The Implications of Your Heartbreak

by FlyingPigPoet

Summary

Starts after 2.3 with Alex meeting Sawyer. I had originally intended a slow-burn Sanvers, but I threw in Agent Vasquez as the person who helps Alex figuring out the whole gay thing after Maggie shuts her down. I had planned for Sanvers to be endgame, but after trying for 160 chapters, I just have not been able to make it happen, so although I love my Sanvers, Valex/VasVers is now endgame. Susan Vasquez is a badass hottie unafraid to take on a baby dyke. So sue my gay writer's ass.

Notes

This got into my head because of the Tumblr meme "Vasquez-returns": Vasquez: You said if you were ever going to do same-sex experimentation, it was going to be with me! Alex: I have never said that to you. Vasquez: It has been implied! Alex: By you!
Who Protects the Protectors?

Agent Susan Vasquez really likes Winn Schott Jr. She didn't always. When he first came to work at the DEO, he was like a kid in the candy store with all the hot new tech. The boy had no chill, not like the hot cop Sawyer that Agent Danvers kept eyeing, the one who said, "This place is sick. Like James Bond secret hideout sick." No, Winn was just annoying, grinning and pointing out how much fun he was having testing all the systems, setting off alarms when he tried out something he didn't have clearance for, giggling, apologizing, and watching Supergirl with longing any time she was striding around headquarters with that cape and those boots...

And maybe that was how he started to get under her skin. Because Winn is almost as dedicated to protecting Supergirl as Alex Danvers is, and Vasquez is nothing but dedicated to making sure that the Alex's little sister is protected. Because even with years of training, Vasquez will never be as strong or as fast or as perfect as Supergirl. But her sister? Just maybe.

Like Danvers, Vasquez is a professional badass chick, who wears her black tactical gear with pride and knows how to get the job done. Like Danvers, she shoulders her rifle with aplomb and puts up with no shit from the newbie agents who just want to shoot everything. And where Alex Danvers automatically stands in front of Supergirl to protect her when the kryptonite comes out, Vasquez has taken to standing in front of little Plaid Shirt (not red shirt) Schott, because she knows that he is one of the most important people in Supergirl's life, and if anything happened to him, Supergirl would be devastated, and when Supergirl is devastated, Alex is devastated.

And Vasquez has seen Alex devastated a time or two and she never, ever wants to see that again.

J'onn knows, of course. He's telepathic. Of course, he knows. Just like he somehow found out about the time Vasquez refused point-blank to let Kara hear what was happening when General Lane was interrogating J'onn after they all found out he was a Martian, how she had instead left the command center, "accidentally" leaving her earpiece behind so that Supergirl could listen in.

And how, after he resumed command of the DEO, Vasquez had found tucked in her locker a very expensive bottle of scotch and a small box of dark chocolate truffles. The note, unsigned, but recognizably in his handwriting, had simply said, "Better together."

So yes, the Sanvers girls' Space Dad knew that pretty much everybody who worked at the DEO had a huge crush on his girls, and he kept his mouth shut because he knew it made them all, ha!, super-dedicated to protecting them. Winn, on the other hand, didn't have a clue. Vasquez couldn't tell if Winn was gay or not. Sometimes, when he wasn't sighing over the sexy swish of Supergirl's cape, he would get a lost expression on his face and then mention James Olsen. To Vasquez, he didn't even read as bisexual, just confused and out of touch with his own feelings. Vasquez had read his folder, knew about his psychotic father, the Toyman. Hell, everybody at the DEO had some trauma in their background; it was practically a prerequisite for the job. The things she had seen as a Marine in Iraq--the human things, even before the aliens got involved--left her waking in a sweat in the middle of the night. And that was just war. She couldn't imagine knowing that your own flesh and blood was capable of doing such things for fun.

So when Agent Danvers strode into the DEO command center that evening wearing a different kind of black, a slinky dress with a plunging neckline and killer heels, Vasquez took pity on Winn and covered for his jaw hitting the floor so hard it practically echoed. She stood quickly and greeted the Assistant Director.

"Ma'am!" She always said it with reverence. She loved working for this badass woman.
"Oh, God, Vasquez, I am going to kill Maxwell Lord in fifty-nine very painful ways. I have absolutely got to get these shoes off, but can you find J'onn for me? We've got trouble."

"Of course we do, ma'am. It's Monday." Vasquez grinned as she trotted off to J'onn's office.

Behind her, she heard Alex snap, "Winn, don't be an ass. Haven't you got work to do?"

By the time Vasquez and J'onn reached the command center, Alex was looking much more comfortable in her usual tactical gear. She handed J'onn a small silver box. "Is Supergirl around? Because we don't want this stuff getting near her."

"No, she's trying to get a lead on that Guardian vigilante. We still haven't figured out if it's a human or an alien, or maybe one of Cadmus's...hybrid experiments."

"I have her on my earpiece, ma'am, if we need to call her back or if she needs reinforcements," said Vasquez.

Alex shot her a grateful look. To J'onn, she said, "Our woman at Lord Technologies was only able to slip me a small piece, so doing a micro-analysis of it may destroy the whole specimen, but at least we'll know if he's actually messing with kryptonite again. And if he is, I swear I am going to feed him his own test--"

Winn shot up out of his chair. "Please, for the love of God, do not finish that sentence, Alex."

Vasquez grinned to herself as J'onn and Alex moved off toward the lab. "Take it easy, little Plaid Shirt. Supergirl would never let her do anything like that to you."
Supergirl loved flying over National City during the hour before sunset, when the skyscrapers, normally silver-blue against a searing blue sky, suddenly went all golden. It reminded her of Krypton under its red sun and gave her a warm feeling in her chest, like just for sixty minutes a day, she had her old home back.

Not today.

Today, the only red she was seeing was her own eyes flaring to burn a circle in front of City Hall around that Tinman who called himself "Guardian" who had just stepped right into a raid that the NCPD had been planning for weeks, then led them and Supergirl on a goose-chase across the city that would have made O.J. Simpson embarrassed. He stood there in the middle of the flaming fence and did a backflip out of it, over the hood of a Black Maria that had just screeched to a halt, pulled up a manhole cover and dropped into the sewer.

Just flipping great, thought Supergirl. It's probably one of those aqueous aliens. That was going to mean goop and smells, and when you have a Kryptonian sense of smell that sort of thing was nine hells and thirty showers. Not often, but every now and then, Supergirl hated being a superhero.

She landed at the edge of the circular hole and grimaced. A dark-haired woman in an NCPD windbreaker handed her a bandana, but she shook her head. "Trust me. Won't help."

Then she dropped down into a foot of stinking water. Her super hearing led her to the right and she waded through the sludge feeling more and more like vomiting, but when she got to the end of the block where another manhole cover had been opened, there was no Tinman and her boots were soaked through. She levitated out of the hole to see the same woman cop waiting for her.

"He got away, Supergirl. He had an accomplice. We got some tire tracks we'll run through the database."

Supergirl nodded, then threw up at the policewoman's feet. She shook with nausea and guilt, gasping, "Oh! I am SO sorry!"

The Latina chuckled, shaking her head. "Don't worry about it. I had to go down there once when I was still in uniform. Couldn't eat for days." She offered her the black bandana again. "At least wipe your mouth off."

"Thank you." She wiped her mouth and then folded the piece of cloth. "I'll wash it and get it back to you. What's your name?"

"Detective Maggie Sawyer."

Supergirl took in the woman's warm smile, thinking that the name sounded familiar. Then she tucked the folded bandana behind the shoulder of her cape, waved to the crowd that had gathered and took off into the air.

"Alex?"

"Sorry, Supergirl. Alex is in the lab. Vasquez here. What can I do for you?"

"I'm going to need to decontaminate when I get back. I don't know what I just waded through, but I am not bringing this smell back home with me."
Lab Rat

Growing up with scientist parents, Alex had always been fascinated by how the world worked: chemistry, biology, physics, all of it. Adding an actual alien from another planet only added to her curiosity, but where Kara had been an English/Astronomy double major in college, Alex had taken the bioengineering route, preferring the micro to the macro.

And yes, just as Kara had major abandonment issues, Alex had anger issues that she finally was able to work through since getting her combat training at the DEO. So instead of getting flustered and annoyed when an experiment or a prototype wasn't working as she had hoped, she didn't drink anymore. She went into the building's gym and beat up on the bag, kicking and punching, slamming her elbows and knees into its solid weight until her body was exhausted enough for her brain to give in and give her the answers.

The gym is where Kara found her. Alex wiped sweat out of her eyes to see the incongruous vision of her sister wearing black tactical gear and her glasses.

"Decided to join the DEO after all?"

"No! But my supersuit smells like crap and my boots are a mess and Vasquez was nice enough to lend me some clothes while Winn figures out how to clean it all up."

"Alien goop?"

"Sewer. I was chasing the Tinman."

"Tinman? Is that Winn's name for a new rogue alien?"

"Nope, it's mine for that Guardian annoying jerk-guy. Winn doesn't like it."

"Kara," Alex said gently. "Maybe it's too much like Toyman?"

Kara blanched. "Oh crap! You're right. Oh, man how did I not see that. Should I apologize?"

"Probably not. Just don't say it again."

"Vasquez said you got something off Max Lord?"

"A sample of something he's working on. It's in the mass spec now and I am down here not pacing while I wait for the results."

"That seems constructive."

Alex grunted and started to unwind the tape from her hands. Kara hurried to help, saying, "I met a cop today. Well, Supergirl did. I have to wash her bandana."

"Supergirl meets a lot of cops. Should I ask about the bandana?"

"Um, I kind of threw up on her shoes... Her name was Maggie Sawyer. Isn't that your new friend?"

A smile and a frown fought for possession of Alex's face. "You threw up on Maggie? Kara!"

"I didn't mean to! And I said sorry. She was really nice about it too."

The smile finally won. "Yeah, she's really nice. She's the one who took me to that alien bar. We
should go there sometime. I think you'd like it."

Alex's phone buzzed and she looked at it. "J'onn wants us upstairs."

When they arrived at the command center, Winn looked back at them from his computer and quipped, "Well, look! It's the Bobbsey Twins!"

Standing behind him, Vasquez smacked him on the head. "You did not just say that." Then she turned to Kara and said, "Although, actually, you do look pretty hot in my clothes."

Kara blushed and Alex gave her an odd look. Vasquez sighed and shook her head. She pointed up at the screen above them. "We've added extra surveillance for the president's speech, but J'onn wants Supergirl in the air as well. Since you lost your Daxamite, we can't be too careful."

"I didn't lose him," Kara grumbled. "He escaped you. And Winn, I am going to need my suit. I can't go flying around National City in Vasquez's clothes." She winked at the agent. "However hot I look in them."

Alex looked like she had just swallowed something. Winn jumped up and ran out. Vasquez muttered, "Girl's got game!" J'onn just groaned.

Half an hour later, Winn strode into the room carrying Kara's supersuit and boots. "Okay, who is about to write out a patent for a new cleaning solution that will clean sewage off inflammable material? This guy!"

Kara shook her head. "Winn, you do know that flammable and inflammable mean the same thing, not opposite?"

"I'm the IT guy. I'm not supposed to be good at words."

Alex said, "No, you're supposed to be scanning the city for the radioactivity from the Daxamite. Okay, Kara. You suit up and get out there to protect the president. I am going to check the mass spec before I head out, see if the sample is done. Why do we always have to juggle so many things?"

Vasquez grinned. "Like I said, Agent Danvers. It's Monday."
Maggie was happy to be off-duty for the President's speech. She got a really good spot near the podium where she would be able to see the woman she admired so much rather than walking around the perimeter looking at people's eyes and hands. It got even better when Alex Danvers joined her.

"Sawyer. I have something of yours." Alex handed her the black bandana, now laundered and possibly even ironed.

"Wait, how did you get this? You know Supergirl? Of course you do. I did see her at the airport. You badass 'secret service' types probably know all the cool heroes. Have you met Superman?"

Alex smiled. "Of course. And for the record, she told me what happened."

The band started to play "Hail to the Chief." Maggie frowned. "I told my girlfriend that Supergirl barfed on my shoes. She wasn't impressed like I thought she would be. She has a huge lesbian crush on Supergirl." She caught Alex making a face. "What? You don't? Oh, right. Straight girl."

The President started her speech and asked the man behind her for a pen.

"History."

Something like a lightning bolt hit the podium and fire burst up in front of the President. A flash of blue and red inserted itself between her and certain death, then took off into the sky. Maggie had seen news videos of Supergirl fighting National City's enemies, but she had never seen it herself in real life. For a split second she stood awed at the two flying women. Then her cop self took over and she hurried to get people under cover.

But then the woman with flaming hands was there aiming at the people and Maggie pulled her gun and held it on her but she stepped too close and the woman threw fire at her gun and the pain made Maggie forget everything and then the next thing she knew she was flying over National City, gagging on the pain, her eyes squeezed shut because flying only looks like fun when somebody else is doing it and you're not half convinced that the person who picked you up and took you hundreds of feet in the air is not going to just drop you to break into a million pieces on the asphalt below and her ears were popping and then they were going down again and yes, they were landing in the God damn warehouse district.

And the only thing she could think as this psycho fire chick tied her burned and unburned hands together and hung her from a hook was, Why is it always an abandoned warehouse?

When she came to again, the woman was ranting and raving about the dangers of registration of aliens and Maggie realized that she had seen this woman before at the alien bar, had seen her superheat her drink as if it were an ordinary thing to do, and had never considered that she might be dangerous.

The woman gestured with flaming hands, called Maggie "the alien lover" like it was a dirty word and Maggie was grateful in a confused way that she was hanging by her wrists because the lack of circulation in her hands made the burns hurt less. Then there was that flash of red and blue again. Supergirl distracted the alien while Danvers whipped out a k-bar knife and cut her down, pulled her away, said, "Get the gun and get out."

Danvers leaped into the woman's literal line of fire and nearly got herself flamed for her troubles.
and Maggie jumped up and dove behind packing crates but couldn't leave. The gun was too far away and the ice Supergirl had blown on the fire chick cracked and melted off and suddenly Supergirl was too far away from Danvers to help her so Maggie picked up a lead pipe off the ground remembered her good form from her college softball days and let 'er rip.

The sound of the metal connecting with the woman's head and knocking her unconscious was highly satisfying. Maggie grinned at Supergirl and Alex Danvers.

"Oh, you guys are fun!"
Inventor

It started innocently enough, when Lena was reading the Journal of Astroxenobiology and realized that iron in the blood was a uniquely Earth phenomenon. In most of the species she had studied in the past, trace amounts of metal were standard: sometimes copper (as found in several Earth sea creatures), sometimes aluminum or even gold, but never iron. So what if she devised a simple skin test that searched for the presence or absence of iron under the skin? Instant alien detection device. It hadn't even taken long to build the prototype, although she wished she could get it about twenty percent smaller, something that would fit into even the smallest pocket. She was inordinately pleased with herself.

"Ocham's razor," she murmured to her empty office. "The simplest solution is often the best." And in this case, also the most profitable. She picked up the pricing forecasts from her desk and smiled.

Her intercom buzzed. "Ms. Luthor, Kara Danvers from CatCo Media to see you."

"Send her in, Jess."

Lena had only met Kara Danvers a few times, but already she reacted to her presence in the room as though she were the living embodiment of sunshine. She welcomed her, asked her to call her Lena, agreed to call her Kara. How could one ever be formal with such a sweet human being?

"You know I can validate your parking for you if you'd like."

"Oh, no, that's okay. I flew here. On a bus." Kara fidgeted with her glasses.

Lena chuckled. "Then they have definitely improved the transit system since last I used it!"

Kara blushed.

"You're here about the President's alien amnesty act, aren't you?"

"Well, you are the sister of one of the most famous anti-alienists in the country. What is your take on it?"

"We need to be able to protect ourselves from these aliens. So many of them are stronger than we are and could do whatever they wanted and we'd have no protection, especially if they can pass as human. We'd never see it coming. Here, let me show you something."

She stood and swiftly took the prototype from the lockbox. "It's a simple skin test, see?" She touched her thumb to the sensor and a light turned blue. "Try it."

Kara looked panicked, which surprised Lena. Kara said, "But this goes against everything America stands for: freedom and liberty and acceptance of differences!"

Lena sighed and turned to look out on National City. "I admire your passion, Kara, but I have seen too much of life to believe we can always rely on other people to be virtuous. My brother is the living proof of that. I disagree with him on almost absolutely everything he says about the world, but aliens..." She turned back to Kara, who was adjusting her glasses again. "You can't trust aliens."

Kara snapped, "You mean the way people say you can't trust Luthors? Oh! I'm sorry, Lena, that just slipped out. I do believe that you mean well with this, but it's just, it feels wrong!"
"Aliens have the right to be citizens now, and good for them. But humans need to feel safe too, and I am a businesswoman. And an engineer. It's my own design. Come on, try it."

Hesitantly, Kara place her thumb on the sensor and watched the light glow blue.

Lena said, "See? It's perfect."

After the reporter left, looking oddly relieved--well, she had said it was her very first interview, after all, and Lena knew a CEO with a bird's-eye view of the city might be intimidating for her--Lena looked back down at her planner and frowned. Maxwell Lord, 2 pm. She abhorred the man. Not only had he try to reverse engineer some of Lex's old kryptonite tech, any time he came within reach, he tried to touch her arm or hand or shoulder. He'd twice asked her out since she moved to National City. For a man with his own tech company, he apparently didn't spend much time on the Internet. She knew that her being a lesbian was old news in Metropolis; maybe National City wasn't as interested in business/celebrity gossip?

She hit the intercom button. "Jess, is there any way to rearrange my meeting with Lord?"

"Sorry, ma'am. Not if you are going to get that patent problem sorted out before tomorrow's board meeting."

"Fine. Just...give us no more than forty minutes and then interrupt with an emergency."

The less time she had to spend with that slime ball, the better.
Supergirl had always been impressed with the speed of her sister's mind and her dedication to her work, but joining her at the crime scene and seeing the peaceful Savillian lifeless in the trunk of a car left her speechless, not because death was anything new but because Alex and this new cop colleague of hers just kept talking like she wasn't even there. They posited one scenario after another, finishing each other's sentences and then just walking away.

"Okay," said Supergirl, largely to herself. "Looks like you've got this sorted out then."

But it was never just one thing at a time with the DEO. When she returned to the command center, Vasquez informed her that Alex had asked for backup and given her a time and coordinates, and then mentioned offhand that the substance they acquired from Lord Technology was some kind of proto-kryptonite, a synthetic version, still inert at the moment, but that Alex had said was probably viable.

Supergirl threw herself back out into the sky, angry and afraid, with the afternoon to kill. She entertained a tiny fantasy of, well, not killing Maxwell Lord, he had been helpful that time with the Black Mercy. But maybe letting Alex beat him up just a little?

She dealt with a traffic accident on the bridge, rescued a kitten from a tree (an actual kitten this time, not an enormous snake named Fluffy--she still had nightmares about that one), and stopped a mugging before throwing herself in the air again. It was bad enough that she had had to let Mon-El go, that J'onnn had convinced her to mentor him the way Alex had helped her with being human, and Oh Rao, Snapper.

A burst of superspeed put her on the roof at CatCo where she always kept a stash of work clothes. She was handing Snapper the piece on Lena's horrible device with great confidence in a job well done, and then he had reamed her out about her "non-objectivity." So she spent the rest of the afternoon rewriting it, until Alex called her in a panic about "What does it mean to wear something nice?"

"Alex! Are you going on a date?"

"No! Of course not. It's the work thing Vasquez told you about. But I think it meant formal."

"How about the dress you wore to that wedding last year?"

"I forgot I even had that."

"That's because you only ever wear a battle dress uniform in one color. And maybe two plaid flannel shirts and concert t-shirts."

"Says Ms. Argyle."
It felt good, communicating with her sister again, but before she knew it, it was showtime.

Supergirl pretty much hated the warehouse district. There was so much lead in all the buildings she had a hard time using her x-ray vision to find her sister, so when she heard the commotion, she just crashed through the ceiling the closest she could and found herself in a walled-off alien fight ring.

With a seven-foot tall alien with an attitude problem. It growled, "I've never killed a Kryptonian before!"

She spat back, "That streak is about to continue!" And even as she said it and ran toward him thinking, Buffy and Xena are so much better at this witty hero banter than I am, she flew up and he grabbed her cape and snapped her down to the floor. She heard shots, saw her sister wearing the dress but shooting at the alien and it ran away.

"God, Kara, are you okay?"

"Um, I hope nobody bet too much on me?"

She limped into the DEO and let Alex do the medical scans, but her mind was on the green Martian they had seen fighting for this creepy Roulette woman. When they told J'onn about his new friend's involvement, he was livid. When they told him about the proto-kryptonite, he started yelling. So Supergirl quietly limped back toward the sunlamp room at the other end of the medical bay. One of the med techs kindly handed her those noise-cancelling earmuffs and she lay down under the lights and napped.
Jess had worked for Lena Luthor for years. And although she was straight, she had friends who were lesbians who talked about Lena in ways that occasionally made Jess uncomfortable. She got it. She had eyes. She could see what they saw: the impeccable, classy businesswoman in the designer dresses, a woman who could work a room if she needed to for networking, but more often just let her cold perfection draw everyone to her.

That wasn't the Lena Luthor Jess loved. Jess loved the nerdy engineer who wanted nothing more than to be able to work in the lab, wearing purple Converse sneakers and skinny jeans and a Princess Leia t-shirt under her lab coat, who tinkered and tested and swore like a sailor when things didn't work. And she loved the passionate, good-hearted, lonely woman whose family was a shit storm train wreck, who just wanted to take L-Corp and turn it into a force for good, do penance for her brother's sins, help the world rather than tear it down.

So, no, Jess didn't ever want to sleep with Lena Luthor, but she would probably protect her boss with her life, because Lena deserved that from somebody, and the only person she really had on her side was Jess.

So when Kara Danvers came crashing in, insisting on seeing Lena after hours, Jess physically tried to stop the surprisingly fast and strong woman, keep her out of Lena's office. It was bad enough, the hours Lena kept, working alone at the top of the building, but for anybody, much less some newbie reporter to come storming in like she owned the place--

"Ms. Luthor! I am SO sorry. She's just so incredibly fast!"

"That's all right, Jess. Make a note downstairs that Kara Danvers is to be shown up immediately whenever she comes here."

Jess swallowed and then watched the reporter beg for help for a friend who had gotten into something dangerous. Lena barely blinked as she considered the request, merely showing her disgust for Veronica Sinclair, an ex from boarding school. (Jess had heard that story one very late night in the lab years ago.) And then Lena was giving the reporter a sticky note with an address and Kara was thanking her and saying she owed her and she sounded sincere, and Lena seemed to think so too.

"It's all right, Kara. I know that you'll be there for me when I need help."

"Absolutely! Thank you so much!"

"Go help your friend."

The reporter was gone in a flash. Lena sat back down at her desk and looked up to see Jess's disapproving look. "What?"

"Um, ma'am, was that...wise? Giving access to a reporter like that?"

"She's not just a reporter, Jess. She's a freaking ray of sunshine. She's a walking rainbow. And when she wrote about the alien detection device, she made me sound sane and balanced and very much not like my brother. And all of those very unexpected things that are Kara Danvers is exactly
what I need in my life."

"Um, I'm not very good about telling with these things, but, well, I'm pretty sure she's straight."

Lena shrugged. "Nobody's perfect."

Chapter End Notes

I love playing with these side characters.
The IT Guy

Chapter Notes

I know wandering from one character to another in the point of view is a little confusing, but all the characters are so interesting and I want to explore what they all think about each other while I try to work out the Sanvers and SuperCorp dynamics.

Winn needed to talk to James about the suit he was building, but he couldn't get out of the DEO in the middle of the day. Then he had a brainstorm about visiting CatCo to deliver to Kara some trial ready-made wipes with the cleaning solution, so J'onn had let him go. On his way from James's office to Kara's desk he saw a gorgeous brunette approach her and engage her and the Daxamite fellow, Marty? Mike?, in conversation.

Now, everybody who ever knew Winn pretty much knew him as the IT guy, and let their preconceived ideas about tech nerds color what they saw of him. But even at his most Computer-Science-Nerd-Guy moments, Winn had the ability to see what a lot of people don't. His heart was as strong as his brain and just as willing to go outside the box if it had to.

So when he stood there in his old workplace twenty feet from where the gorgeous brunette approached Kara and invited her to a charity gala because Kara was her "only friend in National City" (and how can that be a thing with a woman who looks like that?), Winn caught the heart eyes and the lip bite and saw Kara's cheeks turn pink and he instinctively knew before his brain could think it, She never blushed that way for either me or James. And that Mike guy who was getting in the way had no fucking chance at all, excuse my French.

So he forgot to give her the wipes, he walked zombie-like to the elevator he had ridden up and down so many times for so many years, he went back to the DEO in a state of shock because he thought he knew Kara before she came out as Supergirl and then that morning on the roof after the mysterious woman saved the airplane, when she said she had something to tell him about her, his mind had immediately gone there and although she denied it, it stayed in his mind. And although he had growled to himself when that radio shock jock had said Supergirl had a "Sapphic vibe," it stayed in his mind. And today he thought he might have just seen the proof that he had been right all along.

And the only thing left in his head was, That's my girl, attracting the most beautiful woman in National City who isn't actually a superhero!

Later, when she asked him to help her show up at Lena's event as both Kara and Supergirl, he didn't hesitate to say yes, because Winn was a problem solver, after all. So first he did the old spilled champagne trick and calling out for seltzer water to fix the stain and then drifted away as the Girl of Steel made an entrance to the dazzled green eyes of the party's hostess. Supergirl staunchly talked about checking out the perimeter and flew off and while Lena was still looking up dazed, Kara returned as Kara.

"Kara, where were you? You just missed Supergirl!"

"I did? Golly!"
And Winn caught the shocked expression on the Luthor's face, which read as clear as day as meaning, Who the hell still says Golly! in this day and age???. And then the flash of affection as she realized, Kara does. Of course.

But that's when the big angry men marched in with their space guns and ripped Lena's necklace off and she looked ready to spit but said calmly, "Oh, you picked the wrong party to crash!"

At first, Winn thought she meant because Supergirl was on patrol, but when the firefight started, Winn just wanted to get under cover and he ran to the central table and dove under it, hidden by the long white table cloth that reached the floor and there was Lena with a mechanism that he quickly identified as a black body field generator

Winn stuttered, "Uh, okay, so if the Black Body is at equilibrium with the alien weapons then it will absorb their electromagnetic radiation and shut them down. This is genius!"

Lena nodded, still struggling with the device. She said, "I know. But, but the frequency and the wavelength, they were a match so..."

And then they came to the answer together. "The induction coil!"

She pressed the button, there was a pause, and then the sound of immense electricity growing and then the satisfying sound of an explosion. Together they climbed on their hands and knees out from under the table to see Supergirl gathering the criminals and tying their hands. (Winn was pleased that he thought to add a pocket to the cape for zip-ties; he is a firm believer in paying close attention to details.)

When Supergirl saw them together, he said, "We weren't, you know, under there--We saved the day!" And a smile from Supergirl was always a good thing, right?

And Winn thought, What a shame Lena's a lesbian. I could totally marry a genius like that.
Lovesick Puppy? Pfft, No!

Alex had been reading up on the different kinds of kryptonite all day and she was starting to get eye strain. She was way too young to need glasses, despite what Kara and Eliza had to say about the matter. But when J’onn found her in the break room rubbing her eyes and grunting, he told her to take the rest of the day off. It was barely four in the afternoon, but she took a chance to call Maggie to see if she wanted to come out and...get some alien intel that might help both their cases? Sawyer laughed, hearing the excuse for playing hooky as exactly what it was and met her at the alien bar for a game of pool and a beer.

By halfway through the game, when Maggie was playing even worse than usual if that was even possible, Alex started to realize something was wrong. After a shot that put the white ball in a pocket, Maggie just dug out her wallet and handed Alex a twenty-dollar bill.

"I'm done. You've already won anyway. I'm calling it a day."

"Maggie, what's wrong. Forget about the money. What is it?"

"My girlfriend broke up with me."

Alex, shocked, said, "Who would do that?"

"A smart woman. I mean, look at me. She's right. I'm obsessed with work--"

"Nothing wrong with that."

"And a borderline sociopath. And she never wants to see me again. So." She shrugged into her leather jacket. "I am going to go home and drink something stronger and lose my cool. See you around, Danvers."

"Feel better..."

The next day at the DEO, Alex couldn't concentrate. She sat in the control center between Winn and Vasquez, staring off into the distance. She didn't notice the calculating looks Vasquez gave her and didn't hear a word of Winn explaining how he was working to target the signature radiation that the alien weapons gave off. They still had the residue of the exploded weapons from the gala and Alex had done what she could to isolate the different elements used in them, and now she was, as always waiting for results. So she checked her phone now and then for possible text messages from Maggie and mostly just stared into space.

Winn called her on it. "You haven't heard a word I've said."

Rather than argue that she had, Alex just said dreamily, "No, I was thinking about Maggie. She is just terrible at pool. I mean, I even try to let her win and she can't keep up."

Winn frowned. "Who? Your cop friend?"

"Yeah, she so tough, you know? But her girlfriend just broke up with her and she seems so vulnerable. I wish I knew how to help."

Winn shook his head. "Oh, I steer clear from getting involve in other people's relationships!"

"Like you did with Kara's? Right."
"Hey, that was different. I was into Kara. It's not like you're into this Maggie person."

Alex stared off into space again, a small smile playing at her lips. Vasquez coughed and hurried off "to find some cough drops."
Reconsidering Initial Perceptions

Chapter Notes

So I started all of this to see Alex and Vasquez together and then it turned into a series of character studies, because all of these characters are fascinating (except you know who). And I’ve just written 7000 words in two days.

So strange. Maggie couldn’t recall the last time she ran into a colleague (and certainly not a fed) who was so sharp, so quick, so easy to work with, who could follow her own quick leaps, who had her gun out the moment before the danger started to happen. And then, even stranger, when was the last time she met an officer or agent so quick with her weapon whom she actually wanted to make understand the aliens, understand how they were just like us (she thought, just like me)? Or talk about work and not get an eye-roll. Or just talk, just so that she would turn and look at Maggie…

And suddenly she began to feel that alarm bell go off. Oh, Maggie, you’re doing it again: falling for the straight girl. And she just can’t. She can’t. She’d been down that road before. Hell, she’s been down every road at this point and they all go directly to heartbreak without passing go. And she knew finally that it had little to do with the road (except the straight-girl road maybe). It was her.

She’d dated humans, mostly: an accountant, a barista, a professional soccer player, a doctor, two social workers and at least three teachers, and it just never worked. Their jobs were important to them, but it wasn’t like her job, protecting humans and aliens from each other, because they all deserved to be protected, and the world was a scary, strange and dangerous place. So the sudden phone calls, the wail of sirens, the Glock in the nightstand next to the lube, the constant attention to everything in a public place that wasn’t her girlfriend, watching people’s hands and eyes. Obsessed with work, they said. Paranoid. And those were the ones who didn’t have…ideas…about what they might do with her NCPD handcuffs. She shuddered.

So then she started dating aliens, and that was easier. They appreciated her job more, for one thing. And nobody really expected a cross-species relationship to go anywhere, so the pressure was less. But even then, had she ever had a girlfriend or even just a friend whose eyes lit up when she walked in the room? Because she walked in the room? Her? Maggie?

Bizarre.

So when at the bar Alex had told her that her ex was stupid for breaking up with her, she had to leave, because it was clear to her that Alex had no idea what it sounded like she was saying. And then at the crime scene when Alex asked about how she felt and invited her to a tapas place or a pinball bar—and who on Earth even goes to a pinball bar these days?—Maggie had paused to reconsider. Was Alex angling for a date? With her?

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I guess I read you wrong.”

“What do you mean?”
“I didn’t think you were into girls.”

Alex’s eyes got huge. “I, I’m not!”

Whoops. Shit. Still… “You’d be surprised how many gay women have said that to me.”

“I’m not! Not that it’s bad! It’s not! I just! I have to go. I’ll let you know when we have anything!”

And then she was gone. Maggie watched her go. It seemed like she was always watching people walk away from her. The uniform stood up and handed her an evidence bag to check, and when she looked up again, Alex was gone, lost in the sea of onlookers to the crime scene. Maggie sighed. The heavy feeling in her stomach that had been the effect of her ex’s mean-spirited (if well deserved) parting words spread to the rest of her, a kind of sudden full-body exhaustion. She handed the evidence bag back to the uniform, answered his questions with a sharp tone she couldn’t help. The woman had been becoming a good friend to Maggie, who didn’t care about a whole lot of people, and she had just suggested she might be gay. Alex’s response might be internalized homophobia or it might be the other kind. Maybe just surprise. Hopefully just surprise. Maybe the next time they saw each other, they could joke about it. Maggie could say something self-deprecating about needing to get her gaydar fixed. They could go back to the way things were. Time would tell.
Because Blood Is Thicker

Chapter Notes

I got the idea for switching M'gann for Mon-Ew at Cadmus from a brilliant AO3 writer and it just immediately settled in as part of my head canon. But now I can't remember who so I can't give credit. As always, kudos and comments very welcome.

If there's one thing M'gann has learned in three centuries as a bartender, it's that eventually a bartender sees absolutely everything. This is doubly true in an alien bar. So she had watched the interactions between Agent Danvers and Detective Sawyer with a combination of affection and bitterness.

Affection because Maggie Sawyer was a favorite at the bar and M'gann had been watching the way Agent Danvers looked at her for quite a while. M'gann had seen Danvers go for her gun the first evening Maggie had brought her to the bar and had frozen, thinking, Oh, great. A DEO agent. Really, Maggie? What were you thinking? She should have trusted her. Within a week, Danvers had come back for information to save Maggie's life and damn, if that girl didn't kick that guy's ass! It was beautiful. So, yes, to protect Maggie, M'gann had told the agent where to find Scorch, because Maggie genuinely cared about the community and now she'd brought in Danvers and other DEO agents as well, more people to help protect the alien community. So yes, M'gann felt affection watching badass Alex Danvers fall head over heels in love with Maggie Sawyer, figuring out that she wasn't the person she'd thought she was in the process.

But M'gann felt bitterness too. Humans talked about closets in situations like this and the comparison was apt. Martians didn't have a use for clothing the way humans did, but living as a human had given M'gann an appreciation for that place they used to store--or hide--appearances. Suddenly, it seemed Agent Danvers no longer felt a need to not show herself, to lie. For M'gann, that could never happen.

Most of the time, M'gann wore her human appearance, even at the bar among other aliens. It was a neutral self to show to the world, not loaded down with her people's crimes. At the fight club, she wore her Green Martian appearance, taking on a body like those of her people's victims and never losing a fight. It was a kind of sacrifice, an offering, the way a human patron had said that after he had nightmares, he would go back into his dream and fix it, kill the shark, make it turn out the way it should have.

And the pain, the bruises, those were a form of penance, her getting what she deserved for the things she had done. J'onn's self-righteous anger came from his job. He could make up for surviving the death of his people by protecting the humans. He could find a way to do penance through pain simply by doing his job, going out on ops, getting injured in the line of duty. He didn't need to find an outside outlet. So when he refused to kill her, she refused to kill him. And when he had forgiven her--

But it wasn't really her he had forgiven. It was the her he thought she was, a Green with survivor's complex. But the fact that he had offered forgiveness to her at all had softened some of her edges, made her realize that maybe, after all these years, she could let just a little of the guilt go...

The problem, of course, is that inevitably when you stop punishing yourself for doing wrong, for
being wrong, life just gives you the opportunity to do wrong, to be wrong, again. She didn't realize it at first. She saw that fierce Agent Danvers come into the bar, urgently asking for her help for J'onn, who had been badly injured in a fight. Without thinking, M'gann put down the tub of empties and grabbed her jacket, accepting the extra motorcycle helmet and holding on for dear life to the agent's muscled body as they sped to the skyscraper that turned out to be a super-secret government facility.

As they sped through the lobby, Agent Danvers waved her ID at the guards and spoke with someone on an earpiece. "Vasquez, get the usual Non-Disclosure Agreement paperwork and meet me in the lab where J'onn is."

The place was a maze, filled with state-of-the-art human technology and some that she thought might not be human-designed. But the lab she was finally led to was less like a hospital room and more like something out of Star Trek, and it was only when she saw J'onn lying so unusually helpless that she realized that Agent Danvers' request makes no sense.

"What can I do? I'm not a doctor."

But Danvers was pulling on blue gloves and rooting through drawers for a syringe and tubing.

"No, but you're a Martian. He is dying! And he needs a transfusion yesterday." She set up an empty bag and attached the tubing, ignoring M'gann's rising panic.

"Oh, I can't. He wouldn't want me to. He wouldn't want this."

"You know what? I don't care what you want and I don't care what you think he would want. I know what he needs and that is Martian blood. And you are the last, the only person who can save him. So forget your own squeamishness or whatever Martian taboo and open up a vein, M'gann. Because you know he would do it for you."

And there it was. She knew he would. And anyway, if their blood types weren't a match, what she most feared wouldn't happen. If they were not a match, he wouldn't undergo the transformation and he never needed to know that his greatest enemy was the person who was trying to be his friend. That's what she told herself as she slowly took off her jacket and rolled up her sleeve.

She stayed by him for hours, watching, hoping. Martians didn't pray, or at least White Martians certainly didn't, but three centuries on Earth had left M'gann appreciating the human custom, the human faith that something bigger out there might just want good things for them. So she couldn't pray, but she could hope.

And gradually throughout the day, she saw signs that her hopes were more valid than her fears. His skin became greener, his breathing eased. When Alex looked at the readings on the machines by his bed, her shoulders stopped being so tensed. And then suddenly, the red tracery lit up his body and he became once more his human appearance. He thanked her and asked her to stay until he fell asleep again, still holding his strong hand, and she acquiesced. She wanted to give him comfort, and she thought, maybe they weren't a match. Because if they had been a complete match, the red tracery wouldn't have brought him back to his Hank Henshaw persona. It would have made him an enormous white-skinned monster.

But just as he fell asleep again, she saw it, the sign that they were a partial match, his hand trembling. And she jumped up and ran out of the DEO, ran to get away from herself and the one person who remembered her planet and his people and what her people had done to them. What she had just done to him.
And as she ran out of the DEO, she bumped into a tall, older woman with eyes like ice. As she went to excuse herself, a van screeched to a halt in the street and large men grabbed her and hauled her inside. The woman entered after her and closed the van doors. They sped off.

The woman's eyes narrowed. "Finally. J'onn Jones' daughter." And she smiled.
The Man in the Van

If it had been anyone else but James, Winn would have said no. All his life, most of Winn's serious friends had been women, usually strong feminist women who saw him as a little brother even when he was older than them, women like Kara who were sweet and tough in equal measure and loved his sense of humor and his nerdiness but could never bring themselves to love him. Not that way. So when his friendship with James evolved from a workplace thing to a game night thing to the kind of thing where James was asking Winn to use his own particular tech superpowers and make him a suit and support him in turning into a superhero, Winn resisted for as long as he could. Then he gave in.

For James, out there in the suit, it was an adrenalin rush, an ego thing. For Winn, back in the van, it was also an ego thing, but not something about muscles. Something about the brain. Something about his own genius at computer science and materials science and his own (he thinks privately to himself, fucking) creativity. The ability to think so far outside the box that the box ceased to exist. Also, watching James do his karate and judo and acrobatics while wearing the suit Winn made for him? That Winn didn't even have words for.

They started small, having learned from Kara's mistakes the previous year, learning as they went. But when Winn caught the Flying Purple People-Eater on the police scanner, they flew, metaphorically, into action. And finding Mon-El there suddenly trying to be some kind of hero only made the challenge more important. Winn had strange mixed feelings about the Daxamite. On the one hand, Kara's instinctive distrust of him, although based on prejudice, was hard to disregard. On the other hand, he was strong and charming, had an endless tolerance for alcohol, and seemed to consider Winn a friend. Like a guy friend. Not the way women always friendzoned him.

But when neither of the men could contain the recently-turned-Barney-with-teeth, Winn did what he always did. He called for Supergirl. And when she got there, he realized what made her more of a hero than the other two would ever be (although the moment he thought that to himself, he denied that he thought it). Because the first thing she did when she landed in front of the monster was offer to help him. Not fight him. Not kill him. Help him. Who would do that? Well, Kara would. Supergirl would. James and Mon-El wouldn't because they were strong enough to fight and they enjoyed the fight, or at least James did; Winn doesn't know how Mon-El felt. He looked kind of terrified.

But Winn wouldn't. Not because he was strong like them. He wasn't strong. He was smart, but he was not strong. He wasn't even strong enough to stop his father without Supergirl's help. And weak people didn't offer to help monsters. That's what heroes did.

And then, right before she pulled out the plutonium and put the monster in the ground, she said something Winn thought he wought remember for the rest of his life.

"Change is good, when you finally become what you were meant to be. But you were never meant to be a monster."
The Perils of Perfectionism

Chapter Notes

Given that all of Alex's dialogue not about a hot cop or rogue aliens in the first half of this season came directly from my life this past year, this particular chapter is a labor of love that pretty much wrote itself. And I have been sleeping in a Sanvers t-shirt with the real full happy life quote for the past month. Also, I am approaching having written 10,000 words in two days (think about that: NaNoWriMo is 50,000 words in 30 days). Inspired much? So, yup, this is going to be a long one, but we are getting closer to the Vasquez idea that inspired this opus.

In the years before Kara came to Earth, Alex Danvers had a pretty normal childhood and a happy one. As an only child, she enjoyed the undivided attention of her parents and she thrived both personally and academically. Her teachers called her gifted. She was way ahead of her peers in reading, math and especially science. She had close friends, played on the softball and soccer teams and laughed early and often. So when her parents went together to meet Kal-El in Metropolis, leaving Alex with her usual babysitter to play endless boardgames with over that fateful weekend, they left one of the most well-adjusted children either one of them had ever seen.

And that, of course, was one of the reasons they had said yes to taking Kara in. They could not imagine Alex being anything less than kind, loyal, responsible: the perfect big sister, just as she had always been the perfect child. All of this Alex knew. They had talked about it for a long time before Kara showed up. They had talked about it often in the years since. It explained why her parents often seemed so confused and disappointed with her. It explained the perfectionism that made her life both very successful and very difficult. She had (eventually) the perfect sister. She had found the perfect job with the perfect boss and colleagues. Her mother was still terminally disappointed with her, her father was probably dead, and she was personally terminally single, but other than those achingly large imperfections that chafed her at two a.m. many nights, her life was pretty damn good.

And then she met Detective Maggie Sawyer.

For weeks, she had been dazzled by the head tilts, the smiles, the dimples. The quick wit, the fast reflexes, the sheer bravery and selflessness. And then she had been confused by the butterflies in her stomach when Maggie called them good partners, by her inexplicably checking out Maggie's very fine ass as she left the DEO, by that weird sour feeling when she saw Maggie's very pretty girlfriend greet her that night with a kiss. Maggie was lucky. She deserved to have someone who loved her. And that girl probably knew exactly how lucky she was to have someone as amazing as Maggie in her life.

So Alex had done what she always did: she turned up her own super-power to maximum and tried to be the perfect friend. She did what she had always done for Kara: offered comfort, distraction,
unwavering support. And then Maggie had suggested that Alex might be gay. And this was not the men Alex broke up with after a few weeks saying this. It was not the men she turned down when they asked her for sex. This was an actual card-carrying lesbian, a tough, sweet, beautiful woman who had apparently slept with a lot of women, human and alien. So...she'd know, wouldn't she?

That was what made Alex stop and think. That was what made Alex sit up at night with a bottle of scotch, thinking about her past: her unsuccessful boyfriends, her disinclination for intimacy with them, her deep and not always lasting friendships with women, that fight she had with Vicky. That time she had a weird feeling about Agent Susan Vasquez when she had just joined the DEO and saw her in black tactical gear for the first time. That magnetism she had felt at the airport when she saw a beautiful stranger invading her crime scene.

It came as an enormous shock.

It explained SO much.

Kara would never understand.

Eliza would freak.

She had no fucking idea what to do and to the best of her knowledge, she only actually knew one gay person: Maggie. Who else could she talk to about this? And she did, sort of. She couldn't actually say the word, but she knew Maggie had understood. The head tilt. The smile. The soft voice that didn't push. But even after she had done the thing that felt terrifying and also, weirdly right, she still felt confused, unmoored.

It didn't help that things at the DEO were heating up. First, she had failed to talk Kara out of her plutonium idea, and luckily that hadn't turned into Chernobyl as she had feared. Then their mole at Lord Technologies had reported that Maximum Ass-hat was looking frighteningly cheerful and the scientists in the K-Lab way less tense than they had in months. And that couldn't be good. And she didn't want to even begin to think about the crap that the armored vigilante was up to. Kara was almost apoplectic about it.

But for perhaps the first time in her life, Alexandra Danvers couldn't concentrate on her work. And she didn't know what to do.

So when she showed up at the alien bar and apologized to Maggie for dropping a bomb on her, she was surprised at her friend's answer.

"That's not the first bomb I've had dropped on me, Danvers. So how you doing with all that?"

"I just...I don't know what to do now."

"Well, everyone's experience is different. I can only tell you what I did."

"Which was what?"

"I came out to my family."

"Maybe it's just a phase? You know, maybe it isn't real?"

Maggie shook her head. "You're real, and you deserve to have a real, full, happy life. Okay? Tell your family. This is the biggest thing that's ever happened to you, and you shouldn't have to do it alone."
"I have you."

"Yeah, you do. And I'm good for a drink when you come out."

"You promise?"

"Cross my heart."

Now, Alexandra Danvers, while horrible at affairs of the heart, was brave at most other things, and one of those things was her sister. Alex wondered if Krypton even had homosexuality, if Kara even knew what a lesbian was. In a lot of ways, Kara was a bit of a prude, not even capable of hearing Alex talk about her one-night stands in college. She would literally stick her fingers in her ears and shout la-la-la to avoid listening. So this was not going to be an easy conversation, but it was one that Alex knew she had to have. So she interrupted Supergirl training (yelling at) Mon-El and asked her to change into civilian gear and come out for a walk.

Kara knew something was up, because this was just not Alex-standard. She insisted that Alex could tell her anything, and Alex hoped to God it was true. So she tried.

She talked about her friend Maggie, how she had feelings for her. Those kinds of feelings. She talked about Vicky Donohue and their fight. When Kara asked, "Wait, so Maggie's gay, right? Does that mean you're gay too?" Alex didn't know how to answer. And when Kara said, "I mean, I know you haven't dated in a while..." Alex snapped, "This is not about my not having found the right guy!"

Kara floundered. Alex floundered. Alex fled.

To be fair, they were both distracted by work: Kara by always being two people with two jobs that both took a good deal of attention, two personas with two ways of talking and interacting with the world. But now Alex had to admit that she was two people too, and maybe always had been: the woman who needed to be perfect and the woman who wanted something beyond cold perfection, who wanted—could she say deserved?—some warmth. And now she had to figure out how to integrate those two parts.

It bothered her more than she wanted to admit that Kara was pushing her away after the most recent battle. J’onn told Supergirl to go home and get some rest and Alex had offered to go with her, but Kara had physically pulled away from her. Kara, the most tactile person on this planet, pulled away from her touch and left the building.

Vasquez found her in the gym, not punching the bag, just pushing it with her fingers, frowning at her own thoughts. She looked up, “Does J’onn need me?”

“No. I just thought...You seem different. And Kara seemed...different. Are the two of you okay?”

“Good question.”

“You have been remarkably thoughtful lately. Full of thoughts?”

“You have no idea.”

“Try me.” Vasquez crossed her arms over her chest and looked her right in the eye.

“I told Kara something. About me. And now she, I don’t know, she’s not...”

“Welcoming you with open arms? When did you tell her this thing?”
“This morning.”

Vasquez let out a small laugh, but her eyes were kind. “Agent Danvers, you have the mind of a scientist. You follow a system to its end and look at the plausible possibilities and the results and come to a conclusion. It’s one of the things that makes you a good agent. Kara doesn’t come at things that way. She feels her way. And emotions take longer than logic and don’t go in predictable directions. She may just need time to process…what you told her.”

Alex narrowed her eyes at the other woman. “And what do you think I…told her?” Vasquez gave her a slow blink. “I’m sure I have no idea. But don’t the two of you talk about everything? Maybe you should go see if she wants to talk.”

Alex’s voice was shaky. “She might not want to talk to me.”

“Okay. Then maybe you should go upstairs and see Winn. He taped something to his computer console that you might want to read. Or not.” She shrugged and left.

Slowly, Alex followed her out. Winn was away from his desk when she reached it, but she could see the small strip of paper and the words written on it in his handwriting: Change is good when you become what you were meant to be. –Supergirl. Alex was changed into civilian clothes and on her way to Kara’s apartment ten minutes later.

Alex let herself in with her key, to see Kara holding tightly to a pillow with one hand and stuffing her face with popcorn with the other. She turned to see Alex and frowned. “I told you that you didn’t need to check on me.”

“You’ve been so weird since I told you.”

“I didn’t mean to be.”

“Kara, I know when you’re sad, or when you’re disappointed. I don’t know what I would do if you were disappointed in me.”

“I would never be disappointed in you, but you said you didn’t want to talk about it anymore. Sit down. Alex, come and talk with me.”

Alex sat.

Kara leaned into her shoulder. “I owe you an apology. All those years we spent together growing up, the endless nights talking and sharing, now I realize that they were all about me and my secret. There’s never been room for you, and that’s my fault. And I’m so sorry. I do know how it feels to keep a part of yourself shut off, to keep it inside. And I know how lonely that can make you feel. But Alex, you are not alone.”

“I can't do this without you.”

“You don't have to. So what about Maggie? What's she like?”

“I... I just like her so much. You know, she's smart and she's tough and she's just beautiful. She's so beautiful.”

“So are you.” Somewhere, when Kara said something like that, Alex could believe it. She pulled her into a hug and just then her phone buzzed. Of course it did. She said, “DEO's reporting an alien attacking civilians in an alleyway downtown.”
Kara said, “I'll go get the alien. You get the girl.”

And Alex laughed. Before she could ask about the quote on Winn’s desk, Supergirl was flying out of the window. So she just shook her head and looked at her watch. It was five o’clock. Maggie would probably be at the alien bar hopelessly trying to improve her pool game. Alex felt warm imagining her arms around the detective as she improved the line of her shot. Even the wind that whipped against her body as she rode through the city couldn’t cool the warmth in her chest, which only spread as she walked into the dim bar to see Maggie leaning against the pool table aiming. Her white shirt shone under the bar lights. Alex thought she had never seen anything more beautiful. And then Maggie caught sight of her and lit up and Alex had to reconsider that assessment.

“Hey, you!”

“Hey. I told Kara.”

“You did? Good for you, Danvers!” She reached out and gave the taller woman a tight hug that nearly took Alex’s breath away. “I’m buying, all night. What are you having?”

And Alex put her hands on her face and pulled her into a kiss, her heart pounding so hard Maggie must be able to hear it through her fingers. Maggie leaned into the kiss for a moment and then pulled back, looking surprised. “Wow.”

“I have wanted to do that…”

“I can tell. But everything is shiny and new, and you should experience that for yourself, not because you want to be with me. Those relationships never really work out. I’ll be here for you! But as a friend.”

The head tilt. It didn’t mean what Alex had thought it meant.

“Are we good, Danvers?”

Alex forced herself to smile, nod. “Yeah, of course. I have to go.” And she spun around and hurried to the door.

“Alex! Don’t go!”

But Alex was walking away and taking her humiliation with her, first to the whisky aisle of the liquor store and then to her large and empty-feeling apartment, and she stayed there, gone to ground, replaying how the last weeks had happened and how she could have possibly made such an enormous mistake, read the detective wrong, asked for what she wanted, told her little sister something that was obviously untrue in retrospect, something it was going to be very hard to take back.

She hadn’t reckoned on her sister first pounding on her door and then flying in her window, worried about how she had actually missed work, and suddenly work sounded better, but Kara was having none of it. She could read Alex better than anybody.

“What’s wrong? Is this about you coming out?”

“No. Just forget I said anything about it. I made a mistake, okay. I was wrong and I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“What happened?”
“She doesn’t like me. Like that.”

Kara took Alex in her arms while she sobbed, “I’m so humiliated.”

“No. I’m proud of you.”

And it took time, and a long night of hugging and talking and finally sleeping with her tear-stained face on Kara’s shoulder, but eventually she pulled herself together, because that was what Agent Danvers did. The next morning, she walked back into the DEO, not so much as herself as the person Kara believed her to be, the person J’onn had trained her to be. The person who went out and fought the rogue aliens and restrained them once they were down and brought them in, interrogated them, wrote up those reports, analyzed the substances they collected, wrote more reports. Went home. Slept. Came back and did it again.

Black tactical gear. A thigh holster. A look that threatened a bloody death to anyone who so much as looked at her wrong. Working at the DEO was just so much easier than grad school, undergrad, high school, any of it. She could just manage to be human at the DEO, just manage to keep her internal life separate from everything else.

Except that her internal life included Supergirl and Supergirl was her sister and when her sister suddenly went AWOL, Alex completely lost it. But that was the other thing about the DEO: she wasn’t the only badass there. She was surrounded by badasses who also cared about her sister, who were also willing to move heaven and Earth to find her, to protect her, to save her and bring her back to Alex. And Alex had never felt more grateful to them in her life.

J’onn got five separate teams to prepare for an op, five, while Winn set his algorithms in action at his three computer work stations: one to search for Supergirl’s earpiece, one to search for kryptonite, and one to scan the city’s gunshot-detection system. Vasquez was doing something very quickly at her station, muttering about how many lead-lined buildings could possibly be in National City and the vast odds that it was the warehouse district, because, duh, the warehouse district (her words). Alex stood there in the middle of the command center knowing that her outside looked badass and her insides were melting into a hot puddle of fear.

And then they got a call from Maggie, who had a missing persons report on M’gann, and that gave Winn and Vasquez something else useful to scan for.
Supergirl was on her way to interrupt the vigilante's newest fun time when her earpiece was hacked and a woman's voice was telling her that her Green Martian's daughter was in the possession of Cadmus and only Supergirl could save her. Supergirl took only a moment to deduce the woman was confused but probably talking about M'gann and took off to the coordinates the woman gave her.

And that immediately got weird when she burst into a building to see...J'onn Jones? And nearly got her ass kicked, because although that was not actually J'onn, it was a cybernetically enhanced Hank Henshaw, and although she had never actually met the real Hank, she realized after about two minutes of getting pummeled that the original had the same DEO training her sister had. And, not entirely unlike the real Hank or the real J'onn, this guy was not someone to take on a superhero without serious backup.

So that was how National City's own superhero found herself in the clutches of the anti-alien domestic terrorism organization that was Cadmus. In a cell, next to her bartender. And the fact that that was the first thing she thought was testament to her being Alex Danvers' sister, which, in the face of the pain she was currently feeling and her terror about the pain that was pretty much an inevitability, actually made her laugh.

M'gann turned her head. "Oh, no. Supergirl. How did they capture you?"

"You know, M'gann, you're basically a modern day gladiator. So the fact that they captured me shouldn't surprise you. We should both be surprised that they captured you." Supergirl winced, feeling the ache of ribs that were not going to let her relax anytime soon.

"And you woke up laughing."

"Sorry, it's just, it's like the time Alex got taken hostage during that bank robbery last year and the only other person who also got taken was her shrink, and I just thought, here I am with my bartender... Sorry, I guess that's only funny to me."

M'gann licked the crusted blood off her lips. "No, I get it. I've been a bartender for a really long time. I've heard all the jokes. And I guess you're Silver Lining Gal, aren't you." It wasn't really a question. "They've come in and sneered at me, but I can't figure out what they want from me. I'm, I'm just a bartender."

"They wanted me and they used you to get to me. They seem to think that you're J'onn's daughter or something."
"Never tell him that!"

Supergirl stared at her, surprised at the vehemence. "Um, would that be so bad? Or is it an age thing. I know he's like three hundred years old, so..."

"So am I. That's not it. He just...wouldn't like it, if he knew. Please?"

"Okay. He'll never hear it from me."

The sound of heels on a concrete floor reached Supergirl before she saw them and she stood up. An older woman, blonde, blue-eyed, stately and cruel like a Disney queen, stepped close to the bars of the cages.

"So. Supergirl." She said it like some people would say "sewerage" or "dog shit."

"You know you can't hold me," said Supergirl, feeling like bravado was never a bad thing in these situations. It was practically Superhero 101. "The DEO will find me and take you down."

"The DEO? Or L-Corp?"

Supergirl just stared at her. "L-Corp?"

"Who are you to my daughter?"

Years of watching rom-coms made Supergirl frown at the nuances she hear in the question. It almost sounded like one of those cowboy dads asking a not-so-great guy what his "intentions" were, with a gun to reply to a wrong answer. She did what she always did. She told the truth.

"Lillian Luthor? I am her friend. And does she know about you? That you are in charge of Cadmus? That her mother is an evil, murdering--"

Lillian turned to the thugs behind her. "Take her."

"I won't do anything for you!"

"No?" Lillian pulled out a handgun and shot M'gann in the knee. "Lead poisoning can be fatal to Martians."

"All right. I'll go with you. Get somebody to take care of her."

But as the cage door opened and the thugs grabbed her unresisting and still aching body, she didn't see anyone moving to take care of M'gann. "Hey! What are you doing? Somebody has to help her!"

But then there was a green flash and a wave of nausea and blackness.

She woke strapped to a laboratory bed with the big goons leering at her. "Wait! Where is she? Where is Lillian? Has somebody tended to M'gann? She promised!"

And it occurred to her that the promise of someone who was willing to make thousands suffer might not be held as important as the promise of someone who was willing to sacrifice herself so that one could live. It was the kind of thing that Alex would maybe say, that Eliza would totally say. It was, in retrospect, obvious. And it had never occurred to Supergirl until that moment. She felt naive, stupid. And then she heard the heels clicking toward the room.

And then she saw the helmet, heard the explanation. And she knew what Alex would say, what Eliza would say, what J'onn would say, what Winn would say.
And then she thought of Lena, growing up with this monstrous woman as her "mother." And she thought of Eliza's good heart, the way Eliza had made adoption a source of joy and comfort, not exclusion and pain. And she thought, If I am ever going to get out of this, it will be because I gave her what she wanted. If I just refuse, she will kill me. Lex's kryptonite weapons will make that easy. She remembered that kidnapping seminar that J'onn forced them all to attend: make the kidnappers know you and like you.

Because if she couldn't, she wouldn't survive. And Lena, with this as her mother, needed at least one friend in National City. And Supergirl, Kara, would be that if it killed her.

"Give me the helmet."

And then she solar-flared. And then Lillian Luthor slapped her, tasted Supergirl's blood on her wrist, pulled out a syringe...

She was weak, so very weak, when they returned her to her cage, and M'gann had not been attended to. So much for the promises of villains. She can almost hear her big sister saying, "Told you so." Except Alex wouldn't, not about this. About a lot of other things yes, because it was probably in the Big Sister Manual she always talked about but would never let Kara see. But not this. And it was starting to occur to her that she might just be a tad delirious.

It took a while. How long? The seminar had mentioned that, how time ceased to have meaning but not relevance. But gradually the weakness, although endlessly annoying, was not a source of constant pain. Gradually, she found the strength to pull herself up to a sitting position. She shook from the effort. M'gann dragged herself across her cell to be closer.

"I'm so sorry I dragged you into this."

Supergirl waved a weak hand. "Superhero. No choice. Don't...sweat it."

"Don't sweat it?"

"I can't. You know Alex Danvers, right?"

"Sure," said M'gann, confused.

"If you get out of this. If I don't. Tell her." She fought for breath. "Tell her to keep living life on her terms. Tell her...I wasn't afraid."

M'gann gave a shaky laugh. "If you get out of here and I don't? Feel free to tell anybody who will listen that I was terrified."

And Kara had seen dramas as well as rom-coms. She knew how scenes like this could end. But just when she was convinced death was around the corner, the death she had escaped on Krypton almost thirteen years ago, on Earth every other week for the past year and a half since she had embraced her powers...suddenly, something shifted. She heard a key in the lock of her cell, saw someone tall and hooded beckon her out. She stood, still so weak, challenged the person.

And he slipped the hood from his head and was Jeremiah Danvers.

She choked, couldn't make her mouth decide between "Jere--" and "Dad--" so it came out as "Deri...

He hugged her, put the key in M'gann's cell's lock, beckoned her out and caught her when she fell into his arms, her knee still a bloody mess from the bullet.
It was hard to sort out later, when she was trying to explain to Alex and J'onn how it all went down: Jeremiah removing the bullet from M'gann's leg, pushing her into a gradually stronger Supergirl's arms, leading them by secret passageways towards an exit from Cadmus.

What she could remember clearly was him telling them to go, her realizing that he meant to stay.

"But Alex will kill me. She's been so strong. She took on everything, after..."

"She was always too strong for her own good."

"She'll kill me if I leave you behind!"

"If you die here, there'll be no one to kill. I've survived ten years here. I can survive a while longer. Go."

So she went. And by the time they reached the perimeter, a modicum of her powers were back, at least enough to allow her to fly, not far above the ground and not quickly, not with M'gann clutched bridal-style to her chest, but fly nonetheless home. Home to the DEO.
Maggie Sawyer saw death nearly every day, but never like this. Never wholesale slaughter. Never in a place she considered a sanctuary, a refuge, a home away from home. And the victims were never her friends. But she was a cop and she was a very good, very thorough, and right now a very angry cop, so she was going to do her job and make sure that everyone under her did their job too. She had the uniforms take statement from the human survivors who were standing outside in the cold without their coats, looking scared and in shock. She asked for and got the best crime scene techs and made sure they bagged the evidence correctly. She kicked the rookie off the crime scene and asked for and got him transferred down to traffic. And then they found the alien device and she swore a blue streak and looked at her watch, because she knew the DEO wouldn’t even let the NCPD hold that little engine of death in their evidence locker for a hot minute. And was pretty sure who was going to swoop in and tell her so and it wasn’t going to be Supergirl.

She heard the government’s black SUVs pulling up outside the bar before she saw them, which gave her a few heartbeats to figure out what to do. She saw the Science Division’s medical examiner behind the bar leaning over a body, and her heart jumped into her mouth. She went over, afraid to see M’gann, but it wasn’t her. It was Darla, the Roltikkon, Maggie’s ex. She stood up to look away and saw Agent Danvers striding into the room, and it was clear instantly that this was Agent Danvers, not Alex, from her grim expression, her stance, her hard eyes, everything about her. And on the one hand, it broke Maggie’s heart to see her like this, but on the other, she was grateful, because if Alex Danvers knew how to do one thing very well, it was her job. And whoever did this, to these people, here? Oh, they were going to pay very painfully.

The agent met the detective’s eyes and said formally, “This is going to be a joint effort between the Science Division and the DEO. One of our members who was here at the time reported—”

“A device,” finished Maggie, pointing the alien tech attached to the underside of the bar. “Our crime scene techs aren’t touching it. It’s all yours, but we’ll need a receipt from the DEO. Chain of evidence.”

The DEO agents swarmed that end of the bar and Maggie turned away to step outside, where it was cooler, where the bodies were all breathing, where she could breathe.

They did their jobs, keeping out of the NCPD’s way and left with the device in a solid silver container, and dozens of samples from the victims. Then Agent Danvers and her team in black was gone without saying goodbye, not that Maggie had expected it. And she herself stayed for two more hours, until all the photographs were taken, the bodies were bagged and on their way to the morgue, all the evidence collected, and the surfaces dusted for prints. Everything by the book.

Then she wrote up her reports and went home to get three or four hours of sleep before turning around and going back to the precinct to officially start the investigation of the bio-weapon and whoever had used it in a domestic terrorism hate crime multiple homicide targeting the aliens of National City.
Becoming What You Hate

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: mentions of PTSD.

Normally, J’onn could tune out other people’s thoughts, unless they were physically and emotionally close to him or their feelings were remarkably strong. With Alex, all three things were true. So the moment she had walked into the DEO that first morning after the whole thing with Maggie, she knew he knew, and he knew that she did not want him to pry. So when the DEO got the call about the attack at the bar and Alex had started to prep her team, he offered to go in her place, pointing out that it would be a joint investigation with the Science Division.

But by this time Alex had managed to get back her staunch professionalism and simply put her foot down. “Thank you, J’onn, but we both know you don’t need to work a crime scene that sounds like it might have been a trial run for a genocide. I can do this. This is what you trained me for.”

So he nodded, more grateful than he could say even if he were a more talkative man, watching one Danvers sister leave as the other came in with a swish of red and blue.

He turned to Vasquez. “Where are we on the Lord Tech specimen?”

“Agent Danvers has a few hypotheses based on our mole’s intel. There are only so many ways to change one substance into another: chemicals, heat, radiation. Winn is building a computer simulation based on what we know of Lex Luthor’s methods and what we got from Lord Tech on the red kryptonite. There’s even a bet going on down in the lab. Smart money is on a toxic chemical. Alex thinks radiation.”

J’onn sighed. Scientists. “Are you in on the bet?”

“Of course.” She grinned. “My money’s on Alex. She has an annoying habit of being right about these things.”

Supergirl high-fived her. "I knew I liked you for a reason, Agent Vasquez. What kind of radiation would change this stuff though? Like something coming from a nuclear facility? Or something more like my yellow sun power lamps? Something huge? Or something small and ordinary?"

Vasquez shrugged. "I'm Logistics and Strategy Girl, Supergirl. Your sister is the lab rat." She put a hand to her earpiece. “Okay, roger that. Sir, Mon-El was at the bar. He’s alive and doesn’t appear affected, but Agent Danvers wants him in quarantine for observation.”

“Set it up.”

Vasquez contacted medical and told them what was needed. J’onn looked at Supergirl. "Shouldn't you be at CatCo?"

"With this going on? They can live without me for a little while."

J'onn's head snapped up and his eyes went fire-red. He felt waves of darkness threaten to drown him and he leaned suddenly on the console in front of him, taking a ragged breath. Supergirl led
him to a chair and knelt down next to him. When she saw, Vasquez took three strides across the room.

"Sir! What is it?"

J'onn struggled to clear his head, sort out the threads running like electricity through his mind. "They're back from the bar. It was...bad. They're going to need trauma counselors. This was...Alex wasn't wrong. This really does look like a trial run for a genocide."

Supergirl said, "Cadmus." She turned away as multiple sets of footsteps came marching into the command center.

Alex said, "J'onn! It was bad. It was--"

"I know! I saw." He shook his head and pushed himself to standing, then suddenly pulled his sidearm and yelled. "A White! Here on Earth! That's who's behind this!"

But Alex on one side and Supergirl on the other, seeing the frozen DEO agent on the stairs, took J'onn's weapon and held him back. "J'onn! He's one of us! You're hallucinating!"

J'onn sank back into the chair, relinquishing his gun to Alex. "Sorry, Agent. Alex, what if this is a byproduct of what that purple creature did to me?"

"I'll run some bloodwork, sir."

While Alex trotted ahead to set up equipment and Supergirl, restless, took off to patrol the city, Vasquez walked with J'onn slowly to the lab.

"Sir," she said diffidently. "Trauma can have a life of its own, and if you are being psychically triggered by hearing the thoughts of the agents who just got back--"

"I am aware of that, Agent Vasquez." He glanced up at her hard jaw and dark eyes. More softly, he said, "Arrange for trauma counsellors for the team. For me, we'll rule out physical things first. Then, if that doesn't turn up anything, I will willingly discuss...these issues...with the trauma team. Like you, like a lot of us here at the DEO, I know how the horrors we've seen never entirely leave us and can return like waves when we least expect it."

"Yes, sir. Just, if you need..."

"Thank you, Agent-- Thank you, Susan. I will keep your offer in mind. I promise."
Jess Huang was a multi-tasker. To be Lena Luthor’s right hand, she had to be.

Long ago, she had hacked the intercom in Lena’s office and could insert her earpiece to listen in on her boss’s conversations, while she also did whatever typing or computer work needed to be done with her hands. Several times this had allowed her to hear a visitor—a pro-Lex investor for example—begin to get loud and call security before things escalated. Lena never asked how she always knew which visitors were problematic, and Jess never told. And Jess didn’t always listen in, but whenever the Luthor name was in the news, Jess kept one ear on her boss and got on with her work.

Today was one of those days. Reporters were calling for a quote about the attack on the aliens, but Lena had already sent out a public statement condemning it as deplorable. Beyond that, she said she would only talk to one reporter, the sunny one from CatCo. And speak of an angel and she appears.

Lena was surprised that Kara Danvers hadn’t come to get a further statement about the attacks, but was instead asking questions about her mother. Even as Jess listened to Lena put Kara off, alarm bells started going in Jess’s head. If a reporter was asking questions about Lillian Luther after that attack—especially if it was a reporter whose sister worked for the Secret Service (because duh, Jess did her homework when it came to protecting Lena)—then Lillian Luthor probably had something to do with the attack.

Kara left, looking a little disappointed but waving goodbye to Jess as she always did. Then, back in her office, Lena made phone call, asking her mother to come by, which she had absolutely never, ever done in all the time Jess had known her. Jess pulled out her earpiece and picked up her own phone, texting Bart down in IT to bring his computer and come help her with a project. He texted back that he would, but it wouldn’t be immediately because they had detected somebody trying to hack L-Corp in general and Lena in particular.

Jess sighed, wishing she could feel surprised. She texted back, Just come when you can. The research she wanted to do had to be untraceable, and Bart had cybersecurity on his computer that would make the CIA drool.

She frowned when Lillian Luthor stepped out of the elevator dressed to the nines and looking vaguely disgusted.

“Ms. Luthor. Your mother is here to see you.”

“Send her in.”

Jess put in her earpiece. She heard every word of that conversation. She ground her teeth with frustration, wanting to strangle Lillian Luthor with her bare hands. Lena opened the door to her office herself and stood rigid as she watched the older woman wait soundlessly for the elevator.
Not until the doors slid shut did her tensed shoulders ease. Jess wished she could give her boss a hug.

“Jess, get Bart up here and then join me in my office. Oh, and tell him to bring—“

“He’s already on his way, Ms. Luthor. I’ll tell him to get a move on.”

Lena smiled and shook her head. “Of course, he is. Thank you, Jess. If we get through this one in one piece, remind me to give you a raise.”
After J’onn nearly shot a DEO agent due to his hallucinations, it was all hands on deck. Vasquez was needed everywhere: assessing the team of five who had gone with Alex to the bar’s crime scene, getting Eliza Danvers a consultant ID, keeping an eye on J’onn for any more, well, weird behavior, keeping Winn on task when he tried to solve too many problems at once.

Officially, Agent Susan Vasquez was paid by the DEO for “risk assessment.” Narrowly, that meant that when an alien came up on their radar, she had to consider its culture, DNA, psych profile—all the things that might make it a threat—and determine how much and what kind of threat it might pose. But unofficially, J’onn had come to rely on her for so much more. And Vasquez was good at her job.

She watched the team argue about Lena Luthor. Or, rather, she watched most of the team argue that Lena was a deceiving, criminal mastermind, otherwise known as a Luthor, while Supergirl argued that Lena was good and true. Vasquez kind of thought Supergirl was a little in love with the CEO, but she knew when to keep her mouth shut.

Later on, Vasquez watched Winn and Alex argue about how you could go about making proto-kryptonite viable. Winn’s simulations came up with radiation as the top most likely way, with electromagnetism as another idea.

“Well, what if we amplified it? And how about pulse for—”

“And has anyone figured out what Lillian Luthor wants with Supergirl’s blood?”

Supergirl said, “It’s strange, because if all she wanted was Kryptonian blood, I am pretty sure that Lex got some of Kal-El’s before.”

“So why would it have to be yours?”

“Doesn’t make sense. I mean it’s not like—” She stopped and her face went white. “Oh, Rao. I’ll be right back.” She was gone in a blur of speed. After Supergirl grimly returned from the Fortress of Solitude with information on the virus her father had devised to kill non-Kryptonians, Vasquez watched J’onn comfort her.

Finally, Vasquez watched Eliza Danvers interact with her older daughter.

Alex sat at the computer, watching it break down the virus on the molecular level.

Eliza stood behind her with a tablet that she apparently couldn’t pay attention to. She said, “So, sweetie, when do I get to meet your friend, Maggie?”

Alex winced, which surprised Vasquez a little. Normally, Alex’s face lit up at the mere mention of the detective.
“I don’t know, Mom. I’m sure she’ll be really busy with the attack on the bar. NCPD was all over that crime scene.”

“It’s just that you talk about her a lot. It sounded like you two have been spending a lot of time together.”

“Oh, well, a lot of our investigations lately have been jurisdictionally messy, so we’ve been working together a lot.”

“Kara says you beat her at pool a lot.”

“Yeah, she is a terrible pool player. Look, Mom, I really need to focus on this.”

“Honey, it’s just that it seems like a good thing, your making a new friend. You do spend an awful lot of your time working…”

“Of course, I do. Looking after Kara is practically a full-time job. At least now I’m getting paid for it.”

Vasquez recognized the look on Eliza’s face. She’d seen it on her own mother’s face right before she came out to her way back when. Eliza knew.

“Okay,” said Eliza carefully. “Well, do you think she’d be interested in joining us for Thanksgiving?”

“Who, Kara? She’s the one hosting this year.”

“No. Maggie.”

“What? Why would she want to?”

“Well, you two are dating, aren’t you?”

“What? No! Of course not! What makes you—? No! I’m not. Dating her. Or anybody.”

Vasquez watched the distress on both faces and the silence in the room got very tense. She said, “Agent Danvers. I am pretty sure your mom already knows you’re gay. And I’m pretty sure you do, too. So. Elephant in the room wants some peanuts.”

Mother and daughter turned to stare at her.

She raised an eyebrow. “Well, am I wrong?”

Alex flushed. “Jesus, does everybody know?”

“I’m pretty sure Kara hasn’t figured it out yet. But yeah, even Winn eventually.”

Eliza pulled Alex out of her chair and into a hug. Vasquez quietly left the room, smiling.
Parents of Steel, Feet of Clay

High on the list of Supergirl's Least Favorite Things, right above Snapper Carr, were heat-seeking missiles. If you were going to make a weapon that required your skill in building it, aiming it, and launching it, that was one thing. But to use a weapon that was doing most of the work itself was just cheating, even though she could trick it with some fancy flying and either destroy it or ditch it somewhere it could never hurt anybody again. At least it wasn't perfect.

So when she'd stood in the snow in the Fortress of Solitude staring into the face of her father whose likeness she had not seen for thirteen years, and then heard his beloved voice describing the alien virus as perfect, she'd felt cold and sick. Because from the perspective of military efficiency, the ability to kill the maximum number of combatants with the minimum effort, it really was perfect. And it was in the hands of her enemies.

Her own father had designed a weapon that her enemies were going to use to try to kill her friends. And her own mother, who had been willing to put her own sister in prison for attempting to save their planet by controlling everyone's minds, had apparently been okay with it, because it apparently hadn't bothered her how many other people would die as long as Kryptonians stayed alive.

She stood on the balcony of the DEO, looking out on the night lights of National City, remembering Krypton. She tried to explain to J'onn why she felt so ashamed to be her parents' daughter.

He said, "They were trying to save lives."

She scoffed. "I'm sure Lex and Lillian thought their intentions were good, too. Is this their legacy? Death and destruction across the universe?"

"Not death and destruction, Kara Zor-El. It's you."

Eliza and Alex hurried up to them. Alex said, "We know how Cadmus intends to weaponize Medusa."

Eliza said, "They need a dispersion agent, one not available on our planet, but there is an analogous element to isotope 454, which is made exclusively by L-Corp. If Cadmus gets their hands on it, they'll be able to spread the virus across the city.

Supergirl shot into the sky. She had flown to L-Corp at night so many times before, she didn't even have to think about it, which was a good thing, given how her fears for Lena pulsed in her veins.

She flew into the lobby, saw Cyborg Superman throwing a security guard into the air. She caught him, set him on his feet, and turned to face her foe.

She charged, tried to put him in a shoulder lock, but he rolled out of it. They traded a flurry of punches and then she kicked him in the chest, sending him flying backward. Out of the corner of her eye, Supergirl saw Lena, drawn to the noise, white-faced, and Cyborg Superman caught Supergirl's arm and flipped her against the giant concrete "L" logo, cracking it off its base. Supergirl fell on her back, but the cyborg saw Lena, turned, picked up the "L," and threw it toward Lena.

Supergirl got there first, taking all of the impact of the "L" as it turned to dust from hitting the Girl of Steel.
"Go!" she told Lena. "Get out of here!"

Lena ran.

Supergirl flew at the cyborg, but he threw her down.

At the door, a swarm of NCPD cops in black entered, guns blazing, yelling, "Back away! Get down!"

The cyborg was immune to the bullets flying at him. He held Supergirl down by the throat. "You spend all this time trying to save the world. Who's going to come and save you? No one's coming to your rescue!"

But then a loud explosion left a metallic blue cloud in the air above the police and while the cyborg was distracted, Supergirl spun on the floor and kicked his legs out from under him. He fell but looked toward the police and shot one with the laser from his eyepiece.

Supergirl looked to see Maggie Sawyer fall. She ran to her. "Maggie!"

The cop was bleeding and grimacing. "Just, get the bastard!"

But by then he was gone.

Supergirl picked up Maggie and flew her to the DEO, leaving her in the care of Agent Vasquez. Then she hurried back to the command center.

Eliza said that Mon-El was dying.

Winn said her parents never considered a cure for their virus.

Eliza insisted that Lena Luthor must be working for her mother and would know about Medusa.

Supergirl shook her head. "Lena was shocked to see Henshaw. He would have killed her too."

Winn said, "The Luthors are pretty good actors. Or, well, sociopaths. Either way, they know how to fool people."

"No! I looked into Lena's eyes. She doesn't know anything about Cadmus and her mother. I know it!"

Hands on hips, J'onn asked, "Would you stake the lives of all the aliens in National City on that?"

And of course, what she heard her Space Dad asking was, Would you stake my life on that?
Chapter Summary

2.8 Medusa, beginning to go a little off-canon.

Supergirl landed at the DEO with Maggie Sawyer in her arms and Vasquez, who was doing triage, directed her to deposit the detective in a side lab as they were prepping their two operating rooms for more seriously injured agents.

Maggie thanked Supergirl. "But this isn't bad. The vest caught most of it. You should go. I'm fine."

Supergirl said, "But you're bleeding! And Al-- Agent Danvers would kill me if I let anything happen to you."

Vasquez said, "I've got this, Supergirl. You can go."

She was gone in a flash of red and blue.

"Hello. I am Agent Susan Vasquez and I will be your medic for the evening. Would you like to start with a painkiller?"

"Please!" Maggie fought to smile. "Detective Maggie Sawyer."

Vasquez paused as she flicked the syringe and took a good look at the detective. "Sawyer, eh? Okay, I can see it."

"See what?"

"Why you make our badass Alex Danvers go all soft when she talks about you."

Maggie looked away. "Not anymore."

Getting Maggie out of her vest, cutting away the shirt from the wound in her shoulder, injecting local anesthetic and cleaning the wound gave Vasquez time for thought.

Finally, she asked quietly, "Why not anymore?"

"Because I fucked up. Well, no, I mean, I know I did the right thing, but she kinda hates me now."

"What happened?"

"She told me she came out to her sister and I hugged her and offered her a beer--"

"Sounds good to me."

"And then she kissed me."

"Did you kiss back?"

"I didn't mean to. I just--"
"I see."

Maggie winced as Vasquez pulled another small piece of metal out of the wound. "Sorry. That's the last bit. Now we stitch you up. Do you not like her like that?"

"How could I-- No. And she's fresh off the boat and those relationships never work out and all my relationships crash and burn anyway. It wouldn't work."

Vasquez thought she had been about to say, how could I not? And privately Vasquez agreed. But the pain in the detective's voice was palpable, as was the sense that she was still trying to convince herself that this was the right thing to do. Not for her sake, but for Alex's.

"Well," she said slowly. "Maybe you're right. Maybe she needs to experiment a little, get out there and meet people. At the very least, she needs to meet more gay people. Two dykes is not enough when you are first out and have all the questions."

"So you..."

Vasquez grinned. "Oh, honey. Do you think I could rock this haircut and this uniform if I were a straight girl? Fat chance."

She focused on making her stitches small and even. "You'll get a scar from this. You can tell the girls you got it in a duel."

"Not a firefight? I usually just go with the truth."

"If she loves you, she'll hate that your job leaves you scarred."

"That's not what they hate about my job."

"Well, no. The other kind? They just hate that you love the job more than you love them. Once I see that dynamic, it's adios, amiga. I don't have time for that bullshit. I'm busy saving the world, for Christ's sake, the least they can do is be proud of me for it."

She tied off the stitches. "And you. Are. Done."

"Thanks, Vasquez."

"Any time. And don't worry about Alex. We'll take care of her. And she is one of the strongest people I know. She'll be all right. And who knows? Maybe once she's gotten used to standing under the rainbow flag for her pledge of allegiance, you two could have a shot at it. Miracles do happen."

"Not in my life, they don't."

"Funny. I thought your life just got saved by Supergirl. You ask me? That counts as a miracle. I mean, that chick is hot."

Maggie laughed, despite herself. "I know, right? And probably super straight, too. Just our luck."

Vasquez had other thoughts on that matter, but she kept them to herself.
Mommy Issues

Chapter Notes

I wanted to see the Medusa explosion from Lena's point of view.

Lena was a gold star, but that didn't mean she had never kissed a guy. Martin Bart was doing his doctorate in computer science at the same time Lena was studying chemistry and engineering, and the Bart family was known for being notorious hackers. His father was in a maximum security prison. His mother was in Morocco, a country that did not have an extradition treaty with the US. Both his sisters were living underground while the feds searched for them. Marty was the youngest, and while just as talented as the rest of his family, still untainted by whatever surged through their DNA making them want to take apart global computer networks to spite the world. Marty did it to be a force for good.

Marty had been the TA for a class Lena had taken and they had stayed friends afterwards, becoming much closer when he had started dating Lena's roommate. And then Lex had tried to tear down the world, and people had started to look at Lena not as the genius Luthor girl, but as the sister of the mad genius Luthor supervillain. She lost a lot of friends that year. But not Marty.

And on the night after Lex's sentencing, Lena sat in her half empty dorm room drinking scotch and not crying. She was long since out of tears. And Marty had shown up with pizza and a jug of water. He sat on his ex-girlfriend's stripped mattress and talked about family and choosing to be who you want to be. And his kindness had shaken Lena to her core. So, yes, there had been drunken necking, but they both had known it was not about sex. It was about generosity. Warmth. And they had remained friends easily although both were careful to Never Speak of it Again.

When Lena took over L-Corp, she immediately offered him the job of Director of Cybersecurity. And the moment when Kara started asking about Lena and the moment when Lillian lied to her face were the two moments when Lena knew it had been one of the two best decisions in her life.

It didn't take long for Marty to figure out that the DEO was the one trying to hack L-Corp (at least most recently) and it took only a little longer for him to figure out that they were looking for ties to Lillian or Cadmus.

Lena found it odd that Kara would be looking for the same information as the DEO. But maybe it was a coincidence. Lena hoped it was a coincidence.

So while Marty and Jess were working together in Lena's office, Lena went down to the sub-basement lab that had been sealed off after Lex's arrest. Lena had been down there maybe twice since, but this time she had a better idea what she was looking for.

Jess had run voice-recognition algorithms on all of the Cadmus videos and it was at least a 52% match with Lillian's voice and 67% with her speech patterns. That was enough for Lena. It didn't take long to find the old paper lab notebooks that Lex had kept his meticulous notes in even towards the end. And while his handwriting had become erratic in the last few volumes, she could still make out the notes about a weaponized virus, his doodles of the Medusa chasing aliens and letting the snakes on her head bite Superman. And then, in all capital letters, the name of his last project, underlined three times in red: isotope 454.
And suddenly, she understood why the cyborg had come to L-Corp. It wasn't to kill her, as she'd thought. It was to steal from her. And her stomach hurt at the thought of her mother finally achieving what Lex had dreamed of, the eradication of all alien life--she immediately thought of Supergirl--from National City, the country, and the planet. And she knew what she had to do.

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She set the ball in motion, then returned to her office, shooed off Marty and Jess, told them to go home. The next few hours promised to be the most difficult of a very difficult life, and at the very least, she wanted to protect the people she could. It was her family. It would be her pain.

When Supergirl landed on the balcony, Lena's face lit up. Even with all her fears, she couldn't help it. She laughed and put down her tablet. "You know that door's not really an entrance..."

Supergirl was about to speak, but Lena stopped her. "You know, actually, I just wanted to thank you for earlier. Not only did you save countless numbers of my employees, but mine as well."

"Now I need your help."

"Anything!"

"I need help finding your mother."

Lena kept the smile on her face. "My mother?"

"Your mother...is behind Cadmus. She's their leader."

Lena crossed her arms and squeezed her own biceps. "You're lying."

"I'm not." She sounded like she wished she was. "She kidnapped me and now she possesses a virus that could wipe out all the aliens in National City. I need you to help me find her so that she doesn't hurt any more innocent people."

Lena had seen this coming. That Supergirl would put herself in danger to protect other aliens like her. And then Lillian really would have won, if all the other aliens survived, but Supergirl died. Lena was a Luthor and she could deceive if she had to. "You know, I thought you were different. You wear that symbol on your chest and everybody thinks you're good. How many times did Superman put on that high and mighty costume and come after Lex? My mother's no saint. But you come in here and accuse her of being the devil incarnate. How long before you come after me?"

"I know what it's like to be disillusioned by our parents. But I'm a pretty good judge of character, and you are not like your mother. She is cold, and dangerous, and you are too good and too smart to follow in her path. Be your own hero."

Lena picked up her tablet, willing her hands not to shake. "You can leave the same way you came in."

When Supergirl flew away, Lena fought back tears. She had to do this. She had to prove that Supergirl was right about her and the rest of the world was wrong.

//

The next step was actually easier. It is always harder to deceive the ones we love.

As always, Lillian led with sarcasm. "Twice in one day? It's almost like we have a real mother-
daughter relationship."

Lena stared out at the night lights of National City. "The Medusa virus. That's why you sent your
goon here. For isotope 454. You're in charge of Cadmus."

She turned to look at her mother, whose face didn't change. "Is this the part where you lecture me,
like you'd lecture Lex." It wasn't a question, just an expectation.

Lena fought her instincts, fought her fears. She had to save Supergirl, not antagonize her mother. So
she said, "No." She took a breath, let it out. "What you said before. There was truth in that. Ask me
for your help and I'll give it to you."

Lillian frowned. "It's that easy?"

"It's that easy." She opened the silver case on her desk to reveal the isotope.

Lillian stepped closer to it, reverently. "I didn't think you believed in the cause."

Lena smiled. "Then maybe it's time you got to know your daughter a little better."

//

The next two hours were a nightmare. She hadn't minded the black hood as her mother drove them
back to the secret Cadmus base. If anything, it meant she didn't have to school her expression for
twenty minutes. Almost restful, really. But listening to her mother ranting about saving the humans
from the alien menace? That had gotten old when Lex used to do it. At the base, while Lillian had
given orders to more of her goons, she had Lena set up the isotope with the rocket. That Lena took
a second to also place an L-Corp tracker under a packing case that was staying in the base
apparently went unnoticed.

And then the goons took the rocket to the port, Lillian changed her clothes, retrieved the control
briefcase, broadcast the final Cadmus warning, and they followed.

The success of her plan so far gave Lena a modicum of confidence. Enough to bring out her own
sarcasm when her mother took the key from around her neck at the port.

"Some mothers wear a locket with their children's pictures. You wear the keys to a bazooka."

"It's a rocket launcher. And..." she handed Lena the key. "It's yours. Take it. Prove you're with me.
Unleash Medusa and end Earth's alien menace once and for all." That self-satisfied smile.

Lena reached out her hand, took the key, stepped up to the control board, inserted the key.

There was a flash of red and blue. "Don't do it, Lena."

"Why not? I'm a Luthor." She turned the key.

The rocket shot into the sky. The black man with Supergirl yelled, "Go! I've got this!"

Supergirl took off. The man said, "You two are finished!"

Lillian sneered, "You're wrong about that."

And suddenly Lena knew where she had seen this man before, except it wasn't him. The cyborg
version of him came out of nowhere and tackled him. While they were trading punches, Lena kept
glancing at the sky, watching the progress of the rocket and the red streak chasing it. The two men
fought, while Lillian stood looking smug. Then the man who had come with Lena morphed into some kind of enormous lizard man. Lillian grabbed the case and she and Lena ran behind the rocket launcher. High in the sky, it looked like Supergirl had just caught the rocket. Lillian flipped the switch. The rocket exploded.

Lena's heart stopped in her chest. If she had gotten it wrong, if she hadn't managed to make the virus inert, then Supergirl might survive the explosion, but she would never survive the virus. And she would die thinking that Lena was everything she had always believed she was not.

The fallout was a brilliant orange.

Supergirl landed, whole thank God, to knock out the cyborg, as the lizard man turned back into a man.

It was like snow, like orange sparks and it fell like a blessing, and Supergirl and her friend stood there, looking up in fear.

And not dying.

Lillian watched, at first looking victorious, then suprised. "You should be dead. All aliens should be dead."

And then she got a knowing look on her face and turned to Lena. "You. You switched out the isotope. You made the virus inert."

Lena said. "I did."

Sirens sounded. Lena added, "And I called the police."

As the police arrested Lillian, the look she gave Lena was not one of loathing, as Lena had expected, but rather, grudging respect, a recognition that Lena was a Luthor after all.

Then a Detective Sawyer was asking Lena to come back to the precinct to make a witness statement, and since Supergirl and her friend were looking for the missing cyborg, Lena went.
When Maggie got back to the precinct after the Luthor rocket incident, there was a folder in her in-box. I had taken the crime scene techs a long time to sort out the hundreds of fingerprints from the bar--no surprise--but they had gotten a clear thumbprint from the underside of the bar where the device had been. Maggie looked at the old army photo and shrugged. The suspect had been off the grid for ten years. There had even been a report that he had gone missing in action, presumed dead. But a little digging had unearthed an address. Maggie did the paperwork to get an arrest warrant, and when it came through, she executed it.

The man who came to the door looked exhausted, but he let them handcuff him and take him in without a word. When they reached the precinct, he immediately asked for his phone call and a lawyer, so she couldn't even question him. He just sat in the interrogation room looking calm in his black shirt and cargo pants, like he didn't have a care in the world. And when his lawyer did show up, the woman had with her Agent Alex Danvers, carrying top-secret surveillance video footage of the man in question together with Danvers at a secret government facility at the time in question.

"Director Henshaw is my boss," she said.

Maggie sighed. "At the DEO?"

"Yes. The man you are looking for is basically a clone."

"Not an alien."

"A cybernetically enhanced human."

"Enhanced."

"By Cadmus. That version of Henshaw is the one who shot you at L-Corp. How is that feeling, by the way?"

"Sore. Thanks for asking."

Alex simply nodded, emotionless. "Are we done here?"

Maggie waved her hand and unlocked the man's cuffs. They left without another word.

Maggie pressed her fingers to the bridge of her nose. A cybernetically enhanced human with a thirst for alien carnage was out there in National City, sure. But at least Alex Danvers was talking to her again. Sort of.
Chapter End Notes

Not too tacky: 20,000 words in six days. Kudos and comments welcome! What is working for you? What is not?
When Jess realized what Lena had done, what risks she had taken, she went ballistic.

Standing in Lena's pure white office, watching Lena sit behind her pure white desk and her pure white laptop, clutching her pure white smart phone in one perfectly manicured hand, Jess shouted at her boss.

"What were you thinking? Taking on Cadmus by yourself? Taking on HER by yourself? You could have been killed! You could have been arrested! And if you ended up in prison? Lex would have finally succeeded at killing you for sure! And what if your modifications to the isotope hadn't worked? Then you would have been exactly she wanted you to be: to blame for the death of thousands of innocent aliens, hell, maybe even Supergirl herself! How could you even--"

She ran out of words, stood there staring at Lena, who closed her eyes and took the berating.

Finally, Lena replied, "I thought of all those things myself, Jess, but I was pressed for time. I did the best I could, which seems to have been sufficient. I saved Supergirl and the rest of them. I put my mother and the Cadmus goons behind bars. I proved that a Luthor could be good. The fact that it so easily might have gone another way has not escaped me."

Jess paced back and forth over the white carpet. "But if any of those things had happened to you? After Marty and I worked so hard to get you that information? We would never have been able to live with ourselves. And that's cruel, Lena. And don't give me that 'well, I'm a Luthor' bullshit. We care about you, idiot."

"Noted," Lena said quietly.

Jess came over and sat in the client chair in front of the desk. "Did you read the articles?"

Lena picked up the Tribune and CatCo and the other papers and magazines that Jess had gone out to get with the PR director early that morning. "I did."

"Did you see Ms. Danvers' byline? With James Olsen? I thought he was a photographer."

"He took over for Cat Grant while she goes off to eat, pray, love."

Jess snorted. Lena was the only CEO she had the time of day for. "It didn't sound like Danvers' usual style of writing."

"I thought the same thing. Although it did have her usual attention to detail. Not as many quotes from Supergirl, though. Just that fellow from the FBI."

Jess nodded at Lena's phone. "Did she even call you for a quote?"

"No."
"And Supergirl hasn't visited your balcony to thank you for saving the city?"

"No. I'm sure she's busy saving the city for herself." She smiled without humor. "Turns out that can be a little distracting, as I now know."

Jess frowned. "Christ on a crutch, Lena! At least get angry! The least she could do is send you a thank you, maybe through Danvers. Isn't that how you two usually get in touch?"

Lena sighed. "I will admit to being a trifle disappointed, Jess, but it doesn't do to dwell on it."

"Keep calm and carry on? Is that coming from your UK boarding school education?"

"That's the British. The Irish keep calm and keep drinking. Which I may well do tonight after we handle the PR issues. Are you finished, Jess? I really need to prepare for that meeting."

Jess looked at her own hands. "Yeah, I guess so. Um. I'm not fired, am I?"

Lena smiled. "When you add to your already flawless administrative and technical know-how an apparent skill at risk assessment and a mild affection for your boss? Not this time."

Jess nodded. "Right then. Well. Good. I'll just go figure out your day."
How Did We Not Notice You Were Gone?

Chapter Notes

This one is kind of long, setting up Kara going missing on crossover duty. Also Alex tells Eliza what I wish someone would say the writers!

When Kara came back to the DEO, exhausted from having a rocket explode on her, Alex sent her to the sunlamp room.

"But I have to go see Lena! She saved us all!"

Alex was adamant. "Sun first. Besides, she'll probably be at the precinct all night. She has a lot of explaining to do. I'll text Mag-- I mean Detective Sawyer to see if she can let us know when Lena is done. Will that do?"

Kara looked at her sister, knowing she would do that for her. "No, actually, no, it's okay. I can wait until tomorrow morning to see Lena. She's probably exhausted after all that...Maybe I'll bring her lunch tomorrow. She's always forgetting to eat!"

Alex muttered, "Imagine that."

But Kara was already in Happy Puppy Mode™. "I know! I can make her cupcakes! I can pick up some groceries and then make thank-you cupcakes!"

Alex nodded tiredly. "You do that, Sis. I'm going to go check on your Daxamite."

"He is not my Daxamite!"

Eliza was in the medical bay, looking exhausted. Alex brought her coffee. "Any luck?"

"Your idea to use the inert virus was what did it, Alex. I'm almost done with this and then, hopefully, he should make a full recovery. Where's your sister?"

"Sunlamps."

"Oh, because I'm sure she'll want to be here when he wakes up. I think they're kind of sweet on each other."

"Um, Mom? That is a one-way street. Kara trains him because J'onn asked her to, but she doesn't like him like that. If anything, he annoys her."

"Well, sometimes people who are starting to be attracted--""

"Mom, trust me. I know Kara. Just drop it."

"Whatever you say, sweetie."

Alex then went to check on J'onn and was surprised to find M'gann with him in his office. Alex thought he was going to leave the White Martian in the DEO's lockup forever.
When Alex knocked, J'onn said, "Enter."

M'gann was standing and putting on her jacket. "You know you can call me anytime, J'onn. I will help you control this."

"Thank you, M'gann. For that. And for everything. I never thought I would say this, but that form was actually useful tonight. It's powerful. If I can learn--"

"You will."

He nodded. M'gann gave Alex a shy look and left.

"Alex, sit down."

"Did Supergirl talk to you? About what happened out there?"

"Not to me. Vasquez did the debrief. I was helping my mother with the sample from the debris. She says it should work."

"Excellent news. Well, long story short, while I was fighting the cyborg me, I transformed into a White Martian. I chose to. It is a powerful form. M'gann thinks that because it took so long to affect me, I probably only have a quarter compatibility."

"Meaning?"

"I should be able to maintain my chosen forms, as a Green and as a human, unless I choose not to. It will take work, but... Meanwhile, Eliza is hopeful. She thinks there may be other ways to use the samples of the virus we have here. So that may be another option. But for the time being, I'm probably safe."

"That is good to hear, sir. Supergirl is with the lamps and then I'm sending her home to rest. Can you tell her to take tomorrow off? She shrugged off getting blown up, but I know that stuff always takes its toll."

"Absolutely. Anything else?"

"Um, yes. Could the DEO thank Lena Luthor? Officially? It would mean a lot to Supergirl."

"I think that could be arranged. Maybe we can stop by L-Corp tomorrow."

"We, sir?"

"You'll come with me. I think it would be good for the DEO to cultivate Lena Luthor, and I would like to get your read on her."

"Isn't that more Vasquez's job?"

He frowned. "Risk assessment? You think Lena might be a threat?"

"Don't tell Kara I said this, but..."

"Luthor." He thought about it. "Let's leave Vasquez out of it for now. If I know her, she already has a file on Lena anyway."

"Yes, sir."
"Now go get some rest."

Alex went from J'onn's office to the sunlamp room, where Vasquez was standing with a smile on her face.

"Did Kara go home?" Alex asked.

"Yes, yes, she did, right after I finished the debrief. That girl--how does she fight like that and notice all the details of her surroundings?"

"Long practice. When she first became Supergirl, there was collateral damage. You remember."

"Yes, of course. But it's one thing to be careful of civilians in the moment and another thing to remember everything that happened, where everyone was standing, the actual pattern on the dress Lena Luthor was wearing--"

"Put it down to her being super, Vasquez."

"And she told me her plans for take-out tonight..."

"Oh, well. Put that down to her being Kara. God, I'm tired. And wired. It is going to be a long night if I can't get to sleep."

"Well, don't go straight home. Let's go get a drink and unwind first."

Alex was surprised. She had always liked Vasquez, but they had almost never done anything together outside of the DEO. Still, tonight they had averted a genocide. She deserved a drink. "Do you have a favorite watering hole?"

"I do, actually, but I would be kind of curious to see yours. Supergirl was telling me about the alien bar."

Alex's face froze, but then she realized Maggie would probably be stuck at the precinct until late. Rocket launchers were human tech, so it was the NCPD's problem. "Okay. I have my bike. Want a ride?"

"Nah, I have my Beetle. I want to be able to go home, and not impose on you."

"It's not a problem. I have an extra helmet."

Vasquez looked undecided and then said, "What the hell. I haven't been on motorcycle since...Sure. That would be great."

It was strange to have a passenger on her bike. Supergirl had ridden with her once after solar flaring, and she had given a ride to Maggie that one time she had one too many at the bar and didn't want to drive. Vasquez held on to Alex with strong hands. Alex found the heat between her back and Vasquez's front distracting, but she got them to their destination safely.

When they walked into the bar still wearing their black tactical gear, because both women had been just too tied to change, the bar erupted in cheers. Aliens of all shapes and sizes kept sending drinks over to their table, or coming over and thanking them for what they did. Both of them insisted that it was a combination of Lena Luthor and Supergirl who should take the credit, but they drank the drinks anyway.

When the crowd started to thin, Vasquez said, "So I met the cute detective."
Alex nearly spit up the blue drink sent to her by the blue alien who usually sent drinks to Mon-El. "What?"

"She got injured at L-Corp."

"What! No! Is Maggie okay?"

"She's fine, Alex. I stitched her up myself. No dead lesbian tropes today. You're welcome."

"Oh my God. Was it bad?"

"Relax, Alex. I'm joking. Her vest took most of it. She'll be fine. I liked her."

Alex sighed. "I liked her, too."

Vasquez leaned back and put her feet on the seat next to Alex. Their booth was quiet. The wood of the table was worn with age and smooth under her fingers. She played with the coaster advertising Dollywood. Finally she said, "You're not going to be a baby dyke forever, you know."

Alex snorted. "You mean I should enjoy everything being shiny and new? Right."

"I don't know about the shiny, but there is something to be said for getting out there, meeting new people, finding out more about who you are. Hell, you play your cards right, you might even get laid."

Badass Agent Danvers turned a delicate shade of pink. Vasquez gave her a small smile. "Women loooove a dyke who can protect her. With your combat skills, they will come running. And you're not butchy like me, and that hybrid soft and tough thing will drive them wild."

"You're not a butch."

Vasquez shrugged. "Not a hundred percent. But I was a Marine in Iraq and I still don't like dealing with long hair so when I go to the Amphipolis, I always attract the girls who like butchy women."

"What's the Amphipolis?"

"National City's lesbian bar. I'll take you there sometime."

"I'd like that. I think..."

M'gann brought them two large glasses of water. Alex laughed. "It's good to have a bartender who knows you so well."

M'gann stood there looking uncertain. Finally, she said, "Agent Danvers. When Supergirl rescued me from Cadmus, she was only thinking of you. She said to tell you that she wasn't afraid and that you should keep on living your life on your own terms."

Vasquez smiled. "Good advice."

But Alex said, "She told you to tell--"

"In case I made it out and she didn't. And I know that you have also been keeping the conversation about me open with J'onn. So thank you for that. And for...modeling heroism for...her."

Then she walked away, leaving Alex gulping down water with a surprised look on her face.
She picked up Vasquez in the morning and gave her a ride back to the DEO, then changed into her "Secret Service/FBI" pantsuit and heels for the trip to L-Corp. Lena's Asian secretary gave them a long look when they introduced themselves and asked to speak to her boss.

"I'll see if she's available."

When she came out, she ushered them into the large pristine white office that overlooked an amazing view of the city. Lena was sitting at her desk in a dark green dress and four-inch black heels, her hair pinned up, leaving the line of her perfect ivory neck and jaw on display. Alex had only been looking at other women for five minutes but she immediately felt a warming affect from the Luthor's cold beauty. She began to understand why even her very straight sister always adjusted her glasses when she talked about Lena.

Hank introduced them as being with the Secret Service, but she scoffed. "Director Henshaw, I'm not stupid. I know that Supergirl works with the DEO and I did see you fight your doppelganger last night. Let's not play games, shall we? What can I do for you?"

She looked defensive and imperious. Alex wondered what she looked like when Kara was around.

Hank said, "Well, then, all the better. I am here in an official capacity to offer our sincere thanks for the service you did for National City last night. We are in your debt."

The green eyes went wide, then went cold again. "I did what was right, Director. No thanks are necessary."

"Nevertheless."

"Very well. You're welcome."

They all shook hands and Hank and Alex moved toward the door, but Lena stopped them. "By the way...I trust that Supergirl is safe? That she was unaffected by the rocket?"

Alex heard the concern in her voice. She said, "Hasn't she come to thank you yet herself? I know she is planning on it."

Lena shook her head. "I imagine she's busy saving the world. No hurry, as long as she's well."

When they returned to the DEO, they found Winn and Vasquez at the command center, their half-eaten sandwiches forgotten as they stared at Winn's computer.

J'onn asked, "Something up, Agent?"

Vasquez looked nervous, which was not a normal look on her. She said, "When I was rereading Supergirl's debrief this morning, I noticed something odd. At first even when she told me about it, I put it down to her getting thrown around that lobby, absorbing a concrete logo to protect Ms. Luthor, something like that. But I asked Winn to double check."

"What kind of something odd?" asked Alex.

"A moving metallic blue cloud that was there and gone. So I phoned Detective Sawyer. She saw it too."
Winn said, "So I went over to L-Corp with a Geiger counter and a few other fancy gadgets of my own design--"

"Winn," J'onn warned.

"Right, well, we've seen this before. Well, not seen, per se. But it's happened in National City before. Once. Last year. When the Flash was in town."

Alex asked, "You think the Flash is back?"

"We haven't seen any signs of him. I even called James at CatCo, in case Barry went there looking for Supergirl. No luck. And I've looked at traffic cameras and have seen no sign of anyone using super-speed."

J'onn said, "Vasquez, call Supergirl in." He turned to Alex. "Sorry, Agent Danvers, I know we agreed to give her the day off, but if Barry Allen needs Supergirl's help, she might need ours."

"Understood, sir."

Vasquez turned. "She isn't answering her earpiece or her phone."

Alex took off like a shot. Without even waiting for back up she was out of the DEO and speeding toward her sister's loft. It was all she could do to part her motorcycle in front of Kara's apartment rather than just ditching it. She dug in her pocket for her set of keys, but the door to the loft was slightly open. She pulled her gun, kicked it in and swept the room. Clear.

On the table near the door lay Kara's keys, phone, and a bag of groceries with cake mix and icing. But no Kara.
Like Alex, J'onn blamed himself. He couldn't help it. He'd lost his Martian daughters and now, suddenly, he'd lost one of his human daughters. He turned his attention away for what felt like a split second and Kara was gone. Off the planet. To another dimension's Earth. Probably for a dangerous mission. If he hadn't been so caught up with his own potential to transform and with M'gann, he might have been able to stop this: kept Supergirl at the DEO while she soaked up yellow sunlight, read the debrief reports before going to bed rather than after getting back from L-Corp, something, anything.

Even when you are three hundred years old, it can be hard to take bad news philosophically. He knew Supergirl was strong and well trained. He knew that she would move heaven and whatever Earth she was currently on to get back to Alex. But on some level, he was still her dad and he would worry about her anyway.

The team was all taking it hard. Alex looked like cold marble. Vasquez looked like she wanted to strangle anyone who made Alex look that devastated. Winn looked like he might have been crying, even as he was working to identify what kind of portal had opened and get it to open again. Even James came by when he heard, but there was nothing a photographer-turned-CEO could do, so J'onn sent him back to CatCo. That was what they did by day.

By night, Alex went back to Kara's and slept there in case she came back. Vasquez never left the DEO. She was rereading the file she had on Barry Allen and his version of Earth, playing out scenarios in her head, sleeping in the barracks after wearing herself out killing the bag in the gym. Winn was currently asleep at his computer, drooling a little on the desk of his work station. All around the DEO, agents were putting in serious overtime. Supergirl was loved. So was Kara. And so was Alex, and Alex was clearly hurting.

Meanwhile, somewhere out there in the city that vigilante with a shield was cleaning up the criminal underworld, conveniently doing Supergirl's job for her while she was gone. And since they couldn't stop him/her/it, J'onn figured he would just ignore it all for now. Because he didn't know what else he could do.

So two days later, when he got a phone call from Lena Luthor, asking to meet, he put on his city suit and went to L-Corp alone.

The secretary seemed less cold this time, telling him that Ms. Luthor was held up in a meeting and offering coffee while he waited. And the coffee was quite good. He watched her at work at her station, an earpiece in her ear while she typed. She was Asian, Chinese-American from her nameplate, and seemed very competent. At one point she looked up and looked at Luthor's door and said to J'onn, "She should be out soon." Not a minute later, three men in expensive suits left and the woman nodded J'onn into the office. Interesting.

This time Luthor was wearing soft black trousers and a white blouse and looked like something out of one of the 1940s movies the girls had forced him to watch, maybe Casablanca.
"Ms. Luthor. It's good to see you again so soon. What can I do for you?"

"Actually, Director, this time it's about what I can do for you. The other night...when I was at Cadmus, I brought a transmitter and managed to hide it among their equipment. Something went wrong with it at first, perhaps a radiation leak from one of their experiments? My tech people are working on it. But we finally got a location." She handed him a single sheet of paper.

He stared at it and then up at her. "This is their secret base?"

"I believe so. At any rate, it's one of them. It is where my mother had the rocket and several of her soldiers. Beyond that, I can't say, but it looked like they had other equipment there. You might find something useful."

He folded the paper and put it in his pocket. "Thank you, Ms. Luthor. This could be very helpful."

"My pleasure." She stood and he followed.

He offered her his hand to shake. She smiled, a little surprised and shook it. Then she spoke, almost hesitantly, but he could hear strong sadness behind the words, "And have you seen Supergirl recently?"

"I believe that she is off on a mission, not in the United States, currently. More than that, I can't say."

"Of course. One forgets that other countries need superheroes too, I suppose."

"Indeed."

"Well, I won't keep you. I hope that helps."

"We're grateful."

When he stepped out of the office, he turned to the secretary. "So Supergirl hasn't visited Ms. Luthor since..."

The secretary frowned, reminding him of Vasquez for a moment. "She has not."

"Well, I suppose she's very busy."

The secretary snorted in a most unladylike way, which gave J'onn something to think about while riding the elevator down forty-five floors.

Back at the DEO, he sent Agents Danvers and Vasquez with a team to the location he had been given, more to distract them than anything. He did not think the two-day lag between the rocket incident and Luthor giving him the location was a coincidence. Undoubtedly, Cadmus would have cleared it out by now, just as they had after kidnapping Supergirl and M'gann. And that was the best-case scenario. What he thought more likely was that L-Corp now had Cadmus's technology, possibly even a team of hybrid cyborgs, in its basement. And the offer of the location was a sop to the DEO. But all the agents needed some action to keep them busy in Supergirl's distressing absence. So he sent them out and then turned back to his annoying administrative paperwork. HR was harassing him for all the overtime the agents were accumulating. The DEO was a government agency after all, even if one with a black budget. He was going to have to do some fancy footwork to justify the payroll.
Under Orders

It wasn't what Vasquez wanted to be doing, clearing a probably-empty Cadmus site when she should be cutting anybody who took Supergirl from Alex. But orders were orders.

And yeah, no surprise, they found themselves in the freaking Warehouse District again, because duh. And although they fully expected it to be completely empty, like the location Supergirl had given them last time, it very much wasn't. The front door was sealed with a contraption with L-Corp's logo on it and a keypad. Alex gave it a long look and then typed. The lock clicked immediately and she motioned the team forward as she kicked in the door.

They cleared the vast room in seconds. Humans, zero. Tech, yahtze. No cyborgs, which was probably just as well, but things that looked like they might be used to make cyborgs sat in large crates and lead-lined cases.

"We're going to have to get Winn to look at this," said Alex.

Vasquez nodded.

"Lena really came through."

Vasquez asked, "She did. Why do you sound so surprised? Is it just because she's a Luthor?"

Alex shrugged guiltily. "It's just because I know J'onn had doubts about the time gap. Kind of a suspicious two days, don't you think?"

Vasquez shrugged, too. "From what I know about Lena Luthor, she probably had a real tech problem for the first day and then came in here and took anything that would link her to her family and left all the rest for us. To keep it safe. She probably can't keep it as safe from Lex and Lillian at L-Corp as we can at the DEO. And she wants Supergirl safe as much as we do."

"Not possible," muttered Alex.

Vasquez held her tongue. This wasn't the day for that particular conversation, not by far.

When they got back to the DEO with their treasure trove, J'onn showed his surprise. Vasquez just threw herself into her chair at her workstation and put her boots up on her desk, watching the news feed without much interest.

J'onn said, "Agent Vasquez. Don't you think you should be researching--"

Vasquez flipped open the short file cabinet under her desk, pulled out a file and handed it to him.

"Yes," he murmured. "I thought you might have..." Flipping through the pages, he returned to his office.

Alex watched this interaction, frowning.

Vasquez said, "I don't know about you, but I could kill a veggie pizza right about now."

Alex gawked. "You're a vegetarian?"

"Hell, no. I love me my steak and rib roast same as the next girl. But the things they call 'meat' that they put on pizza? Sausage and pepperoni? I mean you don't know what goes into sausage, and
pepperoni is just sausage with spices, right? Give me a twelve-ounce steak and I'm in love for life. But on a pizza? God, no!"

Alex said, "It's three in the afternoon..."

"Yeah, and we're going to be here a while. But once we're done? Hey, maybe we should order like three large pizzas and eat them at your sister's place so that there's leftovers waiting for her when she comes back starving."

Alex's face cleared for the first time in two days. "Yeah... We could do that."

So they did the work they were hired for, and they followed as best they could Winn describing the algorithm he set up to trace the portals to find Supergirl, and they checked out the alien weapons, flying back to the old desert location to see what kind of damage they did far away from civilians' prying eyes and collateral lives. And then they got back to National City around seven o'clock, tired and very hungry.

So they got one Pepper/Pepperoni for Alex, a Hawaian for Kara and a Veggie Supremo for Vasquez, and they took them back to Kara's place and chowed down. Vasquez adored how Alex showed so much enthusiasm for her food (even if she did insist on eating pepperoni), because so many of the femmes and lipstick lesbians she had dated always insisted on diet sodas and "lite" options, and not finishing their fucking food, and rarely taking the leftovers home. What a waste. But Alex explained that when you lived with a Kryptonian whose metabolism meant that food was a focal point of pretty much every three to four hours, you learned to appreciate it, especially when you had something you loved that you didn't have to share.

But then it got late, and Alex looked at the time on her phone and deflated. "We have to be at work early tomorrow," she said, when what Vasquez knew she meant was, "Kara's still not back yet."

It was one-thirty. Vasquez said, "Mind if I crash here on the couch? We've been keeping such late nights."

"Yeah, sure, no problem. But I've called dibs on the sweat pants, so you are going to have to take the Hello Kitty pajamas."

Vasquez grimaced, then said bravely, "It's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it."

She could tell that Alex was impressed by her response, and after she changed and brushed her teeth in Kara's bathroom, and emerged wearing white flannel pajamas with Hello Kitty all over them, Alex was even more impressed.

"They look better on you than they do on Kara."

"Pfft. Of course they do. Goodnight, Alex."

"Goodnight, Vas--Susan."

And Vasquez settled in on Kara's large and very squishy couch with a smile on her face. She had worked through much of her rage and was beginning to have more hope even as her colleagues had less and less. She knew Alex, and she knew Kara and she knew Supergirl. And she was pretty sure that no matter what duties Supergirl felt she had, Kara would always find her way back to her big sister.
Winn Schott, Jr. didn't like toys. His psychotic father had seen to that. But he kept a yoyo in his
desk drawer, despite himself, because it was a reminder of how the universe just kept repeating
itself. Everything that goes around, comes around. Karma, good and bad.

So while his algorithm worked the problem of Kara's multiverse-traveling thing, Winn let his mind
roam free. He played with the yoyo as he sat at his workstation and watched the DEO agents in
their black tactical gear being total badasses on the one hand, while also apparently feeling totally
helpless on the other.

J'onn was characteristically monosyllabic and Alex wasn't far behind. And Alex, like Vasquez,
threatened anybody who even so much as suggested that Kara was lost for good. At least one
rookie had officially resigned because of it.

And that was just the DEO. When he visited CatCo, James was just a mess of cuts and bruises and
the complete drive to replace Supergirl if he couldn't help in finding her. Winn sort of understood,
but he was worried that James and his strange, strong need to be a hero would get him killed. Winn
had not agreed with Kara when she had first suggested this, but she wasn't here now, and he was
beginning to see what she had seen. And he, as the man in the van, had just let it all happen.

Strictly speaking, James was a vigilante, which was not a legal role, which meant that Winn was an
accomplice. They could both end up in prison. And if he had realized that two weeks previously, it
might have meant something. But with Kara missing, they had bonded in a way they hadn't before,
agreeing that whatever happened, the story they told the NCPD or the notes they left on the ziptied
bodies of the villains they captured, would include Supergirl as part of the story. The criminal
world would not find out that she was missing.

It was Winn's idea to ask Lena Luthor for help in finding Supergirl and bringing her back. When he
had first suggested it to James, the photographer had been adamantly opposed. He had seen the
damage and pain a Luthor had caused Clark Kent and he never wanted to see a friend get hurt like
that again.

Winn had mixed feelings about that. On the one hand Lex and Lillian were clearly sociopaths; on
the other, so was Winn's father. So after thinking about it some more, he went to J'onn's office and
made the suggestion.

"Sir, I saw the black body field generator she built for the gala that time. She's a genius, she has the
best training from the best schools in the world, she thinks on her feet and she cares about
Supergirl."

J'onn nodded, flipping through a folder on his desk. He picked up a piece of paper and read it out
loud. "It is because of these qualities, together with the fact that she has now proven herself time
and time again, and that Supergirl trusts her implicitly, that I strongly recommend that we ask Lena
Luthor to join us in the search and rescue of Supergirl. Respectfully submitted, Susan Vasquez."

Winn goggled. "Wait! You mean Vasquez agrees with me? She never agrees with me."

J'onn stood up. "Maybe you both agree because you're both right. Looks like I have another trip to
L-Corp."

Feeling happy that they were going to get more help to find Kara, but guilty because he had
abandoned James for so long, Winn used his lunch break to sit in his van and watch the feeds. And he realized two things: the NCPD did believe that Supergirl was still out there doing her job but the criminals didn't. And with Cadmus out of the picture, National City had itself a power vacuum. At least three different mafias where jockeying for control: bank robberies, extortion, gambling. Supergirl had shut down the underground alien fight ring, but word on the street was that Roulette was back at it again somewhere. Human/human violence was at an all-time high and aliens were going missing again.

So with all of this data, so much more than Guardian could handle on his own, Winn went to Agent Vasquez and asked for her advice.

She had studied him while he talked, her face serious as always. "Hmm. Well, Little Plaid Shirt, I think you're on to something, but a lot of what you are talking about is out of our jurisdiction. A lot of that stuff is NCPD territory."

"I know, but we've been doing so many joint missions with them anyway... And you know how much Alex respects that Detective Maggie Person."

"Okay, kiddo. You have a point. I'll talk to J'onn."

Back at his workspace at the command center of the DEO, Winn looked at the quote from Supergirl about becoming what you were meant to be. He had been so excited to move from being the IT guy at CatCo to being Q here at the DEO, and for a long time, he had thought that they didn't appreciate him fully here either, that the nicknames and hobbit jokes were a sign that they weren't going to accept the outsider.

It wasn't until Supergirl disappeared and Alex freaked out and the entire DEO became an angry mess of black-clad ninja badasses wandering around looking like someone had kicked all the puppies that he realized that they just had their own way of welcoming him on the team, into the mission. Into the family.
Friday. Five days since Lena Luthor had put her mother in jail. Four days since the DEO director had come by to officially thank her. Three days since she gave the DEO the location of her mother's secret base. Two days since they had called to thank her again. One day since Jess had gone on another tirade on Lena's behalf, this time to express her outrage at one Kara Danvers, and how dare she just use Lena for her own professional purposes and then drop her when she needed a friend most.

Lena knew she was lucky to have Jess to articulate things she just didn't have the courage or the energy to say for herself. Five days. No Supergirl. No Kara. Little food. Less sleep. And now she had meetings back to back all day. Worst of all, her three o'clock was at Lord Technologies. She shuddered as her driver, Tom, pulled up in front of the entrance to the building. She sighed deeply, picked up her Gucci leather bag and got out.

Lord's assistant was waiting to take her to the conference room upstairs, where half a dozen other tech company CEOs sat waiting for Maxwell Lord to stroll in and explain his idea to them in detail: a consortium, of sorts, for anti-alien tech development. Lena was surprised that she had been included after the Medusa incident, but perhaps they just assumed that as a Luthor her action had been just an aberration. She was the last guest in the room and the only woman. The men gave her looks: worried, salacious, angry. She put on her most haughty demeanor and sat.

Two minutes later, Maxwell Lord came in and started his spiel: the danger that aliens posed, the need for interdisciplinary cooperation to defend National City, the idea of a brain trust, collaboration. The men in the room nodded, intrigued. One had questions about how issues of intellectual property would be handled, and Lord talked about how the climate change collaborators were doing that. A few more questions, a few more answers. Lena was the only one who asked nothing.

Finally, Lord looked at her and said, "Ms. Luthor? You've been uncharacteristically silent all this time..."

"Probably because I was on the receiving end of this conversation earlier this week, with my mother, at Cadmus. I believe you know what I had to say about that?"

Silence. More dirty looks.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lord, gentlemen. I cannot be a part of this. Good day."

Outside, the assistant jumped up when he saw her and escorted her back down to the lobby. When she reached her car, she saw Tom watching videos on his smart phone, beaming from ear to ear. When he saw her, he jumped up to open the back door for her, then returned to his seat to drive her back.

"Well, Tom. You look happy. Did your team win?"
"No, Ms. Luthor. It's Supergirl! She's back! The news said she was away helping with some alien thing in China and now she's back in National City! And she is working with the NCPD again, there was some kind of sting, I think, mafia maybe, and a huge shootout downtown. Also that kid with the snake that always gets loose. Dunno which makes me happier she's back!"

A rush of relief was followed by firm agreement that snakes might be worse than the mafia. There was a spring in her step as she returned to her office.

Jess said, "I see you heard about Supergirl."

"Tom told me."

"Should I clear your schedule?"

"No need. After a day like today, it's unlikely she'll come by."

Jess nodded, unconvinced, perhaps because she knew as well as Lena did that Supergirl almost always visited her at night, landing on the balcony backlit by the stars and city lights, one of Lena's favorite views from her office.

So she did her work and read reports and answered emails and sketched a design that had been in her mind for a few weeks, and all that time she was subconsciously listening for the thump of boots on her balcony.

But it never came. At midnight, she went home, drank the other half of a bottle of scotch and fell into bed, enjoying a dreamless sleep and waking up with a mild headache. But Saturday was a workday, so she got dressed and went to work. She was surprised to find that DEO woman waiting for her, Agent Danvers, Kara's sister. This would be interesting.

"Jess, clear my morning schedule. Agent Danvers, how might I help you?"

"Actually, Ms. Luthor, that is exactly what I am here to discuss."

Lena let her in and invited her to sit on the couch. She looked like she hadn't slept in a week. "Agent Danvers, are you well? You look..."

The agent opened her mouth and closed it again. She looked distraught. Lena got up and poured her a glass of water and handed it to her. It was too early in the day for anything stronger, although the woman looked like she could use it.

"Ms. Luthor..."

"Please, call me Lena."

"Lena. Alex."

"The director asked me to come see you, to ask for your help."

Lena's eyes narrowed at Alex's tone. "And you're not happy about that? Because I'm a Luthor?"

"It doesn't matter what I think about it. Better heads than mine decided this was a good idea."

"And what does the Department of Extra-Normal Operations need help with?"

Alex smiled humorlessly. "An...extra-normal operation. Do you remember, the other night...?"
"I believe it's safe to say that night will be seared into my memory for as long as I live. Yes, I remember."

"During the fight in your lobby. Did you see a blue metallic cloud? It would have been there maybe two seconds."

Lena's eyes went wide. "You mean that actually-- I thought I was hallucinating or the flashlights the police were using or--"

"Our agents questioned it too, but you aren't the only one who saw it. Our analysts think it was something we've seen before, about a year ago. Do you remember Supergirl's friend, the Flash?"

"Of course, the two of them were front page news for a week and then he fell off the edge of the Earth. Did he give up being a superhero?"

"Um, no. It would be nearer the truth to say that he fell off the edge of the Earth. Or at least of this Earth, in this universe."

Lena stared. "Then the multiverse theory..."

"Is true. Yes. And this looks very much like an interdimensional portal, or possibly an attempt at one. That attempt was unsuccessful, but at another...location, the radioactive residue left behind was similar, but we think it was successful."

"So... Are we being spied on or attacked by interdimensional beings? Or is the Flash back?"

Alex shook her head tiredly. "We think Supergirl went through. And we don't know how to communicate with her or get her back. And we've tried everything."

"But Supergirl is back! I saw the videos, she helped the police--"

"That was, long story short, an illusion. That we concocted to convince and increasingly crime-ridden city that she isn't gone at all."

"Director Henshaw told me she was, wait, in China?"

"The media made up the China angle. We were just saying out side the US. Well, it's true, isn't it? At least, this Earth's US."

Lena stood up suddenly and walked to the window, looking at the floor of her balcony, where she had seen red boots land so many times. "So why do you need me? And if the Flash was here and went home, why do you assume that she is simply visiting his Earth and will return?"

"I hope to God that's true."

Lena could hear the undertones, the fear, the raw need, and her curiosity was piqued. "Supergirl has proved many times how strong and indestructible she is. Why not just trust her?"

"She is strong. She is not indestructible. I do trust her. But what if I'm wrong? What if she's in danger, or hurt, or can't get back on her own? What if she doesn't come back?"

The heartache in those words touched Lena deeply, but still she pushed.

"She survived that rocket exploding in her hands. You really want me, someone you don't trust, to help you save a woman who probably doesn't need to be saved?"
Alex closed her eyes. "Yes."

Lena frowned. "All right. Let me think about this for a moment... And, tangentially, how is your sister, Kara?"

Alex opened her eyes and the pain was embarrassing to see. "We think she's with Supergirl."

Lena scooped her phone and laptop off her desk, tossed them in her Gucci bag and said, "Let's go."

//

In the black SUV, Lena asked, "Why on Earth would Supergirl take Kara with her?"

"The most reasonable assumption is that they were together when the portal opened, something grabbed Kara and Supergirl followed to save her."

Lena muttered, "Yeah, sounds like my girls."

Alex said, "You'll have to sign NDAs and relinquish intellectual property rights to the government. If we figure out a way to cross dimensions--"

"That would be tech we wouldn't want anyone to get their hands on. What Cadmus would do with that! Or even just Max Lord and his 'consortium.'"

"What consortium? What is that--""

"Slimeball doing now? Starting a junior Cadmus, apparently."

As they pulled up to the DEO, Alex muttered, "One of these days, I am going to kill him with my bare hands."

Lena's opinion of Agent Alex Danvers just went up several notches.
Joint Op

Chapter Summary

A little mid-crossover, post-kiss angst...

When Maggie's captain requested her presence in his office, she asked if it could wait as she was just doing the paperwork to put one more Cadmus straggler in the lock-up.

Captain Tilden said, "You've been our DEO liaison for a while now, Sawyer. Delegate."

So when Maggie walked into his office, steeling herself for the sight of Alex Danvers, she was surprised to see someone else in her place, the African-American fellow who was a dead ringer for the man who shot her. Or cyborg. Whatever. The man she had arrested just a few days ago. Biting the bullet, she said, "Director Henshaw. A pleasure to see you. Sorry about the mixup the other day."

"You were just doing your job, Detective. No hard feelings."

Tilden sighed. "Not that we have that out of the way. Sawyer, we have another joint op, this one much larger than we've had in a while. That woman, Sinclair--"

"The one you ordered me to release, sir?" Maggie said innocently.

Tilden scowled. "That was the city's elite gambling. And the word from on high was that 'There is nothing wrong with a flutter now and again' (and what does that even mean?). But this? This is human-- alien-- well, it's people trafficking. And if there is a line in this city, that is definitely over it."

"Yes, sir, because being enslaved in general is definitely worse than being enslaved to fight to the death!"

Tilden gave her the stink-eye, but she could see Henshaw hiding a smile. He said, "Captain, with your permission, I'd like to give Detective Sawyer the run-down so she can prep her team?"

And that was how Maggie Sawyer ended up in the Warehouse District (don't even get her started on that) with a squad of cops in riot gear, a DEO earpiece in her ear, and strategic plan that she really, really hoped was going to work. Supergirl, who she kept getting ziptie notes from but hadn't seen in a while, was doing aerial surveillance.

The jurisdictional part of the planning had been a nightmare. Half her squad was regular NCPD and half was Science Division. The Regulars took out the guards at the perimeter, all humans carrying and using unregistered weapons, and a few using the alien tech that allowed her to give the go-ahead to the DEO team, who breached and cleared and found a dozen aliens chained to a wall, which allowed her to bring her Science Division team in, along with their medics, because those aliens had clearly been drugged to keep them passive. The regulars arrested the humans who had been bidding on the aliens, while her group and the DEO secured any individuals whose species was indeterminable. It was going to cause a whole lot of paperwork, but she couldn't help that.
And when Roulette's bodyguards started shooting alien tech at her people, she thought Shit! and Gotcha! more or less simultaneously. It might not be enough to keep Roulette locked up, but it was another data point for future arrests: not an anomaly but a pattern of behavior.

After the cleanup, she congratulated and thanked her team, watching over their heads as Supergirl flew away without checking whether there had been any casualties, which was strange, because that girl always cared. Hell, that was the girl who had insisted on laundering Maggie's bandana. People said she had been dealing with something in China. Maybe it was jetlag? Did superhero aliens get jetlag? She'd have to ask Alex.

Or not, now that she thought of it. Probably not. Fuck.

Director Henshaw thanked her for her team's help. He said, "We at the DEO haven't always had... constructive collaboration with the NCPD, but Agent Danvers said that if we were working with you, Detective, we could expect nothing but professionalism, courage and efficiency. I see that she was right about that."

He shook her hand, hopefully not noticing her blushing. Alex had said that? About her? After... everything? It gave her a tiny bit of hope that what Agent Vasquez had said might turn out to be true. Someday...

But it was not someday. It was today. And today held the promise of only a shitload of paperwork.
Kara's still not back from her crossover event and her friends, freaking out, enlist Lena Luthor.

There were moments at the DEO when Vasquez regretted, a little bit, not having a better science background, for example, when Little Plaid Shirt Schott and the Good Luthor were ensconced in a lab arguing about resonance and speed and physics and Vasquez brought them coffee and muffins as an excuse to observe the Luthor.

Lena's eyes went wide. "Cinnamon chips? This is from Noonan's! Kara has brought me these before! They're delicious."

Winn frowned. "Why would S- er, she bring you food?"

Lena shrugged. "I get caught up in projects and forget to eat, which Kara apparently thinks is a mortal sin."

"Oh," said Winn nodding. "She does love her food. And I know that project thing. It's like that time I was designing--"

Vasquez kicked him under the lab bench.

"Er, designing an experiment, because I do that. A lot. And I totally missed dinner."

"Exactly!" said Lena, eyes closed as she ate.

Vasquez nearly came then and there just watching her. She pulled herself together. "How is this project going? Any ideas?"

This had the up and down side of bringing Lena back to this Earth. "Well, I was wondering, if the last time this happened, it was the Flash's speed that enabled him to break free of the dimension he was in, and that's also how they got him back, super-speed, then maybe we need to think in terms of speed. But not of humans, unless you could get Superman on board, but maybe particles? A stream of superfast particles? But outside of the Hadron collider, I'm not sure how exactly we could--"

But Winn said, "Actually, some of that tech you left for us from Cadmus seems like it was meant to make one of their cyborg-hybrid jerk-guys (that's a technical Supergirl term), you know, go really fast."

Vasquez sighed. "Winn, you maybe have clearance to look at that stuff. Ms. Luthor definitely does not."

Winn frowned. "Because she's a Luthor?"

"Because she just five minutes ago signed her NDAs. We need to, at the very least, process the paperwork, get her on the payroll as a consultant. These things take time."
"But K- Supergirl could be in danger! Can't we, what's the word, expedite things?"

Lena looked down. "Mr. Schott, don't be naive."

But Winn looked pissed. Vasquez had never seen this side of him. He stood up, looking ready to break something.

"Lena, you're a Luthor, crazy Lex's sister. Well, I am a Schott, crazy Winn Sr.'s son. And the only difference between us is that I've known...Supergirl a little bit longer than you have. And she trusted me when my dad broke out of prison and tried to kill her. And she trusts you. And the DEO needs to get on board with that!"

Lena put her hand on his shoulder, but said nothing. Her face gave away her history of putting up with other people's bigotry about her family.

Slowly Vasquez said, "Winn. Little Plaid Shirt. I know. Remember? I am the one who recommended that Lena be brought on this project."

Lena's eyebrows went up. Vasquez did her best to ignore that. She said, "But there are protocols. Because, and I am very sorry, Lena, but if, just in the hypothetical case that..."

"I betray you all?"

"Well, fuck, Winn, we have to have done our due diligence. Or we'll all look incompetent and lose our jobs. And I know that you, like me, like the director, well, we all are very good at our jobs, we are passionate about our jobs. So although I hate the paperwork and despise the red tape, I recognize it is there for a reason. So back off, kiddo. I got this. I will get you guys clearance as soon as I can. But it is going to take time."

"So what are we supposed to do in the meantime? We're at an impasse."

Vasquez shrugged. "The terms of her agreement, your agreement, sorry, ma'am, are wide open, not just connected the search and rescue. What else have we got going that Ms. Luthor might consult on?"

"You mean like the Lord Tech problem?"

Lena groaned. "Oh what fresh hell has Max 'I Am the Lord' created this time?"

"Um..." said Winn, checking in Vasquez. She nodded. He said, "Proto-kryptonite?"

Lena choked on her bite of muffin. "He, what, how? Krypt-- For Superman or Supergirl?"

"Um," said Winn, "yes?"

And then the classiest woman in National City let out a string of expletives that would have made a sailor's ears turn red. "That asshat needs to be stopped. Or possibly strung up."

Vasquez murmured, "I have a feeling Agent Danvers is going to like you."
Agent Vasquez interrupted J'onn's Martian meditation that M'gann had been teaching him, but the haggard look on her face told him it was not a light choice. She had three folders in her hands, none of them thin.

"Sir," she said, and her voice was ragged.

"Agent, when did you last sleep?"

She stared at him, apparently waiting for an answer to swim into sight. He waited. She shrugged.

"Agent, risk assessment requires that you be clear enough to notice details, nuances...Sleep deprivation can get in the way of that."

She stood rigid in front of him, looked down at the folders in her hands as if just noticing them, and offered them to him.

"Vasquez, sit down, for crying out loud, before you fall down."

She complied. "Thank you, sir."

"What are these?"

"Um, the extra vetting you asked for on Luthor, the file on Sinclair/Roulette, and, um, updating on Schott Sr.'s file, from recent prison records, just in case."

"I see. And he did. He had played chess with Vasquez a few times, years ago when she first became an agent. And he had learned that she was always several steps ahead of everyone else.

"And the Luthor's file has some...clearance paperwork. She needs more access, sir. Yes, I know the risk. Of all people, I absolutely know, but, sir, I heard the ideas she floated to Winn, and I think she might actually understand the science of this mess better than he does. If we want Supergirl back--"

"I hear you, Agent Vasquez. But what I have to consider is the tradeoff. Is the potential of her help, even if it brings Supergirl back, worth the potential of her betrayal if, one, she takes the tech and does something with it herself or gives it to her mother or their people? Two, if she somehow uses it to harm Supergirl? Three, even if she is good, if her mother or brother get their hands on the tech she helps us create? There's probably a four, but I can't think of it right now."

Vasquez waved her hand at the folders. "I've run simulations, with Winn's help, and let me tell you, he wasn't happy about it. I think our biggest risk is the last, her family torturing her to get the tech specs. But see, J'onn, that's where we're strong. We just have to protect her. I do believe she would
give her life to protect Supergirl. She will not betray her."

J'onn asked, "May I look at your mind, Susan? I wouldn't ask--"

Vasquez dragged her hands through her short brown hair and said, "There is very little in here you don't already know about me, J'onn." Small smile. "There may be some small details you will really wish you never knew, of course. But no. I have no secrets from you, boss."

J'onn swallowed. He knew very well how Vasquez felt about this, felt about Alex, and no, he really didn't want to know the details. But his job, his duty, was to protect this planet in the way no one had been able to protect his. So he sighed, came around the front of his desk, sank into the second chair, laid his hand on the side of Vasquez's head, and listened.

It wasn't the same as a Martian mind-meld (far less, for lack of a better human word, sexual, for one thing), but it was an intimacy he had very rarely committed in his three centuries on this planet. Compared to that amount of time, the ten years he had known Susan Vasquez felt like a minute, but it was one of the best minutes of his long life. He trusted her. For Supergirl's sake, for all their sakes, he needed to know that he was right in trusting her. And that required the evidence of her mind.

He quickly found himself in a desert, following camouflaged US Marines with heavy packs and AK-16s, going through some very simple (to a Martian) homes, clearing the neighborhood, expecting explosive violence. The scene shifted to an American urban neighborhood, maybe the Bronx, which reminded him of the film West Side Story that the Danvers girls had forced him to watch. And then he was at the DEO in the desert. He saw Agent Vasquez dressed up as if for a night out, and Supergirl came striding in, followed by her sister. And while Vasquez had known Alex for years, and had a tiny gay crush on her all that time, the moment she had realized that Alex Danvers was Supergirl's sister, she had turned from a badass ex-Marine DEO analyst into a hot gay mess.

J'onn hated the invasiveness. He hated seeing Vasquez's love life, so much of it being displacement over Alex, who she could never have: the straight girl colleague, her eventual hierarchical superior, even though Susan had more field experience. The sex. The breakups. The many, many nights sleeping in the barracks of the DEO dreaming of a day that would never come.

The minor surgery on the detective. The pizza at Supergirl's apartment. The hard work of more displacement, including beating on the bag in the DEO's gym, working on meditating or doing the vetting for consultants, or going off on raids, flanking Alex, noticing--although she didn't want to--Alex's...flanks.

J'onn pulled himself out of Vasquez's mind. She wouldn't meet his eyes. "Sorry, sir."

J'onn rubbed his eyes. What has been seen cannot be unseen, can it? "Vasquez, Susan, you have nothing to apologize for. Our minds are our minds. Attraction is a mystery. Hope is something the neurocognitive scientists cannot explain. But affection and the pull of duty based on affection? I have almost never seen that go wrong."

"Almost, sir?"

He sighed. "Long story. The point is, I think that your recommendation, while it may or may not go wrong, is not based on bias. You have our girls' best interests at heart. So we will work together, you and I, to protect the women we care about."
Chapter End Notes

28,000 words in 7 days. Yep, I am that good. You're welcome.
After Lena spent twenty minutes pacing around the lab like a human panther, Winn leant her his yoyo, explained (in a limited way) its meaning, and then watched her pace around the lab doing yoyo tricks he had never managed to learn. When she saw his dropped jaw, she said quietly, "Lex taught me some--"

He just nodded, accepting, and she kept pacing. She reminded him of James, in a way, all that wild, untempered energy, the huge need to be bigger than, better than, the need to be seen in all her (like his) glory. Except nobody saw them except Winn. His big brown eyes were wide open, seeing the need, the desire, the hope, that they did not really know, either of them, how to achieve. James was trying to achieve it through muscular strength and violence, and that methodology was turning their best friends off. Lena was (apparently) trying it through using her brain, her schooling, her creativity, her (somebody had to notice) passionate concern about Supergirl. (Unlike Supergirl, who used all of the above.)

And let's face it: Lena's passionate concern about Kara Danvers. Winn would never say that he was not a betting man; he was the one who took the bets when Alex and Kara sparred in the K-gym, as the agents called it. In fact, his new PlayStation setup had been funded by him foreseeing Kara finally beating Alex. So when he saw Lena being a 24/7 badass emotionless scientist, much like his DEO colleagues, the instinct to help, to build something to help, was strong in this one, just as it was with him. So he decided that he would help her help them.

First, he nagged Vasquez about the clearances. She assured him that she had made her strongest possible argument to J'onn. Second, he got Alex to bring in Sally, their mole at Lord Tech, to describe what she knew about the proto-k project.

He sat in the lab, watching the results of one of his simulations on a DEO tablet while the three women looked at the schematics Sally had brought them.

Lena pointed to one side of the mechanism. "That's the piece of Lex's design we're suing Lord over. It's a way to filter out the dangerous radiation but leave the UV part of the light intact. Wait, this piece here. It could be an amplifier."

Alex leaned in. "We were talking earlier about pulsation. Winn, did you draw that up yet?"

"God, Alex. I've been searching for Supergirl. I haven't had time."

She pulled a mechanical pencil from the pocket of her cargo pants and threw it at him. "Do it now. Lena, why did Lex want UV light from a radioactive source? Why not just use regular UV light?"

Lena bit her lip. "He wanted to shoot the equivalent of red sunlight at Superman, to weaken him."

Silence fell in the room. Sally, a blonde scientist, said, "Wait, Lena...Luthor?"

They stared at her. Alex said with her deepest, most dangerous voice, "Tell no one."
The woman's eyes got big. "No, no. Absolutely not. Er, I have to get back to the lab. I told them I had a dental appointment..." She practically ran out of the room.

With a shaky laugh, Lena said, "You know, Alex, I could really use you at my board meetings!"

Winn handed them a piece of paper. "That's how I'd do it, at least the first iteration, until I knew more about what the--" He looked down at the schematics. "Oh."

Lena said, "So that's what this piece is. Look, they're pretty much the same."

Together she and Winn let out a gasp. "That's it!"

Winn said, "Could it really be that simple?"

Lena said, "A lot of Lex's inventions were ridiculously simple. All of this mess, this is just so typically Maxwell Lord, making things complicated."

Alex looked from one to the other. "What are you two talking about?"

Winn gestured for Lena to explain. She said, "Well, if we pulsed red sun-type light at the piece of proto-k you said you have..."

"Red kryptonite," groaned Alex.

"Well, maybe. Or pink."

Winn said, "Wait, there's a pink kryptonite? What's it do?"

Lena bit back a laugh. "Nothing to me. Possibly something to you two. Not sure about Agent Vasquez. It would be very awkward for Director Henshaw..."

Winn was typing away at his tablet. "Holy shit! It makes you gay?"

Lena allowed the laugh to escape her. "Only for twenty-four hours. He never did figure out how to make it last, but I think he didn't care. His main goal was to embarrass Superman, maybe discredit him. This was years ago, remember. The world was a different place. But Superman, bless his alien S-wearing heart, simply came out as a huge ally of the gay community after that. So the joke was on Lex in the end."

Winn grinned. They were not closer to getting Supergirl back, but they had at least solved one mystery. Then he wondered, But why on Earth would Maxwell Lord want to make people gay?
"Victory! Mission accomplished, Little Plaid Shirt!"

Vasquez swept into the lab with a grey folder in one hand and a huge bag of Chinese takeout in the other. Alex rolled up the Lord Tech schematics and set them on a side table, clearing the lab bench for lunch.

Vasquez handed Lena the folder. "You just need to sign at the Xs. I've got agents bringing in the tech Winn asked for and then you're good to go. But J'onn said I had to be here to supervise. And Alex, if you take all of the beef and broccoli again, I will have to kill you, boss or no."

"Sorry, it's just that whenever I don't have to share with--"

Her voice faltered. She sat down suddenly in one of the rolling chairs and looked like she was going to cry. Vasquez stepped behind her and began to massage her shoulders, an intimacy she never would have allowed herself before this past grueling week, even in private, much less in front of Winn and Lena. Alex's muscles were tight and Vasquez worked her thumb into some knots until Alex was groaning under her hands. She looked up to see Winn glancing at Lena, embarrassed, and Lena returning the look, amused.

The CEO murmured, "Well, that answers that question."

Vasquez asked, "What question?"

Innocently, Lena answered, "What is Agent Danvers favorite Chinese food. What else?"

Winn quickly pulled out the white cardboard containers and passed chopsticks around. They ate with appetite talking about the crazy news out of DC, the orange-haired parasite, as Winn called the new president, and the attacks on the environment, Muslims, aliens, and gays that were a constant problem that the DEO could do nothing about. Anything to avoid talking about the caped elephant not in this dimension.

After they finished and cleaned up, Winn, Lena and Alex went through the big silver cases the other agents had wheeled in and matched the tech inside to the descriptions listed in the manifest. While they were oohing and aahing, Vasquez pulled out a small box from the pocket of her cargo pants, opened it up and set up a miniature chessboard with tiny black and white pieces. She set her watch's timer and began to play.

Winn said, "Some of these implants are sick. And I don't mean that in a good way. Who would allow themselves to be turned into..."

Lena picked up a set of vials and looked at the chemical formulas written on them. "By the look of these, someone who was unable to consent clearly."

Alex frowned. "Cadmus used roofies?"
"Functionally. A little bit roofie to decrease inhibitions, a little bit steroid to build strength to beyond normal, a little bit, well, I'm not sure what this is but I would bet it's some kind of upper, like cocaine or ecstasy. So you would have a willing, strong, euphoric specimen. Then you offer the implants and hand them the paperwork." She put down the vials with disgust. "Oh, mother..."

Vasquez's watch beeped. "Shit." She still had four pieces on each side of the board.

Lena glanced over and said, "White knight takes pawn three. Check."

Vasquez frowned. "J'onn's right. I do need more sleep."

Alex opened the case that held the alien weapons, read the description, and whistled. "Why didn't I see this before?"

Vasquez looked up. "Oh, that was the one I tested. It split the rocks in seconds. Way too strong for any of our ops. A beam like that would go right through the biggest alien we've encountered yet. Maybe even Supergirl. Very unsafe. The collateral damage--"

She watched as Lena's eyes went wide. She took a small hex wrench and removed the cover from the wide butt of the space rifle. Her face, if possible, went whiter. "This is it. This is exactly it. Speed, amplitude, condensed particles. We couldn't use this, but we could build something to mimic it, but a thousand or ten thousand times weaker... Winn, come look at this..."

Vasquez grinned to herself, set up her board again, ignored the genius science talk. She saw from Alex's face that they had turned a corner. So she played several games, until the alarms went off and then she and Alex trotted up to the command center. Rogue aliens would insist on trying to destroy National City. Just as well. They could use some action.

//

"Sure," said Alex, as they dragged themselves dripping alien ichor back into the DEO. "We could use some action, you said. It'll be fun, you said."

Vasquez ran a black-gloved hand through her hair, threw a handful of goop at the drain in the decontamination shower as they stripped down. "Just don't get it in your eyes. Stings like fuck."

Rosy the lab tech helped them remove their gooey armor and tactical uniforms and pushed them into the shower, not taking no for an answer. She was resigned to the mess. Her job was often all about the mess. And she had no time for anybody's shyness or body image issues. Get naked. Get clean. Then get the hell out of her lab so she could identify why the goop was doing more damage to the armor than it was to the clothing. That was a very weird effect. Vasquez watched the woman with amusement as she washed her own hair, trying to get every bit of that blackish glue out of it. She could feel Alex's eyes on her, and carefully kept her eyes closed. Let her look. That might actually get something going, something that Vasquez really wanted. She wouldn't push. But damn. What a convenient alien!

//

By the time they got back to the lab, Winn had used the 3D printer to build parts for their device. Meanwhile Lena had a courier from L-Corp bring one of her old unsuccessful prototypes, micro-sized it the best she could, losing 62% of its original size by changing out materials. It was late afternoon and the lab was unusually warm. Vasquez went to the canteen and brought back a pitcher of lemonade and some paper cups.

Winn grumbled, "What I really need is a beer."
Lena nodded, although she didn't look like the beer type to Vasquez. Cosmos, maybe, or expensive scotch. "Sorry, Little Plaid Shirt. The lab's got rules. No alcohol around the equipment."

"Hey, how are we going test this? We can't just bring it to--"

"Winn!"

He shut his mouth.

Vasquez looked at Lena. "Sorry, ma'am. I managed to get you much higher clearance by the skin of my teeth, but knowledge about the location of a possible rift in the space/time continuum? Yeah, not that high."

Winn said, "Er, that's not exactly... Did you get all of your alien physics from Star Trek?"

"Hey, xenobiology, xenopsychology are my areas. I'll leave physics to you."

Lena frowned. "He's right, though. What's been described to me isn't a rift that might widen. It's more like a door that is and isn't there, like Schrodinger's cat. The particle beam should just work like a key, to mix my metaphors, to persuade the door to exist and then open. Take out the key, turn off the beam, and the door closes, ceases to exist."

Winn nodded. "And I know Lena would want to be there when we--"

Vasquez grabbed the back of his collar and dragged him out. Down the hall was a gender-neutral bathroom. She pounded on the door and heard a man's voice say, "Just a minute!"

"Well, make it quick. I need the room!"

A few seconds later and agent came out finishing his belt and looking scared.

Vasquez dragged Winn inside.

"Um, Agent? Don't you think people might talk--"

"Winn, everyone in the DEO knows me. They know that the only inappropriate thing I am likely to do with you in a bathroom is kill you and dismember your body for quicker disposal. Listen to me. Lena cannot be with us when we get Supergirl back."

"But--"

"Will you listen? Picture it. Best case scenario: we shoot the beam, and this shiny blue door cloud thing opens and Supergirl just magically pops out! Hooray!"

"Exactly! So--"

"So what will be Lena's reaction when Kara Danvers doesn't shoot out? My guess? That woman would turn around and go in after her and then Supergirl would have to follow and always assuming that didn't turn out into yet another disaster, at the very least Supergirl's identity would be compromised. Do you really want a Luthor, however polite and brilliant, knowing Supergirl's identity?"

"I, I didn't realize..."

Vasquez sighed and ran her fingers through her hair. "If you spent less time playing video games and more playing games of strategy, you would have. Go back and tell her, I don't know, that we're
expendable and she's not, whatever sounds good. I have to go talk to Alex."

What Vasquez didn't say was that she had "lost" her chess game on purpose. And now she had another piece of information to put in Lena's file.
The tech is almost finished and Alex discovers new things about herself, awkwardly, of course.

Alex was standing at the command station, talking to J'onn when Vasquez walked in. Alex immediately made sure her attention was on the computer screen above. She didn't want to meet Vasquez's eyes. Or worse, check out her ass. That would be unprofessional and Agent Danvers was never unprofessional.

Alex swallowed. The shower had been a revelation. Even when Alex had been examining her feelings for Maggie and looking back over her life, most of what she had considered was the way women's minds worked, the way she had always loved talking to her women friends. She had never really considered their bodies. Sure, Maggie's hair and dimples were... But it didn't do to dwell on that anymore. That was never going to happen.

But the alien and the shower, and then Vasquez dropped her pants and the rest of her sticky uniform on the floor and walked straight into the shower---

Well, not straight. Alex thought probably Vasquez never did anything straight. But directly? That would do. And she was magnificent, even with the puckered scars on one leg and on her ribs on the other side. And that butt was, well, it was, it was mainly something she Should Not Be Thinking About.

Vasquez asked, "Where are we on containment when they get the beam finished?"

J'onn rubbed his temples as if he had a headache.

Alex said, "There are some other agents working on a portable containment chamber, sort of like a lead-lined closet. We'll bring that to the apartment and set it up, and hopefully..."

J'onn rubbed his head again, said, "I trust you ladies to handle it," and walked quickly away.

One of Vasquez's eyebrows rose and she laughed.

Alex finally met her eyes. "What's so funny? What's with him?"

Vasquez said blandly, "I have no idea."

But she said it in a similar way to how she had said she didn't know what Alex might have told Kara, when it had become clear later she'd known all along, which meant she did know what J'onn-

"Oh, shit! Psychic!"

"Mmm-hmmm." Vasquez flashed a shit-eating grin, leaning in and whispering, "So Agent Danvers, do you think I have a great ass?
Alex eyebrows flew up. "Not you too!"

"Not psychic, no. Just a healthy body image."

Alex fled to the lab, leaving Vasquez chuckling behind her.

Back in the lab, Lena and Winn were finishing up their device, talking very fast and finishing each other's sentences. Alex had a moment of imagining these two paired up, but then she dismissed the thought. She loved Winn like a brother, but Lena was way out of his league.

"So," she said. "How is the dynamic duo?"

Winn looked confused. "They're in Gotham. Wait! Are they here at the DEO? Can I meet them?"

Lena gave him an affectionate look and grinned at Alex, shaking her head. "Is he always such a nerd?"

"You have no idea. No, Winn. I was referring to you two. Your progress on your device?"

"We think we finally figured out the compression problem, so it's just a matter of testing it, first at low levels. Lena offered a test room at L-Corp, but I figured Vasquez would have my hide if I tried taking it out of the DEO."

"As would I. No offense, Ms. Luther."

Lena seemed resigned, more than anything. "None taken."

Alex was bouncing on her toes with impatience. "How long is all that going to take?"

"Maybe half an hour if it works. A whole lot longer if it doesn't and we have to make changes."

"And what am I supposed to do while I wait?"

"Um, call out for pizza?"

Alex blew a gasket. Picking up Winn by his shirt, she slammed him against the wall. "My s-Supergirl, my friend Supergirl is missing, she's been missing for a God damned week, Winn, and I don't have time to wait around before we save her, do you understand?"

Lena, looking alarmed, put a gentle hand on Alex's shoulder. "Agent Danvers, I am very sorry, but Winn is right. This is going to take as long as it takes. And don't break Winn. There is no way I could have gone from idea to prototype to device in just six hours on anything even half as complex as this, and the only way I've done it is because of his mind and his way of looking at things."

Alex couldn't think clearly. She just wanted Kara home and safe and eating potstickers and fidgeting with her glasses and home and safe and--

"Agent Danvers. You can put Winn down now..."

Alex set Winn down, suddenly feeling the strain of picking up a person who was probably the same weight as she was. Ouch. She was going to regret that tomorrow morning. But she wasn't about to apologize. "Just...do the best you can."
The end of the crossover adventure, almost.

