

**i'll stop the world (and melt with you)**

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# **i'll stop the world (and melt with you)**

by [bearpantaloons](#)

## Summary

Kara and Lena are two agents on opposite sides of a war, where they travel through different times and universes to mold the future to become more beneficial to their factions. What starts as a healthy rivalry becomes something more when they realize that they understand each other more than anyone else ever could, but if their fraternization is ever discovered, it would mean certain doom.

Based on This Is How You Lose the Time War

## Notes

This is for my pal, IHaveTheWrongGlass, for our group's end of summer/fall exchange. You're getting two chapters right away, because it works better that way, so you're welcome.  
:P

I hope you all enjoy it.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

# Krypton

Kara, the Princess of Krypton, lifts her soiled helmet caked with dirt off her head and wipes her muddled brow with her hand. She watches as her men stab their swords into the flesh of stragglers and relishes in yet another victory for herself and the kingdom of Krypton. This battle had just been another cog in the wheel that would lead them to victory against the invaders of Daxam, a vile and barbaric country. Kara's people have tried to live in harmony with the surrounding territories, but when Daxam began encroaching on other borders, pillaging and murdering anything in their way, Kara's family could not stand by and watch it happen.

She was the first woman to be knighted in her kingdom, and as far as she knew, the first woman in any kingdom. The citizens of Krypton did not hold the same gender binaries as others, where women were only seen fit to take care of children and cook. They knew that women had the potential to be warriors or blacksmiths, and to limit them was foolish. Kara worked hard, moving up the ranks, until the leader of their military, J'onn, gave her a unit of her own to command. Her second in command, James, was also her childhood friend, and it was exciting for her to be able to work closely with him.

"Kara, J'onn wanted me to let you know that he wishes to discuss the next course of action with us," James said. He's wearing a training tunic, laced loosely at the neck and has his sword tied to his waist.

"That's 'Ser Kara' to you," Kara laughs while playfully punching him in the shoulder. "Race you there." She gets a head start and her feet carry her through the courtyard and dodges other soldiers and ladies in waiting while they screech in surprise. When she arrives at the door that leads to J'onn's office, James rushes up behind her, out of breath and bending over.

"That was unfair," he pants. "You cheated."

Kara scoffs in faux offense. "How dare you accuse your commanding officer of cheating? I should have you throw into the jails." James rolls his eyes and mirrors his friend's smile.

"If you do that, who are you going to put in my place? Maxwell?"

Kara barks out a laugh. "You're right. I guess I'm stuck with you."

They enter the room together. J'onn is an older man, seen plenty of battles of his own and has counseled the royal family for years. He took Kara under his wing when she showed interest in becoming a knight and trained her night and day, so she could pass the trials easily. She would have done so, anyway, having the natural grace and talent to become a great fighter. Kara's parents were hesitant at first, having a child entering knighthood, but they eventually came around and knew that their daughter would serve their kingdom well. Alex, although jealous at first of the attention Kara got, learned to allow her sister the limelight. If Kara was trained and led their army into battle, the better their survival rate. Alex was better suited as a scholar and counsel for the royal family, anyhow, and took her position very seriously. She had a mind for strategy and planning, which made her an irreplaceable asset.

“Kara, James,” J’onn greets them. Alex is standing to his side and they’re both leaning on a large oak table with a map draped across it. Wooden figures and boats were set up all around it. “Alex informed me that Daxam’s army is on the move again, this time heading toward Kandor. Have you two heard anything?”

Kara and James look at each other and shake their heads. “I haven’t,” Kara says. “I thought we pushed Daxam back with our last victory.”

“It seems that they were just a decoy and the real push is for Kandor. Do you have enough men to send out?”

“We just got back,” James replies, crossing his arms over his chest. “The knights need to rest.”

“What about Argo?” Alex asks. “I can ride out and ask for their assistance. They’re only a day away.”

“No, I need you here,” J’onn answers. “We need to speak with the high council about sending messengers to all of the surrounding areas.”

“I can go,” Kara offers. “My horse is the quickest and I can be there in less than a day.”

“Good,” says J’onn. “Take what you need and head out as soon as you can. I will inform your mother and father.”

Kara heads to her room and packs up her bedroll and then goes into the kitchen to get some crusty bread and cheese. She fills up her pouch with well water and affixes her bags to her horse’s saddle. “You ready for another adventure, Clark?” The horse whinnies and nudges her cheek. She hops onto the saddle and is about to head out of the city gates when she hears someone calling her name.

“Kara!”

She turns her head and sees the blacksmith Winn running to her. When he stops, he’s out of breath and struggling to hold a shining blade of steel up in offering.

“I—” he takes a deep breath, “I finished it! I used the new method my father showed me. It’s supposed to make it twice as sharp, but much lighter.”

Kara hops back off of Clark and takes the sword from him. She unsheathes it and does a couple practice swings, twirling it around and jabbing it in front of herself. “This is amazing, Winn! You’ve really outdone yourself this time.”

Winn grins sheepishly. “Oh, and look, I etched your family crest into the pommel and also wrote some Ancient Kryptonian on the blade.”

Kara turns the blade flat and looks at it. “What does it say?”

“In Rao’s light.”

Kara smiles and pulls Winn into a strong hug. “This is perfect, thank you.”

“It was nothing, kept me busy. But don’t tell anyone else I made it, they’ll get jealous. Especially James!”

Kara laughs and puts the sword back into the scabbard, tying it to her hip, and hangs her old sword from the saddle. She mounts her horse once more and gives Winn a wave before galloping off out the castle gates. The road to Argo is nothing spectacular, mostly farmland. Kara keeps her head down and lets the wind whip across her face as Clark speeds down the dirt path. The moon hangs low and Kara feels like she could just reach out and catch it. Owls hoot and wolves howl out in the distance and it’s a calming sound to hear. It sounds like home.

About halfway there, Kara stops by a brook to let Clark catch his breath and get a drink, so she takes the opportunity to eat some cheese and bread. She sits on a stump and tears off a chunk from her loaf, chewing a mouthful. She hears a twig snap and she’s up like a bolt of lightning, hand on her sword. Her ears strain to listen for any other movement, but there is none. Bandits and robbers are not foreign to this area and even though Kara knows that she could most likely take them, she’d rather not have to bloody her new sword so soon.

“Come out,” she calls out in a low voice. Another twig snaps and she unsheathes her sword, holding it up in a ready stance. Her heart beats steadily as she mentally prepares to fight whoever’s with her in the woods. She hears more rustling in a bush and closes her eyes, taking a deep breath. She silently says a prayer to herself and waits for whoever it is to emerge.

More movement comes from the bush and Kara tightens her grip around her sword and is about to swing down, but what she sees surprises her. It’s a dog. Just... a dog.

“Oh, hello,” she says calmly, kneeling down. She holds her hand out and the dog sniffs it, but doesn’t get any closer. Kara pulls out her cheese slowly and tosses a chunk to the dog, who gobbles it up. “Do you have a family?” she asks. The dog doesn’t reply, of course, because it’s a dog, but she looks around and listens for any other movement in case this is a scouting dog and it was leading people right to her. She decides it’s safe and relaxes a bit, patting the dog on the head. “Well, where I’m heading might be dangerous, but you’re welcome to come with me.” The dog tilts its head to the side and Kara laughs. “I’ll take that as an affirmative. We should head out.”

She closes up her pack and ties it back to the saddle, hopping onto Clark and clicks her teeth to get him moving. The dog trails behind them and they all trot down the path. It takes another few hours of travel to arrive at the outskirts of Argo, but what Kara sees is horrific. There are dark clouds of smoke rising from the city. She nudges Clark into a gallop and rushes forward. A man, holding his bloodied gut, lies against a pile of straw and Kara jumps down to try and help him.

“What happened here?” she asks, placing a cloth against his wound.

The man coughs. “Daxamites. Those curs came out of nowhere. I think some of them are still here.”

“I’ll take care of them,” Kara says gravely. The man smiles before his head falls forward and draws his last breath. Kara frowns and steels herself, marching deeper within the city. Dead bodies litter the ground, most of them farmers and soldiers, and some women. The sight makes Kara sick to her stomach, but she doesn’t have time to think about it as someone lunges at her from inside a house. Their swords clash and Kara kicks the other body away. She isn’t wearing her full set of armor, so she has more mobility, but she’s also more vulnerable to attacks.

