl, she was sure of it; knew too that Lena was dating her. Intuition told her that their next move would be to come after Kara. In fact, to her mind, the spiking of her office stash was the first volley across her metaphorical ship’s bow.

Wait—was L Corp the ship? And was Lex the dread pirate coming for her, the do-gooder captain? She wished she could say that this was where the metaphor broke down, because her as a shining light against evil? Gah. When had such a thing even become possible?

Except she knew when: Right about the time she fell for a superhero.

So. The battle was apparently on. What was her next move? Aligning herself with a powerful ally made the most sense. Because if the dread pirate was coming after her ship, she would do well to rally the troops. Or was it raise the fleet? Obviously she made a better engineer than soldier. Sailor? Doh...

Clearly it was time to join forces with the only military types around she knew for certain she could trust.

* * *

“Lena!” Kara’s eyes widened. “What are you doing here?”

“Surprise visit to the DEO,” she dead-panned, and then reached out to squeeze her girlfriend’s arm. “Sorry, love, I’m not actually here to see you.”

“You’re not—what—then who are you here to see?” Kara asked, the crinkle working its way into her visage.

The tell-tale crease in her brow had been present almost more often than not lately. Lena had heard Alex tease her that it was threatening to become permanent—which begged the question: Could Kryptonians under a yellow sun even get wrinkles? She doubted it; after all, wrinkles came from damaged skin cells, and Kara’s skin was impervious. Did that mean that as Lena aged, she would become a wrinkly prune compared to her smooth-skinned alien girlfriend? Assuming they stayed together; assuming they managed somehow not to get themselves killed.
“She’s here to see me,” Alex announced, walking up behind Kara. “Don’t worry, it’s not a secret this time.”

“No,” Lena agreed, wincing at Alex’s less than subtle reference to recent events. “In fact, I came in now because we wanted you to know.”

“Know what?”

“It’s probably better if we just show you,” Alex said.

After a moment, Kara nodded. “Of course.” But her eyes were still wary as she trailed Alex and Lena to a windowless room two floors down.

Winn was waiting for them. “Hey, Lena! Good to see you.” He leaned forward to kiss her cheek, catching her momentarily off-guard.

“Ahem,” Kara said, her glare only half-teasing.

Winn’s ears turned pink, and Lena hid a smile as he ducked his head. “Anyway, have a seat. You two can stand,” he added over his shoulder, not quite meeting the gaze of either Danvers sister. “Did you bring the files?”

“Right here.” Lena fished a portable hard drive out of her handbag, plugged it into the USB slot Winn indicated, and typed in the password. And then another password as she navigated into a secure folder. And then one last password as she reached the final folder.

“All those passwords—” Winn began.

“Randomly generated by an algorithm of my own making,” Lena said as she clicked through the folders.

Behind her, she heard Kara say, her voice proud, “Lena’s power is being super brilliant.”

Alex snickered. “Okay, whipped girl.”

“No, she’s right,” Winn said earnestly. “Lena’s a certified genius. Like, officially.”

The fact that she could hear them didn’t seem to bother her fan club. And really, how did he even know that? Stupid Google.

“Anyway,” she said, hoping the dim fluorescent lights hid her mild mortification, “I’ve managed to unencrypt probably a dozen files so far. But the other few hundred appear to be encrypted with—”

“Different algorithms?” Winn asked, his voice wry.

“Well, yes. Unfortunately.”

“What’s unfortunate is that super brilliance runs in your family,” Alex said.

“Wait, are these Lex’s files?” Kara asked.

“Yes.”

Lena didn’t look away from the screen. She wasn’t in the mood for another fight, and Kara wasn’t going to want to hear that she hadn’t been sure until recently she could trust the people at the DEO. Given that Cadmus had started out as a government agency, it had occurred to Lena that the DEO
could well be aligned with the group, and Kara and Alex just didn’t realize it. After meeting J’onzz, though, she was reasonably sure that the DEO wasn’t teeming with anti-alien infiltrators. Having a psychic Green Martian director seemed to preclude such an eventuality.

“Wow.” Kara’s voice was more awed than angry. “Thank you.”

Lena chanced a glance back to find Kara watching her, eyes soft. “You don’t have to thank me. It’s my fight too.”

“I know,” Kara said. “But still.” She reached out and squeezed Lena’s shoulder.

“Do you have everything you need?” Alex asked, bringing the conversation back to the work at hand.

“Yep,” Winn said, already typing a complex string of code that Lena could only half concentrate on with Kara so close.

“All right then. Kara, let’s leave them to it.”

Kara lingered, and Lena flashed a smile up at her. “Come get me for lunch, okay?”

“You cleared your morning for this?”

“I cleared all my mornings until we crack these files,” she admitted.

“Wow,” Kara repeated, and then Alex was tugging her away, and even though Lena knew that a human’s touch felt like a fly landing on her skin, Kara let herself be moved. “I have a meeting at CatCo, but I’ll see you at lunch!”

Lena watched her leave, trying to decide if she liked Kara better in her Super suit or dressed as she was now in her reporter’s uniform of button-up and slacks. She’d stopped wearing the pastel cardigans somewhere along the way. While Lena couldn’t quite put her finger on when, she definitely knew that she liked the change. Kara seemed more grown up now, more sure of herself. Could that be because of their relationship?

“You know, she left a while ago,” Winn said from beside her.

“Shut it, Schott.” She smacked his arm.

“Dude, I’m typing,” he whined, but he was smiling at her with a hint of the same softness she’d glimpsed in Kara’s eyes.

When had that happened? When had people begun to look at her with genuine affection more than with wariness or distrust? Probably the answer to this question was the same as the last: right about the time she’d gotten involved with a superhero. Apparently Kara wasn’t the only one changed by their relationship.

“So,” Winn said, “want to walk me through what you’ve tried so far?”

“Absolutely.” Because while L Corp’s anti-encryption technology was top of the line, Lena was a firm believer in the old science nerd adage that two brains were always better than one.

* * *

When the first text message arrived at the end of the week, followed by an email and then a typed letter all on the same day, Lena couldn’t help but feel that the beginning of the end was upon them.
“Let her go, Lena, or we will be forced to take her from you.”

“Your relationship is unnatural. Stop now before one—or both?—of you gets hurt.”

“You cannot love what is inherently unlovable. Think of your name. If you don’t end it, we will.”

She didn’t have to ask who “she” was, nor did she wonder who had penned the creepy, threatening missives. The messages smacked of her brother’s brand of dictatorial insanity, and for the second time in as many weeks, she had to make a decision: to tell Kara or not to tell her?

Realistically, she knew she couldn’t really lie to her, not after the Christmas fiasco. She didn’t want to keep the threats from her, but at the same time, just as before, she wasn’t sure she should tell her. She really hadn’t wanted to ruin Christmas over the Aldebaran rum incident, but there had been more at stake than a peaceful holiday weekend. Because honestly, she hadn’t been able to forget what Kara had said to her the night she flew back from New York: “I’m not sure what I might do... what I might be capable of if something happened to you.”

Her fears had been justified. When Kara found out about the poisoning attempt, she’d admitted to thinking about killing Lex. And while Lena might not love or even like her brother anymore, she didn’t want him dead, especially not at her girlfriend’s hands. For one thing, Kara would probably be all noble and turn herself in. For another, even if she didn’t end up in prison, Lena knew Kara would never forgive herself for doing something that was so against everything she stood for and believed in.

This was what happened when a Luthor fell in love with a Super. It couldn’t possibly end well.

She didn’t sleep well that night. When a crash sounded from her living room in the wee hours of the morning, she sat bolt upright in bed and reached for the gun in her bedside table. Then a voice called, “Don’t worry, it’s just me.”

Lena exhaled in relief, replacing the gun in its hiding spot. And then Kara was there pulling back the sheets and slipping in beside her, dressed only in the boy shorts and tank top she kept in the dresser drawer Lena had cleared for her. “Sorry, I totally tripped over the coffee table.”

As she lay back down, Lena hid a wince. She loved that table. It wouldn’t be as easy to replace as, say, her headboard or the kitchen stools. Wait. It wasn’t like Kara to trip over furniture. Break whatever got in her way in the throes of passion, yes, but randomly destroy a stationary object in the middle of the night? Not so much. “Are you okay?”

“I will be.” Her voice was heavy with exhaustion, and her hair smelled of something Lena had a feeling she should recognize.

“What happened?”

“Cadmus apparently recruited a whole, um, colony I think they’re called, of Circadians. Which is strange because I’ve always heard Circadians are pacifists. Not the ones I met today, though. I think I blew out my powers.”

Lena sat up again and nudged Kara. “You blew out your powers? Why aren’t you at the DEO?” The contents of the threatening messages flashed through her mind, and she bit her lip. She couldn’t protect a powerless Kara, not here.

Kara sat up beside her, pout clearly visible in the dim light. “Not all the way. Just, like, close. And I missed you. I don’t sleep as well anymore without you.”
Which was… *sweet.*

Lena checked the clock. It was almost five, and she knew she’d never get back to sleep now. “Come on,” she announced, “we’re going in. This will give me a little extra time. Winn and I are close to cracking the file that we think might have details on the secret bunker locations.”

“Lena,” Kara groaned and flopped back on the bed. “Why are you like this?”

She smiled and shifted on top of her girlfriend, calling on a proven tactic. “If we go now, we can fool around in the sun room before your powers come back…”

Kara lifted her easily and was in her suit in seconds. “Well? Are you coming?”

Lena bit back the retort at the tip of her tongue and slipped out of bed. With Kara’s powers on low, her apartment didn’t feel safe anymore, thanks to Lex. But maybe there was something she could do to change that. After all, if Lex could figure out a way to kill the Supers, surely she could come up with a way to protect them. Lionel had always said she was the sharper mind between them. She wasn’t sure that was true, but for whatever reason—genetic predisposition, hormonal factors, brain chemistry—she certainly appeared to be less prone to delusions of grandeur and, well, straight up insanity.

She hoped.

A handful of hours later, as she and Winn were running the DEO’s codebreaking software through its paces, Lena spun in her chair and said, “Do you know if is Alex is here?”

Winn glanced away from the screen. “She should be in her lab. Why?”

“I wanted to chat with her about a couple of things.”

“Like…?”

“Like private things,” she said, eyeing him coolly.

“Oh, of course, you betcha.” He grabbed his phone and sent off a text, and within thirty seconds the door opened and a black-clad agent was escorting her through the labyrinth of windowless corridors. Lena liked to think that she had a good sense of direction, but inside the DEO with its unmarked doors and intersecting passageways she was hopelessly lost.

Alex’s lab was mostly windows, though, so she got a chance to observe her as they approached. She was bent over a microscope, jotting notes in a notebook that, as Lena neared, she realized appeared to be in shorthand. She spared a glance at the high-end stereo microscope on the desk. With its trinocular head and integrated LCD tablet, it was impressive, but she would need a closer look to judge conclusively whether or not L Corp’s technology was superior.

“What's on your mind, Luthor?” Alex asked, lifting her head. She folded her arms across her chest and then immediately relaxed them. But Lena noticed.

“I had some ideas I wanted to run past you.”

One of Alex’s eyebrows lifted. Which, interesting—that was Lena’s go-to intimidation tactic. “About?”

“About Kara. Specifically, about her physiology.”
Alex’s arms came up again and this time she left them. “What about her physiology?” Her tone was neutral enough, but Lena sensed the steel beneath her question.

Alex, she knew, had been Kara’s protector since—well, basically forever. It was understandable that she would have difficulty trusting a member of the very family who had decided to invest their considerable intellectual and financial capital in trying to destroy the Supers.

I’m not like them, Lena’s brain automatically supplied. But obviously Alex knew that or Lena wouldn’t have been allowed within a foot of the DEO. Admittedly, while the computers she and Winn worked on had network access, that access was severely limited and did not, for example, include internet connectivity. Even if the DEO had trusted her implicitly, such precautions were wise given the nature of the files she and Winn were attempting to crack. But the DEO, as manifested in one Alex Danvers, didn’t trust her implicitly.

Lena squared her shoulders and met Alex’s gaze directly. “I’ve been thinking about ways to trigger different responses within her system.”

“Because?” The steel was even more prominent and Alex’s tone now.

“Because you and I both know that Cadmus will stop at nothing to get their hands on her again. And when—”

“If,” Alex interjected.

“If,” Lena allowed, “they do, it would be nice to be prepared, wouldn’t it?”

Alex stared at her for a long moment. “What did you have in mind?”

Lena sat down on the stool next to her and said, “I was hoping we could brainstorm some ideas together. You know, two minds and all?”

After another, shorter pause, Alex nodded. “Let’s do it.”

Because even if Alex didn’t fully trust her, Lena thought, at least she recognized that the best way to fight an enemy was from the inside. No one in the world knew Lillian and Lex better than she did. Finally, something good might actually come from the family dysfunction she had never quite managed to leave behind.

For the next half hour they riffed on cortisol, adrenaline responses, Kryptonian neurotransmitters, and other ideas that had been circulating through their minds. Alex gave as good as she got, Lena was unsurprised to find. Perhaps even better, which made sense seeing as she had been working in the field of alien biology significantly longer than Lena had been dating an alien. It was—nice, she decided, working together like this. Refreshing to meet someone who could keep up. Kara’s science prowess was inarguable, but Lena always got the feeling she was holding back. Krypton had been so far ahead of Earth in terms of—well, everything—she sometimes imagined Kara felt as if she was living among the Kryptonian equivalent of Neanderthals.

Assuming Krypton had had such an equivalent.

“I’ve also been thinking of some ways to augment the suit,” she said when the conversation finally paused.

Alex glanced up from the page where she’d been jotting notes and smiled slightly. “Oh, really. Does Winn know that?”
“No,” Lena confessed, returning the smile. “I was hoping that you and J’onn might be able to smooth the way. I don’t want to step on anyone’s toes.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“Excellent.” She paused, trying to figure out how to word what she wanted to say. “I know it’s difficult to get past the Luthor name sometimes,” she offered, holding Alex’s gaze. “But I really do love her, you know. That’s the reason I’m here.”

After a moment, Alex nodded. “I know. And she really loves you too. As crazy as it sounds, maybe a Luthor and a Super working together is exactly what National City needs. Maybe even the world.” Then she stood up and became all brusque and professional again, almost as if she regretted allowing Lena even a brief peek behind her usual mask. “All right, then, I should get back to work. These Circadian tissue samples won’t analyze themselves.”

Lena stood beside her. “Right. Me too.”

But before she could turn away, Alex reached out and pulled her into a hug. “Thank you,” she murmured in Lena’s ear, arms tightening briefly around her waist. “For taking care of our girl, I mean.”

“If course,” Lena murmured back, swallowing against the sudden tightness in her throat. *Our girl.*

Maybe Alex did trust her after all. Wonders, apparently, never ceased.

* * *

A week passed, and not much changed. Then one night Lena jolted awake to a whispered, “Hi.”

“Hi,” she managed, blinking slowly in an effort to force her nervous system to calm down. “Are you okay?”

“Uh-huh, are you?”

Lena huffed out a breath. “I am now.”

Slowly the day came back to her, the news full of reports of renewed tensions and rumors of anti-alien terrorists infiltrating local government channels. She hadn’t seen Kara since their hurried lunch break, had only received a single two-word text from her—“I’m fine”—after CatCo TV showed her taking a hit from a large caliber rifle that, according to the reporter on the scene, apparently used cop-killer bullets designed to pierce even the strongest armor.

Kara slipped her arms around her and started to pull her closer, but then she froze.

“What is it?” Lena asked.

“Nothing.” Kara’s eyes were closed and she was practicing the deep breathing Lena had witnessed on several occasions. *Min-Nal,* Kara called it. Sometimes they practiced together on the balcony, Lena working through her morning yoga routine while Kara lay on a mat nearby and did—whatever this was.

Lena suddenly remembered the close-up of Kara’s face after she got shot and reached for her tank top, slowing her movements when she heard the quick intake of breath. Normally she loved Kara’s abs, but now as she tugged the loose tank upward she had to hold back her own gasp. Kara’s midsection was a purple and green mess, tinged with yellow around the edges.
“I thought you couldn’t get hurt?” she said, and even to her own ears, her voice sounded unnaturally shrill.

“You know I can,” Kara said, calm and patient. “Particularly when the gun relies on alien tech. But it’s fine. I’m already healing. By morning I’ll be back to normal. If you can call it that, heh heh.”

Lena recognized her cue to joke back, to allow humor to smooth over the sharp edges of the fear they both lived with day in and day out, but it was the middle of the night and she’d awakened scared again, and Kara looked so hurt that she couldn’t possibly joke back. But she did allow herself to be tugged closer, did accept the semi-apologetic kiss to her forehead, did turn Kara onto her side and hold her from behind, careful to avoid the mottled skin of her ribcage. Because sometimes she could be the big spoon, too.

They settled down together, Kara’s heat seeping into her and driving out the chill of fear. It wasn’t just the sound of someone creeping through her apartment that had set her nerves jangling this time. It was the knowledge that Kara wasn’t as impervious as Lena liked to pretend; the reminder that her superhero girlfriend could be hurt, just as the daily messages promised. Was her getting shot Lena’s fault? If she had done as her stalker(s) demanded and broken things off, would they really have left Kara alone? It didn’t seem likely, but could she afford to continue ignoring that possibility?

Soon Kara was snoring softly, each inhale hitched slightly as if it hurt to breathe. Lena was exhausted, but she didn’t want to go back to sleep just yet. Late-night visits were some of the only quality time they got together, and even then “quality” seemed a stretch. Every time Kara crept into her apartment, Lena shot up in bed, her system suddenly on full alert. Once she’d actually let loose a small scream, quickly stifled. Kara had rushed to her and pulled her close, stroking her hair and shushing her until finally her heartbeat slowed and her breathing calmed.

The following morning at breakfast, Kara had asked, her eyes vulnerable, if maybe she shouldn’t come by at night anymore.

“No,” Lena had assured her. “I know I freak out every time…”

Kara had smiled a little. “You really do. Which freaks me out every time…”

“I know,” Lena said, smiling down into her mug. “It’s a Luthor thing.”

“PTSD is a Luthor thing? And here I thought it was a House of El thing.”

“I think it can be both. I may not be able to help how I react in the middle of the night, but I really do want you here. I sleep so much better when you’re beside me.”

Kara had nodded, serious again. “So do I.”

“So you’ll keep coming? Even if I scream again or, like, try to shoot you?”

“You have a gun in here?” She glanced around, squinting over the top of her glasses, and Lena could tell each time her gaze tripped over a different concealed weapon.

“It’s a Luthor thing,” she repeated, shrugging nonchalantly. “Don’t worry, I’m trained and licensed.”

“Good thing I’m bullet-proof,” Kara muttered, and Lena could tell she was barely preventing herself from reciting gun violence statistics or possibly safety tips about firearms in the home. Then the crinkle disappeared and she started laughing.

“What?”
“You and Alex are so alike sometimes, it isn’t even funny.”

There were definitely worse people to be compared to.

Now Lena snuggled closer and rested her cheek against Kara’s warm shoulder. It was hard to remember what her life had been like just a couple of months earlier when she’d slept alone in this bed every night. Back then, she’d never quite allowed herself to fully relax if she could help it. But with her own personal superhero in her bed more often than not, she’d gotten used to lowering her guard, to enjoying four or five hours of deep, restful sleep.

Sometimes when she woke up in the morning Kara was still there wrapped around her, and they could greet the day lazily, with kisses and hugs and shared pots of coffee. Other days Kara was gone before she even woke up, or Lena had to rush out to an early meeting. On mornings like that, she felt like she spent most of the rest of the day trying to catch up, until, usually at some point in the middle of the night, Kara would crawl in beside her and she would finally relax completely once more.

It was a bit frightening how terribly dependent she had let herself become on another human be—on another person, she corrected herself. Funny how her mind made that slip more and more often now. She no longer thought of Kara as an alien. Oh, she knew intellectually that her girlfriend was from another planet. It was kind of hard to miss, given the flying and the laser eye thingie, not to mention the alien blood samples Alex had begun to share with her. But when Kara held her close in her arms in the dark of night, Lena no longer noticed their differences. She only felt how they were the same, frightened and joyful and loving and in love, their hearts beating for each other.

She hoped it could stay that way, even if she knew it probably couldn’t.

Admittedly, Luthors weren’t known for their overdeveloped sense of optimism, but even without Lex’s personal vendetta, things seemed increasingly out of control. Since Christmas Day, National City had been bubbling over with alienophobic vitriol. There had been a sharp uptick in Internet chatter geared toward violence, hatred, and exclusion, according to her chief of security. Even though she knew these particular tensions had been lying beneath the surface, just waiting for a seismic shift to send the plates grinding against each other, it still somehow felt like a switch had been flipped, and overnight humans and aliens were at each other’s throats. While the flash points may have been there all along, now they had been brought out into the light. News cameras were suddenly focusing on them, words were being written by the thousands, hate crimes were on the rise, and National City felt like Metropolis all over again.

Lena had worked there briefly, but she’d been so eager to escape the East Coast that she had fled to the Los Angeles office soon after completing her graduate program. She’d had enough of cold winters and muggy summers, enough of her brother and his growing obsession with Superman, and so she’d returned to California, land of sunshine and warm nights. And for a while, she’d been content. Almost happy, even. Then Lex’s obsession took a dark turn and innocent people had lost their lives, collateral damage Lex was only too willing to sacrifice if it meant luring Superman to his potential doom.

It hadn’t meant that, fortunately. Kara’s cousin had triumphed, a god among men just as Lex had predicted, and her brother had finally, at last, been imprisoned. After the trial, she’d thought National City might offer a clean slate. But how could a city with a resident Super ever be a clean start for a Luthor?

At some level she’d known this was how things would go. A part of her had even hoped in the beginning—before she knew Kara personally—that her move to National City would draw her brother out, force him to show his hand, give her the opportunity to meet him in one final battle. Because that was what this felt like: the beginning of the end of the Luthors once and for all.
Either way, Lena would do whatever it took to protect Kara. The problem was, she was pretty sure her family was fully prepared (preparing?) to use that “weakness” against her.

In her arms Kara twitched restlessly.

“Shh,” Lena whispered, kissing the soft downy hairs at the back of her neck. “I’ve got you, sweetie.”

“Lena?” she whispered, adorably sleep-confused.

“Mm-hmm,” she hummed, smiling into her warm skin.

“Yay. I love you.”

“I love you too,” she replied, pressing more kisses against Kara’s shoulder.

If only they could stay just like this.

But even as the thought formed in her consciousness, the seconds were slipping away into minutes, minutes accruing into hours, the Earth revolving steadily—so impossibly quickly—about the sun with the stars and moon silent witnesses in a sky that she knew still felt foreign to Kara.

Sara Lance and her crew aside, there was no stopping the forward progression of time. No changing what had been, no way of predicting what would be. Lena was a Luthor and Kara was a Super and so they would not sit back waiting to see how events shook out. They would act, boldly and confidently, because the only thing you could do was shine your freaking light as intensely as possible in the face of darkness and hope it was enough.

What was the Star Trek quote? “Fortune favors the bold.” Also: “Without followers, evil cannot spread.” And one of her favorites, an old Klingon proverb: “Act, and you shall eat dinner; wait, and you shall be dinner.” Words to live by, really.

She closed her eyes and channeled Picard: There is a way out of every box, a solution to every puzzle; it’s just a matter of finding it. They would find the way out of the box Cadmus—her mother—seemed determined to paint them into. She and Winn would crack the rest of Lex’s files, and she and Alex would develop tech that would keep Kara safe. They would save the world because the good guys always won, didn’t they?

“Not on Krypton,” Kara had pointed out.

Fortunately, they weren’t on Krypton.

Lena closed her eyes and burrowed carefully into Kara’s back. They would be fine, they absolutely would. Maybe if she told herself that enough times, she’d even believe it.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

In which Alex tries her best to believe.

Chapter Notes

Hi friends! Sorry for the extended break. The other project has been kicking my butt! Plus it's summer and my kids are playing lots of soccer and swimming and generally being fun... But I'm ready to finish this fic! More regular updates from here to the end. Thank you for the support! I really appreciate it. :-) Happy reading!

Alex glanced around the squad room, rapidly cataloging the figures bent over desk tops, gathered at the coffee pot on one counter, and interviewing witnesses to a variety of crimes. Lately there were almost too many to keep track of. But that wasn’t why she was here.

Her girlfriend was sitting on the desk of an officer who Alex recognized: Alfonso Ortiz. With massive shoulders, large hands, and a soft belly, he looked every bit the former college athlete he’d apparently been before he decided to pursue a career in law enforcement. Alex caught Ortiz’s eye and put a finger to her lips. He nodded subtly, and Alex took it as permission to sneak up on Maggie, who was gesturing wildly as she spoke in rapid-fire Spanglish. Alex caught a reference to “stonewalling” and “totally compromised” and then she was on the smaller woman, goosing her from behind.

“Hold on there, handsy girl!” Maggie exclaimed, laughing. “To what do I owe the pleasure of your company?”

“I was in the neighborhood,” Alex lied easily. “Hey, Ortiz!”

“Yo, 007.”

“What has you so hyper?” Maggie asked, heading over to her desk where her messenger bag waited.

“We had a breakthrough,” Alex said gleefully, and tugged Maggie out of the squad room and onto the twilit street where her bike waited illegally at the curb.

“We?”

“You know how Lena and I have been struggling with how to block Kryptonian neurotransmitters? Well, Kara wanders in this morning and asks if we’ve thought about ghrelin, the hunger hormone. If we can convince her hypothalamus that her insulin and blood sugar levels have dropped, then her system will automatically—”

“Dude, slow down,” Maggie said, accepting the helmet Alex handed her. “You know I don’t speak nerd.”
“Right. Sorry. Basically, we figured out a way to make it seem like Kara has lost her powers. And, potentially, turn them back on again.”

“Holy smokes! That is big. Will it work on Superman too?”

“I don’t see why not.”

“Damn. Way to go, babe.” Maggie started to lean forward, eyes on her lips, but then she stopped and glanced around as if remembering where they were. “And on that note, let’s blow this popsicle stand.”

Later, as Maggie snuggled up against her in front of the fire in her apartment, Alex tried not to feel it—the warmth of contentment lapping at her virtual self. She tried not to feel it because this was when the universe usually bitch-slapped her: the moment when genuine happiness seemed to be lurking just around the next corner. But she couldn’t help it. With Lena and Kara both chipping in at the DEO, every problem suddenly seemed surmountable. Kara’s brain power was incalculable, and Lena’s ability to glean onto alien biology was outstanding—and a bit sobering. Now Alex understood what had made Lex such a danger to Superman. She caught herself.

Had? Lena believed he was still a threat, prison or no prison. In fact, every time they’d talked about Lex lately, there had been an edge to her voice, shadows behind her eyes.

Alex blinked. And there went her latent happiness. Lena was hiding something that involved her sociopath brother, Alex could feel it. While some people sensed the approach of bad weather with achy joints, Alex sensed untruths with a part of her mind even she didn’t understand.

Maggie shifted slightly and murmured, her mouth just below Alex’s ear, “I love you, Danvers.”

Alex’s breath caught. Had she just…? Did she really…? Wait. Was Maggie even awake? Alex leaned away from her girlfriend to find brown eyes blinking softly up at her. She only just remembered to breathe before replying. “I love you too, Sawyer.”

Maggie smiled instantly, her dimples flashing despite the low lighting. “Whew, that’s a relief! For a second there I thought you weren’t going to answer.”

“Whatever. You surprised me!”

“In a good way, Alex?”

“The best, Maggie. In the best of all ways.”

Maggie settled back down against her side, and Alex went back to staring into the fireplace. *Maggie loves me. MAGGIE LOVES ME!* She really wanted to call and tell Kara, but she also didn’t want to move. Kara could wait. Right now Alex just wanted to enjoy this brief, rare moment of peace.

And love, of course, because *MAGGIE EFFING SAWYER LOVES ME!*

*             *             *

Alex could usually tell when Kara was nearby. As with her internal lie detector, she wasn’t exactly sure how she did it. She only knew that her senses picked up her adopted sister’s proximity even when Kara didn’t necessarily want anyone to know she was there.

Like right now, for example.

“Stalker,” Alex said, not looking up from her microscope where she was studying the effects of a
modified version of British anti-Lewisite, a heavy metal-chelating agent, on a sample of Kara’s blood.

Her sister huffed and entered the lab. “How do you do that?”

“Video cameras.” She winced as Kara smacked her arm. Teasing a super-powered alien was rarely a good idea, but did the threat of bodily harm stop Alex Danvers? Nope. Although, in retrospect, it probably should.

“Jerk! We said we would never speak of that again!”

“You said that, not me.” Alex pushed her stool back from the table. “But seriously, you breathe kind of loudly.”

“I do not!”

Alex hid her smirk as her little sister scowled, the V between her eyebrows looking for all the world like a permanent mark. “Mouth breather.”

“I am not—oh, forget it.” Kara flopped down on a stool, wincing as it squeaked alarmingly. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine. What’s up, Kar?”

“Who says anything is up?” After a moment of Alex staring at her, eyebrows slightly raised, Kara’s shoulders sagged. “I just—you and Lena…”

“Lena and me what?” She couldn’t possibly think… Not that Lena wasn’t hot because she was, which Alex had noticed, but only, like, in passing. Aesthetically speaking, her sister’s girlfriend was attractive.

“It’s just that you guys are working together now, and I know you said you’ve told me everything, but after Christmas I guess I just, I don’t know…” Kara squared her shoulders suddenly, took a breath, and asked, “Is there something going on that I don’t know about?”

“Not that I know of,” Alex said carefully. “Why?”

Kara gave her a look that made her wonder if her alien sister was wiser to her ways than she had previously suspected. “I get the feeling there’s something going on. I don’t know. It feels like Lena’s pulling away.”

“Are you sure you’re reading her right?”

“Of course not.” Kara hesitated. “So you’re really not doing the whole let’s-protect-Kara thing again?”

“We’re really not,” Alex said, gripping her sister’s fingers. “I promise.”

Kara looked at her hard and then, finally, nodded. “Okay. So what are you working on at the moment?”

She thought about not telling her until she had more to go on, but then she realized that she had literally just promised not to keep things from Kara. “Lena has some ideas about how to block the effects of Kryptonite. Or if not block the effects, then at least reduce them.”

Kara perked up. “You mean like an antidote?”
“Possibly, but more like a vaccination.”

The conversation shifted to her research, and they chatted for a few minutes about sulphhydryl groups and covalent bonds. Kara never used to do this before the Red K incident, never chimed in with her own thoughts or offered an intellectual nudge in the right direction. But in the aftermath of Maxwell Lord’s “accidental” attack, she had become far more forthright in certain areas. No longer did she hide her natural affinity for math and science, something she’d long done in order, she’d finally admitted, to prevent Alex from feeling insecure.

The girl was from a large-brained humanoid species that was several hundred thousand years older than modern humans; it would be a bit surprising if her understanding wasn’t farther advanced than the average human. Alex wasn’t average, but even so, she understood her limitations in regards to her alien sister.

“I think you’re onto something with bond stability,” she said, not looking up from her keyboard as she recorded a few notes.

“Groovy.” Her voice drifted away. “You and Maggie are coming to Game Night tomorrow, right?”

“Wouldn’t miss it.” Alex smiled up at her sister who was now lingering once again in the laboratory doorway. “Is Lena going to be there?”

“I hope so. But, well, don’t mention what I said to her, will you?”

“Of course not,” she said. “By the way…” She paused, uncertain if this was the right time to tell Kara about Maggie’s surprise pronouncement.

“What?” The V returned immediately.

“No, it’s good. Maggie, um, told me she loved me last night.”

“OMG, ILY! Alex!” Kara crossed back to her stool, pulled her up, and lifted her into a bone-jarring hug, spinning her around so quickly that Alex worried about the health of her microscope. Stereo scopes were not cheap, and the Superhero Collateral Destruction Fund was running a bit low these days…

“Easy, killer,” she said finally, laughing.

Kara immediately set her down and held her at arm’s length, peering at her. “Sorry, did I hurt you? I got a little excited.”

“I’m fine. I was thinking more of the lab equipment, to be honest.”

Kara nodded. “You did say it back, didn’t you?”

“Of course.” Alex smiled, thinking of the previous night. She was a lucky, lucky woman.

“Good,” Kara said, her voice soft. “You deserve to be happy, Alex. I’m glad you’re finally getting a chance at love.”

“I could say the same about you,” Alex pointed out.

“Right.” Kara’s gaze turned pensive, and then she backed away, grinning cockily. “Too bad you and your lady love are going down tomorrow night!” And then as Alex lifted an eyebrow at her word choice, Kara blushed and backed toward the door. “That’s not—I didn’t—eww, Alex!”
“I didn’t say anything!” She laughed again, watching as her sister flipped her off and super-speeded away.

The research avenue Kara’s input had opened occupied Alex for the next few hours. Then, just before six, her phone’s alarm went off. Time to meet Maggie for dinner. As she rode her motorcycle across the city, Kara’s worried face swam in front of her, and a pang of guilt crept up her throat, making it itch like when she ate something that contained zucchini. To be fair, she hadn’t lied to Kara. She didn’t know anything. It was only that she couldn’t shake the possibility that Lena was hiding something that had to do with her alien-hating half-brother.

“Do you really think she’s talking to him?” Maggie asked later that night as they sat in the dark on her balcony, nursing beers and talking quietly.

“No,” Alex admitted. “But that doesn’t mean he isn’t somehow communicating with her. I keep asking myself, why this sudden urge to work with the DEO? Unless there’s a new threat on the horizon, and Lena’s trying that be your own hero crap again…”

Freaking crime shows. There was a reason civilians like Lena Luthor—and Kara, for that matter—thought they could handle danger and intrigue without professional assistance.

Maggie clicked her tongue thoughtfully. “I don’t know. Couldn’t it just be a mortality thing? Like, she’s worried something could happen to her and she might not get a chance to finish the work on her own?”

“Possibly. But do you remember at her office when you asked if she’d heard from Lex? It was like she was trying too hard not to give away any tells.”

Beside her, she felt rather than saw Maggie glance at her. “What does your gut tell you?”

She didn’t let her mind wrangle with the question, just answered it straightaway: “That she’s doing everything in her power to protect Kara.” Because even if she thought about it, her belief in Lena’s motives didn’t change. She loved Kara. No one was that good of an actor.

