

**i keep my distance (but you still catch my eye)**

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# **i keep my distance (but you still catch my eye)**

by [Jazzfordshire](#)

## Summary

With a final sigh, Lena wrenches the door open, and ends up with an armful of tall blonde as the mystery visitor – who had clearly been leaning on it – lurches forwards. Her taser hits the carpet, and the woman rights herself again, apologizing profusely.

“Shit, sorry Alex, you just took so long and –“ Finally, bright blue eyes track up Lena’s bare legs and silk robe all the way to her face, widening comically.

“You...are not Alex.”

OR

Lena and Alex, two strangers recovering from breakups, swap houses over the holidays for a spur-of-the-moment trip. Neither of them expected to find a holiday fling – but what happens on vacation, stays on vacation. Right?

AKA: The Holiday is one of my favourite Christmas romcoms, so I decided to make it gay. And half Jewish.

## Notes

HAPPY HOLIGAYS, the rest should be up by Christmas

# Chapter 1

It's a new day. Snow fell at some point in the night, and the quiet of it seems to have suffused the whole city – the usual loud Metropolis sounds seem muted to Lena, scaled back. Cars quietly rumble by far below, pigeons coo softly somewhere on the balcony, and the first sunlight of the day falls on the sprawled form sleeping on their couch.

Not *their* couch, Lena reminds herself. Not anymore.

*Her* couch.

With a final, indignant huff, Lena drops the armful of clothes and shoes she's been holding onto James Olsen's stupid, cheating face, and he jerks awake with a grunt.

"What – Lena –" James blinks, frowning up at her against the now-blinding sunlight from the bay windows. "What the hell?"

"Out," Lena says decisively, and James stares at her for a few seconds before shaking his head.

"Out *where*?" he asks incredulously, as if somehow this is a surprise, and Lena's jaw clenches.

"I told you that you could sleep here for a night instead of getting a hotel, and now it's morning. *Out*."

James finally stands, the pile of clothes sliding off of his torso and falling carelessly to the floor. "Lena, this is my apartment too!"

Lena laughs, the sounds jarring in the silence of the penthouse. "Oh? Oh, *is it*? Because I distinctly remember *you* moving in with *me*. Into the apartment that I bought. Just as well as I remember the fact that your entire wardrobe came from my salary. You're lucky I didn't burn it all."

"Baby," James cajoles, reaching out to her, but Lena shudders, turning on her heel and marching back down the hallway. She rips down a framed photograph of the two of them as she goes – one taken at a gala years ago, and James had insisted on developing and displaying in the house despite the fact that Lena hates the way she looks in it – and tosses it behind her, hearing the satisfying shatter of glass.

"Don't call me that. How many times have I told you that I hate pet names?" She can hear James struggling into his clothes in the living room, and she rolls her eyes as she rounds the corner into the bedroom, shouting so that he can still hear her barbed insults. "Especially pet names given to me by pathetic men who sleep with their art directors and then try to come home to their girlfriends."

“I did *not* sleep with her!” James calls back, and Lena fights the urge to scream in frustration. She rips open the closet, seizing James’ half and throwing all of his freshly pressed shirts onto the hardwood.

“James, I am many things, but ‘idiot’ is not one of them. I’ve been having Eve keep tabs on you.” The pants come next, yanked from their drawers and deposited on top of the shirts.

“Eve? Are you kidding me, you were having me *followed*?”

“Clearly, it was necessary!”

Lena rips down James’ jackets – the row of fine, expensive, tailored jackets she’d bought him in an attempt to pretend their relationship was working – and, strangely, she doesn’t feel sad. Last night, when she finally confronted James about his infidelity, she had thought her anger would burn away to heartbreak. It must, right? The end of a 5 year relationship should be *sad*. But strangely, she woke up feeling more relieved than anything else. Kicking him out, getting rid of all his things, feels *cathartic*.

James’ footsteps follow her down the hall, and he sighs in a condescending way that makes Lena’s skin crawl when he sees the pile of his belongings.

“Lena, can’t we talk about this like adults?”

Well. It isn’t *all* catharsis.

Lena whirls around, a load of socks scattering across the floor as she drops them and crosses her arms, arching an incredulous brow. Anger still burns in her gut – not anger about breaking up, necessarily. Not jealousy or betrayal – mostly, she feels angry that she had been so *stupid*. That she spent so long convincing herself that this could work, and he went and did the most idiotic, base, *male* thing he possibly could, and made her look like an idiot.

That anger must show in her face, because James visibly swallows.

“Talk about what?” Lena says coolly. “Talk about the fact that you cheated on me? About the fact that you’ve *been* cheating on me for god only knows how long, and apparently all your friends encouraged it? Do you want to talk about how you’ve been belittling and holding me back for as long as we’ve been together?” James looks taken aback by Lena’s sudden ferocity, but Lena is far from finished.

“I wasted years on you, James. Years! I spent so long trying to force myself into the little box of your perfect girlfriend, and I just never fit, did I?”

“My box? Do you have any idea how difficult it is trying to look good next to perfect genius Lena Luthor? How hard it is to feel like a man when I’m being called your sidekick?” James says venomously, and Lena scoffs.

“It is not my job to make inferior men feel good about themselves. I’m not here to fluff your ego.”

“Look, we’ve been having problems, sure, but if you just worked a little less -” James starts, and Lena lets out a laugh that’s almost deranged.

“If *I* worked a little less? You constantly tell me I work too much, but when you work late nights and early mornings to have more time to fuck your subordinates, it’s because ‘*the news never sleeps, Lena*’!”

“I did *not* sleep with – look, I’m not the one with the working problem!” James says, his deep voice clearly raised in frustration, “You work 100 hour weeks sometimes – you bought out the apartment below us to make a *home lab*, and you sleep with your phone in your hand! And don’t even talk to me about sex, because I can’t remember the last time we had it!”

“Who has time for sex?” Lena scoffs, and James’ jaw twitches.

Truth be told, the best development in their relationship has been the lack of sex, in Lena’s opinion. It’s something she’s always tolerated rather than enjoyed, with all of her exes – quite honestly, she feels more when her assistant brushes her arm accidentally than she does when James has his hands on her body.

But she cuts that thought off at the root, and tucks it into a tidy box in the back of her mind. No need to open that can of worms right now.

“Some people do,” James mutters lowly, and the anger that’s been simmering in Lena’s gut finally boils over.

“God. You *absolutely* slept with her! You need to go.” Lena marches back down the hall, emerging into the living room and heading to the door with determination. “I think it’s time we both admit that this never really worked. I think you loved the idea of you and me together, but not me. Not *really*.”

James follows her down the hall, protesting all the way as Lena grabs his keys from the front table. Technically their apartment doesn't have a physical key, but the balcony does, and she twists on the keyring until that key pops from it, throwing the rest at James. It feels final, physical, and James catches them, not seeming to notice the change.

“I did the best that I could,” he argues, shoving the keys into his pocket.

Lena scoffs, grabbing his wallet from beside the key bowl and thrusting it at his chest. Then, throwing the door open, she gestures out to the hallway emphatically. For the first time since last night, James seems to realize the reality of the situation and he blanches, wallet still in hand.

“What? My stuff –” he looks back in the direction of the bedroom, and Lena shakes her head.

“I will *send* your things to you.”

They exist in a silent standoff for a few moments, Lena fully dressed and James still barefoot in his wrinkled shirt, until finally with a sour look James trudges out to the hall. Before Lena

can close the door he turns back around and stops it, an infuriating look of concern on his face.

“You know you do this, right?”

“Do what?” Lena sighs, the absolute exhaustion of the fighting starting to wear on her patience.

“You screw up every relationship you've ever been in. It's what you do. You didn't really want to be a couple!” he argues, and Lena pinches the bridge of her nose, trying to counteract the throbbing headache she can feel coming on.

“Clearly, even after 4 years of living together, you know nothing about me.”

“You resist it in your own way!” James continues, ignoring Lena’s interjection. “And it's hard to detect how you even do it, because nobody's quite as smart as you. So you're hard to catch at it - but it always surfaces, and this is what happens.”

“What happens?” Lena knows she shouldn’t take the bait, she knows it, but she can’t help but want to know the details of James’ last-ditch psychoanalysis.

“You push people away. Things end. Just like you knew they would. Lena, you know how I feel about you. You just don't want to be what I need.”

James seems to realize, microseconds after the words leave his mouth, that he just uttered possibly the worst argument he could have hit on in a fight against Lena.

“What *you* need?” she says, her voice quiet and dangerous. “And that’s what, exactly? An obedient wife? An ATM?”

“Well, that’s not – I didn’t mean –“

“You know, I would never cheat on you,” Lena continues, and the derision practically drips from her tone. “Not under *any* conditions.”

There’s finality in her words, and at last James seems to accept that he’s lost the battle. His face turns hard again, and he finally admits what Lena has known to be true for over a week.

“Can you blame me? Look at you - you're the only woman on the face of the earth who breaks up with her boyfriend and doesn't even shed a tear. That has to mean something, right?”

Lena shakes her head at the attempt. “Why does it bother you so much that I can’t cry?”

“Because it’s pathological!” James argues, and Lena can feel the words wrap around her chest and squeeze. James might be a cheating bastard, but he knows her well enough to know where her insecurities lie. “You’re *cold*, and honestly if this is your idea of love, you can’t blame me for sleeping with –“

It's too much. All of it – the last 5 wasted years of her life, the stress, the anger, James refusing to leave – something inside her snaps, and she does the only thing she can think of to make him *shut up*.

She winds her arm back, and slaps him in the face.

He looks about as shocked as she feels by the uncharacteristic break of decorum. The hand that was holding the door finally lets go, moving to grasp at his now-reddened face, and he gapes at her.

“Lena –“

“Goodbye, James.”

With a blessed feeling of finality Lena slams the door closed, and locks it.

She leans back against it, passing a shaky and still-stinging hand over her face and feeling the stress of the last few days slowly ease. There are still a hundred things to do – gather all of his stuff, somehow get it to him, get him removed from the security list of people allowed into the building – but the worst of it is over.

Punching in Sam's number and kicking at a stray ball of James' socks that somehow made their way into the entryway, she heads back to the bedroom to get started. Sam picks up on the third ring, sounding harried.

“Hey hon, I'm just on my way to Ruby's soccer game and I'm bringing snacks this week so if I could call you back –“

Lena interrupts, trying to keep her voice even. “That's fine, Sam. After the game, could you come over?”

Sam pauses, and her voice softens. “Hey. What's up? What do you need?”

“I just need some company,” Lena says, and Sam, bless her, jumps immediately into Friend Mode.

“What kind of company? Should I bring wine, or ice cream?”

“The ‘James and I just broke up’ kind of company,” Lena sighs, and the ecstatic yell that Sam lets out almost shatters Lena's eardrum, but in the end she shows up 40 minutes later with a bottle of wine in each hand.

“Sam, it's 10 in the morning.”

“It's a celebration,” Sam deadpans, and Lena closes the door behind her with a soft chuckle. Just her best friend's presence is already making her feel better, and she has to admit, the wine will probably help too. Sam digs in her kitchen drawers for a corkscrew and Lena falls back onto the couch, feeling like she's run an emotional marathon in the last 3 hours.

“Sam, am I...cold?” Lena asks tentatively.

“What?” Sam fires back, pouring two over-full glasses of red and handing one to Lena before joining her on the sofa, long legs folded underneath her. “Of course not. Did James say that?”

“Yes. Because I didn’t cry.”

Sam scoffs. “James is an idiot, I’ve been saying that for years. He was never good enough for you.”

Lena sighs. “He seemed so...kind, at first. Understanding. He was the only person who didn’t seem intimidated by who I was. But apparently, he’s been resentful of it for years. It just built and built until we both exploded. In the end, neither of us were our best selves when we were together.”

“That’s because, as previously stated, he is an idiot.”

Lena laughs, grateful for the outsider opinion, even if it’s one that’s openly disliked James for a long while. It’s good to just hang out with Sam – neither of them in work mode, no boyfriend monopolizing her attention.

It’s started snowing again, and Lena takes a deep drink of wine as she watches the flakes fall and realizes what this – breaking up with James, just before the holidays – means. Their shared friends will likely take James’ side, and her own family wants as little to do with her at Christmas as they do the rest of the year. Sam has Ruby, and Lena is likely going to be going back to spending holidays at her desk. She feels a longing, suddenly, sharp and acute, to not be alone for once.

“Look, can we just – take off, for a few weeks?” Lena says suddenly, and Sam chokes on her wine.

“Excuse me?” Sam looks at Lena like she’s suddenly grown an extra limb, and Lena shifts uncomfortably.

“I need to get out of town. Like...a holiday.”

Sam blinks at her, shock on every inch of her face. “You always say this is one of the busiest times of year for L-Corp! Neither of us ever takes more than a few days in December. And besides, I can’t just leave Ruby.”

Lena sighs, feeling the sudden burst of longing deflate with the introduction of cold reality. “Of course. Yes, you’re right. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“You were thinking you need a break. And you were right.”

Confused at the about-face of Sam’s opinion, Lena frowns. “No, *you* were right. I can’t just take off.”

Sam nods, looking into the distance and seeming more and more on board with Lena’s spontaneous idea. “I can handle things at L-Corp for a few weeks. You’re right – you haven’t taken vacation time in all the time I’ve known you. This is a great reason to disappear for a while!”



“It was a bad idea,” Lena argues, feeling strange at the 180-turn their conversation has taken. “Besides, where would I even go?”

“Anywhere!” Sam exclaims, her wine almost spilling with her gesticulation. “You have more money than God. You can literally go *anywhere*.”

Finally and after a great deal of protest Sam leaves to pick Ruby up, insisting that Lena reconsider and take a vacation, until Lena finally closes the door on her mid-sentence.

And even then, she’s hounded in text form.

**Sam Arias [1:46 PM]**

***Vacation vacation vacation vacation***

***I’m calling Brenda in HR as we speak and booking your time off starting tomorrow***

***Go somewhere warm***

Lena chuckles at the final message, settling in behind her laptop and opening a search window. Drumming her fingers on the keys, she realizes that she has no idea where to even begin.

“Where do I want to go,” Lena murmurs, tapping out an idle rhythm on the backspace key. “By myself. At Christmas.”

Finally, she starts at the most basic – she types ‘vacation destinations’ into the bar, and hits enter.

The first things that come up are, of course, the opposite of what she wants. Popular beaches, Cancun party resorts, group tours through Europe. The perfect nightmare. Then come the exotic destinations – private islands, 12 bedroom villas in Bali. The pictures are beautiful, but all she can think about is how *lonely* they would be. And that’s the point of this venture, isn’t it? To escape the loneliness?

She’s about ready to throw in the towel when, a few hits down, something catches her eye. ‘Vacation rentals’.

Clicking through, she’s greeted with a few sample places. Just houses – ordinary houses, in random towns all over the world. Little pieces of normalcy.

“I could do that. Hole up in a little place somewhere, disappear for a few weeks...” she mutters, clicking the link. A thousand things run through her head – security, privacy, common sense – but she feels like she’s fallen down the rabbit hole, enamored by the idea of hiding away in a sweet little house somewhere far away.

The screen reads ‘choose a city’, and the top ten list appears in order. Paris, London, Rome, Metropolis –

*National City?*

She clicks it, suddenly interested. She's been planning a westward expansion for L-Corp, the idea being to move a new headquarters there in a few years to escape the last vestiges of her mother's reign as CEO. National City is the most promising site. This could be a work-cation – a trial run to see how she likes the area. The justification warms her to the idea even more, and she clicks the third house on the list, her interest piqued by the pool in the photo.

It's not a mansion, certainly. The square footage is less than her apartment, even with its second floor. But it's clean, modern-looking inside but rustic outside, tucked away in a small town called Midvale an hour from the city. It has a well-kept yard and vegetable garden, a small pool, a privacy fence, and is probably the last place people would expect to see Lena Luthor. Not a single person who might recognize her on sight.

It's perfect. Now, she just needs to hope that the owner is willing to give up the house on short notice. Tentatively, she hits the 'book now' button, and a chat window pops up.

Live chat. How very 1997.

Suddenly fraught with nerves, Lena types out a simple message.

***I'm interested in renting your house.***

She hits enter without thinking, and abruptly realizes how strange a message that must be out of nowhere. She hurriedly types a second one with a bit more detail, sending it with slightly more forethought.

**[L.L.]: *I should say - I'm wondering if your house is available for rental this Christmas. If it is, you could be a real lifesaver.***

There's no response for about 5 minutes, during which Lena tries very very hard to remain still and patient.