Even after saving Oliver's life when he nearly fell to his death, even after the presidential awards ceremony, even after the party and the group hug, Supergirl really just wanted to go home. Being away from Alex and Lena and all her friends, even just for a week, made her cranky, and she had taken it out on the old guy, by telling this Earth's president about her Earth's DEO and recommending that the woman she had voted for in the last election, who hadn't won on her Earth, might consider reassigning the annoying jerk-guy to Antarctica.

Was it petty? Absolutely. Was it satisfying? Oh yes. Once more, using her persuasive skills rather than her superpowers for the cause of truth, justice and protecting her friends.

Privately, she thought, You're welcome.

Publically, when Barry said, "Ready to see if Cisco's gadget works?" she answered, "Ready. And remember, if you guys need me, I'm just a call away."

She pressed the button. A shiny blue metallic portal opened up.

And then closed.

She pressed the button again. Again, the portal opened and immediately closed.

"Um, Cisco?"

"Wait! No! No, no, no! That is not what it's supposed to do!" He grabbed it away from her. "I was sure this would work. How can it--"

Supergirl turned to Barry and her voice, even to herself, sounded much less perky than usual. "Um, looks like I'm going to have to impose on you longer than we had thought. Sorry..."

Barry's face was a mix of relief and confusion. "I love having you here, Kara. But we will get you back. If the team can save my life from...all that? We can totally get you home. Sarah! Felicity! Looks like we have more work to do!"
Chapter Summary

The happy ending of the crossover adventure angst!

J'onn sat in his office, finishing up the paperwork, methodically focusing on the numbers and reports to stop thinking about the things that Agent Danvers had been obsessing about in her head. He really didn't need to think about his best agents...in that way. Sometimes he wished that Earth had some kind of psychic Scrubble Bubbles. Mars had had a technology, painful but effective, for erasing unwanted memories, not entirely the way humans made tattoos go away. You only did it for the hardest things. When did your Earth daughter-equivalents having sexual thoughts about each other become harder than genocide and torture? Maybe he was getting soft.

So when Lena Luthor knocked on his office door, asking to speak to him, he gladly put his papers aside. He had read that Lex Luthor had learned some techniques to shield his mind from psychics; it made sense that he might have taught them to his sister. J'onn wasn't sure whether he should be glad or disappointed about it, but the only emotion he could read from Lena's mind was concern about Kara Danvers, and he couldn't fault her for that.

"Yes, Ms. Luthor. What can I do for you?"

"Director Henshaw. I do understand the ramifications of my sudden and, I am assuming, temporary, emergency clearances. I just want to reassure you that I take these things seriously, and when I return to L-Corp I will not take anything more than my memories with me, and I will try not to draw on them when I am creating future tech."

"I appreciate that, Ms. Luthor. I know Supergirl would expect nothing less."

Lena nodded regally. "But I did want to emphasize that Supergirl, as well as Kara Danvers, is important to me. She's saved my life countless times. And Kara is...well, Kara, and Agent Danvers' sister. So if they are ever in danger, I want you to know that you can count on me to help."

"Thank you, Ms. Luthor."

Lena rubbed her hands together, looking like there was more she wanted to say, but not knowing how to say it.

"Ms. Luthor, Lena, everyone at the DEO is grateful for your help. We went from being hopeless to having a concrete hope within seven hours of your showing up. That is no small thing."

Lena waved a hand, as if being told she was a genius was ordinary, boring, meaningless.

"Lena," he said gently. "Is there anything we can do to return the favor?"

Green eyes met brown. "Y-yes? Just, when you find her, Kara, I mean them, and Supergirl, would you let me know? That they're safe? Because that would mean so much."

"Of course. I will send them to you myself. I know what it's like to long for a prodigal daughter...or friend."
"Well, thank you, sir. I guess I'll just--"

A roar of voices met their ears. Lena gasped. J'onn extended his mind cautiously and then grinned. "Ms. Luthor, I think you'll find that you will find out about the fruits of your labors sooner than we had hoped!"

Neither of them ran, though they both wanted to. But if there was one thing that Lena Luthor and J'onn J'onz shared, it was the value of personal dignity. So they strode into the command center side by side, and when the Search and Rescue team saw them, they pulled off the hordes of random agents surrounding Supergirl and shoved her in their direction.

Lena held back while J'onn gave his superhero a bear hug. Then he stepped away and nodded in Lena's direction. The room grew quiet.

J'onn said, "The DEO spent days trying to find a way to get you back to us, Supergirl, but it wasn't until Agents Schott and Vasquez persuaded me to bring Ms. Luthor here that we finally started making progress. And that was just this morning, so I think you can tell how motivated they--and she--were to help our team."

He had barely finished when Supergirl and Lena enveloped each other in bone-crushing hugs. And the look on Supergirl's face suggested that, for the first time in thirteen years, someone was hugging her harder than she was hugging them.
Kara found the transition back to this Earth more jarring than she had anticipated. The DEO psychologist had explained how the entire organization had experienced trauma and grief and helplessness while she was gone. Alex had yelled at her for half an hour about not leaving a note at the very least. Winn...well, that conversation had ended in tears on both sides. James was unexpectedly snide, but he was also moving very slowly, with a limp and gasping for breath between the hard things he had to say to her, and she didn't know what to make of that, so she let it go for now.

J'onn said he was writing up a new rubric for more-extra-normal-than-normal situations, especially now that she had the newly working interdimensional communication device.

And Lena. She went to Lena as Supergirl, landing on her balcony and watching her head turn so fast at the sound that she thought the CEO might get whiplash.

"You know, that door is-- I said that already, didn't I? I apologize, Supergirl. I suppose you need to land where you can."

"Ms. Luthor, I am so sorry for putting everyone I care about in a spin about my being gone. My friend, the Flash, asked for my help to save his version of Earth and I didn't even think."

Lena was haughty and imperious, and devoid of emotion. She tapped away at her tablet, saying, "That is the one thing that superheroes and supervillains have in common. They don't think about anybody else."

"Le-- Ms. Luthor, please forgive me. I don't just feel awful about making you and everyone else I care about worry for me. The thing that kept nagging at me while I was...over there. It was that I never got to thank you for what you did with Medusa and your mother and Cadmus. You were so, so brave. And you risked so much. And lost so much, I think. And I couldn't be here to thank you."

"I did what was right. No thanks necessary."

"We don't thank people because they expect it. We thank them because, well, sometimes they do the thing we couldn't do. They are their own hero, and ours too."

Green eyes flashed toward blue and looked away. "You know, I could forgive you for that." She sighed. "I guess that I do forgive you for that. But what I am having trouble forgiving you for? Kara Danvers."

Supergirl sighed, exhausted but grateful that Alex had briefed her on this. "Kara is...impetuous. When she heard what Barry Allen had to say about the danger on his Earth, about the possibility, the fact, of other Earths, she just leaped in. I went in to help him, yes, but primarily to protect her."

Lena let out a small sob and once again embraced Supergirl tightly. Kara thought that if she never
breathed again, it would be worth it.

Lena pulled back, clearly embarrassed. "And how is Kara?"

"The DEO psychologists are holding her, but honestly, she is pretty tough, mentally. I think she'll be fine. But the DEO, you know. Government organization with a lot of rules. I really hope they let her go tomorrow. Holding her will only make things worse, and she has to get back to her job."

"Will she even have a job?"

"She will. Once the DEO realized that she might be with Supergirl, they told CatCo that she had whooping cough—the vaccine wears off in your early twenties—and they sent in medics to test the people she works with regularly. It was pretty effective in making them let her take the time off. Apparently they even tested Snipper!"

"I think you'll find his name is Snapper."

"Is it? Anyway, I'm sure she'll be here to see you herself once the DEO releases her. She already asked Alex and Winn how you were..."

And that was half the battle, because Supergirl always had answers and Supergirl could plant her feet and cross her arms and speak in a slightly lower voice, and people accepted what she said. She had authority, gravitas, really, which was funny for someone who could fly.

Kara had levitas at best, and this week, she was not at her best. When she showed up at L-Corp, she came bearing a small box of chocolates for Jess, who barely even looked at her, and a larger box for Lena.

Lena said, "I noticed that you made an appointment with Jess, rather than simply flying in here with lunch and a story about your boss, Snapper."

Kara said quietly, "I didn't want to presume. I think maybe I put you through some things that I never intended. Curiosity killed the cat and all that..."

Lena closed her laptop and stood. She was wearing a blood-red dress, her hair tightly pulled back and her face fierce. "Yes! Curiosity kills, Kara! You knew that! You're a reporter, God dammit, and you've seen how these things can go!"

Kara cowered before her. Lena took a deep breath and turned toward the window. After a while, she said more calmly, "Kara, look out there. What do you see?"

And Kara remembered when James had asked her this very same question, back at the beginning, so she gave his answer: "A city, people, in need of a hero."

"Exactly. And your little act of...of curiosity, of bravado, left this city with no hero for a whole week! Crime skyrocketed. Hundreds of aliens were kidnapped. And your friends, your friends had to dance around your boss and colleagues at CatCo to protect your job, to save your ass, and how could you do that to m-- to them?"

Kara bowed her head. "I have no excuse."

Lena watched her. She had never seen Kara not be the perky, happy, sunshiney ray of optimism. She had never seen Kara look so sad.

"Kara," she said, more gently. "I don't mean to shame you. Just, next time, well, think a little more."
Think about the consequences of your actions. Because there are a lot of people here in National City whose lives would be so much less if you weren't in them."

Kara sighed. "That's true of Supergirl, Lena. It isn't true of me, Kara."

Lena turned back to the window, wiping the trace of a tear from her eye with her thumb so that Kara wouldn't see her makeup smear. She turned back to the half-broken woman and her heart melted. She stepped toward her.

"Kara, you are my friend, my only friend in National City. How could you think I wouldn't feel your loss deeply?"

Tears slid down Kara's cheeks. "I am so sorry, Lena. A lot of people have been yelling at me yesterday and today, but the one person I am most sorry about disappointing is you."

And the hug, this time, was gentle and warm. Kara inhaled Lena's expensive perfume and felt her arms around her and she felt more remorse than she felt she had room for.
On the Road to Amphipolis

Chapter Summary

Post crossover, beginning of major canon divergence.

On 2/21 I added another two pages to this chapter. It had started out in Alex's point of view and then I accidentally switched, so we are going to pretend I meant to do that.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It took about a week, but the DEO was beginning to recover from the loss of Supergirl and of Kara. The fact that she was one person was Need to Know information, which most agents didn't need to know. But they knew that Agent Danvers' little sister had been lost for a whole week along with their resident superhero and it had hit them hard. Nobody messed with an agent's family. Slowly, they returned to normal, swaggering around the base with their usual bravado.

Alex watched it with relief. She had hated being the target of pity. She understood that these agents loved Supergirl, and the few who had dealings with Kara loved her too. But the way they had looked at her. And then she felt a twinge in her back and remembered picking up Winn by his shirt and she thought she owed him an apology.

And that was before Agent Vasquez swaggered into the command center and asked after her sister.

"She's fine. Thanks for asking. Tired. And maybe I came down on her a little too hard. But she's okay."

Vasquez sighed. "At some point I need to take that girl out for a beer."

Alex's eyebrows skyrocketed. "What? Why? She's not--"

"A little naive when it comes to threat assessment? Seriously? You think? She needs to learn systems thinking, at the very least."

"Oh, well. Yeah. That. Sure."

And if Vasquez smiled at her response, she put it down to the same relief that she felt: her sister was not gone forever, as she had worked so hard not to fear, and failed.

So when Vasquez had said, at the end of the week after Supergirl/Kara had returned, "Hey, boss, so, do you want to go to my watering hole? 'Cuz you've been kinda tense this week, even after... I just thought, a couple of drinks, to relax?"

So Alex had said yes, without thinking, certainly not expecting (although in retrospect she probably should have) that Susan "the DEO's lesbian" Vasquez would have a gay bar as her watering hole.

But when they sauntered in (after Susan had insisted on driving them in her VW Beetle) to a bar with fluorescent lights and signs advertising a Judy Garland impersonator (apparently male) and a group of Golden Girls impersonators (definitely male), she blanched.
Vasquez just grinned. "You okay?"

"What? Pfft. Of course."

"Of course. Good."

One of the waitresses gave Vasquez what looked like an extra-special smile, saying, "I'll set you up a table. In the back?"

Vasquez just grinned. What Alex would have given to have that kind of--game? chill? elan? She didn't even know the word.

They settled into a back booth in a quiet corner not too far from the kitchen door but not so close as to catch the chaos from that space.

"So," said Vasquez. "We know how Supergirl and Kara are. Is. How are you, Alex?"

Alex coughed. "Fine. Fine."

Vasquez eyed her. "The jalapeño poppers are good here. So is the 'Mexican pizza' and the watercress and beet salad with beef."

"Yeah, that salad sounds good."

Vasquez turned and waved her hand and a different woman appeared, with a mass of red hair tied up in a bun, and a very tight shirt and pants.

"Hey, Sherry. The watercress and beef and shrimp cocktail? And then--" she looked to Alex.

"Sam Adams lager?"

"Make that two."

Vasquez turned back to Alex. "You know, I've worked a bit with the cute detective now, what's her name, Sanvers?"

"Sawyer."

"J'onn had only stellar things to say about her after that alien trafficking ring sting they did: efficient, courageous, blah, blah, blah. Is she really that amazing?"

Alex sighed. "Yes. She is."

Vasquez played with her utensils rolled up in a napkin. "So, if it's not something you don't, I mean, if it's not beyond your, I mean, well, why didn't you tap that?"

Alex stared at her. The waitress put down their beers on coasters. Alex said, "You think I had a choice?"

Vasquez stared back. "Uh, yes?"

Alex's face went through a half a dozen emotions: shock, dismissal, consideration, rejection, confusion, and complete lack of understanding.

It was Vasquez's turn to stare. "So you guys never... before you decided to... call it quits?"
Alex flushed saying, "Apparently, I'm 'fresh off the boat.' And if you're new, then nobody wants to be with you. Which seems like a Catch 22, doesn't it? It makes no sense!"

Vasquez nodded. "I've always thought so."

Alex looked surprised. "What do you mean?"

Vasquez shrugged. "You're new at this. At some point, everybody's new. So why do we make the folks who figure it out late suffer? Because we're afraid they're just experimenting and 'they'll go back'? I don't buy it. That happens. Not gonna lie. But it doesn't happen as much as people claim. A chick tells me she has just figured out that she is bi or gay? I generally believe her. And if it doesn't work out? I don't blame her. This shit isn't easy to figure out."

Alex's face went soft and then she looked away. Vasquez said, "Hey, you want to dance?"

At the time it seemed like an easy way out of the conversation, but Alex had not anticipated that the self-proclaimed "butchy" Susan Vasquez would turn out to be so good at salsa and disco and generally moving her lithe, DEO-trained body in a way that would confuse Alex and make her competitive instincts arise.

And they had moved together for a slow dance, and an Adele song, when over Vasquez's shoulder, Alex caught sign of and ice-cold brunette in oh-very-tight-pants and stilettos dancing with a stranger.

Earnestly she turned and said to Vasquez, "That woman, your one o'clock, that's not Lena Luthor, is it?"

And Vasquez sighed. "Oh God. Yes, I think it is."

"She's here? I didn't think she was--"

"One of us? A sister? A lady-loving lady? Oh, honey. She renamed Luthor Corp L-Corp, after all. Haven't you ever watched The L Word?"

"Um, no?"

"We are going to have to fix that. It's not perfect, but it is a quick way to learn lesbian culture."

Alex nodded, distracted. "Who is she with?"

"Funny. In this light, it kind of looks like Kara."

"What? No! I mean, it can't be. By definition."

"No, I guess not. Kara's taller. But would it be so bad if it were?"

Alex stopped dancing like she'd forgotten how. Vasquez sighed, took her by the hand and led her back to their table.

Finally, when Alex remembered how to English again, she said, "Why would you even ask that?"

//

Before the week from hell, Vasquez had watched Kara when she talked about her friends, and she had watched when she talked about Lena, and she had seen the difference. Since coming back, Kara was different, sad, depressed, and guilty, with everyone coming down on her. But when she
had come to Vasquez to thank her for getting Lena into the DEO, she had seemed lighter.

"Have you seen her yet?" Vasquez had asked.

"Yes, twice. I mean, as both of me."

"And?"

"She forgave me. Both of me. I mean she yelled at us first. But she forgave us." A sudden smile. "I got hugs!"

"Good for you, kiddo. Want another one?"

"Always!"

Vasquez had hugged her tightly, glad to have her back for her own sake.

"You're not going to yell at me? J'onn said you were going to give me a talk about risk assessment."

She'd looked afraid when she said it. The Girl of fucking Steel had looked afraid of Susan Vasquez.

She sighed. "I'm not going to yell. I'm going to teach you to play chess."

"Lena plays chess!" Big smile.

"I know, kiddo. I know."

//

Alex said, "Earth to Vasquez? Are you insinuating that you think my sister is gay?"

"It's not for me to say. But her relationship with Lena is definitely special, even if it's not queer."

They both turned to watch Lena lean closer to say something in the other woman's ear and then they disappeared into the crowd of dancing bodies.

Alex frowned. "I hope not. Because that looked..."

"Like a hookup? Little bit, yeah. To be fair, I imagine most of a Luthor's relationships would have to be...temporary."

"What?" And then she thought about her college days, when she had forced herself to go to the parties and forced herself to try the relationships and even would try the sex, but it never worked out. "That's a lonely way to live, when the only affection you can get is that."

Vasquez said quietly, "Alex, you want to get out of here?"

Alex's eyebrows flew up. "What? You mean, like, with you? And me? Like that?"

Vasquez shrugged. "If that's what you want, sure. Or not, if you don't. I just think we could find a quieter place to talk."

"Oh! Of course. So you didn't mean--"

"Alex," Vasquez sighed. "I know it's complicated. We work together. You're my boss. And you're
still in love with your cop friend. But you and I, we're so similar. You actually understand why I do what I do and take the risks and put up with the scars."

"Yeah, how did you get that one--" Alex slapped her hand over her mouth, turning pink.

Vasquez snickered. "Still thinking about our shower? Maybe we should compare scars sometime. But not necessarily tonight. I would really like to make love to you, Alex Danvers. But I'm pretty sure you're not ready, and that's fine."

Alex sipped from her beer bottle, realized it was empty, fiddled with the label. "Maybe, um. Since you drove. We could, um. If we went to my place...?"

Vasquez caught the waitress's eye. "Check, please?"

Chapter End Notes

Woo-hoo! 36,000 words in 8 days! I'm on a roll!
Chapter Summary

Jess forgives Kara.

Chapter Notes

If you read Chapter 38 before 2/22, I have since added 2 pages to it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Note: If you read the last chapter before 2/21, I have added two more pages to it.

When Jess went down to the mailroom to get Lena's mail, Danny showed her an envelope with a handwritten address and no return address.

We x-rayed it, Ms. Huang. And checked against the notebook. It's not the handwriting of Lex or Lillian."

"Good job, Danny. Actually, I think I recognize that handwriting. Let me see the book?"

He handed her the notebook with handwriting samples. She flipped to D and found what she was looking for.

"No, it's okay, Danny. Friend, not foe. She'll want to open this herself."

She rode the forty stories in the elevator with mixed feelings about the letter writer. Lena had taken the past weekend off, and when she came back on Monday, she seemed lighter, talked faster, and kept stopping short in their conversation to draw things in the notebook she kept, muttering about electromagnetism and miniaturization.

She was happy; so she was inventing.

And Lena told Jess a short version of the story: how Kara Danvers had been following a story and managed to get kidnapped and taken to China and Supergirl had gone to get her back. Jess assumed that there was more to it than this, but she wasn't going to ask. And both Supergirl and the Danvers girl had come to apologize and let Lena yell at them. Jess didn't listen to those conversations, as they were private, but it seemed that Lena had both her friends back, and that made Jess happy, too.

She knocked on Lena's door and entered, handing her the mail with the handwritten envelope on top. Lena immediately picked it up, saying, "Kara?"

She slit it open and took out a single sheet of paper, read it silently, wiped an errant tear out of her eye, and handed it to Jess.
"Tell me what you make of this."

Jess read:

Orange Snow

Across National City, refugees are singing “Silent Night,” “O Holy Night” and falling on their knees, Saved because a Lucifer found love, found Acceptance, faith, a pair of ice-blue eyes That saw her as she is, as she chooses to be. A potential reign of terror suddenly turned Into a rain of hope, horror averted, for now.

If your mother is going to be disappointed In you anyway, let it be for something big Like saving the city, saving the refugees, Honoring the value of untold numbers Of people you will never in this life meet. Let it be for something heroic. That word. When she (not your mother) said it, your heart Leapt at the sound, a puppy hearing her name Called by a loving friend. Be your own hero, yes. Yes, that is something you were always meant To be: genius, scientist, CEO. Neglected daughter, Nervous friend. Vulnerable heart desperate To reach out to that one person, the only one, To see you clearly, as if x-ray vision

Could burn through stereotypes, bad press, And the all-too-human need to find a villain, Someone to blame and punish. Now, across the city Refugees look up, in wonder, and live. Now, As you always do, you turn toward her Beaming A flower that can't help but Blossom

Jess smiled and handed the poem back to her boss. "I think you finally got your thank you."

Chapter End Notes

I wrote this poem during the "LenaNeedsaHug" Hiatus. I am considering sending it to Katie.
You Brought the Sun into My Life

Chapter Summary

Winn and Lena decide to collaborate. It got a little long but I love side character one-on-ones.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Winn sat nervously, watching Jessica Huang work at her desk, earpiece in, typing away. She had told him that the CEO was running late for their meeting and apologized. He glanced down at the little coffee table, but he had already read the newest issue of Wired, so that wouldn't help him kill the time. He sipped at the coffee Ms. Huang had given him, the good stuff. It made him wish that they had better coffee at the DEO or maybe that somebody would clean the coffee pot once in a while.

The office door opened and Lena ushered out three Asian men in business suits, who bowed to Lena. She bowed back and said something in what must have been Japanese because it ended with sayonara. When the elevator doors closed on them, Lena dropped the professional smile and turned as Jess said, "Your two o'clock had to cancel."

A more genuine smile lit up Lena's face. Winn found himself staring: the elegant blue dress set off Lena's green eyes and white arms, and the blue stilettos were just--

"Mr. Schott, I am so sorry for the delay. If we could have spoken English, it would have taken so much less time. All the formalities and beating around the bush. Hideo prepped me all day yesterday, and still."

Winn goggled. "You learned Japanese in a day?"

"Of course not," Lena laughed. "I took classes during my MBA."

"Wait, but I thought mechanical engineering--"

"That's my PhD. Chemistry and business are just master's level."

"Wait, but when-- How old are you? Sorry, that's rude. But seriously, when did you have time?"

"I read quite fast and have an eidetic memory. Have you had lunch?"

His stomach answered for him.

"Any food allergies?"

"Just cilantro."

"Jess, maybe sushi? And get some for yourself, too, if you like."

Winn grinned.
"Yes, Ms. Luthor. Oh, and your four o'clock just cancelled."

"Really. Excellent. Let's keep it that way. That will give us more time. Mr. Schott?"

As they stepped into her pristine white office, she asked, "So, does cilantro taste like soap to you?"

"Used gym socks."

She shook her head, laughing. "And have you even eaten a sock, for comparative purposes?"

"I was bullied in elementary school."

Her smile faded. "So was I. Luckily, no one ever made me eat a sock. Lex would have--"

She moved to behind her desk and gestured for him to sit. "Mr. Schott--"

"Winn, please, Ms. Luthor."

"Then Lena. We did invent together, after all."

"Practically makes us family."

Lena's face froze. "You wouldn't want to be a Luthor."

"Have you ever heard of the Toyman?"

She frowned and then looked as if she were reading something inside her head. "Schott! I thought it sounded familiar."

"Dear old dad."

Lena's face grew soft. "So we have even more in common than I thought."

He sighed. It's an old pain. It's still so close to him, it always shocks him when his friends don't remember. His fight with James about Lena was like that: James saying that you are what your family is, no matter what you do, no matter how good your intentions are. Sometimes he wanted to punch James in the nose, even though he knew he could never land a punch on his otherwise badass friend. It was sad and disappointing and frustrating.

So strange to have more in common with Lena Luthor than with his best friend.

Lena said, "So I imagine you're wondering why I asked you to come by?"

"I am."

"I really enjoyed working with you the other day. I usually work on that kind of thing alone. I rarely find anyone who can keep up with me when I am doing that sort of work, at least not since-- But you-- Ever since the gala, I've wondered about you. And then this past week, I had a few ideas that I would very much like to collaborate with you on. Some of it is for the DEO and Supergirl, some for L-Corp. Does that sound interesting to you?"

"Yes, very much." He paused. "But--"

"Yes, the DEO. Here is what I have been thinking. The ideas I have for the DEO are things that L-Corp probably couldn't sell, so the intellectual property would be whatever it is for that beam emitter we made. And the things I have thought about for L-Corp are things that I am pretty sure
the DEO wouldn't be interested in, but if I am working with you on them, you can keep track of that, even bring in one of your colleagues so that they can assure themselves on that angle. And once the projects have been vetted, you and I would split the patent and whatever profits come from that. I would have to work that out with my lawyers, but..."

Eyes wide, Winn said, "Wow, yes. J'onn said he trusted you but we're going to have to keep an eye on your tech."

"I thought he might think that. And if I am going to have someone keeping an eye on it, I would very much like it to be someone who I can work with as well. I think we could have a very constructive collaboration."

"Um, I know this is probably not the most professional question to ask right about now, but um."

"What? You can ask. I don't guarantee I will answer."

"How do you feel about Star Wars?"

She grinned. "I have the box set. Although Phantom Menace..." She grimaced. "I'm in."

She smiled, and suddenly Winn began to realize why Kara sometimes gushed about her friend. "The first project-- Oh, I'm sorry. Do you have time to start talking about this or do you need to get back to work?"

"Well, we haven't even eaten lunch yet, after all. And I can call in and let them know this is going to take me a while. If there's an emergency, I'll have to go, but if not..."

"Make the call, then."

When Winn was on the phone, Jess came in with the sushi and even had made green tea to go with it, and Winn had never had the good stuff when it came to green tea, but even he could tell that this was the good stuff.

While they ate, Lena pulled out a battered tan Moleskine notebook and opened it to the middle, to a sketch of what looked like some kind of grenade.

"Um, I didn't think L-Corp did munitions..."

Lena laughed. "That's just the delivery vehicle. It's not, strictly speaking, a weapon. I got to thinking, after Medusa. The way my mother"--and those two words had an edge to them--"thought to use military technology to deliver the virus. And I've been thinking about Supergirl, since last weekend, after all those talks about the kryptonite. And I thought, what if somebody exposed Supergirl to kryptonite, but she still needed to fight? And would, maybe, a huge dose of yellow sunlight, super condensed or hot or whatever it is we do to light, could be delivered immediately by somebody else during the fight? Because I know the DEO has her back in a lot of her major fights. So what if we could make a grenade that delivered the yellow sunlight?"

"That's genius."

"Yes, but I can't quite figure out how to make it work. How to make the light strong enough. I've been reading endless papers about light, rereading my brother's research about the red sunlight he used back in the day against Superman. And I just can't see it."
Winn stared at her, a little in love. And he thought that he recognized that look that Lena had on her face, earnest and passionate, when she talked about Supergirl. And he realized that, one way or another, Lena was not his type of girl. Or possibly vice versa. He wondered if Kara knew. He kind of thought she really didn't.

"I would have to do a lot of research. Can you send me links to what you've been reading?"

"I actually usually read on paper, as it's easier on the eyes, so I can give you the actual texts, that I have marked up with ideas and questions. I could let you read Lex's work, but that would have to happen here. I won't let that out of this building."

"Understandable. Okay, well, I have a few ideas off the top of my head, but I think I will need to do some reading first, so I can figure out if they're viable."

"Fine. I was also thinking about a way to scan for the kind of opening we created--"

"I was thinking about that too!"

"I thought you might be. That's actually what led me to ask you about collaborating. I want to keep Supergirl safe. She has saved me more times than I can count, and it hasn't always been my life, per se..."

Winn said nothing, just waited.

"She told me about my mother. Well, I had already had some suspicions because of something Kara had said, but she told me...to be my own hero..."

Suddenly she frowned and looked distracted. "But that makes no sense..."

Winn, having an inkling of what she might be thinking, said, "Well, the two of them are quite close you know. I've seen them giggling together, and you'd be surprised, because Supergirl is so serious and well, a little scary when she wants to be. But Kara is just a little ray of sunshine and she brings something lighter out in everybody. Even Supergirl."

Lena said, "You've seen them together?"

"Sure, at the DEO. Our doctors kept Kara for a while after this whole traumatic thing and Supergirl visited her, to make sure she was okay. I think they really bonded over there in that other Earth. You know, the way girls do."

Lena frowned, then let it pass. "Okay, maybe I misunderstood. Have you had any ideas that I might be able to help you with?"

"Well, yes. But I think I'm going to have to get permission to pitch them to you."

"Fair enough. Let me get the papers I was reading and I'll let you go do what you do. Let me know when you want to get together again. Just phone Jess and she'll figure out my schedule. Here's her card. That's actually the best way to get in touch with me for non-emergency issues, but for an emergency-- If I give you my private number, can I trust you not to share it? Kara has it, obviously and Supergirl, but really very few people do, and I'd like to keep it that way."

Winn stared. "I am honored by your trust." He handed her his phone.

As she typed in her number, she said, almost as an afterthought, "You know, Winn, sometimes I think we are given insane homicidal relatives to motivate us to save the world."
Winn's heart warmed once more to his best friend's cousin's enemy's sister.

Chapter End Notes

The grenade from episode 2.9: J'onn claimed to make it but I instantly felt that Lena had invented it. So, head canon.
Chapter Summary

Lena is confused by the anonymous poem.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After Winn's heads-up, Kara was not unprepared for Lena's call.

"Hey, Kara. I got your note."

"I didn't send you a note. I mean I texted about game night, but--"

"No, the letter you sent me in the mail."

"Letter? No. Oh! Wait! Supergirl asked me to address an envelope to you. I assumed it was an apology or a thank you card or something."

"It was a poem, actually."

"Supergirl writes poetry? Seriously? I wonder if I could do a story on that... Probably not, Snapper is already on my butt for using her too much as a source. He started to insinuate that I didn't really know her and was making stuff up. I had to ask her to come in and speak with him. Actually, that interaction was really fun to watch. It turns out she's taller than he is, and she looked so pissed off, I thought she was going to break his chair!"

"So Supergirl is the one sending me poetry? I just assumed it was you, from the handwriting and the, well, you're a writer after all."

"Oh gosh, Lena. I mean, I took a creative writing class in college, but it was fiction."

"Oh. I guess I was wrong then."

"So did you give any thought to game night? Oh, wait, you're probably busy! Never mind! There'll be other game nights. Whenever you can make it. My friends really like you, now that you saved me from that other dimension."

"Kara, I didn't save you single-handedly!"

"No, but they all say the same thing: they were at a complete impasse until you showed up!"

"Well, Winn did a lot of it."

"Yeah, and he was super excited to get to work with you. Turns out, he's a big fan. Such a nerd. Or is it geek?"

"Both, I suspect."

"Yeah. Oh, sh-- Sherbert. Snapper needs me. Back to the lion's den. Let me know about game
night when you figure out your schedule."

"Wait, Kara. I am officially changing my schedule so that I can attend your game night. Just tell me what I can bring."

"Well, a game? And whatever you'd like to drink. We generally order takeout when people get to my place and figure out what folks are in the mood for."

"It's a date then."

Click.

A date? Kara's whole body went cold then hot.

Snapper's voice cut into her panic. "Hey, ponytail. I haven't got all day!"

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, she's going to figure it out eventually. But it is not this day.
Kara asks Maggie for help in figuring out her feelings for Lena.

Maggie didn't recognize the number calling her phone, so she sent it to voicemail. Then she got on with the paperwork. When lunchtime came around, she sauntered out to the taco truck on the corner and while she was in line, she listened to her voicemail.

"Hi, um, Maggie? This is Kara Danvers. Um. I know that you and Alex aren't... good right now, and although I have an opinion on all of that, I actually kind of need your help on something else? And I think I might not have the right to ask? But you're the only person I know outside of Alex, and actually maybe Agent Vasquez, but I suspect she'll have an opinion on the subject, and I need to talk to someone who's unbiased. Can we talk? I don't know who else to ask. And you could say no if you need--"

The beep cut off her rambling.

Maggie reached the front of the line, gave her order, paid, got her lunch. As she ambled back to the precinct, she processed that call.

Any group that included only herself, Alex, and Vasquez had to be a group of lesbians. She was pretty sure that Kara didn't know a lot of gay people. Was Little Danvers in the midst of a gay panic? Was Alex's coming out leading her to question herself? Maggie had been pretty sure that Kara was super straight, but her gaydar had let her down before. Alex was the perfect example of that.

Fuck compulsory heteronormativity anyway. It messed with so many people. She considered herself lucky that, all the painful times notwithstanding, all the long shame notwithstanding, she had figured herself out early. Alex was so confused and hopeful and humiliated (by her, she knew it) because she had spent so long out of touch with herself. Kara was a puppy. It would break Maggie's heart if another Danvers woman had to deal with that pain without someone to help.

Maggie texted Kara back: Hey, Little Danvers. Alien bar at 6? We could eat there and talk.

Then she got back to her work, to finding more alien bodies, to tracing more kidnapped aliens (because their big sting had not managed to keep Roulette in jail for long), and doing the endless paperwork that her more satisfying work engendered.

Six o'clock rolled around too fast, but her motorcycle was fast too. She entered the alien bar with a bit of a swagger. She hated the memories of the mass murder that happened here, but she was so proud of the alien community's refusal to let the bigots win.

Kara was already in a booth, doing serious damage on a club soda. Maggie slid into the booth. "Hey, Little Danvers. What can I do you out of?"

Kara fidgeted with her glasses. "Um."

Maggie watched her, and her suspicion hardened into something more like knowing. "Oh, Kara.
Have you met somebody that you... like too much?"

Kara's big blue eyes got bigger. "How did you know?"

"Who is it?"

"Um, I don't think I should tell you..."

"Okay," said Maggie easily. "It probably doesn't matter. But it's a woman, isn't it." It wasn't really a question."

"I, I didn't mean to! And I would never steal Alex's thunder. It's just that before she, you, she, oh I don't know how to say this..."

Maggie sighed. "Before your sister figured out that she had a big gay crush on me? And figured out that her life, looking back, wasn't what she thought it had been? That she wasn't who she had thought she had been? That she was in fact gay? Before that?"

Kara rubbed her eyes without taking off her glasses. "Yes. That. It never occurred to me."

"That you might be gay too?"

"But that's just it! I don't think I'm gay. But there is this...person."

"This woman?"

"Yes, right. And I feel so, when I'm around her, I, and she, and then I. And she yelled at me so much after I got back. Well, I guess everybody has yelled at me. Except Vasquez for some reason. And although J- Hank didn't yell, he was very stern, which was just as bad, really."

Maggie nodded, waiting.

"How do you know?"

"How do you know what, Little Danvers?"

"When liking someone becomes...something else?"

Maggie reached out and took her hand. M'gann came over, gave Maggie a beer she hadn't ordered and Kara a new club soda, then walked away. Maggie smiled. Apparently even M'gann saw what was happening and wanted to help. But how could you not want to help this sunshine puppy person be happy?

"Honey, it's different for everybody. Do the stupid love songs on the radio make more sense now?"

"How did you know?"

"Oh boy. You've got it bad."

"But what if it's just, you know, a straight girl crush, like back in school?"

"You have a lot of those back then?"

"One or two?"

"Boy crushes too?"
"Oh, lots of those."

"Kara, have you ever heard of bisexuality?"

"Well, sure, of course, but doesn't that mean you want to, ew, you know, two people at the same time? Because that's just gross."

Maggie sighed. "That is not what it means. I mean a very small percentage of bisexuals want that sort of thing. But normally it means that sometimes you want to date a man and sometimes you want to date a woman."

Kara squirmed. "And by date, you mean sleep with."

"Both. Either. It's different for everybody. But there are phrases for this. Ever hear, 'It's the hearts, not the parts'?"

Kara frowned. "No, but that makes sense."

"So you might be bisexual. Nothing wrong with that. People come in lots of shapes and forms."

"I, I think Alex might not be okay with it."

"Oh, Little Danvers. Alex is still figuring herself out, and that takes a really long time for most people. And you're her little sister, so she is really likely to not want to think about you having sex with anybody at all, male or female. I have siblings too. It's normal. Is it healthy? Yeah, I don't know. But that's what people do."

"So what do I do?"

"What do you want to do?"

"I think I made a mistake."

"What kind of mistake?"

"I may have sent her a poem."

"A love poem?"

"Not...exactly..."

"But kind of?"

"Yes?"

"And why is that a mistake?"

It took a while for Kara to answer. Finally, she said, "I am pretty much her only friend. And I don't think she's gay. So if I tell her how I feel, maybe she won't want to see me again. And I would miss her desperately, because her friendship is just so important to me. But if that happens, then she won't have any friends at all, and I just couldn't do that to her. She needs-- She shouldn't be so alone."

Maggie's heart hurt to hear Kara's love for this unknown woman. What was it about Danvers women, always taking it on the chin?
"Honey, if you think she's going to be homophobic--"

"Oh, Lena would never be homophobic! She's dealt with so much bigotry all her life because of her brother, I'm pretty sure she just takes people on their own merits. But it would be so awkward if I'm doing the unrequited love thing and she's not interested. Mon, I mean Mike, I think he really likes me and it makes it so awkward that I've just started avoiding him. But Lena is important to me. I would just hate it if she started avoiding me!"

Maggie processed as fast as her brain would let her. Kara Danvers was in love with Lena "high femme lesbian" Luthor? Somehow she would have expected Kara to go for a butch, but you never knew. And she had a guy crushing on her and she was running away?

"Honey, some bi's are fifty/fifty. Some are 'I adore men but then I met this one single woman and she stole my heart and if we break up then I'll be with men for life.' To me? You sound kind of 75/25, women in the lead. But it's your head and your heart and your pheromones. So you get to decide. The main thing is, don't let anyone, not even Alex, tell you who you are. You hear me?"

"Yes." Kara's voice was small.

Maggie sighed. "Okay, here's the thing, Little Danvers. I don't have an answer for you. I don't know Lena Luthor, and although it's common knowledge that she's a lesbian--"

"MAGGIE? Seriously? Really? Are you sure?"

"Kara. You're a reporter. Do your research, woman!"

Kara looked dazed. Maggie kept herself from smiling at the look. "Are you listening? Because here's the thing. I know that I hurt your sister and I cannot tell you how sorry I am for that. And I get that you're pissed at me for it. Hell, I'm pissed at me, too. I did what I thought was right and that has caused her pain and I am sorry. But I felt it was what I had to do. But you and me? I want you to know that I will always be here for you, especially when you feel you can't talk to her. These things are hard, and complicated, and you need somebody to have your back. And I do, and I always will."

Kara swallowed and adjusted her glasses. "Um, gosh, thanks, Maggie."

"And just based on my instincts? You need to talk to Agent Vasquez? She has your back too."

"You think she's um?"

"Oh, yeah, that girl is definitely um. And that's not my opinion. She told me so when she was stitching me up."

"Why would she do that?"

"Because she knows just as well as you do that I fucked up my chance with your sister. And although I would make the same call if I had the chance again, because Alex is just-- The point is, Vasquez understood. Also, like me, she thinks Supergirl is hot, cuz, yeah, that's a thing."

"Er, a thing?"

"Shit, yes, that girl is totally a lesbian icon?"

Kara blushed. "Can we not talk about that?"
"Sure, kid, if you like. If it makes you feel any better, I am pretty sure you sister doesn't agree..."

Kara's shoulders untensed.

Maggie said, "My instinct? If you told Lena how you felt about her, she would probably be thrilled. But it you think it's not safe, honestly, women are awesome friends. They think about things differently from the way men do. They are often more physically affectionate than men, and I know that you are a hugger."

Kara looked across the bar at the people pairing up, playing pool, doing weird things with their tentacles. In public. She looked back at Maggie. "I only know how to be physically close to the people I'm already emotionally close to. Growing up, anything else wasn't safe."

"Oh, honey, I hear you. You grew up in Midvale, New England Central. Blue state extraordinaire. I grew up in a very red Nebraska. But the folks here in National City, California? They're pretty blue. And if Agent Vasquez is anything to go by? The DEO is at least a little blue."

"But Alex--"

"Oh, Little Danvers. Alex is as true blue as they come."
Nothing Like a Little Elegant Mayhem

Chapter Summary


After being off her groove for months, Alex welcomed the following week with enthusiasm. Every day found her prepping a team, gearing up, and roaring out of the DEO to:

- corral an incursion of flying blue dogs;
- do damage control when a pair of psychic aliens got into a fight and broadcast their anger across National City, causing road rage, car accidents, breakups and firings across a twelve-block radius;
- shut down the mad scientist who had been breeding those aliens with the black ichor (thankfully, Vasquez hadn't been on that op, and Alex had thought to wear a helmet, so the decontamination shower was mostly a formality).

That was the easy part of the job. She'd also had to testify at Lillian Luthor's hearing, offering evidence the "FBI" had collected and explaining the science behind the virus. Maggie had testified as well, as had Lena. Kara had watched from the back, along with a number of aliens, and afterwards, she had dragged them all to the alien bar for drinks.

The four women got a booth in back, with Lena and Maggie on one side of the table and the Danvers sisters on the other.

M'gann came over and immediately took in their tiredness and awkwardness. "Today was the trial? Then you're all going to need something stronger than beer."

Maggie and Alex simultaneously said, "Scotch."

Lena said, "A Cosmo, please."

"What's that?" asked Kara.

"You'll like it," said Alex. "It's a little sweet. Also, pink."

Kara grinned. She turned to look at Lena, and got serious again. "I'm sorry that was so hard on you, Lena."

She shrugged. "It was easier than last time. Then, I had to testify against Lex and afterwards listen to my mother going on and on about how I was betraying the Luthors."

"I know, but that mean lawyer, during cross-examination, he made it sound like you were lying."

Maggie said, "That's what cross is for, Little Danvers. It's horrible to go through, but you can sort of get used to it."

Lena smiled self-deprecatingly. "Being a Luthor is excellent practice for undergoing cross-examination. I deal with shits like that every day and I have for years. Don't worry about me, Kara."
Maggie grinned and Alex tried not to look at the dimples. "You know, Ms. Luthor, I've testified on a lot of cases over the years and I don't think I've ever seen anybody rock cross-examination like you did today."

Lena nodded graciously. Kara beamed at her.

M'gann came with their drinks.

Kara raised her glass. "To justice. Hey, this is tasty! I like the lime!"

Maggie said, cautiously, "You did a great job too, Danvers."

Alex flushed. "I practiced with Vasquez like a hundred times."

Kara said, "You've been spending a lot of time with her lately. That's good. You need to have a social life that's not just about me."

Alex and Maggie didn't meet each other's eyes. Lena said, "So Agent Danvers--"

"Lena, you can call us by our first names. I mean, we're all friends here. We don't have to be so formal."

For a woman who hadn't been fazed by shark lawyers all day, that comment seemed to fluster Lena completely.

Kara barked out a laugh. "I told you so! I told you they would like you. Alex, is it okay that I invited Lena to our next game night? Please say yes!"

Alex could see the loneliness of Kara's friend. "Duh. Of course."

Kara said, "Thank you! And Maggie, you should come too!"

"Um, Little Danvers, I'm not so sure that's a good idea."

Alex swallowed. "No. It's fine. You should come. We're friends. And hey, if this one here tries to eat all of the pizza, you can arrest her."

Maggie searched her eyes. "If you're sure?"

Calmly Alex said, "Of course, I'm sure."

"Then I'd love to."

"Hooray! You should ask Vasquez too! Does that woman even have a first name?"

Alex snorted. "Sure. It's Agent." She turned back to Lena. "You were going to ask me something?"

"Actually I was curious about the flying dogs..."

They were all two drinks in when Mon-El wandered over and squeezed in next to Alex. It was like sitting between to walls, both of them with their alien solidity. She saw Kara frown. "You know, Mike, you could just bring up a chair."

"Oh, this is friendlier!" Alex could smell the alcohol on his breath. "How's my best girl and her friends?"
Alex grit her teeth and said, "Actually, Mike, I'm great. Thanks for asking. Aren't you supposed to be working the bar?"

"No, this is my night off. And I meant Kara, actually, not you."

Lena said, "Mike of the Interns, I presume. Now you're tending bar?"

"Yeah, I got fired. Too much sex in the copy room or something."

Lena blinked. Kara's martini glass shattered in her hand. Everybody fussed about getting glass off of themselves, and in the upheaval, Alex managed to shift so that Mike fell out of the booth.

M'gann came striding over. "Okay, Mike, I am cutting you off. Go home."

He left.

Kara apologized profusely. "It wasn't really his fault."

Maggie, Lena and Alex all said, "It really was."

M'gann said, "That is what it looked like to me. Kara, don't blame yourself. It's just a glass. And Mike is a great bartender but he is a bit of a shithead."

Alex nodded. "Yup."

Maggie asked, "Is that the guy you were telling me about?"

"Yeah."

Alex looked at her sister. Since when did her sister know Maggie well enough to talk to her about her romantic problems? And why would she go to a lesbian to talk about the guy who had a crush on her? And why wouldn't she come to Alex?

M'gann wiped the glass off the table and brought Kara a fresh drink. "On the house."

"Hey, Kara, I know I haven't been spending enough time with you lately..."

"Alex, it's okay. I mean, you hardly left my side the first few days I was back."

"Did you go somewhere, Little Danvers?"

Kara flushed. Lena and Alex's eyes got hard.

"It was...for a story. It's complicated. I'm still in the doghouse."

Lena immediately said, "No, you're not."

Alex said, "Little bit. Yeah." And then she thought, maybe that was why Kara thought she couldn't talk to her about Mon-El.

Then two green aliens started a fistfight over a blue alien (the one who liked Mon-El?) and suddenly the whole bar was throwing punches and breaking chairs and Maggie tried to yell, "Police! NCPD!" but nobody listened and Alex said, "Maggie, get Lena out of here. I'm going to call Supergirl," but Lena said, "Kara! Come with us! You'll get hurt!"

So it was basically Alex (Agent Danvers) and M'gann (Miss Martian) who ended up kicking ass
and taking names and restraining aliens and stopping the fight. And although Alex went to bed that night with bruises and an aching jaw and a possible cracked rib, she fell asleep with a smile on her face.

After the week from hell with Kara gone missing, possibly never to return, it was just really, really satisfying to punch people.
Winn and Lena explain their ideas to J'onn, and J'onn sees more than he wants to.

J'onn found ways to avoid his female agents, do paperwork and only go on ops with the men, who conveniently weren't in the habit of obsessing about each other's very fine bodies. It was a relief.

So when Agent Schott asked if they could talk, J'onn figured he was safe. Winn had long since given up his long-standing (but even in his fantasy life, largely chaste) longing for Kara. So J'onn said yes. And then when Winn had asked if Lena could be a part of their meeting, because it had to do with some technology that she and Winn wanted to develop, he figured, What could go wrong?

Oh, J'onn, he thought to himself much later. Over three hundred years old and you still haven't learned.

But at the time, it seemed like a perfectly reasonable idea. So he acquiesced.

And then the next day, the man his agents called the Hobbit and the woman they called the Ice Queen walked into his office, both looking ridiculously earnest.

They took turns trying to explain their idea for a Yellow Sun Grenade. He could hear the capital letters whenever they said the name. They explained the reasoning behind it, Supergirl with a kryptonite bullet, for example, who still needed to keep on fighting, and the DEO having her back and being prepared and giving her that extra impetus to finish the fight before her body gave out.

And he saw Winn's pure platonic love for Kara, the terror that had built up in his mind while she was on that other Earth, the determination to do something, anything that might protect her.

Lena was another thing entirely. Her mind was a hot stew of desire for Kara, and an intense determination to protect Kara's (apparently) best friend, Supergirl.

He felt like his brain was steaming from the contact.

"Yes," he said. "Do it. It might be better to build it here rather than at L-Corp..."

"I thought you might say that," said Lena, and the picture he got from her mind was potential spies for Lex at her company.

"Excellent. Will there be anything else? Then it has been a pleasure working with you again, Ms. Luthor. Winn, will you see her out?"
Maggie was nervous. It wasn't a feeling she was accustomed to feeling, not something she had felt in years. Normally, The Sawyer Had Game, or if not that, at least a modicum of dignity and self-esteem. But when it came to Alex Danvers? Nope. No. Nunh-uh.

So she bought a six-pack of her favorite craft beer and shrimp gyoza from the Japanese restaurant near her apartment (because the few times she had eaten "potstickers" with Kara, they were always chicken) and she went to Kara's apartment and rang the bell. The noise hadn't even ended when Kara whipped open the door and enveloped her in a bear hug. Maggie hadn't been hugged in a long time, so it threw her.

She said, "Um, good beer?"

"That's great! Alex and the boys love beer! And you remember my friend, Lena?"

The smile. The blush.

Maggie offered her hand and the two women shook. "You would be a hard woman to forget, Ms.--Lena."

"Honestly, Detective, your dimples are ridiculously memorable, too."

Maggie blushed and just said, "Call me Maggie."

"Very well."

Kara put the beer in the fridge. She said, "Alex and Vasquez are...dealing with a situation downtown. So they'll be running late. But Winn--"

The bell rang.

"Is here!

Winn and James entered, looking a bit apprehensive when they saw Maggie and Lena. Maggie strode up and offered her hand. "Detective Maggie Sawyer, NCPD. I've heard a lot about you guys."

Standing behind her, Lena nodded regally, "Lena Luthor. L-Corp."

James looked like he was going to faint. "Um, Jim-- James Olsen, CatCo."

Winn said, "Lena! I had no idea you would be here! This is awesome!" He grabbed her into a huge hug. James just stared. "I finally figured out the actuator this afternoon!"
"Wait, you did? How? I tried eight different things--"

James moved to be next to Kara. "Um, am I missing something? Because Winn and Lena fucking Luthor?"

Kara said, "Language, James. They're just friends. And colleagues."

James decapitated a beer and sat down on the couch. Winn and Lena sat down on the other couch. The bell ran again.

Kara dropped her glasses, looked at the door and grimaced. When she opened it, Mike strolled in.

"Hey, Kara, I heard you were having a game night, so I thought I would join."

Maggie thought, The little fuck didn't even apologize for crashing her party. The bell rang again, but then the door opened, because Alex had keys to Kara's apartment. She was followed by Vasquez, also dressed in black tactical gear. Kara, of course, ran over and gave them both big hugs. "Alex! Vasquez! You know my sister is trying to convince me that your first name is 'Agent.'"

"And why would you think it wasn't? It was Agent Carter's first name."

"Who?"

"Damn, Alex, how could you not have introduced your little sister to Peggy Carter?"

"She's Marvel. We're DC. You need to differentiate--"

"Nope. Not gonna happen. This girl needs to know all of her role models, from whatever culture or sub-culture. Besides, I suspect Kara is going to really love Captain America."

"Wait," said Kara. "You just called her Peggy Carter. So her first name is Peggy."

Vasquez sighed dramatically. "Okay, you caught me. So what are we playing tonight?"

"Well, since this is Maggie's first time here, I thought we could let her choose?"

Alex said, "Good idea."

Maggie blushed. She looked at the ridiculous stack of games on Kara's table. "Wait! You have Clue? I used to love that when I was a kid!"

Lena said mildly, "That's not too surprising."

"Ha! Rich girl. Did you play that game about buying expensive art?"

"Hardly. Scrabble, Chess, Mousetrap. I usually played...Lex's favorite games."

There was a pause for a heartbeat and then Kara said, "I used to love Mousetrap. And Candy Land!"

James said, "We are not, not, not playing Candy Land."

Alex said, "What's the matter, big guy? Got your undies in a bunch? Masculinity threatened by the girlie game?"
"It's not girly!" said Kara. "But it is about food, and what could be bad about that?"

"Speaking of food," said Maggie, waving her big white bag. "I brought shrimp gyoza."

"What's gee-osa?"
"Potstickers, Little Danvers."

Without thinking, Maggie turned to Alex and said, "What do you think would happen if we introduced her to pierogis?"

"I think her head would explode." Alex said this very seriously, and when Maggie laughed, she looked uncomfortable, and Maggie stopped laughing. Oh, this was going to be a long night.

Vasquez insisted on being Colonel Mustard and Lena being Professor Plum, even though James insisted that she should be Miss Scarlet.

Maggie said, "Personally, I think James should be Miss Scarlet. You know what Ru Paul says, 'We're born naked and everything else is drag.'"

Alex said, "Dibs on Mrs. Peacock. What? I like purple."

Vasquez winked at Maggie. "Of course you do, Alex. Such a lesbian."

"What?"

Winn said, "Fine. I'll be Mrs. White, the cook."

Maggie said, "Well, if neither James nor Mike want to be Miss Scarlet, I'll take her."

Kara frowned. "This game doesn't have enough characters.... Oh!" She jumped up and ran to her bedroom and came back with a bowl full of corks and a set of markers. "You guys can make up your own characters."

James grabbed the yellow marker. "I'll be Mr. Gold."

Mike said, "You know what? I'm bad at these Ear-- at er, these games. I'll just sit out and watch."

Kara grabbed the black marker. "I'll be Alex: Agent Black."

Vasquez said, "I'm Agent Black."

Alex said, "You're Agent Glitter. The black gear just hides your secret identity."

The two shared a warm look. Maggie picked up the box to remind herself of the rules. Yup, they hadn't changed.

The game was goofier than Maggie had expected. Even having met most of these people before, she hadn't anticipated that their interactions would be quite this silly. She felt a little out of place: two CEOs, two badass DEO agents, a reporter, a bartender, an IT guy and a cop. She liked that Alex and Kara had such a wide variety of people in their lives, and that they were all so silly. She mostly hung out with other cops, and when cops got together to drink, they were often drinking to forget, not to make each other giggle. This was refreshing.

In the end, it turned out to be Mrs. Peacock in the library with the rope. (Alex said, "Rope? I would never use rope. SO inefficient!") And then Mike had said, "Well, detective, I guess you're going to have to arrest her. You do have your cufflinks with you? I mean handcuffs. You should probably
handcuff her."

The room went quiet. Then Winn and James jumped up. "Look at the time!"

Alex immediately started to put the game away with help from Vasquez. Kara turned to Lena, "What just happened? I think I missed something."

Lena was fighting not to laugh. She murmured, "I'll explain it to you later."

Maggie took advantage of the shift to make her excuses and head home. It had been fun. Awkward, but fun. She didn't care about many people, but she cared about Alex. And if that was what it was going to take to keep Alex in her life, even if only as a friend, she would put up with the awkwardness.

Chapter End Notes

Wow: 44,000 words in 10 days!
The Choices We Make

Chapter Summary

Guardian's in trouble.

Winn and James dropped Mike off at his apartment and went to do a round of crime fighting while the night was still young. They settled on a potential car theft that had gotten pinged in Winn's system, two young men with records who were much easier to beat up than the bank robbers had been. Vigilante justice was swift and efficient.

When it had come to the van, Winn had gone all out. The video and audio was all state of the art, the computers had been enhanced using some of Winn's new know-how from the DEO. Even the mini-fridge was certified as saving energy. He hadn't managed to squeeze in a toilet, but there were advantages to being a guy on a stakeout, and he always kept a spare empty water bottle for emergencies.

He was impressed at how quickly James had gained not just efficiency but sheer style. They left the two bad guys hanging from a streetlamp when they called it a night.

The next morning, Winn entered the DEO dancing to a song in his head. J'onn, Alex and Vasquez were standing in the command center, frowning up at the video of the news feeds.

"Mr. Schott," said J'onn.

"Sir?"

"We have a new player in town, a vigilante who is going around killing criminals. The criminals so far have all been humans: bank robbers, drug dealers. But we can't be sure just yet that this vigilante isn't an alien. So I want you to analyze these situations, let me know what you make of them."

"Yes, sir, sir."

J'onn rolled his eyes. "Agent Danvers, you might want to liaise with the NCPD, see what they know. We could use all the help we can get."

Winn saw Alex's face go from slight panic to steadfastness and duty. He thought about Mon-El's unfortunate reference to handcuffs, and snickered quietly into his hand, careful that she didn't see. He was glad that Lena had volunteered to clue in Kara. Often that was his job, and this time, yeah, that would not have been fun.

He thought about working with Lena, knowing that he was developing a small crush on the genius CEO, but also knowing that from what the Internet said, and Maggie and Vasquez implied, Lena was a HUGE lesbian. And he thought, just maybe, Lena had a crush on Kara, or possibly Supergirl. Or possibly both.

Thinking such light thoughts, he was unprepared for the news to present him with dead criminals who had just been the targets of Guardian's violence. And everyone thought that Guardian had killed them. Winn's heart fell into his stomach and started to sizzle from the acid there. He made
excuses and hurried to CatCo.

When he got to James's office, Cat's old office, he shut the glass door and then went ballistic.

"James, I can't go to jail!"

"Winn, we won't! I have a lead on the guy. If we can take him down, we can prove ourselves and at the same time, prove we're the good guys."

"Why was I so weak about this, when I was strong enough to say no to your fantasy football league?"

"You and me, man? We're heroes."

//

But the NCPD didn't agree about that. They were telling the world, hell, Detective Maggie "I'm In Love With Alex" Sawyer was on television, telling the world that Guardian was the bad guy and asking people to help them catch him. And the DEO was right behind it.

It got to the point where Winn felt he had to do something to protect James and himself. So he went to see Alex.

"Alex, you know, that Guardian guy isn't a bad guy. He can't be the one killing the criminals. He's a good guy!"

Alex asked, "How do you know that? Most vigilantes are working out their weird subterranean issues. They use violence because it makes them feel strong."

"Er, well, aren't we Sigmund Freud!"

Alex sighed. "Winn, come with me. I need to meet J'onn."

He followed her down the stairs toward the command center.

She said, "Vigilantes are dangerous. They don't follow the rules or the laws."

"Yeah, but after seeing what Supergirl can do outside the law, I feel like I am on the side of the vigilantes. I mean they get stuff done!"

"Outside the law!"

"Um, Alex. The DEO is, strictly speaking, an organization that works outside the law to protect the people of National City and this country."

"But we do have rules, derived from the rule for the military and the rules of international law."

Alex was in a hurry. J'onn had asked for her presence in the lab. So she hurried down the central stairs, trying to ignore Winn's out of character advice.

"Just go easy on Guardian. He's not a bad guy!"

Suddenly she noticed it: how the media called him The Guardian, but Winn called him Guardian, the same title that Supergirl said the vigilante himself had used. She rounded on Winn. "Wait.
What do you know?"

"Nothing?"

She pushed him up against the wall. "Winn, I know six different very painful ways to get you to talk using just my index finger."

"James. It's James. Guardian is James."

"Oh, God, I have to call Kara."

"No! Don't tell her yet? Please. We should tell her ourselves."

"Yes, you should! Because if you don't--" "I know. Six different ways."

Alex slapped him upside the head and stalked off.

"Oh, James," Winn muttered. "What have you gotten us into?"
Revelations

Chapter Summary

Alex. Fixing the Guardian problem, a little. Telling Maggie to back off. Processing the evening spent with Vasquez.

Alex Danvers hated stupidity, always had. From people texting while driving to leaving their loaded gun where children could get at them, it drove her nuts when people put themselves and other in danger. So these vigilante shenanigans that Winn and James were up to just made her want to spit.

It really shouldn't have surprised her, but she had just been so distracted lately. She'd spent the last few months figuring herself out, falling for Maggie, coming out to Kara and Eliza, getting rejected by Maggie, drinking way too much, losing Kara, and then at last, taking a new look at Agent Vasquez.

//

The night they'd gone to the Amphipolis and see Lena Luthor dancing with that woman, Vasquez had driven back to Alex's place. Over beers, they'd turned on Netflix and watched the first episode of The L Word. It was weird to Alex to see women being gay and so absolutely normal about it, talking with each other in public about the words they used for, well, down there, and Alex blushed a lot. She tended to use the clinical words she'd learning in medical school, so when she heard the slang words, she blushed a lot.

Vasquez turned her head to watch Alex watching intently. She asked, "Alex, you ever kiss a girl?"

"No, well, just Maggie, that once. And we know how that turned out."

She gave a shaky laugh and when she looked into Vasquez's brown eyes, she saw something she'd never seen before, not the usual respect or determination, but something softer, something like longing. Like Vasquez longed for her, Alex Danvers, which was ridiculous.

"It can be nice." Vasquez looked like she was barely breathing. "I could show you. If you'd like... Or not. If you don't."

Alex leaned in. "Yes, please."

Vasquez kissed her lightly, then cupped Alex's face in her hands and deepened the kiss. Her tongue met Alex's.

Alex pulled away. "I, no, sorry."

Vasquez dropped her hands in her lap, looking upset. "I am so sorry, Alex. I didn't mean to push."

"No, it's not that. It's the, you know, tongue thing. I never understood that. And I always thought women wouldn't. You know, because of course guys like to penetrate, but..."

Vasquez smiled, relieved. "We could just do it the other way, if you like that better."
Alex nodded, eyes big.

Vasquez kissed her again and Alex kissed back and heat rose in her chest.

"That was nice," Alex said, eyes still wide and voice small.

Vasquez sighed. "For me, too." She looked at her watch. "Shit! It's almost midnight. I should go. Thanks for coming out with me tonight. I enjoyed your company.

//

Alex stood in the command center at the DEO, still trying to process her feelings about that night, while at the same time trying to figure out what to do about James and Winn, and how to talk to Kara about Mon-El. And then there was Maggie, and Mon-El's unfortunate comment about handcuffs. And did Lena really volunteer to explain that to Kara? Alex didn't think those two knew each other well enough to have a conversation that was sure to be embarrassing.

On the screen above her, Alex saw Maggie on the news asking the city for help in apprehending the Guardian, which to Alex sounded a bit like asking for vigilantes to help nab a vigilante. Well, she couldn't solve the other problems in her life, but she could go to the precinct and advise Maggie to back off the Guardian.

//

When Alex got back from the precinct, she was in shock. She knew that asking Maggie to back off the Guardian just because Alex said so was tantamount to asking her not to do her job. And Maggie's tough, efficient way of doing her job was what had drawn Alex to her in the first place. But to tell her, We're not friends?

Alex wasn't used to feeling things deeply. It had never felt safe. And what you can't feel, you can't be honest about. So what had changed?

She passed one of the conference rooms at the DEO and saw Winn and Lena inside having what looked like a heated discussion over the pages of mechanical drawings littering the table in front of them. Winn stabbed his finger at a drawing and waved his hands.

Alex knocked and stuck her head in the room.

"Because it won't work!" said Lena. "Oh, Alex, how can we help you?"

"Just checking that you guys aren't going to kill each other in here...uh, because of the yelling?"

Winn looked at Lena. "Was I yelling? I'm sorry."

"It didn't feel like yelling. Maybe passionate arguing?"

Alex stared at them. Engineers. "Okay, Lena, but remember, if anybody is going to slap Winn upside the head, it's me."

Alex returned to the command center. Vasquez sat, watching the monitors. "Ma'am," she said, one syllable that sounded like the last two months, the last two days, had never happened.

"Vasquez?"

"J'onn asked you to be on call whenever Lena is here. I've got their schedule."
Alex frowned. "Does he think she's going to do something, well, Luthorish?"

"I doubt it. It's more that if Supergirl stops by while Lena is here, he gets one of his headaches."

"Wait, Lena has the hots for Supergirl?"

"I do. Why shouldn't she?"

"Vasquez!"

"Sorry, boss." But it was clear she wasn't. "Uh, ma'am? Look at that!" She pointed up at a screen. "Isn't that the Guardian? Who is he fighting?"

"I'm on it!"

She had ridden her motorcycle to the warehouse district so many times that she could probably do it on autopilot. Her bike and a Black Maria screeched to a halt at the same time and she and Maggie jumped out and pulled their guns on the two battling vigilantes.

The Guardian knocked the other man down and pulled off the man's helmet. Then he knocked him out. The two women kept their guns trained on him.

Alex looked at Maggie. "I hear sirens."

Maggie lowered her gun. "Then he'd better get out of here."

Still helmeted, James jumped on his motorcycle and rode off.

Alex didn't say thank you. Maggie didn't say you're welcome. No explanation was asked for and or given, and not a word was said about owing anything. They just took the unconscious man into custody and got on with their jobs.
I Can Be What You Need

Chapter Summary

Alex is nervous. Vasquez is a hot gay mess. They sort of make it work anyway.

Vasquez spent the week at the DEO doing a threat assessment on the Guardian and pretending, whenever she saw Alex, that nothing had changed. There might be a few more moments of humor, and a little teasing now and then, but absolutely no flirting. She only ever treated her with the same respect she showed J'onn. And she watched Alex slowly seem more calm and confident.

Amazing what a few kisses could do.

Vasquez hated the thought that she might actually have been too good, that the kissing had maybe been all Alex needed to get back on her feet after her coming out and losing and finding her sister again, just a little affection. Such a tiny little bit of affection. But if that was all Alex needed, then Vasquez's job was done, and she would never ask for more.

So when Maxwell Lord's mosquito drones got loose from Lord Tech and swarmed the city, she rode side by side with Agent Danvers and the tactical team to retrieve the rogue tech and bring it in for Winn to figure out what the endgame might be, though he was fairly flummoxed. A number of agents had been stung and were in quarantine until they were sure that the drones hadn't been carrying some kind of disease. The lessons of Lillian Luthor had been hard learned.

And when Maxwell Lord lodged a complaint with the DEO for taking his property, J'onn tasked Alex with going to talk to him, and Alex had asked Vasquez to come to do threat assessment. Well, that's what she said. What Vasquez thought she meant was something closer to moral support. When Alex had thought she was a straight girl, the smart ones, the handsome ones, had always been her type (Vasquez learned this from Kara). And she had had run-ins of the almost-romantic kind with him before.

Didn't matter. Vasquez was good at multi-tasking. Like Alex, she had a decent pantsuit in the closet for when she had to be FBI or Secret Service. It was kind of odd to wear heels instead of boots, but she knew from Lord's profile that they would probably have him at a disadvantage if they went in at least a little dolled up. Such a sexist pig.

And maybe it was nostalgia, but she wore the pale blue blouse she had worn the first time she met Supergirl, after being called in to work in the middle of a date.

Alex said, "Nice blouse. Wait. Have I seen that before? I don't think I've ever seen you dressed up."

Vasquez didn't enlighten her. It's not like she was wearing it for its potential affect on her after all. Vasquez had also done the makeup thing, understated but obviously there. A man like Lord would read her a straight as long as she did the most minimal femme things. A man like that always did.

Winn begged her to secretly take pictures at Lord Tech. She scruffed his hair and said, "Nope. Sorry, Little Plaid Shirt. That's corporate espionage. Not my job. How is the grenade going?"

"We're building the prototype today!"
"Oh, so Lena will be here?"

"Yep."

"Then I'll get Alex back promptly. Er, I think she wants to ask Lena a question..."

When they got to the shiny, science fiction-y building that was Lord Tech and were guided into the master's presence, Vasquez winked at Alex and saw her mouth turn up and her shoulders square.

Maxwell Lord was a bonehead, that became immediately clear. He huffed and he puffed and he said that a government agency could not take the property of a citizen. Alex pointed out that the DEO's mandate allowed them to take technology that was or was suspected of being partly or wholly constructed with alien technology, and that those drones were far too advanced to come wholly from human work. (He had seemed simultaneously pissed off, and pleased by the flattery.) She said that most of them had been destroyed by the DEO's weapons, but that they would keep the few they had in custody while their scientists confirmed that no elements, energies or other technology were of alien origin, and then they would return them, hopefully in less than seventy-two hours, but no promises on the time frame.

In the SUV on the way back to the DEO, Vasquez had simply said, "Nicely done."

"Yeah, he's got an ego taller than our building. Playing him isn't all that hard." But her face flushed a little.

When they got back, an agent told them in an undertone. "Supergirl's here. And J'onn looks cranky. He said he was going to go talk to payroll about all the overtime we've been doing."

Alex frowned. "He hates the payroll people. Says they give him a headache."

Vasquez chuckles. "Won't matter if he already has one..."

Alex stared at her and then said, "Lena?"

"Lena."

Then Alex went down to the lab and Vasquez sat down at a computer to make notes about Lord, his psych profile, and the way his underlings had acted around him: things to draw on later for a more complete assessment.

About an hour later Alex returned. She sat watching the feeds, every once in a while glancing over at Vasquez. Finally, Vasquez decided to bite the bullet.

"Ma'am? Something on your mind?"

There were no other agents in the room. Alex said, "Want to grab a beer tonight? Maybe watch the next episode?"

Vasquez's heart raced. She looked at her watch. "I don't get out until eight, always assuming no emergencies." She rapped her knuckles on her head. "Knock on wood."

Alex smiled. "Well, if you have an emergency, I have one too, so we should still get out at the same time."

Vasquez nodded casually. "Sounds good."

After that, her assessment went to hell in a hand-basket. She wondered: Was this a date? Did Alex
Think it was a date? Or was it just more Lesbian 101? Because she would be okay with that, totally okay with that, but what if Alex actually wanted to date her? Except the woman was a consummate professional and Rule Number One was don't date your subordinates. So, no, it probably wasn't a date. Just a couple of colleagues, who had grown a little closer during some recent traumatic ops, spending time together. As friends. Right. Yes. That.


Sigh.

And when Alex came back from Winn and Lena's lab grinning, Vasquez actually thought that it was because the new project for tech to protect Supergirl was going well. It never occurred to her that Alex would assume that kissing meant dating, or that she would tell her superhero sister about what happened, or that the superhero, who really, really liked Susan Vasquez, might have been giving her sister encouragement... Nope. That would never have occurred to the very private ex-Marine.

When eight o'clock rolled around, Alex and Vasquez strolled together to the DEO's parking garage, Alex said, "You get drinks and I'll get food--is Chinese okay? And we can meet back at my place."

Vasquez felt warmth between her legs, but she just said, "Sounds like a plan."

She bought a six-pack of Sam Adams lager, since she knew Alex liked it and when she arrived at Alex's, the woman had already changed into a Stanford sweatshirt and skinny jeans that hugged her ass in an amazing way that made Vasquez's mouth go dry. She looked down at herself still in black tactical gear.

Alex said, "Don't worry about it. Tough women are hot."

Vasquez blushed. For the first time in maybe six years, she actually blushed. "I should put these in your fridge."

Alex pointed casually and Vasquez tried very hard to focus. She was not used to feeling so unmoored, but then, she had known Alex for a few years, and it was rare, well--no. Had she ever dated a friend? A colleague? Someone she'd known for more than five minutes? Or, more likely, two weeks?

Alex queued up the next episode of The L Word and then sat there, looking really embarrassed as Marina introduced Jenny to lesbian sex. She got smaller and smaller, and redder and redder. Finally, Vasquez had asked, "Um, you okay there, Danvers?" She pushed the pause button.

"Uh, well, you know. Too many boobs in the room. It's just...a little much."

Vasquez hit stop. Turned off the TV.

"Talk to me. Forget the boobs. What has your...experience been like?"

Alex picked at the label of her beer. "The guys. They were never all in, and I didn't feel...safe enough to say what I did or didn't want--"

Vasquez touched her forefinger to Alex's lips. "Stop. I get it. We're good. You can tell me more if you want to, or not. But, well, if you want, I will be that person for you, the one you can tell."

Tears crept out of Alex's eyes. "But what if I, I don't want what you want?"
"Alex, have you ever gotten what you wanted in bed?"

Alex looked away.

Vasquez said, "See, that's it. I've gotten what I wanted, needed, over the years. But you. I would give so much to see you happy and satisfied. And whether it is tonight or some night months from now, any night you're with me, it's just for you."

"But that's not...egalitarian."

Vasquez laughed. "No, maybe not. But you wouldn't believe me if I called it love, so I don't really have a word for it."

Alex said shyly, "It feels...good? Like generosity?"

"Okay, well, we'll call it generosity. I can't believe that in all these years, nobody has been properly generous with you."

Alex leaned in and Vasquez kissed her, keeping it light (from her point of view) although Alex was getting more worked up by the moment from the most minimalist of kisses. "Vas--Susan-- I want..."

"Shhh, sweetie. I think it's still early. Yes, I feel it too, and you've been wanting it longer, but I feel like it would make more sense if we took it slow."

Alex had tears in her eyes. "But you'll get bored with me if I can't, if I don't want to do the things..."

"Oh, honey. I've known you since J'onn brought you on board. I've seen you kick the asses of seven-foot aliens, and figure out alien biology, and love your sister harder than I've ever seen anybody love anyone. How could you possibly bore me?"

Alex sniffled and Vasquez hugged her, feeling her own heart rending at the sight of this magnificent woman underestimating herself. "Alex, tell me what you need."

"One of Kara's hugs."

"Well, I am not the Girl of Steel, but I could maybe manage to be the Girl of Kevlar.... Would that help?"

And then Alex was laughing and Vasquez was hugging her and they both had tears in their eyes, but they would never, never, never tell another human soul that that had happened.
Surely Someone Knows Where You Are

Chapter Summary

Kara's bad day leads her to Slaver's Moon.

Since junior high, when Alex had been a few years older, a few years wiser, a few years kinder, even when Kara had so disrupted Alex's social life, Alex had always been, well, findable. She could search through the sounds of Midvale for her heartbeat, and land fifty feet away so that her friends would think Kara had simply gotten a ride.

National City, larger and more populous, was harder.

Most days, Kara didn't need to search for her sister's insistent heartbeat. Most weeks, Kara didn't hear a difference in the pitch or the rhythm. But then the whole Maggie Incident had made Kara aware of the way life and her sister's patterns could change. And they had gotten through that.

And then, Agent Vasquez.

Kara felt like Alex didn't take Susan Vasquez seriously enough. The woman was all the things Alex had always admired: tough, strong, principled, beautiful... So why had she pulled back? Yes, of course, Kara knew about Maggie's stupid argument about Alex being "fresh off the boat," but in Kara's considered opinion, that was bull crap. If somebody loved you, why would you not just leap into her arms?

Gosh, if anybody had ever thought Kara Danvers was worth loving (who wasn't actually related to her by adoption), Kara would totally have pursued that. But somehow people always sensed her alien-ness, her strangeness. So Alex was her only real friend. And there had been boys. And Winn. And James. And it had somehow never quite worked. But suddenly?

Lena Luthor was a genius. And stunningly beautiful, like how on a scale of 1 to 10, Lena was a clear 12. And she was a successful businesswoman. And although Lena's friends did tend to judge people by their net worth, they always ended up telling Lena how interesting or funny her friend had been, and they had sounded like they meant it.

But Kara didn't feel interesting. She felt forlorn. She remembered Krypton before it was destroyed: her friends, family, her parents' colleagues, their friends. She remembered the culture, the food, the language. Growing up on Earth, the only people who were interested in learning Kryptonese were Alex and Clark, and Alex had worked at it much harder than Clark had. She couldn't blame him. He could only speak it to her on the rare multi-monthly calls that he made. Alex spoke it her (badly, it must be admitted) whenever she was upset.

So it was a bad day for Kara when every time she turned around something made her swear in Kryptonese.

First, it was Guardian, leaping in and taking credit for the jewel thieves, when she was the one who had gotten hit with the surface to air missile. Then it was James with his boy-crush on the Guardian, and then Snapper who was more concerned about his Danish than the life of a missing girl. And then Mon-El telling her to stop "looking for trouble." She didn't look for trouble. She
looked for people in trouble and helped get them out of it.

Out of habit, she scanned for Alex's heartbeat, but couldn't pick it up. So she texted her.

Kara: Hey, FaveEarthling, are we going to have a sister night? I got the new Ghostbusters from Netflix...

While she was waiting for a reply, she saw Maggie saunter into the bar and wave to her. Kara joined her at the table. "Hey, Maggie, thanks for coming!"

"Anything for a Danvers sis--Anything for you, Little Danvers. Here is all the information on the missing girl." She handed Kara a thumb drive. "It's funny, we've had a lot of missing persons lately."

"Do you have any theories? Serial killer? Kidnapping?"

"Serial killers have patterns. Kidnappers have motive. But these people are all different: a young girl, a father, a bricklayer."

Kara looked at her phone. "Looks like my sister's missing too. Hopefully not the same way. Usually she answers pretty quickly."

"Maybe she's on a mission. You don't bring a buzzing phone if you want to sneak up on somebody."

Kara's face lightened. "You're right. Well, thanks, Maggie. And just...give Alex time. She's still figuring things out and she's--"

"Sleeping with Vasquez?"

"What! No! No sleeping! I would totally know if there was being sleeping! No. Not. No. I mean yeah, they like each other a lot, and I think Vasquez is teaching her lesbian things, but, oh that came out wrong. I don't mean the sleeping. I mean the culture, you know?"

"What are they doing, watching The L Word together? That is so cliché."

Kara frowned at the bitterness in Maggie's voice, assuming that it was masking pain. "Maybe it is. But when I first came to, to the Danvers house, it was the cliché things that I needed to learn to fit in properly, and to not make the mistakes from not knowing what was cliché and what wasn't.... Just... let her do this in her own time."

Maggie sighed. "You're wiser than people give you credit for, Little Danvers."

//

Back at the DEO Supergirl gave Winn the thumb drive and asked him to comb through it to see what he could find. "And have you seen Alex?"

"I think she's helping Vasquez with something downstairs." His voice was funny, and he was wearing sunglasses to cover a black eye.

"Winn, what happened?"

"I got mugged."

"Do you want me to find them and beat them up for you?"
"No, thanks. The NCPD in on it."

Supergirl grumbled to herself in Kryptonese. It really was just one of those days. "So are they down in the gym?"

"I think the file room."

Supergirl squinted. "Why would J'onn line so much of this place in lead?"

"It wasn't J'onn who did it. It has the real Hank Henshaw. And he really hated Superman. Oh, now that is interesting. There is a connection between all the missing persons. They all had bloodwork done before they went missing, at the same lab."

"Weird. I'll go get Alex."

"Um, maybe now isn't the right time."

"Why not?"

"Oh, come on, Kara, you're not stupid. What would the DEO's two lesbians possibly be doing in a lead-lined file room?"

"Um, filing?"

Winn rubbed his sore eye. "Right. Tell me, has Lena gotten around to explaining that thing that Mon-El said?"

"You mean about the cufflinks? Not yet. I keep forgetting to remind her."

//

Kara went to CatCo first, to make sure that Snapper hadn't come up with some new way to make her life difficult. Her article was covered slightly fewer red pen markings, so she took that as a good sign and then headed out to the lab where the bloodwork had been done, running into Mon-El on the way, because that stupid Daxamite couldn't seem to keep away from her and let her get her job done. More muttering in Kryptonese.

"Kara! Language!"

Then Mon-El told the lab guy that they were saving money to go to Paris City, and that they couldn't do bloodwork because of their devotion to their gods.

And then the portal, and the aliens, and here they were on a planet with a red sun and no way to get home and no way to alert Alex, because this, this, this Daxamite was a total--

Mon-El apparently knew a little Kryptonese too, because even under a red sun, his face got whiter and whiter as Supergirl's rant went on and on and on.
Filing That Away for Later

Chapter Summary

A nod to Venskus's character on SHIELD.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alex loved her gadgets. She loved her phone and her apps and the tech at the DEO and the guns and just All The Toys. When Eliza had gotten her first cell phone, Alex had figured out how to turn it on and off and do all the things and slowly explained it to her mom, because, yes, Eliza was a genius, but she was more of a micro/nano type of person and very bio, not techno. She'd gotten a lot better since those days, but she still turned to Alex for help figuring out any new gadget.

So when J'onn came to her and asked her to help Vasquez with a project that required someone with very high security clearance, she really, really hadn't been expecting this.

The door to the file room was bio-activated, and J'onn said it would open to her hand on the sensor, and open it did. The door was easily four inches thick, like the door to a bank vault. And as far as the eye could see, it was filled with file cabinets. Closing the door behind her, she made her way down the long row, to find Agent Vasquez sitting at a long table next to a printer.

"Oh, hey. Thanks for coming. This would take forever if I had to keep doing it by myself. It's like that time J'onn asked me to sew trackers into all of Kara's sweaters. That took for-fucking-ever."

"Wait, trackers?"

"Yeah, well, you know, sometimes Kara has the time to pack her civilian gear into that pocket in her cape, but if she's really in a hurry she just lets it all drop. And honestly, she might get a reputation as a streaker if the DEO didn't send Henry around town picking up her pieces, getting them cleaned if she dropped them in a puddle, and getting them back to her. Not to mention the cost to replace them on personal assistant's salary."

Alex just stared. "I never thought about that."

"J'onn's a stickler for details. He said he felt lucky that he could transform his clothes when he changes shape and that's what made him think of it."

"So, what is it that we're doing?"

"Transferring our most top secret info onto hard copy and erasing it from the mainframe."

"That seems...backward."

"It's old school, for sure, but you can't hack paper. It was my idea actually, based on something I saw back when I worked for SHIELD. I'm printing and erasing. You're filing, if you're okay with that."

"Of course."
They worked in companionable silence for a while, Alex filing Vasquez's threat assessments on Lena, Maxwell Lord, Winn's father and a range of aliens that they had recently encountered. "Um, Vasquez. Can I ask a question about this stuff?"

"That's why the clearance. Of course. I won't answer if I shouldn't, but there is very little about the DEO that you shouldn't know."

"Why Winn's dad?"

Vasquez sighed and ran a hand through her short hair. "I've been hearing his name come up on some feeds I follow. Fans, if you will, talking about him more. That could be the sign of another breakout, or a copycat, or maybe it's just static. It pays to be paranoid, do my homework, so we can be prepared."

"Has Winn figured out those drones?"

"It looks like a delivery system, the way real mosquitoes carry malaria."

"To deliver what? Another virus?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. You know him better."

"I had a working dinner/date thing with him last year. He tried to feed me caviar rather than answer my questions."

"Feed you?"

"Like off his fork."

"What a prick."

Alex finished the stacks of papers that Vasquez had taken hours printing out.

"Hey, you're fast!"

Alex chuckled. "We both know that's not true..."

"Yeah, about that."

Alex bit her lip, terrified that Vasquez had changed her mind about her.

"If we're going to do this..."

"Um, file? Or, well, date..."

Vasquez blinked. "Date. It's just that we need to be very careful and very professional about it."

"Understood. Oh my God! What if J'onn finds out?"

"I'm pretty sure he already knows. That's one of the reasons I went to his office personally to ask for your help instead of texting or something. If he had disapproved, he would have said no."

"Wait, you let him read your mind?"

"Er, sort of. He and I have known each other for years, Alex. I don't have many secrets from him. I'm basically his left hand and you're basically his daughter. And--Oh man! I am not looking
forward to that shovel talk..."

Alex laughed. "I'm sure he won't..."

"I'm sure he will. And if Kara finds out? My ass is grass."

"Kara knows."

"What? Nope. If she did, she would have already threatened to melt my face off if I hurt you."

"She knows you won't."

Vasquez shook her head and handed Alex another sheaf of papers that had just come out of the printer. Alex had just stepped over to one of the file cabinets when Winn ran in, with his hands over his eyes.

"Okay, you have to stop what you're doing because Kara's gone AWOL again, she went to a lab to investigate the missing persons, and her phone isn't ringing and her earpiece is offline or possibly off the planet!"

Alex stared at him. "Winn, why are you covering your eyes?"

He peeked between his fingers, then dropped his hands. "You're...filing?"

"Uh, yes?"

But Vasquez was already running out the door, talking through her earpiece about prepping a strike team.

"Danvers! On the double!"

And then Alex put together Winn's incoherent ramble and followed at a dead run, but still thinking, What else would you do in a file room?

Chapter End Notes

Wowza. 50 chapters and over 50,000 words in 12 days. A labor of love.
Winn slammed his locker with his fist and immediately regretted it. His eye and head already hurt enough. Wincing, he undid the lock and opened the door. He pulled out the cranberry hoodie that he had been wearing the night before, with blood on the left shoulder and dirt on the back. What an idiot he had been to think he could go out there with James to play at being heroes. Winn was a genius, sure. But he wasn't a hero. He was just trying to help his friend do some good in the world and keep him safe, but now Winn wasn't even sure that was a smart idea anymore. Somehow he had assumed he would be safe in the van, at a distance, sort of like the way he was safe when he sat in the DEO.

But that was a fortress; the van was not. Any idiot should have seen that.

He looked at his phone. James hadn't answered his texts, asking him if they could meet later on to talk. On the one hand, Winn felt petty for being annoyed that James hadn't asked about his injuries. On the other hand, maybe Alex was right about their being selfish and reckless and what would Kara do if they got themselves killed because hadn't she already lost enough?

Winn had never considered it from Kara's point of view. James certainly hadn't. James had barely thought about anything except himself, which wasn't like the photographer, but maybe James had Daddy issues too, just the opposite kind than Winn had. Winn desperately didn't want to become like his father, but his fears were founded on the fear of the heredity of mental health problems. James desperately wanted to become like his father, the soldier hero, and he thought that enough training and practice and sheer bravado would enable him to do it.

But the thing about all of that, Winn thought, and he had said it to James in the past, was that Olsen Senior was dead, killed in combat. Winn had nightmares about attending James's funeral, standing above the six-foot hole where a long mahogany box was slowly being lowered, a black-suited minister with a white collar handing Winn a handful of dirt to throw, Kara on the other side of the hole sobbing into her sister's arms. Cat Grant was always standing on the edge of the crowd in his dream, her face a torment of annoyance at James's recklessness and self-blame for putting James in a situation that would make him feel the need to do something like this. And Lucy Lane, in her major's uniform, dry-eyed and stoic, giving the eulogy. Winn always woke up sobbing.

But then the next night, he would see James's shining shit-eating grin, and back in the van Winn went.

But not anymore.

So when a grinning James Olsen strolled into the locker room talking about a new crime in progress that he wanted to go stop, sounding like there was some hip new restaurant he wanted to go try, Winn just fucking lost it. This was the same thing that had happened when Winn was trying to finish the suit and James had said they couldn't wait. Pushing and reckless and clueless about reality and with a far too large sense of his own self-importance.
James said, "Hey, brother. You good?"

Winn looked at the mirror on the inside of his locker door. His black eye was redder and bluer than it had been earlier in the morning, and puffier. "Peachy keen."

"I got a real nice and easy 10-37 over the scanner last night, and the cops still haven't found the suspicious vehicle, so just wondering if you wanted to..."

Winn frowned. "I actually thought that, just maybe, you came to check up on me."

"Dude, I came all the way out here because I knew you were upset."

"Yeah! Yeah, I'm upset. You know I almost got killed."

"Winn, everybody gets their ass kicked--"

"No! Just stop."

"Winn, let me--"

Winn slammed his locker door. "Just STOP!" He sniffed. "I'm good here, maybe, at a desk. But I can't go out there again, with you, I can't. Just stop! I can't. I quit."

J'onn stuck his head in the door. "Gentlemen, have either of you heard from Kara? She's not answering her phone."

"I think she's investigating a lead, missing persons."

"Right, well, text me the details."

By the time they reached the command center, Alex had already taken a team to the location, and her video feed showed them what J'onn called a transmatter portal.

Winn said, "Wait! You mean Stargate? But that means--"

On the feed, Alex leaned over and picked up Kara's plaid flannel shirt and looked distraught. "Kara's not on Earth."

By the time Alex's team returned to the DEO, Winn had followed the ion trail of the portal to the planet J'onn identified as Maldoria, the heart of the intergalactic slave trade, lit by a red sun.

Alex's voice cracked as she said, "So she won't have her powers. I should have gone with her. Why didn't I go with her?"

J'onn said, "You didn't know this was going to happen, Alex."

She just bit her lip and looked close to tears.

Winn gave her a confident grin. "Hey, we have the Martian Manhunter! He doesn't need a yellow sun. He'll just go in there and he'll get her and everything will be okay!" He clapped his boss on the shoulder happily.

J'onn said, "I can't join this rescue mission. The air of Maldoria is toxic to Martians. Some kind of silicate in the atmosphere."

Alex turned away as Vasquez strode into the room. "Hey, I heard about Supergirl. How can I
"You can't. You didn't. I was filing, filing when I should have been on Supergirl's six, protecting her back. I can't do this. I was happy for like five minutes and--"

Vasquez cut her off. "Ma'am. We will go wherever we need to go and we will get her back."

"She's not on this planet, Vasquez! She's on a planet with a fucking red sun. My sister is helpless and alone and I can't save her because I was helping you file reports!"

Vasquez turned to Winn, who looked almost as upset as Alex was. "Little Plaid Shirt, do you know how she got there?"

"This portal--"

"So reverse engineer the damn thing so we can go after her. Then get Alex that prototype you and the Luthor have been working on, because it looks like its time has come. I'll prep the team. I know who to requisition for an off-planet."

Alex stared at her. "But we've never gone off-planet. How..."


//

Winn's brain was buzzing in the SUV as he fought to figure out how to work the damn portal. Alex had set aside her fear for her sister and was all business, grim and determined, but Winn was terrified for Kara, terrified for Alex and the team. What if he couldn't get them there? Worse, what if he got them there and couldn't get them back? A tear plopped onto his tablet. He swiped it off and saw the answer to both problems by the time they reached the lab. Thank, Kara's Rao, he thought.

J'onn handed Alex a silver grenade. "We only had time to fabricate the one. It won't last long. Make it count. Bring our girl home."

"I will." She slid the grenade onto her utility belt and turned to where Winn was setting the portal's coordinates. "Winn."

Winn went to hand his tablet to Alex. "Okay, so this should open the portal on the other side."

"Yeah, well, keep it. You're coming with me."

"Yeah, no. This is preprogrammed. And so you just hit the button. You don't need me."

But Alex said, "Yeah, no. I want your hands on the controls"

"Nooo. No."

J'onn had his hands on his hips, looking larger than normal. "Agent Schott, she wasn't asking you. That's an order."

"I'm sor--" He hurried away.

Alex quickly followed. "Winn?"

He said, "I am not going to be of any help to you out there." He pointed to his black eye. "This? I
wasn't mugged. All right? I was trying to help Guardian, and I... if he had shown up just two seconds later, I would be..."

Alex said, "Hey. Kara needs you. Okay? I, I need you."

"I'm scared."

"You don't think I wasn't afraid the first time I went out in the field? Dude, I was terrified. But nobody gets better by running away."

He took a deep breath. Vasquez came over with tactical gear and body armor. The lab had a screen, so she handed him the clothes and he went behind it and changed, his hands shaking and the tears threatening to return, but when he stepped back out, Vasquez helped him with the armor.

"I can, I can do it myself." His voice sounded shaky even to him.

"Nope. You have to get the straps tight enough or it won't protect you adequately. We always help the rookies. When we get back, I'll show you how to do it yourself and we'll practice. We'll also set you up with combat and marksman training. If you're going to be going out on ops, we need to prepare you for them."

She finished with the straps and clapped him on the back. "Hey. Little Plaid Shirt. You got this. I believe in you."

//

On the other side of the portal, the team encountered a rocky expanse. It was night, so the famed red sun was not visible, but Winn leaned down and picked up a handful of pebbles--outer-space pebbles--and dropped them in his cargo pocket. Above him hung three moons, each one bigger than the last.

"I am in...outer space..."

He went to follow the other agents, but Alex turned on him. "And if you don't want to stay in outer space forever, then figure out how to dial us home. I'm tracking Kara's earpiece. Make sure this thing is open by the time we come back."

"Wait, wait! Come back!"

She waved off his fears. "You'll be fine."

Fear, palpable as pain, struck his stomach. He thought about his bloodied cranberry hoodie and years of watching old Star Trek reruns. "I am not a red shirt. I am not a red shirt."

He turned to the control panel on the portal and his hands shook as he tried to type in the coordinates from his tablet. The portal flashed blue and then went dark again.

"Okay, that did not happen how it was supposed to happen." He realized he had transposed numbers in his nervousness. Then a clawed hand on his shoulder spun him around and punched him in the face, first a right and then a left and then Winn hit the ground, and found himself looking up at a biped lizard-like alien guy in a science fiction uniform.

And like the robber from only two nights before, it had some sort of gun. Winn reached up and wrapped his hand around a rock, hit the alien's gun away with the rock, pulling himself to his feet as he did so, and punched it in the face twice with the rock, until the alien fell to the ground
unconscious.

"I am not a red shirt! I am not a red shirt. You! You're the red shirt!"

He whooped and when he saw Supergirl, Mon-El, the team and civilian Earthlings running hell for leather in his direction, he yelled, "Supergirl, look! I'm a badass!"

But Mon-El yelled, "Start the car! Start the car!"

And Winn jumped over to the control panel, fixed the transposed numbers, and slapped the button. Immediately, the portal shimmered and shone with blue and purple light and the team ran through to Supergirl's urging, "Go, go, go!"

Alex waved them through, "Go!"

And then a laser beam shot across the rocks and they saw one of the planet's aliens fall back.

From another rock, a lavender alien in long brown robes was throwing his space rifle over his shoulder and striding toward them confidently. "Carbon forms get Joe off this planet forever?"

Supergirl said, "Yes. Yes, and carbon forms agree! Just go!"

Joe passed Alex and Winn. "Hello. Hello." He strode right through the portal.

Alex and Winn gawked at each other and then at Supergirl.

And then the noise of engines above them screamed in their ears, right above an alien grabbing the missing girl, Izzie, from behind, to carry her back.

Alex pulled out Winn and Lena's grenade, saying, "Let's hope this thing works." She lobbed it into the air, and a flash of yellow sunlight lit up the night sky and launched Supergirl into flight.

Mon-El said, "What was that?"

Alex answered, "A little taste of home.

Supergirl grinned and lit up her eyes, sending twin laser beams into the space ship and blowing it up, and threatening the alien with the same, but it ran, so she just grabbed Izzie. Then they were all running for the portal, jumping through to the lab and watching Supergirl fry the portal's command center with a loud explosion. Laughter. Hugs.

Supergirl said to Alex, "Thanks for the recharge."

Alex pointed to Winn, "It was all this guy's idea."

Winn shook his head. "It was Lena's idea. I just figure out how to make it work."

Supergirl hugged him tightly, whispering, "My hero."

Joe sniffed the air. "Earth smells funny. Always smell like this?"

//

Winn changed into his civilian clothes and made his way to CatCo with a spring in his step. He made his way to James's office, his messenger bag slung over his shoulder.
He began slowly, "Hey. So about what I said before...Forget every word of it. Because I am BACK, BABY!"

James grinned. "What changed your mind?"

Winn pulled the jar of pebbles from his bag and slammed it on James's desk.

"Rocks?"

"Those rocks are from an alien planet I just visited."

"You went to another planet. Without me."

Winn just nodded.

"No way."

"Milky way." Winn turned to leave. "Guardian protects the Earth. But Agent Schott? He protects the stars!"

It was very satisfying to Winn, to be able to stroll out of James's office, leaving James with a dazed look on his face. Plaid Shirt, indeed.
Chapter Summary

Everybody thanks Lena (for a change!). Vasquez gives Lena the shovel talk. Lena explains the comment "Mike" made at game night. Poor Alex keeps spitting up her beer. Mostly fluff with some implied kink.

Lena rubbed her eyes, realizing that she had reread the quarterly report five times without actually comprehending any of the numbers or, really, the words either. She was that tired. She knew that part of it came from the constant workload, which at L-Corp was already bad enough, but although spending a few hours every day working with Winn was immensely satisfying to her engineer side, it was taking away from her businesswoman's ability to get her real job done. She seriously needed a drink and a nap and a two-week vacation in the south of France, and she wasn't going to get any of those any time soon. She stretched her arms over her head and turned toward the balcony, only to see her favorite Superhero giving her a look she could only think of as Sapphic.

Holy shit. Was Supergirl a lesbian? How did things work on Krypton? Because Lex had always assumed that Lois Lane was Superman's girlfriend. Personally, Lena had really been more interested in the Man of Steel's relationship with that reporter, Clark Kent. Lena continued her stretch, holding Supergirl's eyes and watching them dilate. Well, now. That was unexpected.

Languidly, Lena rose and strolled toward the balcony door, practically able to hear Supergirl trying very hard not to drool. She opened the door and leaned against it.

"Supergirl," she purred. "What a pleasant surprise."

The hero opened her mouth and closed it again, gesturing loosely to Lena's office. Lena opened the door further, but only enough so that Supergirl's body had to brush past hers as she entered. She was warm to the touch, but shivered as she passed the CEO.

Lena rarely allowed herself to smirk. When you are a genius and everybody else isn't, your face could freeze that way. But she allowed herself a small smirk before Supergirl turned around.

She cleared her throat. "I need to thank you, Ms. Luthor. You saved my life."

Lena was shocked out of her flirtatious mode. "What? When?"

"Tonight. This is highly confidential, but I know I can trust you. I was stuck on a planet today that had a red sun. I had no powers and was trying to help people escape--it's a long story. I'm going to have to give an interview to Ms. Danvers, so you'll read about it in the Tribune tomorrow. But the DEO found a way to find me, and they brought the prototype of that grenade along. Without that, I and my colleagues and a great many civilians would be either dead or stranded on the other side of the galaxy or both. But your idea saved us. So you have my eternal gratitude."

Lena swallowed, now stuck with the horrific image of Supergirl on another planet, never to return to Earth, to National City's skies, to Lena's balcony.

Supergirl shrugged. "Anyway, I just wanted to tell you that as soon as I could, not take the chance
of something getting in the way when you deserve to know as soon as possible how much it means to me."

"Not like last time, then." Lena couldn't help the supercilious tone.

Supergirl looked down at her shoes, whispered, "Not like last time." Then her head snapped up, like a hunting dog. "Rao, won't they ever give me even a minute? I'm sorry, Ms. Luthor. Crime doesn't sleep."

"And neither do you, apparently." This time there was compassion in her voice. Lena put a hand on Supergirl's warm, muscled arm. "Quickly, before you go. I have to thank you, too."

Supergirl looked confused. "For what?"

"For the lovely poem. At first I had thought it might be from Kara, but she said no."

Supergirl blushed bright red. "I, oh, Kara, she is the one who suggested it, but I begged her not to tell you. I thought if it was anonymous, you'd just think it was from some grateful alien. Which, I guess, it was. Sorry, I'm not good at sneaky."

"It was beautiful. I framed it, you know, to hang in my bedroom. For when I forget how to be a hero like you."

"Ms. Luthor, you can't forget what you are at heart. Not possible." Her head snapped up again. "I really have to go."

Lena watched her fly away, wondering about her new insight about the Girl of Steel.

And maybe that's why, an hour later, when Kara Danvers showed up in her office wearing a linen dress and a pink cardigan and insisting on dragging Lena out of the office on a Friday night, and asked where Lena would like to go, Lena had suggested the Amphipolis.

"Wait," said Kara. "Amphipolis like Xena? That is so cute. Why have I never heard of it? I thought I knew all the restaurants in National City!"

Lena laughed. "It's more of a bar/nightclub. Don't worry, they do serve food, just not pizza and potstickers."

"Oh, that's okay. I ate before I came over."

Privately, Lena didn't think that was going to make a difference, with Kara's unfortunate metabolic syndrome, but she said nothing, merely grabbed her purse, dismissed Jess, and left L-Corp arm in arm with her best friend.

//

When Lena's driver dropped them off at the Amphipolis, they got two Cosmos and looked for a place to sit. Kara nearly spilled her drink when she saw her sister and Agent Vasquez side by side in a booth, their heads close together in discussion.

Wait, the DEO's top two women were lesbians? And in a relationship?

Kara said, "Hey, let's go say hello. Maybe they'll let us sit with them!"

And before Lena could suggest that maybe they would rather be alone with each other, Kara had launched herself into the other side of the booth. Alex spit up her drink when she saw her sister. As
Lena approached, Alex said in a strangled voice, "Kara, what on Earth are you doing here of all places?"

"Hey, is it ladies night?" asked Kara. "There's like no men here except for the bartenders and the bouncers!"

Vasquez said easily, "I think it's safe to say that it is always ladies night here."

Lena laughed at that as she joined them. Alex's drink went out her nose this time. "Lena?"

"Come now, Agent Danvers. The media has made it clear to Metropolis and National City who I tend to date. And don't worry. I'm not corrupting your sister's innocence. This just happens to be one of the few places in town where no one gives me grief for who I am. But I am sorry if we are disturbing you. Kara and I just wanted a quiet talk away from our workplaces. We can find another table, if you'd like."

Vasquez glanced at Alex, and it looked like she squeezed the woman's thigh under the table. "We have discussed much of what we needed to discuss. The presence of National City's most beautiful woman and its biggest puppy can only be a source of pleasure."

Kara frowned. "Wait, she's beautiful and I'm a puppy?" She turned to Lena, "I mean you are the most beautiful woman, like anywhere, but--"

Alex finished, "You are a puppy, Kara. Accept it. Move on."

Lena mentioned, "I got a visit from Supergirl today. She said the prototype worked."

"Very much so," said Alex. "You saved a lot of lives, Lena. Thank you."

Vasquez murmured, "Thank you."

Lena looked uncharacteristically uncomfortable. "Oh, no. I wasn't angling for thanks. It's just that, I mean, I don't suppose you had time to bring it back so we can study how it worked?"

The agents shook their heads. "There wasn't time. We had to skedaddle."

"Oh, well. We can build a new one. We have the technology, after all. But I hate that you had to go into the field with an untested prototype. If it hadn't worked--"

Lena quickly got control of her distress and said, "Let's talk about something else, shall we?"

They talked about easy things for a while, things that had nothing to do with aliens or technology or danger. Lena was surprised that the three women still hadn't seen the new Ghostbusters and recommended it highly. Alex talked about a new tapas restaurant she wanted to try. Kara complained about Snapper. Vasquez didn't say much, mostly just watched the three interact. Finally, she said, "Alex, why don't you and Kara go dance? There are a few things I need to discuss with Lena. Sorry, Lena, I hate to bring up DEO stuff on your evening out. But I promise it won't take long."

The sisters gave Vasquez very similar looks and slid out to go dance.

Lena said, "Well?"

Vasquez leaned back on her side of the booth, smiling easily, though her dark eyes were hard, leaving Lena wary, and as always, weary.
"Lena, I don't know if you knew this, but Alex has barely been out five minutes."

Lena blinked. This was not going where she had expected. "Okay..."

"And with about thirty years of compulsory heteronormativity under her belt, she tends not to see things that are obvious for the rest of us."

"Such as?"

"Your obvious affection for Kara, and hers for you."

Lena laughed. "Agent, Kara is straighter than most arrows."

Vasquez gave a noncommittal nod. "Many women are until they meet someone extraordinary. Such as yourself."

Lena thought, Supergirl, sure. But Kara? Hardly!

Vasquez continued. "I'll be honest with you. I don't care about your last name. As you know, I recommended you to the DEO because we needed your brilliance, and in that sense, I believe you to be entirely trustworthy."

Lena bit back her habitual disbelief.

"But know this. If you do anything to hurt her, to break her heart, I will hurt you in ways you cannot even begin to imagine, and you know what? You will thank me. Because if her sister finds out that you did something? She will do far, far worse things. Are we clear?"

"We're clear."

"I love the Danvers sisters, Lena. I guess many people do once they've gotten to know them. And I will protect them with every means I have. That's all I'm saying."

Privately, Lena thought Agent Vasquez was using extreme understatement, so she simply said, "Kara is very important to me, too, Agent Vasquez, and although I think you are wrong about her feelings for me, I will be very careful with her. And I have seen her big sister's ferocious protectiveness and heard from Kara about how those two are joined at the hip. So I believe what you are telling me about consequences, and I will take your warning under advisement."

Vasquez smiled. "I'm glad we had this chat." She looked over to where the sisters were doing ridiculous disco moves to the music and giggling. "Now I'm going to go dance with my, with Alex."

Vasquez strolled over to Alex and pulled her into her from behind, sliding her hands down the woman's sides and thighs. Kara looked a little pained and gave them a wave and hurried back to sit next to Lena and sip quickly from her drink as if to cool her hot cheeks.

Lena thought, Oh, yes, very straight, poor girl. Aloud she said, "Does it bother you to see Vasquez do that with your sister?"

"I don't know. It is a little awkward. But Vasquez makes her relaxed and Alex has always been so uptight, so, I don't know constrained, holding herself in very tightly so that she doesn't get in the way... It's hard to explain."

"Not really. Part of that is the tyranny of the closet. Part of that is her needing to take care of you."
Lex was a little like that, when I first came to the family. But I have to say, I had thought that Alex and Maggie were a thing."

Kara sighed. "I thought so too, and I really liked Maggie. I still do. But she's too scared, if you ask me. Vasquez is brave enough to take on someone new and simply love her. So yes, even if she, er..." She waved a hand in her sister's direction. "Well, if it makes Alex happy? Then I'm happy for her. 'Course, doesn't mean I want to watch."

Kara sipped her Cosmo and smiled.

Lena asked, "What are you thinking about?"

"Actually, I was going to ask you about the cufflinks. Why did everybody at game night act so weird when Mike told Maggie to put Alex in cufflinks?"

"Oh! I think you mean handcuffs."

"Oh, right, like to arrest her for killing Mr. Body."

"That's probably what he meant, yes."

"What else could he have meant?"

Lena looked at Kara's innocent blue eyes and regretted promising to explain it to her. This was not going to be easy. She began, "Um, Kara, how much do you know about how people have sex?"

Kara fidgeted with her glasses. "I took biology in high school. And I've watched some R-rated movies. I know enough."

"Honey, I don't mean how sex happens in general. I mean the different...things people do to make it interesting, spice it up."

"Well, but aren't orgasms spicy enough?"

"Normally, yes, but not for everybody. So sometimes people play...games."

Kara frowned. "And you're not talking about Monopoly..."

Lena closed her eyes for a moment. "Let me try again."

Kara said, "I mean, because the only thing you can do with handcuffs is restrain somebody, right? That doesn't sound fun or spicy."

"Right, but well, I mean, say, bedposts."

"Bedposts?" Kara repeated. "Oh!"

Lena breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, she'd got it. But no. Kara was reaching for her reporter notebook. Lena put her hand on the notebook on the table. "No! No notes. Okay, let me start again. I assume that since you really haven't had a boyfriend, that you do...take care of yourself?"

Kara blushed and fidgeted with her glasses.

Lena said, "I'll take that as a yes. So have you ever gotten yourself really close to orgasm and then paused and then done it again and again before finally letting yourself come?"
"Um, no?"

Lena smiled. "You should try it some time. The point is, you can do that for someone else, either, I guess you'd call it the regular way, or if you really trust your lover, she or he can restrain you and keep you from coming until they say you can. It's kind of a power thing. For some people it's kind of sexy."

"But wouldn't that hurt your wrists? Pain isn't sexy."

Lena decided that she was not going there with Kara. Instead she said, "Well, there's padding and safewords and they keep checking in with you to see if you're still okay with it, and if you're not, they stop."

Kara nodded thoughtfully. "So, Lena, you know so much about this..."

"I read." She shrugged and sipped her Cosmo. Her mouth was dry.

"So, have, have you ever done that yourself?" Kara asked innocently.

"Hardly. Handcuffs aren't a good look on a Luthor, either way you look at it."

Kara nodded. She saw Alex and Vasquez coming over with fresh drinks and waved to them.

"Hey," said Alex. "Did we miss anything?"

"Oh, yes!" said Kara. "Lena was explaining that dom/sub joke Mike made at game night!"

Lena said, "I'm pretty sure he didn't realize what he was-- Wait! What? I never used those words! You already knew?"

Kara laughed and laughed until she was gasping for breath.

Lena hit her on the arm and then sucked her fingers. "Ow!"

Alex's eyes narrowed. "How did my little sister already know about that?"

When Kara could breathe, she said, "Google. I went home that night and looked it up."

Lena stared at her. "Then why on Earth did you make me explain it to you?" To Alex and Vasquez, she said, "She even tried to take notes!"

Kara shrugged, still grinning. "Well, you did offer. And I really wanted to see your face. So worth it!"

Vasquez high-fived Kara. "Girl's got game!"

Lena put on her most haughty look. "Well, all I can say, Ms. Kara Danvers, is that I for one am deeply disappointed in you. All this time I have believed you to be good and kind, and then you embarrass me and--"

"Oh! No, no, no, Lena! It was just a joke!" She wrapped her arms around Lena and squeezed her tightly. "I am SO sorry!"

Then it was Lena's turn to gasp for breath. "Kara, dear. It's fine. I was teasing. It's good to know you're capable of at least a tiny bit of evil. It means you're human."
Alex choked on her bear. Grinning, Vasquez clapped her on the back.

Kara just said, "Yes! Yes, that's me. Human. Very human. Everybody says so."
Welcome to Earth

Chapter Summary

Directing the DEO isn't all running around with space blasters. Poor J'onn.

J'onn pinched his nose as Supergirl earnestly described how helpful the new alien, Joe, had been with their rescue mission on Slaver's Moon, justifying her split-second decision to offer him refuge on Earth. Sometimes he thought he preferred her rambling incoherently as Kara than the impassioned speeches she gave when Supergirl was arguing that her potentially dangerous friends were just and good and true and all the rest.

Finally, he put a hand up to stop her. "Supergirl, if you were anyone else, I would be reading you the riot act. But if there is one thing I've learned since meeting you in person, it's how you inspire other people--human and alien--to be like you. To be heroes. So fine, we will process Joe's Earth citizenship and give him the orientation he needs to get by here. I know the NCPD is working on their own set of workshops and classes. I will liaise with Detective Sawyer and get him set up. Okay?"

Supergirl's face went from defensive to joyous and leaped forward to squeeze J'onn in a huge hug. Privately he thought she liked to hug him at least as much because his physique could take her strength as because he was the Danvers sisters' Space Dad. He just hugged her back and sighed.

J'onn stretched and looked at his schedule: meetings all afternoon. First Alex, then Winn and Vasquez, the DEO lawyers, a short break and then Maxwell Lord, and after him, Detective Sawyer. He groaned. When he had promised Jeremiah Danvers that he would, in the guise of Hank Henshaw, protect the Danvers girls and in the process protect the Earth, he had had absolutely no idea just how much of Henshaw’s job included tedious meetings and even more tedious paperwork.

Alex came in and handed him a paper file. “Sir, is going back to hard copy really necessary?”

Henshaw sighed. Martians didn’t even have paper, hadn’t been that low tech for millennia.
“Vasquez pointed out that if even Winn Schott Jr. couldn’t hack a lead-lined room full of file cabinets from afar, neither could anybody else. Of course we will keep nonessential information online, protected with all kinds of firewalls. Keep the hackers busy while saving ourselves the embarrassment and danger of letting them get their hands on our crucial intelligence.”

“Yes, sir. That’s my report on Slaver’s Moon, sir. I know that Winn and Lena have been talking about tracing portals like the one Barry used, but I wonder if they could also trace incursions from transmatter portals? We destroyed that one and the techs are taking it apart in the ‘basement.’ But there may be more.”

“So the parts reached Major Lane safely?”

“Yes, sir. She said to give you her best, sir, and to remind you to be grateful about the lack of bats in National City.”

He chuckled. “Wimp. Good. I will discuss your suggestion with Winn. It’s a good idea.”
Alex left. Vasquez stuck her head in the door. “Sir? Supergirl brought you a latte. I think it was either to say she’s sorry or possibly to thank you. It was very unclear.”

She came in and then paused.

“Something else, Vaquez?”

“I’ve started to debrief Joe on Slaver’s Moon, sir. It’s going to take a while. He was stuck there a long time after he escaped the slavers. Short story, sir?”

“Is there a reason I should hear it before you make your full report?”

“When I say a while, I mean weeks, sir. I’ve got him now working with the xenobiologists, cataloguing species, and after that he’ll be with the xenotech boys and girls. He has generously allowed us to examine his rifle and explained how it works.”

“All right, Agent. So you have an initial assessment?”

“Yes, sir. He landed on Slaver’s Moon and allowed himself to be taken. He was undercover from his planet as a, um, a sniffer, sir.”

J’onn’s face stayed deadpan. “A sniffer.”

“Yes, sir. It seems to be like a detective, except olfactory division. Like if we had sentient bloodhounds, I think? If he passes citizenship and other tests, the NCPD might love to have him…”

J’onn rubbed his eyes. “All right. I already have to liaise with Detective Sawyer. I will ask her opinion on that as well. Anything else?”

She handed him the coffee, still hot, probably reheated after flight by Supergirl’s eyes.

“Just, enjoy your latte, sir.” She smiled and left.

Not surprisingly, Winn, when he came in later, was thrilled with Alex’s ideas and immediately began typing preliminary concepts on his tablet while J’onn enjoyed the latte. When he slowed down and looked up, he seemed surprised to be in J’onn’s office.

“Oh, sorry, J’onn! I get carried away…”

“I understand, Agent Schott. But now that you are back here with us, I want your assessment of the Lord Tech drones.”

Winn sighed. “On the one hand, they are completely harmless.”

“Good, so we can return them forthwith?”

“Well, on the other hand, I can think of at least a dozen malicious uses for them off the top of my head, and when I was looking at the schematics on my screen yesterday, Vasquez passed by, looked up, stared at them, and, and—“

“And?”

“And she growled, sir.” Winn sounded a little scared.

J’onn didn’t blame him. “Noted. What do you think Lord is doing with them, Winn?”
“His Epidemiological Division has been working for years to combat malaria in third world countries. The two current prevention techniques being used are DDT, which has its own set of problems, and mosquito nets infused with repellent or insecticide, which also isn’t a perfect solution. For a while, I think Lord Tech was trying to create a genetic defect that would keep mosquitoes from being able to pick up malaria. The idea was to release them into those areas and let them mate with the ones who could, creating offspring that couldn’t carry it within maybe a decade. They haven’t been very successful.”

“Winn, what do you think he is doing now?”

“My guess, he could be ‘infecting’ the drones with an anti-malarial drug so that when the drones bite people, they give them a way to fight if they also get bit by the normal mosquito carriers.”

“That sounds benign.”

Winn shrugged, “Most of Lord’s projects do. But we have seen the other side of him, and them. I think this merits further study.”

“Noted. Anything else?”

“Well…” He pointed to J’onn’s coffee. “We’d all save some of our salary if the DEO actually gave us decent coffee. Just saying, sir.”

J’onn gave him a look, and he jumped up and talked about all the work he had to do and hurried out. J’onn sipped the latte and privately agreed with Winn, but he knew what the DEO’s black budget was and he wasn’t sure how to slip in decent coffee as a line item. Maybe in their lab’s chemical manifest? Miscellaneous terragenetic stimulants?

A knock. A white-haired human head. A lawyer sitting in front of him wearing a pinstripe suit and nervously grasping a leather briefcase. “Director Henshaw, I have the documents that you requested. This is a very different situation than with L-Corp, which has been very cooperative when it comes to issues of intellectual property. Lord Technologies has made it very clear that it considers that the drones were illegally confiscated, and frankly, sir, we agree that the DEO has possibly crossed a line and we need to, er, uncross it. The possibilities for legal ramifications are enormous.”

“You do realize, Mr. Deaver is it? You realize that threat to National City if these drones turn out to be part of a plan to spread a disease, bio-warfare, domestic or other terrorism?”

“Sir, you asked my, our, opinion on the law. And the law here is fairly clear.”

“Only fairly?”

“Well, there are always loopholes, sir, but yes. I would say it is clear in this case.”

“Very well. Thank you, Mr. Deaver. Don’t let me detain you.”

Okay, thought J’onn. He had now hear the voice of technical worry and the voice of legal worry and they were telling him opposite things, possibly in part because they didn’t take each other’s legitimate concerns seriously, they didn’t understand each other’s context. J’onn wished he could find someone who understood both the enormous threat the DEO was trying to avoid AND the intricacies of American law.

He finished his latte, lost in thought. Then he picked up his phone.
“Yes, Director Henshaw. Postpone Mr. Lord’s meeting for two days—out of town, hint at rogue aliens. Then put me through to Major Lane, please.”
Maxwell Lord doesn't bother remembering people's names.

Maxwell Lord was very good at allaying other people’s fears. As he pointed out, the vast majority of his tech was only potentially dangerous and not actually dangerous. As the geneticists on the other side of the “Franken-food Scare” had discovered, you had to guide the narrative yourself, and then the public would believe your story and adopt your technology without frivolous worry.

So when one of the members of the Alien Tactical Technology Advancement Consortium (ATTAC) came to him, worried about the epidemiology project, Lord had talked at length about emergency preparedness, the grants gladly given them by the Centers for Disease Control, and how, yes, of course the bottom line was important, but if they could easily adapt the tech for philanthropic purposes, good PR was important.

And also helping people, sure, why not?

That was his morning meeting. His lunch meeting was a good deal more enjoyable. Dr. Charlotte Arsenault was an independent inventor he had met over the summer at a mechanical engineering conference in the south of France. She was currently consulting at National City University and had asked him to join her for a late lunch. She picked a small Hungarian bistro that one of the NCU professors had recommended and they shared goulash and wine and talked at length about the problems of miniaturization and the pairing of French wines with American food.

She wasn’t his type, petite and blonde, but she was brilliant, which could make up for a lot, and she hinted that although the university was keeping her busy by day, her evenings were often free… They made a date for a concert over the weekend and he returned to his company rather pleased with himself.

And that was a good thing, because his day went downhill from there.

First the director of maintenance and the director of security meet with him to discuss random energy glitches that have been going on for the past five months. The director of maintenance waves copies of the email memos that she had sent Lord ever two weeks, because she knew that he wouldn’t remember. The director of security had only two memos to show, both of them on energy bursts that lasted almost three seconds long, by far the longest of them. Most of them had lasted from microseconds to a second and change.

“But there is no pattern,” he insisted.

Maintenance said, “I finally plotted the data out, and I noticed that there is a sort of a pattern. They’re lasting longer. It doesn’t seem to be affecting equipment now, but I wonder if it could. The last one’s heat signature was still completely insignificant, but the longer a burst like this lasts, maybe the more of a problem it could be for our equipment. I’ve taken the liberty to decrease the temperature a bit further for the mainframe, per IT’s suggestion.”
“So you think this is industrial sabotage?”

Maintenance looked shocked. Security said, “There is no evidence of intent.”

Maintenance said, “I don’t’ know about intent. All I know is what’s happening, what could happen if we don’t take precautions, figure out which of the machines is glitching.”

She always called the computers “machines” like they were jalopies or something. It drove Lord crazy, but he respected her attention to detail.” He looked at Security. “Tell IT to go over systems with a fine-tooth comb. I’d rather not shut down capacity if we can do this while everything’s on line, but if you see absolutely any evidence that there is intent here, we will consider going that route.”

They nodded.

“You can go.”

On his desk were reports on fourteen employees, ten commendations and four problems.

One of the problems looked like potential espionage, and the other three shear incompetence, major and minor. Lord sighed and buzzed his assistant. “Yeah, get me head of HR. No, wait. Have him come up here in regard to the employees’ files he sent me. Good.”

Even geniuses had days like these.
Supergirl was standing on the balcony inside the DEO when she looked down two levels and noticed J’onn walking Maggie Sawyer out. Thinking rapidly she changed into her reporter clothes and hurried down to leave right after her, accepting J’onn’s thanks for the latte.

“Maggie! Wait up.”

Maggie turned. “What are you doing here, Little Danvers?”

“Bringing Alex lunch. She actually forgets to eat when she’s working on something.” Kara made her disbelief and amazement very clear.

Laughing, Maggie said, “Yeah, well most people do that sometimes, Kara.”

“Hey, do you want to have lunch with me? There’s this great new place. The sandwiches are HUGE!”

“Maybe I’m not that hungry?”

“But you can do what Alex does. She eats half there and then puts the other half in the fridge here to eat the next day.”

Maggie hooked arms with Kara. “Sold. Lead the way.”

Kara loved Tasty Layers. Normally, with Alex, she’d get the Super Dagwood, because duh, but with Maggie she just got the Mozzarella Pesto Deluxe, while Maggie got a simple Tuna and Swiss.

“Maggie, you need to jump out of the box sometimes. Be bold.”

Maggie shook her head. "The last time I tried something bold in a restaurant it was salmon Provençale on a date and it was horrible and my date got it too and I had recommended the restaurant and the waiter had recommended the dish and, yeah, that relationship was doomed from the start.”

Kara ate enthusiastically. Maggie seemed distracted, maybe sad. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”
Kara used her Puppy Dog Eyes™. Maggie had no way to resist.

“Alex said that she and I, we’re not friends. I thought even if we couldn’t, that we could be friends. But I guess she’s right. She said that I saw what she was doing, flirting with me, and I called her on it and she came out to herself and you and her mom, and then she asked me for, to be, but I couldn’t, Little Danvers. It just wouldn’t work. And now she thinks I don’t like her, that I don’t want her.”

Kara noted the language she used and thought back to what Alex had said to her that sad night: Maggie doesn’t like me, like that…I’m so humiliated. But what she was hearing Maggie say now was, And now she THINKS I don’t like her… Kara cared about words. And those two sentences were not the same at all.

Carefully, she said, “Well, do you want to be friends? Do you think you could?”

In a small voice, Maggie said, “Yes.”

“It sounds like she told you how she felt about it, and Alex really likes it when people actually listen to her when she is actually saying what she feels, which is, like, practically never. Well, she tells me. But not other people. Go talk to her.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Maggie, even if Alex isn’t your friend, I am.”

“I thought you were going to kill me. Didn’t you threaten to throw me into space after Alex…“ she faltered.

“Kissed you? Yeah, not that I actually could. Obviously. It’s just that she was so torn up about it then.”

“And now?”

Kara smiled. “Well, Vasquez doesn’t seem to mind that whole boat thing. In fact, I think she is enjoying being Alex’s Big Gay Mentor.” She frowned at Maggie. “You know, doing all the cliché things. And Alex seems so much more relaxed these days. So yeah. No spaceshot today for you, Detective.”

“I’m relieved, Little Danvers.”

She didn’t really sound relieved, but Kara, even having forgiven her for hurting Alex, didn’t mind if she suffered just a little bit. So she just gave her a hug and they finished their lunch in accord.

//

Kara checked in at CatCo, then returned to the DEO to find Winn overseeing an op at Lord Tech. She volunteered to help, but Winn said it was a secret op.

“Using a bright red and blue superhero might be more flashy than we’re going for here, sorry, Supergirl. And with any luck they won’t even know we’ve been there, if Lena’s cloaking idea works. Oh! But Alex was supposed to pick up Lucy Lane at the airport. She asked if you could go? She said you could use her bike.”

And that was how Kara ended up in Alex’s motorcycle leathers riding out to National City’s airport. Riding a motorcycle wasn’t all that similar to flying to Kara, but she could understand that
it was as close as Alex ever got these days, and Kara understood why she loved the wind in her face, rushing against her body. She pulled up to Arrivals to see a trim woman in an Army green combat uniform with a duffle bag. She kicked the kickstand down and jumped off to hug Lucy.

“Well, look at you. Traded in the pink twinset for black leather. Very nice…”

Kara blushed. “Alex is on an op, so you’re stuck with me, I’m afraid.”

Lucy sized up the bike, then picked up the duffle and slid her arms through the handles. It wasn’t perfect, but there was no other way either one of them could see to get Lucy’s gear to the DEO. Kara apologized. “I bet Alex just assumed you’d travel light and borrow a uniform and stuff from us.”

“As she would, no doubt. Yeah, but I’m always ‘just camping out’ in places. I’ve learned to take my comforts with me, as well as a tailored uniform for when I have to meet, well, whoever. Though I will borrow the DEO’s iron and some towels.”

They rode back to the DEO with Lucy pressing up hard against Kara’s back, since the duffle on her own back was long enough to push against the very end of the seat behind her, pushing her forward into the unyielding form of the Kryptonian.

When they parked, Lucy apologized, but Kara hadn’t even noticed. She took Lucy’s bag from her and gestures for her to go first.

“Oh, such a gentleman,” Lucy joked.

“More like a superhero. This thing looked heavy for you.”

“Still chivalrous.” Lucy winked.

Kara’s nose crinkled and she blushed, having forgotten how complicated it had always seemed, to simply be in a room with Lucy Lane. She had forgotten about that. It was probably because of their history with James.

As they made their way to the women’s barracks, they chatted about the Basement, the secret underground black site in the desert where Lucy was currently posted.

“I don’t miss it,” Kara said. “The last time I was there, a bat bit me!”

“But it couldn’t have broken your skin.

“Of course not. But it still itched for a week.”

"Don't feel bad, kiddo," Lucy said. "You probably gave it a huge toothache."

Kara asked after the aliens the DEO were being held at the Basement, almost as if she were asking after old friends: the Hellgrammite, LiveWire, the Jailer. “And how’s the Silver Banshee? Still screaming when she doesn’t get her meal on time?”

Well, Kara couldn’t help it. She was a firm believer in the possibility of rehabilitation, redemption. She led Lucy back upstairs to the command center, where Alex and Vasquez were leading in a very scared-looking Sally, their mole from Lord Tech. J’onn stood there looking very serious indeed as Sally apologized profusely for the mistake that made her extraction necessary.

J’onn said, “We’ll discuss that later. Vasquez, you’re on debrief. Alex, how did it go?”
“As an extraction, it was seamless. As a test of the cloaking, there might have been a hitch. Winn has the audio, video etc. from all our coms. It downloaded directly in real time. So we’ll just have to see what he says.”

And when Alex asked Kara if she’d refueled her bike after the trip to and from NC-X, Kara said, “Oops!” and ran out the door.
Chapter Summary

I imagined this non-canon scene in different ways, as you will see. I never expected Lucy Lane to show up, but fiction has its magic golden thread and it will tell you where it needs to go. Writing this in prose, I never expected it to go back to what I wrote two months ago in poetry (See Chapter 57). Then Apollo or Freya or somebody stepped in. Who'da thunk?

Maggie stood in front of apartment 4A and told Alex that she couldn’t imagine her life without Alex in it and that she hoped they could one day be friends.

Alex stared at her coldly, turned and put her hand on Kara’s door handle.

Maggie’s heart broke. God, she fucked up every good thing she ever touched.

Kara was wrong about her. So naïve and wrong.

Alex turned and looked at Maggie’s downturned face as she turned the door handle.

When Maggie met her eyes, Alex said, “Pool. Tomorrow night.”

“I wouldn’t miss it!”

The door closed. Maggie stood there in stunned disbelief, a hopeful smile fighting for custody of her face. Her heart beat loudly, reminding her to get her footsteps moving in time with it so she could get out of the building and completely lose her cool.

//

The next day passed ridiculously slowly. NCPD-Science was called to Lord Tech to arrest an alien with morphing capabilities who was being charged with industrial sabotage and espionage by Lord’s company. Maggie was sure that, at his? its? trial in a few months, it would also be charged with simply being an alien on Earth and trying to do in all humans. As if aliens had the trademark on genocide.

Luckily, it wasn’t a homicide, so the paperwork wasn’t hers, but Captain Tilden had been pushing her to take more responsibility in the division, maybe take the sergeant’s test. He said he needed “more level heads and, yeah, even officers who will push back against my orders from time to time.” Coming from Tilden, that was a huge compliment. So she thought about it, even making a pro and con list.

Pro
• higher pay
• higher status
• more respect from her colleagues

Con
• more responsibility
• more blame when the shit hit the fan
• more reason to be “obsessed with her job”
• harder to get time off for dating or just life
• she would probably use it as an excuse when she fucked up another relationship

Balling up the paper, Maggie wished she really were friends (still, or again) with Alex. She knew Alex took on enormous responsibility at the DEO, and she might have useful insights on how to make a decision like this. But right now and for the foreseeable future, Maggie couldn’t ask her. For a moment, she allowed herself to imagine a different scenario, something different she could have done when Alex kissed her at the bar.

She could have sunk into the kiss, pulling Alex’s body into hers, murmured her name, grabbed her ass, until Meghan the bartender cleared her throat and suggested that they close out their tabs and take…this…elsewhere. She could have taken Alex home, then, insisted that they sit on the couch and discuss what had just happened, how since Alex was just out, they should take things slow, talk about what they each wanted. Maggie was pretty sure that Alex had vastly underestimated her success with men earlier. She was so accomplished and beautiful. The boys must have wined her and dined her, but maybe moved a little too fast? And Maggie would insist that she didn’t want to make the same mistake. And maybe Alex would insist the mistake was that they were men, and this was what she had needed all along, and beg Maggie to give her what she needed…

At her desk, Maggie shook herself. This was not, not, not helpful in thinking about how to fix what she broke, if that could even be done. She looked at the clock: four-fifteen. She buried herself in paperwork and worked on clearing her inbox until she could decently leave and go to the bar.

She had planned on getting a beer under her belt before anyone else showed up—she expected Alex to drag Kara along as a buffer between them, and maybe Kara’s friend Winn—but best-laid plans, etc. There in a booth were Kara in her little pale blue cardigan and white jeans and a lovely grey-eyed brunette with her dark hair just touching her shoulders. She wore black skinny jeans, a cranberry scoop neck shirt, a little leather jacket. The two were giggling. Maggie didn’t know a whole lot of people who giggled. It looked perfectly normal on Kara, but it seemed a little odd on her stunning friend.

As she stood there staring, the woman strolled over to the bar and ordered a scotch and soda and a club soda. She turned to see Maggie admiring her and winked at her. Maggie was shocked. Women never did that outside of gay bars and Pride parades, not here in National City.

The woman said to Maggie. “Hey, can I buy you a drink?”

Maggie stuttered, “I’ll have what you’re having.”

The woman looked a little sly, saying, “So a club soda then? Such a cheap date.”

Maggie laughed. “I’m pretty sure the club soda is for Kara Danvers.”

The woman gestured and Meghan made another scotch and soda, smiling. Maggie took it from her with thanks and followed Kara’s friend back to their booth.

As always, Kara looked more thrilled to see Maggie than she thought she deserved. “I’m so glad you came! Alex said you might. I brought Lucy to meet you. I think you guys would really get along!”

Maggie looked at this Lucy person, wondering what on Earth Kara thought the two of them could possibly have in common. Women had such weird ideas about cops, either fetishizing them or
fearing for their safety constantly. She wondered which kind this Lucy was.

Still, she was hot. Throwing caution to the wind, Maggie sat down next to Kara and offered her hand across the table to Lucy. “Detective Maggie Sawyer, NCPD. Pleasure to meet you.”

“Major Lucy Lane, United States Army.”

Oh. Well, that was different. Maggie smiled. “And what are you doing here in National City?”

Lucy didn’t even blink. “I’m on loan as special council to the FBI.”

Maggie turned to Kara. “Alex’s branch of the FBI?”

Kara’s voice was small. “Maybe?”

Maggie turned back to Lucy. “As it happens, Major, I routinely liaise with your…branch. I just spoke with Director Henshaw today, as this ray of sunshine is completely aware.”

Lucy smiled. “That simplifies things.” There was a deep ripple in her voice that Maggie hadn’t heard in years and she felt flushed and warm. She sipped her drink. It helped, a little. She sipped more.

They talked in general about National City, with Kara easily able to recite whole restaurant menus, and the situation of aliens good and bad, both of which Maggie could comment on. Lucy admired the bar and the Alien Community Orientation and Resource Network (“Yeah, ACORN,” said Maggie, “blame my boss; he means well”).

“Most cities don’t have anything like it,” Maggie said proudly. “Metropolis copied ours just last year.”

And while they were sipping their second round of drinks, which Maggie had bought, Alex and Vasquez walked in.

When Lucy saw them she jumped up to greet them and give them hugs. Maggie turned to Kara. “Do you turn everyone around you into a puppy like you, Little Danvers? Because Lane doesn’t seem like the hugging type.”

Kara shrugged. “Well, she always hugs me. But normally, you’re right, I guess. I’m pretty sure her family members don’t hug each other. But those guys, they’ve all saved each other’s lives a bunch of times and I guess that makes you a different kind of family.”

“That it does, Little Danvers.” She watched as Vasquez ordered and paid for two beers, a Dos Equis for herself and a Sam Adams lager for Alex. She handed Alex her beer and gave her a little push to the small of her back in Maggie’s direction.

Alex ambled up with none of the swagger Maggie had seen at the airport when she had first met her and they had politely disagreed about jurisdiction.

“Sawyer,” she said.

“Danvers.”

“I thought we’d play the first game, you and me.”

“Sounds good.”
Lucy said, “Um, Maggie, have you ever played against Alex?”

“A few times, actually.”

“Oh, good, because people always bet against her and it’s…not a great idea. Financially. Or, well, ego-wise, really.”

Don’t I know it, thought Maggie. Although she had been practicing lately…

Maggie won the coin flip and broke, sinking two solids, but missed the next shot. Alex sank three in a row on her turn. A flicker in her eyes suggested that Alex blew her next shot on purpose, but then the look was gone. Maybe Maggie had imagined it. Maggie got one, and another on her next shot. The white ball followed the second ball to the rim of the pocket to the yells of their onlookers, but then refused to fall in, thank God, but Maggie’s hand was shaking from adrenaline and the next shot failed miserably.

She went to take a sip from her glass, but it was empty. Silently, Lucy handed her a full glass, with a smile. She sipped and found herself momentarily lost in those grey eyes. Her head tilted and she smiled, oddly calm and happy for the first time in a long time. She even watched Alex sink two balls and then a third and hand her the chalk with a small smirk. Maggie chalked her cue and looked at the table the way Alex had described to her so many times, thinking about angles and rebounding—

—and although Maggie knew about rebounding, who better, the idea that bouncing off of something you wanted to touch might lead to something so much better in another direction, was just an idea that had never occurred to her before—

And she hit two balls exactly the way she wanted, one in the pocket and the next as the white ball hit it from behind. Her next shot hit a solid right up close to a stripe, both of them next to the pocket.

Kara clapped enthusiastically. “Maggie, that’s really good! Alex just hates it when I do that!”

Vasquez smiled. “You can do it, Danvers. Just take it slow.”

And Maggie’s mind went someplace completely different, a place that absolutely did not help her game.

But Lucy said, “Hey, can we make side bets that Alex can’t get her stripe in without taking the solid with it or without simply making the solid go in instead?”

Vasquez and Kara bet on Alex (Kara at least having the grace to apologize to Maggie). Staunchly, Lucy bet against her. Maggie said, “You don’t have to, but thanks.”

Alex had eyes for nothing but the five balls on the green baize: two striped, two solids and one white. The eightball was the one near the pocket, so even if she sank it, not sinking the balls in order would cost her points. She stalked around the table considering angles, and everyone else took too steps back. Maggie was certain that Alex had absolutely no idea what kind of impression she made on people. Aliens were handing money to Lucy and Kara was taking down bets in her reporter’s notebook.

Finally, Alex chalked her cue. She snapped the shot, hitting the white ball into the seven which hit the bumper and ricocheted back to smack the solid out of its way, leaving the eight spinning on the edge as the seven fell in. With her next quick shot, she sank the eight ball. Lucy, the blue alien and a very tall and furry alien found themselves paying everybody.
Maggie gave Alex her twenty. “Good game, Danvers. Nice shot.”
Alex said, “Your game has improved, Sawyer. Been practicing?”
“Now and then.”
“Maybe one of these days, you’ll almost beat me.”
“Oh, one of these days I’m going to beat the pants off you, Danvers.”
They stared at one another, Alex blushed deep red, and Maggie fled back to the shelter of her booth, Lane following, controlling her laughter with admirable restraint.
Meghan passed their table. "Same again?"
They both shook their heads.
"Straight scotch," said Maggie.
"Straight soda," said Lucy.
Maggie pulled out her wallet. "How much are you out from betting against Alex?"
Lucy pushed her wallet away. "I didn't bet against Alex. I would never do that. I bet on you, Detective. And I would do it again."
There was a reason Maggie usually drank beer. She sat there working out what Lucy had just said. It wasn't working. Meghan brought them their drinks. Maggie's throat burned as she drank.
Lucy continued. "I suspect the two of you would be more evenly matched in a firefight, or maybe in hand-to-hand combat. And that is me speaking as somebody who has fought side by side with Alex both ways." Lucy lifted her soda and toasted. "To one of the most sports-woman-like losers I have ever laid eyes on."
They drank.
Maggie laughed. "Thank you, ma'am." She looked lost in thought. "She's taller than I am," she said eventually.
Lucy leaned across the table. "All trees are felled at ground level. Tall people always forget that."
"Especially men," agreed Maggie.
They toasted again to men forgetting, drank again. Maggie took her courage in both hands. "Um, not to be forward but, well, but you're not gay, are you?"
Lucy grinned. "Bi, actually."
"Um, you want to get out of here?"
Pool. Tomorrow Night. (Redux Poetica)

Chapter Summary

Same as last chapter, but in Alex and Maggie's points of view.

Chapter Notes

There is a reason that this seemingly impossibly large and fast fictional opus is being written by FlyingPigPoet.

I sent these poems to Chyler with the thank you letter I wrote this past December. I don't suppose she will ever read them, but it doesn't matter now that you guys can read them and tell me what you think!

Kudos and Comments very welcome

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pool. Tomorrow Night. (What Was I Thinking?)

Alex

I used to think of pool as just a game
Played on a green baize table, a matter
Of pockets, physics, line of sight and skill.
Pool never used to make me think of brown.

If seas were made of root beer, like her eyes,
I would be drowning again. If canoes,
Like her eyebrows, rising and falling in the waves
Came to rescue me, I don't know which I'd choose.

Such decisions are moot, I guess. The sea is dry,
No ships are sailing, and no rescue is possible,
As I had once hoped. The sea of this table is green,
A flat ocean, becalmed, like the ancient mariner

Cursed to starve and thirst with unbillowed sails.
The balls are like buoys, striped and solid—
So very heterogeneous. They move in straight lines.
I cannot find a way to queer their pitch.

She grins at me, tilts her head. The cue
Hits the white ball, which sends her striped
Balls into the pockets, one by one. How odd.
Normally, she can't pocket the ball to save
Her life, even after long minutes considering angles. Just my luck. The one time I really want to beat The pants off her—oh God, wrong choice of words—She gets unexpectedly lucky. No, skilled. I mean skilled.

Pool. Tomorrow Night. (Partial Forgiveness?)

Maggie

All my practice since she kissed me is finally Paying off. My shots hit home, the balls find The pockets I want to send them to. We do not Bet this time (she thinks she’s being kind), which is Unfortunate. I think I could beat the pants Off her—oh God, that’s not what I meant— It’s just that practice has made me sharper, Better at judging angles, lines of sight. It is Actually more like a hostage situation, really, Than I might have thought: how to avoid that Kidnapped eight-ball while I take out the solid Kidnappers, balls surrounding my victim. Judgment And caution are necessary. Choosing between Easy targets and experienced adversaries has never Been a hard call for me. Even on the rare occasion When I lose my cool, it’s always clear to me That I remain what—who—I most want to be: A good cop, a good person, someone who, when All hell breaks loose, makes the right call, Gets the bastard, lets the good guy go, and never, Never leaves a lady waiting. The eight-ball sits On the green felt of the table. She looks at me. I cannot concentrate. I miss my shot. Then I wonder if I’ve missed my shot for good.

Chapter End Notes

wow, I could go spectacularly off-canon here, beyond the Vasquez steps into the shoes Maggie vacates. I am trying to set up 2.10, and do it in an elegant way (ha), but this may take a little extra time. Like, maybe, Wednesday?
The Failure of Containment

Chapter Summary

Episode 2.10 from Lucy Lane's point of view.

Taking a break from reading that tedious lawyer's tedious reports, Lucy Lane asked to watch Supergirl's training session with Mon-El. His strength, speed and agility were impressive, and he was focused on destroying the floating target that Winn had dubbed the Death Star, but repeatedly he forgot about the necessity to not let it kill the cardboard civilian targets.

To be fair, each time through, he let fewer die, until this last time, when only a single little girl had her cardboard head incinerated by the Death Star's laser beam, Supergirl had given him a thumbs up, saying, "B+!"

When the Daxamite went to change his burned shirt, Lucy said, "A word, Supergirl? If that girl were your daughter? Or your sister? You wouldn't be giving him a B+. You'd give him the F he had earned and sent him back to the beginning until--not that he'd had a single round where no one got killed by his negligence--but until a hundred, two hundred rounds. Maybe a thousand. In a human army, collateral damage is an option--a bad option, but an option--because we're human and can't help it. But you, Supergirl? And by association your little rookie there? You are going to be judged by a different standard. And you should be."

Lucy's phone went off. "Lane. What? Who authorized that? I certainly did not. Okay, lock it down. No prisoners in or out unless I or General Lane personally authorize it in your physical presence. Yes, I know he's in DC. And I'm in National City. Yes, that is exactly what I mean. And trace the source of those orders. I'll be in touch."

She hit her phone twice. "Agent Danvers. Get your NCPD liaison and meet me at the following coordinates."

She turned back to Supergirl, but the hero was gone.

//

The DEO prisoner transfer van lay where it had jack-knifed across the intersection, NCPD officers holding traffic at bay around it and setting up detours. EMTs were treating the driver's cuts from the shattered windshield glass. Of the four guards, two were being loaded onto ambulances and two into body bags. This was the scene that greeted Major Lane. She walked around the back of the van to find Maggie and Alex kneeling next to the melted shackles.

"Well, we know it wasn't Supergirl," Alex was saying. "But that Metallo guy is still out there. Because nothing cut those." She stood up. "Major Lane, good morning. I believe you met Detective Sawyer last night?"

"Detective."

"Major." Maggie stayed kneeling, writing in her notebook while Alex described the amount of heat it would have taken to melt the manacles that Livewire had worn on her wrists and ankles.
Lucy shook her head. "Why not simply take the key?"

Alex suggested, "Show of force? Speed?"

Maggie looked at her watch. "Three, two, one. You owe me twenty bucks, Danvers."

And there was Kara in her blue raincoat, reporter's notebook at the ready.

"Sorry, Major. She's just so strong."

"It's okay, Sergeant. She's one of us."

Finally Maggie stood, not exactly meeting Lucy's eyes, still jotting notes. "This was very well staged and very well thought out. I'll get the traffic cam's footage to Winn, Major. See you around, Danvers."

//

It had seemed so harmless last night, to take Maggie back to her place, since she'd been drinking more than she was apparently used to and a drunk driving citation was not a good look on a cop.

Lucy regularly drank soldiers half again her size under the table, so a few scotch and sodas, light on the scotch, weren't going to impair her ability to drive eight blocks, or even parallel park. And as she followed Maggie into her apartment, she told herself she was just going to get the other woman settled, that's all.

Except then of course Maggie had kissed her, pressed her up against he front door as it closed behind them and it had been so long and Maggie was small but muscular and Maggie asked, "Can I?" and Lucy had said, "Please!" And their hands and lips and they both had so much longing and her hands and her tongue and when was the last time, and then their skin and sweat and sheets--

And then it was four in the morning and she had never returned to the DEO barracks and maybe no one would have noticed, but then she was picking up her clothes and putting them on in the dark in reverse order until she found her shirt near the door, and her phone underneath it.

One look at her phone told her J'onn was prepping a team for a manhunt. She called and faced that particular lecture about not checking in. She left Maggie a note. When she marched into the DEO at 0500 hours, J'onn simply looked at her and shook his head, muttering about human woman and headaches.

//

But she was not the only one to get lectured today. Back at the DEO, she found Supergirl furious, from what Lucy could tell, at the wrong man.

Mon-El and Winn told an incoherent and rambling story, while Lucy stood in her camos, arms crossed over her chest, looking stern at the tale of "reckless disregard for the safety of yourself" (as Supergirl was yelling at James in the other room).

"Self and others," Winn said. "You're indestructible, Mon-El, but you forced James, who isn't, to take your place and protect those cops--"

"I had to save Kara."

Simultaneously, Winn and Lucy said, "She doesn't need saving."
From the other room:

James: And what about Mon-El?

Supergirl: He's still learning.

James: Oh yeah, and how many lives are you willing to sacrifice because Mon-El is still learning?

Lucy looked at Mon-El, who seemed entirely unrepentant. "Mon-El, is it? Well, listen up, rookie. I pretty much think that you're an arrogant, entitled sexist pig asshole, but I've only just met you and I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt. But in the army and the DEO, if your superior gives you an order and you disobey, you're punished the first time."

"Really? Only the first time? That's generous."

"The second time, you're court-martialed, kicked out with extreme prejudice. You want to work with us, you learn to follow orders. And you, Agent Schott? You either work for the DEO or you work on your own with your friend there. You cannot have it both ways and you cannot--I can't emphasize this enough--use DEO resources for unauthorized operations. To do so is not only an infringement of DEO policies and United States law, it is also a violation of ethics. I had thought, we had all thought, that you were an honorable man, Agent Schott. You will have to work hard to regain our trust."

Lucy was trembling with rage. The oath she had taken as a soldier specifically was about following orders in defense of the country and the Constitution. A soldier who didn't follow orders was no better than an armed thug. And thugs weren't heroes, no matter what they tried to tell themselves to the contrary.

She went to J'onn's office, told him what she had learned. He called in Agent Vasquez and had Lucy tell her what she had told him. Vasquez's brow went dark. She excused herself and came back a few minutes later with two command center earpieces. She handed them to J'onn.

"The small one's mine. The slightly larger one is Winn's. I'm no expert, but I suspect that this piece here is a disrupter, so you can't hear Winn's thoughts."

J'onn gestured for Lucy and Vasquez to sit. He set the two earpieces side by side on his desk. "Ladies, please speak freely."

Lucy started. "Insubordination, conflict of interest, vigilante so-called justice, tampering with DEO resources, sharing DEO resources with non-DEO personnel. And that's just Agent Schott. The other two--"

Vasquez said, "We can't exactly arrest any of them without outing ourselves. But maybe we can control them. What if we gave James the same ultimatum you offered Winn? DEO: in or out? And if out, no more vigilantism. But if in, training 24/7."

J'onn said, "He is currently acting-CEO of CatCo."

She shrugged. "Then he should act like it."

There was pounding on J'onn's office door, and Win came in breathless. "James and Mon-El are gone. I tracked James as far as the warehouse district and I'm getting a ridiculous electrical surge there so Supergirl took off and--"

But J'onn, Lucy and Vasquez were already heading on the double to the command center. All Lucy
could think was, Those legal reports are boring, sure, but I'd forgotten how restful boring could be.
The end of episode 2.10, somewhat reimagined. It bugged me that J'onn complimented the vigilante crew even after what Winn did, which was more than insubordination even if it wasn't precisely treason.

As usual in Season 2, the villains are speaking more truth than just about anybody. Sigh.

The moment Supergirl finished lecturing him, James was out the door, running to suit up. Through his earpiece, he argued with Winn. "C'mon, man. I need to know you're still with me."

"That's just it, James. I don't think I can be anymore. This job means too much to me."

"We need to finish this, then. If this is the last time that you'll help me..."

"James, just stop. You know, your ex-girlfriend is very fierce, and she came down harder on me than anybody. She didn't yell at you at all, because you're her ex-boyfriend."

"Or she believes in me. Yeah, Lucy's fierce. You ought to see her in court. But, man, I need that location. We're helping Supergirl!"

"She doesn't need our help. She doesn't want our help."

"You said the warehouse district, right? I'm almost there, Winn. Winn?"

Even with his helmet on, James could smell the ocean. The warehouse district was close to the port.

A click in his ear.

"See, Supergirl? It's right there...

"Thanks, man."

//

He hadn't expected this: that Livewire, far from being the villain of the piece, having masterminded her escape from prison, was in fact the victim, currently being drained of her excess electrical energy by what looked to all intents and purposes like a mad scientist.

Certainly, Jimmy Olsen had seen some strange things since he met Clark Kent, but this one was like something straight out of a fucking comic book.

He charged. A prison security guard and Livewire's double shot bolts of electricity at him, but he blocked them with his shield and sent them right back at their senders. They went flying. The scientist disappeared.

Guardian ran to Livewire and broke the manacles holding her left wrist in place on the machine
draining her.

"Who are you?" she said. "Where's Supergirl?"

"She's busy," he husked through the mask. "I'm Guardian."

"Oh great," she complained. "I'm screwed."

He sighed, working on her second wrist, glancing at the guard and double who were pulling themselves up from the floor.

Suddenly a form crashed through the window and sent the two flying.

The man was dressed in black. Livewire asked, annoyed, "The hell are you supposed to be?"

The unshaven young man said, "I'm the other Superman. In training."

"Your cos-play sucks."

"That's not nice."

Guardian moved toward Mon-El. "What are you doing here?"

"The same as you, buddy." But his gaze drifted past James and he frowned.

James turned to see the crazy scientist, who smiled at them. "Do you know that most scientists experiment on themselves first?"

"Yeah," said Guardian. "In the nineteenth century maybe."

But then the man had raised his hands and was shooting hot searing electricity into the two would-be rescuers.

//

They woke up, restrained, tied back to back, their hearts still racing, eyes blurry. Livewire was still tied to the machine that was probably about to kill her, and the scientist with his back to them was preparing some fresh hell.

"You know what I love?" Livewire drawled. "Little boys who think they can do a better job than the woman who is an actual superhero."

Guardian whispered to Mon-El, "Can you get us out of these cuffs?"

Mon-El flexed and was immediately encased in yellow electricity. "Arrgh!" he yelled. "Bad! Bad science man!"

The scientist laughed. "Oh, the cuffs. Fun, huh? Patent pending. Funny, 'cuz Shark Tank turned them down."

Guardian asked, "What do you want with us, Leslie?"

Mon-El asked, "And what's a shark tank?"

"I'm not Leslie! I'm Livewire!"

Guardian tried to give the Daxamite a dirty look, but the helmet made that difficult.
"Well, it's clear that the current prototypes aren't strong enough and I will need upgraded models. And that's where you two come in: perfect specimens. Not sure how much power I'm going to need. I might need to drain our little battery completely to pull it off."

James saw the look on Livewire's--Leslie's--face: determination mixed with equal parts resignation. Somehow it reminded him of Supergirl and Kara, wrapped as they were in a single body.

The scientist continued, "But you two are worth it."

Guardian snapped back, "We will never fight for you!"

"You will," he replied lackadaisically. "You," he said to Livewire, "might definitely die."

"Leave her alone!" said Mon-El.

"Oh, what do you care?" asked the scientist. "She's a bad guy." He pulled the lever down and the machine sucked electricity from Livewire, leaving her screaming in agony.

Mon-El, shouted, "That's enough! Come on!"

Guardian yelled, "Stop!"

But then there was a flash of red and blue and Supergirl was throwing the scientist into a wall and using her laser eyes to melt the boys' manacles.

"You two, go get them," she said. "I'll save Livewire."

She went to where Leslie was straining against her shackles. She aimed her ice breath at Leslie's ankles. "This might hurt a little."

The moment her shackles shattered, Livewire stood triumphantly, letting the electricity web high between her hands. Mon-El charged past Supergirl, stepped back and punched Livewire in the jaw, who fell. Guardian leaped to attack her, but was blocked and pulled off her by the security guard.

"Nice of you. Stupid, but nice. Hey, you're not looking so good, Blondie. I'll warm you up." Her hands flared with spider-webs of electricity.

On the concrete floor, Supergirl struggled to rise. She said, "You could kill me, for all the things you think I stole from you. But you wouldn't be who you are if not for me. This is who you are now, for better or worse. He tried to take your powers from you, not me. We may not be allies, but I will punish him for you. What do you say?"

Livewire's right hand filled with electricity and Supergirl thought she was dead, but the gold light flew over her head. She turned to see the Livewire double get flared and fall to the ground.

Livewire said, "We'll discuss this after I deal with Frankenstein."

"Right!"

They charged the others: the scientist, the security guard, and Livewire's double. Guardian used his shield to smash down his opponent, while the double simply used basic "self-defense" moves.

Superheroes and almost-heroes backed up into each other to make a defensive triangle, while Livewire sent a lash of blue-white light around the scientist's throat and took him down to the floor, straining the lash more and more tightly, watching with glee as he struggled and gasped.
Supergirl came running, yelling, "Leslie, this is not the way! He will go to jail, I swear!"

Livewire frowned. "I'll make you a deal, All-American Barbie. You can haul his ass to prison but I never see the inside of a cell again."

"I can't make that deal."

Livewire shrugged. "Then he fries."

"No, wait, Leslie, don't!"

"My name is Livewire!"

"Livewire, listen to me!"

"Why? You know you can't stop me from leaving."

"And you know you can't stop me from chasing after you, and you know how fast I am. But if you spare him, if you do that much, maybe I'll wait to chase you until he's in jail. Maybe."

"Just us girls next time. We can braid each other's hair." She zigged into the light socket and disappeared.

Mon-El and Guardian approached Supergirl. "We could still catch her," insisted the Guardian.

"I will," said Kara thoughtfully. "But not today."

//

Supergirl approached them. "So what now?"

"You tell me," said James.

"We could things back to the way things were? Superfriends? We could be a team again."

