

**a fight to be won for the love you find at home**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/7989025) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/7989025>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Categories:	<a href="#">F/F</a> , <a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Supergirl (TV 2015)</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Alex Danvers &amp; Kara Danvers</a> , <a href="#">Kara Danvers &amp; Lucy Lane</a> , <a href="#">Kara Danvers/Cat Grant</a> , <a href="#">Alex Danvers/Lucy Lane</a> , <a href="#">Alex Danvers &amp; Kara Danvers &amp; Lucy Lane</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Kara Danvers</a> , <a href="#">Alex Danvers</a> , <a href="#">Lucy Lane (DCU)</a> , <a href="#">Cat Grant</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Alternate Universe - Harry Potter Setting</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2016-09-08 Words: 11,216 Chapters: 1/10

# **a fight to be won for the love you find at home**

by [Care](#), [nirav](#)

## Summary

Kara Danvers, The-Girl-Who-Lived.

A Harry Potter AU.

## Notes

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

The summer Kara turns eight is remarkable for three reasons:

One. She finally learns how to whistle. After weeks and weeks of trying, she manages to pucker her lips together in just the right way to release a thin thread of wispy sound. Kara whistles all afternoon while doing the washing up until Aunt Winifred locks her in her cupboard. Kara whistles softly to herself in the dark, trying not to think about the spiders in the corner, and it soothes her racing pulse.

Two. There's a small garden snake behind the house, tucked away in the uneven tall grass around the shed. Kara notices it when she's getting a pair of shears and shrieks. The snake slithers up to her, its long tongue sneaking out to taste the air, and hisses, "Helloooooooooo" right into her face. Kara wonders if she's dreaming, but she feels the damp dirt beneath her palms, the blades of grass prickling her skin, and she runs into the house to get away from the talking snake.

Three. An old woman named Professor McGonagall appears on the doorstep a few days before Kara's birthday. She's the oldest person Kara's ever seen — aside from Mr. Slattery next door — but she looks so different from him that Kara can't believe that they'd ever be lumped together. Mr. Slattery stalks around his yard, clipping his hedges, and yelling at her when she strays too close to his drive. Professor McGonagall is tall and wears the most peculiar pointed hat.

"You look like a witch," Kara says when she answers the doorbell.

Professor McGonagall stoops down to her size. "That's because I am."

"Oh," Kara says, trying to work out in her head how that'd even work. Everyone knows witches aren't real.

"I'm here you to take you somewhere else, Kara," Professor McGonagall says. "Why don't you go gather your things?"

"I'm not supposed to go with strangers." Because that's what they told her in school, though Aunt Winifred's left her at Tesco more times than Kara can count. The strangers there have Tesco name badges and give her sweets to suck on while she's waiting for Aunt Winifred to come back.

"That's all right. I knew your parents."

Kara perks up at this. Her parents are dead — car accident when she was a baby — and Kara's only got the one ripped photo to remember them by. Kara looks into Professor McGonagall's wrinkled face. She seems nice, but Kara knows that's no indication. Aunt Winifred has plump cheeks like the illustrations of mums in Kara's library books, and she's not nice at all.

"Who's at the bloody door?" Uncle Robert yells from inside the house.

Professor McGonagall gives Kara a strange look. "Excuse me, Kara. I think I better speak to your aunt and uncle. Or cousins, rather. They're quite distantly related to you, aren't they? Never mind. In the meantime, why don't you pack a suitcase?"

Kara puts her clothes in her shabby little bookbag and goes to wait in the front hall, listening to Uncle Robert yell from the living room. She can't understand what he's saying, but Kara's learned by now that she shouldn't bother him when he's in that sort of mood. She hopes Professor McGonagall *is* a witch. Maybe Uncle Robert would calm down if a witch told him to.

When Uncle Robert's yelling suddenly cuts off, Kara hooks her hands through her bookbag straps and toes at the carpet runner with one of her trainers. Professor McGonagall sweeps into the hall a second later, trailed by Kara's aunt and uncle.

"We're ready to leave, Kara," she announces.

"You're damn lucky we took her in in the first place!" Uncle Robert's saying. "Zor's side of the family was always odd — and then you show up with *her*, talking about all sorts of nonsense! I barely knew him! Third cousins or something. The fact that we took the girl in at all — "

"She didn't want for anything," Aunt Winifred cuts in. "She was fed and clothed. That girl eats more than five grown men, I swear it."

Professor McGonagall ignores them both. She reaches down with her hand and Kara takes it. "Say your goodbyes, Kara."

Kara looks up at her aunt and uncle. They glare down at her, mouths pinched. "Goodbye, Aunt Winifred. Goodbye, Uncle Robert."

Uncle Robert just grunts in response. Aunt Winifred sighs and gives Kara a dismissive shrug.

"Let's go," Professor McGonagall says and opens the front door, tugging Kara along into the hot summer sunshine.

\*

Alex is exactly nine years, one week, and two days old when she gets a sister. The cellophane balloons from her birthday party are still hanging weakly in the air in the garden — her mother tries to take them down every day, and Alex glares at her every time, so they still bounce lazily against one another in the summer wind— and she's laying in the grass with her book and new Walkman, the balloons floating over her, when her mother calls her inside.

Professor McGonagall is there and she smiles down at her, and Alex runs across the living room to hug her.

(The first time, she'd cried. To be fair, she'd also just accidentally levitated her neighbor's cat into a pool an hour earlier, but mostly she cried because a very tall, very scary, very angular woman had appeared on her doorstep and introduced herself as a witch.)

Alex hops up onto the sofa next to her, feet swinging in the air, helping herself to the plate of biscuits her mother set out with tea.

“I understand it’s quite a lot to ask,” Professor McGonagall says. She holds her tea easy and level, as if she was born with it in her hand, and Alex straightens up next to her, picking up a spare teacup to match. “But she’s— well, she’s very special.”

“Special like me?” Alex says. Her tea sloshes around a bit, a few droplets flopping out onto her hand, and Professor McGonagall conjures up a handkerchief to hand her.

“Special like you,” she says.

(“You’re a very special girl, Alexandra,” Professor McGonagall said, offering her a napkin to wipe away her tears. “What happened with your neighbor’s cat was an accident, but it wasn’t a mistake. You’re special, you see, because you can do magic.”

She leans a bit closer, adjusting her heavy robes so she can keep a hand on Alex’s shoulder from her position kneeling down in front of her.

“And just between you and me,” she whispers. “I spoke to Pudding, and he forgives you for the swim.” She winks and, reclaiming the napkin, snaps her fingers and turns it into a flower.)

“I’m not sure,” Alex’s mother says. “It’s not that we don’t want to, of course, we just — ” She looks around the small living room with the look she gets when Alex asks if she can join the travel football team, or go on the class trip to Ireland, or have a new set of uniforms for school. “I’m not sure we can offer much to her.”

“My dear,” Professor McGonagall says. “You can offer her a family, which I assure you is more than she’s ever had.”

“Who?” Alex peers up at Professor McGonagall, wrinkling her nose. The tea is cold, and Professor McGonagall takes hers without milk or sugar so Alex does the same. It’s disgusting.

“A little girl about your age,” Professor McGonagall says.

“Alex, why don’t you go on upstairs and work on your reading?” her mother says.