*Don't send a third message. You'll sound desperate. Wait until they respond. Wait until –*

She fails against her own impatience, in the end.

**[L.L.]: *I know it's ridiculously late to be asking, but if you're at all interested, please contact me.***

Her third message has a tinge of plea about it, she knows, but for some reason she's become fixated on this little house, and she can't let the opportunity pass her by. To her intense relief, the answer comes only a few moments later.

**[A.D.]: *I'm very interested, but the house is really only available for home exchange.***

Deflating slightly, Lena frowns. She can guess from context what that means, but she asks for clarification anyways.

**[L.L.]: *Home exchange. What is that?***

**[A.D.]: *I haven't done it before, but friends of mine have. You switch houses, cars, everything. Still interested? I know it comes off as a little strange.***

Relieved at the fact that this mystery person seems just as unsure as she is, Lena responds.

**[L.L.]: *Tentatively. Are you willing do go through a basic background check?***

**[A.D.]: *Absolutely. I wouldn't expect any less. Where are you?***

Lena finds herself liking this person, despite only having exchanged a few messages. She's direct, and hasn't expressed any outright derision at being bothered a week before Christmas to switch her entire life around at the whim of a stranger.

**[L.L.]: *Metropolis.***

**[A.D.]: *I've always wanted to see the big city.***

Lena grins.

**[L.L.]: *I've always thought that National City was the 'big city'.***

**[A.D.]: *Grass is always greener, right?***

There's a pause, and Lena isn't exactly sure where to go from here. She's not even very good at making casual friendly conversation in person, let alone online. Thankfully, the person on the other end seems to pick up the slack.

**[A.D.]: *I'm Alex, by the way. Alexandra Danvers. I'm very normal. Neat freak. Healthy. Non-smoker. Single.***

There's something in the way the message reads – the way single is tacked on at the end, almost left out – that gives Lena a feeling of kinship with this woman.

*She sounds no-nonsense. Maybe military?*

Lena shrugs, typing out her own description and conveniently leaving out how she really feels. "Loner, loser and complicated wreck," she mutters, but her fingers type something much more convincingly wholesome.

**[L.L.]: *I'm Lena. Also normal. Nonsmoker, but I enjoy a good scotch. I work...***

She pauses, unsure how to phrase her work without revealing herself. She settles on "in tech", and this Alex woman seems to take it at face value.

**[L.L.]: *I must say, your house looks idyllic. Just what I need.***

**[A.D.]: *Really? What does your place look like?***

They exchange house photos and descriptions, and finally, they come to an agreement. Alexandra Danvers seems alarmingly willing to switch houses with only a day's notice, but

Lena is approaching the point of not caring – as long as it gets her out of this apartment for a few weeks, she’s willing to take a leap. Finally, Lena asks the final – and, if she’s being honest, the most important – question that she needs to make her decision.

**[L.L.]: *Are there any men in your town?***

There’s a pause. Then three dots flash, hesitating before finally –

**[A.D.]: *NONE.***

Lena’s shoulders relax, relieving tension she hadn’t been aware of carrying.

Decision made.

**[L.L.]: *In that case, I look forward to reading your security brief.***

Across the country, Alex Danvers sighs in relief.

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“Miss? You’re cleared to go through.”

The security officer hands her passport back, and Alex startles herself out of her reverie.

“Thanks,” Alex mutters, shoving the passport into her bag and hustling towards the exit. One of the benefits to working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation is that she gets through domestic airport security in a flash, and she’s outside at the cab stands within 10 minutes of leaving the plane.

A blast of chilly air hits her when the automatic doors slide open, and she flags down the first cab she sees, sending a *‘I did something crazy, call me back’* text to Kara as the driver puts her bags into the trunk. She’d called her sister yesterday when she booked the plane ticket, but she hadn’t picked up, and now she’s starting to feel apprehensive about what she’s gotten herself into. This city is huge and unfamiliar, and it’s strange but she wasn’t expecting it to be...winter. Like, properly winter - snow on the ground, chilling breezes, bare trees *winter*. She definitely did not pack warmly enough.

“Where to?” The driver asks once she’s settled in the backseat, and Alex rattles off the address Lena sent her yesterday. The man looks surprised, looking her up and down with an air of doubt, but in the end he agrees and they pull onto the freeway, headed into the city.

Cars and buildings flash by, and Alex’s breath fogs the window as she thinks about how on *earth* she got to this point.

When she initially signed her home up for this ‘house swap’ thing, it was a passing fancy. She and Maggie had actually decided on it together, thinking it could make for an interesting, cheap holiday.

Now, with their engagement broken off and her future plans in shambles, she had understandably forgotten about it.

But when Lena messaged her asking if the house was still available on short notice and revealed that she lived, of all places, in *Metropolis*, the city Alex has been seriously considering moving to ever since the breakup 2 years ago – well, it felt a little bit like fate. Metropolis could be a fresh start, a new city on the other side of the country where there are no memories of their relationship to haunt her. Where Maggie can't turn up with a Hanukkah gift out of nowhere and tug on Alex's heartstrings as if they're still a couple.

She and Maggie had, by all accounts, a fairly amicable breakup. They loved each other, but they wanted different things - their views on life, on kids, on the future, none of them lined up. But Alex would have preferred if they had screamed and shouted – because this, the strange limbo they exist in now where they still talk all the time but Maggie is seeing someone else and Alex's heart gets pulverized every time she's reminded that they are *not together anymore* – is unequivocally worse.

Maggie initiated it, sure – she'd been the one to *say we're just a square peg and a round hole, Danvers* – but Alex knows it was for the best. She keeps telling herself that – for the best, for the best, *for the best* – but it doesn't stop her heart from aching every time Maggie calls and acts like they can just go back to being the friends they were before they got together.

And, right on time, Alex's phone lights up with a notification.

**Maggie Sawyer [11:49 AM]**

***Heard you jetted off to the big city. First vacation in 4 years – congrats. Can I call you later?***

Alex heaves a huge, shaky sigh. The temptation to give in, to continue the conversation just to keep Maggie in her life, is strong. But she came here to get away. To finally pull the last vestiges of Maggie from her heart, and start to move on.

And, possibly, to find out if she can make a home here, far away from her past.

With unsteady hands, she punches out a reply.

***Maggie...I think we both know that I need to fall out of love with you. Would be great if you could let me try.***

She sends it off, wiping at her damp eyes, just as the cab rolls to a stop. She busies herself with getting out of the car, the driver helping her with her bag, and it isn't until he's pulled away that she finally gets a good look at the building – the very tall, absurdly beautiful skyscraper that Lena apparently lives in.

This can't be the right place.

Tentatively she heads towards the doors, her bag rolling noisily behind her, but they swing inwards before she can grab the handle. Inside there's a doorman who tips his hat, and Alex

nods awkwardly back while she tries not to gape at the opulent lobby. It's all echoing marble floors and high ceilings and furniture that looks like it's never been touched, and behind a huge desk there's a well-dressed man typing into a serious-looking computer system.

"Um. Excuse me?" Alex asks, and the man looks up promptly.

"Yes? How may I help you, Miss –?"

"Danvers," she answers, pulling out her phone to read the instructions Lena sent. "I'm, uh... staying with Lena? She said –"

"Ah!" the man smiles, and types something into his computer. "Of course, Miss Danvers. I'll just need to see some government issued photo identification, and I'll need to take your fingerprints and retina scan."

Alex blinks. She starts to dig through her bag for her ID, and the absurdity of the request still has her reeling.

"My retina – this place has *biometric locks*?" She hands over her passport, and the man nods, flipping it open and onto a scanner.

"Miss Luthor has our highest security package. Only two people besides herself have access, and one was actually just removed yesterday."

*Jesus. Who is this woman, the president?*

When she finally gets access, the biometric lock accepting her fingerprint and scan before the elevator door even opens on the top floor, she breathes a sigh of relief. Lena's house is surprisingly, wonderfully bare of Christmas decorations. Alex has no ill will to the holiday as a whole, but it's exhausting being bombarded with it at every turn, and her house is usually a bit of a reprieve – it's nice to know that these two weeks won't be any different.

In fact, the house is bare of any personal touches at all, Alex finally notices. The walls house tasteful art, and there are no framed photos around. The hallway is bare, but judging by the nails still embedded in the walls, it's a recent development. There isn't a single photograph of a human being displayed in the whole house, and it makes the space feel almost like a hotel room. A bare, well-decorated impersonal space.

She doesn't even know what Lena looks like.

What she does know, though, is that she's clearly fucking *loaded*. Every inch of the apartment screams money – it's not overly flashy, besides the building it's housed in, but everything is high quality and expertly picked. The kitchen is cavernous and full of shiny equipment that looks barely-used, and there's dust on the remote for the frankly huge TV in the living room. The floor-to-ceiling windows by the balcony show a stunning view of the skyline, even in the daytime.

It seems like the kind of place that nobody can actually afford in real life.

Alex ran Lena's background check through the bureau before she left, and nothing too out of the ordinary came up – she's in a high tax bracket, sure, and has a brother who was arrested for tax fraud and embezzlement – but after seeing the 'clear' indication on the file, Alex didn't really bother reading it. She just wanted to get out of town, and she doesn't need to know this woman's life story to stay in her house.

Now, though, she wishes she had flipped through it a little more thoroughly.

The apartment – if it can even be called that, seeing as it's considerably larger than Alex's house – seems to go on forever, door after door. She finds two bathrooms, an exercise room, and an office full of packed boxes before she even reaches the end of the hall. The second-from-last door looks to be yet another office, this time with no boxes – instead it's full to the brim with computers and pell-mell bits of machinery and technology, scattered across a huge L-shaped desk.

As she pokes around, something tugs at the back of her brain – recognition of some kind. The state-of-the-art security, the tech, the name, Luthor – *Lena Luthor* –

Alex's eyes land on a tiny remote-shaped object, with a logo emblazoned on the side. A bold L, with smaller letters underneath. She recognizes the logo easily - most people now own something made by L-Corp, since they had a bit of a comeback a few years ago and made their stuff affordable - but this room is littered with company-branded tech. And most of it, Alex doesn't recognize.

It brings something into her memory – she can remember reading a headline a while back about L-Corp. Something about a shake-up in leadership, an arrest – a name change.

With a lightning bolt of clarity, Alex suddenly remembers.

It used to be called Luthor Corp. *Lena Luthor*.

*Holy shit.*

Somehow, through some strange twist of fate, she's staying in the penthouse apartment of the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. One of the biggest, in fact – L-Corp is the leading name in medical and environmental science, and one of the few companies Alex knows of that usually comes out of FBI investigations fairly clean, at least in recent years.

And *Lena Luthor* is now living in her tiny house in National City.

Alex fights the sudden urge to message *Lena* and apologize.

*I really should have read that background check. Or...googled. Some FBI agent I am.*

Trying to calm down her almost-panic attack, Alex takes a deep breath and closes the door to the office, turning towards the final door at the end of the hall.

Of course, the bedroom is just as luxe as the rest of the apartment.

The curtains are black-out, the bed is like a cloud, and there's a secondary door that probably leads to an amazing bathroom. She can't help but feel sorry for Lena, going from this ultra-modern space to her own modest house, but she's here to *relax* – and, she thinks as she opens the bathroom door to reveal a goddamn *hot tub* sunken into the marble tile, that's going to be pretty damn easy.

After a long, hot soak and a few minutes flipping through Lena's vast array of channels (how does a CEO even have time to watch TV? It isn't possible), Alex is just starting to actually relax when a loud, obnoxious buzzing comes from somewhere near the front door, and she almost jumps out of her skin.

"Shit!" she curses, berating herself for being so jumpy. She throws the remote onto the coffee table and jogs to the source of the noise – a small intercom system next to the light switch.

Unfortunately, said intercom has approximately 20 unlabeled buttons, and she has no idea which one to press.

She tries the first three in succession, talking into what looks like a microphone. "Hello? Uh...is this...can you hear me?"

There's no answer, just more buzzing, and Alex curses again. Finally, on button number 8, a voice comes through the speaker.

"Miss Danvers? There's a Miss Arias to see you."

"A who?" Alex asks, dumbfounded. Nobody knows she's here – who the hell could this be?

"A Miss Aria-" There's a huffy sigh, and a female voice takes over.

"Oh, come on, Leonard, how many times have I been here? Hey, look, I'm Sam Arias. Lena asked me to come and get James' things?" The voice is pleasant, and Alex finds herself relaxing at the sound of it. But still, she has no idea what either of these people are talking about.

"James?" Alex asks, and Sam clarifies.

"Lena's ex?"

*Oh, shit.* Alex vaguely remembers, on the long letter left on the counter, something about an ex boyfriend and someone stopping by to get his stuff - but it had reminded her a little too much of her own situation with Maggie, the one she's trying to avoid, and she put it aside. Clearly, another bad call.

"Oh, right, uh - hold on - shit -" Alex fumbles with the rest of the buttons, and there's a laugh on the other end. Alex winces.

"Did you hear - sorry, hold on - god damn it -" Finally she seems to hit the right button, and there's a decisive sound from the speaker.

"I'll be up in a sec!"



True to her word, Sam is at the door only a few minutes later, and Alex has to use all of her government training not to let her jaw drop when she steps into the apartment.

*Do all of Lena's friends look like they just walked off a runway?*

"Sorry – I figured I would buzz up instead of just waltzing in the way I usually do, since you don't know me. I didn't think about the fact that you wouldn't know how to use Lena's ridiculous security system," Sam says easily, holding out a hand to shake. Alex takes it in her own sweaty one, feeling more and more tongue-tied by the second.

"I – yeah, I mean, it's fine. It's my fault for swapping houses with a rocket scientist, right?" Alex jokes, and Sam laughs at it, and *oh no. She's so cute.*

She helps Sam drag a few bags of clothes and an electronics bag to the hallway, and leans against the doorframe in a way she hopes is casual.

"So, um...is this it, or are you going to have to – ow, *FUCK* –" her miserable attempt at flirting is interrupted when she swipes a hand up to her face, and then her left eye is twitching uncontrollably as something gets caught in it.

"Oh, shoot – hold still!" She hears Sam say, and then warm hands are grasping her chin and Sam's face is close to hers, her perfume filling Alex's senses.

"Yeah, you have something in your eyelash. Hold on," Sam says matter-of-factly, before efficiently fishing out the debris. It's over in a matter of seconds, the only evidence of the encounter the wateriness of Alex's eye.

"Uh. Thanks," Alex stammers, and Sam smiles, hefting one of the bags over her shoulder. "Do you need help with that?"

"Oh, no, I'm fine. I'll get it all back to King Asshole."

The unexpected swearing sets something off inside Alex, and she laughs nervously, an harsh braying sound that makes her clap a hand over her mouth, horrified. But Sam just chuckles, ducking her head and looking up through her eyelashes.

"I'll see you around?" Sam asks, seeming hopeful, and Alex blinks stupidly in her face.

"Yeah." *God, I hope so.*

Alex closes the door behind her regretfully, leaning back against it and trying to suss out exactly what's happening in her chest. It's unfamiliar, something she hasn't felt since...well, since Maggie. The very earliest days. And, for the first time in literal years, the thought of Maggie doesn't send an immediate spike of pain through her gut. A twinge, sure, but it's dulled.

And...she wants to see Sam again.

Immediately she turns and throws the door open intending to run down to the lobby, only to be faced with Sam standing in the hallway, a surprised look on her face and a hand raised in

the knocking position. She's biting her lip, and she looks a little bit nervous.

"Oh!" Alex says breathlessly. "Hi. Did you forget something?"

Sam grins, and Alex feels it down to her toes.

"I did," Sam says. "Your number."

It's been less than a day, but Alex already likes Metropolis.

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As the plane gains momentum and pressure assaults her ears, Lena tries to take deep, steady breaths – in through the nose, out through the mouth. In, out. *It's fine. I'm fine.* Her knuckles are white on the armrest, and the man across the row in First Class looks at her with some concern.

"You okay?"

"Fine," Lena grinds out, thankful when the plane starts to even out. As soon as the seatbelt light turns off, she's ordering several drinks and hoping the fear will ease.

It had been interesting, trying to explain to the front desk manager that a complete stranger would be staying at her place for the next two weeks – but since she owns the building, an understanding was reached fairly quickly. It also helped that, according to the extensive background check that her head of security handed her yesterday, Alexandra Danvers works for the FBI.

The knowledge that Alex works for one of the most secure organizations in the country certainly helped to ease Lena's anxiety about having a stranger in her house, but her anxiety over flying still persists.