“You could always confront her, you know.”

She scrunched up her face. “And tell her I suspect her of something because she’s a Luthor?”

“No, tell her you suspect Lex because he’s a Luthor.”

Which, valid. But Alex was loathe to do anything that would tip Lena off to her suspicions. If there really was something going on, the last thing she wanted to do was risk pushing Lena away. “Maybe I’ll ask J’onn to take a peek.”

In the dark she heard her girlfriend sigh. “Seriously? You’re more comfortable asking your psychic boss to pry into Lena’s private thoughts than simply asking her what’s going on yourself?”

She shrugged. “Well, sure.”

“Sometimes, Danvers, I honestly wonder about you.”

Alex reached out and caught hold of Maggie’s wrist, tugging gently. Maggie huffed at the contact, but she left her deck chair and allowed Alex to pull her onto her lap. “I wonder about you, too,” Alex said, her voice low as she nipped at her girlfriend’s sensitive earlobe. Maggie shivered, and Alex smiled, reapplying her teeth to the skin of the smaller woman’s neck.
“Should we go in?” Maggie asked, her voice husky.

“In a minute,” Alex said, sliding her hand beneath Maggie’s flannel shirt.

“Didn’t know you had it in you, Danvers.”

Alex squeezed a warm nipple, enjoying the gasp Maggie couldn’t contain. “I’m more interested in being inside you,” she murmured, glad for the darkness that hid her blush at her own brazenness.

“Alex,” Maggie whispered, moaning slightly as her hands continued to wander lazily.

She paused, one hand resting on the top button of Maggie’s jeans. The balcony was dark, and a bamboo fence at either end made it surprisingly private. In theory, no one should be able to see them. “Is this too public?”

Maggie hesitated. Then she wrapped her arms around Alex’s neck and wriggled against her. “No. Just be quick, okay?”

“I can be quick if you can be quiet.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

And then Maggie was kissing her and grinding down against her hand, and Alex forgot to worry about the neighbors at all.

*             *             *

When Alex found Winn, James, and Mon-El waiting in the hallway outside Kara’s apartment the next night, she felt a frisson of fear skate across the back of her neck. Then she caught herself. Kara was fine. After all, she was Supergirl.

Actually, that thought wasn’t as reassuring as it probably should be.

“Is she making you wait while she cleans?” she asked, forcing her voice to sound cheerful.

The boys exchanged glances and then looked at her.

“No,” Winn said. “We were thinking maybe Game Night got cancelled.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

And then Maggie was kissing her and grinding down against her hand, and Alex forgot to worry about the neighbors at all.

*             *             *

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“No,” Winn said. “We were thinking maybe Game Night got cancelled.”

“But that I know of.”

Beside her, she felt Maggie drift closer as she checked her phone. The last message she’d received had Kara heading to L Corp to wrestle her workaholic girlfriend away from her desk. “All hail Game Night!” she’d typed in her usual formal slash nerdy style, followed by half a dozen emojis it would take too long to interpret. That was fifteen minutes ago, though. By now she should have brought Lena back and super-cleaned her apartment, and currently be in the process of setting out snacks that would mostly be demolished by her and Mon-El. Unless… maybe she and Lena had argued?

“Where are you?” she typed as Maggie unlocked Kara’s door with the spare key. They might as well be comfortable while they waited. “She probably got distracted by a car accident or a mugging,” she said aloud, more to make herself feel better than because she thought it was true.

“Right,” James said, dropping onto the couch and reaching for the remote. “Remember that time she stopped to direct traffic when the grid downtown went out?”

The news was on, but Alex only paid half-attention as she surveyed the apartment. Kara’s clothes
were strewn across the floor near the bed—wait, lace underwear? Since when did she… oh, right. Those were Lena’s. Alex looked away, focusing instead on the curtains billowing at the open window. She would be back any second, right? She wasn’t answering her texts because she was currently flying cross-town with a no-doubt irritated CEO in her arms.

She stared longingly at the window, and then she hit the call button. Except the call never went through. Instead the special alert she’d programmed for DEO emergencies went off.

Maggie’s eyes met hers. “I thought you were off the clock tonight?”

“I am.”

Winn’s phone went off too, and then James was saying, “Guys! Guys, look! It’s Kara!”

The local news anchors were interpreting a “recently obtained” shaky video submitted by a viewer on Twitter. Alex watched, horrified, as footage showed Kara in the air outside L Corp. A helicopter had open-fired on her, but not with bullets.

“That’s Kryptonite,” Winn said, his voice barely audible as TV-Kara dropped to the ground only to be hauled into the helicopter a moment later. The video ended with the chopper lifting off into the skies above National City—with Kara inside.

“God damn it,” Alex said, already moving. “Let’s go, you guys. Let’s go!”

James was last to exit, and paused in the hall. “Should I call Clark?” he asked, his eyes meeting Alex’s.

“Yes.” She shoved down the ridiculous jealousy that always flared at the mention of Kara’s superhero cousin. None of that mattered right now. Maybe it never had. “We’re going to need all the help we can get.”

And then they were bolting down the stairs in Kara’s building, a single thought Alex could almost hear echoing in the minds around her: Get her back. Get her back. Get her back.

* * *

The frisson of fear became a wave as they raced crosstown to the DEO. Alex would have gone faster, but Maggie was already clinging to her, fingers wedged as deep into her belt as she could manage. Besides, a dark voice at the back of her mind whispered, it didn’t matter how fast they went. Kara was already gone.

Clark was waiting when they arrived, arms folded across the House of El crest as he paced the DEO control room, a caged panther among humans. Or mostly humans, anyway—J’onn filled them in quickly, his voice and face grim.

“It was Cadmus,” he confirmed. “Henshaw broke Corben out half an hour ago, and the first thing they did was go for Supergirl. Lillian and Lex are free as well. Apparently it was a simultaneous break-out.”

“How could this happen?” Alex demanded, her voice rising. “Why didn’t we have any warning?”

“They used EMPs at both sites, Agent Danvers,” J’onn said. “By the time communication was restored, Supergirl had already been taken.”

They were so close to protecting her, so close to finding an antidote to Kryptonite. It wasn’t—
“Do you know where they took her?” a new voice chimed in, and Alex glanced up to see Lena clicking across the tile floor toward them, moving faster in heels than any woman had a right to do. Her face was pale, her eyes dark and glittering.

“Lena! You’re okay!” Winn exclaimed, greeting her with a hug.

She let herself be held for the briefest of moments before pulling away. “I’m fine. It’s Supergirl I’m worried about.”

“Miss Luthor.” J’onn inclined his head, his expression as inscrutable as the CEO’s. “Where were you when this happened?”

“At my desk in L Corp.” She frowned slightly. “Why?”

“Because we received this from an anonymous source.” J’onn touched a button and the nearest screen lit up with a video.

The picture was dark and blurry, the vantage point distant, but Alex could clearly see Lena Luthor through her office window seated at her desk, phone pressed to her ear. Accompanying the image was a audio track that appeared to match the call. Even before she heard the words, the fine hairs were rising on the back of Alex’s neck.

“Are you in position?” a voice that sounded like Lena’s said.

“Yes, we’re in position,” an unidentified male responded.

“Good. And we have a deal?”

“Yes.”

“You won’t hurt her, will you?”

“No, we won’t hurt her.”

The screen went dark and all eyes, including Alex’s, immediately went to Lena. She folded her arms across her chest, mouth twisting as she stared back at Alex. “You can’t honestly believe that’s me setting up Supergirl.”

Alex shook her head. “No. I mean…” She paused. Unless Lena thought it was the only way to protect Kara? Or maybe Lillian or Lex had threatened someone else, and Lena went along with the plan because she felt she had no choice. But why would Lena trust her mother and brother to keep up their end of any deal? There was no honor among alien-hating Luthors. Lex had proven that more than once.

“Even you have to admit it sounds incriminating,” Clark said, frowning at Lena.

And—hmm. Being even remotely on Clark’s side was not usually a position in which Alex liked to find herself.

Lena ignored the Man of Steel entirely. “Alex, you of all people know that I don’t want anything to happen to her. The reality is I run a tech business, which means that I have conversations with people almost daily that go exactly like that.”

“Are you saying the conversation happened, but that it had nothing to do with Supergirl?” J’onn asked.
“That’s exactly what I’m saying! Although, to be honest, I don’t recall that specific conversation,” Lena admitted.

“Well, that’s convenient,” Clark commented.

Alex’s gaze never left Lena. Lex Luthor’s little sister. Lillian Luthor’s daughter. Could she be working with Cadmus? No, of course not. But at the same time, Clark was right. This was all just a tad too convenient.

“Nothing about this is convenient,” Lena said, her voice edged with matching steel. “We’re wasting time, which is clearly what my mother and her goon squad wants. Let’s remember they’ve tried to kill me more than once, shall we?”

And Lena, a “puny human,” had survived every time. That was how she’d met Supergirl, Alex remembered, her analytical mind reframing all previous interactions between the two. Lena had kept popping up after that, hadn’t she—including that night at the Balcony Club. Not only that, but hadn’t Lena expressed an interest in Aldebaran rum her first time visiting the alien bar? She was the one who’d said it was Lex trying to kill her. What actual evidence was there to prove it was him?

Damn it. There was a reason Alex didn’t usually believe in coincidences.

Maggie spoke up. “We believe you, Lena. We just need some time. Can you give us that?”

Lena hesitated, bravado falling away briefly. “But I could help find her. I need to help find her.”

“And you’ll get that chance. Won’t she, Alex?”

Maggie’s elbow colliding with her ribs jump-started Alex into action. “Yes, of course. But in the meantime, Vasquez, can you show Miss Luthor to my lab?”

“That’s it?” Clark demanded. “You’re not even going to lock her in one of your ultra-secure cells? She can’t be trusted, Alex, and you know it!”

Alex rubbed her forehead. What she knew was that she had a headache, and that the night ahead was going to be a long one.

Lena’s cool, collected CEO mask fell into place once again. “I guess I shouldn’t be surprised to hear such language from you, Superman. Once a Luthor, always a Luthor in your eyes, apparently.”

“For your sake, I sincerely hope not,” Alex said, allowing a tiny bit of her rage at Cadmus to invade her tone. Clark nodded in agreement, but Maggie and Lena immediately gave her matching disappointed looks. J’onn followed suit. Which, hello! It wasn’t her fault there was a freaking tape.

She nodded shortly at Vasquez, who returned the gesture and led Lena toward the lab floor. As soon as they were out of earshot, Alex turned back to J’onn. “Did you get anything?”

He shook his head. “Miss Luthor is more adept at shielding her thoughts than most humans. She does, however, appear to believe what she’s saying.”

“Of course she does,” Superman said. “Believing what you’re selling is the hallmark of a good con.”

Which, Alex had to admit, was true. Lex had already attacked the Children’s Hospital once. What if he had threatened to do it again—or worse—if Lena didn’t give up Supergirl?

“Alex.” Maggie was staring at her now. “You don’t actually believe Lena had anything to do with
this, do you?”

Before she could respond, Clark chimed in. “Alex doesn’t have the luxury of belief. And neither do you, Detective.”

And that was it. Alex was officially changing his title to Supermanplainer. Or maybe just Egotistical Jackass Man. That had a satisfying weight to it.

“Actually,” J’onn said mildly, “I agree with Detective Sawyer on this one. This appears to be a frame, and a clumsy one at that. Cadmus likely wants Miss Luthor out of the way because they have somehow discovered that she is working with us, and they recognize how dangerous she now is to them.”

Clark’s scowl deepened. “Are you saying that you actually gave Lena Luthor access to the DEO? And now Kara has gone missing, and you honestly don’t see a connection?”

J’onn’s scowl was just as formidable. More so, actually.

Alex sighed inwardly. Great, another pissing match between all-powerful alien dudes. She shoved her thumbs into her belt, resisting the urge to yell at them both. The frame-up theory made sense, but this was Kara they were talking about, her little sister who threw herself into danger without ever stopping to think about consequences. That was what made her a hero—her abject willingness to sacrifice herself for others. It also made her incredibly vulnerable, and Alex’s job had always been to mitigate that vulnerability any way she could. Even if Lena hadn’t knowingly aided Cadmus, which Alex was ninety percent certain she hadn’t—ninety-five?—their relationship had undoubtedly put Kara in danger, just as Alex had known it would.

“Why go to the trouble of framing her? Why not just grab her too?” James asked, clearly trying to change the subject to one that might not set the aliens in their midst at each other’s throats.

“Revenge for Medusa?” Maggie suggested. “A distraction, like she said? Besides, Cadmus likes chaos, and pitting the DEO against Lena is the definition of chaos.”

Which didn’t mean she wasn’t involved, Alex couldn’t help but notice. God-damned Luthors. Why were they like this? And why had Kara insisted on falling in love with one of them?

“All right, team,” J’onn said, straightening suddenly. “We have a hero to find. Superman, if you wouldn’t mind taking to the skies, there are known Cadmus sympathizers that it might be helpful for someone with your skills to, shall we say, investigate. Does that sound amenable to you, or are you planning to take off on your own?”

Clark glanced around the room, still frowning. “No,” he said grudgingly. “That sounds fine.”

“Excellent. Mr. Schott here can get you set up with comms. Also, Winn, I’d like your team to start scanning the area for traces of Kryptonite’s radioactive signature, and have someone check the city’s video feed while you’re at it to see if we can ascertain the helicopter’s flight path. Alex, you and Maggie talk to Lena, see if there’s anything she knows of in her brother’s files that might help us find Kara. And see if she’ll give you permission to search her apartment and office. If Cadmus is watching her—as it would seem they are—it’s possible they might have left clues. Let’s move, team! The clock is ticking.”

Winn ushered Superman to follow him, practically drooling as ever in the presence of his Favorite. Superhero. Ever. (Other than Kara, of course.) Alex was walking away too, Maggie at her side, when an agent she recognized as an audio specialist stopped near J’onn and spoke to the director in a
“What is it?” Alex asked, changing course. “What did you find? Is the audio a fake?”

The agent started, pushing her glasses up her nose in a gesture that reminded Alex of Kara. Kara, who was somewhere with Lillian and Lex Luthor, possibly being tortured at this very moment, assuming she was still alive…

“I’m still working on it,” the technician said, “but as I just told the director, the voice is definitely Lena Luthor’s. The video matches up, too.”

“Thank you, Williams,” J’onn said, nodding gravely. “Keep me apprised.”

With a last nervous glance at Alex, the tech nodded and backed away.

Alex clenched her fists as hard as she could, but it wasn’t nearly hard enough. “God damn it!”

“Chill, Danvers,” Maggie said, her hand firm on Alex’s elbow as she led her toward the laboratory wing. “That’s not news. Even Lena said it could be her.”

“I know. I was just hoping it would be a fake. That way we could rule her out entirely.”

“I already have ruled her out entirely, and so should you, Alex. Think about it. None of this makes any sense unless, like J’onn said, it’s a frame.”

Alex breathed deeply, trying to counter the anxiety racing through her bloodstream. It was probably a frame, she knew that. But it was the tiny, slim, minute chance that it might not be that kept whispering at the back of her mind.

Lena and Vasquez were waiting for them in the desk area at one corner of her lab, the agent leaning against a concrete pillar, Lena seated with hands folded primly in front of her. She looked up as they entered, her eyes focusing on Alex. For a moment Alex could see the fear flicker in her expression, and it made her pause. This was Lena, who Kara loved. Lena, who had somehow helped Kara be more comfortable in herself than Alex had ever seen her. Lena, who must be as out of her mind with worry as Alex was.

She sighed and sat down facing Lena. Then, resolutely ignoring the contrarian voice inside her head, she reached across the desk and touched Lena’s hand. “I’m sorry about before. I just get a little…”

“Crazy at the thought of something happening to her?” Lena nodded, tears shimmering in her dark eyes. “Me too.”

“We’ll find her,” Maggie said, pausing beside Alex with her hand on her shoulder. “We will, you guys. We just have to put our heads together. After all, that’s what Cadmus is afraid of, isn’t it?”

A phone chimed, and Vasquez reached quickly for her pocket. A second later she nodded jerkily at the door. “Do you guys need me? Because I think Winn could use my help.”

Alex frowned a little at the usually level agent’s uncharacteristic twitchiness. Oh, god, had Kara made yet another unwitting conquest? “Go,” was all she said. Any conversation about keeping a professional distance would have to happen another time.

Right. Because Alex should really be lecturing her fellow agents about compartmentalization.

“All right, then,” she said, glancing from Maggie to Lena. “Let’s put our heads together.”
Within a quarter hour, Lena had compiled a list of remote Luthor Corp subsidiary locations on the West Coast, phoned her assistant to give them access to her home and work spaces, and begun to search through Lex’s files on a non-networked laptop one of Winn’s assistants brought her. They left her working away under the watchful eye of an agent, a compromise Maggie had suggested to satisfy both Lena’s need to “do something, damn it!” and the DEO’s (i.e., Alex’s, though they left that part unsaid) not entirely resolved suspicion.

While Maggie accompanied a team to L Corp, Alex took her own group of agents to Lena’s apartment building at the edge of the downtown corridor. The penthouse was immaculate, which made their job considerably easier. Interestingly, the music room was lined with lead, a fact Alex intended to ask Lena about later. Perhaps it was designed to be a panic room, or maybe Luthors automatically lead-proofed parts of their homes as an anti-Super measure. Either way, Alex made an extra sweep through that particular space, simultaneously relieved and disappointed when her team found nothing incriminating.

Lena had revealed that her chief of security routinely swept both her home and office for surveillance equipment, but even L Corp didn’t have access to the kind of technology the DEO did. Using detection devices the DEO’s tech team had built based on advanced Coluan specs housed in Fort Rozz’s impressive data library, her team soon discovered a handful of tiny wireless cameras hidden throughout the apartment. The devices were so small they weren’t visible to the human eye, and were cloaked with some sort of energy field that only a matching—read, alien—piece of equipment could detect.

In fact, they weren’t sure what they’d found until Alex ordered one of her agents to send a targeted EMP pulse at their first discovery. She was happy to note that she wasn’t the only one to crouch and pull her weapon as the object hidden in plain view on a picture frame suddenly grew to its normal size, several inches long by a couple of inches wide. The other agents looked at her and at each other, and then they all cracked up as they holstered their guns. No doubt this operation would become an inside joke among her team members, as in, Remember the time we tried to shoot a tiny fucking camera?

Testimony to the legacy of fear implicit in the Luthor name—or maybe just proof of the seasoned nature of her team. DEO agents sure saw some weird shit in the line of duty.

Alex had her team bag the devices they found and return with all but one to the DEO for the on-base techs to analyze. The remaining camera she zipped into a pocket on her leather jacket. Then she pulled her helmet back on, kick-started her bike, and started across town, considering the evidence as she charged through red lights and passed startled pedestrians on sidewalks. Cadmus had taken Kara. Cadmus had released a tape incriminating Lena. Lena had denied involvement. Maggie and Alex had discovered alien-protected surveillance equipment at Lena’s home and work place. Cadmus had Kryptonite and Kara. And—they had Jeremiah.

Please, Alex thought, lifting her face skyward and sending her thoughts out into a universe she feared wasn’t listening, don’t let them hurt her. Or him. Especially, please, please don’t let him hurt her.

* * *

“Are you sure about this?” she asked Maggie as they entered the alien bar.

“She knows most of the aliens in the city, Alex. Besides, J’onn trusts her now, doesn’t he?”
“I guess so.” Alex bit her lip and surveyed the dimly lit interior. It had taken her a while to be comfortable in the presence of people she had, not long ago, considered enemy combatants. But Maggie had helped her realize that most off-worlders were simply trying to survive and, in many cases, recover from past trauma. Like Kara, who would now have even more trauma to recover from, Alex thought darkly. Hand on her pocket, she stepped forward determinedly. “Okay, then. Let’s do this.”

M’gann watched them approach, but she didn’t smile. “It’s true, then,” she said as they stopped in front of the bar. “They have Supergirl.”

Alex nodded grimly. “Can we talk? In private?”

“Of course.”

She left a man with scales on one side of his face in charge and led them to a back room Alex hadn’t known existed. “It’s safe,” M’gann explained as she waved them to a couple of chairs in front of a desk. “Neuro-shielded, so even telepathic customers can’t listen in.”

Alex didn’t sit. She placed the bagged camera on the desk and explained where and how her team had found it. “We were hoping you might be able to help us track down whoever is helping Cadmus.”

“I can’t promise anything,” M’gann said, “but I can try. Okay if I remove it from the bag?”

Alex nodded, and then watched tensely as M’gann held the camera, eyes closed, head turning slightly as if she were listening to something. When she opened her eyes, Alex asked impatiently, “Did you find anything?”

“I think so,” M’gann said with a slight frown. “The cloaking and miniaturization process you described are consistent with the powers of the inhabitants of Klaramar.”

“Wait,” Maggie said, “like Klee Pan?”

M’gann nodded again. “I know where we can find him. If you want my assistance, that is.”

“We do.” Alex paused. “But why exactly are you helping us?”

“Alex,” Maggie hissed.

“No, I’m serious, Maggie.” She glanced back at the Martian. “No offense, but the DEO kept you locked up for months for no reason other than where you come from.”

“I don’t blame J’onn J’onzz for imprisoning me. I did terrible things to his people before I turned against my own. I won’t ever be able to make up for the lives I destroyed, but at least I can try to help now wherever possible. Supergirl—your sister—helped me realize the importance of using my abilities for good. Without her, I might not even be alive now.”

Alex nodded, remembering the alien fight club Kara had rescued J’onn and M’gann from. That had been her first operation with Maggie, the first time she’d recognized that her feelings for the other woman were slightly—off. A wave of nostalgia washed over her as she pictured Maggie, hot as hell in that little black dress with the lace-up sides, pulling a gun and shouting, “Police!”

She shook her head a little. Focus, Danvers. “All right then, M’gann. Lead the way.”

And that was how they ended up at a seedy apartment building at the edge of the alien ghetto, not far
from where M’gann apparently lived herself.

The Martian rapped sharply on the second-floor door, eyes narrowed and head tilted. The door opened almost immediately, revealing a creature—no, Alex corrected herself, a man she had seen a few times at the bar. She tried not to recoil, but it was difficult. The Klaramarian’s skin was yellow-orange and his ears were pointy, but the truly disturbing part of his visage was that it lacked facial features.

The thought appeared unbidden: How does he eat and drink? Just as unexpected was the answer that formed inside her mind: Like your Kryptonian brethren, we absorb energy directly from the sun. Also, our ears both hear and see.

Beside her, Alex saw Maggie’s gaze flick to the Klaramarian’s ears. He (he, right? Right.) was able to communicate directly with his mind, which was—

Good evening, Klee Pan. I hope it’s not too late to call upon you.

Oh, great, now M’gann was broadcasting her thoughts on the same intra-neural network, Alex realized. Intra-neural network, like INN. Haha. Crap. Oh, no. Don’t think of sex, don’t think of Maggie naked in bed and—

“All right, M’gann said aloud. “Please redirect your thoughts. They’re becoming distracting.”

“I’m sorry,” she gasped. “So, so sorry.”

Beside her Maggie snickered and said, “Go sit on the stairs and sing happy birthday, picturing the words on a blackboard as you do, okay? I’ll fill you in later.”

“Fine,” Alex huffed. Wait, why did her girlfriend know so much about telepathic aliens? Oh, right. Her Roltikkon ex. Kara was probably being tortured by Cadmus, and here Alex was picturing her girlfriend and a Roltikkon naked and—Jesus H. Christ. Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy…

Klee Pan, it turned out, was a fount of very helpful knowledge. He examined the camera and confirmed that it had indeed been “enchanted”—apparently there was no direct translation available in English—by a fellow Klaramarian, and even gave them the address of the only other people from his planet he knew of in National City. By the time M’gann led Alex and Maggie to the house, a rundown trailer on a property half a mile from Klee Pan’s tenement, it was empty.

M’gann did her head-tilt thing and informed them that the family that had lived there had left sometime within the last few days. Not all of them, however. There was one “mental essence”—another English approximation—that had been absent considerably longer than the other’s. And it belonged to a child.

“Leverage,” Maggie said.

Alex glanced at her. “Meaning?”

“Meaning you grab someone’s kid and hold a gun to their head, they’re liable to do whatever you tell them to, no matter what planet they’re from.”

“That would explain the anguish I feel hanging over this place,” M’gann said, her frown matching Maggie’s.

Alex’s phone buzzed—Winn.
“We looked at the cameras, and Alex, they don’t have a very wide range.”

“Wait—so they were broadcasting to someplace inside L Corp? And inside Lena’s building?”

“They had to be.”

“Okay. Thanks, Winn. By the way, can you send Supes my way?”

“Oh. Um, sure. Text me your coordinates.”

Alex hung up and sent the text, and then she glanced over at M’gann, reminding herself not to think of naked ladies and—Fricking frick. “Can we borrow your services a little longer, M’gann?”

“Sure,” the Martian said, and smiled in a way that reminded Alex of when J’onn was trying to make a joke. “As long as you allow me to teach you some thought-cloaking techniques. The parade of naked ladies is getting to be a bit much.”

“Alex!” Maggie smacked her arm. Hard.

Which—yep. She definitely deserved that.

* * *

Alex sat on the balcony, staring out over the city. They might not have gotten Kara back yet, but they had done some good investigative work tonight. Clark and M’gann had managed to find the server rooms at Lena’s apartment and office, and the night shift at the DEO was analyzing the data from the hidden cameras now. The video recordings would, Alex hoped, corroborate Lena’s innocence even for Superman.

Her only concern was the camera they’d found stashed in the bedroom. Poor Kara and Lena. It wouldn’t just be thoughts of her and Lena naked being launched out into the world for the few telepaths who happened to be within listening distance. Real people Alex and Kara both knew would undoubtedly be viewing extremely personal, intimate moments. Fortunately, computers could analyze much of the film. The only time the auto-filter would flag content for manual review would be if it heard certain words or phrases. Or if it couldn’t tell what was being said—which, actually, nope. Alex wasn’t going to think too closely about that. She was just as glad that J’onn had sent her home to get some rest, given what those tapes undoubtedly contained.

She thought of how she’d had sex with Maggie right here on this very balcony, the need to keep quiet and the thought of potentially being caught spurring her on. She had a public sex kink, Maggie had teased her later, which—maybe. But the idea of her fellow agents poring over sex tapes of her and Maggie made bile rise in her throat. God damn Cadmus. This was how you destroyed people, chipping away at their sense of safety and right to privacy one step at a time. The only good thing about Lillian’s approach was that Alex was hoping it meant she didn’t intend to kill Kara this time, either. Lillian would rather return her broken and breaking than outright kill her, which Alex could handle. Broken people could heal. Dead ones couldn’t.

She closed her eyes. She was exhausted, but she wasn’t sleepy. How could she sleep when Kara was out there somewhere, waiting for Alex to find her? How could she rest when she knew that Kara was in the hands of people who thought of her as an object, an it, rather than a living, breathing person? Activity had helped. As long as she’d kept moving, searching… but now, sitting here, she was overwhelmed by images of Kara being tortured, just as she’d been the last time Lillian Luthor kidnapped her. Now she couldn’t stop seeing her little sister injured, bleeding, crying out for help.

And Jeremiah. Was she with him? Had he participated in the operation to capture her? What was the
truth about their father?

She was tamping down the urge to ride through the city on her motorcycle, portable radiation detector strapped to her handlebars—she could do it, she knew she could—when Maggie emerged from inside, blinking sleepily.

“Hey, are you sure you should be out here? If they know who she is, then they know who you are, too.”

Which was exactly what their mother had always worried about. “Eliza managed to infect you, too, huh?”

“I’d already thought of that all on my own, Alex.”

“It doesn’t matter. No place is safe, Maggie. No one is safe in this world, not ever.”

“I know that. And so do Lena and Kara. That’s why we have you.”

At least Lena was in good company at the DEO. Winn had offered to pull an all-nighter with her and work on Lex’s encrypted files to see if they could figure out where Kara had been taken. Alex had wanted to stay too, but J’onn had sent her away.

“I need you to be sharp,” he’d said. “You’re the only one I trust, Alex. When we find her, I need you to go in and get her back.”

That was her job; it had always been her job—to protect Kara and, when necessary, rescue her. She just had to have faith that Winn and Lena would find her in time, that was all.

“We’ll get her back,” Maggie assured her, pushing Alex’s hair back from her face. “We always do, Alex.”

And all at once she remembered all the other times she had almost lost Kara: to Black Mercy, Myriad, Cadmus; to human thugs who’d shot her with high-tech guns and giant aliens who’d used her as a punching bag. Why did this keep getting harder every time? Shouldn’t the paralyzing fear abate instead of grow? Somehow, though, it was as if she was already filled to the brim with terror from the other near-misses, the other near-deaths, and this new lament, piled on top of all the others, created a crushing mass of terror, anger, grief.

“What if we’re too late this time?” she whispered, giving voice to her perpetual worst fear.

“We won’t be,” Maggie said, her voice certain, her arms solid and strong around Alex.

Alex nestled her cheek against her girlfriend’s chest and listened to the reassuring beat of her heart. For a moment, she didn’t see the harm in pretending that Maggie was making a promise she would be able to keep. For just this one single moment in time, it couldn’t hurt to believe.
Even before Kara became aware of the Kryptonite flooding her system, she heard the whir of helicopter blades, the low rumble of voices, the clink of chains and buckles. Everything was muffled, like when she used the lead-coated earplugs Jeremiah had designed for her when she first arrived on Earth. She had lost that first pair years ago, but Alex had updated the design while they were at Stanford, and now they worked even better.

She wasn’t wearing her earplugs, though. Memory came rushing back—the weapon blast that had hit her just outside L Corp; the black-clad faces that loomed over her on the broken sidewalk in front of Lena’s building; the rough hands that secured her arms and legs with Kryptonite-laced bonds before loading her onto the helicopter where another member of the assault team had given her an injection; the terrifying slide into unconsciousness, not knowing if she would reawaken.

_Cadmus_. It had to be. They were the only ones who could possibly have access to real Kryptonite.

Anger and fear flooded her system with stress hormones, and she fought the urge to sit up, to lift her sluggish arms, to move even a centimeter. As long as her captors thought she was unconscious, she had a valuable advantage. The Kryptonite might dampen her powers, but it didn’t extinguish them entirely the way a solar flare did. That was probably why the shot they’d given her hadn’t kept her under for long. Swallowing slightly, she focused her vision on the insides of her eyelids. As soon as she picked up a slight movement of external light, she zeroed in on the way she’d taught herself to do in high school when even AP math and science had bored her so completely that she’d taken to secretly experimenting with her less readily apparent abilities.

Like seeing through her own skin, for example.

As the helicopter sped through the night sky, stars winking just out of reach, Kara took in her surroundings. She was still trussed up like a death row prisoner, bound now to an ambulance gurney. The men around her were military in bearing, and exuded cockiness and anxiety in equal measures.

“Not so super now, is she?” one said from near her feet, and she focused briefly on his face. He was small and dark-haired, with what passed for a moustache shadowing his thin upper lip.

_Why?_ she wanted to ask him. _Why do you hate me?_ But she knew the answer. These men—and others like them—were frightened of her; more than any perceived differences between their species,
more than any potential threat to humanity she represented, they hated the power she possessed to make them afraid.

She remained motionless as the helicopter cruised farther and farther from National City, resting her X-ray vision frequently as the Kryptonite ties continued to sap her energy. They were fifty or so miles from the city, if she had to guess—depending on how long she’d been out—when the chopper slowed and began its descent. From her vantage point she couldn’t see the ground, only the clear night sky. She kept her gaze locked on the stars until the craft had landed. Then, as the assault team unloaded her gurney from the chopper, she let her head loll “naturally” to one side. The landscape beyond the perimeter was dark, but she narrowed in on the mountains on the horizon. They looked familiar. Too familiar. She made some calculations based on the night sky and had to restrain herself from reacting at the result.

_Freaking Cadmus._ They had some nerve. And yet, she could appreciate their diabolical brashness, too. No wonder the DEO had never discovered Cadmus’s headquarters. It hadn’t occurred to them to look in their old backyard.

“Is she still unconscious?” a voice she recognized asked from just out of her line of sight.

_God damn it._ Of course it was her.

“Yes,” the man who had given Kara the injection confirmed. “She hasn’t moved at all.”

She was expecting the ringing blow that came, which was the only reason she didn’t flinch or gasp out loud. That, and the fact that with her powers still somewhat intact, it didn’t hurt nearly as much as last time.

“Excellent,” Lillian Luthor said, her voice coldly pleased. “Let’s show our guest to her home for the duration, shall we?”

The words were as chilling as the tone, and Kara barely suppressed a shiver. _Alex will find me. She always does._

And yet she couldn’t help but wonder if this time would be different. This time it was personal. Kara wasn’t just the cousin of the alien Lillian held responsible for her son’s descent into madness. She was also her daughter’s alien girlfriend, and as such, Lillian probably blamed her for Lena’s rejection of the family business of killing and terrorizing off-worlders. _Lena…_ She must be close to breaking, knowing that her mother had broken out of jail and, as her first act of freedom, kidnapped her daughter’s girlfriend. Not that Lillian knew they were together—she hoped.

Resolutely Kara pushed thoughts of her girlfriend away, focusing instead on her immediate surroundings as her gurney was wheeled through what looked like an industrial door built into a hillside. Though the hideout’s footprint seemed negligible from the outside, Kara knew that appearances often deceived when it came to underground lairs. Sure enough, a cargo elevator carried them several stories below the Earth’s surface, which she knew from experience would prevent the detection of thermal images and radioactive signatures. That was not good. Not good at all.

When the elevator stopped, the Cadmus agents guided her gurney down a long, concrete-lined corridor. Lead-lined too she soon realized, except for the doors, most of which sported narrow, rectangular windows. She glimpsed figures on hospital-style beds in a handful of rooms, almost recoiling when she caught sight of the tiny form in the next-to-last cell. Cadmus was kidnapping alien _children_ now? Beside the child was a woman wearing a white coat and a neural disruptor like the DEO used when interacting with telepathic prisoners, and suddenly Kara realized that Lillian and the agents around her gurney were wearing them, too. She had been so intent on analyzing
Cadmus’s headquarters that she hadn’t noticed until that moment.

Did that mean they were holding a **telepathic** alien child? Interesting, indeed.