“But I — ”

“Go ahead, dear,” Professor McGonagall says. She reclaims the handkerchief and twirls it around and it sparks and whistles, turning into a tiny pot with a flower that smiles up at Alex. “I’ll come see you again soon.”

By the time Alex has finished her reading and tiptoed back downstairs, her father is home and her parents sit in the living room, talking low and fast.

“Eliza, we can — ”

“What about Alex?” her mother says. “We can’t dump a whole other child on her!”

“Who?” Alex says from the stairs, standing on her toes so she can see over the bannister. She outgrew looking through the rails a year ago, after all. “Is this about the special girl?”

It is, they tell her. A girl who’s lost her parents, who’s been with some people who weren’t very nice to her. A girl who would be her sister.

“I get a sister?”

“You might,” her mother says with a smile. “You would have to share your room with her.”

“Can we build a fort?”

“Within reason,” her father says. He picks her up and settles her in his lap easily, poking at her ribs until she squirms away and into her mother’s lap instead.

“Can we keep her?”

“That’s the idea, I think,” he says. Alex cranes her head back up to look at her mother, who nods.

“I’ll phone Minerva tomorrow.”

And so, true to her word, Professor McGonagall returns with a sister for Alex with long blond hair and big blue eyes and a tattered bookbag, peering around Professor McGonagall’s leg. Alex watches from the stairwell, suddenly nervous — what if she’s *more* special than Alex? — until Professor McGonagall waves her down.

“And this, Kara, is Alex,” she says. “Kara is going to be living with your family.”

“Hi,” Alex says, waving from a safe distance.

“Hello,” Kara says softly. She clutches her bookbag to her chest.

“Alex,” her mother says. “Why don’t you show Kara to your room?”

There’s a new set of bunk beds in the room and an abundance of pillows now, and Alex smiles widely.

“Come on, up here,” she says, bouncing back to the stairs and grabbing Kara by the wrist as she goes by. “Do you like forts? We can build a fort!”

\*

Kara's never had a sister, because Kara's never had a family.

(Technically, Uncle Robert and Aunt Winifred were her family. But Kara knew from storybooks that families loved each other and it never seemed like her aunt and uncle did. Mums and dads in books did things like hug and kiss their children, and Kara isn't sure if Aunt Winifred had hugged anyone in her entire life.)

Kara isn't sure what sisters do, actually, but she wonders if they're all like Alex. If they're good at building forts and sneaking biscuits and making things *fun*.

The first night they sleep together in their blanket fort, Kara still too nervous to say much of anything. Alex tells Kara about her birthday party, the nice golden retriever from up the street, her friends at school. It's nice to hear Alex's voice, even if Kara has nothing to add. She's never had a birthday party. The neighbors up the street didn't have pets — as far as Kara knew — and the kids at school didn't like her very much. Alex is different from anyone Kara's ever met.

"My mum and dad said your aunt and uncle weren't very nice to you," Alex says, her voice growing hoarse. She turns to face Kara, her cheek pressed against her pillow.

"They weren't really my aunt and uncle," is the only thing Kara can think of to say. They weren't nice at all, but she still feels bad saying it aloud. "I think they were my cousins. Or my parents' cousins."

Alex considers this. "I like my cousins. I'm sorry about yours."

"It's okay," Kara says, because it is. It wasn't all bad. At Christmas, Uncle Robert and Aunt Winifred would get her new shoes or a chocolate orange or something else nice.

Besides, now she's here. In a house where there's a mum who comes to tuck them in at night and a dad who cooks dinner and a sister to make blanket forts with.

"What happened to your parents?" Alex asks, her voice hushed.

Kara blinks. "Oh. They died in a car accident. I was a baby, so I don't remember it." There's a peculiar kind of sadness Kara associates with her parents. A faraway ache that Kara can feel like an old bruise. It seems to pulse hurt when she presses down on it, but sometimes she forgets it's even there.

"None of it?"

Kara squints, thinking hard. "A green light, but I don't know if that was real. It may have been magic."

"Magic is real," Alex says. "Professor McGonagall can do it."

Kara knows that to be true. She saw it firsthand. Professor McGonagall had walked Kara down the street to the corner, her hand tight around Kara's own. She picked up a rusting tin can from the side of the road — disgusting, Kara thought — and put Kara's little palm against it. The metal was hot from the sun, almost too hot for Kara's skin, and Kara was about to say something when the ground dropped out from beneath her feet. Kara had felt like Alice in Wonderland, falling through time and space. When she opened her eyes, she was somewhere new entirely.

"Can you do magic?" Kara asks, wide-eyed with the possibility.

Alex nods, grinning. "Yes. And you can too."

Kara doesn't know if she believes it, but Alex is so sure of herself. She's still thinking about it when she falls asleep, all the magic in her body, wondering where it is. How come it hasn't come out yet.

It doesn't surprise her that Alex can do magic though. Maybe all sisters can.

\*

There's a lot to learn that year. Things Kara's never learned. How to have a friend, for example. She has to learn the language of whispered secrets and playground alliances. She learns how to have parents. Real ones. Not just the paper-thin versions she's dreamed about at night. Flesh-and-blood parents who ask questions and give goodnight kisses. She learns her new name — Kara Danvers — different and bright and lovely. The sound of it fills Kara's mouth with light. She learns how to be loved. By Jeremiah and Eliza and, most of all, by Alex. It's a vibrant love, intense and big, and Kara thinks she likes it very much.

It doesn't matter that Aunt Winifred and Uncle Robert had a bigger house. It doesn't matter that Kara and Alex don't have the coolest trainers or the newest jeans. Kara's never had those things, and now she has something much better — a family.

Professor McGonagall comes by the following summer, the day after Alex's birthday party and a few days ahead of Kara's. There's still leftover cake in the refrigerator. Kara and Alex are working together on a new project — they're going to write and illustrate a book — and so far they've done far more arguing than writing. Kara's about to suggest that they go downstairs and eat the cake when the doorbell rings.

"Girls," Eliza calls up the stairs. "Professor McGonagall's here to see you."

Alex lets out a happy sound and barrels down, skidding a little on the steps. Kara follows her to the landing, unsure of what to do. She watches Alex hug the professor.

"There you are, Kara. You're looking wonderful," Professor McGonagall says, glancing up.

"Thank you," Kara says, oddly shy. She feels like she hasn't been shy in ages. Something about being with the Danverses, being with Alex, makes her feel brave.

"Come and have a cup of tea, Kara." Eliza motions for Kara to come all the way down.

They take their tea in the garden, crowded around the little wooden picnic table. Alex is beaming next to Kara, and Kara can tell Alex is trying to be so grown-up. She's even sitting taller, her shoulders pushed back. She wants to impress Professor McGonagall. Kara would know. She always feels like she's trying to impress Alex. Kara feels a sudden jab of loneliness, and she spoons as much sugar into her tea as she can before Eliza gives her a sideways look.

"How are things?" Professor McGonagall asks.

Kara isn't sure who she's asking. She takes a big gulp of tea. It's so sweet her teeth hurt.



"Good. Really good." Eliza puts a hand on Kara's head, smoothing down a few strands of hair. "We love having Kara. Alex loves being a big sister."

"We're writing a book," Alex says. She's got her legs crossed, just like Eliza.

"What's it about?"

"Magic," Alex says proudly.