"You know, the seat next to me is free, if it'll make you feel safer –" the man starts, his voice taking on a quality that she's sure he thinks is very smooth, and Lena rolls her eyes.

"I'd honestly rather the plane crashed."

The man blinks, and then scowls at Lena's clear dismissal.

"Whatever, bitch..." he mutters, and Lena finds that his ire actually makes her feel better.

That, and the four glasses of whiskey she puts away over the next 6 hours. By the time she's grabbing her luggage and following the driver she hired to take her to Midvale, the buzz is wearing off, and she winces at the blast of heat that greets her when they leave the airport. She slides into the cool interior of the towncar gratefully, leaning her forehead on the window.

Midvale turns out to be exactly what she thought it would be. It's just off the freeway, with a quaint little grocery store, one gas station, and a single bar that seems to have patrons even at 2 in the afternoon. The main road is lined with small shops – a hardware store, a movie rental place (*really? What year is it?*), a barber – and the place she's heading to is just out of town.

The house itself is exactly like the pictures. It's a cute little beige stucco on a quiet road, with a wooden gate up to the front porch. Interestingly, it lacks Christmas decorations, both inside and outside – not so much as a stocking adorns the inside of the house. Lena doesn't have any in her own apartment, but that's because she's a Scrooge. Midvale just seems like a Christmas decoration kind of town.

Once she's tucked her suitcase away in the closet of the small master bedroom, she takes a minute to explore. The upstairs bathroom has a nice clawfoot tub but no shower, and the downstairs bathroom has a standing shower and no tub. There's a decent kitchen, a nicely decorated hallway – and her earlier question is answered when she enters the cozy sitting room and sees a large menorah in the window. A modest star of David sits on the mantel, and Lena can see a photo of a young dark-haired girl and an older blonde woman – assumedly her mother – at what looks like a bat mitzvah.

“Cute,” Lena mutters, smiling at a 13-year-old Alex grinning at the camera over a huge scroll. She's not positive, but she's pretty sure that Hanukkah is about to start. She briefly wonders what could have happened to make Alex leave her family for the holidays and jet off across the country.

Once she's adequately investigated the house, she decides to venture out into town. She climbs into Alex's little hatchback and hits the grocery store first, absolutely reveling in not being recognized (although she's not entirely unnoticed – she stands out a bit in her expensive dress and heels). She wheels her little cart through the narrow aisles, ignoring the voice in her head that reminds her of her strict dietary rules and instead grabbing everything that looks good, and by the time she gets to the cashier the cart is overflowing.

“Having a party?” the woman asks as she scans the items, giving Lena a wink, and Lena chuckles to herself, looking at the selection of wine and cheese and junk food on the conveyor belt.

“Something like that.”

*Something like that* ends up being Lena in a cotton robe, alone in bed, surrounded by food wrappers and drinking red wine straight from the bottle.

‘Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street’ plays softly on the TV at the end of the bed, but it's not holding her attention. She tries reading one of the books she brought with her, one of the novels she bought months ago and hasn't had any time to read, but she puts it down after only a few minutes. She floats in the pool, goes for a walk around the neighbourhood - she even flips through Alex's CD collection, having a little private dance party to The Killers. But, nothing helps.

Lena is bored.

She thought that small town would mean cute, charming, relaxing. A place to rest and recharge. And it is all of those things – but there’s also *nothing to do*. She’s so used to the frantic activity of work and the city, and this is so far outside her comfort zone it’s not funny. Even after the laundry list of activities she did today, somehow, it’s still *only 8pm*.

By 9, she’s completely ready to call this whole stupid venture a failure and fly back to Metropolis in the morning. She calls Sam, who adamantly refuses to let her entertain the thought, but that might have something to do with the fact that she called Alex ‘super cute’. This whole idea – a vacation, disappearing from the only thing that’s given her any sense of purpose in the last 6 years – was a bad idea. She books herself a plane ticket, and she can just stay in a hotel room so that Alex doesn’t have to fly home.

She goes to sleep that night fully confident in her plan.

And then 2am rolls around, and with it comes a wrench in the gears.

Three loud knocks on the front door have Lena up and out of bed in seconds, already tying the robe around her middle and digging her taser out of her purse. Years of wearing a target on her back has made her prepare for the worst in situations like this, and she descends the stairs with the weapon gripped confidently in her hand.

More knocks resound, louder this time – almost loud enough to shake the windowpanes on either side – and Lena startles a little. Whoever this is, they’re insistent. And strong.

“Aleeeex, open uuuuuup!”

Lena blinks, stopping dead in the front hall. The voice on the other side of the door is decidedly not what she was expecting – it’s female, for one, and melodic, if slightly too loud. The knocking starts up again, and Lena calls out nervously.

“Who is it?”

“It’s me!” the voice calls unhelpfully, and Lena huffs. “Look, can you open up, please, because I have to pee *so* bad and I really don’t want to do it on the front porch in front of all your neighbors –“

With a final sigh, Lena wrenches the door open, and ends up with an armful of *person* as the mystery visitor – who had clearly been leaning on it – lurches forwards. Her taser hits the carpet, and the woman rights herself again, apologizing profusely.

“Shit, sorry Alex, you just took so long and –“ Finally, bright blue eyes track up Lena’s bare legs and robe all the way to her face, widening comically.

“You...are *not* Alex.”

Lena arches a brow, crossing her arms, and the woman seems to blush.

“Or, uh, if you are, I am...much drunker than I realized.”

That pulls a begrudging chuckle from Lena, and she relaxes slightly. She's still on guard, but upon inspection, the woman seems harmless enough – in fact, Lena notes as the woman licks her chapped lips, she's actually pretty. Very pretty. Blonde waves, blue eyes, full lips, an adorable scar between her eyebrows, and what Lena can tell are surprisingly defined shoulders under her fitted blazer.

One might even say she's *hot*, if one were so inclined. Which Lena is not.

"I'm really sorry, I wasn't expecting...you," the woman stutters, and Lena feels an icy sliver of her heart starting to melt.

"I wasn't expecting you, either," Lena admits, allowing a smile.

Kara stares at her for a few seconds more, and then shifts back and forth uncomfortably. "Could I still, uh..." She inclines her head inside, and Lena understands.

"Oh! God. Of course, yes. Come in." The fact that she's letting a stranger inside is not lost on her, but the woman seems to know Alex well enough to barge inside as she has, so Lena puts it out of her mind.

She stumbles inside, but instead of immediately taking off her coat, the woman moves a hand towards a small decorative box that Lena hadn't noticed before, affixed to the wall next to the doorframe. She raises them up to touch it absently and then kisses her fingers, before finally shrugging out of her jacket and throwing it over the couch in a way that's far too familiar to just be a random neighbor. Clearly this person *knows* Alex, and Lena relaxes incrementally.

The blonde woman also shrugs her blazer off gratefully, and Lena gets a full glimpse of what's underneath – a tank top, smooth skin, muscles that literally *ripple*, *how is that even possible, do people actually look like that in real life* -

Before she has a chance to fully appreciate the view, the woman has turned back around, a hand outstretched.

"Sorry, I forgot – I'm Kara! Kara Danvers. Alex's sister." Kara's handshake is firm, and after it, she twirls on her heel and heads towards the downstairs bathroom.

"Right. I'm staying here while Alex is away, I'm...Lena Luthor." Lena says it quickly, like ripping off the band-aid, and braces herself for the bomb to hit. For the moment of realization. But, it doesn't come. Kara just grins at her goofily as she ducks into the washroom.

"Just like that, one word? Lenaluthor?"

Lena exhales in a great whoosh, and all of her tension goes with it. She can hear the muffled noise of contentment behind the door, and it should by all rights be *weird* but instead it's just annoyingly endearing.

She catches sight of herself in the hall mirror – her hair is slightly mussed from bed, and her robe is slipping over a shoulder and revealing a distressing amount of skin. She hurriedly

fusses with her hair as the toilet flushes and the tap runs, but when she gets to the robe, she hesitates before leaving it as it is.

*God, what am I doing?*

Kara emerges again, wiping her damp hands on her jeans, and Lena straightens instinctively.

“So, uh...where *is* Alex?” Kara asks, looking abashed. “She might have told me, but I’ve been – I was - drinking, earlier,” she finishes lamely, and Lena has to suppress a laugh at the tired hand gesture that accompanies it. Kara dips into the kitchen, opening the fridge and pulling out a bottle of water.

“Alex is in Metropolis.”

Kara chokes mid-swig.

*“Where?”*

“Metropolis. You know, most populous city in the continental U.S.?” Lena jokes, and Kara takes another, slower drink of water. Lena watches her throat bob, her own mouth feels strangely dry.

“I know where it is,” Kara frowns slowly, looking more and more confused as she wipes water off her face. “It’s just that that’s not possible.”

“I assure you, it is.”

“Alex doesn’t go *anywhere*.”

Lena finally lets out the proper laugh she’s been trying to hide. Kara grins at the sound, and Lena covers her mouth demurely.

“She put this place on a home exchange site. So, we exchanged. She’s staying at my place in Metropolis, and I’m staying here.”

Kara stares at her for a moment, looking doubtful. “Do people actually do that?”

“Apparently,” Lena answers, slightly self-deprecating. Kara nods, seeming to accept that, and sits on the couch. She pats the cushion next to her, and inexplicably, Lena finds herself sitting down.

Kara seems to contemplate something, “Look, I’m sorry about the intrusion. Although I may not appear it, I am, in fact, Alex’s semi-respectable little sister. “

“Semi-respectable?”

“Yes,” Kara grins, and god help her, Lena can *feel* something. Something in her gut, pulling her towards this woman. It’s perplexing, but somehow intoxicating. “But on the rare occasion that I go for drinks with friends and get a little tipsy, Alex lets me crash so I don’t drive home.”

Lena nods, and Kara moves closer as if to hear her better. Their knees brush, and Lena can feel it like a static shock.

“Smart idea. Good sister,” Lena says, fully aware of the nervousness entering her voice. “Are you feeling okay now?”

“Oh, yeah. I was barely buzzed, but I like to be safe,” Kara replies, her fingers tapping a rhythm on the couch cushion. Lena nods, shifting back and forth. “So how's it going so far? I mean, up until I showed up and ruined your night.”

Lena scoffs gently. “It's not going so great, honestly. I'm leaving tomorrow on a noon plane.”

“Oh. When did you get here?”

“Yesterday.”

Kara laughs, loud and genuine. “Wow. We've made a great impression on you, haven't we?”

“No, it's not that,” Lena insists, trying to articulate the strange discomfort she's felt all day. “It's just that...I'm not quite myself right now. I came here on a stupid whim. Honestly, I've never thought about anything less. It's all very unlike me.”

Kara nods, looking thoughtful and interested and absolutely focused on what Lena is saying. Her face seems close suddenly, overly close - Lena can practically feel the heat coming from her. It's disconcerting, and Lena stands abruptly, disrupting their little bubble.

“Would you like something to drink? Glass of water? Tea? Wine, maybe?” Lena asks hurriedly.

As if she can sense what Lena is getting at, Kara points to a cabinet next to the kitchen door.

“I think there's a bottle of scotch,” she says, and Lena almost melts in relief.

*Thank you, Alex.*

Lena pours them both a healthy serving, throws her own back, pours another one, and takes a huge mouthful of the new glass. Kara watches thoughtfully, holding her own but not touching it. Instead, she takes a long swig of her water bottle.

“So, Lena, you're not married, are you?”

Lena, mid-sip, barely keeps herself from choking at the unexpected question.

“Why?” Lena asks, looking down at herself. “Do I *look* not married?”

Kara blushes fiercely, the red creeping up her shoulders all the way to her forehead as she rubs the back of her neck. “No! No, it was just a backwards way of asking if you were married. Which is a terrible, awkward way of asking if you're...single.”

Something tightens in Lena's chest. It's a strange feeling, wholly unfamiliar, and her voice comes out higher than usual and a tiny bit strangled when she replies.

"No, not at all. Not *not* single, I'm actually - I mean, *no*, I'm not married. I'm...single."

It's the single worst-constructed sentence that's ever left her mouth, and she's wincing before it's even finished. She can't look Kara in the eye, see the judgement of her intelligence there, so she busies herself putting the scotch bottle away and brushing imaginary dust from the cabinet.

"Me too," she hears Kara reply softly, and Lena is pretty sure that at this point she must be able to *hear* the hammering of her heartbeat. Kara stands, rubbing her hands together, and Lena finally pulls herself together and turns around.

"So...is it okay if I stay?" Kara asks, looking adorably unsure. "I really don't drive if I've had a drink or two, and there aren't any decent motels around here. I'll be gone before you even wake up. I promise, you'll never lay eyes on me again."

A pang of disappointment stabs through Lena's tense chest at the idea of never seeing Kara again, but she forces herself to nod.

"No, that's fine. Sure. Of course. I mean, it's your sister's house," Lena says, crossing her arms tightly. Kara visibly sags with relief.

"Thank you," Kara says, as if Lena is doing her some great favour and not simply agreeing to let her sleep on her own sister's couch.

*I guess that's it, then. We go to sleep, I leave tomorrow. End of story.* The thought makes Lena's chest ache.

"Let me just get you a blanket," Lena says, more for an excuse to not be looking at Kara anymore than anything else. She turns towards the hall closet on instinct, and Kara calls out to help.

"In the cupboard, on top of the Scrabble."

Lena grabs a blanket and pillow, replacing the displaced scrabble box, and she can hear Kara rustling around behind her. Probably getting ready for bed. Goosebumps erupt on her arms at the thought, and she can feel the warm buzz of the scotch loosening up her inhibitions.

"So why is it you aren't quite yourself right now?" Kara asks, hanging her coat over the side of an armchair and taking off her shoes. She sets them on the floor under the couch, wiggling her toes into the rug and looking at Lena expectantly as she holds out the blanket.

"Well," Lena starts, "I just broke up with someone. Yesterday."

Understanding dawns on Kara's face. "Ah. So recently single, then."

Lena nods. "And I guess what I was feeling was that I didn't want to be alone over the holidays, and I thought that if I was somewhere else that I wouldn't realize that I was alone?"



The sympathetic look on Kara's face seems to loosen something in her brain. All her confusing thoughts spill out, unbidden, and the emotional weight of it is enough to make her sink onto the couch beside Kara.

"But then I got here, and I've never felt more alone in my life," Lena admits quietly. "Big surprise. Bet you're glad you knocked on this door."

Her attempt at levity is foiled by Kara, in her infinite empathy.

"I am, actually," Kara murmurs, her eyes laser-focused on Lena, and another set of unfamiliar feelings assaults her body. Warm tingles erupt throughout her torso and shoot to her pelvis, gathering there and making camp. The eye contact goes on, longer than Lena can handle, and she finally breaks it off by standing up again.

"Yes, well...sorry. And, good night," Lena says quickly, rubbing at her arms. Kara follows her, standing up and stepping into Lena's space.

"Sweet dreams," Kara says, her voice soft - and then, before Lena can process what's happening, she's already leaned forward and kissed Lena firmly on the lips.

Something zips through her, then. It's sudden, and barely-there, but it's new and *good* and it seems to be connected to the brief 2-second period when Kara's lips were on hers.

Kara, on the other hand, looks mortified.

"I am - oh god. I am *so* sorry. It was - some weird instinct, I didn't even *ask*, you're so *pretty* and I just -"

The slight buzz from the scotch is making Lena feel warm and brave, and she pushes all other thoughts - thoughts that this is a bad idea, that she *can't do this*, the thoughts that were drilled into her for years - and instead focuses on Kara. On her soft lips, and her bright eyes, and the smell of the leather jacket still lingering on her shirt.

Finally, she interrupts Kara's panicked rant with a torpedo of a sentence.

"Kara, do you think you could...would you mind, trying that again?"

Kara's embarrassment turns to surprise, and then, clear as day, hunger. She blinks, and at Lena's even stare, she leans in again with more confidence.

At the first touch of her lips, the feeling comes back, stronger than before - like a previously-dark part of herself is flickering to life, opening up and *demanding* something. Kara's tongue brushes her lower lip, and she feels it down to her toes - she pulls back, overwhelmed at the assault of sensation.

Kara's eyes are wide, the iris almost overtaken by black. There's a sweet crinkle between her brows, and one pupil is slightly bigger than the other for some reason, and the little imperfect details make Lena's heart pound all the faster.

“Bad?” Kara asks nervously, and Lena raises a hand, brushing her thumb over Kara’s lips. Kara draws it into her mouth, sucking softly, and the answering throb between Lena’s thighs almost makes her knees give out.