The other person freezes briefly and quickly steadies themselves, throwing another overhead swing down on Kara, but she parries and ducks around the knight. She looks for holes and exposed spots in the armor and doesn’t see many; even the joints are covered well. If she’d been anywhere else, she would commend whoever smithed this armor. She concludes that she’ll just have to wear the other person out. She prides herself on her cardiovascular strength, being able to run much faster and farther than the other knights. They continue battling, giving back as much as they receive, Kara silently thanks Winn for crafting such a light weapon. Whoever this knight is was trained well and they anticipate all of Kara’s moves. In a last-ditch effort, Kara tries to get the higher ground, stepping onto the steps in front of the castle. She swings down again on the knight, who blocks it with their sword. Kara trips on one of the broken steps and falls backward, watching as the other knight’s sword is raised when she hears a growl and the dog runs up and jumps at the other person.

The knight staggers and Kara uses the distraction to tackle them to the ground, knocking the wind out of herself after falling onto metal armor. She’s about to raise her sword and stab down into the exposed neck of the enemy when she hears hoofbeats coming toward them. Arrows fly through the air, aimed at Kara, who ducks out of the way and hides behind a cart with the dog.

“My lady, knights from Vathlo are coming. We must retreat,” one of them says.

*Lady?* Kara wonders.

The knight picks themselves off the ground and jumps onto the back of one of the horses. She removes her helmet, releasing long, dark locks and she looks back in Kara’s direction. She gives her a smirk before the riders are off. Kara comes out from behind the cart and awaits the other soldiers. They ride up and Kara shows her house’s colors, indicating they are on the same side.

“What happened here?” one man asks.

“I was coming to Argo to warn them about an impending attack on Kandor and ask for assistance, but it appears we were misled yet again.” The knight dismounts and removes his helmet, showing his face. Kara recognizes him from the military meetings – Barry, she thinks his name is.

“We were all too late,” he says grimly, taking a look around. “Are there any survivors?”

Kara sighs. “I’m not sure. When I got here, I was attacked immediately. I didn’t have time to check. They may be inside of the church.”

“Then we should head there.” They walk toward the church while the rest of the unit searches the other bodies for signs of life. The heavy wooden door swings open shining light into the dim hall. Kara notices all of the candles are extinguished and the high walls and pews cast shadows down the middle of the walkway. The sound of their boots echo throughout the church. Kara’s dog sniffs the ground and runs off, barking once as if to tell them to follow.

They find a group of people huddled into a corner behind an overturned pew and they collectively gasp. Kara holds her hand out.

“It’s all right, the Daxamites are gone.” A little girl hesitantly reaches out and takes her hand, standing up, and the rest do the same. She turns to Barry. “They’re all the women and children.”

“Thank goodness they weren’t found,” he whispers. The townsfolk follow them outside, some bursting into tears after seeing the aftermath of the attack. Most of their homes have been burned to the ground.

Kara watches them sympathetically. “We should move on. My people will welcome you.”

A woman steps forward. “Beggin’ your pardon, Ser, but this is our home. We won’t be driven off.”

“What if they come back?” Barry asks.

“Let them come. They’ve already taken our men and our homes, not much else for them to take,” another woman says.

“They could still take your *lives*,” Kara replies, but she can see that they likely won’t budge. Kara, Barry, and the rest of his men do their best to clean up the area, but it’s starting to get dark and Kara knows it’s too late to start riding back. They take refuge in one of the homes that hadn’t been completely destroyed and have a hot meal of stew and bread. The lady of the house, Samantha, sits and watches with her daughter clinging to her side.

“Take me with you,” she blurts out. Kara and Barry look up questioningly. “The women here are stubborn, but I can’t stay here. Not with Ruby’s father—” she turns her head to the side, biting back tears.

Kara puts her bowl down. “Do you have a horse?” The woman shakes her head. “Know how to fight?” Again, she shakes her head. The trip back to Krypton will take twice as long if someone has to walk, but she can’t just leave them there. “Very well. Pack up whatever belongings you need, just what you can carry, and we’ll leave at first light.” Samantha smiles for the first time that evening and pats Ruby on the head.

“Come, let’s gather our things.” They stand up, leaving Kara and Barry to finish their meal.

Kara can’t stop thinking about the knight with the hair of midnight. The smile she gave – well, smirk really – lodged itself into Kara’s brain. She knows she’s held attraction toward the fairer sex since she was a child. She tried to kiss Siobhan once and was given the switch once her parents had been told. Since then, they’ve stopped policing who Kara shows

affection toward, mostly because she's been so busy with the war that she hasn't really had time to court anyone.

But that woman, that *woman*. Her eyes were the color of the sea, or perhaps a seedling just bursting from the dirt, drinking in the first drops of morning sun. Kara chastises herself for drawing her attention to the enemy, someone who would have gladly killed her without a moment's hesitation, but she couldn't help but be enamored with her – another lady knight! Kara thought she was the only one, but to see another, one who was just as good at her with a sword, was incredible. When Samantha and Ruby finish packing, they all settle in to sleep for the night. Kara's mind drifts once again to the beautiful knight, plaguing her dreams with hair of obsidian and eyes of jade.

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When Kara awakens the next morning, Samantha is already up preparing their meal before they leave. Ruby slips her doll into one of the packs and then joins her mother. Barry's snoring off to the side of the room and Kara walks outside to wash her face in the water basin. The clattering of pots must have woken Barry up, because he's sitting in the corner groggily, eating from a bowl by the time Kara returns. When they finish eating, they pack up the horse, Kara lets Samantha and Ruby ride Clark. She whistles for the dog, who comes running up to them and she bids Barry goodbye, thanking him and his men.

"We'll fight with Krypton to end this war," he says. "I have to head home, but we'll be back with reinforcements to take to Kandor."

"Good, we will likely start marching within the next two weeks."

"See you there, Ser Kara." They shake hands and depart in separate ways. The ride back to Krypton is slow moving, just as Kara suspected it would be. Samantha is at least good company, telling Kara about their life in Argo and how she'd met Ruby's father. They hadn't had an easy life, mostly had a marriage of convenience, but they both loved their daughter more than anything.

After a day and a half of riding, they come upon the kingdom, the drawbridge lowers when the scouts see her, and they walk right through. Kara introduces Samantha and Ruby to her parents and gets her settled in with one of the women of the church. Alex greets her, but her attention sits squarely on Samantha and Kara has to snap her fingers.

"Hello?"

Alex shakes her head from side to side. "Yes, what?"

"You've got a bit of drool on your chin."

Alex wipes her face. "I do not!" She shoves Kara's shoulder and quickly changes the subject. "What happened in Argo?"

Kara sighs. "We should speak with our parents and J'onn." They walk to the war room and wait for the others to arrive, sitting down around the table. Their parents come through the door and J'onn follows shortly after.

“Kara, what do you have to report?” her father Jeremiah asks.

“Argo is basically destroyed. When I got there, Daxam had already arrived, burned it all to the ground. I fought off the last of them with the help of Vathlorian knights, but almost every citizen is dead. There’s a small contingency of women and children left and they refused to leave. Only one woman and her daughter came with me.”

“How did we miss this? How do we keep getting misdirected?” her mother Eliza questions. J’onn just shakes his head.

“Perhaps we have a spy, sending messages where we’re sending troops, so they go elsewhere.”

“That is a major accusation, J’onn,” Alex warns. “We would have to question every single soldier and we don’t have time for that.”

“Well, from now on, we don’t tell them of our plans. They will have to follow blindly and obediently until this is all over,” Jeremiah says. They continue speaking a while longer until they’re excused. Alex walks Kara back to her room, so she can bathe and wash away her travels.

“I saw another woman knight, Alex,” Kara says. “She was *strong*, nearly bested me. If it hadn’t been for Dog, I would have surely fallen.”

“Speaking of the dog, do you plan on keeping him?” Alex asks, peering behind her and watching the canine happily trot at their feet.