The last room on the hall had been prepared for her, judging by the additional security required to open it. Lillian placed her palm on a reader beside the door, and then leaned her head into the grip so that her right eye could be scanned. The door clicked with a noise that seemed loud to Kara even without her full powers, and then they were wheeling her inside and letting it fall closed again. Clearly they weren’t taking any chances.

Kara tried her X-ray vision on the walls and ceiling, but every visible surface of the small, cell-like room had been encased in lead. She swallowed hard. She was *not* going to feel claustrophobic. She absolutely wasn’t.

Except that she probably was.

She let her vision blur out, relaxing slightly as her eyelids blocked the sight of her prison cell. Thank Rao for that. And then a wave of cold water struck her—so incredibly cold without her powers to ameliorate the discomfort!—and her eyes shot open as she gasped and sputtered. She didn’t normally require as much oxygen as humans, but Kryptonians still breathed air, not water.

“Ah, I see you’re awake, Supergirl,” Lillian announced. “How kind of you to grace us with your presence.”

“As if you gave me any choice,” Kara said, still spitting water.

“True. But I knew you wouldn’t come if I extended the invitation, so here we are.”

“Orange didn’t suit you, then?”

“About as little as red and blue do.” Lillian turned, running her hands over the contents of a laboratory cart.

“Where are we, anyway?” Kara asked.

“Tsk, tsk, Supergirl.” Lillian pulled the cart closer to the bedside. “Such a gauche attempt to get me to reveal our location. I honestly don’t see what my daughter sees in you.”

Kara blinked. “What she—I don’t know what you’re talking about. She doesn’t, you know, see anything in me because we’re not—”

“You’re not friends?” Lillian’s eyebrow rose in almost exactly the same way Lena’s did when she was teasing, and the sight made Kara feel even more ill than the Kryptonite seeping into her pores.

“That’s funny, I thought the last time you and I conversed you assured me that you very much were my daughter’s *friend*.”

Her emphasis on the last word combined with the way Lillian was staring at her—as if she were a Kryptonian Worldkiller rather than a nearly-human sentient being—told Kara everything she needed to know: Lillian had found out that a Super and a Luthor were doing significantly more than merely working together. As a corollary, she must also know that Kara was Supergirl. Eliza’s voice echoed in her mind, the argument so well-worn she sometimes heard it in dreams: “Keeping your identity secret protects you *and* the people you care about.”

A smirk—again, creepily familiar—broke across Lillian’s face. “I see I have your undivided attention now, do I? Let’s begin, then, as I can’t know for certain how much time we’ll have together. While
my men assure me they weren’t followed, the DEO has proven to be entirely more resourceful in the past than one might hope.”

Begin what? Kara almost asked. But the question was unnecessary. Lillian was already attaching electrodes to her temples and fiddling with a dial on a machine. And then, all at once, Kara’s nerve endings exploded as electromagnetic energy surged through her system. She couldn’t help it—she cried out, her voice almost immediately hoarse and ragged as her body tried to block the pain and failed.

And then, through the fog of pain and Kryptonite cluttering her consciousness, she heard it: “It’s okay, you’re not alone.”

The voice was small and reedy, but she stopped shouting as she focused on it, trying to hear it better. “I’m sorry, I should have introduced myself! I’m Klon Rae. Is this okay? I mean, you seem like you need help…”

Was this part of the torture? It didn’t seem like it.

“I’m a prisoner too,” the voice continued, and an image penetrated Kara’s consciousness of a featureless face, a Klaramarian in miniature. Suddenly she understood: The alien child next door was trying to communicate with her. “I saw them bring you in. You’re Supergirl, aren’t you?”

Kara closed her eyes and let the pain wash over her, remembering Alex’s instructions to relax into it. Fighting pain does nothing except make your muscles hurt more, Kara. With difficulty she formed a single thought and sent it out the way her father had taught her when she was a child: “Yes.”

“I knew it! You’re here to rescue me, aren’t you?” Klon Rae asked.

“No.”

“Oh.” The ethereal touch on her mind receded for only a moment before returning. “Still, now that you’re here, you’ll find a way to save everyone. I know you will.”

Kara heard movement beside the bed and opened her eyes in time to see Lillian turn the dial, intensifying the pulse. The surge broke through the tenuous hold Kara had on her mind, and as she fell into red-tinged darkness, she heard herself crying out, “Jeju!”

Mother.

*             *             *

It was odd, she thought an indeterminate amount of time later when Lillian finally left her, aftershocks of energy still shuddering through her frame every so often. She hadn’t called out for her mother in years, not since shortly after she’d arrived on Earth.

“Sorry!” the voice in her head said. “I miss my mom, and I probably transferred that feeling to you. I’m not very good with my telepathic abilities yet. I think that’s why they took me and not one of my brothers or sisters. Oh! Sorry again. I forgot to ask to initiate contact. May I converse with you in this way at this time?”

Kara closed her eyes, remembering a Klaramarian visitor to her parents’ home when she was a child. The faceless aliens observed strict rules on when and how to communicate with non-telepaths, and as such were considered among the most polite emissaries in the universe. Or at least, the adults were.

“I give you my blessing to converse in this way at this time,” she sent back, visualizing each word as
“Wait—you know the greeting? But of course you do. I read you lived on Krypton until you were thirteen.”

A memory of her home planet in flames as her pod raced along its launch track flickered into Kara’s mind, and she felt her young neighbor pull back.

“Sorry,” Kara offered. If she weren’t so worn out by Lillian’s (Lex’s?) torture device, she might have even felt guilty.

“No,” Klon Rae said quickly, her thoughts more subdued, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you think of that.”

“It’s fine. May I ask how old you are?”

“Ten in Earth years.”

“When did Cadmus take you? And why?”

“It’s been a few weeks, I think…”

“Weeks?” Kara repeated, visions of Lillian’s torture cart flaring inside her mind.

“Don’t worry, they haven’t hurt me like you and the others. I’m not completely sure why I’m here, except it has something to do with you and my father. Do you know him?”

“I don’t think so. Unless… your father isn’t Klee Pan, is he?”

“Oh my god, you know Klee Pan?”

The girl’s sense of awe penetrated the Kryptonite fog easily. “Only in passing.”

“Of course you do. You’re Supergirl,” Klon Rae said, almost to herself. “Anyway, they let me out for walks every day, though only for a short time during daylight hours. They don’t want me to absorb so much solar energy that I return to full strength.” She paused. “If you’re not here to rescue me, then why are you here?”

“I was captured,” she admitted, allowing the memory of the attack to filter through. “But if I had known you were here, I definitely would have come sooner.”

Klon Rae projected an image of a smiley emoji. “I know you would, Supergirl. I believe in you.”

Tears pricked Kara’s eyes as she stared at the wall that separated her from the Klaramarian child. She wasn’t sure that belief was deserved. She couldn’t even help herself, let alone any of the others. What if she never saw Alex again? What if she never saw Lena again?

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

“You didn’t,” Kara assured her. “Really.”

“I miss my family too.”

“I bet you do. Tell me more about them. How did you come to be on Earth?”

As the little girl responded, Kara lay back, forcing her enflamed muscles and joints to relax as much
as possible. Klon Rae’s story wasn’t unlike her own. The planet Klaramar, which existed within a single atom of Saturn, had been threatened with destruction too, only by an energy time-bomb rather than an unstable core.

“Klee Pan saved Klaramar, but my grandparents lost everything in the battle for the capitol and decided to move to Earth.”

Kara tried to remember the powers that Klaramarians possessed in addition to telepathy: size manipulation, obviously, since their planet was sub-atomic; immense strength when human-sized; cloaking—different from shapeshifting—so that they appeared human to onlookers rather than alien; teleportation; and… wasn’t there something about the ability to absorb the qualities of objects they touched?

“We can also project any item we touch with extreme force. Or, at least, my older brothers and sisters can. I can communicate with my mind, but I’m not able to do much else yet.”

She sounded so glum that Kara thought, “I’m sure you’ll learn. You probably just need to grow a bit more.”

“Yeah.” She perked up. “I was kind of worried I might not get the chance, but now you’re here I’m not worried anymore!”

Which was—good. It was good that this child had faith in her because knowing Lillian as Kara did, it was going to take a good deal of faith, not to mention luck, for them both to make it out of this mountain alive.

Kara had more questions, she knew she did, but it was late and she could feel sleep tugging at her. Which didn’t make sense at all. How could she sleep when Lillian and her goons might return at any moment to torture her again? When they could go into any of the rooms on this hall and inflict physical and psychic injury on the inhabitants? She pulled at her bonds even though she knew it was pointless; tried to gather the energy to fire her laser vision, to frost her breath, to see through the ceiling and the layers upon layers of rock and earth overhead. But it was no use. She was helpless.

“You’re not helpless. You can think,” Klon Rae told her. “At least, that’s what my mother always says.”

Kara felt a wave of sadness roll over her, and wasn’t sure if it belonged to her or to the child next door.

“I’m sorry,” Klon Rae said once again, answering her unspoken question.

“It’s okay,” Kara said, blinking back hot tears. They would drip into her ears and itch uncontrollably, just another torture to be endured. “I’m sorry, too.”

* * *

They didn’t let her sleep long. Another blast of cold water woke her a little while later, and she realized that a hose in the ceiling had been positioned directly over her head.

“Wake up, Super Freak,” an unknown voice said, reverberating from a speaker in the corner of the room where a CCTV had been set up. “No sleeping. It’s against the rules.”

Super Freak—how original. Why couldn’t the anti-Super crowd come up with new insults?

Klon Rae remained quiet, and Kara hoped she was asleep. Left alone with her thoughts, she
practiced Rao-Nal for an indeterminate time, unsurprised when the ancient form failed to fully calm her mind. Next she tried to catalog the assorted equipment in the room, some of which she recognized but most of which she didn’t. She had read through some of the files Lena and Winn had managed to decrypt, and these torture devices/anti-Kryptonian weapons, with their blend of sadistic cruelty and technological innovation, had Lex’s signature all over them. Besides, who else would have this much Kryptonite squirreled away? And not the synthetic kind, either. This was the real thing, the last remnants of her extinct planet coated with radioactive residue from Krypton’s core.

She’d forgotten how much she hated how Kryptonite made her feel. It wasn’t enough that her planet had exploded taking with it everyone she loved, was it? No, it had to follow her to her adopted world, the physical manifestation of her tortured memories. She wondered if Lex understood that Kryptonite provided the perfect one-two physical/psychological punch, or if he viewed it merely as a handy way to weaken his Super enemies.

The water came on twice more that night, so that at last Kara gave up trying to sleep. Instead she kept her eyes open and concentrated on the forms of Rao-Nal. When that failed, as it always did eventually, she transported herself to her apartment—mentally, not physically; even if she could teleport herself, she, like Klon Rae, was too depleted by exhaustion and hunger to try. Instead, she pretended she was back on Earth-1 with Lena, sleeping late at Oliver Queen’s, wandering the property in winter gear, preparing meals, showering together… Anytime her thoughts veered toward the X-rated variety, she quickly redirected them. If Klon Rae woke up and tapped into her thoughts, she didn’t want the child to be scarred for life.

Although, now that she thought about it, that risk probably came with the territory of being a telepath.

By the time Lillian returned (the following morning? it must be), Kara’s head felt thick from the combined effects of Kryptonite and lack of sleep.

“We meet again, Supergirl,” Lillian drawled as she swept into the room. “Or should I say Kara?”

She rolled her eyes. “Am I supposed to be surprised you know my name? Because, duh.”

Even without her super-hearing, Kara could hear Lillian’s intake of breath. But she didn’t say anything as she pulled a stool closer in a movement that reminded Kara of Alex zipping about her lab at the DEO.

Alex must be going out of her mind in worry by now. At least she had Maggie and J’onn and the boys to look after her. Kara was Lena’s main support system in National City. Maybe Beatrice would hear about the situation and come look after her. But even if she did, Alex better be looking out for Lena too, Kara thought darkly. If she managed to survive this mess only to discover that her friends and family hadn’t taken care of her girlfriend…

“Now, let’s see what this next device can do, shall we?”

“She’s supposed to be surprised you know my name? Because, duh.”

Lillian ignored the comment as she attached a metal band across Kara’s forehead and wound an innocuous-looking sleeve that resembled a blood pressure cuff around her arm. When she flicked a switch on the small rectangular box both items were attached to, nothing happened at first. But then a feeling of intense grief oozed through Kara’s system like the emotional equivalent of tar, blackening everything she touched. She fought the effects, trying to picture Lena’s face smiling up at her from the bed beside her, alight in mid-morning sunshine, happy and full of love; Lena snuggling into her side in Oliver’s hot tub as they watched stars blink on overhead; Lena whooping in joy as they flew
together across the California coast in the suit she’d designed.

“Evidently low doesn’t work on you,” Lillian said, frowning. She manipulated the controls again, and suddenly the memories shifted: Lena in the helicopter, with the drone closing in; Lena facing down her mother’s thugs at the Children’s Hospital gala; Lena declaring that she was a Luthor right before she turned the rocket key; Lena sipping poisoned rum and falling to the ground where she lay, frothing at the mouth as convulsions rocked her frame.

Wait. Kara tried to stop the memory, to hold it up for closer examination. That hadn’t actually happened, had it? Lena had smelled the alien rum in her decanter. She had called Maggie and Alex, and they had captured the perpetrator, a member of her own security team. Hadn’t they?

Another “memory” popped into her mind, vivid and complex in color and detail, one in which she could only watch as Hank Henshaw threw the L Corp logo at Lena in the lobby of her building. Kara tried to reach her in time but her feet were sluggish and heavy, as if they were encased in cement, and by the time she reached her it was too late. She lifted the giant L away and looked down on a bloody, lifeless body. No! She dropped to her knees and lifted Lena into her arms, listening for a heartbeat she already knew she wouldn’t find as Henshaw laughed mockingly down at them.

“Nooo,” Kara groaned, struggling against the bonds holding her in place. She had to remove the electrodes, had to get the machine away, away, AWAY…

“Oh, my brilliant boy,” Lillian breathed, watching her writhe in place. “Let the Supers underestimate you at their own peril.”

“It’s not real.” Klon Rae’s voice sounded suddenly in Kara’s mind. “Look, there aren’t any shadows. These are only movies your brain’s creating from the things you worry about the most.”

Kara stopped struggling and closed her eyes. Sure enough, there were no shadows, no depth of field. The supposed memories were two-dimensional.

“I’ve seen them use this machine on the others,” Klon Rae told her. “They call it a memory modifier. Don’t worry. Nothing you’re seeing is real, Supergirl.”

Kara blinked her eyes open and stared back at Lillian. Rage consumed her, taking the place of the tarry grief trying to smother her inside her own mind. “Nice try,” she said, spitting the words. “But your son’s little toys didn’t work on my cousin, and they won’t work on me.”

“We’ll see about that, won’t we, Supergirl?” Lillian cranked the dial higher.

“Klon Rae, leave my mind!” Kara managed to send as images began to spill over her.

“But—”

“Now!” She sent the thought as forcefully as she could and hoped that her young friend had listened as false memories assailed her, one after the other: of Lena consumed in flame, twisting and burning; of Alex, shot by an alien weapon, bursting into ash; of J’onn and Eliza and Winn and James and Mon-El, all dying terrible, painful deaths, one after another until she was dizzy from the blood and the gore, the horror of her worst fears come to life.

It isn’t real, she chanted inside her own head. It isn’t real. It isn’t real. Over and over she muttered the phrase until, somehow, she was shouting the words so loudly that Lillian turned off the device and slapped her into submission. Kara lay back panting, the taste of blood on her lips, and felt her eyes heat up. Not enough to actually fire but enough to scare Lillian. She could see it in the flare of her nostrils, the flinch of her body, the widening of her eyes.
“It isn’t real,” Kara repeated, her voice the strike she couldn’t deliver, “and neither are you.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” Lillian bit back, and slammed a needle into her thigh.

Kara gasped as Kryptonite raced through her, forcing the air from her lungs. Her sight dimmed, and she wondered if she would awaken this time. Wondered, again, if this might not actually be the end.

“Supergirl!” Klon Rae’s panicked voice sounded her in mind, and then nothing more.

* * *

“Are you there?” she thought, staring blankly at the wall that separated them. She had come to a few minutes earlier, the water even colder than she remembered as she choked and coughed.

It was a moment before she felt the gentle probe, another before she heard the subdued response: “I’m here. Are you okay?”

“Yes, thanks to you.”

“You saved yourself,” Klon Rae insisted. “You’re stronger than the others, you know.”

“Am I?” She thought for a second. “I think when you survive losing everything, it makes you realize you can get through almost anything. There’s a human saying for that: ‘What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.’”

“I’ve heard that,” Klon Rae said. “I don’t think I knew what it meant until now, though.”

“I wish you didn’t have to learn it at all.”

“Me, too,” Klon Rae thought, her tone sassy.

“I’m glad you’re here, though, all the same.”

“You are?”

“Of course. Every superhero needs a sidekick.”

“Am I really your sidekick? Seriously?”

Kara summoned the energy to send a smiley emoji to her young neighbor. “You betcha.”

“My brother Klar Nee is going to be so jealous! He saw you speak at his school once, and he hasn’t shut up about you since. Just wait ’til I tell him about this!”

Kara only half-listened as the girl went on about her siblings and their degree of allegiance to Supergirl and Superman, Earth’s alien superheroes. Where was Clark now? Did he know she was missing? He must, especially if Lex had been broken out along with Lillian. Thoughts of Clark led to her family, and it occurred to her that she hadn’t seen Krypton exploding in the parade of horrific memories, hadn’t pictured her mother dying, her father blown apart, her childhood friends and their families incinerated as the planet’s core melted down. Was it because those memories were real? Or was it that her grief over those losses was as resolved as grief ever can be? That part of her life was long since gone, and though it echoed in her memories, though she still missed her home and her family, the pain had become a scar that she carried on her heart, no longer the open, weeping wound it had been when she first escaped the Phantom Zone.

Her family was here on Earth—Lena, Alex, Eliza, J’onn, and the boys. They were her loved ones,
her family, her home. That was why the Black Mercy had failed to kill her. Krypton was distant in more ways than one, and Lex’s evil device had recognized that by whatever means it used to evaluate brain activity. A stupid machine had figured out something about her that not even Kara had fully recognized herself.

Maybe she should thank Lillian, after all, not only for raising an amazing daughter but for failing to effectively torture her. She imagined Lillian’s face if she said as much, and then her imagination supplied the likely outcome: Lillian, enraged, lifting a Kryptonite dagger and plunging it into her heart.

Probably best not to mention it.

* * *

The hours fell away—sleep deprivation, hunger, Kryptonite, claustrophobia—until Kara was on the edge of delirium. The only things that stopped her from losing her mind entirely were the practice of Rao-Nal and the presence of Klon Rae. When their captors took the child for a walk a few hours after the second round of torture, she kept her consciousness linked to Kara’s through the hundreds of feet that separated them. Kara closed her eyes, feeling the wind on Klon Rae’s face, smelling the freshness of grass and dirt in the air aboveground, warming to the sensation of sunlight. She felt the strength returning to the child’s system as if it were happening to her own, and for a moment she almost thought she could break her bonds.

She didn’t try. Instead she opened her eyes and gazed at the wall blankly. She didn’t want to give Cadmus any reason to suspect their telepathic link. Nothing good could come of that revelation.

“Thank you,” she thought when the child was returned to her concrete cell. “That was lovely.”

“The mountains here are pretty. Do you know where we are?”

“I do.” Kara sent her a detailed aerial image of where they were in relation to National City.

“So far?” Klon Rae said, and Kara could feel her dismay like an almost physical wave.

“It’s not that far. Not relatively, anyway.”

“Maybe not if you can fly or teleport yourself.”

Which, right. For a child Klon Rae’s size, fifty miles would feel insurmountable. “Can you not teleport even a little?” she asked.

“My mother says I’m not supposed to try. It can be dangerous if you don’t know what you’re doing.”

That made sense. Scrambling your neurons and protons and then reassembling them seemed impossibly complex to one who could do neither. “What about telepathy? How far is your range?”

“I don’t know. Not very far though. You were hard to reach during my walk. It took more energy than I expected.” She yawned, or at least that’s what it felt like in Kara’s head.

“Klon Rae,” she scolded, “don’t do anything to jeopardize your own health! I’m an adult. I can take care of myself.”

“I’ll be okay. I promise. Besides, I like talking to you. I was really scared before you got here. It wasn’t safe to talk to anyone, you know? But then you came, and I knew right away I could trust
“How did you know that?”

“Because you’re Supergirl. Besides, I can read minds, remember?”

Kara only just bit back her snort of laughter. To be seen laughing shortly after enduring torture would definitely raise a few Cadmus eyebrows. Unless they thought she was cracking up? Nah. She wasn’t that good of a liar—though it would take more than Kryptonite to get her to admit as much to Alex.

“Promise me you’ll conserve your energy, little one. I might need you to break us out of here.”

“You’re just saying that.”

“I’m really not.”

Klon Rae paused. “Do you have a plan?”

“Not yet. But I’m working on one,” she thought as confidently as someone who was strapped down and suffering from the after-effects of torture could manage.

“*             *             *”

“My mother says memories feel so real because your mind actually relives the experience,” Klon Rae volunteered after Lillian’s third visit.

This time the torture had taken the form of a device blaring horrifically at a frequency only Kryptonians could hear. Kara had instinctively retreated into her mind, wrapping herself in a memory of the immense silence that was one of her favorite parts of floating at the very top of Earth’s atmosphere.

“That’s true,” Kara said. “That’s why people with powerful imaginations can survive for months or even years in solitary confinement without going insane.”

“Is that really what the Earth looks like from above?”

“It really is.”

“It’s so beautiful! I can see why my grandparents wanted to come here.”

“Even now, when humans are trying to get rid of anyone who’s not from here?”

“I don’t know. My parents say that most humans—and most other aliens, too for that matter—have love in their minds. There are just a few who have been so, like, hurt by pain or fear that they can’t feel any other way. Like that woman who keeps hurting you.”

This reminded Kara of the night she’d taken Lena to see *Hamilton*, and afterward while they were discussing their families Lena had insisted her mother wasn’t completely unredeemable. She wondered if Lena would still feel the same when she found out how Lillian had tortured her this time. Assuming Lena ever found out, an eventuality that depended on Kara walking/flying/punching her way out of this underground house of horrors.

Something else occurred to her: “Can you see inside their minds even with the neural disruptors?”

“Sometimes. They have to charge them at night, and some of the batteries don’t last as long as the
others.”

“And they don’t know you’re listening in?”

“As long as I don’t try to communicate with them, no. At least, not so far.”

“Huh,” Kara thought.

“Huh what?”

“I’m not sure yet. I’ll let you know.”

* * *

It was the end of her second day (according to Klon Rae’s walk schedule) without food when Lillian brought the laptop in.

“What now?” Kara asked, trying to sound stronger than she felt. “Are you going to challenge me to a game of Overwatch? Because I’m pretty good.”

Lillian ignored her quip, but Kara could feel Klon Rae’s amusement rippling through her mind.

“At the first sign of trouble, you’re out, right?” she thought at her alien eavesdropper.

“Right.”

It was a little too quick, though, a tad too agreeable. Kara sighed inwardly. Her sidekick obviously wasn’t going anywhere.

“It’s time I tell you the truth,” Lillian announced, her eyes glittering with what looked like triumph. “You won’t be getting out of here alive, so you might as well know: Lena never actually loved you. She’s been working for me all this time. In fact, she’s the one who helped me break out of prison and apprehend you.”

Kara blinked, and then she shook her head. “You’re lying. This is just another attempt to break me. A pretty pathetic one, actually. As if you would ever consent to your daughter dating an alien.”

“Wait a minute,” Klon Rae thought, her tone scandalized, “you’re dating this lady’s daughter?”

Kara wondered briefly if the child was more shocked that Supergirl was dating a human, a woman, or Lillian’s offspring.

“The mom thing, duh!”

Fair enough.

Lillian’s eyes narrowed. “Just like the rest of her family, Lena is a good soldier for the cause. What is truly pathetic is that you allowed yourself to believe that someone as brilliant as my daughter could care about you. Doesn’t the truth make more sense: that Lena was merely playing you? The ruse worked beautifully. Even what happened at the Port was only a ploy to get you to trust her. And you fell for it, just as I knew you would.”

“I don’t believe you. I happen to know your daughter better than you do, and I know for a fact she isn’t capable of such a thing.”

Lillian laughed. “That’s rich. If you know her so well, then I suppose you know she murdered her
mother’s killer?”

“That’s… she didn’t. She thought about killing him but she didn’t go through with it.”

“Is that what she told you?” Lillian pecked at the keyboard and then turned the screen to face Kara. “Then what is this?”

Kara skimmed the PDF. It appeared to be a scanned copy of a court document that had been sealed due to the perpetrator being a minor. Lena Luthor, aged seventeen, charged with manslaughter in the death of Martin Graylon, aged forty-two, on the night of December 24, 2001. The document looked official, complete with the state of California seal and assorted signatures.

And yet… Kara shook her head again, the movement making her dizzy. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d eaten, and the Kryptonite made her woozy on a good day. This, most definitely, wasn’t a good day. “I still don’t believe you. You lie for a living, and Lena is too good to do what you say she did. She’s not like you or your son.”

“I’m actually the only Luthor who doesn’t lie for a living, if you think about it. I’m a scientist, while the others—including my dear daughter—work in business. But fine, you’re right, documents can be forged. But if Lena isn’t a member of Cadmus, then how would I know that you’ve fantasized about killing my son in prison?”

Had Lex developed a device that would allow humans to read minds? But no—that was why they needed Klon Rae’s father, wasn’t it? So that he could read Kara and Lena’s minds and pass the intel on to Cadmus.

“My father wouldn’t do that!” Klon Rae practically shouted. Then, quieter, “I mean—I don’t think he would.”

Kara tried to school her features, but it was a struggle. She was just so tired of Lillian’s cruelty, so effing exhausted by her willingness to do anything and everything to rid Earth of off-worlders.

“I don’t know how you know that,” she admitted. “I only know that Lena isn’t the one who told you.”

“How would I know about your biology if not from her? How, for example, would I have found out about the solar-powered biomatrix that gives you your powers? How would I know that your cellular structure is suffused with specialized cells and organs whose function is the storage of radiant energy in multiple formats? Or that you can hear a whisper from 500 yards away? That you can survive without oxygen for up to thirty minutes?”

Even in her weakened state, Kara knew that everything Lillian said was something she had shared with Lena, almost word for word. Late at night, Lena would stroke her fingers down her arms, across her collar bone, along her chin and ask the questions clearly teeming in her scientist’s mind: “But how does the sun give you your powers? How far can you hear a sound from? But how did you survive in space after saving the world from Myriad?” And Kara, in love and secure in Lena’s love for her, answered every question.

Just because Lillian knew the answers Kara had given didn’t prove that Lena was a double agent. It didn’t. Did it?

Kara swallowed hard. It was becoming increasingly harder to think. She knew that was what Lillian wanted—to confuse her, to make her doubt herself and, most of all, to doubt Lena. Because if she couldn’t convince her daughter not to trust aliens, then maybe she could convince Supergirl not to
trust her daughter.

She forced herself to sound bored: “If you’re trying to turn me against Lena, it’s not going to work. I mean, come on, Lillian. Could you be any more predictable?”

Lillian’s eyes narrowed to mere slits. “I am not predictable, Supergirl. And while I understand why you might not believe me, let’s see how you handle this.”

She struck a button on the computer and turned the screen toward Kara, her eyes malevolent, smile predatory.

Kara wanted to close her eyes, but even though the recording was blurry, the image was obviously Lena, seated on the couch in her office, cell phone at her ear. She couldn’t look away, not when she might not ever get a chance to see Lena again.

“She has no idea that I’m going to take her down,” blurry-video-Lena said, her voice low and—not quite angry. Intense. “This is war, whether Kara knows it or not. No one messes with my family and gets away with it.”

Which—huh. It sounded like Lena, but it had gone by so fast and Kara was so hungry she could practically hear her stomach shouting at her…

“Okay,” she said. “Let’s say she is on your side. If you really wanted to prove it, why not have her stroll through that door and give one of those supervillain laughs—you know the ones—and tell me she never loved me, in person? Because for all I know, she was talking about you or Lex in that video, and you just overlaid the part where she says my name.”

Lillian snapped the laptop shut. “Don’t be ridiculous. That isn’t—of course we didn’t…”

“Why sneak around then? That’s how you know about my biology, isn’t it? You’ve obviously been following us.”

Or having their Klaramarian spy do so. Klon Rae’s range was impressive, and she was just a kid. Her father—if indeed he was being extorted to help Cadmus—would have significantly stronger abilities. Not just telepathy, either, but teleportation too. No wonder Cadmus wanted him. A Klaramarian would make the perfect spy.

A Klaramarian would make the perfect spy. That was it! Of course. Why hadn’t she seen it sooner?

She almost said as much. Or maybe she did? She didn’t think so, but she was so exhausted by now that she was having differentiating between what she was thinking and what she was saying aloud.


“I’m trying,” she was fairly certain she thought, biting her lip to keep the words from spilling out.

“Clearly you are delusional from hunger, Supergirl,” Lillian said. “You must be getting weak by now. Do you miss your friends? Should I bring one of them to see you? Perhaps your sister, Alex? Or maybe that funny little man, Winn, is it?” She leaned closer, and Kara couldn’t even flinch away if she wanted to. “I could end you if I wanted. I could end any one of your so-called friends at any moment.”

Kara stared her in the eye. What had Alex once told her? When facing a superior opponent, the best tactic was to try to use their strength against them. “Poor Lillian. I’ll bet you got more than you bargained for, listening in. Did it hurt hearing how she talks about you? Does it hurt knowing that the
child you raised would rather be with an alien than anywhere near you?"

“You little bitch.” Lillian’s hand shot out.

But Kara was expecting it and, summoning the last dregs of her energy, put it all into her superbreath. She exhaled, feeling a surge of power as Lillian’s hand froze in mid-air and then, slowly, retreated. With a strangled cry, Lillian grabbed the laptop and practically fled the room. Kara let her head fall back against the pillow. That tiny act of rebellion had felt so good, but she wasn’t going to last much longer without food. Where was Alex? J’onn? Jeremiah, for that matter? Was he still with Cadmus? But he had to be, didn’t he? The only other option was that he…

She stopped the thought, stared at the wall, tried to rest her tired brain.

“You were amazing,” Klon Rae said, her pride practically shining through the wall between them.

“No I wasn’t.”

“Yes you were. As your sidekick, I get to say that and you have to agree.”

Kara wanted to smile but she didn’t think she could. Should? Same difference. Maybe. “Got it.”

“And don’t worry. She’s lying about your girlfriend.”

She tried not to visibly perk up. “Was her battery low? Could you read her mind?”

“No, but I don’t need to. She’s totally mean, and you’re you. Can you imagine having her as a mom?”

No, actually. Kara couldn’t. She wished Lena didn’t have to either.

“I think I have a plan,” she told Klon Rae.

“You do?”

“Um, sure.” To be honest, the pronouncement had surprised her a little too, but then her subconscious could be like that, she’d found. “It involves you trusting someone you’ve never met, though. Do you think you can do that?”

“Yes,” Klon Rae said immediately, with no hesitation whatsoever.

Ah, the beauty of youth, when they didn’t even know what they should be wary of.

“I heard that,” Klon Rae said.

“Oh. Sorry. Anyway, here’s what I’m thinking…”

They went over the plan three times together, tweaking it until they had thought through multiple eventualities, and then Klon Rae recited it back to her twice more.

“It’s brilliant,” the girl announced for the tenth time. But the words were slurred, as if she were drunk.

“It’s late, isn’t it?” Kara said.

“Erm, kinda…”
“Will you hear me if I sing to you?”

“I dunno. Wanna try?”

In response, Kara began to sing “Silent Night,” humming along under her breath. She wasn’t sure if Klön Rae could even hear her, but by the end of the second verse the silence in her mind confirmed that the girl had fallen asleep. As she had done the previous nights, Kara soon retreated into a daydream, eyes open but mind journeying back in time to a happier place. She and Lena had been lying in bed, talking softly, when Lena had asked how her cells absorbed sunlight. Kara started to explain, but before she had gotten very far, Lena had sat up, pulled a pen and notebook from a drawer in her bedside table, and begun to write.

When Kara paused, Lena looked up. “Keep going. I’m listening.”

“What’s that?” Kara waved at the pad of paper Lena was busily scribbling in.

“A notebook.” As Kara continued to look at her expectantly—because of course she knew it was a notebook—she added, “I use it for keeping track of ideas that come to me.”

“Ideas that come to you in bed?”

“Yes. Well, in dreams, usually.”

“You dream about technology.” Lena shrugged sheepishly, and Kara added, “I had no idea you were that gay.”

“Really, sweetheart, there were other clues.” She smirked and then went back to writing, pen moving across the page with seeming super-speed. “You see, the number one problem with solar power is that no one has figured out a way to make a solar cell small and inexpensive enough to mass produce. Based on what you’re describing, I think we’ve been approaching the issue all wrong.”

“Oh.” Kara pursed her lips. Which was cool and all, but really? Lena was going to work right now? They were literally naked, both still aglow from sex, and it wasn’t like they got all that many chances to just be, quietly, with each other.

She tried to swallow down her irrational hurt. She loved Lena’s passion, she did. Just, at that moment she would rather it were focused on her.

Lena glanced up, gaze narrowing. “Is this okay?”

“It’s fine,” Kara said quickly.

“I mean, this could be really beneficial to Earth, and I know you’re all about saving the planet. But I would understand if you didn’t want me to pursue this. I don’t want you to feel like an object because that’s not what you are to me. Not at all.”

“I honestly don’t mind. In fact, it would be a really cool project for us to collaborate on.” She scrunched up her face. “Just, I don’t know. Maybe not right this second?”

Lena put her pen and notebook back in the drawer and turned to Kara, her eyes soft. “I’m sorry. I just got really excited.” She slipped under the covers again and pillowed her head on Kara’s shoulder.

“You don’t have to be sorry. I’m happy you’re excited, really. I’m just being selfish. I don’t get to see you all that much, you know?”
“I know. It never feels like enough, does it?”