Professor McGonagall smiles a secret smile. The one grown-ups use when they think something is funny, but they won't tell Kara why. "Really? I so happen to have a book about magic myself."

Kara doesn't know where Professor McGonagall retrieves the book from, but suddenly there's one in her hands. It's big, with a title stamped on the cover in gold letters.

"I would have posted it in time for your birthday, Alexandra, but I wanted to come for a visit."

Alex is grinning so widely that Kara thinks her cheeks must hurt. "Is it a magic book?" She runs her hands over the spine, tracing the title — *Elementary Magick for Young Users*.

"Yes. Many young wizards and witches read this before they come to Hogwarts."

"What's that?" Kara asks.

"It's a boarding school for special students. Magic students. Like you and Alexandra. It's where I teach, and you'll both be attending."

Eliza sets her tea down on the table with a small clunk. "Not for another year. Alex will go first."

"I'm going?" Alex cries out, dropping the book. "That's — that's amazing!"

"Oh," Kara says, her voice small. She hates today, she decides.

Alex furrows her brows at Kara, the corners of her mouth turning down just a little. Beneath the table, she slides in closer so their knees bump. "It's all right, Kara. I'll go first to make sure it's nice. I'll tell everyone about my sister, so they'll know when you come."

Kara does smile a tiny bit at that. It makes her feel warm.

They all help Eliza clear the tea things afterwards, sweeping the biscuit crumbs directly into the grass. Alex trails after Eliza with an armful of dishes, and Kara's about to follow when Professor McGonagall puts a hand on her shoulder.

"I'd like to speak with you for a moment, Kara," she says.

She sounds very serious. Kara wonders if she's in trouble. She sits down again, reviewing a mental list of infractions she's committed in the last year — lied at school to get two biscuits

instead of one, told Peter Harrison she liked his drawing when she didn't.

"I want to talk to you about your parents."

"You said you knew them. When you came last year," Kara remembers.

Professor McGonagall looks a bit sad. Adults always look sad when they talk about Kara's parents. "Yes, I did. Alura and Zor Potter were wonderful people."

"Did — did they do magic?" Kara asks. She still doesn't really understand how that works, exactly. Except for the odd talking snake, she still doesn't feel magical at all.

"Yes. Lots." Professor McGonagall watches Kara's face very carefully. "Your aunt and uncle told you they died in a car accident, but I'm here to tell you that's not what happened, Kara."

Kara absorbs this news, her hands clutched in her lap. She thinks about the other ways people die. "Was it another accident?"

"No. They were...killed. By a very bad man. Another wizard. His name was — " Professor McGonagall hesitates and takes a sudden breath. "His name was Voldemort. In fact, he tried to kill you too. But he didn't succeed. We don't know why he couldn't kill you, but you survived, Kara. That's how you got that scar."

Kara reaches up to trace her scar, the familiar lightning bolt above the bridge of her nose. It make her feel all shivery and cold, but that might be the story too. She swallows. "What happened to him? Voldemort?"

Professor McGonagall flinches at the name. "He disappeared. Died. You defeated him. People still talk about him. They call him You-Know-Who. He was so frightening, so terrible, people didn't like saying his name."

"Seems silly," Kara says. "Alex is scared of spiders, but she can still say it."

"Yes, well," Professor McGonagall smiles a little. "Alexandra is very brave, and so are you. Now, it's a lot to take in. Do you have any questions?"

A lot, Kara thinks, and also not very many at all. She wants to tell Alex about the story — she can hear Alex chattering to Eliza through the open kitchen window — but there's nothing really to say to Professor McGonagall, sitting in her robes and her strange witch hat, the line of her mouth all crooked and worried.

"No."

"Kara, when you come to Hogwarts, many people will already know this story." Professor McGonagall takes one of Kara's hands in hers. Her skin is papery and warm, just like how Kara remembers it. "It's a well-known piece of magical history. Don't worry if they already know your name."

"Which one?"

"Which what?"

"Which name? Because I have a new name now. Do they know my new name?"

Professor McGonagall is thoughtful. "No, they wouldn't."

"Then it doesn't matter," Kara says. "I'm Kara Danvers now. Not Kara Potter."

Kara Potter still lives with Uncle Robert and Aunt Winifred, Kara wants to tell Professor McGonagall. She sleeps in a dark cupboard beneath the stairs and wears trousers that are always a little too short. She sits in the back of the classroom and doesn't like talking to the other children. Kara Danvers shares a bedroom with her sister. She walks to school with her purple bookbag that has flowers on the front and giggles with Joy Singh during morning assembly. Kara Danvers has a birthday party next week, with cake and balloons and games.

Kara Potter never had a birthday party.

Professor McGonagall looks towards the house, at the toys scattered around the terrace, and the always-wilting herb garden Eliza sporadically tends to. She lays her hand on Kara's head. Light.

"I think you're right, Kara Danvers."

The way she says it fills Kara with warmth. It's a certain magic of its own.

Kara smiles.

\*

It's raining on the morning Alex's Hogwarts letter finally arrives. She's been waiting for it for months, marking off dates on the Save the Rainforest calendar above her bed since January 1st, just as she had on the prior year's calendar. Ever since Professor McGonagall came to visit, to be exact, but the letter wouldn't come until summer, and here summer is now. Professor McGonagall never told her a date exactly, so Alex's barometer is Kara's birthday — July 31st. Exactly in the middle of the summer holidays, when the air is hot and thick, and she and Kara are thinking about ice lollies and running through the sprinklers in the back garden.

Alex spends her afternoons in the front hallway, paging through the worn pages of *Elementary Magick* while she waits for the post to arrive. She's read it cover-to-cover dozens of times by now. The corners are dog-eared from being shoved into her bag. She's caught Kara peeking at it once or twice, but for the most part Kara is quiet on the subject of magic. Alex knows Kara doesn't like the idea of Alex going off to Hogwarts without her.

"But you'll come next year," Alex tells Kara, the two of them almost asleep in their room. "And it'll be better, because I won't have as much fun without you."

Kara's quiet for a long time. Alex thinks maybe she's fallen asleep. "Maybe," she says, doubtfully.

"Of course."

"It's okay if you have fun, Alex," Kara says, and Alex closes her eyes and listens to her turning onto her side and thumping her pillow once, a sign that she's going to sleep.

If Alex could change things, she would bring Kara with her. She's thought about it, of course. Professor McGonagall says that Kara's famous, and what good is being famous if you can't get your way? There's always the option of storing Kara in a suitcase, Alex thinks. She's all gangly limbs and long blond plaits. Coltish, but not too big.

But, sometimes, privately, Alex feels the tiniest jolt of thrill that she'll get to go first. Just one year of being special before Kara goes too.

(The thought always makes Alex guilty and ashamed, and she'll sneak Kara a biscuit or a sweet to make up for it.)

Alex dozes off on top of the book, her head pillowed on her arms, lulled asleep by the steady drumming of rain against the windows. She jerks awake at the sound of the post coming through the door slot, rolled-up magazines and envelopes falling wetly to the ground.

"Post's here!" she calls into the house, already scrabbling through the pile of bills. She chucks them aside for her parents, her heart rising in her throat, hoping *desperately* —

There it is. She holds it up between her shaking hands. It's perfect. Thick parchment with dark green ink. No postmark. Just her name and address scrawled hastily across the front. Alex traces the curve of the letters with one finger, marveling at the elegant script. It's *here*.