“Weird,” Lena admits, her voice a little hoarse. “Kissing a total stranger. Kissing a *woman*.”

Kara releases her thumb with a slick pop and kisses the pad, grinning. “Really? I do it all the time.”

Lena laughs breathlessly. She’s probably laughed more in the last 20 minutes than she has in the last 2 years, and Kara does it so effortlessly.

“I’ve only dated men,” Lena admits, feeling suddenly inadequate in the face of Kara’s experience. “I’m not – I didn’t ever let myself consider this.”

“No time like the present, right?” Kara says hopefully, and against all odds, Lena finds herself agreeing.

It’s Lena who leans in, this time. Kara’s mouth opens to her, somehow using the exact right amount of tongue, and her hands tangle in Lena’s hair – and, yes, there go her knees. The sheer sensuality and *focus* of Kara’s kisses make them weak, and she sinks onto the couch, Kara following without breaking their kiss for a moment.

Kara pulls her closer until Lena is almost in her lap, and Lena loses herself in it. Kara kisses thoroughly, with a single-minded purpose, and her lips drift everywhere – to each of Lena’s eyelids, her cheekbones, her throat - and every single one makes her feel more than James did in 5 years.

“You know, given that I’m in a bit of a personal crisis,” Lena starts, gasping as Kara kisses her way down her throat, “And I find myself in a total stranger’s home, in a town that I can’t *actually* remember the name of at the moment, and considering that you showed up and you’re...just...insanely good-looking and really drunk –“

“I’m not drunk,” Kara mumbles into her neck.

“- and probably won’t remember me anyway,” Lena persists, needing the lie, needing that perception of a no-strings arrangement, “I’m thinking we should have sex. If you want.”

Kara freezes, pulling back from nibbling at Lena’s ear and looking at her incredulously.

“Is that...a trick question?” Kara asks, and Lena laughs for what feels like the hundredth time.

“No, I’m serious. And not that this matters, but I’ve never said anything like that in my entire life before,” Lena says, her hands nervously smoothing up and down Kara’s arms, over her shoulders, feeling the muscle and soft skin. “It’s just that this whole *knowing that I’ll never see you again* thing, that you have no idea who I am, and this won’t ever leave this place – it’s kind of exciting.”

Kara nods, her hands still on Lena's hips. Her eyes look a little hazy, focused on Lena's mouth, but Lena can't seem to stop talking.

"I mean, this is what a vacation's supposed to be, right? You're supposed to vacate your life, do the unexpected, and you are...*definitely* unexpected," Lena finishes, and Kara nods again.

"So, do me, right?" Kara grins, and Lena laughs, pushing playfully at her shoulders.

"God, and you're *funny*, which is a bonus. Nobody makes me laugh that easily."

"Yeah?" Kara asks brightly, and Lena slides her hands up that strong neck, cupping her jaw.

"Yes."

"Never meet me when I'm sober," Kara whispers.

"Deal."

It's hard to tell who leans in first on the third run. But inevitably they crash together again, and Kara pulls Lena fully into her lap. Something about this feels right, feels natural in a way she wasn't expecting. There's no stubble, no harsh cologne or big, pushy hands or insistent tongues. Just Kara, lean and firm, and her clean, fresh smell and soft skin and skilled mouth, *god*, so skilled that Lena's toes are curling already –

Lena has no idea how she's measuring up.

With that startling thought, Lena pulls back again, Kara chasing her lips absently before she realizes that Lena is looking at her intently. The burn of arousal is almost distracting enough to erase her self-doubt. But not quite.

"I should warn you. I'm not very good at this," Lena says matter-of-factly, and Kara blinks slowly.

"*This*, being?" Kara asks, and Lena takes a deep breath.

"Sex."

It's Kara who laughs this time. "Okay, now that cannot be true," she says, pulling Lena closer, but Lena can hear James in her head – *you know, it'd be nice if you tried, Lena – some people do* –

Her hands clench in the fabric of Kara's tank top.

"Well, the guy that I lived with mentioned it once or twice, and a girl does not forget a comment like that. Not even me," Lena admits. Kara looks so concerned, and the thoughts just keep spilling out. "Add that on top of never being with a woman, and, oh *god*, what am I doing?"

"Lena, you're not –"

Before she can try to reassure, Lena cuts Kara off with another kiss. That new feeling hasn't gone away – in fact it's stronger, with Kara's hands gripping her thighs and Lena's centre grinding slowly into her lap, and Lena is so close to absolutely losing herself in it –

She pulls away, hating herself even as the words leave her mouth.

"I mean, how bad could I be?" Lena rambles, her hips still moving and making her voice breathy. "I figured out three PhDs - sex has to be pretty basic, right?"

Kara laughs incredulously, her hands planted firmly on Lena's ass. Lena chuckles and lets her forehead fall forward onto Kara's shoulder, acknowledging the strangeness of the situation.

"Am I pretty much talking you out of this?"

Kara's arms tighten around her, and she nuzzles into Lena's neck. The softness of it adds a new dimension, something Lena isn't quite sure how to process.

"Strangely, not at all. In fact, you're becoming easily one of the most interesting women I've ever met," Kara counters, and Lena scoffs.

"You're just saying that."

"I'm not!" Kara insists, and she shifts until Lena has to raise her head and meet her eyes dead-on. "Look, if you wanted to just forget this and go to sleep, that's okay. Or if you just want to talk. I mean, 3 PhDs, honestly, I'm a little turned on by that –"

Laughing, Lena pushes Kara down onto her back on the couch, and she decides that talking is done for the night. Kara's hands slip under her robe and the voices in her head finally go quiet, chased away by long, calloused fingers.

It's something else entirely, what Kara makes her feel. Lena has already come twice before they even make it to the bedroom, Kara seems to have no qualms about taking their decidedly R-rated activities to her sister's bed. She just pins Lena's hips to the mattress, wiggles down between Lena's spread legs, and gets to work on making her forget every single person who's ever gone down on her before.

By the time she finally succumbs to sleep, sprawled on her stomach after a particularly spirited round of Kara driving into her from behind with piston-like precision, she doesn't even have enough mental capacity left to consider the fact that she's falling asleep next to someone she met less than 3 hours ago.

Lena wakes up warm, slightly sore, and more relaxed than she's been in years.

Birds are singing outside the window, some kind of songbird that is absolutely not a pigeon. It's something she's not used to, living in the city. Sunlight is filtering through the gossamer curtains instead of being blocked by her own black-out window covers. She feels refreshed. She feels rejuvenated. She feels...

Naked.

Suddenly, she's hyper-aware of the sound of another person's breathing next to her. Prying her eyes open, she's met with a sight that sets off two warring feelings of contentment and anxiety – Kara, the covers resting at her waist and the morning sun playing across the golden skin of her back, blonde hair spread over the pillows. She's still fast asleep, and Lena takes a few deep, calming breaths before easing herself out of bed as quietly as possible.

Shrugging back into her robe, she slips down the stairs and into the kitchen, intent on making a cup of coffee so she can clear the cobwebs in her brain (and the slight haze of arousal that seems to have sprung back to life upon seeing Kara this morning). But she's foiled by Alex's coffee machine – she fills the filter, tops up the water, presses the buttons, but for some reason, coffee eludes her.

She's wrenching open the top of the machine and peering at the mechanisms inside, cursing under her breath, when heavy footsteps echo down the stairs. Kara peeks into the kitchen a moment later, her jeans and belt affixed but still shirtless. Her tank top is slung over her shoulder, and while Lena watches she grabs it and pulls it over her head, her abs flexing.

Suddenly, viscerally, Lena has a flashback to those abs flexing as Kara lifted her against a wall, of grinding helplessly on the hard muscle, of her first of many orgasms being rubbed out embarrassingly quickly on Kara's stomach as the blonde panted into her neck, whispering mind-melting encouragements. The memory makes her feel distinctly unstable.

It doesn't help that Kara grins like Lena is the sun itself, and a strange, hot feeling settles in her chest at the sight of it.

"Good morning," Kara says, slipping her blazer back on and leaning against the doorframe. Lena leans against the counter, needing something to steady herself.

"Morning."

Kara fiddles in the pocket of her blazer, producing a small black case. "I lost my contacts last night, somehow," She says abashedly, pulling out a pair of black-rimmed glasses and putting them on. She blinks cutely as her eyes adjust, smiling as Lena comes into focus. "Much better."

With them on and her hair in a neat bun, Kara somehow manages to be even more attractive than she was last night, and Lena feels like she's holding a magnifying glass up to her entire life. Re-examining every moment – every boyfriend, every half-baked excuse to be physically close to a woman, every bout of uncontrollable feelings in her chest as a frightened teenager at an all-girls boarding school.

*God. I'm gay, aren't I?*

"Can I help you with that?" Kara gestures towards the coffee machine, and Lena steps back from the stupid machine gratefully.

"I should know how to do this," she says self-deprecatingly, feeling the embarrassment grow tenfold when Kara reaches behind the machine and holds up the power cord, dangling and clearly not plugged in.

“Three PhDs, huh?” Kara winks, and Lena blushes furiously, rubbing her forehead.

“Well, in my defense, I literally had my brains fucked out last night,” Lena fires back without thinking, and the statement seems to surprise them both – Lena claps a hand over her mouth and Kara gapes slightly, looking surprised but delighted.

“You are *fascinating*,” Kara murmurs, starting the coffeemaker. Lena moves past her and grabs the coffee pot, moving it out of the way and letting the fresh liquid pour directly into her mug instead, just so she can have something to do with her hands. Kara fidgets next to her, drumming her hands on the counter and then wiping them on her pants.

“So, um...” Kara starts, but Lena cuts her off before she can gain any steam.

“Listen, Kara. You don't have to worry. Okay?” Lena assures, and Kara frowns in confusion.

“Okay?”

Lena hurries to clarify. “I mean, it was great. Amazing. Life-changing, if I’m being honest. But you don’t have to...I don’t know. Guide me in some journey. This can be just...a night.”

“Right. Definitely,” Kara nods, fiddling with her glasses. “Also, for the record - your ex-boyfriend is, in my opinion, really mistaken about you.”

Lena snorts into her coffee cup, hoping her blush isn’t too apparent. She’d tried a lot of *very* new things last night, and Kara’s response had seemed enthusiastic at the time, but the confirmation makes her a little giddy.

“Well, yeah, you were drunk,” Lena deflects, but Kara shakes her head.

“I really wasn't.”

Kara holds her gaze for a few seconds past appropriate, and Lena is the one to clear her throat and break the connection.

“I should probably be going,” Lena says, putting down her half-empty mug and busying herself with cleaning out the coffee machine. “I have a flight to catch.”

“Oh, yeah. I gotta get going in a few minutes myself,” Kara agrees, but she makes no move to leave the kitchen. She just stays where she is, watching. Lena can feel the burn of her gaze, can practically detect its path up and down her back.

“So, listen,” Kara says, and there’s a new intensity in her voice that makes a strange, unwelcome sense of hope take root in Lena’s chest. “I know you're leaving, and you’re absolutely not interested in getting involved, but just so you know, I’m...really bad at this. I’d probably mess this up somehow –“

“You *really* don't have to do this,” Lena waves her off, cutting off what she’s sure is a very earnest turn-down. “I'm sort of a mess in this area myself. And, honestly, we hardly know each other.”

“Right,” Kara agrees, but she still looks doubtful. “I just wanted to make sure –“

“I’m not going to fall in love with you, Kara,” Lena says decisively, even as something inside her whispers otherwise. “I promise.”

Kara blinks owlshly.

“Okay. Nicely put. Thank you,” Kara says, but she seems almost...disappointed. Almost self-conscious. Lena tells herself to just leave it, that she owes absolutely nothing to this stranger that, come 10 minutes from now, she’ll never see again, but the slightly wounded look on Kara’s face pulls at her heart.

“No, it’s just –“ Lena starts, sighing in frustration at her inability to articulate herself. “I know myself. I’m not sure I even fall in love at all. Not in the way other people do.” Kara looks shocked at the admission, her concern evident in her furrowed brow.

Lena sighs. “How’s that for something to admit? Hi, nice to meet you, I’m a soulless monster,” she jokes, but Kara remains thoughtful.

“Not soulless. Just interesting,” Kara says, and her voice is achingly heartfelt. It’s too much, the genuine care in her tone makes Lena feel *seen* in a way that she’s entirely unprepared for, and she dives back into the comfort of deflection.

“You’re probably thankful we’re never seeing each other again, right? No need to stress about calling back the weirdo who overshares to the first stranger who stumbled into her house.”

“But what if I wanted to call you?” Kara blurts, and even she seems surprised at her own outburst.

Lena’s instinct, her immediate reaction, is to agree. To say yes to this strange and fascinating woman, to open herself up to whatever this could be. But it wouldn’t work. Not with the distance, not with Lena’s issues – she’d end up breaking Kara down just like she did James, unintentionally making her feel unwanted and inferior until she left just like everyone else.

Kara deserves more.

“Kara,” Lena sighs, trying to communicate her complicated thoughts, but Kara recoils immediately at her hesitation.

“Right. Sorry. Apparently, not the right thing to say at all,” Kara says, grabbing her jacket and throwing it over her shoulders with a nervous laugh. “Look. If, somehow, your flight gets canceled or for some reason you...I don’t know. Change your mind? I’m having dinner with some friends at the pub tomorrow night. I’d really love to see you again.”

Lena nods, and Kara steps into her space again – and with nothing but the counter behind her, Lena can’t even step back.

“You’re *really* great,” Kara says with conviction, and Lena swallows hard.

“So are you.”

Lena *feels* something when Kara leans in for a final, soft kiss - something she's tried to tell herself she doesn't feel, *can't* feel, something that's plagued her since private school. Something she's been trying to smother by spending her life dating the people she thinks she should date, rather than the ones that make her heart soar. But now?

Now she's on vacation. She's in an anonymous town and her mother is nowhere in sight, and last night, she had sex so good that it might as well have been the only sex she's ever had.

And Kara is *right there*, blatantly asking her to give in to this. To a holiday fling.

If there's any time to experiment...shouldn't it be now?

Lena fusses for a full hour after Kara leaves. She packs and unpacks her suitcase three times, sitting on the edge of the bed awash in memories of last night. Of Kara on top of her, inside her, of tasting another woman for the first time and realizing she can never go back. She remembers the feeling of Kara arching into her tongue - the heady, dizzying power in knowing that she made this beautiful woman come. She looks at the pillows, and all she can see is Kara somehow managing to make her laugh between orgasms, until she passed out into the best sleep of her adult life.

And then there was Kara this morning, full of casual praise and toe-curling kisses.

Lena cancels her flight.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

#### MERRY CHRISTMAS EVE

Alex is on the first *first date* she's been on in 2 years, and she's fucking terrified.

She shouldn't be, really. Sam is wonderful – she's funny, and charming, and the date is low-stakes. A casual dinner and drinks, a walk to show Alex around Chinatown and Little Italy, coffee at a tiny bistro near the park. She can see the twinkling lights of an outdoor skating rink across the street, but she and Sam are cozy at their worn wooden table. Sam's foot nudges hers, and her heart races in a way she's not really used to anymore. It's good. It's all good feelings, tingles and butterflies and warmth. But, nonetheless, the nervousness remains.

Thankfully, Sam's warm brown eyes crinkling as she smiles definitely helps.

"So. How are you liking Metropolis so far?" Sam asks, and Alex answers honestly.

"It's...growing on me," Alex says, and Sam grins at that, taking a sip of her cappuccino. "It probably helps that I'm staying in the nicest building in the downtown core."

"Yeah, Lena's apartment is ridiculously nice for someone who usually sleeps in her office. She's hardly ever there."

"Well, I'm happy to take it off her hands for a few weeks. I'm glad I came."

"I'm glad you did, too."

Alex blushes, rubbing the back of her neck. She's still struggling for a response besides '*you're uh h h h h really pretty*' when Sam's phone goes off, the name "Ruby" lighting up the screen. For the third time that night.

The first two times didn't bother her – you can't control other people calling you, and Sam apologized and silenced her phone, even though Alex insisted that she could take it. But this is the third time this Ruby woman has called in one night, and this time, Sam frowns at it.

"I'm really sorry, I have to take this. Hold that thought?"

Alex nods and Sam picks up the phone, walking a short distance away.

"Hi, honey. What's up?" Sam's voice softens the moment the woman on the other end answers, her face broadcasting love and affection, and Alex's heart sinks.