James frowned. "So we just back you up, but we'll never get to do it ourselves."

"But you'll live."

"But not the lives we want. I don't want to be the guy in the office anymore."

Winn said, "I don't want to just be the guy behind the computer."

James crossed his arms over his chest. "We're gonna do this. And we'll do it alone if we have to. But we'd love to work with you."

Winn said, "Always."

Supergirl shook her head. "You know, you two were heroes to me, way before all this. I know you want to help people, but this is not the way to do it. I won't stop you. But, as long as you are putting yourselves in danger, I can't support it."

James said, "I guess that's it then."

He walked away, sadly, heading to the exit, where J'onn was standing holding a manila envelope. "Ah, Mr. Olsen. I was hoping to talk to you."
James didn't roll his eyes, but it was a close thing. "Sir."

"I have discussed this with my tactical officer and Major Lane. We at the DEO have, as you might imagine, mixed feelings about the help you've been trying to render to the law enforcement of National City."

"Trying to render, sir? I am fairly certain we have been rendering help."

J'onn waved that away. "Semantics, Mr. Olsen. I'd like you to take this and give it your consideration. Think of it as three scenarios for how your future might go. I recognize that it might take you a while to make a decision, but I would ask you to refrain from your extracurricular activities until you give me your answer. In any case, I would imagine you would have to come up with new equipment to replace the DEO equipment that was illegally lent to your operation. We have rectified that with our quartermaster. I believe he let you keep the mini-refrigerator, but you may find replacing the rest of it could get a bit costly. Enjoy your day, Mr. Olsen."

James stepped into the elevator, slid the single sheet of paper out of the envelope, and read it. "Shit," he said loudly.
Chapter Summary

The Martian Chronicles.

M’gann was tending bar the first time she got one of the headaches, and she thought it was just the noise. Nights when the moon was full, more humans and more aliens came to the bar, everybody drank more and everybody was loud. And it was a Friday night after a long rainy week when everybody in National City had seemed crabby and out of sorts. So she hadn’t thought much about it.

The second time, she was taking trash to the dumpster out behind the bar, and the trash hadn’t been picked up in a while so the dumpster was fairly full and stank. There weren’t even the typical skittering noises. Even the rats were avoiding it. So she put the low-grade ache between her eyes down to the rank smell.

The third time was different. She was at home, with a sweet-scented candle and Yo-Yo Ma playing in the background. She was wearing a comfortable flannel shirt, sweatpants and fuzzy slippers--

(And at the bar, the aliens often discussed the things made Earth a wonderful place different from their home worlds, and it was a different thing for each alien: for Mon-El it was alcohol; for Supergirl, the rumor went, it was potstickers; but for M’gann, it was fuzzy slippers. There was nothing more inherently anti-White Martian than fuzzy slippers.)

--and lying on her comfortable couch, dozing off, when the pain came again, and this time in waves. Not waves like the ocean, random and natural, but waves like radio waves, uniform and intent. Waves like a psychic attack.

At first she panicked and nearly fell off the couch, but then the waves stopped and she recovered. Three hundred years. It had been three full Earth centuries since she had felt the psychic touch of her people, a touch like a punch to the face. She had hidden and she had learned Earth ways and she had gotten by, and thought that maybe, just maybe, they would never find her. She could live and die passing for human and never meet another of her kind again.

Her first thought was to try to get off-planet somehow, to race away, as far away from her predators as possible, but first she had no transportation and second she didn’t know what direction they were coming from, so she could theoretically be racing right into their waiting claws. She had chosen Earth when she had decided to stop running and go to ground in part because even in the eighteenth century, its primary species, the humans, had been so populous. Now she was a speck of dust in an anthill. So staying put made sense. She had learned to hunt long ago and she knew that the hunter only shoots a duck that has taken off from the ground to escape. Fear led to bad decision-making. She was too old to give into her fear.

She thought of J’onn and the resources of the DEO, but she didn’t dare endanger him or the humans under his command. This was her problem, maybe her fate, and she would face it alone. At least, that’s what she thought.
She was at the bar the next time it happened, and she had just asked Violet to cover for her so she could go home to recover from it, but at that exact moment, the DEO crew came in and started ordering drinks, and J’onn immediately knew that something was wrong. She put him off, said it was just a regular headache, and she almost had him convinced when her head snapped back from the sheer agony in her skull and she passed out at his feet.

She woke up in the DEO, lying on a bed in a medical bay that reminded her less of contemporary hospitals and more of the old Star Trek. The equipment was state of the art, and Alex Danvers’ voice was kind and concerned.

She was looking away, saying, “I’ll keep you posted.” Then she turned back to M’gann and smiled. “Well, look who’s awake. You gave us a bit of a scare, you know.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to trouble anyone. It’s just a headache, a migraine, probably. I’ll just go home and—“

“Nope and...nope. J’onn thinks that you are under psychic attack, and anybody who can do that to you can do that to him, and maybe the rest of us. And that makes your headache,” she pointed at M’gann, “DEO business.” She pointed her thumb at herself. “So I’m going to have to ask you some questions. Do you know who is doing this?”

M’gann was tempted to lie, but if things got truly bad, if the White Martians were coming to Earth, then the humans were going to need to know, to prepare. “My people are looking for me, to punish me for my war crimes.”

"War crimes? But you--"

"Helped the Greens. Exactly. But to do that, I had to disobey orders, kill my own kind. To... what is that quaint Earth phrase, 'give comfort to the enemy'? It is pretty much the definition of treason."

“And your punishment?”

“On most worlds the punishment for treason is death.”

Alex looked at the machine behind her, watching the readings begin to lose stability as M’gann felt the pain start again and rubbed her eyes in a vain attempt to push it away. She felt the needle in her arm as a mere prick in comparison.

“That is a pain med. It will help a little. Now I’m going to go yell at Winn to work on the neural blocker faster. Because nobody is going to kill the best bartender in National City. Not on my watch.”

It turned out that the neural blocker was a piece of technology, a plastic and metal headband that dampened her psychic output to anyone trying to hack her brain, turning her thoughts and emotions from a shout to a whisper. It was a temporary fix, at best, as it required daily recharging. And if the White Martians had already realized that M’gann was on this planet, they wouldn’t stop until they found her. But it was a start.

It worked for a time, and then gradually, the pain came back, regardless. Winn fine-tuned the blocker as much as he could but then one day, even wearing the enhanced blocker, M’gann collapsed in the middle of the DEO. She didn’t know, of course. All she knew was that hell had
come knocking, she had inadvertently opened a door, and the past had entered, an unwelcome
guest she could not evict from her mind.

The red soil of Mars was famed all over the galaxy. Tales stated in poetic terms how the endless
wars of the Martians, White and Green, had shed oceans of blood, but the dry, dry soil, so thirsty
with the sun so close, simply drank the blood into its core and turned a rusty red. It was probably
true.

The mountains were not red, but the Green Martians had scholars of their folklore, and they
pointed out that when enough blood dried, it also looked black like the rocks that made up the
toothy heights on the horizon. The geologists did not comment on this, merely noted how much
iron was in Martian rocks. The desolate landscape told the planet's story succinctly: We Martians,
we are born, we kill each other, and the planet remembers every death.

For the Greens, this was a shame and a regret. To the Whites, it was a banner of victory: they
always assumed the blood spilt came only from Greens. They believed their own propaganda. And
up until the last total war, that's all it had been: folktales and propaganda. But every planet has its
evil souls, souls who will burn the world down just to feel the heat on their faces.

Towards the end of the war, when almost all of the Greens had been corralled in death camps, oily
fires lit the land, burning the bodies of the dead and leaving the stench of burnt hide and bone like
a miasma over the land. She remembered this. She had remembered, even in her sleep after
centuries on Earth, she had remembered the smell. But now she remembered it viscerally. It was
all around her now, again, just as it had been all around her then. She was engulfed by the sere,
bloody, cracked soil, the mountains like broken bloody black teeth, the harsh unbreathable
atmosphere, the smell of burning blood.

She gave herself credit for this one, single, unbelievable thing: she knelt sobbing on Mars' last
battleground in her own true body, the body of a Black woman from Earth, the body she had
chosen over her larger, stronger White Martian reptilian form. Even with all of the pull on her real
morphic form, she maintained her physical form as Meghan the bartender, even though all of the
elements around her pushed and pulled and tried to get her to shift back (so easy to shift back if she
let down her guard for a nanosecond) to the form of M'gann, death camp guard.

But she would never go back to that. Let them kill her. She deserved it, she knew, for the things she
had done. But she would pay for her crimes rather than repeat them. She could never redeem
herself, but at least she could let one soul go, save one Green here, one there. It didn't make up for
anything. It never could. She didn't expect it to.

So when the Green came, the Green who looked like her, when he knelt by her side and called her
by name, she turned and insisted, "Run, Green, they'll kill you if they find you here!"

He said, "M'gann, it's J'onn. This is a memory. We are in no danger here."

"I set the fire. I killed the other guards. They'll find me. They'll kill me. That's all right. I deserve it.
But they can't find you! Please!"

"That's the fire in the guardhouse?"

"They wanted me to kill a child. A little boy. He was crying and they laughed. I took him behind
the barracks. He was so afraid of me. I couldn't do it. I couldn't."

A small Green Martian boy in rags stood at a distance from them, looking terrified and confused.
She shouted, "Run!" He ran away.
"I went back and killed my people. They will not forgive. I'm going to die here."

J'onn said, "Listen to me. You don't die here. You live. You ran that day. You came to Earth."

"No! What?"

"You survive. You hold onto life. You, uh, you meet me, a Green Martian. You save me too."

"I hid who I was. I said I was a Green. I wanted--"

"Tell me."

"To be your friend. I couldn't bring your people back to life, but I could make you feel less alone. I am so sorry."

She looked down, the shame, that aching endless centuries-old void of shame and more shame, guilt and more guilt--

But he took her face in his strong hands, gently pulled her face to look at him. "I'm here with you. I see you. You are my friend, M'gann M'orrs. You are forgiven. It's time to come home."

//

She opened her eyes to see the DEO medical bay, J'onn with his hand on her forehead, pushing her hair out of her eyes. Behind him were Supergirl and Agent Danvers. She did not know what forgiveness might feel like, but seeing these people, people who knew what she was and did not turn away? It might not be forgiveness, but it was something. It was a start.
Love, How Like an Itch, for Scratching Destined

Chapter Summary

A filler chapter to get from here to there. Also, some cathartic destruction.

Supergirl itched.

It wasn't exactly a physical itch. It was more a mental itch, an emotional thing, but it was a lot like that thing where you have that itch in the middle of your back where you can't reach it with one hand over your shoulder from above and you can't reach it with the other hand behind your back from below.

And under normal circumstances, Kara would have simply called on Alex, because duh, that was why Rao had made sisters.

But this was not a normal circumstance, and anyway, Winn was practically her brother, so she requisitioned him from J'onn, who frowned and asked no questions, and she went to her favorite junkyard, the one with all the old cars and she said they needed to talk.

For some reason he looked nervous, but she put it down to the long "talk" J'onn had had with him in the conference room (which unlike J'onn's office, was not lead-lined or even particularly sound-proofed, which Alex said meant that J'onn had very much intended for the entire DEO to hear and take to heart without actively embarrassing Winn by reaming him out in one of the DEO's more public spaces. And that didn't entirely make sense to Kara, but she figured she could ask for an explanation from Maggie or Lena later. It sounded like the sort of thing they would understand better than she did.

Neither as Kara nor as Supergirl was she that duplicitous, but she supposed that was probably why she was a superhero rather than a spy in a clandestine government agency. And that was why she had brought her best-not-actually-Alex-friend here to the junkyard to talk.

Well, to talk and to smash old cars.

"Winn, you're very important to me."

She pulled the door off a car and threw it out over the towering piles of junk like a large square windowed frisbee. They didn't hear it land.

"And that is why we need to talk."

She tore the front left wheel off a faux-wood-paneled station wagon and tossed that in another direction.

"This whole thing with Guardian. Why? And why didn't you tell me? Why did you think you couldn't tell me?"

"Uh, because you would have told us to stop?"

Supergirl tore the hood off the vehicle, tossed it aside and pulled out the engine. She hurled it over
her head. That crash they heard.

"Of course I would have, dummy!"

"Well, um. We didn't want to stop. We were having fun."

"Crime fighting is not fun!" She stopped, considered her statement. "Most of the time. It's serious business, Winn! Serious, dangerous business!"

"I know, Kara, but--"

Frustrated, Kara lifted up what was left of the station wagon and shot it over her head, aiming, apparently, for outer space.

"But what?"

"Um, I don't remember. What was the question?"

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Winn seemed to pick his words cautiously for some reason. "James is...impetuous. That is what always made him such a great journalistic photographer. And I am normally...not. And somehow, I found myself doing the kinds of things I never in a million years would have thought I'd do. And enjoying it. And making a difference."

"You make a difference to me every single day at the DEO. And somehow James encouraged you to be the adrenaline junkie that he is. And I love you both, and I can't, I just can't lose you."

She stalked over to a rusted-out school bus. Flying two feet in the air, she punched window after window after window. Shattered glass littered the ground and shone off her caped shoulders.

"Um, J'onn gave me an ultimatum: Guardian or the DEO. I chose the DEO."

Supergirl threw her arms around Winn, hugging him tightly and transferring glass shards onto his cardigan. "Winn, that's fantastic! So we'll still get to work together! Oh, I'm so happy!"

"Can't. Breathe." She let go. He said, "J'onn said he gave James a similar ultimatum."

Supergirl's grin, if possible got wider. "So he's coming back too?"

"Dunno. He's still thinking about it."

Supergirl's face fell. But she said, "We need to support each other, however our decisions turn out. I want you to come to Game Night this week. And if you can convince him, bring James."

Winn's eyes narrowed. "How much of this is so that we can serve as a buffer between you and Mon-El?"

Supergirl told the truth. Like her cousin, she was known for it. She said, "Actually, I am inviting Lena and Maggie again, and I need my friends to help me make that, you know. Not weird."
After busting a ring of alien drug traffickers and getting shot for her pains, Detective Maggie Sawyer was late for game night, and she thought it was probably for the best. Hanging out socially with Alex would just be too awkward, especially when she was already in physical pain. The EMT had given her a local anesthetic for her arm, and it was only six stitches, just a scratch, but she was tired. It would probably be better not to go.

She called Kara. “Hey, Little Danvers. Sorry about tonight. I just finished work and I’m beat, and I’m late anyway so—“

“Maggie! Do you know how to play poker?”

“Um, yeah?”

“Then you absolutely have to come. Lena was going to teach me, but I’m horrible and I can’t bluff, and I would learn so much better if I could just watch people who are good at it play rather than diving in to try to play myself…”

And that was how Maggie found herself outside apartment 4A with a sixpack of hard cider and butterflies in her stomach. Or maybe moths, those giant ones. Before she could knock, Kara opened the door and pulled her into a hug.

“Easy, Little Danvers. I got a little bit shot today and I’m breakable.”

Kara pulled her inside and set her up in her comfiest chair opposite her couch where Lena was sitting, looking surprisingly informal in jeans and an MIT sweatshirt, shuffling a deck of cards.

“Detective. You know you don’t have to play if you don’t want to.”

“It’s Maggie, Lena. And I’m in. I’m a little rusty, but…”

“And being that this is Kara’s place, we don’t have chips.” The green-eyed CEO grinned. “So we’re betting with M&Ms.”

Over at the table, Alex, James, Winn, and Mike were playing a board game. Alex glanced at Maggie. “That’s great until my sister eats them all.”

“I will not! Well, not until they’re done playing.”

Maggie chuckled. “At least she’s honest.”

Mike said, “So what are these little pink things?”

“They’re babies,” said Winn. “It’s the game of Life, so a family is a good thing.”

“And these pieces of paper with the numbers on them.”
“Money,” said James.

“But money is green.”

“Play money. Just go with it, man. Alex, your turn.”

Kara plopped down on the couch next to Lena and watched as Lena dealt and Maggie winced as she reached for her cards. “Two.”

Another knock on the door. “Vasquez!” Kara ran and greeted the woman, teasing her for not wearing the black tactical gear that was normally as much a part of her personality as her terse replies.

Maggie took in the purple plaid flannel shirt and the black Doc Marten’s boots and thought to herself, Oh yes, Little Danvers, this girl is um, all right.

“What did you bring?”

“Pineapple juice, coconut milk and some of that rum you like so much. But you have to promise not to drink too much of it, because I also brought a chessboard.”

“That little tiny one?”

“Nope. That’s just for work. This one’s bigger and it has arrows on the edge so you can remember how the different pieces move.”

At the kitchen counter, Vasquez made piña coladas for Winn, herself and Kara (theirs with Captain Morgan rather than the Aldebaran booze). Maggie watched this person that Alex was spending a lot of time with. She moved with ease and grace and was clearly someone Kara liked, although aside from Mike and Snapper, there weren’t a lot of people who Kara didn’t like. So when she sat down next to Maggie with her drink in one hand and a leather covered box in the other, Maggie found herself getting distracted from her game with Lena.

Kara was an avid learner and Vasquez was a good teacher. With every move Kara made, Vasquez asked her what she was thinking and pointed out other moves she could have made.

“It’s about thinking more than one move ahead. Eventually, you can see multiple options two or three or more moves ahead.”

Kara snorted, muttering, “Like I’m going to move my horse guy, but I should probably leave my sister a note first?”

Alex shouted, “I heard that! And yes!”

Lena, also distracted, said, “It’s called a knight. It’s my favorite piece.” She glanced at Maggie, who shook her head and put down her cards. They both turned to watch the chess game. Everybody ate the M&Ms.

Over at the larger table, James yelled, “No, Mike, you can’t trade the babies for money. Just no.”

“Hey!” said Alex. “I think I won. I never win this game. I have never won at Life in well, my life.”

Maggie and Vasquez both turned, noting the surprise and the irony in her voice. Maggie sighed and focused back on the chess game. Vasquez just shook her head.

Kara drank her piña colada and moved pieces on the board, answered Vasquez’s patient questions
and watched Vasquez take piece after piece off the board. Finally, with a white mustache, she moved her rook and yelled, “Checkmate!”

The gang cheered, but Lena said, “No, that’s just check, Kara, because she can get out of it.”

A few moves later, it happened again. Maggie watched Vasquez’s big brown eyes calculating possibilities. She looked up to catch Alex watching Vasquez watch the board. She turned and saw Lena watching her watch them. She rubbed her arm and then wished she hadn’t.

Kara said, “Maggie, I have some aspirin if you need it. Alex, could you—“

Alex got up and went to the bathroom, came back with two tablets and a fresh hard cider for Maggie.

“Thanks, Danvers.” No, this wasn’t awkward at all.

Shortly after that, Mike, James and Winn went home, leaving the women sitting around watching a very quiet chess game. Maggie wondered about Vasquez. Her kindness at the DEO had surprised Maggie, who was used to situations in which the friend of her enemy became her enemy, not her friend. And Alex wasn’t her enemy, not by a long shot, but she knew she was still very hurt by Maggie’s rejection. If only she could understand how much Maggie had wanted to finish that kiss and follow it with a dozen more. Alex was brilliant and beautiful and brave and such an adorable nerd and all the things Maggie had been looking for in a woman all her life. Up until now, the brilliant women Maggie had dated had looked down on her BA in Criminal Justice. The beautiful women complained about her flannel shirts. The brave women were also cops so that never worked. She had never actually dated a nerd before, but she was sure with every fiber of her being that if she had, she would have managed to fuck that up too. So of course she wanted to kiss Alex, and date her and adopt puppies with her and live happily ever after with her. But that wasn’t a future Maggie was ever likely to have with anybody, and if there was one person Maggie never wanted to have an acrimonious breakup with, it was Alex.

Maggie sighed and noticed Lena looking at Kara with the same kind of sad longing that Maggie herself felt. She wondered what it had been like growing up rich and beautiful and a genius, what it had been like having her brother sink into criminal insanity and everyone since then assuming her incipient guilt by association, having to move her life and her company to a new city to get away from it and start again, basically from scratch. It sounded lonely. No wonder she and Kara were drawn to each other.

Lena saw the detective’s eyes on her and said, “You want another drink?”

They both got up and wandered into the kitchen. Lena was drinking red wine and Maggie got another cider. Maggie said, “You know, if you ever need somebody to talk to... I mean Kara’s hours can be a little inconsistent. And I know you’re still sort of new to the city, so if you want to, I don’t know, get to know the city better...”

Lena frowned in surprise. “I shouldn’t think the NCPD would approve of one of its finest hanging out with a Luthor.”

“The NCPD can kiss my ass. What I do on my own time is for me, not them. All I’m saying is if the Danvers girls are your friends, then I’m your friend, too. If you want.”

“Det—Maggie. I’m not sure what to say. That is very kind of you.”

Maggie shrugged. “I know what it’s like to be the odd man out.”
Showdown at the NC Corral

Chapter Summary

A snide editorial by Snapper.

National City Tribune—Edward “Snapper” Carr

Over the last several months, National City has seen a sharp rise in extrajudicial “crime-fighting,” or to name the Woolly Mammoth on the urban landscape, vigilantism. That anyone even sees the need to put on a mask to help the NCPD is testament to the poor job that legal body ahhs been doing to curb crime and prosecute criminals. In the old West, vigilantes went to work when a single sheriff couldn’t catch all the cattle rustlers and train thieves across a hundred square miles of godless terrain. When did little old National City become the OK Corral of the 21st century?

It would be easy to blame this embarrassment on money: National City has long underfunded its police departments, lags on recruitment and stints on training. But since the entrance of Supergirl on the city scene, the so-called “Girl of Steel” has acted as a magnet for criminals—whether alien, enhanced, or human—and even if the NCPD actually got the funding it needed, it still wouldn’t be able to keep up.

Others, less generous, note the apparent coincidence of the move of L-Corp, formerly LuthorCorp, from Metropolis to National City. Already much violence—from helicopter crashes to bombs—has been associated with this business organization.

Still others point to the increased activity of the FBI. Apparently Special Agents Mulder and Scully have been hard at work, although even they were unable to prevent two attempts at alien genocide in the past month alone.

Does this city need a guardian? Are we an orphan child, unable to defend ourselves through legal measures? Are we helpless and hopeless, that we so desperately need someone to fly to our rescue? Maybe if we funded our police better, we wouldn’t need these ego-driven flashy babysitters. We already have heroes in National City, dressed in blue without a red cape and boots, and they wear their shield over their hearts, not on their arms. They don’t need to be replaced. They need to be adequately funded.
Birthday Bailing

Chapter Summary

The start of the Martian Chronicles, 2.11.
I edited it a bit on 3/4, because I had forgotten how off-canon I was getting.

Kara left CatCo just as they were going to press. Her article on Supergirl saving the Guardian had been relegated to page nine. Snapper had said, “Well, it’s not like she actually caught Livewire. That would have been front-page news, but not a cockup like that. A mad scientist and two escaped convicts? Leftovers aren’t news.”

Kara needed a drink, and the moment she walked into the alien bar and saw Mon-El pouring vodka and Cointreau under M’gann’s watchful eye, she knew she wasn’t going to have one. Not with him in the room. Everything was just far too complicated. She needed to keep her wits about her. Well, fine then. Club soda. At least it was cheap.

Alex joined her at her table, looking light and happy, but she immediately picked up on Kara’s mood. “Okay, Kara,” she said. “Spill.”

"He told me he liked me."

"Duh."

"Was it that obvious? But I don't like him and I have to tell him, and I just shoved both feet into my mouth."

"I'm sure it wasn't that bad."

"It was, though. It really, really, really was."

“You’ll figure out a way. Maybe write him a letter? You’re so good at writing, and then you don’t have to actually look him in the eye. He can just read it. Easier for both of you.”

Kara smiled, for maybe the first time that day. “You are the smartest big sister I have. But! On to more important things. Earth birthday!”

"Yes!"

"Thirteen years since I crashed here on Earth." Kara grinned. "So I know that we always do cupcakes, but I was thinking that we should go all out, and I've always wanted to try country line dancing, so I made these reservations at this club? And if we get there before seven? They'll teach us all these tutorials and the dances--"

"Um, so Earth birthday. I know that we celebrate, every year. But the thing is that, um, Maggie surprised me with concert tickets to the Bare Naked Ladies, tonight. And she knows that I've loved them since college and I think she is trying to make it up to me after, well the whole thing at the bar, and so, I, you know, if, there's, do you think we could maybe celebrate another night?"
Kara’s mouth hung open. She shut it.

Then Maggie came running into the bar. "Oh my god! You're not going to believe this, but one of the guys at my precinct is working security at the venue tonight and was able to upgrade our tickets to VIP!" She slapped the tickets on the bar, saying, "Boom!"

Alex looked conflicted. "That is amazing," she said. "That is great. That's great."

As if detecting something wrong, Maggie asked, "Are you guys okay?"

Kara sipped her drink. "Sounds great. Sounds like you guys are going to have an amazing time."

Alex asked, "Are you sure?"

"Go!" Kara insisted. "Go, have fun."

Maybe she had expected Alex to push back and insist on staying with her. And she would have said, no, go. And they would have gone back and forth like that, and then Alex would have stayed.

Or maybe she had expected Alex to do what she did, to let herself off her self-imposed tether for the first time in four? five? six? years, knowing that she, Kara, would catch her if she fell. And normally, Kara would like to believe that she would. Except that she had suddenly realized that it had been thirteen years. She had been on Earth as long as she had been on Krypton (the years in the Phantom Zone didn’t count, since she had slept through them). Eliza had been her mother for as long as Alura had. The years had passed so quickly, and suddenly she felt like she was teetering on the edge of something, as if once this day passed, she would be more human than Kryptonian.

And her world, her long-since devastated world, that lived in the entire universe only in her mind and her memory, would get farther and farther away, farther removed, more easily forgotten, one day to be lost completely.
Death is a White Martian

Chapter Summary

2.11.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so I started this in J'onn's point of view and finished writing it partly at work and partly once I got home and then realized I had shifted into M'gann's point of view, but I'm too tired to fix it, so we're just gonna run with it. Don't judge.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He hadn't meant for it to become a habit.

When he first took on a different form to watch M'gann's back--first as a homeless man, then as a child in the park--he had told himself that it wasn't something he would do more than once, maybe twice.

But twice had become three, four times, and let's face it, the DEO had been uncharacteristically quiet for the past week. No rogue aliens. No enhanced humans, care of Cadmus, trying to do them harm, do them in. He would never say that he took to stalking (watching out for) M'gann because he was bored (underutilized). And it wasn't like he had actually seen any threats to her so far. So when she caught him and called him out behind the alien bar that night, he was sheepish.

J'onn J'onz, Martian Manhunter, Director of the super-secret governmental agency with a black ops budget that would make the CIA blush, was sheepish.

So when M'gann came out to drop a bag of trash into the dumpster, and suddenly tensed, turning toward him and saying, "I know you're there," he had pulled himself out of the pile of trash.

"I saw you yesterday too," she said. "The old lady at the bus stop? And you were that little boy in the park this morning."

The homeless man changed in a wave of red-lighted veins, turning into J'onn J'onzz.

"Why are you following me? Do you regret saving me?"

"Of course not!"

"But you still don't trust me."

"I do trust you. It's just what you said. The White Martians are coming. As an agent of the DEO I have a duty to protect this Earth. Whenever those monsters show up. I have to be ready."

"Well, like I said, they're coming. They're not here yet. So you can stop--"
There was a roar, and giant White Martian dropped down between them and backhanded J'onn into the air. He crashed onto the hood of a parked car and rolled off.

Grimly, M'gann transformed into her Green Martian persona and charged, throwing punch after punch, but the monster grabbed her leg and threw her toward a dumpster, J'onn, now Green, flew to help her but she fell against him. She looked up to see two pale blue lasers burning into the thing's chest.

Supergirl growled, "Mind if I cut in?"

The thing flew up into the air, and Supergirl followed. J'onn took off after them.

M'gann went back into the bar, trying to pretend like nothing had just happened. She poured herself a drink, threw it back.

Violet said, "Damn, girl. Never seen you do that."

"I just got...a message. From my ex."

Violet pulled a second glass from the shelf and poured a shot for herself and one for M'gann. "Been there, done that. To exes staying on the far side of the galaxy."

They clinked glasses and threw back their shots. Then Violet went to refresh the Daxamite's rum.

She had seen this coming when the headaches had started, but she had hoped once J'onn had enabled her to cut off the communication, they wouldn't find her. And here she was barely a week later, located, attacked, rescued, uncertain.

But she knew what she had to do.

When she walked into the DEO command center, she saw Supergirl telling J'onn that he should stay at the DEO for protection.

"It's not here for J'onn. It's here for me. They want me to pay for my war crimes. I told you this before."

"We can protect you," said J'onn.

"I can't put you at risk."

Supergirl said staunchly, "It's what we do. Protect people."

"I don't need protection."

Back at the bar, she cut off the Ragullian who had had one too many cans of WD40, and then she looked up and saw him. Armek, the mate her parents had chosen for her.

In human form, he was bald, had a small beard and mustache, a hard look in his dark eyes. He called her "wife" in Martian and she flinched.
"I am no longer bonded to you."

"Well," he said, "The nest has been cold without you these three hundred years."

"It was always cold."

"You've been impersonating a green," he whispered, as if decreasing the volume of the sentence would make it less true, less despicable. "How do you live with yourself?"

"I thought you were dead, and I suppose it gave me some comfort."

He touched the scars across his left eye, nodding. "Your parting gift. No, you didn't kill me, but you came closer than anyone ever will. I've come to bring you back to Mars, wife. Your treachery is legend. The council wants to see you dead more than J'onn J'onzz. And I will satisfy the god of death by watering the desiccated plains of D'ahz with your blood."

"I will never go back." M'gann turned away, but he followed.

"Oh, but you should see it. With the eradication of the vermin, Mars is a paradise."

"So who are you going to kill next? What other species deserves to be obliterated because you decide you're better than them?"

"Whichever one we choose."

"I am not afraid of you."

"No, but I know that J'onn J'onzz and the Kryptonian are your friends. And you might want to be afraid for them. You have two hours to turn yourself over to me. After that, your friends and I will get...better acquainted."

Chapter End Notes

And with this chapter, we have broken 70,000 words and 10,000 hits in 17 days. Superwriter!
Chapter Summary

Mostly Martian Chronicles with a little back story on Earth Birthday. I think this does a little better job of contextualizing the topic than they managed in the episode, and that is important.

It had been so long, so very long, thirteen years, that Alex had legitimately forgotten how it started, the whole "Earth birthday" thing. Like so many of Kara's favorite things in this life, it had started as Alex's idea.

Their first year had been rough. On the one hand, Alex had always, always wanted a sister, and she had been so disappointed after her parents both went through medical testing and explained to her that it was more than unlikely. It was probably impossible. And she had always been a science nerd, so she had understood what they were saying--and hoped anyway.

And then Eliza and Jeremiah had started talking about adopting. In retrospect, she realized that Superman must have come and talked to them, and they were feeling her out, if she really meant it, if she was really ready to become not just a big sister, but a big sister to a super-powered alien whose entire civilization had been torn from her.

But she was Alex Danvers, so of course she was ready. Or she thought she was.

It took time. Again, in retrospect, the best things always did. Kara was a pain, but she really wanted to help. And she was super-sensitive, but the glasses Jeremiah had devised really made a difference. And then Eliza had made popcorn and Kara had dived under the living room table to get away from the strange noises, and without thinking, Alex followed, and hugged her, and explained the science behind "popping" a kernel of corn and the magic of covering the popcorn with butter and salt (because even back then Kara had been fairly food-oriented). And slowly they had become first friends and then sisters and then best friends.

So when Kara had been with the Danvers for about eleven months, going to school, making friends, doing homework, flying Alex at night when they weren't supposed to, suddenly she got different. It was early spring and the trees were all flowering, just as they had been when she had arrived. The weather was turning warm by day, but not by night, and Alex remembered having to explain the climate of a planet with a young sun. She watched Kara talk less, smile less, laugh barely at all, and she had gone to Eliza and asked what was wrong with Kara.

Some of these things they had talked about before: how Kara had witnessed the loss of her parents, friends, civilization, her whole world. Eliza explained what trauma was and how it could scar someone so deeply that they would choose not to feel anything if it meant they didn't feel the horrible feelings that the memories brought back.

So Alex had decided to fix it. She went and bought cake mix and frosting and food dye and she had asked Eliza to teach her how to make cupcakes. She had gone to the linen closet and got out the fanciest tablecloth they owned, all white lace and embroidered flowers in blue and yellow and red.

And when Kara had gotten home from the literary magazine meeting on the day that she had come
to Earth 12 months before, her adoptive parents and sister threw her a huge surprise party. And she had cried and cried and cried, and laughed for the first time in a month at the rainbow cupcakes blazoned with fancy icing Ks.

Alex was remembering all of this as she stood at the table looking at the concert tickets and feeling, as always, conflicted.

Maggie popped the tops off two beers and handed one to Alex. "So I think the last time I saw them, wow, it must have been college. What about you?"

"What? Oh! Ah, I don't remember."

"You know, for a superfan, you're not that excited."

"No! I am! I promise!"

"Really? Because I've seen your face when you defeat a bloodthirsty alien. I know what excited Alex Danvers looks like, and this isn't it."

"No, it's perfect. All of it. I just, um, with Kara. I think I hurt her feelings. I'm sorry."

Maggie tilted her head. "I don't want you to be sorry. I just want you to have fun. And right now something's eating at you."

Alex smiled. "No. No. I am just distracted. So," she brushed her hands off. "Now I will forget about it for the rest of the evening, I promise."

Maggie shook her head. "You know, the days of you pushing down your feelings are officially over. So go. Go talk to your sister. I'll meet you there."

Alex grinned. "You are the best."

//

Alex went to the DEO, changed into her uniform and went to look for her sister. It had been strange at first, the year before, to see mild-mannered, goofy Kara wearing the superhero costume, the crest of the house of El that still said "Superman" to most humans, the boots, the cape. She was different when she dressed this way, stronger, more confident, and more earnest (if that were even possible). Gradually, Alex had gotten used to it, and she thought that the bumbling, glasses-adjusting Kara was actually the secret identity, and the superhero, she was the real one, even though she knew that, for Kara, it was the other way around.

They met on their way to the command center, and Kara looked surprised to see her. "Aren't you supposed to be at your concert?"

"I wanted to check in."

"Well, I'm going to get an update, but I don't think we've found anything yet."

"No, I mean I wanted to check in with you. Your Earth birthday. You made all those plans!"

"I made them this morning. It's not a big deal."

"That's very last minute."

"I know, but it's okay. We can celebrate another night."
"So you're not mad at me? 'Cuz it really felt like you were mad at me, and then I felt guilty for trying to have fun and--"

"Alex, I was being immature. I want you to have fun with your friend."

"But that's it, Kara. She's just my friend. That's all. I'm not, you know. All those feelings. I'm letting it go. I'm past it. If you need me--"

"Alex, I know that you and Maggie aren't a thing right now, and maybe you'll never be. But I know how important she is to you. And I think she is trying to make things right between you, and I know that neither of you really know how to do that. So go with her to the concert. Have fun. Let her be your friend. Even if that's all you guys will ever be to each other, it's still important."

Alex followed Supergirl to the command center, where nothing new had popped up, but J'onn had brought M'gann in and she offered any help she could give.

J'onn said, "Agent Schott, let's brief M'gann on what we know so far."

Then Supergirl said in a deep voice, "Guys..."

They turned to see M'gann coming down the stairs saying, "J'onn, I thought about what you said--"

Then she saw her doppelganger standing behind Winn's chair.

Winn said, "Well, if she is here and she is, oh no."

Alex pulled her sidearm on the M'gann near J'onn, who said with a sneer, "You Greens never learn, do you?"

She and J'onn immediately started trading punches, while Supergirl ran to protect the real M'gann. The White Martian in her form threw J'onn into the banks of computers, exploding them, leaving showers of sparks in all directions. The lights flickered and then failed. Alex kept trying to train her weapon on the White Martian but didn't want to accidentally hit J'onn. Vasquez ran to the command center, trying to turn off the computers before they all fried completely.

Darkness reigned. Agents typed away in the gloom and finally a computerized voice advised, "Auxiliary power activated."

The overhead lights returned. They looked around.

"He's gone," said M'gann.

J'onn strode over to a computer and typed in a code. An inhuman voice announced, "Lockdown mode initiated."

Supergirl asked, "Why are you putting us in lockdown?"

J'onn answered, "Only way to track down that thing is to trap it in here."

"With us?" asked Winn.

"We don't even know where it went," said Alex.

"Or where did it go?" hissed Winn. "It could still be here."

"Could be any of us," said Supergirl.
Supergirl said, "This is everyone who was inside when the doors shut."

"If one of us is a White Martian," asked Alex, "then how do we tell who is really themselves?"

Winn said, "Oh, that's easy. We just have to ask personal questions. Like things that we only would know the answer to."

J'onn said, "No, they can read minds, too. Know all your preferences, everything that makes you who you are."

Vasquez looked angry. The rookie Chen, said, "Hey, what are you looking at?"

She said, "What?"

He pulled his sidearm and then everybody was pulling guns out and aiming them at each other.

"Holster your sidearms!"

"Yes," said Winn. "Do that, please."

Vasquez said over her weapon. "I wasn't looking at you, Chen."

"Yes, she was. She's the White Martian."

And the woman who was bullet-proof leaped to stand in front of the woman who she was 99% sure was really her not bullet-proof sister. "You really need to put that away," said Supergirl.

"But it could be her," Chen said. "It could be any of you."

Vasquez said, "Stop pointing your weapon."

"Then back off!" said Chen.

J'onn shouted, "Come on! We are not going to lose it here!"

Supergirl pleaded, "J'onn, you can read minds. Can you scan us to see who is who?"

"No, I can't. Here's some kind of psychic interference."

Chen said, "Oh, that's convenient."

M'gann sighed. "He's after me. I should turn myself in. Then maybe he'll let you go."

Chen nodded. "Great idea. Mission accomplished."

But J'onn barked, "Absolutely not."

Supergirl said, "That is not how we do things."

M'gann said, "It's all my fault!"

J'onn argued, "I'm the one who sealed us in here."

"No, you don't understand. Armek was my...mate."
Alex said, "Mate? Your husband?"

M'gann shook her head. "It's not the same. For White Martians, it was an arrangement, not a choice. But yes. We were bonded. And he is the worst of my kind."

Supergirl said, "Doesn't matter. We're going to find him and we're going to beat him."

"First thing's first. I'm going to collect everybody's sidearms."

Chen shouted, pointing his gun at Alex, "Are you crazy?"

Vasquez pointed her gun at him and yelled, "Will somebody take his gun?"

And then everybody was yelling and pointing and Supergirl could not be on every side of the circular table at once to protect them all.

J'onn yelled. "All right. There is one way to find out who is and who isn't the White Martian."

In the lab, J'onn lit a Bunsen burner, turned the gas up high so that the flame flared tall. He said, "There was a time, when we were hiding on Mars, trying to build a resistance to the White Martians. We worked out of a network of caves, but they would infiltrate us, send in spies to wreak havoc. Anybody who came through had to put their hand to the fire."

Supergirl asked, "What did the fire do?"

M'gann slipped off her jacket, put her hand up to the fire. They watched as the illusion of human skin gave way to the vision of white hide on her palm in the heat of the fire.

Winn laughed nervously. "Okay, that's not creepy at all."

Chen said, "Do Vasquez first. She was so quick to deny that she was a Martian."

Vaquez snorted. "Because I'm not. You moron." She ambled up to the fire and opened her palm in front of it, held it there while nothing happened, then ambled away, saying, "Now him."

But he was as human as the rest of them. And J'onn, when M'gann encouraged him, showed the heat reveal the green hide show itself under his "human" skin.

Supergirl said, "Winn, you're up."

Winn said, "Oh, seriously? It's me."

"Everyone has to do it."

"Okay, geez." He picked up the flame and his hand immediately became a three-clawed White Martian hand. He said, "You got me," and swung the flame around in a circle. They all jumped back, Vasquez's sleeve catching fire, but then Supergirl charged and beat him as hard as she could and J'onn grabbed him by the arm, but Winn brought the flame closer to J'onn's face, saying, "I am so glad you didn't turn yourself in, my love. I would have missed all the fun."

Supergirl sent her freeze breath to put out the flame in Winn's hand and on Vasquez's sleeve.

Jonn and Winn traded punches, and then Winn broke free and ran out of the room. Alex shot at him, but he was too fast for her bullet. Supergirl, faster, flew up over balcony as Winn jumped over
it. As he landed sixty feet below, her laser eyes followed him and he ran away, leaving a smoking line in the concrete floor behind him.

//

They regrouped in the smoking command center. Vasquez and Chen didn't say much, but tended to each other's burns. Then they broke out the AR-15s and Vasquez offered one to Supergirl, but she just said, "No thanks, I'm armed."

The smell of smoke and sheer adrenaline did more than anything had all day to bring Alex out of her insecurities.

Supergirl said, "I can't believe it was Winn and I didn't know!"

Alex said, "None of us did. You couldn't have." She had the security system to a self-diagnostic. "The motion sensors are offline, but the containment cells are still locked. As Winn, he has access to the whole system."

Red lights flashed throughout the room. The computer's disembodied voice announced, "Reactor temperature nearing critical."

"What reactor?" asked Supergirl.

Vasquez, hurrying to her computer station, snapped, "The one that powers the building!"

"What does that mean?" Supergirl asked, trying to understand the readout from over Vasquez's shoulder.

"It means he sabotaged it," Vasquez growled. "This whole building is going to explode. And it's going to take ten city blocks with it."

Supergirl paced. "Why would he want to blow the building up? He's inside it too. He'll die."

M'gann shook her head. "It doesn't matter to Armek. He'd probably give his life to complete his mission."

Alex asked, "Can we shut it down manually?"

J'onn shook his head. "The White Martian who took Winn's body also took his intelligence. He re-encoded the entire system. We're locked out of everything."

Alex crossed her arms, but all she felt was the challenge, not the fear. She had trained for this. She said, "So to fix it, we need the real Winn."

"But how do we know that Winn's even in the building?" asked Supergirl. "Or still alive?"

M'gann answered, "In order to replicate Winn so exactly, he'd have to be close by, to keep the telepathic link."

"He's in the DEO," said J'onn.

"Supergirl," said M'gann. "Can you use your x-ray vision to find him?"

"No," said Supergirl, giving J'onn a meaningful look. "Someone lined the walls with lead."

J'onn ignored the look. "We'll need to search the building."
"How long till it explodes?"

Vaquez read her screen. "According to our calculations, about fifteen minutes?"

"Vasquez, Demos, you take the north wing. Supergirl, Alex, you take the basement. Let's go."
Chapter Summary

The end of the Martian Chronicles, and the conversation Alex and Kara should have had. Then Kara gives Mon-El the shovel talk on behalf of Ms. Tessmacher. You're welcome.

Supergirl was grateful that J'onn had paired her with her sister. On some deep level she couldn't even admit to herself, she knew that if they couldn't stop the building from blowing up almost all her friends and ten city blocks, at least she had a chance to grab Alex and fly away with her. But she was a superhero, so of course she could never articulate any of that even to her subconscious. But there was tiny, quiet part of her that knew that J'onn knew and would forgive her, and Eliza would expect it of her.

The red warning lights were the only lights that lit the dark tunnels under the DEO. Alex held a flashlight in her left hand over her Glock as they cautiously made their way, clearing one section after another. They reached a corner and Alex hissed to get Supergirl's attention, then turned off the light and made some arcane gestures with her left hand.

Supergirl stared. "What?"

"Look around the corner," Alex whispered.

"Oh!" Supergirl looked. "It's all clear," she whispered back.

Alex turned the light back on and they proceeded. She said quietly, "We're not so good at communicating these days, are we?"

Supergirl nodded. "I was mad before. About Earth Birthday."

"I knew it. I owe you an apology. I shouldn't have bailed on you."

"It's not just that it hurt my feelings. It's that you're normally my rock. And this time of year, I just remember everything. And that used to be the worst part, the most painful part. Remembering. But lately...it's like the opposite. I feel like I am starting to forget things, people. Not my parents, but my friends, my teachers. I can't always remember what they looked like. What their voices sound like. And it scares me. And I needed to talk to you about it."

"I know," said Alex. "It wasn't fair. Look, I don't want to feel bad for wanting to spend time with my friends, but--"

"You shouldn't. But ever since I've been on Earth, I don't know what life is like without you there all the time. And suddenly, you're spending so much time with Vasquez and then Maggie's been trying to fix her relationship with you, and I felt us changing. And it was scary. When my parents put me on that pod on Krypton, I don't think I realized what was actually happening, that I would never see them again. I didn't know that I was saying goodbye to them forever. I've been abandoned before and I didn't want to be abandoned again."

Alex shook her head. "I will never abandon you."
Her sister's big dark eyes held her like strong arms and Supergirl pulled herself together.

Then there was a noise down the hall.

"What was that?"

They hurried down the hall. Then Supergirl had J'onn's voice in her earpiece. "Supergirl, we were wrong! There are two White Martians in the building!"

"What?" She stopped short.

"Alex! The other White Martian has shape-shifted into Alex!"

She spun around. "Alex?"

"Alex" shook her head derisively. "You guys are so dumb!" She started to transform and backhanded Supergirl to the floor.

The transformation stopped. Maybe the thing sensed that it would have an emotional advantage if it still looked like her sister. Supergirl pushed herself to her feet.

"What's wrong?" asked the Martian. "You too afraid to put up a fight?"

"Never!" Supergirl launched herself at her sister's likeness and sent her crashing to the floor.

The disembodied computer voice announced, "Core breach in five minutes."

"Nice shot, sis," said the Martian.

"You're not my sister."

Supergirl's eyes lit up, but the Martian waved her hands around the room. "Heat vision might not be such a good idea in a room with an unstable nuclear reactor."

Her eyes went dark. "Then I guess we're going to have to do this the old-fashioned way."

From opposite sides of the room, the two ran and launched themselves at each other, crashed into each other and rebounded away.

The Martian said, "To be honest, I'm glad they found your sister. It is so exhausting to have to pretend to care about your silly little feelings."

They traded punches. "If you hurt her..." began Supergirl.

"You'll what?" she responded, with a punch that sent Supergirl flying across the room. "Whine at me?" Finally, the Martian released the form of Alex and grew up into the white-skinned lizardman that it truly was. They crashed into each other, punching and throwing each other across the room. Supergirl flew through the air, tumbling over and over and crashing into the wall, but she jumped up and strode over to Martian and punched it to the floor.

She raced over to Winn as he said, "That...should...do it."

The computer said, "Core stabilized."

Supergirl was out of breath and her voice shaky. "Oh, that was a close one."
Winn joked weakly, "Close? We have twelve seconds to spare."

J'onn's Green form gave way to his human form, and he pushed himself up to standing with a groan.

"You okay?" asked Supergirl.

"Yeah, thank you."

Suddenly, behind him, the White Martian rose and extended its powerful arms, but a shot of blue light hit its chest with the smell of burnt flesh and it fell and stopped breathing.

They turned to see Alex, the real Alex, standing there with a relieved smile. She said, "Have I mentioned how much I love my new gun?"

As the red lights turned back to white, J'onn called off the lockdown and sent a message to the sanitation and IT crews to dispose of the White Martian bodies and come replace all the computers that had been destroyed in the fight. He groaned some more, rubbing his ribs.

Alex said, "J'onn, are you okay?"

"Physically, yes. But I just realized that if the White Martians know where to find us now, I am going to have to get a few new line items in our budget, and the Senate is going to--what is that phrase you always use, Supergirl? Freak?"

"That's the one!" Her laughter was still shaky.

Winn said, "I can't believe it's still night time. It feels like it's been a whole week."

Alex said, "A week. One week. Oh, shit, I have to call Maggie." She hurried out.

Winn went back to his station. Supergirl gave him a fond look. He had been her best friend aside from Alex and Cat for a long time, and he always had her back. She went over to him and said, "Hey. Nice job with the decoding."

"Well, thank ya. You did a great job with the...de-Martianing."

They both laughed a little.

She said, "Winn, I know that you have been standing in other people's shadows for a long time: first your dad's and then mine, and lately James's. But I want you to know that I see you. I see the difference you make. Everybody always says that I am this little ray of sunshine, and I don't know. I had nightmares in the Phantom Zone sometimes, or maybe it was just that I would wake up for a few minutes every year? I don't know. But space is very dark, and I just fight that darkness every day I am on Earth, because sometimes it terrifies me, so I guess I try to be lighter for everyone else because I think I'm not the only one who fears the dark. But if I am a ray of sunshine, then you are my Yellow Sun Grenade, the one who gives me that little extra edge when the world is falling apart. And I know we have had problems lately, but I want you to know that this? What you did today? You, you personally saved thousands of lives, including mine and Alex's, and our friends' and if you don't understand that you are a hero, then you really didn't read your job description when you joined the DEO. And you haven't ever looked in the mirror. Because when I look at you, that's what I see."

Winn opened his mouth and shut it again. Tears streamed down his face. He looked away, sat and started typing away at his computer.
"Also," she said, swatting him lightly on the head. "Sometimes you are just such a guy."

She walked away, but she heard him say, "Yeah, gotta work on that. Thanks, Kara."

Supergirl flew home and stripped off her supersuit, which stank from her sweating from fear instead of only exertion or pain. She dropped it in a pile on the floor of her bedroom and replaced with sweatpants and the Power to the Girls shirt that Alex and given her for her regular birthday last year. She went to the couch and pulled up an old movie on Netflix and tried to let it distract her from the fact that she was sitting on her couch alone, drinking hot cocoa without anyone to share it with.

There was a knock on her door. She squinted and x-rayed her door, seeing her sister standing on the other side with a cupcake with a lit candle. She smiled and went to open the door. The cupcake in Alex's hands was yellow and green, with a red K on top and the candle was red. The flame danced.

"Happy Earth Birthday?" Alex said. "Look, there's a K! Well?"

Kara made grabby motions with her hands, grinning.

Alex said, "Go ahead. Make a wish and blow it out. Gently!"

Kara smiled, remembering the first time, when in her excitement she had nearly blown that first cupcake into another state. She gently blew the candle out, and Alex handed it to her.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

They came in and Kara went to find a knife to divide the cupcake. "So," she said. "Was Maggie mad you missed the concert?"

"Well, luckily I have a friend who understands when deadly aliens besiege my place of work. That takes precedence." She came and sat at the table.

"Yeah, I'm glad everyone is okay. Plus, that thing where you were knocked out and strung up with alien goop?"

"Can I tell you how tired I am of the kinds of goop and glue and ichor those aliens spew? Although, the ichor wasn't always bad..."

Kara kept talking. "And, boy, that last White Martian? Whew. First of all, boy, did it do a good impression of you. Second, you got there just in time." She brought the cupcake and knife and two plates to the table.

"Um, speaking of that White Martian...When it was me, did you have a conversation? Because I have these memories, they're like, um, well it's almost like a dream that, that we talked, but I'm not really sure if that was real..."

Kara cut the cupcake in half. "You remember?"

"Yeah, so I'm not crazy."

"No. I guess, if the bond with the White Martian is strong enough, the bond...goes both ways." She handed her a fork and they both took bite-sized pieces out of the cupcake.
"Yeah. I guess so. Kara, I am not ever going anywhere. Hey, I promise. Just because I'm with Vasquez, and spending time with people like Maggie, doesn't mean I am not with you. Okay? Always."

Kara shook her head. "I guess I made all those plans because I wanted the day to be extra special: thirteen years on Krypton, thirteen years on Earth. Tomorrow I will have been on Earth longer than I lived on Krypton. And it scares me. And I...felt you slipping away."

Alex met her eyes and shook her head. "I'm not. Ever. But...is that the only reason you made such big plans?"

"What do you mean?"

"Sometimes in our life when one part is really confusing, we will pour way more attention than necessary into another. And you know, you looked a bit overwhelmed when you talked about Mon-El. So maybe the reason that you made such big plans with me was so that you wouldn't have to deal with how you actually feel about him."

"I told him how I feel. He didn't take it well, as if my feelings about him would change if he just waited around. But Alex, he has no interest in making a difference in the world. All he really wants to do is get in my pants. He is selfish and shallow and he doesn't really care about anybody but himself. And he's sorta cute, like physically. But that isn't how I, I don't know. That's not what attracts me to someone. I want someone who is good and kind and brilliant and beautiful, like Lena, someone who wants to make the world a better place by using her strengths and her genius and her good heart. Oh Rao, Alex, Lena has such a good heart. And when I look at her and then I look at him, I can't figure out how anybody thinks, how he could think, or you, that I could ever settle for an intergalactic fratboy, when I could-- Wait, Alex?"

Alex chewed and tried to swallow, but the cupcake was dryer than she had anticipated. She choked out, "Lena? Luthor?"

"Well, yeah. Just how many Lenas do I know? But the problem is, I think she likes me in one way when I'm Supergirl and maybe another way when I'm just me, and Maggie says she's a lesbian, and I figure she'd know, right? But how do I handle that when I'm two people? Because when I'm near her, it's, I don't know how to, and then she, with the eyes, and I'm a writer, sure, but I can't quite figure out exactly what shade of green her eyes are, and Alex? Are you okay? You look funny."

Alex swallowed a few times, then grabbed Kara's hot chocolate and took a few sips to make the cupcake go down better.

"You...are thinking about...You're attracted to Lena Luthor? Like...romantically?"

"And it is so freaking confusing!"

"And you told Maggie about this?"

"Well, I don't know Agent Vasquez very well, although I think she's kind of awesome, but like, she is so impressive and I don't really know how to talk to her? But Maggie is just really easy to talk to. And I'm sorry, Alex, I know she hurt you, but I think she's just scared and she doesn't have the kind of confidence that Vasquez has, and I wanted to hate her for your sake, but she's just really nice and she's been helping me think through these things, since you weren't...exactly...around to talk to. And I don't blame you--"

"Kara--"
"No, listen. Even that night when you guys were dancing and Susan was a little all over you, and yes, gross, but also, finally! Somebody is appreciating you the way you deserve to be appreciated and--"

"Kara!"

"Um, yes?"

"You know, I happen to have taken a huge romantic risk recently, and I gotta say, it pays off. I don't think you should pursue Lena as Supergirl. I think that could backfire in a big way. And I know you trust her, and I have learned that your big heart is more often right than wrong. And she already knows I'm your sister, so if I have to give her the shovel talk, it is going to come off as much more convincing if I am protecting my little 'human' sister than if I am protecting a bullet-proof, rocket-proof alien."

"You're not going to yell at me because she is a Luthor?"

Alex sighed. "Attraction is weird. When I first met Vasquez? I had complicated feelings that I didn't understand. And I buried them, because I didn't know what else to do. But she is... amazing. And she has given me so much more confidence in myself, and I know that I will probably never find anybody who--"

"You will!"

"Maybe. But I think Vasquez trusts Lena. I think she respects her. And I just feel like, well, try it. Put yourself out there. Test the waters. I will be there to catch you if you fall. And so will Vasquez and J'onn and Winn. And probably, from what you're saying, so will Maggie."

"You're sure?"

"Yup. And if she hurts you and I have to kill her? I have this great new space gun!"

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At work the next day, Kara rode the elevator while reading her draft about the problematic President's cabinet picks, and when she reached her floor, she was too distracted to notice Eve Tessmacher and "Mike" arm in arm heading off to lunch together.

Mike said, "Kara!"

She turned, surprised. "Mike! And Eve! Are you two headed somewhere?"

With a grin, Eve said, "Lunch."

"Together? That's great! That's really great!" Kara knew that her voice conveyed the deep relief she felt. Eve didn't notice it but Mon-El really did.

"That is so great, Eve! But hey, Mike here, he is still a little young, you know? So maintain your boundaries. And Mike, if you ever hurt Eve? I will find out about it. And you know, I know Supergirl, and she will come after you."

Eve's eyes grew wide. "No, she wouldn't!"

Kara's voice grew deeper and she knew Mon-El heard Supergirl when she said this. "Oh, yes, Eve. Supergirl is all about consent and respect and boundaries and women's bodily autonomy. And
yeah, she deals with bank robberies and rogue aliens? But her biggest beef is with men who don't respect women. And I know if she has to fight that battle one problematic man at a time? Oh, she will so be there for that fight. Right, Mike? Glad we had this chat."

Mon-El looked paler as he escorted Ms. Tessmacher to the elevator. Kara went off to her tiny, windowless office with a grin that could have melted iron.
The idea had come to Vasquez that night at Dollywood, when she'd watched the disappointment on Alex's face when she saw Maggie leaving the bar with Major Lane. That she'd turned back to Vasquez and smiled and that her pool game was unaffected were things Vasquez didn't set much store by. Because what Vasquez herself had felt most at the sight was surprise. In a single, very quick game of pool, Maggie had managed to get Alex back as a friend, and instead of capitalizing on that, instead of sticking around and joining in the banter around the pool table, further enmeshing herself with Alex's circle of friends as Vasquez herself would have done, Maggie had chosen to go off and bang Major Lane. And that made no sense.

It wasn't that Lane wasn't hot. She was. And it wasn't like Vasquez hadn't ever had displacement sex. She had. But who would choose one night with Lucy Lane over the long haul with Alex Danvers? Vasquez had thought the detective was smart, savvy, strategic, even. But maybe not.

And Alex was so used to people not wanting her that it wasn't a surprise to her. And it should have been. Alex needed to realize just what a catch she was, and by God, Vasquez was going to show her if it killed them both.

So when J'onn gave them the night off and the calendar showed it to be the last Saturday of the month, Vasquez had caught Alex in the locker room and said, "You want to do something fun tonight? I have an idea."

"Sure. What?"

"It's a surprise. Dress for indoor sports. I'll pick you up at six."

//

When Alex got into Vasquez's Beetle, she was wearing skinny jeans and a Bare Naked Ladies t-shirt under her leather jacket. Vasquez tried hard not to laugh. She pulled into traffic, handing Alex a pair of rainbow-striped socks.

"Here. Change your socks."

"What? Are you telling me my feet smell? Because I--"

"No, Alex. I'm sure your toes are floral and terrific. But where we're going, they also need to be fabulous and this is the best I could do without much time. They're brand new and they're yours. Gotta start getting you ready for June, after all."

"What's in June?" Alex asked as she struggled with her sneakers.

"Pride." Vasquez grinned. "Our baby dyke's first Pride!"

Alex frowned. "I'm not a baby! I'm almost thirty!"
"Aw. Fine, then. What's the significance of the names Tara, Lexa and Carol?"

"I have no idea."

"Who are two pop culture lesbians who died and one who didn't. See? Baby dyke. Don't fret, Alex. I call you this with great affection."

Alex finished tying her sneakers and admired the rainbows on her ankles. "So where are we going?"

"We are going to play dodgeball."

"What? No! I hated dodgeball in school. The boys always--"

"Alex! Hon, no worries. Where we're going? No boys. Zero testosterone-driven penis-people. It's lesbian dodgeball. And we should go with the FBI cover. Yeah, we are colleagues at the FBI."

Alex got quiet.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

But the silence was deafening. At a traffic light, Vasquez looked over and saw a tear slide down Alex's face. She looked out the side window and wiped it away.

Vasquez got through the intersection and pulled into a parking lot and cut the engine.

"What are you doing?" Alex asked. "Aren't we going to be late?"

Vasquez snorted. "Hon, it's lesbian dodgeball. It's not gonna start on time. Now. Talk to me. Something just happened but I can't figure out what. What's wrong?"

"It's nothing."

"It's something and we are going to sit here until you tell me what it is."

"Fine. Then, well, why are going to introduce me as your colleague?"

"Um, because you are? How would you want me to?"

In a very small voice, Alex said, "As your girlfriend?"

Something squeezed Vasquez's heart. Alex looked away again. Vasquez put her hand on Alex's chin and pulled her head to look directly into her eyes. "Agent Alexandra Glitter-Baby Danvers. If we did not work for a super-secret government organization that probably has anti-fraternization rules that we are conveniently ignoring, I would hire one of those airplanes and have it write across the sky of National City 'Vasquez Hearts Alex Danvers' in letters at least a mile high. But that is not the reason I am not going in there and calling you my girlfriend. What I want to do tonight, aside from throwing things at people, which is very cathartic really, is to watch the dodgeball girls hit on you, and they won't hit on you if they think you're taken."

"Taken?"

The way she said it made Vasquez bite her lip, but she continued. "I want you to see how desirable you are."
"Desirable?"

"Maggie and I aren't your only options, Alex. There are a lot of really beautiful, smart and silly women out there who are going to trip over themselves to flirt with you. So just ignore me and enjoy the experience. Now, are we good?"

Alex closed her hand on Vasquez's hand still holding her chin. Vasquez forced herself not to shiver at the touch.

"We're good."

"Okay, then." Vasquez started up the car.

//

It went pretty much the way Vasquez had imagined it would, but then she had always been good at coming up with tactical scenarios. So nice for a change to be planning for love, not war.

When they first walked into the lobby of the dodgeball court and took off their jackets. Peterson, the old-school butch, took one look at Alex's shirt and grinned, "Yes, please. I'll take some of those. Peterson, a pleasure to meet you."

Alex had shaken her hand with a perplexed look on her face, and then blushed hard when she realized what had just happened.

"And hey, it's Supergay! Thanks for bringing fresh meat!"

Alex made a face when she saw Vasquez's t-shirt: black with a huge Super-style pentagon, filled top to bottom with rainbow stripes.

Vasquez said, "Peterson, manners. I bring you my beautiful, brilliant colleague and you call her fresh meat? So crude."

Women trickled in a few at a time, until Alex had met Lisa, Sara, Helena, Mona, Sam, two Jens and three Lindseys. She paid the five dollars and signed the waiver. Peterson said, "Don't worry, Alex. I think Dorcas is bringing a bunch of friends who are visiting for the weekend, so you won't be the only newbie here. And afterwards, we usually go and get beer and nachos, so you can get to know the gang better."

The bunch of friends turned out to be seven girls from Opal City University, half rugby players and half softball players, and they were all wearing the same pale blue Superman shirts, with the yellow background for the crest of the house of El.

Peterson said, "Hey, Vasquez. Looks like you got your own team here. Guess you are the captain of Superteam." She laughed.

Vasquez said, "Two crack FBI agents and a bunch of rugby dykes? Oh, you are so going down, Peterson."

Out of the corner of her mouth, Alex asked, "Do butches always call each other by their last names like cops?"

"Yes and no. Even you, as a femme, if your first name was Millicent? You'd go by your last name too."
They went over the rules and counted out for four teams, conveniently splitting up the college athletes so that all the teams were a mix of young and old, more and less agile and athletic. Alex was on a different team than Vasquez, so they got the chance several time to throw the ball at each other and knock the other out of play.

Whenever Alex's team wasn't playing, she sat with them along the side wall, shooting the shit and watching the game and getting to know the other women. Four separate times Vasquez saw someone writing on a piece of paper and giving it to a blushing elder Danvers. That's my girl, thought Vasquez, chuckling. Except of course, Alex wasn't her girl, not really. Maggie Sawyer hadn't been entirely wrong about not wanting to date a chick fresh off the boat. Those relationships never lasted. But Vasquez was weak. She knew it. And the chance to spend more time with Alex Danvers, the chance to kiss her, and who knew? Maybe one of these days when Alex was feeling more self-confident, Vasquez could show her a thing or two about why loving a woman was so often wonderful, Vasquez could love her like she had always deserved to be loved.

But in the meantime, Vasquez would wait and would find other ways to show her how important and beautiful and desirable she was, even if it meant having to watch younger and prettier women than she was flirt with her boss, friend, girlfriend, gay mentee, whatever she was.

At one point, when neither of their teams was playing, Vasquez threw herself down on the floor next to Alex. "How's it going, Danvers?"

Alex's eyes were wide. "Five different women have written their numbers down and told me to call them."

"Five? Pretty good work for only an hour and a half. You work fast."

"Three more gave me their business cards."

Vasquez's stomach sank. "You gonna call them?"

"What? Of course not! I wouldn't know what to say, for starters. And then there's that other thing."

"You mean what we talked about in the car?"

"That, and the whole FBI job thing. You know I haven't dated since I started working...there."

"Wait. Seriously? Four years?"

"Almost five if you count the year I spent in training."

"You haven't dated in five years."

"Or more..." Alex waved the idea away with her long-fingered hands. "So they were telling me about going out for beer afterwards, that some people go and other people stay and play for a while longer, and it's usually the same people."

"Yep."

"So do you stay or do you go drink?"

"Alex, we can do whatever you want to do. But, kiddo, you know by now exactly how narrow my social circle is. I take every opportunity to be surrounded by my people. Well, my Fabulous Socks People. I spend every day with my Tactical Gear People. So yes, I go drink and hang out and catch up."
Alex looked at Vasquez’s feet. Her black socks were covered with sushi, chopsticks, and sake cups. "Oh my God. Kara would love those!"

"I'm pretty sure she would prefer socks covered in potstickers, and I have never seen that."

The final game ended and Peterson came ambling over with a tall woman with long, flowing copper-colored hair.

“Trish, this is Alex Danvers. She’s FBI like Vasquez here, and she’s a bio-engineer like you. Vasquez, you going for beer? Give me a lift there? Your friend can go with Trish.”

Alex looked surprised, nervous, but Vasquez said, “It’s barely half a mile.”

Peterson got into the Beetle and Vasquez started the engine and then sat there. “Seatbelt.”

“Fine. So… this is the woman you trained? The one who is now your supervisor?”

“Not exactly. I mean, yes, but--”

“And you are madly in love with her. And she hasn’t got a clue.”

Vasquez slipped the car into traffic, with both hands gripping the steering wheel.

“Did you know she was a lesbian when you trained her?”

Vasquez snorted. “She only just figured it out herself.”

“Look, that van is pulling out. You can park there. Vasquez, what have I told you about the baby dykes?”

Vasquez didn’t answer, just pulled the VW into a much bigger space than she needed.

“You are going to get your heart broke, chica. You know that, right?”

“Of course, I know.” They got out of the car and ambled toward the restaurant. “But that’s the price.”

//

Vasquez heard her brittle heart cracking just a little over her Dos Equis as she watched Alex talking animatedly with the gorgeous redhead engineer, but she caught up with the women she knew and flirted lightly with the ones she didn’t know, and when everyone was paying their bills and leaving the restaurant, Alex looked relaxed and thoughtful. They got into the car and Alex pulled out the scraps of paper and business cards she had collected and stared at them with a dazed expression.


“I don’t think I have ever succeeded at a purely social occasion in my life.”

“Eight numbers in one night? I’d say that was successful. They liiiiiiked you.”

“Very funny. And it’s twelve.”

“Like I said. The guys you dated were nitwits, not to see you as clearly as we do.”

“Pfft. Those women didn’t see me at all. Peterson called me fresh meat. That’s all those girls saw.”
“Alex—“

“No, it’s true. The only person other than Kara and J’onn to really see me is you. And the moment, the moment you told me that my mom already knew I was gay, I thought, how does Vasquez always know these things? And then I thought, it’s because you look. Your job is looking and really seeing and thinking about the possibilities, but you don’t ever stop looking even when the job is done at the end of the day. And you care. You care more than anybody I know except maybe my sister. Your, well, your generosity to me these last few weeks, your strength when she was off with Barry. The way you kiss me and I know for the first time in my life what it’s like for someone to want to be with me, Alex, not the person they think I am or want me to be, but me.”

Vasquez was stunned into silence, her heart beating very fast.

Alex waved the hand full of papers around. “These? These are nothing. I didn’t get the one number I really wanted. Yours.”

Vasquez pulled her cardcase from her jacket pocket with her right hand while she steered with her left. She pulled out a card and handed it to Alex. “Susan Vasquez, Secret Service. Call me.”

Alex took it as if were something precious. Then she wound down the passenger window and let all the other pieces of paper flutter out the window on the night breeze.
Winn knew the sound of that bell. He hadn’t heard it in months, and given that the only two people who had even the slightest reason to use the private elevator at CatCo were within his lines of sight, James in his office and Kara getting yelled at by Snapper, that only left one possibility.

Cat Grant was back.

The elevator door opened. Cat grant strode out with a latte in one hand a purse in the other, and even Winn could tell that the purse was worth at least one year of his salary at the DEO. Her tight black pants ended in black stilettos, and her white scoop-necked shirt was topped by a black leather jacket and a heavy gold necklace.

“Well, if it isn’t the hobbit. Witt, isn’t it? I thought you were working with Kira’s sister at the FBI.”

“Winn, yes, Ms. Grant. I am.”

“Then why are you here?”

“I’m having lunch with James today.”

Cat looked through the transparent doors of the office, to where James Olsen was standing with his back to them, staring up at the computer screens, all of which were playing footage that CatCo reporters had managed to get of the Guardian.

“Well, Witt. It is safe to say that your lunch has just been cancelled, so you can go back to work. Chop chop!” She waved him away with well-manicured hands, and strode into her office.

Winn didn’t move. He watched James turn around in surprise at the interruption, and then listen as Cat talked. She picked up her remote and punctuated the conversation by turning off first one video of Guardian and then the next and then the next, until the last video, by far the least flattering as it showed the helmeted vigilante falling on his backside. Winn knew that J’onn had given James an ultimatum similar to the one he had been given. It was the purpose of their lunch together, to discuss it. Personally, Winn didn’t understand what there was to discuss. The DEO was all about being a hero, making a difference. Okay, the pay wasn’t what James was probably getting, filling in for Cat, but still.

James walked out of the office, looking dazed. He walked directly past Winn without even seeing him. Winn stared and then hurried to catch up with him and entered the elevator directly behind him. James turned around to hit the first floor button and said, “Oh, Winn. I was just coming to see you.”

“We agreed I’d come to you, Mr. CEO Man, remember?”

James nodded, still looking surprised. “Not anymore. I need to go sign some paperwork.”
Snapper spat out Kara's newest assignment, the unprecedented recent uptick in the cold virus in National City.

Kara scribbled in her reporter's notebook. "Yes, boss. Right, boss. I'm on it!"

And then a voice split the controlled chaos that was the CatCo newsroom.

"MISS TESMACHER!"

Snapper and Kara stared at each other, then Kara ran to Cat's office.

Cat was yelling. "--might have been good enough when Mr. Olsen was acting CEO, but it is not good enough for me."

The younger woman ran from the room in hysterical tears.

"Oh, hello, Kira. Why aren't you out following the biggest story in town?"

"I am. Cat Grant is back in town visiting CatCo. Can I get a quote from you on that?"

"Well, somebody has learned something while I was gone. I suppose one out of two isn't terrible. And for your information, I am back for the foreseeable future."

"But James--"

"Apparently, while he was AWOL from CatCo all those times, he was developing a new vocation."

Kara's face fell. "You knew about Guardian?"

"Eventually. I wasn't looking into our newest vigilante, Kira. I was looking into complaints about James Olsen. That made it simpler, moving toward a question I didn't I know I had with the answer already in hand. I looked at our surveillance videos and caught the one time he was injured 'in costume' and came here to patch himself up before changing."

Kara stared at her. It had been that easy?

Cat continued, "I've been reading your work with great interest, Kira. It seems Snapper's been able to teach you how to write a coherent sentence, at least. But you haven't been writing as much about Lena lately."

"Oh, yeah. Snapper gave me a lecture on bias, but he was the one who always sent me to get quotes from her so..."

"Well, I for one am relieved to hear that. I was beginning to think that you two had experienced a
devastating breakup."

"A breakup? No, no, no. We aren't, she isn't, I mean, how could you even think?"

"Yes, you're right. A love like you two share is bound to be eternal. What was I thinking?"

Kara frowned, completely confused. She shook her head to clear it. "But wait. You fired James?"

"Oh no. He offered me his resignation and I graciously accepted."

"I don't understand."

"Kira, sometimes, we invest a piece of our soul into an object, and when that thing is destroyed, we can be left unmoored."

"Like a horcrux?"

"A little like that, just without all the evil. When James's camera was destroyed, he lost a very central part of himself and it has taken until today for him to get it back."

"So you gave him this job so he could find himself again?"

"Well, that, and learning to meditate with the Dalai Lama was pretty much a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

"You met the Dalai Lama? Is he nice? 'Cuz I've heard he's really nice!"

"A ray of sunshine, Kira, much like you. Now, off with you. You have to write and I have to clean up messes and put out fires."

"And yell at people?" asked Kara, adjusting her glasses.

"Oh, definitely that. It's what I've missed most."
J'onn read the report with ill-concealed surprise. "A commendation, Vasquez? Really?

"Yes, sir. As I predicted, we were always going to have to extract Agent Ryder from Lord Tech anyway. He is notoriously paranoid, he has routine drug checks, pat-downs of every employee coming and going from R&D, constant video surveillance, and random spot checks. The way this played out was pretty much ideal, compared to some of the scenarios I had posited."

"So the alien they arrested for sabotage?"

"Was in fact trying to create red kryptonite rather than pink--there's some chemical component to it that I didn't follow. But Agent Ryder was able to sneak copies of the specs she had stolen into the alien's paperwork, so her tampering, which had been detected, will be on him instead."

"And her supervisor?"

"Our lawyers will be prosecuting him for sexual harassment. The moment he hit on her in a surveillance blindspot, she realize that it was an opportunity, an out." Vasquez made a face. "Although if somebody tried to stick his tongue down my throat without consent? He would have discovered a new meaning for the word 'opportunity.'"

"And her intel?"

"The epidemiological project is a real thing. Apparently, the Congo has 23,000 deaths from malaria per year, which is at least four times more than most malarial countries. Lord wants to use the drones to do a mass vaccination. His people have been in talks with the government there for months."

"And the pink kryptonite?"

"That project is at a standstill. We're not sure why. Three more people were fired over the weekend, and Lord fires people at the drop of a hat, but they're all sticking to their NDAs, so we haven't gotten anything out of them."

"Back to the drones, then."

"That's the good news. The specs that Ryder sneak ed into the alien's files? She basically memorized them. It's not perfect, because she doesn't have an eidetic memory, but it's something even Winn said he couldn't have done. He's been able to extrapolate a little from what she gave us, figure out what it all means. I'd like permission to see what Ms. Luthor would make of it..."
J’onn sighed. "Let’s hold off on that. I still have mixed feelings about Lena. When it comes to Supergirl's safety, I know she is firmly in our camp, but when it comes to a weaponizable technology, I’d rather keep that out of a Luthor's hands."

"Yes, sir."

"You disagree."

"I understand your argument. Your logic is flawless. My gut says she can be trusted completely. But this is a policy that needs to be made by your logic, not my gut."

"I'm glad you understand that, Agent."

She left and he sighed. Her mind was awash with confusion and hope. He really, really didn't want to know the details. But he had noticed that Alex seemed so much less tense than he had ever known her to be, and all he could do was hope for them himself.

And do more paperwork.

Chapter End Notes

So I just passed 80,000 words in 19 days. As Xena would say, "I have many skills."
The Opposite of Extraction is Connection

Chapter Summary

Women figuring shit out before Luthors....

Vasquez had finally relaxed after getting--literally--burned during their last DEO micro-almost-apocalypse. Her burned arm didn't hurt so much now, only itched, and she knew that was a sign of healing. So when she was sitting at her post in the command center and Alex passed behind her and gently squeezed her shoulder in passing and then gone off to work on hand-to-hand combat training with Winn, Vasquez had allowed herself a small smile. J'onn wasn't in the room. No one would notice.

The day passed unusually kindly: no bad weather, no alien activity, and no weird signals caught by the new forms of alien radar that Lena and Winn had been building for them. At the end of the day, she could actually go home without worrying about being called in the moment she put on her Invader Zim t-shirt and Marine Corps sweatpants. Or so she thought.

Her apartment's bell rang. It was late for UPS. She frowned, pulled out her Glock and looked through the spyhole in her door. There, carrying a pizza and a six-pack of beer, was Alex Danvers. Vasquez's heart sped up. She fumbled the locks and chains on her door.

"Well, hello, beautiful!"

Alex blushed. "Hungry?"

"For you? Always."

"Oh, don't. Just don't."

Vasquez took a deep breath to contain herself as Alex brought her offerings into Vasquez's kitchen. Immediately, Vasquez thought, Damn, I should have mopped last weekend, last week, last month, fuck! When was the last time I was here for any meaningful amount of time?

"I got the veggie deluxe and Dos Equis," said Alex shyly.

Vasquez's heart melted. When had she become this soft?

"My favorites! Why are you so good to me?"

Alex stared at her, confused. "Well, you, I, we just, you would. So I. Yes. Napkins?"

Vasquez pointed. "Paper towels. I haven't been grocery shopping since, I don't know, Lord Tech's drones maybe?"

"Yeah, I don't think I'd have any food in my kitchen at all if it weren't for Kara."

Vasquez couldn't help grinning. "So to what do I owe this great increase in my happiness quotient?"
Alex looked confused. "I don't..."

Vasquez placed a gentle kiss on her cheek. "Why are you here, gorgeous?"

"Oh, I thought, you know earlier today?"

And Vasquez realized that the shoulder squeeze had been Alex asking her out on a date, sort of. "Great. I just wasn't sure if that was what you meant."

Immediately Alex relaxed. Vasquez realized that they were going to have to work on their sub-rosa communication just as much as their up-front communication. She made a mental note, then kissed Alex's cheek again, just because she could. Alex blushed.

"So, what are we doing tonight?" asked Vasquez. "The L Word? Xena? Mad passionate kissing, maybe leading to hot sex? Monopoly? Go Fish?"

Alex stared, as if she couldn't process the options the way Vasquez had presented them. Susan cursed herself for being such a hot gay mess. She retraced her steps.

"Hey, Alex. I'm just teasing. Whatever you want is okay."

"Oh, I just thought, you know, maybe another episode of The L Word? It always makes me reconsider things I had thought I understood. And then you help me make sense of them. But if that is boring for you--"

"Alex, honey. I told you. You could never bore me. You just faced down a White Martian. And it took your, well, you. And then you shot his scaly ass. How could I possibly be bored?"

Alex still looked lost, but she nodded as if she were pretending to be confident about such things. Vasquez said, "Episode three it is."

They queued up the episode as they started eating the pizza and drinking the beer.

In the beginning of the episode, Alice was trying to explain to her producer how, because of the incredibly small number of lesbians in any local region, the odds that they had more or less all slept with each other was pretty high.

Alex paused the show (and Vasquez was impressed that it had only taken three episodes before she felt empowered enough to do it herself and not wait until Vasquez noticed her discomfort and did it instead).

"Um," she said.

Okay, so empowerment took time. Vasquez said, "Questions?"

"Is that true?"

Vasquez considered. "What? The idea that all the lesbians in a locale have eventually slept with each other?"

"Well, yeah."

Vasquez felt the quivering mess that was Alex. Apparently, for some reason, this question meant something to her. So Vasquez was very careful with her answer.

"Okay, kiddo. Here's the thing. We are roughly nine percent of the population. We might actually
be more, but it is still difficult to answer surveys honestly, given the current political climate. Maybe if Hillary had won? But now?"

Alex nodded, very seriously. "So the thing is, there doesn't appear to be that many of us, and that does create a problem."

"I get that," said Alex. "But doesn't that...get...messy?"

"It can. It doesn't have to. Some lesbians are total drama queens. Some are more of the cargo-pants-are-pragmatic-and-so-am-I types. That is my type, by the way, just so you know."

Alex allowed herself a small smile. "I would never have guessed."

And Vasquez stayed externally serious, but internally she was grinning: Alex can do irony! Holy shit! I had no idea! What she said was, "So it can depend on the size of the locality. Memphis, probably yes. Manhattan, probably no. National City? Flip a coin. Does it bother you?"

Alex played with her hands, picked at the label of her beer. Finally, she said, "My sister, Kara, has a crush on Lena Luthor."

Vasquez took a deep breath, let it out. Knowing (she thought) what Alex's response would be, she said, "Damn! Your sister has good taste!"

Alex stared at her. "But--"


"But Lena is--"

"Fucking hot? A lesbian icon? A feminist super-scientist? Oops. Mega-scientist. I can see how the use of 'super' could seem charged."

Alex opened and closed her mouth a few times. Finally, she landed on, "Lesbian icon?"

"Yup. Much like your sister."

"My sister...is not...but...nobody knows about her crush...so how could she...?"

"Oh honey, a lot of straight women are lesbian icons: Jennifer Beals, Lucy Lawless, Chyler Leigh, Floriana Lima, Melissa Benoist, Ming-Na Wen. Does't matter. If they're strong fucking women? We totally admire them, want to be like the strong characters they portray. And Supergirl? Sure. They don't need to know that Kara is a shuddering disaster when it comes to her personal life--"

"No, she's not!"

"Sweetie, I have met Kara when she's not being Supergirl..."

"She's--"

"Okay, I get that saying 'she's human' isn't strictly accurate, but honestly, in the way we generally mean that phrase? She is actually more 'human' than a lot of the women out there."

Alex shot up off the couch. "That is not true! And you don't get to say that! My sister is awesome and confident and, and, and--"
Vasquez backed off. And then she didn't.

"Alex? I adore you. But go home and get some sleep. And then have an honest, open, heart to heart conversation with your sister. Don't force your narrative on her. Listen to what she has to say. And if you come back from that, and tell me I am wrong about her, then I will totally apologize. I will believe what you tell me. Because you will be the expert then. I just, I'm not sure that you are in possession of all the information, all the facts here. And you won't be until the two of you really talk it out."

Alex could barely process language. She said, "I, you. Maybe you're right. I just..."

Vasquez quietly said, "Kiddo, sit down with me for a minute? I get that you're upset. With me. But, well, God, Alex, threat assessment, looking at what beings do in the present to forecast what they might do in the future? That's what I do. And I have watched your sister as Supergirl. And I have watched her as Kara. And I have been on Lena Luthor's ass, this during the past couple of weeks when she was working at the DEO. And I know that your sister--in both her guises--is just about the only person at the DEO who trusts her 100%. Winn, maybe 97%. James, well, he has his own biases."

She sighed. "I kind of wish Cat Grant were here, because I feel like she has her own style of threat assessment, which I would love to learn, but I think I never could because what I do is teachable and learnable, and what Cat does is more like a, well, a big cat that you can't see lying along a branch of a tree above you? And then it pounces on your sorry ass, and you die a loud screaming bloody mess."

Alex opened her mouth and closed it. "Cat's not--That doesn't--"

"Of course she isn't that to you and Kara," said Vasquez. "In this metaphor, Kara is her offspring. And she would--and does--protect Kara with her life. But honey, that comes at a cost. She fucking invented Supergirl when she was a floundering mess of a new superhero and she took control of her narrative and you should be fucking glad she did, because if the New York Times had, Kara might be okay. But if a more conservative rag had? I dunno. But it might have been very bad indeed."

Alex sighed. "Yeah, it's so much easier to take down a vengeance-seeking lizardman alien than figuring out how to help your sister take control of her narrative, but--"

"It's not easy," said Vasquez. "I tend to think that was why we were given friends."
Chapter Summary

Poor James. Learning to be a real hero may be harder than he thought.

James was exhausted. He had thought he was in good shape. But doing a nine-to-five desk job by day and then running around temperate National City for a few hours by night, even with fighting armed criminals, was not the same as wearing a sixty-pound pack and hiking through the badlands of Nevada, and then coming back to sit in a DEO classroom waiting to be called on to recite whole portions of the DEO Training Manual.

And what was worse, their instructor had announced that the commander of the base was going to be watching. The man hadn't showed up yet, but their instructor was already drilling them.

"Holtzman! What are the four key elements that define terrorism?"

The skinny blond recruit said, "Sir. The four key elements are one, it is premeditated; two, it is politically motivated; three, it's, uh, it's, I--"

"Down and give me ten. Smith! What are the other two?"

"Sir, it is aimed at civilians not soldiers. And it's carried out by, um, not by the country's military."

"Smith, down and twenty."

"Partridge, what is the fourth element?"

"Sir!" said the redhead with a smirk. "It is carried out by subnational groups!"

The two men finished their pushups and returned to their seats.

A woman's voice came from the back of the room. James didn't turn around. He knew that voice.

"Lieutenant, maybe you should go over the acronym for the Rules of Engagement."

"Yes, ma'am. Olsen! What is RAMP?"

James's brain froze, but he managed to speak anyway. "R, return fire with fire. A, anticipate attack, M, measure the amount of force you use, if time and circumstance permit. P--"

Major Lucy Lane cut in. "Olsen, is it? Would you mind expanding on M?" It wasn't a question or a request. Since when did the classroom have a back door and why hadn't it occurred to him that Lucy was the base commander?

"Ma'am! We use only the amount of force necessary to, um, complete the mission."

"Yes. And P?"

"Protect with deadly force only lives and property that is, that your commander has, that--"
"Olsen!" said his instructor. "Down and give me fifty. Partridge, you seem to be good at finishing what your fellow agents can't. Tell Major Lane about P."

"Sir! Protect with deadly force only lives and property designated by your commander. Stop short of deadly force when protecting other property."

Lucy, looking sharp as always in her blue service dress uniform, came to the front of the room. She watched as James finished his pushups and returned to his desk.

"The rules of engagement are what make soldiers and agents different from vigilantes and terrorists. We have rules, people. We are disciplined. Those rules and that discipline are what keep conflict from escalating. They prevent unnecessary collateral damage to lives and property. And they keep the United States government on firm legal ground. Memorize them. Take them to heart. Carry on, Lieutenant."

She exited the room. James wondered just what he had gotten himself into.
Chapter Summary

Cat is back and working through her to-do list.

Cat Grant strolled into Snapper's office with the previous week's Tribune in her hand. "Lucas. I just wanted to discuss your ill-considered and relatively snide attack on Supergirl last week. Supergirl is part of the CatCo brand. Kindly remember that."

Snapper looked at Cat over his glasses, which had slipped down his nose. "I write the truth."

"Mmm. Such as the insinuation that L-Corp is to blame for two violent events which were in fact attacks on its CEO? That sort of truth?"

"Cat, you know that woman is up to something."

"This from the man who has apparently been giving impassioned speeches about confirmation bias? Interesting. What about this nineties reference to the X Files? Or the fact that you completely contradict yourself, first saying that the NCPD are basically idiots and it would be too easy to blame their inefficiencies on money, and then that they are superheroes who need more money. Honestly, Lucas, if you can't even write a coherent five-paragraph essay, I may have to find an actual writer to replace you."

She strolled out of his office, checking off one more item from her mental list. A mosquito flew in front of her face and she waved it away. She passed by Ms. Tessmacher's desk. The woman looked terrified, but also hopeful, but then Kara had given her some sound advice, from what Cat had overheard, about boundaries. Cat decided to be nice for a change. Keep the girl guessing.

"Ms. Tessmacher, do we have any insect spray? These bugs are getting into the office and they carry germs. I do not do germs."

"Yes, Ms. Grant, I can get some, but the weatherman downstairs said that it was the rain we had last week that was making them breed."

"Well, find a way to get rid of them. Also, a crisp lettuce roll and one of those eclairs from Athan's for lunch, I think. I'll be back around one."

"Yes, ma'am!" The blonde hurried off.

Cat looked at the old Tribune again, tossed it into Eve's recycling basket. Then she grabbed her purse and made her way to L-Corp.

//

Cat sat in Lena Luthor's waiting area, sipping excellent coffee and watching Jess Huang work. She knew the young woman had Lena's complete trust and Kara Danvers' complete respect, and that meant that she probably couldn't poach the girl, which was a shame. Replacing Kara was harder than it should have been.
Lena came out of the elevator, looking at her phone and then greeted Cat with what Cat thought was calculated warmth.

"Cat, lovely to see you. I heard you were back in town. Staying long?"

They air-kissed each other, and Lena led her into her office.

"For the foreseeable future, Lena. How is your interesting mother?"

"Imprisoned. Yours?"

"Alas, no."

"Well," said Lena, taking her seat behind her desk. "You can't have everything, I suppose. What can I do for you, Cat?"

A mosquito landed on Cat's arm and she slapped it without thinking. "Damn these things. Actually, Lena, I was wondering if I could do something for you. Give you a little advice, woman to woman."

Lena frowned but said, "I'm listening."

"There is a woman in your life who deserves a great deal more of your attention than you are giving her. One of the things I have learned as CEO of CatCo is that business may be important, but our close relationships, the people we love, are more important. Don't let her get away."

"That's your advice?"

"That's my advice."

"You came all the way over here to say that?"

Cat shrugged. "I'm working through my to-do list." She stood.

Lena leaned back in her chair. "You know, Supergirl will be very glad you're back. I know she has missed talking to you. She speaks highly of your advice."

Privately, Cat felt a small warm glow at the thought, but she simply said archly, "Then perhaps you should take it. Good day, Lena. Watch out for the mosquitoes."
Supergirl flew into Alex's apartment and immediately changed into her Kara clothes. She could hear Alex in her bathroom with the hair dryer. To herself, Kara muttered, "Ah HA! It was Alex! In the bathroom! With the hairdryer! She is the one who killed Mr. Body!" She suspected that this would only be funny to her, but it did make her chuckle.

"And then Alex would say, 'Nope, I would never do that. Hairdryers are such an inefficient way to kill somebody!'"

She wandered over to the refrigerator and pulled out a tub of raspberry yogurt. While she ate from it, she noticed a file card on the freezer door with Alex's handwriting on it. "All of us, we reach out from the darkness, from the alienation of modern life, for these connections." --Alice, The L Word, episode 1.3

Alex came out of the bathroom, looking her usual gorgeous self, only a little more so. Kara grinned.

"Hey, Kara. You eating me out of house and home?"

"Yep! What's The L Word? Would I like it? I like this quote."

Alex opened her mouth and then closed it. "Uh, you, no, maybe, well. Have you had that talk with Lena yet?"

"It's been a little busy lately... And what does that have to do with what sounds like a TV show?"

Alex said, "You will appreciate it more if you have that talk first, especially if she wants to date you. What do you think L stands for anyway?"

"Lena? Luthor? Lucy Lane? Oh shi-- sherbert. Lesbian?"

"Yup. By the way, I've been meaning to ask you for weeks. Winn wrote something down that you said as Supergirl. About change being good, when you become what you were meant to be."

Kara blinked. "I say a lot of things, Alex. And I don't know. I think it's the cape. When I'm her, I mean me, I mean, the other me--" She sighed loudly, flustered. "I say better things. Like way better."

Alex came and gave her a hug. "It doesn't matter. I just liked it. It's helped me, since, well everything."

Kara sat at the table, polishing off the yogurt. "Tell me about you and Vasquez."

Alex blushed. "There isn't much to tell."
"So have you, um...?"

"No. We have not um. We watch TV. We talk. Okay, yeah, sometimes we kiss and I forget how to use English. But that's all."

"Do you want more?"

Alex looked away, and the raw need on her face told Kara everything she needed to know. "So why don't you?"

"She keeps telling me I'm not ready, and honestly? I think she's kind of right."

"But only kind of?"

"It's complicated. We work together. I'm her supervisor, basically, but she's got seniority, and J'onn is psychic..."

Kara nodded seriously. "But you know she totally loves you, right?"

Alex just stared. "No, it's not like that. We're friends. She's helping me figure things out and I--"

"Alex--"

Their phones rang. DEO.

//

Supergirl flew to the scene, the bridge across Schuster River, where a long black towncar had been rammed by a truck full of angry aliens, run up the sides of the bridge, blocked and surrounded. As she flew closer, Supergirl recognized the license plate: LL1. Tall grey-skinned humanoids, a yellow-scaled Plutonian and some species Supergirl didn't recognize were rocking the car back and forth, pushing it to the very edge of the bridge, apparently in the attempt to throw it over.

Supergirl could hear the Blackhawks in the air, but they wouldn't get there on time. She aimed her laser eyes on the alien making the biggest effort to lift the back end of the car, and she blasted him. He fell away, but others took his place. Supergirl dropped down into the midst of them and fought her way to the increasingly battered car, jumped up above it, aimed her fist in the space between the front and back seats, punched her fist through the roof, picked up the car, and flew away from the bridge with it. The helicopters dropped black-clad DEO agents onto the bridge to overpower the alien combatants and take them into custody.

On the L-Corp side of the river, Supergirl drifted down and set the car in a parking lot. Lena opened her door and got out looking dazed. She wore a white dress with a green paisley scarf wrapped around her neck.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Luthor," said Supergirl. "I know you don't care for flying."

Lena stood up straight. "It's better than swimming, Supergirl. Thank you for your help."

Her driver got out and thanked Supergirl profusely.

Lena said, "Supergirl, this is Tom. He did a pretty fair job of defensive driving before they overwhelmed us."

Supergirl shook the man's hand in both of hers. "Thank you for taking care of Ms. Luthor, Tom! She's a friend, so I really appreciate it."
"I did a horrible job, Ms. Luthor. I am so sorry. It was like suddenly I couldn't remember how to shift gears with my right hand. And then I was disoriented, and I shouldn't have come into work today because I had that cold and I was distracted and that could have gotten you killed and you should fire me, ma'am, it's all my fault. This should never have happened!"

Sirens rang out and Supergirl looked to see an NCPD black Maria turn a corner and almost collide with another car. Horns were honking and cars screeching to a halt, and above them the two DEO helicopters were hovering loudly.

"If you two are all right, I should go help out."

She leaped into the sky and flew over the bridge, where the DEO agents were getting pummeled by the aliens. She saw a streak of green and then J'onn was in the air beside her. "Something is wrong, Supergirl. The comms are down and the aliens are winning. You take that end and I'll take the other and we'll work toward each other."

It was a long bitter fight. Supergirl saw Alex switch her baton from her right hand to her left and take on the purple tentacled thing that was fighting Chen and beat the thing senseless. She saw two agents go down, good, experienced agents. The aliens she knew were aquatic, she threw over the bridge into the river. The rest she simply knocked out. The one who could shoot fire out of his hands, she froze with her breath.

Finally four DEO containment trucks drove up onto the bridge and they dragged the former combatants into the trucks to bring them back to the DEO to process. Supergirl and J'onn landed next to Alex, who was collapsing her baton with her left hand.

"Alex, what happened here?" asked J'onn.

"Something weird. J'onn I just saw my agents forget how to shoot. I suddenly couldn't remember how to use my baton with my right hand."

Supergirl said, "Lena's driver said something like that. J'onn, we may need to talk to the mayor, get a travel ban in force. If people's memories are being tampered with--"

Alex said, "Not memory, Supergirl, more like muscle memory."

Supergirl's head snapped up. "All over the city. We have to get people to stop driving at the very least. Oh Rao, this is going to be a long day. J'onn, we're going to need help. Can you ask M'gann for help? Deputize her or something? We're going to need flyers."

//

By the time night finally fell, the streets of National City were empty of cars, and the hospitals were filled with people injured in car accidents and industrial accidents. Schools had cancelled classes when students and teachers forgot how to write. The mayor had issued a declaration of emergency and stopped travel into and out of the city. General Lane had created cordon around the city.

Back in the DEO Supergirl landed badly on the balcony and stumbled into the command center. Agent Vasquez leaped to her feet and went and let Supergirl lean on her as she dragged herself to one of the chairs.

"Supergirl, you look exhausted. Did you solar flare?"

"Not exactly, but I can't remember when I have ever been this tired. Heat-seeking missiles are
starting to look good in comparison. I'll need to get to the sunlamps tonight, but first I need to find out what's going on."

"Alex is in the lab running some tests on some agents and civilian volunteers, including Lena and her driver. She seems to think it's some kind of biochemical that is reversing brain dominance. I've got my agents patrolling with the NCPD to keep the peace, because they are totally undermanned for this."

"Were any of our agents hurt or killed?" Supergirl winced as she said it. She hated when she couldn't be everywhere at once, even with superspeed.

"Just injuries. Fourteen rookies and five agents who were trained by Hank or Lucy. Nobody trained by me."

Supergirl frowned. "How can you take credit?"

"Because I train all my people to be functionally ambidextrous. I think of it as the Princess Bride Principle."

Supergirl just rubbed her eyes, then heard static in her earpiece. "Supergirl, do you copy?"

"I copy, Alex, what have you got for me?"

"Just come down here on your way to the sunlamps. I want your opinion."

//

When Supergirl reached the lab, three bored looking agents in black were sitting along the sidewall with Band-aids on their middle fingers. Lena, sitting on a chair, and Tom standing behind her, also were lightly bandaged. Apparently Alex hadn't needed much blood for the tests she was running. On the computer in front of her she had six results side by side. Supergirl couldn't make heads or tails of them.

"What am I looking at Alex?" Supergirl sounded exhausted, even to herself.

Alex gave her a sharp look, then reached into the drawer in her desk and pulled out an oversized Snickers bar. Lena got up and gave Supergirl her seat.

Alex said, "Those are the six of us. The only thing even remotely out of the ordinary is slightly higher than usual antibody activity, but we've all had that cold that was going around, so that probably doesn't mean anything." She picked up a small glass jar with two dead mosquitoes in it. "Do they look at all unusual to you? Are they natural mosquitoes?"

Supergirl shrugged. "Looks like it. I don't know much about insects, Alex."

"So far we only have evidence of this brain dominance problem connected to humans not aliens, but everybody has said they were bitten in the last day or so since that swarm has been in town. My first thought were the Lord Tech drones, but these seem to be actual insects, so--"

"Wait! Alex, stop talking. Guys, stop talking." Supergirl closed her eyes, listening. Then she stood up and turned to Lena. "May I?"

"Er, yes?"

Carefully, Supergirl unwound the silk scarf from the woman's ivory neck, and another mosquito
flew out and Supergirl's hand blurred and she caught it. Alex opened another jar and she deposited it in the jar and stood there squinting at it. Then she turned back to the jar with the dead bugs.

"Alex," she said, "Do we have any kind of tech to do an autopsy on a bug? Because there is something in the live one. I can hear him buzz but there is another sound, like a mechanical sound, almost as if he swallowed a tiny clock."

"Or a nano-drone?" suggested Lena.

Supergirl sat back down and slumped in the seat, the silk scarf in her lap as she suddenly noticed the candy bar in her other hand and pealed off the wrapper and started to eat. She finished it quickly and sat there stroking the green paisley scarf without really realizing it.

Alex looked at the agents behind them. "You're dismissed, fellas." They left.

"Supergirl, you should get your head down. Go sleep int he sunlamp room. If an emergency comes up, I'll call you."

"Right. See you later, Alex, Lena. Bye, Tom."

And she probably didn't realize it, but she took Lena's scarf with her.
That night in the DEO barracks, James texted Kara.

Superjames: Hey, Kara. Heard about the chaos. Sure you don't need an extra set of hands?

Kara: We've got the DEO, the Army and Supergirl. It's covered.

Kara: How's bootcamp?

Superjames: Everything hurts. And least the Commandant is joining you in NC.

Kara: Lucy's coming? Yay!

Superjames: I swear she's talked the instructors into making me do extra pushups.

Kara: It's good for you.

Superjames: I have time off tomorrow. Maybe we could

Kara: Metallo's trial is tomorrow. And NC still in lockdown

Superjames: actually talk in real time.

Kara: Lena has to testify against him and her mother again.

Kara: What an awful thing to have to do.

Superjames: Luthors don't shy away from doing awful things.

Kara: Lena's not like them. She knows Lillian is evil. She's doing the right

Superjames: Be wary of her, Kara.

Kara: thing. She is so brave. I should go see her. She could use a friend now.


Kara: Go do more pushups, James. Good night.
Chapter Summary

The beginning of 2.12, Luthors.

Lena Luthor and Jess Huang had worked together for a long time, and they knew each other very well. So on the mornings when Lena walked into her office with her hair up in a very tight do, all the pins in place, with clothes that showed off curves but also gave her square shoulders, with colors that weren't her signature black and white but something softer that didn't scream "morally ambiguous Luthor"; on those days, Jess looked her up and down and then went and simplified the day's agenda, got her her favorite sandwich for lunch, made sure she was drinking a lot of water. And sometimes, if things were very bad, she would call Kara Danvers, ask her to come over. And sometimes Kara didn't need to be asked.

Lena was tired, standing in her office watching the news coverage of her testimony that day at Metallo's trial.

The news anchor said, "Lillian Luthor and Metallo's defense attorneys tried to downplay Lena Luthor's testimony, characterizing it as the 'angry rant of an estranged daughter--""

The door to her office opened and Jess let Kara in.

Lena turned off the TV, sat on the edge of her desk, saying, "Everybody in National City's got an opinion about me: ungrateful daughter, heroine, bitch. Not you, though, right? You haven't come here for a quote. Wait, Snapper Carr hasn't sent you here to shake me down?"

"No, no, I'm here as a friend. I thought you could use some fried, sugary goodness in your life. You do eat donuts, right?"

"Oh, well!" She stood up, smiling. "I am human. Thank you, Kara."

They sat on the couch.

"Was it terrible?"

"It actually felt good to testify. I got to say my piece, finally distance myself from the Luthor name." She pulled the glazed donut out of the white paper bag. "And then I came back here to twelve calls from the lawyers. Yeah. She wants to see me."

"What do you think she wants?" Kara took a bite out of the pink frosted donut.

"Probably to tell me that my outfit in court was horrible and that I need a makeover." She grinned to hide the pain, though she knew Kara could see it anyway. Her normally sunny expression was serious and a little sad.

Lena dropped the smile. "I don't know and I don't care. I just thought I was done with her, you know? I had..., finally shut the door on being a Luthor. And then there she was, back on my phone sheet."
"Twelve times."

"You don't think I should feel guilty for not wanting to go see that monster, right?"

"Well, do you think you would find peace of mind by visiting her and telling her how you really feel?"

Lena picked at her donut, eyes downcast. She shook her head. "Even if I did, it wouldn't make a difference. Y'know? She's been the same since the day I met her."

Kara looked away. She seemed for a moment to be looking very, very far away. Eventually she said, "I've spent most of my life wishing I could talk to people who are no longer here...."

She looked back at Lena, and Lena felt seen: her sadness, her disappointment, her fear of letting her guard down.

Finally Kara said, "She's still here. And she's still your mom."

"Yeah..." said Lena uncertainly. Because Lillian Luthor was in fact still her mother. But Lena certainly had never had a mom.
Because why would Cadmus have struck when the city was actually at peace?

When Major Lucy Lane arrived at the DEO this time, she came directly to the roof of the National City division's skyscraper by helicopter, wearing her blue service dress uniform and having her adjutant carry her gear and his own behind her. She had to get straight to work.

The command center was relatively sparsely manned compared to the usual busy scene. Agent Vasquez sat in the center, watching computer readouts on the screens above her and also doing something with the tablet in her hand.

"Major. You are welcome as always."

"Vasquez. Where is J'onn?"

"Consulting at National City University. He should return soon."

"And Agent Danvers?"

"Running an experiment at L-Corp with Lena Luthor, who is consulting on this one. And ma'am, if I may ask...How is James Olsen?"

"James is doing relatively well. I still wonder if he hasn't got too much of an artist's temperament to learn to be a good soldier, but he is definitely stubborn and hard-working, so we'll see."

"There's a briefing at fourteen hundred hours if you'd like to get settled first."

Lucy frowned. "I was hoping to get off the ground running."

"Yes, ma'am. Understood. But our people are out collecting intel, and it's taking longer than we'd hoped."

"Where is Agent Schott?"

"At Lord Technologies."

Lucy was surprised. "Doing what?"

Vasquez smiled. "Returning their drones from last time, offering the DEO's most sincere apologies for his superiors assuming that such miniaturized but clearly human technology was more impressive than it actually is and overstepping legal boundaries in their paranoia about letting alien technology potentially endanger the citizens of National City."

Lucy tilted her head, considering the multiple ways that would both insult Maxwell Lord and also mess with his own fears of aliens and his prejudices about how much unchecked power the DEO could potentially wield. "I like your playbook, Vasquez, but is Schott seriously the man for the job? He seems, well, a little soft."
"Seems is not is, Major, if you'll forgive me for saying it. And Agent Schott does Sincere like nobody's business. Also, this one is a cakewalk for him. I decided on going with this line in part because that is exactly what he said when he reverse-engineered the drone. Small, yes. Impressive? I believe the exact phrase he used was, 'Pfft.'"

"Sounds like he's been spending time with Alex."

"Oh, he has. She and I have been overseeing his ops training, since it turns out that having a genius IT guy in the field with you can make or break a mission."

"And your Princess Bride training?"

Vasquez grinned. "I told him that brain dominance was an in-the-box idea. Winn is all about destroying the box. He's doing quite well already."

"It's a great idea, but it seems impractical to think you can make everybody you train transcend something as basic as brain dominance."

"And yet, Major, every agent I have trained has transcended it. And when we needed them to be, well, transcendent the other day? They stepped up. Every. Single. One."

"Even Alex?"

"Especially Alex. That perfectionist streak she has? Personally, it has made her very unhappy over the years. But it enabled her to switch seamlessly between a right-dominant defense to a left-dominant attack in microseconds."

"And I imagine that her becoming functionally ambidextrous would have...other kinds of advantages of a more personal type as well?"

Vasquez's face was bland. "I have no idea what you mean, Major Lane. And by the way, our NCPD liaison will be at the meeting in an hour. Detective Sawyer has gone above and beyond during this crisis."

Lucy felt the heat creep up her neck. She said, "I think I'll go settle into the barracks."

//

By fourteen hundred hours, the conference room was almost full. At the top of the long table sat J'onn, with Alex on his left and Lucy on his right. At the bottom was Vasquez. Along one side were Agent Schott and Detective Sawyer. On the other were Agent Sally Ryder and an empty chair for Supergirl.

"Let's get started," said J'onn. "Supergirl will get here when she can. She is currently assisting the NCPD. Speaking of whom, Detective Sawyer, will you start us off?"

The computer screen above J'onn's head showed a group of masked bipeds looting stores. She said, "This is why Supergirl has been delayed. People--and we think they are human--have been engaging in some very violent and illegal behavior since yesterday. The DEO has kindly stepped in to help us de-escalate the situation. It was deemed extremely unwise to bring in the Army or National Guard, so DEO agents are in NCPD riot gear. It's helping."

"Winn?" said J'onn.

Winn took the remote from Maggie. The screen showed the Lord Tech drones, the mosquitoes
from the most recent attack and a magnified picture of something that looked like an extremely miniaturized drone.

Winn said, "It turns out that the recent mosquito outbreak has a ground zero at Lord Tech's R&D, the same division that had that unfortunate situation when his micro-drones got loose. But I just can't think that someone with such a well-known paranoia for the loss of intellectual property would allow the public or the FBI or the DEO to potentially get their hands on his technology--by accident, mind you--not just once but twice. Lord's a bit of a douche, yes, but he doesn't make those kinds of mistakes."

"Agent Ryder?"

The woman took the remote and showed a magnified portion of the drone. "I can't be sure, but it looks highly likely that this is the piece that holds the cold virus that has been genetically mutated to switch brain dominance--we think temporarily, based on anecdotal evidence."

"Care to share that evidence, Agent?" Lucy asked.

"All of our agents who were affected are back to normal, as is Lena Luthor, but not her driver. We also have numbers of hospital releases, which is high but not 100%. I thought..."

Alex gestured for her to continue.

"Honest to God, Agent, it just feels so much like an experiment with non-consenting subjects."

"How so?"

"It's the way the numbers are coming up. About 93 to 95% of the population who were affected are just fine now and back to normal, about two days later. About 4% seem to have settled into the new brain-dominant scenario, like they just totally switched and got on with their life. But there is also a smattering--I don't yet have accurate numbers--but again anecdotal evidence at all of the hospitals suggests that there are people who haven't settled into either right or left brain dominance and who are seriously confused and physically uncoordinated to a great degree."

Vasquez grunted. "Are you saying, Agent Ryder, that it smells like someone might have been trying to test a hypothesis?"

Ryder hedged. "I'm sure I can't say, Agent Vasquez. But...well...it just doesn't smell right."

Vasquez nodded. She took a note in a paper notebook, looked up. Her eyes flickered over Alex.

Alex turned to J'onn. "What did the NCU professors say?"

J'onn sighed. "The professors in Neurocognition said it sounded feasible, but they would never be able to get funding or permission to test it. Bioengineering wanted to get their hands on the drone, even after I made them sign NDAs even to discuss the concept. The Epidemiology professors just looked scared and started talking about counter-measures."

Alex asked, "Do we have counter-measures?"

Winn said, "Well, there is no cure for the common cold and insect repellents aren't exactly the healthiest thing to spray yourself with, but I've been thinking about how a single, very strong electromagnetic pulse might burn the nano-drones out."

"How strong are we talking here?" asked Alex.
Winn shrugged. "Strong enough to burn out a lot of the unprotected computers in National City."

J'onn growled, "That is not an option, Agent Schott."

The door opened and Supergirl stepped in, twenty minutes late. "Sorry, sorry. There was a fire at the distillery, and the fire department is still figuring out that whole right-left thing. I deputized one of the fire aliens, and he helped, but yeah, that was not a popular move. But if I hadn't, and that block had gone up without getting everybody evacuated?" She shuddered.

J'onn waved her worries away. "We will deal with that later, Supergirl. In the meantime, the worst of this most recent disaster seems to be over as people acclimate to their old or new normal. Major Lane, have you spoken with the general?"

"I have. He and I both agree that at least one more day with the city quarantine and cordon are appropriate, more due to the looting and violence than to the trigger itself. He has spoken with the president and I have spoken with the governor and they are going to issue statements around fifteen hundred hours."

Detective Sawyer raised a finger. "So, if you believe Lord did this intentionally, what can we do about him? Do we have any evidence to get a warrant to search his facility or arrest him?"

Vasquez slid a folder over to the detective, who flipped through the pages and sighed. "Anybody else. Anybody with less expensive lawyers, I could make this work."

Lucy nodded. "It would have to be airtight, and then we would have to be careful which judge we showed it too. Detective, I understand that you have had powerful people interfering with some of your sting operations."

Maggie growled, "Veronica Sinclair, otherwise known as Roulette, might as well be greased with Castor oil. We can't keep her in a cell for more than an hour before word comes down, and my captain says he doesn't know who is calling the shots."

"So, corruption at high levels of the NCPD?"

"If this were Gotham, I'd say absolutely, no shit, Sherlock. But she's the only one who seems to get this kind of attention from...whoever. I would swear that the rest of the department is absolutely clean."

Vasquez made a note. "Blackmail?"

No one commented.

Alex said, "Sir, I'd like permission to see if I can test some of those people whose brains switched, to see if there is anything different about them compared to the rest of us, physically or in some other way."

"Good idea. All right, people. These are our priorities: get more information, restore the peace, figure out how to nail Maxwell Lord or whoever is responsible."

Lucy said, "At the very least, we can start proceedings for a case of criminal negligence. There has been a lot of damage to National City in the last two days, and Lord's pockets are deep enough to help pay for it."

They got up and filed out the door.
Maggie murmured to Vasquez, "I like her."

Vasquez murmured back, "I know."
The Best Offense is a Good Offense

Chapter Summary

Lillian sets her trap for Lena.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Emotional Abuse

Lillian Luthor sat in the visitor's room, waiting to begin round two of her offensive. She didn't even turn around when the door opened and Lena stepped into the room.

"You really did a number on me today in court. Measured, succinct, believable. The jury ate it up."

"I could just call the guard back and go," suggested Lena.

"No. I'm sorry. I promised myself I'd be better. Please sit."

Lena said, "Well, old habits die hard." Lena slowly walked to the visitor side of the table. Her mother's handcuffs were linked to the top of the table with a bolt.

"I don't want to fight. I asked you here because I wanted to let you know that I forgive you. And I still love you."

Lena's face didn't change. This wasn't exactly what she had expected, but she wasn't too surprised. Her therapist had told her over and over again about the methodology of emotional abuse. She said, "The only time you tell me you love me is when you want something from me."

"I know I wasn't the best mother, but I did the best I could."

In her memory, Lena pulled up the Thirty Signs of Emotional Abuse. Number 23: They play the victim and try to deflect blame to you rather than taking personal responsibility. "I think, Mother, that 'not the best' doesn't even begin to describe what you put me through when I was a child. You kept making me feel unwanted, like an outsider."

"You don't want to believe it? But I always tried to protect you."

Lena thought, Number 29: They invalidate or deny their emotionally abusive behavior when confronted. She said, "If only Dad could hear you now. After all the things you've done and justified."

"You hold Lionel up as some saint, but he's not."

And Lena thought, Number 2: They regularly demean or disregard your opinions, ideas, suggestions, or needs, or those of your supportive friends. She said, "Don't...disparage him. He was a good man."
"If he was a good man, then he would have told you the truth. But he hated me too much to do that.

"Tell me the truth about what?

"When I first married your father, it was the happiest time of my life. But after Lex was born, Lionel started having an affair. I was clueless. Until I went to surprise him on a business trip, only to find out that he was with your mother."

Lena's lip quivered. "My mother."

Lillian nodded. "She was already pregnant with you by then. They paid her off. Your father came back to try to rebuild our marriage. Then when you were four, we heard that your mother had died. The state was going to put you in foster care. Your father took you home and we adopted you. But he didn't like me spending time with you. I think it made him remember what he'd done. He felt guilty. He'd lash out. So I stayed away, gravitated to Lex, to protect myself. And you."

Lena tried to remember which number it was, the one where they make it all about themselves, but her mind refused to process.

"But seeing you with him, you looked so much like her. It was like ripping off a Band-aid every day of my life."

Lena went blank. Aloud, as she had not meant to say it, she whispered, "So I am a Luthor."

"We're the only two left. Lex's mind is long gone. And we Luthors need to be there for each other."

She leaned forward, opened her handcuffed hands on the table. "I want a second chance with you. Please, honey."

Lena grit her teeth. Her jaw worked as she looked at the older woman's hands. It was an old ache, the lack of physical touch for such long periods, especially after Lex had gone away to school. Like some perverse magnetism, Lena watched her own hands stretch out and lay themselves on Lillian's hands.
A lighter interlude with James and some new old friends.

After another grueling day out in the dry heat of the Nevada badlands, this time with their marksmanship instructor, James is ready to crawl into his bunk and never wake again. He was good with the shooting from a prone position on his belly, and not terrible standing, but the sitting and kneeling positions were a pain. He wobbled while sitting and felt his back foot go numb while kneeling. And the patrol cap only kept the sun out of his eyes when it was shining directly at his face, where the visor could block it. But when it shone from the sides, he ended up squinting and that messed up his aim. So he also had a headache from all the squinting.

He and the other five recruits dragged themselves toward the barracks, and James saw Holtzman start to follow Partridge toward the women's barracks. No one else seemed to notice so he hissed, "Holtzman!"

The blond recruit turned toward him. "What can I do you out of, Jimmy Boy?"

"That's the women's barracks!"

"Yes. Yes, it is. Your point?"

"What? Have you got a thing for Partridge? You'll both get bounced out of here!"

Holtzman glanced over to where Partridge was disappearing behind the barracks door. "Well. I suppose she does have a fine ass, but no, they're not going to bounce me for that. Not anymore, anyway. Maybe back in the day. But don't worry, Jimmy. I think she's more your type than mine."

James stared.

Holtzman gave him a broad wink. "What? Ain'tcha never seen a dyke before?"

James gestured dazedly at Holtzman's buzz-cut hair and lean physique.

"Yeah, well, Jimmy, for those of us who actually have hair, they make us cut most of it off. And these camos don't exactly show off some of my finer assets. Sweet dreams, Jimmy. See you far too early in the morning."

James turned and followed the other men into their barracks and sat down on his narrow cot to untie his boots. Finn, a corn-fed young man from Iowa, sat down on the bunk next to his. And rubbed his eyes.

"Hey, Olsen," he said. "What were you and Holtzman talking about?"

"Did you know she was a woman?"

"Uh, yeah? You didn't?"
"I am really not getting enough sleep. And what's with Partridge never getting any of the answers wrong or forgetting the wording?"

Finn stripped down to his t-shirt and shorts. His dogtag gleamed in the low light. "I heard she had a photographic memory. Holtzman too. They say that Major Lane always recruits women who are way more qualified than the men to mess with our heads."

"Nah, if Holtzman had a photographic memory, she wouldn't make the same mistakes as us."

"I dunno. Smith said that she won a pushup contest in college at Stanford: a thousand pushups, one-handed, alternating hands. Against the varsity men's hockey and football teams. They paid for her beer for a year."

"That can't be true."

"Yeah, well, you do know she used to fight ghosts in New York, right? She built the plasma rifles herself."

"Wait! She's that Holtzman?"

"Yup. They say, when bootcamp is over, the major wants to send her to National City, to work with the Supergirl team. You met Supergirl, right? What's she like?"

"She's amazing. A ray of sunshine and a pure heart, although a little too naive for her own good sometimes. She always wants to see the good in people, whether humans or aliens. I once saw her offer to help a crazy scientist who had been turned into this purple Godzilla, even after he had been ravaging downtown National City. He declined. She blew him up. But seriously, offering to help Godzilla? Who does that?"

The lights went out and they each crawled into their cots.

Finn murmured, "I knew somebody like that once. Heroes, Olsen. Only heroes do things like that. Not guys like us."

James lay in the dark a long time listening to his friends' breathing and light snoring. He remembered coming back to the van that night, seeing Winn carefully cutting a strip of paper with a sentence on it. He had read what Supergirl had said--"Change is good, when you finally become what you were meant to be, and you were never meant to be a monster"--And he had thought, Yes! I am finally what I was meant to be!

But he realized that Lucy and the others really hadn't seen it that way.
Chapter Summary

Lena deserves a better mother. Supergirl doesn't know how to cope with Lena in this mood.

After her conversation with Lillian, Lena could not go home, so she went back to the almost empty floors of L-Corp. The building was never entirely empty or quiet. R&D often did work that required 24 or more continuous hours of testing or growing samples, particularly in the bio or organic chemistry labs. Even the administrative staff often worked at night; L-Corp was a global corporation, and the other side of the world was hard at work while most of National City slept. And of course the janitorial staff did most of their work at night as well. So the building was never completely silent, though it was quieter, calmer than by day. And Lena craved that calm.

She waved to Jeremy in Finance, who grinned back at her. She knew the folks who worked nights appreciated that she was so often there at night working with them. Jess told her that they had given Lena and herself the nicknames Night Owl One and Night Owl Two. At the time, Lena had been pleased by the affectionate appellation. Now she wasn't so sure.

Night was not the time for honest, good people to be at work. Criminals worked nights. Owls sought their helpless prey in the dark.

She returned to her office, with its pure white floor and furniture and gadgets, and began to see it for what it was: camouflage, a smokescreen, whitewashing. She was a Luthor. She should not be surrounded by such purity.

She went and poured herself three fingers of scotch and sat on the couch, trying to drown out her feelings. After ten years of therapy, she knew this wasn't the way. She should be trying to sort them out instead.

But she was weary. She was just so weary. The long, constant perfectionism she had practiced, first to become a real Luthor, then to face the people who only saw her as evil Lex's evil sister, then to distance her self from the Luthor name. She had tried to fool Lillian, and sort of succeeded. She was just managing to convince the juries in these two trials that she was not in fact on her mother's side the entire time. But in the end, maybe she was the fool. She had told Supergirl that night, "After all, I'm a Luthor," and she had turned the key, she had turned the damn key herself, even with the doubts she had still harbored about her getting the isotope to do what she so desperately needed it to do.

And it had. But it might not have. And she had turned the key anyway.

She had thought she was lying to Supergirl, that she was not a true Luthor.

But she was.

She went to sip more scotch but the glass was empty. She got up to refill it, took another drink, when she heard her favorite sound in the world: boots landing on her balcony.
She turned and smiled, despite herself. The Girl of Steel stood there, her hair and cape fluttering in the breeze. Lena set down her glass and strode over, opened the door to the balcony and stepped out. The breeze did not flutter the coiled armor that was her hair, her skintight dress.

"Supergirl!" she said with considerable warmth.

"Ms. Luthor--Lena--"

It seemed odd that Supergirl would stop calling her Luthor on this night, when she finally knew she was one. Supergirl and Kara Danvers were the only two people on the planet on whose lips her last name hadn't been a curse (or, as when her mother and brother said it, a threat). But now Supergirl seemed nervous and was avoiding her last name.

"Supergirl, it is so good to see you! To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Awkwardly, Supergirl lifted her hand and Lena saw her own green paisley scarf carefully folded into a soft square. "I, um, I accidentally took this with me when I went to sleep under the sunlamps. I was really tired and I, I just, sort of forgot that I had it?"

Lena took it out of her hand. "I saw that. It's all right. That's why I like silk so much. Sometimes when the world is very hard, it can help to touch something very soft."

Supergirl's blue eyes lit up. "Exactly! I mean, I wasn't thinking that, because, well, I was too tired to think. But I think that was probably what my hands were thinking!"

Lena smiled. Then she pointed to Supergirl's cape. "May I?"

"Er, sure, yes."

With her free hand, Lena stroked the bright red cape. "How can it be so soft when it is fireproof and rocket-proof?"

"Oh! Agent Danvers tried to explain it to me. It's not exactly like Schrodinger's cat. It's sort of a quantum material that can be what it needs to be. It responds to the pressure put on it. A soft touch will find it soft. A rocket will make it into adamantine."

Lena smiled, "The mythical hardest material on Earth. Very appropriate." She looked at the green cloth in her hand. "You know, Supergirl, in those old medieval myths, there was a tradition that a damsel would give her scarf to her knight, to carry her token with him for, well, courage. To know she loved him."

Shyly she held out the scarf, letting the green unfold between her hands. "Would you be my knight in quantum armor, Supergirl?"

Supergirl's eyes went wide. "It's green, like your eyes...I mean. I, thank you. That's very sweet of you."

"Well, you have saved me from distress many times. I have wanted to thank you appropriately but I never..." She took a step forward as Supergirl took the scarf from her hands. She looked at the hero's lips, and whispered, "May I?"

Supergirl whispered, "Oh, yes..."

Lena kissed her, softly and Supergirl leaned into the kiss. They lingered like that, warm lips tingling and then Supergirl pulled back a little to take a deep breath.
Lena said, "I imagine you are like your cape, Supergirl. Soft when met with softness."

Supergirl blushed and slid her hand up and down Lena's arm, her hand closing on Lena's bicep, causing a rush of heat throughout Lena's body. She murmured, "What do you become when it gets rougher?" And she took Supergirl's face in her hands and kissed her hard, and for a moment Supergirl was kissing her back, hard and her hand on Lena's arm hurt, but it was a good pain, and then Supergirl pulled away.

"I can't, this isn't, I don't-- I have to go."

And she turned and jumped up and with a flap of the hardened red cape she flew away.

On the floor of the balcony where her boots had just stood, the breeze fluttered the end of the long green scarf.
Reporting To You Live from the Federal Court

Chapter Summary

More of 2.12, Luthors

National City Tribune--Cat Grant

Tensions were high today at the federal courthouse, packed tightly with human and alien spectators waiting to see the outcome of the trial of John "Metallo" Corben, accused of mass murder and attempted genocide, as well as multiple smaller counts of damage to city property, murder and attempted murder.

Following last month's trial and conviction of Lillian Luthor for most of the same crimes, Corben's defense attorneys worked hard to get Corben's trial moved to Opal City, where--they argued--his name was not linked with mass murder in the minds of potential jurors. When the Judge Tuttle threw out that appeal, they successfully got the trial delayed while National City University scientists and doctors at the medical school worked to stabilize his alien enhancements, which the defense lawyers argued would make him too ill to stand trial.

Thanks to the pioneering work of Dr. Charlotte Arsenault, Corben was judged healthy enough to stand trial, and yesterday began the legal battle and accompanying media circus that is the case of the People vs. John "Metallo" Corben.

(See page A8 for the Tribune's exclusive exposé on Corben's Cadmus-built enhancements, and A9-10 on the Cadmus conspiracy to exterminate the aliens of National City. See A11 for Supergirl's statement of gratitude for the timely help of Lena Luthor for taking down Lillian Luthor and Cadmus.)

The prosecution led with the relationship between the accused Corben and the convicted Luthor. Corben described Lillian Luthor as "the doctor who saved my life."

Prosecution characterized Luthor's actions as "turning [Corben] into a weaponized cyborg" leading the defense to object to such language.

Further questioning about his relationship to Luthor led Corben to rant about the "alien threat" to the Earth, claiming that aliens should be "wiped out, starting with Supergirl and her cousin" because aliens bring "violence and disease" although he did not offer any evidence for his claims. The prosecution tried to shut down his ravings about how Lillian Luthor was trying to save the human race and had been doing so "until Supergirl silenced her" and the judge surprisingly did not take quick action to call for order in the court.

Up until that moment, it was still just an ordinary day in National City with the judicial system handling an alleged criminal. Then, when the prosecution asked for permission to treat him as a hostile witness, Corben stood and shot a bolt of what appeared to be bright green kryptonite plasma from the enhanced generator that Luthor allegedly used to replace his human heart.

The prosecuting attorney and two security guards sustained life-threatening burns as the court erupted into chaos, lawyers, jurors and spectators racing to get to the emergency exits before the
room erupted in green fire.

Screams split the formerly quiet space and papers went flying. Through it all, Lillian Luthor sat smiling apparently happily while terror and destruction reigned around her. Corben himself snapped Luthor's manacles and took her out of the courthouse, where they were confronted by Supergirl.

After a battle in which Supergirl tried to contain the Luthor with her laser eyes, Corben shot his green plasma up at a nearby construction crane. As we have come to see for the last two years in National City, the Girl of Steel immediately chose protecting citizens over vengeance, and flew up to keep the several thousand pounds of steel crane from crashing down into the street and creating bloody mayhem.

The NCPD has verified that they do not know the whereabouts of the escapees, and have asked that citizens of National City keep a sharp eye out for John Corben and Lillian Luthor.
And You Thought Your Day Was Bad

Chapter Summary

More of 2.12, this time from Maggie's point of view.

Maggie Sawyer hadn't had a day like this since back when she was a beat cop in Gotham, a day when anything that could go wrong did, on every level from the Mayor on down to her own hands.

The people of National City were increasingly restless, despite the speeches being made at the Statehouse and City Hall. Most industries were back up and running but travel in and out of the city was still restricted to essential work only, and since General Lane was the one who got to say what was and was not essential, the criterion used to make that call was on the conservative side.

There was less looting, but on the other hand, they still had to do all the paperwork and logistics of dealing with all the looters they had already caught and were holding. And then the DEO had given her what had looked to her like enough evidence to get a judge to sign an arrest warrant for Maxwell Lord, but Captain Tilden had insisted on more. He was in his office at that moment discussing the whole thing with Director Henshaw. So that was on hold.

She had been called out to an anti-alien hate crime just as she was going to grab lunch, and when she saw the two blue aliens with their guts ripped out and Hail Cadmus! scrawled with blood on an alley wall, she decided that eating wasn't going to be in her best interest for a long while anyway. And that had been before Metallo and Lillian Luthor broke out of the courtroom and escaped.

Tilden used the death of one of the security guards as a reason to send her to Corben's prison cell to search it herself and personally examine the prison records. It didn't look like he'd had help, but it still wasn't clear.

Then Alex had called her from the DEO and asked her to come by to pick up some more evidence to deliver to Henshaw and Tilden, and that's when she saw Supergirl come marching into the command center, frustrated and angry.

She said, "I've flown over the whole city twice. They're gone. Metallo and Lillian are gone. I should have stopped them."

Alex said, "You saved everyone. That was the right choice."

Maggie's phone rang. "Sawyer."

She listened, stopping in her tracks at what she heard her partner saying about John Corben's cell. With a deep sigh, she hung up.

Alex noticed. "What's wrong?"

"I had the jail check all of Corben's visitors to see how the kryptonite might have gotten smuggled in. But he hasn't had any visitors since he's been there. And when they swept his cell yesterday, there was nothing out of the ordinary, which means he must have gotten it last night."

"That seems to narrow down the window," said Alex. "Why do you look so concerned?"
"Because there was only one visitor to the jail last night. But it was to visit Lillian Luthor."

Supergirl frowned. "Who?"

"Her daughter, Lena."

Supergirl spent ten minutes arguing that Lena couldn't have been connected to Lillian's escape. Privately, Maggie agreed with Supergirl's take on the youngest Luthor, but she kept her mouth shut, knowing that Alex and the others were still not entirely convinced. Finally, Supergirl growled, "It doesn't matter. I'm going to go see her. She's going to need a friend."

And Supergirl took off from the DEO, and Maggie remembered how Lena had looked so lost at their last game night, so alone, and the detective was grateful that Lena had Supergirl on her side.

And then they got that damned video.

The last thing Maggie Sawyer wanted to do on this very bad entirely horrible day was march into L-Corp and make someone else's already much more horrible day worse, especially when she thought of Lena as someone she hoped to be friends with. But she had a job to do. So she had two uniforms meet her at L-Corp and they went up to Lena's office, and there Maggie saw Lena's other good friend, Kara Danvers.

They walked into the office, not nervous but grim.

Kara said, "Maggie! Did you find Lillian?"

"No. We didn't." Maggie turned to the CEO, then turned back to Kara. "We're actually here on official business, Kara. I think it might be better if you waited outside while I talk to Ms. Luthor."

"No," said Kara, putting down her purse and crossing her arms.

Lena said, "I want her to stay."

Maggie wasn't surprised, so she just soldiered on. "The police were sent some surveillance footage I wanted to ask you about." She clicked open her NCPD tablet and hit Play. It looked like a lab, and it looked like Lena Luthor was taking what looked like Kryptonite out of a cabinet. "That's not me, okay. I, I don't know where you got that, but it's, but it's not me."

Maggie handed the tablet to one of the uniforms and reached the case on the back of her belt for her handcuffs. Gently but firmly, she pulled Lena's hands behind her and clicked the cuffs on.

"You are under arrest for aiding and abetting a felon, accessory after the fact, conspiracy..."

Kara cut in. "Hold on. Maggie, slow down. Just let her explain."

Hating herself, Maggie said, "Stay out of it, Kara."

Lena said, to Kara but also it seemed to Maggie, "It's all right." She looked resigned.

Maggie continued, "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you..."

Maggie had dragged handcuffed CEOs out of their enormous buildings before, in front of all their employees, but in those cases she had always been completely convinced of their guilt and the threat they posed others. This time she was convinced of nothing except that there was actually at least one person in National City having an even worse day than she was.
Chapter Summary

With James gone and Cat out on a lead there is no one to stop Snapper.

By the time Kara got back to CatCo, the place was an uproar of activity. Eve Tessmacher looked more than usually fussed. Kara asked her, "What's going on?"

"They're crashing the cover."

"But pub date's today. The cover's set."

"That's why they call it crashing? Don't ask me, Kara!"

They made their way to Snapper's office and he was yelling more loudly than usual. "You're late, Tessmacher. Gimme that."

"I sent it down to layouts already. This one's for you, sir."

"Wait," protested Kara. "You're putting Lena Luthor on the cover? She doesn't need to be a front page story."

Snapper lived up to his name. "She's arguable the most famous name in National City, Danvers. Her notorious brother's in prison. Of course I'm putting her on the cover. She's a Luthor!"

"But she didn't do it!"

"Have you seen the video? Or are you letting a budding friendship corrupt your reporting. Who's got confirmation bias now? If you think otherwise, keep digging. We'll need something for tomorrow's issue anyway."

"I will keep digging. But you can't do this. Tomorrow will be too late. By tomorrow people will think she's guilty."

"They already do."

Kara hurried to Cat's office, but Cat wasn't there. Eve hurried after Kara. "I know she was at the courthouse this morning. I think she is following up with some people about the judge. She thought he was acting oddly at the trial."

Kara called Cat's phone and left text messages about what was happening with Snapper, but she got no answer back, so she called Winn instead.

"Hey, Winn. Are you still at the DEO?"

"Yeees. I was just about to leave for the night... Why?"

"Lena needs our help. Could you take a look at that video that looks like she's stealing Kryptonite, maybe find out where it came from?"
"Kara--"

"Would there be a way to tell if the timestamp or something else about it wasn't kosher?"

"I can look. There are ways to falsify--"

"Would you do that for me? I know that everybody says she's just a Luthor and she's guilty and it seems damning, but I just don't believe it and we have to try everything to save her. I don't think she is going to do well in prison, and I am sure she's innocent. Will you help?"

"Kara, I love you but shut up. Yes, of course I will help you help her. Geez. You had me at 'Lena needs our help.'"
I extended a one-minute scene from 2.12 to do it justice and unpack Lena's experience as it happens. Let me know what you think.

Lena lay on the cot in her small dark cell, finally in the place where all Luthors end up eventually, even though she was at least innocent of stealing kryptonite. She would never do anything to harm Supergirl, but the world didn't know that. The world only knew that she was a Luthor. And though all her life she had been told she was not, now she knew the truth, and the truth had led her here.

She had never cared for small spaces, unless you counted laboratories crowded with machines and computers. Lex was even worse about such things. When he had first been arrested and charged with all of those horrible crimes, back when Lena had still thought that he had crazy ideas about aliens but he would never actually have acted on them, back then she had imagined him locked up in a small cell angry and sweating, the walls too close to contain his enormous mind. But then the truth had come out at trial. He had gleefully admitted to all of it: the first inklings of the plan, the conspiracy, the collaboration, the trap for Superman, the way it should have worked, the people he should have killed if Superman hadn't gotten in the way. He had not denied anything. And he had proudly said that he did it in part because he was a Luthor and the Luthor name would always stand against aliens. And when she had said goodbye to him, denouncing him at his sentencing and agreeing with the judge that thirty-eight life sentences were an appropriate punishment, he had jumped up, still manacled and yelled, "You're no different from me, Lena. You're a Luthor too!"

At booking, they had taken her clothes and watch and given her a long-sleeved white cotton shirt and a blue prison uniform that looked like hospital scrubs. And a tiny ironic part of her mind had thought, At least they're not orange; blue will bring out my eyes. And then they did the "biometrics" that the cop said was the fancy word they used nowadays for the photos against the height chart and the fingerprints. He wasn't horrible to her, just bored. Probably, he met the worst of the worst on a daily basis. What was one more, even if she was a Luthor?

She had waited a long time in the National City lockup. It was almost ten-thirty at night when they finally packed her and twenty other women into a heavily guarded corrections van. They rolled through the city surrounded by four police cars, all of the sirens blaring. They only paused to do the paperwork involved in going through the emergency cordon being enforced by the Army, then they passed through and headed the twenty miles to the women's medium security prison where she would be held until her trial, the trial of the last of the Luthors.

When Lena had made her one phone call, she had called Jess, who knew how to handle everything. They had made plans for as many horrible eventualities as either one of them could think of, and although Jess had protested that Lena would never be arrested, Lena had calmly explained how easy it would be to frame her, and how simply pulling her away from L-Corp would cause the company problems, from an investor's standpoint, and might be a form of industrial espionage. They did not discuss Cadmus. They didn't really have to. They simply came up with a to-do list for Jess if it came down to that, getting the lawyers to arrange her bail, getting PR to handle that shit-show, getting her CFO and CIO and Bart and all the rest to keep the ball rolling while she was gone. And because Lena truly believed in her two friends in National City who were not in her
employ, Jess was instructed to contact Kara Danvers (both for her own sake and for help with the PR angle) and to ask her to contact Supergirl. Because if there were only three people on the planet who truly believed that Lena was not truly a Luthor, they were Jess Huang, Kara Danvers, and Supergirl.

So Lena lay in her cell, hair down, mask down, makeup scrubbed off, all the things she did to keep herself in impenetrable armor negated. And she knew that the wheels were in motion to get her out on bail, to get the arraignment to go the way she needed it to go. She lay there on the razor's edge between despair and hope, teetering but not yet falling. Because if there was one thing the Luthor name really meant, it was not crime or notoriety, but strength.

That was why, when the prison guards in their crisp khaki uniforms had taunted her, wondering aloud if she, like Lex, would lose the last of her hair in prison, she ignored them. It was why when the women in the cells on her hallway whistled and catcalled and hoped to catch her in the shower the next day, she ignored them. And it was why, when Metallo used his green laser to destroy the lock on her cell, Lena didn't fight, didn't scream, just let him drag her by the arm behind him as he ran out of the prison, killing guards left and right, and dragged her to the waiting black SUV.

She remembered something she had seen scrawled on a pink file card that was taped to Kara Danvers' refrigerator on that second game night:

"There's a providence that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will. Let be." --Hamlet
Agents Danvers and Vasquez interrogated the surviving prison guard at the NCPD, with Detective Maggie Sawyer watching from behind the two-way mirror. He was still fuzzy but was clear that Lena had said nothing while Metallo apologized for taking too long to rescue her. He even recalled Metallo saying that he worked for the Luthors. Agent Danvers dismissed them and they went back to the DEO's black SUV, but Vasquez, having inserted the keys into the transmission did not turn them.

She said, "Those surveillance videos bother me. Metallo looked pained. But even if he is weakening, he's still a fanatic follower of Lillian Luthor. We have to find him."

"I know," said Alex. "We need to find where he's taken Lena and help her."

"What if she's not the victim, Alex? What if she's the one who got the kryptonite, as we saw on the video, and helped break him out of prison? What if he is now returning the favor?"

"Kara is convinced that Lena is not a member of Cadmus. Winn agrees. Lena stopped the gang with the alien weapons. She saved my life when Corben tried to kill me."

"That's one way to look at those events. She also shot Corben so that her mother then turned Corben into Metallo, so couldn't that have been the plan the entire time? We might need to start treating her like a hostile--"

"What if, instead, she's really a hostage? Kara asked Winn to scrub the video, see where it came from, whether or not it had been tampered with."

"What has he found?"

"Nothing yet. But she's Kara's friend. And I know everyone thinks that Kara is naive, innocent, far too trusting. I thought that myself for a long time. But she believes in Lena. And I believe in her."
When Winn didn't find her in the command center or the sunlamp room, the first place he looked was in the bagroom in the basement gym. But Kara wasn't there. Then he thought of the training room where she had been putting Mon-El through his paces. Before he even reached the door, he heard the noise and smiled nervously.

Quietly he made his way down the wide stairs to the Spartan training room, where Kara, still dressed as Kara, mild-mannered reporter in a blue polka-dot shirt and flats, was punching and kicking the shit out of the concrete blocks they used as obstacles in Mon-El's training.

Winn clapped. "Nice. It's good to see you, Kara. It's been a while."

"Yeah," she said, surveying the ruins of concrete around her and adjusting her glasses. "Yeah, sorry. It's been...busy lately."

"Chasing bad guys. I get it. And with what's going on with Lena, I'm sure it's extra busy."

"Are you going to tell me not to believe in her?"

"No. Lena is my friend. She understands what it's like to have a psychotic, murdering family member whose name is a warning to children. She understands me, and you believe in me. So I will believe in her if you say you do."

"I do."

"Then so do I. I've got my algorithms working on that video. It's going to take a little bit of time. But we'll figure it out. I thought of something else. There really isn't a face for us to run facial recognition software on, but we did get a fairly clear shot of her jaw, and one of the things that I have noticed about Lena, working with her so much lately..."

Kara nodded. "That ivory neck, and that jaw like a balcony you could land on..."

Winn laughed, a little embarrassed. "Um, well, I had been going to say the infrastructure of her face rather than its surface, but we'll go with what you said. I rewrote the code to search for those angles, and the angles of other jaws in our image database. It may be a long shot, but--"

"Thanks, Winn."

"Hey! What are friends for?"
Chapter Summary

More of Lillian. TW: emotional abuse.

Lena sat alone in the back of the black SUV, wrapped in a loose black jacket over her prison blues, and shivering. Metallo was driving and Lillian was riding shotgun. Lena got a small ironic slice of humor from thinking of her erstwhile mother that way. She thought it was a rare thing to see Lillian Luthor not being in complete control of a situation. Then she thought of Tom, her towncar driver, and Lillian's drivers and other servants. Lillian would not see the passenger seat as anything but a position of authority.

Then Lillian unclipped her seatbelt and stepped into the back of the SUV, took the seat opposite Lena's. She asked, "Are you okay?"

"Don't."

"You're still angry I had Metallo liberate you from that jail."

"Liberate? Hardly. Make me an accessory, more like. It makes me look more guilty when I'm not."

"Even if they found out the truth about you, no one would change their mind." Lillian huffed her disdain. "The public wants to believe the narrative they expect from us: that Luthors are evil. We don't get second chances. Look what they did to me: stripped me of my medical license without even a hearing. Or worse, what they did to Lex! He could have fixed this planet for generations... But Superman twisted what he was doing and they all turned on him."

"Lex went insane."

"Exactly. And if they could take the brightest mind on Earth and drive him crazy defending himself, imagine what they could do to you."

Lena raised her voice. "Stop the van! I'm going back."

"To what? You have no life anymore, Lena. You have no one on your side."

Lillian knew that one of the methods of an emotional abuser was that they separated the victim from their possible sources of help, convinced them that such sources were insincere at best and nonexistent at worst. But she couldn't remember the number. Wasn't it one of the thirty signs? She should remember the number.

Lillian said quietly but insistently, "You're guilty. just like me. You're on the run, just like me. Join Cadmus, and together we can do all the great things you ever dreamed of. And with no Luthor men to divide us? I can be the mother you always wanted. Because I do love you. Let me prove it to you now."

Lena couldn't think clearly. The SUV travelled quickly up a long winding road. Even if she could overpower her mother and pop the lock, throw herself out of the moving vehicle, even if she survived the fall, and didn't end up rolling off the side of a cliff, Metallo would come after her, and
she would suffer a horrific death being burned by an alien plasma ray that would just as easily--or
more--burn and kill one of her best friends. Lena grit her teeth and refused to move.

Lillian only smiled.

//

Even with all of the stress of the last hour, the last several days, Lena dozed off. Was it three
minutes or three hours? She couldn't tell. She woke at the sensation of rising, as if the elevation of
the road had steeply increased. A glance out the darkened windows of the SUV, onto the night
panorama of a low black mountain against a black, starry sky, suggested that they were far from
National City, and not in Kansas either.

Metallo drove the vehicle up to a blank charcoal wall of rock. Lillian pressed icons on her tablet,
and the wall became an enormous door. Metallo drove through.

Lights came on in response to their presence. At first it looked to Lena like an immense
underground parking lot, but when they let her out of the SUV, she realized it was something much
more than that. Across the enormous space there were trucks, semis, giant silver packing crates.

She turned to her mother. "What is this place?"

"One of Lex's old facilities. A giant satellite receiver embedded on top of this mountain monitors
outer space for signs of intelligent life."

"To warn of alien invasion?" asked Metallo.

"Bingo!" said Lillian. "Because we know more are coming."

"Which makes me glad I joined the cause." He smiled grimly.

"There's enough here to sustain us for a long time if we need it. But I suspect we won't."

"Why not?" asked Lena. "As fugitives, we can't go back."

"Not yet. But your brother didn't only keep rations for times of emergency. He also kept an arsenal,
vaults around the world, loaded with the things he'd collected to level the playing field and defeat
Superman once and for all. And one of those vaults," she hit the tablet, "is right...here."

A somewhat feminine computer voice said, "Ready for authorization."

Lillian said, "And all we need? Is to open it."

Lena looked at the keypad. "It's a biometric lock."

"It scans for Luthor DNA."

"Tell me you don't have a bit of Lex frozen somewhere." Lena looked around, half expecting a
cryovac chamber with toenail clippings or a hair sample from her brother.

Lillian smiled. "I didn't say Lex's DNA. I said Luthor DNA. Any Luthor can open it. And you, my
daughter, are part of that family tree."

Lena's world stopped for a long moment.

She thought: Lillian has never smiled this many times in one night.
She thought: It's a trick. If I overpower Metallo, make his hand hit the trigger, it will open.

She thought: It's a trick. If I overpower Lillian, make her hand hit the trigger, it will open and Metallo will shoot his green plasma at me and I will never feel another sensation again, I will never have to see Lillian again.

She thought: I will never see Kara Danvers again. Or Supergirl.

She thought: Or it's true, which means I have power they want, and won't want to destroy.

She smiled back at Lillian. "You didn't have your green goon 'liberate' me from prison because you love me, because you wanted to help me. You did because I'm the only one who can open this vault for you."

Lillian, ever the snake, prevaricated. "While it is true that I need your DNA, one does not negate the other. I still love you. I still want to help you." The smiles came more easily to Lillian than they had in over twenty years. "I promise, it won't hurt." She went to take Lena's hand, as if to place it on the sensor pad.

And once again, Lena's world slowed almost to a stop. Lena remembered getting her vaccines at the age of four. Lillian had said it wouldn't hurt but it had. And Lena remembered, Number 5: They try to control you and treat you like a child.

Back in real time, Lena backed away, saying, "You don't want to help me. You just want to help yourself. I'll take my chances on my own."

Hands clamped on Lena from behind. It was Cyborg Superman growling, "You should listen to your mother!"

Lena said, "You're hurting me!"

"He doesn't want to, Lena," said Lillian. "Put your hand on the pad and we can all start getting along again. I promise."

Lena saw her mother clearly. She said, "No."

Cybor Superman gripped her right and and slapped it down on the sensor pad. "Don't you want to play nice?"

In the center of the room's floor, a flat door opened, letting a vault rise out of the depths.

Lillian said, "See? Now that wasn't so bad, was it?"
Winn was tracking three different computer screens at once. Kara paced behind him. He said, "You know the backseat driving? Not helping."

"Sorry, but have you found anything yet?"

"I promise, I will tell you. You know the phrase 'a watched pot never oh, oh, I might just be simmering..." One of the screens was changing from the still of Lena, pixel by pixel, into something else.

"What is it?"

"Okay, so I hacked into L-Corp's CCTV to get a copy of the raw video footage of Lena taking the kryptonite, but, ha!, it looks like somebody already hacked into this system a couple of days ago. Oh, okay, I recognize this code. This code is what the real Hank Henshaw used the day he broke in to L-Corp to steal the isotope. Okay. If the video was corrupted by Henshaw's cyborg signature, then I can reverse that signature and decrypt it and separate the raw video file from the corrupted one. Aaaaand...."

On his screen in front of their eyes, Lena disappeared to be replaced by a blonde in a long white labcoat. She picked up the green specimen and grinned.

"Lena didn't do it!" said Kara. "Can you run facial--"

"Already on it. Hey. You're right? I mean, You're right!"

A male disembodied voice came from a computer on the other side of the room. "Kryptonite signature detected."

They ran over.

"What is this?" asked Kara.

"J'onn's been having me scan for kryptonite signatures so we can find Metallo."

"What have you found, Agent Schott?" asked the director. He was followed in by Alex.

"Yep, there it is. Fifty miles north of Mount Whitney. But wait, that's strange. Either something is wrong with the signal or the source isn't pure."

Alex looked at the screen. "The ionizing radiation signature is breaking down at an exponential rate."

J'onn said, "Kryptonite is normally the most stable of elements."

"Vasquez said she thought Metallo looked wrong on the surveillance videos at the prison, like he
was in pain."

"It could be synthetic," suggested Alex.

"That would explain why they had it in the first place and it wasn't with Clark," said Kara.

Winn frowned. "Oh, whoa. If these numbers are right, then it's not just unstable. It's going to blow."

"Blow?" asked Kara.

"Like, like go nuclear."

J'onn asked, "Did you finish repairing the anti-kryptonite vest Supergirl wore the last time she fought Metallo?"

"They're in pieces. I--"

Kara said, "There's no time. I have to go now or Lena's dead."

She tore off her shirt, revealing the crest of the house of El, and leapt into flight, leaving her human reporter's clothes behind in a trail on the DEO floor. Winn admired her, no question. But at moments like this, he hated when she did that.
If This Is My Last Fight (It Will Be for You)

Chapter Summary

The end of 2.12, Luthors...

She flew faster than she had ever flown before. In her ear, Winn said, "Kara, we calculated the rate of radioactive decay. It's faster than we thought."

"How fast?"

"Minutes. Its half-life is decreasing exponentially."

"Kara," said Alex in her other ear. "You have to turn back. When the kryptonite explodes, it's going to send out a radioactive cloud of kryptonite gas and if you are anywhere near it, it'll kill you."

"Then I'll make sure I'm not there when it goes off!" Even from this distance, Kara saw the mountain and was able to use her x-ray vision to see the bunker built into its core.

She dove straight through solid rock and drilled through the bunker's roof to land in the middle of a wide, open room.

Lena Luthor, dressed in black like all the rest, led them toward the Woman of Steel. "Supergirl," she called. "I can't believe you're here!"

The hero said, "Kara Danvers believes in you!"

Lillian Luthor, sounding as if she were welcoming the woman to an afternoon tea, said, "Supergirl, you're just in time. I've been wondering if these worked."

She tossed a grenade into the air and it landed in Supergirl's hand, but just as she was about to crush it, a supersonic noise split the air and her superhearing overloaded. She collapsed onto the floor, groaning and holding her hands over her ears.

As the noise started to fade, Lillian stepped closer, holding a silver box tightly in one arm. She said, "Well, that was easy. Want to try more of these toys?"

Lena surged forward. "Don't hurt her!" she shouted, but Cyborg Superman pulled her back, kept her from doing--she didn't even know. Throwing herself between her mother and Supergirl? Taking whatever attack Lillian threw at Supergirl next?

Lillian turned back toward Lena as the real Hank Henshaw dropped her to the floor, head first. "Sorry," she said. "She's got to pay for what her cousin did to your brother." She turned back to the guards. "Lock Supergirl in the vault."

Supergirl's earpiece buzzed. Winn said, "Supergirl, if you can still hear me, Metallo's heart? The rate of decay is ticking up!"

Cyborg Superman grabbed Supergirl and dragged her toward the vault.
She said, "Metallo's heart is going to explode. You all need to leave. You have to get the kryptonite out of here."

"You're lying," said Lillian easily.

"I'm not. He's going to die." She saw the look Lillian gave Metallo, how the green light was webbing throughout his body, no longer focused on his heart. His eyes were rimmed red with exhaustion. Supergirl saw that Lillian looked and saw and doubted and hesitated. But her hesitation would mean Lena's death.

"The only person about to die here is you," said Metallo.

Supergirl aimed her laser vision on the grenade that had attacked her superhearing. It exploded. Metallo sent a beam of hot green pain straight at her.

In her ear, Winn insisted, "Listen to me! The more Metallo uses his synthetic kryptonite, the faster it is decaying."

And Alex ordered, "Get out of there, now!"

Metallo's next attack was unfocused but no less deadly. The wobbling beam of green plasma sent Supergirl flying into a pile of silver cargo containers. She saw Lillian and Cyborg Superman trotting toward the exit. They were no concern of hers, not now with maybe only seconds to spare. His chest was charging again. She picked up a motorcycle and threw it at him and the energy disintegrated it instantly.

In her ear, Winn yelled, "Kara the kryptonite is almost critical!"

Supergirl charged Metallo, punched him in the chest, but he caught her arms. She gasped, "Metallo! That pain in your chest. Take it out. Let me help you!"

"You're lying," he said.

The villains never did want to believe that she only wanted to help.

Then a sound like flying and her arms were released. She heard Metallo say, "Martian."

Then Metallo was landing in a pile of containers, and J'onn Jonzz was shouting, "Get Lena! Let's go!"

In her ears, Alex screamed, "Kara, please!" and Winn shouted, "Supergirl, get out of there now!"

Supergirl flew to where Lena was unconscious on the floor and went to pick her up.

And Metallo was striding toward them, his heart a wild, pulsing, bright green swamp of deadly light. The light spread to his eyes and his hands, and pulsed ever more wildly. And he looked at his body as if he did not recognize it, had not believed her and suddenly realized that she was a dead man in all but fact.

The explosion of green was deafening, blinding. Voices called in her ears. "Kara? Kara!"

Altitude, cold air, with a rush of hot air behind it. Supergirl barely knew what she was doing, where Lena was, where J'onn was. All she knew was that she was flying higher and higher and so far above where the radioactive cloud would go that humans would not be able to breathe and then she realized that she was clasping an injured Lena Luthor tightly, so tightly to her chest, bridal style,
and the woman who was so dear to her, who hated flying, had her eyes squeezed shut and her arms wrapped around Supergirl tightly, so tightly, and although Supergirl's heart was pounding in terror, Lena's heart was calm and measured.

//

Snapper, of course, would never admit to his entrenched case of confirmation bias. Instead he simply told Kara to get an exclusive with Lena Luthor, and to make sure she spelled exclusive correctly.

The fact that the story that their outlets were covering was the most important rescue in Kara Zor-El's life--

And that was thirteen years on Krypton, more than ten years in the Phantom Zone and another thirteen years on Earth, so that was easily three decades, which seemed exactly the right sort of metric for this sort of thing--

Well, that entirely escaped Lucas "Snapper" Carr, which was probably just as well. And his order gave her the excuse she didn't need to go to L-Corp and visit Lena Luthor, which she had been dying to do as Kara Danvers for the last eighteen hours. She even brought her a pre-press edition of tomorrow's CatCo Magazine.

//

Kara sat on Lena's white couch while Lena read her work.

Finally, Lena put the magazine down. "Good article. You flatter me."

Kara waved that away. "I only wrote the truth. I'm learning to keep digging even when all the evidence points one way. There's always another side."

"Even when it's hard to find," suggested Lena.

"Especially when it's hard to find!"

There was a comfortable pause, but then Kara had to say what she really came to say. "So my office is overflowing with flowers..."