“Well, yes, why wouldn’t I? He saved my life.” Alex just shrugs and leaves Kara to her own devices when they reach her room. The servants brought her hot water up already and she strips off her clothing before fully emerging herself into the bath. The soreness begins to fade as she soaks her aching bones and her thoughts once again gravitate back to the lady knight. She doesn’t even know her name, but she looked so familiar, perhaps from her dreams. She wonders how things would be if they weren’t on the opposite sides of the war. Would Kara court her? Would she be allowed to? Would the other woman return her affection? All hypothetical questions that do not matter, because Kara can’t let herself forget that she has a war to win.

She finishes bathing and dresses herself in a loose shift and nightgown, climbing onto her high bed. Letting herself become enveloped in the sheets and pillows feels heavenly and she wonders if her nemesis is sleeping soundly tonight. She shakes the thought from her mind and closes her eyes, wondering if the next time she sees the woman knight will be on the battlefield of Kandor.

Two weeks pass and Kara and James spent the entire time getting their army battle ready. They would be leaving later that day, headed right for the Daxamite army, assuming they were still where the scout said they were. She hugs her parents goodbye and Alex playfully punches her in the arm, telling her not to get killed and Kara says she makes no promises with a wink. She and James stand at the front of their army and lead the way down the road, the gate opens wide and lets them through. It would take them close to a fortnight of travel to

get to Kandor and she hopes they won't get there too late. Kandor's kingdom is vast, the castle settled up on a hill and difficult to get to, so it would take a lot of strategizing from the Daxamites.

They set up camp for the night and build campfires around. Kara and James look over their men and Kara knows James is wondering how many of them will make it out alive. History shows that it will likely be less than forty percent. That's how many sons and fathers who won't make it home to their families? It's their job to make sure as many of them as possible *do* get home. James retires to his tent, but Kara stays out by the fire and watches the flames reach up and try to kiss the sky with their orange and yellow tendrils. She's about to nod off when she hears something zip past her ear and hit the tree she's leaning on. She pulls an arrow out of the wood and sees a piece of parchment tied to the tip and unrolls it, trying to use the flames to light the words.

*Nameless Lion (may I call you Lion?),*

*Our fight in Argo invigorated me something fierce. Never before have I seen such a fighter – a woman, no less! I was impressed, to say the least. I apologize for not finishing our scuffle, but I did not think that the soldiers of Vathlo would play fair and allow us to continue uninterrupted. It is not in my nature to retreat like a coward.*

*Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Lena Luthor of Thorul, the lost kingdom. You may be wondering why I am fighting for Daxam and the short answer is that I am not. I'm fighting for myself, or my people more like. We have lost our homes and our land to kingdoms like Krypton. You think that your expansion and your land was given willingly or because it was deserved? Well, it was not. At the expense of kingdoms like Thorul, the Krypton and its sympathizers were able to grow. My people are just trying to take back what's rightfully ours and using Daxam's army to do it. We don't care about your families' war, or who rules what. We just want our home back.*

*That being said, you really should be more careful where you stick your head. Could have gotten you right between the eyes. I look forward to our next meeting. Hopefully, we can continue what we started.*

*Lena*

*P.S. I'm going to win. And burn this after you've read it.*

Kara reads the letter twice over, confused as to what angle this Lena Luthor was trying to get at. Why send her a letter? Why not just attack her? She burns it in the fire and checks her pack for her own ink and parchment, finding some triumphantly. She scribbles her own letter and hides it within the roots of the trees. If Lena is as good as she says, she'll find it. She climbs into her tent, hugging her sword close to her chest, ready in case they have stalkers in the night. Dog settles in at her feet and lays his head on his paws, half listening for any intruders. Her sleep comes easily, still clouded by a woman with sea green eyes.

# Kandor

Lena waits behind the brush in the dark shroud of night, watching the blonde knight write furiously. She wonders what her handwriting looks like, assuming it may look something akin to a chicken's claw scratches in the dirt. Something about her seems unkempt, but also incredibly organized at the same time. By the way she fought, this knight was calculated, planned every move and every defense. She wouldn't charge into a fight unless she thought she could win it. Unfortunately for her, Lena was going to come out victorious as she always did.

When she's certain that the other knight is gone and the coast is clear, she sneaks over to the tree and feels around the roots until she finds the folded parchment. She takes it back to her horse and rides off to her own encampment, finding a vacant fire and sits down. Her eyes read over every word of the letter, reads each sentence twice, trying to find any hidden meanings.

*Lena,*

*That is a pretty name. I can't tell you how exciting it is to see another woman knight. I thought I was the only one. And your fighting! Goodness. I probably shouldn't tell you this, but you gave me chills.*

*I appreciate you not shooting me between the eyes. It would make it difficult to lead an army if I couldn't use my higher brain functions.*

*I can sympathize with your fight for a home. I'm not sure if you knew this, but our family came to Krypton as immigrants, because we'd lost our own home. I'm sorry you lost yours and not that it would matter to you, but much of the expansion happened before we arrived and I know my family has been trying to even the playing field, but the way that the Daxamites are going, they will murder everyone in their path until they rule the entire continent.*

*I am running out of parchment, so I will leave you here. I hope to meet you again on the battlefield, as well, and look forward to defeating you and the Daxamite army.*

*Kara*

Kara.

Kara is the lion's name. It sounds... familiar. Lena holds the name close to her chest like a warm flame to keep her body heated at night. She takes the letter and let's the fire kiss it until it all turns to ash. It will not be the last time she hears from Kara, that she's sure of.

The next morning, Lena and her men ride out toward Kandor to meet with the Daxamite army. She doesn't tell them that she's had communication with Kara, of course, doesn't even tell them of the Kryptonian's whereabouts. They can figure it out themselves. Truth be told,

she can't stand the Daxamites. She's really only using them for their sheer numbers to get what she and her people want.

Daxamites are a barbaric people, taking slaves and letting the royal family walk all over their citizens, leaving them hungry and fighting for survival. Part of Lena feels sick that she's even siding with them, but it's for the good of her people.

She travels with her men, riding fast through the forests on the outskirts of Kandor, passing the time thinking about the other woman knight. No one has ever met her in fighting skill before and it befuddles her.

"We're here," Lena's second in command announces, breaking her away from her thoughts. The army of Daxam is there waiting and they ride up to try and find the prince. Prince Mon-El is a scrawny thing, very pompous and unrightfully so. He has no achievements to speak of, military or otherwise, but he acts like he's singlehandedly led Daxam to its success.

They ride up to the prince's tent and dismount. Lena and her second walk through the flap and see Mon-El lounging around with a woman on his lap, feeding him fruit. Lena rolls her eyes and clears her throat to announce their arrival.

"Ah! Luthor, you're finally here." He pushes the woman off and shoos her out of the tent. Lena holds back a sneer as he stands before her with a smug look on his face. "Are you ready for the greatest battle of your life?"

"This will not be the greatest battle," Lena says. "The greatest battle will be when Krypton falls and my people finally have a place to call home."

"Yes, yes, that's what I meant. Kandor is just another annoyance in our way. Once we defeat them, Krypton is next."

Mon-El tells them his half-assed plan, which mostly consists of Lena and her troops on the frontlines while he and Daxam hang back as the second wave. Lena has half a mind to shove this man's face into the dirt and leave, but she needs his army if she has any hope of taking over Kandor.

It doesn't take long for Kara and her army to arrive after that. They settle about ten kilometers out and Lena can see them through the trees from where they're waiting. She was instructed to wait there while Mon-El and his people hid safely atop a hill in the distance. She watches Kara rile up her men, riding back and forth on her horse, shouting something inspiring, no doubt. Looking behind her, she wonders if she should be doing the same. Her men look ready, they're hungry and just waiting for the word.

Lena sees the red flag being raised over the hill, her signal to prepare. "Ready yourselves, men," she calls out, unsheathing her sword and gripping onto the reins of her horse. The black flag is raised and a volley of arrows shoots from lines of archers now lined up on the hill, falling toward Kara's rushing army. Lena yells out a *yah!* and her horse breaks into a gallop, running down the field, hooves kicking up globs of mud. They're flanking Kara's army from the west and she watches half of the unit break off and head straight toward them. They meet in the middle, metal clanging together and some diving off their horses to tackle

the enemy. Lena remains on her steed, swinging down at Kara's army, her sword slicing through armor and flesh. An arrow zips by her head and she realizes she's a bigger target for archers if she's higher off the ground, so she dismounts and slaps the hindquarters of her horse to send it away.