*I should have known.*

There's no way a woman as beautiful as Sam is *actually* single. This 'Ruby', whoever she is, is clearly the one that holds Sam's heart, and Alex doesn't expect to be able to compare. She's not sure why Sam is even out with her, honestly. When Sam hangs up the call with a murmured 'I love you too', it's the nail in the coffin. Sam slips back into her seat, putting her phone back into her pocket, and Alex grabs her coat.

"Woah, hey. Where are you going?" Sam looks confused, and Alex swallows past the lump in her throat.

"It's clear that your interest is...elsewhere. I don't really feel like being the other woman," Alex says matter-of-factly, but the confusion doesn't leave Sam's face.

"The other – Alex, what are you talking about?"

Alex sighs, buttoning her coat and fishing a 10 dollar bill from her wallet to pay for her own coffee. "Whoever Ruby is, she's very lucky."

Understanding dawns on Sam's face, and she shakes her head, putting a hand on Alex's arm. "No, Alex, it's not – it's not like that."

"Then, what's it like?" Alex says quietly.

Sam hesitates.

Suspicious confirmed, Alex purses her lips together. "Look, I had a great time. You almost made this vacation bearable," she admits. "No hard feelings, okay?"

Sad feelings, maybe. And a self-promise to never date again.

"Alex –" Sam starts, but Alex is gone, shoving her hands into her pockets against the cold wind. She's in a cab before Sam can follow, but she's not even back at Lena's apartment yet when her phone lights up with Sam's name. Two text messages, one after the other.

**Sam Arias [9:04 PM]**

***It's complicated, but it's not what you think***

***I really liked our date. Please let me explain?***

Alex dismisses the notifications, dragging her feet up to Lena's apartment. She fully expects to spend the night soaking in Lena's huge tub and dulling the disappointment with some of the *very* expensive bourbon she saw in Lena's liquor cabinet.

What she gets is 5 phone calls, staggered every 10 minutes or so, all from Sam.

She shouldn't answer, she knows. She *shouldn't*. She should leave it – maybe even go home, and call this whole thing a giant loss. But Sam's texts seemed genuine, and honestly, Alex is surprised and a little bit flattered that she seems to be trying so hard to explain herself.

*I can at least hear her out.*

Finally, she picks up the phone.

“You’re very persistent,” Alex starts, trying not to sound impressed.

“Only when it’s important,” Sam replies, completely serious. Alex swallows, the attempt at humour dying on her lips.

“So,” Alex says hesitantly, “Whatever your situation is – open relationship, unhappy marriage, whatever – I’m not really interested in –”

Sam interrupts, and there’s a genuine plea in her voice. “It’s not like that. Look, if I text you my address, will you come over?”

“Right now?” Alex blanches, surprised at the request. She has no idea what Sam needs to show her in person, but she can’t deny she wants to know. “I mean – I guess so.”

“Please. Just come over, and if after that you still don’t want anything to do with me, I’ll leave it. I promise,” Sam says, and Alex is inclined to believe her.

She’s not sure what she was expecting when she knocked on the door of the surprisingly wholesome three-storey house in what can only be described as a suburb, but a 12 year old answering the door is definitely not even in the top 5.

“Who are you?” The girl asks bluntly, and Alex gapes at her for a few seconds before she can answer.

“Uh. Alex. I’m looking for…Sam?”

The girl seems to accept that easily, turning back into the house and shouting down the hallway.

“*Mom!* Someone’s at the door!”

Suddenly, everything clicks, and Alex is honestly a little embarrassed that she didn’t put it together before.

“Ruby?” Alex says tentatively, and the girl turns back around, gesturing for her to come inside.

“Yeah. Are you a friend of my mom’s?”

“Sort of,” Alex edges, but she’s saved from the awkward conversation by Sam rounding the corner with a wooden spoon in her hand. Ruby turns to her, asking a question that’s far too pointed to be innocent.

“Is this the person you were calling earlier?”

It's Sam's turn to blush now, and she pulls Ruby into a side-hug that's just a little too tight, handing her the spoon. "Hey, how about you go watch the milk on the stove before it burns?"

Ruby rolls her eyes, but her smile is mischievous when she heads to the kitchen.

Her absence leaves them alone, and Sam is looking at her with a nervousness that lets Alex know that she doesn't do this often. Alex, on the other hand, is doing her best to compute the situation.

Sam is a mom.

Alex can't see a ring on her finger, so it doesn't seem like she's married. But of course, that doesn't mean anything, lots of people have kids when they're not married, she could still be in a relationship –

Sam interrupts her runaway thoughts with a sentence that settles her nerves considerably.

"I'm a single mom."

Alex relaxes visibly, trying to make it seem like she wasn't just staring with laser focus at Sam's left hand. "What? I wasn't –"

Sam chuckles. "I could see the wheels turning. I swear, Alex, I'm not two-timing you. Ruby's father hasn't been around since before she was born, and there's no-one else."

"Oh, well that's...great," Alex nods, before her eyes widen. "I mean! Not great! It's, sad for her, and for you, if you liked – just it's good that you're not – I'm going to stop talking now," she finishes, rubbing a hand over her hot face.

Sam laughs, and leans forward to kiss her on the cheek. "We were just making cocoa. Want some?"

"I'd love some," Alex says, relieved at the opportunity to shut her mouth.

Ruby, of course, is a great kid. She asks Alex a million questions – about National City, her family, her job. She's whip-smart, just like Sam, and Alex warms to her immediately.

"My mom works for a big company. Is that how you know each other?"

"Uh, no," Alex says, looking at Sam nervously. She hadn't revealed her job during their date, and this seems like a strange way to get into it, but here goes nothing. "I actually work for the FBI."

Sam and Ruby's eyes widen almost in unison, and Ruby looks delighted. "Woah! Seriously?!"

"Yes," Alex laughs, tickled by her fascination. "I'm an agent."

"So...is Alex your real name?" Sam asks with a wink, and Alex laughs into her hot chocolate.

“Yes! We can tell people about our work, you know. Unless it’s an undercover op or something.”

Ruby looks thoughtful. “There’s this girl at school who keeps bugging me. Could you threaten her with your badge?”

“Ruby!” Sam scolds gently, and Ruby sighs, burying her nose in the sticky marshmallow of her drink. When Sam looks away to grab her own mug, Alex shoots Ruby a subtle thumbs-up, and Ruby giggles.

The whole evening feels warm and comfortable, and Alex thinks that maybe...*maybe*, she could get used to this.

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When Lena enters the pub, a wall of sound and heat greets her. It smells like years and years of beer and fried food, and it’s the exact opposite of anywhere she’s used to being. But she finds herself a table anyways, primly draping her jacket over the back of the chair.

*What am I doing here?*

She orders a glass of wine from the nearest passing waiter, and waits. Kara is nowhere to be seen as of yet – the music is loud, but she’s close enough to the door that she’s confident she’ll be able to hear her enter.

This is a bad idea.

She’s not even entirely sure why she’s here. The same unexplainable whim that drove her to come to National City seems to be persuading her to stay, driven by her fascination with the woman that came crashing into her life last night with the velocity of a comet.

She’s halfway through her glass of white already when she sees Kara come in.

Kara's looking especially sharp in chinos and a deep red button-down, and while Lena tries to calm her heart rate Kara spots two people across the room – a man and a woman – and heads to their table. She hugs them enthusiastically, but her eyes are glancing around the room as she does. As if she’s looking for someone else.

*She’s looking for me.*

Finally, Kara’s eyes land on her. It takes a second, but the warm, happy smile that follows is an image that Lena won’t soon forget.

Kara waves her over immediately, introducing Lena to her friends – Winn and Lucy, both unsurprisingly almost as likeable as Kara – and to her surprise, the night is actually fun. *Really* fun. Kara is intoxicating, her relaxed friendliness easing Lena’s usual social anxiety

and before she knows it, she's a little bit drunk. Her fifth glass of wine arrives and the room spins a little, Kara's shoulder seeming like the only thing anchoring her to the earth -

Okay, maybe a lot drunk.

The night starts to blur together a bit after that. Kara's friends leave and then it's just the two of them, and she feels warm and happy and safe – she's in a car, and then she's back at the house, and she can feel how much she wants Kara – the intensity of her wanting is kicked up by the wine, and it's all a little overwhelming, everything is still spinning –

She wakes up alone and half-clothed, with a throbbing headache and a dry mouth.

Squinting at the offensive sunlight streaming through the window, she groans lowly. It's been years since she's been *this* hung over, so hung over that she can't remember what happened the night before, and the quiet singing that drifts up from downstairs tells her that Kara was definitely involved.

She stumbles down the stairs, following the music, to find Kara looking perky in her clothes from yesterday and holding two mugs of coffee.

“Good morning!” Kara chirps, handing a steaming cup to Lena. She immediately takes a scalding sip, and the pain in her mouth is absolutely worth it.

“I haven't had that much to drink in...you know what, I don't know if I've *ever* had that much to drink,” Lena mutters, breathing deep and taking another gulp.

“Yeah, I don't know if *anyone* ever has,” Kara grins, leaning against the counter and stirring sugar into her own drink. “What do you remember?”

“The last thing I remember was coming in here last night, and...” Lena glances into the room behind her. She does remember dragging Kara into the living room, and then – pushing her down on a chair? There was music involved, and...grinding?

Just then, Lena happens to spot something hanging from the armchair. Something black and lacy. Something that is *absolutely* her bra.

It comes rushing back, then – insisting that Kara turn on one of Alex's Rihanna albums, climbing into her lap despite Kara's gentle protests, insisting that she can give a lap dance as good as any National City stripper, falling on her face and having Kara carry her upstairs to bed. With a pained groan, Lena snatches the lingerie up and shoves it into her robe pocket.

“I had nothing to do with that,” Kara says, hands raised in surrender and a delighted grin on her face. The expression makes it clear that, even if she had nothing to do with it, she enjoyed it immensely.

Lena sets her mug down, burying her face in her hands. “Ugh, but you were *here*.”

“Yes...I was.” Kara sounds endlessly pleased, and Lena wants to melt into the floor.

“This is the worst,” Lena grumbles, and Kara snickers into her hand, her eyes crinkling at the corners.

“So I guess we... Did we? I mean –“ Lena has never, in her life, been so drunk that she doesn’t remember sleeping with someone. The idea of the first person to break that pattern being *Kara* makes her feel a little bit ill.

“We did *not*,” Kara says, her face shifting into something more serious.

The relief Lena feels at the confirmation is visceral in its intensity.

“We didn’t have sex?” Lena asks, needing that little bit of extra assurance, and Kara frowns, as if the very idea of it is ludicrous.

“Lena, you were unconscious.”

Oh, god.

“Of course. Well. That must have been *really* attractive,” Lena mutters, sinking into a kitchen chair. Kara follows the movement, still looking a little confused. “Why did you even stay?”

Kara’s answer is, like almost everything she says, both ridiculously genuine and blithely unaware of its effect on Lena.

“Because you asked me to.”

Lena is glad she’s already sitting down, because the warmth that suffuses her at the simple statement makes her feel a little bit faint. It’s so matter-of-fact - *of course I took care of your sloppy drunk ass, Lena, why wouldn’t I* – in a way that Lena isn’t used to. Even Sam, although she would absolutely take care of Lena, would do so while simultaneously calling her a pain in the ass. She’s not entirely sure how to handle it.

*Deflect.*

Lena laughs nervously, taking a sip of coffee to cover her face. “Humiliation, table for one.”

“From the moment I met you, it’s been an adventure,” Kara says warmly, and Lena is saved from flailing around for an adequate response to *that* sentence by Kara putting down her mug and clapping her hands together decisively. “I think we should go into town.”

Lena’s crisis is forgotten.

“What do you mean?”

Kara grabs her wallet and phone from the counter, slipping them into her pockets. “I think we should take a drive, get some lunch, and get to know each other.”

“Really?” She knows it shouldn’t be, but Lena’s immediate reaction is doubt. “Why?”

“Because I’m running out of reasons why we shouldn’t. Aren’t you?”

It should be alarming, how easily she says yes to Kara. It should worry her that she gets dressed, gets in Kara's car, and sits down at a cute bistro across from the blonde with almost no protest. In fact, she actively enjoys the drive. Kara is funny, and intelligent, and interesting. She wants to know more, and that in itself is...sort of terrifying.

"So, you're a journalist?" Lena asks, once the waiter has taken their drink orders.

"I am! For CatCo," Kara replies, smiling at the waiter who fills their water glasses. She thanks him when he leaves, before turning her full attention back to Lena.

"What kind of a journalist are you?"

"A very good one," Kara jokes, and Lena chuckles, shaking her head.

"No. What I meant was, what do you specialize in? I mean, Catco Magazine isn't exactly known for its hard-hitting journalism," Lena notes, and Kara laughs.

"No, you're right. But technically, I work for the Tribune. I do whichever stories they tell me to, really." Kara drums her fingers on the table, a quick rhythm with her pointers.

"What did you study in school?" Lena pushes on, and Kara looks increasingly amused.

"English," she replies, and she snorts when Lena's line of questioning continues.

"And did you always know that it was what you wanted to do?"

Kara leans forward, eyebrows raised. "Okay, Lena, my palms are starting to sweat. I feel like I'm on a job interview," she admits, and Lena exhales, trying to relax her posture a bit.

"Sorry. I'm interrogating you, aren't I?"

"Only a little," Kara says, winking. The ease with which she navigates Lena's awkwardness makes the anxiety start to diminish, but it's still there. Sitting on Lena's chest. Making her say *stupid* things.

"I haven't been on a first date in a long time," Lena confesses, fighting the urge to fiddle with the cutlery. She clenches her fists in her lap, instead.

Kara shrugs. "Well, since we've already had sex, and woken up together *twice* - maybe we can bend the first date rules?"

The unexpected honesty throws Lena off guard, and she lets out a nervous bark of laughter, glancing around to see if anyone else heard. Kara tilts her head, looking endeared.

"Why are you blushing?"

"I didn't realize I was," Lena says honestly, taking a sip of water to clear her head. She puts a cool hand to her forehead, sighing. "Okay. You're right. I'm going to try to be myself. I'm not even completely sure who that is, but I'll try."



“I look forward to it,” Kara says, the sun in the window behind her lighting up her hair like a halo, and Lena feels her heartbeat stutter.

“Okay,” Kara says decisively, seeming to decide to pick the conversation back up herself. “Did I always want to be a journalist.”

“Right.”

“The answer is no. My parents – well, my mother was a lawyer, and my father was a scientist,” Kara says, and the way she brushes over the past-tense piques Lena’s interest. She had talked quite fondly of her mother last night, talked about visiting her in a few days for Hanukkah.

“Was?” Lena asks, and Kara nods.

“They died when I was 12.”

Kara’s light dims a little when she says it, and Lena’s heart sinks. *Good job, Luthor. On your first date you managed to interrogate **and** traumatize her.*

“Oh! I’m sorry, I thought – last night, you said –“ Lena stammers, her hands now wringing in her lap. Thankfully, Kara cuts her off before she can further embarrass herself.

“Oh, yes! Eliza is my adoptive mother. And Alex – they adopted me after the accident. Eliza is a doctor.”

The affection with which Kara talks about her adoptive family makes Lena’s heart ache with a sort of yearning she hasn’t felt in a long time. The kind she used to feel as a child, when the pain of her own loss was strongest and Lillian’s power over her life was at its peak. The yearning to be a part of something, to feel any kind of familial affection.

But, she left that behind a long time ago.

“Kara, I’m so sorry –“ Lena starts, but Kara cuts her off with a wave of her hand.

“It’s fine, honestly,” Kara says, genuinely. She still seems a little sad, but in a way that Lena knows from personal experience never fully goes away. “Thank you, but it’s fine. So, Eliza is a doctor, and Alex works for the FBI...me going into English was sort of a break from the norm. It took me a while to figure out exactly what I wanted.”

“I can imagine so.”

“But, I love it. And I’m good at it!” Kara says, before folding her arms and looking pointedly at Lena. “Okay. I think my time is up. Your turn.”

“My turn?”

“It’s only fair,” Kara says, her eyes twinkling.

“Right. Of course,” Lena agrees. *Deep breaths. You can do this.* “Well, like I said the other night...I own a company that specializes in environmental and medical technology.”

Kara blinks, and Lena braces for the first hurdle.

“Wait. I didn't realize that you *own* the company,” Kara says, not quite managing to hide her awe.

“Probably because I didn't mention it,” Lena admits, twisting her hands together. “But now that I know you were raised by such strong parents...I can say it, and maybe you won't be intimidated.”

Kara laughs quietly. “Intimidated? No. A little turned on? I mean, yeah, definitely.”