Lena frowned. "Really?"

"Yeah," said Kara with a laugh.

Lena smiled.

Kara shook her head. "You didn't have to do that."

"Yeah," said Lena. "I did. Supergirl told me that it was you who sent her. I don't know how to thank you."

Kara waved her hand. "Well, that's what friends are for."

Lena shook her head, as if trying to get beyond her disbelief. "You know, I've never had friends like you before. Come to think of it, I've never had family like you. No one's ever stood up for me like that."

"Now you have someone who will stand up for you. Always."
"Well, Supergirl saved me. But you, Kara Danvers, are my hero!"

They laughed. They hugged. And then Kara said, "Well, bye."

And Lena said, "Bye."

Because the most important people in your life always walked away. They never really heard what you were saying to them. They never got how important, crucial, there wasn't even a word, they were to you.

She sat back down on the couch and looked at the coffee table. On the left was CatCo magazine, and her own face looking up at her. On the right was a chessboard, a game she had been playing against herself still half-finished. She picked up the knight (or "horse guy" as Kara had called it) and remembered her first game with Lex, which she had won. She remembered Lillian's response, "Well, maybe you are a Luthor after all," and her feeling of satisfaction, happiness. She had made a friend of her new brother and showed her worth to her new mother, and maybe things, which had been so horrible since the beginning of her real mother's illness, would begin to improve.
Kara went directly from L-Corp to the alien bar. M'gann was tending one end of the bar and Mon-El the other. Kara approached M'gann. "Club soda, please? And can I borrow, well, him? It won't take long, I promise."

M'gann pulled her a club soda and said, "On the house. I heard what you did tonight. But please, Kara, don't abandon your boundaries. Just because, sometimes, well I guess the human word is hormones. We have, had, other words for it on Mars. I know you think he's cute, but he's not--"

"I think the language is 'high value' or 'equal value.' Mon-El is not good enough for you."

Kara opened her mouth and closed it again. She sipped her club soda and made her way to the back of the bar, to her favorite booth. Shortly, Mon-El joined her, carrying an Aldebaran rum in a loose hand. "Hey, babe! What's happening?"

"Mon-El, we're really different."

"I know. I'm super fun and you're hypercritical."

"More like you're an arrogant doofus and I'm the personification of the American way?"

"Oh, so, the point is that. Well. Last year, I thought I could have it all, and then I thought I couldn't. So then I chose being Supergirl over being in a relationship. And then you came along and I thought you were thoughtless and selfish, and you kept proving me right. And tonight I came closer than I ever thought I would to actually dying. And I did it for someone who is basically the complete opposite of everything you are. She is thoughtful and selfless and wants to genuinely make a difference in the world. And I love her."

Mon-El's face fell.

"So I know I have been giving you mixed messages, because, gosh, I've been giving myself mixed messages, to be honest. But now I am finally clear. I know what I want. I know who I want."

"And it's not me."

"It's not you. I'm sorry."

He tried to smile. "Nah, you're good. You want somebody who is actually almost as good as you are. I've always known I wasn't that. I had just hoped you wouldn't figure it out. But you did. And that. Is. Good. For you. So, good for you. And I'm just going to go now."

"Good night, Mon-El. Goodbye."
What We Thought About After You Saved Her Life

Chapter Summary

A little filler.

Vasquez read the reports that Alex and Winn had written. She read the "interview" between Kara Danvers and Supergirl (and not for the first time, and not for the last, she really did not envy Kara her double life).

And then she started thinking about all the agents of the DEO: Winn the agent and Winn the gamer; Alex the scientist and Alex, Supergirl's sister; J'onn the Green Martian and Hank Henshaw the Black man who pretended to be an FBI agent who was really Hank Henshaw, a DEO agent; and herself, her apparently straight self/agent of the FBI or Secret Service, and herself the fairly queer DEO agent who mentored the gay ones and harbored an enormous crush on Agent Danvers vs. herself the Supergay dodgeball lesbian who had loads of game and chill and all the things. And then she thought about James Olsen, photojournalist turned CEO turned DEO rookie. She didn't envy him either. Hell, even Agent Ryder, their ex-mole at Lord Tech, was at least two people. Maybe they all were.

About the only people who had seemed to have a single identity each were Dr. Eliza Danvers and Roulette, and Vasquez was pretty sure those illusions were very much not accurate. One only had to see how other people responded to their presence in the room to know that their realities were more complex than a quick glance suggested. More scrutiny was required.

But that wasn't really a problem. Vasquez was very good at scrutinizing.

Alex came into the conference room where Vasquez was working and handed her two more thick file-folders. "Lord's parents' work. I thought he might have borrowed something from his archival vaults."

Vasquez said, "Good thinking," and set the folders on the table. "Analytics is still calculating the medical cost, the infrastructure cost, the psychological cost of the 'accidental release' of those mosquito drones. That prick is either an idiot or a sociopath, maybe both." She rubbed her eyes.

Alex leaned over the table to look at the list of numbers, her hands on the grey folders. Vasquez looked down. "Your have very long fingers," she said huskily.

Alex searched her eyes, probably uncertain if she had really heard the undertone Vasquez had given her words. Vasquez decided to push a little. "Of course," she murmured, "short fingers aren't terrible. I'm sure you were straight long enough to know that size isn't the most important thing."
Eyes large, Alex nodded.

"Do you know what the most important thing is, Danvers?"

"What?" whispered Alex.

Vasquez put her mouth to Alex's ear and whispered, "Enthusiasm."

Then she winked, scooped up the paperwork and said in her normal tone, "Gotta go see a lady about a warrant."
A Good Day to Arrest a CEO

This time when word came down to arrest a CEO in a very public place, Maggie did her job with enthusiasm. La Rue Droite was known as National City's third most expensive restaurant, the one the rich went to when they wanted to impress each other (because going to the more expensive places would just be tacky) and although Maggie herself had never been inside, she heard that some of those hundred dollar appetizers were the size of a quarter. The rich were very strange. Give her a double veggie burger with all the fixings and she would be quite happy, thank you very much. And today, as so often happened, she hadn't even managed to grab lunch, but she did grab the opportunity to arrest Maxwell Lord and his date.

When the video that had been tampered to apparently show Lena Luthor taking kryptonite from an undisclosed location had been decrypted, the figure had been identified as one Dr. Charlotte Arsenault, a woman that the tabloids said had been seen at several social occasions with Maxwell Lord. One of Winn's programs for scanning the city for kryptonite had been tailored to add a program that Vasquez had asked for that scanned the city for large quantities of lead. That had led them to get a warrant to go to Lord Tech and National City University with a HazMat team to locate the kryptonite. Lord Tech stalled them and then proved to be clean, but Arsenault's lab at NCU was dirty as hell. And the kryptonite found there proved to have been some of the stuff Lord had synthesized the year before, when he had been trying to "protect" the city from Supergirl.

So all of that teamwork led Maggie and four uniforms to march into La Rue Droite, make their way under crystal chandeliers and arrest the two criminal lovebirds, cuff them, and take them out into the street where representatives of the city's media (who just might have been tipped off) were ready to shout questions and snap photos and video of the pair as each of them got their head pushed down as they were forced into the back seat of a cop car.

Maggie made a statement about allegations of criminal negligence and conspiracy. She kept it very neutral, not letting any of her own personal disdain or her friends' outright disgust slip out. When the reporters asked about Lillian and Cyborg Superman, she admitted that the police still had no leads but that the appropriate authorities were working to decontaminate Mount Haystack, where the explosion had "completely obliterated Lex Luthor's facility" because that was the way the Police Commissioner and the Director of the DEO had decided to play it.

"But Detective!" shouted a blonde woman with glasses. "If kryptonite only harms Kryptonians, why is it so necessary to decontaminate it? Does it pose any threat to humans or other aliens?"

"NCPD Science Division is testing samples from the soil and flora in the area. As I understand it, the radiation from the explosion may be mildly harmful. That has yet to be determined. But the Governor agrees that it is best to be cautious."

Back at the precinct, she oversaw the pair's processing. They both immediately asked for their lawyers, which was just to be expected.

Later on, the other team came back with the Lord Tech technicians who had allegedly released the mosquitoes from the corporate R&D lab, including video evidence that the police were carefully double checking, and evidence from text messages that this had been the plan all along.

From here on out, it was up to the lawyers to sort it out. Hopefully there wouldn't be any huge weird science crimes for the rest of the week. Because Maggie, although happier about her job today than she'd been just a few days ago, was one tired cop who could simply use a cold beer.
Okay, I was not planning to do this, although I had thought about it a while back and then bang, here we are.

That night, half of the DEO ended up at the alien bar, and when one of the alien patrons complained first that the Earthlings were taking over their space and second that the DEO hanging out in an alien bar was about as classy as immigration officials hanging out in a bar for undocumented immigrants, J'onn switched into his green self, crossed his arms over his chest and said in his loudest gravelly voice, "First round's on me, M'gann. The whole house!"

After that, things went better. J'onn changed back and ordered an obscure Dutch beer, told stories about working for the Dutch East India Company back in the day, and when he said back, he meant way back.

Kara hadn't come with them. She had said she needed to fly a bit to clear her head, so she went out on patrol as Supergirl.

Alex and Vasquez challenged Maggie and Lucy to several rounds of pool, but even Lucy's extreme finesse couldn't help Maggie win, though they were only betting shiny pennies this time, so nobody really cared.

Winn watched them and slowly, the way Lucy touched Maggie's arm and the way they grinned at each other, made him think it was probably just as well that James was out in the desert. At first when James had left for DEO boot camp, Winn had wondered whether he and Lucy might get together again. Then he'd gotten James's texts and emails and he realized that Lucy might break a small rule to save someone's life, but she would not break the anti-fraternization rules just for her own benefit.

Then James had told him about the rules of engagement lecture she had given his class during their first week on base, and Winn understood, as he thought James probably didn't, what had really bothered Lucy about the Guardian: he didn't just break rules; he completely ignored them. From the little Winn had picked up from CatCo's gossip writers, one of the biggest problems that Lucy Lane had with her sister Lois was that reporter's constant and complete disinterest with any rules except maybe--and only maybe--the rules of English grammar.

Then Winn started watching Alex and Vasquez and his brain nearly melted. He had never really socialized with Vasquez since he came to work at the DEO, and although he saw her at her post and in the gym, he had never seen what he now thought of as her softer side. The day that Supergirl and Mon-El had gotten stuck on Mars, he had totally expected to find Alex lying on a table with Vasquez's head between her pantless legs, and lots of moaning going on. To have found them simply filing had been easier but stranger, because he was pretty sure that those two really liked each other, but after that he figured he was just being one of those creepy straight males who wanted to imagine two naked women--

But his brain stopped him before he could even finish that particular sentence. No. Nope. Nunh-uh. Can't. Go. There. Alex was practically his sister and Vasquez was one of his heroes. So when
Maggie had asked Winn if he played pool, he leaped at the chance to distract himself.

"Pfft. How hard can pool be? It's just geometry with sticks!"

J'onn murmured to Lucy, "My money's on your girl."

Lucy laughed. "Mine too!"

The two of them stood to the side discussing how the recent disasters and their resulting choice to deputize aliens had created a precedent for aliens to be a part of the DEO that they were going to have to be careful about going forward. "Although," Lucy pointed out, "once the president's Alien Amnesty Act went into effect, we immediately had aliens volunteering to join all the armed forces. Surprisingly, the Coast Guard was one of the most inundated."

It was Winn's turn and he looked past his shot to see Lucy turn and grin at Maggie, one of those private we'll-need-to-get-a-room-later kinds of grins and he shot the pool cue so hard the white ball shot off the table and into the air. Lucy caught it without even thinking.

"What are you trying to do, Schott? Take out a superior officer?"

Vasquez took pity on him, as always, and showed him how to hold the cue and how much force to use, how to aim and how to plan to use not geometry but physics. And his game improved, a little--enough to lose shiny pennies but not enough to (further) erode his dignity.

And an alien he hadn't seen before bought him a drink, so he was going to consider this a good evening. And then he looked up at the television and he dropped his drink to the floor. The glass shattered and the drink splashed over his shoes.

Behind him aliens and humans gave him a round of applause, but Vasquez and Maggie hurried over, followed by J'onn and Lucy.

High on the roof of FAO Schwartz's National City headquarters, Supergirl was fighting.

With Winn's father, the Toyman.
Let the Games Begin

Chapter Summary

My take on 1.10 Childish Things. I don't know why this came to me, but I'm running with it.

Chapter Notes

100,000+ words in 22 days. Superwriter!

"You know, Vasquez, I never in all my born days expected to be speeding off to help Supergirl fight off a psychotic toymaker in a VW Beetle with 'a few extra' AK-15s in the trunk."

Vasquez laughed, her adrenaline surging. "That, my love, is because you have only known me for what? A year and a half? And usually I live at the DEO, so my civilian ride is never my ops vehicle of choice."

She pulled up in front of the ten-foot-tall bronze teddy bear outside the FAO Schwartz building, pulled out two guns and handed one to Alex, along with a utility belt with extra ammo. "Let's go."

The lobby of the building was almost empty, just a security guard who gaped at their weapons and a front desk woman in a pink blazer who said, "IDs, please?" as if she watched two women in civilian clothes walk in with army weapons every day.

They both pulled out their "FBI" identification.

She nodded. "I hope you're here to get rid of the strange man? Because I know Supergirl is trying to handle him, but he's not alone. He's got a, a posse, and they're holding our CEO hostage on the twenty-sixth floor."

"Twenty-six," said Alex. "Check."

They went to the elevator. "Shouldn't we take the stairs?" asked Alex.

"Probably, but I'm going to hold onto luck. I want to get to the top with my heart rate mostly calm so that my shots aren't erratic."

They stood in the elevator, cradling their automatic weapons. Vasquez said, "So, have you taken your vacation days yet?"

"What? No! Who's had time?"

"I had a girlfriend who always talked about going to Bermuda or the Florida Keys. You strike me as a swimmer."

"What? Yes, of course I swim. What has that got to do with anything?"
"Just curious. Where would Agent Alexandra Danvers go on her vacations?"

Alex stared at her. "How would I know? I've never taken one. When they make me stay home, I finally get the damn laundry done, maybe go out for sushi one night for a treat."

The bell for the twenty-fourth floor rang. "Let's take this floor and do the stairs. Less likely to attract the wrong kind of attention that way."

Alex just followed her, shaking her head.

//

When they exited the stairs, they realized that the conference room had windows from shoulder-height up, so they dropped to all fours and crawled their way to the bullpen that was where the administrative assistants apparently worked. A red-headed woman hiding under her desk signaled to them, and they crawled toward her, taking cover behind another desk.

"Are you the NCPD? The FBI? Tell me we're not gonna die!"

"You're not going to die, ma'am," Vasquez said with such incredible authority that even Alex believed it.

Alex said, "How many of them are there and how are they armed?"

"Six. Dart guns. Travis tried to protect Mr. Gunther and they shot him and he fell and he is out like a light, but he's still breathing and he has a silly little smile, so..."

"Probably not lethal, then," said Vasquez optimistically.

"Let's just not get shot anyway, Vasquez."

"Check. No getting shot. Bad look on a couple of lesbians anyway." She glanced over the top of the desk. "Damn!"

"What?"

"Looks like they're heading this way. And we don't have any non-lethal options like we would have had at SHIELD. Damn, Alex, those icers!"

Alex turned to the redhead. "Ma'am. We're going to need your help."

//

"It turns out," said Vasquez, back at the DEO and smiling with pride at Alex, "you can fit a whole lot of marbles in even regular pockets. We would totally have rocked it if we'd had our uniform cargo pants on!"

Alex blushed. "Maggie was really great about taking them into custody, since it wasn't our jurisdiction. So is Supergirl back yet?"

Winn shook his head, looking down. "Dad got away. She's trying to pick up his trail, but..."

"Hey, Little Plaid Shirt. Danvers and me just took out six dangerous criminals with nothing but slingshots and pockets full of marbles. We got this. I promise."

//
Cat Grant met with FBI Special Agent Susan Vasquez to get quotes on the "Battle of the Dolls" as she had titled the fight. Vasquez was neutral, avoided humor or puns, no matter how Grant pushed her and ended with, "Just doing our job, ma'am."

Cat turned off the tape recorder. "Now, Susan, off the record. I know that our beloved little computer elf is now working with you and Kara Danvers' sister at the, um, 'FBI.' Is he doing okay? I know he took it hard when his father showed up last year."

Vasquez didn't show the surprise she felt. "He's shaping up to be a good agent. He's handling the problem well. I'll let him know you asked after him."

"No, better not," said Cat quickly. "That would only make things worse. Our parents can be our greatest supports or our most difficult obstacles... Good day, Agent Vasquez."

//

Supergirl returned to the DEO frustrated and exhausted. "Where's Alex?"

"J'onn sent her home not twenty minutes ago," said Vasquez. "I think he assumed you would go there first."

"I wanted to check in on Winn. I figured you wouldn't let him go home where his dad might find him."

"He's in the men's barracks with Mon-El, who is probably trying to get him drunk to get his mind off his problems."

"Well, at least he has one use," Supergirl grumbled. She sat at the station next to Vasquez and twirled around in her chair. Vasquez grinned.

"It's bad this time, for him, isn't it?" asked the Girl of Steel.

Vasquez's grin faded. "I don't see how it could ever be good, not really. They don't have drugs for that kind of psychosis, not yet. Hey, Supergirl. Are you all right? Did that guy hurt you in the fight?"

"Oh, physical pain, pfft. No. I'm worried about Winn. He was so broken up when his dad escaped from jail last year, came looking for him, tried to make him kill so that they could either be fugitives together or in jail together."

"That's some messed up shit."

Rather than admonishing Vasquez for her language, Supergirl just sighed, "Yeah, it is. You know, Winn told me that for years his dad was a great guy, like for all that time he was okay and then one day he just wasn't."

"Sometimes that's the way it happens."

"That's what I said. And Winn just looked so sad and so scared. He said, 'Then what's to say it's not gonna happen to me?' And I didn't know what to tell him. Alex said that psychobiology was still, is still a fairly fuzzy subject. There's just so much we still don't know."

Vasquez shrugged. She knew a lot about psychology, but that was barely a thimble-full compared to the vast range of the healthy and unhealthy human mind.
Supergirl dragged herself to standing. "I'm going to spend an hour with the sunlamps and then go see Alex. Let me know if there's a sighting."

//

At two o'clock in the morning, the DEO's feeds set off alarms throughout the building. According to the NCPD, three banks were being robbed simultaneously, and the Alien American Credit Union was one of them.
Chapter Summary

Toyman's return freaks out Winn. Lena helps.

Chapter Notes

So after accidentally bringing Toyman back, I was rewatching 1.10 Childish things and realized how much of Kara's dialogue seemed more like something Lena would say, which would also change the dynamics of the kiss.

Lena was in meetings all morning, trying to handle the problem of Maxwell Lord being arrested in part because of his having stolen intellectual property from LuthorCorp and using it not just on Superman or Supergirl but, apparently, on the good citizens of National City. PR was in a frenzy handling the bad press, trying to leverage the good press (CatCo, Tribune), and generally just staying on top of the narrative.

So when Kara cancelled their planned 1:30 lunch date, the first thing Lena did was go to her TV and hit the remote. Jess walked in as Lena was standing, hand over mouth, watching the footage of the fight between Supergirl and Toyman on the roof of FAO Schwartz, then the NCPD taking out six ToyKids, the fanatic followers of Winn Schott, Sr. They were not in fact kids, all of them being over twenty-five and far from innocent. CatCo had uncovered an underground ToyFightClub, where extremely high-tech robots in fuzzy teddy bear costumes fought each other for dominance, and the winner got a contract with a foreign power to construct miniature supersoldiers. The whole thing was a mess.

"Ms. Luthor?" said Jess. "Mr. Gunther's on the line. He wants to meet with you."

"I can't think why," said Lena, honestly.

"I think it has to do with your Alien Identification device. He seems convinced that the people who took him hostage were aliens and if he had had something like your device in his lobby along with the metal detector..."

"Contact Detective Sawyer."

"Ma'am, the one who...arrested you?"

"Exactly. She is very good at her job, Jess. Just as you are. Ask her about the alleged hostage takers, and be very clear why you are asking. My guess is she won't give you a straight answer, so listen for nuance, for what she's not saying. I would try to track down Kara, but if she cancelled our lunch, she's obviously busy."

"Couldn't you contact Supergirl?"
Lena looked at Jess, just shook her head. "If rookie reporter Kara Danvers is busy because of this? Supergirl is probably killing herself trying to find the maniac." She turned back to the TV flatscreen on her wall, watched the footage of the NCPD and the FBI responding to the three bank robberies. Lena recognized agents at the Alien credit union. She was pretty sure that was Alex Danvers in the back and Susan Vasquez dragging a civilian out to a medic.

"Jess, call Agent Schott. Ask him if he'll meet me here for dinner. Tell him I want to discuss a new defensive device I've been thinking about. And if he says yes, order about half of what you would normally order if I were eating with Kara, from that Thai place she likes so much. He's the one who introduced her to it. Maybe seven o'clock?"

"Yes, Ms. Luthor."

The business meetings were seemingly never-ending, but what she had learned at the DEO was that there were actually people in this world who, even in a catastrophic crisis, never skipped meals. She could use that to her advantage.

//

More meetings: shareholders, Board members, Lord Tech lawyers, L-Corp lawyers. A reporter from Metropolis (not Clark Kent) who Jess turned away. No word from Kara.

A phone message, left with Jess. "She said, and I quote, 'Hey, genius. Can we talk? I was hoping you could talk with your collaborator at some point, but if you are going to, there are some things you should know that he might not be able to tell you himself. And I am all about people telling their own stories. But we need to find his dad and take him down and Winn is in no shape right now to help. And we really need his help. Give me a call.'"

"Tell Vasquez that I am clearing my later meetings. Then clear my meetings. Did Mr. Schott agree to meet me?"

"Yes, ma'am. At 7:30."

//

It was strange to see Susan Vasquez in civilian clothing. Up until now, Lena had only ever seen her in black tactical gear, which to be honest suited her. It was a very hot look. So when she saw a woman in a navy blue pantsuit, a pastel blouse and two-inch heels, at first she looked past her shoulder to see if the agent had arrived yet. Then she looked back, met Vasquez's eyes, saw the silent chuckle unfolding in the woman's head, and smiled.

"Exactly on time," said Lena. "Come on in."

//

When he showed up at L-Corp, Winn looked exhausted. Jess led him in and then followed with their food on a small, wheeled trolley and laid out appetizers, soup and entrees on Lena's narrow coffee table. "Drinks, ma'am?" she asked.

"I've got what we need here. Feel free to take off for the day," Lena said, knowing that Jess wouldn't leave until she did. Night Owl Two always took care of Night Owl One.

The door closed. Lena said, "Fork or chopsticks?"

Winn gave out a shuddering sigh. "Fork. Normally I use chopsticks, but I am just so damn tired-- I
mean, so tired. Sorry. Language, as Kara would say."

Lena rose and poured two glasses of red wine, brought them back to the couch. "Honestly, Winn? After days like this when I'm in wall-to-wall meetings and I don't know what Kara is up to—because after the China incident, I worry more than I should about my best friend—I am so fucking tired I can't even eat. So don't worry about your language. I've got a much higher tolerance for saying what needs to be said, even if it's not entirely polite, than Kara does."

He swirled the wine in the glass and sniffed. "Wow. My nose just got distracted by your wine! That is really interesting. Like, there's lots of smells going on."

"One sign of a good wine. Are you a connoisseur?"

"Hardly. But I dated one for a few weeks. She was a wine steward or whatever they call it at that restaurant where Maxwell Lord got arrested."

"Impressive. Why didn't you keep her?"

Winn swallowed a bit more wine than he meant to, and then muttered, "She figured out who I was."

"Ah, yes," said Lena. "The inevitable big reveal. These days no one doesn't know who I am. But back when Lex had only recently been ensconced in notoriety, it still came as a surprise for some people. Honestly, I had more respect for the women who broke up with me than I did for the ones who thought there was some kind of kink aspect to it." She made a face.

"Gotta say, that has never been my experience."

"Probably it's the toy aspect that make it more problematic. I got fresh rolls. You like?"

"How do you know my order? This is crazy."

"I know Kara's order for at least a dozen restaurants by now. I know you recommended this one to her, so I assume whatever she likes from there you might have also recommended..."

"Oh ho! You are using logic on me, Lena! No fair!"

Lena grinned. "Blame it on that three-day brain dominance switch. I started out deeply right brained and now I have access to more of my left brain. I think it's made me more systematic."

"But you're an engineer, and a scientist. How do you get more systematic than that?"

"Yes, but I'm an artist in a lot of ways. I love science, but I tend to design things more with that other part of me..."

"Your heart..."

They finished the fresh rolls and moved on to the Tom Ka Gai soup and Winn moaned his happiness. "Coconut milk and lemongrass. Why did America not invent this?"

"Um, because it was already invented? And there aren't as many coconut trees in the United States as there should be?"

"You speak the truth."

"So," Lena said, pouring more wine into both their glasses. "I've been thinking about some more
tech projects to protect Supergirl. We have ways to trace radiation, kryptonite, inter-dimensional portals, transmatter portals--"

"Shit-tons of lead in one place!"

"A very useful thing, as it turns out. Well done. But I was wondering about psychic phenomena. After those two aliens got into that huge fight and then people ended up breaking up with their girl- and boyfriends, getting fired. Shouldn't we have known about that before? Could we figure out a way to trace it?"

"That might be something to discuss with..."

Lena raised one eyebrow. "J'onn J'onzz?"

"How much do you...?"

"Honestly, Winn. I put four and four together and got sixteen. It wasn't that hard. Admittedly I figured it out backwards. He's obviously psychic and after seeing the Green Martian when my--when Lillian kidnapped me... I did the math."

"Right. Well. There are clearly more NDAs in your future."

They opened the Pad See Ew and Pad Thai and ate like they were channeling Kara Danvers.

Finally, seeing Winn relaxing into a carb coma, Lena said gently, "Winn, how are you holding up? With this thing about your father?"

"I'm fine. I'm fine. The DEO and the NCPD are handling it. The FBI is being a pain in, but yeah. I'm handling it all."

Lena squeezed a wedge of lime on the last of the Pad Thai. "You know, when Lex was arrested for all of those things he did, and tried to do, I actually tried to defend him. Worst mistake of my life. A whole lot of people have never forgotten that, and never noticed everything I have said since against him and all his xenophobic ideas."

"You loved him."

"I still do, much of the time. It's hard. But the worst thing these days... I'm a Luthor. How do I know what happened to him won't happen to me?"

"But I thought you were adopted?"

"Apparently my father had an affair. When my mother died of cancer, he insisted on adopting me rather than letting me get lost in the system. What if... what if it is the Luthor side of Lex that is prone to mental illness?"

Winn looked down at his food. "What if his genes are like ticking time bombs waiting to go off inside of you?"

"Exactly."

"It's not going to happen," said Winn. "You're a good person."

Lena shrugged. "That's what people said about him. And then he cracked."

Winn put down his fork, glanced at his glass and saw that it was empty. He passed the empty glass
to Lena.

She took it, then said, "More wine? Or scotch. You look like you could use something a little harder than Chateau Margaux..."

"I haven't drunk scotch since grad school. Yes, that would be good. Thank you."

She pulled out two lowballs, poured them each two fingers. He took a cautious sip and swallowed with a bit of a wince, then sipped again, and gradually looked looser.

She said, "Sometimes, I'm terrified I will become like him."

"God, yes," said Winn. "My dad was an angry man, but nobody knew because he kept it bottled up inside. And when his boss stole his toy patents? He lost it. And if he had completely lost it, it would have been bad but not a tragedy."

"But he retained enough of his genius to be able spread his pain around? Yeah, that sounds familiar."

Winn said, "When he broke out last year and came to find me, he said, 'We're the same, you and I. We're linked. Together we can do anything. My son, my greatest work.'"

"Like you are his invention rather than being your own person, the person who builds himself from scratch."

"And I work hard to never get angry. Because when I do, I always wonder, could this be it? Could this be the day when I lose everything?"

Lena sighed. "The day Lex was arrested for mass murder and a few other things, my mother blamed me first. My father was sick at the time. She didn't tell him. I'm still not sure whether or not he died not knowing. I'd like to think so. And if that's true, then at least she did one good thing in her life."

"My mom died when I was ten. Uterine cancer."

"Yeah, with my dad it was prostate."

"I," said Winn taking a large sip of scotch, "am going to go way out on a limb here and say that cancer sucks."

Lena smiled, saying, "Loudly!" They clinked glasses and drank. She sighed again. They both leaned back against the couch for a while, digesting their dinner, digesting their thoughts.

Finally, Lena put her hand lightly on Winn's shoulder, saying, "Your father, my brother: when their worlds fell apart, they fell apart. But when our worlds fell apart, Winn, you and me? We didn't give in to rage and hate. We are not like them. We lost our families. We lost our whole worlds, and now we give back because of it. You and your father are not the only ones who are linked. We are too, and I'm not going to let anyone mess with that."

She saw his eyes water but not tear. Then he leaned in and kissed her.

He pulled back in horror. "Oh, I am so sorry."

She blinked in suprise. "Winn, it's all right."

"No, it's not. It's not okay. Because, friends and consent and the kind of link you're talking about..."
"Winn. Stop." Lena gave him a stern look. "Yes, I'm a lesbian. And no, you didn't ask for my consent. But don't think that just because I like sleeping with women I might not have given my consent for a kiss to you if you had asked. You're my friend and you're hurting. And your hurt is, well, painfully familiar to me. So, no, I really don't want to sleep with you." She smiled. "You're a little too butch for me, darlin'. But I understand what it is to need comfort when your family is AWOL by definition and there seems to be no one to turn to."

"I shouldn't have kissed you. I'm sorry."

"It's fine."

"No, it's not. My father kept his feelings bottled up inside for years. And then, he just exploded. Because he was a coward, like me."

"Winn, is there anybody in your life that you feel like you like them more than you should?"

"What, you mean like that crush I had on Kara when she first came, er, to National City?"

"Yes, I suppose. But I was thinking more recently. Anyone you've been spending more time with than you might have expected?"

"No, not really. I mean, sure, Mon-El, especially since James went to DEO bootcamp. But no women. There was an alien at the bar the other night who bought me a drink, though, and she was kind of cute."

"Tell me about Mon-El. That's the fellow Kara keeps calling Mike, right? Mike of the Interns? Who got fired for having too much sex in the copy room?"

"Yeah, that's, but how did you know? And anyway, you're not saying I'm gay, right? Because I'm not gay. Not that that's bad. It turns out that I have way more gay friends than I thought. I mean, like you! And Alex! And apparently Vasquez. And Maggie. And I'm still trying to figure out the major. Because she and James used to be a thing, but last night at the bar, the look she gave Maggie was--"

"Lucy Lane? Oh, yeah. She's totally bi. No question. Lucky Maggie."

"But you've never met her. How would you know?"

"Because when she is not out there in the desert, kicking asses and taking names, she and I move in some of the same circles."

"Oh. Like the gay world."

"It's less of a world and more of a scene, but yes."

"But why would you ask me about Mon-El?"

"Because sometimes if we find ourselves attracted to someone we feel we shouldn't be, we displace some of that interest to someone else who feels safer. But Winn, if you tell me you're straight, then I believe you. Probably just as well. Sounds like the DEO is plenty gay enough anyway."
DEO agents clear Lex's contaminated facility, mostly.

The first time Agent Danvers had worn a HazMat suit on an op, she'd felt claustrophobic and awkward, only able to touch things from a distance. The NCPD had reported a UFO sighting, which upon inspection had turned out to be a escape pod from another solar system and it contained two infant aliens who had only survived the crash because their three parents had morphed their bodies into substances that could withstand extreme heat and pressure--just not without dying themselves. Vasquez had been with her for that mission, telling her to focus on the science--how to safely free the small aliens from their cocoon, how to acclimate them to an air climate or protect them from it, while they identified their species and its requirements.

Standing now in a toothy crater at the top of a low mountain north of the city, surrounded by blasted rocks and walls, tossed carcasses of vehicles and half-melted packing crates, and all of it still glowing a pale, fading green that could still surely kill her sister--

--and nearly had--

--Alex found that the science was the last thing she wanted to concentrate on.

The six of them tumbled out of the HazMat truck in their bright yellow HazMat suits (yellow, apparently, now being the new black). Alex's earpiece crackled, but Vasquez's voice was clear. "Alpha team is me and Jones on threat assessment. If we call retreat, it's back to the truck on the double, no questions. Drop whatever is in your hands and fall back. Beta team is Danvers and Wayland on science assessment. If we miss a threat you see, Danvers, you call it and we fall back. Sawyer and McGill on legal assessment--what can we confiscate due to risk and what do we leave for L-Corp. Go conservative on your assessments, people. Better get out alive than finish up dead."

Wayland carried their team's Geiger counter. It rattled out a low grade of static. The radiation was there but it was low enough that their suits should protect them. Together they used a titanium crowbar to open melted cases, carried the cases together back to the truck.

The first and second portions of the echoing chamber didn't have much to offer, but he third section they entered was less damaged due to the long sections of living rock that had served as a kind of blast wall. Clearing the contents from there took longer.

At noon the three groups met at the truck. Alpha and Beta teams had gathered enough questionable tech to fill the back of the truck. Gamma team had tablets on which they had built a manifest of what they were taking with them and what they were leaving behind. By two o'clock, they had cleared as much of the facility as they could reach without special equipment, but they had seen no sign of the chamber that had risen from a lower level, and no sign of a way to get to a lower level if one existed.

The National City DEO didn't have a major decontamination facility, not one big enough for what they were bringing back, so they drove to the desert location.
The HazMat agents took charge of the spoils of their hunt while the three women went to the decontamination showers together, and if Alex had thought the time with Vasquez had been catastrophically awkward, it was nothing compared to this. She just kept her eyes squeezed shut and scrubbed.

//

It was good to visit the old base (bats notwithstanding). Agents Danvers and Vasquez were well liked throughout the agency, and wherever they had served, trained, or led ops, they were fondly remembered and warmly welcomed back. The general consensus was that although J'onn was missed, Lucy was respected as firm but fair.

The three women took the opportunity to watch the five new recruits train. Today was unarmed combat and weapons maintenance. Unsurprisingly, James was strong and fast and took out his peers in seconds and one of his instructors in minutes and the other one not at all, but not for want of trying. Later, when they watched the team, all blindfolded, take apart their AK-15s and put them back together again, Holtzman and Partridge were twice as fast as the fastest of the men (Finn), but when Vasquez and Alex volunteered to show them what speed really looked like, the recruits were left speechless. Maggie just watched, grinning, automatic weapons not being standard issue for city detectives.

But even as she grinned cheekily at the recruits, especially a blushing James, Alex felt a little conflicted. Was she happier to be impressing the woman she came out for, who couldn't do this? Or the woman she came out to be with, who could?
Chapter Summary

Jess tries to protect Lena from her new friends.

When Lena returned from her nightmare couple of days, Jess was utterly mortified that she had not been able to properly protect her boss.

Lena waved that away, pointed out that Detective Sawyer had even apologized to her because Kara Danvers had infected her mind with that reasonable doubt, but a woman that good at her job couldn't let personal considerations stand before the law.

Jess looked at the bandage on Lena's head from the concussion she got after being kidnapped from her prison cell, and begged her boss to forgive her for not getting the lawyers moving fast enough with the bail.

Lena waved that away, said that lawyers could only work at the pace of the justice system, which, unlike criminals, mostly worked by day.

Jess said, "Maybe if I had posted some kind security details at all the exit points from the prison, they could have followed you, found you faster, rescued you..."

Lena said, "Good thinking. I would never have thought of that procedure. You should add that to your to-do list. You know, for the next time I get framed and arrested."

Jess read the Tribune piece, by far the most pro-Luthor (as it was written by the Danvers girl), and said, "Is there some way to contact Supergirl faster? You were milliseconds away from..."

And Lena said, "No, Jess. Supergirl protects all of National City. I am just one person."

And Jess thought that this was deeply wrong.

So two days later, when Director Hank Henshaw of the "FBI"/DEO contacted Jess, hoping to make an appointment with Ms. Luthor, Jess gave him hell.

"MISTER Henshaw! You came here to THANK my boss for DOING YOUR GODDAMNED JOB FOR YOU, and then you had the unmitigated GALL to come and ask her for HER HELP to fix your inadequacies, YOUR fuck-ups, to create tech that she will never profit from for your TAME superhero, but you don't fucking GET that YOUR superhero considers MY BOSS the most important person in her life and will TOTALLY risk that superlife for her, because you didn't protect Lena from the beginning because you and your goddamned SUPER-AGENTS consider the Luthors their goddamned enemies, and YES, Les and Lillian are EVIL, they are PSYCHOTIC, they are all the bad horrible things people can be, but Lena is SO GOOD, and Supergirl, of all the people, SEES THAT, even when the rest of you don't."

Jess ran out of breath.
Quietly, Henshaw said, "You are not the only person in the last few days who has made these points very clearly to me, Ms. Huang. I have... spent a considerable portion of my time since the recent most regrettable events listening to my peers, underlings and superiors make these exact same arguments to me. And I must be honest, Ms. Huang, they all had me at 'Supergirl would have been safer if you had...' So, yes, you are persuasive in your passionate attempt to protect your employer, but I am not on the opposite side here. I have, I want you to know, learned my lesson."

"Sure, you SAY that, but then you imply that all of the CRAP on that mountain are things the Lex meant to do the Supers HARM, and that is just--"

"Ms. Huang. My agents are risking great physical harm in creating a cordon around Mount Haystack to keep it free of humans and aliens who might take the opportunity to get arms and armaments from there that might do Supergirl and Superman harm. And yes, I recognize that your, that Ms. Luthor has sustained some very serious injuries, but she is pretty much the only one who might be able to identify things that would be dangerous to the general public in the wrong hands and things that would not be. All I am asking for, in the short term of the next two days, is an interview where we could discuss these things. I would not ask her to come out there with us, even in HazMats suits, until she has adequately healed."

Jess stuttered, "Well. Then. I will. She will hear. I'll let her. Know what you said, sir. Director Henshaw. Sir."
Super Awkward

Chapter Summary

Superman is in town to help out.

When Kal-El landed on the roof of CatCo, Kara found herself in tears in Superman's arms.

Alex was the one who had called him, both because of what the DEO found at Lex's lair (and what they hadn't found) and because Kara wanted Kal-El to meet Lena, the woman who had tried to put herself between Lillian Luthor and Supergirl. Over the phone, Alex had told him in fairly dispassionate tones what had happened with Lena and Lillian and Supergirl.

Now Kara went on and on about how Lena--a human and a Luthor--had tried to protect a Super with her very fragile and mortal body, and it was about damn time that people started giving her their respect and trust.

And she told her cousin on the roof that evening, about how all week all she could think was how close she had come to losing Lena, if she had followed Alex’s pleas, her orders, to not go, to turn back, to stop short of, well, superheroic measures to save…

Her friend? Her best friend she wasn’t related to?

The woman she loved?

Poor Kal-El had grown up very straight in the Midwest, had found the love of his life during his first job out of college, and he and Lois Lane were even talking about having children someday. So on landing on the roof of CatCo, with his red cape swirling out behind him, the first thing he had said to Kara in her little yellow dress was, “Hey, Cuz, your sister tells me you’re a hot gay mess, but I’m not even sure what that means.”

So she had told him, at great length, about how her relationship with Lena had blossomed since he had returned to Metropolis, how the interviews gradually turned from working lunches into friend lunches and occasionally dinners, and then when Kara had gone missing to the other Earth and everyone thought Kara was gone forever and/or possibly dead, they had brought in Lena and by the end of the day Kara was back, because Lena believed in her, and she believed in Kara at least as much as she believed in Supergirl, and Lena was beautiful and smart and funny and brave, and her eyes were, her brilliant luminescent green eyes, and her jaw and her neck and the way she gestured with her hands—

Poor Kal-El. He had thought that the possibility of putting on a HazMat suit and wandering through his former friend-turned-nemesis’s secret hideout (still glowing kryptonite green just a few days ago) was going to be his biggest challenge in National City.

Nope.
Agent Susan Vasquez's Not Bad, No Good, Horrible Amazing Day

Chapter Summary

Tying up some plot threads with the ensemble cast and the Toyman.

Chapter Notes

Wow. 100 chapters in 25 days. I'm outwriting even SapphicScholar, although she does smut way better than I ever will.

This is a really long one. Since it is the 100th chapter, I gave it to my girl, Vasquez, and showed her interacting with just about everybody. Also, there are Easter eggs for folks who love Xena, three different Star Treks, and POI. Enjoy. Comments and kudos always welcome!

8:00 am

If you’re going to have a very long day at work, thought Vasquez, it helps if you like your colleagues. Of course, it was hard not to like Superman, and she had even giggled a little watching the Man of Steel put on the HazMat suit and then stuff his cape into a red bunch at his back. She suggested he leave it behind, but he said that, if he had to fly, it helped with the aerodynamics. And Lena Luthor could wear a burlap sack and still look sophisticated, so in comparison the yellow HazMat suit was nothing.

The green glow had all but completely faded from Haystack Mountain, but they were taking no chances. In some places the Geiger counter still gurgled a little, although not in the room behind the secret panel where the DNA reader was. Lena put her hand on the screen and the vault that she and Supergirl had described rose from the floor.

It didn’t take them long to clear the vault, in part because Lena remembered the contents so exactly. She only agreed to let them in on the condition that she would take Lex’s warsuit and axe. As far as the sonic bombs, the Black Mercy, and any of the kryptonite weapons, she said the DEO was welcome to them.

Vasquez watched her walk around the vault, opening crates she had not seen that horrible night. Unlike the usual serene, if not haughty, demeanor the CEO usually projected, or the nerdy genius role she generally took on when inventing with Winn, here Lena looked tired, sad, nostalgic, and bitter—a complicated mix of emotions, but then she had had a fairly complicated life.

Superman gathered all of the kryptonite weapons together to take back to Metropolis. Lena packed up Lex’s personal things to take back to L-Corp. The rest they crammed into the HazMat truck. It wasn’t much. They could manage any necessary decontamination back in National City.

Just as Lena hit the control to sink the empty vault back to its hiding place, Superman turned his head suddenly and pounced on the floor, picking something up between his thumb and forefinger.
Lena let out what sounded like a muffled, “Eek!”

Vasquez said, “Oh, that’s good. They didn’t catch any animals for testing the effects of the radiation.” She picked up a box, had Superman bore a few airholes in it with his laser vision, and closed it on the mouse. “Okay,” she said. Let’s go home.”

10:00 am

Rose met Vasquez when she drove the truck in, muttering about how she didn’t get any work for weeks at a time and then suddenly she’s overrun with sticky agents and glowing soldiers. Vasquez left her to it and brought the mouse in his box down to the lab.

Alex and Eliza were examining other specimens and were excited to have a chance to look at the mouse, but the moment Eliza picked it up and felt it in her gloved hand, she said, “This isn’t a mouse.”

The other two looked at her. She carried it over to a lab tech and told the woman to get an x-ray. The woman took the mouse and left.

“Uh, Dr. Danvers? I’m no scientist, but I think I know what a mouse looks like.”

“Exactly, Agent Vasquez. That looks like a mouse. But I think it is not an animal. I think it’s mechanical, like the kind of toy mouse you might wind up to make your cat crazy.”

The lab technician came back with the mouse and the x-ray. Vasquez handed her the box. Alex took the x-ray, her face getting very serious. Sure enough, the very realistic rodent was full of metal parts.

Vasquez said, “Ma’am?”

“It’s a toy.” Alex turned and walked out of the lab with the x-ray. “I need to show this to Winn.”

Eliza murmured, “Poor Winn.”

“We’ll catch his dad. Maybe this will help.”

Eliza nodded. “By the way, Agent Vasquez, I don’t know what you’ve done to my daughter—“

“Nothing! I haven’t—“

Eliza patted her on the arm. “Sorry, I meant for her. She seems much happier these days than I’ve seen her in ages. And she talks about you quite a lot lately, about your ops together, about your taste in pizza. She told me about the volleyball game you took her to.”

“Dodgeball. Yeah, it was fun.”

“Just, I mean, I know she’s tough, but…”

“Um, ma’am, is this the part where you threaten to beat me with a shovel if I hurt her?”

“Oh, no. Of course not. I was just going to say, protect her heart.”

She bent over her microscope again as Vasquez turned to leave. Without looking up, she added, “That other thing? That’s Kara’s job. And I’m pretty sure she would use her bare hands. She’s very direct that way.”
10:30 am

Winn was at the command center, looking grim. A small beep went off on one of the monitors. Winn's head snapped up and then he started typing. The monitor that showed a map of National City zoomed in to show the center of downtown. Two red energy signatures flashed on the map, one strong and stable, the other weak and dispersing as they watched.

Vasquez said, "Wait. That's us. And that's... Is that L-Corp? Which scan is this for?"

"Kryptonite."

10:45 am

J'onn in a blue suit and Alex and Vasquez in black tactical gear rode the forty-odd stories to the top of the L-Corp building. As J'onn exited the elevator, the two women flanked him, eyes hard. Lena's secretary looked up in surprise.

"Director Henshaw," she said.

"Ms. Huang. We're here to see Ms. Luthor on a matter of some urgency."

Jess looked down at the tablet in her hand. "Ms. Luthor is in a meeting until eleven. Would you care to wait?"

J'onn sat down in one of the guest chairs and flipped through a magazine. Alex and Vasquez stayed standing at ease, hands behind their backs and eyes locked over Jess's head. Vasquez obliquely watched the woman sit and try to type, but she was sweating, and after less than five minutes, she pressed the intercom button and said, "Ms. Luthor, Director Henshaw is here to see you... Yes, ma'am, I would say so."

The door to Lena's office opened and two lab-coated women stepped out, both carrying paper files. Lena looked at Jess, then at J'onn, relaxed, and then at Alex and Vasquez, ready.

"Director Henshaw. A pleasure to see you. Come in."

Vasquez was impressed with Lena's calm demeanor, and noted the insistence on white, ultra-modern decor in Lena's office. She had driven by the Luthor mansion in Metropolis years ago, a nineteenth century Gothic pile that she imagined to be filled with dark wood paneling and tapestries. Lena's office was clearly a rejection of her upbringing, a statement about moving forward, not back.

"To what do I owe this visit, Director?"

"Ms. Luthor, our scanners at the DEO detected trace amounts of kryptonite enter this building about thirty minutes ago."

"Kryptonite?" Lena looked genuinely surprised. "Are you sure it wasn't from the artifacts I retrieved from the site with Agent Vasquez and Superman?"

"You brought those back over an hour ago. If they were contaminated--well, first of all, we wouldn't have allowed you to take them--and the K-signature would have showed up the moment you brought them into the building."

"Then I have no idea what could be causing the effect. We use no kryptonite here. I would never allow it."
"Because Supergirl often visits you here."

Lena blushed but her voice was strong. "I would never do anything that would endanger her."

"Yes, I believe that. However, recent events might have inspired someone to use L-Corp as a trap for Supergirl."

Lena's eyes flashed. "Then, Director, you have my permission to search the building from top to bottom. In my presence, of course. But if there is kryptonite here, I want it out!"

Vasquez and Alex each had a K-counter (recently miniaturized by Winn) and they swept the building, starting in Lena's office and making their way down floor by floor. Nothing in Finance, Accounting, or Marketing (no big surprise, but you never knew). Nothing in the R&D departments, Bio, Chem, Mechanical, or Electronic. Nothing in bathrooms or break rooms. Not until they got to the sub-basement did the counters start clicking faintly.

J'onn asked, "Was this where your brother stored his kryptonite?"

"No, he kept it all in Metropolis. This location was always clean. That was a major consideration when I chose National City to relocate to."

Alex and Vasquez compared readings. Alex said, "This amount, it's just trace. Even if Supergirl were here, she probably wouldn't even get a headache."

A skittering at Lena's feet made her jump and she landed badly on her stilettos. Vasquez grabbed her arm to keep her from falling.

Lena blushed. "I hate mice."

Vasquez and Alex shared a look. Alex asked, "Where is the furnace room?"

As they followed Lena down the hall, their counters started clicking much louder. Alex slipped hers in a cargo pocket and pulled her weapon. Standing to the side, Vasquez quietly turned the handle and Alex kicked the door in and entered.

Skittering loudly, hundreds of mice came pouring out of the room and Lena literally leapt backwards into J'onn's arms, and he held her up, her feet high off the floor, her big green eyes bigger than usual. Vasquez's counter was practically screaming.

Once the mice were gone, Alex came out and said, "Clear."

She eyed Lena. J'onn put the CEO back on her feet. Vasquez quickly stepped into the furnace room to avoid smiling at the dignified woman she had grown to respect. She heard Lena's voice say defensively, "Mice are dirty. They carry disease. The furnace room is going to be a disaster. The janitors are going to strike."

Vasquez stepped back into the doorway. "Um, good news, bad news. Your room is clean. No scat at all. And that is not possible. There is no way that hundreds of mice don't shit in the sheets. Those weren't really mice. There were mechanical. They were toys."

Lena said, "Toys?" and then looked at the serious faces of her friends. "Oh, shit. Winn's father. But why here? And why kryptonite?"

Alex said slowly, "Anybody who doesn't really know about you, Lena, about the relationship you have with the DEO, and only thinks maybe Supergirl is enamored of you, might assume that
putting something laced with kryptonite here at L-Corp would make us come down here and harass you about it. And under other circumstances, I think you might have stalled us and tried to figure out the source yourself. This could have taken days rather than hours."

Vasquez nodded. "It's a distraction, a diversion." She hit her earbud. "Winn, you there? What else is going on in National City? Violence? More kryptonite somewhere else? We think L-Corp was a diversion, and whatever they don't want us noticing probably needs us to pay attention..."

Winn said, "Well, the L-Corp K-signature is pretty much dispersed now. I am getting a reading, almost like a line from L-Corp, moving... It's almost like it's moving toward the port?"

Vasquez groaned. She and Alex rolled their eyes and said, at the same time, "The Warehouse District!"

Winn asked, "Wait, what? What's happening in the Warehouse District this time?"

J'onn said, "We don't know yet. We're coming in. Get four teams to prep for an op. Contact Detective Sawyer and tell her to get a team to meet us at the port in an hour. The jurisdiction issues on this one are going to be tricky and we don't want to mess this up on a legal technicality."

2:15 pm

Vasquez stood in the armory, pulling down an AK-15 and sliding extra ammo into her utility belt and cargo pockets. Lucy, J'onn and Alex were similarly preparing along with each of their teams of five. The armory was crammed with people checking weapons.

Lucy sidled over to Vasquez. "Um, can I have a quick non-op-related word?" she muttered.

"Not a good time, Major, but if you make it quick..."

"How well do you know this detective?"

Vasquez looked at her blankly. "Which detective? The NCPD has so many."

"Fuck with me, Vasquez, and I can make your life miserable." She drew the last word out.

"Then I think it's fair to say that you know her much better than I do."

"Susan. I'm serious."

Vasquez sighed. "She's good people. She's a good cop. She made Alex realize that she is a total lesbian and then she wouldn't date her 'cuz Alex is fresh off the boat."

Lucy frowned. "Well, that's not totally unreasonable..."

Vasquez slammed a cartridge into her gun. "Broke the girl's heart, came this close to making her go running back into the fucking closet. As a detective, as a cop, Sawyer's as good as they come. As a person? I'm not a fan."

2:40

On the scraggly boundary that would show on a map as the dividing line between the sketchy area around National City Hospital and the even sketchier port/warehouse district, there ran a scruffy green line that could loosely be described as a park. Kids played basketball with metal hoops with no nets. Old men played chess on cement tables. It seemed to Vasquez that every single fucking time they were rolling into the warehouse district, the same two men were playing chess at the
second table after the broken water fountain. A tall grey-bearded man who always wore an old green Army jacket and a younger man with horn-rimmed glasses and a three-piece suit. She had always thought them an odd pair. But what was most odd was that never in all the time she had been with the DEO, either only with black SUVs screaming around the corner or with black Marias with sirens screaming, had either of these two men bothered to look up from their game. And what was up with that?

The four teams approached the target warehouse from the compass directions. Maggie and her team of NCPD regulars and science cops were on Vasquez's six. Winn's voice in Vasquez's ear said that Alex's team was probably closest to the source of the kryptonite. J'onn gave Alex the lead.

The six teams surrounded the warehouse, which had three doors, North, South and West. Alex and Vasquez's teams took North and South. Sawyer's cops took the West, while J'onn's people were stationed around the warehouse to catch anyone who tried to run.

From Vasquez's point of view, the op went like a dream. All the teams breached at the exact same moment, and Winn's father, a silver fox of a madman sent his ToyKids against them, throwing bright yellow rubber ducks into the air, which, when they hit the steel ceiling burst into fireworks that left everyone blinking rapidly. From the side balconies above the warehouse floor, other millennials with Raggedy Ann facemasks set off catapults armed with gobs of what looked like mashed potatoes or glue.

The grey-white splats did not look dangerous, but Vasquez yelled, "Don't step in the white shit! It could be explosive!" And her team danced around the piles with great dexterity. Vasquez grinned.

At the north end of the warehouse, the Toyman stood on a pile of bright yellow shipping containers. Alex was on the floor below him, pointing her AK-15 up and telling him to surrender.

A flick of his wrist sent what looked like a yoyo down to hit Alex's gun and an electric shock ran through the gun to her, sending her flying fifteen feet backwards. Vasquez started to run. Her team followed, but what happened next happened way too fast.

Alex's body shook.

The Toyman yelled triumphantly, pulling what looked like a toy sword but probably wasn't.

Alex stuck her hands in her cargo pockets.

The Toyman leaped up and fell like a comet toward the floor.

Alex threw something with both hands to the floor.

The Toyman landed on both feet and screamed.

Alex shot him with her sidearm.

He fell, bleeding heavily.

The ToyKids freaked and ran.

By the time Vasquez and her team reached the scene, Alex was on her feet, putting Winn Schott, Sr.'s arms behind his back while Detective Sawyer handcuffed him and read him his rights.

Outside, she would later learn, J'onn's team had caught the ToyKids.
Vasquez knelt down to see what Alex had thrown, what the Toyman had landed on, that had completely defeated him.

They were jacks. A little girl’s game turned into medieval caltrops. Alex had beaten the Toyman at his own game.

6:55 pm

Criminals processed, reports written and submitted, sweaty tactical gear stripped off and replaced with civilian clothes, almost everyone involved agreed that dinner and drinks at the alien bar was the only way to close out the day. Vasquez wore tight black jeans and a cranberry shirt with the sleeves rolled up. Alex wore that white scoop-necked shirt that showed off her collar bones.

Vasquez sauntered in with her arm around Alex, who was still beaming from the ultra-successful op. Alex never really hung out with Winn alone and never talked about him when he wasn't there, but Vasquez knew that she considered him to be her and Kara's honorary little brother. Hell, they all did. So everybody was buying him drinks and telling him how different he was from his dad.

He looked at Vasquez and said, "How can you wear a red shirt? The red shirts always die."

Vasquez said, "Sure, in the old days. But Captain Picard was a red shirt. More importantly, Captain Janeway was a red shirt."

But Winn was hard to comfort. He asked (three drinks in), "But do we know why he did it this time? Did he talk?"

Everyone turned to Detective Sawyer, who had been the arresting officer. "It was the brain dominance thing. Apparently he had always been very right-brained. And then he got bitten by a bunch of mosquitoes, because you know the max prison is in the middle of a swamp, and suddenly he's all systems-guy, and he was fascinated by the mosquito problem, without ever realizing that he'd been affected by it, and he thought of a way to create a Moses-style plague, but he couldn't figure out how to use it until Lillian created a swamp of her own, engulfing Haystack Mountain with kryptonite. So he sent his plague of mice to Lex's old place, programming them to stay until they got a certain amount of the K-radiation. Then they were programmed to go to L-Corp, and from there, to the port."

Kara walked in with Lena Luthor at the end of Maggie's explanation. Lena looked so relieved but also concerned. "So at least we know why and how it happened. But what's to keep it from happening again? I won't let L-Corp be used to endanger Supergirl!"

Kara looked at her fondly. Lena stuttered, "I, I know she's your friend."

Maggie laughed. "Oh, come on, Lena. You know you have the hots for Supergirl. Who doesn't?"

Alex, Kara and J'onn raised their hands. Everybody else looked sheepish and turned back to the bar to get M'gann to refresh their drinks.

Lucy smiled at Maggie, who muttered, "Come on, I'm only saying what everybody's thinking."

Lucy said archly, "So Detective, I take it that means you prefer blondes? Or is it the blue eyes?"

Maggie looked surprised. "Not at all. But that girl's biceps are a national treasure."

Lucy considered this, sipped at her gin and tonic. "Hmph. Fair enough."
Vasquez turned to Alex and noticed how close they were standing, how close Alex's lips were. "Um, so your mom."

"Yeah, she got called back to Midvale. Another professor is sick and she's got to take his classes for a while. Wait. Why? You look...relieved."

"Yeah, she kinda, it's hard to explain. She didn't give me the shovel talk, exactly."

Alex's face worked. "Well, that's good right? It says she trusts you?"

"She implied that Kara's reaction if I ever hurt you would be...paleolithic."

Alex thought about it for a while. "Hm. Might be true. So what we need to figure out is who you can call on if I am the one who messes this up? Who is going to give me the shovel talk?"

Vasquez looked away. With parents who were handling her queerness by not handling it, with very few friends, because of the nature of her work, she really didn't have anyone who would do that for her. Alex leaned in and kissed her. "Refresh your drink?" she asked.

Vasquez immediately took advantage of the opportunity to change the subject. Alex walked away, went to where Kara was at the bar. They talked. Kara came over to Vasquez.

"Vas-- Susan? Let's find a seat."

Kara took her to her favorite back booth and they sat opposite each other. Kara said, "Alex has been telling me about you."

Vasquez numbly nodded. Great, she thought. Aliens don't even bother with shovels. They just melt your face off and then pitch you into outer space.

Kara said, "I know that you two have become very close."

Vasquez nodded, unable to meet the superhero's eyes.

"And I know my sister thinks the world of you."

Vasquez squirmed. She muttered, "I will never, never, never hurt her, Supergirl!"

Kara opened her mouth and closed it. "Well, duh. Of course not. You love her. An idiot could see that."

It was Vasquez's turn to stare.

Kara laughed her jingly little laugh. "Sue, I'm so not worried about Alex and you. The two of you are like...I don't know. Twins would be sisters and that's not what you guys are. But, well, I know that she is not great at relationships. And from what Lucy and Maggie have explained to me, you are taking a huge personal risk in dating her--cuz you guys are dating, right? I know lesbians have a hard time telling when they're doing social things or if they're dating--"

"She says we're dating, so we are. I would do--"

Kara waited, her face open, her blue eyes clear and hopeful.

"I would do anything for Alex. I would never hurt her!"

"Anything?"
"Fuck yes!"

"But you guys still haven't..." she fidgeted with her glasses, "you know, gone to bed yet. And I'm pretty sure that all the orgasms Alex has had, she's had alone, which is sad. I love my sister. She needs someone who can make her happy and satisfied. And I think that you can do that." She sends a dirty look across the room that does not entirely reach Maggie. "There are other people who could, but they're not as brave as you are. And she so needs you, Sue, she really does."

Vasquez tossed down her scotch. Her throat burned, but it gave her the courage to say, "I would give her...but she is so nervous, so I figure waiting makes more sense."

"Do you think she's cute?"

"That dork is utterly adorable, but cute isn't the first word I would think of when I look at her."

"I like words," said Kara. "What words would you think of?"

Vasquez stared. "Brilliant? Beautiful? Passionate? So lacking in the self-confidence that women with half her skills and men with ten percent all take for granted? I really don't get that. But she's...when we're on ops, she just goes in and does it. She's so courageous. And then sometimes she looks at me with those big brown eyes, and I totally come undone."

Kara nodded very seriously and adjusted her glasses. "Yes. Okay. I get it. So. Susan Vasquez, there are two things you need to know."

"If I hurt her you will, one, melt my face off, and two, hurtle me into space."

Kara considered that. "Oh, yes, I suppose so. But I don't expect that to happen, so that's not really an issue."

Vasquez stared again.

Kara looked mildly uncomfortable. She squirmed a little. Then she glanced toward the bar, where Alex was clearly making awkward conversation with Maggie and Mon-El.

She looked back at Vasquez, and her eyes were even bluer than usual. "Okay, so, awkward. But you really need to, you know, make love to her, because somebody has to and nobody ever has yet. I know she had sex with guys in college but it was never good and always made her feel horrible about herself. And I didn't handle it well because I was younger and I just couldn't figure out why they couldn't see her as fabulous as I always did."

Vasquez's mouth flickered with a small smile. "Yeah, I imagine Alex was always just a little bit fabulous, just nobody actually ever saw the glitter..."

It took a moment for Kara to follow, but then she giggled. Then she got serious again. "So, the second thing..."

"Right," groaned Vasquez. "And so this, this is where you threaten to melt my face off and/or pitch me into space."

Kara looked surprised, dazed, misunderstood. "No, no. Of course not! What a dummy you are, Sue! Nope. This is where I tell you that if my dummy of a sister hurts you or abandons you or does something stupid that hurts you, I will haul her tiny ass up and I will totally give her what-for! And I will make her apologize to you and make it right. Because I think you two are great for each other!"
Then Kara said, "Oh, my drink's empty. I need another one. Ciao!"

Vasquez sat there in shock, sipping her drink, without really tasting it. Then Alex strolled up to her booth and didn't sit across from her as she had expected, but sat next to her and laid her left hand lightly on Vasquez's right thigh. She ran her hand lightly up and down Vasquez's thigh a few times. Then finally she said, "So. You wanna get out of here?"

And DEO/SHIELD fearless double agent Piper/Vasquez, red-hot lesbian extraordinaire, said, "Uh, I, um, sure."

But because even when the world was falling into a fiery apocalyptic mess, Vasquez still had icy (if traditional) chill, she asked, "Your place or mine?"

And she completely didn't notice every single friend in the bar, grinning to see them leave together.

9:10 pm

They practically fell into Alex's apartment kissing, and although Vasquez didn't really understand Alex's dislike of kissing as happening with tongues, she found that Alex really got excited even when she did the most minimal things. Vasquez slid her hands down Alex's body and Alex fumbled the buttons of her shirt, giggling, "Winn's face when you, oh my!"

"Focus, Alex. I need you all over me."

"Yes, Captain Janeway, ma'am!"

"Or Picard: make it so, Danvers."

Alex finally just pulled the shirt open at the bottom, popping a button, which skittered along the floor. "Oh, I am so sorry!"

Vasquez pushed her up against the wall, "I can't remember the last time anybody was that eager to get my clothes off."

Alex blushed and faltered.

Vasquez felt a gush between her legs. "God, you make me so wet for you. Give me your hand. I want you to feel that." Taking Alex's hand she slid it down into her underwear and saw Alex's eyes get big. Then she pulled her hand out and looked at it. "Oh..."

Blood.

"Shit," said Vasquez. "What day is it?" she asked.

"Friday?"

"No, not that, the date."

"The twelfth?"

"Shit. Do you have any tampons?"

Alex pointed to the bathroom. "All that stuff is in the cabinet under the sink."

Vasquez trotted off, swearing. In the bathroom, the cabinet held extra toilet paper and several thicknesses of pads, but no tampons. She made do with the medium pad, despite the awkwardness
and came out a little annoyed. “You need to stock up, there, Danvers.”

“Huh? I just did, last weekend. There should be plenty of everything.” She opened the refrigerator and pulled out two beers, both Dos Equis, and popped the tops.

“Everything but tampons.”

Alex waved that away. “Oh, I can’t use those. I’m too tight, can’t get them in.”

“So it’s not that toxic shock thing?”

“No, it’s just physical. It’s just how I am. My gynecological exams every year are a nightmare. It’s so embarrassing. I’m almost thirty and they still use the junior speculum on me.”

“But, wait. You had sex with guys, right? Doesn’t that… open things up?”

“Oh, well, I tried in college. We never got very far, even if I was a little drunk and more relaxed… So one time the nurse was like, ‘Oh, are you avoiding sex for religious reasons?’ I literally changed my doctor after that. It was humiliating.”

She took her beer and flopped down on the couch.

Vasquez fought not to stare. This was Alex’s reality and she had to respect it. But she found herself flustered. “Um, there are… other ways to stretch out, to, uh. I mean, you do masturbate, right?”

“Yeah, of course. With all the shit we deal with everyday, if I didn’t my head would explode from the stress.”

Vasquez sat down next to her. “But you do use your fingers, right?”

Alex looked blank. “I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Or a dildo?”

“Oh, hell no! I’m not going into one of those stores with the creepy blow up dolls and the, the—“

Vasquez nodded slowly. “It’s true that the stores that cater to men can be very creepy. But we do have a Good Vibrations in National City. It’s like a feminist sex store, basically.”

“Oh, I could never…”

“What if I went with you? The women who work there are well trained and very helpful.”

“I’d be too embarrassed.”

“And if anyone embarrassed you, I would put them in a headlock.”

Alex laughed, but there were tears there too. Vasquez pulled her hand to her lips and kissed it. It was damp from Alex having washed the blood off. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

Alex didn’t say anything for a minute, just sat there staring at the dark screen of the TV with a tear making its way down her cheek. Vasquez shifted closer, so she was cradling Alex’s arm, their shoulders touching.

“Is this the reason?” Alex whispered.
"Is what the reason for what?"

"What Maggie said about fresh off the boat. Because it’s so much work for you to always be explaining all these things that I should already know."

Vasquez put her arm around her and squeezed. “Nobody’s saying you should already know anything. And you thought you were straight for a long time. There’s no reason you should necessarily know a lot of this. And you are totally worth the work.”

“So I am. I’m too much work.”

“T did not say too much work, Alex. You’re not hearing me.” Vasquez thought about it, her eyes drifting to pictures around the room of Alex and Kara together at different ages. Finally she said, “You trained Kara in hand to hand combat. Was that a lot of work?”

“I guess, but—“

“Was it too much work?”

“No, of course not!”

“Of course not. Because…?”

“Well, because I enjoy fighting, and it was to protect Kara.”

“And you love her. This is like that.”

“Pfft. It’s not like you love me.”

“Right, we’re not calling it that. It’s generosity. You make me feel generous, Alex. So yes, I am more than willing to do the work.” Vasquez put her beer on the coffee table, then took Alex's from her hand and put it down beside the first. "You know, just because I have my period doesn't mean we can't have sex, if you want to."

Alex's body answered for her. Her breath shuddered and no words came.

"Although it might be nice if you would refrain from coming at least until I get you naked."

Alex shuddered again, "Then you might need to hurry up."

Vasquez laughed, stood and grabbed Alex's hands and pulled her into a hug and a long, tongueless, but by no means chaste kiss. "Then lead the way."
The Swiftest Traveler

Chapter Summary

The start of 2.13 with Mixy, but off canon.

Chapter Notes

The swiftest traveler is he that goes afoot. --Henry David Thoreau

Kara's Monday was going really well, at least at first. Snapper said that her article on the takedown of the Toyman was "acceptable" after only making minimal markings with his red pen. When she brought sushi to eat with Lena, Jess had complimented her new blue sweater, which Kara somehow thought had less to do with her fashion sense and more to do with Jess's overall approval of how the DEO had handled that kryptonite mess. (Kara was still ticked off that they hadn't included her in the operation, even though she knew exactly why they would keep her as far from kryptonite as they could. But still.)

Then Lena.

Kara practically forgot how to use chopsticks when Lena smiled at her. "Caterpillar roll, dragon roll, and I don't even know what this one is, but it is about to become my new favorite kind of sushi. Is that bluefin tuna, and sockeye salmon, with roe that feel like fireworks in my mouth?"

Kara blushed. "I challenged Noriko to make a Supergirl roll and that's what she came up with. There is some wasabi in there too, for kick."

"It's rare to find a sushi restaurant with female chefs. They have some sort of idea that since men's body temperature is about a degree higher than women's, the men can mold the rice better or something."

"The name of the restaurant translates as Divine Hurricane. I'll take you there sometime. But we'll have to go Dutch. I can't afford to pay for both of us."

"In that case," Lena said with that flirty smile. "I'll take you."

The three words hit Kara unexpectedly hard and she coughed and then drank the green tea that Jess had kindly made for them.

Later in the day, after doing research for an article on the Broadway show Hamilton that was finally premiering in National City, Kara had put on the supersuit and caught some industrial types dumping molten metal in one of her favorite junkyards, which had started a huge fire that she had managed to put out with her freezing breath, and then she went back to the DEO to recharge and hang out with her friends.

Winn and Vasquez were in the command center, bickering over something, but when they saw her,
they both greeted her, grinning.

"What's so funny?"

And Vasquez had given Winn A Look, and Winn had said, "Oh, nothing. Have you seen Alex today?"

"No, I think she's doing lab stuff about the Haystack Mountain facility. Usually when she goes radio silent for a couple days in a row it's because she's doing a scientific experiment."

Winn schooled his face to be blank. "I'm sure that's it. And J'onn is off with Lucy, dealing with the legal ramifications of everything that happened last week. Oh! But hey, good news. Lucy's five new recruits are coming to National City to get a tour of the DEO and shadow some agents."

Supergirl grinned, coming up behind Winn and squeezing his shoulders. "And is James going to be shadowing you?"

"Me? Hardly. No, I've been promised someone more...like me. Whatever that means."

Vasquez smiled. "I think you're going to be very happy with your recruit, Little Plaid Shirt. On the other hand, Supergirl, you should know that Mon-El is back, and he has submitted an application to become a DEO agent."

"Arrrrghh."

"Yeah, that's what I thought you would say. But to be fair, it's Lucy who gets to interview him and make the call, so..."

Winn said, "I know he's not the greatest guy but--"

"Don't, Schott. Just don't."

Supergirl grit her teeth. "I think I'll go see what Alex is up to in the lab."

Whenever Supergirl strode through the DEO, agents greeted her with big smiles, and she always gave them her 10,000 Watt smile in return. She was always a little surprised that a super-secret governmental institution charged with the dangerous task of protecting the Earth from aliens and vice versa was such a happy place. She knew that warriors like Alex and Vasquez, and J'onn and the rest, typically were hard, cynical, a little paranoid and a little dour. But she never got that feeling when she interacted with the agents. She wondered why that was.

Down in the lab, Alex was comparing slides under a microscope. When she saw her sister, she grinned and looked away to pick up more slides, but Kara caught the slight increase in her sister's heart rate and stepped over and put her hand on Alex's arm. "Something just happened. What was it?"

"What? No, nothing. Just looking at the decay rates for the kryptonite..."

"You're blushing."

"What? Pfft. No." Alex tried to pick up the slides, but her sister's iron grip wouldn't let her.

"Does this have to do with Vasquez? Because after you guys left the bar Friday night, everybody was taking bets. Did you get laid? Tell me you got laid!"
The slight pink in Alex's cheeks surged toward magenta. "Um, yes?"

Supergirl let go of her sister's arm and gave her a huge hug. "Alex, that's fantastic!"

Alex frowned and pushed her back. "Did you bet too? Tell me you didn't bet."

Supergirl laughed. "Of course I bet." Her face fell. "I mean, I'm going to have to split my winnings with Mon-El, of all people. But still. I believe in you and Vasquez. You belong together."

Alex grinned.

"Oh, somebody looks like she got hit with a love ray!"

"There's no such thing! But, yeah, a little bit."

Supergirl dropped her voice. "Did you, you know, have an orgasm?"

Alex looked down. "No..."

Supergirl frowned. "Do I have to kill Vasquez for letting you down?"

Alex looked up again, grinning. "I had a few, actually. I kind of lost count!"

In their earpieces, Winn said, "Um, ladies, you might want to come up here. I'm calling in J'onn and Lucy as well. We're having some weird activity on those interdimensional scanners we built. I've called Lena to come, in case it's a glitch and not an actual, whatever we might call it..."

"Traveler?" offered Supergirl.

//

By the time they reached the command center, everyone Winn had called in was there, which was... good? Given that in the next second, a strange man with a British accent appeared out of thin air, shimmering with the blue cloud of interdimensional transportation.

He knelt before her, to the surprise of everyone and said, "Supergirl, I love you!"

Supergirl's face went completely blank. To her right, J'onn and Lucy frowned. To her left Vasquez and Winn gaped.

Alex pulled her gun and trained it on the strange man. Mon-El said, "Crap! Or possibly shit! I know there's something here that has to do with bodily functions."

Lena stood, in front of the elevator, having just stepped out the moment the man appeared.

He ignored them all. "We need to set the mood. Lights!" He gestured with his hands and candles appeared on all of the computer stations: white, pink, red.

"Are you crazy?" asked Supergirl.

"Then, music!" He gestured to an open corner and a string quartet appeared, playing romantic music, the three women and one man seemingly unaware of their unusual surroundings.

"What the hell?" said Supergirl, stepping back.

But the man simply whirled around in a flash of electric blue energy. "Next, flowers."

Red roses, dozens of roses in dozens of crystal vases, appeared next to the flowers, covering all the silver and black surfaces of the DEO's mission command center.

Lena murmured, "You're plagiarizing here, Mister."

"And for the piece de resistance," the man said, kneeling at Supergirl's feet, holding something shimmering in his hand, "the ring. Supergirl, sweetest, like I said, I am your one true love, your soulmate, your One True Pairing. My name is Mxyzptlk, and I love you, Supergirl."

Supergirl stuttered.

He said, "Tell me. Will you marry me?" He started to sing, "I can show you the world--"

Alex Danvers strode forward, picked him up by his lapels and propelled him up against the wall.

"No, you can't! I don't know how you got to this planet, but that is my s-- that is Supergirl, and you will treat her with respect, which pretty much means you don't get to propose marriage to her when you don't even know her. Any one of these people here have a much better right than you to propose to her."


And Winn shouted, "Hey!" just as Vasquez leaped up and shot a punch at the man, who disappeared in a cloud of blue and then reappeared behind her.

"Hmm," he said. "Maybe you all should play to your strengths." He snapped his fingers and everyone except Supergirl was left in their underwear.

Well, except J'onn who looked the same as always and immediately turned away from the room and the loud embarrassment he must have immediately sensed from everyone around him.

Mon-El wore a white sleeveless t-shirt that showed off his muscles and patterned green and white boxer shorts.

Winn's shorts had Superman's version of the House of El crest, with the yellow background.

Lucy and Alex both had fairly prosaic black bras and underpants.

Vasquez's bra was black and normal, but her underpants had Semper Fi in white letters on the back, across her ass.

Lena's underwear had more lace than everyone else in the room combined. She and Vasquez were the only ones who didn't seem phased by the sudden change in their clothing.

Supergirl was pissed. "I don't know who you are or how you got here, Mix-iz--"

"Mxyzptlk. It's spelled like it sounds." He waved a hand and the name was blazoned in blue energy in the air."

"Right. So start again and start slow. Where are you from?"

"Oh, they call me the Interdimensional Man About Town. It doesn't matter where I'm from, Sweetcheeks. So let's get his knot tied!"

He snapped his fingers and Supergirl was suddenly wearing a sleeveless white wedding dress.
She gasped, "What? Is-- Are you crazy? You can't just put me in a wedding dress!"

"Why not?" he asked, with the ring in his hand again. "It's Vera Wang."

"This is not okay!"

His head fell. "Okay, I'm sorry. I came on strong. I'm just enthusiastic! To finally be here with you."

"How do you even know who I am?"

He snapped his fingers again. The three women of the quartet disappeared, leaving only the male violinist. "I watched you across the dimensions. Mortality and lovelessness. There's no one like you where I'm from: a woman as strong and independent or as beautiful, or as brave, or as bold..." He laid his hand on her bare shoulder, started to slide it down her arm, but she pushed it off.

"Okay, look, look. I'm flattered, but I'm not going to marry you."

Alex, Vasquez, Lucy, Lena, and Winn stepped forward to place themselves between the strange man and their superfriend.

He sighed. "You know, it's funny. I'm all-seeing and all-powerful, but that is one of the few things I can't make you do. That and making you fall in love with me, or stop you from killing yourself, or stopping you from drinking orange juice for some reason. Anything else, yes, but go figure!"

Supergirl frowned behind the human shield her friends were making for her. "Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you but I'm just not interested."

He surveyed the humans in front of him and sighed. "Don't be sad, Buttercup. I realize now that there are other suitors and the only way that I will win your love is to show you that I love you more than they do."

"What? No!"

"You're flustered, confused. Your heart is racing! I have that effect on women. But let me tell you how this works. I have chosen you as my mate, but I recognize that I am not the only one who has made that choice. So--"

He snapped his fingers and suddenly there was a larger goblet in his hand, and fire was roaring from its depths. "Here, we have the Goblet of Fire, which is--"

"Wait!" shouted Supergirl. "You mean that's real?"

"Oh, darling, in the fifth dimension many things are real that you cannot even comprehend."

"Wait, so do we exist there?" asked Winn. "What house am I in?"

The strange man shrugged. "Hufflepuff, of course. And you two--" Lucy and Vasquez " are Griffindor, and the sister is Griffenclaw, and you, my love are Ravendor, and--"

Lena said, with a dead voice, "I know. Slytherin. Of course. Like all my family."

He tilted his head. "Oddly enough, no. Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Slytherin all started fighting to have you as a member, and blood was even shed, so you asked the hat to put you into Hufflepuff. Not a choice I would have made, but I suppose it takes all kinds."
Lena looked surprised.

The man said, "We will have a series of duels, between me and whoever puts their name into the goblet. But I will win your heart, Supergirl. And once you've gone Mixy, there's no going backsy!"

He shook the goblet and small pieces of parchment flew into the air. J'onnn caught each one and read it out loud. "Lena, Winn, Lucy, Maggie, Vasquez, Alex? Er, James? and Mixerspitluck."

Supergirl gurgled.

The strange man said, "Let the games begin. Ciao, me amore!" He snapped his fingers and was gone.

J'onnn let the bits of parchment disappear as he watched his agents and friends get their normal clothes back. Everyone looked a little embarrassed and a little relieved. He said, "Okay, people, we've just been visited by a fifth-dimensional being."

"Wait, you've seen one of these before?"

"Not here on Earth. On Mars. One of them moved the Zhan-Ze Mountains halfway across the planet during the Zuc uprising. Fifth-dimensional lifeforms possess the ability to warp our reality to their own whims, with abilities that would appear to be magic."

Mon-El said, "On Daxam, we had a zero-tolerance policy for those creatures. Those guys knew how to party, but they're dangerous."

J'onnn said, "Agent Schott, scan the archives for anything related to fifth-dimensional incursions here on Earth."

Winn typed in the query and they waited.

Lucy said, "Griffindor. Not bad."

Winn sounded bitter. "Nice for you. I'm Hufflepuff."

Lena came and sat in the chair next to him. "With me, Winn. Is that so bad?" Then she used The Eyebrow™ on him and he got all flustered. "Um, no?"

The Danvers sisters looked at each other.

"Griffinclaw?"

"Ravendor?"

Winn said, "Aha. Results." He pointed to the computer screens. "Between genies, djinns, and leprechauns, humans have been documenting reality-bending creatures for centuries."

"And how did they slay them?" asked Mon-El. "On Daxam, we crushed them."

"What?" asked Supergirl, eyebrows rising. "No. Absolutely not."

"The only way to deal with them is to kill them. Let me take care of him."

"No! We don't kill."

"I'm not going to let some imp stalk you and live."
"I can take care of myself."

Winn said, "So we're going to go nonlethal?"

Mon-El said, "No."

Supergirl said, "Yes."

J'onn, as always, looked very serious. "The DEO has some artifacts in the sub-basement storeroom. Maybe one of them could send him back to his dimension or at least suppress his powers. Have them brought up."
Chapter Summary

More Mixy.

Chapter Notes

Title is from Shakespeare's Hamlet. It actually refers to death, not the fifth dimension, but I'm not picky.

Alex woke up Saturday morning (and also Sunday morning, late, and Monday morning, early) naked in her own bed with Vasquez, who was wearing nothing more than a skimpy pair of black underwear with the words Semper Fi across her very fine ass.

The phrase "What has been seen cannot be unseen" was normally associated with situations of awkwardness, embarrassment, even disgust. Not this time.

Standing in the command center when the strange fifth-dimensional being had, well, revealed them all to each other, Alex felt a lot less embarrassed than she normally would have because, oh my, Semper Fi. Her girlfriend had a great ass.

And Alex needed to protect her sister from this freak.

And the whole team was all about protecting Supergirl, which made Alex a little less freaked. Kara, on the other hand, was, well, superfreaked.

In civvies afterwards, they went back to Kara's apartment, with Kara ranting about the problem. "I can totally handle Mixus-- whatever his name is, but it's Mon-El who's infuriating."

She unlocked her door and led the way in, only to stop when she realized the creature had filled her apartment as well as the DEO command center with hundreds of red roses.

She muttered, "Lena was right about the plagiarism. He must have been paying attention to figure out how much--"

She picked up one of the larger vases, with at least a dozen red roses and baby's breath and said, "Hey, maybe take these to Vasquez. She'd like them!"

"Oh, I don't know. I need some advice. About Valentine's Day."

"Oh my God, it's your first Valentine's Day with Vasquez! That's so exciting! Oh. You have to go to Il Palazzo, the Bolognese stuffed calamari is to die for! I'm sure they're booked, but Ms. Grant was a regular, so..."

"I don't need a reservation. I mean Vasquez and I are still so new. We've only ever even... well, had sex... like once. Well, not once, exactly, but one weekend, and I just, what if she doesn't like
Valentine's Day? What if she think it's some cheap, commercialized holiday for selling chocolate and cards and--"

"Why would she think that?"

"A lot of women do. Especially tough women who don't like the whole heteronormative--"

"You mean gay women don't like it?"

"No! I imagine a lot do. I just feel like, come on. Vasquez was a Marine. But I just, after not being a relationship for like two decades, I had just hoped I could do all the cheesy, sweet things...that couples do."

Kara pulled down two wine glasses and a bottle of Merlot. "Well, maybe you don't have to go all out the first time. Maybe just be with her. Watch TV together, spend the night?"

"But what if she doesn't even want to be around me? Like celebrating it would validate it?"

"Alex, have you talked to her about this?"

"I don't dare. I mean, this past weekend was..."

"So, um, Semper Fi?"

"I know, right? How cute is that?"

"Cute wasn't the word I, um, but couldn't you reinvent the holiday for the two of you? What does she like?"

"Guns. And scotch. And Xena, for some reason."

"Alex! Xena is like the best thing ever! I totally get why you love Vasquez."

"I don't love her! We're just colleagues. I'm her, well, I'm kind of her boss."

"Yeah, and she says 'ma'am' when she looks at you like most people say 'the love of my life.' She totally adores you. And I know that it's mutual even if you won't admit it."

Outside the window, they heard the noise of cars screeching to a halt. They went to Kara's balcony and saw, at the intersection, the purple Parasite terrorizing civilians and the NCPD.

"The Parasite?" asked Kara.

"How is he still alive?" asked Alex.

"I don't know," said Kara, tearing off her shirt over her supersuit. "Stay here."
Travelers Speak the Same Language

Chapter Summary

Our heroes deal with the feelings Mixy has brought up about Supergirl.

Maggie

When Maggie and her partner sped to the scene of the crime, it was not lost on Maggie that the address was less than a block from Kara's apartment. By the time they arrived, there were already at least two pairs of uniforms, guns out, shielded by cars, below the giant purple lizardman that looked awfully familiar. How many aliens had a mouth of teeth inside a mouth of teeth inside a mouth of teeth? That couldn't be a common thing.

She and Reynolds jumped out of the car, pulling their weapons on the twelve-foot tall purple Godzilla, but then Supergirl landed in the street and shot lasers out of her eyes at the thing, hitting it straight in the chest. It went down and another car smashed into the blocked intersection and Supergirl turned and the thing was back up again, and backhanded her into more cars. Maggie screamed and ran at the thing, but not before Mike appeared out of nowhere, saying cheekily, "Remember me?"

The thing picked him up and sent him flying down the block. Maggie emptied her Glock at the monster, and it barely noticed. Supergirl pushed herself to her feet and ran to Maggie.

"Are you okay?"

"I was gonna ask you the same question." Maggie reloaded.

The purple thing reared back and roared. The humans on the sidewalk pointed up to the sky, where a red and blue streak was circling the skyscrapers.

"Look!"

"Up in the sky!"

"It's--"

"A bird!"

"A plane!"

A swirl of red and blue landed in front of the purple beast. It turned around to show the Super pentagon filled with a huge M.

"It's...Mighty Dog?"

The fire from the cars crashing was quickly zooming toward a tanker truck. Mxyzptlk turned toward the crowd. "Mighty Dog? Seriously?"

Meanwhile, Supergirl used her freeze breath to put out the fire before it became an inferno.
"Ha!" shouted Mon-El. "I so won that round!"

"No," said Supergirl. "I won. You both lost."

The purple beast crawled up to swat its enormous claw at Supergirl, maw open and screaming. Maggie shot it right in down the throat and it fell.

"And Maggie took second place. Boys," Supergirl stood with her arms crossed over her chest, biceps bristling. Mon-El and Mixy gave each other dirty looks but they couldn't contradict her. What was true was true. "Now, both of you, just go. Mixy, I think you brought Parasite back just to play the hero. Mon-El, I told you I could handle this myself. Both of you, go. Just go. Now!"

Mon-El stalked off.

Supergirl looked at the strange one. "So, Mighty Dog, what is it going to get you to leave this planet?"

"Two little words: I do."

//

Vasquez

Back at the DEO, Supergirl paced back and forth in the command center, while Winn and Vasquez watched with wildly mixed emotions. Winn knew he was out of her league and let's face it, lately she was sorta gay, so the Y chromosome was not working in his favor. On the other hand, he would lay down his life for her without a second thought. So, there was that.

Vasquez on the other hand, had a different sort of problem. Supergirl was hot, no question. When women like Maggie and Lucy both agreed on the temperature potential of the same woman, and women like Vasquez and the Luthor agreed, they were way past subjective attraction and into objective fact territory. Supergirl was hot. It was a fact.

And it might not have been such a Hunger-Games scenario if the recruits hadn't shown up in the middle of it. The DEO was a family, built of mostly older, more experienced agents. Mon-El was a little shit from another planet, but even Winn, who had only been around for a few months, was mature, respectful and understood the chain of command. And he loved Kara Danvers the way only a real friend could.

The rookies were a whole different ball of gummy worms.

When Lucy marched them in, J'onn, Alex and Vasquez had done the hard-eyed soldier-agent shit that they had pulled off at L-Corp during the kryptonite mess, and just like Jess, who actually had interacted with them previously, the recruits had responded with jangling nerves, even James. The one person who seemed less of a mess than the other four was Holtzman.

Vasquez had a whole, very thick, file on that one: her education, her experiments into the paranormal, the rise of the Ghostbusters and the weaponry the woman had designed and built to fight it off. Plasma rifles, for crying out loud, on a community college budget?

So when Major Lane marched in her recruits, the DEO agents looked them over with jaded eyes, but Vasquez paid close attention. Smith, she expected would wash out in the next two weeks. Partridge would probably transfer to the CIA. But Finn and Holtzman were built to be DEO. And James Olsen? Well, only time would tell.
Vasquez paired up the recruits with the agents they would shadow. "Chen, you have Smith. Jordan and Partridge. Danvers and Finn. Holtzman and Schott. Olsen, you're with me."

Vasquez led James to the armory, where his eyes got shiny with gun-lust. Growling under her breath, Vasquez handed him a collapsed baton, saying, "You know how to use one of these?"

"Of course."

"I'm sorry, recruit. Let me ask that again. Do you know how to use one of these, mister?"

He leapt to attention. "Yes, sirma'am. Yes, ma'am!"

Vasquez, although a few inches shorter, got up in his face. "I think you'll find," she said quietly, "that your female superior officers will respond better to 'ma'am' than 'sirma'am."

"Yes, ma'am!"

"Well," she said, looking at the tall handsome black man who had helped Supergirl figure her shit out back when she became a superhero, "It's a start."

//

Lucy

Major Lucy Lane was very good at following orders. She was very good at giving orders. She really hated people who actually thought orders were an existential mistake. Lucy had assumed at the beginning that the Supers would automatically ignore rules and laws and orders, and she had been stunned when it turned out that Superman, and a few years later his cousin, had both turned out to be sticklers for rules.

That was a very attractive characteristic for her. That was why it hadn't surprised her too much when she started falling for Detective Dimples, as she privately thought of Maggie Sawyer. The woman followed rule to the letter. She had even arrested a woman that Lucy knew Maggie wanted to be friends with, both for her own sake and for her relationship to the Danvers sisters, Kara in particular.

So it was very strange for Lucy to suddenly be having these feelings for Supergirl. Even though she knew the weirdness was clearly being caused by this Mixup, who appeared to be the universe's biggest rule-breaker, Lucy made up her mind that she was going to win her duel against him, win Supergirl, and show up Lois once and for all.

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Lena

Back at L-Corp, Lena tried to pay attention to what Jess was saying, especially since the next few days, when they would be negotiating with Tate Industries, would be crucial for the future of L-Corp, especially for distinguishing it from the old LuthorCorp. But all Lena could think about was Supergirl.

It was strange, really, since Lena had early and often (although to her shame, not always) considered Kara Danvers the woman she had a hopeless gay crush on. But Kara was very straight and any attempt on Lena's part to change that would undoubtedly separate her from her only regular friend in National City. And that was simply not an option.
So Lena's dreams were filled with her sliding her hands up and down Kara's thighs, sucking and licking one of her breasts while fondling the other with her hand until Kara shuddered and bucked...

But they were only dreams. And then suddenly there was this fifth-dimensional being challenging the Earth folks to prove how much they loved Supergirl, not realizing how easy that was going to be for the Earth folks. Because lusting after Supergirl was easy. It was almost as easy as pining after Kara Danvers, who was clearly much straighter than Supergirl, who had grown up on a planet where sexuality was much more fluid than it was on Earth.

"Um, ma'am? Ms. Luthor?" said Jess.

"Jess, how would you go about wooing Supergirl?"

"Um, I, I wouldn't ma'am, not as me and definitely not if I were you, although I am pretty sure you could if you wanted to, but what about Ms. Danvers? You would totally break her heart! She loves you, and I know you like to play it all cool but you love her too."

Lena stared at her secretary. "What? No, that's--"

"The truth. You pay me to tell you the truth when no one else will."

"Well, Kara Danvers is Supergirl's friend, and Supergirl is in trouble with a fifth dimensional being who wants to marry her and take her away from Earth. And I have to stop him. What do we have in the sub-basement that might track fifth-dimensional energy?"

//

Winn

When the Agents brought up the toys from the archives, Winn immediately went through the manifest, trying to find something that would help him save Supergirl from the Mixerpluck. Major Lane marched into the room in her blue service dress uniform, looking beautiful and fierce.

"Okay, Agent Schott. Tell me, what do we have here?"

"Oh, only the coolest alien artifacts ever! I mean, I knew the E in DEO stood for Extra-normal, but I did not realize we had stuff like this, dude!"

"Agent Schott, you do not refer to a superior officer as 'dude.'"

"Oh, right. Sorry, ma'am." He opened one of the smaller black cases, to show a small medallion that glowed electric blue.

"What will this do to the alien?"

"I have almost no Earthly idea, but it tested off the charts for fifth dimensional energy. Now the spectrometer needs to update before I can do anything else and that's going to take like three hours, so I have to go work on that."

And he walked out of the room, leaving the major looking very thoughtful.

//

Vasquez

The afternoon at the DEO was going slow, and Alex had completely dropped off the radar. The
conversation they had had over breakfast had been stilted and awkward. Vasquez wondered if she had played it wrong. She had always taken Alex to be the complete opposite of a romantic. Every Valentine's Day Alex had ranted about how she was going to spend the Day for Independent Women drinking scotch and watching action movies and she didn't need a man to make her feel complete, etc., etc.

But in retrospect, maybe that had been displacement.

They were getting nowhere on that whole Mixy thing until Winn could figure out the old alien tech, so she got Jordan to cover for her, foisted James off on him, and went to buy a dozen red roses for her girlfriend. She could just slip into Alex's apartment, leave them on the table with a mushy note and slip out, and if Alex hated them, then Vasquez wouldn't be there to be hurt and if she loved them than Vasquez wouldn't be there to see Alex's embarrassment.

That was the plan.

But when she used her lockpicks to get into Alex's place (because they weren't at the key stage yet), she opened the door to see lit candles all over the apartment, the lights turned low, a platter piled high with potstickers on the table next to what looked like a cake made out of Twinkies wrapped in a big red bow, and a pitcher of what smelled like a Cosmo.

There was a card covered with hearts. She picked it up and read, "Hey, pretty lady. Pour yourself a drink. Let's have some fun."

There was a noise from the bathroom.

"Danvers?" Vasquez called.

Alex stepped out in a black silky negligee. "Supergirl? I was just about to make my entrance--"

"Alex?"

"Vasquez?"

The door to the balcony opened and Supergirl stepped in. "Alex? You wanted to see me?"

The three women stared at each other.

"Vasquez, you need to go."

Supergirl looked around the room, took in her sister's clothes (or lack) and the bouquet of red roses in Vasquez's hands. "Oh, whoops! I didn't realize that you guys would be-- Wait, really? In the middle of the day?"

"Alex, you can't do this. She's your sister!"

"Not by blood! And you're just jealous because I'm closer to her than anybody! Supergirl, I'm the one you want!"

"Alex, if you do this, you are going to hate yourself tomorrow."

Supergirl looked at the food on the table, then looked at Alex. "Oh Rao, is this ever wrong. Okay, that's it. I might just have to kill him a tiny little bit." And she turned back to the balcony with superspeed and flew away.

Alex looked pissed. "How did you get in here, anyway? I didn't give you a key!"
Vasquez gestured with the flowers. "I, I wanted to surprise you... I know you hate the holiday, but I thought, maybe it was just because nobody ever... Anyway, if you hate them... I'm just gonna..."

She set the vase down on the coffee table, away from the potstickers. "I'm gonna go."

And she practically ran from the room. At this rate, she might just have to win over Supergirl herself, if only to keep Alex from making a terrible mistake.
And Pierces the New Traveler with Love

Chapter Summary

We fix and de-Mon-etize the episode. Say goodbye, Mixy.

Chapter Notes

"It was now the hour that turns back the longing of seafarers and melts their hearts... and pierces the new traveler with love..." --Dante Alighieri

Lucy changed into her camos and went looking for the annoying imp. If she was going to fight him, she was going to be dressed for it. She went behind the alien bar, holding the alien medallion in her hand.

"Mxyzptlk! Show yourself, you smug, grandstanding dandy!"

"Oh my," said the alien, lounging on the top of the dumpster. "A duel between a soldier and a gentleman. I've never had one of those before." He slid down and said, "For Supergirl's hand?"

"Yes."

"To the death?"

"Yes."

"I accept."

"But first--"

"No! If we are going to take part in a proper duel, we are going to do it like the gentlemen that we are. Or well I am. I suppose you are a lady..."

Through her teeth, Lucy spat, "I am no lady."

"Very well, then." He snapped his fingers.

Lucy found herself standing on a brightly lit stage, wearing fawn breaches, a green waistcoat, a long blue Revolutionary style coat and black boots. She raised a hand to see the white lace cuffs at her wrists.

"How do you like the duds, Major Hamilton?"

Lucy turned to see Mxyzptlk, similarly dressed, swinging his legs from the edge of the balcony. Below, they had an audience of DEO agents. "Is that Lucy?"

In a flicker of an eye Mxyzptlk was on the stage opening up a case with two dueling pistols. He
said, "I'm a Burr man, myself. He gets a bad rap, but he was the one who knew his way around a pistol."

From the audience, Supergirl yelled, "Lucy, don't! You can't die for me!"

"I don't intend to die today, Supergirl. Him, on the other hand?"

Mon-El shouted, "Hey, I thought we were going with non-lethal options!"

James ran up to the stage and leaped onto it, throwing himself between Lucy and the imp. "What about the rules of engagement, Major! I thought we didn't engage unless lives were at stake!"

"Lives are at stake, rookie! If he marries Supergirl and takes her away to the fifth dimension, her life will be forever ruined and a lot of people she might have helped will die! And you know that that Guardian idiot could never keep up with taking up the slack. So stand down!"

Mixy snapped his fingers again and James was back in the audience. He pulled out the two pistols and handed one to Lucy. "Pistols at dawn, so revolutionary."

Lucy said, "So if I shoot you with this, you'll die?"

"Well, that's generally how these things work, yeah. But don't throw away your shot, because you only get one." He turned to take the three paces and turned around.

Lucy shot him in the chest. He fell back with a gasp and then laughed and backhanded Lucy across the stage. "Did you really think I would hand you a gun that could actually kill me? You are thick, aren't you." He stepped forward and aimed the pistol at Lucy's head.

She pulled out the medallion and shone the blue light at the alien. He tried to snap his fingers and nothing happened. "Oh, no."

Lucy punched him in the jaw and the crack was loud, then she hooked his arm over her shoulder and flipped him on his back. "Oh, yes." She stepped forward and ground the heel of her boot into his crotch. He screamed and passed out.

She put the medallion back in her pocket. "I won. I won Supergirl."

Suddenly the DEO agents could move. J'onn and Alex leaped onto the stage. J'onn put the imp in blue-glowing handcuffs. The man came to, groaning.

Alex's eyes were wide, looking back and forth between the mewling alien and her fierce and angry friend. "Lucy, you can't just..."

But Mxyzptlk gasped, "The law of the universe has to be upheld. She, she won. Fair. Square. Supergirl, she has to. Has to marry Supergirl."

Vasquez said, "No. Just because you two are trying to claim someone else doesn't give you the right-- Supergirl can choose for herself."

Mxyzptlk shook his head. "It's not me. That's how the universe works. She beat me."

"STOP!"

Everyone turned to see Lena Luthor striding down the central aisle, carrying a long case. She was wearing jeans and white sneakers and a bright white shirt. Around her neck was a glowing blue medallion like the one in Lucy's pocket.
"She beat you," said Lena, climbing the stairs to the stage, "so you say Supergirl is hers. What happens if I beat her?"

"Then Supergirl is yours."

"Lucy Lane, I challenge you to a duel. Oh, too bad there are no more bullets in your pistol. I guess we'll have to use something else. I don't suppose you fence? I know Lois used to. Won tournaments, as I recall." She knelt on the ground and unzipped the case to show two rapiers with ornamentation along the blades. She stood up and swished first one sword and then the other against the long red velvet curtains, leaving them in shreds. "Spanish steel," she said.

Lucy shrugged off the long blue jacket, tossed it at Mxyzptlk, who couldn't duck in time. Alex pulled it off his head.

Supergirl said, "Lena, what are you doing?"

"Fixing this. Trust me."

Lucy took one of the swords. "You people are going to have to back off. We're doing this whether you like it or not. But honestly, the outcome is inevitable. A Lane fighting a Luthor for a Super?"

Lena smiled. "As you say, Major Lane. Inevitable."

The DEO agents backed off, forming a ragged circle around the edges of the stage. Lena and Lucy faced each other, tapped their swords against their foreheads in salute and then the clash of metal and the sound of their feet back and forth across the stage filled the air and sent agents pulling away. Lena slashed the buttons off Lucy's green waistcoat and Lucy responded by slicing across the belly of Lena's shirt, flicking blood across the stage.

Supergirl screamed, "Lena! Lucy, I swear to Rao, if you hurt her I will kill you!"

And Lena pushed Lucy back, step by step, swords clashing until finally, Lena hooked Lucy's sword with hers, swung them in a circle and sent Lucy's sword flying into the aisle with a clang. She touched the tip of her sword under Lucy's chin, pricking the skin so that a single drop of blood dripped down her throat and blossomed red on her pearly white cravat.

"Give up, Lane. As you said, it's one thing if a Lane is fighting a Luthor to save a Super. But you weren't fighting to save her. You were fighting to have her. And that's not right. I am a Luthor and I will go to my grave before I let you take Supergirl's bodily integrity away from her. Say it. Say I won."

Lucy looked dazed, as though the magic had worn off. "You won, Luthor."

Mxyzptlk said, "Then I guess she's yours. Vera Wang for two!"

Supergirl's face was conflicted.

Lena came over and handed her the sword. "Supergirl. You're free. I would never..." She stepped closer and whispered so only the superhero could hear, "And anyway, I'm in love with Kara Danvers."

Lena stepped back again. "Lucy, help me with this."

She took the medallion from around her neck and Lucy took hers out of her pocket. They stepped over to Mxyzptlk. "You know," said Lena. "This annoying person messed with Superman a few
times, once when he was still friends with my brother. And Lex learned some things about him back then. He learned the kind of energy that could destroy him, if a positive charge, say, and a negative charge were put together the right way."

"But, but," said the man trying to get to his feet. J'onn pulled him up by the arm. "I'm not a bad man. I just wanted someone to love me."

"You can't force love," said Supergirl. Then she looked at Lena. "You have to wait for it to come to you."

Lena said, "Supergirl here didn't want to use lethal force on you, and I respect her. So, as you know, Mxyzptlk, there is another way."

He looked at the medallion in Lucy's hand, the blue glowing in a circle in one direction, and then he looked at the one in Lena's hand, the blue glowing in a circle in the opposite direction. "Well, we all had fun. Kltpzyxm. Ta-ta for now."

And he disappeared in a wash of blue. The medallions lost their light.

Alex turned to Supergirl. "Oh, God. We have to talk. I am so sorry."

James and Winn frowned and then shared a look. Vasquez came up between them and put a hand on each of their shoulders. "Gentlemen," she said. "Curiosity does not become you. And just be glad it wasn't you who were affected. Okay? 'Nuff said."

Lucy picked up the buttons that had fallen off her vest. She rubbed the blood off her throat and looked at her hand. Lena came up to her somewhat shyly.

"Sorry about that, Lane."

Lucy offered her hand and Lena shook it. "Thanks, Luthor. I owe you one."
A Traveler's Right to Embellish

Chapter Summary

Alex and Kara work out their awkwardness thanks to Vasquez's intervention. Kara asks out Lena for Valentine's and warmth ensues. This is a long one.

Chapter Notes

"A traveler has a right to relate and embellish his adventures as he pleases, and it is very impolite to refuse that deference and applause they deserve." --Rudolf Erich Raspe

Kara went over to Alex's apartment with some trepidation, but Alex had said she wanted them to talk, so Alex could explain and apologize and anyway, she had tons of potstickers that weren't going to eat themselves, so Kara went.

When she got there, Alex was sitting on the couch wearing a baggy old blue sweatshirt and staring at the roses that Vasquez had brought her.

"They're beautiful," said Kara. She piled potstickers in a bowl, reheated them with her eyes and sat down next to her sister.

"Yeah, they are."

"So's Vasquez."

"Yeah. You know, I asked her about you. About how she didn't seem affected by Mixup's magic. She said she was affected and she had been trying to figure out how to win you, but then she had a parallel line of thought going about me and Valentine's Day and how to figure out if I had always just been complaining about Valentine's Day because I never had anybody to spend it with."

"Except me, because I never dated either."

"Right, and so, she said, maybe that was what was going through my head: spend it with the woman I'm suddenly dating who I don't love exactly--"

"Alex, I've seen the way you two look at each other, especially when either of you think the other one isn't looking."

"Just, let me get this out. She said, maybe I actually felt guilty because I wanted to spend it with her and that would mean that you'd be spending it alone. And that, that asshole of an--"

"Go with imp, it's more polite than he deserves."

"That imp's magic, or whatever it was, twisted that."
"And Vasquez helped you not just at the time, but she has also helped you think about it in a way that could make things between you and me not be weird. I'm pretty sure everybody else at the DEO is going to be super weird around me for the next three weeks."

"Yeah."

"Alex, I want you to be happy. Spend the evening with Vasquez. I'm, I'm going to go see Lena."

"As Supergirl?"

"No. As me. I'm going to ask her to dinner. As a date."

"You're going to tell her you like her? You don't sound nervous anymore."

"She told me she did all that for Supergirl because they're friends, I mean we're friends. But she also told me that she's in love with me. Not Supergirl me, but the real me. Kara me. I mean who falls in love with a rookie reporter instead of a Superhero?"

"Don't quote me on this, Kara, but that woman is really starting to grow on me."

Kara smiled. The doorbell rang. "Sounds like your Princess Charming is here to swoop you off your feet."

Kara opened the door for Vasquez, who had a garment bag and a bottle of champagne. "Hey, Vasquez. Thanks for, well, everything today."

"Me? I didn't do anything!"

"Exactly."

"Now, you, on the other hand..." Vasquez said, laying the bag across the back of the couch. Alex frowned. "Kara didn't do anything?"

"No, Kara didn't. But Supergirl was totally checking out my ass at the DEO."

Kara laughed. "Of course I did. Gotta make sure you're good enough for my sister. But seriously? Semper Fi?"

Vasquez slid the bottle of champagne into the refrigerator. "Once a Marine, always a Marine."

"So where are you two going tonight?"

"Well," said Vasquez. "I hadn't asked Alex yet, but--"

"You know I'll say yes."

"There's a little place just outside the city that does an amazing prime rib. But it's a dressy place, and I didn't know if you wanted to get all--" She waved her hand around. "Dolled up for you? Pfft. Of course. I know you'll make it worth my while later."

They kissed.

Kara picked up her purse. "Okay! So I am off! Have fun you two!" Superspeed had its uses.

//
On the sidewalk outside Alex's building, Kara called Lena.

"Hey, tell me you're not still at work."

"Of course I'm still at work, Kara. That's what I do."

"But it's Valentine's Day."

Lena's voice was flat. "It's not like I have a date."

"From what I heard, you could have if you had wanted it."

"You've talked to her already, have you?"

"I am pretty sure I am the only friend she has right about now who didn't just get a little weird. Not that she thinks you got weird. She told me how grateful she was for what you did. She told me something else too..."

"Oh, really? And what might that have been?"

"Well, she suggested that if I asked you out to dinner, for a, well a date, for Valentine's Day, you might not say no."

"She's a smart one. So are you going to ask me?"

"Hey, Lena, want to be my Valentine?"

"Very much so. Where would you like to go?"

"Oh! I hadn't gotten that far..."

"You know, that place you like so much, Tentaifun? They have a sushi party boat for four that might just sate even your enormous appetite... I'll pay for dinner. You can pay for dessert."

"You're never going to get a reservation for tonight!"

"You forget, Jess has superpowers. Meet me there in half an hour?"

Kara swallowed. "Yes?"

//

Most sushi restaurants in National City didn't make their waitresses wear kimonos. Tentaifun was the exception. When Kara walked in and given Lena's name as the name for the reservation, she immediately was led to the bar and offered a drink on the house. She sipped the pink Cosmo, distracted, looking at the time on her phone every thirty seconds.

But one of the many beautiful things about Lena Luthor was that she had been raised by WASPs and was always early. When the brunette strolled in, Kara immediately burst into smiles.

"Kara! I hope I'm not late. My last meeting was with China..."

"Oh my gosh, no, Lena. You're still early."

They kissed on both cheeks and Kara wondered if she shouldn't have made as much noise doing it as she did. She'd have to ask Alex.
One of the waitresses shuffled over to them at the bar, where Lena was waiting for her Cosmo. "Your table is being cleared. It should be ready in a few minutes!"

The waitress seemed nervous, but Lena never acted badly in restaurants. Kara wondered what Jess had said to make them fear her so much.

The waitress led them up to a small room, lined with tatami mats, with a sunken table for Americans who need to put their feet down into the well under the table. Kara sat at the back so she could face the sliding door and Lena sat on her left and immediately reached out and touched her arm.

"Thank you so much for asking me to dinner, Kara. I was looking forward to a sandwich at my desk."

"Do you even have a home, Lena?" Kara joked.

"I do. You'll have to come by some time and see it. It's only fair, since I've seen yours."

Kara didn't quite know why that made her blush, but just put it down to Lena being Lena.

The waitress came in with a pot of green tea and small blue cups traced with bamboo. As she knelt to pour for them, she asked, "And when do you expect the rest of your party?"

Lena said, "Oh, we're all here. It's just the two of us."

"Oh, but there must be some mistake. The food order--"

"The order is correct. We're quite hungry." Lena's eyes slid toward Kara as she said it, and Kara felt a strange warmth even as her stomach growled her agreement.

The waitress left and came back with a double order of gyoza gracefully arranged on a long tan plate with a spray of pink cherry blossoms enameled on one corner.

"Yum!" said Kara, grinning. "Their potstickers are the best. And the plates are always so pretty!"

Lena ate one gyoza for every four or five Kara inhaled. And the plate was quickly empty.

"Did that take the edge off?"

"Oh, yes. That was exactly what I needed. So! I was going to ask. You know how to fence?"

"Boarding school, Kara. Lex learned at his school too, so when he found out I had started learning, he made it a point to improve my form, timing, all of the things that matter in a match. He was a good teacher."

"I wish I could have seen you. Supergirl said you looked really badass, especially when you cut Lucy's buttons off. But she said you got cut too. Are you really all right?"

"Just a scratch. A few Band-aids and I'm fine." She smiled at Kara's concern.

"I miss all the fun stuff!"

"Trust me, you wouldn't have wanted to see all those people lusting after Supergirl."

"Yeah, she seemed really creeped out. And if anybody had actually died--" Kara could hear the distress in her own voice."
The waitress came in carrying the party boat with the sushi and sashimi, and took away the gyoza plate. As soon as the door slid shut, Lena snaked out her chopsticks and picked up a piece of octopus, the edges of its white flesh a soft purple. Kara watched her eat it with her own chopsticks loose in her hand. For some reason, the sight of Lena's jaw and her long white throat as she chewed and swallowed was distracting Kara tonight.

"Don't like octopus? How about the tuna?" And Lena picked up the piece of dark pink fish and offered to feed it to Kara, who opened her mouth without thinking and took the tuna.

She moaned a little. "Mm. I love the texture. So soft and smooth, like, I don't know what."

Lena chuckled. Kara blushed and pulled herself together, eating with raw enthusiasm. Lena ate lightly, more watching Kara than remembering to eat herself.

They talked easily about unessential things, TV shows that Kara watched and Lena had only heard about, an Italian fashion designer in town for a show for the National City elite that Lena had been invited to.

"Are you going to go?" asked Kara.

"God, no. I've got actual practical things I need to do. There was an art gallery opening I was thinking of going to, but it conflicts with a conference call with L-Corp-Germany. What about you? Any fun plans?"

"Well, I had been planning a game night this weekend, but now that the gang got all weird about Supergirl, they're having a hard time talking to each other, and I'm pretty sure Alex and Vasquez will be all over each other, so it'll probably just be me and Netflix this Friday."

"Maybe we could have our own game night, over at my place. We could work on your chess game, maybe watch some TV reruns..."

"Did you know Vasquez found out that Alex had never watched Xena? So now they're binge-watching it together. They even put The L Word on hold, because Vasquez said something like if Alex was going to be a badass dyke, she was going to have to know her Xena!"

Lena grinned. "I knew I liked that woman for a reason!"

"I know, right?"

There was one last piece of pale orange salmon, lying on the far end of the boat. Kara said, "I should leave that for you."

Lena picked it up with her chopsticks and held it between them at mouth height. Her eyes twinkled. "Or... we could split it..."

Without thinking Kara leaned forward when Lena did and their lips met as they each took one side of the sushi and bit down. Kara's face flushed as she chewed the soft and slightly fatty fish. She swallowed. "Wow. That was...tasty."

Lena shook her head. "I'm sorry, Kara, that came out far more sexy than I had intended. I shouldn't have..."

But Kara said, "So you did intend it to be sexy."

"I, what?"
"You intended it to be sexy," said Kara seriously. "Just not that sexy."

"Oh, I, not if you-- I didn't mean to make you feel--"

"Exited?"

"Uncomfortable."

The words came out at the same time. They stared at each other.

Lena put down her chopsticks shakily on the table, biting her lip and looking away.

Kara watched this woman whom she had seen looking reserved, impassioned, terrified, joyful, playful, and always, always supremely confident. Until this moment. Slowly, she said, "Supergirl said you told her that you were in love with me. That that was one of the reasons you gave her back to herself, because it wasn't, it wasn't her you...wanted."

Lena nodded, her eyes tightly closed, and a tear slid down her cheek. She whispered, "I don't expect you to, to feel the same. You're too good a soul to want someone like, and I'm not, well, you're not... I know you prefer men."

"I always preferred Chinese food until I tried sushi, too. And I'm pretty sure you couldn't have just..." she waved her hand between them, "...with Kung Pao Chicken. So there's that."

Lena looked at her, another tear following the first. Kara took her face in her hand and wiped it away with her thumb. "Alex always says that I am really oblivious when people are flirting with me. I just figure they're being friendly. And I was really scared to say anything to you because what if it messed up our friendship? And you're my best friend, after Alex. Winn used to be my best friend and I still love him, but when I'm with you I just feel like you're not expecting anything from me. And the guys in my life, it's like they always expect something from me. But you're just kind and good and your smile is like the moon on a dark night..."

Lena bit back a small laugh. "I'm pretty sure most people would see me as the darkness."

"Oh, no, Lena, you are so full of light! That's probably why we get along so well. People always call me a ray of sunshine. It always used to embarrass me, but whenever I'm with you, that is exactly what I feel like."

Lena smiled incredulously, sure her ears were deceiving her. "So you like me back, Kara?"

"I've always liked you, Lena, from the moment I met you. And you're so smart and brave and you keep saving Supergirl and Alex, and they're my two favorite people on the planet aside from you."

"Yes, but you wouldn't want. I mean you, we. Never mind. Just, where do we go from here?"

"Well, there's this little French bistro not far from here, that does an amazing chocolate mousse, and I was eating there one time with Alex and they had a big kitchen fire and we called Supergirl and she blew it out and they were all, 'We don't know how to thank you, Supergirl,' and she said that I had told her about the mousse and she liked it so much and she made me take a picture of her with them and the mousse and she put it on her Instagram, and that brought a lot of people in, which helped them pay for the damage."

Lena laughed. "I do love stories with happy endings."

"Oh, but it gets better. Now any time I go to pick some up for me, they give me another two orders for Supergirl! For free!"
"Well, that is a happy ending!"

When they got to Chez Fleur, the place was packed, so Kara ordered their mousse to go. The chef, Fleur, and her husband, Henri, hugged Kara tightly and kissed her on both cheeks, welcomed Lena with the same gratuitous warmth, and told her how they had heard about what she had done for the aliens and thanked her again and again, telling her about their son's alien bride, showing her pictures of the two on their wedding day, the week after the Medusa virus rocket exploded over National City. They insisted on having Kara take a picture of them on either side of Lena, which they said their son and his wife would be very happy to see.

By the time they got out of there, Lena had received more hugs from strangers than she ever had in her life: apparently the aliens of National City appreciated French cuisine.

"Sorry about that, Lena. I know you're not usually a touchy-feely person."

Lena was silent, still looking dazed, as they waited a block away for Lena's driver.

"But, in a way, I'm also not so sorry. I'm glad you finally have an idea what you did for people that night. You're not only my hero, you know."

The black towncar pulled up and Tom got the door for them. "The condo, Tom, if you please."

"Yes, Ms. Luthor."

"This is nice, Lena. I almost never have the chance to be in a car. I pretty much walk everywhere."

"Or fly. On the bus?"

Kara laughed. "Not this week. Traffic has been a mess. The National City Heroes have just started spring training, and they're finishing the renovations of the stadium, and just all kinds of things. The buses have been late all week."

"Sometimes things can be too good to last," said Lena, and her voice sounded small.

"Oh, they'll fix it. I was talking to Maggie and she introduced me to the NCPD Traffic Division head and I wrote a small article on the plan they're working on. Whether Snapper runs it will be another thing. But still."

But what Kara was really thinking about was how strange it was to see National City from below, looking up, instead of from the sky, looking down. Just one more of the many ways that knowing Lena had shifted her perspective on the world. But maybe that was just what good friends did. If you spent enough time in their presence, something of them rubbed off on you and you became something a little bit different, a little bit more than you were.

They arrived at a tall building and Lena bade Tom a warm goodnight. Then they passed the uniformed security guards and went through the metal detector and were let into the special elevator that only went to the top five floors.

"Gosh," said Kara. "Who else lives up here?"

"Oh, my closest neighbors run the gamut. Joe Soos, number nineteen on the Heroes. Shelly Henderson, the channel seven news anchor. The governor's ex-wife and her wife. One or two others."
The elevator opened on the top floor and Lena placed her hand on a sensor pad and then unlocked her door with a regular key. She turned on the lights as they walked in and shed their winter coats.

"That's odd," said Lena. "It's cold in here." She went to the radiator and felt for heat, and then reached for her phone.

Kara looked around. The space reminded her at the same time of Alex's apartment and Lena's office. The furnishings were spare and a little monochromatic.

Lena said, "Yes, Bernie. No heat. I don't know, the dial says it is turned on... Yes, would you? And I know it's probably just a pilot light thing, but check for bombs, too. Paranoia pays off, after all. Thank you."

Kara had expected all the furniture to look expensive and maybe the art on the walls to be artists she recognized, but in fact the big squishy white couch and armchairs looked like only slightly better version of hers. Admittedly, the flat screen TV on the wall was four times the size of her little set and the audio system was state of the art.

Lena put down her phone and said, "I'm going to go change into something... a little less intimidating." She gestured dismissively to her tight black dress and stilettos. Kara smiled and nodded.

There was a row of bookshelves along one wall, the books carefully organized by topic, and within each topic, by author, alphabetically. Kara wondered if Lena thought her own bookcase was an utter mess in comparison. Probably. It really was.

Science and technology took up the whole first bookcase. Then architecture, medieval history, World War Two and the Holocaust, biographies of people from Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein to Amelia Earhart, Eleanor Roosevelt and Coco Chanel. Several shelves of classic novels and almost a full shelf of novels by writers Kara had never heard of like Sarah Waters, Katherine Forrest, and Ingrid Diaz.

"Like my books?" Lena came back wearing black skinny jeans and a shirt with some strange formula on it.

"They're great! And so well organized. You should come help me organize mine! Or, well, no. You're the CEO of a multi-million dollar company. Never mind."

Lena laughed. "I would love to help you organize your books, Kara. That's one of the best ways to get to know someone, to look at all their books, ask why they're important."

"These novels at the bottom here, I don't recognize any of the authors."

"I wouldn't expect you to. They're all lesbians. Those are my lesbian romance and mystery novels. I do classics most of the time, because who doesn't love Jane Austen? But sometimes you want to relax with something a little more contemporary and less heterosexual, more, what's the word the kids use these days? Relatable."

Kara nodded. "I like science fiction."

"You'll have to show me your favorites so I can read some of them. Now, on to more serious topics. It's been at least half an hour since you last ate. You must be starving."

"Lena! Be nice. But you're not all wrong, either. Where are your spoons?"
They ate the chocolate mousse and this time Lena insisted that they split the food fifty/fifty. When they finished it and licked their spoons clean, it was still very cold in the condo, so Lena called down to maintenance again. When she put down her phone, she said, "We appear to be clear of bombs. Bernie thinks it's just that the fuel line is gunked up, so the fuel isn't running smoothly. They're working on it. I would understand if you wanted to go home where it's reasonably warm."

"No, I never feel the cold. But we could maybe wrap up in a blanket and sit on the couch and watch something. Alex and I do that sometimes in the winter on sister nights."

"I will queue up Netflix and you get a blanket from the chest under the windows. I know I have a big fuzzy blue plaid wool thing in there somewhere."

Kara went to the chest and opened it. On top was something bright red. She picked it up and recognized the material by feel and gasped. When she unfolded it, she saw the familiar crest of the House of El, except not her family's version with the blue background; rather it was Kal-El's family's version, with the yellow background.

Lena hurried over. "Oh! That's the blanket Superman wrapped Lex in after he nearly froze to death helping him stop the fusion reaction at that place in the arctic. When Lex went to prison for thirty-eight consecutive life sentences, I was the one who had to clear out Lex's primary home, and I just kept it... It's very warm."

"It would be," said Kara. "It doesn't feel like it's of this Earth."

"I'm pretty sure it's not. I suppose I should have given it back to Superman. I just... didn't want to face him at the time. And then I forgot about it. And then this past winter it surfaced again and by that time, Supergirl was saving me all the time and I just thought, this was the sign that once upon a time a Super and a Luthor... could be friends. I suppose I should give it back to him. Or give it to her..." She sounded sad.

Kara's mind was awash with thoughts. To wrap your family's crest around another person was tantamount to proposing to them, although Kal-El would not have known that at the time, and even Kara in an emergency like that would have gone with caution over culture to protect a friend's life.

"I think," she said slowly, "that Superman would appreciate it that someone else besides him really believes that Lex was his friend once. And Supergirl would want you to have something to remind you that what the two of you have, that it's real, your friendship. I know it means a lot to her."

Kara carried the blanket to the couch and whirled it around her, holding one arm out for Lena to join her and sit with Kara's arm over her shoulders, the red blanket wrapped around them both.

"So what are we watching?"

"Xena. What else?" Lena clicked the remote.

Together they intoned along with the voiceover, "In a time of ancient gods, warlords and kings, a land in turmoil cried out for a hero! She was Xena, a mighty princess forged in the heat of battle. The power... the passion... the danger. Her courage will change the world!"

"Which one did you pull up?" asked Kara.

"I don't know. I think it's the Christmas one, or sorry, I mean Solstice."

"Oh, I love the funny ones. And in this one Lucy Lawless does a bunch of different voices."
"I was watching it the other night after I heard Alex's story about how they took out the Toyman. What was the stuff his followers were shooting out of the catapults?"

"Oh, that was really cool, scientifically speaking, apparently. It was sort of a double impact plastic explosive. Most of those, you hit them once, they explode. With this, it hits a surface and heats up and the next time something hits it or steps in it, they blow sky high. Winn and Alex have been trying to reverse engineer it."

Lena frowned. "That would be chemically fascinating. I mean, to temporarily suppress the-- What?"

Kara grinned. "Nerd."

"Yeah, well. Nerd who has built up a fairly impressive amount of personal wealth and new inventions on top of the family's already impressive company and pile of patents."

"I'm not saying it in a bad way! My sister is a huge science nerd. And you know Winn! I love nerds!"

Lena opened her mouth and closed it again. Kara caught her breath, realizing what she had just said. They watched two more episodes, laughing at Xena being in cognito at the Miss Known World pageant, and then Lena looked at her watch.

"It's late. You probably have plans for tomorrow."

"Oh, the usual. Work. Wow, it's still really cold."

"Yeah, too bad I can't just cuddle with you all night. Your body is very hot, I mean, warm. I mean..."

It was rare to see Lena ramble. That was usually Kara's job. But she thought about what Vasquez had told Alex about how our minds find ways to make us feel comfortable with the uncomfortable things we aren't ready to deal with. Slowly, she said, "Um, Lena. I don't know how to say this, so I'll just be straightfor-- Well, no. Not straight. Maybe direct?"

Lena smiled and bit her lip.

"I know I've been pretty much straight all my life. And then I met you and, well, have you heard of pink kryptonite? Yeah. So. Here I am, not who I thought I was, just like Alex. And at some point, I think I would really like to, well, explore some of that with you? Like, um, a lot. But maybe not tonight. But, well, you're right. My core body temperature is a little over-warm, just as Alex's is a little under-warm. Turns out that very few people are exactly 98.6. So I would very much like to, um, well, stay with you tonight? If you want? Just to snuggle and keep you warm while your heat is down? Or not. If you don't want."

Lena swallowed. "I want."

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Later in the dark, in Lena's vast bed with the high threadcount sheets, Kara played big spoon, holding Lena close to her and whispering in her ear, "Best Valentine's Day ever."
Continuing to salvage Homecoming. You're welcome.

Although James had spent the last several weeks working eighteen hour days, many of them out in the desert heat by day or the desert freezing cold by night, he had told himself it was for a greater purpose, to change his life, to become something bigger. So he had shocked himself with how outrageously happy he had been to return home to National City, with its temperate climate and all his friends. The other recruits weren’t from here, so he got to show them around when they had a few hours leave, and he took them to the alien bar, where Holtzman was instantly recognized by the inhabitants, human and alien, which at least had the advantage of getting all five rookies a few rounds of free drinks. But nobody had ever treated Guardian like that. Admittedly, since he was a masked hero, they couldn’t have. But still.

But it also meant he hadn’t really minded when Holtzman, Partridge and Smith didn’t go on the mission the next day. Vasquez had called it a routine patrol, and certainly that’s how it had started, with Vasquez and himself in one truck and Alex and Finn and another. But then Winn had identified a Cadmus convoy on the road, and sent Supergirl and the Martian Manhunter to intercept from the sky while the human agents went to intercept from the ground.

James had to admit that air support did make the job easier, especially when Supergirl could shoot her laser eyes and start fires on the tarmac that caused the Cadmus vehicles to veer off course and roll over. And then she separated the main truck from its cab, leaving J’onn to take care of the driver, while he and Vasquez jumped out and fought with the lock of the main truck’s doors. In the end, Supergirl simply melted it off and pulled the doors open to reveal—

A chained man, who had been badly beaten. Why on Earth would Cadmus put a single prisoner in a semi and then make all that noise with a convoy? It probably would have been a lot less noticeable to throw him in a taxi, much the way diamond couriers always looked like ordinary travelers, didn’t draw attention to themselves. Strange.

But then he watched Supergirl and Alex react to the sight of the man, to the sight of Jeremiah, their father, basically back from the dead.

//

Alex couldn’t take her eyes off her father. Fifteen years. He had been gone for half her life. She had forgotten how similar they were, the color of their hair and their eyes. She had always been Daddy’s little girl, and she felt that deeply now as she cleaned and bandaged the wounds on his face, which he insisted were his only injuries.

He told them about his work for Cadmus, always being just helpful enough to not be killed, escaping so many times, being caught every time and punished. She knew he meant tortured, but no one said the word. He talked about how he had managed to sabotage Metallo’s kryptonite heart without anyone figuring it out but how other attempts at sabotage had been discovered and punished.
“Dad, we should probably do a full physical and x-rays, to be sure you don’t have any lingering injuries…” said Alex.

“Honey, I’m fine. Okay, stiff and aching from the chains in the truck, sure. But fine.”

He told J’onn that he wanted to get back onboard at the DEO as soon as possible.

J’onn smiled. “Pending a psych eval, I look forward to bringing you back soon. I’ll get started on the paperwork today.”

Vasquez asked, “Sir, do you know why they were moving you today?”

“She said they had a new specimen to enhance, but he’d been so badly injured that they couldn’t bring him to me. So instead, they were bringing me to him.”

“But how could you do anything without your equipment? We searched all of the trucks. There was no medical equipment or sign of any of their enhancement tech.”

“She didn’t say. I just assumed if he were in a hospital, they’d find a way to get me in. And then I said something stupid and Henshaw started beating on me and I forgot to worry about it.”

Alex said, “Does it matter, Vasquez?”

“No, probably not. But if I was going to squeeze somebody in to work at a public place incognito, I’d be more likely to hit him where the marks wouldn’t show rather than mark up his face like this…”

J’onn said, “I’ve fought Henshaw. He doesn’t lead with logic. He leads with rage.”

“Point taken, sir. So Lillian wasn’t there at the time?”

“Oh, she egged him on. I really hate that woman.”

Vasquez looked thoughtful. “Sir, I know someone who would be good to do the eval. He consults with both the DEO and SHIELD.”

“Bring him on, as soon as possible.”

Then Eliza walked into the room, and Alex shooed the agents out. After fifteen years, those two needed to be alone.

//

Vasquez thought that dinner that night at Kara’s place was…strained to say the least. Jeremiah had never known Vasquez, since she had joined the DEO five years after his disappearance, so he was simply playing off of J’onn’s evident approval when Alex introduced her to him as her girlfriend.

“Well, things really have changed! My daughter deserves the best, though, so…”

Vasquez nodded. “She really does, sir.”

“What did you bring?”

She had read her predecessor’s profile of Agent Danvers, Sr. She handed him the bottle. “Tequila.”

He took it grinning, “Fifteen years. Wow, she really is part of the family. Honey, can we make Margaritas, show the girls how it’s done?”
Eliza smiled, mouthing “Thank you” to Vasquez.

They were just pouring out the yellow drinks when the doorbell rang and Kara jumped, gave Alex a scared and nervous look and went to let in Lena.

Jeremiah turned, smiling. “And who is this lovely lady?”

“Jeremiah,” said Kara, fidgeting with her glasses. “This is my friend, Lena. Well, I guess, maybe not so much friend as, I mean, because we are friends! Of course, we are! But like, now, girlfriend?”

Lena strode forward. She was still wearing a grey pantsuit from work. Vasquez assumed that Kara had told her to dress down and this was what she came up with. Lena shook Jeremiah’s hand.

“Dr. Danvers, a pleasure to meet you. And Dr. Danvers…”

She turned to Eliza, who smiled. “Please, Lena. It’s Jeremiah and Eliza.” They shook hands.

“Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you too, ma’am. I’ve heard so much about you from Kara.”

Eliza handed out Margaritas to all, and they toasted to homecoming.

Jeremiah asked, “So what do you do, Lena?”

“I run L-Corp, a technology company.”

The smile drained away from his face. “You mean LuthorCorp?”

Lena’s expression grew guarded. “That’s the old name and the old mission statement, the evil, world-domineering mission. Now we are trying to develop technologies that do some good in the world, improve people’s health and safety.”

“Lillian Luthor claims that she is trying to improve people’s health and safety by targeting aliens,” said Jeremiah grimly.

“She does. And I have set myself against her and against Cadmus several times in the last few weeks. I am not my mother. I am not my brother. I am friends with Supergirl and I have helped her and the DEO several times already. I believe my loyalties are quite clear.”

Kara frowned at her father. “She has saved me and Alex several times.”

Jeremiah glanced at Eliza and J’onn, who both nodded. So he said, “Then thank you, Lena.”

During dinner, they stuck to safe topics: the weather, the nutcases in the White House, things that they could all agree on. Afterwards, when Jeremiah insisted on washing the dishes with Eliza, the rest of them hung out in the living room, old friends having fun together, with Lena trying to fit in quietly, but mostly listening to the stories. At the end of the night, Vasquez offered to walk Lena to her car, and when she realized that Lena had been dropped off by her driver, she offered to drive her home.

“So,” said Vasquez. “That must get old fast.”

Lena sighed tiredly. “You have no idea.”

“Lillian did torture him.”
"And she tortured Supergirl, and M’gann, and probably a lot of other people. I’m a little surprised that she didn’t even bother to start with me. But maybe the emotional abuse is more satisfying than physical torture. I wouldn’t put it past her.” She sighed. "What about you, Agent Vasquez? You're the threat assessment expert. What do you think of all this?”

Vasquez glanced at Lena curiously. "What should I think?"

"Cadmus sends their top asset in a very obvious convoy just in time to warn us about a supersecret bomb, just in time to possibly locate it and stop it. And because this asset is trusted, is family, we know his information is good and trustworthy and we don't ask too many questions."

Vasquez smiled but didn't say anything.

"You don't think that's not all just a little too convenient?"

"Of course, I do. But I'd be interested in hearing your reasoning."

"Maybe it's the family equals trustworthy part? Doesn't really work for me. But I know it's a card my mother likes to play, particularly when she wants to be cruel. Well, crueler than usual."

Vasquez sighed. "That's what I thought too, but I know the Danvers women and this is not an argument they are going to want to hear."

"So what can we do? How can we protect them?"

"Due diligence. Good technology. And when it all goes pear-shaped, bring the firepower and emotional support."

"And if it doesn't? If we're wrong?"

"Amazed gratitude, I suppose? And continued vigilance."

Vasquez dropped Lena at her door and watched as the security guards greeted her familiarly. As she drove away, she called Winn and put her phone on speaker and attached it to her dash so she could drive with both hands.

"Hey, chief, what can I do for you?"

"Winn, I need you to have our girls' backs over the next couple of days. I have a feeling we're going to get hacked, maybe from the outside, maybe from the inside."

"You think we have a mole?"

"Honestly, I don't know. It just feels like a hen who's spent fifteen years with foxes maybe shouldn't be let loose in the hen house immediately."

Winn whistled. "Alex and Kara aren't going to like this."

"I know. So do it on the down low. It may be nothing."

"I don't like it, Vasquez. I mean this is family."

"Yes, Agent Schott, and as Lena just pointed out, family doesn't always mean trustworthy."

"Well, no, not our families, but surely the Danvers--"
"Are human, Winn. And as Supergirl likes to point out, humans are fragile."

There was a pause. Then Winn said forthrightly, "Then we'll protect them."

"Thanks, Little Plaid Shirt. I know I could count on you."
Who Ya Gonna Call?

Chapter Summary

More salvaging of Homecoming.

Chapter Notes

Please appreciate that I have been forcing myself to watch that episode a few more times to get the events and dialogue right. This means fast-forwarding through scenes with the space-fratboy and watching absolutely no Katie McGrath at all. And I did it for you, nerds. You're welcome.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

During the incursion from the fifth dimension, Winn had been working all over the DEO, digging in the archives, updating the spectrometer in the lab, writing code patches for the software that ran the hardware that the last few battles at the DEO had smashed and shorted out, which the IT maintenance team still hadn't finished replacing. So on Monday morning when he went to collapse with his first coffee of the day at his home station in the command center, he was surprised to see a black-clad blonde agent twirling around in his chair.

He stopped and stared and when the chair spun around to face him, she leaped up and offered her hand. "Hey there, handsome. Holtzman. I'll be your shadow this week, and we'll all find out the answer to that burning question, how many more weeks until spring?"

He shook her hand, said, "Winn Schott, Jr." and waited for the inevitable.

She grinned. "Yeah, I know who you are!"

He winced.

"You're the one who wrote that paper about quantum materials as lightweight body armor. There are one hundred and thirty-six questions about that I want to ask and one question about something marginally more important."

"Let's start with that last one."

"Is the coffee here literally made from liquefied and filtered shit, or does it just taste that way?"

"It just tastes that way."

"Excellent!" She pulled out a pocket notebook and opened to a long list, put a check next to the top item. "Oh, and here's my CV." She handed him an origami peacock made out of office paper covered margin to margin with typing. "I got bored."

"It's... too elegant to unfold."
"Don't worry. By the time you've finished reading it I will probably have published a few more papers. I have five in submission at least. And I've been wanting to fold an elephant in about forever."

Carefully, Winn unfolded the bird and gaped at the number and quality of not just first-author but only-author publications in the best journals worldwide and the list of patents. He looked up and said, "So that is what they meant about you. Um, we recently got hold of an alien rifle that we don't understand well enough to completely reverse engineer. If I put you in a fully equipped lab with two assistants, what could you do for me?"

Holtzman grinned. "What couldn't I do?"

//

Having set up his rookie, Winn turned his mind to the problems Vasquez had set for him. He already had plenty of programs aimed at detecting hacking from without. It was only a matter of an hour or so of work before he had used the same code to detect and ping hacking from within the DEO. But it was only about twenty minutes after he finished it that it first signaled a hack, and he immediately assumed it was a false positive, so he identified the physical location the computer was saying had been breached and hurried there himself to find the bug.

Except it wasn't a bug. It was a father.

Winn hit the local lockdown code and then summoned J'on, Security and Vasquez, and Kara and Alex came with them. He tried to explain that he had been attempting to patch security holes and had written some code that would identify unauthorized attempts to gain access to information, or attempts by agents without high enough authorization levels, or agents who tried to use outdated passwords.

And this ping had hit all of the alarm bells for all of the scenarios he had targeted.

When he hit the icon on his tablet, the door to the mainframe slid open with a hush and Jeremiah stood there, looking guilty.

Alex sounded crushed but grabbing onto anything for hope. "Dad! What are you doing here?"

Winn said, "You just tried to access some highly classified files from the mainframe."

"That's true," said Jeremiah easily. "I did."

Alex asked, "Why?"

Jeremiah said, "So I tried to use my old passkey to access some case files. the access has changed, so I did a workaround to get inside."

J'on put his hands on his hips. "What were you looking at?"

"Case files from the last twenty-four months. I just wanted to find out what my daughters had been doing. The crises you faced, the people you saved, the adventures you've been on. I've been away so long. Case histories are just a way to feel closer, like I'd been there. The way I should have been. I'm sorry."

Alex looked at the others as if his explanation was all they needed to let him go.

J'on said, "Winn?"
Winn looked at his tablet. "Yeah, it looks like it's just old case files.

Vasquez turned to J'onn. "Sir," she said pointedly.

"Your psych eval is today, Jeremiah. And once you pass that, you'll have complete access again. Why didn't you wait a few hours?"

"Fifteen years is a long time to wait."

Kara said, "You could have just asked us. We're right here."

"You were kind of busy trying to find a fusion bomb. I thought that took precedence."

Alex put her arm around her father and led him away, giving Winn a dirty look as they passed him.

Vasquez said, "Winn, keep looking. Make sure that's all it is. I'm sorry, Kara. I know he's your dad. But honestly, who remembers their passcode for fifteen years? Who doesn't expect a government organization to routinely change access codes? This smells off."

Kara nodded. "I understand. She does too, at heart. This is too important to get it wrong and we owe it to ourselves to check every avenue, even if it makes us uncomfortable. I trust Jeremiah, but I don't trust Cadmus. We'll do what we have to."

Winn's tablet pinged. "Oh, yes! Remember that time I was good at absolutely everything?"

Vasquez, Kara and J'onn said, "No."

"Well, it paid off. We tracked the radiation signature. Cadmus is moving the fusion bomb!"

Chapter End Notes

Over 125,000 words in 29 days. Boo-yah. Emphasis on the boo.
Back when Kara first joined the Danvers household, everyone focused on her all the time. She had just woken up after a decade of sleep, so as far as she was concerned, the destruction of her world that she had narrowly escaped had only happened a few months before. She worked through her trauma with a counselor from the DEO, but she often burst into tears for no apparent reason and she needed a lot of hugs and comfort. there were often times that she woke up levitating, or pulled a door off its hinges or got so angry that her eyes burned a hole in the rug. So once a week for a fairly long time Kal-El had visited and spent the day with her, teaching her control, having her catch eggs, trying not to break them in her fist.

And on those days, Jeremiah had taken Alex out to spend the day with her. Sometimes they went hiking or surfing, or played miniature golf. But the outings Alex loved best were when Jeremiah took his service weapon and they went to the local gun range and he taught her how to shoot. He showed her how to pull the slide back to cock the gun, how to hold it with her right thumb low to avoid slide bite when she shot. She loved the acrid smell of gunpowder and his hands rearranging her hands, pressing down on her shoulders when she got tense, mussing her hair when she hit the X in the exact center of the bullseyes on the target. "X is for Alex," he'd say.

During the first few days after his disappearance, she had been quiet, grim, stoic, and Kara had followed her lead, the two of them holding in their pain, trying to quell their hope, since Eliza said the DEO offered no hope. His body hadn't been found, but Hank Henshaw said that when he went over the side of the cliff, no one could have survived.

Then, the first weekend after his disappearance, when she realized they would never have a Saturday together again, she had cried herself sick.

Leading the tactical team to the (where else) Warehouse District of National City, Alex stuck her new alien laser pistol in her side holster and slung her AK-15 over her shoulder, resolutely not remembering that.

The convoy drove through National City's streets, Vasquez and Alex's team in the lead. Alex watched the two rookies, Olsen and Finn and asked, "You boys okay there?"

"Yes, ma'am!" said Finn. She had heard he was an elite fighter and was glad to have him on her team. He followed orders with precision and his combat skills were impressive. James Olsen she still had some misgivings about, but he also nodded his readiness and looked unafraid.

When they came to the warehouse the scanner had indicated, the grouped around the wide white sliding door. Alex hit her earpiece.

"All right, I'm in position. Dad, are you there?"

"Right here, Alex."
"Standing by for your instructions once we get inside."

"Be careful! Anything happens to that bomb before you disarm it, the whole city could go."

Alex glared at Supergirl. "Nothing's going to happen."

"Let's stop them once and for all, girls."

Supergirl stepped toward the white sliding door of the warehouse. "Ready when you are, J'onn >"

"On my mark. Three, two, one. Engage."

Supergirl's eyes lit up and shot lasers at the door, superheating it and blasting it into the warehouse. The DEO agents ran in, flashing the lights from their AK-15s and clearing the space. It was clean and empty.

Supergirl said, "Something's not right."

Alex said, "J'onn, please advise. There's no sign of target. I repeat, there's no sign of target. There's nothing here."

In their earpieces, they heard J'onn growl, "What's going on!"

"J'onn?" said Alex. "Dad?"

They heard J'onn bark, "Why can't I read your mind?"

Alex and Supergirl stared at each other. Alex yelled, "Regroup! Back to the trucks! On the double!"

The agents scrambled back into the trucks. Vasquez drove like a demon. Behind her, the rookies Finn and Olsen were complaining,

"Bait and switch," said Finn. "I hate when that happens."

Olsen asked, "You're ex-military?"

"Army. Stationed in Sunnydale. There's a Hellmouth there. We had an operation a lot like Cadmus, with humans trying to make hybrids, enhancing humans with tech and demon parts."

Alex snapped, "Rookies, shut up! I need to hear my comms! J'onn?"

And then she heard J'onn growl, "What are you?" And then it sounded like an entire glass wall was shattering.

Their truck fast outpaced the rest of the convoy and skidded into the DEO parking level.

"Out! Out! Out! To the command center! On the double! Be on the lookout for Jeremiah Danvers. Consider him armed and dangerous!"

But by the time they got to the command center, Winn was sitting at his station, bloody and pale. "Stand down, agents," he said. "It's over. Jeremiah got away. J'onn's in Medical. He's all right, but..."

Alex tore off her helmet. "What happened?"
Winn stood up, swaying. "It was a diversion. Pulled enough of us away so he could access the mainframe again, this time download actual intel that he, and Cadmus, really shouldn't have. I'm figuring out now what they took." He tried to type on his tablet, but then he stumbled.

Vasquez handed Chen her rifle, pulled Winn's arm over her shoulder. "C'mon, Little Plaid Shirt. You can do that while they're taping you up."

Alex and Supergirl followed them down to the medical bay, to see J'onn glow red and return to his human form, lying on one of the beds.

They sat Winn down and a medic started to feel his skull.

"Is J'onn okay?"

"Yeah," said Winn. "Jeremiah got the jump on him."

Alex shook her head. "Even if my dad had turned, there is no way he could have overpowered J'onn."

J'onn's eyes opened. "Yeah, that's what I would have thought."

Supergirl exclaimed, "Thank God, you're okay."

"Jeremiah's arm," said J'onn. "The one we thought had nerve damage? He's been enhanced, cybernetically."

"Like Hank Henshaw?" asked Supergirl.

"Jeremiah isn't who he was. I'm sorry."

Alex nodded but her voice broke as she said, "Not as sorry as Cadmus is going to be."

Supergirl said, "We'll find him."

Vasquez asked, "How?"

The medic finished with the bandage on the back of Winn's head. Winn looked down at his tablet. "Oh, okay. Um. Don't be mad! But I may have hid a tracker on Jeremiah. He's heading south of the city."

Supergirl said, "There's nothing there but old-growth forest."

Vasquez said, "Good place for a secret bunker though..."

//

The sky was clear and black. South of the city, away from all the lights, the stars were bright. As Supergirl carried a very armed Alex Danvers over the forest, their eyes searching for any signs of human activity, Alex couldn't help remember their flights over Midvale at night before their parents had discovered their nocturnal adventures and put a stop to them. Alex had always loved to fly with her sister, had always felt closer to her, closer to the stars she came from, when the cold wind whipped at their hair. Now all Alex felt was rage.

"There it is!" yelled Supergirl. "Headlights! I'll set you down a few hundred yards away. Then you go low and I'll go high to cover you."
Alex landed and flipped her rifle's light on, hearing the flap of her sister's cape as the hero shot back up into the sky.

Alex marched up the side of a low hill, seeing the glow in the distance and trying to keep her heart rate down so her shots would be straight when she got there. She couldn't see Supergirl above her due to the towering trees, but she knew that she would be tracking Alex's heartbeat and following very close.

When she neared the three jeeps in the small, rough clearing, Supergirl shot laser beams from her eyes and exploded one of the jeeps' tires. Cyborg Superman, Lillian Luthor and Jeremiah turned to stare.

Hovering above them, Supergirl shouted, "It's over!"

Utterly unflappable, Lillian said, "Not yet. But it will be soon."

Alex trained her weapon on them. "Dad? You're coming with us."

Lillian said, "That's unlikely, dear."

A train's horn sounded. Cyborg Superman growled, "Kaboom!"

Supergirl's head snapped around. "A bomb on the tracks? What are you, Snidely Whiplash?"

They heard the explosion. Alex said, "Train! Go!" And Supergirl took off.

Cyborg Superman thrust his fist into a thirty-foot tree and pulled it down between them and Alex.

Jeremiah yelled, "Alex!"

"Dad!" Alex dropped her rifle and pulled her alien pistol and flashlight. She scrambled over the tree and ran after them.

Lillian and the cyborg were too far away to catch, but Jeremiah was running like he was winded and Alex was younger and armed and very, very dangerous. She started to catch up, yelled, "Freeze!"

He stopped.

"Look at me! Dad! Look at me!"

Slowly, Jeremiah turned around.

Holding the gun on him, Alex stepped closer. "How could you? How COULD you!"

"Would you believe me if I said I did it for you?"

"You betrayed everyone at the DEO. Your friends. Our family! Everyone that I love! You did that for me?"

"Family's complicated, honey."

Her voice breaking, Alex said quietly, "I'm bringing you in."

"Not alive, you're not." He raised his arms. "The only way you're bringing me in is to shoot me."
Alex hit the live switch on the alien gun. It lit with blue power.

"If you do it," said her father. "I'll understand."

Alex's hands shook as she took aim, tried to think where she could shoot him that would be non-lethal, but they were too close and the gun was too powerful. Even with her rifle, she wasn't sure she could simply injure him and not maim or kill him.

He said, "You were always the best part of me."

Her hands shook. She couldn't do it. She dropped the gun, powered it down. He backed away and then turned and ran. She fell to her knees, sobbing. And that was where Supergirl found her ten minutes later.
Chapter Summary

Almost done with salvaging Homecoming. Almost...

Vasquez had stripped out of her Kevlar, returned her weapons to the armory, reported for duty in the command center. From what Winn told her, Jeremiah had shot enough rounds into the mainframe that the IT squad was practically weeping. At least with the White Martian, they had only lost secondary systems. This was going to be long, messy, and inevitably expensive. She turned in her chair to watch Winn try to give his crew directions.

Into his phone, Winn said, "No, the green wire attaches to the other green wire. Green! Okay, I'm going to head over to you."

Alex and Supergirl walked in side by side, but not, Vasquez thought, exactly together.

Winn asked them, "Hey, any luck?"

Supergirl said, "We lost him."

Alex nodded. J'onn came up behind them.

Supergirl asked, "On your feet already?"

"No time to waste," said J'onn. "Any idea what he stole from us? What he gave to Cadmus?"

Winn rubbed his head. "Not yet. I have to go down and check on the mainframe that he shot. And once we get the system back on line, I can run a diagnostic."

"Quick as you can. I want to know what we're up against."

Winn said, "Yes, sir." He left.

J'onn turned to the sisters, who both had their arms crossed over their chests and were not meeting each other's eyes. "How are you both?"

Supergirl said, "It's been hard."

"Alex?"

But Alex had just sighted her mother behind J'onn. "Excuse me."

J'onn asked Supergirl, "What are you thinking?"

"I'm...just worried. I'm worried about what this means, for Alex, for me, for Jeremiah and Eliza. For our fight against Cadmus. I'm just worried it's going to change everything."

"It will." He put his hand on Supergirl's shoulder. "It'll make us stronger."

He left.
Vasquez watched Supergirl watch Alex talk to Eliza. Both mother and daughter stood ramrod straight, neither one of them showing any emotion. Eliza nodded, then she turned as if to go back to the lab.

Alex came back to the command center. "I'm calling it a day."

In a low voice, Vasquez said, "Can I come over later? When my shift is done?"

Alex just nodded. She looked like she was just holding on by a thread. "That'd be good," she said.

Vasquez watched her stride toward the elevator, and her heart broke a little bit. "What is it with the Danvers women," she muttered to herself. "Always taking it on the chin."

//

When she got to Alex's apartment, Alex had been knocking back scotch for a while. Vasquez took the bottle from Alex's hands and screwed the top back on. "That's not what you need, kiddo."

"Vasquez, if I tell you something... Will you not tell J'onn?"

Immediately, Vasquez knew what she was going to say, and she hesitated. Threat assessment was her job. If Alex let her father go rather than simply losing him, Alex was, strictly speaking, a threat. If Vasquez only guessed it but didn't have it confirmed by Alex, she could pretend it was just one scenario, not the truth.

"Honey, J'onn's a psychic. You can't tell me anything you don't want him to know."

"But I can't be with you if you think I'm a good person, because I'm pretty sure I'm not. I'm not a good agent, I'm not a good sister or daughter or--"

"Sweetie, you are one of the best agents I've ever seen. And J'onn has the entire National City division of the DEO that he has to watch over, and he has some leeway, but he also has a mission directive, and orders, rules he has to follow. If he thinks, finds out--"

"You need to know."

"No, Alex. Darling. I don't. I don't need you to tell me anything. Do you think I don't know you well enough by now that there is anything you could tell me that would make me stop loving you?"

"But you don't love me. And after today--"

"Are we still going with that generosity shit? Alex, I know exactly who you are. I know exactly how much your family means to you, each and every one of them. I know exactly how much each and every agent at the DEO means to you, from J'onn all the way down to the rookies. I. Know. You. And I know the things--both good and bad from the rules perspective--that you are capable of. I can imagine every single scenario that could have played out in the woods out there. So nothing that you might confirm for me would surprise me or make me stop loving you. I know the lengths you will go to for the people you love. But from J'onn's point of view, if I don't actually have proof, as long as I don't have verbal confirmation, then I do not, in fact, know. I only speculate. And if you want to stay on this case, I cannot know. Do you understand me?"

Alex nodded wordlessly.

"Now tomorrow is going to be hell and high water, and you need to get some rest. Today has been
exhausting for us all, but I think more for you than the rest of us. So I am going to put you to bed."

"Will you, will you stay?"

Vasquez pushed a stray lock of hair out of Alex's eyes. "I was hoping you'd ask..."
Chapter Summary

The end of the Homecoming Salvage Operation. (I deserve a medal for this one.)
Mission complete. You're welcome.

Lena had not been able to sleep well, the night of the party at Kara's place. Her talk with Vasquez had made her restless. She kept trying to think of a way to scan for a fusion bomb, something that they had not thought of yet, but she was pretty sure that Winn's program was still the simplest, most efficient way. So then she was thinking about nuclear bomb disposal, and that led her to think about cleanup of a nuclear disaster zone like Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and that led her to consider the HazMat suits that they had worn on Mount Haystack and something Supergirl had told her about quantum materials.

So then she had dragged herself out of bed, poured herself a glass of wine and opened her laptop on the kitchen island. It was 2:15 and she was inexplicably hungry, even after eating a bowl of Eliza's chili. She looked in the refrigerator and saw the last five lonely gyoza from the last time she had ordered out while thinking about Kara.

She put them on a plate and hit the button on the microwave, then went back to searching for papers on quantum materials. Nothing. Nada. But wait, how many people even knew they existed? She changed the search keywords to "Winn Schott, Jr." and came up with a single paper, in the Journal of Theoretical Materials Science, which she had never heard of before. There was another article in that issue about theoretical plasma by a Jillian Holtzman with more PhDs than Lena had, so she read that too, and had to refill her wine glass and reheat the already reheated potstickers because she got so intrigued by what she was reading.

By four, she realized that she desperately needed to sleep, so she had dragged herself back to her all too large, all too cold (without Kara's warm body) king-size bed, and eventually, thinking about Kara and what they might one day do in her bed, slept.

She woke three hours later, before her alarm went off, hit the clock and pulled the notebook and pen she kept next to it into her lap, sketching, making lists of materials and questions to ask Winn, and then jumped up and put on black slacks and a black English French-cuff shirt with Super-crest silver cufflinks and three-inch black slingbacks, and hurried off to L-Corp.

When she arrived at the top floor, she was still half an hour earlier than she had gotten there in a very long time, and Jess had not yet arrived. She knew that her assistant would be mortified to find her boss there before her, but she hoped that Jess, knowing Lena's endless energy when inventing, would forgive her.

She was standing sorting out her keys for the one for her office when a young man in a delivery uniform exited the elevator carrying a large bouquet of flowers. She signed for them, expecting a sweet note from Kara, but the note actually said, "Dearest Jess, Don't work too hard. XOXO Darren." Below the signature was a little cartoon of an Asian woman in a pencil skirt and heels, holding up the L-Corp L logo over her head.

The elevator bell dinged. Jess stepped out of the elevator and looked shocked to see Lena standing...
Lena blushed a dark crimson. She could feel the heat on her face. She said, "Oh, Jess. I'm so sorry. I'm inventing and I couldn't sleep and then I got up early, and the delivery man just, and I just assumed they were from Kara, for me, because, flowers. But they weren't. And I am so, so sorry." And she held out the card for her assistant to read.