Someone yells behind her and she waits until the last second before she rolls out of the way and cuts him down at his knees. He cries out in pain and she silences him with one last thrust of her sword. She moves down the field, bringing her weapon down on anyone in her way, looking for that recognizable golden mane and sleek fighting style. A few yards ahead, she spots her – her lion. She smiles behind her helmet and pushes her way through, blocking strikes and tossing men aside. She knows she's been spotted when Kara turns her head and squares up in front of her.

Lena's about to take her first stride forward when one of her men rushes past her right for Kara. He lets out a guttural sound from his chest and lunges, but someone else tackles him before he can reach Kara. The lion looks stunned for a moment, but quickly switches her attention to someone coming from her left and cuts right through his belly, watching as he falls to the ground. Tightening her grip on her sword, she takes another step forward, but another volley of arrows flies through the air and one hits Kara through her thin armor, right in the chest, and more hit other men – both Kara's and Lena's. Mon-El wasn't supposed to send anymore arrows once they all met in the center of the field.

Lena lets out an angry growl as she stares at Mon-El's grinning face as he watches the massacre, biding his time until Lena's army has taken care of most of Kara's, but she feels her heart clench when another arrow finds Kara's leg and she falls to her knees. Without thinking, she races forward and grabs Kara's sword before dragging her across the field. She finds an abandoned horse and throws her over the top of it, jumping on and riding out, yelling at her men to stand down and retreat. They ride past Mon-El, who's yelling at her to get back and fight, but she ignores him and keeps going. She looks back to see the knights of Kandor breaking away and heading toward Mon-El's army on the hill. They ride through the night until they think they're far enough away from the battle and set up camp. She's down at least a third of her men, but her second in command, Jack, builds their fire.

"Why did you bring her?" he asks.

"We may be able to use her as leverage," she lies, not wanting to tell him they have this strange connection to one another that she can't explain. "If we take her to Krypton alive, they may give us a reward. Besides, Mon-El betrayed us and I want to see him dead."

They tend to Kara's wounds as best they can, but arrow punctures are difficult to deal with, and neither one of them are healers. Lena makes a paste to help stop the bleeding, but they'll need to get her back fast. When dawn breaks, she instructs her men to go back Midvale, a half day's ride away, and wait for her, specifically instructing them not to kill anyone else and not to disturb the citizens. She and Jack ride on to Krypton, but they're rightfully met with hostility. They pause before the large gates, arrows pointed right at their chests while the drawbridge lowers and a group of men march forward, weapons drawn.

A dark-skinned man steps forward, taking one look at Kara's limp body draped across her horse. "Who are you?"

Lena removes her helmet and tucks it under her arm. “My name is Lena Luthor of Thorul. I’ve come to seek a parlay.”

“Drop your weapons and dismount,” the other man says. Lena looks over at Jack and nods. They both throw their swords to the ground and dismount their horses. Two knights hurry forward, taking the swords and backing away again, while two more grab Kara and take her away in a cart.

“Throw them in the jails, I want to question them,” the man instructs and the other knights escort them through the gates and down into the depths of the prisoner cells. They’re stripped of their armor and thrown into two different holding cells in nothing but their underclothes.

“Well, that didn’t go as planned,” Jack muses.

“No, that’s what I expected to happen,” replies Lena. “They have no reason to trust us.” She sits down on the cold, stone floor, leaning back on the wall. The straw bed in the corner looks like it’s already been inhabited by a couple of rats.

“What are you hoping to accomplish? Assuming they don’t just have us hanged.”

“It was a mistake trusting Mon-El. I want him to pay, so I will offer our services to assist in seeing him and the Daxamites fall.”

Jack lolls his head to the side, looking at her. “And what makes you think they’ll trust a word you say? You were the enemy not even a full day ago.”

“They want to defeat the Daxamites just as badly. I’m hoping to play on their desperation and hoping that bringing the knight back alive is enough.”

Hours later, two knights walk in and open Lena’s cell, dragging her out and roughly handling her as they head back up the stairs. She’s sat down in a chair and four people sit across from her – two she recognizes as royalty, likely the king and queen of Krypton.

“What is your name?” the king’s voice booms.

“Lena Luthor.”

“And where do you come from?”

“The lost kingdom of Thorul.”

The king looks at the others and Lena isn’t sure if that’s a good thing or a bad thing.

“You sided with the Daxamites, so why are you here?” the knight who greeted them at the gates asks.

Lena takes a deep breath. “Mon-El assured me a victory and was to give me Kandor as a reward – a new home for my people, but he betrayed us, released arrows on both us and your knights while he stayed safely at a far distance.”

“Why did you save Kara?” the woman with red hair asks.

“I was hoping bringing her back alive would be a show of good faith.”

And you expect us to believe this?” the woman asks again with a scoff.

Lena leans forward in her chair and stares at her dead in the eye. “Would you rather I left her to die on the battlefield, face-down in the mud? Not really an honorable death for a knight. How is she, anyway?”

The red-haired woman pushes her chair back suddenly and stands, hands balled into fists.

“Alexandra,” the king warns. The queen looks visibly upset and Lena raises an eyebrow.

“She’s important to you, more important than any regular knight. Daughter?” This was better than anything Lena could have hoped for. If the knight was also royalty, she could get a much bigger reward for her safe return, assuming she lives through the night. She’s taken back to her cell and given watery broth and moldy bread to eat. She and Jack are kept there for days, eventually releasing Jack to send him to Midvale to inform their army not to retaliate in any way, lest they want their commander’s body sent back to them to bury.

On the seventh day, she gets a visitor. She can hear the limp going down the stairs and the wooden crutch hitting the stone. Kara’s face comes out of the shadows and seemingly lights up the entire gloomy space. She pulls up a chair and sits down in front of Lena’s cell, groaning as she does so.

“I suppose thanks are in order,” the blonde grunts.

Lena shrugs. “I used you as leverage, so I suppose that’s up to you.” Kara examines her closely and Lena imagines she must look a fright. She hasn’t bathed in a week, has been sleeping on the floor for just as long, hasn’t had a full meal and knows her eyes must look sunken as a skeleton.

“You deserted.” It’s said questioningly, almost like Kara wouldn’t have believed it if she hadn’t been there herself.

“Mon-El outlived his usefulness. I saw a better opportunity and I took it.”

“Is that the only reason why?”

Lena narrows her eyes, unsure if she’s being lured into a trap, but she doesn’t see what sort of trap she could fall into. Still, she was being held in a cold, dark cell with no indication that she’d be released anytime soon.

“The only,” she replies. The knight’s face sags a little, but brightens up again.

“Did you receive my letter? I’ve never corresponded with a rival before. It’s kind of exciting, isn’t it? It’s strange, I feel like I know you – not as a knight, but outside of that. It’s difficult to explain.”

Kara's enthusiasm is disgustingly attractive and her ability to spout nonsense even more so. She'd be lying if she said she didn't feel some kind of pull toward Kara, something she couldn't explain, either. Kara takes her leave soon after and promises Lena she'll get to leave her cell within the next few days. They just need to ensure that her people won't wage war in the meantime.

Kara comes back to speak with her everyday after that, usually for no reason at all, other than wanting to talk to Lena and ask her random questions. She brings her pieces of dried meat under her cloak, which probably means that she isn't supposed to, but Lena is absolutely ravenous and almost swallows each piece whole.

"I've been talking to my mother and father about releasing you," she says. "Alex thinks we should keep you here longer, but I don't see you as a threat."

"Maybe you should," Lena says, raising an eyebrow. "I have tried to kill you twice, after all."

"Technically, it was only once. Plus, you also saved my life once, so it balances itself out." Kara takes one more piece of dried meat out of her tunic and takes a bite of it, handing the rest to Lena.

Taking a bite, she rests against the wall of her cell. "Why are you here? Shouldn't you be planning your attack on the Daxamites?"

Kara toys with a cord that dangles from her neck and frowns. "I was told to leave the room, because I kept insisting that I was ready to go back into battle and everyone kept telling me I needed to rest, so I tried to prove it by swinging my sword around and cut through the table."

Lena holds back a laugh and lowers her head, so she doesn't take one look at Kara's pouting face and crack. "So, you've decided to spend your time with a prisoner instead?"