“No,” she’d agreed, her arms tightening around Lena’s smaller, curvier frame. “But you’re right. If my body chemistry could somehow help shift the global economy to renewable energy, that would be amazing. It would be a way to contribute other than just using my fists.”

“You do more than use your fists to help people, Kara.”

“I know. But if this worked out, it would feel like maybe there’s a reason I got stuck in the Phantom Zone for so long. Like, maybe there’s a bigger reason that you and I met.”

She’d held her breath then, worried she’d put too much pressure on Lena and their relationship. Kara knew that Alex and Clark and Eliza believed she did everything excessively. She cared too much about other people; she trusted too easily; she had too much faith that the forces of good would overcome the forces of evil. Since they had started dating, she’d worried that she would overwhelm Lena with the sheer magnitude of her feelings.

But then Lena had smiled up at her in the candlelight and wound their hands together. “For me, there doesn’t need to be a bigger reason that we met. I’m happier with you than I’ve ever been in my life. I love you, Kara Zor-El Danvers.”

“I love you too, Lena Letitia Luthor.”

“Stupid Beatrice,” Lena said, rolling her eyes. Then she’d leaned in for a kiss, and Kara had quickly lost herself in Lena.

They hadn’t realized how lucky they were, Kara thought now, dizzy with missing Lena. She could practically smell her lavender body wash—which, maybe she really could; sometimes she used it herself just so she would smell like her girlfriend as she worked at her computer in the bullpen, or grabbed coffee with James at Noonan’s, or sat in “their” booth at the alien bar waiting for Lena to appear as if by magic. It always felt that way when she first caught a glimpse of her: magical.

That was what was real, Kara reminded herself. Lena loved her, she knew she did. She couldn’t fake her body’s response even if she wanted to; couldn’t falsify her racing pulse or short breaths, couldn’t fabricate arousal or joy or softness. Despite the fact that Kara would probably never completely understand human beings, she knew this much: Lena loved her not in spite of the fact that she was from another planet but partially because of it. Lena loved their differences, just as Kara did, and loved even more the places they connected despite being born decades and light-years apart. Lena loved her, and that was why Lillian was torturing her: because it irked her so deeply that her husband’s daughter, a woman who shared her own son’s DNA, dared to open her heart to the very creatures Lillian blamed for the loss of who her son had once been—perfect, whole, unbroken.

What if they never saw each other again? What if two nights ago was the last time they would ever have sex, ever kiss, ever touch? What if they didn’t get a chance to say goodbye? It couldn’t be over, not so soon. Not just like that.

To crowd out her growing anxiety, Kara called up one of her favorite poems, “New Face” by Alice Walker:

I have learned not to worry about love;
but to honor its coming
with all my heart.
To examine the dark mysteries
of the blood
with headless heed and
swirl,
to know the rush of feelings
swift and flowing
as water.
The source appears to be
some inexhaustible
spring
within our twin and triple
selves;
the new face I turn up
to you
no one else on earth
has ever seen.

No one on Earth had ever seen Kara the way Lena had. That was the reality, not the dark fantasy Lillian had tried to sell her. Lillian could hawk her vicious wares all she wanted, but Kara wasn’t buying.

* * *

The next time the door opened, her foster father stepped into the room, Lillian nowhere in sight. He wasn’t wearing a hoodie this time, rather walking proudly in a black shirt and pants with a gun strapped to his thigh. For a moment he reminded her so intensely of his daughter—except that he was here, in her cell, his biometrics presumably stored in the security system as friend rather than foe.

“Jeremiah,” she said, nodding at him. He wasn’t actually on the wrong side of history here, was he?

“Kara,” he said, and glanced down at her suit’s crest. “I wish we were meeting under different circumstances.”

She was tempted to tell him she knew the feeling, but instead she watched and waited. As depleted as she was, it wasn’t that much of a challenge.

“I hope you’ll hear me when I tell you to stop fighting,” he added. “If you give Lillian what she wants, then she’ll let you go.”

Kara couldn’t help it. She laughed. “Are you kidding? Is that what she told you? And you believed her? Seriously, who are you and what have you done with Jeremiah Danvers?”
His face hardened. “I’m right here, Kara. I’ve been here all along.”

“And why is that?” she asked. “Why are you still here?”

“I don’t have a choice.”

“Everyone has a choice, Jeremiah. You used to believe that, too.”

He shook his head, chin jutting stubbornly—just like Alex’s. “I did what I needed to keep my family safe.”

“From aliens?” She shook her head. “Did you say yes to Kal-El when he asked you to take me just so that you could keep an eye on me? Have you hated us all along?”

“No!” He lowered his voice, glanced up at the camera in the corner, looked back down at her. “No, it wasn’t like that. I wanted to help.” His voice dropped to almost nothing. “I still do.”

“Whatever.” She closed her eyes and felt herself begin to spin away almost immediately.

“Kara.”

She jerked awake, blinking dazedly. “What?”

“I didn’t have any choice. Please, tell Alex that, will you?”

She laughed hollowly. “Oh, I will. Just as soon I see her again. Did you know your friend Lillian threatened to kill her? Her exact words were, ‘I can end your sister or your friends any time I want.’ Check the video if you don’t believe me.” She watched his face darken. Interesting… And then it hit her. “They threatened us, didn’t they? That’s why you’re here.”

He focused just over her shoulder and shifted in place, fingers fidgeting with the snap on his gun. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, Jeremiah.” She shook her head. “We never asked you to do that. Now all the blood Cadmus has spilled is on our hands, too.”

“You don’t have a child,” he ground out. “You don’t know what it’s like to sacrifice—”

“Everything? I don’t know what it’s like to put my life on the line for other people, to watch the people I care about most do the same because it’s the right thing to do? Someone once told me that there is light and darkness inside each of us. There’s always a choice.”

“Maybe you’re right,” he said, meeting her gaze. “I’m sorry, Kara. We can’t all be heroes.”

That reminded her of Lena, too. Then again, everything did. A wave of homesickness washed over her, and she gazed up at her foster father, wondering if she could—should?—trust him. But she wanted to go home. She wanted to see Alex and Lena and Eliza and the boys and even Cat Grant (wherever she was) again. More than that, she wanted Klon Rae to be back with her family. And if she wanted all of those things, she really didn’t have any choice in the matter.

“Ready, Klon Rae?” she sent.

The answer came back immediately. “Ready, Supergirl.”

It wasn’t hard to manufacture the tears. She was so tired and sad and lonely that even though they’d only given her a little water in the last three days, she made herself cry easily.
Jeremiah’s face softened. “Come on, Kara, don’t worry. You’ll be out of here soon, I know you will be. You just need to cooperate.”

“Okay,” she said, allowing defeat to suffuse her words. “I will. I’ll do whatever it takes. Could you just—would you mind wiping my tears? They keep sliding into my ears.”

He nodded. “I can do that.”

As he leaned closer, she turned her head supposedly so that he could wipe the tears. With her face turned away from the camera she whispered, “Turn off your neural disruptor.”

He paused incrementally, then wiped her face and pulled back. “Better?”

She nodded, eyes on his. But he didn’t give anything away. It was possible he hadn’t even heard her.

Without another word, Jeremiah turned and walked out. Kara lay back, breathing hard as if she’d just run a race at low power. She could feel her own heartbeat, faster than usual, far more stressed than she could remember; blood rushing through her system; millions of cells dying and multiplying inside her body every single second. For some reason, the thought reminded her of how celestial bodies were in continuous motion; how the universe itself was ever expanding, everything in it moving rapidly, constantly, ceaselessly away from one another.

There was a metaphor there, she was sure of it, but her mind was too slow to track the thought. Was this it? Would Lillian Luthor be the actual death of her? She giggled, and then stopped because there was a reason she wasn’t supposed to laugh, wasn’t there? Oh yeah, Klon Rae. And death, too. Death wasn’t supposed to be funny.

She wasn’t afraid of death, though. She’d imagined it enough during her lifetime, faced it more than a few times in the past year and a half. In her years on Earth she’d maintained her Kryptonian belief in death as a transition to another state, so she didn’t worry about something as primitive as the human concepts of heaven and hell. Kryptonians had believed that each individual life was like the Big Bang, only in microcosmic theory—the initial burst of electromagnetic energy as atoms and molecules fused to form new life, then the growth of the fetus marked by constant expansion until the infant was born. Early on the child revolved closely about her parents—a dual star system, in most cases—until she grew old enough to separate and explore the universe on her own. At the end of her life, she transformed back into stardust, and the cycle would repeat. Again and again and again, for how long no one really knew.

Although, she supposed they knew now: until the planet died, taking nearly everyone with it.

She didn’t fear death itself, not on her own behalf. What she feared was never seeing Lena or Alex or Eliza again, never getting the chance to say goodbye. She feared leaving them as suddenly and violently as she had been left herself, almost exactly thirteen years earlier. She feared what such a loss would do to each of the people she loved and who, in return, loved her.

“Do you think he’ll help?” Klon Rae asked.

“I don’t know. I hope so.” Kara blinked and felt herself begin to slide into unconsciousness. “Do you remember the plan?”

“I remember everything you told me.”

“Good. If he turns off the disruptor, ask him to help you. Your family needs you, little one.”

“So does yours.”
“Yes, but I’m Supergirl, remember? They always knew they could lose me.”

There was a moment of silence, and then Klon Rae said, “I remember.”

Kara couldn’t fight the dizziness anymore. “I think I’m going to try to sleep for a little while,” she thought, not wanting to scare the child. “Goodbye, Klon Rae.”

A foreign, almost familiar phrase sounded gently in Kara’s mind, followed by the childish image of a heart. “Not goodbye. See you soon.”

She closed her eyes, and then the darkness washed over her, so quiet and complete it reminded her of space.
Beatrice reached for Lena’s mug and slid it out of reach. “The last thing you need right now is more coffee, Lee. I have some weed, though. That might make you feel better.”

Lena shook her head. She hadn’t slept much in the past forty-eight hours, and given the current state of her world, she suspected that smoking up would launch her into a paranoid fit. “Maybe after we get her back...” She trailed off, and Bea must have seen something in her face because she pushed away from the kitchen counter and enfolded her in a tight hug.

“We’ll get her back,” Bea said, rubbing soothing circles into her back. “I mean, come on, she’s Supergirl! The good guys always win, right?”

Lena hid her face in her best friend’s shoulder. “I used to think so.”

Bea had appeared on her doorstep the previous evening and refused to go back to LA despite Lena’s worries about her “getting caught in the crossfire.” She claimed that Lillian and Lex knew better than to mess with her—and Lena had to admit she wasn’t all wrong. Lillian had always seemed slightly intimidated by Beatrice and her mother.

“That’s her inner racist,” Bea had commented the first time Lena brought it up. “My mom says it’s okay to take advantage of that kind of stuff since we have to live with it every day.”

They were ten then; having Lillian Luthor and Mama Dang as their mothers had been an education all on its own. That was the first –ism Lena had recognized about her adopted family. Unfortunate, really, that so many others had followed.

Reluctantly Lena allowed Bea to pull her away from her coffee to the couch, where they cuddled together, Bea’s strong musician’s arms around her, Lena’s head pillowed on her shoulder. Bea was softer and less bony now that she had a child, a fact that Lena appreciated at moments like this. She pictured Rowan, with his dark eyes and darker skin and downy curls, smiling up at Bea, and her eyes filled with tears as they had been doing ever since she saw Kara fall to the ground outside her building.

She’d stayed at the DEO for the first thirty-six hours, coding furiously first with Winn and then Vasquez by her side, but L Corp had hundreds of subsidiary locations around the world that could easily be fronts for Cadmus. Add in Lex’s crazy bunkers, and the list of potential hideout sites was disheartening. J’onn and Superman had each taken half the list, but after nearly two days of searching, they’d yet to find any sign of Kara. Lena had overheard Alex tell Winn that she had a feeling Lillian and Lex had stashed Kara somewhere completely off the grid. A short time later, Lena had blacked out from what Eliza, in town to help in any way she could, had diagnosed as a case of exhaustion. Vasquez had driven her home, where Lena had found Beatrice waiting for her.

Now it was Monday morning and she was just supposed to go to work and pretend that everything was fine, that her world wasn’t in fact crumbling? She couldn’t do it. She couldn’t face the shouts of
the paparazzi, the stares of her employees, Jess’s stalwart kindness. Her assistant hadn’t ever said as much, but Lena was almost certain Jess realized that Kara Danvers and Supergirl were one and the same.

And therein lay the rub, didn’t it? Too many people—the wrong people—knew Supergirl’s identity. Including, apparently, Lena’s mother and brother.

“How can we just stay here?” Lena asked, wiping her tears with the sleeve of the Stanford sweatshirt Kara had left at her apartment weeks earlier. She had slept in it last night, Bea’s arms curled around her from behind, and when she first woke, the world dark outside, Kara’s scent in her nose and an arm at her waist, she had forgotten for a moment that Kara might not even still be alive.

“We can stay here,” Bea confirmed.

They snuggled on the couch as the sun rose over downtown National City where Supergirl supporters had held a candlelight vigil the night before. Lena and Bea had watched the livestream huddled together on this same couch, and Lena hadn’t been able to shake the sense of unreality that had settled over her. What if they never got her back? What if her mother actually killed her girlfriend? Leave it to the Luthors to make even the homophobic rhetoric of Fred Phelps and his demented “church” seem moderate.

Superman had made an appearance early on at the vigil, appealing to the public for information on his cousin’s whereabouts, and multiple anti-alien activists had gone on record condemning the unprovoked attack on Supergirl.

“She’s an alien, yes,” said a middle-aged white man wearing an “Earth First” insignia on his hat, T-shirt, and jacket, “but not the kind we’re talking about. Supergirl is a productive member of our society, not like the aliens who have come to take our jobs and drain our planetary resources.”

Beside her, Bea had snorted. “That’s white people code for, ‘She’s okay because she’s pretty and blonde.’”

Kara had said the same thing more than once: Humans responded differently to her than they did to other off-worlders because she had blue eyes, pale skin, and similar anatomy. Moreover, they accepted her because she used her super powers to protect them. That part had always bothered Lena—as if Kara owed the people of Earth for daring to crash-land on their planet as an orphaned, homeless youth.

More anti-alien commentators had joined in the conversation from the network studio, most of them condemning Cadmus for kidnapping Supergirl and all of them calling for her safe return.

“Just because we’re pro-human doesn’t mean we’re anti-alien,” an older woman had insisted. “We want the best for our own species, the species that God chose to put here, but we don’t wish for harm to befall Supergirl or Superman or other good aliens like them. The Luthors have taken the fight too far once again.”

Unable to listen to such hypocrisy—as if spewing modulated hate was somehow less damaging than what Lillian and Lex had done—Lena had snapped the laptop shut. Hearing other people espouse such ideology only reminded her of her own ignorant attitude toward off-worlders before she fell in love with one.

Now, as the sun brightened over the city, she wished she could escape the anxiety clawing at her stomach, her mind, her heart. Bea was right about one thing—caffeine was only making her crazier.
An indeterminate amount of time later, her phone dinged, the text alert strident in the quiet apartment. Lena looked at Bea, eyes wide. A police siren—that meant Maggie. The siren had been Kara’s doing. She’d also changed Alex’s text alert and ringtone to clips from the *Interstellar* soundtrack.

“Do you want me to check it?” Bea asked softly.

“No. No, I’ll do it.”

But she didn’t move right away. If it was bad news, did she want to know? Did she have any choice? Finally she lifted her phone from the coffee table.

“Come downstairs,” Maggie had written. “A car is waiting in the garage.”

Bea was reading over her shoulder. “Oh my god, Lee, do you think they found her?”

“I don’t know.” *Damn Maggie and her cryptic messages.* “Good news or bad?” she sent back, opting for the voice-to-text function as she gathered her purse and pulled on a baseball cap and sunglasses, Bea right behind her. The sweatshirt and jeans were almost enough to hide her identity on their own, but the last thing she needed was for the paparazzi to follow her to the DEO. Presumably this was why the powers that be—her money was on Alex—had sent a car.

They were in the elevator (there was no way Lena was letting Bea out of her sight) when her phone dinged again. She held her breath and checked, and then turned the screen to Bea who screamed a little and clutched her arm.

A thumbs-up. Maggie had sent a thumbs-up.

*             *             *

The ride to DEO headquarters was entirely too slow for Lena’s liking. She sat with Bea in the back seat, knee jumping spasmodically as an agent from Alex’s strike team guided the tinted car through the city. When at last they had reached the DEO and passed successfully through the stringent security protocols—it helped that the agents on duty recognized Bea from her pop-star days—Lena found James, Winn, and Mon-El waiting for them on the main floor.

Winn pulled her into a hug, crowing, “She’s back! I told you we’d get her back!”

Mon-El hugged them both, and then James hesitated only briefly before wrapping his arms around all three, motioning Bea forward as he did.

“What the hell,” Bea said, and joined in the group hug.

It was strange, Lena thought, to be in this place with her old life—Bea—and her new one—the boys, as Kara referred to the trio—celebrating the survival of the woman they all loved to varying degrees. Strange and yet so life-affirming. Kara, who had brought them all together, was alive.

“Where is she?” Lena asked, pulling away. “Can I see her?”

“She’s unconscious,” Winn said, “but I know she would want you to be there when she wakes up.”

He didn’t say if. Lena took some comfort in that.

She left Bea in James and Mon-El’s capable, charming hands and followed Winn through the maze of corridors to a lab not far from Alex’s, a veritable arsenal of human and alien weaponry hanging in the background. She could see Kara lying in her sun bed from down the hall, and before she knew it
she had broken into a run.

Alex looked up from a tablet as Lena burst into the room. Then she set the tablet aside, crossed the space between them in a few long strides, and pulled her into a hug.

“We got her,” she said, voice tight with emotion, body practically shaking. “She came back to us, Lena.”

For a long moment, Lena relaxed into Alex’s arms. Kara was safe; somehow, impossibly, everything would be all right after all. Then, with a last squeeze of Alex’s waist, she pushed away and moved to Kara’s side, touching her hand, her arm, her cheek. She was here. She was really here. And yet, she was so still, beautiful hair splayed out beneath her, chest rising and falling in that slow, alien way of hers.

“Is she all right?” she asked, semi-amazed the words managed to make it past the huge lump in her throat.

“We think so. She hasn’t woken up yet but all her vitals check out. Kryptonite can have this effect sometimes. She should come around soon.”

“Was it…” She cleared her throat and, hand still curled tightly around Kara’s fist, met Alex’s eyes. “Was it my family?”

Alex answered unflinchingly: “Yes.”

“Did you capture them?”

“No,” Alex’s shoulders dropped. “They escaped again. We’re trying to track them, but no luck so far.”

Lena released a breath and felt blindly for the stool at the side of the bed. “Damn it,” she muttered, and collapsed on it, still holding onto Kara. That meant the nightmare wasn’t over. Sometimes it felt like this particular nightmare would never be over.

“I’m sorry,” Alex drifted closer and rested her hand on Lena’s shoulder. “I wish it had worked out differently, but the good news is she’s alive and safe.”

That was something—at least her mother and brother hadn’t killed her girlfriend in a fit of homophobic, alienophobic rage.

“Where’s Eliza?”

“She stepped out to get some fresh air. To be honest, I think she wanted to give you some time with Kara.”

“What about Clark?”

“He flew back to Metropolis a little while ago, but I’m supposed to text him when she wakes up.”

Lena sighed, staring at Kara’s peaceful face. “They must hate me.”

“Clark isn’t exactly your biggest fan,” Alex admitted. “But Eliza doesn’t blame you. She blames me.”

“You? Why would she blame you for my sociopathic family?”
“It’s complicated.” She shrugged and then smiled tiredly at Lena, quirking an eyebrow. “Mothers. What can you do?”

“I know, right?” she joked back. “Can’t live with them, can’t kill them…”

Alex burst out laughing, which was good. Not everyone approved of dark humor. Kara, for example, probably would have side-eyed her in disappointment for such a crack. Of course, for that she would have had to be awake.

“How did you find her?” she asked.

“We didn’t. Technically, she was rescued by non-DEO personnel.”

“What does that mean?”

It meant, Alex explained, that an alien who was being held in an adjacent room had managed to escape and contact her father, who teleported himself into the facility where Kara was being held, grabbed Kara before Cadmus could react, and teleported her back to Maggie’s precinct.

“Teleported,” Lena echoed. “As in, quantum entanglement theory?”

Alex squinted at her. “Right.”

In the last couple of months, Lena had time-traveled, dimension-hopped, and flown at close to the speed of sound with Kara. Why not add teleportation to the theoretical physics-defying mix?

“Oh, of course,” she said, and turned her attention back to Kara. “You said the alien who escaped contacted her father. How old was she?”

“Ten. She’s a second-generation immigrant from the planet Klaramar. Lucky for us, she’s quite the Supergirl fan, too.”

“Sidekick,” Kara said, eyes still closed, her voice sounding like her throat had been shredded. “She’s now my official sidekick. Rao,” she added, eyes opening at last, “I’m hungry. I could die for a pizza right about now.”

Lena laughed, her eyes wet, and then she pummeled Kara’s shoulder. “You cannot mention the word die right now, Kara!”

“Sorry,” she said unapologetically, smile sweet as she gazed up at Lena. “Hi.”

“Hi,” she breathed, leaning in despite the sun bed’s intense UV rays.

“You’re here.” Kara’s tone was wondering as she reached up to touch Lena’s cheek, thumb wiping away the tears that had managed to sneak past her defenses.

“I think that’s my line.” She leaned even closer, lips hovering over Kara’s, only to feel her pull away at the last second. “Oh. Sorry.” She straightened up a little.

“No, it’s not you! It’s just…” She lowered her voice. “I haven’t brushed my teeth in like, days.”

She couldn’t help it. She laughed again. “Oh, sweetheart.” And then she kissed her, chastely, warmly, firmly, her tears dripping onto Kara’s hot skin.

“Ahem,” Alex said from nearby.
Lena reluctantly ended the kiss. “I think someone else might want to see you,” she confided, moving sideways just enough to allow Alex into the space beside the sun bed. She didn’t relinquish her grip on Kara’s hand, though, and Kara didn’t let go of her either.

“Yo, sis.” She smiled up at Alex. “It’s really good to see you.”

“You have no idea,” Alex said, and promptly threw herself at her sister.

“Easy, killer!” But Kara’s voice was gentle as she held Alex close with one arm, gaze still fixed on Lena.

“Kara,” Alex whispered, and her voice was suddenly breaking in a way Lena had never imagined she would hear, “you can’t do that to me. You can’t just disappear.”

Kara closed her eyes, but a tear still worked its way out. “I know.” She squeezed Lena’s hand. “Trust me, I won’t again if I can help it.”

And yet, she couldn’t help it, could she? Even as Lena gripped her hand, she knew her hold on Kara could only ever be tenuous. She didn’t know how long they would have together, didn’t know how long either of them had in general. That was the thing about being human—and Kryptonian, too. Their powers did not include precognition, which meant that they followed time’s forward progression entirely at the whim of fate. She knew she would die one day, and Kara too (probably), but none of them had any real control over their end, no more than they’d had over their beginning.

The thought was enough to send her into an existential spin—except that Kara was holding her hand and hugging Alex, and the Danvers sisters were crying and laughing all over each other, and they were both smiling at her and pulling her into a crushing embrace that she hoped she would have a chance to get used to. They were her family of choice and she was theirs, even if Alex and Eliza still struggled sometimes with worry over her family of origin. That struggle was fine, as far as Lena was concerned; after all, the same battle raged inside her own head. As long as Alex and Eliza tried to accept her, that was what mattered. They didn’t have to always succeed; they just had to keep trying.

That was the meaning of family of choice, after all—that you chose to love and forgive and accept each other; that you promised to stick together despite the potential presence of multiple nutcase relatives lurking in the background.

Alex pressed Kara’s hand as she pulled away. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Kara said. “How’s Klon Rae?”

“She’s fine. Eager to see you. We’ve got her whole family stashed in a safe house not far from here.” She paused. “She said Dad’s the one who slipped her the burner phone. She somehow managed to hide it and then used it to text her father when they took her outside for a walk.”

“That was the plan. He saved her first, though, right?”

“Absolutely. He teleported her to her mother and then came back for you before the guards could figure out what was happening.”

“Good. I was worried she might try to convince him to rescue me first.”

“Oh, she did,” Alex said. “Your sidekick is nothing if not stubborn. But that means you saw him? You saw Jeremiah?”

“I did.” Kara looked down. “Just the once. I’m glad he helped her. I wasn’t sure he… would be able
“They got away,” Lena said, not bothering to hide her bitterness.

“Oh.” Kara’s shoulders dipped the same way Alex’s had earlier when discussing the elusive Luthors. “Well, did you at least get a chance to free the other prisoners?”

Alex shook her head. “By the time we got there, they were long gone. Can you believe they built their HQ so close to the DEO’s remote site?”

“I know, right?” Kara was shaking her head. “Serious gumption, those Luthors.” She glanced up at Lena. “Which, in the right Luthor, is a really good thing.” She patted the bed. “Come closer, will you? I don’t like you being so far away from me.”

Alex shifted to make room, and the three of them sat like that discussing the events of the last few days. Lena didn’t pay close attention to the conversation. She was too occupied with the feeling of Kara’s heated skin beneath her fingertips. She couldn’t seem to stop touching her; fortunately, there was no need to.

“To be honest,” Alex said at one point, “Cadmus might have overplayed their hand taking you down so publicly like that. Multiple videos showed they shot you in the back, and even people who aren’t fond of off-worlders expressed concern about them attacking you without any provocation. The anti-alien chatter has really calmed down since last week, and the protests have all but died out.”

“Really?” Kara said, perking up slightly.

“Really. It’s not world peace, by any means, but there does seem to be a subtle shift. At least outwardly.”

Which, now that Alex mentioned it, made sense. Lena had been so focused on Kara being in danger that she hadn’t taken time to consider the impact of her kidnapping.

“You know,” Lena said, frowning a little as she worked through the idea, “I could talk to my PR department about issuing a joint statement. You know, a Luthor and a Super working together to overcome differences? This might be the perfect time to hold a press conference condemning Cadmus and emphasizing our commonalities.”

She imagined Lillian’s face watching the coverage and shivered a little. In satisfaction, not fear, she assured herself.

Right.

Kara made a face. “Isn’t that, I don’t know, sort of cynical, though? Exploiting public sentiment for ideological purposes?”

“It’s more political than cynical,” Alex said. “I’ll talk to J’onn and see if we can get the President to issue a statement of support. She’s definitely a fan of yours, Kara.”

“What? She’s not! I mean, maybe a little, but only because I helped her that one time,” Kara said, ducking her head. “But that was so long ago she probably doesn’t even remember me.”

The tips of her ears were redder than the rest of her, and Lena and Alex exchanged an amused look.

“I think you might be a tad more memorable than you imagine,” Lena said, more fond than sarcastic. She lifted Kara’s fingers to her lips and kissed them. “In fact, I know you are.”
“Seconded,” Alex announced, flicking Kara in the shoulder. Then she shook out her hand. “Damn it! Why do I always forget how solid you are?”

Kara shrugged. “Beats me.” Her stomach growled audibly. “Hey, so about the food thing…”

As if by magic (or more likely, Lena thought, via means of teleportation since apparently that was a thing here on Earth-38), Winn appeared in the doorway just then, a stack of pizza boxes nearly obscuring his face. Behind him, Beatrice, James, and Mon-El hovered in the hallway, carrying plates, napkins, and a six-pack of beer.

“Did somebody order pizza?” Winn asked, grinning at Kara. He dropped the boxes on a nearby lab cart and squeezed between Alex and Lena, launching himself at his best friend. “You’re awake!”

Kara laughed, her smile happy as she squeezed him and ruffled his hair. “I am. And you are now my favorite human. Other than Lena, of course.”

“Ingrate!” Alex said, but she slid off the bed and headed for the hallway.

“Where are you going?” Kara asked, her smile slipping as she watched her sister walk away.

“I’m going to call Mom and Maggie and Clark and tell them to get their butts down here for the ‘Supergirl Returns’ party.” Alex paused in the doorway, phone at her ear, and flashed a gentle smile back at her sister. “Don’t worry, I won’t go far.”

“Promise?” Kara asked, and suddenly Lena could see the girl who had lost everything all those years ago shining through, frightened of being left alone again.

Lillian had done that, Lena thought, rage acidifying in her bloodstream. Her father’s wife—not her mother—had reduced Kara to this skittish shadow of herself via means Lena was sure she didn’t want to know.

“I promise,” Alex said. “I’ll be right here.” And then she turned, face brightening as Maggie’s voice sounded from her phone’s speaker: “Danvers! How’s our girl?”

“She’s good. Really good.” Alex wandered down the hall, a goofy smile on her face as she talked to her girlfriend.

Meanwhile James and Mon-El had wiggled their way onto the edge of the sun bed, and even though Kara pouted at her, Lena reluctantly gave way and joined Bea at the lab cart, loading food onto plates for the impromptu party.

“Can I put this on Snapchat?” Bea asked. “Can I be the one to tell the world she’s safe and sound? Pleeeease?”

Lena shook her head. “All it would take is one nosy pap to wonder how you know Supergirl, and then it’s only two degrees of separation from you to me to Kara.”

“Blasted secret identities.”

“Tell me about it.” Lena paused in popping open a can of beer. It might not be noon yet, but as Lillian’s family was fond of saying, it was five o’clock somewhere. “There might be something else that you could do, though. If Alex approves.”

“Does it involve Supergirl singing, by any chance?”
Lena nodded. After all, what better way to bring people together?

“I’m all in,” Bea announced, “as I’m pretty sure you already knew.”

“I’m pretty sure I did too.” Lena glanced over her shoulder and caught Kara’s gaze. She looked exhausted, and worn down, and still just a little bit on edge. But she also looked relieved, with all the people she loved most around her. “I love you,” she whispered, knowing Kara would hear it.

Judging from her smile, she did.

*             *             *

It was a good day. Eliza, J’onn, Maggie, and Superman joined the party, which necessarily spilled into the hallway, and the Super Friends shared food, drink, and plenty of stories of derring-do—mostly tales of Kara’s previous feats, but there were mentions of Alex, J’onn, Superman, and Guardian too. Other agents came and went, sneaking pizza and congratulating Kara on her return. Winn tried to get Vasquez to join them at one point, but the ultra-serious agent declined. Alex rolled her eyes and whispered something to Maggie, who snickered. Lena had a feeling she didn’t want to know what that was about.

After the party died down, Kara seemed almost back to normal. Physically, anyway. The occasional flicker of bleakness in her eyes told Lena otherwise. Alex made her spend a couple of more hours in the sun bed, during which the Super Friends—and Bea, who Kara had crowned an honorary Super Friend, much to her delight—took their leave one by one until Lena and Alex were the only ones left. Even Eliza had headed home to Midvale with a last hug for “my girls,” which Lena was touched to realize included her.

“Can we go?” Kara asked the second Alex let her out of the sun bed.

“Soon,” Alex promised. “Lena and I just have to compare calendars.”

J’onn had approved Lena’s idea of a joint statement, so while Kara fidgeted restlessly, Lena and Alex bent over a laptop one last time. Just as they were finalizing the timing of the announcement, an email popped up from President Marsdin’s communications director that included a statement of support for Supergirl as well as for the Alien-Human Alliance (or \textit{AHA!} as Kara never seemed to grow tired of calling it), the community action program L Corp and the NCPD were piloting.

“See, I told you President Marsdin loves you,” Alex teased. “Or should I say \textit{Olivia}?”

“Alex!” Kara all but stomped her foot, and Lena could suddenly picture them as teenagers arguing over time in the bathroom before school.

“That reminds me—I heard from an old friend of yours while you were missing.”

Kara stopped spinning on her stool and stared at her sister. “Cat? Seriously? You better not be joking, Alex, or I swear I’ll use my freeze breath on you.”

“Girl scout’s honor. The Queen of Media herself is back in town and I bet she would be more than happy to conduct the interview. That way you could meet at CatCo rather than have to stand up in front of a crowd, which from a security standpoint, I’d prefer you not do right now. If that’s amenable to you both?”

Lena shrugged. “Sounds good to me.” She had never met Cat Grant, but of course, her reputation as a master of spin preceded her. Besides, Kara loved her, so she couldn’t be all that bad.
“I don’t know,” Kara said, frowning. “You know she suspects I’m Supergirl, right?”

“I thought we handled that.”

“Possibly. But she’s Cat Grant. She’s going to figure it out.”

“She’s also your friend, isn’t she?” Alex asked.

“I think so.” Kara’s head tilted. “More like a mentor? But yeah, I think we’re friends now that I’m not her assistant.”

“Excellent. We’ll aim for tomorrow afternoon then. Gotta strike while the iron is hot. In the meantime, Kar, J’onn and I both think you need a little R&R. You could probably use some yourself, Lena.”

“Oh, no,” Lena said immediately, “I’ve already spent enough time away from L Corp. The board may have voted me out by now, for all I know.”

The thought of returning to the office after being AWOL for even one business day was daunting, but the idea of staying away any longer was far worse. Lillian and Lex’s breakout and subsequent kidnapping escapades couldn’t be good for L Corp’s stocks. She hadn’t bothered to check all day, though—some things were simply more important than share prices.

Actually, now that she thought about it, a lot of things were.

“I thought you might say that, so I had Maggie stop by Kara’s apartment on her way here earlier.” Alex reached into her messenger bag and pulled out a small box that Lena immediately recognized: the interdimensional extrapolator.

Kara gasped a little, and then she threw her arms around her sister. “I love you!”

“I had her pack some clothes for you both, too.” Alex glanced at Lena. “I hope you like flannel.”

“She does,” Kara said. “What do you say, Lena? Want to ditch this dimension?”

She smiled at the thought of time away with Kara where Cadmus couldn’t touch them. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Kara planted a kiss on her sister’s cheek. “We’ll see you soon. Like really soon because to you it’ll be like we never left.”

“Good. I think I could handle you never leaving again.” Even though she’d clearly meant it as a joke, it came out more wistful than amused.

“So could I,” Lena said, and then Kara was pulling her and Alex both in for a fast, hard hug.

She’d lost count of how many group hugs she had endured since entering the DEO that morning, but she didn’t mind. She would take the spontaneous joy ebbing and flowing within the cold, concrete halls of the government building because she felt that same sharp bite of happiness herself. Kara was back, and for that, Lena would tolerate a thousand group hugs if necessary.