Jess gaped at her, then took the card, read it, blushed.

Quickly, Lena said, "He knows you well, if he knows that you are holding L-Corp up by main strength! It's true. And I know I always remind you to remind me to give you a raise, but I actually did go by HR yesterday to set that up. It'll start at the end of next month."

Jess opened her mouth and closed it.

Lena said, "I didn't eat yet, and I'm not hungry, but I could really use a cup of that amazing coffee, and then when you have sorted out my schedule for the day, I could use your help. As a springboard. I'm trying to figure out a new countermeasure, and a new material, and a few other things, but my brain is trying to do them all at once, and that never goes well."

Jess said weakly, "Shall I order in some croissants? You usually eat croissants when you can't focus on food."

"Oh! You're right, I do. Huh. Yes, excellent idea. Also, yogurt. Protein helps the brain work!"

She went down to her personal lab in the basement between annoying meetings: board members, shareholders, philanthropic fundraisers. That last was least annoying. She was trying to pull together a few corporate partners to found a hospital for aliens, hire headhunters to find doctors and surgeons with xenobiology backgrounds, get other NGOs to help fund the equipment that would be needed. That part of her day was a labor of love. The other meetings meant dealing with Dead White Men With Money who were, annoyingly, still quite alive.

But the rest of her day, she was down in the lab, at the drawing board making mechanical drawings of the things she was envisioning, or visiting the materials R&D folks and asking them to create samples and prototypes, and she knew that when she spoke, she was talking too fast for anybody except Jess to keep up, so Jess was by her side the whole day, taking notes, making lists, and translating to the dazed scientists and engineers who really didn't deserve to be racing to keep up with the mind of a Luthor in invention mode.

At eight o'clock that night, she was welding parts together when her phone went off. Puppies barking and yipping: Kara Danvers. She pulled off her welding mask and picked up.

"Hey, beautiful!" she said, her Flirt Mode™ immediately activated.

"Hey, Lena..." Kara sounded exhausted.

"Honey, are you all right? What happened? Is it Snapper? Shall I have him killed? Just say the word. Luthor reputation be damned!"

Kara gave a weak laugh. "No... It was my, it was Jeremiah."
"Was?"
"Cadmus. He stole. And we tried. But Alex..."
"Sweetie, are you at home? I'll be right over."
There was a sniff. "Thanks, Lena."
//
Lena knocked on Kara's door.
Inside, Kara yelled, "It's unlocked."
Lena came in, set her purse down on the kitchen island and slid off her trench coat. She said, "Hey. You okay?"
Kara was lying on her couch, covered with a blue blanket. "No."
Lena came over and sat next to Kara's legs. "How about you tell me what you need?"
Kara's face was wet from crying, the little mascara she ever wore was smeared under her eyes. She whispered, "Just be here with me."
Lena nodded. "Come here," she said, opening her arms out. Kara sat up and shifted over to snuggle against Lena, resting her head against Lena's shoulder.
Lena murmured, "Do you, do you need anything else?"
"Wake up with me?"
Lena inhaled silently. "I'd love to."
They snuggled for maybe half a minute before Kara's phone went off. Lena said, "You don't have to--"
But Kara sat up, pushed off the blanket, and picked up her phone. "Winn, did you figure out what Jeremiah stole from the DEO computers? ... Okay, I'm coming in."
She hung up, put the phone down, her whole body tensed, her forehead crinkled.
"Hey," said Lena. "What is it?"
Kara looked at her. "Cadmus has a list of all the aliens in the country."
"Well, what do we do?"
"We get up."
Lena saw her resolve. "Yes. We do. What can I do to help?"
Before There Is Exodus, There Is Pain

Chapter Summary

Unpacking Exodus.

Supergirl stared at the computer screen, working hard not to let her laser eye beams incinerate it. "That's the twentieth abduction since Cadmus got the alien registry."

Everyone else in the DEO command center had their arms crossed over their chests: Alex, J'onn, Lena.

"And they're escalating, getting more aggressive," said J'onn. "Are we any closer to finding out where Cadmus is taking them?"

"Or what they want?" asked Lena. "Because that is the million dollar question."

"No on all counts," said Winn. "I mean, we're monitoring traffic cams, sat feeds, cell-phone chatter. Maybe Jeremiah taught them how to avoid our radar?"

J'onn said, "From now on, Jeremiah Danvers is to be considered an enemy combatant."

Vasquez asked, "What does that mean?"

"It means, if found, he is to be arrested on sight. That's not a problem, is it?"

"Of course not," said Alex.

"Good."

Supergirl said, "But we have to let these aliens know. They need to be able to protect themselves. There are hundreds on that list. Can you issue a statement?"

"Not without compromising the DEO. We're off the books for a reason."

Vasquez said, "So do it anonymously."

Supergirl shook her head. "If it's anonymous, no one will take it seriously. But they might listen to CatCo. I'll write an article, get them to run it on the front page."

"You think Snapper would run that?" asked Alex.

"Of course!" said Supergirl. "Absolutely!"

//

"Absolutely not!" shouted Snapper. "I'm not going to start a public panic by publishing a conspiracy theory."

"But Supergirl spoke on the record. You saw all those soundbytes."
"You use Supergirl every time you want to get something past me."

"You said a good reporter should cultivate her source."

"Sourcezzz. Plural. Not gonna take your word for it. There's too much fake news out there. I can't risk it."

"So, what? You're just going to put people's lives in danger?"

"Careful, Danvers. You're at Def-Con Three with the moxy. We're the paper of record in this town. From now on, you need at least two independent sources verifying every quote, no matter whose life is at stake."

Kara crossed her arms over her chest. She offered, "What if you interviewed Supergirl? I mean, you've interviewed our president, world leaders, Julian Assange, credible sources."

"Would it be an exclusive?" growled Snapper.

"Course!" said Kara. "She won't speak to anyone else!"

Snapper bit down on his danish, and Kara took that as a yes.

//

That night, Alex found herself at the alien bar, playing pool with Maggie. She had finally made her peace with being "social" with Maggie now that she and Vasquez were clearly and unequivocally dating. She even didn't need Vasquez or Kara or Winn or any of the others anymore to feel comfortable with her friend.

"Game!" said Maggie. "Which means you owe me dinner, and a bottle of scotch, and one of those flash grenades! It's like the twelve days of Christmas! Alex?"

Alex shook herself out of her worries. She said, "I'm sorry. I'm just thinking--"

"About your dad?" asked Maggie. "Don't worry. The DEO's going to find him."

"That is what I'm worried about. The DEO considers him a threat. When we find Cadmus, things are going to get rough and he could get caught in the crossfire. He stole the registry from the DEO. He hurt J'onn. But, Maggie, I know him. He's a good man. And even if he is siding with Cadmus, there has to be a reason. Either they are threatening him or they are blackmailing him or they are mind-controlling him, or using him. I am the only one left who believes in him."

Maggie nodded. "And you're going to be there when they find him. And you're going to help protect him."

Alex nodded, as if she were working hard to convince herself that what Maggie said was true. "You're right."

Maggie smiled. "Mm hmm."

"Double or nothing? There's no way I'm giving you a grenade."

"Fine," said Maggie. "I'll go get us another round."

"I'll rack."
Maggie made her way toward the bar, catching the eye of the bartender and putting up two fingers. She heard Winn, slightly toasted, saying, "And Lyra loved the movie version of Dune, except for..."

And about one minute later, the bar exploded. Hooded bipeds--were they human, were they alien? Men? Women?--burst into the bar with automatic weapons, shooting up at the ceiling, leaving everyone diving under tables for cover.

Alex picked up a pool cue and hit one assailant's rifle out of his hands, hitting this partner in the face on her back swing. Maggie had her Glock out, shot a third one, while Alex broke the cue sweeping a fourth off his feet. Then they were all in close punching and kicking. James flipped a fifth, but there were just too many of them, and they were grabbing the aliens and dragging them out the back door. Alex pulled her alien gun and shot a sixth and he went flying over a table.

"Lyra!" Winn screamed from the floor, as his friend was dragged out the door, but Alex strode past him. "I'll get her!"

She chased the men out and yelled, "Freeze! Or I will shoot!"

But then she felt a gun in her back and a man said, "Stop! The lady's about to put her gun down. Aren't you?"

Alex dropped her gun.

Behind them Maggie yelled, "Let her go!" and the man whirled around, using Alex as a shield between him and Maggie's gun. Then Alex heard a strange noise, felt the man's grip loosen and then felt him torn backwards away from her. She turned to see James in his civvies, but holding Guardian's shield, standing above the bald man who had grabbed her, his face now a mess of broken nose and blood.

But the black van was already driving away, Lyra and the blue alien pounding the back windows and screaming noiselessly for rescue.

Winn started to run after the van but Maggie pulled him back. James let the shield collapse back into the wrist brace. "Um, don't tell Supergirl?"

Alex looked down at the man who had gotten the drop on her. Maggie came over and cuffed him and read him his rights. Alex still felt the small push of his pistol against her back.

"This time, James." She looked around. "How many did they take?"

Maggie said, "I saw four, but I wasn't focused on counting."

Alex picked her gun off the ground. "Thank you. Both of you."

Maggie said, "I rode my bike here. Can I get some help with prisoner transport?"

Alex shook her head. "Jurisdictionally this is another messy one. We're gong to need him to give us some answers. I want to take him back to headquarters."

"I've already read him his rights. I'm doing this by the book."

"Don't you get it, Maggie? This isn't a mugging. This fucking Nazi Germany and those aliens are going to die."
"I still have to do my job, Danvers. Fine. I'll call a patrol to pick us up. But he's NCPD's. You go do what you have to do. I'm not stopping you. But I'm doing this by the book. You want my prisoner, you're going to have to go through channels."

Alex stuck her gun into the back of her waistband and pulled out the keys to her motorcycle. "I don't have time for this." To the boys, she said, "I'll meet you back there ASAP." To Maggie, she said, "You'll be hearing from J'onn."

When Alex got back to the DEO and explained the situation to J'onn, he was pissed, but he went and changed into his FBI suit and when he came back two hours later, he had the Cadmus agent in custody.

"Agent Danvers, reminder. Your scene, your prisoners, you have to take control and not let the locals undermine you."

"Yes, sir, I just never dreamed Maggie would--"

"I had to call in a favor from a pro-alien judge. We have custody for forty-eight hours and then we have to give him back to the NCPD. I'm going to go interrogate him. Get it together, Agent Danvers."

Alex went back to the command center, to find Winn and James arguing. James apparently was back on his "Guardian would have handled that better" kick and Winn looked ready to throttle him.

"This is not about your ego, James. This is about our friends' lives, my friends' lives. You can grandstand all you like but in the end, you didn't save them. You didn't rescue them. And everything I have done over the last few hours has come to nothing."

Alex said, "We'll get her back, Winn. We'll get them all back."

"You don't know that. We don't know anything. The blue guy, the one who's always drinking the WD40? He's got a body heat signature twice what Supergirl's is. I am trying to track that. Lyra's blood, you know how human blood has iron in it? Hers had gold. I'm trying to track that. Nothing is coming up. I am running out of ideas."

J'onn strode into the command center looking frustrated. He took in the conversation and said, "We'll come up with something, Winn. We always do."

"Everything I've tried, it's led to nothing!" He turned on Alex, "And if they hurt her, I'm sorry, but your father, I swear I will--"

"Agent Schott!"

Vasquez took Jordan's place at the center desk. Jordan said, "Agent Vasquez, you have the watch."

Alex asked, "Sir, what did you get from him?"

"Nothing. Cadmus has found a way to shield his mind from me. We're going to have to find another way."

Vasquez said, "Director, I have some requisitions from IT that need your signature, for the mainframe repairs."
Alex strode down to the brig. The bald Cadmus agent saw her coming and shook his head. "Like I said to the other guy who came in here to talk to me, I got nothing to say to you people."

"Yeah, that's what I heard." She keyed in her code and the glass door opened. She walked in and punched him in the jaw. "Now, me," she said, kicking his handcuffed wrists. "I bet you got loose lips." She dragged him off the floor and slammed him against the white wall. "Now tell me! Where's Cadmus?"

She punched him, first with her left fist, then with her right, then threw him on the floor. "Tell me where Cadmus is!" She slammed her heel into his groin, leaving him curled up and screaming.

"I can't! Okay! Cadmus put something in my head. All right? Don't know! They'll kill me!"

Alex picked him up again, slammed him into another wall. "Well, it's either them or it's me!" She punched him over and over. "Tell me! Tell me!"

"Danvers! Get off!"

Strong hands grabbed her from behind and pulled her off him.

The prisoner yelled, "She's crazy!"

"One more word," J'onn snapped at him, "and she'll be the least of your worries!"

He pulled her out of the cell, slammed the door shut, dragged her by the arm out into a corridor where the prisoner couldn't see them.

"All right!" shouted Alex. "Let go! Look, I'm sorry. I know I was out of line. I just--"

"Alex."

"I thought I could get him to tell us--"

"Alex! We only have him for forty-eight hours, which means any physical damage will be on us. And he can't tell us anything if he's dead!"

"I would have stopped!"

J'onn took a deep breath. "What Winn said about your father--"

Alex was pacing. "Look, this has nothing to do with him, okay? I just want to help Winn find Lyra. I want to find them all. Okay? Before its too, before Cad--"

"You need to take a moment."

"I'm fine. Okay? I promise." She was still breathing heavily, but she walked away.
The Need for Confirmation

Chapter Summary

Moving toward Exodus...

Eve Tessmacher looked like a blonde bimbo. She had known that about herself for years. Ever since she was a high school cheerleader who had secretly campaigned to be Homecoming Queen, knocking the three major contenders out of the race without ever lifting a finger to offer cupcakes to football players.

She had made it work for her at Yale, as well. People consistently underestimated her. But when something needed to happen, when the Future Business Women of America had needed funding, or when the Eli's mascot kept passing out from the heat of the heavy costume, Eve Tessmacher had always known what to do.

Then came Kara Danvers.

If Kara Danvers had been the magician of personal assistants, she would have been Harry Houdini, and Tess would have knelt at her feet to learn from her. Card tricks. Escape tricks.

And then came Mike of the Interns.

If Mike had been a living embodiment of biochemistry, he would have been pheromones. The reason one body turned toward another body without thought, without even realizing it was happening.

So on the one hand, Eve took over Kara's job with a sense of having earned the role by her hard work for the last ten years. And on the other hand, sometimes she got so caught up in her dreamy boyfriend that she forgot what her name was. Not today.

Today she watched Kara fight for the aliens being abducted, trying to get Snapper to run her piece, trying to get Snapper to interview Supergirl, trying to get Snapper to take Supergirl's warning seriously. The passion that moved Kara Danvers moved Eve Tessmacher.

So she called her big sister, who was a hotshot at the Huffington Post, and they talked.
Alex Danvers was exhausted.

Too much adrenaline. Too many emotions. Too few answers. Too little hope.

It all added up, which was strange really, because it felt much more like subtraction.

She went home and changed into comfortable clothes, reheated some Indian takeout and tried to relax. Maggie's betrayal, Winn's panicked threats, J'onn's disapproval. It was all too much. She went to the refrigerator and pulled out a beer.

She turned and saw her father standing right there in her living room. She dropped the beer and it shattered on the kitchen floor, fizzing and spreading over the tiles.

"Dad!"

"Alex. Listen to me. There isn't much time. Cadmus is going to slaughter them. Every one. Now, I can stop them, but only with your help."

Alex's eyes got big. "I want to trust you. But I have to know you're telling me the truth."

"The only reason I'm alive right now is that Cadmus believes that I turned to their side. The only way I could prove my loyalty to them was by betraying my own children. Alex, I am on your side. Always. Cadmus has them penned up in cells that are rigged to kill them. All Lillian has to do is press one button. Now I can't disable it myself, but in the DEO armory, there is a magnetic field disruptor. It will shut down the cages. I need you to get that for me."

"Just, just come with me! We'll explain everything to J'onn and he'll help--"

"J'onn is not family! If the DEO apprehends me, they're going to treat me as a hostile. You don't know what they're going to do to me."

Alex's mind was overwhelmed. She turned, thinking to find paper towels, clean up the beer, but Jeremiah touched her arm.

"Alex, I need you to decide quickly. Will you help me or not?"

Alex turned away, her mind in a torment of thoughts. She went to the roll of paper towels, tore three off, then stared at them, not really knowing what they were or why they were in her hand. Finally, she nodded, "Yes, I will help--"

But when she turned back Jeremiah was a flash of red-veined light that turned into J'onn's human persona his hands behind his back.

"J'onn! You were testing me?"
"I had no choice. You're a federal agent, Alex. You took an oath. We're facing a crisis situation here. Thousands of lives are at stake. Sadly I was right."

"J'onn, just--"

"I'm sorry, Alex. You're suspended from duty until further notice."

"No. No, no, no. J'onn! No! Don't--"

Alex stood, one hand in the air, trying to think how she could possibly have done anything except what she did. She pulled off the old sweatshirt that covered her tank top and examined the bruises on her arms from the bar fight. She never gave anything except her all, her one hundred percent. J'onn knew that. How could he betray her by catching her out when she was weak?
Chapter Summary

Moving through Exodus.

Chapter Notes

Honestly, a couple chapters back I really tried to bring Alex and Maggie closer together and it just went a completely different way. Vasquez just insists on...VasVers???

There was a knock on the door. Kara came into Alex's apartment and said, "Hey, Vasquez. Alex, I heard what happened. J'onn should not have done that to you."

Alex said, "It was a betrayal and it was unfair, and I need you to explain that to J'onn and just ask him to put me back on the case."

Kara crossed her arms over her chest, looking uncomfortable. "Well, I, I don't agree with his methods, but I do agree with his assessment. I think you should sit this one out."

"What?"

"Alex, I heard what happened. You lost it while interrogating a suspect. What's going on?"

"That's not what matters! What matters is our father. And there is still good in him. So I need you to convince J'onn, because I have to be there when we find Cadmus."

"Alex--"

"I have to protect him!"

"Alex, listen to me. I am not going to let anything happen to Jeremiah. I promise. But you are putting all of your focus on him, when you should be focusing on the aliens we are trying to find. And when we find them, you risk making a bad call, putting him in danger, or worse, getting yourself hurt. I have to go. I'm sorry. I have to figure out how to run this article run. I'll call you later."

She left.

Alex was pole-axed. She turned to Vasquez. "I assume you agree with Kara?"

"Actually, I don't. If you need to protect your dad, that's what you need to do."

Alex gasped. "But you'll help me?"

"Ride or die."
Alex stared. "But, J'onn. He'll know. And anyway, it's one thing if I put my career at the DEO in jeopardy, but I can't let you do that. I can't imagine that you would even want to. And I can handle it myself, so you don't have to. I don't know what I was thinking when I asked. I am so, so sorry, Vasquez. Forget I said anything. I will not let you--"

Vasquez took Alex's face in her hands and kissed her, hard. "Agent Alexandra Baby-Dyke Key-to-My-Heart Danvers. Number one: I am the threat assessment officer, and if you were anyone else, ANYONE else, I would say J'onn was right and categorize you as a threat. But you're you and I trained you and the only threat in this situation that I can see is if you aren't on the case when the shit hits the fan. Number two: I have ways. Don't ask. J'onn won't be able to tell. Number three: You can always, always ask. Someday I might say no. There may come a day when the courage of women fails, when we forsake the other dykes and break all bonds of fellowship, but it is NOT this day. Number four--"

Alex, breathless, said, "There's a number four?"

"Number four: Nobody 'lets' me do anything. You couldn't stop me if you tried. Supergirl couldn't stop me."

"Thank you," Alex said with a small voice.

Vasquez kissed her again, simply because she could. "Now, how do you want to do this?"
Continuing Exodus, with a small Buffy twist here. Am I the only one who thinks Brian is basically Clem?

Brian sat in his car under the I-485 bridge, talking on the phone to his bookie, Clem, in Sunnydale. "You've got to give me the benefit of the doubt this time, Clem. This is a sure thing. I have been watching the social media for weeks, and they've even come to the bar together, a Luthor at an alien bar. Exactly. Lena Luthor is totally dating that CatCo reporter. She is. And I know that, but, no, man, I will totally pay you back, out of my winnings. You will? Fifty down on Kara Danvers. You won't be sorry!"

He hung up the phone and picked up his sandwich, but then he heard a police siren and looked into his rearview mirror to see a human police officer striding toward his car. "Dammit."

"Good afternoon, sir. Saw that you have a broken taillight. Lucky for you, I have some special tape to fix that right up."

Brian smiled and got out of the car, saying, "It's my lucky day after all!"

But when they came to the back of the car, the taillights were both fine.

"Wait, but--"

The cop slammed him into the side of his car, pulling his arms behind him, and two masked humans handcuffed him and pulled him into a black SUV.

Behind him he hear a woman's voice say, "Officer, I think that man needs help." There was the sound of punching and a body falling to the ground. Brian strained to look out the side window of the SUV and saw two women he'd seen before at the bar with the Danvers girl, holding weapons on the policeman. The shorter woman had an alien gun that glowed blue when she shot the two thugs.

"I need to borrow this more often," she said, smiling.

"Huh. Yeah, right," said the taller woman. They hurried to the SUV, the taller one going to the front seat while the shorter woman unlocked his handcuffs.

She turned when the taller red head trotted over. "Find anything?"

"Yeah. GPS coordinates for everywhere this van has been. I know where Cadmus is."

"I'm coming with you."

"No, I have to do this alone."

"No, Danvers, you really, really don't. That 'I've got to do it alone' is macho bullshit. I'm coming
with you, as your backup. I said ride or die, not sit on the sidelines and watch you maybe get that very fine ass get kicked."

Vasquez pulled Alex in for a kiss. "Fine, then. Come with me."

Brian grinned. "Wish I had what you two have!

Together they said, "Go away, Brian!"
And When I Say, "What Are Friends For?" I Mean...

Since the cold night Kara and Lena had cuddled in Lena's large bed, they had been taking it slow. Lena had really never had an actual serious relationship, not since that fiasco with Veronica at boarding school. Her relationships had been short and pragmatic, mainly focused on sexual release, not feelings. But Kara Danvers was a whole different ballpark, not even an American ballpark. It was a Japanese ballpark with foreign rules and a completely different timeline.

Lena had come up with twenty-seven different "safe" dates. (Okay, Lena had come up with the first nineteen and Jess had helped with the other eight. But still.) Currently, they were on number seven, the kombucha place. Lena had left her office in a rare fit of extreme good humor, telling Jess to move her one o'clock meeting until two just in case. And Jess had hidden her smile and said, very seriously, "Yes, Ms. Luthor." And Lena had watched The Princess Bride enough with Kara to know that "Yes, Ms. Luthor" was Jess's way of saying, "As you wish."

So when Lena entered CatCo, she remembered the first time she had been there, to invite Kara to be her date for the gala, and how nervous she had been that Kara would say no. And how the strange intern had invited himself along and she had gone with it, thinking that he might have been Kara's boyfriend.

And thankfully, that had not turned out to be the case.

Lena asked for directions from a blonde woman who gave her a look like she knew who Lena was, but Lena just turned on her Haughty Mode™ and followed the directions to Kara's desk. She stood watching the buzz of activity that was CatCo's newsroom. Much like L-Corp's R&D departments, the floor gave off the feeling of good-natured rivalry, people outdoing themselves to outdo each other to do the best job possible. But then, it was a company founded by Cat Grant. Lena would have expected nothing less.

She turned and watched the detested Snapper in his office, and she thought that he had simply taken Cat's methods to an extreme: be mean, make people struggle and even suffer for it, but get them to go so outside their comfort zones that they excel. It wasn't a playbook that Lena liked, but she knew it worked for some people. It had certainly worked for Kara Danvers. (According to Jess, Kara was an icon in the personal assistant community, and who even knew that personal assistants WERE a community?)

So Lena watched Snapper until a voice said, "Excuse me." She turned.

And there was Ms. Sunshine herself, Kara Danvers with her hair braided and a camel blazer that made her look more serious than her usual pastels.

"Lena!"

"She said with surprise in her voice for some reason!"

"Oh! Ohhhhh! We were going to try that new fermentation place! I totally forgot! I'm so sorry, there's just, there's a lot going on." She waved her reporter's notebook and got that crinkle between her eyes.

Lena said, "It's okay. You don't need to explain. Kombucha can wait."

"Ohh, okay," Kara looked frenetic and exhausted.
"Is everything okay?"

"No, Snapper refused to publish my article on Cadmus. He says I need more sources."

Lena's voice dropped an octave. "What did Mother do now?"

Kara looked sad. "Cadmus stole the alien registry. They're abducting everyone on the list."

Lena's big green eyes lost their flirtatiousness, simply locked onto Kara's eyes.

Kara said, "My article was meant to...warn everyone."

Lena's mind raced. How many anti-alien rants had she been forced to listen to, first from Lillian, then from Lex before the trial, during the trial. Then she had managed to sidestep her mother, up until Medusa, and then she had heard the rants again. And then with Lex's old facility. Again. And suddenly here was this brave, sunny, kind person who only wanted to protect the people (and Lena knew her family members didn't think of aliens as people) that her family had always targeted as evil.

Lena looked away, pulled herself together and looked back at Kara. She said, "Well, something that important, if Snapper won't let you publish it at CatCo, maybe be a citizen journalist. Post a blog, Tweet the hell out of it. Imagine how many people you could reach instantly by just blogging about it."

"Yeah," said Kara, her forehead crinkling again. "Maybe you're right. Although Snapper would crucify me."

Lena smiled, seeing Kara's passion.

"Hey," said Kara. "In the meantime, um, maybe there's something you can help me with. Does L-Corp have any technology that we could use to help find the missing aliens?"

"Oh, well, we can look into it. Or... maybe I can do one better. When Lex ran the company, Mother was on the board. Maybe she left something behind, you know, trail of breadcrumbs? Could be a second source."

Kara bit her lip. "Thank you."

"What are friends for?"

And Kara laughed to hear her own words repeated back to her.

//

Lena was as good as her word. When she got back to L-Corp she had Jess clear all of her meetings for the rest of the day and then join her in the archives. They spent six hours digging up tax returns and quarterly reports, reading important bits to each other to assess how useful they might be. Eventually, they brought what they thought was most relevant back up to Lena's office. By that time, the sun was down, but it didn't stop them. At Jess's desk, Alana, the new girl, looked excited to see them.

"Oh! Ms. Luthor! You've had nineteen calls. I've got them all down here!" She waved a swatch of pink slips. "Who do you want me to call back first?"

Jess strode forward and took the pink slips from her, reading them one by one and dropping all but
three in the bright blue recycling bin. "Thank you, Alana. I'll take it from here. You can go home."

Lena hit the remote that controlled the TV/computer screen in her office and pulled up some surveillance footage from a URL mentioned in one of the budget reports. "Jess, look at this. Did you know that Luthor Corp showed up my brother's naval research facility back in 2007?"

"I was in college..."

Lena smiled. "Well, if it's been shut down for ten years, why did L-Corp get billed for a metal shipment last year? It doesn't make any sense."

"Accounting just switched operating systems. Maybe it's just a glitch?"

"Could you go back to the archives and get me the tax returns and annual budgets for the last ten years?"

"Right away, Ms. Luthor." Jess hurried off.

Lena returned to her desk. There was so much about all of this that just didn't smell right, but at least she had Jess on her side to figure it out.
Once More Into the Breach

Chapter Summary

Working through Exodus.

It took a while, but eventually Vasquez convinced Alex that she needed backup on this op, that she needed Vasquez. Alex Danvers notoriously didn't ask for help, even from her super sister, not if she could avoid it. But, as Vasquez pointed out, this was potentially the most important op of her life, and she couldn't afford to let her macho sensibility mess up her most important family relationships.

Meanwhile, Vasquez thought, where the hell was Supergirl?

But she didn't ask. Alex was too focused on getting her father back and Vasquez figured that a two-man (woman) op was the best that they could manage for now.

//

It was easy for Alex to take down the first three Cadmus agents, the first with her alien gun and the next two with her bare hands. But then more Cadmus agents blocked off one avenue of escape and Jeremiah claimed her as "with him." So she was forced to give up her weapon and pretend to be a little bit helpless.

He took from the perimeter she had breached to the center of the compound, but he wasn't happy to see her.

"You shouldn't have come after me, Alex. You could have been killed."

This was the compound's command center, where Lillian's agents worked at computers. She knew that, out of sight, this was probably where the aliens who had been rounded up were being held prisoner. What she realized as she viewed the complicated green schematics on the computer screens was that this was also where an enormous spaceship was being built from the parts of other spaceships.

"What the hell is that?"

"It's a Hoshian frigate, the best in the Kazar fleet, with...enhancements. Once it breeches atmosphere, it'll jump to lightspeed, go to Takran Galtos. They'll find passage home from there." Jeremiah told her proudly that the ship was named Liber, Freedom.

"Lillian is sending them back?"

"It was my idea."

"I don't understand."

"Lillian was going to kill them all."

"You are forceably deporting them. I mean, some of them have escaped famine, poverty,
"genocide?"

"At least, this way they have a chance."

"It was all a lie."

"No."

"No, everything you told me in the woods. You said you were working for Cadmus for ME."

"And I am. From the moment Cadmus took me prisoner, they told me that they would kill you and Kara unless I did what they said. I made my choice: protect my girls at all costs."

"How could you think that we would want you to hurt others to protect us?"

He said, "There are some things you will never understand until you are a parent."

Alex asked, "Do you think Mom would understand this?"

"I can only hope that someday she will."

Alex stared at him, hoping that he meant something better.
Chapter Summary

One of the best parts of Exodus, without You-Knew-Ew.

Kara took Lena's suggestion very seriously. Her blog wasn't big, unfortunately. She only had 3,581 followers, but she knew that many of them were aliens and allies, so she hoped it would help. Her Twitter account was much bigger, since that is where she often posted comments about Supergirl, and of course, Supergirl retreated them, which made a difference. It hardly mattered. She was basically running out of options.

She sat at her kitchen island typing away at her laptop, thinking of all the things Snapper had taught her about hooks and leads and avoiding run-on sentences. There was nothing more she could do about presenting corroborating evidence, but hopefully she had credibility with her followers. She could only hope. She hit Publish.

Her phone rang.

"Lena!"

"I found something. Activity at a Luthor facility that is supposedly defunct. It's big enough to build almost anything. Or to hide something."

Kara heard a sound like electricity and a man's yell and a crash. With one hand she tore at her shirt. "Lena?"

"Stay back!" yelled Lena from a distance, as if she had dropped her phone.

Supergirl was out the window in a superspeeded heartbeat, clothes in a pile in her wake.

//

Supergirl had flown fast before, first when she had caught her sister's sabotaged airplane as it started to fall from the sky, later on as she trained against heat-seeking missiles with the DEO. The Medusa rocket, sure. But up until that night when the kryptonite bomb had been about to go off and Lena's life was endangered, Supergirl had never, ever flown that fast.

Tonight she flew faster.

She could see the three figures on Lena's balcony before she could reach them, but the struggle was clear, so instead of trying to fly to the balcony, she flew lower, judging wind speed, Lena's weight, the thrust of the men's push.

So when, as she had feared, they tossed Kara Supergirl Zor-El Danvers' heart off the balcony, Supergirl was there to catch her.

Lena was a warm solid weight in Supergirl's arms, her heart pounding rapidly, her arms wrapped tightly around Supergirl's neck. Supergirl rose straight up to the balcony, holding Lena bridal style, much to the surprise of the men. She quipped, "Drop something?" then used her freeze breath to
blow them to the floor, helpless.

The moment Supergirl landed and set Lena on her feet, the CEO turned. "How did you know?"

"I was uh, getting coffee with Kara Danvers."

"Well, that's lucky! I'm glad you're here. I have something you will both want to know. Cadmus and the missing aliens? I know where they are."

She handed a flustered Supergirl a sticky with an address on it, and Supergirl had turned and jumped into the sky before she realized how quickly Lena's heart had gone from the frantic pounding of terror to the slower pump of rock-solid confidence.
Quick Decisions

Chapter Summary

The action from Exodus that has been in low supply during Season Two, with Alex being a total badass.

An alarm went off in the Cadmus facility, sending its agents into a flurry of activity. Even Jeremiah responded to the protocol, typing commands into the computer as agents poured into the command center.

Alex said, "Dad, stop! It's not too late."

But there was Lillian striding into the room saying, "I'm afraid it is, Agent Danvers. Get to your launch stations!"

Jeremiah said, "Lillian, what are you doing?"

"Your other daughter, Kara Danvers, just released an article online exposing our plan and the news got picked up immediately by the Huffington Post, Time, the Tribune, and Der Spiegel. We're going to cut our losses, launch the ship with the aliens already loaded. We've got a few hundred of them. That's not what I envisioned. But it's a start."

A disembodied computer voice said, "System unlocked."

Alex said, "Turn it off. Now."

Lillian whipped around. "You don't threaten me."

"Lillian, do you really think I would walk into the lion's den without a whip?" Alex pulled out a remote from her jacket pocket. "I planted ten Haldor particle mines all over this facility. Stop the launch."

Lillian considered her with narrowed eyes. "You're lying," she said with a small smile.

"You wanna bet?" Alex hit the button and two explosions when off. The Cadmus agents, Lillian and Jeremiah all jumped away from the noise. An agent fell off a high beam.

Alex held up the remote. "The rest of the bombs are on a Dead Man's switch. I let this go, and the entire place lights up!"

Quietly, Lillian said, "I won't stop this."

"I don't need you to!" said Alex. "Dad. It's time for you to do what you taught your daughters to do. Are you with me?"

"Tamper with my launch, Jeremiah, and I declare war on your whole family."

"Let her. We protect each other. Always."

"Jeremiah? Jeremiah."
"Dad," whispered Alex. "Make this right."

Alex held his brown eyes with her brown eyes, the brown she got from him. He hesitated and then gave the tiniest of nods, which she returned. Then they were exploding in opposite directions, attacking the Cadmus guards around them, disarming the men and pulling their weapons to bear on the rest. He used the butt of his rifle to hit the guard who had helped him capture Alex, pulled her alien pistol from the man and handed it back to Alex.

She pointed it at Lillian. "Now stop that launch."

"I can't." She sounded calm and pleased.

Jeremiah growled, "Give my daughter the override code."

"There isn't one. The only way to stop that launch is to drop that stick." She smiled at Alex.

Alex held up the remote, seeing no doubt, no insecurity in Lillian's eyes.

Alex dropped the stick. Explosion after explosion rocked the facility. Lillian leaped back to the computer, but the system was shorting out.

Alex grabbed her father's shoulder. "I'm going to get on that ship and stop the launch from the inside."

"Okay, go! I'll try to hack it from here." He took over the command computer.

Then Alex was running, running toward the explosions on the south side of the facility where she knew the ship was docked. Fires burned on all sides. Ahead of her like an airport runway, the ship's ramp was lit with blue lights, she ran up the ramp, taking in the alien insides with barely a glance, carefully clearing each turn in the corridor, her gun down but ready to rise and fire. Steam from the ventilators was lit with the alien orange lights.

A disembodied computer voice announced, "T minus sixty seconds to launch."

But there were other voices too, terrified voices all coming from the same direction. Alex ran that way.

"Stop!" yelled a Cadmus agent. Alex shot him.

She stopped at the cages where the aliens were packed in tight and panicking.

A voice shouted, "Alex!"

She turned. "Lyra! Get back!"

She shot the lock off the door and told Winn's friend, "Start getting everybody off this ship. I'm gonna stop that launch."

She ran forward, shooting another Cadmus man, hearing the escaping aliens shouting in the distance behind her. She trotted onto the bridge of the ship and tried to figure out the logic of the alien computers.

"T minus thirty seconds to launch. Engine ignition."

"O-kay!"
"Primary engine ignition." The ship roared to life. Alex sat in the command chair, assuming that the crucial controls would be within arms-length from there.

"Secondary engine ignition."

The ship slowly started to rise out of its cradle. She called Winn at the DEO.

"Um, sorry, Alex, can I call you back? We've got an unauthorized launch."

"It's me! I'm the launch! Not a drill. Once the ship reaches atmo, it's going to jump to lightspeed."

"So we've got to stop it before it reaches space," said Winn.

J'onn said, "I'll never get there in time."

"Plan B!" said Alex, trying to stay calm. This is a Hoshian vessel. So walk me through landing it."

"Just a minute! Okay, I got it! Try toggling the switch next to the control yoke and that should you back in manual control and then I can take it from there."

"Nothing's happening," yelled Alex. "It's still accelerating!"

Winn said, "We need to slow it down."

Supergirl yelled, "I'm here! I can slow it down!"

Alex saw the figure of her sister in red and blue zooming toward her, but the command screens lit up red with targeting interfaces. "Winn? What's going on? The screens just lit up red."

J'onn yelled, "Countermeasures!"

Winn said, "They just registered Supergirl as a threat and they're trying to target lock."

J'onn yelled, "Supergirl, keep moving!"

Supergirl ducked and rolled but some of the shots the ship fired at her hit her right in the chest, knocking her off course. "I'm all right!" she shouted, then got hit again.

"Supergirl!"

No reply, but the computer still noted a small moving object flying toward the ship.

"It's all right. She just lost her comms!"

Alex watched Supergirl stop, inhale, then send her freeze-breath at the ship's guns, breaking them off the side of the ship. Then she sped to the prow of the ship, where she flew up to the window of the bridge and her sister, and threw herself at the window. Alex stumbled from the jolt and hung on for dear life.

Alex nodded at her sister. The woman pitched a million ton alien prison into space, surely she could keep this ship from following it.

Knowing her sister couldn't hear her through the alien glass, she said, "Go!"

In her ear Winn was saying, "Alex, in twenty seconds this ship will be on the other side of the universe--"
"It's up to her now!"

And Supergirl pushed, frowning, looking upset, scared, shaking her head that she couldn't do it. But Alex believed in Supergirl and she believed in Kara, so she nodded encouragingly. "Come on..." And flattened her hand against the glass. "You can do this!"

Kara's hand met hers and she pushed and she screamed and screamed.

"You got this!"

And Kara's face, Supergirl's face hardened in icy resolve, and Alex heard the engine slow, felt the inertia of the ship slow.

Supergirl, Kara, her sister had not let her down.
When Kara came to work at CatCo the next day everyone stared. She adjusted her glasses and
when to her desk in Snapper's domain. Atop her desk was the dreaded brown cardboard box, filled
with her pens, her vase, her mug, her picture of her and Alex.

She turned to Snapper. "You're firing me?"

"Of course I am, Danvers.com. You deliberately published an article using CatCo resources on a
competing social media platform, which is not only a conflict of interest, but also a direct and
flagrant breach of contract."

"But you refused to run the story. I thought that what I was doing was right."

"You weren't right. You were lucky. The next time, you might not be. One wrong statistic about
the stock market, and suddenly we're in a Great Depression. One misattributed quote from a
candidate, and you put a fascist in the White House. The rules are there for a reason: to make sure
you get the story right. That's not luck. That's being a good reporter."

Kara nodded and picked up her box.

"You know what the worst part is?" said Snapper. "I was rooting for you."

When Alex got the text from J'onn to meet him at the DEO, she felt both hope and fear. On the one
hand, she had stopped Cadmus from deporting hundreds of aliens to dangerous worlds across the
galaxy. On ther other hand, she had done it by completely flouting DEO rules and protocols and
putting her own life at risk. Also, damage to Luthor property, though the thought Lena could, and
would be glad to, simply write that off her taxes.

She found him in the conference room looking grim. Well, that didn't tell her anything one way or
another. J'onn usually looked at least a little grim. She entered, feeling out of place in her civilian
clothes, but she faced up to him.

"I'm sorry I disobeyed your orders, J'onn. But you shouldn't have done what you did. That was
cruel."

"I did it because I thought you might be reckless and get yourself hurt. But then I almost lost you
on that ship anyway... I was wrong, Alex. And I'm, uh, I'm sorry."

He stood. "Please know that I, I only did it to protect you. I never meant to hurt you."

She met his eyes, brown like Jeremiah's. "You sound just like him." She stepped forward and
hugged him. "Can we just agree to stop doing the wrong things for the right reasons?"

"Yeah. Sounds like a plan." He let go of her. "And let me start by doing the right thing. Report
back to work, Agent Danvers."

"Yes, sir."
"I hope, one day, we get him back."

"We will."

//

Vasquez met Alex on the balcony overlooking the DEO command center. "You get your job back?"

"Yeah, I did."

"Good. Cuz I'm not dating some unemployed slacker. Though you do make good arm candy..."

"Yes, don't I?" Alex put her arm over Vasquez shoulders and they headed for the exit.

"Vasquez, I need to thank you. You were right. About me. Needing backup. I could never have set the last eight bombs by myself, even if my dad hadn't caught me. And if they hadn't gone off, I wouldn't have had any leverage over Lillian at all, and certainly not enough time to..."

Vasquez squeezed Alex's waist. "No shit, Sherlock. What's that thing Supergirl's always saying? Better together?"

"Stronger together."

"We are indeed."

Chapter End Notes

Finally caught up to the show. Now I can spend two days working on old subplots and side plots, angst and fluff.
Chapter Summary

From a prompt by a reader...that ended up going in a slightly different direction.

Lena came to work the next morning, feeling happy and proud, but staying away from the doors to the balcony. Maybe she could have them put another six inches of rail on top of it? She'd have Jess make a note. It was one thing to know Supergirl had your back. It was another thing to be stupid about it. She had gotten up at 3 am because of the nightmare of falling and gone to the bathroom, splashed her face with cold water. In the mirror she had seen a single white hair among the ebony and plucked it. She was sure it had turned white halfway down to Supergirl's arms.

But she did now for sure live in a city where a Luthor and a Super could help each other make the world a better place, could be friends, could save each other. Her heart warmed at the knowledge.

And the feeling of being held by Supergirl, of finally being able to wrap her arms around Supergirl's neck, feel those iron-strong arms wrapped around her... She wasn't going to say it made it worth the near heart attack or the near dying, but, well...

Meanwhile, she felt like celebrating. She had watched the morning news at home, seen how the viral media had picked up Kara's blogpost and used the precautionary principle to justify spreading the word that aliens might just possibly be in great danger from Cadmus, which had already for months admitted that its long-term goal was the extermination of what it called the "alien threat."

She grabbed the remote and turned on the midday news. Apparently the Army, the Air Force and NASA were all scrambling for possession of the spaceship, which promised unprecedented technological advancements, even though unnamed authorities claimed that it had been "irreparably damaged" in the crash landing.

"Sure, it was," muttered Lena, doubting that very much. That was damage control on the DEO's part, she was pretty sure. She was also pretty sure that J'onn Jonzz would never let her set eyes on even the smallest part of it. She shrugged. She had enough to deal with here at L-Corp.

Jess came in with her mail and the day's agenda. "Congratulations, Ms. Luthor."

"Right back at you, Jess. You helped make it possible. Thank you for your hard work. You saved countless lives."

"We did, ma'am, along with Supergirl. Boy, I would have loved to have seen that!"

"Yes, I'm sure it was spectacular." She didn't mention falling off the balcony. "Jess, can you call Kara and ask her to lunch? She might be busy covering the fallout of all of this, but if she's not, order one of those ricotta lasagnes from Tutto Il Cibo."

"Yes, Ms. Luthor."

"And get me the most up-to-date numbers for the nine o'clock with the board. I looked at them yesterday and they looked wrong, and I don't want to be underprepared. I'm pretty sure Mr. Grouchypants has it in for me and I need to nail him with it fast."
"Yes, ma'am."

Jess left the room. Lena rubbed her eyes, thinking she should have picked up coffee on her way in, but she was both too tired from all the excitement and the broken sleep and too revved from an idea for an invention that was cooking in the back of her brain to think of it.

The door opened. Jess entered, carrying the sixteen-ounce mug that she had bought her boss for her inventing mornings. It was inscribed: "Damn, I'm good!" That complex Viennese roast was wafting through Lena's office.

"You're a mind reader, Jess." Lena grinned.

"Yes, ma'am." In her other hand she had a sheaf of papers. "I'll give you a fifteen minute warning for the meeting."

//

The board meeting was even more grueling than usual. The board members had watched the news that morning and all they had noticed was that the Cadmus group had been using a LuthorCorp facility. They completely ignored that L-Corp's PR people had gotten out ahead of the flack by pointing out that Lena had proactively cooperated with the authorities, giving them not only the address of the facility but also the blueprints. While none of the reporters had actually mentioned that last part, Lena knew that the total destruction of the enormous facility with only ten bombs was testament to the DEO training on how to cause the most structural damage possible.

"Yes, Mrs. Seavers, Legal has already dealt with the NCPD and the federal authorities on criminal responsibility, and since my mother was seen actively participating in the firefight, and since she was a board member," she emphasized the words, "of LuthorCorp when the facility was built, long before I came to work in the labs here, there shouldn't be a problem. And accounting has already started dealing with the tax mess."

"It's a defunct site anyway," said Cox. "After this is over, we should sell the land, separate ourselves from the whole thing."

"Actually," said Lena. "I have plans for the site, but it will have to wait until the legal hoopla is over, and that could be months. Meanwhile..."

Current business being finished, they dealt with old business, and then someone brought up the upcoming shareholders' meeting. Lena smiled. "Well, that is actually something I am quite looking forward to, and I intend to make a splash with it. Details aren't important right now, and we're still working on the logistics, but I have some ideas to get out there with some good PR around the same time we pat our shareholders on the back for making such a wise investment as L-Corp."

Seavers and Cox frowned at each other in some disbelief. Lena ignored them. "I think that wraps everything up for now. Good meeting, people."

//

Lena got back to her office exhausted, dropped to the couch and slipped off her heels. Jess gave her ten minutes to get her second wind and then came in looking worried.

"Jess, what is it?" asked Lena, alarmed.

"Ma'am, it's Kara Danvers. She's been fired from CatCo."
A chat with Arnold in Legal told Lena what she needed to know. Kara had said that Snapper would crucify her if she took Lena's advice about being a citizen journalist, but Lena had been thinking more about how they might counteract Lillian's actions rather than about what the cost might be to Kara. Lena knew how much Kara loved CatCo and how much she had been trying to make the reporter job work. About the only things that Kara loved better than CatCo were Alex Danvers and food.

And now Kara had had that taken away from her because she trusted her friend Lena Luthor, because Lena Luthor had given her advice and she had taken it.

Lena thought back to the game nights when Kara's friends had hesitantly accepted Lena even though she was a Luthor, who had given her the benefit of the doubt, believed against belief that Lena would never harm Kara.

And Lena had just harmed Kara.

Lena hit her intercom button. "Jess, clear my schedule for the day. I'm going to go down and work in the lab. If Winn Schott calls, ask him to come over and send him down, but I really doubt that will happen. I am going to figure out a way to fix this, Jess."

"I know you will, Ms. Luthor. Let me know how I can help."

It had occurred to Lena a while back that there might be an invisible electrical component to the quantum materials that made up Supergirl's suit, cape and boots. It was working with the proto-kryptonite that had done it, since the different forms of kryptonite mostly differed in the number of electrons.

(So brilliant in the lab. Walk into the workplace of a friend, though, and your brain goes out the window. Over the balcony. Only it's not you that falls, it's Kara, and Supergirl can't save her because she's saving the aliens instead.)

She had wondered if finding some of the elemental components of the quantum materials and then figuring out a super high-powered, but necessarily miniaturized battery to attach, giving the wearer the ability to turn it on at the start of a firefight and turn it off to recharge afterward--

(As if we ever really know when the fight is beginning. You think you're going to try some fancy new drink with your friend and you end up poisoning her life. When would you have thought to turn on the battery to protect her?)

And she and Winn had been discussing recharging possibilities. He said the Army had been working on using a soldier's physical actions to recharge the batteries in their comms units, but since Supergirl's actions were bigger, stronger, faster, surely her ability to recharge a battery would be worlds past what an ordinary soldier could do.... Except she already had her own quantum materials that didn't require recharging, and the DEO soldiers, for whom they had been considering this tech, were basically only elite soldiers, after all, not all that much stronger or faster than other ordinary humans.

(At first, Lena had wondered why Alex hadn't talked Kara out of posting her blog, but then she had heard about the spaceship, and she immediately sensed that Supergirl would not have been able to do what was physically impossible without the strongest of motivations. Saving hundreds of aliens
was a strong motivation, but saving her best friend's sister (and she had seen just how close Supergirl was with Alex, even if she hadn't seen the hero interact with Kara), well, she suspected Supergirl couldn't have had a stronger motivation than that.)

There was a knock on the lab door and Lena opened it to see Winn standing there with a small silver case in his hand and an eager look on his face.

"Hey, Lena! Jess called to ask me to fix some HR paperwork that got messed up and I had been thinking about showing you something I've been working on and Jess said you were working in your lab for a change and would probably actually be glad to see you. Can I help you with something?"

"Yes, Winn," said Jess, knowing that Jess had likely fibbed about the paperwork. "You absolutely can."

//

A few hours later, Jess came down with a cardboard box labeled Bernetti's. Lena and Winn looked up as if they were waking out of a dream. The lab bench was as littered with metal and plastic parts as the desk was littered with mechanical drawings and hasty sketches.

Jess said, "Um, lunch? I went to Howard's, or where it used to be, but it moved to the financial district, and Millicent Bernetti's new place was having a Grand Opening, so I got an assortment of half-sandwiches that you could eat with one hand..."

Lena stretched and grinned. "Winn, you're going to like this! Millie is based in Metropolis and I haven't had her food since... wow. I'd heard she was expanding her brand." She picked out a sandwich that seemed elegantly layered and took a bite. Her eyes close as she chewed more and more slowly and eventually swallowed and then shook herself. Winn looked away, embarrassed, but Jess was used to her boss's slightly orgasmic relationship to gourmet food.

"Oh my." She took in Winn's embarrassed look and Jess's slightly sardonic smile. "Jess, can you order a box like this for Kara, on my personal card? She is going to be out of this world for these."

"Yes, ma'am."

Winn picked out another sandwich and took a bite, looking equally surprised and in love. "Holy mackerel!" he said around the bite.

Lena saw a postcard clipped to the side of the box, advertising Cool Burn, a new food magazine that was the newest part of Millie's brand. She stared at it, transfixed, then met Jess's eyes.

"Will there be anything else, Ms. Luthor?"

Wordlessly, Lena handed Jess the postcard. Jess looked at it blankly for a moment, and then said, "Oh!"

"Exactly," said Lena. "Get me a meeting with Millie."

Jess hurried out of the room.

Winn looked from the box of sandwiches to Lena. "Um, what just happened?
For the first time in about forever, Kara had slept until almost noon. Usually she woke when the yellow sunlight hit her face, or when the DEO called, or when her alarm clock went off at seven, whichever came first. But last night she had not set her alarm and the DEO knew better to call her after she had come this close to blowing her powers out, and that was even before they had heard about her getting fired.

Let the Martian Manhunter handle National City's problems for a while, she thought. Kara Danvers needed copious amounts of sleep even if Supergirl didn't.

So when her phone rang, she simply assumed it was the DEO. "Alex, what's up? Where do you need me?"

"Um, hello? May I speak to Kara Danvers, please?"

Kara rubbed her eyes and grabbed for her glasses so that the local noises didn't distract her from this phone call. "This is she."

"Hello, Ms. Danvers. My name is Cassandra DeWitt. I'm the executive editor for the publications of Bernetti Food Incorporated. How are you this morning?"

"I'm, er, fine, thank you. What can I do for you, Ms. DeWitt?"

"Well, Ms. Danvers, I have actually been following your work for a little while now and a friend happened to mention that you had recently had a little trouble with CatCo over a political post that you made in an effort to protect some of National City's more vulnerable citizens."

Kara sighed. "You could say that."

"Well, we here at Bernetti Food employ a great number of extra-terrestrial-Americans, so I happened to mention this to my boss, Chef Millicent Bernetti. I am sure you have heard of her?"

"Wow! I used to watch her show on the Food Network all the time! And a friend of mine has actually eaten at the Million Nettles and the Tiger Papa and some of her other restaurants! My, my friend, she travels quite a lot, or she used to."

"How fortuitous. We were wondering if you would be interested in doing freelance work for us from time to time. I understand that your skill with words is matched only by your enthusiasm for food."

Kara groaned. "Is your source Lena Luthor, by any chance?"

"In fact, yes, but we also got a glowing recommendation from Cat Grant, and another from Lois Lane."

Lois? Not Lucy? Not Clark? O-kay...

"Well, um, that's very flattering, Ms. DeWitt, but I have never in fact written about food before."

"That won't actually be a problem. Next week is National City's Restaurant Week, and we have a bullpen of full-time writers and a small army of less experienced freelancers who need to cover the multitude of activities. We try to pair up more and less experienced writers for this event in the
effort to cultivate new talent... Would you be at all interested in this? I should warn you, it will mean a lot of eating, so you may need to spend extra time at your gym in the next few weeks if you say yes." She chuckled.

Kara laughed. "That won't be a problem! I mean, because, I am, I'm totally a gym rat. That's me."

"So are you interested?"

"That sounds like fun. And a challenge. To write about the senses clearly."

"You see the problem. Some people are good at it and some people aren't. And sometimes great writers have oversimplified palates."

"Well, Ms. DeWitt, I don't know how sophisticated my tongue is, but I am sure my hands would like to give it a whirl."

The editor laughed, and Kara couldn't quite follow why what she had said was so funny, so she adjusted her glasses and chuckled along.

"I think Ms. Bernetti is going to like you Ms. Danvers. I'll text you the address. We'll be doing some training on Monday morning at eight sharp. See you then!"

Kara hung up the phone, then looked out the window where no yellow sunlight filtered through the rainclouds. Still Kara felt optimistic, if also a tiny bit guilty. "Oh, Lena," she muttered. "You didn't have to do this."
Crossed Out, or, Love Is But a Dream, Sweetheart

Chapter Summary

The beginning of 2.16, "Star-Crossed," in which I will fix everything wrong with that episode, so we are talking at least 40 minutes of it. You're welcome.

Chapter Notes

In which our hero (that would be me, your writer) works hard to justify the tiny bit of pro-Man-Child attention my head canon will admit that Kara gave him, while also setting her right, first with herself.

When he had first met Lyra on Valentine's Day, Winn had been primed to see her as desirable. First, duh, Valentine's Day and the American idea of Romantic Manifest Destiny (RMD); second, she was blonde and blue-eyed, despite the raised veins on her face; third, Australian accent. Because, let's face it, to Americans, any version of a British accent is classy, cool, and sexy. His friends told him so later, describing the Trifecta, and after a while he learned to accept their reading of the situation. With his little bit of experience: first dates here, good friends who didn't want to take it further there, he was, he had to admit, a fish opening its jaws wide to receive the hook. Winn never stood a chance.

//

Back on Krypton, things were a bit like Earth's ancient Rome. Before and even after marriage, both men and women could have relationships that didn't create children for their house. Kara's own parents had not indulged in such relationships in Kara's lifetime, being too completely engaged with their work in the Science Guild and Justice Council--working to save the world, as Kara had thought at the time. And maybe that was on reason Kara had never prioritized non-family relationships. She had always known that she would never truly have a child that would be "the future of the House of El," since her house was lost. She and Kal were the last. No children they might produce with humans would truly belong to the Kryptonian House of El.

But Mon-El, although a Daxamite, was closer to Kryptonian than any human could ever be. At the very least, he was stronger, and if she were being honest with herself, she had thought about the idea of having sex with him once or maybe twice. Because in college when she had tried being intimate with guys, well, things... happened. Dan's broken wrist. Pete's broken headboard. And human men weren't just physically sensitive; they were emotionally sensitive too. When a "little blue-eyed blonde" was that much stronger than them, they tended to run away.

Well, not literally.

Well, okay, maybe once.

It could make a girl cautious about trying to pursue a relationship. And it wasn't like she'd had a
role model in Alex. So yes, all these months since Mon-El had landed, she had tried to give him the
benefit of the doubt, despite his sexism, despite his strangely privileged, entitled attitudes. She had
figured that he had learned them from spending so much of his time for years trailing behind the
prince of Daxam, who had an intergalactic reputation as a womanizer, a user, an elitist pig, and a
number of other things human language didn't even have words for. Kara had tried to use the
opportunity of training him as a chance to become the counterexample he so desperately needed.
She really hadn't expected him to fall in love with her.

Why did her male friends always fall in love with her? What was it about Earth air that made
everyone think in terms of romance and sex? Why couldn't her friends simply be her friends?

Eliza had told her that someday she would meet the right person, the person she was meant to be
with, the person who would make her be a better person simply by being around her. Kara had
always nodded, but she had always assumed that if there ever had been someone Rao had meant
her to be with, that person had perished with Krypton.

For twelve years, she had faced the mirror every morning, forcing herself to be grateful for what
she had, for who she had in her life, and not what and who she didn't have.

Mostly it wasn't hard. She loved the Danvers, adored Alex. And the older she got, the more
amazing friends she made. But it had been hard watching James and Lucy together. It had
reminded her that she would never have what they had. And most of the time, she could be happy
for Alex to be with Vasquez, since Alex had been as alone and unhappy and resigned to it as Kara
had. And these days, watching the two of them together, Kara was sure that Alex had found the
one she was meant to be with, the one whom Kara had known for more than twelve years that she
would never, ever find--could never, ever find.

And then she met Lena Luthor.

She remembered the moment when she and Clark had first set foot in the pristine white office,
after a brisk walk from CatCo, with Clark describing his friendship with Lex and the heartbreak of
his betrayal. He had gone on the defensive immediately with Lex's sister, agreeing that they
wouldn't be interviewing her "if her last name were Smith." And Lena had dealt openly with the
problem of her being a Luthor, offering only an impassioned request to be judged for herself, for
her own actions. And Kara watched her talk, watched those green eyes flash, watched those long-
fingered hands gesture so eloquently...

Kara Zor-El had traveled to many planets, seen the wonders of galaxies. She had never seen
anything as beautiful as Lena Luthor.

Sometimes, in the ensuing months, when her confusion about the people in her life overwhelmed
her, she jumped into the sky and flew, scouring the city for crime or just taking off and flying as far
and as fast as she could. The cold wind whipping her cape brought her back to herself so that, when
she finally landed, she could think clearly again.

That morning, she landed and strode into the DEO, which was bustling more than usual. On the
computer screen above their heads, J'onn, Alex, Vasquez and Mon-El were staring at what could
only be a space ship.

J'onn nodded at Supergirl. "This just entered orbit ten minutes ago. Do you recognize it?" He
turned to Mon-El. "Either of you?"

Supergirl shook her head. "But it's been twenty-three years. Space technology could have come a
long way from the things I remember since then."
"Mon-El?"

"No. No, I've never seen anything like that."

//

Winn had seen all the movies. All his life, his best friends had always been women, so of course he had seen all the romantic comedies, knew all the tropes. He'd even read Jane Austen, but he blamed his high school English teachers for that.

He knew you that you had to lose at love before you found it. Check.

He knew that one day you would meet someone's eyes across a crowded room and feel... different. Check.

He knew you were supposed to insist on taking it slow (check) but that person might insist on taking it fast, hot and heavy.

Check. Check. Check.

The songs would make sense. You'd risk your life for her. You'd feel things you'd never felt before, do things you'd never done before.

Like breaking into a museum after midnight because she had promised you amazing museum sex. Um, check...?
Chapter Summary

More of 2.16, Star-Crossed.

Chapter Notes

In which our hero (that would be me, your writer) works hard to justify the tiny bit of pro-Man-Child attention my head canon will admit that Kara gave him, while also setting her right, second with her girlfriend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next morning, the alien space ship left orbit and entered Earth's atmosphere, hovering high above National City. Kara Danvers, conveniently had the flu, leaving Supergirl free to pace the command center of the DEO, argue with J'onn about whether they needed to call Kal-El, and periodically tell Mon-El to shut up when he joked about taking the aliens to see their leader (although, privately, she agreed with his idea of begging them to then take their leader with them into outer space; even a stopped clock was right twice a day).

All of a sudden, the screens were filled with blue static and a woman's voice came over the loudspeakers. "We demand that you turn over Mon-El of Daxam. We know where he is being harbored. If you do not relinquish him by the time your sun is overhead, we will take him by force."

Alex asked, "What do a bunch of space invaders want with a guard from Daxam?"

J'onn said, "We're still searching for the origin of the ship, to see if that gives us any indication of who our new friends might be, but so far, no luck. We have until noon, people. The clock is ticking."

"Well," said Supergirl, striding toward the window. "I think it's time we give the noobs the old Supergirl welcome."

Mon-El came after her. "I'm coming with you."

"How? You can't fly. And all we know about these people is they want you, so you should be the last person to go."

"Okay. Well, then be careful."

"I always am." She took off into the sky, flying between skyscrapers and aiming toward the space ship.

In her ear, J'onn asked, "Okay, Supergirl. What are we working with?"

She flew up to the battered space ship and then stopped to really look at it. "Looks like it's taken a
few bumps and bruises. I'm going to approach."

"Copy that. Proceed with caution."

"Any idea where the front door is on this thing?" No sooner had she said this than a rocket shot out of the space ship and narrowly missed her, exploding off to her right. "I'm assuming that wasn't friendly fire." She turned and tried shooting her laser eyes at the ship, but it had some sort of shielding that prevented her from doing any damage. In response, a bright blue globe shot at her and encompassed her, and then quickly sank toward the Earth.

With super-strength and super-speed, she punched the shell of the globe repeatedly until, finally, it shattered. She landed on one of the streets of National City in Superhero Pose™ right in front of a car that screeched to a halt without hitting her (so at least the driver didn't have to deal with that particular insurance mess) and then took off again into the sky. She returned to the space ship, and watched as another mass of guns moved out from the mass of metal. She could only imagine that it was targeting her.

In her ear, she heard Mon-El shout, "Stop! Stop! Stand down. This is Mon-El of Daxam. To the invaders: I will relinquish myself."

Supergirl stopped. All the gun turrets on the ship stopped and retreated back into the ship. Supergirl returned to the DEO.

The moment she landed on the balcony, she saw Mon-El marching toward it. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm going up there."

"No! No, they literally just tried to kill me. How do you know they won't shoot you on sight?"

"I don't, okay, but they want me, and this is my decision."

"Hey," said Alex from the floor of the command center. J'onn was right behind her. "We picked up a honing signal from a teleportation beam."

J'onn said, "The ship is locking onto our coordinates now. We'll have back up ready if you need us."

Supergirl asked, "Are you sure about this?"

He nodded, said, "I'll be okay," and kissed her as if he were saying goodbye. He stepped up to the platform and started to glow green and without a second thought, she used super-speed to reach the platform and enfold him in her arms, so that she was taken by the beam too.

they found themselves inside the alien ship and they pulled away from each other.

"Why did you follow me?" he asked.

"Well, I didn't want you to come up here by yourself!"

"Maybe I wanted to come up here by myself."

"Why would you want to beam yourself up to an unknown space craft?"
Because stuff...?"

Suddenly, Supergirl noticed that the guards around them had started to place their left arms over their eyes and bowed down to one knee.

"Mon-El. Are they bowing to us?"

A woman's voice said, "Mon-El."

They turned to see a man and a woman in what looked to Kara to be fancy space-garb.

Mon-El said, "Mother. Father."

"My son," said the woman.

"We finally found you," said the man.

"At long last!" said the woman as she surged toward Mon-El and engulfed him in an embrace.

"I thought you were dead," said Mon-El, obviously reeling.

"We are very much alive, my son," said his father. "My apologies, Kryptonian, if you were hurt before. We were only defending ourselves against your attack on our ship."

"Attack?" said Supergirl with a little embarrassed laugh. "I seem to recall you shooting first."

The older woman said, "Shall we go through the entire history of Krypton's carnage?"

Mon-El interrupted. "Mother, Father, this is Kara Zor-El, hero of Earth. Kara, these are my parents, Queen Reya and King Largand of Daxam."

"Which makes you--" Kara stuttered.

"The prince," he said, "of Daxam."

"Our prince," said his mother. "Thank the gods you're alive!"

And his father said, "And returned to us at last! So tonight! We feast!

But Mon-El stuttered, "I can't stay. I am also a hero, or at least, trying to be, with Kara's help. Anyway we can't--"

"You can't leave! We've come so far to find you!"

"And we must get to know Kara as well," insisted his mother.

With some irony, Supergirl said, "And I would love to learn more about you."

"I knew you wouldn't stand in the way of a family reunion. We have much to discuss."

"You have no idea," said Kara, and her eyes looked daggers at Mon-El.

//

Maggie was already in a foul mood even before the rookie came in with the surveillance video. Paperwork was absolutely her second least favorite thing when it came to police work (her least favorite being domestic disputes), and every time they made a big bust it came with just as large an
amount of paperwork. But when the rookie from the NCPD regulars came in with footage from the museum's cameras, she stopped everything.

"You see, ma'am, they did facial recognition and this name came up and he works for the local FBI, and I know you have been doing a lot of cross-jurisdictional cases with them, so I wondered if you wanted to take point on this?"

"Just because I know some Fibbies doesn't mean I know them all." Then she opened the file folder, saw the driver's license picture, and looked at the footage again." "Oh, shit."

Half an hour later, Winn Schott, Jr. was eating donuts in her interrogation room.

"Can we continue?" she asked, holding her patience in check.

"Sorry, I'm stress eating."

"If you're telling me the truth, there's no need for stress."

"I'm very uncomfortable in police stations. My dad had a thing with law enforcement. Just like a whole, I don't know..."

Maggie came around and stood over him, leaning on the table. "Were you at the National City Art Museum last night?"

"Briefly..."

"What did you do while you were there?"

"Looking at some art..."

"In the middle of the night."

"The lines are shorter?"

"Winn, come on."

"Okay, fine. Fine! Lyra and I, we broke in. And it's just, like, when a beautiful woman asks you to do something, you gotta do it. Right, you know!"

Maggie pulled a photograph out of a folder, slapped it down in front of him. "Do you recognize that?"

"That is Starry Night, a classic paint-by-numbers."

"Well, that classic went missing from the museum last night."

"Somebody stole a Van Gogh?"

Maggie just cocked her eyebrow at him.

"Oh! Oh, no, I didn't see anything. Maybe Lyra did? Oh, look, we're happy to help, but if I didn't actually witness anything--"

Maggie took the remote and turned on the footage, to show Winn in the museum in front of the Van Gogh.
“Hey, look at that photogenic fella! Hey, wait. Where’s my girlfriend? Um…”

Maggie turned it off. “You get how that looks, right? So let’s review. You’ve admitted to being at the scene of a crime and the security footage doesn’t show anyone else but you. Any thoughts?”

Winn’s face went white. “I think I’m going to need that one phone call.”

//

The four of them sat down to dinner on the space ship. As Alex’s sister and Eliza’s daughter, Kara had by definition attended some ridiculously awkward family dinners, but this one took the prize.

The king, at one end, said, "Where’s that appetite of yours. Aren’t you happy to see us?"

"Of course," said Mon-El, across from Kara, not touching his food.

"Or have you been distracted by Kryptonians in capes since you fled Daxam?"

"How did you find me?"

"We heard your beacon," said Largand. "The transmission was incomplete. It brought us to this galaxy. The rest was gathering breadcrumbs."

His wife nodded. "We had our greatest success at Slaver’s Moon. We heard from one of our Dominator ambassadors that you’d been freeing slaves."

"Yes, imagine our surprise when we heard of your heroics."

The queen simpered at Kara. "Your influence, I’m sure."

"We freed them from being treated like animals," said Kara, smiling hard. "They weren’t goods to be traded."

The queen smiled back. "There’s that famous Kryptonian exaggeration."

The king said, "Mon-El, you remember how well your servants were treated at the palace. Just like family."

Still smiling, Supergirl said, "Because you stole them from their families."

Speaking like she actually believed it, the queen insisted, "We liberated them from greater hardship. We gave them a path."

Mon-El asked, "How did you escape the blast? I thought you were dead."

"When Krypton exploded, the Kryptonite rained down, killing everything. We had to get off planet to survive."

"And to find you," added the queen, "so we can return, now that the atmosphere is hospitable. To make Daxam great again."

Quietly, Mon-El said, "Daxam was never great."

His mother said, "Has the Kryptonian rubbed off on you so much so that you’ve forgotten? I know that you’re fond of a pretty face, but let’s be reasonable."
Smiling again, Kara said, "Well, I think what he might find novel about me is integrity."

The king changed the subject. "Let's not discuss worlds of old. Why don't you tell us of your journey and how you survived."

"Yes!" said Kara, eating. "I would LOVE to hear about that!"

"I'd rather not."

"No, no!" said Kara. "Prince, by all means! Please, tell us of your heroic escape!"

The tale he told resembled the tale she had heard months before, in the way an x-ray resembles a living body. His bodyguard interrupted him at sex and insisted they escape together and leave the girl, so he followed. They struggled through the red-lit firestorm that was the end of Daxam, his bodyguard dragging him up when he fell.

He told how his bodyguard led him to the Kryptonian consulate, where the ambassador with the crest of the House of El on his sleeve was preparing his pod. How he had begged the bodyguard to let him return to Krypton. How the bodyguard had said, "Your planet is gone and it's taking us with it. This is your punishment."

And shot him.

How he had leapt into the pod, leaving his bodyguard fighting tooth and nail against the Kryptonians, hit the controls, and flew away.

His jaw set, Mon-El said, "That's how I got out."

Supergirl, her face blank, stared at him.

His mother said, "My son, you're so brave. And your guard dines at the god's table. Hail, Mon-El, Prince of Daxam!"

The servers knelt. Supergirl dropped her fork and stood. "Please excuse me. I have business to attend to on Earth."

They beamed back down to the DEO together, but then Kara immediately strode away from him. Mon-El said, "So, you survived the first dinner with the fam!"

Supergirl turned on him. "You're a liar."

"I'm sorry. Can you really blame me for wanting to be Mon-El, regular guy from Daxam?"

"Oh, wow." Supergirl turned away, an able to even begin.

"Well, what would you think of Daxamites? If you'd known I was the crown prince, would you have even talked to me?"

"You didn't even give me the chance!"

"I tried to tell you so many times."

"What, that's supposed to make this better?"

"Me being the prince doesn't change anything, not how I feel about you--"
"This. Changes. EVERYTHING. It's bad enough you lied. But you being the prince? I thought you were just born on a cruel planet, but you LED it! You BENEFITED from its cruelty! What about that Kryptonian emissary, who wore MY House's crest? And your guard? Do you even feel guilty?"

"Of course I do."

"I can't even look at you." She walked away, strode back the balcony, leapt into the air and flew fast and hard and, more than anything else, away.

National City at night was like a jewel, all the twinkling lights serving as beacons: the CatCo building, the State House, the DEO building.

L-Corp.

Lena's skyscraper towered above the city. And the lights of the topmost floor were on. Without thinking, Kara flew toward the building, saw Lena at work at her desk, landed on her balcony. Lena's genuine smile was a balm. Lena gestured for her to come in, but when Supergirl hesitated, she came out to her.

"Supergirl, what is it?"

Supergirl couldn't help it. She paced back and forth across the balcony, feeling like a caged tiger. "Do you remember Mike of the Interns, Mon-El?"

"The sorry excuse for a man Kara came perilously close to dating?" Lena asked, raising the Eyebrow™.

"Yeah. Him."

"What about him?"

"Do you remember what I told you about his planet?"

"Slave-holding hedonists, wasn't it? Ruled by royalty who regularly threw orgies?"

"Yeah. Them."

"I remember."

"He's the prince."

"The prince."

"His parents are in a space ship hovering over National City and they want him back. Apparently, Daxam has stabilized. And I think he is going to refuse to go, because he still claims to be in love with me. He lied to me. For months. Not just about who he was, but about how he escaped the ruin. And the story, the real story, is just so much worse. He's a coward as well as a liar. And he thinks that simply saying, 'I'm sorry' is going to fix anything, change anything, and now just even thinking about him, I feel like I want to throw up."

"Oh, darling." She put a hand on Supergirl's shoulder, pulled her into a hug. When she let go, she stepped back and looked at Supergirl, frowning. "You know," she said slowly. "I have, among the rest of my skill sets, a great deal of experience dealing with entitled elitist pricks who want to get something out of me and the company I care very much about, preferably without offering
anything of value in return. What do you say we go back to my condo and strategize?"

Supergirl looked down at her supersuit. "I didn't bring my Kara clothes."

Lena stopped and stared. Supergirl looked up and went white.

"Holy fuck!" said Lena, and Supergirl stared back at her, having never heard her friend swear before.

"So you ARE her!"

Supergirl opened her mouth and shut it again. Finally, she said, "No, no, what I meant was--"

"Flew here on a bus? Seriously, Kara. You flew here on a bus. And you know Clark Kent. I had wondered for a long time, but then I kept seeing you and her at the same-- Oh, of course! J'onn Fucking J'onzz, the Green Martian. They're shapeshifters! That's how you did it!"

Supergirl said, "Lena, I wanted to tell you. I always wanted to tell you, but Alex and J'onn. And James. And they all were worried about you being a Luthor, but in the end, Alex also pointed out that you would be in more danger if you knew, and I never wanted to be the one to put you in danger!"

Lena waved that away. "Oh, I understand their reasons and yours. I don't blame you. I blame me for not seeing past two sets of mannerisms, glasses and a ponytail. Kara, I am a certified genius. It shouldn't have taken me this long to see it. I came so close to seeing it so many times. But I thought, well, honestly, I thought that Supergirl was a lesbian, or pansexual or something, and Kara was hopelessly straight."

Supergirl considered that for a moment. "I think that might actually be sort of accurate. Maggie thinks I'm bisexual..."

Lena smiled. "Works for me. Let me get my things. Then you can take me home."

"But you hate flying."

"There is nothing about you--Supergirl you or Kara you--that I could ever hate. So I will learn to love flying like you do."

Kara stood on the balcony watching Lena gather her things from her desk, and murmured, "I am the luckiest girl on this or any other planet!"

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I didn't see that coming, but people have been asking about it so I guess it's been in my head for a while. I can't believe it took me over 140,000 words to get there.
Chapter Summary

More Star-Crossed.

Chapter Notes

Largely canon, with some divergence to get to the inevitably brilliant show-saving ending.

Winn sat in the interrogation room sweating.
"I am telling you we did not take anything!"
"I believe that you didn't, but what about Lyra?"
"What? No, she would never!"

Alex and James walked in. Alex, said, "Hey, we got your call"
"Are you okay, bro?" asked James.

Alex turned to Maggie. "A heads-up would be nice next time before you arrest my friend."
"Com on. You know that's not how this works. I don't interfere with your job and you don't question mine."

"You better have evidence," said Alex.
"She doesn't! The crappy video doesn't even show Lyra!"

Maggie said, "I don't think that's a coincidence."
"You think she set him up?" asked Alex. She turned to Winn. "When's the last time you spoke to Lyra?"
"I mean, I've been trying to call her all day--"
"Let me guess," said Maggie. "Her phone's disconnected."

He sighed. "I don't get it."

"She framed you, Winn!" shouted Maggie. "Look, I got a partner out there who thinks you're going to be his thirtieth arrest of the month. That's a station record. I need proof that you weren't involved, or they're going to pin this on you and I won't be able to stop it."

"If it's proof you need," said James, "we'll get it."
Alex said, "Release Winn to us, okay? Give us forty-eight hours."

"You want me to let my prime suspect walk."

"If we want to catch Lyra, then we need Winn. Two days."

Maggie opened the folder. "Well, look at that. Looks like McConnell forgot to sign the warrant. You got twenty-four hours. A minute later and I'm coming for him myself."

Winn stood up, dazed. "She femme-fataled me."

Alex frowned. "Well, you certainly have a type."

In the SUV on the way back to the DEO, James sat in back with Winn, while Alex drove with reckless precision. Winn held on tightly to the door handle. James shook his head. "She's got the best driving record at the DEO, dude. Don't sweat it."

"My whole life is coming apart at the seams, James. I think sweat is a reasonable option here."

"Man, we are going to figure this out. Trust us!"

When they got back to the DEO command center, Winn felt more secure. This was technology. This is what he knew how to handle. Well, handle metaphorically, since he was not allowed to physically touch the footage, for fear of accusations of tainting the evidence, but at least he could give the other agents guidance on what programs to use to examine it at the pixel level.

Alex stood looking at her tablet and sighed. "We have examined this footage frame by frame. She's just not there."

"Well," Winn laughed nervously. "She was there. And I have the bruises. And, well, they're wonderful bruises--"

Quickly Alex said, "Please don't point to where they are!"

Kara came up behind them. "Who are her people?"

"She's Valerian."

J'onn said, "Valerians can't be seen in photographs."

"Or on security cameras."

Alex tapped at her tablet. "And there's no picture on her amnesty file either."

"Oh," said Winn. "So I have an invisible girlfriend."

James said, "So she used your tech skills to get into the museum and then she pulled a disappearing act to make the grab."

Alex kept working at her tablet. "Oh, it looks like this wasn't her first time either. Check it out." She hit a button and the large computer monitors on the wall showed newspaper articles. "There've been two major heists in the last nine months. There was a Rodin stolen from the Modern Art and Cultural Museum, and an original Warhol, taken from the Art Institute of Metropolis."

J'onn looked over Alex's shoulder at the tablet. "Same MO. Both perps claim their girlfriend set them up."
Alex looked back at her friend. "Sorry, Winn."

He waved his hands. "Oh, no. don't apologize. It's not your fault I'm an idiot."

Kara said, "Hey, sometimes the people closest to us are our biggest blindspots."

James asked, "Do you know where she lives"

"No, we've only ever been to my place. I know she came from Starhaven, and she came by herself, and that she's registered."

J'onn looked at the tablet again. "The address she's registered under looks like a fake."

Winn smiled at the irony. "Great! I mean, the alien bar. That's where we met."

Kara said, "Well, it's a start."

"Yes, said James with his easy smile. "Let's go catch a thief."

"Yes!" shouted Kara, singing, "Superfriends! Back again!" She high-fived James and then Winn and squeezed their hands.

"Gah, uhm, Kara!" gulped James.

She let go. "Oh, sorry! That's... too much."

James asked, "Should we get Mon-El?"

"No!"

Alex said, "You know what? You guys go ahead. I'll catch up." When the guys left, Alex looked at Kara and said, "Maybe you should sit this one out."

"What? No! I'm ready to Nancy Drew the crap out of this!"

"Okay," said Alex, following behind Kara and throwing an arm over her shoulders. "Okay. Enough with the overenthusiastic deflecting. I know you're upset with Mon-El, and you have every right to be. Okay? Own it!"

"I just, ah, I hate him right now."

"I get it and I hate that he hurt you. But friendships often get messed up."

"This is more than messed up. I don't even know who he is anymore. Do you know why Daxam was such a party planet? Because the royal family kept their subjects drunk and distracted so they didn't notice how oppressed they were. Mon-El was a part of that!"

"Your values are very different, and you need to maintain your boundaries. Can you communicate to him that you expect your friends to respect that? That if he can't even keep to the most minimal standards of honesty and integrity, you will have to cut him loose? Give him a chance to step up. And if he doesn't, then walk. I want you to be happy, and you won't be in an unhealthy relationship."

The balcony platform made the electrical noise of someone beaming over. Queen Reya stood on the platform, calling out, "Kara Zor-El."
The entire DEO pulled out their rifles. Alex pulled her alien pistol. J'onn roared. "Stand down! Stand down! Do not engage!"

The woman stepped forward, ignoring the panicking soldiers. "I need to speak with you."

//

Alex, Winn and James went to the alien bar, and Alex found the tall bearded alien who she had beaten up for information before. She slammed him into the pool table.

He said, "Has anyone ever told you that you have anger issues?"

"I prefer the term leadership skills."

James settled comfortably into a chair next to the table. "Hey, we're looking for a girl."

"Aren't we all?" said the alien. Alex picked him up and slammed his head into the pool table again.

James said, "You might want to answer our questions, 'cause this table's not gonna get any softer, buddy."

"Lyra Stray. She's a Valerian. She's been involved in a string of art thefts."

"Never heard of her."

Winn frowned. "C'mon. Blonde hair, blue eyes, kind of a serial backstabber."

"Even if I did know something, why would I tell you?"

"Okay," said James easily. "What's it gonna cost us?"

Alex pulled him off the table and let him stand. "Hamilton tickets," he said. "Orchestra."

"Okay," said Winn. "Well, we're screwed."

Alex sighed and looked away, frowning. She looked back. "Deal."

"Her kind hangs out at the trailer park, up near Blackmoor. That's where she'd be."

She nodded and led the boys out of the bar. Winn murmured, "Hamilton? How're you gonna pull that one off?"

Grimly, Alex answered, "Guy who plays King George is from Ramber Five. He owed me a favor."

//

Kara joined Queen Reya on the balcony, looking out on National City. She took off her glasses and waited.

Reya said, "Your new world is quite stunning, just like Daxam used to be. I didn't thank you, earlier, for looking after my son. A Kryptonian taking care of a Daxamite. And I'd thought I'd seen it all."

"But you didn't come her all this way just to thank me."

"No, I didn't. I need your help. Daxam is a wasteland. Our people are scattered across the universe. We need to bring them home, rebuild what your people destroyed. I don't say it to offend."
Kara shook her head. "No, no. You're right. Krypton made horrible mistakes. I can admit it."

"That's more than I expected."

"What do you want from me?"

"My planet died on my and my husband's watch. For our people to rise again, they need a future. Mon-El is young. He can be the face of that future."

"You want to take Mon-El back to Daxam?"

"Would you rather he stayed here and learn by degrees that he's not good enough for you?"

"You don't know me."

"I know how Kryptonians value their integrity. And although the House of El as a rule has had a mixed history with actually living up to their understanding of what integrity means, we have watched you during our journey here. We have seen the good you do, good I very much doubt your House would have let you do on Krypton if things had been different. Alura Zor-El would never have approved of her daughter being a glorified security officer, rather than a Justice, as she was. Fighting? Risking breaking a nail or worse? No."

"My mother--"

"Would have agreed with you. She would have despised Mon-El."

"I don't despise anyone!"

"But you think you're better than him. Than us. And I'm not sure that you are wholly wrong." She looked out across the city. "Most Daxamites get to choose their mates, you know. But not the aristocracy. The royals get their pick of the peers, the peers get their pick of the lower peers... I was a baron's daughter, the sixth of seven children. I thought I would be able to work in the sciences. Oh, nothing as lofty as Krypton's famed Science Guild. But research. Finding the answers to problems. But then I caught the attention of Largand's parents and my life would never be my own again."

Kara said, "I didn't know."

Reya waved that away. "It took practice, pretending I didn't understand the plight of the slaves, the plight I understood all too well. And I tried to use my position... But I suppose everyone says that."

Kara put her glasses back on, adjusting them nervously.

"When my son was born, I didn't dare train him differently. I thought if he actually believed his father's lies, he would fit in, be able to rule... I see my mistake now. But survival... I know you despise him for the way he escaped a fiery death. He is the same kind of coward his mother is. The difference is that he didn't find that out until he met you and the humans. They are better than Daxamites."

"They are better than Kryptonians, most of the time."

"Is that why you serve them?"

"That. And I was spared for... some reason. I can only think it was to help a world not make the mistakes our worlds made."
"Then do what is best for him. He also was spared for a reason, for the sake of his people. Tell him to speak to his parents the people who love him."

"What makes you think he'll listen to me?"

"Because he is under your spell. And he has no idea how unforgiving your people can be."

Long after Queen Reya beamed back up to her ship, Kara stood on the balcony, looking out on National City, thinking about her mother who had refused to forgive her sister, who had used Kara to trap and punish her own sister, who had been in every good Kryptonian's esteem, the best of them.

Kara wondered about the cost of being your own role model. And the thanked the stars, and Rao, for the Danvers family. There had been times when she had felt bitter towards Kal-El for not bringing her up himself, but in the end, she thought he had been wise. Kara, Supergirl, was who she was because she remembered her planet's demise and she had embraced the love of real, fragile, loyal humans, humans with critical minds and deep integrity and love that embraced even the new and alien and strange, not because it was obviously loveable, but because she had so, so needed to be loved.
Chapter Summary

Finishing off Star-Crossed and pitching the Man-Child into space as he so richly deserves.

Chapter Notes

In which our hero (that would be me, your writer) works hard to justify the tiny bit of pro-Man-Child attention my head canon will admit that Kara gave him, while also setting her right, last with her family of choice.

The Jupiter's Springs trailer park didn't only cater to aliens, but no one walking through its rows of trailers would fail to realize that aliens were well and fully represented among its denizens. Winn made his way to the trailer the alien at the bar had described, and his talk with Lyra went exactly had he had feared it would.

"You. Were. A. Mark."

"Have it your way."

Guardian's armor, requisitioned from J'onn's custody at the DEO, still fit James remarkably well. Which was good, considering the two goons that Lyra had invited to help protect her.

Guardian said, "You get Lyra. I'll deal with these two."

And Winn had run after her but she was tougher than he was and before he knew it, he was on his back on the ground and she was grinding her high-heeled boot into his chest. And he knew, he knew that this should not be hot, but...

"You should have run when you had the chance!"

And she didn't say chance like it rhymed with pants, but like it rhymed fonts. Which also shouldn't have been hot.

And then Alex came in as backup for Guardian and the thugs got away but Guardian caught Lyra and Alex found the painting in Lyra's trailer.

Lyra said, "You have no idea what you've done."

//

She didn't speak to Winn, or anyone, during the drive back to the DEO. But once she was in the interrogation room with Vasquez, she talked early and often.

"It's my brother. They've got him. He's as good as dead now, thanks to you and your friends. I'm a
refugee. I'm a thief too. That's the truth. That gang? My brother Bastian works for them, but he hasn't been carrying his weight. I told them I'd clear his debt. I didn't want to use Winn. He's like one of those Earth creatures. Puppies? But that also made him useful to me. Such a smart puppy he is. And family is more important than anything else. So I had to do it: M'garzam tfl yuuugrz. Blood is greater than speaking. It doesn't translate well into English. And if I can't get that painting to them by the end of today, they'll kill him."

Vasquez leaned in. "So who's the buyer?"

//

J'onn and Alex looked at the results Winn had brought up on the computer based on Vasquez's results. Vasquez, off to the side, was playing with Winn's yoyo.

"Okay," said Winn. "So the fence is a guy named Mandrax."

J'onn frowned. "Mandrax was a resident of Fort Roz for quite some time. After Fort Roz crashed, he escaped. Since then, he's been a big player in the art trafficking business. Earth art is big money."

"Yes, it is great that Picasso is intergalactically adored."

James asked, "What do you want to do?"

Winn said, "Okay, here's the plan. We go in, we give them the painting, we get back Lyra's kid brother, done and done. Right? Lives saved. Heroes praised."

J'onn shook his head. "Agent Schott, we have an intergalactic art smuggling ring and one of National City's most violent gangs in our grasp. Ms. Stray--"

"Needs our help!"

"Is an admitted con artist."

"Her brother is in danger!"

"Have you ever met this brother? Or could this possibly be just another con from a woman who knows how to play you?"

"I believe her."

"I know you do. But I can't afford to. We'll investigate Mandrax and proceed accordingly."

The others walked away, clearly embarrassed for him. Winn studied the picture of the fence on the computer: his ribbed forehead, his pointed ears, and he wondered if he were exactly as naive as they all thought he was.

//

When Mon-El texted Kara to meet her in the lab, she automatically assumed it would be something about how to track the fence's alien biology, and therefore being work related, not something she could just ignore.

Nope.

She entered the lab and he immediately started talking. "Okay, so I have been doing some serious
research into Earth relationships and by now in the movie, the girl would have forgiven the guy for whatever dumb thing he did."

"I had a nice chat with your mother."

"Wait. What? What does she want?"

"You. She wants to talk to you."

"I am not going back there."

"Well! I tried." She walked away.

"What? That's it?"

"What else am I supposed to say? That you are the hero of Daxam? Or at least you could be if you put yourself out just a little? That the pissant 'heroics' you are attempting to do on Earth don't come anywhere near the actual heroics that your planet needs from you?"

"Just tell me what to do, okay?"

"I can't. I can't tell you what to do. I can tell you what I would-- But no, you would never do what I would do. Never mind." She turned to walk away again.

"Tell me what it is and I will fix it."

"You can't! Okay? You can't take back the fact that you lied to me. Or that you ran from your planet's destruction even though you were an adult who knew exactly what was happening. You can't unring that bell."

"Well, I can try."

"Just forget about you and me for one second. Do you even understand the second chance you've been given? You thought you were the last Daxamite and you're not. Your people are alive. Your parents are alive. Do you think for one second, that if I found out tomorrow that Kryptonians, that my mom and dad, were alive and trying to make a new Kryptonian civilization out of the ashes, that I wouldn't leave everything I hold dear here on Earth, everything I love more than life itself, that I have loved for thirteen years--"

"It's not the same."

"No! It's not! They love you. They need you. So don't just throw that chance away, because many of us don't get one. All the refugees here? Me and my cousin? Heck, even Winn's evil girlfriend. We're just making do on Earth to make up for our worlds', our civilizations' destruction. You? You're a prince. Start acting like it."

//

Winn had hoped, had prayed to whatever gods didn't treat humans as toys, that the deal would go down cleanly, that the criminals would take the Van Gogh, maybe even give Lyra the money they had agreed upon and she would get her money back. But the Van Gogh that she had was a fake. And apparently there was no brother. And when the DEO came in to arrest them all, Lyra fled.

Guardian protected him, up to a point. At one point, when Guardian shot a grenade at Mandrax, he caught it and crushed it in his hand. "You humans. You think you can be heroes. It's so annoying."
The fight that ensued was messy and left the aliens on top, until the DEO agents crashed down through the ceiling and held weapons on Mandrax and his followers.

"Freeze!" shouted Alex, and the alien criminal held up their hands, grimacing at being caught by mere humans.

"Oh, thank God!" said Winn.

"Nice job, guys," said Alex, holding her alien pistol on Mandrax.

"It took you long enough," complained Winn.

Alex grinned. "Yeah. Traffic was brutal."

Winn tried to smile, but he couldn't help watching the DEO agents handcuffing Lyra, who they had found hiding in the warehouse, and her ironic grin at him. "Well, the story was worth a shot, wasn't it? I almost had you convinced."

Alex kindly drove much slower on their way to the NCPD precinct. Winn was sad, an emotion he had fled from for much of his life, but betrayal could do that to you, he supposed.

When they reached the precinct, he handed Maggie the actual copy of Starry Night, saying, "A ring of alien art thieves and the real Starry Night as promised. All within twenty-three hours and fifteen minutes. Winn Schott, exonerated, boom!" He slapped his hand on Maggie's shoulder.

She snapped, "Leave before I throw you into holding for fun."

"Ahhh. I have better places to go."

Back at the DEO, he found himself staring up at the blank computer screen.

"So what now?"

Winn turned to see Kara looking pensive.

"What do you mean?"

"She lied to you."

"Yeah, she did. And I bought it because I have been so lonely for so long. Women never seem to--sorry, I don't mean you. But seriously, women never, I just. And now Mon-El is leaving, did you hear? Going back to Daxam. And I haven't ever had a whole lot of guy friends. Pretty much just James and Mon-El. So I got really excited back when he was first here, because he treated me like a guy. A real guy. And I get why you can't give him the Kara he needs because the Kara he needs, in my opinion, is Cat Grant on steroids. And the woman he wants is some Hollywood chick on steroids. And you, Kara, are not that."

"Winn, thank you for being my friend. For being my loyal guy friend when the other men around me were trying to turn me into something that they wanted or needed me to be that I couldn't be. That I didn't even know how to be. So thank you for your friendship."

Winn sniffled. "Thanks for saving me from myself, from my stupid decisions."

They hugged tightly. Winn said, "Can't... breathe..." and Kara let go and apologized, adjusted her glasses.
"Sorry..."

"What doesn't kill us makes us stronger?" said Winn. "Maybe you should say your goodbyes to himself. I think they're leaving at midnight."

Kara texted Lena and Maggie. Both texted back that they had just arrived. She took a deep breath, looked over at Vasquez. "Where is he?"

"Gathering his stuff. Alex is with him, to make sure he doesn't change his mind."

"And J'onn?"

Kara and Alex's Space Dad sauntered into the room. "I got your texts."

"Thank Rao! I can't do this alone."

J'onn said, "You never have to" at the same time that Vasquez said, "That's what friends are for" and the elevator opened. Maggie and Lena joined them. Lena turned to Kara. "Who is using our signature phrase here?"

"Lena, you know Vasquez."

Lena smiled. "I do."

Winn looked from Lena to Vasquez with confusion. Why was Lena flirting with the agent? Then he saw Kara frown and Vasquez's eyebrow rise. Oh. They were distracting Kara. Nice.

Mon-El walked into the command center with a large black DEO-issued duffel bag. Alex walked behind him looking very stern, her left hand hovering over the grip of her alien pistol. When he stopped, she stood behind him with her arms crossed over her chest.

Kara stepped toward him, and her friends shifted to create a ring around the two of them.

Mon-El looked nervous. "Can we be alone?"

"No," said Kara. "My friends, your friends wanted to say goodbye to you properly, to honor your decision."

"But it's not decided yet. I mean, they want me to be--"

J'onn stepped forward. "Mon-El. I have to tell you how inspirational this is for me. My people are gone. I alone remain. My culture is gone. It was wiped out. You, the chance you have been given, to lead your people home, to bring your culture back from the brink of disaster... I envy you that."

Mon-El stared at him, then looked back at Kara. "Kara, I know I messed things up. And you are... You deserve better than me."

"Yes. I deserve better than to be lied to."

"You do. And I can only hope that you can see the good in me. Please."

Winn and James met each other's eyes and stepped forward. Winn said, "Mon-El, you made me see that I had been waiting to live my life. And that's no way to live."

James said, "The way you threw yourself into that grueling training, letting Supergirl beat you up over and over again, just so you could learn how to be a hero. Man, I admire you. Because what
"you are going to do now? Not fight stupid criminals like Superman does, but fight for your civilization! Damn, that's... it's heroic."

"I, uh, thank you?" He looked back at Kara. "I was going to tell you."

Kara frowned. "No, you were never going to tell me the truth. You want being a hero and falling in love to be easy. But they aren't easy. They're hard, and they're messy and they hurt sometimes."

"I will never hurt you intentionally."

"Maybe not. Or at least, I believe that you believe that. I'm not sure I do. But you spent most of your life only worried about what you wanted, only focusing on your own pleasure."

"Yes! And that is what my parents want to reinstate on Daxam. If I go with them--"

Alex stepped forward. "Exactly! If you go with them, you can change the story! You can inspire your people to change the way they live. And that will change their chance for survival. Once they learn how to sacrifice for the greater good, your world will be stronger for it."

Vasquez added, "When Krypton destroyed your home, your people didn't know how to fight. But now you've learned the skills of a hero, how to fight the good fight. That's what they will need to learn if they are going to rebuild and survive."

He stared at them and turned back to Kara. "If you asked me--"

But she said, "You know, you might actually achieve on Daxam something even my people couldn't achieve: saving your planet, your people, your civilization? Daxam will finally prove to the galaxies that it can be better than Krypton could ever have been."

He gaped.

On the balcony, Reya and Largand beamed into the room.

Mon-El turned back to Kara. "You believe that?"

"I don't say things I don't mean." She glanced at the king and queen and repeated, "Daxam has the chance to become greater than Krypton ever was. But it can only do that with your heroism."

Maggie and Lena stepped up to Mon-El. Maggie pulled him into a long, slow kiss, then stepped away, wiping a tear out of her eye. "To think I'll never see a hero like this again..."

Lena gently pushed her out of the way and pulled him into a longer, slower, slightly more salacious kiss and squeezed his butt. "Heroes are a big turn-on for most women, doesn't really matter the species. But simply beating up criminals? That's not hot." She turned back to Supergirl and James. "Sorry, guys. But seriously. They save money, a life or two. You will be saving a whole world!"

She winked.

Winn thought, Mon-El really never stood a chance.

Queen Reya stared at the humans, especially Kara. Then she turned to her son. "I see that I misjudged your Earth friends, Mon-El. Clearly, they not only care for you, but have also helped you become an even better man than you were. You will need that. The coming days will require you to outdo yourself."

Mon-El looked at Kara. He whispered, "Tell me to stay, and I'll stay!"
But Kara said, "If I had the chance to go back and help my people, if my people still lived, if I could, if my parents..." She took a deep breath. "No, you have to go. You need to make a difference. Isn't that what you said you wanted to do? Make a difference? This is your chance."

King Largand, apparently insensitive to the emotions in the room, said, "Already we have been gathering candidates for your consort, and they are eager to prove their worth to you by--"

Reya cut him off. "It is time, my son. We must go now, if we are to return to Daxam at the same time as the transports return from Alam Six, the Slaver's Moon, and the Zuntiam Junction. Let us go. Farewell, friends of Mon-El. Your loyalty to my son shall not be forgotten!"

Winn thought that Mon-El moved forward robotically. No one offered him a hug, not even or especially not Kara. Winn wondered if the Daxamite understood the real meaning of that lack, or if, perhaps, Daxamites didn't hug people they would never see again in a million years (if they were lucky). The royal family stood on the balcony and then blue energy took them away.

As one, the Superfriends turned to the computer monitors. Vasquez went and typed at the keyboard, allowing them to see the satellite feeds that showed the space ship powering up and reaching light speed, disappearing in a shower of stars.

Lena turned to Kara. "You did it."

Kara shook her head, let Lena take her into her arms. "You planned it." She let Lena hug her and then looked over Lena's shoulder at her friends. "And you guys sold it. Thank you. I can't thank you enough."

J'onn, looking serious as always with his arms crossed over his chest, said, "Supergirl, you know we would do anything to protect you. Now we might need a protocol for the chance that he might come back, but--"

Vasquez said, "I've been working on that..."

"I'm sure you have. Agents, ladies. It's been a long week. I suggest we all stand down and take some leisure time, gather our strength for the next big bad..." He nodded and walked away.

James and Winn said, "Pool?"

Maggie said, "Is Lucy out of ICU yet?"

Winn said, "Follow me!"

Vasquez said, "One round. Then home and sleep."

Alex said, "Best out of three. Then home..."

Kara turned to Lena. "Take me away from all this?"

And Lena laughed. "I thought you'd never ask!"
Chapter Summary

The start of the Flash crossover "Duet" with some...adjustments to make up for the Man-Child who is happily now in another galaxy: Alex who would never intentionally let her sister leave their dimension without her.

As always, you're welcome.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Supergirl strode through the DEO feeling mixed. She was thrilled that she had been able dump Mon-El in an honorable way, a way that might set him on the straight and narrow. And she was even more thrilled to have spent the night with Lena, a night that was neither straight nor narrow. But she still felt... icky.

And then Winn hurried up to her.

He said, "So hey, hey, how are you doing there, buddy?"

"Getting there," said Supergirl.

"So I just finished running diagnostics on this little beauty." From his pocket, he pulled the interdimensional gadget. "And I gotta tell you, it is in tip-top shape. Just gotta say that this Cisco fellow and I would be BFFs, you know if we lived in the same dimension." He handed it to her.

"Yeah, don't tempt me. 'Cause I could totally use an interdimensional vaycay."

J'onn appeared on the balcony above them. "Morning, everyone! Now, we have a new prisoner coming in today. He's not our typical guest. So look sharp!"

They turned and saw two DEO agents guiding in a civilian dressed in black pants, blazer and t-shirt with a bright red pocket square.

Winn, having recovered from his most recent crush rather quickly, said, "Ohhh, he looks... fun..."

"Oh," said the prisoner. "There you are..."

Supergirl and Winn looked at each other, pointed at each other. "You mean me? Or..."

"Yes," said the man. "I've been looking for you, Supergirl. Why else do you think I would have let myself be caught? C'mon. She's funny. I've been looking for you."

His eyes changed, morphed in and out, and Kara found herself feeling a change that went with them. The prisoner broke his cuffs, pushed his guards to the side. He stepped forward and grabbed Cisco's gadget from Supergirl's unresisting hand.

From a distance, she heard Winn say, "Supergirl?"
Alex pulled her alien pistol. "Prisoner! Stand down! Drop your weapon!"

The man looked at the contraption in his hand. "Oh, no. This isn't a weapon. This is part of my brilliant escape." He clicked it, and a whirling cloud of blue light burst out behind him. "Ladies and gentlemen, this dimension has been a blast but I have to go chase down the fastest man alive. Toodles!" He tossed the gadget to Winn and then leaped into the blue cloud. It evaporated as soon as it had swallowed him up.

Winn looked at the mechanism in his hand as though it had just betrayed him, which really it just had.

Kara's eyes unfocused. She stepped forward and fainted. Alex caught her. The last thing she heard was Alex asking, "Supergirl, are you okay?"

//

Kara, in the club's Greenroom, pulled herself together. She had a great voice. She knew that. But when the strange young man was beating on her Greenroom door, she found herself confused. And let's face it, when had she had a Greenroom door for strange young men to beat on? Then she suddenly realized that she was totally rocking a spangled black sequined dress--sleeveless, to show off her muscle--and long black gloves.

Hadn't she just been dealing with the exit of Mon-El? What was she doing in a fancy dress with some young man yelling at her?

"Kara! Kara, you're on!"

"On what?"

He grabbed her arm and dragged her out to the back stage area. "C'mon, c'mon. Johnny canceled on us. You got the bump. You're the opening act, kid! Go on, go on, go on!"

He pushed her through the gold curtains and the pianist automatically started the intro. She recognized it immediately, while feeling a bit lost looking out at the club, with the lights in her eyes. But she had always been a singer. And she knew that intro, and she knew that, for some reason, this was exactly the right song to sing at this moment, even though she felt strangely, well, between worlds, if that made sense?

//

Barry might be the fastest human alive, at least on his own Earth, but he had always found that emotional heartache healed for him at a ridiculously, painfully slow pace. He did what he could. Just as physical illness required medicine, cough medicine or antibiotics, emotional illness required a balm. In this case, Gene Kelly.

On the one hand, yes, Singin' in the Rain had been his mother's favorite musical. On the other hand, he felt like the song itself, making a beautiful and happy thing out of quintessential bad weather was also a life lesson, one that he had struggled over and over, so very slowly, to learn.

Cisco walked behind the couch, shaking his head. "This? Again? What? Are you going to spend the rest of your life sitting around on the couch? Come on. You've been doing this for day. Let's do something. Let's go out."

"I'm sorry. I just don't feel like going out."
"What is it with you and musicals?"

"Everything's better in song."

"I know it's been bad for you since Iris, or I guess you, broke off the engagement. I just, I don't know, man, I just wanna help."

"Nothing you can really do."

Their phones buzzed. "Work calls."

Star Labs was dark at night, only the lights from the many computers and other electronics and the safety lights lit the spaces. By the time Cisco and Barry reached the central lab, a huge electric blue cloud was swirling on the platform.

Harrison Wells looked happy, which never boded well. "It could be..."

The cloud dissipated, to reveal, standing on a platform, a reddish-haired woman in black tactical gear holding an unconscious Supergirl in her arms, while a similarly dressed black man stood behind her. They looked distraught.

"Supergirl. Kara. What happened to her?"

The man said, "We don't know. But whoever did it has come to this world."

They got her to the Star Labs medical bay and hooked her up to the machines to monitor her progress.

Caitlin said, "Her vitals are low. How long has she been like this?"

"A few hours."

"Okay," said Alex. "We need to find whoever did this and punch him repeatedly until he reverses whatever spell he put on her. And I get to punch him first."

Barry asked, "Who are you exactly?"

"Her sister. Alex. You remember? I work at the DEO on our Earth."

"Oh, yes. The fierce sister! Right." He looked up as Iris walked into the room, and forgot how to English. Iris nodded at him.

Iris asked, "So what happened to her?"

"An alien prisoner escaped our custody," said J'onn. "He did something, put her into some kind of coma."

"He disappeared," said Alex. "We tracked him here and followed."

Iris asked, "Okay, but why would he come to this Earth?"

"We believe, for you," said J'onn. "His last words before he disappeared were about finding the fastest man alive."

Cisco was the only person in the room who didn't look horribly upset. He said, "Well, clearly, we are talking about a Breacher here, and if there's one thing I can do, it's find Breachers."
They left the medical area and went to the better-lit central ops area.

Barry asked, "So what else can you tell us about this guy?"

"Not much," said J'onn. "Like he just materialized out of thin air."

Cisco pointed to one of the monitors. "You mean like this clown just did?"

On the screen a man in black pants, a black blazer and a red pocket square looked up at the camera and saluted them.

Barry said, "I'm gonna go," and before his words had landed, he was zooming out of the room.

Barry sped into the room the intruder had breached, skidding to a stop.

"Hello, Barry Allen."

"How do you...know my name?"

"I know a lot of things. And I can do a lot of things."

Kid Flash sped into the room.

The intruder laughed, "Oh ho. Wally West made it here too. This is exciting. It's good of you to join the party, Kid Flash. I'm happy to have you."

"What do you want with Supergirl?" asked Kid Flash.

"Same thing I want with both of you. Teach you all a lesson." He sped across the room, sending the Kid sliding into a wall and when Flash zoomed to attack him, he caught the hero by the throat. "You're too slow." His eyes did some strange thing and then he said, "Nighty-night, Flash."

Chapter End Notes

And we just broke the 150,000 word sound barrier in 39 days. Boo-yah, as the lady said. Emphasis on the Boo.
Barry felt lost. How had he gotten to a nightclub, dressed in a suit and tie? Whose was that angelic voice he heard singing? How was it that the bartender handed him a martini? Had he ordered this?

"Moon River, wider than a mile, I'm crossing you in style, someday."

"What the hell?" He wandered forward, sipping his drink absently. The woman singing on the stage in the long slinky black dress looked so familiar, but he couldn't place her.

"Oh, dream maker, you heartbreaker, Wherever you're going, I'm going your way."

Then it hit him. "Kara?" he whispered. She shifted to a higher key and he smiled at how natural and perfect it was.

"Two drifters, off to see the worlds. There's just so many worlds to see."

Somehow she managed to mix the completely innocent ingenue with the hint of a woman more knowing, and he found himself inexorably drawn to step closer and closer.

"We're after the same rainbow's end, Waiting round the bend, My huckleberry friend--"

She saw him. Her eyes went wide, like she was panicking. Not knowing what else to do, Barry waved. Eyes still wide, she finished.

"Moon River... and me..."

A woman at one of the tables turned and saw his dumbfounded look. She grinned. "What a great singer! Do you know her?"

And Barry heard himself saying, "Yeah. I do."
The moment Kara saw Barry standing slack-jawed in the audience, her fears decreased. When he gave her that little wave, she was sure that he recognized her, which was important, since she barely recognize herself in the slinky black dress. And when she rushed off stage, after taking her bows, he was there.

"Barry? Is that you? Oh, thank Rao!" She hugged him tightly, then pulled back. "Wait! It's really you, right?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Good!"

"Wait," he said. "What is, where the hell are we?"

"I was hoping you could tell me, or explain to me why I was pulling an Audrey Hepburn and singing in a nightclub?"

"Maybe we're dreaming?"

"The same dream?"

"Yeah, that's.... What's the last thing you remember before you got here?"

"I was at the DEO. They had just brought in an alien prisoner. He got loose and, um, it was really weird. He had this, um, red...

"Pocket handkerchief?"

"Yes!"

"I saw you, on my Earth. You were in a coma. Your sister brought you to us."

"Alex!"

"She said that this guy whammied you and you just skipped to my Earth. He showed up at Star Labs. I went after him. We tried to wake you up..."

"And then you got whammied."

"Yeah..."

"So where are we?"

"I dunno. It could be a parallel dimension or maybe some elaborate illusion. We just need to figure a way out."

"I...guess...I could click my heels together three times?"

"Yes!"

"I was kidding."

"Oh. Right." They moved out to the floor of the nightclub. He said, "You're a really good singer, by the way."

"Hey, thanks! My sister says I put the Kara in Kara-Oke!"
"There you are!" said a man in a short white jacket with a black tie, black pocket square and a red rose on his lapel.

"Merlin!" said Barry.

Kara looked at the man, but he looked older than the Merlin Barry had described to her a year before. He looked much less young and much less innocent.

"Who?"

"Malcolm Linn, former head of the League of Assassins?"

"What the hell are you talking about? My name is Cutter Moran. I own this club and both of you belong to me. I employ you to do something other than to pepper me with questions. I hope you got something better in your songbook what than you were belting out there, Blondie."

"Hey!" said Kara. "Don't call me Blondie!"

"Hey," said Barry, "I don't know who you are but you are--"

The man flicked out a switchblade.

Barry finished, "quick with a knife..."

Kara said, "You have to excuse my friend. He doesn't think before he... talks."

"Yeah, I had a cousin like that. I had to slit his throat too."

"Oh!" said Kara.

"Great!" the man said. "Grady! Get these two set up," he said to his lackeys. Then he turned back to them. "And nothing I've heard before. I want something original."

Kara whispered, "Barry, I don't have my powers..."

"Me neither..."

Then the man's second in command strode up to them. Kara said, "Winn! You're here too?"

But the young man with the greased back hair and the tuxedo pulled away from her touch. "Who's Winn? I'm Grady. You realize how he got the nickname Cutter, dontcher?"

"No..." said Barry.

"Because he likes to cut people."

There was a laugh from over at the bar, and a Latino fellow said, "You ask me, I think he's all talk." He wore a short grey jacket with his black bowtie, the sign of his lesser stature than the man he was critiquing.

Winn/Grady said, "If you are very lucky, you will never find out how very, very wrong you are, Pablo. No go do your job." He growled at the young man and then stalked off.

The young man said, "You know, Grady doesn't know this, but someday, I'm going to be somebody and it's going to happen right there on that stage. You'll see. I just need my one shot."
Barry said, "Curiouser and curiouser..."

"Yeah," said Kara. "It's like the Wizard of Oz: 'And you were there, and you were there...""

"Yeah," said Barry. "Except it's not really them. It's like they're playing characters in a..."

They said it at the same time: "a musical!"

Kara turned to him, wide-eyed. "Barry, where are we?"

"I don't know."

A voice from the stage sounded loud in their ears. "Well, you know what they say, 'The show must go on!' Supergirl, I loved your rendition of 'Moon River,' such a classical song. You were a little flat in places, but I'm willing to let it slide because you are so cute!"

Barry said, "Hold on. What did you do to us?"

"Nothing much. Just put a little song in your hearts."

"Why did you bring us here?"

The alien pretended surprise. "I didn't bring you anywhere. We're inside your heads! You created this world. And we got lucky, 'cause it could have been a war movie or a space opera, but thanks to your love of musicals, and the countless times you watched uh," he pointed to Kara, "Wizard of Oz? With your adoptive parents?"

"How did you know that?"

"And you. All those rainy nights watching Fred Astaire and Frank Sinatra with mom. Well, where else would we be?"

"All right," snapped Kara. She tried a right cross to the annoying man's jaw, but he disappeared.

He reappeared, saying, "A swing and a miss! I didn't tell you: I'm not really here. See, here, I'm out there in the real world. Central City is mine for the taking!"

Barry said, "We're gonna stop you!"

"Yeah!" agreed Kara.

"You're welcome to try that., if you can get out of here."

Kara asked, "How do we get out of here?"

"You're in a movie musical. So all you have to do is just follow the--"

"The yellow brick road?" asked Kara.

"No. Uh, the script."

"Oh, yeah, that makes..."

"Reach the end of the plot and, presto-change-o, you get to go home. One little detail though, that I should mention? If you die in here, you die out there."

"Lovely," said Barry.
Kara shook her head. "I have reached my limit with magical creeps."

"In the meantime, I hope you too are willing to get the rust off those pipes of yours."

"We're not singing for you!" snapped Kara.

"No!" said Barry.

"Er, anymore, I mean."

"Oh, come on, maybe just one fun opening number?" He took his jacket off, revealing a white shirt and red suspenders, and tossed it aside.

Barry said, "Leave your jacket on!"

"Just to kick things off?"

"Wait, where'd it go?"

"Think of your fellow man--"

"Stop that," said Kara.

"It's not happening," said Barry.

"Lend him a helping hand--"

"It's not going to work," said Kara.

"We're not singing!"

"But a little love in your heart!" He backed up to the piano where Winn sat, and plunked the last note of the phrase.

Winn started to play, but Kara yelled. "All right! All right. We'll sing. But we're not singing that! Barry!"

Barry strode to the piano and pushed Winn to the side, raised his hands to keys, waiting.

Kara gave the strange imp a dirty look and sang:

"What you want, Baby, I got it. What you need, Do you know I got it. All I'm askin' Is for a little respect when you get home!"

The imp shook his head, but shooed Winn and Barry from the piano. "Don't just sit there. She needs backup!"

So the imp played, and Winn and Barry stood behind Kara, singing, "(Just a little bit.) (Just a little bit)"

And the choreographed dance added the cigarette girls and the waitresses with their trays with martini glasses that refused to obey gravity and fall when the women twirled around. And then
Pablo, the bartender took a verse:

"Hey baby (just a little bit) when you get home,
(Just a little bit) mister (just a little bit).
I ain't gonna do you wrong while you're gone.
Ain't gonna do you wrong cause I don't wanna.
All I'm askin'
Is for a little respect when you come home (just a little bit).
Baby (just a little bit) when you get home (just a little bit).
Yeah (just a little bit)."

Then the green-jacketed waiters came in with push-brooms (why brooms?) and the choreography got more and more intricate, and then Kara belted out:

"R-E-S-P-E-C-T
Find out what it means to me.
R-E-S-P-E-C-T
Take care, TCB.
Oh (sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me)
A little respect (sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me).
"

All the workers were whirling around mirroring each other's choreography and singing backup. Kara kept singing, with feeling:

"I get tired (just a little bit),
Keep on tryin' (just a little bit).
You're runnin' out of fools (just a little bit).
And I ain't lyin' (just a little bit).
(Re, re, re, re) when you come home,
(Re, re, re, re) 'spect
Or you might walk in (respect, just a little bit),
And find out I'm gone (just a little bit).
I got to have (just a little bit)
A little respect (just a little bit)."

The moment the last note faded, all of the workers simply when back to delivering drinks and sweeping. The imp was gone.

Barry said, "Where'd he go?"

"I don't know."

"C'mon, let's find him."

But the greenroom was empty.

"Now what?" asked Kara.

"Well, we do what he said. We figure out what the plot of the musical is and we follow the story."

"Okay, so what do we know so far?" Kara asked.

"We're singers."

"And apparently we work for a gangster."
"Who apparently wants us to perform for him. Honestly, it's pretty straightforward," said Barry.

Then they heard the click of guns and turned. Three men in suits and fedoras stood there with pistols pointed at them. Kara murmured, "I miss being bullet proof..."

One man in front of them said, "You're coming with us."

"Says who," asked Barry.

A man behind him pistol-whipped him and Barry fell to the floor unconscious.

"Says me."
There's Just So Many Worlds to See

Chapter Summary

More "Duet."

The best Kara could say about the warehouse the men brought them to was that it was warmer and friendlier than the warehouses on her Earth in her time that the criminals insisted on conducting their criminal activity in. The gangsters had tossed the unconscious Barry onto a pile of bags with a stencil that claimed "SUGAR."

She whispered, "Psst. Barry! Are you all right?"

Barry groaned and shifted. "Don't shout..."

"Sorry..."

"Don't worry, Star Labs will be working round the clock to get us out of this."

"Yeah, I'm glad they brought me to your Earth."

"You know, your sister looked really fierce. I always wanted a sibling, somebody I could count on and go to for advice..."

"Yeah, Alex is the best. What do you need advice on?"

"Iris. I asked her to marry me."

"Great! Did she not say yes?"

"Oh, she said yes, but I did it for the wrong reasons. I was trying to change the future and then I pushed her away so I could focus on saving her, and it's just a mess now."

"Maybe she doesn't need saving. Maybe she can save herself."

"Everything's so simple when I'm running."

"Or flying."

A man's voice yelled, "Shut up!"

Kara had met Stein and Joe West before, but that's not what they were calling themselves here. West called himself Dixie Foss and claimed to run this town. He asked them to find his missing daughter, Millie, who was, of course, when he showed them the photo, Iris West. Apparently the girl was missing, last seen at their boss's nightclub. Of course.

"What do we do?" asked Kara.

"Follow the script."
The bartender, Pablo, took them to Millie's place so they could search for any evidence of where she might have gone.

"So this is where Iris is?" said Barry. "I mean, Millie is? This is Millie's place?"

"What? Yeah, she's here, but it ain't her place, and don't you go telling anybody that I showed you this. A word to the wise: you go digging around in this dirt, you might not like what you find." Then he left.

Kara said, "Now remember, it might look like Iris, but it is not Iris."

"Yeah, tell me about it. It's going to be weird."

There was a high pitch squeel. "Oh my God!"

"That's Iris! Stand back, I'm going to kick the door in!"

Kara pushed him aside. "You stand back! I'll kick the door in."

"Well, I didn't mean it like a gender thing. I just wanted to kick the door in."

"Fine. Together then. One, two, three!"

Two superfeet kicked the door in, much to the surprise of the two people wrestling on the couch: one who looked like Iris West.

And the other who looked like Alex Danvers.

Everybody stared at everybody else.

Barry strode forward. "What the hell is going on?"

Iris sighed. "All right, you caught us."

Alex put her hands on her hips. "We're in love."

//

Back at Star Labs, the two costumed superheroes lay side by side in the medical bay, taped with sensors. Cisco, Iris, J'onn, and Alex stood around them, feeling helpless.

Caitlin came in with her tablet, looking worried. "Guys, we've got a problem. Well, another problem. The p-force cells in Barry's body have been severely depleted, as has the solar radiation in Kara's body."

"What exactly does that mean?" asked J'onn.

"They're being drained. The guy who did this to them, I think he's stealing their powers."

They moved the command center and their surveillance cameras captured the strange man zooming to the front door of the Central City bank with Barry's speed and melting the locks on the front door with Kara's laser eyes.

Kid Flash zoomed into the room. "I'll take care of this. I'm the reason Barry got whammied."

Cisco sighed, used to this kind of thing from Wally. He said, "We win or we lose as a team. I'll go
with you."

J'onn said, "I'm coming too."

Cisco said, "J'onn I respect your whole DEO special agent thing but problem right here needs someone with--"

J'onn transformed. "Call me the Martian Manhunter."

"Green skin and a sickass cape..."

Alex said, "I think you'll find that J'onn is more than just a pretty face."

Caitlin came running in, saw the Green Martian and said, "Uh, hello? Guys, their vitals are all over the charts...."

"Let's go," said Wally.

They used the portal to get there instantaneously. J'onn, Cisco and Wally landed on the damp pavement outside the bank, and the strange man was there to greet them.

"Hey! So nice of you to join the party! And Kid Flash, I'm a huge fan of your work, although I gotta say, recently your work has been a little off. Maybe it's just that you're a little scared about what happened in the Speed Force, is that it?"

"No. I'm not afraid of anything."

"Prove it," said the man, and sped away, and Kid Flash followed him.

In Cisco's ear, Iris reported, "Cisco, he's heading for Fourth and Aspen."

Cisco said, "This way." He and J'onn jumped back into the portal and jumped out at the intersection just as snow was starting to fall. They looked around, heard the electrical trail of the runners, saw the strange man jump into the air above then and then fly off in the opposite direction.

"So, J'onn. How do you feel about a little one-two combo? I'll open up the portal and you get ready to hit something really hard."

"Hitting hard I can do," said J'onn very seriously.

"Wally, you get ready to do the same on the ground."

Cisco opened up the portal and watched J'onn leap into it and disappear.
We're After the Same Rainbow's End

Chapter Summary

More "Duet."

Back in the strange apartment, the Alex look-alike got defensive. "Hey, who are you?"
"Who are you?" asked Barry.
"Lexie Moran. Now you. Names."
Kara said, "I'm Kara. This is Barry. We're singers at your dad's nightclub."
"Um, Millie," said Barry. "Your dad thinks you've been kidnapped."
"Well, clearly he's mistaken."
Kara folded her arms over her chest. "He really wants you to come back."
"Listen, I am never going back there."
"But why not?" asked Kara. "There's no place like home!" She gave Barry an embarrassed look. She couldn't help it. It just slipped out.
"Moran here is my home, aren't you baby?"
Alex slipped her arm around Iris's waist. "If our geezers ever caught wind of this, they'd go to war. It'd be more than just the end of us."
"Yeah, Lexie's right. They hate each other. Our love is forbidden."
Barry said, "This is sounding like West Side Story."
"I was thinking more The Fantasticks, but..." said Kara.
"The point is," said Iris, "we ain't tellin' nobody nothin'. And neither are you, capiche?"
"Oh! Um, yeah, capiche..." said Kara.
"Can you give us a minute?" asked Barry, and pulled Kara over to the door. "Look, we have to follow the script, right? We're in a musical. So if we can convince them to tell their fathers that they're in love, maybe that'll get us out of here."
"And back home where we belong. Yay!"
They turned back around. "Look," said Barry. "Your dads aren't perfect."
Kara nodded. "Love's not perfect."
"But being honest about what you want and need, that's the only way forward. And that includes
telling your fathers about how you feel about each other."
Alex and Iris looked deeply into each other's eyes, while Kara and Barry managed to keep their own eyes anywhere else.

Finally, Iris said, "Oh, all right! You make a convincing argument. Let's go do it now!"
Alex patted Kara on the shoulder. "Thanks, kid!"

They exited the apartment. Barry asked, "That was a convincing argument?"

"No, nope. No. But...it is musical theater and not logical theater, so... Just run with it."

//

When they got back to the Foss warehouse, both men were waiting and looked equally relieved when they saw Iris walk in.

Barry announced, "She's back!"
She hugged both men tightly. They said, "Thank God, you're safe."
"Of course, I'm safe. Barry and Kara told me you sent them to find me."
"We were concerned!"
"Dads, there was no reason to be concerned."
"Dads?" asked Barry.
Both said together, "You got a problem with that?"
"No!" said Barry. "I love musicals. So."
"Look, Dads," said Iris. "There's something that I need to tell you. I'm in love!" She giggled.
Her fathers stared at each other. Foss said slowly, "Who is...the lucky boy?"
"Oh, yeah. About that. It's, well, she's a girl. It's Lexie. Lexie Moran!"
The men exploded.

//

Kara and Lexie weren't doing any better with Cutter Moran.
"Are you kidding? She is the daughter of my enemy. And the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I knew you were keeping something from me. But this?"
Kara said, "She isn't your little girl anymore. Well, she isn't. She's an incredibly brave strong woman."
Lexie stared at Kara. "You don't even know me."
Kara's voice shook. "I know how strong you are, and how loyal, and how when you love, you love with your whole heart. Vas-- Ir-- Mollie is lucky to have you in her life. One look and you can see that. And they want to be together, no matter how dangerous it is, no matter that Le-- Mollie's last
name-- And when you find a love like that, you've got to hold onto it, no matter who's trying to stop you. That's clear to me now."

//

After Dixie and his husband sang in lovely harmony of their acceptance of their lovely girl's choices in love, and she ran out cheering and giggling, followed by the relieved singer, his husband asked, "What now?"

"Gather up the boys. We're going to war."

"I thought so."

//

Back at Star Labs, Iris and Alex visited the strange man being held in their containment area. He was cheerful, annoyingly so.

"Well, if it isn't the two people I was hoping would visit me the most."

"Fix them," said Iris. "Now."

"I can't."

Alex frowned. "If you ever want to get out of that cell, that's exactly what you're going to do."

The man chuckled. "You don't get it. You don't understand, ladies. My powers don't work that way."

"You're the one who did this to them," growled Alex.

"Yes, but they're the only ones who can control what happens to them now. As are the two of you. How much do you love him, Iris? And you, Alex, how much do you love her?"

"She's my sister!"

"Yes. And you've been...distracted lately. And giving her iffy advice. That space fratboy, isn't that what you're friends called him? And eventually, you recognized that she should have good boundaries, but at first you did push her in his direction. A little internalized homophobia maybe, that you didn't want to smear on her? Or your prejudice about that green-eyed babe? Or maybe the knowledge that if she dated somebody that inferior, Kara would always need you to save the day... Here's the thing. If you want Kara and Barry back from the world they're in, then go get them yourselves. You have that power."

Together, they asked, "How?"

"Ah, sorry! Can't tell you. You have to figure that out for yourselves."

//

Back in Cutter Moran's club, Barry and Kara paced the greenroom.

"Okay," said Barry. "What have we missed? We got 'Mollie' and 'Lexie' to tell their fathers they love each other, but do we have to do next?"

Just then Grady/Winn strode into the room. "Ah, there you are. Are you two ready?"
"Ready for what?"

"For rehearsal, you dolt. Mr. Moran wants a new show."

"We have to finish the musical," murmured Kara. She turned to Grady. "Do you happen to know anything original?"

"As a matter of fact, I've been working on something all day." He sat down at the piano.

"Wow," said Barry. "Things really are easier in musicals."

Grady played some opening chords, and Barry gave it a shot, singing:

"At times like these
When life is getting me down
And the world looks like it's going to end... ship?
There's still one power that we both have
And that's the power of...

"Friendship?" asked Kara.

"Yeah! That's exactly what I was going to say!"

"Hey, it's an easy rhyme."

He continued, while beginning to tapdance:

"I'm your Superfriend.
I'm your Superfriend.
I'll be there in the nick of time
If you're ever in a spot."

Kara joined him in the dance, singing:

"And if you're not in time
You can go back in time
And give it another shot!"

"Yeah," said Barry. "I'm actually not supposed to do that anymore."

"Oh! Okay..."

Kara sang:

"I'm your Superfriend,
Superfriend!"

Barry added:

"When you need a compliment,
I can rattle off a dozen.
For instance, I am not impressed
By your more famous cousin!"

"Thank you!" said Kara. "Nobody ever says that!"
"if you ever need money,
I've got the cash.
On my couch
You're welcome to crash.
When you need me
I'll be there in a Flash!"

"Barry!

"That was funny!"

"I'm your Super, that has a double meaning, friend!"
Chapter Summary

Aaaand another episode f*cked up by the writers gets fixed by your hero, the flying pig. You're welcome. We have about 23 hours until our next heartache. So, enjoy. Tomorrow I will start all over again. For you, my lovely nerds, for you.

Alex was pacing again. She wasn't going to say that she wasn't impressed with Star Labs, but it was no DEO. Cisco was good, maybe even better than Winn in some ways, but not in others. And she immediately respected Caitlin for her scientific expertise. She wasn't so fond of Mr. Wells; he reminded her far too much of Maxwell Lord, and that wasn't someone she really wanted to rely on for the health and well-being of her sister or her friends. She wished Vasquez were there, or Lena, or someone better versed in creating tactical scenarios, coming up with a way out of no way.

So when Barry and Kara both started to buck on their tables, showing signs of trauma and shock, she was ready for any destroy-the-box solution. And when Iris started babbling about Vibing into the dream world, Alex immediately was up for it. She grabbed Cisco's shoulder with one hand and Kara's with the other, just as Iris did the same with Barry.

The blue light of this Vibe thing was similar to the blue light of the interdimensional portal, and during the half breath between Star Labs and... wherever they went... she wondered about blue light as a possible energy factor, the way red and yellow sunlight--

The next thing she knew they were in the middle of a back street littered with bodies bleeding out from gunshot wounds, including Kara in a gold lamé dress and Barry in tails.

Iris ran to Barry, calling out to him. Alex ran to Kara, immediately applying pressure to her wound. "Iris, apply pressure."

"Barry, I am so sorry."

Alex yelled, "Kara, stay with me. You got this!" She tore her own black shirt and balled up the fabric against Kara's gut wound. "Kara, I'm sorry I didn't trust Lena at first, that I trusted Monhell too much. I should have trusted you. Don't die, Supergirl! You can't die!"

"Iris, I love you."

"No, Barry--"

Kara stopped breathing and Alex lost her shit. Still holding the remnants of her shirt against Kara's wound with her right fist, she beat on Kara's chest with her left. "Don't leave me! Damn you, don't leave me!"

There was a gasp, and the world turned blue.

They were back at Star Labs and both Superheroes were alive and breathing and not bleeding and definitely breathing and alive.

"They're alive," squealed Wells, sounding even less dignified then Winn at his nerdiest.
Someone started clapping. They turned to see the strange man with the red pocket square applauding them heartily. "That was so good!" he shouted. "Bravo! Brava! Standing O! That was a hell of a show! And you two. I guess your love really was strong enough after all. Beautiful."

Cisco yelled, "Man! How did you get out of the cell?"

"Cisco," the man replied with disbelief. "Do you really think that cell is just going to hold me?"

"No," said Barry. "I'm sorry, but why did you do this to us?"

"I did it because I believe in the good guys! I told you when we first met, that it was to teach all of you a lesson! 'Cuz I see everything. And I saw two people with two broken hearts, and another two people over- and underestimating their own judgment when it came to themselves and the people they loved."

"So," said Kara slowly. "The lesson was..."

"Love, Supergirl. For Barry and Iris, it was about letting your love lead your actions rather than fear. And for you and your sister, it was, well, love's sister, trust. You and Alex both had to trust that you knew what you needed for yourself, for your own happiness. That you knew who truly loved you and who really, really only loved himself."

"Wait," said Barry. "So now you're just going to go teach somebody else a lesson?"

"Yeah, that's exactly what I'm going to do."

"So are you from the fifth dimension, by any chance?" asked Kara.

"What? No! Oh, Mixy? He's an amateur. I am much more complicated. You wouldn't even. But hey: Think of your fellow man, lend him a helping hand..."

Kara and Barry looked at each other and sang, "R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me--"

And the strange man disappeared.

//

The moment that Alex and J'onn took Supergirl with them through the interdimensional portal, Vasquez called Lena's secretary, Jess, and told her that Lena would want to drop by the DEO when she was done with work for the day. Jess had asked no questions and Vasquez had not elaborated, but six hours later, Security was reporting that the consultant Lena Luthor had stopped by for an unscheduled visit. Vasquez went down to the first floor to meet her in person and escort her back upstairs to the command center.

Even completely composed, Lena Luthor gave off the faintest of vibes to Vasquez: nervousness? When Vasquez led her to J'onn's office, a small private space devoid of its owner, Lena finally said, "Agent Vasquez, may I inquire as to what this is about?"

"Ms. Luthor. Lena. There has been... We have a situation."

"Is that government-speak for SNAFU?"

"No, ma'am. The situation is, well, extra-normal, if you will."

"Of course it is. And how can I help?"
"I'm actually not sure you can." That threw the Luthor. "I'm sorry, Lena. You remember, of course, Mixy-whatever-his-name-was?"

"Mxyzptl-something. Of course. A difficult... person... to forget. Please don't tell me he's back."

"No, ma'am. Not him. But something, someone similar."

"An empowered individual from another dimension."

"So we believe."

"Who can, I suppose, bend time and space?"

"Something like that."

Lena nodded, not letting her composure crack. "And?"

"This... being... said he was off to find the fastest man alive. That would be Barry Allen, who is in the other Earth dimension that Kara visited, um, a while back."

"I recall."

"We sent her back. With Alex and J'onn. To there, to him, in the hopes that he and his friends who are more well-verse in these interdimensional situations than we are--"

"Sent her back?" snapped Lena. "Are you trying to tell me that she was incapable of traveling on her own?"

"She was unconscious, apparently comatose. Stable, but..."

Lena considered this information without a change in expression. Vasquez thought the woman would make an excellent covert operative.

"So, if I can't help, why did you bring me here?"

"Ma'am, seriously? I know that you and Kara are, have, you are in a relationship. And whatever happens to Kara, you will want to be here. I know ignorance is easier at the time, but it is inexorably harder in retrospect, if you didn't know, couldn't at least worry, or, I suppose, pray, or..."

Lena's Eyebrow™ rose. "And are you, Agent Vasquez, praying for Alex?"

"For all of them, ma'am. There are no atheists in foxholes, however virtual."

Lena nodded. "Well, if I have to wait here, it would easiest if I could be working while I wait. Is Mr. Schott on hand?"

"He is down in the lab, ma'am. He said that if you were interested in joining him there, we should send you down."

Lena looked relieved. She said, "Thank you, Agent Vasquez. I believe I know the way."

//

Winn sat at the lab table tinkering with small metallic objects on the lab table. He heard the door open behind him, saw Lena, leaped up and ran to hug her. She stiffened, then hugged him back.
"What do we need to do?" she asked him.

"Trust people we haven't ever met, that they'll take care of them."

Then alarms went off across the DEO and everyone deployed to battle stations, which in the case of Winn and Lena, meant scrambling to get to the command center, where the blue light was disappearing and Alex and J'onn were supporting Supergirl, who still looked a bit weak, but whose grin was the usual 2000 Watts.

"There's no place like home!" she shouted, giggling.

J'onn let Lena take Supergirl's left arm, shaking his head and saying, "Okay, people. Eight o'clock in the morning and no later: reports on... all of this mess."

Alex wouldn't let go of Supergirl, and Vasquez put herself under her girlfriend's free arm. "Um, Supergirl, ma'am?" she said with her typical self-deprecation. "Permission to requisition your apartment for a cathartic game night for the troops?"

Winn shouted, "IT will cover the pizza!"

Supergirl just laughed. "Of course. See if James is off duty and--"

From down the hall, they heard J'onn shout, "Agent Olsen! Report to Agent Danvers for your evening assignment! Good night ladies. And gentlemen!"
Lucy Lane had been taking a forty-minute nap in the women's bunks when the crew came back victorious, alive, and happy. Once J'onn updated her and gave her leave, she called Maggie, asked her to get booze for eight or so people, and threw herself into her civvies to go celebrate the latest interdimensional miracle.

It was James who answered the door at Kara's place, which was awkward for a second or so, but then they hugged each other, and James pushed Lucy to go welcome the wayward warriors back to their home dimension.

It was a little weird, to be honest. Vasquez couldn't keep her eyes off Alex, and was only barely using her Stoic self-discipline to keep her hands off her. Ditto for Lena and Kara. Winn looked at his girls piningly, while mentioning in an offhanded way how he missed Mon-El, a sentiment that was not, NOT--absolutely not--seconded by anyone else in the apartment.

Lucy watched James watch Kara and Lena. He seemed nostalgic, but happy for Kara. Even a ten of a man would have to--if he really loved his ex--be happy that she had landed a twelve of a woman, right?

And then Lucy caught his eye, as he watched her and Maggie, and looked away. Lucy studied James for a moment. He was the perfect specimen of a man: muscled, smiling, easy-going, sexy as fuck. And a male feminist, or he had been when she had dated him. She wasn't entirely sure about this whole Guardian business. Lucy looked at Maggie, who seemed embarrassed to have been caught watching her... girlfriend?... friend-with-benefits?... watch the woman's fairly serious ex-boyfriend.

"Want another drink?" asked Maggie, and before Lucy could answer, skittered off to the kitchen.

Winn and Kara were arguing about the rules to Risk (one of Lucy's favorite games, but she sensed that the argument had little to do with the game itself, so she decided not to engage). Maggie came back with a beer for Lucy, who would have preferred a scotch, but who understood that this night was rather special, and by special, she meant potentially super awkward for a lot of people. Better to tone it down by 30%, right?

"Thanks, babe," she said, and then watched Detective Dimples blush prettily. Maybe that wasn't what she should have said?

Kara frowned at Winn. "Alex! Lena! Tell Winn he's wrong!"

Quickly, Lena said, "Sorry, hon, this is a game I haven't played in a long time... I've tried to stay away from the whole 'world domination' thing lately... Vasquez, did you bring your chess board?"

"I did, but I really want to play Risk, so you're on your own." She pulled the small box out of her messenger bag.
"That's okay, I often play alone."

There was an awkward sudden pause in the conversation. Lucy wondered if Lena knew they were all wondering if they were the only friends she had.

Without showing that, Lena added off-handedly, "It helps to play with the best opponent you know."

Lucy smiled and raised her glass to the Luthor, who looked surprised. Kara adjusted her glasses and said, "Fine! Play it Winn's way. Lena, can I play with you?"

Again an awkward pause, but this time there were giggles.

The Luthor Eyebrow came out. "Kara, I thought you'd never ask..." she purred.

Alex spat up her beer. Lucy put her face in her hands. James sputtered, "Wait, what? No. Seriously, Kara? Since when? I thought you and--"

Six people yelled, "Don't say that name!"

Kara cringed. Lena saved her. "We all make mistakes, Mr. Olsen." She turned to Kara. "Do you want black or white?"

Kara said, "White! Or, wait, no, Lena, you should take white. I'll take black."

Lucy watched Lena's composed face go soft at Kara's gesture.

"So you get to be the bad guy, Kara?"

Alex muttered, "As long as it isn't red, we should all survive Kara being a bad guy."

Kara frowned, but didn't reply.

James muttered to Winn, "I'll second that!"

As they set up the board, Lena quietly asked Kara, "What was that about?"

But the usually sunny reporter's face got dark. "I'd rather not talk about it."

"All right."

Kara played slowly, considering the implications of every move before even touched a piece.

Lucy noticed that Vasquez kept glancing at the progress on the chessboard, even to the extent that she would forget to take her turn. "What's so fascinating there, Susan? Your protege not living up to her teacher's example?"

Vasquez frowned, and it wasn't her thinking frown. It was her combat frown, the frown she used when dealing with inexperienced rookies. "She didn't learn that from me."

Lena looked up with surprise. "I just assumed..."

Vasquez stood up and came over to the board. The rest of the gang yelled at her, but she knelt down next to the board and said, still frowning, "Is that the Dutch Defense?"

Kara looked guilty. "Uh, yes?"
Lena and Vasquez stared at her. Lucy came over and looked at the board. Eventually all the Risk players came over and surrounded them. Kara adjusted her glasses nervously. "Um, what?"

Lena said, "Darling, where did you learn all this?"

Kara went pink. "I read some books. And I practice a lot."

"With whom?" (Lucy rolled her eyes at Lena's grammatical precision.)

"Um, me?" Kara squeaked.

Alex looked around at her friends: at the confusion of the guys, the shock on Lena and Vasquez's faces, at Kara's discomfort. She came and put her hands on Kara's shoulders. "Kar, how many games of chess have you played with other people besides yourself?"

"Um, this is the second."

Alex nodded. Then she put her hands on her hips in her Agent Alex Danvers is a Total Badass Mode™. Everyone took a step back, except for Lena who stayed in her seat, her surprise still showing but tinged now with respect for the Danvers sistes.

Alex said, "Okay, people, now that we have ascertained that my sister is as smart as she is argyle, we can let these ladies get back to their game. And we can get back to ours."
Chapter Summary

In between all the episode fixing, we have this piece of fluff which went in directions I did not expect.

Alex lingered at Kara's apartment after most of their friends had left. She and Vasquez sorted the recycling and washed the dishes and when they were done and Lena still hadn't left, Kara came over and frowned at her sister.

"Alex, thanks for having my back earlier, but really, you guys should go."

"We can give Lena a ride home if you like."

Vasquez rolled her eyes at Alex. "Kiddo, I'm pretty sure she's staying the night."

Alex's eyes got big. "Already? Are you sure you're ready for that, Kara?"

Lena came up behind Kara. "Don't worry, Alex. We're taking it slow."


On the way out the door, Vasquez winked at them.

Kara frowned. "What is with her?"

Lena said, "She's your older sister. She is entitled to have a hard time believing you are ready to have sex at the ripe old age of twenty-six."

"I just hate the double standard."

"What? That she can and you can't?"

"What? No. She's older than me. She's going to do most things first. I mean that people expect me to be able to do something hard, like throw a spaceship into space, but not something easy, like being with you."

Lena smiled and ran her finger down Kara's nose. "I'm glad that you think being with me is easy. Most people I've dated would never say that."

"Well, I mean, the stuff we've done so far is easy. I like kissing you. Especially the new bits." She grinned. "Can we do more of that tonight? Or are you tired?"

"Not too tired for you kissing any of my bits, Kara. But I should set the alarm for six..."

"Why did you tell her we're taking it slow?"

"I'm sorry. You're right. That was none of her business. I just assumed she would be worried about you. I know she trusts me more than she used to, but..."
"You would never hurt me... You couldn't."

"Physically, no. But emotionally? And for all we know she might be more worried for me than for you. I was going to ask you... Have you ever been out of control before? Should I worry about your super strength?"

Kara got quiet and went to sit on the couch. She hugged the pillow hard to her chest. "Maybe..."

Lena sat down next to her. "Tell me? If you want?"

"It's what they were talking about earlier. Last year... Oh, Rao, it was almost exactly a year ago, right around the time change... Maxwell Lord... It was red Kryptonite. I did some things, and said some things, I'm not proud of. Things I should never have done or said."

"And you hurt Alex and James?"

"And others. I threw Cat Grant off her balcony and caught her in the nick of time. I mean, sure, Cat can be snarky and annoying, but nobody deserves that."

"But you caught her."

"And she did eventually forgive me. Everybody did. It was easiest for James. What I did to him wasn't violent. It was more... sexual. We were at a bar and I was coming on to him really strong. And he could tell, somehow, that I wasn't myself, and that maybe the consent was going to be a problem. So he turned me down and went home alone."

"That doesn't sound so bad."

"Not for him. But then I..." Kara took a deep breath. "You should know this about me, Lena. I, after that, I picked up somebody else, and I wasn't gentle and it was one night because the next day the DEO, Alex, they figured out how to fix it, but..."

"You're wondering if the man was all right afterwards? You couldn't ask the DEO...? No, I suppose you really couldn't, could you..."

"Even if it hadn't been humiliating, I never got her name and I didn't remember where I had slept, and it was all this big angry blur..."

Lena frowned. "Her?"

Kara nodded, clearly embarrassed. "And that was the other reason I could never tell Alex. Because I didn't know how she would take it. And I think that was why it took me so long to realize that you and I could be... Because I associate that side of myself with that anger."

"Maybe..." said Lena thoughtfully.

"Maybe what?"

"Well, I understand how you would interpret it that way, but I can't help thinking about that woman, and what it might have been that drew her to you. And maybe what she saw wasn't just the anger, but... Well, you are a very passionate person, Kara Danvers. It's what makes you such a good hero, and at times, it is also what can make you such a good reporter."

"Thanks, but..."

"Just, listen, okay?" Lena bit her lip. "You know my story, how much I have had to deal with--"
"I know, Lena. And you are so brave--"

"Kara, don't. This is difficult for me. Please don't interrupt. It's just, that under this cool exterior that I work so hard at, is a hot, scalding mess of rage for all the bad things, all the lacks and losses. And I fight it, every single day. Every night. And even though I know that Lex's issues were very different from mine, I always wonder, you know? Is this the day I let my rage win? Is this the day I turn into Lex? So, I mean, on the one hand, I understand why you would run from that anger..."

"Lena..."

"Hush, darling. Let me finish." She took a deep breath, took on that haughty Luthor demeanor that Kara had come to recognize as her armor. "Some people, sometimes people, well, they..."

She got up and walked to the balcony window. She gave out a harsh little laugh. "Do you remember, that night at the Amphipolis, when you tricked me into explaining the whole bondage thing to you?"

"Yes. You said it wasn't your thing."

"It absolutely isn't. But... I do understand the occasional bit of... rougher sex. Of just a little bit of pain. A little bit of punishment. Because I do understand the rage that pulses silently underneath my skin, and sometimes I feel, well, guilty about it. And I could understand maybe somebody being okay with you being rough with her, especially if it was a sudden, passionate connection."

"Lena..."

"I'm just saying." She wouldn't look at Kara.

Kara stood and came up behind her, enfolded her in her arms, kissed the back of her neck. "Thank you."

Lena sniffed and turned around in Kara's arms. "For what, love?"

"For explaining myself to me. My, well, Eliza, my foster mother. She tried to explain Survivor's Guilt to me, and in college I took psychology classes, but it just never connected before. Most of the time, I try to be sunny, just like everybody says. Because if I didn't, that rabbit hole leads directly to the Earth's molten core."

"Kara..."

"And it's like tonight, with the chess. People think that the sunny person--who is of course coincidentally blonde--is me, the only me, and they expect her to be sweet and maybe not very smart."

"Oh, I hear you. The brunette tends to be the evil genius, after all."

"Yeah," Kara's laugh had some tears hiding in it. "And then I do something, like, like--"

"Like nearly beating a chessmaster at her own game?" flirted Lena.

"I didn't nearly beat you."

"Not this time."

"The point is, no one sees it coming. Except maybe Alex, and I think J'onn, but he is psychic and didn't grow up with the Earth tropes, although, gosh, he certainly has been here long enough to
learn them... But it's kind of exhausting..."

"Oh, yes, the exhaustion of everyone thinking you are whatever they expect you to be? And not bothering to figure out what you are? I wouldn't know anything about that..."

"Maybe that's why I love you so much," said Kara shyly.

Lena froze in her hands.

"What? What did I say?" asked Kara.

"You... you love me?"

"Well, duh." Kara laughed at her and then got serious. "Oh. Oh! I didn't mean to, well not today anyway. Not this month. Because we haven't been together long enough."

"I think I've loved you since you walked into my office with Clark."

"Yeah, that was some three minutes, wasn't it? I think he still has no idea what happened that day."

"That makes two of us."

"I know what happened," said Kara softly, running her hand up and down Lena's back.

"What?"

"I found the person I'm supposed to be with. And it's true what Maggie says about me, I am a slow and oblivious little bean..."

"I quite like her. Well, when she isn't arresting me."

"Yeah. Hey, you want to go to bed and um, do some bit-kissing?"

Lena laughed. "Yes, Argyle Danvers. I would like that very much indeed."
It's New Dawn, It's a New Day

Chapter Summary

Still between episodes. Finally, over 130 chapters and 400 single-spaced pages later, I might start earning the M rating. Okay, I guess I am a shy writer. But these two...

Chapter Notes

Also, starting to fix that abominable episode, 2.17, "Distant Sun." You're welcome.

Lena Luthor had always supposed that relationships--real, healthy relationships--would always be something that happened to other people. Lillian and Lionel had never shown much overt affection toward each other in front of their children, and the only girlfriends Lex had had (that Lena knew of) had been in college and grad school, and he never brought them home because it was clear that Lillian wouldn't have thought they were good enough for him. So Lena had never seen relationships modeled at home.

In boarding school, there had been relationships. In the early years, there were the on-again/off-again friendships with overly dramatic fights. In later years there were... the other kind. Veronica Sinclair, for one. But then, Lena supposed that one could learn from negative examples as well as positive ones, and Lena had always been a quick study.

College had been best: her first attempts at love, tentative and awkward. Her mind flourishing next to another beautiful mind, her body flourishing next to another beautiful body. She still was convinced that the sun had shone on more days in those four years than it ever had in the previous eighteen.

And then grad school. And then Lex. The trial. Lillian's recriminations. The loss of almost all her friends. The sheer impossibility of having a lover, or anything that lasted longer than a night.

But then her friend, Kara. But then her friend, Supergirl.

And then an "it-should-have-been-obvious" epiphany on a balcony...

And now, here was Lena Luthor in Kara Supergirl Danvers' bed, lying naked under the very solid Kryptonian, whose head lay on one of Lena's breasts and whose hand was on the other, keeping her warmer than she would have expected given that the sheet and blankets had long since been kicked off the bed.

They had only done this once before, right after the team had sent that Mon-El person packing. At the time, Lena had been astonished by Kara's lack of inhibitions, because the kitchen counter, and then the couch, and then halfway to Lena's bedroom, and then her bed--

And two hours later, Kara had woken up hungry. And who knew that leftover Hawaiian pizza could be an aphrodisiac?
But Kara had been very careful with Lena, much gentler than anyone Lena had ever been with, constantly checking in with her to see whether she was still all right. Her fingers were like feathers for hours and then when Lena really, really needed her, they became very, very different.

And the main difference between that night and this night was that Lena's apartment actually had insulation that also worked as noise suppression, and Lena was pretty sure that Kara's didn't.

Lena might have to invest in that for her, to keep the other tenants from hating her...

Like Lena, Kara was a quick study, but that quickness came in two varieties: the moment Lena asked her to do something--like licking her nipples, perhaps--Kara grinned widely and immediately tried it out. But when she used her superspeed to flicker her tongue there, Lena nearly came completely apart at the seams, and had to shove a pillow in her mouth to keep from getting her girlfriend evicted.

And her stamina!

So in the dark hours of the morning, while Kara slept unmoving, keeping her feeling warm and loved and astonished to feel those things with another human being (although, in retrospect, Kara was more than human), Lena tried to think of what she could do to show Kara how much she meant to Lena, how much her unflagging loyalty, her unabashed joy, and her uninhibited lovemaking meant to a woman who had been alone for the vast majority of the last three decades.

So when Kara finally rolled off her, Lena did two things.

First, she went to the bathroom and peed for a really long time. She was, after all, as she had told Kara not too long before, human.

Then she threw on some of Kara's clothes and started to make a lumberjack breakfast: thirty pancakes, twelve strips of bacon, nine eggs slowly cooked into the biggest omelet she could manage in Kara's iron skillet, to encase all of the rest. The bread in the pantry was moldy, so, yeah, no toast. Three glasses of orange juice and one of milk. A bottle of Flintstone vitamins (seriously? how was Lena even surprised by that?). And all of this Lena tried to fit on the biggest tray she could find. She wished she had a few cut flowers, but March wasn't the best time for that, and anyway, the tray was pretty much packed.

Lena was just fitting the plates and glasses on the trays--honestly, she had two Bachelors degrees, two Masters degrees and a PhD, how hard was it to fit food for a Kryptonian girlfriend on a single tray?--when Kara came running out in a blue and red terrycloth robe with the crest of the House of El on the back (admittedly, Superman's yellow, not her blue, but still), shouting, "What is that smell? What is that smell? Baaaaacon!"

Lena grinned. "So suddenly you're hungry now, Kara? Rather than thirsty?"

"What?" asked Kara absently, picking up a fork. "I'm both!"

Lena said nothing, simply made a mental note to talk to Vasquez or Maggie about teaching Kara more... vocabulary.

Kara picked up the heavy tray and dragged it to the island, then looked up at Lena. "Wait, you need to eat too! You did, um, well, use up a lot of calories last night..."

"Yes, I did," said Lena playfully. "And this morning. And then later this morning..."

"Well you have to eat. Here, take a bite of this. It's amazing!"
"I cooked all of that for you. I have your last lonely waffle in the toaster oven for me. Trust me. You can afford all those calories. I can't. Also, there wasn't any coffee in your freezer, did I look in the wrong--"

But Kara was gone in a superflash and then back again in her supersuit with four cups of coffee in one of those recyclable mushed-paper trays. "Large cafe Vienna for you, three toasted almonds for me."

Lena shook her head. "Such girlie drinks for a rock-hard superhero."

"I can be both. It's both/and, not either/or. We fight oppression every day in small ways. And then we beat up the bad guys in slightly larger ways."

"Thank you for the coffee, Kara, but I think you let your food get cold."

Kara trained her laser eyes on her breakfast. Steam arose. "Not a problem." She sighed happily. "Well, there is one good thing about not having to work at CatCo: more time to spend with you. Although..."

"Yes...?"

"I seem to have a new, part-time job now... if I manage to pass the editor's tests, I think?"

"Oh? Really..." Lena knew that the Flirt Was Strong With This One, but she just couldn't help it. "Funny, isn't that the same thing you said when you filled my office at CatCo to bursting with exotic flowers? Hmm. I sense a pattern here."

"Oh, well. I would NEVER want to become predictable..."

"I didn't say you were predictable! I like when you, um, well, when you..."

"Flirt? Try too hard to impress you? Try to make an impression on that thick, steely, Kryptonian oblivious skull of yours? That?"

"Um," mumbled Kara around a mouthful of omeletty-bacon-eggy goodness. "Ys, tht."

The television dragged their attention away from each other. The running head was "Aliens Rampaging Through Midtown Park," and the visuals showed an alien with the same kind of one-eyed-laser-thingy as the Cyborg Superman guy had, starting fires and sending civilians fleeing.

"Oh, crap!" said Kara, abandoning the last quarter of her food. "Well, duty calls."
Jess Huang didn't need an alarm clock. As probably the second best Personal Assistant in National City, and possibly in California as a whole, she had a sense of time that put atomic clocks in the shade. Furthermore, she drank tea all day and into the evening when she was at work (and she was always at work). She had a small bladder. And she had two cats. Put that together and there wasn't a single day in the year when her eyes didn't snap open on their own at 4:29 am, or with help at 4:31.

She didn't even bother to turn the lights on, as she shuffled first to the bathroom with Tigger and Roo entwining around her feet and then to the kitchen to feed them and turn on the coffeepot that she had filled religiously the night before. Turning back to return to her bedroom, she remembered why maybe a small light would have been a good idea as she stumbled into unopened boxes from the recent move.

"Shit, shit, shit!"

But when on Earth did she have time to unpack when she spent twelve to sixteen hours a day, six days a week, at L-Corp?