*Miss A. Danvers  
The Bottom Bunk  
109 Oak Grove  
Dorwich-on-the-Wold  
Surrey*

She rips the envelope open. Even that feels magical, like she's stepping through a just-open door.

*Dear Miss Danvers,*

*We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...*

Alex takes a deep breath. Then another when it feels like the first isn't enough. Everything's fluttering inside her, certainty blooming in her chest.

Then she hollers loud enough to rouse the entire neighborhood: "Mum! Kara! Dad! I got my Hogwarts letter! I got my Hogwarts letter! It's here!"

\*

Professor McGonagall leads them into an alley — it's dark and damp and the kind of alley Alex would never, ever be allowed into; behind her, her mother is glancing left and right and left and right, as if a robber is going to jump out of the bricks at them — and pauses in front of a blank, useless brick wall. She transfers Alex's hand from hers to Kara's and extracts a stick from her billowy coat and taps it against the wall and —

"It's a door?" Alex says, bouncing up and down. "Kara, look!"

Kara fidgets at her side, hand weak in hers, but smiles somewhat when Alex glances over at her.

"Alex, calm down," her mother says. She drops one hand to Alex's shoulder, the other to Kara's, and takes a deep breath before turning to Professor McGonagall. "Where to first?"

"The bank," she says with a brisk nod. "Come along, now, everyone stay close."

Diagon Alley, as Professor McGonagall calls it, is bustling and loud, filled with people in floaty cloaks and fancy sticks and shop bags floating after them. Alex trips over every other step, her head swivelling left and right and left and right as she takes in the overwhelming presence of *magic* filling the air. She almost walks into Professor McGonagall when they stop in front of an enormous stone building.

"This is it?" Alex's mum says.

"It is," Professor McGonagall says. She lets go of Alex's hand briefly, just long enough to rest it on Alex's mom's shoulder and smile, before leading them inside. "Girls, it's very quiet in here."

Kara hasn't said a word since they stepped into the alley, and Alex moves to her side, clamping down on her hand and grinning widely, because *magic*. It's a huge building, all stone and shine and echoes of clinking coins and —

"What are those?" Kara whispers, finally speaking, eyes wide and locked on the tiny, grouchy meticulously dressed figures counting the coins.

"Goblins," Alex whispers back. "I read about them in my book. They do the bank stuff."

"Girls," Eliza says, shushing them even though she's staring just as blatantly as they are.

Professor McGonagall ushers them forward to a counter, speaking quietly to the goblin and helping Eliza feed the pounds in her purse into a machine that grumbles and whistles softly and then spits out a series of coins.

"The exchange rate isn't what it used to be," Professor McGonagall says, a hand on her shoulder. "But this is plenty, I'm sure."

After the bank, they head to a bookstore. Every now and then, someone stops and stares at them in the street, and Alex flushes under the scrutiny and holds her chin up; she may be new here, but she's with Professor McGonagall, and everyone nods respectfully at her as they go by, so Alex grips tighter to Kara's hand — Kara, who wilts under the attention, ducks her

head, presses closer to Alex — as they make their way along. The bookstore is crowded and people stare there, too, but Professor McGonagall sweeps them along, helping Eliza collect the books they'll need.

Alex drags Kara over to a quieter section of the bookstore, history books crammed into the teetering bookshelves that tower over them, and clambers up on a stepstool to grab one and haul it down.

"Look at this," Alex says, plopping down on the floor with the book and her lap and dragging Kara down with her. The golden lettering on the cover flashes in the light. "I read about this in my book Professor McGonagall gave me. It's a game we can play, on broomsticks. Flying!"

She opens the book reverently, the cover wide enough to span across both of their laps, and smiles widely when Kara gasps at the sight of the pictures inside, moving and flashing, people on broomsticks diving through the air and throwing balls between them.

"Quid-ditch," Kara pronounces carefully. Her voice is soft, almost lost in the din of the store, and she smiles for the first time all day. "How do they fly?"

"Magic, of course," Alex says. "I bet if we ask Mum, we can get this book."

"Okay," Kara says, still staring down at the picture, where the players are now showing off for her, diving more spectacularly and pulling up later, twirling and spinning through the air.

When they leave the shop, Kara's clutching the book to her chest, her fingers tight around the cover.

They buy school robes at Madam Malkin's — Alex fidgets when she's supposed to be standing still for the measuring tape — and Kara stares up at a wall of Hogwarts paraphernalia, wide-eyed. Professor McGonagall knows every store. There are cauldrons and scales, rolls of parchment and sharp quills ("Haven't they heard of three-ring notebooks here?" Alex's mum asks in bewilderment, holding up a jar of ink). There's a pet store Alex and Kara cast longing looks at, but all they get is a "we'll think about it" in response. By the time they get to Ollivander's for Alex's wand, the magic of the day is starting to wear off. Kara's walking slow, which means she's tired, and Alex's feet hurt.

"Just one more stop, girls," Professor McGonagall says, holding the door of the little dark shop open for them.

The inside is musty, with a smell like mothballs and old books. Kara slides her hand into Alex's, her palm damp with sweat. Behind the counter, shelves lined with narrow boxes go up as far as they can see. Alex squeezes Kara's hand; Kara squeezes back.

"Welcome to Ollivanders. How may I help you?"

Alex starts, and Kara lets out a small yelp. An old man materializes from the deep shadows by the counter. Alex wonders if he's been there all along.

Professor McGonagall sighs. "Good morning, Garrick. We're here to pick up a wand for young Miss Danvers here."

She lays a hand on Alex's shoulder. It's warm and reassuring.

The old man blinks at Professor McGonagall. "Ah, Minerva. What a treat to see you. It's not often that you're here, ushering prospective students."

"Special circumstances," Professor McGonagall says lightly. "Alexandra, Kara, this is Mr. Ollivander. You won't find a better wand-maker anywhere."

Mr. Ollivander sweeps his strange silver eyes across Alex. He lingers on Kara. "I see," is all he says. "Well then, let's get started. Miss Danvers, is it? Hold out your wand arm, please."

Kara moves off to the side, letting go of Alex's hand. Alex holds her arm out as still as she can for the measuring tape as Mr. Ollivander scours the shelves. He slides out a box from somewhere above her head, humming cheerfully as he opens it.

"We'll try this one first. It'll take a few attempts. It's the wand that chooses the wizard, you know." He places the wand in Alex's hand, the wood solid and cool against her skin. "Ash and unicorn hair. Eight inches. Rather rigid, but could be a good fit. Go on then. Give it a wave."

Alex flicks it once, heart in her throat. Nothing.

Mr. Ollivander whips it from her grip. "Not that one, no, didn't think so. Let's try another. Ah, this is a lovely wand. Rosewood and a phoenix feather. Twelve and a half inches. Bendy. Go ahead."

Another flick. Nothing. Alex's throat dries up and she glances back to where Kara stands. Kara, even tired and unsure, offers her a bright smile and a thumbs up, and it's enough to calm the uncertainty in Alex's stomach.

"Hmm, all right. We'll find the one. How about — yes, I think so." Mr. Ollivander's hand darts out and snatches a box down low. He wipes the dust from the lid. "Yew and dragon heartstring. Ten inches. Lovely and whippy. Bit of power there. Try that, Miss Danvers."