"I like talking to you," Kara says simply. "And you won't be a prisoner much longer. My father says he's planning on letting you out tomorrow once our scouts return. But I should be going. Alex said she'd help me strengthen my limbs."

"Alex is your sister?" Lena inquires.

Kara nods. "Yes – well, not by blood. The king and queen took me in after my parents were killed in the Battle of Vex."

"Ah, I am sorry," Lena apologizes.

"It's all right, the king and queen have treated me like their own flesh and blood. I couldn't ask for better parents. Anyway, I should be off. I'll make sure to sneak you some real food for dinner."

Lena lets out a deep breath after Kara leaves and wonders what will become of her if she ever leaves her cell. Would her men welcome her back, or treat her like a traitor? She knew Jack would remain by her side, but the others were unpredictable.

True to her word, Kara comes back down with more dried meat and an apple this time, but must leave again right away. The next morning, she's removed from her cell and allowed to bathe in one of the spare rooms of the keep. She sits in the shallow tub for much longer than normal, letting the grime wash off of her body. She's given fresh clothes, a dress, which she isn't used to wearing, but she doesn't think walking around nude will give off the best impression.

There's a knock on her door after she's finished dressing, the woman named Samantha is there with a dog to escort her to the dining hall to break her fast. The table is long and stretches across the entire room, but she sees Kara sitting at one end with her family. Lena is walked through the room and asked to sit down in the chair across from Kara, who stares at her with widened eyes.

"Apologies for not releasing you sooner, Ser Lena. We needed to wait to hear from our scouts and they tell me that your men are still waiting for you in Midvale, as instructed. Mon-El has moved into Kandor Keep, as well. So, after we eat, I think we should discuss what happens next. Will you now fight for Krypton?"

"I fight for myself, for Thorul, but we will assist you, as long as Mon-El falls."

"Can we trust your men to switch their allegiance just like that?" Alex asks, scowling.

"My men are loyal to me. They will do what I say."

"Very well, once we plan our attack, you're free to go and we will reconvene wherever we decide to begin our march to Kandor."

"Will you honor my agreement with Mon-El and allow me and my men to live freely once we're victorious?"

Jeremiah looks at Eliza and then at his daughters, nodding at Lena. "Kandor Keep will become your home, as long as no innocents are harmed."

"I accept," says Lena.

They spend the rest of the day discussing their next move. Lena is to ride back to Midvale to gather her men and then march them back to Kandor. There, they will meet with Krypton's army, led by Kara, but Lena will keep her men back until the first wave attacks, to catch them off-guard, but they will need a way to get past the castle walls.

"There is a weak point where their water flows out. It's where we were going to attack once we got through your army."

"Then that's where we'll go," says J'onn. "Kara will gather the men and have them prepare for travel."

The meeting is adjourned and everyone leaves except for Lena and Kara. Kara takes a deep breath and sits down in the stiff chair, rubbing her shoulder.

"Are you okay?" Lena asks.

“Fine,” replies Kara. “Still a little sore.”

Lena furrows her brow. “You haven’t given yourself much time to heal. Your wounds are still fresh.”

“There isn’t much I can do. Someone needs to lead my men.”

“What about your second? James, was it?”

Kara shakes her head. “It has to be me.”

Lena understands that feeling, the feeling that you’re responsible for your men and keeping them alive. It’s a heavy burden to carry, but such is the life of a knight when your army becomes your family. And for someone like Lena who’s lost so much, family is all you have.

She gets an idea and pulls Kara out of her chair. “What are you doing?” Kara screeches.

“We still have time before we need to leave. Practice with me.”

Kara gives her a strange look. “Practice what?”

“Fighting. What else?”

Lena decides that fighting Kara was the worst idea she could possibly have, because Kara is standing in front of her with a loose tunic on and trousers so tight that she wonders how she has any mobility at all. Lena has changed out of her dress and borrowed some clothing of her own, stretching her muscles and throwing some practice swings in front of herself.

“Ready?” Kara calls out from across the courtyard. They’re in a large grassy rectangle in the center of the castle with pillars boxing them in. Lena nods and gets into her ready stance, waiting for Kara to tell her to go. There’s no announcement and Kara just rushes toward her wildly. Their swords clang together and Kara is relentless in her attacks. Lena parries them easily enough and knocks her shoulder into Kara’s side, pushing her away.

Kara comes at her again, throwing overhead swings and pushing Lena back until she hits a pillar. The blonde throws her body forward until it’s flush against Lena’s, their swords in between them and she can feel warm breath lightly brush against her face.

“Yield?” Kara asks with a cocky grin.

“Never,” replies Lena as she knees Kara in the leg where she knows she’d be tender. Kara grunts and backs away as Lena goes on the offense, bringing her sword down toward Kara’s head, but she frustratingly blocks every swing. The blonde runs around a pillar and Lena swings into it, breaking off a chunk of the marble. When they get back on the grass, she sees Kara lunging for her, grabbing her around the waist until they both lose their footing and fall to the ground. The impact makes her drop her sword and it slides across an archway, out of reach. They’re both out of breath and Kara’s on top of her, practically straddling her abdomen, and holding her wrists above her head. Their faces are so close together that she can see the golden specks in Kara’s eyes and if she moves her head up just an inch, she can probably kiss her.

“Now do you yield?” Lena’s breaths are heavy, and she swallows thickly before nodding. A look of realization falls across Kara’s face and she releases Lena’s arms before rolling off of her. “That was, um, a good fight.”

“It was,” Lena replies, sitting up. “You bested me.”

“After you cheated!”

Lena scoffs. “How did I cheat?”

“You kneed me where the arrow hit me,” Kara frowns, rubbing her leg.

“That’s not cheating, that’s using your weaknesses to my advantage.”

Kara huffs and helps Lena up. They return to their rooms and get ready to leave. Lena’s armor is returned to her and she has someone assist her in putting it on. It’s been cleaned and polished, looks better than it has in years, actually. She heads out to where the rest of the men gather and she can feel a lot of judgmental eyes on her. A tall man approaches her and nods at her.

“You ready?” he asks.

This must be James, Lena thinks to herself. Kara’s second in command. “I am. Are you and your men?”

“Yeah, they’re itching to fight. Last round was incredibly dissatisfying.”

“I agree,” replies Lena.

“I saw you fighting out in Kandor. You’re good.”

Lena ducks her head. “Thank you. When you’re driven by rage and vengeance, it’s a great motivator.” He must notice her watching Kara as she says goodbye to her parents, because he leans in closer.

“She’s pretty amazing, too. Not driven by rage, but by duty and honor. She’s always wanted to prove herself to the king and queen, even when she had nothing to prove.”

“You sound a little smitten,” she observes, curling her lip into a smirk. James smiles, but his eyes show signs of sadness.

“I care for her, yes, but she is... unattainable – to me, anyway.” She’s about to ask why when she hears her name being called. Kara trots over to her.

“Winn the blacksmith says he has something for you.”

“Me? Why?”

“I don’t know, but let’s go see what it is. Sorry, James!”

James chuckles and shakes his head, shooing them away. Kara leads Lena to the blacksmith's shop and they walk inside. Winn startles, but sees them and rushes over with a blade that was sitting on his counter.

"I-I wasn't sure what the crest for house Luthor looked like, so I just added a wolf onto the pommel. They're a pack animal and dreadfully loyal to their pack. It sounded appropriate – from what I've heard, anyway."

Lena swallows thickly, her words failing her. "Thank you. I don't know what I can give you to pay you for this."

Winn waves her off dismissively. "It's free of charge. Just make sure the Daxamites lose." Lena nods and walks back over to Kara, who's smiling at her.

"New blade, polished armor. I think you're ready for war."

"This is all very unexpected. Why is everyone being so nice?"

Kara shrugs. "Why wouldn't they be? You're a friend of Krypton now."

Lena doesn't know how to feel about any of this. For so long, it's just been her and her men. Part of her wants to be ready for another betrayal, like Mon-El's, but another part can't help but trust the Kryptonians. After splitting off from Kara, she rides off in the direction of Midvale. She's missed her men and hopes they haven't caused too much trouble in her absence. That evening, she rides up to the town and is greeted by Jack and the rest of her army, who cheer at her arrival. She's relieved to see that nothing has changed and they don't see her as a traitor.