Really, though, she hoped it wouldn’t be.

* * *

Three hours later they were seated on “their” seats in one of the hot tubs at Oliver Queen’s house,
looking out over the lake. Lena was as close to Kara as she could get without sitting in her lap. Not that she wouldn’t have, but Kara was still moving gingerly. Lena had asked her if she was in pain, but Kara had insisted it was nothing.

“Just Kryptonite hangover,” she’d said, wincing as she stepped naked into the hot tub. “A soak and a good night’s sleep and I’ll be back to normal.”

Lena could count on one hand the number of times she’d seen Kara in pain. Because it was such a rare occurrence, each time felt strangely alarming. Kara was Supergirl. She wasn’t supposed to get hurt.

The swirling jets seemed to have helped, though, because for the first time since she’d regained consciousness, Kara’s face had lost its tight, pinched quality. She finally looked relaxed.

“So,” Lena said softly, “do you want to tell me about it?”

And that was obviously the wrong thing to say because Kara’s shoulders immediately hunched, the crease returning to her brow. “I don’t think so. Not yet.” She hesitated. “Is that okay?”

Lena swallowed down her disappointment. This wasn’t about her. “Of course, sweetheart,” she said, and ran her hand over Kara’s damp ponytail. “Hey, did I tell you that I finally asked Felicity the name of the lake?”

S.T.A.R. Labs Maps—the equivalent of Google Maps in this dimension—showed the lake as a small, unnamed blip. Their last time here, they had amused themselves by proposing different names each morning over coffee.

Kara blinked at her. “No.”

“Crooked Lake.”

“As in, shady criminals?”

“I prefer to think of it as not straight.”

Kara smiled, but it wasn’t the adorable grin Lena was used to.

She waited a few minutes and then tried again. “I know you said you don’t want to talk about it, but is there anything I can do to help?”

“You are helping.” She closed her eyes and lifted her face to the porch roof, face half lit, half in shadows.

She was so beautiful, and so proud—too proud to ask for help. Or maybe she just didn’t know how. Lena knew that that was one of the things Lex hated about Clark: his stubborn insistence on doing everything on his own. Kara was like that too, to some extent, but she’d also grown up female in an American family that had encouraged her to hide her strength, her power, her spirit from the moment she arrived. Middle school was hard enough for Earth natives. What must it have been like for a girl from outer space?

“I love you, Kara,” she murmured, resting her chin on Kara’s shoulder and inhaling her scent. They had showered before coming out to the bath house, but even under the soap and shampoo and toothpaste, she could smell that unique Kara (Krypton?) scent. The real thing was so much better than a faded sweatshirt.
Kara turned her head and pressed her lips against Lena’s forehead. “I love you, too. I’m sorry I’m off.”

“You don’t have to be sorry. I just wish there was something I could do for you.”

“Well, maybe there is something…”

Kara tugged her gently through the water, hands pressing against Lena’s limbs until she got the gist of what Kara was requesting. Soon she was kneeling on the stone bench, legs on either side of Kara’s lithe body, arms twined around her neck.

“Are you sure this is okay?” Lena asked, peering down at her worriedly.

She nodded, gazing up at her with wide, serious eyes. “Please. Unless you don’t want—”

Lena caught the words in her mouth as she kissed Kara. She wanted. She wanted so much that she could feel her hands shaking as she pulled Kara impossibly closer; she wanted so much she didn’t even notice the cold of the winter night against her skin.

Kara kissed her back just as desperately, and then her hands were on Lena’s breasts, belly, between her legs. Lena arched her head back and closed her eyes against the sight of the black sky littered with stars. She didn’t want to think about space, didn’t want to think about how close she’d come to losing this woman from another planet, this person who had slid so easily into her life, so deeply that Lena wasn’t sure how she’d ever lived without her. The Before Kara era was gray and dull in her memory; After Kara was vibrant, colorful, and painful too—but in a good way, like the way your elbow tingles right after you smack it on something sharp. You know the tingling will be gone soon, and it’s not even pain, really, as much as it is a reminder that you could be hurting.

Because there was always someone hurting somewhere. It was simply a fact of life.

*             *             *

In the middle of the night, Lena awoke to a cold bed. A familiar crackling sounded not far away, and she blinked sleepily, reaching for her robe. In the great room, she found Kara in her sleep tee and shorts huddled on the floor in front of the stone fireplace. She was staring intently into orange and red flames and didn’t look up as Lena approached.

“Hey,” Lena said, yawning as she pulled a scrunchie from her wrist and secured her hair.

Startled, Kara looked up at her, eyes wide for a moment with an emotion Lena didn’t entirely recognize but that, she thought, was probably fear. And she felt it again, the unspeakable, violent rage towards her would-be mother. Or rather, her wouldn’t-be mother.

“I’m sorry,” Lena said, even though the words felt impotent. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“You didn’t.” Kara looked back at the fire and pillowed her chin on her upturned knees.

Lena didn’t bother pointing out the lie. She merely sat down behind Kara and wrapped her arms and legs around her. “Couldn’t sleep?” she murmured into Kara’s hair, which smelled of chlorine and wood smoke.

“No. I think I’m out of the habit.” Kara held herself rigid, but then as Lena nosed into the soft skin of her neck, she sighed and melted into her. “They didn’t let me.”

This last bit was offered so matter-of-factly that Lena almost missed it. “What?”
“They kept me restrained on a gurney in this tiny room, and every time I started to doze off, a hose would come on and spray me with water. Like, ice-cold water. Normally I’m not affected by things like that, but Kryptonite weakens my…” She trailed off. “But you already know that. As you said once, you’re Lex’s sister.”

Lena swallowed against the rage percolating inside of her, forcing her arms not to tighten around Kara. Not that it would hurt her. There was no Kryptonite anywhere in this dimension because Krypton had never exploded here. Had Kara’s people discovered the problem with the planet’s core in time to stave off destruction? Or was the change more significant than that? Perhaps a comet had nudged an asteroid into Krypton’s path multiple millennia before, and Kryptonian humanoids, like the dinosaurs on Earth, had failed to survive the impact winter.

“I’m sorry,” Kara added, her voice small. “I didn’t mean—”

“No!” The word burst out of Lena, and she felt Kara flinch slightly. “No,” she added, tempering her tone, “don’t apologize. I’m the one who’s sorry. Sorry that my family is so bloody heinous, that your cousin and my brother hate each other so much, that my mother…” She stopped and breathed out, trying to relinquish the anger and powerlessness washing over her in dark waves. “I’m sorry, Kara.”

“It’s not your fault.”

Lena kissed her neck and waited, giving her the room to speak if she wanted to. Or not. Either way, it was her choice.

“In fact,” Kara added after a minute, turning her head so that her cheek brushed Lena’s lips, “you were what kept me going. They had this device—Klon Rae called it the memory modifier—and it was awful. It seizing on every fear I’d ever had and just…” She stopped and shivered, and Lena simply held on, lips pressing gently against Kara’s skin. “Anyway, I fought it off by calling up real memories of you. You smiling at me, the two of us flying together, just—happy thoughts. You helped get me through even if you didn’t realize it.”

_The memory modifier_—where had Lena heard that term before? Then she remembered: Lex’s files had contained notes on such a device. Apparently he had managed to produce a working prototype before landing himself in prison.

“I’m glad I could help,” she made herself say, even though she felt sick at the idea that her brother—the sensitive, empathetic boy who had become a haunted, twisted man—had created machines meant to bring the otherwise invincible to their knees.

“How to defeat gods like Superman?” he had written in one of his note files. “Mind control. That is the only true weapon humans have against the all-powerful aliens who flock to our world seeking their fortune at the expense of ours.”

Robots and mind control, the stuff of little boy fantasies. Except Lex’s fantasies had crossed into reality, and the woman leaning back into her, made of other-worldly flesh and blessed with a character Lena sometimes thought was too good, too pure for the vagaries of humankind, had fallen victim to his violent scheming.

For a moment, she remembered how Kara had admitted to fantasizing about killing Lex. Now that he had done more than talk about hurting the Supers, now that his anti-alien tech had actually been employed against Kara—by their mother, no less—Lena thought she might consider walking back her own position on the topic.

“Lena,” Kara whispered, her eyelashes dark, damp smudges against her silky skin.
“I’m here, love,” she whispered back, throat tightening as she felt Kara’s shoulders begin to shake. And then Kara was turning into her, pressing her face against her chest, hands scrabbling at her back. She was crying great rending sobs like the night Lena told her she loved her, and Lena felt just as useless as she had the last time Kara had dissolved into tears in this very room. She couldn’t fix this. She couldn’t research and design and tinker, all things she was good at, to solve this problem. Her mother and brother were still out there, and nothing Lena did could protect Kara because the insignia she wore on her chest made her an automatic target. Lena could no more stop humans—or other aliens, for that matter—from harming Supergirl than Kara had been able to stop Krypton from imploding.

After a while Kara calmed down again, and soon she was pulling back to smile wryly at Lena, eyes swollen and skin blotchy just like a human’s. “Apparently there’s something about this room that makes me cry.”

“Maybe there’s a smell that triggers the neuronal area of your brain.”

Kara’s smile was more genuine this time. “You’re such a nerd.”

“Yes, but I’m your nerd,” Lena said, sliding her palm across Kara’s still-damp cheek.

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

Humming a little, Kara encircled Lena with her arms and floated them toward the couch. “Is it okay if we stay out here by the fire?”

“Of course,” Lena said, her eyelids growing heavy again. “Whatever you need.”

“Sleep tight, my little dumpling,” she heard Kara murmur as the couch cradled them in the fire-warmed room.

“Love you, Kar.”

“I love you too.”

*   *   *

You know the kind of dream that seems so real that even after you blink awake in the dark or light, the sights and sounds of the waking world filtering into your dozy brain, you’re not sure if the dream’s events were real or not? Then you realize that whatever calamity befell you or your loved ones or the world didn’t actually occur, and you breathe again, relieved.

There on Oliver Queen’s couch, with Kara wrapped around her like a Kryptonian koala, Lena had one of those technicolor dreams that follow real-life logic and rules. In a startlingly realistic scene, Lillian died in a hail of gunfire sprayed by a DEO agent’s gun. But when Lena woke up in the early morning, the winter world only just beginning to lighten beyond the window, she felt not relief that her mother was still alive but disappointment that her dream self hadn’t managed to save the world. Or, at least, Kara.

*   *   *

When she awoke again, the world beyond the picture windows was all sparkling snow and sun-streaked blue sky. It was blinding, that was what it was. Lena closed her eyes again, longing for her sunglasses.
She sat up on the couch, looking around. Where was Kara?

In the kitchen there was coffee percolating, so she relaxed a little. Kara was somewhere nearby, and Cadmus couldn’t follow them here. They were safe, she reminded herself yet again.

She was leaning against the counter inhaling the aroma of coffee from her mug when Kara blew in the front door. Her cheeks were rosy instead of splotchy, and her eyes were clearer than the day before.

“Hi,” she said, and darted forward to kiss Lena.

“Good morning.” She touched Kara’s cheek. Her skin was icy cold, which explained the rosiness.

“Were you flying?”

Kara nodded and opened the refrigerator, bending slightly to survey its well-stocked contents. “I forgot how peaceful the world is when it snows.”

“Someday I’ll take you on a ski trip.”

“Um, I’m not much of a skier.”

Lena grinned into her coffee cup. “Don’t tell me—another bicycle disaster story?”

“Sort of?” Kara smiled endearingly over her shoulder. “But I can sit by the fire and read while you ski.”

“Or you could just levitate beside me down the mountain…”

Kara laughed and turned back to the fridge. “Oh my god, Alex would kill me.”

“What Alex doesn’t know can’t hurt her, you know.” Lena took advantage of the view, eyes skimming over Kara’s jeans-clad figure. Her pants disappeared into boots Lena knew she’d borrowed from the front closet, and a North Face jacket hung off her shoulders.

“Are you looking at my butt?” Kara asked.

“No. Maybe. It’s such a lovely butt.”

“Right back at you,” she said, and winked.

Kara was hungrier than the previous day, too, Lena was pleased to note. They fell into an easy rhythm, making pancakes and eggs and eating at the butcher block island like it hadn’t been two months since their last sojourn on Earth-1.

“This is nice,” Kara kept saying, blueberries staining her lips.

And it was.

After cleaning up their breakfast dishes, they adjourned to the great room to practice yoga and Min-Nal on adjourning exercise mats. When they were all practiced out, Kara announced that it was time to go outside.

“It is, is it?” Lena asked, eyebrow lifting.

“Eliza says fresh air is a cure-all, in her scientist’s opinion, so I thought I should give it a whirl.”
Lena laughed as she opened the front closet, surveying the outdoor clothing options. “Surprisingly, Lillian comes from the opposite school of thought.” She made the comment thoughtlessly, as if Cadmus didn’t exist and her mother hadn’t just spent the weekend torturing Kara and god knew how many other off-worlders.

“Right.” Kara’s voice was tight, her eyes downcast.

“Kara, I’m sorry,” Lena said quickly, reaching for her hand.

“It’s okay. I’ll meet you outside.” And she slipped away, closing the door behind her gently in a gesture that took Lena back a few months to the day she’d realized Kara Danvers and Supergirl were one and the same.

So much had happened since then, and yet here Lena was, still pushing her away, still hurting her inadvertently.

God-damned Lillian.

* * *

Over the next few days, Eliza’s cure seemed to take effect. They walked around the lake every morning after breakfast and yoga/Min-Nal, spent lazy hours in the sauna and hot tubs, and Kara began to seem less cagey, more relaxed. The shadows in her eyes started to fade in earnest, and she opened up more and more about her time with Cadmus. Gradually a picture emerged of her captivity, multiple pictures in fact that Lena wanted to close her eyes against. She was tempted to stick her fingers in her ears and hum so she wouldn’t have to hear details, but it was her mother who’d done the torturing, after all; the least she could do was listen.

When they weren’t outside, they went back to their old Earth-1 habits: chess, Monopoly, video games, and cooking/eating, of course. There was more napping than their last visit, but this time the sex alternated between desperate, shuddering encounters like their first night in the hot tub and slow, quiet ones in the comfortable king bed. Occasionally Lena would open her eyes and find Kara staring at her as if trying to memorize the moment, recording the sight and sound of their intimacy for future reference.

Lena herself had never cried during sex before. In fact, she’d always secretly looked down on people who wept over an orgasm. But then on their third night at the house, Kara had her way with her three times in a row, not allowing her to fully come down, and Lena found herself crying softly. She pulled Kara up and kissed her, and she thought they probably both knew that it wasn’t sex making her cry. Kara’s ministrations had merely lowered her walls, knocked down the imaginary boundaries she tended so carefully, and Lena couldn’t help thinking all the what ifs she’d managed to keep at bay until that moment: What if Klon Rae hadn’t managed to get free? What if Kara had simply vanished and she’d never seen her again?

“It’s okay,” Kara whispered, holding Lena’s face between her hands and peppering her cheeks with kisses. “I’m here.”

Which only made Lena cry harder because if things had gone even a little bit differently, she wouldn’t be anywhere at all. She would be dead, and Lena would have to decide which path to tread: the path of light and love, in Kara’s honor, or the path of revenge and murder, in honor of her family name.

* * *
Lena knew Kara was feeling better when she woke up one morning to find her bouncing on the bed and serenading her: “Do you want to build a snowman? Come on let’s go and play!”

She tried to pull the pillow over her face, but Kara whipped it away in a blur of super speed, narrowly missing a bedside lamp. “Whoops. Leeeena,” she added, wheedling her name and bouncing some more.

And even though Kara was under strict orders not to speak to her before coffee, Lena thought she could make an exception, just this once.

The snowman, of course, was fabulous.

*             *             *

Lena let Kara guide the pace of their serious discussions, trying to give her space. It took a few days, but Kara eventually told her about her interaction with Jeremiah.

“Are you going to tell Alex?” Lena asked when she'd finished.

They were seated on the couch in front of the fire, and Kara was demolishing the “Congratulations on Not Dying at the Hands of a Supervillain!” cake Barry had brought by earlier. He’d stayed to eat dinner with them before zooming away again, and that had been an experience. Cooking for superheroes was like preparing institutional food—you thought you should have plenty, but then they started eating and you realized there was no way you’d made enough.

Kara nodded and swallowed an obscene bite, frosting smearing around her mouth. “At some point. I'm just not sure how to tell her that he’s basically joined Cadmus.” She wiped her lips. “Oh my god.”

“What?” Lena paused mid-sip of her after-dinner coffee. “What’s wrong?”

“Klon Rae’s Klaramarian, and Klaramarians don’t have facial features.”

“I know.” Alex had mentioned that fact before Kara woke up, preparing her for their eventual introduction. She was looking forward to meeting Klon Rae. After all, the child had saved Kara and in doing so had apparently become her “sidekick.” Did child labor laws apply to clandestine governmental black ops groups? Lena wouldn’t put it past the DEO to try to recruit the girl.

“Does that mean she’s never had cake? Or ice cream?” Kara was staring at her plate now, clearly horrified.

Lena huffed. She’d thought Kara remembered something from her captivity, but instead she’d merely had a food-related epiphany. Typical.

“At least Jeremiah helped you,” she said, trying to bring the conversation back on topic. “Klon Rae’s father, too. That’s more than can be said for my parent’s involvement.”

Kara finally looked away from her cake. “Um,” she said, sucking frosting from a fingertip. “I sort of have to tell you something.”

“Okay.” Lena swallowed. “Does it have to do with Lex?”

“No. Actually, I didn’t see him at all. Klon Rae said it seemed like he and Lillian had been arguing, but she couldn’t be sure.”
“Mind reading is a really useful skill when you’re being held captive, isn’t it?”

“You have no idea. Anyway, about your mother…”

“What about her?”

“I’m pretty sure she knows about us and, well, she might be a little bit mad about it.” Kara squinted at her in an expression that was pure Alex Danvers, except with more anxiety. “In fact, I’m pretty sure part of the reason she kidnapped me was to try to break us up.”

“I had garnered that, Kara,” Lena said, smiling affectionately at her girlfriend.

“Oh. Okay! Good.”

“I have to admit, I’m a little relieved. I thought you were going to say she tried to convince you I was working with Cadmus.”

Kara looked away and then immediately back at her, blinking rapidly in the tell Alex had told Lena to watch for one Game Night when the boys insisted no one who was dating could be on the same team. Alex and Lena had immediately gravitated to each other, and had proceeded to win every game except Pictionary, which they lost in spectacular fashion.

“She did, didn’t she,” Lena said slowly. “Did you believe her?”

“Of course not.” Kara looked offended. “She showed me a tape of you supposedly threatening me, so I called her bluff. I told her that unless you walked in and announced that you were part of Cadmus in person, I wasn’t about to believe a word she said.”

Lena sighed. That must have gone over well. “Let me guess. She responded with more torture.”

Kara’s face scrunched up. “I’m a little hazy on the timing, to be perfectly honest. Anyway, I wouldn’t say torture exactly. It was more like experimenting on me with anti-alien weapons.”

“That doesn’t make it sound any better, Kara!” Lena stood up and began pacing. “I’m so sorry. If I could get unadopted I would. Wait.” She stopped suddenly and snapped her fingers. “That’s it! I could talk to an attorney about severing legal ties!”

Why hadn’t she thought of that before? Minors could become emancipated, couldn’t they? Surely there must be a similar option for adults.

Kara stood up and approached her. “Lee, calm down. It’s not your fault your mom is a supervillain.”

Lena closed her eyes. “She’s the supervillain on the cake, isn’t she?”

“I think so. Sorry. I tried to smack Barry when I saw it, but he always moves faster than I expect.” Kara pulled her back to the couch and wrapped her arms around her. “I know it’s hard having Lillian as a mother, but it’s not like you’re the only one with a problematic parent.”

Lena burrowed her chin into the curve of Kara’s elbow, angling their bodies closer. “I know your dad created Medusa, Kara, but he was trying to defend your people against invaders like the Dominators. That’s hardly the same thing.”

“Okay. But my mom was this judicial tyrant who imprisoned the only people trying to save Krypton, and Jeremiah works for your mom. Oh! And don’t forget that Winn’s father is a mass murderer, Maggie’s dad is a born-again homophobe, and Mon-El’s parents owned slaves. Really, if you think
about it, James is the only member of the Super Friends who doesn’t have a villainous parent in the mix.”

Lena smiled into Kara’s shirt sleeve, a well-worn blue and white baseball tee that was one of Lena’s favorites. Given that Maggie had packed for them, Lena’s ridiculous gayness for her girlfriend in this shirt was apparently obvious to others, which wasn’t a thrilling realization. But having Kara’s strong arms encircling her, her scent wafting from the soft cotton, was just what Lena needed.

“Still, I can’t believe she used a child,” she said. “Then again, I suppose she was willing to sacrifice me, so…”

“Alex says groups like Cadmus try to enlist assistance first with bribes, but if that doesn’t work and they need someone, extortion is an easy second. And who better to take than a loved one?”

Her arms tightened incrementally, and Lena nestled closer. Cadmus had gone to such lengths to get hold of Kara. Was it just part of the Luthors’ hatred of Supers? She supposed that was motivation enough. But still, she couldn’t help but wonder if Kara’s kidnapping was retribution for her refusal to give in to her family’s demands that she end their relationship.

Should she tell Kara about the harassing messages from her brother? Probably. But Lex could wait. Right now they were a world away, literally, and Lena wanted to enjoy their closeness while she could. She wanted to stay in this moment, safe and loved.

Was it still called emigrating if you moved from one dimension to another? If not, it definitely should be, she thought, closing her eyes and rubbing her chin against Kara’s shirt sleeve.

“Let’s just stay here forever,” she murmured.

“Sounds good to me.”

But they wouldn’t, she knew. They had to go back at some point. There were things to do, political opportunities to take advantage of, irons to strike while hot. And fresh. Although, could irons be fresh? What was striking irons an actual reference to, anyway? Too bad they didn’t have Google Assistant in this dimension.

Actually, maybe it was just as well. She could “invent” the underlying tech and patent it here on Earth-1, and then they wouldn’t need Oliver Queen’s lake house or a credit card from S.T.A.R. Labs. They could come back for months at a time, if they wanted; travel to the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone and Zion and Redwoods National Parks. Especially Redwoods. She had seen photos, and she couldn’t wait to one day walk among the towering giants, some of which had been alive for nearly the entire last millennium.

Someday they would see those trees, Lena thought. And Kara would lift them up to the very top so that they could see the view of the Californian sea and countryside from above, just like the ancient giants themselves.

We’ll go, Lena told herself fiercely. We will.

Right. Just as soon as they finished saving their own world.
“Well, well, if it isn’t Kara Danvers,” Cat Grant said from behind her desk, TV screens transmitting a complicated digital signal behind her. “I was beginning to wonder if you still worked here.”

She’d said her name right. *Wait.* Cat Grant had said her name right?

“You said my name right!” she blurted as she stopped a few feet away.

“Kara Danvers—that is the name on your byline, isn’t it? I must say, you’re looking well.”

“Thanks! You look great, too. I’m so glad to see you, Miss Grant.” She meant it, too. The problems they were facing somehow seemed less overwhelming with Cat back at the helm of CatCo, ready to work her unique brand of magic on shifting public opinion. After all, Cat had helped defeat Myriad. Surely Cadmus would seem almost trifling in comparison.

Cat walked around her desk and gave Kara a brief hug, surprising her again. Then she stepped back, arms folded across her chest. “With the Luthor family on the loose again, it seemed like the right time to return. No matter how much the Dalai Lama begged me to stay, I simply couldn’t pursue my own enlightenment at the cost of National City’s destruction.”

Her eyes were as observant as ever, her tongue just as sharp, and yet, there was something different about the media mogul. Or maybe it was Kara who had changed since they’d last seen each other. After spending so much time with Lena, another strong woman who used dark humor to deflect, Kara felt she better understood Cat Grant.

“Come on, Miss Grant, admit it—you came back because you missed the coffee at Noonan’s. That, and your feather mattress.”

Cat’s eyebrows rose. “I think I like confident reporter you far better than meek assistant you.”

“So do I, to be honest.”

Cat laughed, a genuine sound Kara had only ever heard when the CEO was with her youngest son. Speaking of...

“How’s Carter?”

“Relieved to be home.” Cat waved her toward the couch. “He only missed a few months of school, and of course I hired a tutor to travel with us, but he struggled with the lack of what he deems ‘the essentials’ in remote India. Quite vociferously, in fact.”

As she took a seat beside Cat, Kara pictured the young, self-proclaimed nerd trying to make do with dial-up or, potentially, no access to the Internet whatsoever. “I’m sure it was good for him.”

“He might agree with you a few years down the road.” She paused, gaze once again narrowing on
Kara. “So. I hear your career isn’t the only significant change in your life.”

Kara frowned. Cat had only been back in town for a few days; was she already crossing into secret identity territory? “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Of course you do: Lena Luthor. I hear the two of you have gotten super close.”

Kara was careful not to react to her former boss’s—current boss’sboss’s?—word choice. “Oh, right, that! Yes, we’ve been dating for a few months now.” She squashed the urge to wax romantically about her girlfriend. Cat wasn’t the right audience, for so many reasons.

For example: “I suppose that explains why things didn’t work out between you and my son. What was Adam to you, an experiment?”

“No! That’s not it at all, Miss Grant. People aren’t only—I’m not only—that is…”

Cat held up a hand. “Relax, Kara. I’m only teasing you. I do have some experience of my own with Sapphic encounters. College in the eighties wasn’t nearly as goody-goody as you might think.”

Kara briefly considered stepping off the CatCo balcony and faking her own death—anything to get out of discussing “Sapphic encounters” with Cat Grant. Cat, however, seemed oblivious to her discomfort. That, or simply indifferent. Probably the latter.

“While I doubt that’s what Snapper had in mind when he sent you to interview Lena last fall, he says you handled the situation quite professionally. I myself once pursued a liaison with an interview subject, but of course that was back when Brad was single. Come to think of it, he’s single again, isn’t he? Anyway, I haven’t met the youngest Luthor, but now that I’m back in National City I’m sure it won’t be long.”

“Actually,” Kara said, pushing up her glasses, “that’s one of the reasons I’m here. Supergirl and Miss—Lena would like to issue a joint statement to the press, and are wondering if you might want to conduct the interview.”

Cat’s intake of breath was so quiet that a human couldn’t have heard it. “What news could Lena Luthor and Supergirl possibly have to share with the world?”

“A message of hope.” Kara lifted her chin at Cat’s raised eyebrow. What the heck was it with powerful women and their ability to deploy eyebrows as tools of distraction and intimidation?

“I see,” Cat said. “Trying to bridge the gap, so to speak?”

“Exactly.”

“In that case, I’m happy to help. When would this interview take place?”

“As soon as possible?” She heard the question in her own voice and tried again: “Supergirl and Lena have time this afternoon. If that would work for you?”

“Don’t mind me. I’m just trying to catch up after being away for months.” She shook her head. “This afternoon it is. On one condition.”

Kara didn’t trust the smirk on Cat’s face. “What condition is that?”

“You attend the interview, too.”

But… Kara couldn’t think of an excuse quickly enough, and Cat was watching her like the
proverbial feline with a canary. “Fine.”

“Fine,” Cat repeated.

The interview was on—the one where Lena, Supergirl, and Kara would all be in attendance.

Crap. J’onn was going to kill her.

They settled on a time, and then Eve, the assistant who had replaced Kara, appeared in the doorway clutching a stack of messages.

As Kara left the office, she heard Cat order, “Find me Brad Pitt’s publicist’s number. And for God’s sake, remove these lilies at once. If I wanted my office to smell this sweet, I’d fill my office bar with liqueur.”

Kara laughed under her breath. Good to know that some people never changed.

* * *

Later, though Kara couldn’t remember everything that had been said, she was pretty sure the interview went well. J’onn did a perfectly serviceable rendition of reporter-her, ably replicating her nervous mannerisms and occasionally archaic use of English. He also obeyed her very strict instructions to not so much as touch Lena, which was good. After the incident with Sara Lance on the Waverider, Kara was fairly certain she was in fact the jealous type. The last thing they needed was for her to fire laser beams at J’onn; then they really might have to fake her alter ego’s death.

Cat would likely be delighted by such a turn of events, no doubt, but Kara would rather not confirm her Supergirl suspicions anytime soon. For one thing, Cat was a media powerhouse who might be tempted to reveal Supergirl’s identity for the sake of ratings and professional acclaim. For another, Kara couldn’t stand the idea of having to listen to her smug claims of “I knew it!”

The only iffy moment came at the end of the interview when Cat suggested she and Lena go out for dinner sometime. Off the record, of course.

“I’d like that,” Lena had returned, smile cool but welcoming.

“Kara,” Cat had added, “do you know if my favorite Italian restaurant is still reservation-only?”

“I don’t know,” fake Kara had answered, reaching for her phone. “I’ll check.”

Before she could panic and ruin the ruse with nervous babbling, Kara felt a gentle touch on her mind.

“Kara. What is the restaurant called?”

Beneventi, she thought back.

“Ah,” fake Kara said, glancing up with a bright smile. “Beneventi’s is indeed still reservation only. Would you like—”

Eve! Eve is her assistant! real Kara had shout-thought.

“—me to share this information with Eve?”

Cat had eyed J’onn with narrowed eyes. “No, that’s all right. I’ll do it. You don’t mind if I take your lovely girlfriend out to dinner, do you?”

“No,” J’onn replied, smile faltering momentarily. “Of course not.”
“What was that, by the way?” Kara asked as she and J’onn flew back to the DEO after the interview.

“What was what?”

“You did this weird smile thing when Cat asked if I minded Lena going out to dinner with her.”

“Nothing. She just thought something a little—colorful. I think she was testing my telepathic skills.”

“What?!” Kara lost a few feet of altitude before recovering. “Oh my god, she knows I’m Supergirl, doesn’t she?”

“No. She thinks you’re Supergirl, and telepathy was the only way she could explain how I would know about the restaurant, but she doesn’t have any evidence. Your secret is as safe as it was before the meeting.”

For now, anyway. Knowing Cat, she wouldn’t rest until she unearthed the evidence she sought.

Kara left J’onn over downtown and veered toward an eastern suburb of National City. She found the neighborhood she was looking for easily enough, but she had to check her phone a second time for the right address. Google Maps navigation didn’t work from the air, and all of the houses in the planned community below her looked alike from a distance.

Super vision helped, though. Finally she found the intersection she was looking for and touched down in the front yard of a small house.

“Supergirl!” Klon Rae leapt off the porch, where she’d clearly been waiting for Kara. She was cloaked in her human form, with bright red hair pulled up into braids and overalls. With her freckles and wide grin, she reminded Kara of Pippi Longstocking.

“I know, right? Isn’t Pippi the coolest? I love her so much!” Then she stopped a few feet away, hands to her ears in a Klaramarian gesture of dismay. “I’m sorry. I mean, may I converse with you in this way at this time?”

“Yes, you may,” Kara said aloud, laughing. As she approached the child who had saved her life, she felt her eyes begin to prickle with tears. “May I hug you?”

“Yes!”

But she didn’t get a chance. Moving faster than Kara would have thought possible, Klon Rae launched herself into her arms. Kara staggered under her weight before squeezing her tentatively. Klon Rae was more solid than a human, that was for sure.

“You can hug me harder than that,” Klon Rae offered.

So she did.

Klon Rae was just as bubbly and brave in person as she had been at Cadmus’s mountain stronghold. She held Kara’s hand tightly as she led her inside and proudly introduced her to her entire family, who were waiting in the living room: “This is my friend, Supergirl. Supergirl, this is my family.”

She didn’t release her grip as her mother, also cloaked in human form, rushed forward and enfolded Kara in an even more crushing hug. “Thank you for my daughter’s safe return! I don’t know how we can ever repay you.”

And—huh. Her voice sounded like it was actually a voice, not a thought inside Kara’s head.
“That’s because it’s not in your head,” Klon Rae transmitted. “My mom is human.”

Kara stared at the girl quickly, and then heard what passed for a thought-giggle.

“Just kidding. Hah! You should have seen your face. I totally had you. But really, my parents can project their thoughts as speech using a transceiver from Klaramar. It’s pretty cool. I have one too. I just haven’t—”

“She hasn’t quite mastered the technique yet,” her father said, sending an admonishing look at his daughter as he stepped forward and clasped Kara’s free hand. “It’s good to see you looking well. The last time we met, I’m afraid that wasn’t the case.”

Kara nodded and squeezed his hand gently. “I am well, thanks to your daughter and you. I’m not sure where I would be otherwise.”

“I apologize,” he said, and hung his head in a very human gesture. “I’m truly ashamed of the part I played in your capture and detainment by those—humans.” His wife (presumably) elbowed him, and he straightened. “I’m sorry. We try not to speak ill of humans, as we are guests on their planet.”

“It’s okay,” Kara said. “In this case, I’m pretty sure the ill will is entirely deserved. And you don’t have to apologize. My capture wasn’t your fault. You were coerced.”

“That’s kind of you, but I should have resisted. Instead, all I cared about was my daughter’s safety.”

“You did resist in the end,” Kara pointed out. “Besides, most people in your position probably would have done the same thing.”

“She really believes that, Dad,” Klon Rae broadcast. “You can trust her.”

“Klon Rae,” her mother said, human scowl so realistic that even Kara flinched a little. “You know better than to repeat another’s thoughts without their permission, young lady!”

“Oh, yeah.” Suddenly Klon Rae looked almost as guilt-ridden as her dad. “Sorry, Supergirl. My bad.”

“No, it’s fine.” Honestly, Kara felt a little helpless. This whole situation was awkward even without the multiple modes of communication required, each with its own form of etiquette. “You know, I was already thirteen in Earth years when I arrived. My cousin helped me learn English, but the cultural cues and non-verbal stuff was really difficult for a long time. Sometimes it still is even now.”

Klon Rae gazed up at her. “It’s hard being different, isn’t it?”

“It is. But it’s also a blessing of sorts because it teaches you empathy. And for someone who isn’t telepathic, learning empathy can also be really difficult.”

“How did you end up on Earth?” one of Klon Rae’s siblings asked, eyes wide, and the conversation took a less intense turn—much to the relief of everyone present, Kara was pretty sure.

The visit lasted for another twenty minutes, and then her phone dinged. Lena, checking in to make sure she was okay and they were still on for dinner. Kara smiled a little as she sent back a thumbs-up.