Jess wasn't complaining. She would walk through hell in high heels for Lena Luthor, no questions asked, and after all, it was the generous raise and enormous bonus that had enabled Jess to move out of her old cramped apartment and into this fancy-shmancy condo that was, among many other thing, twenty minutes closer to L-Corp. When they had moved the company to National City, Jess had taken the first apartment she could find, reasoning that she wouldn't be there all that often anyway. But then she had adopted Tigger and then Roo had come along later, and let's face it, cats needed space to exercise. So now they had it, but most of Jess's things were still in boxes.

Somewhere in all that mess was her toaster oven, but it didn't matter. She had to pick up muffins at Noonan's if she was going to get Lena to eat breakfast at all, so she could pick up one for herself as well.

As she buttoned her blouse, she turned on the TV news, caught the weather (mild today, rain tomorrow) and just as she was sliding her shoes on, she caught the alien attack at the Midtown Park. There was a swirl of bright red, and Jess paused as she grabbed her keys, watching the alien shoot a laser out of one of its eyes that Supergirl blocked first with her chest, and then with her own laser vision. He sent her flying and then she came back, punching and kicking. She put her hand through his laser eye and sent him flying into a streetlamp, taking it down with him. Then she walked away like nothing had happened.

Jess turned off the TV. Time to get to work.

//
Jess entered the building at six exactly, and the security guards looked bleary when they checked
her ID. She said, "You've got about ten minutes to start looking chipper, gentlemen."

One frowned. "What happens in ten minutes?"

"The CEO walks in and fires your inattentive asses," Jess said with a sweet smile. "Have a nice day, boys."

She spent the long ride up the elevator drafting the memo for HR on her tablet, so that she would have it ready for Lena to sign when she gave her the coffee and blueberry muffin.

Lena walked out of the elevator looking royally pissed. Jess had been going to give her the coffee first, but instead she handed her the tablet and stylus. Lena looked down at it and shook her head, then took it and signed. "Oh, Jess."

"Yes, ma'am. I got you--" She stopped and sniffed. "Um, have you already eaten breakfast?"

"I had a waffle, actually." Lena smiled. "Why?"

"Well, because you, um, well, you smell like bacon..."

"Oh, shit, I should have thought of that. Oh, well, I don't have any morning meetings, do I?"

"Er, no, ma'am. Ma'am, why do you smell like bacon if you didn't eat any?"

Lena's grin was huge. "I cooked for Kara."

"You cook?" Even Jess had not known that.

"I cook! I have many skills."

"Right! Yes, ma'am. I got an email from R&D about the material you were working on? Johnson and Boyd want to meet with you. I thought 10:30?"

"Excellent. And Agent Schott?"

"Actually, he just called. He had to cancel. They're dealing with that alien that tore up the park this morning. He said he couldn't reschedule until they figure out what they're dealing with."

"I thought that might happen. Can you see whether the police are done with the warehouse over at the port yet? I'd like to get my architect in there to do a walk-about with me."

"I think they said they intend to release it tomorrow. We should be hearing about the court date for your mother soon."

Lena sighed. "She will have her lawyers keep pushing it off. If I know mother, she is going to fight it based on the aliens not being people, the president's amnesty act being unconstitutional, some BS like that." She looked past Jess's shoulder at the Noonan's bag and the two cups of coffee.

"You know, I might still be hungry after all. I did burn quite a lot of calories last night..."

Jess handed her the coffee and the muffin, watched her saunter into her office. "Yeah, I'm sure you did." She didn't begrudge her boss her relationship with Kara Danvers, although she would really have liked to have a relationship herself one of these days. But she had known Lena Luthor for almost ten years now, and she knew that the woman had always sated her sexual appetite with one-night stands that Jess personally thought were risky on a lot of levels. Finding someone like the perpetually sunny reporter was a miracle that had been a long time coming. Too long.
So if her boss was having (probably) very athletic, very cheerful sex all night, well, more power to her. She deserved an extra muffin, dammit.

So Jess did her work and when the R&D engineers came up to see Lena, Jess figured that she might as well listen in, so that she could anticipate needs and get balls rolling early and often.

//

"Kate, Ron, it's good to see you!" said Lena, and she meant it. Lena knew the first and last names of every single person who worked in the building because every Monday from three to four, Jess tested her on it. Every single week.

"Er, yes, Ms. Luthor. We're happy to have some good news to bring you." Ron always sounded nervous, like he expected to be strung up if the news was bad.

"Well, that makes two of us. Do you both have all the equipment and materials you need?"

"Yes, Ms. Luthor, thank you." That was Kate, a much more together person, a much more methodical engineer. "Although, actually, it was a lack of equipment that led us to this particularly effective iteration."

"Oh? Do tell?" Jess snorted. Normally Lena only used her Flirt Mode™ on Kara Danvers. This time it reduced Ron to stutters, but Kate was just fine. Jess wondered if Kate was a lesbian; she took a lot of Lena things in stride that made the straight boys uncomfortable.

"Well, we knew that you wanted a material that had the ductility of fabric, and we couldn't make that work. So then I thought, okay, what if we just can't? Can we at least achieve the quantum factor that you were going for, a material that might not be as soft as fabric when it's soft, but could still be as hard as we needed it to be when it was hard? Less like a fabric and more like a plastic."

"Go on," Lena purred.

"We think we have made something that could be very useful in medicinal applications. For prosthetics."

"Go on."

Two humans took deep breaths. Jess imagined that they gave each other nervous looks.

Kate began, "There are... aliens, a particular species we've been thinking about, although I imagine there are others. But the Vo'on species went through decades of ethnic cleansing on their planet. Unlike the dominant species there, the Vo'on have a head crest. It's not bone, it's closer to the cartilage in a human body, but even that isn't exact. The point is, the dominant species have a punishment for the Vo'on, if one gets caught committing a crime..."

Ron said, "But pretty much just being Vo'on is considered a crime on their world."

Jess was surprised by the vitriol in the man's voice. She had not thought him capable of such strong feeling.

"Well, yes," said Kate. "The thing is, once they have no crest, they basically no longer exist. It's sort of like castrating a human male, except everyone can see it. So they become refugees. Thousands, hundreds of thousands have come to Earth."

Lena tapped her pen against her desk. Jess knew that sound. It was one of Lena's thinking sounds.
"So," said the CEO, "you want to use the material to recreate the crest?"

Kate hurriedly explained. "This is much more than simply cultural plastic surgery. You know how humans mostly die from heart disease and cancer? Well, the Vo'on here on Earth, when they die? It's about 72% from infections to the brain. But we think this material could fix both problems in one go."

The pen tapped some more. "And how do you know about this particular problem?"

Kate quickly said, "Research, ma'am. You have always encouraged us to research non-typical applications for--"

"My boyfriend is dying. And he shouldn't be. Because it's not his damn fault what species he is!"

More pen tapping. "I like the idea. I have some experts I will need to consult, but I think it sounds viable. And even if we can only help a few dozen, it still seems worth doing."

"There are a least half a million Vo'on here on Earth. A lot in Canada, Scandinavia, Russia. They prefer cold climates." Ron's voice was almost too soft for Jess to hear.

"All right. Do you have what you need to make a prototype? We'll need to do the standard, well, I guess it's not human testing, but you know--the paperwork to justify testing on sentient creatures? And finding volunteers, and all that rigamarole?"

"Yes, ma'am! We can get started on those things right away!"

Ron's voice was ragged. "It won't be fast enough."

Lena said, "Ron, even if we can't save him, he will die knowing that his life might lead to saving more of his people from the same fate. But if we can get this going fast enough, use the loopholes in the aliens-are-not-humans laws to our advantage? We will fucking try."

//

Jess wiped her eyes. By the time Lena let the engineers out and gave Jess her lunch order, no one would have been able to tell that the PA was anything but strictly, emotionlessly professional.
Chapter Summary

Starting to fix 2.17 "Distant Sun." It may take some time to undo the damage and put Supergirl back at the heart of her own damn show, but we will make this happen. And by we, I mean the intergalactic flying pig. You're welcome.

Winn had watched the fight downtown unfold in real time on his screens, wincing every time Supergirl took a hit. When they got a good visual of the alien, Winn ran his species recognition software and discovered things he had really hoped not to know.

Not that he had hoped that. Because it hadn't occurred to him to hope that Supergirl would never be put in danger in this way. But if it had occurred to him, he would totally have--

"Agent Schott!" J'onn wasn't growling. Not... quite.

"Um, well, this guy, he's not just any rogue alien. He's from a race of alien bounty hunters called Amlax."

"Bounty hunters?" asked Alex.

"Yeah," said Winn, "When the DEO were interrogating your monocular best friend, they found this." He hit a button on the control panel. A tiny hologram of Supergirl with her hands on her hips appeared.

"Hey, that's me!" squealed Kara.

Everybody else looked very serious indeed.

"What is that?" asked Alex.

"It's an interplanetary messaging device," said Winn. "It accesses some shady alien dark-net for all your alien space needs."

"Is there a message?" asked Alex.

Winn hit a button. The computer said, "Name: Supergirl, the Last Daughter of Krypton. Location: National City, USA, Earth. Three hundred quartz crowns upon proof of death."

Alex asked, "How much is three hundred quartz crowns?"

J'onn said, "Enough to buy a planet."

Winn asked, "So, enough to buy a planet in a good neighborhood or like a hipster, up-and-coming kinda vibe?"

"For that kind of bounty, everybody in the universe will be coming to take their shot."

"Fine," said Kara, "I'll just take them out one by one."
Alex stopped her. "Hey, now wait. It's not that I doubt you, but it seems like a series of battles with interstellar bounty hunters doesn't seem good for public safety. I've already got agents from maintenance dealing with NC Parks and Rec over the damage this guy did. And you did. No judging, Supergirl, but..."

"Alex is right," said J'onn. "You should lay low until we figure out who is behind this."

"You want me to hide? I don't hide."

J'onn said, "When you have to go out there, we will be behind you. Just give us a day to try to get ahead of this thing."

"Fine. Okay. Twenty-four hours."

"Agent Schott, see if you can find any more of those things. Maybe we can find a way to stop those bounty hunters before they strike. Agent Danvers, run a database search for other species who might be using this network."

"Absolutely. Oh, I had plans, but never mind. I'll cancel."

"No," said Kara. "Don't cancel just to run a database search!"

Drily, J'onn said, "Those databases won't search themselves."

Winn said, "Actually, they will. I just have to write a program for it. And... I just signed up for more work, didn't I?"

//

James had mixed feelings about the DEO. On the one hand, he had assumed that being a hero would mean more ass-kicking and less studying about when it was appropriate to do the ass-kicking. On the other, the longer he spent with the other rookies who had stuck around, Riley Finn and Jill Holtzman, the more he felt like he might have finally found the place where he belonged.

But he was grateful to be spending the time with them in National City, since it meant he could spend more time with Winn and Kara and the rest of the Superfriends. He had missed game night with the girls, so when J'onn sent him off to keep an eye on Kara, he was happy to go.

But Kara was a wreck, wanting to get out there and do the hero thing, and James couldn't entirely blame her.

"Grr!" she said, "I hate this!"

"What? The game?"

"No! I love this game! I hate being stuck inside!" She pointed to the TV. "Look! I could be there and back so fast!"

"No, no!" said Winn. "J'onn said you can't go anywhere as Supergirl."

"We shouldn't even let you watch the news," said James.

"I will be back before I miss my turn!"

"No, no. We can't let you do that."
There was a knock on the door. Kara looked up. "Vasquez?" She ran to let her in.

"Hey, kiddo. Alex sent me over to help."

"Help keep me from flying off the handle?"

"Or out the window. Either way." She shook a white paper bag. "Shumai...."

"Huh? What's that?"

"They're like gyoza, potstickers, just a different shape. You're gonna loooove them."

Kara frowned. "Is this a bribe?"

"Yup. Uh huh. Yes. Absolutely. But once you taste these, you will totally forgive me." She went to the refrigerator and took out a beer. She tried twisting the top off, but it refused to let her.

"On the fridge," said Winn, and Vasquez reached for the ASPCA bottle opener magnetized to the freezer door but then dropped the beer. It shattered on the kitchen floor.

"I'm sorry, I don't know what happened," said Vasquez. She leaned over to pick up the glass. "Ah, I can't move."

They stared at her, Kara half-smiling as if this were a joke. Suddenly Vasquez sprang upright, eyes wide, worried. Then she dove toward Kara, grabbed her, and vaulted out the window with her, leaving shattered glass in their wake.

//

Kara flew them down to the parking lot, knowing that Vasquez would be very badly hurt if she didn't. She softened the other woman's fall and immediately jumped back.

"Vasquez! What are you doing?"

"I'm sorry! It's not me! I would never--" But then she sent a punch that Kara easily blocked and a sidekick that Kara avoided. "I'm not in control of my body!"

Kara avoided the next two punches, but her instinct took over and she kicked Vasquez in the stomach. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean--"

"It's okay! I deserved that!"

Kara put her in a headlock. "Just focus and try to fight it!"

"Don't let go!" yelled Vasquez. "If I hurt you, Alex will kill me."

"And you think she won't kill me if I hurt you?"

Vasquez broke free. "I'm sorry!" She aimed a punch at Kara, but a wire snaked around her wrist and dragged her across the parking lot. Guardian.

"I'm sorry, too," Guardian rasped.

Vasquez broke free of the wire and hurtled back toward Kara, just as her body got her own authority back. Kara punched her in the nose, spraying blood everywhere, and Vasquez landed on her back, throwing up her hands and yelling, "It's me! It's me! I'm back!"
"Oh!" said Kara. "I'm SO sorry!"

//

It wasn't often that Winn "Little Plaid (not Red) Shirt" Schott got to save the day. But today was one of those days. They put the bald bounty hunter into a DEO containment cell, and sorted out what had just happened.

"So Creepy McGee here got inside of Vasquez's head," said Winn. "And thought he could use her to kill Supergirl."

Supergirl asked, "Who put the bounty out on me?"

The man half smiled and refused to answer.

"He knows," said Alex. "You can tell."

He said, "I'm the most powerful telepath in the Alcorian system. I know more than you can imagine."

"Yeah," said Winn. "Except for the difference between a gun and a stapler."

"You'll never get me to talk. You humans are too moral to do what's necessary to penetrate my mind."

"Winn," said Alex. "Get me a wrench."

"Oh, yeah," said Winn and went to his toolbox.

Alex stepped forward as Winn handed her his eighteen-inch wrench. The telepath blinked.

J'onn came striding into the room. "Alex! Stand down. You know how much maintenance complains about getting the blood off the tungsten carbide walls." He stepped forward, with his hands behind his back and stared into the bald man's eyes. J'onn's eyes glowed a hard red and the man's eyes glowed a pale blue. Underneath the bald head, it looked as if the man's brain was trying to run away from the force of J'onn's stare.

Finally the man collapsed on the floor, vomiting. He gasped out, "Koku'ria Delu Taaran."

J'onn frowned. "The Taaran crime syndicate. From your galaxy, Supergirl."

The man fought for breath. "Most of the Fort Roz prisoners were members. They practically owned this planet. When your DEO changed a few years ago, started to protect aliens rather than just capture or kill them, it started to get harder to recruit here. Less resentment meant less crime, which meant less profit for the syndicate. Then, when she launched Fort Roz back into space, half of them died."

Supergirl's face went white. Alex quickly moved to put her arm around her sister's shoulders

"The prison's life support didn't take the pressure of space after the damage it sustained when it fell to Earth. A nearby ship rescued most of them, but not all. It took a while to find out who was to blame for the deaths. Taaran Qi didn't care about most of them; they were non-things. But his, you would say son, I think, or heir. That is a different story. So now he wants revenge."

//
The team wandered back the command center, grim and nervous.

"We need to retaliate," said Alex, still holding on to Winn's wrench. "If we hit them back we can force them to retract the bounty."

"How can we do that if we don't know where to find them?" asked Winn.

J'onn said, "We're going to need to work with NCPD on this one. That art ring we helped them break up was almost certainly a part of the syndicate. If we can interrogate some of those prisoners, we might get a lead on where the syndicate's bases are. If we can do that, then Alex's plan has some merit. Alex, contact Detective Sawyer and see what she can tell us."

Supergirl said, "But didn't the President tell you the DEO can't take any action that will cause an intergalactic war?"

"Yes, she did," said J'onn. "But she said nothing about this country's police departments deterring and punishing criminals on sovereign American soil. And if those metro police departments happen to need consultancy from the FBI or other federal agencies? Well, we are always here to help them. In the meantime, we will keep Supergirl safe."
The Need for Coordination

Chapter Summary

More fixing of 2.17.

Chapter Notes

We have a few weeks until 2.18. If you have prompts that I can work into this subplot, send them through your comments.

Detective Maggie Sawyer was nervous. Coordinating strikes on the home bases of an alien criminal syndicate in fourteen American cities, Vancouver and London, working with the DEO and their international counterparts, and liaising with each city's resident superhero had been a jurisdictional and communication nightmare. Doing all of that without leaking word of the simultaneous strikes across six different time zones in three nations had been almost impossible. So when she spoke in her comm and counted down for the sixteen strike teams, she could be forgiven, she hoped, if her voice shook.

"On my mark. Three. Two. One. Go!"

Black-clad DEO agents and National City Science Division cops swarmed her city's warehouse district (because, duh) on the ground, rained down from Blackhaws in the sky. Lasers melted holes in concrete walls, explosions sent humans and aliens flying. There was gunpowder and ashes, rust and broken tarmac, broken bodies and blood in nine different colors.

And after a battle that lasted exactly forty-two minutes and nineteen seconds, they had destroyed the base, killed twelve aliens and arrested almost two hundred more. They confiscated half a million dollars worth of illegal alien drugs, twelve million in stolen art, and an uncountable (at least in the field) amount of alien weaponry, enough to take out the entire city. They found evidence of multiple terror plots against Supergirl, against the governor, against L-Corp and Lord Technologies.

And they found evidence that Sal Meinsen, Superintendant of the NCPD was in on all of it over his head.

And that was just National City. The numbers and the damage in Metropolis, Opal City, and Gotham were even larger. (And Gotham being Gotham, the evidence of corruption all the way up the ladder of the police department and the municipal government was astronomically greater, to no one's surprise.)

The NCPD had only lost one man. Overall, the losses to the white hats were low, especially the DEO across the country. But to the crime syndicate it had been, as Hamlet would have said, a very palpable hit.

The paperwork was a nightmare. The whole operation was causing the department's overtime
budget to hemorrhage. But that wasn't why Detective Maggie Sawyer was still, after it was all over but the shouting, nervous.

She stood in her apartment, tying the black necktie and buttoning the blue jacket of her dress uniform. Her hair was neatly pinned in a bun at the nape of her neck. She looked great. And she was a total bundle of nerves. When her doorbell rang, she leaped into the air and landed, grabbing for her Glock.

Of course, when she looked out the peephole, she saw Major Lucy Lane, dressed very similarly. She opened the door, trying to hide the gun behind her back.

Lucy winked. "I do love a lady in uniform! But hey, don't shoot me!"

"It's ironic that the dress uniform doesn't actually include a holster."

"Trust me, I've noticed that too. Are you ready to go?"

"Physically or psychologically?"

"C'mon, cowboy. Your presence is requested, remember?"

Lucy drove her little black Prius as if she were driving a sports car and Maggie just loved to watch her normally, but now she was just too damn nervous.

"Lu, what about backlash? Criminals don't take this shit lying down."

"Honey, we will burn that particular bridge when we come to it. Today we celebrate. Tomorrow we can hunker down and strategize. Loosen up."

"I don't loosen, Lane. You should know that about me if we're going to--"

Lucy didn't ask her to finish her sentence, didn't tease her. Instead, she pulled into the parking garage behind city hall, where a DEO agent took her keys so they could go to the huge outdoor courtyard where the ceremony was taking place.

The stage built out on the stairs of City Hall was crowded, but the number of spectators filling the hundreds of folding chairs in the immense courtyard was astounding. Maggie and Lucy sat in the front row, along with Captain Tilden and Hank Henshaw. Another chair was reserved for Supergirl. Maggie turned to Henshaw.

"Where is she?"

"Up there, keeping watch until the last moment. Making sure we don't end up with a counterattack on our hands."

"Makes sense."

"Also, I think she just really, really likes making an entrance."

He looked very serious, but there was a twinkle in his eye. Maggie hadn't realized that the man could make a joke. Or maybe it wasn't really a joke. Supergirl did seem to have a flair for the dramatic. Probably it was the cape.

And just as the mayor stepped up to the microphone, a blur of blue and red swooped down, and Supergirl took her seat, absently sliding the "Reserved for Supergirl" card into her boot.
The speeches went on forever, but eventually the men and women in the front row stood up to receive their medals, The Order of California. The wide ribbon that the mayor settled over their heads was striped red, green, white, gold and blue. The shield was blue on top, with red and white stripes below, and the California bear walking on all fours over the place where the colors met up. More speeches. An absolute and unexpected lack of anything blowing up.

And after it was all over (including the shouting), they all went back to the alien bar (including a bemused Captain Tilden), wearing their medals, and getting free drinks all night.

And after Lucy and Maggie went back to Maggie's place, Lucy made sure that Maggie understood that Maggie could, in fact, loosen up under the right circumstances.
Hunkering Down

Chapter Summary

Vasquez helps Kara deal with her guilt.

Agent Vasquez hadn't been on duty during the strike because of her broken nose, and she blamed herself for the death of the NCPD cop, because if she had been there, she wouldn't have died.

She hadn't been on duty at the ceremony. She sat in the back of the dias with Alex to watch their colleagues get the fancy medals, to watch Supergirl who was indestructible get a medal pretty much just for showing up, to watch J'onn get a medal for directing the op from the safe confines of the DEO command center, while Maggie Sawyer (who deserved her medal) and Alex Danvers (who hadn't been offered one) directed the op on the ground, put themselves in the line of fire--and when lasers were going off, the line of fire was a very literal description of what was actually happening. And if anything had happened to Alex Danvers, Agent Vasquez would never have forgiven herself.

Because it would have been her fault. If she had been able to control herself, to throw off the telepathic alien's little brain-rape kill-the-superhero nonsense, she wouldn't have gotten her nose broken, and she would have been on duty to protect Alex, to protect the cops, to limit the collateral damage.

So after the medal ceremony, Vasquez hadn't gone with them back to the alien bar. She'd gone back to the DEO and taped up her hands and attacked the heavy bag.

And that's where Kara found her. Kara, not Supergirl.

Vasquez looked up when Kara wandered in. She knew she looked horrible, with the tape across her nose, the black eyes that Alex had tried to cover with makeup. The sweat pouring off her now undoubtedly was smearing that and making an even bigger mess on her face. She didn't care.

"What the hell are you doing here, Supergirl?" she asked harshly. "Shouldn't you be off getting a hero's reward from your people?"

Kara shook her head and leaned against the wall, watching Vasquez beat up the bag. She was wearing a blue polka dot shirt and blue slacks, brown tie shoes, a little brown belt. She didn't look like the grandstanding hero of the ceremony. She slid down the wall to sit on the floor and held her knees tightly to her chest. "I heard you," she said. "So I came."

"You heard me."

"Your heartbeat. And the things you were saying."

Vasquez stared. "You heard my heartbeat?"

Kara nodded sadly. "They're like fingerprints. I memorize the people I care about, so I can find them fast in an emergency."

"And you care about me?" Vasquez asked in disbelief.
Kara just nodded.
"Because I'm in a relationship with your sister."

"Oh, that too. But mostly just because you've always loved her. I could see that the first time I was brought to the DEO. So I memorized you."

Vasquez went to hit the bag again, but kept just looking at Kara. "So why aren't you at the alien bar with the rest of them?"

"Because you're right about me and Alex. She deserved the medal they gave me. I don't. And I tried arguing with the mayor and J'onn, but they said that I was better press and anyway it's better, safer for Alex if she gets to keep her anonymity."

Vasquez came over and sat down next to Supergirl. She wiped her face with the hem of her black tank top and sure enough, the beige concealer came off on it. "At least they were honest about their reasons. I guess it's not your fault."

"I hung it in her locker here."

"She won't keep it."

"She won't have a choice."

Vasquez smiled. "Yeah, I think I'm going to bet on you this time, Kara. She can't face your pout, I know that."

Kara gave her small smile and then looked... broken again.

"So you just came to tell me that?"

"No, I came to be with you. Because I think you're the only one who can understand."

"Understand what?"

"The guilt."

"You mean about the cop who died?"

"No. Well, yes, that, there's always that, isn't there? The one you can't save, or the one who has your back and dies because of it? But I was thinking about Fort Roz. All the criminals who died when I threw it into space. It never occurred to me that it could have been anything except safe. And I killed them."

Vasquez saw the tears standing in her eyes, unshed, perhaps unsheddable just yet. "Yeah, and we killed twelve more in the op. From what I could tell, all but one was killed by NCPD. And when I find out which DEO agent chose to use deadly force, they are going back the desert with the rookies to retrain."

Kara leaned her head against Vasquez's shoulder. "J'onn said, you know, well, they were criminals. But on Krypton, we didn't kill criminals. My mother used to argue against the people who wanted to... but then she was okay with my father creating a bio-weapon against non-Kryptonians, so I don't know what to think about her anymore. But I'm certain it's wrong. Alex said, well, I couldn't have known about the damage to the ship, but I didn't want to know. I didn't examine it. It seemed impossible that something as meager as striking Earth could damage Kryptonian technology. And
that is just arrogance on my part. Kryptonian arrogance. Rao, forgive me."

Vasquez put her arm around Kara. "Is Rao your sun or your god?"

"Both, really, the way humans think about it. Like Apollo, except much kinder and he doesn't, you

know, sleep around like your Greek gods do."

"Does he forgive?"

"Sometimes. Do you believe in your Earth God?"

"Sometimes. I grew up believing, and then when I came out in high school, sometimes people

would throw that Christian homophobic shit at me, and I just stopped, you know? But when I was

training with the DEO and it was twelve hours a day and I had to come to terms with a universe

that contained all those planets and all those civilizations... Somehow when I didn't know about

that, I could imagine that Earth was an anomaly. That evolution just happened on its own, that

humans were a rare parasite in a dead universe..."

Kara picked her head up and looked at Vasquez. "That's a sad way of thinking about your people's

existence."

"Fighting insurgents in the desert doesn't exactly make you an optimist. Off and on again, I would

believe, because it was terrifying. And when it's terrifying you want to believe somebody is going

to protect you. But it wasn't until I saw real aliens for the first time, when they attacked our convoy

and I had to admit they were real, and then I was almost killed, and Med-Evaced back to Germany

to recover, and I had a lot of time to think, you know?"

"I know when I solar flare, I get... Alex calls it philosophical."

"Yeah, injury, pain, it can do that to you. Anyway, while I was recovering, they had me on desk

duty in Germany, coming up with tactical scenarios for dealing with the aliens. And when I had to

decide whether to sign up for another tour or not, your cousin paid me a visit."

Kara stared, "Kal visited you in Germany?"

"J'onn sent him. He has... people... in the different branches of the military who recommend people

for work in the DEO. And this one had been there when I was first brought in. He was the base

chaplain, and he heard me screaming and later he came to talk to me and heard what I thought I

knew about aliens, how they were all evil and the universe was an evil place or-- I was in a lot of

pain and later I was on some interesting drugs. Anyway, he recommended J'onn to get Superman to

come see me. He stayed for two days, just answering my questions about other worlds. Of course, I

didn't know at that point that he was answering based on his reading, not from knowing himself.

But he described beautiful, peaceful worlds."

"And that made you believe in God?"

"No, that took longer. I'll tell you about that someday too. But it did make me decide to join the

DEO, to become somebody who could help make this world more peaceful. I've always believed in

the idea of America as a refuge for people who can't go home again. That's why I joined the

Marines in the first place, although that didn't always... Anyway, I just figured at the time, that if

there wasn't a god, then trying to help the world wouldn't hurt anything and if there was, then

maybe I could, I don't know, gain points to make up for the mistakes I've made, the people I've

killed."

"Do you think your god keeps score?" Kara asked curiously.
"I don't know. I just have to believe it evens out somehow. For me. For you. For all of us."

Vasquez started pealing the tape off her hands. Kara helped her.

"You don't have to--"

"Pfft. I do this for Alex all the time." When all the tape was off, Kara said, "Let's go get you cleaned up and then go collect Alex from the bar. Um, Vasquez?"

"Yes?"

"Are you going to sleep over at Alex's tonight?"

"I don't know. If she wants me to. Why?"

"Just, if you do, could I stay over too? I can sleep on her couch. It's really cozy. I, just, it would be really comforting to be able to hear your two heartbeats tonight..."

"Sure, kiddo. I'm sure she won't mind."

"And then I can make you guys breakfast tomorrow!"

Vasquez laughed. "Of which you will no doubt eat more than half!" But she didn't tease her more than that. Vasquez didn't know Kara very well, but she knew her well enough to know that for Kara, food meant love.
Kara's first day at work for Taste the Bern Magazine was easier than her long-ago first day working for Cat Grant and much easier than her less-long-ago first day working for Snapper Car, but then again, most jobs were easier than those.

Cassandra DeWitt was an easy going, slightly overweight woman with a short and wild platinum haircut that reminded Kara of Chef Anne Burrell, except the woman was actually wearing a green necktie with pies all over it, which Kara squealed to see, although she had promised herself not to be such a little nerd.

"I love pie!" she said, while shaking Ms. DeWitt's hand. Then she blushed furiously. "I mean, your tie. I love your tie, Ms. DeWitt!"

"Thanks, kid," the woman said, laughing. "I love my pie tie too. So let's start with the basics. You seem like you're okay with alien Americans. How are you with queer people?"

"Oh! I'm great! My sister is a lesbian and so is her girlfriend!"

"Well, that is often how it works. Great. That settles that. Now we do have a test for you and a few others of your peers who had their interviews earlier than you. I hope you're hungry."

"Always!"

"Yeah, that's what they all say."

Kara found it strange how jaded the woman sounded. Oh well. She'd soon see.

Ms. DeWitt led her to a room with five small tables, with four people--about half human and half alien to the naked eye, but Kara recognized that some of the apparent humans had cat eyes or pointed ears, so she felt oddly at home.

She sat at the last open spot, one of the tables at the back. She couldn't see who the people in front were, but she figured, she was here to eat, not rubberneck, so who cared?

(In the back of her mind, she still thought about the Fort Roz prisoners she had killed, the kindness of Vasquez, her and her sister's gratitude for the six a.m. pancakes and hot cocoa she had made for them (half of which she had in fact eaten) before zooming off to her job training. She had arrived at Bertinelli's building with an appetite anyway.)

The waitstaff came around with a small plate and a file card and a pen for each eater. They started with an appetizer. The card asked them to list the ingredients and the Super Ingredient. Kara grinned. "Hey, this is just like Iron Chef, except backwards! It's like Iron Tongue!"

Her tablemates, two humans and a Tellurite, rolled their eyes at each other. She ignored them. She couldn't help being enthusiastic.
The hors d'oeuvre had both sweet and savory components. With one amazing bite, Kara was scribbling on her file card, while the others at her table took more bites, finished their appetizer. All of them scribbled a few things down for ingredients but had no guess about the Super Ingredient. Kara wrote down in small letters (as she had learned in school from Alex to make sure no one copied from her): Kryptonian olive root. And where the heck had they sourced that?

The salad was trickier. They were definitely using alien ingredients along with Terran ones, but Kara didn't know the English words (if there were such things) for them, so she had to say things like "it's like the avocados they grow on Mexur Six" or "sort of the Daxamite version of cilantro."

The soup was harder. For some reason, Kara could never pick out ingredients when they had been so mixed together. So she had simply written, "tomatoes, cream, celery root, heart of palm, something salty."

The entrée was easy: beef tartare, baby spinach, Andorian potatoes, Martian dragonroot.

But dessert. Oh, dessert. Kara's tastebuds exploded in her mouth. Her mouth was orgasming and her hands barely remembered how to write. She managed to print in large letters: "human chocolit, Venduzian--you know, that stuff like cinnamon, but it's not, Quordian, whaddyacallit with the spiral flowers and the leaves that are like human mint and make everything cooler even if there is pepper in it that should make it taste warmer?"

The whole meal took two hours and when Kara left, her mouth was still buzzing with the familiar and unfamiliar tastes, tastes she had been eating every day for thirteen years, and tastes she had not had in her mouth since her world died.

She left and went straight to the DEO and went to the bag room. She changed into the workout gear that Alex and Vasquez had had made for her with what looked from a distance like the DEO logo, but when people came up close and looked at the two-inch logo over her heart, it actually said, "Department of Super Girl Operations" and the eagle wore the crest of the House of El on its chest.

She beat the bag into a pile of dust and then went to the Compensation Department and had them take the cost of (another) big bag out of her monthly stipend. When she went up to the command center, Winn and a still bruised and battered-looking Vasquez were bickering like siblings.

When they saw her, the fell silent. Winn asked, "So Supergirl, how'd it go?"

Kara grinned. "I think I'm gonna love this job."
Maggie Sawyer's partner told her she was wanted in Captain Tilden's office. When she got there, she saw him through his office window carefully packing his possessions into a cardboard box. He waved her into the office.

"Sir?"

"Moving on up, Detective, in no small part thanks to your recent good work. I've been promoted to Inspector."

"Sir. I mean, congratulations, sir."

He waved that away. "I know we haven't always gotten along..."

"Sir, it's just when I first started working here, you saw all aliens as enemies. But you changed."

"Again, in no small part thanks to you. But here's the thing, Detective, Maggie... My... replacement is more like me than than me now. So, on the one hand, I could say that you have your work cut out for you."

Maggie groaned softly.

"I know, Maggie. But he's... Well, the problem isn't the man who has been given my office. It's the people who gave it to him. Sal Meinsen is not a good man by anybody's reckoning. But he's not the only one. He's the only one who got caught this time..."

"Understood, sir."

"And because you were on point for his takedown..."

"Understood, sir."

"I know the DEO wants you."

"I'm NCPD all the way, sir. You know that."

"I do. And for now, that serves you. But there may come a time, and it may come soon, when your... connection with the DEO could become a liability. Mostly because the powers that be don't like that we work so well with them, given the results?"

"Understood."

"And they may, I would guess will, try to use that connection against you..."

"Because I'm gay?"
"Because the results fuck them up. But don't doubt they will use the gay card if they want to, if they think they need to."

Maggie nodded. She had considered that possibility before.

"Now, Detective, I've had DEO people sound me out about your interest in possibly joining them."

"Sir, I--"

"I know. Oh honey, I know how much of a cop you are. Pure copper through and through. But you might want to consider it before they attack you, before their smear campaign--and it is coming--makes my letter of recommendation useless. Rats are some of the smartest non-human Terrans on the planet."

(And Maggie thought how only three years before, Tilden would simply have said animals: how far he's come.)

"But even they jump ship, Sawyer. Please promise me you will be smarter than a little white rat."

"Yes, sir," Maggie said, with unexpected tears in her eyes. "I promise you that."

"Good girl," he muttered, also trying to hold back tears. He clapped his hand on her shoulder. "So do what you can here. Pass on the good copper ethic to the kids. Then, when you hear the sound of water in the hull? Jump."

He sniffed. "For yourself. And for me."

"Yes, sir. I promise."

"Excellent. You are dismissed."

Detective Maggie Sawyer left the precinct and went straight to her apartment. She changed out of her work clothes into a Metropolis University sweatshirt and yoga pants, and then pulled down the bottle of Johnny Walker Black she almost never drank from. Maggie was a beer girl. The had been drinking Dos Equis since she realized that they always drank it on The L Word and had figured out the deeply buried marketing joke of the double X genetics: Dos Equis equals girls. It always made her chuckle.

She wasn't chuckling now.

After two drinks, her downstairs door buzzed. She went to the buzzer and said, "Yes?"

"Sawyer, it's Lane. Can I come up?"

Maggie buzzed her in, thinking, of course, now when she needed somebody most, Lucy was going to get hauled back to the dessert and she would lose the one good thing--

The knock on her door almost made her weep, but Maggie was nothing if not strong. She opened the door, grinning. "And to what do I owe the honor of the most beautiful woman currently in National City knocking at my door?"

(Because even depressed as fuck, Maggie Sawyer had game, dammit.)

Lucy smiled softly, leaning in for a kiss. She sniffed. "Drinking already? It's barely eight o'clock."

"I got bad news."
"About your captain? I heard. Your partner called me."

"Rodriguez?"

"How many partners do you have, girl? Yes, Rodriguez. He saw you get called in to see your captain and he guessed that it went badly. Or that you took it badly. Or...?"

"Captain Tilden has been kicked upstairs, maybe because we did our job too well. And he warned me... He thinks I should jump ship, join the DEO before I get myself scandalized out of the NCPD."

"Is that a verb? Never mind. You could. You would be an amazing addition."

"I don't want to be a soldier. I want to be a cop."

Lucy nodded. "I get that. But you might be better able to be a cop with us than with a compromised police department."

"Yeah, maybe. But then you and I-- we couldn't be able to be... whatever the hell we are."

"No, not immediately. But there are other places you could do your training besides National City or Nevada, and after that..."

"There would still be fraternization rules."

"Yeah, well... You do know that Danvers and Vasquez are totally fucking each other, right?"

"Yes, but they're equals--"

"God, no, they're not. Alex is like six steps above Vasquez on the hierarchy even though Vasquez has seven or eight years of seniority over her. But they make it work, in part because J'onn has a very open mind, not only because he's telepathic, although I suspect that's part of it."

"Dammit, Lane, I am a COP!"

"No, Sawyer, you are a human being with over-the-top observational skills and an amazing command of criminal pathology and, oh, yeah, knowledge of xenobiology. Fuck, girl, you don't think that wouldn't make the DEO HR people drool? 'Cuz I'm pretty sure that would make them drool. And give you an offer. The kind of offer that has a compensation and benefits package that would make your financial advisor drool and point you in our direction."

"So your people do a lot to drooling, Lane? That's what I'm getting from you."

Lucy snorted. "Yes, Sawyer. We drool. Maybe if the NCPD did more drooling, they would be less corrupt. Ouch. Okay, I'm sorry, that wasn't cool. It's just, Winn has been looking into, well, since all of the--"

Maggie sighed. "No, I get it. I heard about Gotham, not that that was particularly surprising. I just thought National City was different."

Lucy sighed too. "Humans-- No, that's not fair. Sentient beings. They move toward their own benefit. Sometimes that includes values and a wide circle of ethical concern and sometimes it doesn't."

Maggie put her head down on her arms. It was all too much. "I don't know what to do."

Lucy said, softly, "Under other circumstances, Sawyer? I'd say do me. But I get where you are
right now, and I know that is totally not an appropriate response. So, just, if you want me to stay, and just, I don't know. I'm not much of a cuddler, but I do get where that can be something a person might need...

Maggie struggled for her words not to come out as a sob. "Stay, please?"

"Of course, sweetheart."

"Thank you."
Review, Redux, Reprise

Chapter Summary

Because the show's writers are on 2.17 and I am on 141: almost 170,000 words in like 47 days. And I needed to regroup and figure out what just happened.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Agent Alex Danvers was a badass soldier-scientist with a brain like a razor blade and a heart of pure mush folded into a casing of Spanish steel. All her schooling, all her training, and all her, well, Supersistering, really, had prepared her for the job she had: taking down the bad aliens, protecting the good aliens, and taking care of her little alien sister, who was not actually little at all.

She was also, as Willow Rosenberg might have said, kinda gay.

So she stood with her arms folded in the command center of the DEO wearing black tactical gear and a thigh holster like it was going out of style, her face blank and impossible to read as she watched Winn coding as fast as he could at his computer; as she watched J'onn give Lucy custody of the 197 alien prisoners to bring to her desert DEO base and argue that habeus corpus didn't apply when the prisoners were capable of burning a maximum security prison to the ground with their eyes; as she watched Agent Vasquez's mind work at almost Kara's superspeed as she typed away at her tablet, coming up with threat scenarios and strategies to meet them. And although her face was emotionless, Alex Danvers felt... warm. She loved her colleagues almost as much as she loved her sister. She loved her little brother, Winn; her Space Dad, J'onn; her practically a twin, Lucy; her lover?... girlfriend?... what was she allowed to call Vasquez?

And then Supergirl strode in, her red cape swirling behind her. Supergirl, Kara, Alex's hero, her little sister, her best friend.

The last few months had been trying. Alex had fallen for her new cop friend, figured out she was gay, got rejected, bounced back, mostly thanks to Supergirl, who then disappeared to another Earth in another dimension for like a WEEK, then returned completely clueless to the trouble she had caused.

Then Vasquez had softly padded into Alex's heart, slowly, like one approaches a deer to keep it from panicking and fleeing. Then Supergirl went missing again, but that time, they knew where and could bring her back, together. Because, yes, el mayarah, they were always stronger together.

And James left and Cat Grant came back. And Lucy and Maggie hooked up, and Alex still didn't know what to make of that particular detail, but she was trying to be happy for them because she had Vasquez, and Vasquez wore underwear that said Semper Fi, because she might be an ex-Marine, but she was also freaking ADORABLE.

And then that White Martian had taken Alex's form and said things to Kara that had made Alex finally, finally understand what Kara had gone through last year when the Red Kryptonite had taken away her inhibitions. And Alex still found herself scrubbing harder in the shower to try to get rid of those feelings.
And then Lillian Luthor had framed her own damn daughter, and Kara might be an oblivious little bean just as Maggie and Vasquez agreed, but at that point even she had realized that Lena meant more to her than anyone except maybe her own big sister. And if Alex's heart hadn't entirely stopped every time Kara went missing, in another dimension or on another planet, watching Mount Haystack explode in a bright green cloud of death came really damn close.

Compared to that, having an imp from the fifth dimension poison your brain so that you almost committed functional incest with your, erg, ew, no, nope, can't even think about that mess-- And then to be saved from it all by a Luthor--

And she still had nightmares about that spaceship, about Kara not being able to slow it down, push it back into the Earth's atmosphere, keep Alex from losing her forever into the endless reaches of space--

Or die shot by men who had only been alive inside Kara's mind?

Or, worse, end up with that nitwit from Daxam? And Alex still had nightmares where she had encouraged Kara to date the sleazy bastard because she felt so guilty about spending so much time with Vasquez and ignoring her own sister...

But Vasquez had her back. So that she could have Kara's back.

And if Alex wasn't mistaken, Vasquez also had spent some time talking to Kara after the latest news of Kara's, well, accidental alien serial killing (Alex didn't think of it that way, but she was pretty sure that Supergirl did). So Vasquez also had Kara's back. And Alex loved her for it.

And that was where things got complicated, because Alex had never loved anyone who wasn't more or less family. And suddenly Vasquez occupied this other category that wasn't exactly family, not Danvers family, and was more than the kind of family Alex enjoyed at the DEO. And she didn't have a word for it and didn't really know who to ask about a word for it.

And when the DEO-required trauma therapist heard her ramble about the last several months and asked, "So how do you feel about that?" Alex had simply stared at her.

Fuck. If she actually knew how she felt about all of this shit, she absolutely wouldn't be needing therapy.

Chapter End Notes

Send me prompts in the comments for things to add in during the next few weeks while we wait. Again. For more SG writer fother-muckery.
Lena's driver dropped her off in front of the green Victorian house with the gold shutters and gingerbread and she walked up to the front door carrying flowers and a bottle of expensive cognac. Before she had the chance to ring the bell, a thin red-haired woman pulled the door open and greeted her with a grin. The woman was wearing tennis whites and held a racket in her hand. "Well, if it isn't Lena ever-lovin' Luthor, talk about timing! I'm off and running late, but Millie's in the kitchen, no surprise, so just go right on through, she'll be pleased to see you, bye!"

Lena laughed at the whirlwind that was Millie Bernetti's wife, Audrey. She passed through an elegant nineteenth century dining room to find herself in a twenty-first century kitchen, all black granite and stainless steel.

Millie, blonde and a bit plumper than Audrey, stood whisking a small saucepot, looking vaguely annoyed, but she smiled when she saw Lena and turned out the flame on the stove. "Lena, I'm glad you could come. It's been too long."

They kissed each other's cheeks and Millie took the flowers and cognac, clearly pleased. "You didn't need to..."

Lena shrugged. "I've missed you, Millie. What brought you to National City?"

"Time for a change. Metropolis has gotten old and stale. Here, I can feed the hipsters. Besides, Audrey's from here." Millie pulled out a tasting spoon and dipped it into the cooling pot. "Here. Tell me what you think."

Lena let her put the spoon to her lips and sniffed before she tasted. "Cherry and... Very sweet. A dessert sauce?"

"No, dammit. It's for a starter, a bit of pheasant and cherry reduction. Fuck. I can't get it right today."

"Maybe something to cut the sweetness. A little red wine, or something salty?"

Millie shrugged and pulled out a wine bottle and two glasses, poured a little for each of them and used the spoon to measure a little of the wine into the sauce. "Worth a shot. Your other idea for me looks promising."

"My other idea?"

"Don't be coy. The writer. The Danvers girl. We had twenty recruits take a pro-level taste test and she did better than eighteen of them, most of whom were actually pros."

"Only eighteen?" asked Lena, sipping her wine with a smile.

"Number nineteen was a professional nose in the perfume industry for years, retired now, but
looking for something to do. So, Lena, how does your girl know so much about off-world ingredients?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say," murmured Lena demurely.

"Uh huh," said Millie, unconvinced, giving her a long look with those dark blue eyes. "Says the woman who invented and then scrapped an alien detection device."

Lena ignored her. "Was there a writing test as well?"

"She's doing that this week. We gave the eight who passed some example articles and sent them off to review restaurants each with a mentor, so they could eat and write reviews. Cassie DeWitt is taking on Danvers herself."

Lena nodded, impressed, but not terribly surprised. That was Kara, automatically magnetizing the best and most talented and experienced women and men to be her mentors and friends.

And lover, or whatever they were...

Millie said, "You two are a thing?"

"Yes."

"It seemed unlike you, to email about someone like this, so when I got your email in Paris, I just told Cassie to check her out. And she was... impressed. Cassie is hard to impress."

"Kara can be... impressive. Or, no, it's more like that she makes... an impression. Like a meteor falling to Earth..."

Millie studied her for a while, then whistled. "Damn, girl. You've got it bad. You planning on marrying her?"

"What? No, no! Of course not! Who would marry a Luthor? Don't be ridiculous."

"She'd be cute in a white tie and tails..."

"Millie!"

"I'm just sayin'... Okay, fine. Sorry, Luthor. Crossed a line there. Sorry. But, still... You seem, well, smitten..."

"She's special, you know? I met her for the first time when people were interviewing me about aliens and my device and the Amnesty Act and... she was different..."

"Didn't take the Evil Luthor Party Line?"

"Exactly. And when was the last time that happened?"

"You tell me."

"Um, never?"

Millie turned and opened the refrigerator, dug around and pulled out ingredients, vegetables, a piece of fresh salmon. From her cabinets she pulled pans and herbs and vinegar and olive oil and a tangerine. Then she stared at them and walked away. By the wide picture windows that looked out on a broad green garden, there were two chairs and an old wooden table with wood that had been
worn and sanded and oiled and well used and well loved. She came back and took their two glasses of wine, placed them on the table, took the flowers that she deposited into a vase she filled with water, took the bottle of cognac and two lowballs. All of these things ended on the table.

"C'mere, Luthor. Sit with me."

Lena, warily, shifted to the empty seat at the window. Millie poured a small amount of cognac into the two smaller glasses, picked up hers and raised it, as in a toast. Lena picked up her glass.

Millie swirled the glass, letting the afternoon light turn the amber liquid to a kind of molten gold. "You know, my parents were a lot like the Luthors, right? Just Catholic, which I get from your mother's point of view meant that we weren't even on the same planet?"

Lena's eyes widened. "No..."

"Yeah, my dad made money in business and his dad had made money in business, and nobody ever said anything while I was growing up, because that would have been coarse or nouveau or something, but there was money underlying my youth that I had no idea about. So in junior high, when I started cooking and baking in earnest, well, it was about this chick in my girl scout troop, and of course I was completely clueless, but I guess my parents and my siblings weren't. And gradually, it was like we kept getting less and less Catholic and I didn't know why. My mom complained about their rejecting women priests. My dad complained about how rejecting contraceptives meant requiring abortions, and all of that made sense to me, I guess, while also being completely meaningless, since I didn't see the point of boys and why would I want to be a priest? Priests don't cook!"

Lena smiled, and swirled her cognac but didn't sip.

Millie said, "Thing is, my grandmother wanted me to marry well. Whatever the hell that meant. So by the time I got to college and had figured out the whole lesbian thing, I just assumed nobody knew, right?"

Lena nodded, "As if that ever works these days."

"So then my parents fought with her and she disinherited them because of me--my grandpa was dead by then, so she could. And my parents sent me to study cooking in France. And one of my teachers was an alien, a Vo'on, if you know what that means?"

"I do."

"He was dying of a brain infection. They--"

"I know how that happens. Ethnic cleansing."

"Yeah. But he was a genius, taught me how to use all these off-world ingredients that are seriously, um, well, yeah--out of this world. And I took copious notes, because it was clear that I would probably never meet anyone like this again after he died. And when he died, he left me his cookbooks, his notebooks, all of his experiments, all of his contacts who got him the off-world ingredients..."

"Millie? I'm not sure why you are suddenly telling me this..."

"Honey-pie, I've been hearing things about L-Corp--" She saw Lena bridle and immediately put her hand on her arm. "Good things, hon. Things about your philanthropic plans. That maybe an alien medical clinic might be on the roster?"
Lena opened her mouth and closed it again. "How?"

"Hon, I own restaurants where people with too much money like to talk to each other. And I employ aliens, many of whom can pass quite easily as human but who might have really good hearing and really good memories... It adds up. I eventually hear things that are going on or might be about to be going on... You see what I mean."

Lena processed this, going gradually stiffer as she worked through the implications. "Okay. What do you want?" she asked harshly.

Millie stared. Then she looked out the window on the garden. "You know, Audrey loves to garden. She loves being out there in the mud and the green things? I hate being dirty. It's probably left over from my chef training where you are always washing your hands, you know? But her planet was all about growing things, and the different species there were all good at growing different kinds of things until the Daxamites and other species came to colonize..."

"Wait, Audrey is a Xa'er-Entrite?"

Millie's eyes shot up to Lena's. "You know of them?"

"My brother did his homework, and left notes behind..." Her voice was glum.

"So... Yeah. That is the main reason why I employ so many aliens. I would like to think I would have anyway, but you know how it is, until it really, really matters, we're all fairly shitty allies. But I fell madly and deeply, so here I am. And I've just known too many aliens who have died in the last twenty years since we've been together simply because nobody knows all the different alien biologies. I know that queer folks don't like to hear us compare the alien medical crisis to the AIDS crisis, but the comparison is actually quite apt."

"I haven't seen..."

"Honey, forgive me, but a Luthor would never be allowed to see the pain. The community as a whole assumes that you are down with their pain--"

"I'm NOT--"

"Sweetie, I know that. They... assume that they don't. We believe what we want to believe until someone proves otherwise. But here's the thing. How are you going to raise the money for this place? Because Audrey and I, we will want to be a part of this."

Lena tossed back her cognac, swallowed, looked out into the garden. Millie refilled her glass a bit deeper than before. Lena sipped more slowly. "You know," she said, "I have had a bit of an idea... And maybe you are the exactly right person to help me figure out how to do this..."
Kara was excited. Lena had asked her to be her date for the L-Corp Patent Appreciation Night, the second annual celebration of the company's geniuses and their discoveries and inventions. But she was also really, really nervous.

Kara had been so nervous that she had asked not only her sister and her sister's girlfriend but also her other (queer) friends, Lucy Lane and Maggie Sawyer, to help her figure out what to wear.

"I mean she is so, so girlie--"

"High femme," said Lucy while she flicked through her phone messages.

"So I have to be girlie too, right?"

Maggie laughed. "Not if you don't want to be. I mean, we don't have time to get you a bespoke suit from Kippers, but surely we can let you dress in a butch-like way if that is what you really want, Kara. But I had always assumed that you were more of a chick-chick...."

"I wear dresses!" Kara yelped at Alex, who said, "Hon, it's okay. I am 97% sure that Maggie is messing with you. And I am a 120% sure that whether you walk in wearing a sleeveless dress or a Victorian librarian's dress, or a hipster guy's suit, or a burlap bag, Lena will not, pardon my French, even fucking notice. Because all she will see is Kara, and she will be wanting--ew, awkward for me but, well, yeah, great for you--to well, ick, get kinda naked. Let's never speak of this again!"

Kara blinked a few time before she put her sister's explicit content together with her implied content, and it all kind of actually registered. "Um, and that's... a good thing... right?"

Without looking up Lucy snickered, "Yeah, Kara, it's a good thing."

Maggie was kinder, which didn't surprise anybody. "Little Danvers, how do you feel when you're with her? Really feminine? Really masculine? Really in the middle?"

Kara scrunched her eyes shut.

(Four humans thought, "Crinkle!")

"When I'm Supergirl," she said slowly, "I guess I feel sort of masculine. I mean, I tend to carry her across the city in my arms after she's been in danger, and that is so hot."

Alex snapped, "Kara!"

"Er, right! Sorry... But when I bring her lunch, because she is such a workaholic and sometimes she just forgets to eat meals if I don't, or Jess, her assistant, doesn't, you know, remind her..."

Vasquez ran her hand through Alex's hair, and Kara wished she could do that with Lena. She
thought she totally could do that with Lena, given some of the other... interesting things they had done together. It was just that Lena made her so self-conscious.

Vasquez offered, "And you feel like feeding her is a feminine thing? Like maternal?"

"No! Or maybe! I don't know!"

Alex asked, "If you wore a dress and she wore a better dress, how would you feel?"

"Like she makes more money than me, because she does?"

Maggie smiled. "Yes, but would that be a problem for you, for your ego?"

Kara was flustered. "She's a CEO of a multi-million dollar global corporation. I am a rookie reporter..."

Alex added quietly, "Who apparently has icon status in the world of personal assistants because of your work for Cat Grant..."

"Icon? No! Pfft! Of course not!"

"Fine," said Alex. "Believe me or not. But you can't deny that Supergirl is kinda hot. She is totally a lesbian icon. Maggie, Vasquez, back me up on this..."

The two women who thought Alexandra Danvers was completely hot caught each other's eyes and looked away.

"Yes."

"Yup."

Lucy's grey eyes caught theirs. She snorted and said, "Maggie's right. At some point, we should probably get you a suit. But for tonight, wear a dress. Sleeveless is a good look on you, since people will notice your muscles and forget that the dress isn't Vera Wang or whatever."

“What? No! What?"

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The venue was enormous. Lena had told her that L-Corp employees were coming in from other American cities and around the world, but somehow Kara hadn’t wrapped her little Kryptonian brain around the enormity of it. Or maybe she just hadn’t realized, when Lena said “all the patents that L-Corp teams had achieved this year” that “all” meant about ninety rather than five and that a team could have at least a dozen engineers in it, rather than two or three.

She had known it was being held in the National City Convention Center, but she had assumed that was because the L-Corp lobby, where Lena had held the gala for the children’s hospital, was still under reconstruction to repair the damage that Cyborg Superman had caused, not because there was no way that it would hold so many employees and their significant others. She also hadn’t realized how many aliens L-Corp employed, and how much they would appreciate that all four caterers were also aliens and were offering, at each of the four corners of the enormous room, both Earth and alien delicacies.

Standing in the middle of a crowd of overdressed engineers and their significant others, Kara fell a little more in love with Lena Luthor, if that was even possible.
She turned to see Lena shining. People always said that Kara’s smile was like the sun, but honestly, Lena’s smile really did make Kara feel like she felt under the DEO’s sunlamps: rejuvenated and strengthened as well as warmed. And Lena in a dark green dress that brought out her eyes? Kara adjusted her glasses.

She grinned back at her friend. "Lena! This is amazing! And the caterers! Please tell me you didn't hire them just so that the magazine would make me write about them..."

"Don't be silly, Kara. When you've had the pickled magrah from Jupiter's Feast, you will know exactly why I asked them to be one of the caterers. And anyway, changing L-Corp had to happen at all levels, from actively recruiting aliens to work for us, to hiring them to do other things that the company needs. But yes, get going on that writing thing because once the program starts, I'm going to want you by my side. If that's okay?"

Kara grinned. "Of course it's okay. I said I would come with you!"

Lena shook her head in disbelief. "But I know you're not entirely out yet, and I didn't want to--"

"Is this about the Luthor thing again? Because you know where you can stuff that."

"Kara!"

"Lena!"

And Lena laughed and it was like the sun came out from behind a cloud. Oh Rao! thought Kara. Maggie was right. She really had it bad.

//

Lena had started the patent appreciation night the year before, in an effort to build collegiality at L-Corp, show the employees how much they and their innovations were valued. And she held it two or three weeks before the shareholders meeting, since the celebration generated good PR for L-Corp and put people in a good mood.

She had thought to use alien caterers last year, but hadn't had the guts to go through with it, to her shame. But after her talk with Millie Bernetti, and Millie's promise to use Kara's familiarity with alien cuisine in her magazine, the whole thing seemed like a no-brainer.

As Kara went off to sample the food and type notes about it on her phone (and no doubt charm the caterers), Lena found Jess, who gave her a tablet with the information to introduce the engineers and explain their innovations. Wisely, Jess had suggested starting with the chemistry patents, when everyone in the room was wide awake and sober, and moving into the more intuitive things like mechanical engineering and robotics at the end of the night, when people were fuzzier.

And after all the presentations, Lena went around with Jess and Kara in her wake, greeting everyone and their plus-ones by name, mainly to prove that she could, that she cared, and she loved watching their surprise that the CEO actually knew who they were because when Lex ran the company, he had never bothered, and to be frank, how many CEOs actually knew the rank and file? But Lena had a photographic memory, so she figured, why not use it? Names were important. People needed to know that they were known and valued.

And, if she was being totally honest with herself (and she was certain that Jess knew her dark secret), she had to admit that having Kara there, realizing how much Lena cared about her
employees, was a very large incentive to show off in this way.

Lena looked up at the L-Corp logo spinning on the large computer screen at the front of the room and grinned.

She was totally getting laid tonight.
Kara opened the door of the towncar for Lena, yawning. Lena got in first and Kara followed and the moment she shut the door and Lena told the driver to go to the penthouse, Lena immediately took off the four-inch heels she had been wearing and started to rub her feet. Immediately, Kara said, "Here, let me."

Lena made small noises in her throat as Kara rubbed first one foot and then the other. The driver hit the button that raised the privacy window between the front and back seats, and Kara laughed and Lena blushed, and when they got to Lena's condo, she groaned as she slipped the evil shoes back on and thanked the driver and they took the elevator up to the penthouse.

As Lena placed her hand on the bio-sensor and then unlocked the door with her key, Kara asked, "So I assume you're working your usual half Saturday tomorrow?"

"God, no," said Lena. "Not after all that. I give myself and Jess the day off after an event. What about you? Do you have plans for tomorrow?"

Kara could hear the careful carelessness of the question, could tell that her answer might really matter to Lena, even though she was pretending it totally didn't.

"I was going to take tomorrow off, actually, barring some kind of world-saving necessity..."

"So we could maybe just spend a quiet day together?"

"Sure. I hope so. I mean, you know what National City is like: the moment we let down our guard, a group of evil Cadmus agents--"

"And my mother."

"No, Lena, I didn't mean that--"

"Sweet, sweet Kara. It's all right. I know what she is, what she does. I've dealt with my denial about it. She is like my brother, just with a lot more hair and on subtler steroids."

"Lena..."

"But that doesn't mean I can't have my way with my girlfriend and then hopefully get through the paper's crossword puzzle with you tomorrow before all hell breaks loose due to my relatives."

Kara sighed, then perked up. "Have your way with me?"

Lena grinned. "You noticed that, did you?"

//

For Kara, sex with Lena was always a revelation. So far they had been very, very careful. Kara
always made sure Lena got what she needed and then, when Lena fell asleep, Kara took care of herself. They had talked about it, briefly, just the one time, and Kara had made it clear how nervous she was about possibly losing control and potentially hurting Lena. So Lena wasn't happy about it, but they didn't really have an alternative.

And then Kara had asked Vasquez to come over to her apartment to talk about "some difficult things." And Vasquez had said, “Ah. Is this about Lena and you?”

“I, er, yes?”

Kara was so relieved that she didn't actually have to explain to Vasquez why she needed to dull her powers that she nearly ended up in tears.

Vasquez had come over with a lead-lined briefcase that held a chip of the green Kryptonite that they used in the workout room where Alex and Kara sparred, but the moment she opened the case, Kara felt ill. Vasquez simply closed the case again and went to the bathroom and came back when Kara had pulled herself together again. Kara was wiping her eyes and putting her glasses back on when Vasquez returned.

“I'll talk to Winn about a containment method. Well, let’s try Plan B.” She had brought the specs for the red sunlight that they were still working out based on Maxwell Lord's pink Kryptonite project. They talked about how strong the light would have to be and whether that would potentially overheat the room. Throughout the conversation, Vasquez was serious and nonjudgmental, confident that they could come up with a solution.

"Thanks, Susan," Kara said shyly.

Vasquez waved that away. "Kiddo, I can't say that I didn't see this coming. I had, when I first posited this scenario, originally assumed that the person would be a male, but..."

"Oh, yeah. But life is... surprising, isn't it?"

"Some people just take longer than others to get to the surprising bits."

//

Kara wasn't used to sweating. She could fight off aliens, chase and be chased by heat-seeking missiles, and even have a fire-throwing alien throw fire at her and she could throw her freeze-breath at it and maintain, well, honestly, her cool.

But when Lena Luthor started to take off her very femme clothes and reveal her very femme underwear, Kara Danvers just did not know how to react. Because, let's be honest:

aertyopghjkil567890.

Lena said, "Kara, you look fairly..."

"Shook?"

Lena laughed. "But we've been intimate together before. So what's the problem?"

Kara rambled. "Well, I’ve been watching you all evening and I mean you were so beautiful, and obviously, you’re always beautiful, with your jaw and your neck and your eyes, I’m still trying to figure out the exact right word for green that your eyes are, because, wow, right? And let’s face it, watching you work a room like that is sort of foreplay.”
Lena laughed.

“See? Then you do that, you laugh and I just, I can’t, I can’t focus, it’s like a brook in a forest, your laugh, and then you have that green dress that brings out your eyes, and then suddenly, you don’t, and I can’t, because I want, and your skin, and then—”

“And then…” Lena purred, with that evil grin.

“And then…” Lena purred, with that evil grin.

“See? You do that on purpose! How am I supposed to keep it together when you are doing that?”

“Doing what?” The smile was a deliberate tease.

Kara took a deep breath. Quietly she said, “Making me incoherent?”

Lena took pity on her and stepped forward to give her a hug, but the fact that she was wearing only black lacy underwear undermined her effort. Once Kara’s hands were on her smooth cool skin, she started shaking and rambling again.

“See, this is exactly what I was talking about, when you do that, and you are this, and it’s just, I never thought I’d, but then you, and I want to, well, and we did, you’re right, we’ve done this before—“

“Kara…”

“And that was great! I really love y—doing that with you and it makes me feel, like, all the things, all at once but, I don’t know—“

“Kara…”

“And I talked to Vasquez about a way to tone down my powers because I couldn’t bear it if I hurt you, and she’s working on it, so we can—“

“Kara. Stop. Look at me. Look me in the eyes, love.”

Kara gave her the Puppy Dog Eyes™.

“Just come to bed.”
Chapter Summary

Trying to solve the age old problem of alien strength.

Vasquez returned the briefcase with the kryptonite to the vault and signed the archivist’s forms. Then she went to find Winn in the command center.

“Little Plaid Shirt, I need to borrow you down in the lab. Get somebody to cover for you.”

As they walked through the DEO’s halls, Vasquez asked, “The training room and Astra’s Krypto cuffs. How do they work?”

“You mean on a cellular level?”

“On a metaphorical level.”

“Oh, I see. Well, it’s a bit like a fishtank, I suppose. When you shoot a laser light into water, the water bends the light, deflects it, so the light can’t go in a straight line to its target.”

Vasquez frowned. “Okay, so the light can’t reach them, but what about the radioactivity?”

“Well, it’s not actually water, but a kind of cooling agent. That’s inexact but…”

“No, that’s fine. Close enough. Could you miniaturize the system for a tiny piece of kryptonite?”

“I doubt it. Even with the cuffs, we had to make sure to take them off Astra at night so she didn’t get sick from too much exposure.”

When they reached the lab, Vasquez asked the two lab techs if they wanted to take a short coffee break and they gave her the room. She locked the door behind them.

“Uh, Vasquez… What’s going on? And why would you want to have a small amount of kryptonite?”

“Okay, Winn, don’t get weird on me. Kara has… a problem.”

“With kryptonite?”

“With Lena. And superstrength.”

Winn sat down, frowning. Vasquez didn’t elaborate, just waited for him to get there.

“Oh. Oh! Wow, I never thought about that!”

“I did, but I still haven’t come up with a way around it, because I’m more psychology than physics. What about the red sunlight?”

“Hmm. That should, but then, no. Well, what about?” He got up and pulled open one of the file drawers. “If we miniaturized that Lord Tech emitter that he was going to use to make pink
kryptonite… I may have to talk to, oh, no, that would be super awkward!”

“Lena.”

“Yeah…”

“Awkward for you, Winn. I wouldn’t worry about her. If you can figure it out, I am sure she will be very happy to have that conversation. And if you just can’t do it, you can explain it to me or, better yet, Alex, and then she can talk to Lena.”

“That wouldn’t be very efficient. All right. Let me think about this. Because it’s frequency and—“

“Winn, I don’t need to know right now. Just… work on it and let me know the results, what resources you might need.”

“Yeah, I am not filling out those forms.”

Vasquez grinned. “It’s going to have… medical applications. Leave the paperwork to me.”
Meanwhile, Back at the DEO

Chapter Summary

Because rogue aliens don't just police themselves, after all.

"You know," said Alex, as the team bundled back into the troop trucks dripping black ichor, "we really ought to simply do a warehouse district patrol once a week."

Vasquez took her gloved hand and wiped the sticky stuff off her face and flicked it to the floor of the truck. "Go wild. I'd rather listen to opera while being tortured."

"I'm pretty sure that is redundant, babe."

"Good point."

The rookies, Olsen, Finn and Holtzman, looked utterly miserable. Alex, on the other hand, crossed her ankles and hummed a small tune. It sounded like "2 am Breathe," which was her jam, and Vasquez grinned.

"Hey, rookies, listen up. You see this badass woman here? This is what you want to aspire to. The point is not simply to learn combat skills and science and law; the point is to be a fucking badass, and that requires style. It requires chill. It requires not giving a flying fuck when the aliens shit on you in ten different colors."

Holtzy said, "Yeah, I get that. But ectoplasm doesn't smell nearly this bad."

Vasquez unbuttoned one of the cargo pockets in her pants and pulled out a small tube. "Wasabi. You eat some right before you go into the field when you know the target is stinky. Shuts your nose right down."

Alex smiled at her, shifting seamlessly from So Badass to So Gay in a nanosecond.

When they got back to the DEO, the male agents let the ladies decontaminate first, and Holtzy gave her superior officers cute little leers as they showered.

Putting on fresh tactical gear, Vasquez said, "Holtzy, are you gay?"

"Queer as a three dollar and twenty-seven cents bill."

Alex laughed. "That's pretty queer."

When they returned to the command center, J'onn was complaining about how the White House budget cuts were going to affect the DEO.

Winn said, "But I thought they were taking funding away from the arts to put into the military?"

"They are. We aren't considered military by this administration. They think we're too pro-alien."

"Because of Supergirl?"
"Among other things." He looked up as the women walked in. "Well, I can smell that Rose finally changed that horrible shampoo. How are my iron lilies?"

"I think you mean steel magnolias," quipped Winn.

Vasquez rolled her eyes at both of them. "Try tungsten carbide roses, thank you very much. What have you got?"

Winn hit some keys and an apparently human male appears on the screen above them. "Jeff Volstead, doctor of comparative xenobiology. Was a professor in Metropolis during Lex Luthor's active years and part of his R&D team as a consultant to LuthorCorp. After Lex was sent to prison, Volstead went underground, we think possibly to work with Cadmus. But he has a history of fights with Lillian, from back when she was on the Board of Directors, and he got canned. That's all we have on the mainframe."

Vasquez looked at Alex. "We're going to have to dig him out of the file room. I am pretty sure I did scenarios on him back then. It might give us more to go on."

Alex groaned. "Fine, but I am getting decent coffee first. The DEO shit is becoming undrinkable."

J'onn smiled. "Actually, before the budget went through I sneaked in a small line item for a foreign medicinal stimulant..."

"Foreign?" they asked.

He smiled. "Columbian."
Lucy Lane had gone back to the desert with the hundreds of alien prisoners, overseen their processing, grabbed her mail and a change of clothes and gone back to National City, back to Maggie's place.

Maggie was cooking fettuccini Alfredo while Lucy opened her mail, but dropped the spoon she had been stirring the sauce with when she heard Lucy gasp. Turning the burner down, she came over to see Lucy staring at a thick cream envelope with her name and address written out in careful calligraphy.

"Wedding?" she asked.

Stunned, Lucy handed her the envelope. The return address was Lois Lane's.

"Wait, that's--"

"My sister."

"Wait, you didn't know? She didn't tell you before this?"

Lucy snorted. "Lois? Hardly. This is totally her style. And her maid of honor will probably be somebody she met last week."

"Not you?"

"Me? I'm just her sister," Lucy said bitterly.

Maggie slid her arm around Lucy's waist. "Well, no time like the present for bad news. Open it up."

Lucy used her finger to roughly tear open the fancy stationery. The card announced that Clark Kent and Lois Lane were thrilled to announce their wedding in Metropolis, blah, blah, blah. Inside the card, a handwritten note said, "Lu-- Would you be my Maid of Honor? It'd mean a lot to me! Love you! Lois!"

"Huh."

"So... that's good, right?"

"I have no fucking idea. And if the bridesmaid dresses are a horror show, I will simply refuse to go."

"But if you do go..." said Maggie.
"What?"

"Um, nothing. No, I just."

"You would go with me?"

"Of course I would. I mean, I still haven't figured out what we are, what we're doing here? But I understand problematical families, and the importance of someone having your back."

"Well, the Danvers will be there anyway."

"They know your sister?"

"Kara is Clark's cousin."

"Seriously? That's a huge coincidence."

Lucy gave her a surprised look and then coughed. "Yeah, I forgot you didn't know... Yes, a coincidence. Ironies all around... But, seriously, you would be willing to go with me?"

"Absolutely. Give me the date and I'll go talk to my captain, make sure I can get time off."

Passing Lane (8:45): Alex, check your mail.

Big Danvers (8:48): Holy SHIT.

Passing Lane (8:50): I know, right. She never said a word about this to me.

Big Danvers (8:52): Sis, have you talked to Clark lately?

SuperSister (8:53): He left text messages a few days ago, but I've been really busy. Why?

Big Danvers (8:54): Read them. NOW.

SuperSister (8:57): OMG! They're getting MARRIED!

SuperSister (8:58): He wants me to be his best person!!!

SuperSister (8:59): Do you think I could bring Lena as my plus one?

Big Danvers (10:00): Lu, um, Kara wants to bring Lena as her plus one. Would that be too weird for Clark?

Passing Lane (10:01): Fuck him. Kara should bring who she wants.

Big Danvers (10:02): Because he's asked Kara to be his best person...

Passing Lane (10:03): All the more reason. I like Little Luthor. Clark can suck it.

Big Danvers (10:04): Kara, Lucy seems to think it won't be a problem, but when in doubt, ask...

SuperSister (10:05): That makes sense! I'll call him now!

SpaceDad (10:05): Alex, did you get an invite from Clark and Lois? I thought he didn't like me...

Big Danvers (10:06): Um, Clark is complicated?
Big Danvers (10:07): Hey, babe, want to go to a wedding with me? It's Clark and Lois.

House of Vasquez (10:08): Will you wear a nice dress and sexy lingerie?


House of Vasquez (10:09): Name the date and I'll inform J'onn.

Big Danvers (10:10): Pretty sure he already knows. Probably half the DEO will be there.

House of Vasquez (10:12): So a big gay wedding for a hugely straight couple? Should be a blast!

Chapter End Notes

WOOT! 175,000 words in 52 days.
Jess has been dealing with shareholders all week, calling to complain about the news that L-Corp had used alien caterers for the Patent Appreciation Night, snarking that suddenly the company was "implicitly supporting that lifestyle" or "those invaders."

Jess was polite and very, very clear: L-Corp supported the President's Alien Amnesty Act and supported alien refugees. Any shareholder who wasn't on board with that could just sell their shares. And many did.

The company's value took a dip, but then it rose. Nobody at the company knew why. The financial analysts talked about bounce and people who didn't know the company simply choosing to "buy low."

Jess, of course, could have informed them if she had wanted to about the group of investors who worked at the company, believed in it and pooled money to buy back shares and buoy the company's stock price. But why would she do that? That would be telling. And Jess, when it came to supporting her boss, was nothing if not discrete.
In Which I Take My Courage in My Hands...

Chapter Summary

Yeah, I didn't see this happening either.

Winn's life had suddenly gotten really interesting. On the one hand, ew, Agent Vasquez had tasked him with figuring out a technology that would allow his ex-crush Kara to have sex safely with her new girlfriend, his basically-geek-crush, Lena Luthor. On the other hand, James was back at the DEO being all manly and exciting, and Winn didn't entirely know how he felt about that, but it felt... different.

On the other hand... Wait, what kind of alien had more than two hands?

Anyway, the point was that Winn also had just been invited to go to Clark Kent's (freaking Superman's!!!) wedding and he did not have and probably would not have in two months, a plus-one person of interest. Which totally sucked. He had gone to maybe fourteen weddings in his life and he had attended them all alone. But Superman's wedding? Oh, he totally needed a plus-one for that.

But on the other hand, and this would probably make about four hands at this point, he had been asked to present at the conference of Quantum Materials, and J'onn had approved his petition to go (and the DEO would even pay for his flight, and that just never happened).

So he was working down in the lab with rather mixed feelings when Holtzman came in wearing a white lab coat over her DEO black tactical gear. She carried a large silver briefcase that she set down on her table in back and opened up. Winn recognized the rifle donated to the DEO by Joe, the blue alien who had come back with them from Slaver's moon.

"Hey, Holtzy," Winn said. "Still working on that thing?"

The woman grinned, slipping on her safety goggles. "Well, actually, I took it apart, discovered what made it tick, wrote up the specs, did a mechanical drawing of it with the help of this sweet baby here--" She stroked the computer on her lab desk. "And now I'm building a prototype with Earth materials to see whether the plasma will successfully shoot our enemies into an early grave, or, failing that, melt into a white-hot maiming puddle of metal in our hands. Right now, I'd say our odds are fifty-fifty."

Winn blinked. "O-kay! Well, let me know if you need a hand with that."

She winked at him. "Oh, I never say no to applause! But what about you, Winnie the Pooh?"

Winn ignored that, blushing and glad that none of the other agents had heard it. "I'm trying to generate red sunlight."

She pulled her goggles up to the top of her head and looked at his drawings and the pieces of his prototypes. "What are you using for the crystal actuator?"

"Earth quartz."
"Martian quartz would be better."

"Of course it would, but we can't get a piece big enough. The stuff is expensive and, strictly speaking, a regulated substance."

"Hmm. Well, if you have any at all? How about a layer of Martian quartz between two layers of Earth quartz?"

"But they vibrate at different rates."

"Sure, but that isn't necessarily a bad thing."

Winn watched her pull a mechanical pencil from her pocket and sketch what she meant on a corner of his plans and he immediately saw what she meant. "Aw, Holtzy, that's genius! Marry me!"

Holtzman laughed.

Winn blushed some more. "Oh, wait. I forgot. The girls said you're another lesbian. Sorry!"

"Another?"

"Oh, yeah, turns out that the DEO is lousy with them. You'd think we'd actually made that pink kryptonite!"

"Well, then you'd turn into a lesbian too," she joked.

He sighed. "Yes, I like the girls. But I think I'm sapiosexual. I really get turned on by the smart girls. And one man crush in grad school with one of my professors..."

"Was he gay?"

"Oh, God, no. Wife and three kids. I kept it to myself."

"Yeah, well, I'm pan, so I feel you. Loving outside the bounds of the cis, straight, white, blah, blah, can get old really fast."

She smiled at him again and he felt it to his core. "Um, Holtzy. If this is inappropriate, please tell me, but... Um, would you go to a wedding with me? Like, as my date?"

"A wedding? Whose?"

"Clark Kent and Lois Lane."

Her eyes widened. "Like Major Lane's sister?"

"Yeah."

"You mean I'd got to see Lucy Lane in a dress?"

"Probably."

"And we could talk nerdy about tech stuff when major wedding type stuff wasn't happening?"

"Absolutely!"

"Hmm. Well, I would totally not wear a dress to this. You get that, right?"
Winn shrugged. "You can wear whatever makes you feel happy." He was nervous about saying
this, because he'd seen what she wore to the alien bar a few times, but he figured that Clark would
understand. Probably.

Holtzy grinned and gave him a high five. "Okay, Agent Schott. You've got yourself a date!"
The alien bar wasn't exactly the perfect place to have this kind of discussion, but on the other hand, it wasn't all that bad either. The odds of human paparazzi trying to hide in plain sight were much less than they might be at another kind of bar, gay or straight. And Lena really wanted to have a private conversation with Vasquez and Maggie somewhere other than her own penthouse, where they might feel ill at ease. So.

The three of them gathered in the farthest back booth, as they often did with the Danvers, but this time, they all knew it was sister night, so they would not run into anyone who might make this conversation even more uncomfortable than it was already likely to be.

Lena wore a plaid flannel shirt and black skinny jeans and was a little amused when the other two women showed up dressed pretty much the same. Vasquez snorted. Maggie just shook her head. They signaled M'gann who came with their usuals without them even having to order: scotch for Vasquez, Dos Equis for Maggie, a Cosmo for Lena. They would definitely be tipping much more than 20% tonight, for sure.

Lena said, "Thank you, ladies, for coming."

Vasquez murmured, "Oh, you know us, Lena. We love coming for another lesbian."

Maggie snorted and looked away.

Lena shrugged. "Didn't know I had that kind of power, to make a girl come on request."

Vasquez raised her glass in salute. "You know, Lena, at the DEO, we are working on your... issue."

Maggie looked confused. "Wait, is your mother back? Lord, that woman is a menace!"

"You're not wrong," sighed Lena. "But no, that's not the issue. It's a... technical problem."

"Winn and Holtzy are working on it."

Lena blushed lightly. Maggie sipped her beer, not noticing. Vasquez said, "Did you hear that Holtzy said she would go with Winn to the wedding?"

They stared. "But isn't she...?"
"Queer? Yup. Well, not a lesbian. Pan, apparently. And she likes Winn. Who'da seen that coming?"

They all shook their heads.

"So," said Vasquez. "What can we do you for, Lena? I mean, beyond..."

"Okay, I haven't had too many actual, healthy relationships, especially in the last few years, since Lex.... My life hasn't exactly..."

They nodded.

"But with Kara, well, she's really very back and forth. One week we're having sex, well, in every room in my apartment and the next week she's all stuttering and rambling and embarrassed. I've never been with someone who wasn't either the one or the other. How do you handle someone who is both like that??

Maggie muttered, "Baby dykes. That's why I just don't do baby dykes. Way too confusing."

Vasquez waved her hand. "Pfft, as Alex would say. Honey, every relationship has tradeoffs. You got a newbie, and that means you have to train and educate her, and yeah, that takes a little bit of work. Not gonna lie. My Alex is a piece of work. But holy God almighty, she is... enthusiastic. So the small downside is balanced by a huge upside." She smiled. "Huge."

Maggie looked away. "Must you?"

"Yeah, Sawyer. I must. Because you totally fucking hurt her and scared her off gay relationships, and I've had to work double time to make her trust her instincts again. And yeah, let's face it, I'm fucking hot~" She gave a devilish grin, and then sobered. "But it's been work, and all because you didn't have the courage, the fucking courage, to just fucking date her and be her friend and do the educating. Kara told me that you thought that my watching The L Word with her was cliché and embarrassing. Well, you know what? Do you have any idea how much sex we've had basically because she gets so hot and bothered? Shit, girl, you have NO idea what you're missing because you were just too scared."

Lena watched the two of them and forced herself to not ask the questions that were crowding her mind. Finally, she asked, "So why does Kara suddenly get so nervous, when we've been so... uninhibited before?"

Maggie said, "Maybe precisely because you were so uninhibited? Maybe she got embarrassed about the stuff you did? Thinks you are judging her for it? Seems to me that Little Danvers has a TON of filters normally. Maybe she feels guilty for not using her usual filters?"

Vasquez spoke carefully. "Most of us are... at least two people. The person we are on the outside is a persona, and that is us, but it isn't all of us. It's the socially acceptable us. I often get the feeling that Kara has struggled with that for a long time."

Lena nodded. "I hear you."

Vasquez ran her hand through her hair. "But Kara has... another side?"

"Yes, she does," said Lena, realizing what the agent was actually saying. "A stronger, more confident side..."

"Exactly. So with you, because she wants to be with you and please you and, well, be pleased, I suppose you could say, she shuttles back and forth between those two... personas. Personae?"
Maggie grunted, "You're making her sound manic-depressive or multiple personality disorder. I'm pretty sure that Little Danvers' mental health is rock steady."

Vasquez gave Lena a look and Lena returned it. Carefully, Vasquez said, "We all have different personas. Think about Alex with J'onn or with a rogue alien or with Kara or with me or with you. That doesn't give her multiple personalities. Persona is a mask; personality is a self. There's a difference."

Maggie waved a hand to agree in theory.

Lena asked, "So how do I handle it? When she gets all... nervous?"

Vasquez tilted her head. "Seriously, Luthor? What do you think? How have you been handling it so far?"

Lena sighed. "I let her lead, define the terms, back off when she seems nervous."

"So what is the real problem?"

Lena tried to contain what she was thinking, but it had been several weeks and she needed to say it out loud to someone, even if, especially because, she couldn't necessarily say it to Kara. "I really like both sides of her, the rambling Kara and the, wow, you have no idea Kara. Oh my fucking god, I can't even describe--"

Vasquez cut her off. "Better you don't. Alex would totally flip."

Maggie nodded. "Please don't!"

Vasquez said, "Way back when, even before the Marines, I studied kung fu with this middle-aged Cantonese guy who had studied with one of the last masters who had survived Mao and left China to survive. He used to always say that the three things you needed to get really good at kung fu were time, patience and money, but that you could learn it with only any two out of the three. I'm pretty sure that relationships are the same, and time and patience are the most important bits."

Lena smiled. "I've got all three, but I agree with you that money is tertiary at best. It has its uses..."

"Yeah," said Maggie. "We all heard about the flowers."

Lena's smile got bigger. "Do you know that she was still thinking I was being her heterosexual friend?"

Vasquez groaned, "Compulsory heteronormativity. And general straight cluelessness!"

Maggie snorted. "You make it sound like they are two different things!"

Lena asked, "So what do I do?"

Vasquez said, "What you've been doing. When she is confident, do her. When she is not, let her do you, or just cuddle. Shit, Lena. She's a chick! Chicks love cuddling!"

Maggie nodded. "Cuddling is almost never bad. And sometimes it can lead to... non-cuddling..."

She looked off into space for a moment, a soft look in her eyes.

Not unkindly, Vasquez asked, "So, Maggie. You and Lucy. What's going on there?"

Maggie shook her head. "I really don't know. It started out, after..."
"After Alex," said Vasquez, matter-of-factly. "Classic displacement."

"But then I thought it was just a one time thing, except then she came back to the city and when she does, sometimes she stays with me instead of in the barracks at the DEO, and it's been great, and she's great, and... I may have accidentally offered to go with her to her sister's wedding... as a date. And I'm pretty sure that her father doesn't know about this side of her..."

Vasquez groaned. Lena looked confused.

Maggie said, "Her father is General Sam Lane."

Lena winced. "That's a name I recognize. My mother thinks he's terrific. He's homophobic?"

Maggie shrugged, "She wouldn't say, but even if he's not, it's still one more way she might end up disappointing him. Again. I am one more way she might disappoint him. But if he is?"

Vasquez smiled without much humor. "Well, we'll protect you, Maggie, if we have to. Half the DEO is going to be there, after all. Pretty much the gay half."

Lena barked out a laugh. "Oh! I'm sorry. It's just that Kara said it is going to be ridiculously formal. Clark said tuxes for the men."

"Why is that funny?" asked Vasquez.

"Because Kara is his best man, or well, person. She went shopping with me for dresses and saw the price and flipped. I offered to buy one for her, but then she decided to rent a tux instead. She said it would be so much cheaper, but honestly, I think she wants to butch things up a bit, maybe mess with Clark because she thinks he still doesn't really approve of her dating a Luthor. Also it's easier to wear her--uh, her, uh never mind."

Lena and Vasquez shared a look. Lena saw Vasquez realize that Lena knew about Kara and Supergirl.

Maggie didn't seem to notice. "Hey, Little Luthor. Think she'll save a dance for me?"

Lena smiled. "I'll insist on it."

Vasquez looked thoughtful. "I could rock a tux... Oh, man, the general is going to have a shit fit!" She grinned.
Sisters shopping...

Alex was having a blast. Normally, she ignored Kara's occasional fit of blushing and wild hand movements when they talked about things like sex, because she knew that at heart Supergirl wasn't bothered by those things even if Kara Danvers was. She didn't entirely understand her sister's strange two-sided response to sexual topics, but she was used to it and knew how to get around it when she needed to, like the talk they had when Kara's period had started, or when she was getting ready to go to her senior prom with a boy Alex didn't entirely trust, or hell, before Kara went off to college. She was direct and emotionless and supportive and never, never teased.

Well, almost never. Certainly now that Kara was in a serious relationship with Lena Luthor, Alex figured Kara had finally got her shit figured out--well, both the sisters had, really, and it was mostly, mostly, much, much easier. So she had figured, after Kara's declaration that she was going to test Clark by going to his wedding in a tux, that sure, a tux was fine, but if she was going to have Lena Luthor as her arm candy and roommate in the Metropolis hotel, by God, Kara was going to wear sexy lingerie underneath it. And Kara's eyes had gotten wide, but she had nodded shyly, agreeing to the necessity.

But actually getting her into Victoria Secret was another thing. And Alex was a good big sister. She was. She was fearless and devoted and brave and kind and supportive.

But let's face it. The Big Sister's Manual also had a chapter on teasing your little sister mercilessly. Not all the time, of course not.

But occasionally...

So she dragged Kara to the back of the store, where she picked up a lacy bra and underpants in a bright blue: Supergirl blue.

She grinned evilly. "Kara, this is perfect! Blue is totally your color! It'll bring our your eyes! Lena is totally going to love these!"

Kara blushed and looked at the ceiling. "I don't know, Alex, maybe I should just go with my usual black Jockey's. I mean what if I get, you know--" She whispered, "Called out for an emergency..."

"Your suit will keep them safe and they'll match ut too, so, big plus there!"

"Er, um, right! Well, okay then! And what about you, Alex? You're going to have to up your game if you're going with Vasquez. I mean she's been out for a million years, right? So she probably has, um, expectations." Despite herself, Kara managed to wiggle her eyebrows. She reached out for a set with cheetah markings. "For example..." she said, grinning.

Just at that moment, their earpieces went off and Winn's voice was saying, "SG crisis and, hey, huge surprise: it's NOT in the warehouse district! National City University Science Center is under attack, and if that is not Cadmus doing the attacking I will eat my cardigan!"
The sisters dropped the merchandise, groaning and sternly marched toward the store's door. An overly made-up and underly dressed blonde said, "Ladies! Can I help you with your unmentionables today?"

Kara used her deep Supergirl voice. "Not today, ma'am. We have work to do."

Alex yelled back, "Put the blue and the cheetah on layaway. We'll be back when this latest fuckery is dealt with!"
An Unexpected Lesson

By the time James and his peers unloaded from the DEO troop truck and fanned out across the quad in front of the Science Center, there was black ichor in a disturbing spray pattern across the cobble stones and the edges of the grass verge. Finn raised a fist to stop their progress and knelt to look at the pattern. He turned around.

"They were running away when this happened. And look at how far apart the largest drops are. They were going at a really good speed. But this, this is too much. There should be bodies. They were bleeding out as they were fleeing. So where are the bodies? There should be..." He looked around, counting. "A dozen corpses?"

James looked at the ground and realized that Finn's earlier experience in that Hellmouth place made him look like a Navy Seal and James like an Eagle Scout. Barely.

Or maybe Beagle Scout.

Holtzy pulled out a tech gadget that sent a green laser light into the puddles. "These are old. This happened an hour ago, maybe more. How did we not hear about this until ten minutes ago?"

More black DEO troop trucks were circling the perimeter and James saw Alex Danvers leading a troop of helmeted agents toward the building. "Finn," he said. "Tell her what we're seeing. She won't hear it from me and we can't let them go in blind."

Finn nodded and marched over to Agent Danvers and talked to her at length, pointing at the ground. Alex looked murderous, but like maybe she was taking him seriously. She turned and directed her troops in four groups around the building. Finn came back.

"Our orders are to secure the transport in case we have to retreat quickly."

James took his place in the driver's seat of one of the transport trucks, wondering how he had ever thought taking down petty criminals one or two or three at a time was the height of heroism. How he had thought that diving into the physical fight was the hard thing, the brave thing. Now he sat waiting for his friends, for his almost-girlfriends big sister/best friend, and he was sweating.

James Olsen, who had gone with Superman to fight Lex Luthor was sweating. James Olsen who had gone in to Iraq as an embedded reporter, was sweating. James Olsen, who had gone head to head with Cat fucking Grant was sweating.

Maybe heroism wasn't what he'd thought it was.
J'onn prowled into the lab as Alex was just finishing up the tests on the ichor. "What news?" he asked.

Alex jotted the last notes into the notebook next to the microscope. "Looks like they are being altered, probably chemically, but I can't tell from these samples. Next time, if we're quicker to respond..."

"You think there will be a next time?"

"Vasquez said she thought it was a 70% possibility. And to me, it feels not like a simple experiment but like a program. I looked at the Volstead's lab’s surveillance videos and this group was much bigger than the ones we took out several weeks ago. Alien steroids? Genetic mutations? Selective breeding? Who knows?"

There was a light knock on the door and Vasquez sauntered in holding a file folder. "Who knows? The shadow knows! Otherwise known as Susan Vasquez. I found my folder on Jeff Volstead. The foundation for his comparative xenobiology professorship was experimental genetics. He left LuthorCorp after a very public fight with Lillian about whether it was ethical, appropriate, and/or horrific to modify humans with alien DNA."

"Which side was he on?" asked Alex.

"Pro. At the time, Lillian was not. Apparently that's changed."

J'onn crossed his arms over his chest. "Which leads to the question, have they made up their differences? Could they be collaborating again?"

"But that's not what this project is," said Alex. "This is probably him making bigger, badder aliens. That doesn't seem like Lillian's cup of tea."

“Unless she was using them to distract us,” said Vasquez, “while at the same time making her PR point about that alien menace she loves to talk about.”

“Or he is building an army for somebody else,” murmured J’onn.

“But sir,” said Alex, “something Agent Finn said is bothering me. The quad’s outdoor surveillance cameras were tampered with, so we really don’t know what happened to those bodies. We didn’t kill them and drag them away, so who did? And why? Finn said he thought it might be about getting, well, parts… His former employer did that at the Hellmouth...”

“Yes, I remember that incident. Tell Agent Schott to see whether the satellite feeds have anything to offer. And put out a feeler to the NCPD about signs of alien organ harvesting.”

“I’m on it, sir.”
She hurried out and J’onn turned to look at Vasquez, who handed him the file. “You are unaccountably quiet, Agent Vasquez,” he said. “Mentally, I mean.”

Vasquez blinked. “Yes, sir. I’ve been working with M’gann on some meditation exercises. I think they’re really helping.”

J’onn held her eyes a few moments too long, but she did not waver. He had figured it out a few days before, how her earpiece was slightly larger than standard, how it looked an awful like the one Agent Schott had used when he was working with Guardian and protecting his mind from being easily seen by the Green Martian.

"Yes," he said. "Of course. And since M'gann and I will be traveling together to Metropolis for Clark's wedding, I am sure that she will have plenty of time to tell me about how thoroughly she is mentoring you."

Vasquez's eyes never wavered. "Yes, sir. I'm sure she will."

J’onn turned away, taking the folder back to his office for reading and consideration. He did not distrust Vasquez. He knew her too well. But he would keep an eye out, well, actually two eyes. Because that thing about Extra-Normal Operations was that they were, in fact, extra-normal. And a Martian had to keep his wits about him, even among colleagues.

And friends.

And family
RSVP

Chapter Summary

A (not) little hiatus filler. I had fun with this, using a framework I learned from spacemanearthgirl.

CGrant@catco.com: Maxwell, I am assuming you've heard about the L-Corp gala on Friday. It's a fundraiser for Luthor's new initiative, an alien medical clinic. I know how you feel about the potential dangers of aliens, but even you have to admit that people who have healthcare are less likely to revolt against the more powerful in society... Would you care to be my arm candy for the evening?

Lord@lordtech.com: Dearest Cat, what an honor for you to consider me. You make an interesting argument. And of course, any opportunity to see you in a slinky dress should not go to waste...

CGrant@catco.com: And by that you mean opportunity for good PR to confuse the pro-alien investors who have been threatening to pull out of Lord tech, I presume.

Lord@lordtech.com: Potayto, potahto. What time shall I pick you up?

CGrant@catco.com: Six. You're taking me to dinner first.

Lord@lordtech.com: But of course. See you then.

//

LenaL@lcorp.com: Kara, will you be able to get away Friday night for the gala?

KDanvers@catco.com: I've already arranged it. Um, but how should I...dress for it?

LenaL@lcorp.com: Heels, not boots, I think...

//

PassingLane@gmail.com: Hey, Mags, care to go to Lena's gala with me? I got two tickets through Kara.

MSawyer@ncpd.gov: Can't Working that night. ATTAC has applied for a permit to protest and three different alien groups will be there to counter-protest. The new captain is requisitioning more riot gear for the occasion.

PassingLane@gmail.com: Shit. Then I'll probably end up working too. I'd better tell JJ.

MSawyer@ncpd.gov: He know you refer to him as JJ?

//

At the command center of the DEO, Winn turned to Vasquez. "You going to the L-Corp gig?"

"Nah, too rich for my blood. Don't tell me you're going? Those tickets were expensive!"
"I'll be there as a consultant, working the black body field generator just in case, so Lena can do regular CEO stuff."

"Yeah, you're going to need that. No way Lillian and company are going to ignore a chance to mess with Lena on this issue."

//

The young man at National City Center for the arts was thrilled when word went round about a freelance gig for the weekend. They were between shows, the rent was due soon and this would be the perfect opportunity for the gang to make some money. He looked at the list he had been given and headed into the prop room. Four days wasn't a lot of time to prepare, but he was a pro. He'd make this work.
Setting Up

Chapter Summary

Even when you can see things coming, you can't see it coming.

Artkqrz "Arty" Grln, head chef at Jupiter's Feast, was nervous and excited. This was the second big gig they had gotten with L-Corp and they had gone all out. Human and alien waitstaff were loading all five vans with alien delicacies that Arty had slaved over, including one of the strangest requests they'd ever gotten, Kryptonian potstickers. Well, Arty figured, the customer is always right.

//

M'gann nodded with satisfaction as the bar filled with people: green, pink and blue people, people with hands and people with tentacles, and above all, people with signs:

Dump Xenophobia!

Healthcare is a Sentient Right!

Alien Lives Matter!

(and her personal favorite)

I can't believe I traveled 20 million light years and I STILL need to protest this shit!

She looked at her notes on reminders for nonviolent protest, hopped up on the pool table and waved for everyone's attention. This was going to be an interesting night.

//

The precinct was wall-to-wall cops, all dressed in black tactical gear, carrying riot shields and looking very grim. It had taken all week for Detective Sawyer to convince the new captain to let her take point on the operation, to get some volunteers from other precincts to fill out their ranks, volunteers that she knew for a fact where experienced and imperturbably (and pro-alien, or at least not anti). It would do them no good, she'd argued, if the NCPD got a reputation for anti-alien violence, particularly since the city's elite would be attending the gala and would be witnesses if anything went wrong.

//

Kara and Winn took a taxi to L-Corp together and were stepping out of the yellow vehicle just as the caterers' vans were arriving. Already the human protesters were lining up behind police barriers, waving signs that said Make the Earth Human Again and less pleasant messages. They watched a pair of men jump over the barrier and start jostling the caterers unloading the closest van, yelling obscenities and tossing at least one cellophane-wrapped pan to the ground. Immediately, two of the black-clad cops arrested them, read them their rights and hauled them off.

Winn muttered to Kara, "You do have your suit with you, right?"
Kara frowned. "Of course. But J'onn recommended that I not engage unless lives are seriously endangered. I'm the city's most public alien, and my enemies could use my actions against me. Besides, Winn, that's why you're here, isn't it? To save the day?"

L-Corp's vast lobby positively glittered. The tall tables that dotted the space were draped with pale green cloths. The caterers had finished setting up. Winn was on hand for emergencies in addition to a squad of extra security, both in uniform and undercover. On the back wall, eight Earth artworks and five alien works hung for the auction later that night (and how Lena had gotten someone to donate a Picasso even Jess didn't know). The alien quartet had flown in from Metropolis for the occasion. Jess consulted her tablet. Everything on her list was checked off, including the last two items: Hope for the best. Prepare for the Blast.
Act One

Lena took Kara's arm as they artfully mingled with National City's pro-alien elite, the mayor, the governor's ex-wife, alien CEOs, and half of the National City Heroes baseball team. Bruce Wayne had even come to town for the occasion.

Kara's warm fingers patted Lena's chilly fingers on her arm. "You know, Lena, if you need support so much, you shouldn't wear five-inch heels."

Lena smiled. "Maybe I just like feeling your biceps... And anyway, it always surprises men when a woman is taller than they are. It's important to keep one's business rivals off balance."

"Even if you have to soak your feet afterwards?"

Lena shrugged. "We all choose what we're willing to suffer for. Speaking of which, how are the protesters getting on outside?"

Kara looked over her glasses at the crowd control going on beyond L-Corp's walls. "A little yelling. A few fistfights. Two or three more arrests. The police are keeping it under control."

"Yes, your friend, Maggie, came over this morning so we could coordinate security for tonight."

"She's your friend, too, Lena. She worked really hard to get her boss to let her take point tonight. She still feels bad about having to arrest you."

Lena nodded, distracted, and looked at her watch. "Well, it's showtime."

//

Winn had checked and double-checked the new, miniaturized black body field generator in the corner of the lobby at least half a dozen times. He had received deliveries of appetizers from James about once every half hour. And he had watched Kara and Lena walking around the gala all evening, seeing them engage other people in conversation very seriously, and then, every time they walked away together, make each other smile or laugh. He watched how Lena so casually kept her hand on Kara's muscled arm and he couldn't blame her. Then, when they parted for Lena to step up to the podium, he watched the way Lena's hand lingered a second too long, and he couldn't blame her for that either.

As Lena started her speech about the art auction, James came to stand by his side and handed him a plate of dumplings. "I feel your pain, bro," said James. "But can you blame her?"

"God, no. Compared to Lena, you and I are Kiddie League."

//

The young man from the arts center and his friends approached the set as he had been instructed, seeing the lights and the cameras, the TV news trucks, the two groups of extras with their costumes and signs. The director had explained how they were adding to both groups a little at a time, making the scene seem more organic and realistic.

("Verisimilitude," he had replied wisely.

The director, an older blonde woman with cold blue eyes, gave him a small smile. "Precisely,"
she'd said.)

The blue makeup felt tight on his face and hands and he grimaced as he joined the crowd. To his left, he saw another alien of his own type turn and he was extremely impressed with the fellow's much superior makeup job. He saw the man sniff at him and scowl.

He looked up at the enormous L on the side of the building, saw a blue laser flash against it: on-off, on-off. On. He pulled the heavy, realistic Star Wars-style blaster out from under his brown cloak, nodding at his friends to do the same.

"Showtime, boys," he said.
Kara was trotting into the ladies room and changing in a stall with a burst of superspeed before the first round of alien gunfire was over. She flew over the crowd in the lobby and pushed through the door, her red cape flapping behind her. Red and blue lasers pulsed from weapons, but, much to her confusion, the plasma flares were not coming from the ATTAC protesters but rather from the alien counter-protesters. Supergirl registered the confusion of the black-clad police and threw herself into the gap between the two groups, spreading out her cape to take the brunt of the assault herself.

Screams of fear. Screams of pain. The acrid smell of burnt flesh and the sudden sweat of terrified victims. She saw M'gann in her Green Martian form fly down and pick up wounded humans and fly them away. She heard Maggie shout to her cops not to shoot at M'gann because "She's one of us!"

Human riot police and alien civilians threw themselves between the shooting aliens and bleeding humans. Sirens. More screams. The police tried to use their riot shields to block the plasma shots, but that was not what the shields were made for and the screams and the smell of metal and plastic melting left Supergirl furious. She shot her laser eyes at first one armed alien and then the next, sending them sprawling while the NCPD cops took down the rest. When Maggie signaled that the battle was over, Supergirl joined M'gann in flying the wounded to National City's hospitals.

The police were the worst, with their riot shields melted on their arms. Supergirl used her freeze breath to cool the hot, bloody mess. Thankfully it was only four cops, but that was four too many. Supergirl flew back to L-Corp, checked in with Maggie and then marched back into the L-Corp lobby still in her cape and boots. Security had pushed the gala's participants to the far side of the room, away from the windows. But of course the aliens hadn't intended to hurt L-Corp or their allies gathered there, thought Supergirl. Setting aside her anger and confusion, she marched up to Lena's podium and announced that the violence was over, police were handling it, they were safe.

As Lena came to the podium to finish the auction, Supergirl used the opportunity of shaking her hand to murmur, "I have to go."

Lena nodded, frowning as Supergirl strode outside and flew away.
Channel Seven was having a field day. While Fox News showed footage of aliens shooting humans. Seven (a diversion of CatCo Worldwide Media) showed Supergirl absorbing plasma blasts with her cape and the police and alien civilians throwing their bodies between the shooting aliens and the humans holding signs that said Human Lives Matter.

Fox quoted the CEO of Earth First Innovations, one of the founding members of the Alien Tactical Technical Advancement Consortium, as saying, "Aliens can't be trusted! You offer to build them a clinic and they shoot the humans who don't like the idea!"

Seven quoted Detective Maggie Sawyer: "Because of the heroic response of the NCPD and our alien fellow citizens, far fewer humans were injured, and as of right now only two have died. The NCPD would also like to thank Supergirl for not only protecting the humans but also delivering wounded NCPD officers to the hospital within seconds of the attack."

Fox commentators sneered at Lena Luthor's "naive attempt to give help where it is clearly not deserved."

Cat Grant herself interviewed Lena Luthor and the two of them agreed that healthcare was a sentient fight that no creature could not deserve, and applauded National City General Hospital and St. Olaf's for taking in wounded attackers as well as humans. Snapper Carr himself visited the hospitals and was the first to break the story about the witless human actors who had been duped into being agent provocateurs.

Fox promptly turned its attention to the president's bombing of Syria.
Aftershocks

Chapter Summary

Wherein our heroes react the the recent traumatic events in character.

The next few days were a blur of work for everyone.

At the NCPD, Maggie oversaw the processing of a dozen very shocked and appalled (and young, and so, so stupid) humans whose varied shades of greasepaint were half wiped off their faces and hands. She wrote up the commendations for the officers who had thrown themselves in front of the victims, particularly the seven who had been very badly injured for their trouble. She called Lucy and J'on in as "FBI advisors," introduced them to her new captain, Tom Adams, and suggested some avenues of collaboration. And, since she was sleeping in the precinct's barracks, that was the only time she saw Lucy all week.

Returning to the DEO, J'on and Lucy had assembled a team to work backwards from the National City Center for the Arts to find the culprit behind the attacks. J'on argued that it might not actually be Cadmus, but then Maggie sent them an email with the actor's statement and the sketch of the woman he had thought was directing an action film: it was the spitting image of Lillian Luthor. No one was surprised. Lucy muttered something about Lena's evil stepmother and Supergirl put her fist through the wall of the conference room, then strode out to the DEO balcony and flew away on patrol.

She was patrolling eighteen hours a day now, and even Alex couldn't stop her and J'on had told her not to try. Winn said he thought that it was the injured officers that was probably eating away at her. Kara had a big enough heart to mind that bigots were injured by other bigots, but her super-senses always made the smell of burnt flesh worse for her than for any human with a normal sense of smell. She flew fast in the vain hope of getting away from it.

As for Winn, J'on let him take a few personal days to go work at L-Corp as a consultant. The field generator had had a momentary glitch that he needed fix. But when he reached the L-Corp lobby, now returned to its normal appearance, the security desk had a note from Lena Luthor for him to meet her in R&D, where her prosthetics team quizzed him on the possibility of using quantum materials to mimic skin for grafts that included, in this case, four prosthetic arms.

Lena left them to it and returned to her office. She met with the VP of Philanthropic Programs, who gave her the final numbers of the money donated at the gala: $3.72 million, nothing to sneeze at, clearly, but still a drop in the bucket considering what they would need even to sink the clinic's foundation once the rubble from the Cadmus mess was finished being cleared from the port property. After that meeting, Lena found herself pouring a glass of scotch and stepping out onto the balcony, searching the sky for a familiar flash of red and blue. She searched in vain.

And at Lord Technologies, Maxwell Lord directed the facilities worker to hang his new Picasso on the wall across from his desk, while his PR girl read back to him the press release about his $1.2 million donation toward the proposed Lionel Luthor Hospital for Extraterrestrials. Just because he truly feared what powered alien individuals might do to humans, he didn't want aliens to die simply because they had no healthcare. He wasn't a monster, after all.
Also, he had a bit of a weakness for Picasso.
Meanwhile, Back in the Villain's Lair

Chapter Summary

From Lillian's POV, finally.

Chapter Notes

I adore Brends Strong as a villain. She is one of those women, like Sharon Stone, who has only gotten hotter as she's gotten older. And the little honest smile she gets when talking about rocket launchers or watching a courtroom devolve into violent chaos around her is so frickin' hot. So I really wanted to have her talk with someone who was her friend and her equal, and Adelle DeWitt from Dollhouse just suddenly seemed like the perfect fit.

Lionel Luthor had always believed in real estate, and he had passed on that belief to all his family members. For Lex, in addition to his many labs and lairs, that had also warped into the central value of Earth and its foremost native inhabitants, humans. For Lena, it had translated into making L-Corp a truly global company, with headquarters all around the world. For Lillian, it had led to her investing in a pied-a-terre in several major cities in the US, Europe and Asia. And every time she bought a place, she always made sure that she could enter and exit it without being seen by humans, surveillance cameras, or satellites.

Opal City was the location of one of her favorite abodes, built and decorated after Lionel's death and Lex's incarceration, and holding no old memories of any of her family. Opal City was also the home of her oldest friend, Adelle DeWitt, whom she had met in boarding school in England years before, and from whom she had a standing invitation for dinner whenever she was in town. Lillian arrived at Adelle's house at exactly 7:30, the sun still up, but the day just beginning to wane.

Lillian greeted her friend with a kiss on the cheek, not an air kiss but a real one. It was an act of affection Lillian offered no one else in her life.

"El," Adelle said. "I'm so, so glad you're in town. It's been too long."

"It has indeed, Addy. I've missed you, but there is so much work to be done. I rarely have time these days to indulge."

"And I'm an indulgence now, am I?" Adelle shook her head and gestured for Lillian to follow her through the house to the back patio, where a small metal table and chairs were framed by orange trees whose white blossoms showered the air with sweet scent. On the table stood a bottle of wine, two crystal glasses and a rough ceramic teapot and two small, unmatched cups. Adelle poured wine for Lillian and tea for herself.

"Unless you'd prefer...?"

Lillian shook her head. "No, you know me well. And after this week..." She swirled the red wine in
the glass and sniffed appreciatively, then sipped.

Adelle's eyebrow went up. "National City? I read about your daughter's plans. And the reaction to them. A messy business."

"Perhaps. Still, it's heartening that someone was wiling to make the effort."

Adelle snorted, and her British accent was sharp when she said, "Sloppy though, if you don't mind my saying. Unenhanced humans. Actors! Without even memory modifications. Too bad you don't know the leader of Cadmus. You could recommend my agency."

Lillian rolled her eyes. "Given that your agency charges more for a single operative than Cadmus probably spends in a year, I hardly think it would be cost effective. A single shooter is a deranged individual. A dozen shooters suggest a movement."

"Not if they spill the moment they get caught."

"The orange blossoms are lovely," said Lillian, changing the subject.

"Yes, they are," said Adelle, letting her. These two had been friends too long.

"You know, in two months, Opal City will be hosting the International Business Women's Conference. And they are inviting aliens to present this year."

"I'd heard that."

"Will you be attending?"

"Should I?"

Lillian shrugged. "It could be interesting. At the very least, it'll give the newspapers something to write about other than those gay pride events." She said it with a sneer.

Adelle shook her head. "You still have such old-fashioned ideas about that, El. We can't help how we're programmed."

"Actually, we can," Lillian said pointedly. "As you of all people know."

"Lillian, long-term programming is dangerous, if not impossible. You would be turning decent people into psychopaths, and for what? To make you less uncomfortable?"

"Addy, you know it's more than that."

"No. I do not. I'm with you on the alien thing, El, because they terrify me. But humans? No, I draw the line there."

"Are you, of all people, going to try to take the moral high ground with me? Surely, we know each other far too well for that."

"I'm just saying, I believe in consent."

"Which we both know multiple ways to get."

"I think," said Adelle primly, "we should agree to disagree."

They spent the rest of the evening the way old friends often do, avoiding the difficult topics of the
present by reminiscing about the easy topics of the past. When Lillian finally left around midnight she stuck her hands in the pockets of her camel coat, reaching for her keys and instead found the pink flyer she had plucked from the windshield of an alien's car in the parking lot where the L-Corp valets had parked the guests' vehicles.

She read it again:

DOLLYWOOD has always had your alien back

and now SHE needs YOU to have HERS!

Next Saturday night, from 8 to 2,

KARAOKE NIGHT: $10 cover, $25 to sing!

Bring yourself! Bring your ALIEN friends!

Human allies admitted with valid ID.

COME HELP US PAY FOR THE DAMAGE CADMUS DID TO OUR SANCTUARY!

Lillian crumpled the piece of paper in her hand, stuck it in her pocket as she flicked her car keys out of the other pocket.

Oh, they would help pay. Yes. They would help pay, indeed.
Because the show hasn't been doing enough to deal with Kara's PTSD. Harrumph.

It had started with a cough. At first Jess had thought that it was just the dry atmosphere at L-Corp and all the talking Lena was doing for the shareholders meeting, but the cough didn’t go away and in fact it quickly got worse. Jess rearranged Lena’s schedule for the following week, putting off her trips to Metropolis and LA, and simply cancelling some of the meetings that were just routine updates from her engineers. By the time Lena was feverish and actually admitting that it might be a good idea to go home--maybe even, heaven forbid, take the following day off--Jess had already called her driver.

Then she called Kara, left her a message, asked her to call back. But Kara didn’t answer and she didn’t call back.

So Jess called CatCo and asked to speak with her, got sent to voicemail, left a message, asked her to call back. But Kara didn’t answer and she didn’t call back.

So Jess called Winn. Lather, rinse, repeat.

In the end, Jess took Lena down to the car herself and sat in the back with her while Tom drove them to Lena’s condo and waited for Jess to set up her boss with tissues and cough medicine and all the things. When Lena voluntarily (voluntarily!) crawled into bed, Jess, stunned, took her boss’s phone and called Kara’s phone and left yet another message.

Because Jess was pissed. It was one thing for Jess to have to take care of her boss on the very rare occasion that she was this sick when Lena didn’t have a significant other to do it for her. But now that Kara was getting the (probably) expensive dinners and (presumably) glorious sex, she could at least do some of the less appealing work of a relationship too.

Alex was a wreck, but wouldn’t admit it. She nagged Winn incessantly about satellite feeds, facial recognition systems, a way to trace the radiation from the alien weapons back to their source. She paced a groove back and forth across the command center, checked her phone every five minutes, and generally behaved as if Kara was off-planet or in another dimension rather than simply overworking to avoid facing her recent trauma.

Winn and Vasquez shared a look and Winn said again that nagging didn’t help him do the things she was asking him to do. Vasquez stood up and stretched and went to the DEO’s balcony, searching the sky for the superhero. Winn’s phone buzzed, but he ignored it and kept typing, muttering under his breath. The sky was growing cloudy over National City, and Vasquez hoped it would rain, since Alex said that Supergirl really didn’t like flying in the rain, especially since she had been hit by lightning the year before.

They were all pretty much living at the DEO now day and night. Vasquez barely remembered what her apartment looked like. Well, that wasn't new. It was just that, before, if she was going to be
honest with herself, she had often stayed because Alex had stayed. In the women's barracks, she had spent many nights listening to Alex breathing as she slept, every once in a while emitting a cute little snore, and in the dark she could let herself long for the clearly straight agent to climb into her bunk and beg her—

She had never dreamed that it could actually happen, that she would ever hear her beautiful colleague moan her name, that she could ever be the one to cause Agent Alexandra Badass Danvers to shudder under her hands and beg for more.

But it had happened. Somehow the miraculous had happened, because Maggie Sawyer was a total badass too and Maggie Sawyer was beautiful--toaster-oven beautiful: so hot even a closet case like Alex could see it. And it had happened because Maggie Sawyer was, in her own way and for her own reasons a bit of a coward. She had been scared and she had turned down the most beautiful, brave, brilliant woman on the planet. It also had happened in part because Alex Danvers wasn't a coward. She could have slunk back into the closet, called her coming out a mistake. But she didn't. And it had taken Vasquez time and patience and endless acceptance, lack of judgment, and lots of "generosity." It had taken love that Susan "Semper Fi" Vasquez hadn't even known that she was capable of.

But taking on Alex Danvers meant taking on Kara Danvers. And now Kara Danvers was hurting. It seemed a little strange. Kara had held an exploding rocket in her hands, had been thrown to Earth from a great height many times, had watched her sister nearly get launched into space. In contrast, the latest run-in with Cadmus had been quick and clean. Neither Alex nor Lena had been endangered, and there were few casualties, and none that Supergirl could have realistically prevented. So why was Kara taking this one so hard?

Winn approached her. He nodded his head back toward Alex. "She is going to drive me nuts."

Vasquez pinched the bridge of her nose.

He looked past her at the skyline of National City. "It's almost worse than when she was physically gone, because then we could do stuff to bring her back to us." His phone buzzed again.

"You going to get that or what?"

He glanced at his phone, saw Jess Huang's name. He frowned. "Everybody is nagging me today!"
He went to put the phone in his back pocket, but Vasquez grabbed his wrist hard, certainty gripping her stomach.

"Answer it!"

He held it up to his ear, listening, and his jaw dropped. He said, "jess is trying to get ahold of Kara, but she's not answering."

"Alex said she left her phone behind this morning. What does Jess need Kara for?"

"It's Lena. Jess said she's really sick, flu maybe. She left work early and is planning to take tomorrow off."

"Seems reasonable."

Winn shook his head, staring at his phone as if it had just grown a dozen legs. "Not for Lena freaking Luthor. One of the R&D guys said she hasn't taken a sick day or a vacation day since she took over the company a couple of years ago. And even when she worked in the lab, they had to threaten her to get her to take vacation days."
Vasquez looked out at the drizzle that was starting. She tapped her earpiece. "Supergirl, I know you are listening. Get over to Lena's condo. She's sick and jess thinks she needs you. You hear me?"

A small voice, Kara's not Supergirl's, came back into Vasquez's ear. "I hear you. I'm on my way."

"We'll take care of any 911s tonight. So get some actual rest. You hear me?"

"Yes, Vasquez," Kara said dutifully. "I hear you."

Vasquez couldn't decide if she wanted to roll her eyes or pitch herself into the sky and fly to Supergirl and give her a hug (as if she even could have). All she knew was Kara loved Lena and Lena was one of the strongest women she had ever met, even compared to her Marine and DEO sisters. If anybody could sort out Kara's problems, it was Lena Luthor.
Even Like This, You Are Stronger

Chapter Summary

Kara and Lena working toward each other.

Supergirl banked and turned to fly toward Lena's condo, muttering about the stupid rain and seeking out Lena's heartbeat in a sea of heartbeats and city noises. She landed on Lena's balcony with rain sluicing from her cape and thought of the mess she was about to make on Lena's carpet. She shook herself like a dog at Superspeed and then walked through the door, pleased to only be leaving minimal wet footprints as she made her way to Lena's bathroom, stripped down, hung her suit over the side of the tub to finish drying and padded into Lena's bedroom. From a pile of clean laundry on the dresser she pulled out Lena's MIT sweatpants and one of her beaver t-shirts, put them on and slid into the bed behind Lena.

The moment Kara wrapped her arms around Lena she realized that the woman was boiling hot and shivering. Lena murmured and leaned back into Kara’s warmth. Outside, the rain picked up and thunder rumbled. Kara remembered, when she had first come to Earth, how strange it had been when she had experienced rain for the first time, since her region of Krypton had been gripped in drought for about half her life. She had loved rain, at first. But when the unfamiliar thunder had rumbled in the night, her dreams had turned to Krypton tearing itself apart and she had woken screaming.

Eliza and Jeremiah would hold her, talk to her until she calmed, but if she fell back asleep, it would only happen again, so when hurricane season came around, Alex had simply pulled Kara into her bed. She had been alone in her pod for years before coming to Earth, and she associated not being touched with the destruction of her planet and the long lonely dreams of her long stasis. Something, even in her sleep, told her that if she was not alone, she was not in danger, that all had not in fact been lost.

With time the trauma dreams had decreased in frequency and intensity, and now as an adult Kara could generally sleep alone through even the loudest storm if she had to. And for most of her adult life she had had to. She hadn’t give much thought to it for a long time. Her roommates in college had usually been dorks much like herself and they didn’t date much either. After college, the learning curve for working for Cat Grant had been steep and time-consuming, and since she watched Alex also throwing herself into work and not really date, she hadn’t considered her solitude abnormal. And then, when she came out as Supergirl, she had added night patrols to an already busy day. When she slept, she slept like the dead.

But then Maggie and Vasquez had happened to Alex. And Kara had watched her sister gradually settle into her happiness and wondered what it would be like to have someone who wanted to be around her, by night as well as by day. At first she hadn’t even thought of it as being about sex, just having that warm body to lean against in the dark, feeling safe and protected.

That was how she felt now, protected, even though outside it was pouring a deluge of rain and the thunder was crashing and lighting splitting the sky at intervals, and even though the person she felt protected by was feverish and sweating through her pajamas. And all Kara could do was hold her and try to keep at bay that niggling reminder of how fragile humans were.
By morning, Lena's fever had broken, but she was still coughing and weak. Kara sat up and looked down at the exhausted-looking CEO. Her black hair was splayed across the pillow and her face was even paler than usual. But Rao, those green eyes!

"Mornin', beautiful."

Lena groaned, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. "Hardly. I'm soaking wet."

Despite her recent grim mood, Kara grinned mischievously. "I do love hearing you say that!"

Lena threw her pillow at her, then smelled her shirt. "Ew. I need a shower." She stood up and then faltered.

Kara put her hand out to steady her. "Whoa, there. Looks like you might need me in there with you to hold you up."

"I wouldn't say no." And because she was Lena, she added, "To that. Or other things..."

"Come on, Miss Flirty. Let's get you clean."

Kara set the water to be warm, but not too hot. Lena tiredly draped her arms over Kara's shoulders as Kara worked the shampoo in her hands and then lathered Lena's lovely black hair, hyper-aware of what Lena was looking at.

"Kara," Lena said matter-of-factly. "You know I worship your abs, right."

Kara rolled her eyes and stepped Lena back so the shower would rinse her hair. Lazily, Lena let one hand glide down from Kara's shoulder to her collar bone, over one breast and caressed her abs, grinning slyly as a shudder went through Kara's body at the touch.

"Lena!"

"Oh, sorry, darling. I know I'm supposed to ask first, before I slide my hands over your naked body, or caress your breasts, or--"

"Lena."

More sincerely, Lena said, "Sorry. I guess my dreams last night were feverish in more ways than one."

"Rain check? You do need the energy to keep up with me, after all." Kara turned off the water and helped Lena step out of the shower.

"Fine. But..."

"What?"

Lena's face took on a vulnerable cast. "Nothing."

Kara looked at her, so different wrapped in a green towel and drooping. Kara lifted Lena's chin and forced her to meet her eyes. "I am going to call CatCo and tell them about the terrible flu I have, and then I'm going to make you breakfast, and then I will figure out a way to make sure you spend the day actually resting."

Lena looked like she was going to cry, but she just said, "That's lovely, Kara, but you don't have to. And I'm not really hungry."
"Yes, I do. You never are. I always am. So I will make me breakfast and let you steal some when you see how amazing it smells."

"How can you see a smell?"

Kara just rolled her eyes and pushed Lena into her bedroom to get her dressed. Lena handed Kara her maroon MIT sweatshirt and a pair of jeans, while Kara picked out sweatpants and a big green and blue plaid flannel shirt for Lena.

In the kitchen, Kara tied her still wet hair back and set to making pancakes.

Lena said, "If I'd known you'd be coming over, I would have bought blueberries. Where have you been all week?"

"Flying. Patrolling. Fighting any bad guys I could get my hands on."

Lena nodded. Kara knew that Lena was no stranger to fleeing problems through working harder. "It was the attack at the gala, wasn't it? Something happened. What happened?"

"I've been trying to figure that out for days. I think it was those policemen, the ones whose riot shields were melted into their arms. The smell, maybe something in the metal and plastic, the burnt flesh. It just reminded me of my last day on Krypton, hurrying through the burning streets with my parents to get to my pod. The smell..."

Quietly, Lena said, "The part of the brain that regulates smell is right next to the memory center."

"I know."

"You know how you noticed that scar on my shoulderblade? I had fallen out of a tree. I was seven and trying to keep up with Lex and I fell on a sharp rock and got cut. It took four stitches, which isn't much, but my, well, Lillian yelled at Lex for pretty much spending time with me and then yelled at me for being irresponsible."

"No hugs?"

"Later, after Lillian and Lionel went to bed, Lex sneaked in and hugged me. But that was maybe eight hours later. Anyway, it's just that the forsythia were blooming, and I have walked into parks, or tennis courts, or other places when forsythia was blooming and I have this abrupt anxiety attack, and it always takes me a few minutes to figure out what triggered it." She shook her head. "I know getting a little cut is nowhere near like having your whole civilization destroyed--"

"Scale doesn't matter," said Kara. "It's about the body reacting to stimuli. Big or small doesn't really make a difference. It happens and you can't control it."

Lena started coughing. Kara handed her the cough medicine. "Tea?"

"Yes!"

Kara reached for the teakettle, filled it with water, opened the cabinet that held all of Lena's exotic loose-leaf teas, because a woman who had spent that much time in Ireland would clearly never use teabags.

Lena sat watching her as if she were some chef on the Food Network, and Kara flipped pancakes and or every four she ate, she slipped one onto the small plate in front of Lena, and Lena nibbled on it like a rabbit, but eventually she had eaten at least five.
Kara rinsed all the dishes and stacked them into the dishwasher, adding soap and turning it on.

"So," she said, turning back to Lena. "We have one day off, because you won't take more and I have no doubt by tomorrow yet more havoc will break loose. So how do you want to spend it?"

Lena's eyes widened. She stopped and looked out the window and the still pouring rain. She turned back to Kara. "Maybe... a movie?"

"Sure! What do you want to watch?"

"Um... Maybe Princess Bride? i mean, I know we watched it just two weeks ago, and probably you don't want to watch it again, but it's just that--"

"Um, Ms. Luthor? That thing where I said that I LOVE that movie? I don't think that word means what you think it means."
As You Wish

Chapter Summary

Feels and Fluff for SuperCorp. No plot, no problem.

Chapter Notes

And with this chapter, that I wrote yesterday, the 60th day in this adventure, I passed 500 pages. *wipes sweat off brow, takes a bow*

The few sick days that Lena had ever taken in her entire life had, not surprisingly, been about her being ridiculously sick. They had never, never, never been about her playing hooky. And even though she was, today, actually ridiculously sick, sucking on cough lozenges and sucking down cough medicine every four hours, she felt like she was cheating.

Watching movies with Kara, kissing Kara between coughs, blissfully knowing that Kara could not catch Earth illnesses—all of it was heaven. And Kara had instigated a rule that Lena could only check her messages every three hours and only respond to the ones that were either emergencies or from Jess, because Kara said that Jess was probably doing her level best to keep situations at L-Corp from becoming full-blown emergencies.

When they got to the sword the sword fight between Inigo and the Dread Pirate Robert, Kara turned to Lena with shining eyes. "Did I mention how hot it was, watching you fight Lucy for me? I was ready for you to carve a Z on her shirt."

"You're mixing movies, darling."

Kara shrugged and turned back to the movie. Lena watched her, concerned. Normally when they sat side by side like this, Kara was anywhere from happy-go-lucky to relaxed and sleepy. And maybe it was the last several days of racing around the city, or the rain continuing to pour, but as the movie continued, Kara's laughs came fewer and farther between and she crossed her arms and settled into herself. Finally, Lena picked up the remote and paused.

"You okay, Kara?" That triggered a fit of coughing.

Kara looked at her watch, got up and brought back the cough medicine from the kitchen, poured out a dose into the little plastic cup and handed it to Lena, who grimaced as she tossed it back.

"Yuck. Thanks."

Kara sighed as she twisted the cap back on. "Alex hates that stuff. I asked Eliza why medicine had to taste so bad and she said it was to make people want to get well faster."

Lena made a face. "Well, that part of it's working."

Kara sat back down on the couch. "Why did you ask if I'm okay?"
"Because it feels as if you're not."

Kara leaned her head back against the couch. "I'm just tired. Not physically. I slept well last night, though I'd prefer it if the sun were shining. It's just all of this stuff. Before I was Supergirl, I would see and hear all this pain around me, but I wasn't allowed to do anything about it. And suddenly, now that I'm this--" she gestured at her chest, then looked down and gave a small mirthless laugh--"apparently a Super MIT student..."

"You can actually help. But not everybody."

"And it's better. It is. It's just--"

"Exhausting, I'd imagine."

"You have no idea. Or, I don't know. Maybe you do. Maybe I'm not the only one putting out fires every day."

"Just little fires," said Lena with a smile, holding her thumb and forefinger a half inch apart. "Teeny tiny."

"Forgive me, Lena, but your mother is not a small fire."

"No, true, Lillian is four-alarm, all the way. Luthors go big or go home."

"And you've helped me with my fires, too."

"Well, why should you be the only one to have a day job and save the world on the side?" Lena laughed and then fell to coughing again. Recovering, she added, "But you're right. It takes its toll. But what can we do but soldier on?"

"Vasquez told me once that R&R has a purpose, that maybe recreation can help re-created us after a firefight or a week spent waiting around and pacing."

"So, the alien bar, game night?" said Lena. "Yes, and..." The smile came back to Kara's eyes. "Kryptonian potstickers."

"You noticed that, did you?" It was Lena's teasing voice.

"Rao, Lena. How did you guess? I've never told anyone, not even Alex."

"Kara, I love dumplings in all forms: gyoza, shumai, pierogi. A lot of cultures have them and yes, they're fabulous. But nobody loves them as much as you do, and most people who love them love all kinds, not just gyoza. And sometimes when you're eating them, you look nostalgic... I know a few things about alien food and I've tried a lot of alien restaurants--"

"Without me?" It came out as a squeal. Kara blushed and reached up to adjust her glasses.

"I didn't want to disappoint you if I didn't like the food."

"And did you?"

Lena could tell that the answer was important to Kara. She said, "Yes, most of it. The food at the Maldorian place was sort of... slimy."

"See, that's why you have to go with me! You have to drink, well, it's kind of like lemonade made
with vinegar, but fermented. It cuts that taste."

"Like drinking a yogurt lassi with hot Indian food?"

"Exactly! But you liked the others?"

"Kara, as you know very well, I've been hiring alien caterers lately for my L-Corp events. I don't give my guests food I don't like. Even Luthors don't do that."

"I just thought somebody had recommended them."

"Well, yes, actually Millie Bernetti is an old friend and told me where to start."

"Is that how you got me the job?"

"Of course not. I just emailed her and suggested she interview you."

"And got Lois and Cat to write recommendations."

Lena shrugged. "So I'm thorough. But it was the taste test that got you the job."

"So then... why would you want to eat alien food?"

"I want to encourage people to accept the aliens that are here for good. And food is a way to start doing that. That's how humans change. They fall in love with an unfamiliar food and then they're less averse to dealing with that culture's people. You change hearts by changing stomachs. Or tongues, I guess."

"Okay..."

"And I wanted to feel like I could share something with you that most people wouldn't think to do."

"No one ever has."

"Well, then."

Kara leaned her head on Lena's shoulder. "Am I allowed to love you yet?"

"If you want to."

"Your heart just got fast."

"It often does when I'm with you. As you well know."

"Yeah, I just thought you were excitable."

"And straight, apparently."

"I'm glad I was wrong."

"So I'm not excitable?" Lena teased.

"Oh, very. Just not in a particularly straight way."

Lena laughed. "I should get a t-shirt saying that."

"I'll make you one for your birthday. When is it by the way? Even the DEO doesn't have that info."
"I'd rather not say."

"You tell me yours and I'll tell you mine."

"The verb you're looking for there, Kara, is show."

"Pretty sure you got an eyeful this morning."

"Well," said Lena, coughing. "I am a connoisseur of find arts." She cocked The Eyebrow™.

"Lena!"

"Kara!"

Kara sighed. "I think we both need a nap."
A Most Important Mission

Chapter Summary

Major Lucy Lane is nothing if not strategic.

Lucy had threatened to wear her uniform to the bridal shop in Metropolis. She had gone dress shopping in uniform before, and it always elicited one of two responses. Either the skinny little clerks had gone overboard to find her a dress that was hyper-feminine, presumably to "make up for" her uniform and job, or they had simply tried to get her out of the store as quickly as possible, because they figured otherwise she might, what? Shoot it up? Lucy didn't care if it meant she got through the painful process faster.

But, no. Lois had put her stiletto-heeled foot down on that one. Plan B. Lucy had gone to Kara and asked for a little bitty favor. When Kara had heard what Lucy wanted, she sat down abruptly on her couch, laughing so hard she could barely breathe. She gestured weakly. "Take... whatever... need." And then laughed even harder. When Lucy had gotten what she wanted, Kara was gasping for breath.

"Good... luck..."

So Lucy had dressed up for this difficult afternoon in Metropolis, took the high-speed rail rather than driving so that she could use the time to bone up on alien surveillance techniques. Ever since Winn's alien girlfriend had turned up, one of a species that could not be captured on camera, Lucy had been searching for alternatives. She was not surprised that some of the tech out there that was trying to address this problem came from L-Corp.

Pulling out her phone as the countryside passed by at speed, Lucy called the number for the company's CEO.

"L-Corp. Lena Luthor's office. My name is Jess. How can I help you?"

"Hi, Jess. My name is Major Lucy Lane. I don't think we've met, but I am from the same division...." Lucy glanced around the business section of the train before continuing somewhat more quietly, "of the FBI as Director J'onnnz."

"Ah," said Jess, knowingly. "And what can I do for you, Major?"

"I've been researching some of your company's special surveillance technology, the ones driven by big data analytics. I would like the opportunity to speak with your CEO about the possibility of contracting L-Corp to create a signature version of that tech for our group."

"Let me take your name and number, and I will consult with Ms. Luthor and get back to you on that."

Lucy gave her the contact information and hung up. Out the windows, she could see the familiar cityscape of Metropolis and she focused on her mission.

No flounces. No flounces. No flounces.
When she dragged her rolling bag behind her into the station, she saw Lois immediately, dressed like Jackie Kennedy in a little skirt suit with a little matching hat. Who the hell wore matching hats in the twenty-first century?

They air-kissed like a couple of debutantes, and then Lois took in Lucy's outfit: the blue raincoat, the blue chinos, the blue and white polka-dotted shirt. The little brown oxford shoes, the little brown belt. The little pale blue cardigan over it.

"Um. Lucy?"

"Yes, Lois?"

"Your style has... changed..."

"Oh, that. Well, you said no to the uniform, and I find this style very practical. I can run or fight if I have to while also being, you know, color coordinated." She smiled sweetly.

"Um, okay... The car is... over here..."

Lucy's smile was angelic. What did they say at West Point? Always keep your enemy guessing? So true.
As a computer scientist/genius hacker/IT guy, Winn had never had to worry about informed consent of human subjects before. So when Lena had asked him to join her R&D team, led by Kate Johnson and Ron Boyd, to work on the problem of the prosthetic head crest for the Vo'on refugees, he had looked at it as a strictly technical problem and had not considered the more social/political/individual issues. He had not realized that scientists who dealt with sentient testing might be held to a very different standard than scientists who only dealt with animal or human testing alone, and of course, since everything he had ever done was with inanimate objects or code, all of this was (pun intended) alien to him.

Kate Johnson was fierce as she argued with the L-Corp lawyers about the need for extreme interventions in the face of this species' health crisis. Apparently Ron no longer went to those meetings, just stayed in the lab twelve hours a day before going home to his--it could no longer be denied--dying boyfriend.

Meanwhile, Winn was working eight hours at the DEO and another six at L-Corp every day. If only he could create a stopgap measure, to give the terminally ill patients a little more time for the paperwork to go through so that they could legally test the prototype of the crest on the desperate patients who had volunteered. On Thursday, when Kate had returned, frustrated and exhausted from her latest head-to-head in the upstairs conference room, Winn had several different prototypes of his idea waiting for her to examine them.

"Winn," she asked tiredly. "What are you still doing here? What time is it?"

"Quarter to seven. But I finished them and I wanted to you see."

She set her clipboard and purse down on her lab bench and came over to his. Set in a row were several different size skull grafts, made of the pale grey material they had been experimenting on. None had crests.

"What is this?"

"Well, I had Lucy look at our lawyers' briefs on the problem of sentient consent, and she said that most of them focused on the idea that our previous prototypes were 'cosmetic' in nature. I thought if we started out simply to find a way to make a better seal for the old wounds to avoid infection of the brain through a basic graft, then later, if we need to use some sort of additive technology to build up the crest for the cultural significance, that would be a separate thing. But we're not going to get to that point if we can't save lives and then show the statistics on the lives we've saved. Proof of concept meets humanitarian, er, sentientarian, oh hell, you know. Medicine."

"Who's Lucy?"

"One of the lawyers at the DEO," Winn hedged. "She also said she would messenger over the legal stuff that your lawyers either have ignored or just didn't know about. So you could... start again
with a different tactic?"

Kate turned the grey caps over in her hands. "How long would it take you to make surgical quality prototypes?"

"If you can get us time in the cleanroom? Four to eight days, depending on how many you need up front."

"I'll call Ms. Luthor. I know she wants to move this project ahead as quickly as possible."

"How's Ron?"

"Exhausted. Despairing. I told him today to take tomorrow off, just be with his boyfriend, maybe get some sleep..."

"Is there anything else I can do?" asked Winn.

"Get me a meeting with this Lucy person, asap. Do you think she could meet tonight?"

"I think she's in Metropolis, but she's supposed to be back tomorrow."

"Okay, well, soon as you can. And Winn, thanks. You didn't have to do this."

"Yeah, well, one of the things I've learned while working with K-- my colleagues at the DEO, sometimes heroism comes down to having the right information at the right time."
Chapter Summary

Some action to add to the fluff.

Chapter Notes

While we are waiting until the end of the interminable hiatus, I will take prompts, if you like.

When the DEO's multiple systems scanning National City continuously for unusual radioactivity, alien materials and vehicular traffic all pinged at the same time, Winn whooped and Alex came trotting over.

Winn raised his hand for a high-five. "We've got him!"

Alex stood there, hands on hips. "Who? How? What are you talking about?"

"It's Vorstead. I'd put money on it. Those ichor aliens and some kind of Maldorian iron alloy. And a whole lot of large vehicles headed east from National City."

"What is out that way?"

Winn gave up on the high five and used that hand to point to the map. "A few things that might be of interest. And old abandoned army bunker, for one. Further on, beyond that, a good piece of wilderness with lots of flora and fauna. Vasquez was wondering out loud the other day, if step one might be raising these things in the lab, might trying out some free range aliens be a next step?"

"And you think it is?"

"Well, that is one of three ideas I had. The third location beyond these two is Opal City. It's a non-hero city, and we don't have much presence there because it's never really attracted much alien attention. So it's relatively unprotected."

Alex patted his shoulder. "Good job, Winn. Get me more specifics and I'll start prepping a team. Let Vasquez know I'll need her, and tell J'onn. Find out if Supergirl is back yet. It never hurts to have aerial backup that they can't see coming."

//

The rookies were in one of the training rooms, blindfolded taking apart and putting back together their AK-15s. As always, Finn finished first, Holtzy second, and James last. He ground his teeth in frustration. They were just taking off their blindfolds when Agent Danvers marched into the room.

"Okay, rookies, you're coming into the field, so prepare for a rural op: waterproof boots and WiFi battery packs, along with field rations and more than the usual extra ammo. AKs and side arms,
batons, flashlights, basically the usual plus. Riley, you know what I mean. Help the others out. We meet in the map room at fourteen hundred hours; be dressed in tac, but leave your packs in the evac bay."

She marched out again. Finn was already typing on his phone. "I'll send you guys the list beyond what we normally take. It isn't much, maybe an extra nine or ten pounds. Will that be okay for you, Holtzy?"

Holtzy looked at him condescendingly. "Do you know how much shit we carry when we're on Poltergeist Patrol? The plasma pack alone weighs thirty pounds and then the actual rifles are another twelve, and the suits with the inner shielding... You don't want to know. Don't worry, Finster. I can carry my weight."

James, who was taller and had more muscle than both of them combined, felt a small stab of relief. The purely physical requirements of the job he knew he could always handle. And once they got into the field, adrenalin started to kick in, and that helped. The fighting itself pretty much came naturally to him.

As he gathered his gear in the barracks, he heard Finn behind him say, "You know, there are some tricks to getting faster on the AK exercise. I notice that you are much better with the sidearm exercise. If we can figure out what makes that easier, I can probably help you increase your speed. If you like."

"Yeah, man. Thanks. I just can't see to get it for some reason."

"We're all good at different things."

"So if you were so good with that army group, why'd you leave?"

"They were army, but they acted like Cadmus. And they endangered my friends and targeted the woman I was in love with, attempted to kill her and make it look like an accident."

"A human?"

"Yes... but human the way Batgirl is human, plus a few gifts of her own. Let's go. We've only got fifteen."

//

Vasquez took the briefing after Winn updated her. She strode into the map room, where J'onn and Alex already waited with the two teams. She tapped at her tablet and the map of the area around the abandoned army bunker came up on the screen. She kept tapping at her tablet as she introduced the area, the aliens that they already know, Vorstead's picture and stats.

(AgentKevlar: Where's SG?)

BigDanvers: On her way.)

She gave them permission to use deadly force on the aliens but told them to try to take Vorstead and any other humans alive. "We don't know if they're working for Cadmus or on their own or possibly with a foreign entity or even a domestic company."

Alex murmured, "Like Lord Tech?"

"He has interfered before. We don't know. So we will absolutely need to capture them for
questioning."

Finn asked, "Ma'am, if we can capture rather than kill the aliens, is that preferred?"

"I'd like to say yes, but I don't know if we have enough bodies to contain them. It looks like we may be outnumbered. Let's start by capturing if we can, but if I call Black Mambo, or Agent Danvers does, then it's kill on sight. Any other questions?"

Holtzy raised her hand. "So this will be like the drill we did back in the desert."

"Exactly like that. We infiltrate, capture as many humans as we can, capture at least a few of the aliens so we can do testing on them, shut the bunker down and get out. Except I doubt it will be that simple."

Finn sighed and murmured, "It never is..."

"You're right, Finn," said Alex sharply. "It never is that easy. And this is why we train, drill after drill, many tactical scenarios as we can think of, to be prepared for what you can never prepare for. But I have faith in your training and I have faith in you. I know you'll do the DEO proud."

//

They came in hot, each squad in a Blackhawk, and landed, making a perimeter around the bunker. Alex and her alpha team led the attack on the front door, while the rest of her teams took the other entrances, and Vasquez's teams waited as backup with some stationary guns and a pair of medics behind the lines.

The infil was easy--maybe too easy, worried Alex. They blew all the doors open simultaneously and ran into the underlit, smoky tunnels, descending with rifles and flashlights, clearing room after room. On the first level, the hostiles were all unconscious, lying where they fell from the multiple percussive explosions and the pressure. The firefight started on the second level, but it wasn't the guns the hostiles were using that caused most of the chaos. Alex got eyes on Vorstead, shot his two bodyguards with her laser pistol. They fell as more explosions from nearby went off. In her comms, she could hear her agents screaming and it sounded like panic.

Then she heard Holtzy's voice shout, "Don't shoot the ichor! Repeat DO NOT shoot the ichor. The ichor is explosive. No lasers! Keep your shots high."

Alex pulled her backup piece that shot lead bullets while she informed Vasquez of the new information. "Vasquez! The ichor is explosive! Do not enter with your team! DO call Black Mambo! We cannot let this strain of alien loose on civilians. Attention, all agents. Do Not Shoot Ichor. DO shoot aliens. Black Mambo. Repeat, Black Mambo. Shoot aliens to kill. Capture humans only."

She saw Vorstead again, climbing up a stack of crates that said in black stencil, disturbingly, "GESTATION." He saw that she'd seen him and went to leap, but she shot him and he screamed, collapsing on top of the crates. Like a mountain goat, she leaped up, crate to crate, saw the bloody mess that was his knee and pulled his arms together and handcuffed him.

More explosions went off. A heavy set of boots landed behind her and she spun around and kicked the man's feet out from under him, but even as he fell, he rolled and was back on his feet, hands with AK-15 held up in surrender.

"James? Agent Olsen, help me get him out of here. Take one arm. He's our prime target. Once we
get him out, get him to medic. If I hit his femoral artery, he'll bleed out."

James lifted the man up over his shoulder. "You cover me, ma'am. This way's faster."

Impressed despite herself, Alex jumped down and pulled her lead pistol in her left hand and her laser in her right.

They shot their way to the surface.

Above ground, a dozen humans were lying in a row, their hands cuffed behind them. Supergirl stood talking earnestly with Vasquez.

Inside the bunker, an explosion sounded, followed by a chain of explosions. James sprinted with Vorstead to the medics. Vasquez trotted up to Alex, her face white. "So the place was rigged to blow?"

"They didn't want us collecting evidence about this strain."

Vasquez smiled grimly. "Too bad. We've got one live prisoner and one cadaver. They are being very, very carefully transported back. The live comes with us. J'onn wants to try to communicate with it. And Lucy wants to do the autopsy out at our bunker in Nevada, far from unintentional casualties. The humans come back with us for questioning."

"And do we... have casualties?" asked Alex.

"Two." Vasquez looked upset for a second, then her face went back to her usual mask.

Alex gripped her arm. "Not the rookies!"

Vasquez put her strong hand over Alex's. "No. They have all gone above and beyond. Old farts like you and me who assumed too much."

"Vasquez!" Alex admonished.

"Sanderson and Macy."

Alex remembered the bravado that she had several times called out on the two men, who seemed to think they were immortal, who took stupid risks. "We should have pulled them months ago. At least they'd still be alive."

"Noted, ma'am."

Alex focused on her, what? Friend? Girlfriend? Lover? Subordinate? Trainer? "We'll have to talk to J'onn about changing the protocol for that sort of thing. I can see it happening again in the future."

"Yep," sighed Vasquez sadly. "Because... testosterone."

"When did Supergirl show up?"

"The nick of time, when else? Your teams started streaming out followed by the aliens and they were spewing left and right so she took to the air and laser-beamed the ones at the back, so when their ichor blew, it took the other aliens with them but not our people. And then, she dropped down to check on our casualties, but then another spurt of them came out and they ran at her. And she simply spread her cape to protect herself and us..."

"Vasquez, what are you not telling me?"
Vasquez looked away, took a deep breath and looked back at Alex. "One of Vorstead's human agents had a weapon... He was behind us..."

"Not a gun?"

"Not a gun... that shoots... lead..."

"Kryptonite?" yelled Alex, gripping Vasquez's muscled arms hard.

"She's fine, Alex! She's okay!"

"But, but--"

"It was Agent Finn. He saw what was happening and threw himself between her and them. He took several kryptonite bullets. Supergirl insisted on flying him back to the DEO, but I overrode that. They could easily have crashed if Supergirl was affected by the proximity to the bullets. One of the Blackhawks flew him in."

Alex looked across the field to where Supergirl was pacing impatiently, her red cape swirling around her in the breeze. Even from that distance, Alex could make out the crinkle. "Do we know...?"

"They made it safely. He's in surgery. The Blackhawk should return in about ten minutes."

"And the person who shot Finn?"

"Yeah, my men took that personally. There is going to have to be some retraining next week."

"Can you blame them?" Alex's voice was hard.

"Blame them? No, of course not. But retrain them? Yes. Because a hostile willing to risk his life like that might possibly have had intel that we needed. Alex, listen to me. I learned this lesson in Iraq. We can't kill or even torture, really, if we want to get all the facts. It sucks, but it is the truth, and I think you know that."

"It's easier when it isn't about her."

"Ma'am, I know."

And the strangest thing of that very strange day, Alex later thought, was how Vasquez could say "ma'am" in a way that made Alex hear "sweetie."

But at the time, she simply said, "Round up the troops and let's all go home."
Some Forms of Paperwork Are Worse Than Others

Chapter Summary

Wherein J'onn Jonzz helps us fill up the interminable hiatus.

Back on Mars, before the long war, J'onn J'onnz had been a sort of paper-pushing bureaucrat--except that paper was at least two centuries in the past on Mars, so he had not seen the description as apt until he landed as a refugee on Earth and had taken on, at first, the face of a French white middle-class worker. And, in retrospect--(retrospect including the bloodbath that was the French revolution)--his choice to be small and unnoticeable had been a sheer stroke of genius, as it had allowed him to survive yet another genocide, although the Europeans had not seen it as such.

In later decades, he had been a Dutch white middle-class worker, and then after the English civil war, a British white middle-class worker. And he just kept avoiding being part of whatever particular slaughter Earth people had insisted on perpetuating at any given time. Long before the second world war, he had decided on the United States as his home base, and had passed as a white middle-class bureaucrat for several decades, even though the institution of black slavery had scraped against his soul, and then segregation had left him with nightmares of his own planet: this is where it starts, he had always thought. And that phrase had echoed in his nightmares.

So when he had been recognized and chased at the end of the twentieth century, by a privileged black man with a xenophobia to match what J'onn had seen from the rabid white aristocrats across several countries, across several centuries, and then he had seen Jeremiah Danvers refuse to participate in the hatred, he had known deep down, what he would need to do.

Solidarity was not a word, even in translation, that had any meaning on Mars. Solidarity only worked when there were more than two groups in the contest with each other, and on Mars there were only two: the White transcendent, and the Green subordinate.

But having watched from the sidelines of the last fifty years of US history, J'onn knew exactly who would be white and who would be green if the planetary tables were turned. Maybe it was a coincidence (although he was not a person who believed in coincidences), but white seemed to be white everywhere.

So when he suddenly had the opportunity to take on the black identity of the otherwise white-privileged-seeming Hank Henshaw, J'onn knew what he had to do.

In a way, it was ironic, the fact that the black/white and green/white juxtaposition, where it all went down, was in South America, a place where white colonialism had permanently broken the ancient indigenous institutions. But any jungle could serve as a convenient metaphor, he had supposed then and he still supposed now.

So when the army colonel and major had begun questioning him, on the one hand, J'onn could withstand any of their psychological attacks. White Americans, however racist and xenophobic, were closer to German Nazis than to White Martians. So he had a sliver of hope, of opportunity. But the questions they asked him did take him back to that tiny sliver of time he had spent with the good white human, Jeremiah Danvers, who had, it must be admitted, tried to understand.
Jeremiah had built a "campfire" and tried to convince J'onn that it would not kill him, while it might save Jeremiah from freezing to death. J'onn had tried to explain his aversion to the fires that had ravaged his planet.

"The agency that I work for," said Jeremiah, "They pinged you as a threat. That was before you saved me, before I learned that you're not a danger. You're a refugee. Like my daughter." He pulled a photo out of his breast pocket. "This one. Kara. She's adopted. She's not from here either. That one. Alex. She's tough. They both are, in their own way."

"Alex. Kara." J'onn tried out the unfamiliar syllables. "I too had daughters." He handed back the photo.

"When I link back up to my team," said Jeremiah, "I'm going to explain to them who you are and what you did for me."

"I am not a threat."

"I know that! But humans can be ignorant. Especially when they're scared. But I will do everything in my power to help keep you safe, to help find your place here. I'm Jeremiah Danvers. You can consider me a friend."

He extended his right hand and J'onn examined it curiously. Finally, J'onn extended his hand and said, "I am J'onn J'onzz. Someone is here--"

A plasma shot hit the Martian and he fell. Jeremiah immediately inserted himself between the shooters and the Martian. "No, no, no, stop, stop!"

But Hank Henshaw pushed Jeremiah aside and strode up to the prone body of the Martian Manhunter, his long-time prey. He pulled his rifle into his shoulder and growled, "I designed these bullets specially for you, Martian!"

"Hank--" said Jeremiah.

"The most powerful being on the face of this Earth," growled Hank. "You know who calls you that? Superman! Sure means something, coming from him."

The Martian said, "I mean you no harm. Please."

Jeremiah pulled on Henshaw's shoulders. "Hank, stop. No, he's a good man. He's a good man!"

Henshaw sent a roundhouse kick to Jeremiah's jaw, but he ducked, hearing, "He's not a man!"

They traded blows, first on their feet, and then on the ground. And then, without meaning to, Jeremiah sent Hank over the cliff. But he also was a mess, bleeding and gasping for breath. He said to the Martian, "Take care of my girls."

When he entered the DEO wearing the body of his nemesis, the DEO agents, welcomed him back by his body's old name.

"Welcome back, Director Henshaw."

"It's good to be back."
All of these thoughts went through J'onn's head as he watched Alex interrogate Vorstead and listened to the man's roiling mind. Eugenics, thought J'onn. Coerced evolution was just another side of the genocidal mindset.

Question after question that Alex asked over the next three hours left Vorstead weary and confused. Then, when Alex declared that she knew he was lying and slammed him up against the wall, he had totally lost it, collapsing on the floor and babbling that it wasn't his fault, that they'd made him do it, that his sister was their hostage, that he never wanted to make the aliens that dangerous, that the next step of the project was so, so very much worse, so he had intentionally moved his operation in a way that would catch somebody's attention...

It went on and on and the video and audio recorders caught all of it.

When he was finally a bubbling, exhausted wreck, they had left him alone and returned to J'onn's office. It was almost midnight. J'onn's assistant told them that the rookie Finn had only just then gotten out of surgery and was expected to make a full recovery.

J'onn gestured Alex to the seat in front of her desk, and he had pulled out a bottle of scotch and two glasses. "We're off duty," he said, handing her one, and she swirled the glass and sniffed appreciatively.

"So. What do you think?"

"The moment I heard Holtzy say that the ichor exploded on contact with lasers, I thought this might be the next step--that the dead bodies would explode, either with help or on their own. The ultimate supersoldier: cadaverous kamikazes."

"Holtzman figured it out? I thought it was you."

"No, sir. She got on the comms and told everybody on our team to avoid shooting the ichor, to aim high. She's a fast thinker, sir. Can we keep her?"

"Lucy already recommended that. But I hadn't thought... hmmm. Although actually, I have a report here on her from Winn that I haven't had a chance to read."

Alex grinned.

"What?"

"Winn adores her. She figured out that alien, Joe's, laser rifle in like three days and is already prototyping a replica. Also, he might be taking her to Lois and Clark's wedding..."

J'onn frowned. "I have in fact been in the same room with Holtzman and you and Vasquez, you know."

"Yeah, she normally rolls in our direction, but she's pan, sir, and I think they connect on a more intellectual level. It's just a wedding, anyway. But I know he totally respects her mind."

J'onn nodded. "Makes sense. Well, I have to say all our rookies stepped up today. I have your report on James Olsen, I'd like you to make an official report on Holtzman, and I have Vasquez's report on Finn. I assume she told you?"

"She did, sir." Alex looked away to compose herself. "I am grateful that he would realize how much danger, how important, most people just think she's impregnable, and he put himself--"
J'onn waited until she could look at him again. Finally, he said, "After it was, what's the phrase, 'all over but the shouting'? I happened to find an old award. It hasn't been used in years, not since, well, you, Agent Danvers. The Cadet Recognition Award for Leadership. I think it would be appropriate to give out three this year, don't you?"