Lena relaxes. Kara is still interested, not running for the hills yet, and the first test is passed. She's almost at ease with the conversation when Kara asks a question that Lena has come to dread when it comes to dating.

“Is it a company I'd know?”

And there it is. The big question, and the one that has felled many dates before – it's usually the start of a gradual but noticeable decline in interest, followed by a good old-fashioned ghosting.

“Possibly,” Lena edges, and Kara nods with interest. “It's...L-Corp.”

Kara's face goes on a journey. Lena tries to follow it, but she's a bit preoccupied with her own pounding heart.

“You own *L-Corp*?” Kara asks, her voice tinged with awe, and Lena shifts uncomfortably.

“My family owns it, technically. But since most of them are now dead or in jail, it's...mine,” she finishes awkwardly, and Kara nods, her eyes still a little wide.

“Wow. I mean...wow. That must be really, really hard.”

“I know it can be off-putting, so – wait, what?” Lena blanches, her brain finally catching up to what Kara actually said.

“To handle that all on your own,” Kara says, her concern evident. “You said your family is gone, right? I can't imagine how hard it must be to run an entire company you didn't ask for when you're not even 30. I mean, you're a scientist – owning a company must be totally different from what you wanted to do.”

Lena is, frankly, floored. She's never once had someone express sympathy over her job – inferiority, jealousy, outright derision, yes. Never sympathy. But Kara's eyes are soft, and her hand is warm when she lays it on top of Lena's on the table.

The moment stretches between them, Kara waiting patiently and Lena opening and closing her mouth soundlessly, but finally something in her chest seems to click, and she voices a

thought that she isn't usually capable of admitting.

"Yeah, it's...it's a lot," Lena confesses quietly, and Kara smiles in understanding.

"What about your family?"

"What about them?" Lena scoffs.

Kara chuckles. "Well, it sounds complicated. I'm here to learn about you."

*Right. Fair is fair.*

"Okay," Lena breathes. "I'll say it fast. My mother died when I was 4 years old. The Luthors – well, it is complicated, you're right. But, they adopted me, and Lillian's rules were...strict. I wasn't allowed to keep any of my things. I was expected to leave everything. Become a Luthor."

"Oh, Lena," Kara murmurs, and her voice is so soft, so full of empathy and understanding, that Lena's throat feels thick. She swallows, pushing down the completely unwelcome wave of emotion. The need to distract is strong, to deflect, and the only thing she can think to do is to keep talking.

"Lex always tried to make me feel included, but then my father died when I was 11, and Lex got sent to boarding school. Every time he came back, he was more distant. I think I cried myself to sleep for..." Lena swallows, the memory of those lonely nights rising up – of lying in bed in the Luthor manor, nobody else in that huge drafty house besides Lillian and the staff. Knowing that, without Lex around, she was completely alone in the world. Now that she's opened the floodgates, she can't seem to stop herself from spilling *everything*.

"Well. A long time," Lena says finally. "And then I realized that...it did nothing. I had to adapt. Toughen up. And, well, I got through it and I haven't really cried since. I also haven't told anyone this, ever."

Lena expects stunned silence, after the veritable flood of trauma that she accidentally unleashed. But Kara just tightens her hold on Lena's hand, the crinkle between her brows deep with concern.

"Wow. Lena, that's –"

"And then last year Lex got arrested, and my mother went on the run, and I had to come in and clean up all the dirty little experiments he was doing and try to bring the company into the light again." Lena can hear the tremor in her own voice, and it's mortifying.

*God, stop talking, stop talking -*

"And that's my tragic little story. Let's order," Lena finishes tersely, grabbing the menu and burying her nose in it. "Goat cheese salad, that looks –"

But Kara isn't content to leave it there.

“Wait. You haven't cried since you were 11?” Kara asks, pulling at the menu until Lena sets it down again.

Lena sighs. “I know it must mean something awful. But it just doesn't happen. No matter how upset I am. I didn't even cry when I broke up with my ex.”

“Well, your ex sounded like a dick, so I don't blame you,” Kara quips.

Lena laughs, nodding. “Yeah, you're right about that. Can we just talk about you some more, please?”

Kara, bless her, takes the hint in stride.

“Okay,” Kara says easily. “Absolutely. Well, I cry all the time.”

Lena snorts into her water glass. “You do not.”

“I do!” Kara swears, her hands raised. “More than anyone you've ever met.”

“You don't have to be this nice,” Lena insists, but Kara continues, laughing warmly.

“It happens to be the truth. A good book, a Disney movie, a birthday card, I *weep*.”

“You're ridiculous.”

“It's true! Just ask Alex! You should have seen me when we watched *Up*.”

Lena is spared from the banter by the waiter returning for their food orders. Kara requests more food than Lena has ever seen a single person eat, and she's even more shocked when Kara manages to actually consume *all* of it while Lena picks at her own salad and bread. It should be revolting, watching Kara practically inhale enough food for three people, but something about it is actually captivating.

Side-stepping that strange thought, Lena turns the conversation to Kara's family, and the upcoming Hanukkah celebrations.

“So, Alex is your adopted sister. I noticed the menorah – are you Jewish as well? I only ask because you were 12 by the time you were adopted, you don't have to tell me if it's too personal –” Lena realizes halfway through her question that it's an extremely personal thing to ask, and she's relieved when Kara just waves off her increasingly panicked rant.

“It's fine! Lena. It's fine,” Kara smiles, putting a hand over Lena's again. “I converted after I was adopted. I mean, my parents weren't really religious of any sort, so it was a big change, but the Danvers...they made it feel like home, you know? They never forced me to go to temple, and they gave me a bat mitzvah a year after they adopted me. I mean, got everyone together, paid for everything – they aren't cheap, and Alex had only had hers a few years before. It made me feel like...like we really were family. Everything just sort of fit.”

“I've never felt like that about anything,” Lena admits, and Kara squeezes her hand sympathetically. A tiny voice in the back of her head is nudging her, reminding her that there

is *one* thing that immediately felt like it fit and it's sitting across the table from her right now, but in true form Lena seizes it by the hair and shoves it into a box.

Lena is hung over, and she hasn't showered, and she spilled her life secrets to an almost-stranger, but somehow, it's easily the best date she's ever been on. There were no lulls in conversation, Kara lets her pay the cheque with only minimal protest, and she puts a strong hand on Lena's lower back as they leave the restaurant that makes Lena's knees a little bit weak.

They're even weaker when Kara has her pinned to the side of her SUV, making out in broad daylight and completely uncaring of their potential audience.

She should be more careful, she knows. But there's something thrilling about the public display – about letting Kara's hand slide down to her thigh and knowing that nobody in the vicinity cares about who she is, that the strange looks they're getting are entirely because they're two anonymous women sucking face in a small-town parking lot and nothing else.

They do manage to disengage their lips and get into the car, but only after a passing car full of rowdy guys honks at them as they zoom past, and Kara just giggles into Lena's neck in a way that feels like freedom.

Or, would feel like freedom, if the specter of Lena's return home wasn't hanging over them.

"This was such a great afternoon," Lena says genuinely, as Kara pulls into Alex's driveway.

"It was. I'm glad you said yes," Kara replies, and Lena smiles.

"I'm glad you persuaded me."

Kara reaches for the door handle, but Lena stops her with a quick hand on her shoulder.

"You know, you don't have to walk me in," Lena says in a rush. "You probably have places to be, and I really just need to shower –"

It's not that Lena doesn't want to spend more time with Kara. In fact, all she wants to do for the next 2 weeks is be in Kara's presence, to feel even a shadow of the freedom Kara has given her already. But it's not quiet enough to drown out the fear.

Kara smiles sadly, and her hand leaves the handle to rest on the steering wheel. "You can just say you don't want me to come in."

"No, it's not that," Lena interrupts hurriedly, needing Kara to *know*. "I just...I'm leaving in ten days, Kara. And that makes this complicated. I'm not sure I can handle complicated right now." It's the truth, even if it's a coward's truth. Her life at home is complex enough as it is, and introducing a new element – especially one as contentious as 'long-distance female fuck buddy' – could absolutely topple her already tenuous control.

Of course, as she does with everything, Kara takes it in stride.

“Okay,” Kara says evenly, accepting Lena’s decision with little argument. The only protest is in her eyes. They’re full of resignation, a sad sort of understanding, and Lena wishes she could take it away, make it better somehow –

And then they’re kissing again.

The armrest is digging into Lena’s side, but she doesn’t care. Kara’s lips are soft and her hand is tangled in Lena’s hair, and Lena should be better than this. She should be able to pull away, catch her breath, detach herself from Kara’s mouth and go home. But, even as their lips slowly part and her eyes flutter open, all she wants is to push forward and do it all again. Kara is addicting, and Lena is weak to her pull.

Kara lets out a long breath, her thumb rubbing gently over Lena’s jawline. “And that doesn’t make things complicated?” she jokes, but her voice is a little bit shaky. Somehow, knowing that Kara is just as affected by this whole situation as she is makes it a bit easier to breathe.

“Sex makes everything complicated,” Lena murmurs, her eyes drifting closed as Kara trails kisses from her forehead down the slope of her nose. “Especially when it’s actually good.”

Kara laughs, the burst of warm breath making Lena’s eyelashes flutter.

“You’re really something else, Lena. I...I hope I can see you again. Someday.”

Lena nods, and finally, painfully, she manages to wrench herself out of Kara’s orbit. She kisses Kara’s palm, still resting on her cheek, and reaches for the door handle.

“Me too.”

Kara waits in the driveway until Lena has crossed the threshold of the house, and Lena waits until her car turns the corner and disappears before she finally closes the door, leaning back against it and closing her eyes.

“Goodbye,” Lena whispers, and in that moment, it truly feels final.

It feels less final 3 hours later, when she’s soaking in Alex’s clawfoot tub and thinking about how Kara makes her feel, and her hand is creeping inexorably towards her pelvis. She’s never been one to do this, never had much that made her feel *need* like this before, but Kara is different.

She’s so wonderfully, exhilaratingly *different*.

Her fingers reach a slickness that’s thicker than water, and she gasps at her own sensitivity. Her fingers slide over her clit, back and forth and in circles just like Kara did with her tongue, but it’s not enough. Not hard enough, not soft enough, just not *Kara* enough.

Her hand feels good, but it pales in comparison. Kara played her body like an instrument. Her own fingers feel clumsy, the angle is wrong, and as powerful as her memories are, they aren’t the real thing. She needs more. She needs...

She needs Kara.

Huffing in frustration, she hits the surface of the water, splashing it onto the floor. Her half-hearted attempts at self-pleasure have done nothing more than wind her up even more, and the goodbye she accepted earlier seems less and less important.

Kara's address is on Alex's fridge. She could go there, now, and within half an hour it could be Kara's fingers inside her.

They still have 10 days.

Kara opens the door in sweatpants and a sports bra, to a Lena who's almost excruciatingly aroused. Salt 'n Peppa is playing loudly in the background, and she's holding a feather duster and a broom – she's clearly been cleaning her house, and she's sweaty and beautiful and somehow more *real* than she's ever been before.

"Lena!" Kara says, her voice high and loud. The surprise is evident, and she sets the broom and duster down on an end table.

"Hi," Lena says breathlessly, following Kara's every sweaty, painfully attractive movement.

"I thought –"

Lena cuts her off with a kiss, and Kara responds immediately and with great enthusiasm.

It's a rush more potent than nicotine, having Kara pinning her to the couch again. It's a different couch, in a different apartment, but Kara's warm body is already familiar in the way it weighs her down *exactly* the right amount. She smells like shampoo and lemony cleaning products and tastes like fresh sweat, and it's absolutely, completely working for her.

"Should we – bedroom?" Kara gasps as Lena bites her earlobe, and Lena wraps her legs around her waist.

"Too far," Lena mumbles, grinding her hips up. "Don't stop."

Kara, to her credit, does not stop. She just lifts Lena bodily from the couch, stumbling down the hallway until they finally fall back onto the bed, breathing hard.

Kara's bed is soft, but her skin is softer – and her body is hard. Her thigh is an unstoppable force as it grinds into Lena's centre, and oh my *god*, she's going to come. She's going to come before Kara has even undressed, with her own shirt still half-on, she's going to come all over Kara's sweatpants and nothing can stop it, *nothing can* –

And then Kara pulls away, and Lena's anguished groan is probably loud enough to wake the neighbors.

"Hold on, I just want to – I want to try something," Kara pants, and she fumbles under the bed for a box. Lifting the lid, she pulls out a harness, and Lena's entire lower body melts into the mattress at the sudden knowledge of what Kara wants.

"Do you want – I mean, can I –"

Lena's eager nodding is thankfully enough to spur her into action, and Lena hurriedly strips before waiting with waning patience while Kara struggles out of her own clothes and tightens the buckles. Lena's legs are spread as wide as they can physically be when Kara finally climbs on top of her again, and she wraps them immediately around Kara's waist, pulling until she can feel the toy dragging agonizingly over her clit.

She was never even into sex like this, before Kara. Penetration was never the way to get her off – usually, if she was lucky, she could get a small orgasm out of shutting her eyes tightly and grinding on something. But Kara seems bound and determined to overturn every single one of Lena's expectations. Lena feels the silicone pressing wetly against her and thinks of the stretch, the fullness, the *closeness*, and it's undeniable that she *wants* it.

"Kara, please," Lena whispers, trying to line the toy up where she needs it, but Kara's hips dance just out of reach.

"Please what?" Kara's voice is low and sweet, teasing, but there's something animalistic inside Lena and it is *not* willing to wait. She digs her nails into Kara's ass, pulling until she's exactly where Lena needs her and then arching up.

"I need you inside me –" Lena gasps as the tip of the toy teases at her entrance, and Kara's hips stutter. "Please, *please* –"

There must be something about her desperation, about the frantic way she begs for it, because Kara bends immediately with a low groan. Within seconds it's hard and frenzied, Kara panting into her neck and Lena rocketing to the edge at record speed because despite having no idea that *this* was how she liked it, the unrelenting pace is exactly what she needs.

As her toes curl in the air over Kara's back and her first orgasm of many blots out most other thoughts, Lena knows. Without question.

They may only have 10 days, but god help her, she's going to be spending every last second of them *right* here.

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The trill of Alex's phone is startling in the echo of Lena's huge bathroom, but Alex's irritation at the interruption to her hot tub time eases when she sees the caller ID. She picks up immediately, careful not to get her phone wet.

"So are you ever coming home?" Kara's voice is a welcome sound, and Alex sighs in relief.

"Kara! God. Hi! It's about time you called me back," Alex says with only a little bit of reproach. Kara at least has the decency to sound guilty.

"I know, I'm sorry. I've been...kind of busy. How's it going? Are you liking the big city?"



“It’s great, actually. The city is awesome, and Lena’s place is really something else,” Alex says, letting her feet float to the surface of the hot water. “By the way, you should go meet her.”

“Yeah. I have, actually.”

“You have?” Alex says, surprised, but the thought is interrupted by a beep in her ear. “Oh, shit - call waiting. Can you hold for a sec? I really wanna talk to you.”

“Sure,” Kara says easily, and Alex switches to the other line, an unidentified number. Her greeting is much more cautious this time.

“Hello?”

A much less familiar voice answers, but Alex relaxes when she hears it.

“Alex, hi. It’s Lena.”

“Lena!” Alex says, remembering that they had planned to call each other this afternoon to check up. “I’m glad you called. How are you? How’s it going?”

“Everything’s great. How are you?” Lena asks, and she does actually sound pretty content. How she can be, when she’s missing out on living here, Alex has no idea, but there’s a smoothness to her voice that wasn’t there the first time they spoke just before the trip. Alex can hear the hum of a lawnmower and the familiar sound of her poolside radio, and Alex is glad that Lena is at least making use of the one luxury she has at her tiny house.

“Your place is amazing,” Alex says honestly. “I’m loving it. But actually, can you hold for a minute? My sister is just on the other line.”

“Kara?” Lena asks, and her voice perks up considerably.

Almost...too much.

“Yes,” Alex says slowly. “She said you guys had met.”

“Yes, we did meet. How...how is she?” Lena asks, and the creeping suspicion in Alex’s gut ratchets up a few notches. Lena sounds far too interested to be friendly.

*Oh, Kara, you didn’t.*

“Fine, I think,” Alex answers, intentionally vague. “Can you just hold on for a sec?”

“Of course,” Lena says graciously. Alex clicks the button, and switches back over to Kara’s line.

“Hi, sorry. That was Lena,” Alex says, testing the waters. Kara’s reaction solidifies her suspicions.