They sit down in the pub and Jack sits at a table across from her. "The men are ready, been itching for a fight. I've made sure they continued their practicing and drills, so they didn't become lazy."

"Thank you, Jack," Lena says, smiling.

"So, how was it? Did they torture you after I left? Are you missing any fingers or toes?"

Lena laughs. "No, they were very hospitable. The blacksmith even forged me a new sword. Look." She lays her blade across the table and Jack lets out a low whistle as he brushes his fingers against the edge.

"This is amazing work. Sharp edge," he picks it up and bounces his arm a little, "light. And... a wolf?"

"The blacksmith said it fit me."

Jack smiles at her. "It does, pack leader. Now, let's get you a pint!" They drink and talk for the rest of the evening, but not enough to get drunk. They still need their wits about them and get a good night's rest.

"And the other woman knight?" Jack inquires.

“What about her?” Lena takes a sip from her tankard.

“Did you two...” he waggles his eyebrows.

Lena narrows her eyes and throws a cup at his head. “Don’t be crude. No, nothing happened.”

“Pity,” Jack says, laughing. “With the way she kept visiting you, I would’ve thought she’d have pounced on you by now.” Lena’s thoughts drifted to when Kara was on top of her at the end of their fight and how it felt to have the weight on her. She feels her heart speed up and she gulps down the rest of her ale. “Slow down,” Jack says with a laugh. “You want another?”

Lena shakes her head. “No, I should get some sleep. So should you.”

“Ah, you know my pre-battle ritual. I’ve come to get to know the people of Argo fairly well.”

Lena snorts. “Okay, go bed your man or woman, or both, but don’t be late. We’re leaving at dawn.”

“You should try it sometime,” Jack winks. “Might make you fight better.”

Lena rolls her eyes and takes her sword back. She tosses a few coins onto the table and takes her leave, stumbling a little toward her tent. She falls asleep, imagining burying her head in a sea of lion’s mane.

She wakes up before the sun rises and starts preparing. One of the young squires helps her put on her armor and she makes her rounds, making sure everyone is ready. Jack looks a little worse for wear, but it’s not as bad as she’s seen him before. They march down the road on their way to Kandor and stop just before the tree line that surrounds the castle. She spots Kara and her army waiting on the hill, she’s pacing back and forth in front of her men, most likely giving them another inspiring speech. Usually, she doesn’t say much to her men, because they don’t need it, but this time, she feels like she should. She rides up ahead and mimics Kara’s pacing.

“This is it. This battle will determine whether we can have a home of our own, finally. Mon-El promised us the land, to build a home, but he stabbed us in the back and betrayed us. I believe Kara is different. She has integrity, honor, all things that Mon-El does not possess. She will keep her word.

“I have fought by your side for many years, let my heart and soul on so many battlefields, and it’s all led to this point. We can beat the Daxamites, we can win. They are no match for any of you, so give everything you have and let’s go home.”

Her men yell and cheer, raising their weapons in the air, Jack nods and smiles proudly. Turning her horse around, it leaps into a gallop and they ride through the forest, emerging on the other side, heading straight for the weak spot of the castle wall. Kara meets them there and her men roll out the battering ram and start ramming the gate. Once the door is down, they rush in, thigh-deep in water. Lena and Kara cut down anyone who gets in their way.

They find Mon-El deep within the keep, hiding in one of the royal quarters and he's dragged out into the center. The front gates are being broken down by Barry and the army of Vathlo, who came to help them fight.

Lena walks forward, hand tightening around the grip of her sword. Mon-El has tears in his eyes and scoots back across the dirt, holding his arms up. "Please," he begs, "have mercy." With a pained yell, Lena lifts her sword, about to bring it down upon the betrayer's head when a hand stops her. She whips her head around and sees Kara standing there.

"What are you doing?" Lena snarls.

"There's been enough bloodshed. Mon-El's people have deserted and those who haven't have bent the knee. Look," she gestures to the men surrounding them, still wearing the Daxamite colors, but they've dropped their weapons and were all kneeling.

"He *betrayed* me. That cannot be forgiven."

"I'm not telling you to forgive him, but he's unarmed. This isn't an honorable death."

Lena's muscles strain against Kara's grip, but she eventually relents and drops her sword with a sigh. "Get out," she growls. Mon-El looks between the two knights and scrambles to his feet, running out the front gates. They laugh as people throw rocks at him, goading him and mocking. Lena narrows her eyes with concern. "You know he'll be back."

"Perhaps, but we'll be ready."

Lena looks at Kara, whose profile looks like something out of her dreams. "We?" Kara turns to face her now and smiles, taking one of Lena's gloved hands in her own and she suddenly wishes she didn't have all of her heavy armor on, so she could feel Kara's skin on hers.

"I have been thinking a lot these past few weeks of knowing you and you may not remember, because these things take time to un-fog themselves, but we are not from this time. This isn't our home." Lena blinks and tries to piece together the things Kara is telling her, but they make no sense. Kara holds her face in her hands now and looks in her eyes like they've known each other forever. She swallows thickly, feeling wholly unnerved. She begins to feel lightheaded and grabs onto Kara for leverage. The blonde knight wraps her arms around Lena and presses her lips to the side of her head and whispers, "Find me," before Lena's vision goes dark and she can feel herself falling.

## United States; November 22, 1963

Kara's eyes focus and she blinks a few times before looking around to see where she landed next. She appears to be in someone's study, hiding behind a desk. Checking her coat pockets, she locates a knife, but that's about it. She crawls over to the door and cracks it open, peering out. There's no one in the hallways, so she sneaks out quietly, listening carefully at each door. She reaches one and hears a thud from inside. Jiggling the handle, she finds it locked and uses the blade of her knife to jimmy it open. When she walks inside, she sees someone standing on the windowsill before they jump out. Kara yells at them to stop, but they're already gone. She looks down at the dead body lying on the floor and sighs. That must be the person she was sent to protect, but she was too late.

She's about to leave when she notices a book out of place on the bookshelf. Sliding it out of its spot, she checks the cover, then takes it off of the book completely. A letter is written in blood, which is completely dramatic and unnecessary, seeing how there are pens sitting on the desk.

*Hey Slowpoke,*

*Sorry for foiling your rescue plans, but I couldn't let you beat me. I guess the more you travel, the more you remember, because I remember our last mission in its entirety. I don't think our commanders will be too pleased if they learn we helped one another. Although, we both got what we wanted – no Mon-El in power. I got an earful for not killing him, so thanks for that.*

*I've been wondering, how do you receive your assignments? I usually just get thrown into the strand and left to figure out what it is I need to do. Sometimes I'm on a strand for years, like we were in Thorul and Krypton. Others, like this one, take hours at most and then I'm whisked away again, off to the next one. I wonder how they decide to send us.*

*Writing by hand is a foreign thing to me. We usually communicate telepathically, or verbally. Written word has become somewhat of an archaic method of communication, and much slower; might I add, but I have to admit, I do like the way it looks.*

*I hope your next mission comes easier. I imagine you're a very capable operative in your own right (when I'm not around, anyway). I never know how to end these, so I guess I'll just let it end abruptly.*

*Lena*

Kara reads the letter once more, following the flow of the letters in their loops and waves, before throwing it into the fire and watching the flames tickle the paper until it curls up and turns black. It's nice having someone to talk to in these strands – kind of. Makes the missions a little less lonely, but now that she knows that she and Lena are on opposite sides, it makes things more complicated. It occurs to her that she will need to leave letters in every strand just in case Lena finds herself there next.

These strands make up the fabric of time, so their job is to knot it in the correct place, to change the outcome of history. Whose history is yet to be seen. Kara was recruited to become an operative for the Streaks, codename Red, and takes great pride in a job well done, seeing each mission to the bitter end.

She cleans up the mess Lena left behind, disposing of the body, as well as her failure. She mops up the blood, wiping away her shame, and waits. When the Powers That Be deem it sufficient, she feels herself become weightless and it's onto the next strand.

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Lena ties her hair up in a blue ribbon as the harsh morning sun shines through the window before her. She's been on the new strand for the past couple of weeks, trying to keep track of her target and finding the perfect time to strike. She knows Kara will probably be there soon, if she hasn't shown up already. She never imagined she'd have a nemesis. They're meant to be solitary operatives, complete their missions as quick and efficiently as possible with little to no interactions with others, lest they get distracted. For the past fifty or so strands, Lena's been alone, and she prefers it that way, but ever since meeting Kara – someone she's found a competitor in – she's found herself thinking of the blonde often, which was not something she intended to happen, nor something she could allow herself to be caught doing. She has to remain steadfast and vigilant, continue fulfilling her duties in order to not expose herself.