“See, I told you that lady was lying about her,” Klon Rae thought, her tone smug.

“You did indeed,” Kara agreed as she rose from the couch. “Thank you all for your hospitality, but I must be getting back to the city.”
There were hand-shakes and hugs, and then, just as Kara was turning to leave, Klon Rae at her side, she heard the young alien whisper-think, “Klar Nee doesn’t believe that I’m your sidekick.”

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Kara added aloud. “When are you available to report for sidekick training? We’ve got a suit design for you to approve.”

Which was mostly true—Kara had asked Winn to design something in Supergirl colors with the symbol of an atom on the chest, but Winn claimed that Cisco had told him via some interdimensional chat app (which, was that really a thing?!) that Atom on Earth-1 already had that design “locked down.” Kara thought it was silly, but Winn insisted he couldn’t duplicate an existing superhero’s costume, even if it was on an alternate Earth.

The point was, the suit was definitely in the works.

“Are you serious?” Klon Rae shout-thought as she literally jumped up and down. “Oh my god, you are! I’m going to be a superhero!”

“In training,” Kara said, with a glance at her young friend’s parents. “With parental approval and at times that don’t interfere with your schooling, of course.”

Klon Rae’s mother nodded, her smile, Kara was relieved to note, genuine and even a little emotional.

“Thank you,” she said to Kara. “Really. Just, thank you.”

“I could say the same thing,” Kara pointed out, and hugged the red-haired woman again.

It took her another five minutes to extricate herself from the grasp of her Klaramarian sidekick, but eventually Kara found herself winging winglessly across the city toward Lena’s penthouse, where she found her girlfriend waiting for her on the balcony, a glass of wine in hand. Kara could see her from a long way out, of course, so she took advantage of the distance to X-ray the apartment quickly. Except for the music room and the refrigerator, both lined with lead, she didn’t see anything out of the ordinary. Still, from what Alex had told her, the apartment wasn’t the safe refuge they’d convinced themselves it was.

“Hi,” Lena said as she landed with a soft thud on the balcony.

All at once Kara remembered the first night she’d hovered near the railing, not long after she and Lena had kissed for the first time and Mon-El had nearly wrecked a city block in an alcohol-fueled meltdown. What had Lena said that night? You have to land sometime. November seemed so long ago. Had it really only been two and a half months since they’d started dating? Well, actually, no. More like three if you counted the Earth-1 jaunts. Even so, it didn’t seem like nearly enough time to contain all the events that had transpired.

“Hi,” she said softly, sweeping forward to enfold Lena in a careful hug. It was difficult to be away from her now for pretty much any length of time. And yes, she realized that sounded a bit obsessive, which was why she hadn’t actually said as much out loud.

Lena relaxed against her. “I’m glad you’re here. I was worried about you,” she admitted, nuzzling Kara’s neck.

“So was I,” she admitted back. “I mean, about you, of course.”

Lena laughed slightly. “Back for one day and we’re both already a mess.”

“Sounds about right.”
They were both quiet, and then: “What are we going to do?” Lena murmured, the amusement seeping from her voice.

Kara felt it too, the desperate fear that neither of them would ever be safe as long as Lillian, Lex, and Cadmus were in the world. But she didn’t want Lena to worry, so she kissed her cheek, pulled back, and smiled. “Personally, I was promised food, so…”

“Right,” Lena said. But her smile was more pensive than usual, and her eyes were still dark.

“Can we go out, though?” Kara asked.

Lena glanced over her shoulder at the apartment lit up against the already dark evening sky. “Definitely. Just let me get my bag.”

“What would you say about using your suit?”

“My flight suit?” The shadows receded slightly. “I’d say this date is sounding better by the moment.”

“That’s the plan,” Kara said, and kissed her before reluctantly letting her step away.

An hour later they were seated in a booth at her favorite college restaurant, waiting for their order of calzones and gnocchi. Their respective suits were stored in a bag beside Kara, and they were holding hands across the battered wooden tabletop while college kids and families with young children chattered away around them. Kara for one was more relaxed than she’d been all day, mainly because there wasn’t much chance Cadmus could track them here. She hadn’t had a credit card in college, so there was no data stored away somewhere that would tie her to this restaurant. Besides, a student haunt wasn’t exactly Lena Luthor’s style.

“This place reminds me of college,” Lena said, as if reading her mind.

“Me, too,” Kara quipped.

“Gee, I wonder why. Did you used to study here?”

“Sometimes. Mostly I came here with Alex, though, for weekly sister check-ins.”

“Weekly?”

Kara smiled a little. “Alex has always liked trying to make order from chaos.”

“Sounds like Sister Night has some pretty deep roots,” Lena said, sipping the house sangria without making a face. Impressive, given that even Kara could taste the cheapness of the wine base.

“Very deep. It actually started when we were in high school. I used to go up on the roof to look at the stars after everyone else was in bed, and one night Alex used a rope to follow me up there.”

“So she was a badass even at sixteen, scaling buildings in a single lasso toss?”

Kara nodded. “She’s always been a badass.”

“That I can believe.”

Kara pictured Alex’s face from that morning when she and Lena had showed up at the DEO before work. The relief that had flooded her sister’s system had been all too obvious before she hid it, and Kara had almost regretted not staying in a safe house the night before like Alex had wanted. But between Cadmus and Earth-1, she’d already been away from home for too long.
Now she shook her head and ran her fingertip over a pair of initials carved into the wooden tabletop. “Can we just, I don’t know, talk about something other than our families? Like, how was work? Any cool new tech that Winn will soon be drooling over after stealing the specs from one of your servers?”

“As if he could hack my R&D servers,” Lena scoffed. “But I’ll make you a deal: I won’t bring up our families if you don’t ask about work.”

“Did something happen?” Kara asked, her mind automatically going to drones armed with missiles and thugs armed with alien weapons…

“No yet. But my board insider informs me that a vote of no confidence is all but guaranteed at this point.”

Kara gaped at her. “They can’t do that, can they?”

“Of course they can. It’s like impeachment—I wouldn’t have to resign because of the vote, but the board could make my work life hell. More hellish than it currently is, that is.” She shook her head and ran her thumb across Kara’s hand. “But let’s not talk about that. Tell me about Klon Rae and her family. Did you get to meet them all?”

Kara genuinely wanted to hear more about the coup L Corp’s board was planning; she’d helped Cat dodge an attempted force-out once and hoped she might be able to do the same for Lena. But as she began to tell Lena about her “sidekick” and her family, she realized it was a relief to chat about the Klaramarians instead of worrying about Lena’s hostile board of directors.

Just like their trip to Earth-1, though, this break from real life could only ever be temporary. Eventually, after a sizable meal and a long, peaceful walk along the bay, Kara flew them back to National City.

“Your place or mine?” she asked as they approached the city limits.

“Yours.” Lena’s reply was immediate.

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

And yeah, Kara knew what she meant. It was hard to imagine wanting to sleep in the place where Cadmus agents had spied on them for weeks. Sleep made you incredibly vulnerable—even if there was a team of agents following you wherever you went, monitoring your slightest move.

Alex was waiting on the couch when they got home, a half-empty pint of cookie dough ice cream on her lap, the DVR paused on the latest Game of Thrones episode. Kara stopped as she took in the sight of her sister gazing steadily at her from the living room. She wasn’t prepared for this conversation tonight; then again, she would probably never be prepared for it. But maybe she was worrying needlessly. It was possible Alex only wanted to binge GoT and overdose on ice cream.

Kara set her keys on the kitchen island. “Traitor! I can’t believe you’re watching without me.”

“And I can’t believe you ditched your security detail tonight to go god knows where,” Alex replied, stabbing the ice cream with her spoon. “Hey Lena,” she added, tone warmer.

“Hey Alex,” Lena said, voice similarly tinged with what sounded to Kara like affection. She pointed toward the bathroom. “I’m going to take a quick shower, so she’s all yours.”
Alex saluted, and Kara knew immediately that her worry had been one hundred percent needed. *Dang it.*

Lena tried to slip past, but Kara caught her hand. “Don’t abandon me!” she whispered under the pretense of kissing her girlfriend.

“You’ll be fine. Just talk to her.” And with that, Lena sauntered off to the bathroom.

Was an emergency too much to ask right about now? Kara strained her ears, listening to the sounds of the city, but no sirens or cries for help presented themselves. Giving up, she dropped onto the couch beside Alex and reached for her spoon, earning a groan from both the couch and her sister.

“So,” Alex said, launching right into it.

Kara sucked a sweet spoonful of ice cream into her mouth and swallowed before handing the utensil back. “So.”

“You said you saw him. How was he?”

Kara could have lied by omission. She could have dodged the question, could have glossed over the conversation and focused on the part where her foster dad helped her escape Cadmus’s clutches—again—thereby keeping Alex’s hopes alive. But while Kara didn’t want to be the one to destroy her sister’s faith in her father, she fully believed that Alex deserved the truth. She had been there for Kara so many times over the years. It was time for Kara to return the favor.

“Alex,” she said softly, trying to think how to word what she needed to say.

Her sister’s shoulders dropped, and then she was setting the ice cream aside and pushing back into a corner of the couch, making herself a small ball of unblinking anxiety. “He’s with them, isn’t he?”

She wanted to soften the blow, but then she thought about what Alex would want. “Yes. He is.” She laid it all out—how he’d entered her biometrically secure cell, armed and unhurt; how he’d tried to convince her to cooperate; how he’d refused to believe that Cadmus would harm her.

“But why would he *do* that?” Alex’s voice reflected the hurt in her eyes. “He doesn’t hate aliens, I know he doesn’t. He and Mom took you in and gave you a home. He’s friends with Superman, for Christ’s sake! Or, I guess, he was.”

Kara blinked at the sudden heat behind her own eyes. “I know. I’m so sorry.”

“I’m the one who’s sorry.” Alex scooted closer, reaching for her hands. “I’m sorry we failed you. I’m sorry the people who were supposed to look out for you instead turn out to be helping the people who hate you the most. First me with the DEO and now Dad…”

“Stop, Alex,” Kara said. “This isn’t about me. Jeremiah is *your* father. You get to make this about you. I just hope you can hear me when I tell you I’m sorry he isn’t as strong as you are.”

After a moment, Alex nodded slowly. “Maggie and I have talked about it so many times, and the only thing I could figure—other than a literal personality change—is that he thinks he’s protecting the greater good. Do you think he could be a double agent?”

“It’s possible.” She shrugged, trying to ignore the flare of envy that rose in her at Alex’s words. “If you thought that, though, why didn’t you mention it to me?” She winced at the petulance in her own tone. Nailed it. *Not.*
“You always see the best in people, Kara, and I didn’t want to be the one to burst your bubble.”

Which was sweet, and also a tad condescending, and overall just so Alex.

For her sister’s sake, Kara wished now she’d thought to ask Klon Rae to read Jeremiah’s thoughts when the neural disruptor was off. Of course, the request probably hadn’t occurred to her because for one thing she’d been totally out of it by then, and for another, she hadn’t fully believed he would help.

So much for seeing the best in people.

“If he’s not a double agent,” Alex said, gazing down at their linked hands, “then the other possibility is that he thinks he’s protecting us.”

“That seems more likely.” Kara relayed the rest of their conversation as best she could remember. “He said I couldn’t understand because I don’t have a child; that he was sorry and we can’t all be heroes.” She paused. “He also asked me to tell you that he didn’t have a choice.”

Alex shook her head, a hint of steel in the clench of her jaw. “Bullshit. First the DEO and then Cadmus? Seems pretty obvious what he chose.”

“So, you think he really is protecting us?”

“A double agent can’t protect anyone,” Alex said. “If he really wants to protect us, he’d be on our side. Remember, the DEO offered him protection and he said no.”

“Right.” Kara sighed. “Well, let’s hope he’s a double agent then.”

“Us,” Alex said, voice soft again. “He chose us, Alex—you, Eliza, me—over all others. Would you do any differently in his shoes?”

Alex pulled one hand free and rubbed her eyes. “I don’t know. I’d like to think so.”

Kara had thought about Jeremiah every day at Oliver Queen’s house. She’d pondered this same question as she sat with Lena in the hot tub at night, snow falling softly in the bath house lights; as she tried to sleep beside Lena in the dark bedroom, a line of light visible under the bathroom door; as she cuddled with Lena on the couch in the great room, flames flickering in the stone fireplace. Would she have done things differently? Like Alex, she would like to think so. Ultimately, though, she couldn’t be sure. He was right when he said she didn’t know what it was like to have a child. Look at Klon Rae’s parents. Look at hers and Kal-El’s, even. When it mattered most, they had chosen their children over the lives of strangers every time. How could she say for certain she wouldn’t do the same?

“I’m sorry,” Kara said again, wishing she could undo the years of not knowing, the shock of realizing that he had allowed them to think he was dead all that time when, in fact, he was in bed with the devil. She knew a little about learning your parent wasn’t who you thought they were—or wanted them with all your heart to be—and would have spared Alex that pain if she could. “I didn’t want to be the one to burst your bubble, either.”

“Don’t worry, I can differentiate between the message and the messenger. Besides, he’s been with Cadmus for nearly ten years, Kara. If nothing else, they’ve had plenty of time to brainwash him.”

She nodded. Another day or two without food and sleep, and Cadmus might have turned her, too. Thank goodness for Klon Rae and her father, she thought for easily the thousandth time since her rescue.

“Thank you for telling me,” Alex added, squeezing her hands. “It couldn’t have been easy.”

“What are sisters for?”

At that, she felt Alex tugging gently and allowed herself to be pulled into her familiar embrace. Sighing, she snuggled closer, inhaling Alex’s scent mixed with what she now recognized as...
Maggie’s perfume. She wondered if she smelled like Lena. Probably. Even their body chemistry was shifting now as their lives became more and more entwined with those of the women they had grown to love.

“A year and a half ago, would you have thought this would be our lives?” Kara asked, running her fingertips over the seams of Alex’s sweater.

“Mine, yes, minus the hot girlfriend,” Alex said. “Yours, though, with the cape and the girlfriend and the reporter’s credentials? Not so much.”

They cuddled for a little while talking about their adolescent dreams of what life as an adult would be like, and then Kara couldn’t resist the melting ice cream any longer. Alex hit play on Netflix and soon it felt like just another sister night. Kara couldn’t believe how close she’d come to possibly never having another one of these ever again, and as she caught Alex sneaking looks at her out of the corner of her eye, she had a feeling Alex couldn’t quite believe it either.

Lena joined them a little while later, hair damp and skin flushed from the shower, and for a little while as Kara sat squished between the two most important people in her life, television screen flickering in the otherwise dark apartment, she felt safer and happier than she had ever imagined possible.

* * *

The video interview made even more of a splash than Kara had anticipated.

“Dudes,” Winn called when she and Lena made their way into the DEO before work a couple of mornings later, “you guys have been shared one point one million times already!”

“Um,” Kara said, frowning at his word choice while beside her Lena lifted one beautifully sculpted eyebrow, “don’t you mean the article has been shared one point one million times?”

“Wha…?” Winn’s eyes widened and he spun around in his seat, hunkering down and staring at his screen. “That’s what I said,” he harrumphed as everyone within hearing range cracked up.


“Says the man whose multiplayer name is WinnAtEverything,” Alex teased from where she stood leaning against the central console. “Seriously, Lena, great idea on the interview. We’ve seen another drop in anti-alien chatter in the twelve hours since the video went live. Nicely done, you two.”

“What can I say?” Kara said breezily. “You can’t fake chemistry like ours.”

Lena kissed her cheek before heading off to her server “dungeon” for a couple of hours of work on her brother’s files. They were thirty-seven percent unencrypted now, and with Lex still on the loose, J’onn and Alex had agreed, the files had become even more crucial to Kara and Clark’s safety.

The unintended consequences of the interview began appearing in Kara’s twitter feed later that day, dampening her enthusiasm. The first mention featured an outtake from the interview that showed Supergirl gazing soulfully at Lena—which she didn’t even remember doing—with Kara (J’onn) a blurry figure in the background. The caption read, “Look at it this way, @KaraDanvers: not many people can say they got dumped for #Supergirl. #KarLena #SuperCorp”

She immediately texted the link to Lena, who responded with a laughing emoji followed by a heart-eyes emoji.

“This isn’t funny,” Kara texted back.
“Sweetheart, you have no need to worry. My heart belongs to you, not SG.”

Within hours, though, the SuperCorp hashtag was trending, and Kara was fielding teasing remarks at her desk in the bullpen. She rushed through her edits on an emerging tech piece for Snapper and then literally flew out of CatCo, happy to escape her gossiping coworkers.

Lena “comforted” her that night, and the Twittersphere was soon otherwise engaged, but over the days that followed, Kara still fielded more mentions than she usually did. Besides the annoying tweets, though, life began to settle down. By the time they were a week out, the SuperCorp ship had lost steam, mostly due to Lena posting a rare Instagram photo of herself in a Stanford tee, her arms looped around Kara’s neck, their smiling faces close together, accompanied by the caption, “My own private Cardinal.” As per Alex’s request, Kara was mostly obscured, but you couldn’t miss her glasses and ponytail or the pink button-up “she” had worn during the Luthor/Super interview. Kara’s ego was soothed even though, as Alex and Winn pointed out, it wasn’t like she could cheat on herself with her own girlfriend. But whatever. The rest of the world didn’t know that.

In other news, Lex and Lillian had been spotted in Eastern Europe, though not apprehended. Kara and Clark wanted to go after them, but J’onn argued successfully that it might be a trap intended to lure out the Super cousins. M’gann volunteered to accompany him on the scouting trip, and while they returned two days later with no additional intel on the Luthors, the couple was noticeably closer.

Another week passed, and life was beginning to settle into a rhythm. With Cat back in charge of CatCo and, more importantly, of Supergirl’s image, the anti-alien protests outside the courthouse had puttered out completely. Editorials had begun to focus more on the negative impact to the economy of attacks by rogue anti-alien groups than on criminal acts by rogue aliens. Cat, citing Kara’s knack at drafting evocative personal profiles, assigned her a regular column focused on aliens who were making positive community impacts in National City and beyond.

On a personal note, Kara and Lena were finally finding a relationship rhythm, one that featured regular dates and sleepovers, double-dates with Maggie and Alex and Game Night with the boys, not to mention spontaneous trips to Paris and Rome, London and New York. Lena was still the head of a Fortune 500 company (at least for now), and her schedule was still packed with meetings, events, and conferences, many of which took place out of town. Kara, meanwhile, was still a superhero at the beck and call of the DEO and local authorities and, really, anyone—human or alien—who needed help. The Luthors were still out there somewhere and the anti-alien movement had merely gone underground for the time being. But still, Kara couldn’t help feeling that the tide was finally turning back in the direction of tolerance, back where she’d felt it going before the Alien Amnesty Act had passed, riling up both humans and off-worlders alike.

“I don’t know, you guys,” she said one Friday night nearly a month after Cat Grant’s return. “I kind of feel like maybe everything will be all right.”

She and Lena were sitting on one side of their usual booth at the alien bar, and Kara didn’t need superpowers to pick up on the immediate reaction among her human companions. Maggie knocked on the wooden tabletop, Alex leaned back, frowning, and even Lena knocked back a quick shot of tequila, sucking the lime with a wince.

“Cadmus is reorganizing as we speak,” Alex said. “We can’t afford to get complacent, Kara. You can’t afford to let your guard down, not even for a second.”

And of course Kara knew that. She still occasionally had nightmares that suspiciously resembled the false memories planted by the memory modifier, a long-term effect of the device she was sure Lillian would have loved to know about. But still… “Being optimistic isn’t the same as being complacent, Alex.”
Lena lifted Kara’s hand and kissed her fingers. “I wish I had your optimism, love. But as long as my mother and brother are out there, I’m afraid I agree with Alex. We can’t afford to relax, not until they’re apprehended.”

“Same,” Maggie said, and took a gulp of beer. “So. What do you two have planned for Valentine’s Day? This one here is determined to convince me that V-Day isn’t just another Hallmark Holiday.”

She looked fairly unconvinced, and Kara decided they should have a sisterly-ish chat, and soon. Valentine’s Day was only a week away, and Alex was thrilled to finally have someone to celebrate with. Maggie better not ruin it for her.

“No plans yet,” Lena said, gazing flirtatiously at Kara. “Although I don’t doubt it will be super.”

They all groaned—except Kara, who only pretended to find Lena’s humor in poor taste. In reality she loved when Lena said cheesy things because she knew that underneath the flirty smile, Lena meant every single word.

* * *

The lull lasted a total of five weeks. Five weeks of relative peace and prosperity returning to National City and L Corp; five weeks of learning to sleep through the night again; five weeks of focusing on good rather than bad. It wasn’t as if crime had suddenly just stopped, of course. There were criminals on the loose and aliens causing trouble as per usual, but the threats to National City were more on an individual basis rather than on a global scale.

When the lull ended—as, let’s be clear, it was always going to do—Kara didn’t know it at first. It was Valentine’s Day, and while Alex and Maggie were still at odds over the holiday, Kara and Lena were thankfully on the same page. Instead of a grand romantic plan involving reservations in some far-flung locale, they had decided on dinner at Kara’s, a viewing of their favorite romantic movie, and a candlelit bath. In other words, an evening at home just for them.

And yet… Kara couldn’t resist a little bit of Supergirl-foolery. She was in Italy picking up Lena’s favorite ravioli when her phone vibrated. Pulling up her message app, she stepped outside the restaurant.

“Where are you?” Lena had texted.

“ETA 15 minutes,” Kara texted back. “Everything OK?”

The thumbs-up she received in reply was a bit curt, so she figured Lena was probably stuck in rush-hour traffic on her way to the apartment. But when she landed in her loft fourteen minutes three seconds later—she liked to time her flights; this was a new record—her girlfriend was seated at the table frowning, a small cell phone Kara didn’t recognize in her hands. And suddenly the curt text took on an entirely different meaning.

“What’s up?” she asked warily, setting her Supergirl bag on the kitchen island.

“We need to talk,” Lena said, her voice flat.

“Okay.” She sat down across from her girlfriend, trying to read the odd look in her eyes. What the hell was going on?

“We have to break up,” Lena declared.

“Excuse me?”
“We have to break up.” She winked, one eyelid sort of drooping slower than the other. And then she whispered low, lower than most frequencies, “Just play along.”

“Um, okay?”

“Seriously? That’s all you have to say?”

“It’s Valentine’s Day,” she tried again. And then, truthfully, “I don’t understand.”

“You’ve got that right,” Lena said hotly. She winked again as she rose to her feet, momentarily towering over Kara. “I can’t believe I ever thought this would work. Don’t call me. I’ll call you when I’m ready to talk. If I’m ready to talk.”

And then she turned and swept out of the room. As the door closed behind her, Kara heard a barely audible, “DEO. ASAP.”

Just like that, Kara was alone in her apartment, all thoughts of a romantic night with her girlfriend blown utterly to bits. What had just happened? Like, seriously, WTF? She sighed as she stowed the take-out in her refrigerator and prepared to head out again. At least she hadn’t changed out of her Supersuit yet.

Freaking humans and their penchant for drama. There was always something, wasn’t there?
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

In which a plan is hatched.

Chapter Notes

Hello my friends! Okay, so the showdown chapter turned into two. (Typical, my wife says…) Also, I broke form to explore multiple POVs in this chapter and the next, so be warned. No trigger warning for this chapter, but the next will have canon-typical violence and the death of a minor character (or two…?).

P.S. The next chapter is already complete and will be posted momentarily. Happy reading!

“What do you mean, Lena just broke up with you?” Alex set her glass of Scotch on her kitchen counter. Maggie had walked out a few minutes earlier, leaving Alex to wonder why she could never seem to get relationships right. When Kara’s name flashed on the caller ID, she almost hadn’t picked up. Now she was glad she had.

“I don’t know, Alex. It was really weird. Something strange is going on.”

“Obviously. That girl loves the shit out of you. Are you flying?”

“Yeah. Incoming.” And then she was tapping at the window, Supergirl cape billowing around her shoulders.

Alex clicked off her phone and went to open the window for her sister—a phrase that, if she was being honest, had never ceased sounding odd.

Kara’s eyes widened as she noticed Alex’s fancy bathrobe cinched tight to hide the lacy lingerie underneath. “Sorry, am I interrupting?” she asked, glancing around the apartment as if Maggie might be hiding behind a large piece of furniture.

“Nope,” Alex said, giving the “p” an extra pop.

Kara’s gaze rested on the glass of Scotch on the island. “Why are you drinking alone on Valentine’s Day?”

“I don’t know. Why did Lena break up with you on Valentine’s Day?” Alex shot back, and then sighed as Kara’s face scrunched up. “I’m sorry. It’s been a really long day. Tell me what happened with Lena. What did she say, exactly?”

Kara spoke quickly, stalking the perimeter of the apartment as she described her girlfriend’s bizarre behavior. “I’m pretty sure I heard her say ‘DEO ASAP’ as she was leaving,” she finished, coming to a stop beside the still-open window.
Alex was already heading toward her bedroom area. “How sure, Kara?”

“Like, 99.5 percent?” And then, as Alex shucked off her robe, she spun away, covering her eyes. “Dude! I did not need to see that!”

Amused as ever by her sister’s Kryptonian prudishness, Alex just laughed. “I think you seeing my V-Day underwear is the least of our problems right now, Kara.”

“It’s not a competition, Alex.”

She pretended to gasp as she changed into her DEO uniform. “Bite your tongue! Everything is a competition.”

Back in the living room, she strapped her favorite gun into her thigh holster. She felt less vulnerable in her work clothes, stronger and more sure of herself than she had in the lingerie. In a way she was glad to have something to focus on. Maybe now she would stop replaying the image of Maggie gazing at her in disappointment right before she spun on her heel and walked out.

“Ready?” she asked, grabbing her keys from their hook.

Kara bit her lip. “No, but let’s go.”

Which wasn’t the DEO’s official motto but, frankly, should be.

*L * * *

Lena was waiting at central command when they reached the DEO. As soon as she saw Kara crossing the main floor, she ran to her and flung herself into her arms. “I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean any of that! It’s my damned mother again.”

“Oh, thank Rao,” Kara said fervently.

Mostly Alex was relieved: relieved that her sister’s face was no longer pinched and crinkled, relieved that she wouldn’t have to make good on the shovel talk she had never actually had with Lena. There was just this tiny, selfish part of her that was envious that Kara’s girlfriend wasn’t in fact the villain she had seemed to be—unlike her own girlfriend.

Then Kara held Lena at a slight distance. “What the hell is going on?”

Alex caught J’onn’s eye and jerked her head at a nearby conference room. He nodded.

“Let’s go in here,” she announced, ushering Kara and Lena into the sound-proofed room. “I think this conversation calls for privacy.”

They sat down at the conference table, and Lena clung to Kara’s hand as she launched into an explanation of her earlier behavior. It had all started with the track phone she’d discovered in her purse after a legal meeting crosstown late that afternoon. She remembered a young woman bumping into her as she left the attorney’s building, but she’d been checking her email on her phone and hadn’t thought much of the encounter.

“She must have been working with someone else,” Lena said, brow furrowed.

“When did you find the phone?” Alex asked, glancing at Kara. Her sister’s gaze was narrowed, her expression flat. From experience she knew that Kara was trying to control her emotions for fear of reacting too strongly to something that, by rights, should terrify her. Because if Cadmus could slip a
“Not until I got back to my office. An alert went off, and I pulled it out—”

“Lena!” Kara stood up so quickly her chair overturned. “It could have been an explosive device! Why didn’t you call security?”

“I haven’t exactly been sure who to trust lately, Kara,” Lena responded, her expression unflappable.

“What about me? You should have called me!”

“Actually,” Lena said, “it’s a good thing I didn’t. If I had, the children’s wing of that alien clinic by the waterfront would be nothing but smoking rubble right now.”

Kara froze. “What?”

“Yeah, do you want to elaborate on that?” Alex added.

The text, Lena told them, had been very clear. She had twenty-four hours to end her relationship with Kara and deliver herself into Cadmus’s hands. If she failed to comply, Lillian (“Because let’s be real: this has my mother’s name all over it…”) would destroy the children’s wing of the alien clinic. If Lena contacted the authorities or was seen consorting with Supergirl at any point in that time frame, the hospital would be destroyed immediately.

“The thing is,” Lena added, gazing between the two sisters, “the clinic isn’t the only target.”

Alex felt the hair on the back of her neck rise. “Who, Lena? Who else did they threaten?”

Lena sighed softly but she didn’t look away. “Your mother.”

Their mother? “Eliza?” Alex asked unnecessarily, her mouth dry.

“Yes.”

A noise on the other side of the table caught Alex’s attention. Her sister was standing motionless, fists clenching and unclenching as she tried to maintain her fast-slipping control. Great. A freaked-out Supergirl was exactly what they didn’t need right now—and exactly what Cadmus wanted.

Alex moved toward her as a telltale red glow warmed Kara’s blue eyes. “Hey,” she said sharply, her grip tight on her sister’s arms, “stay with me, okay? I need you on this one, Kara. *Mom* needs you.”

Kara swallowed hard and nodded, the glow fading as she focused on Alex. “Okay,” she said, still nodding. “I’m good. I’m fine.”

“Where is this phone now?” Alex added, turning back to Lena. “And how do you know you weren’t seen coming here?” Her other thought—*how could you put our mother at risk like this?*—went unspoken, but she was pretty sure they all heard it anyway.

“The phone is with my chief of security in a movie theater not far from here. I have one hour and then I need to return. And don’t worry, I checked the device. It has location and audio tracking enabled but not video.”

“That doesn’t mean Cadmus couldn’t be following you,” Alex pointed out, a little annoyed at how coolly Lena was behaving. There were *lives* at stake, and yet her willingness to risk coming here seemed to indicate she cared more about her relationship with Kara than she did anything—or anyone—else.
We can’t all be heroes. The words echoed in Alex’s mind.

“Yes, but it’s highly unlikely they think I’m anywhere but in that theater.”

Again with the Luthor arrogance. “And why exactly is that?”

“Because my chief of security is Durlan.”

Kara’s eyes narrowed. “Durlans can’t be trusted.”

“Really, Kara? Based on what—their name? Or perhaps their species?” As Kara’s face flushed, Lena glanced at Alex. “Durlans can shape-shift, which is how I can be in two places at once.”

“They’re also among the most xenophobic species in this part of the universe,” Kara put in, her chin sticking out stubbornly. “I didn’t even know there were any still on Earth.”

Alex didn’t particularly care about whatever interplanetary grudge lay between Kryptonians and Durlans. All that really mattered was that their mother was safe. For now.

“Okay,” she said, leaning against the table, “let’s review. You’ve fulfilled step one of their instructions but not step two. If you don’t text to say you’re turning yourself over to them by this time tomorrow, they’ll kill a bunch of alien children and…” She faltered, then resumed: “And Eliza. Does that about cover it?”

Lena nodded and glanced at Kara, her face losing some of its collected quality as she took in her girlfriend’s slumped shoulders.

“Right.” Alex made a decision. “We’d better get you back to that theater, then, while we figure out a plan. Can you use your security chief to cover for you again in the morning?”

Kara stared at her. “You can’t actually have any intention of letting her leave the DEO, Alex!”

“It’s fine,” Lena said, rising to catch Kara’s hands in her own. “I’ll be okay. Besides, it’s probably better if I don’t know what you’re planning.”

“But you can’t… I won’t…” Kara trailed off, cheeks beginning to turn blotchy as she fought back obvious tears.

Alex looked away. She hated when supervillains made things personal. Somehow they always knew where to hit heroes where it hurt most.

“I promise I’ll come back to you, macushla,” Lena said softly, leaning up to kiss her cheek.

Kara laughed weakly. “Isn’t that my line?” Then she pulled Lena to her, but so slowly and carefully that it made Alex’s heart ache even more. Kara was always so cautious of the humans in her life.

Then again, Alex thought, picturing their mother, she usually had good reason to be.

* * *

“I’ve called this emergency meeting because it has come to our attention that Kara and Lena…” Alex trailed off, staring at the note Vasquez had just slipped in front of her: I’m wearing a Cadmus wire!!!! Stunned, she glanced up at the stone-faced agent, who pointed at the note before giving the universal “Go on!” hand signal.

Which, right. Continue. It wasn’t like Cadmus was listening to her every word or anything.
“Well,” she said, stalling, “I guess I’m not entirely sure how to put it.”

“It’s okay,” Kara said, eyes wide as she glanced up from the note. “It’s not like everyone hasn’t already seen the tweets.”

The tweets…? Oh. The tweets. “ Completely. That’s why we’re meeting: to discuss Kara’s social media emergency. It seems she’s, ah, concerned that her identity has been compromised due to the attention garnered by her interview with Lena last month.”

“I received a DM earlier today threatening to expose me as Supergirl,” Kara explained quickly. “So I brought it to the DEO.”

DM…? Alex racked her mind. Direct message. Sheesh. She needed a briefing for this briefing. Turning again to Vasquez, she said, “Agent Vasquez, I’d like you to work with IT to try to track down the user, see if it’s someone connected to a known hate group or simply a rogue citizen looking to get rich quick. In the meantime, J’onn, Kara, and I will brainstorm potential responses should the news get out.”

Vasquez looked up from the note she was furiously scribbling. “Yes, ma’am,” she said, neutral tone belying her drawn expression. With one last weighted glance at Alex, she slid the pad of paper across the table and left the room.

“What does it say?” Kara asked, crowding Alex for a look.

Alex read the note out loud: “I’m sorry. They said they would kill my wife if I didn’t cooperate. USE ME. I can be a…” And then it ended.

“Double agent,” J’onn supplied. “She wants us to use her as a double agent.”

“Did you know she was working with Cadmus?” Alex asked him.

“No,” he admitted. “In addition to bugging her phone, Cadmus gave her a bracelet that generates a neural feedback loop.”

“How do you know that?” Kara was pale, and Alex could tell that she was shaken at the idea of Cadmus infiltrating the DEO command. To Alex, however, the notion of the DEO being compromised was neither new nor, at this point in her special ops career, all that surprising.

“Because she turned it off before she entered this room, thereby allowing me full access to her thoughts and memories. Cadmus informed her a few hours ago to tell them right away if Lena showed up at the DEO, so she knew they were planning something big.”

“And did she?” Kara asked, voice rising.