This time, the wand warms in Alex's fist. She sweeps it in an arc above her head, and a glittering string of rainbow lights appears. They're only there for a second, maybe, just long enough for Kara to gasp, and for magic to tingle in Alex's fingertips. She waves the wand again, and this time there's music, swelling loud and sudden around them. Mr. Ollivander looks pleased.

"Very good, Miss Danvers. I'll wrap that for you." He exchanges a look with Professor McGonagall. "You know, yew is a powerful wood. Combine that with a dragon heartstring core and — well. You'll be a formidable witch indeed. I wouldn't want to cross you."

Alex insists on carrying the Ollivanders bag when they leave, her mood buoyed by the wand purchase. Kara is quiet, as if she's thinking very hard about something.

"It's nothing," she says when Alex nudges her. "Do you think we can get some ice cream now?"

Alex's mum and Professor McGonagall smile down at them.

"Yes, I think that'll be just the thing to cap off our trip," Alex's mum says, and Kara grins.

\*

All Alex wants to talk about for the remainder of the summer holidays is magic. Magic and Hogwarts. Hogwarts and magic. Kara grows rapidly sick of hearing about it. The memory of Diagon Alley has grown a bit dim, and even the Quidditch book Kara has isn't quite enough to keep her interest. Not when her sister is going off and leaving her all alone. Alex marks off each day on her calendar, and Kara watches the cross-outs with dread as they get closer and closer to September.

The night before they're supposed to go to King's Cross, Kara lies awake in her bunk and thinks about all the long days stretching ahead without Alex.

"Are you awake?" Alex whispers.

"Yeah," Kara says.

There's the rustling of blankets down below, and then the ladder creaks as Alex climbs up. Kara moves over to give Alex some room beneath the sheets. The two of them settle in together, side-by-side in Kara's little bed.

"I'm nervous," Alex admits. "What if I do it all wrong? Magic?"

Kara drops her cheek against Alex's shoulder. She's nervous too, and she's not even going. "You won't. You've read all your books. You did that magic thingy with your wand. I think you're going to be wonderful."

"I wish you were coming."

Kara almost doesn't say anything. She's not sure why she hesitates — maybe because she's mad, maybe because somewhere inside she wants to punish Alex for going without her — but in the end she can't help but feel that tug too. That warm feeling she gets whenever she's with Alex. "Me too," she says eventually, feeling the words ring true.

"I'll see you at Christmas though. It's not too long. And I'll write. Professor McGonagall says there are owls at Hogwarts I can use. I'll tell you about everything."

"Don't forget," Kara says. "Don't leave anything out."

Alex turns, their faces close together in the dark. Kara can only make out the flicker of her eyes. "Pinkie promise. Everything. And you write me back, okay?"

"Pinkie promise," Kara echoes.



Alex seems satisfied with that. She yawns, pressing her cheek against Kara's pillow. "They'll see," she murmurs sleepily. "Next year, when you're there. No one messes with the Danvers sisters."

She falls asleep after that, little burbling snores tickling Kara's hair. Kara lies awake for a little while longer, staring up at the dark ceiling. Next year is still a long way away.

\*

The next morning — Hogwarts morning — Kara wakes too early. The summer sunlight is already spreading across their bedroom, sliding across her top bunk and down to the floor, landing just short of the desks across the room and the calendar, filled with cross-outs, pinned to the wall above Alex's desk. Alex is asleep in the top bunk next to her, sprawled half-pressed to the railing near the window, her back warm and comforting against Kara's. Downstairs, Jeremiah and Eliza are moving around the small kitchen, making breakfast and tea, the clink of china floating straight up into their bedroom.

There are a hundred and ten days between Alex leaving for school and coming home for Christmas. Kara counted the days on Alex's calendar, triple checking her math.

Alex rolls over and her hand slaps sleepily against Kara's arm. It's enough to pull Kara's attention from the calendar, and enough to wake Alex, who shifts from fully asleep to buzzing with energy in less time than it takes for Kara to take a full breath.

"Are you awake?" Alex whispers loudly, loud enough to wake anyone from a dead sleep.

"Yeah," Kara says. "I think they made breakfast."

"I'm not hungry," Alex says, still loud-whispering. "I'm scared."

"It's just a train, right?"

"What if I miss it?" Alex says. "And the magic. Kara, I haven't practiced at all."

"I told you. You've already done it — "

"What if everyone is better, though?"

"They won't be," Kara says, loud and reckless. "You're better than them."

"But — "

"You're going to be great," Kara says over her, drowning Alex out, feeling the words ring true like they did last night. "Because you're always great." She pushes up to a sitting position and levers herself over the edge of the bunk, hopping down to the floor.

Alex follows after a long hesitation, climbing down the ladder slowly. It's been almost two years since Kara moved in, and she's just barely edged past Alex in height.

"Come on," Kara says. She grabs at Alex's hand and pulls, dragging her towards the door.

Breakfast is a quiet affair, Eliza and Jeremiah trying and failing to fill the silence, to get either of them to do more than push pieces of toast around their plates. Alex excuses herself quickly, sprinting back upstairs to once more check her trunk — a little faded and a little squeaky at the hinges, but full sized and sturdy and packed to the brim with her robes and books and wand — while Kara stays slumped at her seat in the kitchen.

“Kara,” Jeremiah says softly. “Are you okay?”

“Yes,” she says. She directs spears a slice of toast with her fork and steers it around her plate, focusing on the tablecloth instead of Alex’s empty seat or the worried parents across from her. “I’m going to go help Alex.”

She tosses her napkin onto the table and trudges up the stairs, following Alex’s footsteps sullenly to their bedroom. She continues later, following Alex down to the car, into the backseat, into the train station. It’s too loud and too busy at King’s Cross for her to hold herself very far away, though, and she reaches for Alex’s hand on instinct and shrinks closer when overgrown adults push past them.

“What’s the platform, Alex?”

Eliza is just as harried as the women in suits and men in coats around them, and Alex manages to uncrumple the ticket clenched in her fist long enough to squint and read out “Nine and three-quarters.”

“What the — ”

“This way for Hogwarts!” Someone says as they zoom past with an over-packed luggage cart, bright red hair flashing in the fluorescent lights before he careens straight into a brick wall and disappears. Kara recoils, grabbing for Alex’s arm, just as another redhead runs straight into the wall and vanishes.

“What?” Kara mumbles, gripping at Alex’s sleeve, but Alex practically vibrates around her broad grin as she gasps out “Magic!”

“We just run through, Kara,” she says, bouncing on her toes. “Come on!” She abandons the cart to Eliza and Jeremiah and grips Kara’s hand, tugging her at a sprint towards the wall.

They flash through, sound roaring briefly in Kara’s ears in the in-between, before they stumble onto a platform that mirrors the one they’d started on, save for the bright red train labelled “Hogwarts Express” and the crowds of people in robes milling around.

Jeremiah and Eliza burst through a moment later, stumbling and wide-eyed, Alex’s trolley rattling in front of them.

“Alex,” Eliza says sharply. “Please don’t do that again, not without us.”

Kara shrinks behind Alex, two years of family still not enough to squash out worry, but Alex bounces up and down anyways, pulling at Kara’s sleeve and pointing at the train.

“Look,” she whispers. “Next year we’ll go together, okay?”