"They have lived up to my best hopes, sir. I know Lucy will be proud." She wiped under her eye with her forefinger, careful not to smudge her light mascara.

"She will. Now, Agent, you need sleep. Go home. Come in late tomorrow. Say, nine o'clock?"

Alex laughed. "Yes, sir. I'll be sure to sleep in."

J'onn smiled as she left, although his expression changed as he looked at his inbox. What was it about bureaucratic red tape, he wondered, on any planet, in any country, in any century, that was so very mind-numbing?

Well, he might have to fill out forms justifying the money for this op, but before he could do that, he could at least draft the justification for the awards for the rookies. Most of the time he took paperwork in stride, as he had for more than three centuries. But sometimes, every so often, he enjoyed it.
Starting the Team

Chapter Summary

Because I really loved Joe from Slaver's Moon.

Chapter Notes

If anybody knows some good fic with Kate Kane (with or without Maggie), drop me a comment. I want to do more with her but no nothing about her.

Maggie's new captain was not what Captain Tilden had predicted he would be, and that made Maggie nervous. Was he encouraging her to continue her contacts with aliens so that, eventually, he could pull some kind of nazi dragnet shit and pull them all in simply for being aliens? It made her nervous.

But then a blue alien had walked in with a typical police application and a very non-typical recommendation from Supergirl, and another from "FBI" Director Hank Henshaw. He was wearing brown chinos and a pink shirt and a tan and brown cardigan.

And a bowtie.

Maggie was a detective. She detected. She knew that Supergirl and Kara Danvers were good friends. For a while now, she had also suspected that they might even be the same person. Seriously, glasses and a ponytail? She had seen them together maybe twice, but there were ways of pulling that off; after all, this was the freaking DEO they were talking about.

"So." She looked at the application in front of her. "Joe? How did you hear about this opening?"

"Supergirl tells Joe of opening. Supergirl tells Joe of Maggie Sawyer."

"Did Supergirl also tell Joe of bowties? Nice look, by the way."

"Supergirl's friend Kara Danvers brings Joe to Men's Wearhouse."

"And did either of them explain the past tense to you?"

"Oh, yes. Past is when the scent finally leaves the air."

Maggie thought about that. She had worked with the K-9 division in the past and she knew that a dog could follow a scent hours after it had been left on a trail, unless rain or heavy wind dispersed it. Clearly time had a different meaning on Joe's planet.

"And do you have a family name?"

"On my planet, we do not nominate based on clan or nestlings. Joe is choosing a very good name but it is taking time."
"Right."

Maggie read through his application. Under Experience, she read, “Fourteen years on Pr’aloptinae IV as Constable (3 yr.), Chief Constable (4 yr.), and Sniffer (7 yr.).” Two of his references were offworld and probably unreachable and the third was in Southern France, currently working at a winery. She made a note to contact the alien.

“Okay, Joe. Tell me what you know about chain of evidence.”

“Chain very important. If the smell is broken, evidence no good.”

Maggie thought, When did my job get this weird? Out loud, she said, “You’ll have to attend our police academy, the same as you would if you’d been a cop in a different country.”

“Understood.”

After he left, Maggie reread her captain’s memo directing her to start putting together a taskforce made up of alien police officers, modeled on the Metropolis and Gotham squads. He had already convinced those city’s police commissioners to lend them two officers each to work with Maggie on the training protocols, and though the Metropolis cops didn’t trust the Gotham cops, she had gotten her ex-girlfriend, Kate Kane, to contact Batman, and he had given them a strong recommendation.

And of course, the conversation with Kate had been… interesting.

“Is that all you’re calling me about, Mags?” she had purred, and it was like she had flipped an old switch in Maggie’s belly, leaving a sudden warmth spreading…

“What else would I be calling about?”

“Oh, the upcoming wedding, for instance…”

“Wedding?”

“In Metropolis? Rumor has it that you’re the bridesmaid’s plus-one.”

“Oh, yeah. That.”

“You going to save a dance for me?”

“Your date might not like that.”

“My date won’t have a choice.”

Maggie heard a resonance in the words. “Wait! You don’t have a date?”

“I never said that.”

“You didn’t have to.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’re a detective. You detect. Fine. My last girlfriend just broke up with me. Usual reasons. She’s got a normal life, I have a secret identity.”

“I’m telling you, Kate. Find you a DEO dyke and you will never go back.”

“I’m pretty sure that there aren’t any Lanes left.”
“Just General Dad, and he is SO not your type.”

Kate barked a laugh.

“Eh, don’t worry, Kate. I’ve never known you to be single for more than three weeks.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere. I gotta go now. But, Mags, don’t be a stranger, okay?”

And Maggie hung up thinking that Kate had just admitted that she missed Maggie, maybe that she still loved her. Because Batwoman never stayed in touch with her exes.
Hooray for Dollywood!

Chapter Summary

The musical episode the incredible singers/actors on this show deserved that they didn't get. You're welcome.

(And the pig sings, "Here I come to save the day!")

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dollywood was packed.

Aliens from all over the galaxy and humans from all over the city danced and drank and bet on each other’s pool games, and signed up at the bar to sing on the makeshift stage that hid the worst of the damage that M’gann still couldn’t afford to repair.

The alien bar had for a long time been National City’s best-kept secret. After the Medusa virus killed so many of its alien staff and patrons, it had become National City’s worst-kept secret (if you didn’t count Supergirl’s identity). But after Cadmus had shot it up and kidnapped yet more of its patrons, the place had been a wreck, and the insurance hadn’t covered more than a third of it, just enough to get back up and running, but not enough to get completely up to code. J’onn had helped her apply through the DEO for FEMA funding, which got the electrical up to code and even get new stalls for the bathrooms that had been shot up when aliens fled inside and then Cadmus agents shot the sinks up and dragged their prey out. And the water damage was the only reason her insurance had kicked in at all.

But the far wall was just a mess and had been covered in bright blue sheeting for months. It had taken her that long to figure out what to do. So when she heard people talking about the gala Lena Luthor was going to put on to fund the alien hospital, she had talked a bunch of her friends (human and alien) and their kids to watch the valets at the gala and put flyers about the karaoke night fundraiser on the cars of aliens. It was a risk going public in that way, but she had run out of ideas and out of money. All of her savings were tied up in this place, and she couldn’t ask J’onn or her other friends for help.

But she had only printed fifty flyers. And Dollywood was packed. So the word of mouth must have been phenomenal. She had added a dollar onto the price of all the drinks, but even so, people were drinking the drinks faster than her extra bartenders could make them. And she had invented a few new (even more expensive) cocktails for the occasion. There were signs advertising them all over the bar:

The Supergirl: Blue Curacao, dark rum, pineapple juice, and cherries on a plastic sword.

The Lena Luthor: White rum, midori, muddled mint leaves, lime wedge

The Green Martian: Vodka, triple sec, midori, lime juice

The National City: Vodka, gin, rum, tequila and ginger beer
The Orange Snow: Vodka, grand marnier, orange juice, orange peel

Admittedly, they were just twists on already existing cocktails, but considering that her clientele usually drank beer, Aldebaran rum or WD40, she was amazed at how popular the drinks were. It was almost as if her guests had come ready to shell out money For The Cause, and if they were going to do that anyway, they might as well get drunk as shit too, since that would make it a whole lot easier later to take to the stage and sing in front of all these people.

When she saw the DEO crew come in together, a part of her that had been nervous relaxed. She had refused to call in any favors but one: she had begged Alex to bring Kara and to sing with her. M'gann had heard Kara singing to herself while she watched Alex and Vasquez play pool, and the Martian thought that anyone who heard that girl sing would probably pay to sing with her. Alex had agreed to talk to Kara about it. By the grin on Kara’s face, M'gann thought that she was thrilled to be able to sing all night, with somebody else paying the extra five bucks per song.

The aliens who frequented Dollywood knew Maggie and the DEO agents. They knew the food reporter who was making a name for herself due to her deep knowledge of alien food and enthusiastic writing style. And everyone knew who Lena Luthor was and what she had done for them. So when the Danvers and their crew rolled in, the aliens who had their usual booth agreed to give it up in return for Lena, Maggie and Kara's autographs. (DEO agents couldn't, being secret agents, after all.) M'gann came over to take their drink order personally.

Lena, still laughing about the autographs, laughed even harder at the special cocktail menu, and immediately ordered a Supergirl, while Kara ordered a Lena Luthor. J'onn went for an Orange Snow, James and Winn had National Cities, and Vasquez and Alex had Green Martians. Maggie and Lucy muttered about being designated drivers, so M'gann promised them club sodas on the house all night.

When she brought the drinks, she gave them a sheet to sign up with the songs they were planning to sing so that she could use the app for finding karaoke versions of all the songs.

"What are you going to sing, Kara?" M'gann asked. "Something by Journey?"

Alex and Kara both yelled, "Not Journey!"

"Okay," said James. "There's a story there. Is this Alex's fault?"

"No," said Alex. "Eliza's. She and Jeremiah would dance around in the kitchen while cooking Sunday dinner together, singing Journey songs at the top of their lungs. They called it rocking out. We called it walking out."

"Parents are inexplicable," said Vasquez. "My dad loves jazz and my mom loves country. Talk about stereo wars. And yet they are still together. Go figure."

//

M'gann was called away and the crew chattered about the songs that they might sing. J'onn immediately pulled the paper toward himself and wrote in small but neat capital letters, "Impossible Dream."


J'onn shrugged and passed the paper to Winn. "Yes, I am Agent Schott. So what is the dynamic duo going to sing?"
James grabbed it gleefully. "Sir, have you ever heard this dude sing? He's professional quality." He jotted down "You and Me."

"Oh, I love that song!" fangirled Winn.

"Dude, I know. I've heard you sing it in the DEO shower. Like a million times."

"C'mon! Victor/Victoria is a classic!"

Alex turned to Kara. "M'gann wants us to start. Holding Out?"

"Perfect!" said Kara. "My theme song!" She turned to Lena. "What are you going to sing?"

"Oh, I don't know, Kara. My voice is nothing like yours and I don't dare to totally humiliate myself in public."

"Then maybe later on in private?" Kara batted her eyelashes.

Lena laughed. "Yes, I will humiliate myself for you in private."

"Promise?"

Lena gave her a haughty look. "I don't make promises and not keep them, Ms. Danvers."

Lucy grabbed the paper, jotted something down.

Maggie said, "Lemme see!"

"Nope. Just a little something to remind you of Metropolis. It'll be a surprise. Don't show Sawyer the page."

"But what if Maggie wants to sing?" said Kara.

Lucy and Maggie together said, "Maggie doesn't want to sing."

Maggie added, "My talents lie in other directions, Little Danvers."

"Being a badass?" asked Kara quite seriously.

"Being a Supergay Badass," said Maggie.

J'onn sighed. "So why aren't you working at the DEO yet, Ms. Sawyer? You'd fit in well."

Alex got flustered. "But, sir, you're not gay, sir. I mean, are you? NO, forget I asked! I have no right--"

"Agent Danvers, I feel that I may be the last of the DEO to hold what you might call the straight line..."

James wiggled his hand. "Two. And I am pretty sure Finn is three. And from what I've heard, Pam from HR probably makes four." He made a show of thinking very hard then shook his head. "Nope. That's all I got."

Vasquez smacked him on the head before Alex got the chance.

Alex asked, "What are you going to sing, Vas?"
"Hmm. Not sure yet. I'll find something terribly romantic for you. How do you feel about Elvis?"

Kara rolled her eyes even though Alex obviously tried to be diplomatic, "Sure thing, if that's what you want."

"Parents again? No worries. I'll think of something else. Something classic, like you."

M'gann came around and gathered up papers from the different booths and took them back to the side of the stage where a makeshift sound system had been set up.

Winn bounced in his seat. "I don't get to sing nearly enough. They should do carry-okee nights every week!"

Vasquez reached across the table and smacked him in the head. "If I ever hear you say that again, Winn, it's you and me in the Special K room downstairs, five rounds minimum."

"Say what?" He looked bewildered.

"That travesty pronunciation of a perfectly pronounceable Japanese word. Repeat after me, kara, as in Kara Danvers, oke as in Okay. Kara Danver is okay. Kara-okay."

"Kara-okay."

"Remember that."

"I didn't know that," said Alex.

"I did," said J'onn.

"Sir, forgive me. You're three hundred years old. You know a lot of things all of us together don't know."

"Remember that, Agent Danvers, the next time I give you an order you don't like."

M'gann trotted up the steps to the stage, and picked up the mic that a client had donated for the evening. "Hello, National City friends of Dollywood! Welcome to the Karaoke night fundraiser!"

Vasquez pointed to M'gann and hissed, "See, she said it right!"

"I am overwhelmed with gratitude that so many of you came out tonight to support your home away from home! With the proceeds from this evening, I am hopeful that we will soon be back to being a dive bar with four actual walls! A dive bar you can write home about, even if home is 20 light years away!"

Laughter and cheering greeted her words.

"I am pretty sure our first act needs no introduction. These two sisters are a force to be reckoned with, whether you need to be protected from Cadmus or you need to find some Infernian tacos at two in the morning. Give it up for Alex and Kara Danvers!"

The room erupted in cheering as the sisters leaped up to the stage. Alex took the mic from M'gann and Kara took another from one of the other bartenders.

The two of them had obviously long ago come up with choreography for the song, Kara singing soprano and Alex singing alto and letting their voices meet and loop in an out of each other, dancing back and forth across the stage.
I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night
She's gotta be strong
And she's gotta be fast
And she's gotta be fresh from the fight
Over in the DEO booth, where they almost had enough queer girls for a softball team, the crew cheered the change in pronouns. Alex and Kara continued:

I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light
She's gotta be sure
And it's gotta be soon
And she's gotta be larger than life!

Alex took the lead while Kara danced in the background.

Somewhere after midnight
In my wildest fantasy
Kara stepped in front of Alex to put out her lines.

Somewhere just beyond my reach
There's someone reaching back for me
Alex faced Kara and told her:

Racing on the thunder and rising with the heat
Kara turned from Alex to point her gaze at Lena:

It's gonna take a supergirl to sweep me off my feet!
As they raced to the finish, Maggie and Vasquez both gave Lena a thumbs-up and Lucy gave her a squeeze. J'onn nodded his paternal approval.

The crowd went wild. M'gann hugged the sisters as they exited the stage. "Thank you to the WonderDanvers! Also, if you want to sing with Kara, she has agreed to join in if you pay her five bucks too, so think about that. Up next we have Brian!"

The unassuming blue alien in the suit and tie took the mic and waved at the audience wiggling his fingers. "Hi, guys! This is one of my favorite songs!" There was the rhythmic sound of chains and then some sixties drums.

I was working my lab late one night
When my eyes beheld an eerie sight
For my monster from his slab began to rise
And suddenly, to my surprise,

And Brian gestured for the audience to join in.

He did the mash!
He did the monster mash!
The monster mash.
It was a graveyard smash.
The monster mash.
It caught on in a flash.
He did the monster mash!
He did the monster mash.

By the time Alex and Kara returned to their booths, everyone in the bar was singing along with Brian. When Alex settled in next to Vasquez, Vasquez said for Alex's ears only, "I'm kind of glad we saved that idiot."

Alex just nodded, watching Winn and James scramble out of the booth to be ready when Brian ended. She turned back to Vasquez and half shouted into her ear, "What's Victor/Victoria?"

Vasquez face-palmed, said, "We'll watch that next. Buffy and Xena and the L Word can wait. Oh my heavens!"

Then the boys were on stage looking dapper and mischievous. They started the song, singing in unison.

You and me,
We're the kind of people other people
Would like to be.
Wand'r ing free,
We present the kind of picture
People are glad to see.
And we don't care that tomorrow
Comes with no guarantee;
We've each other for company.

James said, "Me harmony."

And come what may,
You and me, we'll stay together
Year after year,
Won't we, my dear?
That's why we're you and me.

James said, "Walk this way," and Winn followed in time.

"Taught him everything he knows," said James.

"That's why he has so little left," quipped Winn.

"Oh, I'll get you for that."

Winn whistled the refrain while James called on his (don't ask) tap dancing skills. "Very difficult step."

Winn shook his head. "Oh, such a fuss!"

"Oh, yes..."

"Mm-hmm, wanderin' free--" sang Winn, heading to his right.

"This way, please," said James grabbing his hand and heading left.

"Sorry 'bout that." He continued to hum the refrain as they danced in a circle and James turned to...
"Well, that was fun. Now what do we do?"

"You got us into this, you get us out!" Winn stuck his hands in his pockets.

James did a complicated dance step and reached for Winn's hands. "May I have this dance?"

"Oh," said Winn. "I'd be delighted!"

And as they waltzed, they sang, "And we know that tomorrow comes with no guarantee--"

Winn said, "You're leading again!"

James said, "Well, I'm sorry!"

We've each other for company
Eee-eee
And come what may,
You and me, we'll stay together,
Year after year
Won't we, my dear?
We'll always be you and me
Ee-ee-ee-ee
We'll always be you and me-ee-ee!

The bar erupted in applause. James and Winn's grins could have lit up an electrical utility.

Chapter End Notes

Holding out for a Hero, Bonnie Tyler, performed on Glee by Melissa Benoist and Becca Tobin: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2i4yC5XE5vk

You and Me, Henry Mancini, performed by Julie Andrews and Robert Preston:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIXZPmKMUuI
Karaoke Night Extravaganza, Part One

Chapter Summary

More of the musical we should have gotten. You're welcome. (I know I'm so pretentious. Sorry about that. It's just that this is my favorite show ever, since Buffy and Xena, and they are f**king it up royally and I feel that it is my bound, King Arthur-style duty, to fix it.) So here I am. And, yeah, you're welcome.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Winn had not realized that Lyra was out on parole until he saw her step up to the mic. She didn't look in his direction, quite the opposite in fact. But she used her deep sexy voice, and he couldn't help but feel that she was aiming her song at him.

Star Trekkin' across the universe,
On the Starship Enterprise under Captain Kirk.
Star Trekkin' across the universe,
Only going forward 'cause we can't find reverse.

Lt. Uhura, report.
There's Klingons on the starboard bow, starboard bow, starboard bow;
There's Klingons on the starboard bow, starboard bow, Jim.

Analysis, Mr. Spock.
It's life, Jim, but not as we know it, not as we know it, not as we know it;
It's life, Jim, but not as we know it, not as we know it, Captain.

There's Klingons on the starboard bow, starboard bow, starboard bow;
There's Klingons on the starboard bow, starboard bow, Jim.

Star Trekkin' across the universe,
On the Starship Enterprise under Captain Kirk.
Star Trekkin' across the universe,
Only going forward, still can't find reverse.

When she ended, she bowed, blushing and disappeared into the crowd. James hugged Winn awkwardly, murmuring, "It's harsh, man. You did the right thing."

The applause faltered as J'onn J'onnz stepped forward, looking much more serious than anything the last song led anyone to expect. They certainly did not expect a rich baritone from this man a few of the regulars had seen maybe twice, maybe three times at the bar in months. M'gann handed her barcloth to one of the extras and wandered over the DEO crew to stand with them to listen. She tried to tell herself it wasn't because she expected him to look in this direction as he sang:

To dream the impossible dream
To fight the unbeatable foe
To bear with unbearable sorrow
And to run where
The brave dare not go

Kara looked away, fighting tears. Alex put her arm around her shoulder, pulled her in.

To right the unrightable wrong
And to love pure and chaste from afar
To try when your arms are too weary
To reach the unreachable star

M'gann looked away, fighting tears. Maggie put her arm around her shoulder, pulled her in.

This is my quest
To follow that star
No matter how hopeless
No matter how far
To fight for the right
Without question or pause
To be willing to march into hell
For a heavenly cause

Alex looked away, fighting tears. Vasquez put her arm around her shoulder, pulled her in.

And I know
If I'll only be true
To this glorious quest
That my heart
Will lie peaceful and calm
When I'm laid to my rest

James looked away, fighting tears. Winn put his arm around his shoulder, pulled him in.

And the world will be better for this
That one man, scorned and covered in scars
Still strove with his last
Ounce of courage
To reach
The unreachable
Star

When J'onn returned to the booth, none of his agents could meet his eyes. Only M'gann, with eyes shining, gave him a grateful look and then disappeared into the crowd.

/

Kara handed Alex her handkerchief. Her high body temperature meant that her tears evaporated faster than her human sister's did. Alex sniffled, then handed it back. Slowly everybody pretended that they hadn't been moved beyond the telling of it, and could sort of it and could maybe interact with each other again in a more or less normal way.

The Infernian who took the stage next was dressed to kill (and Kara and Alex shared a look that hoped she was only ready to kill metaphorically, emotionally).

She gestured to the waitstaff and the skinny waiter scrambled to bring a bar stool up to the stage.
She started by listening to the introductory music, letting flames leap from one of her hands, the light flickering against her long sleeveless satin red dress as she settled in on the stool. She looked like an opera singer about to take "a sentimental journey."

Seven, that's the time we leave, at seven.
I'll be waiting up for heaven.
Counting every mile of railroad track, that moves me back.

I never though my heart could be so yearny.
Why did I decide to roam?
Gotta take a sentimental journey,
Sentimental journey home.

She smiled at the audience, and repeated in a drawl:

Sentimental journey home...

The crowd cheered. J'onn looked nostalgic, as did Kara. Winn was clearly scanning the crowd for Lyra. James murmured in his ear, "Let it go, buddy. You don't need that drama."

"So who's next?" asked Lucy.

Lena put a hand on her arm. "Oh, this won't be cheerful."

Winn followed her eyes to the stage and saw Ron, the R&D guy, take the stage and take the mic like he almost didn't know what to do with it. On the side of the stage, Kate, his lab partner, gestured her support. In a soft voice, Ron began:

Goodbye to you, my trusted friend.
We've known each other since we were nine or ten
Together we've climbed hills and trees
Learned of love and ABC's
Skinned our hearts and skinned our knees.

The crowd at the bar, that had been murmuring, slowly quieted as the man sang.

Goodbye, my friend, it's hard to die
When all the birds are singing in the sky
Now that spring is in the air
Pretty girls are everywhere
Think of me and I'll be there

Vasquez wasn't the only one to just barely remember the lyrics of the refrain. There were older patrons of the bar, forty and fifty. There were J'onn and M'gann. And there were people who were in between fifty and three hundred. So the chorus got a lot of voices leaping in.

We had joy, we had fun
We had seasons in the sun.
But the wine and the song,
Like the season, had all gone.

M'gann's eyes swept those of her bartenders. They knew the rules: cut customers off BEFORE they started fights or tried to drive home. They nodded back.

Goodbye, Papa, please pray for me.
I was the black sheep of the family.
You tried to teach me right from wrong.
Too much wine and too much song,
Wonder how I got along

James saw Winn get a bit verklempt at the mention of a father, as did Lucy, Maggie, and Alex. He felt the pull himself. Not a day went by when he did not miss his father's presence, although he had never considered how much harder it might have been for his father if it had been James who had died young. Children lost their parents; that was life. But for a parent to lose a child? That was so much more unfair. James felt, for the first time in his life, a little ease around his loss.

Goodbye, Papa, it's hard to die
When all the birds are singing in the sky.
Now that the spring is in the air,
Little children everywhere,
When you see them, I'll be there.

Winn was crying and he didn't care who saw. The people who knew him knew why this was painful for him and the rest didn't fucking matter. He saw Agent Badass Threaten-You-With-Her-Index-Finger Danvers turn to sob on Kara's shoulder. He saw James look away and sniff away tears. He saw Major Lucy Take-No-Prisoners Lane stare off into space like a secret agent putting herself in a different time-space continuum while she was being tortured. Maggie excused herself to go to the bathroom and he was pretty sure it wasn't because of the single drink she had imbibed, which was, after all, a club soda.

We had joy, we had fun
We had seasons in the sun
But the wine and the song
Like the seasons have all gone

When you had a dozen badass DEO agents, superheroes, and NCPD detectives sobbing in their bar booth, Winn was pretty sure the night wasn't likely to get any easier from there.

We had joy, we had fun
We had seasons in the sun
But the wine and the song
Like the seasons have all gone

Thankfully, Winn thought later, he had been completely wrong about that.

Chapter End Notes

Star Trekkin, by John O'Connor, Grahame Lister, and Rory Kehoe: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZS2-4-iUJ4

Seasons In The Sun, Performed by Terry Jacks, composed by Jacques Brel and Rod McKuen: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YG9otasNmxI
Karaoke Night Extravaganza, Part Two

Chapter Summary

More of the musical episode we didn't get...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lucy sat on the edge of the booth, her arm around Maggie’s shoulders, watching Maggie watch Alex and Vasquez finish each other’s sentences. Lucy had known those two for years, known Vasquez for twice as long as she’d known Alex, and if Alex hadn’t been so terribly straight (read: clueless) for so long, Lucy would have totally predicted this relationship years ago, though she knew that Maggie thought that Vasquez was just some random lesbian who had happened to show up just at the moment when Maggie had wowed Alex into figuring out her deeply closeted self and immediately run from the wondrousness that was Alexandra Danvers.

Lucy knew without being told why Maggie had run. She’d had her own share of hit-and-run relationships with both men and women. She had her own problematic relationships with her dad and her sister. But, for whatever reason, despite all that, Lucy Lane was fucking resilient. She wasn’t afraid to throw herself into love, despite the many times she’d been burned. Maggie, from what Lucy could tell, considered herself damaged goods. Lucy considered herself a sword: heated to white hot, beaten, folded over and beaten again until she was flexible steel. What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger indeed.

But that wasn’t the song Maggie needed to hear tonight. She needed somebody to say something small: that Lucy loved what Maggie loved, that it was okay to love and protect a city because she didn’t know how to love and protect herself.

M'gann called her up to the stage. She whispered in Maggie's ear, "This is for you, babe." Then she trotted to the stage, took the mic and inserted it into the stand in front of her and adjusted its height.

Some folks like to get away,  
Take a holiday from the neighborhood...

Normally, when Lucy did karaoke, she danced. Her mother had forced the Lane sisters to take dance for ten years. Lois, unsurprisingly, had hated it, which had almost guaranteed that Lucy would love it. But tonight, she simply stood at the mic, holding on tight and singing her heart out.

I'm taking a Greyhound on the Hudson River Line.  
I'm in a New York state of mind.

Maggie had shuddered when Lucy had described the DEO bunker in Nevada. Eighteen years in Nebraska had given her a longing for city life, and at college in Metropolis, she had thrived. Work took her first to Gotham and then to National City, but she still had a photo of the Empire State Building, shining in the sun, on the wall of her bedroom.

It was so easy living day by day,  
Out of touch with the rhythm and blues.
Now I need a little get away:
The Metro Times, CatCo’s Tribune.

It comes down to reality,
And it's fine by me, 'cause I've let it slide.
Don't care if it's Chinatown or on Riverside.
I don't have any reasons.
I've left them all behind.
I'm in a New York state of mind.

She caught Maggie in her gaze and let the last lines linger one more time.

I don't have any reasons.
I've left them all behind.
I'm in a New York state
of
mind!

The crowd loved it. They cheered. Lucy took a bow, blowing a kiss to Detective Dimples. She was replaced on stage by two purple aliens who were, if Lucy wasn't wrong, giggling together. She returned to the booth. Brian the alien had taken Lucy's seat, so Maggie pulled Lucy into her lap.

Well, I saw the thing coming out of the sky.
It had one long horn and one big eye.
I convinced the shaky and I said oowee.
It looks like a purple people eater to me.

It was a one-eyed, one-horn flying purple
People eater
Sure looks strange to me.
ONE EYED!

At the end of the table, Kara and Vasquez were flipping through Kara's phone intently, probably still looking for a song for Vasquez. Lucy loved how Kara had simply absorbed Vasquez into the Danvers clan, even more than she had for Lucy, but then Lucy had never dated Alex. As far as Lucy knew, nobody had.

Well, he came down to earth and lived in a tree.
I said, "Mr. Purple People Eater, don't eat me!"
I heard him say in a voice so proud,
"I wouldn't eat you coz you’re so tough!"

It was a one-eyed, one-horn flying purple
People eater
Sure looks strange to me.
ONE HORN!

Lena dragged Kara's attention away from her phone to point out someone in the crowd. Kara grinned and waved her hands wildly. The apparent target was a casually dressed young Asian woman who was rolling her eyes, but who fought her way through the crowd to their booth.

I said, "Mr. Purple People Eater, what's your life?"
He said, "It's eating purple people and it sure is fine,
But that's not the reason I came to live.
I want to get a job in a rock n roll band.
I want to, I want to, want to rock n roll."

Well, brace my sole rock n roll flying purple people eater
Pigeon-toed undergrown flying purple people eater
We wear short-shorts flying purple people eater
Sure looks strange to me!

The crowd applauded and Kara shouted, "Jess!" and grinned. "Everybody! This is Jess Huang!"
She ran through the names of everyone at the table and Winn leaped up to offer her his seat.
Immediately the two of them started talking as if they'd known each other for years and for all
Lucy knew, maybe they had.

They certainly knew each other well enough to get up and push their way through the crowd to
M'gann, who was arguing with a tall alien whose speaking voice sounded like gravel. M'gann
grabbed onto Winn gratefully.

"There you are, Winn! What took you so long? You're up next!"

Winn gave her a slip of paper and he took Jess's hand and helped her up to the stage. They took
their mics and as the music started, Jess "mmm'ed" to the music. Winn turned his hands into claws
and gave a little roar in her direction, and she laughed, then sang:

Tale as old as time
True as it can be
Barely even friends
Then somebody bends
Unexpectedly

Winn looked deep into Jess's eyes as he sang, ignoring the audience completely.

Just a little change
Small to say the least
Both a little scared
Neither one prepared...

Together they sang,

Beauty and the beast.

Ever just the same
Ever a surprise
Ever as before
And ever just as sure
As the sun will rise!

During the instrumental break, Winn took Jess's hands and waltzed her around the stage and she
laughed, throwing her head back at his silliness. He pulled her back to center stage before the
break finished, and he did the monster claws thing again and she just shook her head at him. Again,
they harmonized:

Ever just the same
Ever a surprise
Ever as before
Ever just as sure
As the sun will rise!

Jess took the lead:

Tale as old as time
Tune as old as song

Winn joined her and harmonized with her again:

Bitter sweet and strange
Finding you can change
Learning you were wrong

Then Winn led and they alternated:

Certain as the sun
Rising in the east
Tale as old as time
Song as old as rhyme
Beauty and the beast

Jess sang, "Tale as old as time--"
Winn sang, "Song as old as rhyme--"
And then, their eyes locked and the laughter fallen away, they slowly sang, "Beauty... and the... beast..."

The music lingered with their gazes. Then it stopped and the crowd burst into applause, and Winn did the monster claws again but ended up hugging Jess. She looked, to Lucy's eye, surprised and pleased.

Well, that was interesting. Imagine Winn actually falling for a girl who wasn't actually a villain!

Chapter End Notes

New York State of Mind by Billy Joel, performed by Melissa Benoist and Lea Michelle
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wkkdhZ86jE

Purple People Eater by Sheb Wooley, performed by Alvin and the Chipmunks at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nEeoXS18Ww

Beauty and the Beast by Alan Menken, performed by Jeremy Jordan and Ashley Spencer https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Qyc7Q7DhHk
Lena was having the night of her life, literally. For the first time in her life, she was surrounded by friends, ten goofy, brilliant, brave people packed into a space that normally might have fit six if nobody breathed. Kara asked her what she wanted her to sing for her, and Lena had no answer. That was simply not the kind of question she had ever in her life expected anyone to ask her.

She had gone to musicals in high school and college, but she had been careful never to daydream that anyone would ever be so sappy or stupid as to sing to her, Lena, with or without the Luthor. The world simply didn't work that way.

Except maybe, maybe ever so rarely... it might?

She had watched Kara and her sister dance around the stage singing their hearts out, singing what Lena only ever dared sing in the shower, thinking of Supergirl, her Supergirl, but never, never, never intending for her hero to know that she sang it.

She had listened to Brian, the hapless alien that her friends kept saving, singing a goofy Halloween song, completely unselfconscious.

She had watched James and Winn clown around on stage. She knew that James was a Pulitzer Prize winning journalistic photographer-turned-badass-DEO-agent. Winn impressed her more, because she'd seen his intellect, his creativity, and his passion to help his friends. And although the first friend she'd seen him help was Kara Danvers/Supergirl, he had also been more than willing early and often to help Lena Luthor. They had so much in common, bad and good. She loved him, and wondered if this was what it felt like to have a little brother. It was a little hard to see him pine after his felonious ex-girlfriend, but if he wanted relationship advice, she absolutely wasn't the one to help him, so maybe it was for the best that he was besties with this James Olsen, Superman's BFF.

She had been moved to tears by J'onn Jonzz's beautiful baritone and his startling sincerity, and she had seen his entire crew nearly fall apart simply upon hearing their boss say explicitly what all of them, apparently, felt implicitly about their jobs. More than anything else she had seen all year, this glimpse into the inner workings of the DEO made her trust them, not just as individuals, but as a team.

She had noticed how everyone had responded to the fiery singer and her nostalgia for a long-lost
home. Perhaps, Lena thought, she was not the only one to feel lost, unmoored, unhomed much of the time. Perhaps, just perhaps, this was part of the human dilemma? Or, she considered, watching J'onn, Kara and Brian, the sentient dilemma?

And then Ron, poor Ron. She didn't have to ask. She could easily imagine that Kate had dragged him away from the hospice for the evening, to give him a little bit of recreation, to distract him from the immense pain of losing the person he loved. But you couldn't separate someone from their grief; they always took it with them. She picked up her phone and emailed Winn.

LenaL@lcorp.com: Great job tonight, both times! If you start dating Jess, I may have to give you a shovel talk... Just a tiny shovel, because I trust you. :0 ) BTW, how is the crest project going? Should we do a catch-up meeting on Mon? I'm worried about Ron...

She looked up and watched the aliens and humans sing, apart and together, and she smiled. She couldn't imagine her mother watching this. The woman would have an apoplectic fit. Which, to be frank, Lena wouldn't mind seeing... and getting on video, for her lifelong viewing pleasure. And maybe playing it from time to time for some recalcitrant board members...

When Lucy sang about Metropolis for Maggie, Lucy watched Maggie's face go soft and vulnerable, and although she had known even at the time when Maggie had arrested her that the tough cop persona was just that, a part of the job like Supergirl's Hero Pose™, with hands on hips and voice pitched low, or even, for that matter, her own Haughty Luthor Pose™, still it rankled just a little. And yes, of course, Lena had long since forgiven the woman for just doing her job and doing it with more compassion than Lena had ever experienced from her other (wrongfully) arresting officers over the years. But it hurt. And so in a way, it was nice to see Detective Sawyer looking a bit more like Lena felt all the damn time: vulnerable, exposed, painfully hopeful, despite all experience to the contrary. She hoped, maybe, that they could someday become friends. She thought they might have more in common than they appeared.

She had laughed along with the rest at the purple aliens mocking themselves, and again had wished her mother could have been there to see it, even though she knew that Lillian would never have been able to appreciate it. Something in the woman was just broken. And to be fair, it had taken six years of therapy before Lena had been able to admit that the broken one was her mother and not her.

And then Jess had shown up. That had taken Lena completely by surprise. What she found less surprising was the way Winn, darling Winn, had pulled Jess under what Lena privately thought of as Supergirl's cape, although in reality it seemed to be more of a Danvers clan tartan or... she didn't even know what to call it. Certainly, if real families were capable of expanding this way, the Luthors were not (Lillian's opinion be damned), NOT a real family.

Kara being Kara, it wasn't long before the waiters were bringing the table garlic bread and cheese fries. Lena smiled fondly at her girlfriend, knowing that the super appetite would wipe out the majority of the "appetizers" that the bar had to offer.

So it was a strange moment when she heard, just over the loud and slightly drunken chatter of her friends, M'gann's voice introducing a singer named Lutessa.

Lutessa. Lena's hated middle name. Lena froze. She stared at Kara until her girlfriend looked at her, and Alex, pressed against her other side, also suddenly noticed Lena's deer-in-the-headlights look. And naturally, Vasquez noticed Alex noticing Lena and Kara.

"Yo, Luthor," said Vasquez breezily. "What's up?"
Lena couldn't turn around in her seat, but she could see Alex and Kara both looking behind her and turning ghostly pale.

A woman's voice, a low alto, started to sing.

Crazy world,
Full of crazy contradictions like a child;
First you drive me wild
And then you win my heart with your wicked art.

Alex and Kara looked at each other, panicking. Alex started to move, but Kara grabbed her hand hard (and Lena knew what that felt like). Kara whispered sharply, "You'll start a panic!"

One minute tender, gentle,
Then temp'remental as a summer storm.
Just when I believe your heart's getting warmer
You're cold and you're cruel
And I like a fool try to cope,
Try to hang
on
to hope.

J'onn saw his agents acting strange and turned around to look at the stage. Lena then had the space to turn her head. Standing on the stage, dressed all in black, with her blonde hair pinned up and an old family necklace adorning her collarbones, Lillian Luthor was singing.

(And to be fair to Lena, she had never, ever heard Lillian sing and was shocked at the beauty of the woman's voice when she wasn't spitting vituperative anti-alien bullshit or telling Lena how incredibly inadequate she was. It was, truly, a bit of a shock.)

Crazy world, every day the same old roller coaster ride;
But I've got my pride
I won't give in
Even though I know
I'll never
win--

She held the note. Lena expected gunfire to break out. She really didn't expect that her mother would be... dramatic? But then Lillian stretched out the ending like a pro.

Oh, how I love
this
crazy
world.

The entire bar cheered louder than they had for anybody else, and the irony was not lost on Lena, or, from the slight smirk on her face, on Lillian. The woman bowed her head humbly and then stepped off the stage and disappeared.

Kara, Alex, J'onn and Jess were jumping up and leaping into the crowd. Lena didn't bother. Mother wouldn't have come without a foolproof exit strategy. Lena signalled M'gann and ordered a Lena Luthor. Vasquez leaned in. "What just happened? Who was that singing?"
"That?" asked Lena. "That was my mother. The leader of Cadmus. You know, our nemesis? Yeah. Her."

Vasquez breathed out, "Shiiiiiiit."

"Precisely. I'm having a Lena Luthor. Would you like one?"

And Vasquez, of all things, laughed. "I would LOVE one. From the little I hear from Kara, they're very, very tasty."

Lena blushed and laughed. And Vasquez kept overtly flirting with her (not seriously, that was clear, but in a playful way that decreased Lena's stress) until the DEO agents and Jess came back empty-handed and grumpy.

Alex said, "I still say we should go after her!"

But J'onn said, "How? We have no trail. There's nothing to follow."

Vasquez said, "Well, and here's the other thing. If we all leave now, and that is what she was planning, who is going to protect the patrons here? That would be an even bigger catastrophe than the previous two."

Kara and Alex mutually crinkled. M'gann, still clueless, called on Susan Vasquez to sing next.

"Besides," said Vasquez, sliding out and thanking the boys for moving for her. "You wouldn't want to miss this, Alexander the Great. Or your royal court..." She grinned and salaamed and trotted up to the stage. Alex blushed.

On stage, Vasquez gave her mischievous grin and started the teaser to her forties song:

I have a feeling, it's a feeling I'm concealing,
I don't know why.
It's just a mental, sentimental alibi.
But I adore you, so strong for you.
Why go on stalling? I am falling,
Love is calling. Why be shy?

Alex turned to Kara, looking panicked. Vasquez grinned in her direction, thinking Keep Calm and Sing Your Fucking Heart Out. She sang;

Let's fall in love
Why shouldn't we
Fall in love?
Our hearts are made of it
Let's take a chance
Why be afraid
Of it?
Let's
Close our eyes
And make our own
Paradise
Little we know of it, still we can try
To make a go of it

From the stage, Vasquez watched the DEO booth. She saw the Danvers sisters' interaction. She
saw all the boys (and she included J'onn in this category mentally, although she would never have done so verbally) nod, satisfied, at each other. She saw Maggie look uncomfortable, and she definitely saw Lucy Lane run her hand over Maggie's jaw, her hair, her shoulders, murmur something in the cop's ear that made Maggie look less taut and uncomfortable. That made Vasquez happy. She liked Maggie even though the woman had been a complete idiot in how she had handled Alex. But how could Vasquez blame her when it had ended in Vasquez finally, finally getting to be with the woman of her dreams? Inspired, she sang with gusto:

We might have an end for each other
To be or not be
Let our hearts discover.
Let's fall in love
Why shouldn't we
Fall in love?
Now is the time for it,
While we are young
Let's fall in love!

Humans and aliens, having no clue (99% of them) why this song might be the reason their lives would be saved in the coming months, cheered anyway. Vasquez took a deep, sweeping bow. Then she called out Lena to come sing with her. Not Kara, as everyone expected, since other people had from time to time over the last few hours, paid extra to get that golden voice to work with theirs.

Lena looked uncomfortable, but Kara whispered in her ear. If Vasquez knew Kara like she thought she did, she was probably telling Lena that 1) everybody here was way too drunk by now to remember anything Lena might do and 2) her mother had totally fled, so that potential embarrassment was simply not going to happen.

Nervous, but smiling and looking like a million dollars in her form-fitting black dress, Lena joined Vasquez on stage. Vasquez pulled up the lyrics and music on her phone and handed it to Lena while she went to talk to M'gann, who was still fighting off the tall gravelly-voiced alien. Vasquez had quite nicely asked if M'gann needed her to handle him, and he had taken one look at her and hurried away. She and M'gann exchanged grins.

M'gann said, "Have I told you lately how I love you?"

Vasquez laughed, "Honey, I am well and duly taken, but then, if you want to be, I think, so are you!"

M'gann blushed. Vasquez hurried to the stage. She handed her phone with the music and lyrics to Lena, saying, "Sweet bitch, you're Elsa. Cool?"

Lena stared at Vasquez and then laughed. "Oh, I've so got this. But you will pay, Susan."

Nobody called Vasquez by her first name. She was taking a risk. She nudged Lena into singing:

The snow glows white on the mountain tonight
Not a footprint to be seen.
A kingdom of isolation,
And it looks like I'm the Queen
The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside
Couldn't keep it in;
Heaven knows I've tried
Don't let them in,
Don't let them see.
Be the good girl you always have to be
Conceal, don't feel,
Don't let them know.
Well now they know.

And here Vasquez joined in on the chorus, wondering if Lena had yet realized that normally, this was a one-person song.

Let it go, let it go,
Can't hold it back anymore.
Let it go, let it go,
Turn away and slam the door.
I don't care
What they're going to say!
Let the storm rage on!
The cold never bothered me anyway.

Vasquez stepped back to let Lena make the most of her moment. The Eyebrow turned in Vasquez's direction and she knew Lena had realized how the agent had tricked her. But she wasn't Lena Luthor for nothing. She prowled the stage, singing her heart out.

It's funny how some distance
Makes everything seem small
And the fears that once controlled me
Can't get to me at all.

It's time to see what I can do
To test the limits and break through
No right,… no wrong, no rules for me,
I'm free!
Let it go, let it go
I am one with the wind and sky
Let it go, let it go
You'll never see me cry
Here I stand
And here I'll stay
Let the storm rage on....

My power flurries through the air into the ground
My soul is spiraling in frozen fractals all around
And one thought crystallizes like an icy blast
I'm never going back, the past is in the past!

Let it go, let it go
And I'll rise like the break of dawn!
Let it go, let it go
That perfect girl is gone!
Here I stand
In the light of day!
Let the storm rage on--
Silence swept the room as people stared up at the green-eyed goddess, who then purred:

The cold never bothered my anyway!

And she winked. Lena fucking Luthor winked at the crowd of humans and aliens. As they left the stage together, with Vasquez's hand on the small of Lena's back, she murmured, "Damn, girl. You got ovaries! Nicely done."

Lena did the haughty look. "You wouldn't have tried that if you didn't think I could handle it."

Vasquez grinned. "Well, you're dating someone who I'm guessing probably routinely breaks your bed's headboard. That's not for the faint of heart."

"You have no idea."

When they got back to the booth, the gang was sorting out coats and bags and getting ready to go home. Vasquez caught Alex's eyes and winked, enjoying the sight of Alex's blush. Winn and Jess squeezed past James and Winn hugged Lena, apparently to her surprise, and then opened his messenger back and pulled out a package.

"Happy unbirthday, Lena. Don't open it until you get home."

Lena looked surprised but thanked him and shrugged.

Vasquez, who was pretty sure she knew what the package contained, said, "The last time Winn gave me an unbirthday present, it was my electric waffle iron that he had fixed for me."


Alex saw this and came up and threw an arm over Vasquez's shoulders. "Waffles," she said very seriously, "fuel badassery. I would have thought you knew that, Luthor."

Kara hurried over. "Alex! You said you would be nice from now on!"

Lena smiled at Kara. "Your sister was simply taking me to task for having failed at the full breakfast experience. Would you like waffles for breakfast, Kara?"

Kara's blue eyes got enormous. "You have a waffle iron???

"Pfft. I am the CEO of a multinational technology company. I should think I know my way around a waffle iron."

Vasquez and Alex watched them walk away arm in arm. Alex asked, "Do you suppose Lex ever ate waffles?"

"Nah, probably wouldn't touch one with a ten-foot pole. That's how you can tell the difference. I mean, back in the day people wore white hats and black hats. Now you have to watch them at breakfast."

"Speaking of breakfast..."

Vasquez nuzzled her girlfriend's jaw. "Don't get ahead of yourself, Missy. Midnight snack comes first."

"Oh, there will be coming, for sure. And that's Agent Missy to you!"
Chapter End Notes

Crazy World by Henry Mancini, performed by Julie Andrews
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oBNvw4y55s

Let's Fall in Love by Ella Fitzgerald.

Let It Go by Robert Lopez, Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Emanuel Kiriakou, performed by Idina Menzel
Chapter Summary

What music can do.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had taken a long time, a long damn time, for Alex to learn to be comfortable with physical, non-sisterly affection. Alex had told Vasquez her history early on. College guys and drinking and rough, hurried frat-boy sex that never really went anywhere and then she'd be leaving early, hurrying across campus, stumbling across campus at 2 am, and of course he wouldn't have bothered to go with her, because he was probably looking for another drunk girl to try to have sex with. And by the time she got back to her dorm room, her roommate would be hard at it with her boyfriend, having assumed Alex would be out all night and then Alex would have to sleep on the hard couch in the lounge, and because it was public and people were coming in and out, whooping and drinking, she couldn't give herself what she needed.

And after a while a person can get used to not getting what she needs.

Vasquez knew this as well as anyone and she also knew that getting used to not getting what one needs is just another set of words for depression. And she had been there, done that, gotten the t-shirt and the bumper sticker and the I-don't-have-moods ring. And the years of therapy thereafter that had taught her that it was all bullshit.

So when they had first started having sex, she took it slow, so very slow. The first few weeks were just kissing after episodes of The L Word got Alex very hot and bothered and nervous. Every once in a while, say, when Alex was making them dinner (but not actually using a knife or extreme heat), Vasquez would come up behind her, slide her hand over her shoulders, down her back and gently cup her ass, making Alex jump in shock.

And Vasquez would give her a shy little grin, put her hands on the countertop and ask how she could help. And eventually, eventually, Alex had gotten used to that.

And then there was the night when, after a particularly explicit L Word episode, Vasquez had heard Alex mutter, "Too many boobs in the room."

Vasquez had gaped momentarily, then pulled herself together. "Um, that's interesting. Why do you say that?"

"Well, it's not like I'm ever going to have children to nurse, and that's all they're good for."

"Really? But they feel nice when someone touches them, right?"

Alex looks at her like she's crazy. "Not particularly."

Vasquez chewed on her lip, thinking hard. Was it possible that Alex was asexual? Because that would be hard, but Vasquez loved her, so she would deal with it, but O Lord, how had she not seen that coming? Okay, bad phrasing. But all these years yearning for the Danvers and dreaming about
touching her and making her giggle, or possibly scream, with pleasure, and what if...

Agent Susan Vasquez, she thought to herself, you will deal with that if you have to. Love doesn't insist on its own desires. You know this.

Alex pointed to the screen. "It's not like they even look nice. I mean, maybe, except for Dana's..."

"So you don't, um, when you're on your own...?"

Alex was distracted. "What? Oh, no, of course not. What would be the point?"

"So no one's ever...?"

"Oh, yeah, well, the guys, but that was the worst part, the squeezing."

"Squeezing? Oh, honey, that is not how it's done."

Alex looked askance. "But they'd know, right? Guys love boobs."

Vasquez sighed. "Guys love sex. And if you're very lucky, a guy will love a girl and figure out what she needs and wants. But guy bodies, when they are taking care of themselves, I mean, basically rougher works better for their plumbing than it does for ours. And if that's what they know, that's what they're going to do."

"So you... you would do it... differently?"

"Absolutely."

"Could you... one of these days... show me?"

"Most definitely. Just say when."

And Alex had nodded absently, biting her lip and returning her attention to the show, but a few weeks later when they were at Vasquez's place, and she had cooked a shepherd's pie for Alex, and they were cuddling on the couch, Alex had nuzzled Vasquez's ear and murmured, "So I've been thinking..."

"Mmm. About what?"

"You."

"What about me?"

Alex buried her face in Vasquez's neck and didn't respond.

Vasquez squeezed her shoulders. "This wouldn't just possibly maybe be about me when I'm naked in your bed? Or is that me projecting my desire? Because you could totally be thinking about me being a badass in the field..."

"What makes you think the two things are separate?" Alex teased.

"In the field I have clothes. And weapons. And I frown a lot."

Alex laughed. "And in bed?"

"Much less frowning. Fewer weapons."
"Fewer clothes?"

"If you like. But you'd have to do that yourself. I've had a long day and I'm too tired to take my own clothes off..."

"Yeah."

"Yeah, I am too tired or yeah, you are too tired?"

"Both. Sucks, really. That means we're going to both keep our clothes on."

Vasquez listened to the extra resonances in Alex's voice. "That sounds terrible," she offered.

"Seriously."

"Because if one of us was energetic enough to... help the other one..."

"Mmm."

"It's funny, really, how sometimes a girl gets a second wind around---" she glanced at her watch "um, ten-seventeen..."

"Really? That's awfully precise..."

"DEO agents are known for their precision during missions."

"You have a mission?"

"Holy shit, yes! My girlfriend thinks that breasts are boring. Somebody has to show her how they can be... well, I don't really have a word for it."

"You could unbutton me, if you had that second wind..."

"Well, isn't that a coincidence. It's ten-nineteen." Her hands shook a little as she unbuttoned Alex's flannel shirt, revealing a black lacy bra, not the grey Jockey sports bra she was expecting.

"You know," said Alex. "I was reading this article online about the twelve most important skills lesbians needed to learn."

"Why do I have the feeling that Kara sent this article to you?"

"How did you know that? It's like she's so invested in my new life now. And it's sort of flattering and also sort of weird."

Vasquez didn't ask any questions about Lena Luthor, as Alex clearly wasn't there yet. "And?"

"Number eight was unclipping a bra with one hand."

"You want me to prove my lesbian street cred?"

"If you want..."

Her hand shaking, Vasquez reached around and unclasped Alex's bra, and she felt Alex's hot exhale, and reached around to the front and drifted her fingertips across Alex's breasts, tickling, stroking, fondling. She imagined that Supergirl would be listening to the other woman's heartbeat, but she was human and could only go by the way Alex shuddered and her hips rolled. Good
enough.

"You want me to use my tongue?" she asked.

Alex frowned. "What do you mean?"

Dear God in heaven, thought Vasquez. Had no one treated this girl to what she truly deserved as a human being? Out loud she said, "I can show you, if you like. It can be nice."

"Um, okay, if it's not a problem. I don't want you to, I mean, if you don't want..."

"I want."

Vasquez lowered herself and kept stroking with her right hand on Alex's left breast, listening to how Alex's breath hitched. Then she started to lick Alex's right nipple, flickering her tongue, feeling Alex writhe underneath her. She grinned at the other woman's response, mentally cursing the idiot college boys who had only taken what they wanted and not given anything of value.

Alex gasped, "What are you doing?"

Vasquez stopped, pulled up. "I won't do anything you don't want me to do. Is this bad? Because we can stop. I don't want--"

"Stop? God, no! Don't stop, that feels so--" She faltered. "Why didn't anyone? How did you learn to do this?"

"Honey, you know the oral tradition? People passing on stories and poetry and songs simply by telling and singing them? It's kind of like that."

Alex lay there for a while, absorbing what she'd said. Then, suddenly, she laughed. "Oral... tradition! Hah! I get it!"

"That's my girl."

//

Tonight was different. Pretty much every night since they had been together, Alex had been nervous and hesitant and careful, and Vasquez had tried very hard to follow her lead. One of the most important things they had done was decrease the drinking. Alex had started out a little terrified of the lesbian sex, even though Vasquez had assumed that it wouldn't be so different from what she imagined that Alex did for herself, although she had been a bit wrong on that topic.

So moving from the humping that Alex thought was the only way to... do things... to fingers and then to sex toys had taken a lot of time. Things she had managed in two months with past ex-girlfriends took a year with Alex. And Vasquez considered it totally worthwhile, frustrating but worthwhile.

She had learned a few rules for this relationship:

1. Always ask permission.
2. It's always about her, not about me.
3. Listen before I speak.
4. There is probably something I should remember, but I don't.

Vasquez had considered these rules as she had watched Alex sing with Kara, completely
uninhibited. Obviously, she trusted Kara implicitly, she knew the words and she knew the choreography. She trusted her own voice and her own body. She could sing and dance in front of a hundred strangers with no problem, just like she could rappel out of a helicopter in the middle of an urban warzone and barely raise a sweat. But still, after all this time, sex made her nervous.

So it was a bit of a surprise when she had watched Alex only have two drinks the entire night, a Green Martian and a Supergirl. And then when they got into Vasquez's Beetle, Alex had still been humming bits of the songs people had sung. They drove through National City at a decent pace, due to the late hour. When Vasquez shifted gears and left her hand on the gearshift as they waited at an intersection, Alex absently traced letters on Vasquez's hand. The light changed. Vasquez changed gears, her mind a sudden blank.

"Did you just... write your name on my hand?"

"What? Pfft. No. I mean, I wrote your name."

"I distinctly felt the A at the beginning."

"For... Agent!"

"Four letters. Ending in X. Alex."

"Um... maybe?"

Vasquez didn't know what to make of it, so she just kept her mouth shut until she reached her parking space.

"I thought we were going to my place?" said Alex.

"I hope you don't mind. My waffle iron is bigger, and my bedroom has an actual door."

"I doubt Kara will be dropping by tomorrow morning."

"Once was more than enough. Took five years off my life."

Alex sighed. "Doesn't matter as long as we're together."

And Vasquez wondered if a shape-shifting alien had taken her gir-- had taken over Alex's body. But then, she thought, shape-shifters usually said the thing you really didn't want to hear, not the thing you did. So she took her by the hand and led her upstairs to her apartment.

She knew that Alex had been surprised the first time she had been to Vasquez's apartment (the weekend after the Supergirl Morning Incident). To be sure, Vasquez had gone through her own Monochromatic Period that Alex was still embracing in her too-rarely-lived-in apartment. But years of therapy, six months dating an interior designer and, quite frankly, the last year of working with Kara Sunshine Danvers had all changed the way she thought about the space she inhabited when she wasn't inhabiting the black-and-chrome (or, the previous year, the barren-desert-and-black-and-chrome) DEO.

Unlike Kara, she wasn't a fan of pastels, which reminded her too much of deserts in her life: Nevada, Iraq, her heart. Jewel tones, though--burgundy, gold, pine green, and cobalt blue--adorned every room, combating the monochromatics of the rest of her life, along with art from the 1920s and 30s, Alphonse Mucha's flowing art nouveau women and other artists' angular art deco flappers.

She had expected Alex to hate it, but Alex had been delighted by the difference compared to what
she was used to, and even mentioned that Kara had watched the movie Chicago and insisted that
they learn to do the Charleston. Alex had always seemed relaxed here, and Vasquez had been
hugely relieved. The fact that Vasquez's bedroom was smallish and her bed a full-size as opposed
to queen, or in Alex's case, king-size was a small point of debate, but Vasquez had pointed out that
less space had meant more closeness or even (they'd drunk a bit much that one night) on-top-of-
ness.

And tonight, after all the singing was over, that was what Alex was apparently counting on. She
kept hold of Vasquez's hand as the woman locked up behind them, and then Alex was dragging her
into the bedroom, singing.

The day we met,
Frozen, I held my breath.
Right from the start,
I knew that I'd found a home for my heart to fall.
Watching you stand alone,
All of my doubt
Suddenly goes away somehow.

One step closer

I have died everyday, waiting for you
Darling, don't be afraid,
I have loved you
for a thousand years
I'll love you for a thousand more

Time stands still.
Beauty in all she is
Every breath,
every hour
has come to this

One step closer

And all along I believed, I would find you
Time has brought your heart to me,
I have loved you
for a thousand years
I'll love you for a thousand more

And Alex took Vasquez's hand and led her into her own bedroom, bemused, confused, and very
tentatively hopeful.

Chapter End Notes

A Thousand Years by David Hodges and Christina Perri, performed by Melissa
Benoist and Jacob Artist https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05ceB5Ax20E
Chapter Summary

More of the same.

Chapter Notes

I was going to try to do a SuperCorp edition too, but it isn’t happening. Maybe I’m just distracted by the episode last night with Jack and Guardian.

Vasquez lay in the dark, staring at the ceiling where car lights occasionally made shadows drift left to right. She watched them absently, listening to Alex’s contented little snores. The sheets were soaked in sweat. Vasquez gently played her fingers through Alex’s damp hair, feeling exhausted and spent, but mostly very stunned.

In some ways, it had been as if Alex really had been taken over by a shape-shifter. Admittedly, a very enthusiastic shape-shifter. A shape-shifter who really, really liked Agent Susan Vasquez, and who knew all the things Vasquez liked Alex to do with her hands and all the things Vasquez had long secretly hoped Alex would do with her tongue…

It had been breathtakingly wonderful, but bizarre and unexplainable, and Agent Vasquez liked to have explanations for unexpected phenomena. She liked to know which variables in a situation caused which behaviors.

So she lay there in the dark, with Alex’s head lying on her chest, one of her hands tangled in Vasquez’s hair and the other tangled… somewhere else. And she tried to untangle the variables that had made Alex… not nervous. Because normally, drunk or sober, Alex was nervous. Between ops or after a grueling or terrifying or even triumphant op, when Vasquez was always ravenous, though she never showed that to Alex—well, she couldn’t because Alex was always nervous. So why would something as ordinary as a karaoke night suddenly turn Baby Dyke Danvers into a jaguar in bed?

Alex sighed and rolled over, and Vasquez took the opportunity to slide out of bed. She threw on a sweatshirt and shorts and slipped into the bathroom. She splashed water on her face and tried to untangle her bed-hair and gave it up as a bad job. She turned off the light and stood in the dark hallway, getting back her night vision, then padded into the kitchen. She pulled down a mug and pulled the water pitcher from her (no longer as empty as usual) refrigerator and poured a cup of cold water and gulped it down.

She was pouring out a second cup when she heard the toilet flush. She turned to see Alex, wearing Vasquez’s red pajama top, the one with the white piping, join her at the kitchen island, yawning and stretching in a very distracting way.

Vasquez felt her eyes drop and then flicker back up to Alex’s face, to see her smirking. “Like what you can just barely see?” she murmured.
“That’s a good way of putting it. Water?”

“Mm. Thanks. So you’re still thirsty too?”

Vasquez felt unmoored, watching Alex drink. “Always.”

Alex set the empty cup down, turned it on the counter to see Captain America’s shield on the side. “Nerd,” she murmured.

“Takes one to know one,” said Vasquez meaninglessly.

Alex reached out and touched the letters on the sweatshirt Vasquez had thrown on blindly. Vasquez looked down and realized it said Stanford rather than USMC.

“Oh! Sorry! I picked it up in the dark.”

Alex grinned shyly. “I like you in my clothes. Besides, if I need it back, I can always just take it off you…”

Vasquez pulled her forward by her hips. “Or for any other reason…”

They kissed and Alex ran her hands up and down Vasquez’s back, sighing easily.

Cautiously, Vasquez asked, “Hey, kiddo, talk to me. What’s different tonight? You seem so relaxed.”

“I’m happy.”

“I’ve seen you happy. That’s never translated into you being so, well, wildly enthusiastic in bed.”

“You said you were in love with me. And I realized that I’ve kind of known that for a while now, but I just hadn’t let myself believe it because I believed what Maggie had said about how relationships between somebody like me who is fresh off the boat and somebody like her or you, who have been out forever, how those relationships never work out by definition, and it made so much sense, and when I realized just how much I didn’t know and how much work you had to do to teach me, with the language and the pop culture and the sex and just even how I needed to start thinking of myself and I kept just waiting for that to happen, for you to get tired of having to do so much work on me and for you to, I don’t know, long for the familiarity of someone who you don’t have to explain everything to—“

She took a breath and Vasquez cut in. “Sweetie, we’ve discussed this. How could I ever get tired of you?” Even as she said it, she was scrambling to remember when she’d said she was in love with Alex, because she might well have gasped something along those lines after they’d gotten into the bedroom when Alex was already relaxed and confident, but before? She drew a blank.

Alex said, “I just always felt so guilty.” She looked away.

This, at least, Vasquez had long seen coming. She sighed. “You thought that when I gave up on you, maybe you could be with Maggie.”

Alex nodded silently, tears falling again.

“Yeah, I thought that too, at first, that maybe I could give you the confidence you needed to go talk sense into her… I even suggested something like that to her when I was digging bullet fragments out of her shoulder.”
“Wait, why would you say that to her? Wait. Back then? That was weeks, months ago. She didn’t want me.”

Vasquez cursed herself silently, but she told Alex the truth. “Yes, she did, and I said maybe one day, after you’d gotten out there a bit, she’d have a better chance of making it work with you.”

“But she didn’t want me. And she’s dating Lucy now. That proves it.”

“Proves? Not necessarily. We’ve talked about displacement, Alex. When you can’t have what you want, you take what you can get. You still love her, I know that.”

“I can’t help it. I am such a horrible person, Vasquez, Susan, you’ve been so kind and so patient and I’m such—I have to go!” she ran into the bedroom and grabbed pieces of clothing off the floor, trying to find her own.

Vasquez ran after her. “Sweetie. Alex. Stop.” She went and wrapped her arms around Alex. “Just stop for a moment. Hear me out.”

Alex stopped pulling away, though she was still sobbing.

Vasquez held on harder and her own voice came out ragged. “Alex, I always swore to myself that when you no longer needed me, I would, I would let you go. I always knew I was temporary. So I swore I would, and I will.” Her tears washed the back of Alex’s neck. “But not like this, not in the middle of the night.”

They stayed like that for a minute, for two. Whispering, Vasquez begged, “Stay the rest of the night? Wake up with me one more morning? Because I have done my best to love you the way you deserve to be loved and I get that I can’t be what you really want. I can’t be Maggie. But I have always loved you, pretty much since I met you, and these last few months have been some of the best of my life, getting to spend time with you and make you laugh and touch your skin and kiss you and make you shudder and gasp and accept yourself as beautiful and badass and completely perfect and maybe even loveable—“

Alex turned around in her arms and stared at Vasquez, reached up tentatively to wipe away her tears with both hands. “Since you met me?”

Swallowing, Vasquez nodded. “The first time, when I started hand-to-hand training with you, I wasn’t too impressed. I knew you were smart, but I didn’t think you were particularly tough.”

“You took me down by grabbing my hair.”

“All that long, beautiful hair. Yeah, I did. And the next day you came in with that little pixie cut, and I thought maybe I misjudged you, underestimated you. And every single fucking time you failed at anything, and I thought, I guess Hank was wrong about her, the next day you’d come back and get it right and exceed my poor expectations, and then my ordinary expectations, and then my amazing ones. And eventually the student surpassed the master. And I loved you. And then I found out that you were Supergirl’s big sister, and I loved you even more, because it was very clear to me that even before you’d trained her to fight, she had the heart of a hero. And it was obvious to me that she’d learned it from you.”

“But if you loved—But you dated. For as long as I’ve known you—“

“Oh, honey,” Vasquez breathed. “How do you think I know so much about displacement?”

Alex stood there, still stiff and confused. Vasquez held on for dear life, held on to that strong,
warm, dear body that she knew she was about to lose forever. But dear God, she prayed, to someone she hadn't prayed to very often in the last twenty years, not just yet. Not yet.

She whispered, "Will you stay? For the rest of the night?"

Alex pressed her forehead against Vasquez's. "Can you forgive me?"

Vasquez frowned, trying to hold back more tears. Dammit, she never cried like this. "For what?" She sounded as genuinely bewildered as she felt.

"For using you. To get experience. It took me a while to realize that's what I was doing, but once I realized, I should have--"

Vasquez's fingers covered her lips. "No. Just no. My intent at first was just to hang out with you, like you said, teach you the language and the culture. I swore to myself that I wouldn't take advantage--"

"But I needed to learn."

"So maybe we can agree that we both had mixed motives at different times. I don't regret anything. I just wish--"

"What?"

"I don't think there's anything more you need me to teach you."

"This isn't the DEO. Relationships aren't about passing exams or getting promotions. I don't really know what they are about, actually. I've never really been in one."

"You have your family."

"Oh yes: my traitorous father, my chronically disappointed mother and my superhero sister. Yeah, that's going to help me model a way to be with my girlfriend! People will probably beg me to write a book about it!"

"Did you say girlfriend?"

"Yeah, of course."

"But you were just about to leave..."

"I thought you'd hate me once you knew about me. But you say you knew and you don't seem like you hate me."

"I could never hate you, Heart of my Beating Heart Danvers."

"There you go again, doing that name thing." Alex laughed. "You've been doing that since dodgeball. Why do you do that?"

"I don't honestly know. I just-- I have no idea why I do it."

"It's cute."

Standing there in the dark, head to head with Agent Alex Danvers, Vasquez felt herself blush. When the hell was the last time anybody had called anything she'd done cute? Fifth grade? She started to bristle, but then she thought about Kara fiddling with her glasses while fiercely offering
to "give Alex what for" if she ever hurt Vasquez, and she had been amazed at how much more intimidating Kara could be when being cute rather than being unapologetically strong as Supergirl.

"I could be cute for you," she said quietly.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. In private."

"And in public you'll frown a lot and carry lots of weapons?"

"Of course. How else am I going to fight back to back with you?"

"You know," said Alex, "that is really all I've ever wanted from anyone..." She took a deep breath. "Well, then. And what do you need from me?"

"Whatever you're willing to give me," whispered Vasquez, and in her own ears, she sounded pathetic.

"Yeah, no," said Alex, apparently hearing it too. "You should be able to ask for what you need from me."

Vasquez closed her eyes. "How about this then. Fuck me tonight. Make me waffles in the morning. After that, when we are in between world-threatening catastrophic crises, we talk about it. Figure it out."

Alex kissed her eyelids. "Of those three things, I am going to totally rock the waffle-making best."

Vasquez opened her eyes. "Cooking, Danvers? Seriously?"

"Kara, Supergirl, the Kryptonian with the endless appetite is my little sister. Oh my, yes, cooking is totally easier than talking or sex."

"Right, right. I knew that. So what do you need from me right now?"

"My sweatshirt. Your shorts. Lots of kisses?"

"Ma'am, your wish is my command!"
Maxwell Lord, recently squeaked from jail by his apparently not-so-overpriced lawyers, looked at the pale yellow liquid in the test tube and grinned. He had finally figured out how to strengthen the chemicals enough so that they would filter through the city's water system and still work when people drank the water but weaken it enough so that it didn't actually kill the delivery system. Even now, R&D was delivering barrels of the stuff down to room Sub-B257, where 200 ceramic dog bowls waited for the dogs his staff had liberated from kill shelters. They all wore collars with GPS coordinates programmed in, to guide them to the reservoirs. He'd even made sure that the chemicals, if sprayed onto solid materials, like trees or fire hydrants, would still leech into the air and do the job.

He should have thought of this sooner. It was so obvious. If there were no crime, there would be no need for crime-fighters or for super-secret governmental organizations supporting them. The city would save money if it didn't need the police anymore, and National City would be a haven of peace and prosperity, where businesses could work freely to create added value for everyone. Once it was no longer Vigilante Central, National City would be a wonder of the modern world. Seriously, he thought as he said the code word that set the dogs to drinking and their collars to giving them electrical signals, he deserved a medal. "Cry havoc and release the dogs of war!"
On Monday morning, Supergirl flew among the sparkling blue high-rises of National City in a cheerful mood, laughing at the blue sky itself and the yellow sun shining down on the superhero and her chosen home. She turned backflips, waved at folks working in the office towers and generally grinned herself silly.

//

The weekend had been... enlightening. She giggled at the thought. When Lena had showed her the package Winn had given her before they'd left the alien bar Friday night, Kara's first thought had been that Winn wanted Lena to have a Yellow Sun Grenade of her own for emergencies (which, actually, wasn't such a bad idea; she'd have to suggest it). So when Lena unwrapped the small red sun lamp, she hadn't immediately remembered that this was something she had asked Vasquez for, and of course, Vasquez would have had to go through Winn to make it happen. She wondered how awkward that had been for Winn; she hoped not much.

When they were examining it, Lena said, "You know, Winn and the others really love you."

At first Kara didn't understand what she meant, until Lena said, “A little bit of mood lighting…” Lena smiled.

“Wait. You knew about this?”

“Winn asked me for some ideas for miniaturizing your sun lamps. It didn’t take much to figure out what he really meant.”

“It looks like it’s got three settings.”

“So we can experiment.”

Kara had rolled her eyes at the tone. She knew what Lena had meant and she also knew that Lena couldn't help but flirt with her even when they weren't talking about sex.

And at first, she had blushed and hemmed and hawed and talked about changing into something lighter, because of course she had worn her supersuit under her Kara clothes, since everyone had worried that the fundraiser would serve as a magnet for more anti-alien activity than a single song. She had overheated a bit with all the humans and aliens packed so tightly in the bar and she longed to put on a t-shirt and shorts and just cool down.

(And she had watched Vasquez searching her phone for the lyrics to the song and knew that her friend would undoubtedly come up with a threat assessment based on those by Monday morning. To each her superpower, she supposed.)

Lena had drawn a bath and thrown in the bubble salts and pulled out a package wrapped in Wonder Woman wrapping paper. ("Sorry, love, they were out of Super paper. It's probably too popular.")
Then she pulled a shorts-wearing Kara into the bathroom, asked for help with the back zipper of her dress, and slipped it off.

"Thanks, but I'm not the only present you should be unwrapping." Lena winked. Of course she did.

And Kara let herself be distracted by Lena in burgundy underwear for a moment before carefully tearing at the paper and opening the box. The moment she saw the contents, she burst out laughing. There were five rubber ducks, but not the usual duck or even the pirate duck. There was Superduck, Flashduck, Arrowduck, Wonderduck, and Batduck. Also a small, windable tugboat.

Laughing off her previous nervousness, Kara whipped off her clothes and jumped into the tub, splashing a bit. Lena shook her head and stripped down and joined her. Kara pointed out that they would need villain ducks too, and Lena promised that she would find some regular ducks and personally paint them with the Penguin and Livewire logos. They played with the toys, sending the ducks after the (obviously) villainous warehouse-on-water tugboat and when the bubbles had dissipated, so had Kara's inhibitions, as Lena had no doubt anticipated.

And then the red lamp had done the rest.

//

Kara zipped into the DEO and landed, still laughing. She strutted into the command center. "Whooo! It is another beautiful day in National City and the Girl of Steel is ready to take on the world! I am ready to kick some ass, take some names, and do it all with an endearing smile on my face! So. Bring it on. What have you got for me?"

J'onn said, "There is literally nothing for you to do."

"Nothing?"

Winn said, "I challenge you to find an eight-year-old stealing candy."

Alex joked, "It's like somebody slipped Law-Abiding Serum into the reservoir."

Supergirl said, "Did somebody do that? Is that illegal? I could stop 'em."

J'onn shook his head, looking as disappointed as Supergirl felt. "We'll let you know if something comes up. Until then, I'll be upstairs, checking the budgets."

Winn said, "I'm going to work on that new Labeckian codebreaker." He looked happy as he strutted off.

Alex shrugged. "Monday morning knife practice." She also walked away.

Supergirl stood alone in the command center. "Okay. Well, what am I supposed to do?"

//

She flew home and changed back into Kara clothes. Even her computer wasn't helpful. She sat at the kitchen island, munching on carrots (Lena disapproved of chips as a source of calories) and scrolling through her social media. Then she checked her email. Cassie DeWitt had sent her the recipe for a souffle that Millie had baked for an office party a while back, plus a link to a past show where she showed the steps for making it. Kara had been trying to reproduce it now for a couple of weeks without any luck. So she tried it again, doing everything in the recipe, everything they showed on the rerun. Finally the oven timer went off.
"Yes! Fifth time's the charm!"

She opened the oven and pulled it out with her bare Kryptonian hands, but it had already collapsed, so she dumped yet another one into the trash. Then there was a knock on her door. Stripping off her orange apron, she hurried to open the door.

And there was Lena (wearing a Supergirl-blue coat).

"Hey! What brings you to the rent-controlled side of town?"

Lena sniffed and gave her a funny look. "Are you grief baking?"

"No! I mean, being underemployed is not fun, but I figure if I keep at it, they'll hire me on full-time. Or I'll figure out another way. Wait. Is everything okay?"

Lena sat down at her kitchen island as if it were completely normal, which by now it was.

(And Kara remembered that she had to call her friend whose business Supergirl had saved from the Infernian, to get him to come fix the granite kitchen island Kara had broken Saturday before they realized that maybe the second setting on the red sun lamp might be safer.)

"Yeah, no. Ah, absolutely. Ah... So today there is this press conference for Spherical Industries' new unveiling? Whatever they announce, it's going to be the next big thing that everyone wants."

"Are they your competition?"

"No. Um. Their CEO, Jack Spheer and I, we... we used to be close."

Kara couldn't hide the surprise she felt. She asked, "Until when?"

"Until I moved to National City?"

"Oh! I see! So this is a recent closeness! How long were you two together?"

"Kara, it's complicated."

"I imagine so." She adjusted her glasses. She hadn't thought Lena had ever been in a relationship with a man. Was she allowed to feel jealous at the thought? Was it something Lena should have told her, or was she allowed to have her own secrets? After all, how long had it been before Kara finally revealed her secret identity to Lena? A long time, she thought. She took a breath. "I'm sorry. This is just so sudden."

"Kara, it started out as friendship, and then we were working so closely together. We had a start-up for five years." She smiled nostalgically. "Worked out of a garage, trying to find a cure for cancer. He knew I was into girls but we were elbow to elbow for so long... We had a lot of small explosions and good times. I ended up leaving when I did in part because of Lex, but also in part because he wanted more and I just couldn't be what he wanted."

Kara reached out and held Lena's hands, sorry that she looked so sad.

"He's given me a personal invite to this conference."

"Are you going to go?"

"Jack's my kryptonite. It's just gonna bring up a lot of painful things, and I'm not sure I can deal with it."
"But," said Kara, getting up from her seat, "if your girlfriend, Kara, came with you..."

"And had my back..."

"It wouldn't be so hard to face it."

"Thank you!"

"It is so much better than grief baking, and I always have your back."

"You're my favorite." Lena opened the door. "So what's your kryptonite?"

"Um, gosh. I don't know. Maybe kryptonite?"

//

The auditorium was packed. Snapper Carr took his seat in the row in front of Kara and Lena. He caught sight of Kara's reporter notebook and rolled his eyes. He snarked, "I'm pretty the nanobots aren't going to be an ingredient in haute cuisine, Ponytail."

Lena murmured, "Ignore the marsupial. He wouldn't know good cooking if it ate his shoes."

And Kara reflected, that made no sense, but because it was Lena saying it, she felt better.

Music started and a fog of dry ice swirled on stage. From the fog, a backlit man in a blue suit emerged. Tall, dark, bearded, handsome. British accent.

"Vaccines, anesthesia, antibiotics. These are the three medical miracles that ushered us into the modern age. And now, I will show you how Spherical Industries will propel us into the future."

"Impressive," murmured Lena.

"Are we allowed to look him in the eye?"

On stage, the man gestured to his right, where a woman in a dark blue dress strode toward him, carrying a shiny sphere.

"This is Beth Bree, our CFO of Spherical Industries."

The crowd applauded and the woman smiled. The man, Jack Spheer, approached the podium and picked up a scalpel. The enlarged view screen behind him showed him take the blade and cut across his hand, drawing blood. Sitting in the second row, Kara could also see his physical pain spasm across his face.

He nodded to Bree, who opened the metal sphere, releasing a swarm of tiny metallic... things, that flew to his hand and... healed it.

Lena's eyes went wide. "Oh my god! He did it!"

Kara asked, "This is the project you were working on with Jack?"

"We were so close on our research, but he finally cracked the code!"

On stage, Jack showed them his healed hand. His face no longer showed pain. He said, "What you have just witnessed is the fourth medical miracle: BioMax."

Kara saw that he seemed distracted and looked where he seemed to be looking. Lena. Of course.
He took a deep breath, cleared his throat. "No longer will we need to inoculate ourselves against disease, risk complications by going under anesthesia, or combat increasingly resistant bacteria with antibiotics. We are proud to launch our BioMax Nanobot Medical Program across National City!"

The crowd applauded. He beamed. His CFO smiled, holding the sphere in her hands.

"I'm happy to answer your questions."

Hands flew up, including Snapper's, and Kara leaped up to get there first. "Jack, Jack. Yes, Kara Danvers with karadanvers.com. You originally began research on this project in Metropolis, but you're launching in National City: are you following FDA regulations about distributing drugs across state lines?"

"Excellent question, Ms. Danvers. I would never compromise the FDA's rigorous standards for safety with any of our medical products."

//

The hotel where the press conference had been held was very modern, very (thought Kara) Lena's style. As the two women exited the event, Jack hurried up behind them.

"Lena!" he said. "I'm so glad you came."

Lena's hands looked lost, but she stepped forward and gave Jack a hug. "Yeah. Uh, I wouldn't miss it for the world..."

Kara stood with her hands on her hips. Jack turned and said, "You grilled me."

"Yes, I did."

Lena said, "Uh, this is Kara Danvers. She is one of the best reporters in National City."

Kara laughed. "Stop! I should go, actually."

Lena nodded. Jack looked expectant.

"Yes," said Kara. "I have to tell the readers about the next medical breakthrough."

Still a little nervous about this Jack fellow, Kara hurried downstairs. On the first landing, a diffident bearded man addressed her by name.

"Do I know you?"

"I know Jack Sphere. And I have some information for you. Meet me in the parking lot at Fourth and Main tonight. You're the only reporter I can trust."

Kara watched him walk away, confused.

//

She flew to Alex's apartment, but a quick sweep with her super-hearing from a few blocks way told her that Alex had long since finished her knife practice and was in fact practicing other things with Agent Vasquez. She swooped into the DEO, but found that Winn had left off his codebreaking activity to go do something else, and she assumed that was video games, since Jess was probably very busy at L-Corp even though the CEO was not there for the day.
She ended up at Dollywood by default. M'gann was minding the bar, but the place was mostly empty, probably because of the construction workers tearing apart that last half-broken wall, sorting out the electrical wiring behind it, and building it up again, all of which (Kara thought) ought to make much, much less noise.

Kara yelled, "M'gann!"

And the Martian had turned and handed her a green drink and some Bose noise-reducing earmuffs, saying, "Two-for-one Noise Reducers this week, Kara. That'll be twelve. Want to start a tab?"

"Nah, it's too early in the day for that." But she drank the green drink and then drank another one. "M'gann, what the heck is in this? I shouldn't be feeling floaty, but there is some float here."

"Well, I have human and alien versions. That's the alien version."

"Another."

"Okay, but only three. Your sister was very clear on that..."

"Of course she was." Kara considered her inner state, recognized jealousy, an emotion she was most familiar with from the incident last year with the Red Kryptonite. She didn't like the feeling, but she recognized it and accepted it, knowing it was the emotions one pushed down that were the most likely to pop up in dangerous situations.

She said, "M'gann, have you ever felt jealous?"

"Of course. Everyone has."

"What did you do about it?"

"Which time? The time it went to hell in a handbasket? The time I lost friends? The time it almost sorta worked out?"

"Is almost sorta the best option?"

"So far."

"Then lay it on my. This is really tasty!"

"I talked to the person I was feeling all those feelings about. I made very sure not to kill the person who was making me feel that way. That's pretty much it."

Kara sighed. "That is depressingly good advice, I suspect."

M'gann barked a small laugh. "You're welcome?"
Kara Danvers showed up at the parking lot once sunset had hit around 7:30, and she stood in the shadows waiting for a car to drive in and just sit, without its driver leaving. She waited until 8:15. She approached the car slowly, reaching out with her super-hearing, x-ray-visioning the car, but all she saw or heard was that man who had reached out to her. He was sweating and panting just a little, but there were no bombs that she could see for several blocks, so she took a chance and approached the car. He opened the passenger side door for her and she got in.

"Why me?" she asked.

"You warned the aliens about Cadmus. You want to help people."

"I do."

"Okay. My name is Joe Watkins. I was a lab technician at Spherical. I was fired last month."

"Does this have something to do with the BioMax Nanobots?"

"I was archiving files on the mainframe computer. I noticed that the results from the human trials hadn't been entered. I went to the public records. They seemed fine: operative word, seemed."

Kara felt a humming in her hears and tried to clean her right ear out with her little finger, but it didn't help. She tried to focus.

"But why weren't there anything in our own archives? I think the human test trials were faked. Jack shouldn't be launching BioMax right now. It's not ready. These nanobots are dangerous."

Kara's head snapped up. "Did you hear that?"

But the explosion was happening even as she got the words out of her mouth, the car was a ball of flame, Joe was incinerated and all Kara could do was fly above the car, the car and herself still flaming. She covered her mouth with her hand so that she wouldn't cry out, although every atom in her body wanted to scream.

She looked down at her Kara clothes and saw that her house crest had survived where her normal shirt had not, and she gathered up the sides of her burnt tan trench coat to hide her identity and flew, crying, back to the DEO.
Lena felt more confident in her skirt-suit in Supergirl blue, even thought Jack's suit was navy. They stood on the second floor bridge in the hotel and she tried to remember how this man had confused her so much only a few years ago, after two decades of women had made her ignore men for so long.

"So tell me," she said to him, as Kara hurried away. "The nano-swarm. How did you make it work?"

"I'll tell you over dinner? It's been so long. I'd love to catch up."

But his CFO came up and told him to spend some time with the shareholders, and he couldn't say no.

"It's been great to see you," said Lena.

//

Lena went back to L-Corp and her usual grueling routine. She sat at her desk, crunching numbers and considering marketing options for hours. So when her door opened, she automatically said, "Jess, can you cancel dinner? This is going to take me till at least eight o'clock, and I fully intend on crashing afterwards."

"That's disappointing."

Lena looked up to see Jack walking in.

"You don't have an appointment."

"No, but I was hoping to get one."

"How did you get past Jess?"

"No one's above a snack break. So I know you're free for dinner: good news. But you have no interest in dinner: bad news. It's been an emotional rollercoaster since I walked in."

"Oh yeah, you seem wrecked!"

"Completely. But I'm hoping I don't have enough data. For instance, would you be willing to go to dinner if I was a factor?"

"No."

"Are you mad at me? Is it because I cracked the nano-code alone? Seems petty."

"Just stop, Jack. You know I wish you all the success."
"But?"

"But I'm not going for dinner with you."

"Do you have fun here?"

"I feel good about the work we do."

"You had fun with me. Ruining your eyesight, staring into a microscope. Throwing said microscope at my head when I was insufferable. I don't like how things ended with us."

Lena nodded. "You could have made it easier on me. It's not like I wanted to go."

"I'm not here to make it harder. I just miss you. May I please have dinner with you? Simple as that."

Lena raised one eyebrow. "Just dinner?"

"It's entirely your choice."

"Well, then. Just dinner. Mind if I bring a friend?"

Jack seemed awkward. He said, "Isn't this just about you and me?"

But Lena smiled, saying, "A few years ago that would have been what this was. But my life has gotten much more interesting since we... stopped being peers."
Winn sat in the command center of the DEO, watching Alex and Vasquez fighting off a pair of the most minimal of aliens (some sort of pon farr, he figured) fighting each other in the park, which no one would have cared about if a) ANY other alien crime were happening, which it wasn't. or b) the two aliens weren't also tearing down the lampposts and park benches, which they were.

Once they got through that mess and had sent the adolescent Parvo'knikians home, he was forced to direct these highly trained, skilled and armed women to yet another minor crime. "Armed robbery at Fourth and Sixth. Hey, you know what to do. You got this!"

A masked assailant came running out of the liquor store and Vasquez hit him in the face. They traded punches and then the kid's mask came off. He couldn't have been more than seventeen. "You're just a kid."

She let him go and held Alex back when she made to follow. "Hon, slow down. He's a kid. We all made mistakes back then."

And Alex just nodded.

Winn, back at the DEO, wondered about the interaction, but didn't comment. On the other computer, he watched James and Holtzy take down what had looked on the surveillance cameras like an alien setting bombs in the National City baseball stadium, but had turned out on further inspection to be a couple of human college students in Halloween masks setting up fart bombs in the stands.

Everybody came back to the DEO cranky. James was muttering about how much easier things had been when he was Guardian, Alex was muttering about taking samples from the reservoir, Vasquez looked unhappy, and Holtzy was talking about how the prototype of Joe's rifle that she had made was underoptimized and how she needed Winn's help to fix that. And once Winn was off duty, he totally was down with going to the lab and helping her figure out how to make the plasma shots could be hotter and/or faster, because she couldn't make them both. Winn grinned. This was exactly his type of problem.
Snapper Carr knew he was a bit of a bastard. That's how he got his job done. Other kinds of jobs--psychiatrics, dentistry--required a soft touch, a clear understanding of how far one could push a human being's emotions, a good idea of how far was too far.

But that was life. This was journalism. And he had no tolerance for people who tried to apply the rules of life to journalism.

So when he showed up at the door of the source, announcing himself: "Snapper Carr, CatCo Media. We got a date," he expected someone much more courageous than the face that looked at him from behind the chained door and then hesitantly let him in.

It was strange, really. The fellow was tall, looked strong, had a dark five o'clock shadow and wore a gold chain over his baseball shirt.

"Okay, talk to me," said Snapper. "What do you know about BioMax?"

"Not much."

"They paid you to participate in the human trials. Did you actually participate?"

"Technically. I came in and signed the forms. But that was it. No tests. If there were, I wasn't a part of them."

"And they tried to con--"

But there were hundreds of tiny metallic things swarming into the room.

The man shouted, "What the hell is that?"

Before Snapper could answer or even comprehend what was happening around him, a huge weight pushed him and the other man down to the ground, as the strange metallic things swarmed above him and disappeared out the door.

Then they came back.

But Supergirl leaped up and used her freeze breath to contain the strange technology long enough to push the men out the door.
Something in the Water

Chapter Summary

Not my best chapter, but something for my lovelies tonight.

M’gann had a weakness for root beer, which she decided much later, was a very lucky thing indeed.

From the time the bar opened at 3 pm, people had been acting very odd, both human people and alien people. First of all, everyone said please and thank you, which almost never happened. And they tipped at least 25 percent, which really never happened. But now they were having arguments, with bullet points, about why playing pool by one set of aliens’ rules was actually cheating on Earth, and the unethical nature of those rules.

Seriously. Bullet points. It was getting to the point where it looked like there was going to be a fistfight next, so she came over with a pitcher of water and told them to slow down on the drinking or she would cut them off completely. And they emptied three pitchers of water before she realized that that was just making it worse. Luckily James was in the back booth, scrolling through his phone and looking very upset. She sidled over and asked him if he would mind helping her contain the rowdies at the bar. He looked relieved.

Between the two of them, they rolled half a dozen aliens and four humans into cabs and sent them home.

“What’s with people today?” asked M’gann. “It’s like there’s something in the water.”

James looked at M’gann. They both looked at the pitcher of water. James said, “Metaphors are dangerous in National City. I’m going to take this and get Alex to run some tests…”

M’gann popped open another root beer and put a sign up on the front door: Closed for Spring Cleaning. Then she drove home.
When he saw that Supergirl was pacing back and forth across the command center of the DEO, Winn realized that some intervention might be in order. She was more than her usual frenetic self, and when he asked her why, she stared at him.

"Oh, gosh, let's see. There is some weird new nanobot technology that is murdering civilians. I had to save Snapper--Snapper!--from getting murdered by it. There is something weird going on in National City that apparently is making normal, non-nano people obey the law, possibly against their wills, and if that wasn't enough, by girlfriend, the love of my life, is getting all googly-eyed about a man who might have been her colleague or might have been her ex-boyfriend, but I can't figure it out because she is being super vague, and he's cute and he's a genius like she is and she's all nostalgic for the really long time they worked together and--"

A beep went off in the vicinity of Supergirl's right boot.

Winn said, "You going to get that?"

"Jack Spheer's nanoswarm ate my source."

"Oh! Are you okay?"

"Two people have died and I couldn't save them!"

"And I have no idea how to keep the nanoswarm from killing someone else. No source, no lead--"

"What about Lena?"

"What?"

"She called. She's having dinner with Jack, and she was hoping you would talk her out of it."

Supergirl stuck her hand in her boot and pulled out her phone. She looked at the text message and grabbed Winn. "We're going."

//

The message Lena had sent was minimalistic, of course: just the name of the restaurant, the address and the time, 7:00. But that was the way that they often invited each other to lunch or dinner, so it wasn't meant to be a surprise.

Lena sat in the restaurant, knowing she was totally rocking the red dress: she could see it in his eyes. She hadn't meant to flirt with him. But like Kara, he brought it out in her. The British accent. The big brown eyes. She glanced at her watch, hoping Kara would use super-speed to get to her.

Jack said, "L-Corp is very demanding." He clinked his glass of red wine with hers and they both...
drank.

She said, "I do enjoy it, you know. For what it's worth."

"You always loved the challenge. You look... stunning, by the way."

Lena laughed. How could he still try to flirt with her, after all this time of knowing that she was a gold-star lesbian? Or was that it? Was it the challenge?

Suddenly she heard Kara's voice. "Oh my god! Are you guys eating here? Winn and I are eating here too!"

Lena grinned. "What a complete and utter coincidence!" She scrunched her nose as she said it, knowing how that messed with her girlfriend.

Jack looked slightly pained. "Ms. Danvers."

Kara said, "This is my best friend, Winn Schott." She leaned down and kissed Lena on the lips. "Hey, babe. Do you mind if we join you? I missed you today..."

"I missed you too," said Lena, taking Kara's face in both hands and kissing her more deeply.

Winn and Jack shook hands. Jack said, "Damn, I had hoped I'd be the handsomest guy in the restaurant tonight."

Winn laughed. "Charming!"

Lena leaned toward Kara as she took the seat next to her. "Kara, I appreciate the rescue!"

"That's what friends are for!" she said quietly. Turning, she said more loudly, "So, Jack. How's the BioMax rollout going?"

"You're trying to get me in your crosshairs, Ms. Danvers."

"Reporter's job is never done."

"I can respect it. Um, BioMax is going wonderfully, so far."

"So how did you know it was ready? Did you do any trials? Human trials?"

"It's all on public record, if you're curious."

Lena pushed. "How did you figure it out? I want to know."

He looked disappointed. "Was that the only reason you came?"

Lena gave him The Eyebrow. "No."

He got flustered. "Okay, so a few months after you left, I stayed up all night. The sun came up and there was a flock of starlings going by, and they were all moving in perfect sync. Like, when one turned, all the others turned. And I thought, I've made a terrible mistake. I should have gone with her. I'm no good without her. Then I realized that I'd been modeling the nanoswarm on the wrong kind of animal. See, bees need a base, a queen to revolve around, and I'd been trying to make an animal into a queen by programming a protective algorithm, but--"

"Oh my God. The nanoswarm, it migrates. It's linked, AI sentient."
"Yes, it's all the Spherical mainframe. And I would never have gotten there if I hadn't been thinking about you."

Kara said, "Actually, I was also wondering--"

Jack said, "Maybe another time..."

"Lena, are you--"

Lena, looking a bit dazed. "I think Jack and I need to talk..."

Winn took Kara's hand. "We are out!" He stood. Jack stood. Jack offered his hand, but Winn pulled him into a hug. "I feel a connection to you. We should hang. You should call me."

"Er, yeah sure..."

Kara and Winn walked off, Kara frowning. "Winn, what did you do?"

He grinned and showed her what was in his hand. "I stole his security badge..."
In the back of the towncar, Lena and Jack made light conversation, and he gently mocked her for using a driver rather than driving herself.

"Laugh all you want," she answered archly. "I came up with that handheld biometrics scanner while driving and had an accident. Never again. You know my brain. I can never really turn it off. And the last thing L-Corp needs is for me to run over a couple of schoolchildren because I'm trying to drive and invent at the same time."

"I always loved that about you." He put his hand on hers.

"Jack, I'm still into girls."

"So I saw. This Kara Danvers then. The reporter. How did you meet?"

"She interviewed me a few times and gradually we became friends. And eventually, more."

"How much more?"

"I'd marry her in a heartbeat."

His eyebrows went up. "I never thought I'd hear Lena Luthor say that about anyone."

"That makes two of us. And she still thought she was straight when she met me."

"Did you get the toaster oven then?"

"Very funny."

They reached L-Corp and she took him up to her office. She knew she was trying to impress him, maybe show him what she had been able to achieve with out him.

"Wow, nice view, Lena."

"It's pretty decent."

"Pretty deeece."

"Oh, no, you did not just say that."

"I'm ridiculous, aren't I?"

She chuckled.

He got serious. "I'm so sorry."
"For what?"

"Making you choose. L-Corp or me. I was greedy."

"You were hurt. You know I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I'd stayed. Maybe we would have figured out the nanoswarm together. Maybe I'd have made a name for myself apart from my family."

"I wonder what would have happened if I'd said, there was room for both me and your family. If I'd made room. If I could still do that."

He leaned in and kissed her and at first she let him and then she pulled away. "I can't. Kara. We can't go back."

"Right, yes. I totally get it. Look, I should go. I forgot something. Back at the lab. I'm sorry."

Lena watched him go, her feelings in a turmoil.
What We Can See When We Look

Chapter Summary

Ace Reporter, Continued

Kara and Winn broke into Spherical Industries without too much ethical pain. The man was apparently parading his technology as being painless and perfect when in fact it was capable of killing people. And that wasn't right.

Kara and Winn made their way through the darkened hallways of Spherical Industries. Winn pulled out a flashlight but Kara told him to put it away. "I am a woman with X-ray vision."

"Fair point."

She swiped the keycard and the door beeped and sneaked in. Kara immediately sat down at Jack's desk and clicked the mouse to get to the password screen. She looked at the screen for a moment and then typed. The computer immediately gave her access.

Winn said, "How did you do that? I'm the computer genius, not you."

"The password was starling." She grinned.

"That romantic bastard."

"Okay, here we go." She typed some more, pulled up several file folders. "Human trials. And... it's empty. The whistleblower was right."

"Wait, what about that one?"

She clicked on it and opened a video of Jack sitting at his desk. He said to the camera, "BioMax version 38. Control one. Begin." He took the injector and injected himself in the arm, yelling from the pain. Then he... became the swarm... and then went back to being himself again.

Kara said, "The human trials weren't missing. There weren't human trials. Jack knew the nanoswarm was dangerous from the beginning. That's why Derek and Joe had to die. Jack's the killer! Thumb drive."

Winn inserted his thumb drive into the computer. As they watched the percentage of the download slowly, slowly rise, Kara's head snapped up. "What is that sound?"

Winn shrugged. "Normal sound or super sound?"

"Super, I think. Oh, no. Run!"

She grabbed the drive and Winn's arm and dragged him out of the room.

//

Kara and Winn argued for hours at Kara's apartment. Kara said she had to tell Lena what Jack was doing. Winn argued that if she knew, she might confront him, and that would put her in danger.
Kara argued that she was in danger either way, but at least knowledge was power. They hadn't figured it out by the time Winn went home, but a night of broken sleep, Kara decided that she had to tell Lena. So at lunchtime, she went to L-Corp.

When she knocked on Lena's door, Lena was staring at something on her computer, looking bemused, so Kara knocked again.

"Oh! Sorry! I didn't hear you."

"Distracted?"

"Busted!"

"So, um, sorry about last night. When you sent the text, I assumed you wanted to be rescued."

"I did, Kara. And I was glad to see you. I just didn't anticipate Jack being..."

"Yeah, that was awkward."

"And you know I love Winn. And if he starts to date Jess, maybe we could do a proper double date, with the people we are actually dating." Suddenly her face fell. "Actually, Kara, I do have a confession to make. Last night, after you left. Well, I invited Jack up here to see L-Corp, and well, things got emotional."

"Emotional?"

"He kissed me."

"Oh. I see." But she didn't really see at all. She felt like her stomach had just hit the floor. "Well, um. Did you kiss him back?"

"Only for a second. I was so surprised. I am so sorry, Kara."

"No. No. Lena, I trust you. And you two worked so closely for so long. I, I understand. It's just that I actually came here to talk to you about Jack. I've been investigating him."

"Yeah, I can tell."

Kara looked down and took a breath. "Lena, BioMax is dangerous and he's covering it up."

Lena stared at her as if she couldn't understand the words. Finally she said, "That's not true."

"I'm not lying."

"Well, you're mistaken." Her voice was hard. "Jack would never hurt anyone." Lena got up and hurried to her pitcher of water. Just as she started to pour, Kara held up her phone and showed her the video of Jack.

"He's using the nanoswarm to kill people."

"Who else knows?"

"Just us."

Lena looked like she wanted to cry, but she looked Kara in the eye and said, "I won't ask you to bury it, but please, let me go talk to him before it gets out."
"Lena, he has killed two people. Now, I know how you feel about him, but you will be the third if you confront him. Please just promise me you'll stay away from him for now. It's for your own safety."

Lena nodded, seemingly having difficulty speaking. Finally she said, "Thank you for telling me. I won't go see him. I promise."

"Are you okay?"

"Actually, I've got some work to do. Would you mind, Kara?"

"Yeah, of course. Right."

"You were just doing your job. It's all any of us can do."

So Kara went back to her job and tried to figure out how to leak a video that she had obtained illegally.
J'onn rubbed his eyes. He'd been looking at the budgets now for over an hour and he couldn't remember a single thing he'd read. He stood up and stretched, then pulled all the papers out of his in-box: memos, letters, and one thick cream envelope with his address written out by hand. The wedding. He hadn't expected an invitation, given his long-standing disagreement with Kal-El about the reserves of Kryptonite, but maybe Superman hoped he'd serve as a distraction for General Lane. And what do you get the Man of Steel for his wedding anyway?

There was a knock on his door and Alex and James came in looking worried.

"Why do I get the feeling that you're going to tell me something is finally happening today, that our crime-free day is coming to an end?"

"Not exactly," said Alex. "Maggie called. Apparently, all day people have been turning themselves in at all the precincts in town for jaywalking, cheating the parking meter and taking two bags of chips when they only paid for one."

James said, "There's something in the water."

"We think the two phenomena might be linked."

J'onn pinched the bridge of his nose. "Why does the name Maxwell Lord immediately spring to mind?"

"Maggie's already volunteered to arrest him, but I don't think we're going to get enough evidence. Chemicals aren't like hard tech or computer coding. There's no signature or style involved."

Winn joined them, looking uncertain.

"What is it, Agent Schott?"

"Sir, this isn't alien, I know, but it seems clearly extra-normal. There is a huge herd of dogs at the reservoir."

"Flying dogs?" asked Alex. "Because that was no fun last time."

"No... Just regular dogs."

"Then that is the NCPD's problem not ours." And that didn't solve his wedding present problem, but J'onn would take what he could get.
In the end, Kara decided to do what Alex always told her to do: leave it to the professionals.

Entering Snapper's bullpen was one of the hardest things she had done as Kara Danvers in a good long while. But underneath the argyle, she was Supergirl through and through and she would do what she needed to do to protect the people of National City and beyond.

As she walked up behind Snapper, he said, "Isn't there a Pinterest Anonymous support group you're missing right now?"

"How did you know it was me?"

"I can smell desperation a mile off."

He turned around. She said, "I heard Supergirl saved you."

"Yeah, she was there."

"Did you say think you?"

"Once, to a divorce lawyer. It was uncomfortable for everyone involved."

She tossed her folder on his desk.

"What's this? More alternative facts?"

"All my research on Spherical. I thought I'd help your story."

He crossed his arms over his chest. "What's in it for you, Ponytail?"

"I know we've had our differences. But I've learned a lot from you. And the biggest thing I've learned is that it's not the reporter that matters. It's the truth that matters. And CatCo will get the truth to more people. Also, I wanted the truth to get out so badly that I disobeyed you. Broke the rules." She was having trouble meeting his eyes, where stayed trained on her as she talked. "You were right. I got lucky when I posted my first blog on Cadmus without your permission. I let you down. And I apologize."

Snapper said, "Finally."

She opened the file on his desk. "So anyway, this is all the information I found on Spherical, including an interviewer with a whistleblower named Joe Watkins. BioMax human trials were faked."

"Not bad, Danvers. I got the same confirmation from a source named Derek Simmons, before he was killed."
"I'm glad our information lines up."

"Except Jack might not be the only one involved in the cover up. Beth Breen signed the checks."

"She's Spherical's Chief Financial Officer."

"She has a lot of money riding on the success of these nanobots. If BioMax fails, she stands to lose everything."

Kara fidgeted with her glasses as the pieces of the puzzle started to slide into place. "I have to go. Thank you, Snapper."
Confrontations, Choices

Chapter Summary

Not entirely the end of Ace Reporter?

Lena struggled with herself all afternoon. She had made her promise to Kara, really believing at the time that she would follow through on it, that she could avoid going to confront Jack, ask him for the truth, beg him to tell her that it wasn't true, that there could possibly be another interpretation of that video.

But night fell, and her faith wavered. Her faith in Kara wavered; her faith in Jack increased, just a little bit, just enough that she could no longer keep herself from asking the questions she had to ask. She had never placed a high value on her physical safety. That was one of the things even years of therapy had not manage to fix. She couldn't help it. She refused to live in fear and she refused to believe the worst of the man who had once been her best friend, her closest colleague.

So she went.

She found him in the R&D lab at Spherical.

"Jack!" she said as she strode in.

"Hey," he said. "What's wrong?"

"You lied to me."

He looked surprised. "Everything I said last night was the truth."

"I'm not talking about us, Jack. BioMax."

"What about it?"

"I saw the video, Jack. You shot those things into yourself, faked the human trials. You... killed people."

"Killed people. I don't know what you're talking about."

"You knew, we knew, three years ago, that the nanoswarm had a side effect. The rats' brain chemistry was forever altered. They had no control. We could make them do whatever we wanted. You did this to yourself!"

"Lena! I don't know what you're talking about!"

Lena stared at him. "Oh my God. You're telling the truth."

A woman's voice said, "Ms. Luthor." There was a mechanical noise and Jack's eyes lost focus. He stared, unseeing at her. Lena looked behind him to see Beth Breen, Spherical's CFO, still with that blue-lit earpiece.

"He can't hear you," she said. "No one can."
Jack's face showed the nanobots for a moment and then went back to normal, but he continued to stare unseeing.

"So who killed those people," asked Lena.

"Jack did. Well, he didn't choose to and he doesn't remember it, but he did." She tapped her earpiece.

Lena smiled in understanding. "You've been controlling him this whole time."

"Poor sweet boy wanted to scrap the whole thing just because of a pesky little side effect that removes free will. Not financially responsible. Luckily, I was there to step in. You know it's true what they say: behind every great man is a strong woman."

"Oh, I wouldn't know. I've never stood behind a man."

"You just clean up your brother's messes. Idiot. You walked away from the breakthrough of a century."

"It doesn't work."

"See, I think it works beautifully. I have a brilliant figure head who will do everything I say. The entire world will welcome the nanoswarm into every hospital, army base and eventually home."

"God, you are repulsive," said Lena.

"I'm a realist."

Lena smiled.

"What's funny?"

"Well, you're going to kill me. That's the only reason you're telling me all this."

"Again. Not very financially responsible." She tapped at her earpiece. "I already control Jack. Why would I kill you when I can control you and, by extension, L-Corp. Think of that merger."

Jack zombie-walked over to the table, and picked up an injector like the one he used in the video. Suddenly, Lena felt afraid.

"Okay. Jack, you put, put it down, all right? Jack, listen. I know you're in there somewhere, okay? Listen to me, all right?"

He came bearing down on her, and her instinct said, spread yourself out.

The skylight exploded and Lena was airborne before she knew what was happening and when Supergirl set her down several yards away from Jack and his controller, Lena knew enough to bend her knees to take the stress.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah."

Jack devolved into the swarm of nanobots.

Kara said, "You gotta get out of here."
But Lena said, "No, I, I've got a better idea. You keep him occupied."

And Kara trusted Lena's enormous brain. So she leaped into the air and let the swarm follow her.

Lena strode over to Breen, who was momentarily distracted by watching the swarm, but when Lena approached her, she kicked Lena in the knee. "Did I mention that I'm a blackbelt?"

Lena punched her in the jaw, sending her earpiece flying. "Did I mention that I was a Luthor?" She punched her straight to the head, knocking her to the floor.

Supergirl kept the swarm on the move, and then landed and tried to freeze-breath them again, but somehow they had learned or upgraded or otherwise become immune. They came back at her and pushed her up against a strange blue and chrome frame that was interesting-looking but had no apparent use without an actual superhero to crucify. Lucky for them that Supergirl had come along!

The nanobots physically lifted her up and slammed her against the frame, covering her like a swarm of bees, from her feet to her skirt and including her arms, to keep them spread and locked against he frame.

"Jack, make it stop!" yelled Lena. Then she leaped forward and stomped on Breen's earpiece.

Jack gasped, and returned to himself long enough to say, "Lena!"

But then the bots returned to try to take over his body and Supergirl's body. He was screaming and Kara was screaming.

Lena yelled, "Jack!"

And in a space between the nanobots attacking his body, Jack yelled, "Lena, the mainframe!"

She ran to the computer. "I think I can override it!"

Kara yelled, "Lena! Hurry!"

Lena yelled, "I'm almost there, okay?"

"You'll kill them." Breen dragged herself to her feet and strode over to Lena. "The override destroys the nanobots. You kill them, you'll kill him."

Lena gave her an elbow to the face, dropping her to the floor. Supergirl's face was almost covered with nanobots. Jack was on his knees in agony. She turned to him, "I'm sorry, Jack!"

"Do it," he begged. "Please!"

The bots covered him completely. Lena pressed the key and the computer announced, "System override."

Jack exploded. All the bots disappeared off Supergirl, who gasped for breath.

Jack fell to the floor, and Lena ran to him, hoping, she didn't even know, to do CPR? But it was too late.

Supergirl approached, but Lena was already broken up and there was nothing she could do except pick up Jack's body and fly him to Maggie's police precinct to explain what happened and report on Beth Breen as a person of interest in those two killings. Strictly speaking, the case was not a Science Division case, but Maggie knew exactly who to pass it on to, and she gave Supergirl a very
long hug (which caused guys in her precinct to start their tongues wagging, but she just ignored them all. Little Danvers needed help and she would be damned if she wouldn't give the Little Danvers a hug if she needed it.)
Feeling the Loss

Jack Spheer's funeral was well attended. His employees loved him. His colleagues across the industry cared about him. Old friends from undergraduate and graduate programs remembered him fondly. And all of them avoided Lena Luthor, because they had all heard that she was the one who caused his death. It didn't seem to matter that he had chosen to experiment on himself, or that he had been used by the CFO he had trusted or that if he had lived both Lena and Supergirl would have quite likely died. Nobody seemed to remember that. So a five-foot space surrounded Lena at the funeral, from the moment she walked into the green and flowering cemetery to the moment she walked up to the casket and tossed the lily down, turned and walked away. And of course camera flashes were going off, so Lena knew that the distance people were keeping would be captured for the world and commented on the following day.

It didn't matter. It was another day in National City, and Lena had work to do. She always had work to do.

Tom, her driver, looked sad, but didn't break her solitude. He simply drove her back to L-Corp, and gave her his hand to help her out of the car when they got there. She gave him a small smile in gratitude. She glanced at her phone as she crossed the L-Corp lobby and saw the message from Jess about R&D, so she went there first.

The news was good. Kate showed her the quantum material they had made and she signed off on sending five samples to National City General Hospital to their one xeno-surgeon who had patients desperately awaiting skin grafts, including Ron's boyfriend. Only time would tell whether the material would work as they had hoped. And that small good thing was enough to give her the energy to go up to her office and work for a few hours, but then she found her attention wavering as the afternoon wore on and eventually, she just closed her laptop, tossed her pen on her desk and went and sat on the couch, remembering her friend Jack, his fine mind and his ridiculous sense of humor. And that was where she was a few hours later when Kara came by with a vase with red, orange and yellow roses.

"Those are beautiful," said Lena.

"I wish there was more I could do to help."

"Oh, you came to see me. That's more than enough."

"Beth is in jail."

"Good."

"You're in shock, Lena."

"I know. Loss does strange things to my family, and I have lost a lot of people."

"When Lex was arrested, my mother was there. My mother saw her son dragged, bleeding and raving, from her house and when I got there, Lillian was tidying his room like he'd been away on a business trip. That's how I feel. Cold and calm. Until I think about Beth dying in jail, and then I feel warm for a minute."

"You're not going to lose me."

Kara said, "Well, you're not going to lose me."
Lena said, expressionless, "I think when I feel things again, I am going to be very, very afraid about the person I might be."

Kara moved to be next to Lena, put her arms around her. 'You don't have to be afraid. I am right here. And I'm not going anywhere."

Scared, Lena asked, "Promise?"

Kara pressed her head against Lena's. "I will always be your friend, and I will always protect you. I promise."

Lena sat with wide eyes, but tears refused to fall.

Kara said, "Come on. Let's get you home."
Chapter Summary

Starting Alex.

Chapter Notes

So, having gotten rid of the Daxamites, I am a little uncertain how to handle what was basically a pretty good episode except that Kara was totally OOC the whole time. I am hugely open to suggestions!

Detective Maggie Sawyer was very good at the different skills her job required. As a detective, lately, she mostly worked on alien-related disappearances and homicides, but as one of the most experienced detectives in her precinct, when the serious shit went down, she was often one of the first people called for to make it right.

Both human and alien crime had been on an uptick all month, and the NCPD was stretched thin, which is how a 9 am bank robbery had turned into a cordon on inexperienced regulars calling the Science Division for an experienced negotiator, and Maggie getting sent in to talk, talk, talk, get them to release one of the hostages at noon (a diabetic woman) as a sign of good faith, and another at 6:15 pm (a man having a panic/asthma attack). That left four robbers and fifteen hostages and another eight hours of talking, talking, talking down the robbers, staying calm, reasonable, unthreatening, presenting a friendly voice of reason, never letting the men in the bank feel panicky or out of control, because panicking people make dangerous decisions, and at 2 am, Maggie was exhausted but determined that those last fifteen terrified hostages were going to go home healthy and whole to their families.

It was going to happen soon. She had felt the shift in the conversation and she gently pressed her advantage.

"I don't want to hurt anyone," the man said.

"You don't have to hurt anyone," said Maggie, her arm numb from holding her phone to her ear for so long. "No one is making you do this. You're choosing to do this. You and your friends chose to go into that bank. You chose to take those people hostage. But you know what? You can choose to put your guns down. You can choose to let those people go. You, you can choose not to hurt anyone."

"I, yes, we--"

Behind her, someone yelled. "Look! Up in the sky!"

The sound of an explosion made everyone jump and then a blur of red and blue brought out first one pair of men and then the other pair and dumped them at Maggie's feet. The one closest to her had blood smeared on his forehead, and he rolled over and retched on the pavement, reminding
Maggie of the first time she had met Supergirl months before.

Supergirl led the hostages out of the bank, saying, "Now even Pretty Boy Floyd got to meet Supergirl! It'll be a fun story to tell your roommates in jail."

Grinding her teeth, Maggie called for the EMT to check the robber for concussion. Then she approached the Superhero.

"Supergirl," she said. "I almost had him."

Supergirl put her hands on her hips. "And I got you over the finish line. And just in time for breakfast! I'll see you later." She flew away.

Maggie turned away. She kept her temper in check while she went with the regulars to book the hostage-takers and take statements from the hostages. It was 9 am before she left the precinct. She was exhausted and she was furious. After recharging her phone, she called Alex.

"Danvers! We have to talk! Your sister is totally out of control!"

"Wait, what? Maggie? What are you talking about? What did Kara do?"

"She flew into my crime scene, completely contaminated my evidence, broke one perp's arm gave another a concussion. That girl needs to recognize that we have jurisdictions for a reason!"

"Wait, are you saying Kara--"

"Yes, your caped little sister my have just sent my case sideways!"

"Okay, uh. Let's meet for dinner. My place at six. We'll figure this out."
At the DEO, Alex had a long talk with Vasquez after they watched the Channel 7 news report that summarized the long, cautious negotiation, the torturously slow de-escalation, and the explosive ending.

Vasquez shook her head. "That was not okay," she said. "The cops didn't ask for her help, did they?"

"No, she just leapt in."

"I really thought that teaching her chess would make her consider the consequences of her actions."

Alex frowned. "My parents and I have been fighting that battle for years."

Vasquez drummed her fingers on the command post computer. "You know, I hate to say it, but that was the one good thing that Daxamite did for us, for a little while: made her more careful about auxilliary damage."

"If anyone ever asks, I did not hear you say that and I did not agree."

"Your secret is safe with me."

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Alex brought the wine. Vasquez and Winn brought the NDAs, which Maggie signed, growling, "Seriously, Danvers? A ponytail and glasses? What kind of ridiculous disguise is that?"

Alex sighed. "I know. I always said that."

Vasquez turned to Winn. "Pay up."

He took out his wallet and handed her a twenty. "Seriously, Maggie, couldn't you have waited to figure it out until the end of the month?"

"Winn, I figured it out weeks ago."

Alex handed Vasquez a ten. Vasquez murmured, "Wait for it..."

Maggie threw the pen down on the table. "For crying out loud, guys. I'm a detective. I detect."

Vasquez crowed.

Winn and Alex handed her another ten each.

Maggie rolled her eyes. "And Vasquez's god-damned job is predicting scenarios. You fools actually bet against her?"

Vasquez grinned. "At least somebody around here appreciates me."

Winn tried making excuses. Alex got the door for Kara, who came in with a stack of pizzas.

Vasquez took one look at the strange patchwork jacket Kara was wearing and frowned. "Well, that's a... new look for you, Kara."
"Thanks!" said Kara, hearing a compliment where none existed. "I'm trying to branch out!"

"Yeah," growled Maggie. "About that..."

"Food first," said Vasquez, setting herself between the two women. "Never argue on an empty stomach."

Alex and Vasquez split the veggie pizza with Maggie, while Winn and Kara split the ham and pineapple.

Winn said, "I know this combination is wrong, but I love it. So, hey, Kara! Good job today. Bank robbers, zero. Supergirl, four. We don't even need cops anymore."

Alex said, "This from the man whose dad is in prison..."

"No," said Maggie. "He's right. Why try to talk a guy down when Supergirl can just swoop right in and force him down. Seventeen hours of 'What do you want? How can I help you?' Good old fashioned hostage negotiation wasted."

Kara looked shocked. "You're not upset that I caught the bad guys and got everybody out safely, are you?"

"I would have gotten them to free the hostages."

"Maybe. But they're in jail now where they can't hurt anyone. And that's all that matters!"

"As long as they don't use the Supergirl defense."

"What?"

"It's a thing some criminals use to get their charges dropped. It's the perfect storm for a defense attorney: excessive force, evidence contaminated by debris, and vigilante justice."

"Vigilante justice? I stand for health and help and justice. I did what I had to do to get those people out of there."

Winn said, "What if it had been the Guardian that had done that? Would you still think it was better than letting the cops handle it?"

"Winn, whose side are you on?"

Alex cut in. "I think what Maggie's trying to say is that what you do is amazing when we're up against..."

"A giant purple monster?" offered Maggie. "Or a cyborg murderer? Sure! But most of the time police work requires a more delicate touch."

"Delicate?" Kara adjusted her glasses.

"Yeah. You broke a guy's arm. You gave another one a concussion. And that is after you broke in the roof of a National City landmark. And now it has a big Supergirl-sized hole in it."

"A thousand things could have happened from the time of your call to the hostages walking out. Maybe, sure, I broke some walls. But I got everyone out of there safely, and that is a win."

"Well, you should have asked. But you never look before you leap."
"Because I can fly."

Alex and Vasquez exchanged glances. Vasquez said, "Kara, there is a time for punching and a time for talking. I've heard you try to reason with the Parasite, and Jack Corben and other aliens and cyborgs. So why wouldn't you let Maggie reason with a bunch of humans?"

"Because you did hear me try. And you heard me fail, every time. No one listens to reason."

"Right before you crashed your way in, he was agreeing to let them go. And the NCPD has the entire conversation recorded, if you don't believe me," said Maggie.

"Obviously, I've upset you, Maggie," said Kara putting down her napkin. "I'm going to go."

"No, wait, Kara, don't--"

"Thanks for dinner." She left.

Winn stood up. "I'll see what I can do." He followed her out.

Vasquez kept eating. "For what it's worth," she said to Maggie. "We're all on your side. I don't know what is going on with her lately. She's been like this for a while, taking more risks, taking on more things that really aren't super-sized or DEO sized."

Maggie said, "You know, thanks, Vasquez, but you guys really need to rein her in."

Alex said, "Maggie, I know you and I haven't always gotten along but I'd hate to see your relationship with Kara suffer."

"Kara and I get along great. It's Supergirl I sometimes have trouble with."

"Okay, just try. Please?"

"Yeah. For you. I'll try."

Alex put on her jacket.

"Where are you going?"

"To try to catch up with Kara and tell her to try to. She's just as stubborn as you are. Vas, don't wait up for me."

Vasquez said, "Well, if I'm okay company, do stay and help me finish off the pizza. We can open another bottle of wine and watch something on TV that has absolutely no police or aliens or superheroes."

"What does that even leave?"

"Um, Food Network?"
Chapter Summary

More Alex. Trying to figure out reasons Kara would be so out of character for the whole episode.

The past week, Lena had moved through her days like an automaton, eating when Kara or Jess put food in front of her, preparing for meetings, attending meetings, leading meetings that felt like herding cats while sitting at the head of the long conference table. She left work most nights around seven, when her body just wouldn't support her and she would spend the evening reading or watching something on Netflix, and by the time Supergirl landed on the condo's balcony, she would be unable to tell her what she had read or watched. Kara made an effort to end her night patrol most nights by one, leaving the safety of the city in the hands of the NCPD and the DEO. And at first her presence in Lena's bed had helped. They would talk a little, usually about Kara's day and then sleep with Kara holding Lena as she fitfully slept. Sometimes, if Lena couldn't sleep, they would make love, which usually left Lena tired enough to sleep, sometimes even snoring lightly in Kara's arms. But she wouldn't talk about Jack.

Kara had tried to get her to talk about it, had encouraged her not to be afraid to cry. She'd talked a little bit about when she first came to Earth and had to process losing her civilization, but Lena just said, "Luthors don't cry." And there wasn't much else Kara could do to help her. And after a while, Lena had turned away from Kara's warmth in the bed and stopped touching her completely. And then Kara's Supergirl patrols had gotten longer, returning her later and later and more exhausted, to throw herself into two or three hours of sleep before leaving bleary for her reporting assignments in the morning, throwing herself into restaurant menus as a replacement for the other kinds of nourishment she craved.

The night/morning of the bank robbery, she had been on patrol since sundown, flying low over National City, trying to avoid listening for Lena's heartbeat by listening for the activities of whatever petty criminals had proved relatively immune to the effects of the tainted water supply.

So maybe, maybe her reaction to Maggie's hostage situation had been overenthusiastic, under-thought-through, her spontaneous heroism tinged with carelessness. She tried not to think that she might have similarly been tainted by Mon-El's bad example.

She tried to think instead of how she might make things right, how she could help Lena heal. But most of the time, she could only think clearly when she was either in flight or fighting the rarer than usual criminals. And on the night after she had ended the standoff between the police and the hostage-takers, she flew all night and came up with no answers to her problem, no answers to the breaking of her heart.
Lena had met the older woman a few nights before, when she had dropped by just as Lena had been getting ready to leave work and go home, if home was even still the right word for her condo, now that Kara was spending less and less time in it. On some level, Lena knew that she had been pushing Kara away, but on the surface all she could recognize was that Kara and Supergirl both, the ones she had once thought were her only two friends in National City, were both avoiding her, abandoning her just when she needed them most, just after she had chosen Supergirl's life over Jack's, just after Kara had made a solemn promise to never leave her, to always protect her.

The woman had stood in her office's doorway, wearing a black dress and a white and black blazer.

"Lena Luthor?" she'd said.

"I'm not seeing anyone right now," said Lena in a low voice.

"I heard about your colleague, Mr. Spheer. I'm so sorry."

Lena turned and really looked at her. Why would a stranger come at night to convey condolences?

She asked, "Who are you?"

"My name is Eleanor Penn. I have a business proposition for you."

//

Lena spent the next three days reading and rereading the proposal, trying to dig up any literature she could on the technology, even engaging L-Corp's research librarian, Tiffany, to help her narrow down the keywords that would help them find the most theoretical physics journals that dealt with the mere possibility that such technology was even barely feasible.

The idea at this stage was very simple: a portal through which they could send things through space with very little time and no organic breakdown. The problem that Ms. Penn identified was small size and capability of the system: it could transmit large things of very limited complexity or a very tightly limited size or quantity of slightly more complex material.

Either bulk simplicity or limited complexity, but not both. The problem was basically a memory issue, similar to the limits of computer memory. Size, quantity and complexity all took up distinct amounts of memory, and memory was how the object was stored between disappearing on one transmatter platform and reappearing on the other. Without adequate memory, one platform would send all of the information about an object, only sixty percent of which might get stored. But that led to only sixty percent reappearing on the second platform. And these objects were all nonsentient. The odds that they would ever be able to send living plants was infinitesimal. Sending sentient beings? Astronomical. But still, Lena thought, reading the proposal for the tenth time, imagine the applications!

//
Eleanor Penn showed up for her appointment with Lena Luthor dressed to the nines and confident as any CEO might be expected to be. Lena admired the way she balanced out the standard navy skirt suit and heels with a starched white blouse that stood around her neck and peeked at the cuffs.

"Ms. Penn," Lena said. "I have been looking at your proposal and I have never seen anything like it. A device for matter transformation and reconfiguration? It's astonishing."

Penn crossed her arms over her thin frame. "Well, I saw you TED talk on the future of quantum technology, which made me think it might be right up your alley."

"This could revolutionize travel, energy, security, just about anything." Lena got up and went to stand in front of the computer screen that normally showed the revolving L screensaver, and now showed a rendering of the transmatter portal. "You could move food and water to famine-stricken areas in an instant. Solve climate change. That is, if it works. The proposal you lay out is sound, but... it is all theoretical."

"Which is why I need you. My thought was, if we wed L-Corp's work in zero-size intelligence to my design, I'm confident we can make it a reality. Of course, I've kept a few key details out of the proposal. I needed to gauge your interest before revealing all of my secrets."

"Oh, I'm interested," Lena said with a smile, not realizing herself that it was the first time she had smiled in a week.

"Good!" said Penn. "Because I've made us a reservation at Paka's."

"Well, how could I say no?"

The two chuckled like old friends and something loosened inside Lena.
Sister Problems

Kara was exhausted. Once again, she had spent a portion of the night with Winn pacing back and forth in her apartment, begging her to see the error of her ways and follow DEO protocols, which were there, he argued, to protect civilians (guilty as well as innocent), to protect legal cases from getting bogged down (as Maggie had argued), and to prevent agents from unnecessary court cases. This, he argued, was the main lesson that J'onn and Lucy had hoped James would learn at the DEO, the lesson the vigilante Guardian had so very much needed to learn.

By 1:30, Winn had no voice and the stony-headed Kryptonian was no closer to agreeing with him, so he had gone home. She had slept in her own apartment for the whole night for the first time in a long time and ended up waking more well-rested than she could remember having been in quite a while.

She showed up at work much less weary than she had in a good long time and got to work with determination if not actual enthusiasm. Kara was sending some page designs down to layout when she saw Maggie walk into CatCo.

"Kara, hey," said Maggie.

"Maggie," she said awkwardly. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah, I was just looking for Alex, wondering if she checked in with you?"

"Didn't you crash at her place last night?"

"I did, but she left to catch up with you after you left. What, she didn't stay at yours?"

"She never caught up with me. Maybe she went to the DEO."

"Winn says she didn't check in last night or report this morning."

Kara said, "Huh," but then her phone rang and it was Alex's number. "Ah, mystery solved. Alex!"

In her ear, a man's voice spoke. "Hello, Kara Danvers..."

"Who is this?"

"The real question is, who are you? Everyone around you thinks you're just a mild mannered reporter. But I know the truth."

"What do you want?"

"I have your sister."

"You're lying."

"I'm not." A ping on Kara's phone rang and she looked to see a photo of Alex lying unconscious on a floor. The man continued, "A man named Peter Thomson is serving a life sentence at Albatross Base Supermax Prison. You will free him in the next thirty-six hours, or your sister will die. And I know you can, because I know you're Supergirl."

//
Alex woke up on a floor, in a strange green-tiled room with pipes on the ceiling, long fluorescent lights floor and ceiling, and up in the corners, surveillance cameras. The argument at dinner came back to her, followed by her leaving her apartment to go find Kara, the men in the elevator who had taken her down and out, a long darkness and now this.

Three walls were made of glass, but when she cupped her face she could not see through them into the darkness beyond.

"Hello? Hello?" She pounded on the glass to no avail. Then she looked up at the red light of the surveillance cameras. "I knew I recognized you from the elevator. I know who you are. The people I work with, they will find you. And when they do, you will be in a world of hurt. So I am giving you one chance: free me now. When I get out of here, I will END you!"

She beat on the glass wall again, endlessly.
J'onn looked at his agents. He said, "So this person who says they kidnapped Alex, what exactly did they say on the call?"

Kara looked extra vulnerable in a pink shirt and grey skirt. She paced like a wounded lioness. "He said he would kill Alex if I didn't break Peter Thomson out of Albatross Bay. He said he knows Kara Danvers is Supergirl. He's targeting Alex because she's my sister."

Agent Chen raised his hand. "Um, this might be stating the obvious, but why don't we just spring Peter Thomson and bring Alex home?"

Vasquez snorted. "The DEO does not negotiate with terrorists."

"But this is Alex."

"If we do it once, we'll open the floodgates. Every bad guy will know Supergirl can be controlled."

Maggie added, "And even if we do what he wants, it doesn't guarantee that he'll release her. She's his insurance."

J'onn barked, "All right, people, let's get to work."

Most of the crowd around the command center dissipated. J'onn came up behind Winn at his stations. "Winn, any luck with Alex's subdermal tracer?"

"No, it's been offline since ten o'clock last night. Whoever took her must have found some way to power it down."

"Where are we on triangulating the signal from the phone calls?"

"Nowhere. The caller used four different arrays to scramble the signal. You guys, listen! We gotta move."

J'onn said, "Well, let's start with what we do know. If this guy knows you're Supergirl, we'll use that to our advantage."

Chen said, "Well, that's gotta be a short list. Who knows your secret?"

Kara took a deep breath, listing, "Jeremiah, Eliza, Clark, the DEO, Lillian Luthor..."

Maggie asked, "Does Peter Thomson have ties with Cadmus?"

Winn shook his head. "No, I've already checked. There's nothing."

"Then you're asking the wrong question," said Maggie. "We don't know where Alex was taken, we don't have a crime scene, we don't have any physical evidence. They've clearly been planning this for a while. Whoever has been planning this is a ghost who doesn't want to be found."

Kara asked, "Then what's the right question?"

"Who is Peter Thomson and what does he mean to our ghost?"
The restaurant was dimly lit, well staffed, and elegant. It was one of Lena's favorites for a certain type of meeting--almost never meetings with men, who would get the wrong idea, absolutely not meetings with potential bedmates for whom it was too lavish (because they would also get the wrong idea); meetings with women who were equals, yes. It was the sort of place she would have taken Cat Grant.

"So, Ms. Penn," Lena said, sipping her scotch. "Where did you study?"

"Undergrad at Oxford. Masters of Engineering from MIT."

"I went to MIT. Did you have Martinez?"

Penn laughed. "I think I was there many years before you, but I will take the compliment, and I will offer you one in return. The applications of your black body field generator blew me away. You're quite the genius."

"And you are too kind. "I'm being honest. I wish I had a daughter like you. Your mother must be proud!"

"Oh, that's not how I'd describe her," Lena said with an ironic smile.

"Mothers and daughters, not always the easiest relationship."

"More like apocalyptic, but you know." She chuckled.

"We don't have to talk about it."

"No, no. It's fine. You know, she never really cared about me and only came back into my life to steal from me and frame me for a felony. So, you know, usual mother/daughter stuff."

Penn poured more scotch into her own glass. "Well. You have a sense of humor about it. I'm impressed. I try, but I'm not usually so successful."

"Were you played by your mother too?"

"Mmm. No. My son. He was always the light of my life. But recently, he met this horrible girl, and everything changed." She took a long sip of her scotch.

Lena looked at her with compassion, trying to imagine ever having children, ever caring about them in all the ways Lillian had never cared for her. She had thought these thoughts before, although never for long. Her inventions were her children. She had occasionally thought that, if she ever found a partner, the woman of her dreams, she might possibly adopt a cat or two. Cats were more independent than dogs and as someone who worked fourteen hour days regularly and traveled a lot for business, a dog, however freely affectionate, wouldn't be practical.

"My husband and I," Penn continued, "lost our son. And on the heels of it, my husband died." She took another drink.

Lena closed her eyes, remembering how Lillian, whom she had always fought, had collapsed for four days after Lionel's death. True, on the fifth day she had gone back to work as if nothing had changed, but still. Loss was loss. "That's awful," she said.

Penn smiled. "I am so sorry. I never open up like this."

"Don't be silly. I started it." She smiled apologetically.
"I guess since I'm sharing, I should share everything." She handed Lena flash drive. "These are the key concepts I kept back from the proposal."

"Oh! I can't wait," said Lena. "And I give you my word, I will not steal it. You know, regardless of what happens, with the business, I have the feeling we're going to be friends."

Penn raised her glass for a toast. "To new friends. Thank the gods I found you."

Lena's eyes flickered as their glasses clinked and they drank.
J'onn thought Albatross Bay was well named. Just as the ancient mariner had been forced to wear a dead albatross around his neck after causing his ship to be becalmed, until the day he appreciated God's creation in the simplest things, the shining minnows below his ship, this prison held people in a meaningless life until, just maybe, they were rehabilitated. At first glance, Peter Thomson did not seem to be a candidate for freedom.

"Mr. Thomson, I am Hank Henshaw, FBI. This is Detective Maggie Sawyer, NCPD, and um, Kara Danvers, and independent investigator."

"The Feds, a pig and a dick! To what do I owe this confusing pleasure?"

Maggie, smiling, tossed his file folder on the table. She said, "Your jacket's a thrilling read: three home invasions, two DUIs, two counts of felony murder"

"You all didn't come down just to flatter me, did you?"

"This morning we got a call from an anonymous source asking that you be released from prison."

"Someone wants me out of jail? I'm not used to that! People usually want to keep me behind bars."

J'onn pointed out, "A life sentence can't be all that easy, being here all by yourself, not keeping contact with anyone on the outside."

"Just last week, Mr. J.C. Penny sent me a letter. He said there was a sale on galoshes, except I don't have anywhere to wear them."

Kara snapped. She surged forward and pounded the table (leaving a dent). "Enough! My sister has been kidnapped and her life is on the line until we figure out who wants you out of prison."

J'onn said, "Ms. Danvers---"

But she continued, "Save us the sarcasm. Who is it? Who has her?"

"Calm down," said Maggie.

"Who has my sister!"

Thomson said, "I don't know."

Kara said, "You're lying."

J'onn said, "He's not! We're done here."

The security guard led Thomson back to his cell. Kara immediately whirled around on J'onn. "Why'd you let him go?"
"Because I read his mind. He's telling the truth."

Maggie said, "Losing control is not going to find Alex. It's only going to her killed."

Kara's phone rang. She answered it, put it on speakerphone. "Winn."

"Hey, we got something!"

"What?"

"So I scanned for the visitors logs for Patrick Thomson for the past three years. They're pretty sparse, except for one name that kept popping up."

"Who?"

"Doesn't matter. It's a fake name. But! I pulled security footage and, baby, I ran that facial recognition software. Thomson has a son."

"But we checked. He doesn't have any relations."

"Well, apparently this is a lot of family drama. Thomson's name isn't even on the kid's birth certificate. And I only figured this out after I cross-checked the name with the court transcripts. The kid spoke at Thomson's sentencing, and his name is Rick Malvern. He has a house outside of the city."

"Malvern. Why does that sound so familiar?"

"Because he grew up in Midvale."

Before either J'onn or Maggie could stop her, Kara was out the door and speeding away from the prison.

Maggie turned to J'onn. "Does she seriously NEVER even stop to make a plan?"

J'onn sighed. "Once in a blue moon, if it's a Tuesday. Maybe."
Supergirl could fly from National City to Midvale in the dark, with her eyes closed, which was probably just as well. She had caught the looks Maggie and J'onn had shot each other the moment they had heard the word "Midvale," but she had torn off at superspeed anyway, the moment Winn had told her the address of Malvern's house.

Flying through the night sky, red cape billowing behind her, Supergirl was a mess of fear and rage. The familiar shape of Midvale from above wasn't enough to dull the sharp blade of worry that was cutting her up from the inside out.

She landed in Malvern's back yard, kicked the back door of the house in and immediately entered, calling out, "Alex?"

"Alex!" She hurried from empty room to empty room, to come to a broken down dining room with an array of computers showing surveillance feed of Alex imprisoned in a cell. "Alex? Alex!"

Behind her a man's voice said, "She can't hear you, Kara."

Supergirl turned. Rick Malvern was older, but still recognizably himself. "Rick?"

"Geez, I haven't seen you since graduation. You look great!"

Supergirl grabbed him by the lapels of his coat and picked him up. "Where's my sister?" she growled.

"You break my father out of prison yet?"

"You know I can't do that."

"Can't? Or won't?"

Kara tossed him into a wall. "Tell me where she is."

Rick held up a hand. "That's not how this works. Why don't you try and play nice? Kara? You were always the nice one."

Supergirl took a deep breath. "Just let me talk to her."

He stood. "Well. If that gets you to play ball, then, I'm happy to help." He moved stiffly to the computer and hit some keys.

"Alex!"

"Kara? Is that you? It's Rick! Rick Malvern from Midvale. He kidnapped me."

"I know. I'm with him right now. Are you okay? Where are you?"

"My tracker. Can you use my tracker?"

"It's not working. We don't know what--"
"Okay," said Rick. "That's enough."

"Wait, no!"

"It's simple. She's told you she's okay. And now we trade my father for Alex."

"Your father is a murderer."

"Manslaughterer," he corrected.

"Tell me where she is."

"Tick-tock. Tick-tock."

Supergirl saw red as her eyes lit up and she aimed her X-ray vision at his face, but he never even flinched. In fact he stepped toward her until the light from his eyes was reflected on his face.

"Oh, wow. It's even cooler up close. You hurt me? You'll never find her. And she'll die. Slowly."

Supergirl let the light in her eyes die and pulled away from him. She saw Alex pounding on the confines of her cell, and she turned back, grabbed Rick by the back of his belt and flew out the window.

//

There was always room for one more at the DEO, even if that one was not, strictly speaking an alien or a danger to aliens in general. J'onn had a little leeway to define "Extra-normal" a bit broadly.

They stood watching the video feed as two DEO agents escorted Rick to the interrogation room. J'onn stood, arms crossed over chest, looking grim. Maggie paced back and forth. Vasquez sat in a chair with her feet crossed on the table. Supergirl looked ready to combust at any moment.

Maggie muttered, "He looks normal. They always look normal."

"He was always nice in school," said Kara. "He used to carry Alex's bookbag. Why is he doing this to her?"

J'onn said, "I tried reading his mind, but he seems to be blocking me somehow."

Maggie said, "Let me in there. I can talk to him."

J'onn nodded. "All right."

//

Supergirl came with her, and stood at the door looking angry and fierce. Maggie sauntered over to the table and sat looking at the man, waiting for him to start the conversation.

"Detective Sawyer," he said easily. "I know they say there's never a cop around when you need one..."

"So you know me."

"Of course. I took a whole year planning this. Watching Alex. Preparing. I know everything."
From the door Supergirl asked, "How did you know I was Supergirl?"

"That day at the beach, before you started wearing glasses. Back then, I had no idea that Alex would end up playing for the other team, so to speak. I was just happy she had showed up on a date. And there was a crash. Alex's kid sister walked away without a scratch. People at school said it was adrenaline. But uh..."

"But you didn't believe that," said Maggie.

"I saw Kara Danvers do something amazing. And it stayed with me. I knew that Kara was living in National City. And then Supergirl showed up in National City. I put two and two together. I knew it was you."

Quietly Kara asked, "What happened to you? I remember when Alex had the chicken pox. I was eating lunch by myself. And you came and sat with me."

"I was fourteen. And I didn't have the nice house or the perfect family that you and Alex had. You think we had it easy?"

"You have no idea what Alex sacrificed for me or what I was going through!"

"Why? Because you had to hide your superpowers? I was hiding bruises! Do you have any idea what it's like to have your mother tell you you're garbage every single night? A belt whenever you had the wrong opinion? And then I found a lifeline, a dad that my mom kept from me. And he saved me from her and he moved me away from Midvale. And even though he was always struggling, he always made sure that there was food on the table. And he got me enough money to go to college. And then three years ago, the state took him away from me."

Maggie said, "Your father killed two people. He confessed."
"They had it coming. And now I'm going to rescue him like he rescued me. I can't believe we're still talking about me. You have twenty-four hours and eleven minutes. Come on, Kara! Show us some of that rah-rah Midvale Junior High spirit! FREE MY DAD! Or your sister dies."

Supergirl sped across the room and held him up against the wall.

"If you use half the gusto in springing my dad, you'll have your sister back for game night."

"Kara!" yelled Maggie. "We're done here."

Kara dropped him, growling. She followed Maggie to the door.

Behind them, Rick said, "Hey, you know what would be fun? Finding out which one of your loves her more. Honestly. I wouldn't know where to place my bet."

The walked out and the door slammed behind them. They were silent as they both strode back to the surveillance room, where Vasquez still sat, playing with Winn's yo-yo.

Supergirl said, "I'm giving him a minute and then I'm going back in there."

"No," said Maggie. "Let him sweat it. We got what we wanted."

"What? All we know is how he knows my identity."

"We know that Rick has pinned his whole sense of self-worth on Peter Thomson. Thomson is the key to getting Alex back."
Vasquez watched them leave, physically together but still psychologically apart. She nodded to herself as she watched the man under the surveillance cameras smile to himself, assuming he was playing them off of each other successfully.

"Not bad, little man," she murmured. "But you have totally underestimated my girls." She thought about that statement a bit, then added, "All three of them."

Chapter End Notes

Over 220,000 words in 80 days. Woo-hoo!
Since Jack's funeral, Lena had been wearing all black. It wasn't all that hard. Since rising to the head of the company and taking it over, she had found herself often in situations that had required her to seem or to be a Morally Ambiguous Luthor, and often, she found, it was easiest to play that role (not unlike Hamlet or Satan) while wearing all black. So yes, her wardrobe included whites, reds, blues, and greens, but times like these required the greatest power color of them all. It didn't hurt that she also looked stunning in it.

She stood, later that evening, staring at the computer schematic of the transmatter portal on her wall, weighing her options. Part of her hated herself for her prejudice, her fear, her sense of self-preservation, all of which had kicked into overdrive over drinks just hours before. Another part of her--the part trained by Lillian?--simply said she was protecting herself. As she had told Kara that time, some people are just evil and we have to be able to protect ourselves.

So she looked at the transmatter portal from another point of view. Not hers, thinking about how to transport food without losing nutritional value. No, this... woman's. What did she really want to transport, and why?

The woman showed up on time. She stood in Lena's doorway watching her pensive frown, then asked, "Like what you see?"

Lena turned and beckoned the woman to enter, smiling. "All very interesting. I almost forgot. I wanted to give you elevator access, so that you can come up to this floor without an escort." She picked up the alien detection device and held it out to Penn. "Security just needs your thumbprint and they'll issue you a badge."

Penn pressed her thumb into the sensor, which immediately turned red.

"Is that good?"

Lena kept smiling, set the device on her desk. "I was looking through your designs and there's a small problem. It requires an element that doesn't exist on Earth. You see, we have 118, and this would be categorized as 260."

"I don't know what you mean," said Penn, playing with the collar of her shirt.

"I think you do." Lena's face lost all emotion.
"It was when I thanked the gods at dinner, wasn't it?" asked Penn, rolling her eyes.

"You're an alien. And this device just proved it."

"Red is never good on this planet."

"I don't know who you are, but I am not helping you build anything. You talk about betrayal and people hurting you and then you do it in spades. I want you out of my office. And there are several heavily armed guards coming if you have trouble finding your way out."

Lena held the door for Penn who strutted through, and then Lena slammed it behind her.

//

Maggie opened to the door to the interrogation room herself, to let one prisoner in to see the other.

Rick Malvern stood up immediately upon seeing his father enter the room.

"Hey, kid!"

"Dad!"

They went to hug, but Rick still had handcuffs on, so it was for the uncuffed Peter to embrace him. "All that time in prison, I imagined the day I could talk to you without a pane of glass between us." He took Rick's face in his hands. "And here we are!" He hugged him again and pounded his hand against his son's back.

Rick's eyelashes fluttered.

Maggie said, "The DEO moved heaven and earth to free this man. We did what you wanted. Now tell us where Alex is."

"No," said Rick. "No, not until my father and I are far from here."

"You think we're stupid? I showed you mine. Your turn."

Peter growled, "So you can toss us in Gitmo? Not gonna happen. Maybe it gives you peace, a little token of good will... You gotta give 'em something, Ricky. That's how it works. Tell 'em where she is."

Rick shook his head. "Well, you really nailed his essence, I'll give you that."

"What?" said Maggie, stepping forward.

"I mean that thing where you couldn't decide whether to hug me or not. That's vintage dad." He sat behind the table again.

Peter said, "What are you talking about?"

"My father would never be playing these games. He'd be wanting to get the hell away from here and making sure he never went back to prison. I've been planning this for a year. Did you really think I didn't prepare for you, Martian?"

Peter turned and walked away, the electric red veins turning him back into J'onn J'onzz.

Rick looked at his watch. "You're down to 23 hours and 14 minutes. And counting."
Maggie pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to think of--what were they on by now?--Plan D? They could do this because they had to do this, so they would, to save Alex. But in the last three days she had gotten too little sleep and had had even less rest. The only thing she could do was hope, trust, that her friend Agent Danvers was as badass as Maggie had always assumed, trusted, fantasized that she was. Because if she wasn't... But no. She had to be.

She had to be.

//

Agent Alexandra Danvers was nothing if not resilient and resourceful.

She might doubt her own sex appeal. She might doubt her ability to be a halfway decent daughter. She might, from time to time, even doubt her own intelligence.

But if she had learned nothing else from being Kara's big sister and from being a DEO agent, it was how to find her way (fake her way?) out of one impossible situation after another. So this one? This one, she thought, would be a piece of cake. After all, the lights and the cameras were inside the cell, not outside, as she would have designed the space.

She tore off her black jacket and belt and climbed up to tear down one of the surveillance cameras. She tore the camera apart to find the bits that were transmitting the video... elsewhere.

She sat down in the cell saying, "Okay. No problem."

She took her leather belt between her teeth, pulled a credit card out of her wallet and tore it apart, and then, biting down on the belt, she used the sharp edge of the torn card to cut into her shoulder where the tracker was subcutaneously injected. If the DEO could put it in, she could pull it out.

She pulled the bloodied, red-blinking tracker out of her arm, chewing on her belt and gasping in pain. Then she spat out the belt. "That sucks."

Still gasping, she connected the tracker into the video transmission interface.

"Hell, yeah," she muttered, before passing out.

//

In the command center of the DEO, Agent Chen was confused. He said to Winn, "I just got a software update request from one of our trackers. The system's not recognizing the IP address. Looks like a hack. Should I kill it?"

Winn looked. "Wait, wait. That's Alex! She couldn't get a signal out, so she wired herself into the camera, which means we only need to find the location of the camera's IP address. Alex, you beautiful human, this is NEXT LEVEL!"

He ran to the lab where Kara and Vasquez were arguing.

"Guys, we found Alex! I found her!"

"You did?" gasped Kara.

"We got a ping from her tracker! She's not far!"

Kara ran for the interrogation cell and Winn followed as if stuck by magnetism, so he saw the interaction that followed.
Kara ran into the room, yelling, "Maggie! Winn found Alex."

"What? How?"

To Rick, Kara said, "I guess you underestimated my sister. Let's go."

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you," said Rick.

Kara rounded on him. "You're delusional, and the second we get back here with Alex, you're going to prison with your dad."

"Well, don't say I didn't warn you."

Kara stormed out. Winn watched the disinterested look Rick threw Maggie, the worried look Maggie left the room with, muttering, "Watch him!"

She followed Kara into the command center, where Vasquez was making Chen show her the connections he had followed to locate Alex.

"Hey, stop!" Maggie yelled. "Malvern thinks he's still in control. He's not acting like someone who just lost. He didn't even flinch. It's like he expected this."

"No!" said Kara. "We are not listening to that psycho. Every minute we wait matters."

"I want to get her as badly as you but we can't punch our way out of this. We gotta get it right."

"If the shoe were on the other foot," said Kara, "Alex would already be out the door. I'm not waiting."

"You're not the only one who cares about her!"

"I'm going!"

And Winn knew about the whole Maggie-got-the-toaster-oven-for-Alex bit and also about how Maggie threw her chance away like a nitwit (that last part might just possibly have been something Winn had overheard Vasquez muttering to herself at some point, but he'd never admit it, even under torture. Okay, well maybe under torture.)

But he was still surprised to see Maggie not following Kara, but rather turning toward Vasquez and his own god-damned yo-yo, and sitting down and having what looked like, from the panic seat he sat in, like a calm and cool conversation.

But no. That couldn't be right. Maybe women just panicked, you know, differently from guys...

//

Kara flew fast and furiously, and punched a hole straight through the roof of a, duh, warehouse. When she landed, she saw a lit-up square on the floor. She yelled, "Alex!"

And Alex yelled, "Kara, I'm down here!"

But when Kara had peeled back a thick metal ceiling off of a square cement pit, she saw spray-painted on the wall below: NOW YOU HAVE FOUR.

Kara said, "Four? Four what?"
Then she saw an iPad that showed the cell and Alex in it, and water shooting into it, and Alex trying to use her coat to plug the water pipes. Then the iPad shorted out.

Kara screamed. No one heard her.
In Which I Ruin Your Odds

Chapter Summary

More "Alex" on-canon and off.

Villains always loved the bait and switch. They knew that superheroes were straightforward people, people who followed a lead like it was a leash and expected there to be kibble or biscuits at the end of the trail. This made it easier to plan one's villainy. One simply needed to hide the torturous trail that was one's actual actions with a serious of short straight lines that appeared, each, to lead somewhere totally logical. After the heroes had worn themselves out following straight lines, one could simply run off with the booty, which had most likely been hidden in plain sight all along.

Supergirl hated the bait and switch. So when she carried the laptop into the interrogation room, she was furious, but because she was Kara/Supergirl, she held out hope for... what? Detente?

She opened the laptop to show Rick her sister, in the cell he had made for her, which was taking on water. She crossed her arms over her chest. "Where is she?"

He shrugged. "I told you not to go there."

Supergirl pounded a fist-print into the metal table. "Tell me where she is now!"

"I gave you 36 hours to bring my father out of prison, but you didn't listen. So now, that room is going to fill up with water in less than four hours. I think it's time you got moving."

Kara felt like death, didn't know what to do. So she said, "Let me talk to Alex."

Rick nodded and moved his cuffed hands to type into the laptop.

When she saw her sister, she said, "Alex!"

Knee-deep in water, Alex said, "I, I sent out a signal. I thought you were coming."

"He rerouted the IP address, he sent us somewhere else. Do you have any idea where you are?"

But Alex shrugged. "I was unconscious. I could be hours away or I could be in the city, I don't know."

Rick said, "Alex, it's Rick. I don't want to hurt you. I keep telling your sister that. Tell her to get my father and this can all be over. You can come home and get dry."

"Kara, no. Kara, no. You do not give that terrorist what he wants. You cannot let yourself be blackmailed. You cannot open yourself up to that. Ever. Do you understand me? Supergirl is bigger than me."

The doors opened and Vasquez strode in.

"Alex!"
"Vasquez!"

For the last twelve hours, Kara had seen Vasquez showing no emotion, pretending to be more the girl of steel than Supergirl herself, to be pulling back when everyone else surged forward with anger and fear and anxiety and tortured hope: and Vasquez had just kept sitting there with her feet up, playing endlessly with Winn's yo-yo and saying nothing.

"Vasquez, I, I need to speak to you. Alone."

And then Vasquez grabbed the laptop and hurried out of the room with it.

//

Vasquez carried the laptop to the nearby lab, but she was talking the whole time. "Babe, everyone here is working hard and we're going to find you."

"The water is rising fast and there are things that I need to say."

"No. Don't start talking like this is the end."

"I don't want it to be, but in case that it is--"

"It's not. You're a badass, Danvers. And you're going to figure out a way to get yourself out of there, alone, until I find you."

Alex said, "Vas, Susan, listen, to me, please."

"No! Okay, we just started, you and me. And it's not going to end. Not today. Not for a long time. We just had our first Valentine's Day. And I want to do more with you. I want more firsts. I want our first vacation. We haven't even argued about where we're going to go yet. Or how to load the dishwasher. Or what to name our first dog. Do you want to get a dog?"

Alex stopped and thought and said, "Um, hmm. Let's name her Gertrude."

"See, there's a lot of lifetime of firsts we're going to do together, so you hold on, okay? Hold on until I get to you. You promise! Promise me!"

"I promise!"

Then the image disappeared.

"Alex!" shouted Vasquez, hitting keys, then threw the unresponsive laptop on the floor.

Supergirl rushed in. "What happened?"

Vasquez's voice was ragged from unshed tears. "Maggie told you, over and over, not to rush in. J'onn told you. Now you've made things worse. We have twenty less hours--"

"I did what I thought was right!"

//

Maggie hurried into the DEO with a folder from the NCPD's crime scene analysts, who had gone over the decoy location with a fine-toothed comb and superspeed. Winn gave her the short story and sent her after Supergirl. Maggie came running in, saw the laptop on the floor and said, "Guys, what happened? Winn said you had contact with Alex--"
Supergirl rounded on her. "Why do you even care? She wanted to be with you and you wouldn't even give her the time of day!"

Maggie said, "No, I--"

"And you!" Supergirl turned on Vasquez. "I've been flying my ass off for the last twelve hours, and you just sit around playing with that god-damned yo-yo. At least Maggie's been trying to work the case! Don't you even want to save Alex? Your girlfriend? Your lover? You don't really love her at all!"

Vasquez slammed Supergirl into the wall with one arm across her collarbones. "Don't. You. Ever."

She pulled back, tore herself away, as if she'd suddenly realized the extreme unwiseness of physically threatening the Girl of Steel. She stepped back to stand behind the chair, her knuckles white as she gripped its back.

Maggie stepped between the two women, and it was one of the bravest things she'd ever done, but she told herself, this was Kara, and Kara would never hurt Maggie, right? They were friends. She'd always known that Kara had never forgiven her for the way the thing with Alex had ended, but she'd also never given her a chance to explain. They had less than four hours now to save Alex, but Maggie believed in the power of words to guide actions, so she spoke.

"Kara, I've told you before that I regret the way that played out and that I would still do it again because I thought it was the right thing to do. Kiddo, you have no idea how many relationships I have fucked up. Well, all of them, really. And I never wanted to fuck up with Alex Danvers. I never wanted to hurt her-- Well, I failed at that. But I never wanted her to hate me. And she would have."

She paced as she talked. "Don't you get it, Little Danvers? She would have hated me because she is so good and so kind and I am just not. And she wasn't just fresh off the straight boat, Kara, she was fresh off the alone boat. She's never been in a real relationship and she deserves, at the absolute least, to not have her first time in a relationship be with a fuckup like me!"

Supergirl stared. "She's been in relationships. There were always guys in high school and college and--"

Vasquez sighed. Her voice was quiet. "No, Kara. She really hasn't. You knew that. Remember telling me that somebody needed to give her an orgasm? You weren't wrong."