“No.” J’onn shook his head. “They have no idea at this point, and she has no plans to tell them. She wants to help, but she also, obviously, wants to keep her wife alive.”

“Fuck,” Alex said, and then glanced apologetically at her sister.

“Fuck,” Kara echoed, her crinkle impressive.

Vasquez’s wife—just another innocent to save from the clutches of Cadmus. How did the list keep growing?

But then again, this meant they had the upper hand. For possibly the first time in the history of their
interaction, the DEO had a chance to get out in front of the terrorist group. Cadmus was going to rue the day they brought Eliza into this, she thought darkly.

Another thought occurred to Alex as she ducked out of the conference room: She hadn’t even known Vasquez was married.

* * *

Vasquez carried her phone out to the balcony and hit dial.

“Code?” the voice at the other end asked brusquely.

In a routine she’d repeated numerous times since the beginning of the new year, she gave the code number that had appeared as a text message that morning on her regular phone and waited.

After a moment the voice grunted. “Do you have anything to report?”

“Yes,” she said, and paused. She could do this. She had to do this. “Supergirl is here at the DEO. She seems really upset, and I overheard her tell Agent Danvers that she and Superman were right. She said she never should have dated a Luthor, that they were all alike and none of them could be trusted.”

There was a pause, and Vasquez heard typing at the other end. Then: “Is that all?”

“Yes,” she said. “For now.”

The line went dead, and Vasquez tucked the track phone back inside the thigh pocket of her cargo pants. Glancing up at the sky, she watched the still mostly full moon rising slowly over the city. Please, God, she thought, touching the ring that hung on a chain about her neck, keep her safe.

* * *

J’onn left the room where Alex and Kara were putting the final touches on their hastily assembled plan to take down Cadmus while still, somehow, protecting the innocent. He wasn’t sure it would work, but he wasn’t sure it wouldn’t work, either. He closed his eyes and reached out with his mind, skipping from consciousness to consciousness until he found the non-human entity he sought.

“Come,” he thought. “Please.”

He didn’t have to wait long. Within minutes M’gann was alighting on the DEO balcony and striding into the central command center, her movements graceful and sure. She came right to him, her mind glowing slightly orange with her elevated emotions.

“We need your help,” he said before she had even reached him.

“Oh course.” M’gann nodded resolutely. “Anything.”

They put their foreheads together and J’onn gave her access to his memories so that she could see the plan they’d spent the last hour concocting.

“Bold,” she commented, pulling away. “Are you certain?”

“No, but we don’t have time to come up with a plan B. Will you help?”

“I told you,” she said, leaning into him again, “anything.”
“Do you need me here for this part?” Kara asked Alex.

“No, but don’t do anything stupid.”

“I’m from a race that makes yours look like Neanderthals.”

“That may be true, but geniuses fall prey to their emotions just as much as the next person. Maybe even more.”

She couldn’t argue with that.

Moving faster than the human eye (she hoped) could track, Kara launched herself from the balcony and soared high above the city. Her first stop was Midvale, where she hung thousands of feet up and used her telescopic visual powers to check on Eliza. Her foster mother was asleep, unaware of the van parked less than a mile from her house, three humans monitoring a bevy of tracking devices inside. Though every part of her longed to strike the van with her heat vision, to simply laser the Cadmus team out of existence, she remembered Alex’s warning and, with a last look at her peacefully unaware foster mother, buzzed back toward National City. Again she hung out of range of human and computer sight as she surveyed the alien clinic. This time she didn’t detect anything amiss, but then again, a strike team was significantly easier to hide in a city of millions than in a town Midvale’s size.

Her last surveillance target was significantly easier to track. Even though it was well past midnight now, Lena was sitting up in bed, Kindle open on her lap. As Kara floated above the city, she watched her girlfriend reread the same page over and over again. She wished she could swoop down and take Lena in her arms, hold her until both of their heartbeats calmed, until they fell asleep listening to each other breathe. She wished none of this was happening. She wished she could simply dial back time, return to a period when Lex and Lillian were both rotting in prison. If she’d been able to see into the future, she would have exercised her power more ruthlessly. She might have even become—willingly—exactly the monster the Luthors feared.

Was that their aim? To bring out the darkness buried inside her heart, tamped down and hidden beneath the layers of resilience and hope? If it was, she decided as she hovered thousands of feet up over Lena’s building, then that was what they would get. This ended here and now. She was tired of being the mouse to the Luthors’ cat, tired of worrying that Lena’s adopted family would come after them.

_Come and get me_, she thought, wishing just for a moment that Lillian and Lex were telepathic.

Once she managed at last to nod off, Lena slept better than she’d expected. Which is to say she enjoyed three whole hours of sleep that night. Still, that was probably more than Kara had gotten. Lena would have bet her year’s salary that Kara had stayed out all night patrolling National City.

When her alarm went off, she was already awake and staring at the white ceiling over her bed, waiting for the day to begin. Would this be her last day alive? Would it be Kara’s? Lex’s? Lillian’s? Who would live and who would die?

Soon, she supposed, the answers would come clear. Sooner than she hoped, and yet not soon enough.

She rose and went about her morning routine, aware of the track phone charging on her bedside
At least they hadn’t texted her overnight.

*Jackasses.*

Kara hadn’t been in touch either, which was to be expected. Lena didn’t normally believe in things she couldn’t see, but she had *felt* Kara with her in the middle of the night, just before she fell asleep. In fact, that feeling was what had allowed her to set her Kindle aside and turn out the light. She’d dreamed that she was with Kara high up in the atmosphere, the lights of the city a smudge below them, the stars mere pinpricks among the vast blackness of space.

“I’ve got you,” Kara had whispered, her voice close, her arms steady around Lena. “I’ll protect you, Lena. Always.”

When she’d awakened before her alarm, the sky beyond her apartment still dark, Lena had half-expected Kara to be there beside her. The bed was empty, though, and she’d felt a wave of grief followed by helpless rage. There was nothing she could do about her family’s latest evil scheme. Nothing but hope that Kara and Alex and the rest of the Super Friends would figure out a way to save the day once again.

In their world, villains rarely won the day outright. Would that trend repeat today? God, she hoped so. She was so tired of this push and pull with her mother and brother; sick to death of their attempts to pull her over to the dark side. She wondered if they would believe her if she pretended to come around. The thought was delicious—for once, she would have the upper hand.

She hoped the DEO’s plan included an opportunity for her to punk Lex and Lillian. It was the least they deserved. The very least.

* * *

Mon-El showed up at the DEO just before eight the next morning, accompanied by a handful of aliens Kara recognized from the bar.

“They all lost friends in the Medusa attack,” he explained when Kara glanced at him, startled by the new recruits.

“Please, we would like to help,” Darla, Maggie’s ex, said, stepping forward. “What they did to the others…” She trailed off, shuddering.

Kara glanced at Alex, who glared at Mon-El. “Do you just not listen?” she asked. “Or do you simply choose to ignore orders such as ‘top secret’ and ‘on a need-to-know basis’?”

“Alex,” Kara said, catching her sister’s wrist. “We could use the help, couldn’t we?”

Alex sighed. “Fine. But you’re in charge of this little unit, got it?” she said, pointing at Mon-El.

He nodded, smiling brilliantly. “Thank you,” he added to Kara as Alex stalked away.

“No, thank you,” she returned. Was it possible he had finally realized that the meaning of life wasn’t to ensure that his own needs were met but rather to help others, to be honorable, to make a difference in the lives of other people?

Or maybe he was still trying to get into her pants. Which, eww. But whatever. She would take all the help they could get.

Maggie showed up on the heels of the Alien Bar Strike Force, as Mon-El was calling his little team,
and Kara watched her through narrowed eyes as she pulled Alex aside. She tried not to use her super
hearing to eavesdrop, she really did, but, well, she failed miserably. She pretended to pay attention to
Winn’s explanation of the similarity between neural feedback loops and video feed loops, but she
was really listening to Maggie’s clearly rehearsed apology and Alex’s quick acceptance, followed by
her sister’s confession, “I’m really glad you’re here. It was killing me not to tell you what’s going
on.”

“What is going on?” Maggie asked, glancing around the room.

As Alex caught her up, Maggie’s eyes fell on Kara, who looked away quickly. Probably not quickly
enough, but too bad. If Maggie didn’t like dating the sister of a superhero, there were plenty of other
fish in the lesbian cop dating pool.

James arrived in his Guardian suit a little while later, helmet under one arm. “Hey, Kara.”

“Hey, Guardian,” Kara said teasingly, smiling as she punched his bicep lightly.

“I was going to tell you, really…”

He seemed stressed, so she hugged him. “It’s fine, James. Believe me, I know how tricky the identity
reveal can be.”

She caught a glimpse of red and blue over his shoulder and quickly ducked around him. “Clark! You’re here too?”

“Of course I’m here,” her cousin said, hugging her tightly. “We’re family. This is what we do—we
protect each other.”

Kara clung back just as tightly, putting all of her anxiety and terror into the embrace. But Clark didn’t
stagger under the force. He merely returned it.

“We’ll keep them safe,” he told her. “All of them.”

Rao, she hoped he was right.

The next arrivals she had hoped would come, but hadn’t been certain of: Klee Pan and Klim Nak,
Klon Rae’s mother. The Klaramarians, who appeared in full battle regalia, didn’t need security
clearance because they simply materialized at central command.

Klim Nak embraced her, telling her that Klon Rae had wanted desperately to come along too, but
had finally accepted that her youth and relative lack of powers made her more of a liability than an
asset.

“She said to tell you she’s with you in spirit,” Klim Nak added.

“I appreciate her offer more than she knows.” Kara didn’t need telepathy to know how difficult it
must have been to keep the girl away.

“We have a saying on Klaramar,” Klee Pan told her. “Individually we are one atom; together, we are
the sun.”

*Stronger together,* Kara thought, glancing around at the mixed human-alien team they’d managed to
assemble at short notice. The pieces were almost in place to take on Cadmus. In a few short hours,
they would know if the plan had worked—or if it had crashed and, literally, burned.
Now all they needed was Lena.

* * * *

Alex checked her watch one more time. The teams were briefed and ready to go, and Vasquez was waiting in Alex’s lab where her Cadmus wire couldn’t do any harm. The only missing link was Lena, who should have been at the DEO ten minutes ago.

“Where is she?” she muttered, and then wished she hadn’t when, across the room, she saw Kara’s head shoot up.

As Alex watched, Kara’s face changed, pinched, panicky look replaced by relief the likes of which Alex couldn’t remember ever seeing her sister display. She followed Kara’s gaze and frowned. Why was she looking at that random agent—

Except it wasn’t a random agent approaching central command. It was Lena, dressed in her security chief’s uniform. As she reached the console, Lena removed the chief’s baseball cap and shook out her long, beautiful curls. And honestly, it wasn’t fair that one person should be endowed with so much money, intelligence, and beauty.

Then Lena tripped on air, and Alex hid a smirk. Grace definitely wasn’t one of her many attributes.

Kara of course was at her side in less than an instant, righting her and checking her over for phantom injuries. Alex tapped her foot impatiently. They had an op to run and were literally on the clock, and Supergirl was using her girlfriend’s slight misstep as an excuse to practically make out with her at central command! No wonder Pam in HR had an apoplectic fit whenever DEO staff even thought about dating each other.

When Kara’s hands dipped a little lower than was purely professional, Alex cleared her throat.

“Listen up, everyone,” she said, pleased when her sister stopped whispering to Lena and gave Alex her full attention. Or, mostly, anyway. Alex pretended not to see the way Kara was holding Lena’s hand to her heart. She was Supergirl. Surely she could hold her girlfriend’s hand and listen to the most important DEO briefing of her life to-date, couldn’t she?

Yes, Alex told herself, and focused on the teams gathered around her.

“I don’t think I have to tell you all what’s at stake today, but I’m going to anyway. For years, the Luthors—with one exception—” and here she nodded at Lena, who nodded back—“have made life difficult for Earth’s off-world citizens. Their xenophobia and hate-mongering has gone too far, and today, we have a chance to turn the tide against Cadmus and the Luthors. I’m not speaking in hyperbole when I say this may be our only chance to do so. To date, the Luthors and Cadmus have proven ridiculously elusive. But today that changes.”

A slight ripple of anticipation ran through the room, and she waited for it to pass. They were as ready as they would ever be, she thought, looking at the earnest faces around her and trying not to wonder who would still be alive at the end of the day and who wouldn’t; whose career might be ended by devastating injury; who might end up plagued by PTSD for the rest of their lives because of the plan she, J’onn, and Kara had drawn up. She pushed the creeping thoughts away. This was the job, and she’d accepted the risks long ago. In fact, she’d accepted the risks the day her parents sat her down and asked her what she thought about taking in the grieving, marooned girl who had just lost her entire world. Alex might not have truly understood what she was agreeing to, but she wouldn’t take back the decision even if she could. This was the life she had chosen, and she would sacrifice anything to protect the innocent, the weak, the disenfranchised.
Her gaze fell on Maggie, who gave her a small, proud smile. Well, maybe not *anything*.

With Winn clicking through the schematics on the screen behind her, Alex went over each step of the operation one more time. And then it was time.

“Supergirl, do you have anything you want to say?”

Kara blinked in surprise, and then, with Lena’s encouraging smile, stepped up beside Alex. She gazed around the room slowly, making eye contact with each of their friends in turn. “I just want to say thank you to everyone here. Your courage and strength remind me of what we’re all out there fighting for every day—freedom, justice, equality. For hope and, yes, love. Some of you know that the emblem my cousin and I wear on our chests is not an S for super, but rather the family crest of the House of El, an ancient and noble lineage on Krypton. What you may not know is that our family has a motto, *El mayarah*, or ‘stronger together’ in English. That is what we are, all of us in this room: stronger together.”

Another ripple of excitement ran through the room, and Alex knew it was time. She glanced at J’onn, who nodded and clapped his hands.

“Be safe, people,” he called out.

Alex watched as the teams made their final comms and weapons checks, and then Maggie was at her side, leaning into her. “Anyone ever tell you you’re a badass, Danvers?”

“I thought all us feds were alike?” she teased back, her eyes on her little sister. Kara was hugging Lena, eyes closed, brow furrowed, looking for all the world like she never intended to let her go. Lena was the one who finally pushed away and placed a lingering kiss on Kara’s cheek before turning and striding out of the room, leaving Kara looking broken-hearted. And angry. Not a good combination, as Alex knew from experience.

Forget Eliza. Cadmus was going to rue the day they’d ever threatened Kara and Lena’s relationship.

“Lillian makes every other homophobic parent look like Mr. Rogers, doesn’t she?” Maggie commented, her gaze on the receding Luthor.

“She does,” Alex agreed, and slung her arm around her girlfriend’s waist, tugging her close. It wasn’t like Maggie worked for the DEO. As a detective with NCPD’s alien bureau, she was more *DEO-adjacent*. Pam in HR didn’t need to get her panties in a bunch over the two of them. Besides, in a few hours when the injuries and collateral damage began to accumulate, there was going to be a lot more to worry about than a little on-the-job PDA.

“What now?” Maggie asked.

“Now we wait.”

Kara came to stand beside them at the console, Winn’s schematics still up on the screen.

“Do you think it will work, Alex?”

“I hope so,” she said softly, and slipped her other arm around her sister. “We’re damn well going to try, aren’t we?”

“Or die trying.” Kara’s voice was grim.

“Ride or die with the Danvers sisters.” Maggie shook her head. “I told you when we first met that
you two were fun, but I had no idea.”

At that, Kara relaxed slightly, enough to smile wryly at Maggie. “You didn’t, did you? Too late to back out now, Sawyer.”

“I wouldn’t even if I could,” Maggie promised.

Alex tightened her arms around her sister and girlfriend. *Here we go.*
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

The next-to-last chapter, AKA The Luthor-Super Showdown.

Chapter Notes

TW for canon-typical violence and a fairly detailed death scene of a minor character, so be aware of that. As a reminder, the ending will be happy for fans of the Super Friends, and no queer people died in the plotting of this story. Also, as in the previous chapter, multiple POV alert in this one. Finally, both song lyric sections are from “Mystery” by the Indigo Girls, which always and forever will now remind me of SuperCorp.

Winn was right where he liked to be during an operation: at the keyboard of the DEO’s most powerful servers in complete control of all the data entering and leaving the facility. Right now he was monitoring the first stage of the operation: undermining Cadmus’ ability to inflict collateral damage.

On screen one, Vasquez’s cell phone camera relayed sound and images as she opened a door and stepped through. The video was a bit choppy, but the audio came through clearly.

“I’m home,” Vasquez called. A voice from off-screen answered her, and the agent began to move down a hallway. In the bedroom, she dropped her messenger bag on the desk, leaving the Cadmus phone behind. It didn’t matter if she kept the phone close at home. There were bugs everywhere in her apartment, apparently, even in the bathroom light fixture. The only place Cadmus didn’t monitor was the bathtub itself, Vasquez had told them bitterly.

Winn chewed on his nails and checked the second screen. It was still black, which meant M’gann and Klee Pan must still be en route. The third screen was active, though. Agents Williams and Liu were in a DEO van near the waterfront, working on a patch into the alien clinic’s security system. Cadmus had already hacked into the network, so it was a delicate operation to piggyback in on top of their hack without getting caught. This mission was the one that worried Winn the most.

Actually, no, Klim Nak and Vasquez’s was. But Klim Nak had sent the all-ready signal from inside the apartment three full minutes earlier, so that was a good sign, wasn’t it?

On screen one, Vasquez had stepped into the bathroom to say hello to her wife, who was getting ready for her daily nursing shift at National City General Hospital. Winn averted his eyes as the two women hugged, listening intently instead. Sure enough, he heard Vasquez turn on the shower and then, only by turning up the audio channel as high as it would go, the murmur of voices. He couldn’t make out actual words, but after a moment the DEO phone’s camera was pointed at the white tile floor and he heard Vasquez say, “Come on, I’ve been at work all night. Come take a shower with me… pleeesease?”

“Fine,” a woman’s voice huffed good-naturedly. “But only if you wash my hair.”
“Done,” Vasquez said promptly, and the sounds of clothing hitting the floor echoed over the audio feed.

Screen number two flickered to life, and Winn squinted as Klee Pan’s body camera panned the exterior of the Danvers property. No sign of Cadmus, which didn’t mean anything. The screen went black again, only to flicker back to life a minute later. Now M’gann and Klee Pan were entering the Biology building at Midvale College. Soon they reached a laboratory on the second floor where Eliza Danvers was currently talking to a pair of students. She looked up as M’gann and Klee Pan approached.

“Dean Mueller,” she said, nodding. “I’m sorry, did we have a meeting?”

“No,” a woman’s gravelly voice intoned. “But I was hoping to talk to you about a topic of mutual interest. I was contacted by Utah State regarding an exchange program, and you came to mind immediately.”

“I’m flattered,” Eliza said, offering a polite smile that gave nothing away.

Winn tapped his chin. Now he knew where Alex got her poker face.

“It’s such a nice day,” the “dean” added, “I wonder if we might take a walk to discuss the details?”

“Oh course.”

Eliza said goodbye to the students, and then she and the DEO agents strolled outside to the quad.

They were in the middle of the quad, surrounded by students and staff alike, when Klee Pan and M’gann made the switch. If Winn hadn’t been expecting it, he never would have noticed the slight sheen to the air, the displaced quality of the sounds. One moment Eliza Danvers was ducking between a tree and a student, and the next “she” was nodding subtly at Klee Pan as a mouse poked its inquisitive nose out of her lab coat pocket.

Winn sent a text to Klee Pan’s mission phone, and a moment later the “dean” checked her phone and excused herself. Thirty seconds later Winn received a text from the Klaramarian: “On site at location #3. Rendezvousing with team leader now.”

“Yes!” Winn pumped his fist. Part B of step one was now complete, thanks to Klee Pan. Teleportation was the absolute best. And cloaking, of course. And the ability to miniaturize yourself and other objects… Maybe he should just say that Klaramarians were the best.

He glanced back at the first screen and waited. After another few minutes, he heard bare feet squelching across the tile floor. And then Vasquez said the code phrase Winn had been waiting for: “We could use a weekend away from the city, couldn’t we?”

“I’ll say,” her “wife” replied, completing the phrase. “Someday, Susan.”

He spun around in his seat. Awesome! Two down, one to go.

Resettling, he focused on the feed from the surveillance van. There were only three minutes left for this part of the operation. If they didn’t get it done by the agreed-upon time, everything else would have to be delayed, which meant they would need to risk calling Lena. Alex had come up with a contingency plan—she would call Lena and demand to know why she had dared break up with her little sister, and then say that Kara had shown up at her apartment the night before at x time, where x stood for the revised operational go time. Lena would offer one of three responses: “I can’t talk about this at work” meant message received; “I have to go to a meeting now” meant too late to change the
Winn really, really, really hoped that last eventuality did not come to pass. They would figure something out if it did, but—

“All set, Agent Schott,” Williams said suddenly. “The video feed is set, Klee Pan has made contact, and the strike team is ready for launch.”

“All set, Agent Schott,” Williams said suddenly. “The video feed is set, Klee Pan has made contact, and the strike team is ready for launch.”

“Copy,” Winn replied. “Hold for now.”

He glanced at the mission clock: twenty-seven seconds to spare. That was cutting it close… He typed in a command on one of the servers, launching the group text that indicated everything was on track: “Capital One Bill Alert: Your credit card bill is ready for payment.”

The rest was up to Lena and Supergirl. And, like, a bunch of other people too. But mostly Lena and Kara. Winn leaned back in his seat to wait for the signal.

*             *             *

Maggie and Ortiz, her former beat patrol partner, waited in a patrol car in an alley near the waterfront, James leaning beside them on his bike. She had wanted to bring more NCPD personnel in on the operation, but the reality was that urban police departments were not exactly depositories of virtue. Cops were eminently corruptible—not to mention eminently vulnerable to extortion—and as much as Maggie would like to believe that her precinct was different, she couldn’t risk the fate of the operation on a wish. The anti-alien tensions in National City were finally simmering down. The last thing they needed was another incident like the Medusa attack on the alien bar to undo all the advances they’d made in the past month. This time the stakes were even higher, given that the potential target was alien children.

Ortiz was regaling them with a story of his five-year-old daughter, a native of Qaria he’d adopted two years earlier after her parents were murdered in an as-yet unsolved case. The little girl looked human but was in fact an aquatic-dweller, which made living with her… interesting, to say the least.

Maggie had heard the story before, but she didn’t mind hearing it again. Just as he was getting to the point where his wife pulled on a snorkel and mask and prepared to dive into their daughter’s tank, Maggie’s phone beeped. James’s followed a second later, and they all exchanged a look before checking the message.

Sure enough, it was the Capital One alert they’d been waiting for. The mission was on track—so far.

“Well, that’s good news,” Maggie said, and the two men nodded solemnly.

One more alert and it would be time to move. In the meantime, she thought, Ortiz probably had enough time to finish his story.

*             *             *

Kara sat at her desk in the CatCo bullpen, eyes focused supposedly on her screen but in fact winnowing in on L Corp, less than half an air mile from the CatCo building. She could see Lena in her office, alone (thankfully!), and while Kara was only just too far away to hear her heartbeat or listen to her phone conversation, she could see the tension in Lena’s shoulders, sense her displeasure in the way she slammed down the receiver, observe her anxiety in the way she kept glancing at the two cell phones sitting side by side on her desktop.
And then, suddenly, Kara’s own phone beeped. She grabbed it and unlocked the screen quickly, only just remembering to use human speed, and there it was: the credit card bill alert Winn had devised to notify the strike teams that the collateral victims had been secured. She redirected her gaze and watched Lena set her smartphone down, type and send an email, shut down her computer, and pick up Cadmus’s track phone.

In the moment that Lena paused, fingertips hovering over the track phone’s screen, Kara pictured herself fulfilling the fantasy that had been flitting about the back of her mind since the meeting at the DEO that morning.

“Why can’t you just switch with your chief for the rest of the day?” Kara had demanded after the briefing as the teams made their final preparations. “I don’t understand. Why not let her pretend to be you? She’s indestructible. You’re… not.” Her mind had unhelpfully supplied the myriad of ways in which Lena could die, a dizzying array that had replayed on loop ever since.

“I wish I could, love,” Lena had said, touching her face.

“But you can,” Kara argued. “You could. It’s your choice!”

“You’re right, it is my choice. But I can’t ask someone else to fight this battle for me, Kara. For better or worse, Lillian and Lex are my family. It’s my responsibility to face them, no one else’s.”

Kara had almost stormed away, but then she’d remembered her mother and father kissing her goodbye, how she had clung to the memory of that last embrace for years upon years upon decades. This couldn’t be how her relationship with Lena ended, and yet it very well might be. So she let go of her anger and frustration, and pushed aside everything except her love for the stubborn, strong, independent, fragile human being standing before her.

“Oh, okay,” she’d said, and pulled Lena in for what she told herself was absolutely not their last hug ever, god damn it. “I love you, but I hate that you insist on taking risks like this.”

“You can’t live in fear,” Lena had murmured, kissing the edge of her cheek. “You more than anyone should know that.”

Kara had closed her eyes and held on tight, song lyrics flashing in her mind:

But you like the taste of danger
It shines like sugar on your lips
And you like to stand in the line of fire
Just to show you can shoot straight from your hip

She wasn’t sure which of them the song lines described better, really.

At that moment, like in this one, Kara had longed to rewind time, to go back to a simpler, easier era before they fell in love, before Lillian emerged as the head of Cadmus, before Lena’s risky behavior possessed the power to put Kara’s heart in serious, credible danger. But that would mean giving up everything that had happened since the night of Lena’s gala when she’d looked at Kara, eyes alight with the start of something entirely new, and said, “A Luthor and a Super—who would’ve believed it?” And, let’s be honest: Kara wasn’t willing to give up even a single moment with Lena.

Now as Lena’s fingers began to descend, Kara knew she had only moments to put her secret plan into action—to fly to L Corp and spirit Lena away, back to her apartment where she would open a window onto Earth-1 and maroon Lena there under Barry’s care until all of this could be resolved one way or another. A few moments was all she needed. After all, she was Supergirl.
But that was the thing of it: She was Supergirl and Lena was a Luthor, and it was always going to come to this, wasn’t it? Hiding Lena on Earth-1 wasn’t a viable long-term solution. It wasn’t even a viable short-term option. The only thing that would come of it would be a lost opportunity to surprise Cadmus with the plan J’onn and Alex—and even Lena—had seemed so excited about.

“Don’t you see?” Lena had asked her that morning shortly before they parted ways. “This might be our one chance to close this nightmarish chapter and move on.”

“To other equally deadly, possibly deadlier crises,” Kara had reminded her.

Lena had shrugged, smiling at Kara over her shoulder as Alex beckoned to her. “But at least it won’t be the old Luthor-Super battle.”

And yes, Kara knew what she meant. At least the next fight wouldn’t be quite so heart-breakingly personal.

That, in the end, was why Kara didn’t move—for the chance at closure her girlfriend so desperately wanted. That was why Kara sat where she was and watched as Lena texted Cadmus, the screen in a position Kara could read even from nearly half a mile away: “I’m ready. Name a time and place to meet.”

A reply popped up almost immediately: “L Corp roof, five minutes.”

Lena spun in her seat and looked out across the city skyline. In theory, she might have been searching the sky for the Cadmus helicopter. In reality, she was looking for the CatCo tower. Kara knew this because Lena seemed to be staring right at her as she mouthed, “I love you, Kara Zor-El.”

“I love you too,” Kara whispered, and then she heard it: the drone of a helicopter.

Lena’s head tilted and her gaze shifted and Kara almost heard the deep breath she took. Then, with a last nod toward CatCo, Lena rose from her seat, smoothed down her slacks, and headed for her office door.

Kara grabbed her phone and added time and location details to the first of two pre-drafted group texts waiting in her message app. Her phone trilled as the message was instantly delivered to the operation’s group leads, and she stood up and paced to the balcony, squinting at the L Corp building in the distance where she could see Lena moving steadily toward the showdown with her family.

Wait, Kara reminded herself, gripping the railing fiercely. Stick to the plan. But she was Supergirl, and waiting did not come naturally to her. Waiting reminded her of decades in the Phantom Zone, years of confusion and powerlessness as she drifted without aim, without knowledge of the universe unfolding around her. Waiting was weakness, especially when someone she loved was in danger.

Please, Rao, she thought, closing her eyes and reaching out with her mind. Please, please watch over her.

* * *

As Lena slowly ascended the steps to the L Corp helipad, she wasn’t thinking about her mother or brother. She wasn’t thinking of Eliza, either, or even of the children lying in their sickbeds at the alien clinic. She wasn’t thinking of Vasquez or her wife, of Alex or Winn or J’onn or James. She wasn’t even thinking of Kara directly. Instead she was thinking of Klon Rae, the off-world child with the light of ten thousand suns lighting up her face every time Kara smiled at her or gave her a word of encouragement.
Kara and Lena had taken Klon Rae ice-skating at the rink downtown only a week earlier, and the
girl's physical capability had been exceeded only by her obvious joy at being with them. She was
like an alien puppy, eager and sweet and a bit unwittingly dangerous with her elbows. Sort of like
Kara herself, in fact, only without the weight of an entire lost civilization pressing down on her.

And maybe it was alienophobic to compare the two, or species-ist, but Lena couldn't help it. Their
solar-derived energy was boundless, and that created a similarity in how Kara and Klon Rae
interacted with the physical world around them. She didn’t think it was bigoted to say so. At least,
she hoped not.

Still, it wasn’t Klon Rae’s ice-skating abilities or her alien ways that Lena was pondering as she took
what might well be her last walk—one way or another—through the halls of L Corp. It was the girl’s
adulation of Kara, of this real-life superhero who had deigned to take notice of her, who had decided
to make her part of her life on Earth. Lena recognized that emotion in the alien child because she felt
it herself to an almost embarrassing degree. She was so lucky to have met Kara, to have been touched
by her goodness, her heroism, her dedication to the lives and happiness of others. And yet, she was
wrecked by her love for Kara, too. Elevated and destroyed in equal parts by her love for this other-
worldly woman who her family hated and hated and hated.

Song lyrics popped into her mind, and she repeated them to herself as she climbed the last set of
stairs to the roof:

> There must be a thousand things you would die for
> I can hardly think of two
> But not everything’s better spoken aloud
> Not when I’m talking to you…

*Be your own hero,* she’d said. That was exactly what Lena was trying to do.

The light was blinding as she stepped out onto the helipad, and she reached for her purse, intending
to pull out her sunglasses. Then a voice she hadn’t heard in over a year, a voice she hadn’t honestly
missed at all, sounded.

“Freeze!”

And there he was, her psychotic half-brother, dressed in his infamous warsuit, floating above the
deck of the landing pad on rocket thrusters that sparked and hummed. The suit was different from
how she remembered it. Instead of a seeming lack of head protection, this version of the warsuit
came with a helmet that hid his bald scalp but left his face uncovered.

Lena scowled. She’d known in theory what she was getting herself—and Kara, presumably—into,
but seeing her brother in a revamped robot exoskeleton was deeply disturbing. Her fingers twitched.
She wanted a cigarette suddenly, even though she’d only smoked for a short time while living in
Metropolis.

Family. Couldn’t live with them, couldn’t…

He laughed. “Kidding, of course, darling sister! I’ve just always wanted to say that. It’s lovely to see
you. I would hug you, but—”

“But then you’d have to kill me?” she drawled.

“You said it, not me.” The noise of the approaching helicopter grew louder, and he looked over his
shoulder, an irritated frown overtaking his slightly maniacal expression as the sleek black combat
craft drifted down to land.

She took advantage of his distraction to examine the warsuit. The helmet appeared to be more than just protection. The wires snaking from her brother’s temple down inside the neck of the enhanced suit were curious. Was that a neurotransmitter? Did he have an onboard AI? Despite herself, admiration of her brother’s genius flared inside her mind. He’d been jealous of her accomplishments, particularly her Combat Robot League national championships while at MIT. But as the younger sibling, she’d been accustomed to looking up to him. And for more years than she liked to remember, she had looked up to him.

The boy she’d loved was long gone now, though. The man before her was twisted and hateful, murderous and sly. She’d come to accept the previous year, during his lengthy trial, that there was no sign of the real Lex left in him. Her brother was lost, a fact their mother steadfastly refused to admit.

Speaking of… Lillian stepped off the helicopter while the blades were still moving, her bearing as regal as ever, her eyes as she took in the reunion before her—anxious? If Lena hadn’t known better, she would have sworn that her mother was nervous.

“I thought we agreed to arrive together,” Lillian said to Lex as she stopped a few paces in front of him, angling her body between her two children.

“You agreed. I didn’t,” he said dismissively. “In any case, we’re here now. Let’s do this.”

“Here?” Lillian turned slightly. “Hello, Lena,” she added, as if in afterthought. Her smile was cool, but Lena thought there was a hint of warmth to it.

“Hello, Mother,” Lena said, used to being an afterthought. And yet, even though she was a successful CEO with a home of her own and a superhero girlfriend, she still felt herself shrinking, automatically returning to her old role of peacemaker as her mother and brother faced off against each other on the rooftop of her father’s old company. And honestly, after all these years, how was she still in the middle?

“Yes, here,” Lex said irritably. “Why not?”

“We talked about this, Lex.” Lillian folded her arms across her chest. “It’s too public. Too many witnesses.”


“I don’t have a girlfriend, thanks to you,” Lena shot back.

Lex stared at her, and then he laughed. “Good one, little sis. That’s actually amusing.” He lifted a gloved hand toward her like a gun—it probably was a gun, knowing him—and added, “Okay, how should I say this: Call that alien freak and tell her to come at once if she wants her ‘mother’ to live.”

Lena stared back at him, and then, pretending reluctance, she pulled her phone from her purse and dialed Kara. So far, everything was going according to plan.

Kara picked up immediately. “Lena?” she said, her voice tense.

“Don’t be alarmed, darling, but I am currently involved in a family reunion on the roof of my building, and your presence has been requested.”

“I’m on my way,” Kara said, sounding far too agitated for Lena’s liking.
The line went dead, and Lena began to count to a hundred as detailed in the DEO’s plan: 1, 2—

Supergirl appeared suddenly in a blur of red and blue, landing with a thud between Lex and Lena. And, yeah, that couldn’t be good. Had she even had enough time to send the second text?