“Okay,” Kara mumbles, staring apprehensively around the platform, at the people, the train, anything but Alex’s excitement.

To the left is a quiet family, dark-haired and dark-clothed, a girl Alex’s age and a teenager who looks too bored to care about the brilliantly bright train behind them or the magic wall they’d come through. The younger girl sits quietly atop her trunk, methodically handing treats through the cage wiring to a bright white owl, and looks away long enough to catch Kara staring and glare.

The train whistles, so loud the owls all around the platform hoot angrily and the children wince, and Kara claps her hands over her ears. A porter, stubby and disgruntled, takes Alex’s trunk from the trolley and flicks his wand, levitating it to a storage space below the car. Kara and Alex stare as it floats, down past the dark haired family, and the girl their age smirks disdainfully at their gaping. It’s enough for Alex to blush, shrinking back minutely and clutching at her ticket and her wand as she turns to face her parents.

“Professor McGonagall is sure, right?” she says, glancing between her parents and Kara.

“Of course she is,” Eliza says. She smiles, soft and sad, and pulls Alex in for a hug. “You’re going to do wonderfully, dear.”

“Listen to your mother,” Jeremiah says, one hand on Alex’s shoulder and one on Kara’s. “She’s a smart lady.” He kneels down, gripping at Alex’s hands. “But if you don’t like it after this year, then of course you can come home. There’s no pressure, okay?”

“Okay.” Alex nods, sharp and stubborn, and Kara twists her hands together, leaning into Eliza’s arm around her shoulders.

The goodbyes for Alex and her parents are warm and extended, too many hugs and unconcerned “I love you”s traded between them all, and Kara picks at the trolley handle, intentionally gravitating further and further from them.

“Kara!” Alex pulls loose from her father’s arms, reaching and reaching until she can grab at Kara’s hand and yank her closer. They’re almost the exact same height but Kara grips at the back of Alex’s shirt and pushes her forehead into Alex’s shoulder anyways.

“I’ll write as soon as I get there,” Alex says fiercely. “I promise.”

“You have to tell me everything, okay?”

“Everything,” Alex promises, echoing their sleepy words from the night before. “I won’t forget anything, I swear.”

Kara pulls back, just enough to worm her right hand up between the two of them, pinkie speared out and waiting for Alex to hook with hers.

“I promise,” Alex says. “But you have to write back, okay?”

“Promise,” Kara says. The train whistles again, and she steps back, yanking her hand free. Behind her, Jeremiah rests gentle hands on her shoulders, and Eliza hugs Alex again.

“Be careful, sweetie,” Eliza says, smoothing out her ticket and handing it back to her. “Let us know when you get there, okay? We love you.”

“I love you too.” Alex’s voice is quiet, almost muted by the sound of the platform, but the waver is audible anyways. She looks past Eliza’s shoulder to where Kara stands, quiet and uncertain with Jeremiah at her back.

Alex darts forward, sliding past Eliza and grabbing Kara up into another hug. “I love you, little sister,” she says, quiet and fierce into Kara’s ear, and Kara mumbles a quiet “I love you” back at her, and then the final whistle for boarding sounds and Alex has to go, sprinting over to the train with her bookbag and wand. She disappears onto the train and reappears a moment later in the window, struggling with the heavy glass until she can slide it open and wave at them.

Kara waves back, Jeremiah’s hand on her shoulder and her side pressed into Eliza’s, watching as the train doors shut and it starts to chug out of the station.

\*

The first letter arrives immediately, dropped by a sleek barn owl that swoops through the open kitchen window over breakfast three days later. It scares them all so much that Jeremiah’s coffee mug goes flying, shattering on the tiled floor. The letter falls into Kara’s cereal bowl, and she has to rescue it from drowning in milk. Alex’s impatient scribble is so familiar that Kara feels a sudden burst of emotion in her chest. She’s already moved all of Alex’s left behind stuffed animals into her own bunk, squirreling them into the crevices and tucking them in around herself. When she closes her eyes, she can pretend that it’s Alex sleeping next to her, not just a ratty old toy lion.

"What's it say, Kara?" Eliza asks, hand clutched to her chest.

*Dear Kara,*

*Hogwarts is AMAZING.*

Amazing is underlined three times blotchily, as if Alex was trying to jam her quill nib through the parchment.

*I can't wait for you to come. I don't want to spoil anything, so I'll just say one thing — MOVING STAIRCASES. Okay, two things — TALKING PORTRAITS. I've gotten lost sixteen times already, but I wasn't scared at all.*

*The first thing that happened when we got here was the Sorting because every student is in a house. I wanted Gryffindor because Professor McGonagall's the head (she greeted the first-years when we arrived, but she didn't say anything even when I waved), but the Sorting Hat put me in Slytherin instead. It's all right though the other houses seem a bit mean about it. They said that bad wizards are in Slytherin, but I'm not sure that's entirely true. Not everyone in Slytherin is bad, right?*

*Classes are wonderful. You were right — I can do magic after all! Even better than some of the other kids who came from wizarding families.*

*I miss you lots and lots. Give Mum and Dad a kiss for me.*

*Write back!*

*Love, Alex*

Jeremiah gives Kara a little smile when she finishes reading. "Sounds like Alex is doing all right then."

"Slytherin?" Eliza says, frowning. "I thought she would be with Minerva. Minerva promised that she'd look after her — "

"I'm sure Minerva can keep an eye on Alex just fine. Don't worry so much, Eliza."

Kara pushes her chair back from the table, tucking the letter into her pocket. She slips outside into the garden, a hand clutching a corner of the letter, rubbing it between her thumb and forefinger. It feels comforting to have it there. Like a tether to her sister, far away at Hogwarts. Kara rereads the letter again, sitting beneath the shade of the old oak tree. When Kara presses her face close and inhales, she smells ink and paper and the dusty notes of *magic*.

\*

At first, Alex writes more than Kara does. Every other day at least. They get used to the owls, and Kara even takes to feeding them bits of toast or bacon. She likes to pet them when she can, stroking their feathers until they playfully nip her fingers. Kara privately promises she's going to ask Eliza and Jeremiah for an owl next summer. Maybe it can be a joint birthday present for both her and Alex. She decides she wants one with a heart-shaped face.

*Dear Kara,*

*There's this horrible Ravenclaw girl in my Herbology class. She thinks she's so much smarter than the rest of us. Her name's Lucy Lane and supposedly her family's very rich. I don't care how much money she has — I can outride her on a broomstick and I know I'm the best at Transfiguration in our year. Professor McGonagall told me so after class last week...*

Kara reads the letters until the parchment goes soft beneath her fingers, folding and refolding them along the same creases. She keeps them all in a shoebox in her bedroom cupboard. Sometimes she takes the most recent one to school with her, small in her pocket, so she can reach for it during lessons. Just for reassurance, to know Alex is still there. Somewhere. Her friends ask where Alex has gone and Kara repeats "boarding school" so many times that it seems to lose meaning.

"Are you going to go too?" Joy Singh asks, the two of them walking to school.

Kara kicks at a pile of leaves in their path. They go fluttering up. "Maybe."

"My mum says only posh people go away for school." Joy casts a sideways look at her. "You aren't posh."

"Alex got a scholarship," Kara mumbles, the lie coming easily. Jeremiah and Eliza coached her on what to say. Don't offer the information, they had told her. Only if you're asked.