“Lena? How’d she sound? How is she doing?” Kara asks excitedly, and Alex frowns.

“She just asked me how *you* are.”

“And what did you say?” Kara says, sounding distressed.

*You have got to be kidding me.*

“I asked her to hold,” Alex says drily, already planning on calling her neighbor to ask exactly *how many* times Kara and Lena have ‘met’ in the last week.

“I can hold while you talk to her!” Kara insists, and Alex drums her fingers on the tile. “Find out how she is, okay?”

Now almost fully convinced that Kara has somehow managed to seduce the billionaire that’s using her pool, Alex switches the line, hearing the lapping of water and Lena softly humming to the music.

“Hi, Lena? My sister wants to know how you are.”

“Oh!” Lena says, sounding pleased. “Can you tell her I’m good? And - what’s she been up to? Did she say?”

Alex rolls her eyes, fully cemented in her new knowledge. “I’m not sure. Do you want me to ask her?” she says sarcastically, but clearly Lena does not pick up on her tone.

“Sure!” Lena answers, and Alex sighs.

*Walked right into that one.*

“Okay. Hold, please,” Alex says pleasantly, and immediately switches to the other line to finally let loose the thought that’s been rattling around in her head for the last few minutes.

“I can’t *believe* that you have had sex with the woman staying in my house!”

To her absolute, abject horror, the voice that answers is definitely *not* Kara.

“Oh my god, she *told you that?*” Lena sounds almost as horrified as Alex is, and Alex is about ready to throw herself from the nearest 39<sup>th</sup> floor window, bathing suit and all.

“Oh, my God – I’m so sorry, I thought I was talking to Kara!” Alex apologizes, wishing she could just curl up and die right here. She’s lived a good life. Maybe it’s time. “God, I’m so – can you just hold on a second?”

She barely waits for Lena’s affirmative before hitting the switch button more decisively, and she rounds on Kara with a vengeance.

“Kara, I can’t *believe* you had sex with Lena. She just went through a breakup, and the one thing she asked me was, “Are there any men in your town?”, assumedly because she didn’t want to be bothered, so I assured her that there were *not*. And then you meet her and immediately get into her pants?!”

“It’s...still me.”

Absolute mortification rolls through Alex at the sound of Lena’s voice, clearly deeply embarrassed. She groans, her head falling backwards onto the marble with a *thunk*.

“Shit - I must have lost her,” Alex mutters, her voice horribly magnified by the echo. “Lena, I am so sorry. Can I just...call you back?” She absolutely needs to be finished with this terrible conversation as soon as possible, and thankfully, Lena seems to feel the same way.

“Sure.”

The call waiting beeps again just as Lena is agreeing, and Alex hits the cursed button in lieu of hanging up the call.

“Yes, hello,” she snaps, expecting a moonstruck Kara calling back and asking what colour Lena’s shoes are today, but the voice that answers is a blessed relief.

“Hey, it’s Sam. Am I in trouble?”

“Oh, thank god,” Alex groans, and Sam chuckles.

“Now that’s more like it,” Sam says cheekily, and even after the horror of the last call, it makes Alex smile. “I was just wondering, what are you up to this Christmas Eve?”

“Uh, nothing, generally,” Alex answers honestly. “Usually I’d be celebrating the 5<sup>th</sup> night of Hanukkah with my family, but...”

“Oh!” Sam says, sounding surprised. “I didn’t realize – well, do you want company?”

Alex thinks about it – about lighting the candles with Ruby and Sam, instead of alone and missing her family – and a feeling of calm washes over her. It actually sounds nice.

“Actually, yeah. That would be great,” Alex says with growing enthusiasm.

“Do I need to grab anything? I don’t know much about Hanukkah,” Sam admits, and Alex smiles at the consideration.

“No, don’t worry. I’ve been doing everything myself for the last few nights, so I have everything I need.” She’d had to go shopping, since Lena apparently doesn’t keep actual food in her apartment, but she’s confident that she won’t need anything extra.

An hour later Ruby is helping her make latkes while Sam sips at the wine, and it’s pretty much exactly what she always hoped her future with Maggie would be. The thought of her ex brings the usual pang to her chest, but Sam’s warm eyes over the rim of her wine glass chase the feeling away quickly.

“So, what’s Hanukkah about?” Ruby asks, as Alex flips the last potato cake and turns off the stove.

“Well, historically, it’s pretty much the same as most other Jewish holidays – ‘someone tried to kill us, let’s eat!’” Alex jokes, and Ruby and Sam both laugh.

“No, seriously!” Ruby says, and Alex hands her a plate with some latkes and applesauce on it.

“I am serious!” Alex insists, grinning. “It has a lot of history, but we can do a lesson another day. For now, I want to stuff my face full of fried food.”

Ruby and Sam agree, and until sunset they do just that. It’s so easy, hanging out with them, and for a few hours Alex is able to forget the fact that she’s going to have to leave all of this behind in a week and a half. Eventually darkness starts to fall, and Alex shows Ruby how to light the candles while she does the blessing. Usually the lighting is Kara’s job as the youngest, but Ruby seems enthused to take it on, grinning when Alex gives her a high five.

All 6 burn against the darkness of the sky, and Kara texts her a menorah emoji, and Alex feels a little less alone in the world. Again, just like when she first met Ruby at Sam’s house, she gets that strange feeling of *home*.

The feeling persists even when Sam gets a little overly tipsy on the Manischewitz (“*It’s so sweet, Alex, it tastes like juice!*”) and Ruby passes out on the couch. Alex guides them both to Lena’s huge bed, tucking them in with growing affection, and she’s about to find one of the guest rooms and fall into bed herself when Sam stops her with a hand on her arm.

“Get in here,” Sam murmurs, patting the bed beside her, and Alex gets in with only a moment’s hesitation. Sam nuzzles into her shoulder, and Ruby snores softly on the other side of the bed.

Before she drifts into a peaceful sleep, Alex makes a mental note to call the bureau in the morning about starting the transfer process.

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Lena wakes up on day 10 of her vacation the same way she has since she and Kara threw the rulebook out the window a week ago – to Kara kissing her on the forehead before she heads to work. It’s become a habit, sleeping until Kara leaves and then doing nothing for most of the day, and Lena knows she’s going to have to start adjusting back to her old routine.

But for now, Kara is *right there*.

Today, Lena reaches out just as Kara is straightening up and hooks a hand around the back of her neck, pulling her back down for a proper kiss. Kara laughs into it, tasting like toothpaste and coffee, and she doesn’t seem to mind Lena’s morning breath as she climbs back into bed at Lena’s urging to spend a few minutes kissing lazily, propped up on an elbow.

“Good morning to you too,” Kara says when Lena finally lets them part, her head falling back on the pillow.

“Do you have to go?” Lena is completely aware of how pathetically whiny she sounds, but she can’t seem to rein herself in. Kara just grins, kissing the tip of her nose.

“I do. I’m off on New Years, though.”

Lena sighs, the anxiety she’s been trying to avoid manifesting in her chest at the reminder that, by then, she’ll be gone.

She and Kara have been spending every second possible together all week, getting to know each other - going for walks, making out in the park, swimming, making out in the pool, defiling every inch of poor Alex’s house with mind-blowing, brain-melting sex –

It’s official. Lena is very gay for one Kara Danvers. But she has to go home in 4 days, and she’s starting to panic.

She finally lets Kara go after a few more kisses, and it’s barely 11 before she’s already texting her. *What are you up to tonight?*

**Kara Danvers [10:35 AM]**

*It’s the last day of Hanukkah, I usually go upstate to Eliza’s. Raincheck?*

*Of course*, Lena writes back immediately, swallowing her disappointment.

This is for the best, Lena reasons as she stares out the bay window at the rain hitting the surface of the pool. Maybe she just...shouldn’t see Kara anymore. Just go cold turkey, and by the time she goes back to Metropolis, it won’t seem so bad. The idea of ghosting on Kara is almost unbearable, but it might be easier to tell Kara their arrangement has to end if she’s had a few days of space. This can be a good start.

It’s a good thing. It’s over now, she’s going home soon, and this is a good thing.

Except that Kara turns up at her door at 2 in the morning, soaking wet already from only a few minutes outside, and that reliable magnetic pull has Lena in her arms in seconds.

“I thought – I thought you were – upstate –” Lena gasps between kisses, already shucking Kara’s wet jacket off her shoulders and dropping it onto the carpet. Kara walks them forward until Lena’s back hits the wall, and Lena moans as the decisiveness makes her melt like a popsicle.

“I drove back. Wanted to see you,” Kara mumbles, already scooping Lena up and heading to the bedroom, not breaking their connection for a second.

Kara has mentioned that Eliza’s place is 3 hours away, Lena remembers. Kara drove 3 hours, in the middle of the night, in the pouring rain, to see her.

Lena thanks her the only way she knows how. And after the 3<sup>rd</sup> vehement ‘thank you’, Lena kisses her way back up Kara’s trembling body, wiping her mouth and flopping back onto the pillows next to her.

“So...you're totally great,” Lena says, her own voice a little shaky. Kara nods, her legs stretching towards the end of the bed.

“Yeah.”

“This is a bitch.”

Kara laughs quietly. She turns on her side, propping head up with an elbow and laying a warm hand on Lena’s stomach. “Well, you must come to National City all the time for work, right?”

Lena swallows. Technically she doesn’t come to National City for work very often *right now*, but she will be, soon. But starting a new branch of a large company takes time, and she has no idea when she might actually end up moving here. It could be years.

“Long-distance relationships can work,” Kara tries to argue, looking painfully earnest.

“I can't even make a relationship work when I live in the same house with someone,” Lena reasons, and Kara grins.

“So this could be a good solution for you!”

Lena laughs. How Kara can still make her smile so easily, even now, when this whole thing seems to be falling apart, she has no idea.

“Okay,” Lena says finally, engaging her logical brain, even though it hurts. “Let's say we just make this happen. We commit to flying back and forth as much as we can.”

“Yes! It's doable, definitely.” Kara’s excitement at the prospect makes this even harder, but she pushes on.

“And then let's say in six months we hit a wall. I can't constantly be away from work, and neither can you. And we start to feel the tension. We know this isn't going to work, so we start fighting. And then, after a long, tearful – at your end - call, we just...we say goodbye.”

Kara’s face has been steadily falling through Lena’s whole speech, and it takes a gargantuan effort for Lena to finish it.

“Or,” Lena says, taking a deep breath. Kara perks up immediately.

“Thank you,” Kara says with relief, and she moves forward for a kiss. But Lena ducks it.

“Or maybe...we should just realize that what we've had these past few weeks has been perfect,” Lena says, the words weighing heavy on her chest. “Maybe we're trying to figure this thing out because this...what we’ve been doing, it makes us feel good. Because the fact that I’m leaving in 3 days makes this more exciting than it would be, normally.”

Kara frowns. “That's considerably more depressing.”

“I know,” Lena sighs, sadly. Kara scoots closer, biting at her lip nervously and tracing quick patterns over Lena’s skin.

“I have another scenario for you,” Kara says, and Lena smiles, lacing their fingers together idly. The casual affection she feels with Kara is unparalleled – she’s never been this comfortable with anyone.

“Oh?”

“I'm in love with you.”

Lena’s entire brain stutters at those 5 words. Like the whole thing shuts down except for one tiny section, the one that holds the memory of Kara’s voice – I’m in love with you. *I’m in love with you.*

Nobody has ever said that to her before.

She’s heard *love you*, of course. It was James’ go-to, usually said with an air of distraction. She’s even heard *I love you*, Lillian saying it every time she needs something.

But those words from Kara’s lips – *I am in love with you* – make her heart race.

She knows what her immediate response is. She knows it. Her heart tries to leap out of her chest at Kara’s words, aches to be heard too – but Lena smothers it with a mountain of rationale. She’s bad at this, she can’t possibly be in love, not after 2 weeks, not with a woman, it can never work, *it can never work* – James’ voice slithers into her head, saying *you always do this, you screw up every relationship, this always happens* -

“Kara...” she says softly, and Kara’s light visibly dims.

“As weird as this sounds, as much as I’ve tried to fight it, it’s true. I’m in love with you,” Kara insists. The words haven’t lost their impact, and Lena’s heart skips again. “I'm not feeling this because you're leaving. And not because it feels good to feel this way. Which, by the way, it does. I can't figure out the mathematics of this. I just know I love you.” Kara finishes the speech with a deep sigh, not quite meeting Lena’s eyes.

Lena doesn’t mind the lack of eye contact, because she’s having trouble looking at Kara herself.

“I wasn't expecting "I love you,"” Lena whispers, her thumb digging into the soft skin of her palm. The discomfort is centering. When Kara’s eyes finally meet hers, Lena can see the resignation there.

“Can you not look at me like that?” Lena pleads quietly, grabbing Kara’s hand again before she can pull it away. “I'm trying to find the right thing to say.”

“I think if the obvious response doesn't immediately come to you, we can...just... forget it,” Kara says, burying her face in the pillow. “We should just talk about something else. Like,

possibly, what a complete idiot I am.”

“Kara, I’m sorry.”

“I do remember you promising me you wouldn’t fall in love with me. I really need to pay better attention,” Kara mutters, muffled by the pillow.

Lena wants to tell her. She aches with it – she wants to be brave, to tell Kara that she feels the same way and that she can try to move to National City as soon as she can. But all she can bring herself to do is rub circles on Kara’s back.

“Kara –“

“It’s okay. It’s okay. Let’s just...forget I said anything, okay?” Kara finally raises her head again, and Lena hates seeing how watery they are. “We can enjoy these last couple of days together, and then...”

And then.

“Just...come here.” Kara leans in with a sort of desperation, holds her just a little too tightly, kisses just a little too deep. But Lena craves it. Needing the distraction just as much as Kara does, needing to silence her own thoughts, Lena gives in to her instincts and for a few hours, she forgets.

---

“Oh my god, you *said* that to Lena?” Sam laughs over her teacup, and Alex nods, grabbing another piece of sushi.

“I sort of yelled it, actually. I thought she was Kara! Stupid call waiting.” Alex pops the roll into her mouth, and Sam giggles.

“God, I wish I had heard that. She must have clenched hard enough to make a diamond.”

Alex snorts, rice and seaweed threatening to lodge in her nose.

This is hardly even a date – it’s really just a lunch before they go to Ruby’s recital. But with Sam, everything seems to feel like a date, whether it’s coffee or dinner or hours of frankly *incredible* sex while Ruby is at dance practice.

Just as Sam’s foot traces up her calf, Alex’s phone goes off, vibrating obnoxiously on the surface of the table. The contact name makes Alex freeze.

**Maggie Sawyer.**

She knows that Sam sees it too. Her foot freezes, and she bites her lip, seeming a bit nervous. Alex hurriedly rejects the call, and within seconds she sees a voicemail icon appear.



She turns her phone over.

Sam shakes her head. “Alex, you could have taken that. It’s okay.” Sam knows about Maggie – at least, the basics – and she’s been incredibly understanding, but the last thing Alex wants to do is answer that call.

“I didn’t want to,” Alex replies, and she’s relieved to find that it’s actually the truth. Right now, when she’s with Sam and she has the excitement of Ruby insisting she come to her performance, she doesn’t feel the pull that Maggie has always caused.

When Maggie calls yet again an hour later, when she’s perfectly content with Sam in her lap on Lena’s couch, she’s actually irritated.

“Just take the call –“ Sam says, pulling back, but Alex pulls her close again, biting at her lower lip until their lips meet again.

“What call?” she mutters against Sam’s lips, and Sam smiles into the kiss.

Eventually they disentangle themselves, realizing that they’re about 15 minutes late to getting Ruby and heading to the theatre, and Sam is still trying to fix her hair and pulling Alex through the building lobby at a breakneck pace when she hears her name in a painfully familiar voice.

“Alex?”

Alex stops in her tracks, pulling Sam’s arm taut. There at the front desk, beside an irate-looking Leonard, is the last person she expected to see here.

“Maggie,” Alex whispers, her throat feeling thick. “What – *why* –“

Sam’s eyes are wide, looking back and forth between them as Maggie approaches. She slowly lets go of Alex’s hand, and Alex misses the warmth immediately.

“Wow. Okay. I should, um. I should go,” Sam says, and Alex immediately protests.

“No, Sam, you don’t have to –“ But Sam slips away.

“Try to make it, okay? Ruby was really looking forward to it.” And then she’s gone, and Alex is left alone.

Well, not entirely alone.

Maggie steps forward, with her hands in her pockets and that dimpled grin that used to make Alex’s heart race. Now, all she feels is a hollow echo.