“Are you okay?” Kara asked, keeping her gaze trained on Lex.

“Me?” He flashed his teeth predatorily. “Why, I’m peachy, Supergirl. How kind of you to ask.”

“I’m fine,” Lena said once her brother had stopped his sarcastic preening. She was about to comment on the too-quickness of Kara’s appearance, but Lex didn’t give her the chance.

“Yes, yes, she’s perfectly well,” he said. “But unless you want countless innocents to die, including your dear foster mother, I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you to step away from my little sister.”

Lena saw the cords in Kara’s neck tense and realized her girlfriend was close to snapping. “Do as he asks, Kara,” she said.

Kara glanced back at her, and Lena nodded encouragingly, relieved when she stepped away.

“Good,” Lex said, smiling in that alarming way of his. “So here we all are on the very spot Lena first met Supergirl. I have to admit, I truly enjoy the poetic nature of this moment. Without further ado, Mother, I believe you had something to discuss with the girls?”

Women, Lena thought, glaring at him. But he was trying to get a rise out of her, just like always.

“Lena,” Lillian said, “I would like you to tell Kara the truth.”

The truth? “I don’t understand.”

“Of course you do, dear. Remember our earlier conversation? You said you were ready to come clean about your Cadmus involvement.”

That was why Lillian had agreed to Lex’s scheme? She was still that determined to break them up? Lena swallowed a disbelieving laugh. Just when she thought her relatives couldn’t get more ridiculous, they ended up on top of the family skyscraper fighting about inter-species dating.

Lena glanced at Kara and raised her eyebrows slightly. Kara was the one with the ear piece connected to DEO HQ, which meant only she knew when the next step of the op could begin. Kara shook her head minutely, eyes transmitting an unmistakable apology. Lena looked away. She knew Kara had gotten to the roof too soon. Teleportation or not, evacuating an entire clinic took time.

“I’m waiting,” Lillian said, her eyes narrowing.

“Fine,” Lena said slowly, stalling. She turned to Kara. “My mother thinks it’s time I tell you I’ve been playing you. I only pretended to love you as part of a long, complicated con. In reality, I’m loyal to Cadmus.”

Kara blinked. “No, you’re not.”

No, of course she wasn’t. But: “Yes, I am.”

Either Kara’s acting abilities had improved or she was actually worried. Oh, for Christ’s sake. Lena winked with the eye her mother and brother couldn’t see, frowning as Kara bit her lip again, this time in amusement. Whatever. She was a good winker.
“Oh. Well, fine.” Kara paused dramatically. “I already knew that, though. I’ve been playing you, too, you know, to get info on Cadmus. Like, as a triple agent.”

Lena rolled her eyes. “There’s no such thing as a triple agent.”

“There is too.”

“There is not.”

“Jesus fucking Christ, shut up, both of you,” Lex sputtered. He looked at their mother. “Seriously? This is why you begged me to bring you along?”

*Interesting*, Lena thought, glancing from her brother to her mother. This whole thing had been Lex’s idea? Lillian stared back at her, eyes clearly trying to communicate a message of some importance. But Lena hadn’t spent time with her mother in years—by choice—and couldn’t begin to interpret her rapid blinking.

“Enough,” Lex said suddenly, and raised his arm toward Lena again. “I’m tired of this game.”

And before she could react, he flicked his wrist, releasing a coil of blue and white energy at precisely the same moment Kara shouted the code phrase into her comms: “*Puny humans!*”

*Shit*, Lena thought as time seemed to slow. And then she didn’t think anything at all.

* * *

Kara was fast, but for once a human was faster. Without hesitation, Lillian leapt between her son and daughter, taking the force of his shot full in the back.

“Mother,” Lena cried out, catching Lillian as the blast carried her across the roof. And then Kara was there shielding them both from further fire as chaos erupted around them.

Superman, J’onn, and a large portion of the DEO team blinked into existence in the center of the helipad, forcing Lex’s attention away from his family. He roared in fury and a green energy wave blasted from his right forefinger. Kara winced as it struck Superman full in the chest. *That had to hurt.* But as expected—by her and the DEO agents, though clearly not by Lex or Cyborg Superman, who had just leapt from the helicopter into the fray—Clark rebounded quickly and began firing lasers at Lex and the other Cadmus agents fanning out across the rooftop.

The Kryptonite vaccine Lena and Alex had devised *worked*, Kara realized. It actually worked.

“How you okay?” she demanded, checking Lena over quickly. “He didn’t hit you, did he?”

“No.” The red of her cape reflected against Lena’s face, making her eyes look almost pink as she gazed down at her mother, brushing Lillian’s normally perfectly coiffed hair back from her face. “Hold on, Mom. We’ll get you help, won’t we, Kara?”

“Yes, of course,” Kara said. But over the sounds of the battle raging around them, she could hear Lillian’s heart skipping and faltering, her body’s delicate electrical balance overwhelmed by the pulse of energy from Lex’s suit. Human hearts rely on an electrical conduction system to contract and pump blood throughout the body, and the weapon blast had effectively fried the circuits of Lillian’s heart. In reality, Kara knew, it was already too late to save her.

Lillian gazed up at Lena, eyelids fluttering. “You never call me that.”
“What?”

“Mom. You never call me Mom.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry too.” Her eyes drifted to Kara. “Take care of my daughter.”

Kara nodded gravely, the memory of Astra’s face flickering before her. Which was ridiculous—except that, really, it wasn’t. “I promise,” she said. “Always.” And then, too quietly for human ears, “Rao’s will be done.”

“Lex…” Lillian whispered. And then her heart slowed even more, and her breathing became labored, fast, frothy pants more than breaths as she stared wide-eyed at nothing, her body twitching violently.

Lena gazed up at Kara, her eyes damp. “Can’t you do something?”

“I can’t,” Kara said helplessly, keeping her cape taut above them as the fight raged on. Some part of her noticed that Alex and Vasquez had arrived on the roof, leading a team that included Mon-El and Darla up from the stairwell, but most of her attention was focused on her girlfriend’s dying mother.

It took another long, drawn-out minute of harsh breathing and seizing before Lillian’s body finally fell silent and empty. Kara could sense the moment her life force faded away—her heart no longer beat, the blood stilled sluggish and quiet in her veins and arteries, her lungs sat in her chest still as stones. CPR wouldn’t help; Lillian’s heart had been too badly damaged. And yet Kara was tempted to try anyway. This woman had tortured her, yes, and treated Lena abysmally for most of her life. But when it had mattered most, Lillian had sacrificed herself for her daughter.

It was an unnecessary sacrifice, too. She must have known Kara wouldn’t let anything happen to Lena—or maybe she hadn’t. Maybe her final act in life demonstrated just how impossible it would have been ever to change her mind about aliens.

A shout sounded as a DEO agent fell near them, and Kara swept Lena and Lillian up into her arms. “I’ll be back, Alex,” she said into her comms, and then she was in the air, Lena gasping against her neck as she flew her to safety.

She dropped the two women, one dead, one very much alive, onto the CatCo balcony. “Find Cat,” she told Lena, already preparing to return to the battle.

“Wait!” Lena said, grabbing her wrist. “Take me with you! I want to fight, too!”

Kara shook her head, looking down at Lena’s tear-streaked cheeks, her flashing eyes. “No, Lena. You’ve fought enough for today. I’ll be back. Find Cat.”

And then she was streaking back through the air. With Lena safe, a single thought resonated through her mind: to protect her family.

Back at the L Corp roof, she quickly surveyed the fray. Alex and Vasquez were hunkered down behind a bit of concrete, firing their pulse rifles at a pair of Cadmus agents manning the helicopter’s weapons. Klee Pan and Klim Nar had assumed their rightful states and sizes—orange skin, featureless faces, and eight foot tall muscular forms—and, together with J’onn in his Martian Manhunter form, were holding an unconscious Cyborg Superman. Most of the Cadmus agents had either fallen or been placed in handcuffs at this point, and some were being led from the roof even before the fighting had fully ended. Superman and Lex drifted high above the deck, trading blows.
Lex may not be able to rely on Kryptonite, but his warsuit still made him nearly as strong as a Super—and just as invulnerable, judging from the blows he was withstanding.

Kara made a decision and leapt into action. First she used her freeze breath to neutralize the helicopter’s weapons. Next she rounded up any existing Cadmus agents and disposed of their weapons before dropping them in a heap in front of her sister and Vasquez. And finally, she shot into the air, determined to help her cousin.

Lex saw her coming, though, and quickly fired off a salvo of different colored Kryptonite rays. She dodged them easily—all expect one. A blast of red Kryptonite struck her shoulder and she dropped a few feet in the air. Then she recovered and resumed her course, slamming into Lex and driving him down, down, down… They crashed into the center of the helipad just as she had done months ago when Lex sent Metallo after his sister, only this time she wasn’t falling from a missile to the chest. This time she was in control and Lex was the one taking the brunt of the hit.

She heard him gasp for breath as the warsuit shuddered against the broken concrete, and she smiled, feeling the Red K licking at the corners of her consciousness. “That was for Lena,” she said, “and this is for me.” She lifted him again only to drive him back down into the concrete as hard as she dared without shattering the rooftop completely. The building had been evacuated, but Lena would still have to deal with the damage one way or another.

Lex gasped again beneath her. Then his eyes flickered, and he smiled cruelly. “I know you, Kara Zor-El. I know you wish more than anything that you were human. I know that you would give up your Kryptonian identity if you could.”

And it was true, Kara had admitted as much to Lena late one night after a long day dealing with anti-alien rhetoric as a reporter and anti-alien extremism as Supergirl. But Lena had held her, and Lena had whispered words of love and caring into her skin, and Kara had felt beautiful, deserving, special in her uniqueness.

“There is no one on this world or any other like you,” Lena had whispered, “not because you are the last daughter of Krypton but because you are Kara. You are you, and that you is made from the same stardust I am made from, the same neurons and protons that shapes every other person—human or otherwise—on this planet and all the other life-sustaining planets in the universe. You are you, and I love you. And so does Alex and Eliza and James and Winn and Cat, and too many other people to even count.”

“Klon Rae?” Kara had half-whined, smiling when she felt Lena’s lips curve against her skin.

“Yes, Klon Rae. Especially Klon Rae.”

Now Kara pictured the Klaramarian girl gazing up at her with the pain of difference in her eyes, hurt that could be crowded out by something as simple as skating around an ice rink.

“You don’t know me,” she told Lex. “I wouldn’t trade being me for anything.”

She lifted her fist to end the conversation, and that was when she saw it—a Kryptonite dagger in his hand swinging toward her chest. He had distracted her on purpose. Apparently he did know her, after all.

Before the blade could make contact with her flesh, Kara felt a hand grip her shoulder and pull her out of Lex’s reach. Not even a second later, an electromagnetic pulse shattered the air around them. Kara felt herself pulled back again, the strange hand still clamped on her shoulder with inhuman force, as Lex cried out, his back arching, electricity crackling through the warsuit. The helmet...
glowed red against his pale skin and his cry suddenly transformed into a scream that cut off as
abruptly as it had begun. He fell back against the cracked and blackened pavement, smoke rising
from the suit, eyes staring unseeingly at the mid-day sky.

Kara listened intently, but his body was silent. There was no heart beating, no blood rushing, no lung
sounds whatsoever. For the second time that day, a Luthor had died, and yet this time Kara couldn’t
find it in her heart to be anything but glad.

A dozen feet away Vasquez stood, EMP pulse rifle still pointed warily at Lex’s warsuit. “Is he…?”
Kara nodded. “He’s gone.”

Vasquez’s forehead cleared. “Good,” she said, and turned away.

“Kara,” Alex called, and then she was beside Kara, hugging her with all her puny human strength.
The vise-like hand finally released her shoulder, but Alex reached up and pulled it back. “Dad,” she
said, her voice breaking, and Kara finally understood why the cadence of the heart at her back was
so familiar.

She turned, arms still around her sister, and saw her foster father gazing down at them. “Jeremiah.”

“Kara,” he said, and then he was hugging her and Alex too, his tears cool against her skin that
burned with the sun’s energy just beneath the surface. “I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry…”

“It’s okay,” she said.

Then she thought of Lena, who had sacrificed her family so that Kara and Alex could keep theirs.
Lena, who was good and kind and the best that Earth had to offer. It wasn’t okay, not even close, but
maybe someday it would be.

*             *             *

Lena knew her brother’s fate before Kara appeared in the doorway of Cat’s office, cape flowing
around her. Intrepid camera operators from local news outfits—including CatCo—had filmed the
latter half of the battle from nearby buildings. Lena had been watching when Lex nearly stabbed
Kara, only to be struck down by the blast of a DEO agent’s weapon.

Her nightmare had returned to her then: the one where her mother was killed in a spray of DEO
bullets. She’d been close. Only instead of bullets, electromagnetic waves had killed both Lillian and
Lex. That meant Lena was no longer the figurative last Luthor standing. She was merely the last
Luthor, period.

“Lena,” Kara breathed, hesitating in the doorway to Cat’s fishbowl office.

“Supergirl,” Cat said, a note of warning in her voice.

But Kara ignored her and the watching eyes of her co-workers and rushed to Lena’s side, enveloping
her in a tight hug.

“Are you okay?” they said at the same time. Then they both pulled back, and Lena meant to smile up
into Kara’s eyes because she was here, which meant she must be okay. But her mouth wouldn’t
cooperate, and instead she found she was crying, the sobs rattling through her in a way that reminded
her of great rooms and warm fires, snow falling and steam rising from heated tubs overlooking a
moonlit lake.
“They’re gone,” she found herself saying, clutching at Kara’s arms, her cape, whatever her fingers could find purchase on. “They’re both gone.”

“I know,” Kara said, catching her tears on her thumbs and trying to wipe them away as fast as they fell. “Shh, sweet girl, I know.”

Lena was dimly aware that Cat had left her office and shooed everyone on the floor away, giving them the privacy they hadn’t thought to ask for, but she couldn’t find it in herself to care. She had wanted closure so badly, had told herself she didn’t care if her mother lived or died, if her brother perished at the hands of the authorities as he more than deserved to do. She had told herself they weren’t her family, not really. But now that they were gone, she couldn’t stop the cascade of memories, the overwhelming feeling of guilt pressing down on her. They had died, and yet she was the one seeing her own life flash before her eyes, accompanied by flashes of understanding that rocked her view of the past.

Lex had been sick, not evil. He had been paranoid and dangerous, yes, but as a result of a chemical unbalance in his brain, not because he was inherently a bad person. She had known that, she had. Why then had she turned away from him? He was her brother, flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. She should have tried harder to get him help, should have stuck it out through his paranoid ravings and bouts of violence. She should have met Lillian halfway even one time in her life. What would that have cost her? Why couldn’t she give even a little? She’d known the emotional shit show Lillian had come from, knew how emotionally broken her adopted mother was. Why couldn’t she have been more patient with her? Why couldn’t she have found it in herself to love her as a mother?

“You never call me that,” she kept hearing Lillian say, face contorted in pain, fear shadowing her eyes.

Lillian had been afraid of death, she knew, and yet she had given up her own life so that Lena might live. And now Lena didn’t know what to make of that.

“Shh, Lena, I’ve got you,” Kara said, rubbing her back soothingly. “I’ve got you. I’m not going anywhere.”

“God, Kara,” Lena said through her sobs, hiccupsing and choking, “what have I done?”

“You survived,” Kara said simply. “You lived.” And then, “It gets better. I promise it does.”

Lena closed her eyes and buried her face in Kara’s neck, tangled one hand in her silky hair, inhaled the familiar alien scent of her girlfriend. She had survived, she realized, focusing on Kara’s words. She was still standing and the pain would get better. She didn’t doubt that Kara knew what she was talking about. After all, she was the last daughter of Krypton.

“I love you, Lena,” Kara murmured.

“I love you too,” she sobbed. So much that she didn’t even care that she was getting snot on Kara’s Super suit. It was probably snot-proof, anyway. And if it wasn’t, it should be.

She cried for long minutes, reaction and grief and relief all pouring out of her, and Kara held her through it all. But after a while Lena remembered who she was and where they were and pulled back, mopping up her tears with the Kleenex Kara liberated from one of Cat Grant’s desk drawers.

“Okay?” Kara asked, checking her over.

“No,” Lena admitted.
Kara smiled a little at her tone. “Are you physically sound?”

The archaic wording made Lena smile a little in return, which she supposed had been Kara’s intent. “Yes, Kara, I am physically sound. Emotionally and mentally, not so much.”

“I’ve been saying that for years,” Kara said with impeccable dad humor, and winked at her.

Speaking of dads… “Was that Jeremiah on the roof?”

Kara’s crinkle returned. “Yeah. Winn says Jeremiah helped James and Maggie evacuate the alien clinic. Apparently he found our code piggybacking on Cadmus’s, but instead of alerting Lillian, he hid it and made sure everyone got out safe.”

“Apparently today is the day for parental redemption,” Lena said, and then wished she hadn’t as her mind got stuck afresh on the loop of Lillian’s last agonizing moments.

“Am I interrupting?” a voice said from the doorway.

Lena glanced up to see Cat standing there, watching them with something like kindness in her face. “No. No, I’m sorry, this is your office. I didn’t mean to—”

Cat waved a hand as she approached, staving off Lena’s apology. “Don’t be silly. From what I’ve seen so far today, if anyone deserves a good old-fashioned cry it’s you.” Her gaze shifted to Kara, eyes sharpening. “Is that my Kleenex or yours, Supergirl?”

“Yours,” Kara said, and then seemed to realize that while Kara the former assistant would know where to find Cat Grant’s secret tissue stash, Supergirl most certainly wouldn’t. “The perks of X-ray vision,” she added quickly. “Sorry?”

Cat paused, staring at Kara. But then she shrugged and turned away, moving behind her desk to take her seat beneath the array of television screens, most of which were showing coverage of the Luthor-Super Showdown.

Great, Lena thought, averting her gaze from the news. Back into the spotlight—but hopefully for the last time now that her notorious family had been winnowed down to only one.

“If you’re feeling better, I should probably get back to it,” Cat said, more gently than Lena would have thought she was capable of.

“Of course,” Lena said. “Thank you, Miss Grant.”

“I told you, you must call me Cat.”

She nodded. “Thank you, Cat.”

“You’re welcome, Lena. Get that girlfriend of yours to take care of you,” she added, giving Supergirl a hard look. “She seems to have disappeared for the moment, but I’m sure you won’t have any trouble tracking her down.”

Kara, the worst liar Lena had ever met, maintained her title by blinking rapidly, swallowing hard, and averting her gaze. Lena swore she saw a triumphant smile pass across Cat’s face before the older woman’s expression returned to its usual mildly irritated look.

“I don’t suppose either of you have seen my missing art director, have you?”

“Um, no,” Kara said.
Cat rolled her eyes. “Just perfect. I suppose he’s off playing hero again, too.”

If she could have, Lena would have laughed at the look in Kara’s eyes as she sputtered, “What? I mean, I’m sure he’s just doing his job, Miss Grant.”

“Which job is the question, Supergirl.”

Lena tugged on Kara’s hand. “Right. Well, we’ll leave you to it, Cat. Thank you again.”

“Don’t be strangers,” Cat said as they left the office.

“She totally knows, doesn’t she?” Kara fretted.

“It’s possible. But if she does, I’m pretty sure she can be trusted.”

“Crap. Alex is going to, um, pummel me. Speaking of my sister, I have to get back to the DEO to debrief,” she added as they neared the balcony. “Do you want me to fly you home?”

“No, I should probably get back to L Corp.” She felt Kara’s eyes on her and stopped, facing her girlfriend. “What? Do you know how much work today’s little escapade has made for me? Besides, it would be nice to keep busy right now.”

“Fine,” Kara said, her reluctance obvious. “But I’m coming by to pick you up later, and you will come home with me, capiche?”

“Yes, but as yourself, capiche? I’m not sure I can handle your #SuperCorp angst right now.”

Kara levitated off the balcony without her. “Just for that, you can find your own way back to work, Miss Luthor.”

Lena stared up at her. She knew Kara was only teasing, but even so she still felt panic rising inside at the thought of Kara going anywhere without her.

Kara dropped back to the balcony. “Sorry,” she said, hands smoothing down the already flawless lines of her suit. “I was just kidding.”

“No, it’s fine,” Lena said. “I’m just a little, you know…” She moved closer and slipped her arms around Kara’s neck. “Change of plans. I don’t think I want to go back to L Corp just yet. How about I come back to the DEO with you instead?”

Kara perked up. “Really? Honestly, I would love that, and so would everyone else. They were almost as worried about you as I was.”

The thought warmed Lena more than it probably should. But then she remembered that the Luthors hadn’t actually been her family in years. Her real family was Bea and Derek and Rowan, Kara and Alex and Maggie and Eliza, Winn and J’onn and even James and Mon-El. They were her family of choice and she was theirs, and that was how it was always going to be.

“All right then,” Lena said. “Up, up—”

“—and away,” Kara finished, lifting them into the air. “Hold on tight, my little dumpling.”

“Believe me, I will.”

Normally she closed her eyes against the dizzying view of the city streets far below, with only a frightening amount of empty air between her feet and solid ground. But today as Kara
flew them across town, pace slow but steady, she thought she just might keep her eyes open.
A brief epilogue. :-)

“Are you ready?”

Lena took a deep breath before meeting Kara’s eyes in the vanity mirror. “No.”

Kara laughed. “You’re going to be amazing,” she said, stepping forward to stand behind Lena. Her eyes were warm and her hands gentle as they settled on Lena’s shoulders, kneading away the knots of the past few months.

“I know. I’m just…” She shrugged, unable to articulate the feelings swirling through her mind and body. Fortunately, Kara didn’t seem to need her to.

“I know,” she said, and pressed a kiss to the top of Lena’s head. “But you’ll be great anyway.”

Lena took another breath and checked her hair and make-up one last time. Then she rose from the bench and turned to face Kara. “We better go. Can’t be late for the first day.”

“Definitely not,” Kara agreed as she tugged Lena toward her and kissed her, lips tasting of toothpaste and maple syrup.

She had been up before dawn, Lena knew, patrolling the city before her shift at CatCo, and had still had time to make a large breakfast. Lena had awakened in their bed to the scent of coffee and pancakes, and had lain under the comforter wondering why her stomach felt so tight until memory abruptly returned. Then she’d leapt from the bed—and immediately tripped over Kara’s boots.

“Damn it, Kara,” she’d griped, “don’t leave your boots on my side!”

At that, Kara had appeared in the doorway, eyebrows raised. “Good morning to you too. Nervous, are we?”

She’d started to snap back that no, we weren’t nervous, when Kara’s lips twitched in amusement. At that Lena’s ire had mostly deflated, and she’d squinted across the room at her girlfriend. “Maybe a little?”

Kara turned away. “Breakfast is ready when you are, sweets.”

The term of endearment was new. So was the apartment, the furniture, and nearly too many other things to count. Lena had grown up in a private boarding school where change was the only constant—new teachers, new students, new curriculum plans every single year—and, as an adult, had moved cross-country twice. And yet, even for her, the cascade of recent changes in her life was almost too much to take.
It had been three months since the Super-Luthor Showdown, three months since they’d scattered Lex’s ashes at the top of his favorite ski mountain in Colorado, three months since Lillian’s funeral in LA. Worried that the only people who would show up would be rubbernecker and press, Lena almost hadn’t held a funeral despite the will that described Lillian’s end-of-life choices in detail. In the end, though, Lena couldn’t bring herself to go against her mother’s final wishes, for which she was now grateful. The service had been well-attended by friends from the old neighborhood and people who had worked with Lillian for decades before she’d gotten swept up in “all that politics,” as one older woman had put it. Their sorrow for Lillian’s passing was evident, as was their concern for Lena. They even shared fond memories of Lex at the reception that Sabina Dang, Bea’s mother, organized at the local country club. Kara was there the entire day, of course, and she and Bea rarely left Lena’s side. The Super Friends came as well, including Eliza who, along with Bea’s mom, worked behind the scenes so that Lena was free to mingle. All in all the day had turned out to be much more emotionally gratifying than she’d expected. Not happy, of course, but meaningful.

When her mother’s coffin was lowered into the plot Lillian had picked out and paid for herself a few years earlier, Lena had felt a shock of renewed recognition: Both of her mothers were gone now; she was well and truly on her own. Except that she wasn’t. Kara and Bea were beside her, and each of their mothers embraced her at the end of the reception and told her that she was part of their family—if she wanted to be.

“I do,” she’d assured them both, wiping away yet more tears. And, “thank you.”

Six weeks later Kara had asked if she wanted to move in together. When Lena stared at her, surprised, Kara explained that she was tired of commuting between two apartments plus three places of work, and even though it was arguably a bit soon, Lena was a lesbian so she should be okay with the accelerated commitment timeline, shouldn’t she? Kara had looked so nervous as she spewed out what was clearly a well-planned proposal gone terribly awry that Lena couldn’t help laughing as she launched herself into her girlfriend’s arms, assuring her that yes, of course she wanted them to move in together. She hadn’t asked herself because she hadn’t wanted to rush Kara.

“Pssht,” Kara had said, grinning and resting her hands at Lena’s waist, “I’m the fastest living creature on the planet, remember? It isn’t scientifically possible to rush me.”

Within weeks they had found the perfect apartment—loft style like Kara’s, but large and with a balcony like Lena’s—midway between CatCo and the DEO and directly across the street from a waterfront park. They hadn’t taken L Corp’s location into consideration because by then, Lena had already offered her letter of resignation. She hadn’t been voted out, not quite, but she could see the writing on the wall. Besides, not only couldn’t she bear the thought of working in the very building where her mother and brother had died, she wasn’t happy at L Corp. She believed she was capable of guiding her family’s company, but it wasn’t where her interests lay. And if Lillian and Lex’s early deaths had taught her anything, it was the importance of following her passion.

Which brought her to today — her first official day at the tech start-up she and Jenny Bartlett, L Corp’s research chief, were launching together with their own money and the financial backing of Jack Spheer, Lena’s old college friend and former Combat Robot League teammate. Their mission: to provide clean energy technological innovation. Their first product: a high-efficiency solar cell. Aisha Williams, one of Lena’s friends from the Yale MBA program, would be their chief financial officer, thereby rounding out the company’s leadership. Lena couldn’t wait to see what they would build together.

That didn’t mean she wasn’t terrified to walk into the mostly empty office space on the fiftieth floor of a downtown building whose terrace just happened to face CatCo Worldwide Media. Because she was. Absolutely terrified. But in a good way — like when her stomach dropped each time Kara
stepped foot off their balcony into mid-air with Lena in her arms. The best way possible, really.

They didn’t leave via the balcony today. Instead they caught the lift down to the ground floor and began to walk along the waterfront toward work. Kara could have had them there in moments, but this was their chance to enjoy each other’s company before the work day sucked them in, they’d agreed. They strolled quietly, hand in hand, Kara nodding and smiling at passersby, Lena going over to-do lists in her head and wishing the walk took longer.

It didn’t. Ten minutes later they stopped in front of Lena’s new building. It was nondescript as skyscrapers went, other than the tiered terraces. They had paid extra for the outdoor space but Lena didn’t mind. She had the cash to spare, and Supergirl was worth it.

“This is it,” she said unnecessarily, gazing up at Kara.

“It is.” She paused and asked again, “Are you ready?”

Lena leaned up and kissed her cheek. They were both smiling when she pulled back.

“Yes.”

*             *             *

Kara watched Lena go before crossing the street to her own building. Inside the CatCo elevator, she distracted herself by using her X-ray vision to track Lena’s movements as she unlocked the door to her new, as-yet unnamed company. She watched as Lena entered the wide, open room with its empty cubicles waiting for staffing. Neither Jenny nor Aisha had arrived yet, and as Kara watched, Lena opened the door to the largest of the executive offices, which was still only a fraction of the size of her L Corp suite. She immediately went to the sliding door and stepped out onto the terrace, eyes going to CatCo before she spun in a half-circle, taking in the view of the city. She was smiling her happy smile, which made Kara, in turn, smile hers.

“What are you smiling at?” Eve, Cat’s assistant, asked as she got on at the floor below Kara’s.

“Oh! Nothing.”

“Probably that you’re no longer Miss Grant’s assistant,” Eve said with a sigh.

The doors clicked open again and they both stepped out.

“Hang in there.” Kara patted Eve’s shoulder. “She’s actually a fantastic mentor once you get through the first year.”

Eve perked up. “Really?”

“Really. Second year, max.”

“Oh. Okay. Well, see you, Kara.”

“See you, Eve.”

Kara picked her way to her desk in the bullpen, stopping to chat here and there. With Cat back, she’d hoped she might get her own office again if only to minimize the potential correlation of her absences with Supergirl emergencies. Plus sometimes when she got really into an article or research, she stopped paying as much attention to suppressing her powers, which could be bad in a room full of reporter types. So far she was still bullpen-bound, though.
The daily editorial meeting was about to start, so she tucked her bag into her desk drawer and checked her email. There was the usual work-related notifications, the usual spam, and—that was interesting. An email from Jeremiah.

Despite his insistence that he be jailed for at least a little while, her foster father had been cleared of any and all wrongdoing based on the fact he had been coerced into cooperation and, on numerous occasions, had turned into the double agent Alex had longed he be. In the end, in fact, it was his cooperation and insider’s knowledge that allowed the DEO to round up the remaining members of Cadmus and their closely-aligned splinter groups. Being a white male human with DEO ties hadn’t hurt his legal standing either, as Alex had pointed out. But regardless, Jeremiah had been released with the caveat that he wasn’t allowed near the DEO or any other alien-oriented organizations.

Almost immediately he had moved back to Midvale, and while the college was loathe to rehire him, the local community college had been thrilled to add a scientist of his caliber on the faculty. He and Eliza hadn’t exactly picked up where they left off, but they were spending time together trying to gauge how much the last ten years had changed each of them. A decade was a long time to be apart, Eliza had told Alex (who had told Kara). She loved Jeremiah, but she wasn’t sure she wanted to stay married to him, not after all the lies.

Kara empathized with Eliza. She couldn’t see how she would ever trust him again either. Still, she had agreed to try to rebuild a relationship with him. His unflinching support of Alex and Maggie, not to mention her and Lena, had gone a longer way than it probably should in melting her defenses.

Alex had taken the news of her parents’ potential separation better than Kara had expected. It helped that she was finally in a mature, adult relationship of her own. What she hadn’t taken well was Kara announcing that she was going to ask Lena to move in with her.

“You’ve been together for like half a minute!” she had exclaimed when Kara let her plan slip at the DEO.

“Geologically, more like .0000008 seconds,” Winn put in helpfully.

“Or .00000000008 thribs on Krypton,” Kara told him.

“That’s so cool. You have to teach me more Krypton factoids. I feel like we could develop a code language based on that. Or maybe a Game Night tradition.”

“I think it’s wonderful,” J’onn said, ignoring Winn as usual. “Have you practiced what you’re going to say to her yet?”

“No,” Kara had admitted. “Is that—do people do that?”

Alex had rolled her eyes. “Oh, for God’s sake, come over tonight and I’ll help you plan.”

It was a good thing she had, too, because Kara had apparently been about to ask Lena all wrong, according to Alex. Whatever. Humans.

The end result was that they had a beautiful home and she got to wake up with Lena every morning—when they were both in town. Getting a start-up off the ground had kept Lena away more than usual recently, and she wasn’t the only one traveling for work. Kara’s writing before and immediately after Operation SuperCorp, as the DEO insisted on referring to it (she blamed Winn), had garnered national attention, and now she was considered something of an “alien whisperer.” Alex and Eliza had both nearly blown a gasket over this turn of events, but Kara was pretty sure Cat Grant had multiple contingency plans in place were anyone to guess her secret identity. J’onn
probably did too, for that matter.

In the meantime, she would enjoy her newfound career success as well as the opportunity it gave her to meet with aliens across the country. Cat thought she might be able to get a book out of it, and Kara loved the idea not only because her writing career was taking off but because the more off-worlders she met, the less alone she felt.

Not that she was alone that often these days. Between Lena, Alex, and their friends, her life felt pretty full.

Her phone beeped, and Kara opened a photo message from Lena: “The view from my terrace,” she had written. “I love you!”

The picture was of CatCo and the rest of the city spread out around it, the morning sun glinting off the water in the distance.

“Gorgeous,” she typed back, “just like you. I love you too!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” She added the requisite number of emojis (six this morning) to demonstrate just how much, plus the little alien with the fishing pole because it always seemed to make Lena laugh extra hard.

She closed the message app and stared at the picture on her home screen. It was of the Super Friends, including Klon Rae in her new mini-superhero suit, out on the balcony at the DEO a few weeks earlier. Of course, as a super-secret photo, it only existed on her phone, which Winn had secured to such a degree that Kara had had a difficult time unlocking it when she needed it. She had promptly set the security back to low. What Winn and J’onn and especially Alex didn’t know couldn’t hurt them.

Well, actually, that wasn’t quite true. There were lots of things that people on Earth didn’t know about that could definitely hurt them. For now, Kara thought it would be better to let them find out on an as-needed basis.

“Ponytail,” Snapper called from the hallway, living up to his name and reputation, “stop being a freaking Millennial and join us, will ya?”

“On my way,” she called back, and turned her phone off. Then, trusty notepad and Supergirl-proof pen in hand, she followed him toward the conference room.

This was her life, and it was a good one. She touched the necklace at her throat as she walked. Thank you, Mother. Thank you, Father. You chose well.

Now if she could just get Twitter to stop using the SuperKarLena hashtag…

Chapter End Notes

Holy Moly, y’all, this story is actually done! Thank you for going on this looong ride with me. When I first started, I had no idea how in-depth I would end up going into SuperCorp, Sanvers, and the Super Friends. But now that it’s done, I have to admit I’m sad to say goodbye to the SG characters. I might tackle revisions and a sequel, with more alien-type adventures along with an expanding family motif, but if I do it won’t be until early 2018 as I currently have other projects in the works. (USWNT fan fiction, anyone? Hit me up on Tumblr at homodramatica or @katejchristie on Twitter if that’s
your thing.)

Thanks again for sticking with me. If you liked the story, or have suggestions on how it could be improved, let me know. But please be constructive with your criticism. I am, after all, only a puny human…

SuperCorp for the win!!!!!!!!!!!!!

End Notes

Come find me on Tumblr at homodramatica or on Twitter at katejchristie.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!