She sits perched in an abandoned building, gun assembled and sitting next to her. The parade should be starting soon and her target will be sitting in a convertible car near the end of the convoy. Lena takes great pride in her marksmanship, never missing a target, never getting caught.

Horses trot down the street with their riders holding up decorative swords and crowds marching behind them. She waits patiently for all of them to walk by until she sees vehicles start to drive through. She lifts the gun onto the windowsill and waits patiently. When she sees the vehicle she's been waiting for, she looks through the scope and rests her finger on the trigger.

Deep breath in. Hold.

She gets a shot and takes it, pulling the trigger and a loud *bang* rings through the air, but before the bullet even reaches her target, he disappears before her very eyes and is left facing a smiling blonde in his stead. Lena lets out a frustrated growl, quickly dismantles her weapon and packs it up, escaping down the stairs of the building and running out the back door. She sheds her clothing and grabs some out of a nearby dumpster, putting them on, along with a wig and sunglasses, slinging her duffel bag over her shoulder. Camouflaging herself within the panicked crowd, she is able to leave the area unseen until she slips into her safehouse a mile away.

A piece of notebook paper is nailed to the inside of the door and it reads *burn before reading*, so Lena takes it over to the fireplace and lights a match, lighting the kindling and the piece of paper. Letters of reds and oranges make themselves seen with the curls and swoops of familiar letters and they begin to form recognizable letters in the wake of the flames that tickle the page.

*Dearest friendly foe,*

*Gotcha! Sorry, I couldn't let you get away with this assassination, too. We need him for something, although we're never told what. I'm sure it's important. Did you like my little apparition trick? Pretty cool, huh? I've spent years trying to perfect it and most of the time, it only ended up making the target look like a blob. I'm glad I got it to work for you, though. I've been meaning to ask, do you dream? I've heard operatives have their memories wiped whenever they've finished a strand, but that obviously can't be true if I remember things. Unless it's because I'm a higher rank than the rest – trusted.*

*I have always wondered what it's like to dream. What would I dream about? Would I dream of you, glaring at me? Glowering? Would we be working together, in unison, as a team? It's a pipe dream, I know (ha ha). We are on opposite sides of this war with no end in sight. Neither of us knows what our side is actually trying to accomplish, we are pawns. Cogs. A means to an end.*

*I long for a day when I can take a vacation, a real one. I know I should be dismantled for even thinking that, for not putting my duty and the war on the forefront of my mind, always. If you could go anywhere in the world, at any point of time, where would you go? What would you do? I would want to go somewhere quiet, somewhere that I can just... be. More often than not, I'm finding ways to alter myself, to make myself better. All I do is tinker and adjust, calculate which upgrade would work in what strand. I suppose you don't have to worry about that. All of your skills are naturally engrained, learned.*

*I should be going now. Always more knots to untangle.*

*Better luck next time,  
Kara*

Lena lets the words linger on her mind for a moment longer before throwing the parchment into the fire. She's letting herself get distracted and it's upsetting her. It's making her sloppy and causing her to make mistakes she wouldn't normally make. It's all because of this woman, this person she's inexplicably drawn to through time and space. She just hopes that she doesn't slip badly enough to get caught, as the higher ups don't take failure lightly.

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As Lena waits to be assigned to her next strand, she finds herself wondering where Kara is, what time period, what history she's trying to change. According to her memory, she has been tying and untying knots for the past one hundred forty-five linear years. She's not sure anything she's doing is making a difference, but she's never thought to ask. Although, with Kara undoing all her hard work, it's likely that everything she's done has been all for naught. She can't be too angry, though. It's been quite some time since she's had competition and she would be lying if she said it wasn't exhilarating knowing that Kara would always be there to try and stop her.

She does worry, though, that she'll get caught eventually – not by the Streaks but by her own Commandant for the Corporation. They send out Seekers to follow them, always remaining in the shadows, so they never know when they're there. They watch and pick up evidence

that may or may not be used against them. Lena's always careful, though, but it only takes one slip-up and she's done.

Her closest call is when she gets her next assignment: a strand in the 30<sup>th</sup> century. Her armor is light with blue details painted on, and her weapon charged as she trudges through the ruins of a decimated city. She climbs up fallen buildings in search of... well, anything, really. The area is barren and she's not even quite sure what it is she's looking for. The instructions weren't clear, as they rarely ever are, but she keeps her eyes open and scans the entire horizon before her. This planet's second sun is a deep purple and it's beginning to set, casting shadows all around Lena. She treads lightly around the rubble, looking for traps, and doesn't notice a large creature laying in wait just a few steps in front of her. Just as she's about to step right into its maw, someone jumps in front of her and pushes her away.

"Run!" they yell at her.

It's against every instinct in her to run, but Lena does as they say and she ducks behind a wall a few buildings down, watching the other person fight this creature. The other fighter dodges a swipe, but gets caught by the tail and it knocks off their helmet, revealing the familiar golden head of hair.

It's her lion, it's Kara.

The creature snaps its jaws at Kara, but she blocks it with her arm. As the snake-like monster pulls back, Lena can see Kara's arm. There's no blood, only the sound of metal and wire crunching between jagged teeth. Then, a robotic dog charges forward and sinks its teeth right into the creature. With one smooth movement, Kara stabs her spear held by her other hand right into the creature's neck and it screams and writhes, releasing the arm from its mouth. Another stab to the top of the enemy's head, right through its brain, is the killing blow and Kara stands triumphantly over the body. She looks down at her arm curiously and starts to rewire it, sparks flying everywhere. Lena wants to go to her, to thank her, to... she doesn't know. She still doesn't understand this magnetic pull she feels with the Red Lion, and it's terrifying.

Kara will be the death of her.

Lena looks up again and Kara is looking right at her. She smiles faintly and holds up her good hand as if to wave and then she darts off in the opposite direction, dog following at her heels. Standing up and dusting herself off, Lena continues along her path and wonders if Kara is as afraid of being caught as she is. She doesn't know how the Streaks handle insubordination, but the Corporation does not tolerate it one bit. Now that Kara's saved her life, they're even, but Lena still feels like she owes *more*, because before she knew Kara, she only knew solitude. She never realized exactly how lonely she was until she had someone to share her experiences with and it scared her to death.

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If Kara needed breath in her lungs, she would definitely be without it after fighting with that snake creature. After leaving the area, and Lena behind with it, she stops at a nearby clearing and leans against a tree to assess her injuries. She looks at her arm and the shoddy rewiring job she did, furrowing her brow. It would only get her so far before she would need to have it

repaired back at headquarters. Then, she would have to explain how she sustained such an injury and she isn't sure if she has the ability to lie her way out of it; she's never had to lie before. Robotic Dog sits patiently and waits for her to finish, wagging his metallic tail and causing a small windstorm behind him.

That was the closest she's been to Lena in years. They hadn't been assigned to the same strand in quite some time, but that didn't stop Kara from leaving letters anywhere she could think of – in bee stings, in the frothy waves of the ocean where it kisses the sand, in a hummingbird's wing, hoping one of them would reach her. She'd missed her, and that feeling was not one that Kara was familiar with. Kara knew duty and honor and pride, but emotions were foreign entities and not things that were programmed into her, as they clouded judgement and made her weak – at least, that is what she was told.

Streak operatives work alone, her Overseer taught her. Anyone else would just get in the way. Strength in numbers did not apply to them, as they were built to be their own one-man army. So, it's very inconvenient that Kara can only think about Lena in every capacity when she should be thinking about her assignments. Lena plagues her every thought. It's spread across worlds and strands and she sees her everywhere. Whenever she sees the subtle evergreen foliage of trees, she thinks of Lena's eyes. When she sees the ivory of mammoth tusks, she thinks of Lena's pale skin. And when she sees the darkness of a moonless night, she thinks of Lena's waves of hair that Kara regrets not being able to run her hand through. She idly wonders if any others have ever felt this way, or if she's the first. There were rumors about a band of rebels who were excommunicated from the Streaks centuries ago, but the details are vague and full of holes. They aren't given much time off for recreation, but every once in a while, they're called in for routine maintenance and are given a few days away from the strand.