“I’ve been trying to reach you all day. This place has some security, huh?”

Alex gapes at her, still trying to process the events of the last 5 minutes. It’s all a bit of a blur, and she pulls Maggie to a more secluded corner of the lobby.

“What are you *doing* here? How did you even know where I am?” Alex finally asks, and Maggie shrugs.

“I got the address from your mom. It's Hanukkah, and...I missed you.”

A tiny piece of Alex's heart – the part that belongs to Maggie, and always will – leaps at that simple statement. But the rest of her, the parts that remember the pain and Maggie's voice saying *square peg, round hole* and the huge, overwhelming part of her that knows Maggie has a girlfriend now – those parts stand strong.

Those parts think of Sam.

“Maggie, we can't do this,” Alex says heavily. “I can't do this. You're dating someone else.”

Maggie's easy demeanor fades, then. She frowns. “She's not you.”

Alex laughs humourlessly. “I'm not me anymore, either. We ended an *engagement*, Maggie. I can't just – forget everything you said, all those things that make us not work.”

“I just thought –“

“That a grand romantic gesture would change my mind? You know me better than that, Mags,” Alex says, and the finality of it isn't lost on Maggie. She looks dejected, but in a way that Alex knows she'll move past. There's sadness there, but also respect. Affection, tinged with acceptance.

“Can't blame a girl for trying.”

Alex laughs shortly. “Yeah. I appreciate you coming out here. But...I have somewhere to be.”

“Hot date, huh?” Maggie nods towards the door. “She was really pretty.”

“Something like that,” Alex answers vaguely, and Maggie nods with acceptance.

“I get it. Listen Alex, you're...you're always going to be –“ Maggie searches for the word, for something to describe the strange feeling between them, and Alex nods. It hurts, but in a good way. Like pressing on a bruise. Like healing.

“So are you, Maggie.” Alex kisses her on the cheek, and steps towards the doorman. Towards Sam and Ruby, waiting for her across the city. She still has time to make it, if she hurries.

“Goodbye.”

When she steps back and through the doors, they close on Maggie and she feels genuine closure.

A new start.

It's a mad rush across the city, but she slides into the theatre atrium exactly 4 minutes before Ruby is due to be on stage, and practically throws her ticket at the attendant.

“I have – a seat, can you open – I need to go –“ she gasps, and luckily the ushers are feeling generous – they point her in the direction of her seat, and she silently thanks whatever deity is listening, because there are only two people between it and the aisle. She slides into it with only a tiny bit of fanfare, tapping on Sam’s arm.

“Hey! Did I make it? Ruby hasn’t gone up, has she?”

Sam blinks at her, clapping along with the audience as the latest group leaves the stage.

“No, she’s next,” Sam answers, leaning in close. “Are you okay? I thought, with Maggie –“

“The Maggie thing is done. Completely,” Alex answers, and she whistles as Ruby emerges from the wings with three other girls. She takes her place on the stage, her eyes searching the crowd, and grins from ear to ear when Sam and Alex wave from the audience. The music lines up - Alex’s eyes don’t leave Ruby, and Sam’s eyes don’t leave Alex.

“She’s a rock star. Look at her!” Alex whispers, and Sam nods, leaning over and putting a hand on her knee.

“Alex?” Sam whispers. “What are you doing on New Years Eve?”

Alex finally takes her eyes off Ruby’s dance, meeting Sam’s and frowning apologetically.

“I’m going back to National City on New Years Eve,” she answers quietly. Sam nods, looking thoughtful.

“You know, I’ve never been to the west coast.”

“You...haven’t?” Alex says, unsure exactly where Sam is going with this. She can’t mean what Alex thinks she means. Right?

Wrong.

“If I come over there, will you go out with me on New Years Eve?” Sam asks, squeezing Alex’s knee, and the music crests as Ruby’s dance wraps up with a dramatic flourish.

The crowd applauds, and Alex gives Sam her answer with a kiss.

---

A car horn sounds loudly outside and Lena jumps out of Kara’s arms, hurriedly fixing her lipstick. She should have left 10 minutes ago, but then there were goodbye kisses, and the goodbye kisses turned into a heated goodbye make-out session, and now she’s scrambling to clean the red smudges from her face before she goes out in public.

“Sounds like your ride is here,” Kara says, and Lena nods, glancing out the window to see the sleek black town car waiting in the driveway.

“We're not going to make a bigger deal out of this than it already is,” Lena says, heading to the door and pulling her bag behind her. She's not sure who she's trying to convince, herself or Kara, but Kara nods along with her.

“No, we're not,” Kara agrees, but the words sound hollow.

“It's not like we're never going to speak, or e-mail, or...” Lena knows she's reaching. She should just leave, and let the both of them move on from this painful moment, but she needs the empty confirmation.

“No set rules,” Kara echoes. She's clearly trying to keep up an exterior, but her eyes betray the truth, as they have been ever since they discussed this for the first time a few days ago.

“None,” Lena agrees. “So now I'm just going kiss you for the millionth time...and say, "be seeing you."”

Kara smiles at that, and immediately she captures Lena's lips in another kiss that's absolutely going to ruin her makeup again. Lena falls into it, letting Kara's tongue brush hers softly for the final time, and something heavy sits in her chest, in her throat. It feels like pressure. It's odd, but somehow it feels right.

When they finally pull apart, Lena knows it's time for her to go.

“Be seeing you,” Lena whispers hoarsely, and Kara exhales against her lips. Her response is almost as quiet.

“Take care of yourself.”

Kara stands in the doorway of the house that Lena has come to associate with *home* for the last two weeks, waving until Lena's car turns the corner, and it's painfully obvious how hard she's trying to hide her sadness even from afar. Lena leans her forehead on the cool glass, knowing that she's returning to Metropolis a changed person.

Kara changed her.

“Did you have a good holiday, miss?” the driver asks, looking at her in the rearview mirror, and Lena smiles wistfully.

“Yes. Probably the best of my life.”

‘Good holiday’ seems like an inadequate description. It's been two weeks of the most profound happiness she's ever felt. Not just the sex – Kara makes her feel cared for, listened to, important. Kara makes her feel loved. She feels the stretching of her heart the further she gets from Kara, trying to accommodate for the distance, and as the car turns onto the freeway something unfamiliar starts to happen.

The pressure that's been building in her chest seems to rise up her throat, gathering behind her eyes until it finally bursts forward in a wet, genuine sob. It feels good, like a release, and she takes in a ragged breath, letting it happen again. Reaching up to feel her cheeks, she realizes that her eyes are leaking. She's...*crying*.

Crying, over Kara.

Who she loves.

“I’m in love with her,” Lena whispers, and the relief she feels at finally saying it out loud is almost as intense as the relief of crying for the first time in 17 years.

“Excuse me, Miss?” The driver asks with obvious concern. “Are you all right?”

The growing distance between herself and Kara seems absolutely unbearable, all of a sudden.

“Turn around!” she yells suddenly, and the driver visibly jumps in his seat. “Turn around and go back, please!”

“Did you forget something?”

“Yes!” Lena exclaims, wiping her face and staring at her wet hands in disbelief. “Yes, I did.”

She doesn’t even bother to grab her suitcase when they roll into the driveway – she’s stumbling out and running towards the house before the car has even stopped, and she’s relieved to find the door still unlocked. She bursts in without so much as a knock.

“Kara?” She calls, hoping against hope that Kara hasn’t left yet. She didn’t even think to check if Kara’s SUV is still parked on the street, as preoccupied as she was with getting inside. “Kara, are you –“

Kara appears in the doorway to the kitchen, her eyes red and looking absolutely gutted. Tears are still sliding down her cheeks and she laughs wetly, gesturing at her own face as if to say, *‘see? I told you’*.

Without hesitation, Lena throws herself into Kara’s arms. And Kara catches her, just as Lena knew she would.

“What are you doing here?” Kara snuffles into her hair, her hold tightening. “I thought –“

“You know, I was just thinking,” Lena says, pulling back just enough to look into Kara’s sad eyes. “Why would I ever leave before New Year’s Eve? That makes no sense at all. I mean, you didn’t exactly ask me out, but you did say you loved me. So, I’m thinking I’ve got a date. If you’ll have me.”

Kara looks like she’s barely following Lena’s line of logic. Her brow furrows, and she shakes her head slightly.

“What about work? What about all the things you said –“

“I can work remotely for a while,” Lena insists, smoothing her hands over Kara’s arms, and Kara looks skeptical. “I can. And we’re working on moving headquarters to National City in the next year anyways – I can hurry it.”

At that tidbit of information, Kara’s eyes widen.

“You’re *what*? You didn’t tell me that.”

Lena nods, her head slightly bowed. “I know. I was scared. I was scared of taking a leap and not having it work out. But then I was on my way to the airport, and I realized – well, I realized it before that. But I was crying, and I suddenly thought -”

Kara exhales, stepping back slightly. “Lena, you’re going to miss your flight –”

“I love you!”

The silence that follows the confession rings in Lena’s ears. Kara blinks at her, her mouth slightly open and her face a mask of shock. Seconds unfold with no response, and Lena starts to feel even worse about how she left Kara hanging a few days ago because this feels absolutely *awful*.

Finally Kara seems to come to life again, looking a bit confused but definitely enthusiastic.

“I’m sorry, I just – could you repeat that for me? I need to make sure this isn’t just an elaborate daydream,” Kara says, and Lena laughs, grabbing Kara’s hands and cupping them in her own.

“Do you usually have elaborate daydreams featuring confessions of love?”

“Only lately.”

As usual, the simplest statement is the one that practically puts Lena on her ass with its intensity. She gathers what’s left of her wits, and takes Kara’s face in her hands.

“I’m in love with you,” Lena parrots Kara’s words, loving the way the conscious mirroring makes her smile. “And I don’t want to run from it anymore.”

Kara’s answer is a kiss to shame all other kisses. She pours everything into it – every repressed feeling from the last 2 weeks and beyond – and by the end of it her whole body is tingling in the best way. Kara is beaming down at her, and the burn of unfamiliar tears is back but this time it’s paired with a feeling of such intense joy that it feels overwhelming. Happy tears.

“So, you’re going to need a place to stay, right?” Kara asks, and Lena laughs, patting Kara’s cheek affectionately.

“Kara, I own a company.”

“...oh, yeah!”

---

**2 years later**

Sam's door swings open before Lena can even reach her hand out to knock, and immediately Lena's arms are full of excited teenager.

"*Mom, they're here!*" Ruby yells, and Lena only winces a little at the volume pointed directly at her ear. When she pulls back from the hug to get a good look, she's alarmed to find that Ruby now towers over her by at least 3 inches.

"Ruby! God, look at you, you're taller than me!" Lena says, and Ruby laughs, spreading her arms out.

"I'm 14 now!"

"Yes, and your mother is an Amazon, I know," Lena snarks, pulling Ruby in for a second hug. "Oh, I missed you."

"I missed you too, Aunt Lena," Ruby says, quieter this time.

The moment is interrupted by Kara bustling up the steps, holding bags of food and presents.

"I come bearing gifts!" Kara shouts, and Ruby laughs, pulling her into a hug too. Alex and Sam appear in the doorway, and Lena gives them each a hug of their own.

"Kara!" Alex scolds, taking some of the bags. "You guys already sent Hanukkah *and* Christmas presents, what's all this?"

"New Years presents!" Kara replies, and Alex raises a brow that almost rivals Lena's.

"That's not a thing."

Kara puts down the rest of her packages, pulling Sam into an embrace while Ruby closes the door against the cold. "We're making it a thing. This is what happens when you date a rich person."

"It's about time you guys got here, I was worried your plane crashed," Sam quips, and Kara blushes suddenly, busying herself with gift distribution.

"No, we were just...running a little late," Lena says, taking great care to keep her voice casual and not broadcast the fact that they're almost an hour late because Kara decided the first thing they had to do upon arriving at the hotel was break in the bed, but she should have known that Alex would see right through her.

"Oh, *gross*," Alex gags, and Kara interrupts by thrusting a gift into her chest.

"This is for you. Hey, who's hungry! It smells great, Sam -"

Alex rolls her eyes, but Sam nudges her with a hip and she drops it, settling onto the couch next to Ruby.

Sam's house is warm and cozy, the New Years Eve ball drop special playing on TV and Ruby excitedly opening one gift after another. Lena thinks back to two years ago, when she'd been convinced she was destined for a life of working holidays and lonely nights, and everything feels that much warmer in comparison. It's been amazing, just how easily the Danvers sisters fit into their lives, and how well Sam transitioned into the role of CEO of L-Corp East.

"So, Lena. Is L-Corp West still doing well?" Alex asks once she's gotten over the trauma of her sister's sex life, and Lena nods happily.

"Incredibly, well, yes. The National City technology scene was being run by two morons, and L-Corp came out on top pretty easily. Our shares are booming."

Alex laughs, putting an arm around Ruby's shoulders. "Two morons, huh?"

"Morgan Edge and Max Lord tried to fight it, but Lena always comes out on top," Sam winks, and Kara shrugs.

"Well," Kara mutters, "I mean, not *always* —"

Sam snorts into her wine glass.

"Kara, oh my *god*," Alex groans, and Lena blushes crimson and busies herself taking an overly large gulp of her wine. "I was *just* forgetting —"

"What does that mean?" Ruby asks, and Lena suddenly wishes she were on the plane again.

"Nothing, Rubes. Could you go grab some more chips for me?" Sam says deftly, still stifling her laughter, and Ruby leaves, looking suspicious at being left out of the joke.

Lena elbows Kara. "You're lucky I love you."

"I know," Kara grins, and Lena accepts the kiss she offers with minimal complaint.

As the evening inches closer to midnight, Kara and Ruby start up an impassioned game of Pie Face and Lena feels a hand on her elbow. Alex stands there, looking terrified, and Lena frowns in concern.

"Hey. Are you okay?"

Alex nods, but the set of her mouth says differently. "Yeah, I'm great. Can I just talk to you for a second?"

Lena nods, and Alex pulls her into the kitchen.

"Alex, seriously, is everything alright?" Lena asks. "You're acting really strange —"



Alex takes a breath, and from her pocket she pulls a small velvet box. It pops open, and on the silk interior sits a beautiful engagement ring. Lena stares at it for a second, floored, before looking up at Alex's nervous face and grinning.

"You know, Alex, I'm very flattered, but I think Kara would be upset," she starts, and Alex rolls her eyes, huffing.

"No, god, it's – Sam. Not –"

"I know," Lena assures, laughing. "That's so great, Alex. Congratulations!"

"I just wanted to ask your permission."

Lena pauses. "My permission?"

"Well, *blessing*, really. Sam doesn't really have much family, outside Ruby," Alex hurries to explain. "She considers *you* her family. I already asked Ruby, and she seemed excited, and I just wanted to... I don't know. Make sure you're okay with this."

Lena puts a hand on Alex's shoulder, oddly touched by the gesture even while she feels absolutely zero authority over Sam's life.

"Alex, I've never seen Sam as happy as she is when she's with you," Lena says honestly, and Alex swallows hard. "Or Ruby, for that matter. By my estimation, you've been part of the family ever since you moved out here to be with her."

Alex looks a little shocked at that. She opens and closes her mouth, purses her lips, and then finally she pulls Lena into a quick, hard hug that ends almost as quickly as it began.

"Right. Great. Uh, thank you," Alex says, blinking rapidly over glassy eyes, and then she turns on her heel and heads back to the living room.

It's all a little bit surreal – a small part of her thinks she might have dreamed it, until a minute or so before the ball drops when Alex pulls Sam away, leading her upstairs and, most likely, to the balcony in the master bedroom where the city skyline is visible in the distance. Ruby clambers to the stairs to the landing to listen, looking absolutely delighted, and Lena settles into the crook of Kara's arm on the couch.

"So, my sister's getting engaged," Kara says matter-of-factly, and Lena startles.

"Did she tell you that?"

Kara shrugs. "No, but she's been looking at her watch all night and there's a box-shaped lump in her pocket."

Lena laughs quietly. On the TV the Times Square ball counts down from 10, signaling another year passed – 3, 2, 1 – and from upstairs comes a muffled yell, happy in its intonation, and a thump.

“Sounds like it was a yes,” Lena jokes. Kara looks down at her with the same affection she’s held for 2 years and kisses her, slow and soft.

“Happy New Year, Lena,” Kara murmurs, and Lena smiles as footsteps fall on the stairs and Ruby darts back out into the living room, pretending she wasn’t listening the whole time.

“Happy New Year.”

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