Joy blinks. She has a way of doing it very rapidly, all in a row. Some of the other kids used to tease her on the playground, but after Kara had mentioned it to Alex, they stopped. "Will you be trying for a scholarship then too?"

"Eliza and Jeremiah say it's easier if you've already got a sibling in."

"I'll miss you," Joy says. "I thought we'd be together next year."

"I'm not sure I'm going," Kara says, but her stomach twists up. Part of her wants to keep going to school with Joy too. Continue being Kara Danvers. Being normal.

The other part of her is counting down the days until the Christmas holidays, until Alex comes home.

"You'll come home for summer holidays?" Joy asks, hopeful.

"Of course," Kara says and changes the subject to what film they should watch this weekend because Joy's dad's promised to take them to the movies.

\*

*Dear Kara,*

*Another run-in with Lucy Lane yesterday afternoon. She crashed into me in the corridor outside the library and I'm certain she did it on purpose. My books went everywhere and she didn't help me pick them up. She just said, "Sorry" in that snotty way of hers and smirked. I was five minutes late to Charms and Professor Flitwick took off house points...*

\*

Kara writes back as fast she can, but she doesn't have as much to say. Nothing's as interesting as magic, after all. Kara tells Alex about what she's studying in school, what's on the telly, that Halloween's coming up and they're having a party at school with costumes and punch. Alex replies with stories about Potions class and broomstick lessons and speculation on what lurks in the Forbidden Forest. Her letters seem like fairy tales. In class, instead of listening to her teacher leading a maths lesson, Kara doodles in her notebook — witch hats and dragons and ghosts.

One afternoon in November, Ms. Palmer asks Kara to stay behind while the rest of the students pile outside for recess.

"Kara," she says, not unkindly. "I found this by your desk."

She hands Kara one of Alex's letters. Kara's hand flies immediately to her pocket. Empty. Her body goes hot and then suddenly cold. She's going to have to *explain* now, and she's not allowed to do that — everyone's told her so. Magic is supposed to be a *secret*.

"I, um," she says, all the air in the room going tight and warm.

"I know your sister's gone away to boarding school in Scotland. I think it's lovely that she's writing you these stories. She must love you very much. It's very detailed. I love the bits about the ghost that's teaching — what did she say? — History of Magic. Yes, very clever."

Oh.

"But I think it's distracting you from your schoolwork, Kara. Now, I understand. My brother and I were very close when we were young, and he went off to school as well. I missed him too. But you must concentrate on your marks." Ms. Palmer folds her hands. "I've written a note to your parents. You're not in trouble, Kara, but I won't have you drawing during lessons again, understood?"

Kara nods, unable to speak. She takes the note from Ms. Palmer and woodenly tucks it into her bookbag. Relief doesn't hit her until she walks outside, the crisp autumn air like a smack in the face. She gasps, doubling over with her hands on her knees. Thank *god*.

She waits until after dinner to give the note to Eliza and Jeremiah. Waits until after they've cleared the table and washed the dishes. Eliza's drying her hands on a tea towel when Kara silently passes her the note, Jeremiah craning from the sink to see. Kara doesn't wait for them to read it — she runs upstairs, her heart in her throat. She's in so much *trouble*, she knows it. Even if Ms. Palmer thought the letter was just a story Alex made up. She shouldn't have brought the letter to school at all, not where anyone could just take it and see. Kara sits on Alex's bed, her legs trembling.

It's a long time before anyone comes upstairs. At least twenty minutes. But at long last Jeremiah knocks on the door.

"I'm really sorry!" Kara blurts out before he can say anything. She's crying now, her chest heaving. "I didn't mean for anyone to see it! I won't do it again, I *swear*."

He sits down next to her, scrunching up his shoulders to fit. "Kara, shh. It's alright. Nothing's come of it."

Kara sniffs miserably, wiping her runny nose with the back of her hand. "I just — I just wanted to have it with me."

"I know. It's been very hard on you since Alex has gone away."

She just nods, the words lost around an edge of a sob. Jeremiah pats the top of her head, the way someone would pet a cat. "You know, Eliza and I think it might be nice for you to do something fun. Lessons. Anything you'd like."

"L-lessons?"

Jeremiah smiles. "Anything you fancy. Ballet? Guitar? Karate?"

"Drawing," Kara says quickly.

"Brilliant. Drawing. I love it." He gives her a small squeeze, his arm around her shoulders. "Just promise me that you'll save it for the lessons and not for maths."

Kara giggles a little at that, all watery-sounding. "I promise," she says.

\*

*Dear Kara,*

*I can't WAIT for you to be here next year. You're going to love Quidditch matches so much, I'm sure of it. The first match of the year was this weekend and my house — Slytherin — lost to Hufflepuff, but it's so much fun to watch. I think I'm going to try out next year. When you get here you'll see what I mean.*

*How are the drawing lessons going? It's cool that you're getting to do them, even if Mum and Dad never let me take karate. Did I tell you that all of the paintings here move? All of them. Apparently there's a painting of a gigantic fat lady in a pink dress in front of one of the towers...*

\*

By the time the holidays roll around, Kara's been taking drawing lessons on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons with Mrs. Wilson, near the primary school, and she's befriended all of the owls that Alex has used for her letters. Jeremiah is less than pleased at the continual presence of a tawny owl on his breakfast table, but Eliza shushes him every time he tries to scold Kara for feeding pieces of toast to the owl.

It's raining on the Saturday when Alex's train is meant to arrive — at 2:30 PM precisely at King's Cross Station, Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  — and the first weekend off from school, but Kara wakes up at 6:00 anyways. There are hours to go before they'll even leave for the train station, but her skin hums excitedly and she bounces downstairs while Eliza and Jeremiah are still asleep because Alex is coming home for Christmas.

She accidentally wakes Jeremiah when she's climbing up on the counter to reach her favorite mug, the bright blue one that she used the first day she lived in this house, and her foot knocks a plate from the drying rack and it cracks on the floor.

"What — "

"I'm sorry," Kara mumbles out, still sitting on the counter. "I didn't want to wake you up."

"It's six in the morning," Jeremiah says with a yawn, crouching down and gathering the pieces of plate up. "No, stay up there." He deposits the pieces in the sink and pauses to kiss the top of Kara's head before he fetches the broom.

"So," he says. "You're excited for Alex to come home?"



“Yes,” Kara says with an energetic nod. “I’ve missed her a lot.”

“I had no idea,” Jeremiah deadpans. He pauses in his sweeping to look up at Kara and wink before returning sweeping the last of the pieces into the dustpan and shaking them into the trash can.

“Okay, down you go,” he says, grabbing Kara around the waist and hoisting her up over his shoulder. She laughs and grabs at his t-shirt, flailing dramatically until he plops her down into a chair at the kitchen table. “One pot of tea, coming right up. Why don’t you go get the paper, yeah?”

“But it’s cold outside.”

Jeremiah rolls his eyes dramatically and kicks his slippers off. “Excuses, excuses.”

Kara shoves her feet into his slippers and clomps out and down the pavement to fetch the paper, hustling as best she can. It’s dreary and grey even though the sun hasn’t come up, and the neighbors left their Christmas decorations lit through the night again. Alex’s last letter said that the holiday decorations at Hogwarts are old fashioned and have candles and floating Christmas trees, but there aren’t any multicolored lights like their neighborhood at home. It sounds like it’s too solemn for Kara to enjoy, and she pauses, newspaper in hand, to take in the blinking colorful lights across the street.