"But, but, I mean, you don't have to have sex to be in a relationship!"

Maggie and Vasquez traded looks. "Tell the guys that," muttered Vasquez. "My sister's straight and she complains about it all the time."

Supergirl sputtered, "But Maggie, you're with Lucy now. So you can't seriously expect me to believe you really think all those horrible things about yourself, or that Alex would care about any of that!"

Maggie nodded sadly. "She probably wouldn't care. She's so innocent about some things..."

Supergirl looked astonished. Vasquez just nodded.

Maggie continued, "And as for Lucy, well, is she as tough as Alex is on the outside? Maybe, maybe not. But on the inside, she's tough as nails. And so, somehow, she accepts me, the broken me. And I don't know how I got so lucky, but she isn't afraid of my, well, being so inadequate and broken and such a fuckup. She's too tough to ever let me hurt her. And so, when I do finally fuck
this relationship up, because of course I will, she'll walk away and be fine."

Maggie fought to find the words. How could she make Kara, kind, good Kara, understand? "Lucy's had good relationships. Look at her and James, for so long. So whatever we have and lose won't become the Pattern of All Things to Come. But for Alex it would be. But Kara, you have to understand. I do love Alex: not enough and not the way she wanted. But I love her more than enough to contribute my training and experience to helping you guys get her back. Because I may be a horrible lover, but I am an amazing cop."

Supergirl just stared blankly, reaching up to fidget with glasses that weren't there. Turning to Vasquez, she snarled, "What's your excuse?"

Vasquez shrugged. "Maggie's a detective. She detects. I'm a strategist. I strategize. It's hard to do either when you're flying 300 miles an hour."

"You're blaming this on me?"

"Well, Kara, you tell me. You fucking tell me who keeps running in, or, well, no, flying in when the rest of us are trying to do our jobs and suddenly we went from twenty-four hours to four, because you couldn't take ten minutes to listen to Maggie, who's got a shit-ton of experience with hostages and kidnappings and all the things. And did you even ONCE, just once, even THINK of asking me what I thought? Do you have any idea, any idea at all, just how much training and experience I've had in the last twelve years at the DEO in positing scenarios, planning for all fucking possible scenarios, different teams, different weather, different aliens, different human psychoses?"

She turned away. Maggie reached a hand toward her, but she just stared at the wall. Supergirl looked pissed but also confused, which Maggie hoped meant that she wasn't about to melt both their faces off.

Vasquez turned around and her face was dark. "I should have been heard. I should have been listened to. I'm her girlfriend!"

"I'm her sister!"

"And you think that trumps me? That you know what's right for her. I got her to be herself, Kara. I have just as much to lose as you! You should have asked me."

Vasquez stormed off. Maggie thought it was to save all their lives. Supergirl turned to her, looking dazed. "I suppose you agree?"

Maggie hedged. "She's the best in her field. And she loves Alex. You know that. Everybody knows that. Even J'onn. You know that the DEO has rules about relationships like that. But he knows she'll protect Alex with her life, her body and soul, so he lets them be what Alex needs them to be. Against the rules that he really and truly believes in."

Maggie glanced at the folder in her hand, having forgotten it was there. She said, "I have to get this to your labrats. Supergirl, take a moment and think. Consider. That's all we're asking."

//

Supergirl pushed her cape away and sat in the rolling chair, stunned, confused, and filled with something that wasn't fear, something that was in a very small leaky kind of way replacing her fear for Alex.
She thought about the way Maggie had always spoken, then acted. The way Vasquez had sat, silent, for hours, considering as Maggie had said. Considering options, consequences. Kara/Supergirl had rushed from one not-solution to the next, but Vasquez had sat quietly, thinking.

And suddenly, Kara realized that it would have been impossible for most humans to be that still and that emotionless in the face of the amount of terror and worry that she and J'onn and Winn and Maggie were feeling. So either Vasquez didn't care about Alex after all, as Kara had thought she did, or...

And Kara/Supergirl/Zor-El/Danvers, who knew maybe better than anybody what it was like to have multiple identities and to always have to navigate who she showed which pieces of which identities to, suddenly started to realize (just when she felt at the edge of losing absolutely everything, everyone) that maybe Vasquez experienced something of the same trouble too....
Lapses in Judgment and Their Consequences

Chapter Summary

Close to finishing up "Alex"--canon and noncanon. Cause that's what the flying pig does...

Lena sat in her office late that night, considering things: considering the potential applications of the alien technology, the potential misuses, the potential crimes. In theory, it could be used to smuggle drugs, weapons, or at least the ingredients of drugs, the materials that could be used to develop weapons. How naive she had been to immediately think only of the benign and benevolent uses. How naive she had been to trust someone simply because she seemed like the photographic negative of her mother.

She stared at her laptop. Suddenly, she heard boots on the balcony, and she grinned without thinking. (Consciously, she was not on good terms with Kara. But subconsciously, she longed for her hero to come and save her from herself.) So the sound made her turn, a smile beginning on her lips until she saw her actual visitor, "Eleanor Penn" now dressed in a black bodysuit and black cape, walking slowly to the balcony door.

Lena stood and spoke. "I thought I made myself clear. Our business is done. Now get out of my office before I call security."

"I'm the one who hasn't myself made clear, Lena. And I'm sorry for that. You are right. I lied to you. I pretended to be of this world. Only because I know how much your mother loathed aliens and I presumed you'd be the same."

"That's what people do when they hear I'm a Luthor. They presume."

"Everything else I told you was the truth. Being betrayed by your own blood: there's nothing more painful. I know you understand that."

Lena stood with her arms crossed over her chest, eyes serious. "What do you want from me?"

"I want exactly what I proposed," said Penn stepping closer. "I want us to work together to create a transmatter portal. We have them where I come from. L-Corp has already built a large-scale generator ring. We could easily adapt it for this. The portal would help your planet immensely and it would help me get home to mine."

"I don't work with people I can't trust."

"I made a mistake. You are nothing like your mother. I see that now. Please, Lena, don't let my one lapse in judgment keep us from doing great things."

Lena shook her head. "I'll think about it."

Penn smiled. "That's all I can ask."

Lena turned away and sat down at her desk. The sound and yellow light that came from Penn's being... what? tranmattered away?--took Lena's attention briefly. Then she realized that her own
distrust of herself had been keeping her from asking for help from the one person she could always count on, despite their recent difficulties.

She picked up her phone and dialed Kara.

"Lena."

"Kara, I'm glad I caught you. Um, can I ask your advice about something? Someone."

"Uh," said Kara, thinking about her now less-than-four-hour deadline, thinking about what her friends had been trying to tell her for a while now. "I, uh, yes. Do you need me to come over?"

"Gosh, could you?"

"Lena, did you just say gosh?"

"No! Absolutely not. God. I said, God."

"I'll be there in a heartbeat."

In fact Lena counted six heartbeats before she heard the more-than-welcome sound of Supergirl's boots hitting her balcony, and she turned, grinning to see Supergirl's troubled expression.

"Supergirl? Kara?"

Supergirl slowly pushed her way through the balcony door. "Lena, I am so sorry. I didn't mean to not be here when you needed me."

"Kara, come on, we're fine. I just need some advice. I'm not trying to imply anything by it!"

"But I haven't been there for you. The last day, two days, I don't even know what day it is. Is it May yet?"

"Um, yes, just."

Supergirl rubbed her eyes. "How can I help you? How can I give you advice? You are much smarter than me, much more," she snorted, "strategic than I am."

Lena frowned, but stepped forward and took the caped superhero into her arms. "I'm sorry, Kara. I know I have been pushing you away. I didn't mean to. It's just my habit--"

"Yeah, Alex does that too. I'm used to it."

"You shouldn't be."

"But I am. Lena, how can I help you? Can I... really honestly help you?"

"It's just, there is this businesswoman who came to me with a proposal. Have you heard the name Eleanor Penn?"

"No. What's her company?"

"Alpha-Echo-Nova Technologies. She has an idea for a transmatter portal--"

Supergirl's hand gripped Lena's arm so hard that she yelped.

"Oh, gosh, Lena, I am so sorry! Did I hurt you? Rao!"

"I'm so sorry. Maybe I should--"

"Kara, you're distracted. What is it?"

"It's Alex. She's been kidnapped. Someone we knew as kids figured out who I am, wants his dad sprung from prison. And I keep trying to leap in and fix it and I keep making it worse. And Maggie's mad at me and Vasquez is mad at me and I just--"

Lena took Supergirl by the arm and led her back at to the balcony. "You know, whenever I look out at the city at night, I wonder where you are, who you're saving."

Supergirl's head bowed, and she said nothing for a long while.

Lena asked, "What are you doing?"

"Listening for her. I can't hear anything. I can do all these incredible things, but I can't... punch my way out of this or... fly fast enough and turn back time. And now I'm afraid that I'm going to lose the person that that is most important to me--"

"To us," said Lena fiercely.

Kara nodded. She said, "Maggie was right. I shouldn't have rushed in. I made things worse."

"Okay, sweetie," said Lena. "I don't know what's going on but I am going to take a flying leap here. Most likely Maggie, who we both know is in love with your sister--"

"No, she's--"

"She was probably frustrated and upset and scared. I can see her lashing out at you when you were doing what you thought was best whether it was in the end or it wasn't."

"It wasn't. I was wrong. I've made things worse. And I'm scared."

Lena had no idea what was really happening with Alex or at the DEO or with Cadmus and her mother or with anything else for that matter, especially the enigma that was Eleonor Penn. But she knew Kara Danvers, even when she was wearing the big red cape.

"Hey, Kara. C'mere. So am I."

After Supergirl's body finally went a little limp, a little relaxed, Lena said, "Now we go back to the DEO and we'll do a group brain thing: mine, Winn's, Vasquez's, yours, J'onn's and whoever else we can get to contribute their grey matter. And we will figure out how to get to wherever this cocksucker has put Alex about a split second after she manages to free herself!"
How We Discount People, How We Discount Ourselves

Chapter Summary

Almost the end of "Alex," on canon and off.

Chapter Notes

200th chapter! 82 days!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1. It had been Lena's idea. Of course it had. She had sent Supergirl and Winn back to the house in Midvale to bring back the tech so they could get a clearer fix on the real IP address of the security cameras. Then she had asked Vasquez if she could give an earpiece to Maggie so that Vasquez could listen in on the next interrogation and advise while she watched on the surveillance feed.

"What are you going to do, Lena?" asked Vasquez.

"Help J'onn put together a kit for when you find her. You'll want to be prepared."

//

Maggie returned to the interrogation room, pausing as she closed the door.

In her ear, Vasquez muttered, "You've got this."

Maggie stopped and looked at Rick Malvern, forcing herself to see him as a man in pain, a man whose life had been poisoned by his mother's pain, a man who did what a lot of criminals did with their pain, spreading it around so that other people felt it too. Much of what she did as a cop involved showing people how that just made the world harder for everybody, showing people how to separate themselves from their pain and the cyclic sharing of it that helped no one.

She could do this. Slowly, she walked to the metal table and sat, looking at Rick. (She forced herself to think of him as Rick, not "that shithole who has endangered the most beautiful woman in the world." It was more productive.) She didn't speak, just looked him in the eye. Silence was power. Speaking was weakness.

He spoke. "Under two hours. The clock is ticking fast."

"I know. And if it ticks down completely, we both lose." She kept her voice soft. "And I don't think you want to lose."

"Neither do you."

In her ear, Vasquez said, "Take control. Make him nervous."
Maggie said, "Two hours. Have you even bothered to imagine what is going to happen two hours from now? Not your unrealistic expectations of being lovingly reunited with Daddy. No, the reality. That you have set up an impossible situation. We won't find Alex Danvers. She'll drown. We might never even find her body. It'll bloat in the water. Have you ever seen a drowning victim, Rick? It's ugly. She'll bloat beyond all recognition. And then, even if we can't find her? The creatures will. You know what I'm talking about, Rick. Flies. Maggots. Your little underground prison won't keep them out. They'll eat her flesh, leave her a stinking, rotting, well, not even corpse. A corpse supposes that there is a whole body. That the flesh will still hold together the bones..."

Maggie let the silence drag out, as if she had all the time in the world. Rick pursed his lips, looking nauseous.

"Detect--"

"Kara said you used to carry Alex's bookbag. That's sweet. And from your remark earlier about Alex playing for the other team, I'm guessing that you were sweet on her, that you had feelings for her. Maybe that you dreamed of going off with her in some romantic sunset to get away from your mom. Makes sense. And I bet she was a little clueless, but you kept on trying. Because you saw something in her."

His eyes watered. He said, "Well, obviously, I never had a chance."

"Seriously? You've never heard of bisexuality? You know, she told me about that day, about how you were being so nice, you had always been so nice, but she had to take care of Kara, always taking care of Kara. So she couldn't be with you. She wanted to be with you..."

"No, she didn't."

"It made her feel guilty. Wanting you when Kara needed her so much. It's a shame, really. That the man who might have... But no." She looked at her watch. "In one hour and forty-eight minutes, it'll all be over. We'll never see our friend again. You'll be in prison for kidnapping and attempted murder, well, murder if we end up finding the body. The woman who might have... But no, you shut that possibility down when you shut her in your little cell. Did you have plans to rescue her at the last minute? Maybe throw your father's freedom away to get the girl?"

Again she let the silence drift between them.

Finally, he said, "I was wrong about Kara. She's too much of a Girl Scout to do what I need her to do. I misjudged her. But I may have discounted you. You're a cop. You could just walk into that place and break my father out, if you wanted to. You care for her. I've seen that. All those nights at the bar, playing pool..."

"Stalking us."

"The way you look at her. The way your hand touches her hand when you're waiting for your drinks. Love can make people do things that they don't normally do."

In her ear, Vasquez murmured, "How do you want to play this, Maggie? Do you want to pretend to be convinced?"

Maggie looked him right in the eye, swallowed, then looked away.

2.

Alex, the daughter of Eliza and Jeremiah Danvers, was scared. Agent Alexandra Danvers of the
DEO was not, if only because her training had considered what they called "contingencies": small and large, more and less violent, scenarios; and how to deal with them one step at a time.

So although Alex Danvers was scared and confident and also quite confused, she was able to draw on the lessons she had learned from her parents, from the DEO, and even from her alien little sister; she was able to draw on the lessons she had learned from J'onn J'onzz and from Agent Susan Vasquez.

Alex had already cut into herself to send a message. The message had been sent, mis-sent maybe, but sort-of heard. Plan B. Alex dove down to get her belt, wrapped it around the water pipe's valve, desperately trying to turn it, setting her feet against the wall, using her body weight to turn it. Unsuccessfully. Plan C. She surfaced and took a deep breath, wrapped the belt around her right hand and pounded, pounded on the glass. Surface, breathe. Dive, pound. Over and over again. But the water wouldn't let her get any force behind the punch. And the water was still rising.

Alex stopped pounding, then stripped off her pants, tied the legs together. She shoved them down into the water one, two, three times, until the third time the legs were filled with air and she could shut put it over her head so they could serve as a life preserver.

She was exhausted, and she had exhausted all her possibilities for saving herself. The last thing she needed was to drown before they found her simply because she fell asleep and sank. That at least was definitely not happening. She gasped for breath and let her self hang in the water. If something else happened that would require strength later on, at least she would have gotten some rest for it.

3.
Kara paced back and forth behind Winn's desk, her arms crossed over her chest as if she were trying to hold herself together. "Please tell me you have something!"

Winn shook his head. "I have literally tried everything. I've checked family holdings, bank accounts, call logs from the prison. There's nothing."

Kara looked at the countdown clock on the computer over Winn's head. It read 59:01. She groaned.

Winn said, "We're going to find her."

Kara said, "I'll go talk to Maggie, see if she got anything else out of him." She glanced at the computer that relayed the surveillance video from the interrogation room. Rick Malvern sat alone, looking bored. "Wait, where's Maggie?"

Kara ran down to the control room outside the interrogation room. On the desk sat two earpieces. The tech who sat across the room nodded to her.

"Where's Maggie? And Vasquez?"

"I don't know, ma'am. Agent Vasquez requisitioned a helicopter and then they both hurried out."

4.
Normally Vasquez loved any opportunity to fly one of the Blackhawks, even during the most grueling of ops, but this was not one of those nights. The lights of Albatross Bay Prison shone against the water that surrounded the prison on three sides, but without the prison staff's approval, she was going to be landing on a dark helipad.

Maggie sat next to her, tapping her right hand against her knee as she held the tablet with the prison map in her left. Vasquez said into the comm link, "So I'm thinking you will have exactly eight
minutes from when I land to when the alarm sounds, and if we're very lucky, that will give you four minutes to get him back to me. Understand?"

"Got it."

"Okay, here we go."

//

Maggie ran through the prison like a sprinter until she got to Cell Block D, when she forced herself to walk, keep her mouth closed so no one would hear her breathing heavily, so she could hear the jangle of keys when she needed to. She managed to dodge a guard, and plant a wide-angled laser that would take out all the surveillance feeds. Then she hurried to Thomson's cell, set the L-Corp "skeleton key" to unlock the door.

Thompson looked shocked. "Hey, what the hell are you doing?"

Maggie grabbed him by the arm. "Taking you to your son."

She hurried him through the corridors, trying hard not to think of Alex pressed up against the ceiling of her prison, minutes away from drowning. She turned a corner, shot a camera out with the laser pistol, kept dragging Thomson.

"Move it!"

"Nice gun!"

"It's my friend's."

//

The alarm still hadn't gone off when Maggie dragged Thomson to the roof where Vasquez sat waiting in the helicopter, ready to take off. Vasquez looked at her watch. On the one hand, the laser had apparently worked better than she had hoped. On the other hand, there was always Factor X, the unknowable: the sleepless grandmother who heard the agents, the sudden shower in summer that meant agents left behind footprints.

Or in this case, Factor S: Supergirl.

Vasquez had thought that sixteen minutes was the absolute minimum amount of time they might have before Kara figured out what they were doing and came flying in to stop them. That gave them four minutes to fly to the prison and twelve minutes to get Thomson out. She had thought they could do it, though it would be cutting it close. Fifteen minutes and thirty-two seconds.

Supergirl stood on the helipad, hands on hips, her cape carried out behind her on the light wind. Maggie reached the roof, holding the laser pistol in one hand while she dragged Thomson with the other. Seeing at least six ways this could work out, none of them good, Vasquez tore off her headset and harness and jumped down from the Blackhawk, striding over to set herself between Supergirl and Maggie.

Supergirl was using her outside voice. "Maggie! You know Alex wouldn't want you to do this."

"All I care about is getting her back alive. You're right. Sometimes words don't work."

"Sometimes punching doesn't either." Supergirl turned to Thomson. "She just came from your son.
She was with him all day, trying to turn him, make him understand. Do you know what kind of words your son's been using? Words like 'rescue' and 'love.' Says he wants to rescue you like you rescued him. But if he kills Alex Danvers, he'll never be rescued. He'll have to live with that for the rest of his life. And that'll be his hell. Now, you've done a lot of bad things in your life. But you've never killed. And you've done one thing you can be proud of: you were a father, a good one. You were there for your son at the toughest time of his life, and that's what you need to do again now. If he kills her, you will have failed at the one good thing you've done with your life. Be a father now."

Supergirl took off to return to the DEO at Lena-saving speed, while Vasquez flew the three of them after her. Maggie was taking video of the flight and sending it to Winn, who went with J'onn to show it to Rick.

The clock was ticking down, and Vasquez couldn't think about Alex floating--alive or dead?--at the top of her prison cell, not yet drowned, already drowned, drowning--not if she needed to drop Maggie and Thomson on the DEO helipad and pick up J'onn and the equipment Lena had packed, turn on a dime and get them to the warehouse in the next three minutes.

It couldn't be done. They didn't do it. Her soul screamed inside her body when they blew they way into the vast space, when she saw Alex floating in the green tank. J'onn shot a blast into the tank, and the bullet-proof glass shattered, sending a wave of water, Alex riding limply on its tide. Supergirl ran to her immediately, and Vasquez took Alex into her arms.

"She's alive! She's alive!"

Alex was gasping for breath. J'onn handed Vasquez the oxygen mask that Lena had packed, and they watched in the dim light as Alex's color changed from a blue-tinged to a red-tinged pale.

Vasquez kissed the top of her head over and over again. All three of them held hands and Supergirl squeezed Vasquez's hand, which squeezed Alex's hand.

Supergirl said, "You held on!

Alex tore off the mask. She gasped out, "I held on."

Chapter End Notes

Can anyone explain the pants thing? It had to be air not water or it wouldn't have worked. So why did she keep swirling them around if not to fill them with water?
Lessons Learned

Chapter Summary

End of "Alex" on and off canon.

Vasquez had done her shift at the command center. Of course she had. What else would she do?

J'onn had said, "Agent, if you need to take some time..."

She simply stared at him. When he stared back, she reached down to the small file cabinet under her workstation, and pulled out three folders. "For your consideration. Sir. I'll be coming up with a few more over the next couple of days."

And J'onn had muttered, "Of course you will," and stalked off.

Winn kept his distance. He had reappropriated his yo-yo, but it sat behind his keyboard, underneath the quote from Supergirl that he had taped to his computer screen about becoming what you were meant to be.

"So, Little Plaid Shirt. I can see you've got questions. Spill."

"Um, well, just. How do you do it? You sit there like the Sphinx, looking like you want to kill somebody, but you don't actually show anger or fear or any of the, well, like the rest of us do. And, um, don't kill me."

Vasquez rubbed her eyes. "Not anytime soon, Schott." She sighed. "I find that excess emotion takes up energy that emergencies need us to use in other ways. If I'm emoting about people I care about being in danger, then where am I going to find the energy to save them once I've figured out how?"

Winn nodded as if he understood. He said, "It's just, I mean, I know Kara thought, and not that I agreed, but from a distance it just sort of looks..."

"Like I don't care."

The silence hung there between them. Winn squirmed. Vasquez's phone buzzed. She looked at the text from Kara: "She's awake."

She shot out of the command center faster than Kara when promised ice cream.

//

Vasquez saw Supergirl absently ringing out the water from her cape just inside the door of her sister's room in the medical bay. When she saw Vasquez trotting toward her, she smiled. "That didn't take long!"

Vasquez slowed. "Pffft. Did you think you were the only one who could use superspeed? Seriously? When it's Alex we're talking about?"
Kara shook her head, looking troubled, but she just said, "She asked for you immediately. Go, be with her. But later, you and I will have to talk. Okay?"

"Absolutely." Vasquez pulled Supergirl into a hug. It was a little like hugging the heavy bag. Then she pushed past her so she could stand by Alex's bed.

Alex was dozing off. Her tank top looked like it had dried out, and the pale blue blankets were probably not even needed, given how warm the room was. Vasquez took the moment to look at the computers. Alex's stats looked good. Her body, at the very least did not appear to have sustained any damage. The rest of her? They would just have to wait and see.

Behind her, Alex said, "Hey, you."

Vasquez turned and moved toward the bed, taking Alex's hand.

"Are you okay?" asked Alex.

Vasquez shook her head, trying not to tear up. "Am I okay? Are you kidding?" She took Alex's hands in hers. "You know you're really clever, with the whole Navy Seal thing with your pants. That was..."

Alex grinned. "Well, I knew I just had to buy a couple of seconds. I knew you were coming."

They smiled at each other. Vasquez thought she could smile at this woman 24/7 for the rest of her life. With, possibly, a few hours off, here and there, for ops when they would absolutely be frowning and carrying badass weapons. Villains wouldn't take them seriously if they were grinning nonstop.

"You know," said Alex. "You didn't let me finish before. But I, um, I just really have to say it now." She pushed herself up to sitting.

"Careful," murmured Vasquez.

"It's okay. It's okay." She pushed her hair behind her ear and looked Vasquez in the eye again. "Those firsts that you talked about?"

"Mmm."

"I want to have them all with you. I never want to stop having firsts with you. I love you, Susan Vasquez."

"I love you, Alex Danvers."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

//

After a bit of kissing and hugging and telling each other that they will never let the other feel that lost and alone again, a promise they both know they cannot honestly make, Alex says, "I need to see the team. They need to see me walking. Help me?"

And Vasquez breathed, "Always."

They took it slow, Alex leaning on Vasquez maybe a little bit more than she needed to. When they
got to the command center, Vasquez said, "She refused to stay in bed."

J'onn laughed.

Supergirl said, "Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm all right."

Winn said, "I knew you'd be fine."

J'onn grinned. "You did good, Alex. You too, Vasquez." He hugged them. Then he turned to where Maggie was standing off to the side. "And you Detective Sawyer, Maggie. We couldn't have gotten our girl back without your help." He pulled her into the hug.

When they all pulled away, Alex said, "Just doing what you taught me to do, sir."

Just then, a pair of DEO agents brought Rick Malvern in. He took one look at the love-in and snarled, "Oh, so you survived."

Winn got in his face. "Oh, you do NOT get to talk to her!"

Alex asked, "What are you going to do to him?"

"My job," said J'onn. "Protect the identity of Supergirl and the DEO."

"You're going to mind-wipe him?"

"Do you object?"

"No! Just, before you do that..." She turned and punched Malvern in the mouth. The two agents caught him as he fell. Vasquez and Maggie looked shocked. Thrilled and shocked. Kara and Winn looked surprised and happy.

Alex turned back to J'onn. "Just make sure that he remembers that."

"Will do," said J'onn.

J'onn and the agents took Malvern away.

Winn held his hand up and Alex gave him five.

Vasquez and Maggie were murmuring together, and then Vasquez pushed Maggie in Kara's direction.

"Kara, I need to explain."

"No, you don't. I know how Vasquez's mind works. Sort of. She figured that we had Rick, and if you guys pulled his dad out of prison, then Rick would give us Alex's location in time. Then we could put them both back in jail. You weren't acting rashly, like I've been doing lately. You were being strategic."

"Yeah, and you helped. By talking."

Kara shook her head. "Words. I've spent the last year thinking about words, but not living by them. But you showed me... maybe I need to believe in words more. So, yeah, maybe they don't always work, but sometimes..."
"Yeah, sometimes." Maggie smiled. "You and me. And, I guess, Vasquez. We made a pretty good team, didn't we?"

"Yeah, well. We all love her."

Maggie held out her hand.

Kara said, "What? No! Get in here!" And she pulled Maggie into a rib-crushing hug.

Kara's phone sounded. "Oh, I gotta get this."

Maggie walked away smiling. Kara said, "Lena, hey! Thanks for your help! In part because of you, Alex made it out okay! I would never have thought to bring oxygen. You're the best! What can I do for you?"

"I was just calling to check up on you. I'm glad it worked out."

"Thank you so much!"

"Hey, brunch on Saturday. I know a place."

"Yeah. And no kale this time, for real. And, uh, how did that business proposal with that woman go? I feel like you spent all that time helping me, and I never got around to helping you with her."

"Yeah, yeah, I figured it out."

"Okay. Bye?"

"Bye."

Kara turned back to the gang. "Alien bar? Karaoke? First round's on me!"
That Ridiculously Heterosexual Lunch on the Balcony

Chapter Summary

The beginning of CIty of Lost Children, on-canon and off. It will probably diverge more and more as the episode goes on and as we find out what happens in the last two episodes.

Lena and Kara sat on the balcony of Bernetti FoodCo, eating sandwiches and potstickers and catching the breeze. It was only a seven storey building, but the weather was good and the tables out on the patio allowed for a nice break.

"I love him!" said Kara, waving her arms. "I love, love, love him. Joss Whedon is a genius. But I'm telling you that he lost his bid for a Wonder Woman movie when he insisted on having Lucy Lawless in the title role. And I'm not complaining about Gal Gadot, because HOT! But it was strategic error on his part."

"Oh, obviously!" said Lena. "But here, let me ask you this, right: Would you rather have a sixth season of Person of Interest, with Amy and Sarah back together, or a Xena reboot?"

"Ohhh! Shoot! My OTP!"

Lena giggled.

Kara groaned. "That's an impossible question to answer. And you're cruel for asking."

"Well, you know, sometimes my Luthor genes just shine through."

Kara chuckled, gazing fondly into Lena's bright green eyes. "Hey, thanks for catching lunch with me."

"Well, you know. Since I canceled on you the last three times and you came back from that tasting at the restaurant starving, I figured you were worth the extra effort."

"Yeah, what's been keeping you so busy?"

Lena's eyes got wide. "Top secret."

"Intriguing..."

"As soon as I can tell anyone anything, you will get an exclusive. Although it won't be about food..."

"It's not technology made to deliver potstickers by drone straight to my apartment?" Kara smiled, adjusted her glasses, keeping her baby blues, which she knew Lena adored, locked onto her favorite non-DEO human being.

Lena blushed. "You're close, actually. I'm working with a new partner."

"Mmmmm."
"Yeah, she, she's...fantastic. It's like having a mentor. You, you'll love her. Promise."

"You're blushing. Should I be jealous?"

"Ew, no. She's like my mother's age!"

And Kara had thoughts about that, thoughts that came with their own little warning bells, but Lena looked so happy, so she just filed it away for later and said, "You have to give me something. I have to have something to look forward to."

"Okay. What do you know about quantum entanglement?"

"Oh! I know this one. It's like you can't describe a system of particles without explaining the whole system. Like we can't know something about one thing without, wait, no, it's the other way around?"

"Polyatomic anions?"

"Wait, that's two charged chemicals that act like one? No, that's the ion, not the anion. Or--" Finally, she shrugged.

Lena laughed, "Well, when you see what we're doing with them, it'll blow you away."

"Well, I can't wait."

Lena's phone rang. She picked it up. "Oh, this is her. I have to go. We're doing our first test today."

They both stood up. Kara pulled her in for a hug and kissed her soundly. "Oh, it's so good to see you! Next time, lunch is on me."

"Okay. Bye."

Kara watched her girlfriend walk away, dazzled as always by Lena's brilliance and Lena's passion and Lena's sense of style. And all the things that were Lena Luthor.

But she also knew Lena's desperate longing for a mother figure in her life, and she worried a little bit about this newest person in her life. She searched herself for feelings that she associated with Red K, but couldn't find any. She didn't think this was jealousy, just care for her brilliant, beautiful and a little bit broken girlfriend. Then she picked up her phone and called Eliza.
James walked through the Farmer's Market downtown to get a falafel wrap from the food truck that Winn always raved about. He had been doing that a lot lately, in the weeks since the whole pink kryptonite fiasco. He put it down to Winn having great taste in food, in part probably due to his long friendship with Kara, for whom food was paramount.

It was really awkward. They could still work together at the DEO, because, as had been the case with their Guardian exploits, James was out in the field and Winn was back at the DEO, but also in the earpiece in his head. And that was a strange metaphor really, but it also seemed apt. It was a little like the way Lucy had gotten into his head after they met at a Super Awkward Lunch with Lucy, Lois and Clark. And suddenly he was using her legal language and thinking in terms of not what people probably meant, but what they actually said, which was the opposite of what he had always done before. And now, suddenly, he was thinking about computers and toys and food trucks.

And suddenly, he heard a familiar voice, only this time it was outside of his head.

"Hey, hey! Look who it is. You know, I love those falafels. Because they are like the best in the city. Gotta say."

"Yeah, they are the best in the city, and I know that because you told me about them and I actually listen to what you say."

"Yes, yes, I did. And yes, I am totally stalking you, because what happened? You said, after, well everything, that we were good. You were back to coming over to my place to play video games. What happened? We played one game before you had to leave. One and done? That's not like you."

"It's just, I feel different, man, you know? Like I turned this weird corner and my life turned a little upside down there, and you were really cool about it, but then since karaoke night, it's been all about you and Jess. And I get how much she's helped us, and how Lena has helped us, but you're talking about this chick constantly."

Winn stared at him. "I do?"

"It's just that I'm not the big hero guy that I thought I would be. First the DEO shut down Guardian, and then I'm kissing my best friend. And my ex-almost-girlfriend keeps getting abducted practically once a week--"

"Yeah, dude. What is it about Mondays anyway?"

"And I have thrown myself body and soul into these DEO ops, or at least as much as they let us rookies do anything. But all we are is Supergirl's sidekicks."

"Are you dissembling sidekicks? Because, dude, I was Guardian's sidekick and I saved your life a few
"You did. But all I was doing was beating people up. And any thug with muscles could have done that."

"Whoa, dude. We did a lot of good."

"Supergirl and Superman, they make a difference. They're changing people's hearts and minds. They inspire people. But Guardian only inspired fear. And am I any better wearing my black tac gear and carrying a big gun?"

"So what do you want to do? Go back to being a photojournalist?"

"They didn't see it coming, although in retrospect they should have. It was Monday, after all."

But they didn't see the fashionable (and apparently) African American woman striding in slow motion into the Farmer's Market, looking nervous, which caught the attention of the NCPD uniform, who followed her. "Ma'am," he said.

Her eyes turned purple and a small quake sent people stumbling for stability. The cop said, "Ma'am, stop what you're doing."

Winn said, "Was that an earthquake?"

But James had a photographer's eye for the center of a scene and he saw the policeman signaling the woman to stop. He saw what looked like the woman shooting the man into an organic vegetable seller's stall. He dropped his umbrella behind him and ran forward. He yelled, "Everybody get out of here! Go, go, go, go, go!"

The woman rose into the air.

Winn, still holding his umbrella, was calling work. "This is Agent Schott. We have a hostile telekinetic in Simmons Square Go! Get outta here!"

James saw the ketchup and mustard on a table shake and looked at its trajectory, towards a couple. He yelled, "Watch out!" and barreled toward them, gathering them in his arms and carrying them away from the car coming at them as if on a hurricane wind. A parked car flipped and broke an umbrella that shaded one of the tables. Then a pickup truck burst into the air toward a building that seemed like it was all glass. James panicked. Even if he had been Guardian in this moment, he would never be able to stop what was about to happen. But a flash of red and blue caught the car, holding it over her head while the crowd cheered. James just stared.

Winn ran back up to him. "Hey, where'd the alien go?"

But she was gone.

//

"Breaking News: Authorities are investigating an alien attack that occurred earlier today. Police have no leads on the identity of the alien or motive. But tensions are on the rise as the fear of another attack--"

Alex hit the stop button on her tablet, shutting the newscaster's voice off. J'onn had crossed his arms over his chest, and he was bristling. "If the news keeps stirring up fear, there's going to be a witch hunt for whoever this alien is."
Alex said, "This could get out of hand very fast."

Winn strode in. "Okay, we've figured out what kind of alien she is. She's a Fourian."

"A what?" asked Alex.

"I never realized any had taken refuge here on Earth. Historically, they're a peaceful race."

"Suddenly not so peaceful," said James.

Alex said, "Well, thank God Supergirl was there. Hundreds could have been hurt."

Alex saw James's look. She knew he had helped get people out of the space, but still, it was a freaking pickup truck.

J'onn continued. "Normally, their telekinetic powers are benign. I've never heard of a Fourian doing so much damage."

Winn added, "And they're also telekinetic like Martians, linked by their thoughts."

"Do you think more of them will attack?" asked Alex.

"For now let's just keep this as a lone wolf situation."

James asked, "So how do we find her?"

"Supergirl is out sweeping the city to see if we can find her."

James said, "I'd be happy to help--"

J'onn frowned. "As Agent Olsen or as the Guardian?"

"Either."

"Agent Olsen, this is a DEO matter. If you went out as Guardian, you'd out putting yourself and the entire DEO at risk. You'll go out as DEO, and you'll have a handler--most likely Winn or Vasquez or even myself. Consider it the buddy system. Stronger together."

James left the command center to prepare for the op, not feeling any better.
Lena and Ms. Penn sat at the same table as before, in the restaurant that Lena was starting unconsciously to think of as "theirs." Again, she settled for a half-glass of good red wine rather than the scotch she hoped would drown her sorrows.

"Today was just our first test," Penn was saying. "You can't expect it to be perfect on the first attempt."

"I quadruple checked my calculations on this, okay. The reaction of the polyatomic anions was supposed to be strong enough to spark the core of the generator."

"Neither of us has gotten to where we are without persistence."

Lena looked low. "If I can't make this work, it won't power the portal that we're building. This was supposed to revolutionize the way everything is transported, eliminate famine, the need for fossil fuels. I wanted to help my planet, and get you home to yours."

"And you will," said Ms. Penn. "You're making advancements in science that most people on Earth couldn't even dream of. No one said it would be easy."

"What if I can't make it work?" asked Lena, still looking dejected. "What if I can't get you home?"

"I have confidence in you, Lena." She stood. "I am going to the test facility to check the progress of the portal." She took Lena's perfect jaw in her hand. "I know you don't believe in it yet, but you are going to make this work."

Lena leaned forward and smiled. What if she had had a woman like Eleonor Penn as a mother? What could she not have achieved?
Chapter Summary

More City of Lost Children, mostly canon.

J'onn sent agents out in pairs to search for the woman. Finn and Olsen got the south side of the Warehouse District, because as Vasquez said, "Duh, warehouse district."

In their ear, Winn asked, "See anything suspicious?"

They stood on the top of a low building clouded by steam that obscured and then revealed the area. Finn pointed two fingers at his eyes and then away at a distance down. An apparent human and an alien, moved toward each other, glancing around furtively. The human reached two fingers into his pocket and pulled out a small baggie and the alien pulled out his wallet. Finn and James slid down a nearby ladder and hurried up silently behind them.

"Is this a private dance or can anyone cut in?" asked James.

The two turned and the human lashed out at James with a punch aimed at James's jaw that he blocked and turned into a joint lock with the man's arm behind his back.

The alien shouted, "James? Finn? Hey, guys! What's up! I mean this is totally not what this looks like."

"Brian? It looks like a drug deal," said James.

"Come on! It's just a little bag of weed. I got anxiety! I was kidnapped recently and I'm very, very tense!"

In their ears, Winn said, "Brian? Of course. Hey, wait, see if he's heard about the alien woman."

"Brian," said Finn. "You usually have your ear to the ground in the alien community. You know anything about the attack on Simmons Square?"

"The woman. The one with all the crazy powers that everybody's looking for? Sure, I know her. I know where she lives. I tell you and you let this pass?"

"Sure," said James. "We've got bigger fish to fry than a bag of weed."

"Um, that's a mixed metaphor, James. My bag--"

"Brian!" James barked.

"Sorry, man..."

He gave them an address on the other side of town, near the hospital, a two-family house in a neighborhood where a lot of aliens lived, that had tiny restaurants catering to different species. Finn took the back door and James took the front. When Finn stepped into the kitchen, he interrupted a little black boy who was sitting there coloring, saw him, panicked and went running to the front
"Do you know where your mother is?" asked James. "We need to find her so we can help her. Can you help us do that?"

The boy with the alien markings on his temples just nodded.

James watched Alex in the interrogation room with the boy, who hadn't talked the entire hour. Alex had sent him out for two hamburgers, one for each other them, and James had hoped that would help, but no. He was a little surprised at the gentleness that Alex "Find Me a Wrench" Danvers was exhibiting, but then he had seen her with Kara, and maybe it was just the different context that made him anxious for the boy.

Through the room's microphone they heard Alex say, "We've been in here a long time. You must be hungry." She picked up one of the hamburgers and took a bite. "Mm. This." She chewed. "Is a really good burger."

He just stared at her.

She put down the burger, nodding. "Okay, I know you don't want to be here with me. I just want to help you. I'm going to help you and your mom. I promise you that. But the authorities are after her because she did a bad thing. You know that, right?"

One nod.

"And if you help us, then we can protect her from doing something bad to somebody else. So do you have any idea where she could be?"

Outside, in the control room, Winn backtracked from the house's address to get the names and immigration info on the two aliens. The boy's name was Marcus and he had been born here, but his father had died in childbirth. His mother worked two jobs, at neither of which had anyone seen here since the incident.

J'onn stood behind Winn, looking characteristically grim.

Winn said, "We should give him some action figures. Right? Like if someone had given me some action figures when they interrogated me about my dad, when I was ten? I would have sung like a canary, I'm just saying."

James shook his head. "This kid has just completely shut down. And dragging him into an interrogation room like some criminal off the street I don't think is the best way to get him to open up."

"So you're not just a masked vigilante and a photographer, you're also a child psychologist now?" asked J'onn.

"His life has been upended. His parents were refugees and then his dad dies and now his mother goes missing, and if he's turned on the TV even once since the attack all he's going to see is people calling for blood. I wouldn't help either."

Alex comes out and says, "James is right. I've been in there forever and all he does is stare at the
"He's looking at you."

"Through a wall?"

She walked around behind him and pushed him to step forward across the room and the boy followed their movements.

"He's an alien with telekinetic and telepathic powers. You said he connected with you."

"I guess he saw someone who looked like him."

"He identified with you, James."

"Are you saying you want Agent Olsen to interrogate the boy?"

"He might trust you more than me. Out of here, in a more conducive environment. We have to find his mother before she attacks again."
The lab was huge and complex, and everyone there knew their jobs, from the chemists with their blue and green concoctions to the computer scientists, but Lena was in mechanical engineer mode today and she was frustrated. She hit her tablet and saw the turbine start to turn, just as it had six times before, and like all six times before, a flash of sparks halted its movement. She tossed tablet on the nearby table, this time at least managing not to swear.

Eleanor Penn wandered over. "Still isn't working?"

"Was it me throwing it down in disgust or the sparks that gave it away?"

Penn glanced up at the darkened turbine and then turned to the nearby engineers. "Can you give us a minute?"

They nodded and took their work a distance away. Penn turned back to Lena.

"Failure is a part of the process, Lena. I told you this was going to take time."

"It's not about time. I'm just not getting it. You know, maybe we should pay a visit to Stryker Island and get Lex Luthor to come in and save the day!"

Penn took her sarcasm in stride. "You think he could get this working?"

"Lex was the genius who was supposed to save the world. You know, I thought if I could get this to work I could prove to the world... and to my mother... that I was as good as the golden boy. But most of all, I just wanted to prove it to myself."

Penn considered the woman before her, saying, "You don't have to prove anything. You're smarter than Lex."

Lena just laughed.

"No, I'm not saying that to make you feel better. I'm saying it as a scientist, as someone who knows." She turned back to the turbine. "But you need to stop trying to think like your brother. From what you told me about Lex, he is a man who is consumed with power. And so that's how you have been trying to fix this. With more power, you think it will work."

"Yeah, but it just gets blown"

Penn touched Lena's arm. "But you are not a person who is concerned with power, are you? So if you weren't trying to do what Lex would do, what would you do?"

Without thinking, Lena answered, "I'd try to find a way to increase the anion input without overloading the energy output, all the while maintaining the elements at a constant."

"Not power. Balance."

With a grin, Lena turned back to her work.

//

James brought Marcus to CatCo and introduced him to Cat Grant, who offered her hand to shake but didn't take it personally when the boy just stared at her. Her younger son had been like that too,
“Nice to meet you, Marcus.” She hurried off to her lunch meeting.

Eve Tessmacher came up and said, "James, I was able to get the things Cat said you needed. Can I help with anything else?"

"Maybe milkshakes?"

"Sure thing!"

James led Marcus into Cat's office. The boy took in the furniture, the drinks tray, the wall of media monitors, all wordlessly.

Then he went to look at the camera equipment on the table between the two white couches. James picked up the oldest one. "I bought this with the money I got for selling my first photo. Here."

The boy looked through the viewfinder then put it down and looked at one of the others. "This one inspired me to be a photographer. My dad gave it to me before he passed away. He was a soldier."

Marcus said, "My father was a soldier too."

And then they talked quietly about absent fathers, and pain.

//

Back in the lab, Lena Luthor finished typing in her changes to the program, feeling hopeful and a little bit giddy. She felt rather than heard Penn step behind her chair, and she picked up her tablet and stood, smiling. "If my mother had given me pep talks like you, imagine the things I could have done."

"I'm happy to have mused you. But trust me, it isn't always easy being the parent we aspire to be. Shall we test it again?"

"I'll just plug in the algorithm and fire it up!"

Penn pushed the red button that opened the view screen that showed the prototype ring standing in the desert, the steel shining in the sunlight.

//

James showed Marcus how to load the film and let him wind it himself. He looked through the viewfinder and pointed the camera at James. "Can I take a picture of you?"

"Of course.” James grinned. The boy pointed the camera, then suddenly lowered it and looked past him to the screens on the wall, one of which showed his mother, her eyes glowing dangerously. It was old footage from the previous day. James turned it off with the remote.

Marcus said, "My mother would never hurt anybody on purpose."

"Do you know where she is?"

//

"Well, here goes nothin'," said Lena, holding the tablet in one hand and gradually raising the energy signatures with the fingers of the other: 12%, 28%, 41%...

Inside the lab, the turbine started to slowly spin. Outside, the ring, fifty feet tall and showing the
mountains in the distance, suddenly filled with purple light.

//

At CatCo, they felt the floor shake. James watched the screens on the wall all short out as Marcus, eyes bright purple, slowly walked across the room, while employees screamed, windows broke, wind blew papers everywhere and furniture and lamps fell on the floor.

//

"Energy is stable at the reactor core," said Lena happily, "anions are reaching a steady state."

//

The boy started to levitate. Kara came running in. James yelled, "Go!" And as she rushed away to dump her Kara clothes, he dodged flying computer monitors to usher the last of the reporters and other employees to the emergency exits.

Supergirl flew through room, grabbing up Marcus and flying him out of the building. Holding him tightly, she turned to look at the wreck that was the CatCo building.

//

Lena grinned. "We did it!" She pulled the energy levels back down to zero, and the purple light disappeared from the ring.

Penn turned to her. "You did it!" she said with a smile.

//

Coming back to himself in Supergirl's arms several hundred feet above the city, Marcus panicked, but Supergirl held him tightly. "It's okay," she said. "I've got you."

And watching them, James knew he could never have saved the day as Guardian.
Kara and James stood outside Marcus's containment cell, watching the boy sit silently. "James you saw what happened," she said. "He wasn't in control of himself. It was like something was controlling him."

James nodded. "Do you think that happened to his mother too?"

"Maybe she's not the perpetrator we thought," said Kara. "Maybe she's the victim, just like Marcus. Either way we'll need to keep him in that cell. The telekinetic dampener will protect him from having another episode. So he's safe but his mother's still out there. You need to get him to tell us where she is. You are still our best chance for that, James. I know you can do it."

"I'll try, Kara. What will you do in the meantime?"

"See what Alex and Winn turn up. Hope I can find whoever's behind this. Pound them into paste."

James gave her a sad smile and sighed. "Your job will be easier."

Kara strode into the DEO. "I've searched the city, high and low, and found no sign of another attack."

"What do we know?" asked J'onn.

Alex said, "We looked into the Fourian's physiology. Turns out that a major shift in atmospheric energy can cause a change in their mental state."

"Well, what causes a shift like that?" asked J'onn.

Winn tapped his tablet and pointed to a computer screen on the wall. "Okay, so this measures electromagnetic activity around the city. See those red spikes? The first one was at the time of the first fight on the street yesterday."

Kara said, "And, let me guess, the other during the attack on CatCo today."

"Good guess!" said Winn. "But that spike was around five times the size."

J'onn asked, "Do we know what caused the spike?"

"Yes, high levels of polyatomic anions released into the atmosphere."

Kara's jaw dropped. "Wait, I was talking with Lena and she said she was working on a new project. She mentioned those anions. It can't be a coincidence. I'm going to call Lena."

But Kara's phone rang once and went directly to voicemail. "Lena, it's Kara. Your anions are..."
creating surges in telekinetic alien activity all over the city. Basically, they just caused an earthquake. You have to stop the testing until we can figure this out. Give me a call as soon as you can."

//

Eleanor Penn was annoyed. Her research had told her that Lena Luthor had mommy issues and poor self-esteem, and that she routinely worked eighteen-hour days and forgot to eat meals. She was said to be a stylish genius, a high-femme lesbian, and have maybe one friend in the city, Kara Danvers, and no family who were not currently in prison.

And yet, when her phone had rung at noon, and Eleanor had reached for it and said, "Maybe fewer distractions would--" Lena had scooped it up and grinned.

"It's time for lunch anyway. A change is as good as a rest, and I need some pizza."

And Eleanor hadn't managed to see the name under Lena's hand, but it started with an E, not a K.

//

James brought another chair into Marcus's cell. "May I?" he asked.

Marcus just nodded.

"Thanks." He set the chair across from the boy's, took off his leather jacket and hung it on the back of the chair and sat down.

And suddenly he felt too big, as though Marcus was the correct size and James didn't fit. And it reminded him of when the Army officer had come to their door and sat James and his mother down at the dining room table and expressed condolences, and James didn't know what the word meant except that it had made his mother cry unconsolably, and James felt too small, like the whole world was bigger than he was and he couldn't understand it because his head was not high enough up, his eyes were not on the same level as everybody else around him.

James dragged himself forcefully back into the present. He said, "Look, I know that you didn't mean to attack everybody. Okay? Neither did your mom. Look, all I'm trying to do is to make sure that everybody who saw her picture in the news knows that's not the real her, right?"

"Before I was born, my parents went to four different planets, but every one of them made them go away, until we got here. And it's been hard here, with people being scared of us, but they don't try to kill us. They think we're bad but they leave us alone."

"I was bullied in school. And after my dad died, it got a lot worse. People don't like it when we're different from them. But when I made a friend who was different too, it got better."

"I can see her. My mom. But I don't know where she is. It's... somewhere I've never seen before."

"Can you take me to her?"

"You'll protect her?"

"I will protect you both. I promise."
When Things Don't Go According to Plan

Chapter Summary

The end of City of Lost Children.

Winn and Alex sat in the command center finishing off the new scanning program.

Alex said, "Okay, we are now scanning for any electromagnetic activity within the region. If anyone powers up this device, we're going to know exactly where they are."

"Good," said J'onn. "Then we can strike."

James strode in, saying, "Marcus knows where his mom is. But he has to take me to her."

"That device is still out there. Whoever has it could set it off at any moment. It's not safe for him outside of containment."

"But his mom is still out there."

Thinking to himself, I am not a Red Shirt, Winn raised his hand. "I could, I could go with him. I have a mobile version of the telekinetic dampener. It should have plenty of juice to keep Marcus and his Mom from going all Carrie."

"Be safe, agents."

They didn't even take the time to change into tactical gear. James drove one of the DEO SUVs through National City, with Marcus saying, "Turn right here. Go straight. Toward those buildings over there."

James glanced at Winn in the passenger seat. "Thanks, man, for having my back."

Winn patted his mobile device, grinning. "You do realize where we're going, right?"

James groaned, "The warehouse district. Because of course."

"Also, this is our first DEO mission together. And what is so super-awesome about that? I am the senior agent here!"

"Here," said Marcus. "That building. She's here!"

They followed the boy down the narrow, dimly lit hallway. "She's here! Mom? Mom!"

"Wait, slow down!"

But he was hurrying ahead of them, toward the woman who stepped out from behind some hold shelving. "Marcus?"

"Mom!" Marcus ran forward and she hugged him fiercely, then looked up to realize that he wasn't alone. "Mom, these are my friends. They helped me find you."
"It's okay," said Winn. "We know you didn't attack the square on purpose. You're safe now. This bad boy is going to protect you." He grinned.

"All of us?" she asked.

"All of..." James and Winn gaped as a dozen men and women of the same species slowly stepped into the light.

Lena was glowing. She turned to Ms. Penn with a huge smile. "Tomorrow we can begin the material trials." Penn's face was serious. She didn't answer. Lena gestured nervously. "I keep forgetting that success means that you're leaving. Working with you has meant so much to me."

"Me too. Whatever happens next, I want you to remember never to doubt yourself again. You are a marvel, Lena. And your mother should be proud to call you daughter."

Lena grinned, knowing that Lillian would never, never see her that way. Anything less than perfect Lena did was proof that she wasn't good enough. Anything perfect she did was just an accident. But for a moment, looking into Eleanor Penn's eyes, she thought, Maybe I'm good enough after all...

And then Penn picked up the tablet and pushed the energy up to full power.

"Wait! What, what are you doing?"

The turbine started to turn. Out in the desert, the ring filled with swirling purple energy.

Kara paced back and forth across the DEO command center, worried about Marcus and his mother, worried about Lena. Could she be behind this? How could that be? Kara looked at her phone. Lena still hadn't returned her text. She sent another one: Lena, your anions are causing aliens to react telekinetically. If you turn that on again, we'll have another earthquake. Call me!

Alex shouted, "We've got something! A huge release of anions."

"Where?" asked Kara.

"San Encidro Valley."

"You got a satellite image for that?" asked J'onn.

"Yeah."

"Let's go," said J'onn.

Kara tore off her glasses and ran after him.

Winn pulled his mobile device onto a table and began the startup sequence. The warehouse lights turned on and off, and the floor began to tremble. The aliens stood stiff, bereft of will, and their eyes glowed purple.

"Faster..." murmured James.

"I'm going as fast as I can!"
"I don't think it's working, Winn..."

The device shorted, sending out a spray of sparks. Winn jumped back. "There's too many of them! It's not working!"

"What's wrong with it?" asked James.

"It's made for two, not twelve! We gotta get out of here. This much telekinetic energy between these Fourians-- The entire city is in danger!"

"I am not leaving here!"

"Then what do you want to do?"

"Well, they're linked telepathically, right?"

"Yeah."

"So if I can break through to him, maybe he can break through to them."

"Okay. Go..." And Winn thought for the hundredth time that James's overwhelming need to be a hero was going to be the death of Winn yet.

//

Lena ran to the computer, typing in kill codes. "Why won't it shut down?" She glared at Penn. "What did you do!"

"What I had to do for my people. I want you to know that the affection I have for you is real."

A rain of plaster dust cut off her words as Supergirl and J'onzz drove through the roof and landed in the lab.

"Turn it off!" commanded Supergirl.

Lena said, "I can't. I tried!"

Supergirl tried shooting the turbine with her laser vision, but there was some energy shielding it. It continued its slow turn and the purple energy billowed and flowed in the ring out in the desert.

"Why won't it turn off?" yelled J'onzz.

"I don't know!" said Lena. "She must have made it self-sustaining somehow."

//

Winn stared from behind a wall as James strode toward Marcus, trying to get the boy's attention.

"Marcus! I need you to look at me. I told you that I would keep you and your mother safe. And I am NOT breaking that promise!"

//

Lena stared at Eleanor Penn, as the woman watched the ring glowing brightly, a look of heady anticipation on her face. Lena said, "You're bringing something here. What is it?"

"You'll see."
In a burst of superspeed, Supergirl grabbed Penn and slammed her against a wall. They traded blows and the woman was strong--alien strong. Kara ducked and Penn put a fist into the wall behind her. Then Supergirl knocked her out and flew out through the hole in the roof.

James yelled, "Marcus! I need you to hear me." A rain of sparks shot from the lights. The trembling of the floor grew more intense. "I need you to let me in like you would let a real friend in!"

Winn dodged the sparks, thinking, okay, maybe a little bit Red Shirt. He yelled, "James! It's not working! We have to get out of here!"

"I'M NOT LEAVING HIM!"

Supergirl flew to the portal. It was only fifty feet high, but she remembered the nanobots and she knew that even small things could cause astronomically large problems, and when they were talking about a portal in space, the term "astronomically large" was literal. She stopped her flight and stared into the purple energy. She tried sending her laser vision into the portal, but something shot through the portal and encased her. It was like the globe of energy that the Daxamite ship had shot at her. It dragged her fast back down to Earth with a huge concussion.

Lena hurried to the computer and tried to find a way to shut it down. Penn pushed herself up and faced J'onn, who growled, "You don't mess with my family!"

But Penn pulled out a handheld device and shot a red laser at the man, halting him in stasis.

"Eleanor! What is that?" shouted Lena.

Calmly, Penn said, "A White Martian gave me this. White Martians developed this technology in order to keep the Greens under their control."

J'onn's body flared with red lines and he fell to his knees, taking on his Green Martian form and still staring off, appalled, into space.

"It traps a Green Martian in his own mind, a never-ending nightmare. Pretty savvy, if you ask me."

J'onn collapsed. Lena ran over to him, grabbed him by the shoulder, touched his throat to check his pulse. "J'onn!"

Lena stood suddenly. "You're lucky he's still alive, Ms. Penn." She walked back to her computer station. Next to her chair was her large Gucci bag. "So, Ms. Penn. I take it that you are an alien yourself? What planet are you from?"

"Daxam."

Lena rolled her eyes. "I've heard about Daxamites. Apparently, I even met their prince. Actually, come to think about it, I kissed him goodbye when we finally got him and his Mommy Dearest to leave Earth for good."

Penn gasped. "That is an honor, indeed!"
"Um, no, nope, unh uh. But I will do a lot for my best friend, and she asked me to help send him off in style, so I did." She wiped her mouth off with one hand, and flicked her fingers as if to toss away the touch of his lips on hers.

Penn looked outraged. "How, how can you not be, how dare you--"

"You fooled me, Ms. Penn, if that is even your name."

"Elyrapin, close enough. Call me Elyra."

"Elyra. You were quite convincing. You obviously learned a lot during your time on Earth. How long has it been?"

"Ten of your years. Forever, really."

"I see," said Lena, reaching into her back, pulling out a Glock and pointing it at Elyra. "And did you learn that you're not bullet-proof here?"

//

The warehouse shook like it was about to collapse in on itself and James continued to refuse to notice.

Winn screamed, "JAMES!"

"MARCUS! You just have to look inside of yourself and see the strength and the courage that I see in you! You're not alone. YOU. ARE NOT. ALONE!"

The purple went out of Marcus's eyes and he lunged toward James, who pulled him into a hug.

Winn watched as the boy's mother's eyes lost their purple light and then one by one all the other aliens lost that terrifying light. Marcus hugged his mother. James turned back toward Winn, grinning.

Winn shook his head, rasping, "That is a hero without a suit!"

//

Elyra didn't panic, didn't show a single trace of emotion. "Put the gun down, Lena. I know you care about me too much to shoot me. You don't want to hurt me. Would you kill your mentor? Your friend?"

Lena smiled sadly. "You played me, Elyra. You did. You played on my mommy issues to get in under my radar, to inspire me the way my own mother, brilliant as she is, could have if she had ever, ever wanted to. But she never did. She always preferred to tear me down. So, yes, on the one hand, with my, let's be honest, genius intellect, could I have achieved greater things if Lillian had given me the kind of pep talks you did? Sure."

"Lena, you are not going to kill me. Whatever you think of me--"

Lena said, "For all your brilliant pep talks, you are still a binary-thinking person, aren't you? I would have expected so much more of you. No, Elyra. I am not going to kill you."

Elyra smiled.

Lena shot her in the knee.
Supergirl dragged herself up from the ground, watching, terrified, as two-man X-Wing fighters flew one by one through the portal.
Nobody Expects to Become Sleeping Beauty

Chapter Summary

The beginning of Resist.

When I got rid of that @#$%^ Daxamite royalty a few chapters ago, I had thought we might be done with them. So I had this whole cool Dollhouse crossover thing planned. Yup, no.

So I am now back-pedalling to get my head canon to sort of fit with the actual canon and it's probably going to be messy. Lobster bibs may be advised... On the other hand, we get FOUR (count them, 4) Baddass Women Over Fifty (BWOFs) in this and the next episode, so I'm all in.

Elyrapin was a patriotic Daxamite. She had seen Krypton's destruction coming and tried to warn the royal court, but the Destructionist Deniers ignored her at first, and later on, actively worked to cut off her connection with the royal family. In the end, she had taken a pod and flown as far as she could to avoid what she saw coming, weeping as Daxam grew smaller and smaller in her viewscreen.

When she reached the solar system her friend had recommended, she went to Mars first. It was very clear to her that the White Martians had much in common with Daxamites, and she had traded Daxamite technology and also liquor for a safe place to lay low while she figured out what to do next. In the end, she found the genocide of the Green Martians to be a failure of imagination on the part of the Whites, who should have simply enslaved them and convinced them that they were being taken care of. That's the way they would have handled it on Daxam.

So she left Mars, and tried the next planet along, Earth, where they handled such things as different versions of the same species with a bit more complexity. She liked Earth. She liked the people and the politics and the clothes. If only, she had often thought over the last ten Earth year-cycles, if only Daxamites had seen the end coming sooner and had planned better, they could totally have colonialized this planet.

New Daxam. It had a nice ring to it.

So when Queen Rhea had sent out an interplanetary memo, encouraging the courtiers in diaspora to find a new planet for Daxamite refugees to colonize, Elyrapin had sent out her own messages to her own former partisans, inviting them to Earth to make way for a new possibility for the survivors of their planet's destruction.

It was brilliant, really. Her Majesty had basically set opposing groups against each other in a contest to find planets that would enable them to start settling Daxamites in whatever form and will bring the court/capital to the one she liked best. His Highness Mon-El, recently returned to the Royal Armada from his year on Earth, urged Daxamites to find an uninhabited planet where they might build from scratch, start from the beginning and create something completely new. And Elyrapin worshipped the attractive prince, but she knew that Daxam would rise to glory faster if they could find a planet that already had infrastructure and an unlimited number of potential slaves.
A planet like Earth.

It had taken Elyra a while to figure out how to bring the royal court back to Earth after Mon-El forced his mother away. It had taken her quite a while to make the connections with scientists and engineers who could even begin to comprehend the much more sophisticated Daxamite technology, but eventually, she had discovered Lena Luthor.

If she weren't such a royalist and if she weren't old enough to be Lena's mother, she would have been tempted to abandon the plan and pursue the girl for her own selfish desires. But Elyra was a patriot. So she crafted that relationship carefully, using the psych profile she had done on the woman to take advantage of her failed familial relationships. And it had worked beautifully. The woman's genius had not been a myth. This Earth woman had achieved in mere days what even a die-hard patriot Daxamite like Elyra admitted would have taken Daxam's brightest scientists months at least to achieve.

And that, of course, had given rise to Elyra's other plan.

//

Queen Rhea of Daxam was nothing if not creative and resourceful, and she admired those qualities in her courtiers above all others. When Elyra had contacted her, explained her plan, the technology, the psychological maneuvering, the long-term plan, she had been at first intrigued and then thrilled. Finally someone had come up with a strategy for saving Daxam that was as brilliant and as creative as the late planet and its people in diaspora deserved.

When the portal opened, Rhea had been disappointed at first to see how small it was. Surely Earth had the resources to create the size portal that would allow Rhea to convey her armada, the one that her husband had said could never be gathered. It was admittedly ironic that his tragic death had motivated thousands to join the aero-navy in his memory, making possibly after his passing what he would have kept from happening in his lifetime.

But then, thought Rhea, life was just full of such ironies.

Now, as Elyra knelt with her arm covering her eyes, and reported on her progress on Earth: not just the portal that had allowed Rhea to send in thousands of small ships to harass the Earth, but also the woman, Lena Luthor, the genius who had made it happen and might make... other... bigger things happen.

"Elyrapin, daughter of Tyreapin, I welcome you to the order of the Knights of Daxam, with all the rights and privileges connected thereto. And I name you Lady Councillor to the Queen of Daxam. Arise and take your place at my right side."

//

Lena dreamed of flying in Supergirl's arms. The sky was a frightening green, but the blue of Supergirl's eyes kept her from trembling. She held on with her arms tight around Supergirl's neck, breathing against the woman's ear, and oddly wishing that Supergirl were actually Kara Danvers.

Normally, when Lena woke up from such a dream (at least since her hunch had been confirmed), she smiled and fell back to sleep and then slid into a very different kind of dream, warm and damp and pleasurable.

But this dream had other elements, aliens shooting red lasers, X-wing fighters zooming past. The sense that doom was not an unreasonable premonition to have.
Then Lena Luthor actually woke up.

The hand that was pushing her hair out of her face did not belong to Kara Danvers. It belonged to the woman Lena had only ever met once, when she was playacting an attraction for the Daxamite prince to encourage him to leave Earth. Queen Rhea of Daxam.

Lena realized that she was dressed in a long black dress (and who had changed her?) lying on a wide double bed. She pushed herself up to sitting, gasping for breath as she saw Rhea sitting on the edge of this very wide bed. Behind the queen, Elyra stood on the alien version of crutches.

Rhea said, "Hello, Lena."

"Where the hell am I?"

"I've been taking care of you, ever since Supergirl nearly killed you when she attacked our portal."

"Supergirl tried to stop you. I should have stopped you. You lied to me, used me."

"I did what I had to do for my people. But I did it for you to. Elyra has told me about you. She says that you are a marvel, and from what I have seen, I believe her. Few Daxamites--a race so far beyond the minimal standards of Earth--could have done what you did, could have broken through the scientific hurdles you did. I know that you are meant for bigger things, better things. But this is a planet of wasted potential and you represent the best of your race."

Lena hurried to get off the bed and see what Rhea was pointing to out the windows of this... spaceship?

"And I am going to make a society worthy of you. So. Get comfortable, Lena."

Lena hurried to the window. Rhea put her arm around her shoulders. "You are where you belong. Beside me presiding over this new world that we will create. Together."

Lena stepped closer to the window and saw X-wing fighters sending down laser pulses into National City, her city, the city she had chosen for her new beginning. The city she had led into an intergalactic apocalypse.

And all she could think of was her mother, Lillian's voice saying, "Oh, really Lena. You've done it again."
On the ground, below the small fighter pilots hovering over National City, randomly shooting lasers into the streets, chaos ensued. Armored Daxamites landed, and fought the unsuspecting and unprepared Earthlings hand to hand. Meanwhile the largest of the ships, the head of the royal armada, a forty-foot-wide ship that nearly tore the portal apart when it passed through, downloaded a communication from the queen.

"People of Earth. Do not be afraid."

The Daxamite soldiers' weapons were a cross between medieval halberds and AK-17s and Star Wars laser rifles. The best that could be said about human ballistics in comparison was that they shot lead, which Daxamites were deathly allergic to, but given that only a handful of humans out of the 7.2 billion on Earth knew that fact, it didn't exactly help.

Rhea continued, across the chaos. "We have crossed a sea of stars in order to bring you a new way, a better way."

Across the city, cars were hit by plasma blasts, people (especially those most vulnerable: the poor, the queer, the aliens) ran screaming, trying desperately to find shelter. At Maggie's NCPD precinct, cops were racing to the armory, grabbing shotguns, racing out to the chaotic craziness that was the new chaos that was National City.

"I will be your queen."

Maggie grabbed the shotgun from a fallen peer. She shot two aliens and ducked behind a cement wall.

"And you will be my subjects. Obey our orders and we will protect you. Do not resist."

She pulled out her phone and called Alex. "They're everywhere. The soldiers are everywhere!"

"Are you okay?" yelled Alex.

Inside the DEO, Rhea's message played across all the screens, just as it did across National City.

Winn said, "We've got transmet signals all across the city. Our satellite systems are crashing."

"They've attacked the NCPD," Alex said.

"Is Maggie safe? What are we going to do?"

Suddenly on the balcony, Daxamite soldiers appeared and started shooting. Alex shot back and yelled, "Everybody evacuate! Winn, go!" She ducked behind the central table and tapped her earbud. "Supergirl, we're under attack. I've evacuated the DEO!"

"Hang on, I'm almost there!" yelled Supergirl above her own wind.

"There's no time!"

"Then I'll meet you outside!"

Alex jumped up and shot a soldier and slid on her knees under the halberd of another, jumped to her feet and ran up the stairs to the balcony, leaping over one soldier's body, ducking another's
blast of blue energy.

The balcony was broken and the soldiers were chasing her. She leapt over the edge of the balcony, turning backwards to fire at the soldiers as she fell into space.

Falling.

Trusting.

Being caught by her sister, held tight in the arms of steel.

"We need to get somewhere safe," said Supergirl.

Above, Air Force jets and Daxamite crafts flew in high-tech dogfights, shooting at each other, spiraling to the city streets in colossal explosions.

Below, on every screen in National City, Queen Rhea said, "Welcome! To New Daxam!"
Scenario One: Preparing for Mobile #Resistance

Chapter Summary

Because how did they get all that equipment from the DEO under siege and set up in Dollywood so fast?

Before Lena and Kara had worked together to get Mon-El to go with his parents back to Daxam, Agent Vasquez had thought through a variety of scenarios. And although there was not much that General Sam Lane and Agent Susan Vasquez had in common, one was the idea that at some point, an army of aliens might just possibly invade Earth. So, in the interest of world peace, or at least preparation, Vasquez had shifted her drinking from the Amphipolis to Dollywood and she made it a habit to get to know every single alien she could.

She knew which aliens were visiting Earth for business and pleasure and she found out as much about their worlds as she could: politics, economics, business practices, technology. The range of their military forces.

She knew which aliens were refugees from famines, wars, genocides. Most of the refugees were like M'gann and Kara, one of a handful of their species left anywhere in the galaxy. Very few were like the Daxamites, an entire world population without a planet to go back to. An entire world population looking for a new world to populate.

Earth might start to look very homey in the wrong light.

And the DEO could handle a lot of high-powered aliens, but an army?

Also, Vasquez had thought, the Daxamites already knew about the DEO. If they ever did come back, they would know enough to attack it first thing. So, if J'onn ever had to give the order to evacuate National City's DEO, they were going to need a command center... elsewhere.

And by command center, Vasquez meant computers, scanners, a small armory, medical supplies. So when M'gann had finally gotten the money to do the rest of the rebuilding of Dollywood after Cadmus had shot it up, Vasquez had asked to take a look at the bar's basement, and had worked out a deal for the DEO to rent it as storage for what they would need if hell ever did show up to National City in a handbasket, or, more likely, via a space squadron. That was part one: Plan Whisky. Parts Two and Three (Tango and Foxtrot), were in other parts of the city, and Vasquez and J'onn had allocated agents to each mobile center in the event of an evacuation, so everybody knew where they were supposed to go.

So the moment Vasquez heard Supergirl sounding stunned and scared in her earpiece, Vasquez had sent two agents to set up the command centers across town, and she went to commandeer Dollywood, just in case.

And that's where she was when Supergirl carried in a comatose J'onn J'onzz, and left him there to go back into the fight. M'gann helped Vasquez make him as comfortable as she could, but she said they would have to get the device from the Daxamite who had been working with Lena and then had kidnapped her.
Vasquez still had her earbud in when she heard the exchange between Alex and Supergirl. 

"Hang on, I'm almost there!" yelled Supergirl above her own wind.

"There's no time!"

"Then I'll meet you outside!"

Shots fired and a rush of wind. Vasquez's stomach dropped to the floor. She knew what "I'll meet you outside" meant and it terrified her.

Then she heard Supergirl say, "We need to get somewhere safe."

"S-Supergirl," Vasquez cut in. "We're setting up in Dollywood. Bring her here."

Then she ran into the ladies room and vomited.
When Supergirl and Alex walked into the bar, Vasquez ran to Alex and kissed her soundly. "Are you all right? I hate when you do that!"

"Vas, it's not like I make a habit of jumping off buildings."

Vasquez turned on Supergirl. "Always be faster than her. Always. Promise me!"

"I promise, Sue. Don't worry. How's J'onn? Do we know what that woman did to him?"

Alex looked at the mobile med monitor next to him. She shook her head. "His vitals are erratic. It's like his neurons are working overtime. He's comatose on the outside, but on the inside...."

Supergirl took J'onn's hand. "Will he wake up?"

M'gann shrugged. "We need to get that device."

The door opened. Winn said, "Look who found us."

James walked in wearing his Guardian armor and carrying his helmet. The sisters stepped forward to greet him with hugs.

"James," said Supergirl. "I'm so glad you're okay."

"Yeah, me too. It's a warzone out there. The Daxamite troops are beaming down from everywhere, setting up checkpoints, arresting resisters. It's like they're instituting their own martial law."

"Not to mention the full-on Independence Day out there with the mother ship hovering over the city."

"Lena's on that ship," said Supergirl. "She almost got away from that woman, but Rhea beamed them both up."

"Have you reached Clark yet?" asked James.

"I called Perry White. He's not at the Daily Planet. He's not at the Fortress of Solitude."

"Maybe Superman is out there fighting," suggested Alex.

"If he is, I didn't see him," said Maggie walking in.
"Maggie," said Alex. "I'm glad you're okay."

"And I am glad that when things look their worst, we both thought to run straight to a bar."

"That was Vasquez's doing," said Alex.

"Of course it was."

"We're all together," said Supergirl. "We can fight back."

"Where do we start?" asked James.
"Well, without the DEO mainframe, we're flying blind," said Winn.

"Not to mention the Daxamite military patrolling the streets," said Maggie.

Yet another person walked through the door. "Maybe I can be of service." It was Lillian Luthor. Alex, Maggie and James all pulled their guns on her. "What?" she said. "Not happy to see me? You people are so predictable."

Alex said, "Hands above your head."

"No," said Lillian, taking off her black gloves. "I find it as distasteful as you do, Supergirl. But I need your help. And you need mine."

Alex held her laser pistol on Lillian, who looked completely unphased (?). "Where's my father?"

Lillian's eyebrows rose. "I don't know."

"That's the wrong answer," growled Alex, holding the gun so close to Lillian's chest the blue light glowed on her face.

"Well, it's the truth."

Supergirl strode over. "All right. What do you want?"

"To take down our common enemy. Everything I have has come to pass. The alien invaders have come to destroy our way of life and claim our planet, just as I said they would."

She dropped her gloves on the table and sat down.

Winn grumbled, "You could just say, 'I told you so.'"

"I did tell you so. And now you can shoot me. Or we can work together. And we can save our loved ones and this city."

"You mean your daughter that you kidnapped and framed?" asked Supergirl.

"We're going to save this city," said Maggie.

"But we will never work with you," said Alex.

"That's right," James said. "We got this."

Lillian advised, "Don't let your pride get in the way of your objective. That ship is armed with kryptonite canons. You have no transmat portal and the Daxamites have upgraded their shields."

She stood up, using her height to look down on them. "I need your help to get onto that ship."

"Even if we wanted to, like you said, there's no way on board."

"Are you so sure about that?"

"What are you saying?" asked Supergirl.

"I'm asking you to work with me. We find Lena and together we can save her."

"You said your piece," said Alex. "Now leave."

Lillian picked up her gloves. "You're making a mistake, Agent Danvers."
She walked past her, paused in front of Supergirl. "I understand why you all don't trust me. But whatever happened in our past, I am asking you to leave it there. The love I feel for my daughter is real. Please, Kara. Help me save her."

Supergirl took a breath. "Get out."

Subtly, Lillian palmed a burner phone into Supergirl's hand. "Call me. If you change your mind."

Kara took the phone and walked away. Lillian left.

Maggie said, "I think James and I should get back out there, see what we can do."

"Okay," said Alex. "That's a good idea."

"Call us if you need us," said James. They left.

Supergirl turned to Alex. "So how are we going to do this ourselves?"

Alex turned to Vasquez. "Show me the armory. What have we got to work with?"
Rhea sat and gave her general orders. "Set up a blockade and arrest any resistors. I don't want anyone getting in or out of the city."

"My lord, the human's army is already creating a perimeter around the city."

"Destroy them."

"Yes, my lord. And we are receiving a communication from Earth."

"Put it on."

The viewscreen showed a dark-haired woman, who said, "Rhea, Queen of Daxam. My name is President Olivia Marsden."

"You represent planet Earth?"

"I represent the United States. But today I speak for all humanity when I demand that you abandon your siege of National City."

Rhea smiled. "Well, I'd be happy to move my invasion force to Washington, DC if you would prefer."

"Oh, I'm not in Washington. I'm heading straight for you."

//

Back at Dollywood, Winn was monitoring transmissions. "Um, guys? I'm picking up a live transmission from... Air Force One."

"Air Force One?" said Supergirl.

"Oh, don't tell me the president is heading towards the conflict and not away," said Alex.

"Every time I think I can't get happier that I voted for that woman!" said Supergirl, hurrying over to Winn's makeshift station. He set it up so that the two women were shown on his two screens.

Rhea said, "National City is mine and you should be glad that that is all that I am currently taking from you."

"The militaries of Earth will unite against you."

"I'm not afraid of your trembling little militaries."

"Stand down!" barked President Marsden.
Rhea looked shocked and amused. "Stand down? I think you are confusing the situation with one in which you have any sort of negotiating leverage."

"This is not a negotiation. This is a demand."

"You speak like that to me again and you will feel the consequences."

"Oh my God!" yelled Cat Grant. "Enough! All right, ladies. Ladies! If I wanted to listen to this adolescent macho posturing, I would have stayed in DC!"

Supergirl looked confused. "Miss Grant?"

"Is this really who you want to be? Testosterone-driven windbags boasting about your big guns? Surely, we don't have to measure anything, do we? We're women. We're tough, we're wise and we're way above this pettiness. So let's just roll up our sleeves and talk peace."

Rhea looked confused. Cat had a habit of doing that to people. "I'm sorry," said the queen, not sounding sorry at all. "Who are you?"

Cat looked surprised that someone didn't know who she was. "I'm Cat Grant, known on Earth as Queen of all Media."

"Oh," chuckled Rhea. "Well, Cat Grant. I'm Rhea, and Earth now has a new queen."

"Oh," said Cat, sounding apologetic. "Let me just give you a little bit of friendly advice, Rhea. That tiara that you have on the top of your head? It's overkill. Real royals, they don't need to try that hard. The thing is that I have brokered peace between Kanye and Taylor Swift, so I think mediating peace between our two worlds should be a piece of cake. And... the future is female. We've all read the t-shirts. So we are three strong, formidable women and we can do anything we want. So let's just talk it out and come up with a harmonious solution, shall we?"

Supergirl saw the look on Rhea's face and panicked. "Oh my God!" She ran out of the bar at superspeed.

Rhea said, "As I said before. I'm queen now. I don't confab. I command. This conversation is over."

Alex and Winn raced out the door and looked up at the mother ship above the city. A line of laser power shot eastward across the sky. Alex yelled, "Supergirl!"

But Supergirl was already in the sky, following the sound of Cat Grant's racing heart to wear Air Force One was breaking up in the sky, and Cat was flying out of the broken plane screaming.

Cat plummeted toward Earth, but Supergirl caught her and landed her in the field where the remains of Air Force One lay burning.

She put Cat down and stared, horrified at the torn and burning metal. "Oh my God! The president!"

Then the metal moved and the presidential seal was hurled away.

And the clothes were the same, they were Olivia Marsden's clothes. But the face--the reptilian, alien face--was something else again. Supergirl stared. Then the face morphed and changed back to the apparently human face of Olivia Marsden, who said, "Er, I suppose I owe you an explanation..."
Cat said, "Well, at least tell me you're still a Democrat."

The moment Supergirl brought Cat and the president back, M'gann poured one scotch neat, one gin and tonic, heavy on the gin, and one club soda with lime, because she had been a bartended for three hundred years and she knew how to read people.

Alex said, "Oh, Madame President, thank God you're alive!"

"Remarkable, isn't it," said Cat.

Winn said, "Miss Grant, you're alive too!" He pulled her in for a hug.

"What did you think, Winslow? My city is under siege. Did you think I was just going to allow myself to die?"

The president took one long sip of the drink M'gann handed her and then let out a deep breath. "Is there a place I could freshen up?"

"Just around the corner," said M'gann.

Cat said, "Supergirl, I understand you setting up your rebel headquarters in a dive bar. It's very French Resistance. But what are all these monitors and these satellites and these handsome armed men dressed in black?"

Supergirl sighed. "Well, Miss Grant, we work for a clandestine government organization called the DEO."

Alex explained, "We're devoted to protecting the planet from extraterrestrial threats."

"Oh, I see," said Cat. "Well, you do a bang-up job."

Winn got between Cat and the computer monitor. "How'd you get on Air Force One?"

"Just kismet that I happened to be in DC with the Dalai Lama when the Daxamites invaded and I just hitched a ride with Olivia."

"Olivia," he said, "like leader of the free world Olivia."

"Yes, she was my RA at Radcliffe. And I'm having this vague memory of walking into the dorm bathroom and seeing ET in a bathrobe, and I thought it was the pot brownies, but now I'm realizing it really was ET."

Alex frowned. "What are you saying, exactly?"

"I'm sorry. Did I not make myself clear? Our leader of the free world, Olivia, is an alien."

Winn laughed. "Okay, come on. The president is not--Oh my God! The president is an alien."

Marsden walked out of the bathroom wearing her alien face and gradually morphs back to her "human" face. "I assume you are all a little frightened, but I assure you, I mean you no harm."

"Obviously," said Cat. "Otherwise I would have been stabbed in the back by you that night in college when your fiancé flung himself at me. Clearly, she's a pacifist. And darling, I love you just the way you are, scales and all." Cat's phone rang and the screen showed Madeline Albright's
name. "Oh, sorry. I need to take this."

Olivia turned to M'gann who handed her a second drink. "How did you know?"

M'gann said, "I'm a Green Martian. I'm telepathic."

"Just what you want in a bartender. Thank you."

She sat down at the table with them. Vasquez asked, "So Madame President, what's your story?"

"Olivia, please. I was born on a beautiful planet, and when the invaders came, we hoped for the best. And we did nothing. Within a year they had enslaved my people. I was one of few to escape."

"Well, now I understand why you're so supportive of alien refugees," said Supergirl.

"Yes, and I would be grateful if you would all keep my secret."

"Your secret is safe with us," said Alex.

"Thank you. And J'onn J'onzz is still injured, which makes you Acting Director of the DEO, Agent Danvers."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"You and your team will break back into the DEO and access the positron canon that is mounted to the roof."

Winn's jaw dropped. "I'm sorry. We have a positron canon? Like a vaporize-anything-it-shoots positron canon?"

"You are to fire it and destroy the Daxamite super ship."

"There are civilians on that ship. My friend, and one of America's most brilliant engineers--"

"The Daxamites shot down Air Force One. Make no mistake. They have the intent to destroy us. The terrible lessons I learned on Durala will not be repeated. Destroy those ships. That is an order."

//

After the president left, Supergirl turned to her sister. "You can't kill Lena!"

"Relax, Kara. I am not going to let Lena die." She turned to Vasquez. "Tell me, please, that you have come up with a scenario for this."

Vasquez frowned. "I did not know we had a positron canon. Let me give it some thought. I have a few ideas, but... you're not going to like them."
Off-canon. Because you know that Lena wouldn't just sit around waiting to get rescued.

On the ship above, Rhea explained her plan to Mon-El and Lena, and eventually got their reluctant compliance and sent them away.

The guards thought nothing of it when Mon-El said he was going to spend time with Lena in her bedroom/cell. The Prince of Daxam had a reputation when it came to the ladies, after all.

Lena turned on him. "Why did you let her come back here? Why couldn't you just sail off into the heavens and leave Earth alone?"

"I wanted to. I even found an uninhabited planet for my people to move to. Even now, thousands of people are there, building a new world for themselves. But my mother thought it was too slow, too demeaning. She and my father fought about it. And then she murdered him."

Lena stared.

He paced back and forth across the narrow room. "There are at least four worlds with Daxamite refugees building new homes for themselves. I tried to convince her to stay, but she decided to do things her own way. And then that woman, Elyrapin contacted her, said that you two were building that damn portal and it would be the perfect way to bring Daxamites to Earth, bring the army and just take what they wanted. I argued against it, but you see what she's like. There is nothing she won't do. Kill thousands of sick children? Sure, why not? Kill her own husband? And when she says that we might as well languish in filthy cells after she is done with us? Oh, I totally believe that that's part of her plan."

"So what do you think we should do about it?"

"Do you have any way to contact Kara?"

"No. But she must know I am up here. And she has probably figured out that you are up here too."

"And she is probably so disappointed with me."

"That's putting it lightly." Lena stared at him. "Mon-El, I know what it's like to have a mother who is willing to do horrific things. My mother keeps trying to commit genocide, after all. But the big question is what are you willing to do?"

He sat on the bed and looked at his hands. "You want me to kill my mother? Even if she wasn't so well guarded, I just don't, I don't think I could do it. Even after everything."

"Could you stage a coup?"

He shook his head. "The generals are personally loyal to her. They pretty much think I'm a joke. I pretty much am."
"Then we're going to have to escape. Can you get me a copy of this ship's plans?"

He stared at her. "It wouldn't be easy."

"Well, would you rather marry me and die in a dungeon?"

He gave her a weak smile. "You know, Kara always said that you were a very persuasive woman."
In Which, Of Course, Everything Is At Stake

Chapter Summary

Mostly on-canon

Supergirl paced back and forth across the bar, now crowded with guns and grenades, agents monitoring computers and agents sacked out on the top of pool tables. Everybody was exhausted and on edge. She could hear Alex and Vasquez arguing in the basement, but she was tired of hearing the two sides.

Yes, they had orders, from the President herself, and disobeying those orders would be treason. And yes, the positron canon was their best hope of stopping the Daxamites, maybe their only hope.

But Lena.

And Alex hated Vasquez's plan, but it was the only way they even had a chance of getting Lena out alive before they had to blow the ship. And Supergirl hated Vasquez's plan only slightly less than she hated Alex's plan.

Finally, she went back out in the alley behind the bar to get some air. She was surprised to see Cat sitting on a stack of boxes. "Miss Grant. What are you doing out here?"

"Just came out to look at the stars, but there isn't much to look at tonight. Oh, and I didn't get a chance to say it before, but thank you for saving me. Again."

"Of course. It's been nice having you around again."

"So, who's up there?"

"My girlfriend. My best friend. Lena Luthor. I mean, maybe the president is right. Supergirl has a responsibility to protect everyone. But the only thing I can think about is that the one person I love more than anybody else is trapped on that ship. Destroy it, and she's destroyed too. And that, that would break my heart. And I don't know if I could go on doing this..." she gestured with her cape, "if that happened."

She sighed, feeling ready to cry. "I'm just selfish."

Cat shook her head. "No, no, that's not selfish, Supergirl. It's human." She paused. "Do you want to know the real reason I left National City? I wasn't happy. So I asked Siri, where is the happiest place on Earth, Siri? And she answered, Bhutan, so I booked my passage to the Himalayas and I moved into a yurt. Now, do you have any idea what is in a yurt? Nothing. Nothing, not even central air conditioning, but these people, they are happy."

Supergirl smiled, listening to Cat, her mentor who she had so sorely missed these last long and difficult months.

Cat continued. "A child learns how to walk, they sing. A group of people come down from a hike in mountains and they dance. A couple, they go on their first date and they throw a damn festival. And all of a sudden, the secret of happiness just dawned on me. It's human connection. And I could
conquer the world at CatCo or I could twiddle my thumbs in a yurt and the loneliness would feel exactly the same. Because I was missing the point. It's not about what you do. It's about who you love. And there is the person that you love trapped in an evil spaceship. Wanting to rescue them is not selfish."

Cat shook her head, trying to find the words. "It, it's everything."

"Yeah," said Supergirl slowly, nodding. "Yeah. I have really missed your advice, Miss Grant."

"And I've really missed giving it. Now, shoo. Up, up and away. No time to lose."

Supergirl grinned, nodded, and took off into the sky. With her superhearing, she could hear Cat say, "That is still so... cool!"

As she flew through the night sky, she pulled out her phone and called her sister. "Alex, it's me. We're going with Vasquez's plan after all."

//

When Supergirl brought Lillian and the cyborg back to Dollywood, Alex was pissed. "How can we possibly work with Cadmus? We have been fighting them for a year. We cannot trust them!"

"I know! But we need them! We cannot do this without them!"

Lillian snapped, "Time is wasting."

They came to the table where the Cadmus gear and the DEO's gear lay scattered together.

Supergirl said, "You said you had a plan?"

"Yes," said Lillian. "When Henshaw was at the Fortress of Solitude--"

"Breaking in," snapped Alex, "stealing a deadly virus to kill aliens in this very bar."

"He discovered that your cousin keeps a phantom zone projector among his Kryptonian artifacts."

"A projector?" said Winn. "That sounds kind of low-tech."

Supergirl said, "They used it to beam the prisoners instantaneously up to Fort Rozz."

"That is very high-tech."

Henshaw said, "I can repurpose it to beam us onboard the Daxamite spacecraft."

"That's why we need your help," said Lillian. "Give us access to the projector and we bring you aboard."

"That sounds like a great plan," said Alex. "One that we can carry out without you."

Lillian smiled. "Not quite."

Henshaw rasped, "My cybernetic core has been enhanced. I can interface with the onboard Daxamite computer system. We'll pass through undetected."

"Cool," said Winn. Alex gave him a look. "Er, not, not cool."

"And when we're onboard, Alex can wrestle back control of the positron cannon at the DEO. It'll
be a tight squeeze to fly out Lena before she fires."

Lillian nodded at Alex. "I suspect you're up to the challenge."

"We need to get going," said Alex.

But Winn said, "Listen, we are forgetting the biggest obstacle of all here: Rhea. Right? I mean, she took Lena for a reason. She's going to be watching her. And she's going to need to be distracted if we're going to go in there and rescue Lena."

"Then we're going to need one hell of a distraction."

Cat entered. "I'm the queen of distraction."

Lillian murmured, "So I recall. Hello, Cat. You're looking well."

"Hello, Lillian. I see they haven't yet built a cell that could hold you."

"Maybe one."

Supergirl said, "Miss Grant, this could be dangerous."

"No! No, no, this will be dangerous. But if it's dangerous for all of you, why shouldn't it be dangerous for me? But I'll need Winslow."

"What? Me?"

"Well, I'm not taking the robot."

Henshaw rolled his eyes.

Lillian picked up her M16. "The Daxamites are powerful, but they are susceptible to lead. A well-placed bullet will take them out. We can do this. And now it's time to go."

Alex pulled Supergirl aside. "I'm sorry. If it were you on that ship? Or Vasquez? I would do anything I could to save you, her. So you better hurry."

"I will."

"If you are onboard when I fire, you will not survive that."

"I know."

Alex pulled her into a hug. "Okay, so please, just be faster than me. Okay, I know, I know you're fast, but just be faster."

"I was this afternoon. And you weren't worried then."

"Pfft, that was my life. This is yours. Just, just be faster."

"I will. Faster than a speeding bullet."

Alex nodded and let her go, let her walk away. Behind her Vasquez said, "Once we get back from this and everybody is still alive, except for Rhea and any Daxamite I get my hands on, we are going to have a very long talk about your priorities and jumping off god-damned buildings, Danvers."
Alex wiped the trace of a tear from her eyes, trying not to muss her mascara. "Vasquez..."

Chapter Summary

Non-canon, Lena being a badass even while hoping to get rescued. Mon-Ew being less of a douche than usual.

The guard escorted Mon-El into his mother's presence. They stood waiting while Rhea gave her generals their orders and turned to check the chamberlain's notes for the wedding. Mon-El noticed the woman Elyrapin standing off to the side on crutches. He wondered what her prize would be in New Daxam.

"Mon-El, my son. This is a surprise. Please don't tell me you've come to make another tiresome argument about not getting married."

"No, mother. I came to get the vows. If we're going to do this right, we're going to have to say them in the old language, and I'm going to have to write out a phonetic translation for Lena to read."

She looked startled but pleased. "I had assumed we would use English, for the humans."

"Not all humans speak English, even on this continent, and anyway, we are surrounded by thousands of homesick Daxamite soldiers. They're going to want to see it done right."

"And you still remember the old language."

"If you recall, Father insisted. His belt may have been involved. Oh, yes. I remember."

"Very well. I am pleased that you are holding on to the ways of your people. We might be able to make a king of you yet." She gestured to the chamberlain who handed Mon-El a tablet. Mon-El bowed and gestured for his guard to lead him back to Lena's chamber.

As soon as the door closed, she said, "Did you get it?"

He handed her the tablet, showing her how to side-step the security protocols.

"Excellent," she said, then pushed some paper at him. "You work on those phonetics while I do this. If I can't make this work I'm going to need to say those vows, and your language is an utter disaster. No offense."

"None taken. It really is."

And he scribbled while she dug down under the layers of encryption to get at the launch codes for the escape pods.
Setting Them Up

Chapter Summary

Mostly canon-compliant. Mostly.

Normally spending time at the Fortress of Solitude made Kara feel less alien. The huge ice sculptures of her ancestors, the Kryptonian technology, even the different sigils for the different lines of the House of El were familiar and soothing. But not that night. As she picked up the ten-ton key and unlocked the door to the Fortress, she wondered not for the first time how Henshaw had ever gotten inside before. It wasn't like Clark to leave the place unlocked, however unlikely it was that anyone would be coming to the Arctic to steal his secrets.

She led Henshaw and Lillian inside. "Is this going to work?" she asked.

"Most likely," rasped Henshaw.

"And if it doesn't?"

"Then we'll all spend a lot of time getting to know one another in the phantom zone," deadpanned Lillian. "Turn it on."

Supergirl turned to Lillian. "I'm curious about something. You know my real identity. But Lena doesn't know that you know."

"Eventually, she'll find out on her own. Find out you've been lying to her all this time. And when she does? She'll hate you for it."

"Well, it's good to know you're consistent, Lillian. But I have news for you. I told her. And she had figured it out long before I told her. And she didn't hold it against me. She loves me."

"You're delusional. My daughter may be a lesbian and a lot of other things, but love you? An alien and a Super? Hardly."

Kara was a good person, normally, but she had been having a Really Bad Day, so she said, "Do you know the thing about superspeed? There are things I can do with my tongue that make your daughter scream."

Lillian stared at her. "Don't be vulgar, Kara. Right now, our interests are aligned. When this is over, we go back to being enemies."

"I look forward to it."

Henshaw said, "It's ready."

The projector started to spin slowly as they stepped in front of it. In a second, they were gone.

//

Apparently the color for a bride on Daxam was scarlet. Lena didn't know what she thought about
that, except that she knew she looked gorgeous in that color, so if she was being forced into an arranged marriage with alien royalty on a day that might end with her escaping or being married or possibly dying very, very messily, at least she knew she looked hot. The general tasked with escorting her to the ceremony obviously thought so. She could see the admiration in his eyes as he offered her his hand. She gave him a look. "Yeah, I'm good." She turned away to join Mon-El in front of his mother.

Rhea also looked damn good. Lena might be about to get married against her will to an alien with man parts but she was enough of a gold star lesbian to appreciate an attractive woman in a beautifully tailored dress. She might also hate the woman beyond the descriptive ability of human speech, but she could still appreciate her aesthetic appeal.

"Please join hands."

They wouldn't. Rhea gave them both A Look. Mon-El held out his had. Lena put hers in it. Damn the woman anyway.

"We come her today under the eyes of the gods to seal a bond of marriage."

//

The thing with war, thought Cat Grant as she and Winn picked their way through the rubble that was the CatCo building, was not really just its physical destruction or even the loss of life and limb, but the way it took symbols and skewed them.

The blown-up CatCo Magazine covers, with their thin, long-haired, attractive models with their come-hither looks: some had fallen off the wall completely, but most were simply tilted. Seriously, it was like a metaphor: in peacetime, beauty matters most of all; in wartime, not so much.

And then, in the midst of such philosophical thoughts, Cat's attention was yanked away as she strolled thoughtfully into her office. "Oh my God!"

"I know," said Winn. "Yeah. The damage is extensive. There was this little alien boy..."

"No, not that. This." She tapped her phone against her other hand. "There are... free-weights in my office."

"Well, yes, James, he believes that the body is a temple."

"And it smells like a West Hollywood gym in here." She stepped up to her desk and picked up a signed baseball with her middle finger and thumb, trying not to touch it anymore than she had to. "And there is sports paraphernalia on my desk where my diptyque candles are supposed to be." She put the ball down again and brushed her fingers off.

"Yeah, I will make sure that James cleans all of this stuff up as soon as we, you know, save the world."

"Clearing up is not going to do the trick. I'm going to have to burn sage for, like, a century. And where is James Olsen? It's just biggest story in the history of the world and the reason I put him in charge."

"James is, uh, hiding, like a coward."

"And Keira? Where is she?"
"She's also... a coward."

"Hm."

"Are you, I'm almost finished. Are you ready?"

"Oh, Winslow!"

"Yup?"

"I am always ready."

And Winn thought probably Cat Grant had been born ready. But given that she was back to calling Kara Keira, but that she was calling him Winslow rather than Witt or the hobbit, he figured he was doing okay, under the circumstances.
Knocking Them Down/We Have a Job to Do: #Resist

Chapter Summary

Mostly canon. My attempt at portraying a montage/speech.

Kara had never actually experienced the phantom zone projector before, so the experience of moving in microseconds from the ice blue Fortress of Solitude to the matte black walls of the Daxamite mother ship was new. But Supergirl was Supergirl after all, and she was ready at a nanosecond's notice to slug the bad guys, so the Daxamite guard who suddenly found himself facing three non-Daxamites materializing in his guard room didn't stand a chance and, after getting hit by the Girl of Steel, probably wouldn't be waking up anytime soon.

If he hadn't been part of an enemy occupying force, she might have felt bad for him. But he was, so she didn't. She just hurried down the hallway, with Lillian and Henshaw right behind her.

//--
"Agent Danvers." President Marsden's voice sounded in Alex's earpiece as he landed in the ventilation shaft. "Requesting update."

"Roger," said Alex. "I've infiltrated the HVAC system and am proceeding to command center."

"And Supergirl?"

"Supergirl is dark out of mission necessity. I've got a very trusted agent on my six." Alex turned to pull out the vent and set it aside.

Vasquez jumped down and landed behind Alex.

"We're almost there," said Alex. "Are you good?"

"So good."

Alex bent down to enter the HVAC duct.

"You know what I just realized?" asked Vasquez. "The first training session I did with you was crawling through the DEO's HVAC system on a scenario where we needed to take back the building. Makes this kind of a full-circle kind of thing for us."

"Damn, Vasquez, I had no idea that you were a romantic. Let's go."

//--
Lena stood there in the red dress—not the color she had envisioned for her wedding, if she would ever have a wedding, which for many years she just assumed would never happen.

And she stood there with her hand in the hand of a man, and she had always been VERY sure that that kind of a wedding would never happen.

But Rhea was talking. "Though there are many stars in our celestial kingdom...only one will lead
you down the correct path. Each of you have found your star.

Lena could only imagine what they looked like. Surely the Daxamites (and humans?) watching this broadcast must notice the emotions being shown by the (clearly not) happy couple. Surely they saw his despair and her dissociation. Surely.

"And so, in my power as acting regent of the Daxamite Empire, it is my duty, and my honor, to proclaim you--"

And then the viewscreen in the throne room lit up in the middle of the ceremony.

"Good evening, National City. It's Cat Grant. Yeees, I've been away for a while. But I'm back! Now I can imagine that you're feeling afraid and like your world is spinning out of control. But believe me, you have power. And right now, you have a job to do."

In the streets of National City, humans and aliens together were gathering to hide from the Daxamite troops. But their phones were charged and their laptops were carrying the message. "Resist. Resist these alien invaders with everything you've got."

In houses and apartments families watched what Cat Grant had to say. In a single police car, an officer listened to Cat Grant.

"They come with empty promises and closed fists."

The aliens who gathered around Dollywood and other alien clusters in the city looked up in hope and fear.

"They promise to make our world great again... And yet they know nothing about the people who make this world great"

Behind wire fences, aliens who had been pushed back into ghettos started fighting back.,

"They think they can con us, and if that doesn't work, what? They're going to beat us into submission?"

Police shot at the Daxamite soldiers.

"They have no idea who they're up against."

"Aliens and humans, we need to band together."

Aboard the ship, Lena and Mon-El shared a look.

"We need to stand up and fight back! Everyone needs to be a superhero. Everyone needs to get up and say, Not in my house!"

Crowds of humans armed with baseball bats and shovel charged toward the half a dozen Daxamite soldiers who were still pointing their alien weaponry but beginning to back away, realizing that even caveman weapons could beat high-tech Daxamite technology if there were a hundred cavemen and only six Daxamites.

"Let's prove to these thugs that we are strong and we're united and we are not going to be conquered. And, Tiara Woman..."
Queen Rhea stepped off the dias and pushed Lena and Mon-El aside to get closer to the viewscreen that Cat had taken over.

"If you and your little minions happen to be listening, you have come to the wrong town."

Lena thought she heard Rhea growl.

"Yeah. Cat Grant. Not goin' anywhere."

Back at CatCo, Winn whispered, "Classic."
Chapter Summary

Mostly canon, with non-canon components

Queen Rhea was incensed. She turned to the generals. "Send a squadron to the surface and kill that woman."
"Yes, my lord."
"Take them to their chamber."
Mon-El gestured for Lena to go ahead of him before the soldier.

//

Maybe it was Cat's inspirational monologue, but the Daxamites on the ship seemed more intense than they had previously. They came at them through the gunmetal blue corridors, three at a time, and Supergirl just punched their lights out.

Lillian said, "Just a shame your politics are so intractable. You're very useful."

Supergirl said, "My politics? I thought it was my alien genetics that were the problem."

"Just take the compliment."

Supergirl turned to Henshaw. "Do your thing, R2."

Henshaw opened his hand and let a spinning metal device extend out of his palm and insert into the Daxamite computer interface. The interface lit up and geared plates spun.

Supergirl asked, "Any sign of them?"

Henshaw rasped, "There's only one other human heat signature on this ship."

Lillian smiled. "That's my girl."

"I can lead us," said Henshaw, extracting his cyborg part from the ship."

"And I can punch," said Supergirl. "Let's go."

//

The Daxamite guard who was tasked with escorting the prisoners back to their chamber really should have seen this coming. He was armed and they weren't. There were two of them and only one of him. She was a woman and the prince, well, everybody knew that the prince was, what was the English word? A wuss. But if the guard had read any human stories or had seen even a single action movie, Star Wars, maybe...

The prince turned and said, "As your prince, I order you to lay down your weapons and let us go."
The guard said nothing, simply pointed his laser pistol at the prince's chest.

Mon-El laughed. "Yeah," he said, turning back to Lena. "I didn't thing that was going to work either." They he stepped forward, knocking the gun to the floor with one hand and punching the guard in the jaw with the other. They grappled and then a laser burst to the guard's chest sent him to the floor. Mon-El said, "Thank you."

Lena just rolled her eyes and marched in the other direction.

Mon-El said, "This way..." and found himself hurrying to catch up with her.

//

The DEO was crawling with Daxamite soldiers, but they didn't know the building the way Agents Danvers and Vasquez did. The two came out of the ventilation duct and Alex set the vent aside while Vasquez noted the location of two soldiers and motioned to Alex: two soldiers, at eleven and one o'clock, take them out from both sides on three.

Three. They silently moved to either side of the mainframe.

Two. They raised laser and lead.

One. Two shots, one sound. Two dead soldiers.

Alex moved to the mainframe and typed in her passcodes. She tapped her earpiece. "Madame President, we're in."

In her ear the president said, "Excellent work, Agent Danvers. How long until the cannon's ready?"

"I'm not sure," Alex hedged. "I'm powering up now."

"We are watching closely, Agent Danvers. We expect you to fire when ready!"

Alex swallowed. "Yes, Ma'am. Over and out." She glanced at Vasquez and then looked away, muttering, "C'mon, Kara..."

She watched the computer power through the steps of the protocol, a blinking light telling her that the positron cannon on the roof was emerging from its casing. She looked down at the codes she had written on her hand for the coordinates of the alien ship.

And she knew that the next five minutes would be some of the longest in her life. Right then, a tank full of freezing water looked a whole lot better.

//

Mon-El led then to the locked door and tried to use his hands to get at the computer.

Lena pointed with the laser pistol. "Break that."

"This?"

"Yeah." Sometimes, she thought as he smashed the glass with his elbow, Mon-El was such an idiot. She still couldn't see what Kara had ever seen in him. As he brushed away the glass, she took off her tiara and used the pointed end to insert into the portal of the interface. The lights went on and she pushed the buttons in the sequence she had gotten from the tablet she had hacked.
Mon-El said, "I can see why Kara loves you."

"She appreciates competence."

The door slid open to reveal three armored soldiers. He stepped in front of Lena, but then there were punching sounds and they dropped to reveal Kara standing behind them rubbing her knuckles. The moment she looked up to see them, her jaw dropped and her eyes went wide.

Mon-El smiled. "Hi!"

"Hi!"

Lena immediately rushed toward her and embraced her. They kissed passionately while Mon-El gaped. Behind them, Lillian cleared her throat.

Lena's head snapped up. She knew that sound. She looked up at her mother, shocked. "You came!" She frowned. "With her!"

"I did."

"We should move," said Henshaw.

Lillian took Lena by the wrist and they hurried after him, with Supergirl and Mon-El bringing up the rear. Too slow. Too slow.

The three in front disappeared in a flash of light.

Mon-El said, "Where'd they go?"

"Lillian left us to die."

//

Lena didn't know what just happened, but the moment she found herself freezing in an ice cave with enormous statues of godlike beings and alien technology, WITHOUT Supergirl, she turned on Lillian. "What did you DO, mother?"

"Humans only, dear. Disable the projector." She turned to dial her phone as Henshaw moved over to the alien tech. Lena ran over and pulled at him, and they grappled while Lillian made her call.

"Agent Danvers. This is Lillian Luthor. We're clear of the super ship and safe. Fire at will."

Lena yelled, "No! Alex, no!" So she didn't hear Alex's response.

"Turn it back on, Mother!"

"I came for you, not them."

"Supergirl helped you. How could you betray her?"

"I put everything on the line to save you from them. Supergirl is still an alien and she will die with her own kind. I thought you'd finally see my side."

"Why would I? Yes, Supergirl is an alien. She is an alien that has done nothing but try to protect this planet from the bad aliens. And she's basically the love of my life."
"Who lied to you for months."

"What do you mean?"

"I've known for a while about the mild-mannered reporter that you fell for. Reporters in capes! The bane of the Luthors!"

"Wait, you knew?"

"Of course I knew. I make it a point to get to know my enemies very, very well. You should hate her, Lena. She and her cousin made your brother--"

"Lex made his own doom, Mother. You know that. It wasn't Superman's fault and this isn't Supergirl's fault. If she lied to me it was to protect me from people who would try to get at her through me. People exactly like you, Mother. I don't blame her for lying to me. But you? I blame you for lying to me, over and over again. And if we're talking about identity, why did it take you two decades to tell me I was Lionel's daughter? In comparison, a few months is nothing."

//

Back on the ship, Mon-El was panicking. "A positron cannon? What are we going to do?"

Kara sighed. "Lillian Luthor betraying us wasn't the biggest shock ever. So I had J'onn bug Henshaw and get Winn to rig a remote so we could beam us out if she double-crossed us. Hope for the best."

"But have one shot prepared for the worst."

//

Lena was freezing on the outside, but inside she was a volcano of rage. "You of all people expecting me to hate her for not revealing her own identity, when you never told me--"

"Your stubborn pride still blinds you to the truth, " snapped Lillian.

An electrical sound turned their heads to the projector, where Henshaw looked perplexed.

Lillian marched over. "Why is it turning back on?"

The cyborg's enhanced eye turned from blue to red. "I don't know! I am not in control of myself." His right arm snapped up and grabbed Lillian by the throat.

//

On the ship, Mon-El said, "Let's go."

"I'm not going with you. You're mother has lost. She deserves the chance to surrender gracefully. But I need you to go down there and protect Lena, because her mother did not rescue her without some other nefarious purpose. Promise me you'll take care of her."

"My mother won't surrender. You're not going to get through to her."

"Mon-El, you never listened to me while we were dating but I beg you to listen to me now. I have to do this, but I need to know Lena is safe. If I don't make it out--"

"Don't say that!"
"I have to know she is safe. I promised to protect her. You have to do this for me. Just once, listen to me and do what I tell you."

He nodded. She hit the button and he disappeared.
Just When You Thought Things Couldn't Get Any Worse

Chapter Summary

Mostly canon.

Back at CatCo, Winn turned off the camera and shook his head, amazed as always by Cat Grant. He said, "Ms. Grant, that was incredible."

"And that was a pretty nifty trick, Winslow."

Suddenly a Daxamite soldier landed on her balcony. Winn yelled, "Go, go, go!" They headed toward Cat's personal elevator, but then another soldier came flying through the broken window and Winn grabbed Cat's hand and pulled her in another direction, yelling, "Go, go, go!" But two more soldiers appeared and they were surrounded and they just stopped. Winn froze but Cat just shrugged.

"Okay, well, it was nice knowing you."

Then there was a sound like an arrow and another armored man was sliding in on a zipline, but this time it was James. Winn grabbed Cat and dragged her under a desk.

The Daxamites aimed their halberds at him and he growled, "Bring it."

Then he aimed his fist at them and a tube on his arm sprayed grey dust at them. "Lead dust. Let's make this a fair fight."

Under the desk, Winn explained to Cat. "Space asthma. It's my idea."

"It's a good idea," said Cat.

The shield was the perfect foil for the halberds, and between James bashing the soldiers in the head with this shield and punching and kicking, the soldiers went down without a yell heard. He flipped the last one to the ground, probably dislocating the man's shoulder in the process, and punched him in the face when he tried to rise.

Winn helped Cat to her feet.

Guardian said, "You're safe now, Ms. Grant."

"Thank you, James." She went to answer texts on her phone.

"I'm... Guardian."

"Oh, honey. I can see your eyes right through the slits." She turned and went back into her battered office.

James looked at Winn. Winn just shrugged, grinning.

//
Mon-El appeared in the Fortress of Solitude. Immediately Lena asked, "Where's Supergirl?"

"She's not coming," said Mon-El. He pulled out the phone that Kara had given him. "Alex, it's Mon-El. Lena is safe, and Winn's device worked. But Supergirl stayed up there."

Back at the DEO, Alex heard his words and her heart nearly stopped.

In her earpiece, the president said, "Time is up, Agent Danvers. The positron cannon is ready to fire. You need to use it."

"Alex, do you read me?" asked Mon-El. "Supergirl stayed up there."

Alex tapped her earpiece. "Madame President, I need more time."

"You have your orders. Now complete your mission."

A million moments went through Alex's brain as she held her palm above the cannon's firing device.

A teenaged Alex slouching into the Danvers living room as Eliza and Jeremiah ushered a trembling thirteen-year-old alien girl in, saying, "Alex, meet your new sister, Kara."

The sight of Kara, smudged with ash standing next to a burning car and a woman holding her baby so tightly.

The body of a 747 bound for Geneva, the oxygen masks falling from the plane's ceiling. The feeling of death, come for her at last in the plane's freefall. The feeling of the plane leveling off, turning and landing in the water. The sight of Kara standing on the wing. Relief and panic wrestling for control of Alex's adrenal glands.

Eliza at that first Thanksgiving after, blaming Alex for allowing Kara to come out as a superhero.

Maggie in the bar that night, her shirt shining white under the bar's lights. The feeling of that kiss. The kick in the stomach that was the "fresh off the boat" rejection.

Vasquez and pizza at Kara's place. Vasquez in Kara's yummy sushi pajamas. Vasquez asking her to put her hand between Vasquez's legs. Blood. The conversation about tampons. Sex with someone who actually cared about what she, Alex Danvers, wanted.

Semper Fi.

Standing there in the DEO, Alex turned to see Agent Susan Semper Fi Vasquez staring at her, worried, concerned, but respecting her enough to leave it up to Alex to figure out what to do.

//

Kara supersped her way into the throne room, only to see Rhea standing next to the window, overlooking the destruction her forces were committing in National City.

"It's over, Rhea," said Supergirl. "I came back to give you one last chance to do the right thing."

Rhea turned. "How generous of you."

Supergirl said, "When I was a child, I could look up into the skies and see Daxam in the stars. I was told so many times how terrible a place it was. But I couldn't understand that. Cuz they had families, like us, people they loved. In a few minutes, this ship will be destroyed by a
positron cannon, and everyone on it. You don't want that. Save your people while you still have time."

Rhea looked unconcerned. "Touching speech, Supergirl. Sadly, wasted on the wrong audience. When my own husband opposed me, I killed him. You really think you can tug at my heartstrings? You were right about one thing, though. It is over, for you."

And Kara realized that she was about to die. Alex would follow orders. And a million moments went through Kara's brain as she faced off with the queen of a dead planet.

Terrified by all the sounds and feelings, she followed Eliza and Jeremiah into their house's living room, to find a sullen dark-haired teenage girl. "Alex, meet your new sister, Kara."

Alex's face, terrified and disappointed when she came running to the crash scene to see Kara standing next to a burning car and a woman holding her baby so tightly.

The immense weight of the 747 bound for Geneva as she maneuvered it over the bridge and into the river. Her flush of satisfaction as she stood on the wing, knowing she had saved her big sister.

That first Thanksgiving after she came out as Supergirl. Eliza's attack on Alex. Her failure after all these years to know how to protect her big sister from their mother's chronic disappointment.

That moment in Lena's office with Clark, when she had seen those startlingly green eyes for the very first time and been so very flustered.

The moment when she walked into her tiny office at CatCo to find it filled floor to ceiling with exotic flowers and she had known, bone-marrow deep, who had sent them without ever needing to look for a card.

Plumerias.

//

Alex stared at the computer readout, as the numbers charged upwards astronomically, and then fell to zero in less than a heartbeat. The roof's surveillance camera caught the yellow laser light that shot into the positron cannon and made it explode with a shower of gold sparks.

Alex watched, appalled and shocked. "It's gone!" she yelled. "The positron cannon is gone!"

//

"Super... girl..." said Rhea. "You'd really thought you'd won. Didn't you?"

And then, in the periphery of her vision, Kara saw the swirl of a red cape, and she was punched across the room.
Sifting Through Our Options

Chapter Summary

Mostly canon.

Super... girl..." said Rhea. "You'd really thought you'd won. Didn't you?"

And then, in the periphery of her vision, Kara saw the swirl of a red cape, and she was punched across the room. Blearily, she looked up to see Superman striding toward her. "Superman?"

"This is my planet," he said, picking her up. "These are my people." He punched her and she went flying through a computer monitor. Glass shattered. Sparks flew. Superman stood over her menacingly. "And I will not let you harm them."

Supergirl leapt to her feet and punched him, sending him sliding across the floor. She turned to Rhea. "What have you done to him?"

Supremely unconcerned, Rhea said, "I once told you that my planet was riddled with the corpse of yours. But not only green kryptonite rained down from the skies. There are so many more ways to harm your kind than to simply weaken you. Silver kryptonite. Your cousin is so much like you: reckless, stupid, barreling headfirst into danger. I couldn't have set a better trap if I'd tried."

Supergirl stared at her cousin, shocked. "Kal, it's me, Kara!"

"Oh, he doesn't see you. He sees his worst enemy."

"You should have stayed away, Zod," said Superman.

Kara pleaded, "Kal, listen to me--"

But Superman's eyes lit up so Kara had to meet lasers with lasers. They circled each other.

Amused, Rhea said, "You're his mortal enemy, Supergirl. The person he fears most. You will take everything from him. So this time, he will not hesitate. This time, he will protect his planet. This time--"

His voice strangely changed, Superman said, "I'll stop you forever."

He flew at her and they barreled through the ship's window out into the night sky where they grappled while free-falling down, down, down through the roof of an apartment building. They landed on the first floor and Supergirl pushed herself off him to see a mother and son in an open elevator. "Don't be afraid!" she said, moving forward to protect them.

Superman said, "Stay away from them!" and grabbed her, throwing himself and her out the window and careening through the air to land in a park at the center of the city. They bounced off a police car and she threw him into a set of concrete steps.

//
At the DEO, amid the chaos of taking their building back and making the best repairs they could, the K-scanner was going berserk.

"What is that?" asked Vasquez. "The cannon?"

"No," said Alex. "Something else. The DEO system registered a major kryptonite signal at the center of National City." She looked at the map on the computer screen. "Oh, my God. Kara."

Supergirl and Superman collided in midair. Superman punched her in the face and she returned the favor. Far below on the ground, Supergirl could hear Alex Danvers' hurried heartbeat getting closer, with Vasquez's heartbeat not far behind. Fires flared where cars were burning in the streets. She grabbed hold of Superman and flew as fast as she could downward and they landed in the shallow pool in the park, water spraying everywhere. They both jumped up and immediately tried to laser-eye each other, but they were almost evenly matched, so Kara broke off her attack and superspeeded right up to him where she could punch him repeatedly. He returned the strikes, but she powered on through and finally, with an uppercut to the Jaw of Steel, she sent him flying into the air and landing with a resounding splash in the water, unconscious.

Supergirl fell to her knees in the water, stunned, just waiting for her sister to arrive.

Hands grabbed her and kept her upright. "I'm here. It's okay. I'm here."

Kara's apartment had lots of windows, and she usually slept with the curtains open so that the golden sunlight could come in every morning, but especially on the morning after a major fight. She loved waking up to see Lena's head on her pillow, the beautiful woman with her makeup off and her hair a mess and the smile in her eyes so clear and sparkling.

This morning was no different. She grinned at Lena. "Let's just stay here a little bit longer," she said, rolling to snuggle on Lena's shoulder.

"How long?"

"Just till tomorrow..."

Lena chuckled. "Okay, woman of tomorrow." She fingered the stone that Kara wore on a chain around her neck. "Hey, you always wear this."

"Yeah, it was my mother's. She gave it to me the day I left Krypton. I'd just watched little Kal-El launch into space. Our world was falling apart around her and, even in the middle of that, she looked at me and smiled and said as long as I had this, I would never be alone. She'd be with me in my dreams." She snuggled in further. "I know we can't stay all day, but let's just stay a little while longer. Please."

"But Kara," said Lena. "You're not here."

"What?"

"You're in the Fortress."

//
Supergirl gasped and opened her eyes. She found herself on an ice slab, sitting up to see the Fortress of Solitude and her sister in a black parka by her side.

Alex quickly came over and helped her sit up. "Hey. Hey, you're okay."

"What happened?"

"You passed out and then you woke up and flew us here and then you passed out again."

"Ow. Oh, I feel like--"

"You got punched by Superman?"

"Repeatedly."

"Yeah."

They turned to see Superman gasp and wake and struggle to sit up.

"Kal!"

"Kara? What happened?"

Kara ran and embraced him, grateful that he had returned to himself.

//

Lena sat in her pristine grey and white office at L-Corp, wearing black and drinking scotch.

She thought, when all of this was over, if they even survived, she might wear black and drink scotch for the rest of her life. On the floor next to the couch was her "wedding dress." The color reminded her of Supergirl's cape, but it also made her feel like a scarlet woman, a woman who had nearly sold her body and her life to protect her planet. Hence, the scotch.

She drained her glass and glanced at the chessboard on her glass coffee table, where she had been playing a game against herself for weeks. She knocked the pieces off the board, disgusted.

In the open doorway, a silhouette appeared. Lillian's voice said, "That chessboard's been in the Luthor family for generations."

Did you come here to yell at me for not treating the family heirlooms with respect or to blame me for what's happening outside?"

"How could you let that woman deceive you? I taught you to be a scientist, to question everything!"

Lena got up and refilled her glass. "No, what you taught me was to doubt myself! To look for validation elsewhere, so much so that I was willing to take it from the first mentor that offered it to me." She strode back to the couch and sat down.

Lillian considered that and nodded. "I'm sorry."

Lena huffed her doubt.

"I am, Lena." Hesitantly, she sat on the other end of the white couch, folded her hands. "When you came to visit me in prison, I honestly wanted to be a better mother to you. But every time I've had
the opportunity to choose you or something else.... I've chosen something else."

Lena muttered, "Congratulations on saying the first honest thing in your life." She took a sip of scotch.

Lillian nodded. "I have justified the worst behavior for the best of causes, but I was right." She reached out and righted the white chess pieces. "The threat was real. But maybe I backed the wrong child to stop it."

Lena stared at her.

"The transmat portal you created? That was brilliant, Lena. If you could do that, with the portal, maybe you could do something with this." She picked up a metal box and held it up for Lena to see.

"Is that from Lex's vault?"

"He created it to get rid of Superman."

"Does it work?"

"Well, you'd need to adapt it. But if you could? You would be the Luthor who saved the world."

//

Supergirl watched her cousin come to terms with what had happened. He paced, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Silver kryptonite. That's a new one. The whole time, I thought I was fighting Zod. It didn't weaken me at all."

"It might have," said Supergirl.

"No," he answered. "No, I was at full strength and you beat me."

"Well, I'm just glad we're both okay. But we need to come up with a plan to defeat Rhea or she'll just keep coming after us."

Alex said, "The positron cannon was the only weapon we had capable of penetrating their ship's shields. Is there anything that powerful here?"

"Not a weapon. But I might have something we can use against them."

"What?" asked Supergirl.

"Information. I feel like there was something in the archives about the early wars with Daxam."

The moved to the computer, and Kal-El placed his hand on the bio-sensor. Kryptonian glyphs covered the screen above them.

"Dakam 'Or," said Kara. "I've never heard of that."

"It's ancient," said Superman, "but it might work."
Challenging Days Are... Challenging

Chapter Summary

Mostly canon

Vasquez had gone with Alex to the plaza where the Supers were fighting, but once Kara had beaten Kal-El, passed out and woken up again, Vasquez agreed with Alex that the next stop had to be the Fortress of Solitude and since Kara could only carry two people, Vasquez should return to the DEO to update the crew and take point on whatever happened next. Nobody had said that Alex's Assistant Acting Director was Vasquez, but everybody knew that Vasquez was informally third in line, so nobody got in her face about it. If anything, a lot of the higher-ups looked relieved that it didn't have to be them.

So Agent Susan Vasquez had stood in the command center, hands on hips, taking up as much of her agents' mental space as she could (Silverback gorillas did it. Human men did it. The Danvers sisters did it. Clearly, it worked.). And people obeyed her.

But, damn, was she relieved to see Kara, Superman and Alex land on the torn-up balcony, whole again. She and Winn hurried toward them. Winn embraced Kara immediately. "You okay?"

"I'm so much better now."

Winn let go awkwardly and fan-girled at Superman. "Hey, you probably don't remember me--"

"Winn Schott?" said Superman, shaking his hand. "Resident genius of the DEO? Good to see you, buddy."

Winn grinned mindlessly.

Superman turned to Vasquez. "And you're the woman dating my cousin's sister."

Vasquez frowned. "Yes, sir. Susan Vasquez."

Superman shook her hand. "You must be good, or she wouldn't want to be with you."

Alex said, "Winn, what's happening here?"

Winn led them down the stairs. "Oh, ah, yes. J'onn is still unconscious, unfortunately, but he's stable. We've cleared all Daxamite soldiers from the building."

Supergirl added, "We might have found a way to get rid of the Daxamites in the archives of the Fortress of Solitude."

The computers suddenly started going amok.

Alex asked, "What is it?"

Vasquez glanced at the readout and her stomach sank. "The energy weapons of the Daxamite ships are charging up."
"Which means they're waging another attack," said Alex.

"Winn? Get me face to face with Rhea."

Vasquez watched Kara become Supergirl. Sure, she was wearing the outfit, but it was the lowered voice, the larger body language, the commanding presence that made the difference. It was why so few people had apparently figured out the secret, she supposed. When one persona seemed so weak and dorky and the other so calm and strong and composed, it was hard for ordinary people to see them as the same.

"Queen Rhea of Daxam," Supergirl proclaimed. "I, Supergirl, Champion of Planet Earth, invoke the sacred rite of Dakam 'Or, to meet with you in single combat before the gods. May the fate of my people rest on the fate of my life."

All the viewscreens in the command center took the visage of Rhea, who said, "Dakam 'Or. I accept your challenge, Supergirl. We duel in four hours. Daxam assures you, it will be your last."

The transmission ended and the DEO's logo took over the screen again.

Winn said, "Okay, what just happened?"

Alex said, "The radiation signature is diminishing. Their weapons are powering down. What did you just do?"

"I'm going to end this."

//

When Mon-El learned what she had done, he was incensed. He chased her across the DEO. "You just invoked a trial by combat created by barbarians. It's been around since we crawled out the caves on Daxam with rocks and sticks."

"If I win, she goes," said Kara. "They all go. They are bound by ancient law to leave this planet in peace. She's not gonna win."

"But what if she does? Do you know what will happen? You'll have to stand by and watch her walk this planet, trampling everyone underfoot."

"I just have to beat her, and I will."

"Why not Superman? Isn't this his fight too?"

Superman said, "It's everyone's fight. But Kara just defeated me. She's the Champion of Earth."

Kara lowered her voice. "I don't have time for you to be afraid. I need you strong."

//

Alex checked up on J'onn in the medical bay. His vitals weren't optimal, but they were steady. She took his hand in hers, saying, "Please, J'onn, wake up soon." She picked up her phone and dialed M'gann, but she got no response. She sighed, "We need you." And she went back to the command center.

J'onn was telepathic. Even in his weakened state, he could feel the emotions of the people around him. He knelt in the blood-red dirt of Mars and he could feel the emotions of the humans around him even as he was stuck in a cycle of self-loathing that kept him inside his own brain.
But then...

But then, M'gann was there.

He had felt her at the periphery of his mind for... a while. He couldn't measure it. He had felt her hesitation about reinitiating the bond. He could feel her sensing his disgust about White Martians. He had felt her staying away. And he had heard Alex making the argument to M'gann.

"If we can't get that device from Rhea, and how the hell do you suggest we do that? If we can't, then how are we going to get him free? He went into your mind when he didn't have to, to save you. It's time for you to do the same thing for him."

M'gann had thought about it for hours and then she had come back and told Alex that she would try. Alex had given her a dark look. "Don't just try. Do it. We need him. The DEO needs him. The fucking planet needs him. And I think you need him too."

So M'gann and come to the medical bay and done what she had sworn she would never do. She put one hand on J'onn's hands and one on his forehead. "It's true," she murmured. "You have to wake up. Your friends need you, J'onn. The great fight is coming."

He shook his head, barely conscious. "Don't know if I'm gonna be strong enough."

"Don't worry. Everything will be fine." She kissed him. "Now, wake up."

He lay there. Shaking her head, she walked away. She had done what she could. Time to go back to the bar, where the DEO agents were still running mission and patching up injured agents. J'onn would heal or he would not. She had done the best she could.

//

Alex was testing Winn's lead formula to make sure it would be safe for humans. She wasn't completely convinced. She had tried several tests, but--

Suddenly she hear gasping coming from J'onn's bed and she ran, expecting to have to call for a crash cart, but he was sitting up on his bed panting a little and patting his chest, but looking relatively normal. "Oh, thank God!"

When she reached his bed, he asked, "Where's M'gann?"

"You've been out for days, J'onn. She visited, but--"

"She was right here!" He jumped up and strode across the room.

"Sure, two days ago. She's probably at Dollywood now..."

He looked around at the damage to the laboratory. "What happened here?"

Alex sighed. "Everything."
The Events vs. The Story We Tell About Them

Chapter Summary

 Mostly on-canon

The media were having a ball: newsprint, radio, TV and Internet were telling the world how it was being touted as the fight of the century as Supergirl and Rhea of Daxam prepared to face off in the trial by combat.

Winn and Kal-El stood beneath the DEO's computer screens, absorbing the stress that the media was spreading around like it was Nutella.

"Woof," said Winn. "No pressure."

Out of nowhere, J'onzz's voice said, "We need to contain this"


Alex said, "Hey, easy."

Winn pulled back. Superman offered his hand. "It's good to see you on your feet."

Kara hugged him next.

J'onzz said, "You need all the help you can get. Alex told me about the offer you made. We'll get you everything you need. But for right now, that needs to be handled. Don't want an audience of civilians when you fight Rhea."

Kara nodded. But how were they going to avoid that?

//

"Tessmacher! Get Snapper on the line. His dispatches have no teeth. Where's the hook? Where's the lead? Where's the stats? And where the hell is my latte? I've been typing for twelve hours. I need caffeine, I need carbs, I need a... Clark... bar?" Cat took off her glasses and touched up her lipstick.

Kara looked away, embarrassed. Clark looked at Kara.

Cat stood up and adjusted her necklace. "And, what, pray tell," she said coming around to Clark's side of the desk, "brings you here?"

"Gosh, Ms. Grant," he said, "I just wanted to see what I could do to help."

"Ohh, you do love danger, don't you, Clark Kent? Yet another reason why Lois made no sense. Oh... and speaking of sense, I need you to talk some sense into your friend James Olsen."

"Ah, Jimmy?"

"He's been parading around like Darth Vader, punching out villains and I for one do not want to
watch some space invader slay him with their life saver."

Clark said, "I think you mean, light-saber."

Kara added, "And, and Darth Vader actually punches out the good guys."

"Oh. Okay. Whatever. I've never seen Star Wars."

Kara stared, shocked.

"Oh, and Kiera, where have you been?"

Kara took a deep breath to reply, but Cat got there first.

"No, no. You are ostensibly employed there as a reporter, and Supergirl is out there, about to have the biggest skirmish of her career, and I thought maybe you might want to go out there and report--"

"Yes," said Kara. "That's actually why we're here. The fight between Rhea and Supergirl--"

"Go on," said Cat.

Kara adjusted her glasses, saying, "Supergirl gave us an exclusive interview..."

Cat leaned on her desk. "In exchange for...?"

"A request," said Clark. "She'd like you to tone down the...gee, how do I put this? The sensationalist tone that the battle has been receiving in the media."

Cat shook her head. "Mm, I don't know how I can do that. People are finally starting to fight, finally starting to stand up."

Kara frowned. "Supergirl doesn't want anyone showing up and getting hurt."

"And I don't know anyone who cares more about the people than you do, Ms. Grant."

"Once again, Kansas, you're the only person who really gets me."

"I try."

Cat rolled her eyes. "Fine. Deal." She sat down and looked Kara in the eye. "And what do you think, Kiera? Do you think Supergirl is ready for this."

Crinkle. "She told me she is."

"Well, great. Then I put all my chips on the Girl of Steel. Now, you go out there and you tell Supergirl that we are all rooting for her!"

"Sure thing," said Clark. "It's good seeing you again, Ms. Grant."

They turned and went out the door. Clark handed Kara his phone. "You're never going to guess who wants to see us."

//

When the Supers landed on her balcony, Lena came out to greet them, followed by Lillian.
Lillian said, "Of course the two of you would make an entrance."

Lena sighed, "Unfortunately, this is her on her best behavior."

"What did you want?" asked Supergirl, annoyed.

"My daughter has a way to save us."

Lena led the way back into her office. "It's a device that Lex designed to keep humans safe while irradiating the atmosphere with kryptonite. It would have made the planet uninhabitable for both of you."

"Well," said Supergirl, "lucky for us, my cousin put him in jail before he could make it work."

"And lucky for you, I found it," said Lillian.

Lena said, "I've been studying it, and I think I can get it to irradiate the atmosphere with lead rather than kryptonite."

"Just a trace amount," said Lillian. "Harmless to humans. But the atmosphere would become toxic to Daxamites. The aliens would be forced to leave, or stay and die."

"All of them?" asked Superman.

"And they could never return," said Lena. "Even Rhea's son."

Supergirl swallowed. "Start working."

//

The Supers walked into the DEO command center looking grim.

Alex asked, "What did Lillian want?"

"Lillian and Lena have a way, a failsafe, to get rid of the Daxamites, if Kara doesn't beat Rhea."

"It's a device that would seed the Earth's atmosphere with lead. No Daxamite would survive on this planet."

"Except for Mon-El, right?" asked Winn. "Because he was here under our yellow sun for months."

Superman nodded. "Mon-El might be able to survive a little longer than the others."

Mon-El said, "Well, if it comes down to it, you use it."

"No," said Supergirl. "It's not going to come to that. I told Lena to start working, but I want to be clear. We will not have to use that device because I am going to beat her. Your mother is going to leave for good."

J'onn turned to Winn. "Agent Schott, head to L-Corp. Help Lena."

"Yes, sir."

Vasquez hurried after him. "Hey, Little Plaid Shirt, wait up. I'll give you a ride over there."

Mon-El said, "When you go to meet her, I'm coming too."
"You can't fight for me."

"But I can be with you. I can be your second."

"Alex is my second," Supergirl said automatically. Then she turned, "Alex, I'm sorry. I shouldn't assume."

Alex nodded. "Yes, you should. Of course I'll go with you."

"I could use your help now, Kal. Spar with me. Keep me on my toes until I meet her."

//

Vasquez drove through the broken streets, keeping her eyes peeled for Daxamite soldiers, but they seemed to be honoring the cease-fire.

Winn said, "I would have been perfectly fine going on my own, Agent Vasquez."

She grunted. "Maybe, maybe not. Better to be on the safe side. Also, I had some thoughts. I don't trust Lillian as far as you could throw her."

"I agree."

"Excellent. So, let me run a few scenarios by you, and see what you think."

Winn grinned.

//

Back at the DEO gym, Supergirl flipped Superman over her shoulder and ended with her arm locked under his jaw. He tapped out.

"That's good, that's good. You're a fast learner. I learned that move on War World."

But Kara was staring off into space.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I just, I feel like I'm on the brink of having everything I've ever wanted: family, friends, a job I love, a life as a hero I never imagined... And Lena. If I beat Rhea, I get to keep all of that. And I, I don't know. I don't know if it's possible to have everything you want." She shifted her cape and sat on the bench, searching for words to explain.

"Well, it is." Kal sat next to her. "But only because you've worked for it. Whenever I fight, no matter who it is, I'm always fighting for Lois. I fight for her right here." He tapped over his heart. "The people we love, they're another secret superpower. Keep her with you."

He hugged her. Then he said, "It's time."
Since Supergirl had challenged Rhea, Rhea got to choose the place, and she had blithely chosen the roof of a building right in the heart of National City and used her troops to evacuate it of its workers. Supergirl flew with Alex in her arms and they landed together. Alex looked worried, with the same crinkle in her brow that Kara routinely wore.

"I'm here for you, Kara," she said.

Supergirl nodded. "I know."

Rhea and one of her generals beamed to the roof together. Rhea said, "I see you brought moral support."

"So did you."

Rhea strolled forward, saying, "So once you are disposed of, I have your word that your forces will lay down arms, that the city, the nation, and the planet will be surrendered?"

Supergirl nodded. "On my honor. And if I defeat you, your invasion ends, you leave, once and for all."

Rhea nodded to her general who stepped back into the corner. Alex took the opposite corner behind Supergirl.

Rhea and Kara saluted each other, with fists over their hearts.

"For the Earth."

Then they leaped into the sky and smashed headlong into each other. Landing on the roof again, they traded punches, their black and red capes billowing out on the wind at that height. Rhea dodged to one side and grabbed Supergirl's cape and used it to whip her around so that she smashed into the large and very solid electrical box. She pushed herself up and charged Rhea with superspeed, but Rhea was older and wily and sidestepped her, sending Supergirl to the ground again.

Supergirl pushed herself up, panting, and met Alex's eyes.

The eyes of the big sister who had dived under the dining room table to comfort Kara when she'd been afraid of the popcorn machine. The eyes of the DEO agent who had come to help her take down a pair of supervillains, while wearing a kryptonite-powered exoskeleton. The eyes of the woman who had nearly launched an alien vessel and trusted Kara could, would stop it from taking her into the far reaches of outer space.

Alex nodded. Kara nodded back. Then she dove toward Rhea and punched her in the stomach, chest and face. Rhea fell to her hands and knees, but she was laughing, and she really shouldn't
have been laughing. Supergirl followed her eyes up to the sky where the smaller Daxamite ships were circling the mother ship, then suddenly sped away and started shooting up National City.

Supergirl stared at Rhea. "You agreed to the Dakam 'Or! Send them back! You dishonor yourself before your gods!"

"My gods are only concerned with my victory."

"No! No, destroying this city is not the answer!" said Supergirl.

"A city that's destroyed will need a new leader to rebuild it."

Supergirl turned to Alex. "Go. The city needs you more than I do now."

Alex ran for the roof's fire escape and headed down to help keep whatever peace could be found amid the firefight.

//

At the DEO, they noted Alex's departure. Kal sounded worried when he said, "Kara is alone." On the screen above him, one of the ships shot into a building, sending the top floor into a mass of flames.

J'onn said, "Supergirl's handling Rhea. Right now we need to help the people in that building."

"We?" said Kal, and then he watched J'onn's skin go red-lit and then turn into a Green Martain.

"El Mayarah," said J'onn.

"Brother," said Kal.

J'onn said, "Vasquez, you're in charge."

As the two aliens rushed out into the city, James said to Vasquez, "Don't worry. I've got your back."

//

Back on the roof, Supergirl and Rhea circled each other.

"You're getting tired," said Supergirl.

"Finish me, then. Hit me! Consider it a gift."

Supergirl leaped up into the air and came down with a solid punch to Rhea's face, sending her back down to the ground. "Are you ready to give up now?"

"Hardly." Rhea touched her forehead, where a sickly green glow came from the cut Supergirl had left there. She stood, reaching out her hand, the fingers covered with the same green substance. "Because of your people, kryptonite poisoned my entire world."

Supergirl stared and stumbled backward.

Rhea gloated, "I carried it across galaxies. It's part of me now. So go ahead. Make me bleed."

//
Lillian felt the building shake from the explosions going off all over town as she paced back and forth in front of Lena's desk in her once-pristine white office. Now it was strewn with rubble, and Lillian chewed at the inside of her cheek, the only sign she allowed herself of her frustration with her daughter's--and the world's--persistent disbelief that aliens were a menace. And now that she had been proved right about everything, it was down to these two, Lena and Winn, to save the world.

Preposterous.

Lena held the tube in place with one hand and said, "Can you hand me the, the, um, uh--"

Winn handed her the Allen wrench.

"Thank you, Winn."

"You know I'm pretty good in a crisis!"

Another explosion went off, this time much closer and Winn jumped and yelled.

Lillian said, "Oh, we can see that."

"Hey, I do not like you!"

Lillian just rolled her eyes.

Lena slid the last piece into the device and used the wrench to fix it in place. "There," she said with disbelief in her voice. "It's done."

Lillian strode over. "Good. Turn it on so we can end this."

"No!" said Winn.

Lillian pushed him aside. "There's no time to waste." She grabbed the device and strode away, pushing the button on top. She looked around, saw nothing happen, and looked accusingly at Lena. "You said it worked."

"Oh, it does. I just gave Supergirl the remote. Only she can turn it on."

Lena turned to Winn. "We should call the DEO, get them to let Supergirl know it's ready if she needs it."

Lillian remained cold and calm, placing the device back on Lena's desk, thinking what an unfortunate time Lena had chosen to suddenly start acting like a real Luthor.

Across National City, chaos reigned. Explosions took chunks out of concrete buildings, set cars on fire and left people reeling from the impact. The DEO was out in force hurrying to get people to safety or at least to places of marginally less danger, but the Daxamite soldiers were remarkably adept at killing with their space halberds.

Mon-El fought against his own people, and they had no compunction shooting at him, but he did wrest a halberd from one the soldiers and fought and killed six more with it. He had always preferred the halberd to pistols and now he remembered why. It had the ability to fire, yes, but it could also be used to trip and smash his enemies.
Superman, famously, hated weapons. He used his freeze breath to encase four soldiers in ice, while the Martian Manhunter, led a group of humans to a street that was not currently burning.

At the DEO, Vasquez studied the computer screen above her head and tapped her earpiece. "Superman, we have bogies above National City Children's Hospital."

"I'm on my way!"

On the roof of the building, Rhea picked up Supergirl and smashed her down three stories, then picked her up and burst through the hole she had made to drop her down on the roof again. Above them Superman was using his laser vision to attack the small ships that were hovering over the hospital. Rhea turned to her general, snarling, "Get the Kryptonian!"

He put on his helmet and took off into the sky, but he was no match for Superman, who knocked him into next Thursday, taking a few of the walls at CatCo with him.

On the ground, Alex used her laser pistol on the Daxamites who stood between her and the DEO building a mile away. She ran through the streets shooting the soldiers, pulling people out from under chunks of concrete, always moving closer and closer to her goal.

In her earpiece, Vasquez said, "Alex, what's your twenty?"

"Maybe five minutes. I need to recharge this gun soon."

"Well, get your ass in here, Ma'am. I hate being in charge!"

And Alex knew Vasquez well enough by then to realize that she was telling her she loved her. Alex grinned and shot another Daxamite, holstering her uncharged pistol and grabbing one of the Daxamite halberds. "Oh, yeah! This is epic!"

Six blocks away, J'onn was fighting seven Daxamites and then M'gann M'orrz landed at his side with half a dozen White Martians with her.

"They're friends," she said.

He said, "You came."

"You called."

And he had to admit that having some ten-foot-tall berzerk lizardmen in the fight with them was rather useful.

//

On the roof both women were tiring. They traded punches, blocking some hits and taking others. Both of them were grunting with each strike.

"It won't stop here!" yelled Rhea. "There's Star City and Metropolis." She punctuated her words with a punch to Supergirl's jaw. "I will destroy city after city until your whole world is gone!" She punched again and Supergirl fell to her hands and knees.

But Supergirl, Kara Zor-El of Krypton, already lost one world, one home, and she would not by Rao let this woman destroy another one.

Rhea punched and Supergirl caught her fist in her hand and squeezed. Holding tight to the evil queen, Supergirl used her other fist to punch her once, twice-- "This is MY home!" --three times.
Rhea went flying to the ventilation shaft, crashing through the rusting metal.

"And I am going to protect it," said Supergirl.

Rhea pushed herself up to her feet. "It doesn't matter if I live or die," she said calmly. "We'll keep coming."

Mon-El landed on the roof, as more of the Daxamite ships swarmed like mosquitoes over the city. In Supergirl's earpiece, Vasquez said, "Supergirl, they've locked onto every school, hospital, and municipal building in the city. They're gonna destroy everything."

Supergirl looked at Mon-El. He just nodded. She took the remote out, looked at it, looked at him, and whispered, "I'm so sorry." She hit the button.

On the roof, Rhea started to choke. Down in the streets amid the fighting, Daxamite soldiers stumbled and fell. Green streaks of light lit up National City as the Daxamites beamed up to their ships, leaving their weapons behind. The ships above the city turned like a flock of birds and shot up into space.

They didn't bother to take their queen with them.

Rhea watched her armada's retreat with wide eyes as she gasped for breath. "Mon-El. Please! Save me!"

He gasped, "Like you saved Father?"

Her face showed one last emotion, disbelief, as she turned to led dust and shattered.

Mon-El fell to the ground.

"Mon-El!" Supergirl grabbed him. "No, please! I'm going to take you somewhere safe!" She tapped her earpiece. "Alex! Do something!"

Vasquez said, "Supergirl, it's Vasquez. Head to the following coordinates north of the city."

"How long does he have?"

"I don't know. A few minutes? Fly fast!"

The coordinates led them to a green field where Mon-El's pod sat waiting for him. Supergirl carried him to it, picked him up and deposited in it as she would have a baby, and she had a momentary memory of Kal-El as a baby, and watching her aunt and uncle deposit him in a pod just like this one.

Before the pod door closed, he said, "I'll be a better man because of you."

"I know you will. Now. You have to go."

And the pod took off into the sky, getting smaller and smaller until it disappeared.
Denouement

Chapter Summary

The end of the season and the end of this unending fic. 255,500 words. 700 pages. 101 days.

At the DEO, the agents were giddy with exhaustion and they greeted the sight of the Daxamite ships in full retreat with cheers and applause, hugging each other despite differences of rank. Above their heads, the computer monitors showed the people of National City dancing in the ruined streets, crying, hugging, and cheering.

Kara stood alone on the balcony, staring up into the stars. That's where Kal-El found her. He stood silent a moment, then said, "I have to get home."

"I know."

"Are you okay?"

"Of course. I did the right thing."

"I think it goes far beyond the right thing. I couldn't have done it."

"You don't have to make me feel better."

"I'm not. I'm humbled by you. I'd like to think that if it came down to a choice between Lois and the world, but... I don't think I could. You are so much stronger than me."

"But that's the thing, Kal. I'm not. This choice? Making him leave again, never to return? That was easy. The only thing I got from him when we were together was pain and annoyance and self-doubt. But if it had been Lena? No. And I know that Cat said that the people we love are everything, but I just know if anyone ever figures out that she is my weakness, the world could be destroyed. We got lucky. This time. Because Mon-El is kryptonite to me. He never made me my best self the way she does. Rao, Kal, Lena is my sunlight. She give me strength, she saves the world with me, for me, again and again. And if I ever put her in danger like this one--"

"You won't. Do you think I don't worry about Lois? That's why I'm going now, to check with her, to be with her. And to make sure there aren't any stray Daxamites in Metropolis. When you need me again, I'll come back. The cleanup and reconstruction is going to be a mess. I saw it when Lex... But you know that."

"Thanks," said Kara. "Say hi to Lois for me."

He nodded and hugged her and flew away.

On the other side of the glass, J'onn was asking M'gann. "How did you contact them?"

"They contacted me. After your people sent the Whites packing, the resistance heard about it, about me being here. They're refugees. They've been having a hard time with the anti-alien groups, but after all the surveillance footage of them fighting alongside us, I'm hopeful we can get them
"full citizenship."

"And...you came to me, when I was in that horrible--"

"I heard you call out to me. So I came."

"Thank you."

Alex watched them and she looked for Kara, eventually catching sight of the red cape out on the balcony. She stepped out into the cool air and started talking without preamble.

"There was a moment this year when I felt completely broken, when I regretted a choice that changed my life. And then you forced your way into my home, wrapped your arms around me and you said, 'I'm proud of you.' Didn't make me feel any better at the time. But. It was something to hold onto."

Alex took a step closer to Kara. "I am so proud of you." She took a breath. "Do, do you want me to stay over tonight? I could be there as long as you need."

"No, no. Go be with your girlfriend. I need to know you two are happy. Like I want to know about Maggie and Lucy and J'onn and M'gann. Clark and Lois. And I'll go be with Lena. It's not like my world stopped. You don't have to act like it."

"What do you need right now?"

"Just...never let her go. Okay?"

Alex nodded.

Kara took off into the air.

Vasquez stepped onto the balcony and took Alex in a hug from behind, a move that once upon a time might have ended with Vasquez having a broken nose. Not tonight. Alex was hurting for Kara.

"She'll be okay," said Vasquez.

"Yeah, I hope so."

"Hey, you know the Danvers girls don't break easy."

"Marry me."

Vasquez stared. "Excuse me?"

"Seriously. Marry me. Please?"

And of all the crazy scenarios Agent Vasquez had posited since she had met Alexandra Danvers, this, this was not one of them. She broke into a grin and said, "Yes, I mean, no. I mean yes, eventually if you still want to when our lives aren't in danger every single Monday, but we'd need to talk about money and where to live and, and--"

"Then let's go home," said Alex. "Let's start having those conversations."

//

Supergirl flew to L-Corp, where Lena was sitting on her formerly white couch sipping scotch and
playing chess against herself. Lena's head turned when she heard Supergirl's boots, and she smiled sadly, and waved for her to come in.

Supergirl gathered her cape and sat down next Lena, surveying the small board. "White knight takes black queen in three moves. Checkmate."

Lena smiled and went through the moves, proving her girlfriend right. Then together, they set up the board to be ready for a new game. There was always a new game to be played, thought Lena. "I'm sorry about today. About your having to send him away."

"He's not the one I love. But I could never have sent you away, even if it meant accepting an alien invasion."

"Better never let Mother hear you say that."

Supergirl leaned her head on Lena's shoulder. "Why are you here?" she asked. "You should be celebrating."

"Luthors don't celebrate. They gloat. So you can be sure that Mother is off somewhere regaling reporters with how she took down the alien menace."

"That is so unfair."

"Life is unfair, Kara. I would have thought you of all people would have learned that by now."

"I fight every day to make it more fair."

"And that is one of the reasons I love you."

"Thank you, Lena. For loving me. For saving National City. For saving the world. Again."

"For you, Kara, any time. And anyway, if Lillian is taking credit for something I did, it means she values it and that's a first."

"We really need to get you to work through your issues with your mother, Lena."

"We've already started. Right before Rhea took over the portal, I got a phone call that made me start thinking about people with ulterior motives, failsafe devices. So when Winn suggested the remote, I thought, yes, Lillian will betray me, might as well make that part of the plan."

"Who called you? Vasquez?"

"Eliza. To thank me for the Mother's Day card I sent her, thanking her for being such a great mother to you two. She said that you had sent her a picture of me, the big one we took after the karaoke night and another one of just you and me. She said she put them both on her mantel."

Kara grinned and Lena wiped an errant tear from her eye, careful not to muss her mascara.

More seriously, Kara said, "I killed my ex-boyfriend's mother today."

"I know."

"And I sent him into outer space forever."

"I know."
"And I don't feel bad about it."

"You will. There is infinite time to have all the feelings eventually. And feel them and process them. And get on with our work."

"And between now and then?"

"Sleep. And in the morning I will make you endless waffles. And then we will both get on with our work. The city needs both of us, more now than ever."

"Heroes," said Kara, kissing Lena on the nose.

"Heroes," agreed Lena, kissing Kara's forehead.


And although in the golden light of the next morning, when Kara showed up at CatCo a little better rested, but still unsure about how she felt about everything, she went straight to Cat Grant's office. As Lena had predicted, Lillian had taken credit for driving the Daxamite fleet away. Cat called it fake news and complete crap and then looked up to see Kara.

"What's wrong with your face?"

"What?" asked Kara, fidgeting. "Do I have something?"

"That frown. It's causing little tiny wrinkles to sprout up under your eyes. Keira! The city has been saved from that fashion-challenged fascist, so why do you look like your world is about to end?"

"It's personal..."

Cat stood up and leaned on her desk.

"While you were gone, I was in a relationship and I'm in another one now and it's just--"

"Ahhh. Kara Danvers has a boyfriend? Hah! A year in a yurt and I miss everything!"

"Had a boyfriend. Now I have, well, girlfriend."

"And he was like every other guy I've even tried to date, but worse, and I stayed with him when I should have left. And now, for the first time in my life, I like someone, love someone, and she respects me in ways that he never did. And she helps me do my-- be my best self. And he never did. And I realize now that I stayed in that relationship because it's what I thought I deserved. And I feel like I don't deserve her. Like I don't deserve to be as happy as she makes me. And I know Alex would say that's not true, but..."

Cat sat down across from Kara. "Take it from someone who's been married four times--"

Kara looked surprised.

"Four. It would have been five but I turned down Rob Lowe. Twice, actually. See, the thing that makes women strong is that we have the guts to be vulnerable. We have the ability to feel the depths of our emotion and we know that we will walk through it to the other side. And, by the way, you have accomplished great things this year. Your articles: Slaver's Moon, alien registry, alien fight club. It's all very powerful. And your prose, it's not bad. I mean, it's not great, but it's not bad."
"You read them?"

"I did. It's 2017 and they have WiFi in the Himalayan Mountains. But you, my dear, are on a hero's journey, as Joseph Campbell would say. And yes, you have hit a bit of an obstacle but you will soar right over it just like I would, but without the Luis Vitton shoes."

On the screens above Cat's desk, sirens started and a reporter was talking about a fire downtown. Kara glanced up and then back down at her hands. "Actually, there's something I forgot I have to do. I have to go."

"By all means."

Kara rose and adjusted her glasses. "Thank you."

And if Kara hadn't been so distracted, she might have heard Cat say, "Go get 'em, Supergirl!"

But she was in too much of a hurry to get to the balcony at CatCo, tear off her Kara clothes to reveal her Supersuit and leap up into sky that was as empty of clouds as it was empty of spaceships. Up there, she felt weightless and the world was small and she felt like she could, as Lena said, get back to her work.

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Agent Susan Vasquez had seen Agent Danvers devastated a time or two and she never wanted to see it again. So she was very careful the night before to take the time to explain why making life-altering decisions while still high on adrenaline from a mission might not be the best idea.

Alex had said, "Yes, but when you know, you know!"

"Yes," said Vasquez. "But taking a few weeks to think about things and talk about things, that's just adding the rational side to the emotional side, make sure we're making a balanced decision."

And Alex's jaw had gotten tense, and her eyes got watery, and she said, "I see. Okay, well. Sure. No big deal."

And she had stood up but Vasquez leaped up with her, "Alex! You know me! You know what I do! I don't give J'onn any scenario that I haven't thought through completely, sometimes for weeks to get all the parameters. I am genetically incapable of being spontaneous! I'm not like you!"

"So you think we're, we're not compatible? Is that why you don't want to marry me?"

"Of course I want to marry you! I have since three and a half weeks into your probationary period and we didn't even have gay marriage back then!"

Alex stared. Vasquez stared back, covering her mouth with her hand.

This time when the tears started in Alex's eyes, they had been tears of laughter. "So you've been thinking about marrying me for years? 'Cause that's what I got from that."

"I, er, uh. Um, well. Maybe?"

"Not just weeks. Years."

"Um." Vasquez felt her face get very red.

"So what's your ring size, Vasquez?"
"You're not going to get crazy on me, are you?"

"Yeah, probably."

And she had, of course, which was why Vasquez was sitting at the command center wearing black tactical gear and a goofy smile on her face, satisfied but exhausted. When Winn grinned at her, she threatened him with grievous bodily harm and he got serious.

And when Agent Danvers strode into the DEO command center that evening wearing a different kind of black, a slinky dress with a plunging neckline and killer heels, Vasquez took pity on Winn and covered for his jaw hitting the floor so hard it practically echoed. She stood quickly and greeted the Assistant Director.

"Ma'am!" She always said it with reverence. She loved working for this badass woman.

"Oh, God, Vasquez, I am going to kill the General Lane in fifty-nine very painful ways. I have absolutely got to get these shoes off, but can you find J'onn for me? We've got trouble."

"Of course we do, ma'am." Vasquez grinned as she trotted off to J'onn's office. "After all, it's Monday."

FINIS

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