This time, Kara is due for her maintenance and is summoned back to headquarters, where her arm is repaired. She sits patiently while the other androids work on her until one of the others shows up and leans against the doorway – Alex, the closest thing she has to a friend.

“Hey, Red. Looks like you got pretty banged up this time.”

Kara nods and looks at her arm. “Had a little disagreement with a roc worm.”

Alex gives her an odd look. “You were assigned to strand 3046 X75?”

Kara simply nods again. She doesn't give any indication that it wasn't where she was supposed to be, lest the others in the room catch on. Alex accepts the answer and waits for Kara to finish up before they walk out.

“Have you ever encountered someone from Corporation while upthread?” Kara asks Alex nonchalantly.

“No, we are not to fraternize with others. You know that.”

“Yes, I know. It's just... we've been doing this for thousands of years and how is it that we've never met anyone else?”

Alex glances at Kara. "If you are doing your job well, you will complete your mission unseen. Even if you are in a strand for years on end, you shouldn't ever run into another from the Corporation if you are careful."

Kara nods. "Right, of course."

"Come, you have some time to relax. I haven't spoken to you in decades, let's converse," Alex suggests, clapping Kara on the shoulder. They walk toward one of the bars in the city center and sit down at a couple of stools. The bartender walks up to them and Kara recognizes her immediately.

"Samantha?"

The woman looks at her cautiously, but doesn't let her face show any recognition. "What'll you have?"

"I'll have a Bromodian lager. Kara?"

Kara flips through the menu quickly and her eyes focus on a blue liquid. "Glaciatic ale, please." The bartender nods and walks off to make their drinks. "You said her name. Do you know her?"

Kara shakes her head. "Perhaps I was mistaken." Their drinks arrive and Kara sips her sapphire-colored beverage that reminds her of Lena. Drinking is more of a social habit for the Streaks, as their bodies do not become inebriated as humans' do. Kara watches Alex stare at the bartender a little longer than is appropriate as she walks away and considers asking about it, but it would be foolish to do so in public, in case they're being watched. Instead, they talk about their missions, how long they were there, their success rate. Kara finds herself thinking about Lena again, wondering where she is now and how long she's been there. Then she wonders how long it will be until they can come in contact with one another again.

Alex waves her hand in front of Kara's face and drags her out of her thoughts. "Sorry, what were you saying?"

"I've never seen you so distracted before. Are you still upset about getting damaged?"

Kara shakes her head. "No, it's nothing." Alex gives her a scrutinizing look, but says nothing further. They finish their drinks and leave the bar, Kara taking one last look back at the familiar bartender. She shoves the receipt into her pocket and leaves with Alex.

"How much longer do you have on recreation?" Alex asks.

"Only another day and then I get my new assignment," Kara replies. "I hope it's somewhere warm. The cold always makes my joints stick." As they walk down the street away from the bar, the robotic dog trots up to them. Kara kneels down and pats it on the head.

"Friend of yours?" Alex asks.

"Yes, this is Dog. We've been through some missions together." Kara coos and scratches the dog behind its metallic ear. Just then, Samantha exits the bar and Alex notices.

“I’ll meet up with you later. Don’t leave without letting me see you off,” she says hastily, darting back in the opposite direction. Kara looks over her shoulder and chuckles to herself. She heads to her bunk and sits down at her desk that’s lit by candlelight. Normally, it would have bright energy-efficient lights turned on, but Kara enjoys the ambiance. She begins crafting a letter as she’s done every night since she returned and attaches it to the roots of an old redwood tree, the last of its kind, and hopes the roots continue to grow until they reach their destination.

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Kara reports early for her next assignment, but she’s been waiting longer than usual. The door opens and her superior J’onn walks out with a grave look on his face.

“The Overseer would like to speak with you.”

This concerns Kara, because Streaks usually have very limited interactions with the Overseer, usually dealing with their minions instead. Kara stands up and follows J’onn inside, who promptly leaves soon after, closing the door behind him. The Overseer is small in stature, but Kara knows that she could snap her in half with a look. She stands in front of a large screen with many different monitors, surveying different moments in time, looking for the next thread to knot. Kara stands in the middle of the room patiently and waits.

The Overseer turns around and walks over to her desk. “Ah, Red, thank you for coming. Please, have a seat.” They both sit down on each side of the desk and Kara folds her hands in her lap. The Overseer brings out a folder and starts flipping through some pages and the silence is unnerving. She slides a few documents across the desk in front of Kara, who picks them up to examine them. “Do you know who that is?”

It’s a grainy photograph of Lena.

“It is possible that I have seen them in one of the strands before, on one of my missions. Why do you ask?” If Kara hadn’t been trained to steel her nerves and not show any emotion when under pressure, she may have cracked, but she looks at the Overseer straight on and doesn’t waver.

“This asset is always one step ahead of us, undoing all of the hard work we complete. She has become quite a nuisance, and I want you to inform me the next time you see her on one of your missions. It appears that the Corporation has been assigning her specifically to your strands and I want to know why. It appears her codename is Blue and she’s the best they’ve ever had.”

“Understood,” Kara answers. What she doesn’t say is that Lena *is* the best they’ve ever had, since she’s thwarted many of Kara’s attempts to complete her missions.

“You’re excused,” the Overseer says. Just as Kara’s about to stand, the Overseer calls out. “How are you feeling, by the way?”

“Feeling, ma’am?”

“Your injury. In all of the years I’ve been your Overseer, I’ve never seen you get hurt once. It must have been quite a battle.”

Kara shrugs it off. “Just a flesh wound, nothing serious. I’m perfectly fine.” The Overseer nods and excuses Kara once more. Kara rushes out of the room and exhales deeply once she’s out of sight.

By the time she’s given her next assignment, she’s completely healed and it’s like her injury never happened. She travels upthread to strand 9276 G82 and finds herself looking in every tree knot of each forest, every wave of magma at the slope of a volcano, just to see if she was left a letter from Lena. She never finds one and wonders how long it will be until she does. Part of her wonders if Lena’s forgotten about her, which she wouldn’t fault her for. They’re agents first, friends – if that’s what they are to each other – second. Still, she makes sure that she leaves letters wherever she goes, just in case.

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Lena has been stuck in the same godsforsaken strand for the past seven years. Unable to leave until she’s completed her mission, she’s done her best to make the most of it, but she finds the pang of loneliness deep within her aching chest, even though she has a husband and child. Knowing they are just a means to an end, she finds it impossible to form any sort of attachment to either one of them, even though she’s mastered the art of manipulation and has convinced everyone that she’s the doting wife and mother she ought to be.

As much as she hates to admit it, Lena finds herself missing Kara. She hasn’t had any communication with the other agent since she’s been on this strand and she’s worried that Kara may think she’s gotten caught, or worse. In the off chance that Kara comes to the same strand, Lena’s left letters in almost every inch of land she’s walked upon, hoping that one day she’ll receive one back, but the day never comes.

This isn’t the longest time Lena’s spent on a strand, but it is loneliest she’s felt. Her husband starts to notice and tries his best to console her, but she’s not receptive and the townsfolk all tiptoe around her due to her melancholy. Even her daughter at two years old asks why she looks so sad all the time and all Lena can do is assure her that it’s not her fault and that she loves both her and her father very much - a lie, but a convincing one.

One day, she rides into town after leaving her daughter with her in-laws to grab a few groceries and other things they need at the house. It’s a simple trip, should be in and out within the hour, but she finds herself browsing inside of the other shops. A candy store sits at the corner of the road and she pops in, perusing all the different types, wondering what kind Kara would eat – or if she even eats candy. She picks a few pieces under the guise of taking them back for her daughter and when she leaves the store, her attention is drawn across the way to the saloon. Normally, she wouldn’t step foot in there, because most men didn’t know how to behave, and she would certainly blow her cover if she broke all of their noses.

When she walks in, she sees a few card tables set up, as well as women entertaining their clients, but what catches her attention is someone sitting at the bar. It isn’t unusual for men in that time period to have longer hair, but this hair she recognizes. The body it belongs to is slender and muscular and she knows it immediately: her lion.



## End Notes

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