By the time she’s back inside, Eliza is awake and in the kitchen with Jeremiah, and they’ve started breakfast.

“There she is,” Eliza says. “Is it raining yet?”

“Not yet,” Kara says. She thrusts the newspaper into Eliza’s hands and pops back into her chair, still wearing Jeremiah’s slippers. “When are we going to leave?”

Eliza laughs into her tea. “Worried we’re going to be late?”

“What if we are, though?”

“We won’t be,” Jeremiah says from his place at the stove. “Or, we won’t be if you give me back my slippers so I can make breakfast without being distracted by my cold feet.”

Kara rolls her eyes and kicks the slippers off. “We can’t be late.”

“We won’t be late,” Eliza says. “I promise.”

\*

There’s traffic, and they’re late. The dashboard clock clicks over to 2:26 as they park, and Kara fumbles with her seatbelt to get out of the car.

“Kara, hold on,” Jeremiah says, unfolding himself from the car. “Wait for us.”

“We can’t be late, what if Alex — ”

“Sweetie, it’s okay,” Eliza says. She grabs Kara’s hand and holds it tightly, keeping her from running across the parking lot to the station. “Alex won’t be able to get off the train immediately anyways.”

Jeremiah grabs her other hand, locking the car with the other, and as soon as the horn beeps Kara starts forward, pulling them along behind her. They both laugh at her, but she ignores them and pulls harder. Her watch — it was Alex’s before hers, and Jeremiah’s before that, and is far too big for her tiny wrist — says 2:27.

They make it through the barrier at 2:31 and the bright red train is waiting for them, cooling and clunking in the background of the busy platform. Kara pulls at Jeremiah’s hand impatiently.

“Can you see her?”

He doesn’t say anything and instead sweeps her up with a grunt, manhandling her up onto his shoulders. “You need to stop growing, okay?” he grumbles out. “I’m too old for this.”

“Alex!” Kara shouts out, waving wildly from her spot up high as soon as Alex appears in the doorway to one of the train cars. “Alex!”

Alex’s head swivels left and right, twice, until she sees Kara finally. She grins and waves and hurries off the train, and Kara pushes at Jeremiah’s arm until he lets her back down to the ground.

“Go ahead, kiddo,” he says with a wink, and Kara doesn’t wait to check with Eliza before running off towards the train. There are people everywhere, some in robes and some in normal clothes and Kara barely manages to avoid barreling into a redheaded woman who’s trying to herd a pack of similarly redheaded children — “There you go, dear,” she says kindly, smiling at the way Kara stumbles trying to avoid skidding into her, and steadies her before encouraging her on her way — and then she leaps at Alex for a bodyslam of a hug.

The force of it sends them both stumbling back towards the train steps and the air whooshes out of Kara’s chest from the impact, but she just digs her fingers harder into Alex’s back because Alex is *home*.

Somewhere behind Alex, someone’s throat is cleared, loud and delicate and indignant, and Kara looks up to see a girl Alex’s age standing on the train stairs with her arms folded over her chest. Her hair is dark, darker than Alex’s, and matching dark freckles pattern over her nose.

“Sorry,” Kara mumbles, stepping back and pulling Alex with her. Alex looks back and glares, nose wrinkling and eyebrows creasing, as the other girl continues down the stairs and disappears into the crowd.

“Don’t apologize to *her*,” Alex says loudly. “She’s a jerk.”

“Alexandra!” Jeremiah says, appearing from the crowd with a scowl. “You know better than to say that about someone.”

“But she is!” Alex says, gripping at Kara’s hand. “Dad, she’s the *worst*. She’s my nemesis.”

“Your nemesis?” Eliza says, one eyebrow arching up. “Aren’t you a little young for a nemesis? I don’t think I had one of those until I was at least seventeen.”

Alex huffs loudly, glaring into the crowd in the general direction where her nemesis is visible again, hugging an imposing woman who must be her mother. Kara glares as well, memorizing Lucy Lane’s face — it must be Lucy Lane, stuck-up and rude in her Ravenclaw uniform, the one Alex complained about in every letter home — and huffing in solidarity with Alex.

“She’s rude,” Kara says helpfully.

“See?” Alex says.

“You still don’t say that, okay?” Jeremiah says with a sigh. “Now come here and give me a hug, munchkin.”

“I’m not a munchkin!” Alex says indignantly, even as she flies from Kara’s side to hug him.

“Absolutely not,” he says, patting her on top of the head before propelling her over towards Eliza. Alex bounces from one hug to another and then back to Kara’s side, hand wrapped firmly around hers. Kara grips tightly with both hands and lets Alex lead her through the crowd, content to listen to Alex’s chattering as Jeremiah gathers her trunk and Eliza leads them back to the car.

By the time they’re back in their bedroom, Alex’s trunk propped open by the bunk beds, Alex has finally almost run out of things to talk about. Kara hugs a pillow to her chest, watching as Alex piles dirty uniforms into the laundry hamper, stacks her schoolbooks carefully, and dumps broken quills and pieces of parchment on the floor.

“Why can’t you use pencils?” Kara says, prodding at a quill with her toe.

“We just don’t,” Alex says with a shrug. She dumps the last tangle of still-knotted green and silver ties into the hamper and plops down on the bed next to Kara. “I guess it’s a magic thing. Or tradition.”

“I like pencils,” Kara says with a shrug of her own.

“I’m sure you can use them next year if you want,” Alex says. She pushes her elbow into Kara’s ribs, more and more until it tickles and Kara squirms away with a giggle. “You’re going to really like it, Kara, I know you will.”

“Yeah,” Kara says, picking at a loose thread on the pillowcase. She takes a slow breath in and puffs it out, blowing her bangs back momentarily, and Alex’s eyes flick up to the scar she hadn’t looked twice at in years.

“You’re really going to like it,” she says again.

“Well, yeah,” Kara says with a shrug and a smile. She shoves her elbow into Alex’s side. “It’s gonna be awesome.”

Alex flops dramatically with the elbow to the ribs and rolls off the bed, landing on the floor and propping up on her elbows to peer into her mostly-empty trunk.

“Here,” she says, dragging a rolled up poster out and thrusting it towards Kara. “So you can have something magic to look at it until you come.”

Kara unrolls the poster, dinged around the edges, to reveal a collection of women zooming around on broomsticks, darting through and around the Holyhead Harpies logo. Alex rambles on about how they’re the only all-girls Quidditch (*Quid-ditch*, Kara still pronounces it in her head, the syllables too foreign to squeeze together smoothly) team around, how she’s already planning to try out for her house team next year.

Eliza calls them to dinner, and Alex bounces out of the room, running loudly down the stairs, but Kara pauses to carefully roll the poster back up and tuck it securely into her sock drawer, along with a wrinkled green and silver tie she yanks out of the pile of laundry, before hurrying down the stairs after her sister.

## End Notes

If you're sitting there right now, thinking "well, *this* is an ambitious undertaking," you would be correct. But don't worry, we have a plan. ;) Actual chapters that take place at actual Hogwarts to come soon, with appearances from Lucy and Cat.

Title from Growing Up by Run River North.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!