

**(For context, this interlude starts the same night Kara prepares the envelope for Avery after all the hospital shenanigans)**

Pass' dashed into her room and slammed the door behind her. For a few moments she just stood there, leaning against the wood, hands on knees, panting. Slowly she slipped down until she was on the floor, head turned towards the ceiling. Eyes closed and slow deep breaths breathe breathe breathe.

*Breathe.*

Tonight had not been a good first mission. And that was putting things lightly. She pushed her palms into her eyes and groaned. If she was going to protect people, she'd need to be faster. Get there React quicker. just... quicker. And more.

She was soooooooooo *tiiiiiiiiired*.

She peeked through her hands to risk a look at the homework on the floor near her cupboard. Nope. No energy. Too tired.

Wait maybe Outlier had some ideas about-

Pass' leapt up and dove onto her bed. Reaching over the headboard, she grabbed her backpack and rummaged around inside. Phone phone phone phone pho- aha! Phone! She quickly turned it on and swiped through her contacts before shooting off a quick message.

And waited.

And waited.

Credit to mysterious and stalker-y, he apparently went to bed way too late at night. A ping came back just as she was finishing getting into her PJs. Pass' squealed and pounced, foot kicking the blanket as she swiped the information up.

There was a looooooot of information.

"Boring, boring, boring... training... blah blah... yeah I know! Blah blah... sparring...? Heroe- OHPRETTY!!!!!"

She tapped on the butterfly themed hero. Cool costume, blue mask, butterfly-wing cape?

Pass' squealed again and tapped open hamstergram and sent off a message. and several more.

Eldr1thUnicorn sent you a friend request!

Eldr1thUnicorn sent you a friend request!

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:05 am

HEEEEEEEY! HELLO!

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:05 am

You're a meta right?

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:05 am

Cause if you are I love you're costume!

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:05 am

We should totally meet up. DO you like Ice cream? Cause I like icecream?

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:05 am

\*your costume

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:05 am

It doesn't have to be ice cream. It could be something normal

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:05 am

Like a walk

AnEldr1thUnicorn | 1:05 am

\*be ice cream

AnEldr1thUnicorn | 1:06 am

Walks are normal yeah? Id say we could game but I want to meet up like in person

AnEldr1thUnicorn | 1:06 am

Wait are you even up?

AnEldr1thUnicorn | 1:06 am

If you weren't sorry for waking you

AnEldr1thUnicorn | 1:06 am

Wait is this even the right address? This is going to be so embarrassing if this is the wrong address

---

Kara's just finishing cleaning up the mess her apartment has become, at least as much as she can. The structural damage will take a lot longer to work on, but that's a problem for another day.

She glances idly at her phone, and narrows her eyes.

13 notifications. From an unknown number.

For a moment she considers ignoring it, and assuming it's just a poor attempt to scam her. But it sounds...weirdly earnest.

Kara's curious. Whether this is a friend or foe, ally or weapon, more knowledge is always useful.

coins&wing5 | 1:28 am

That depends. Who do you want this to be? And who are you?

*And what do they mean by 'meta' Kara wonders.*

---

Pass' jumps up with a start at the buzzing of her phone. Pushing her mussed up hair out of her eyes and rubbing the sleep from her eyes, she quickly swipes up on the notification. And frowns.

Ok, not what she had expected? Like, excuse me? Manners?!

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:28 am

???????

Fingers poised to send more, she stops and takes a deep breath. Rubs the sleep from her eyes. Maybe...maybe she got the wrong address...? Except that Outlier doesn't get stuff wrong. Definitely not basic contact info. So that's not it... come on, get that tired brain working. Do not shout at the awesome hero with the cool costume.

Pass' flumphs her face into her pillow and tries to think. *Hero. Hero gets message. Hero sends cold message back. So hero doesn't think you're a...*

*Oh, Butterfly doesn't realise that I'm also a hero.*

*So, cool and calculating's just freaking out over someone asking her private civvie account for hero stuff.*

*Oh pumpkin.*

"Great way to start things off..." Pass' groans into her pillow.

It's a really comfy and fluffy pillow.

She takes a few seconds to just enjoy the warm furriness.

*Rightbusiness.*

She pops up from the blankets and focuses on her phone screen, round two let's go! Tap out a few letters- NO DON'T SEND THAT!

Taps again. Hesitates for a second.

*Well what's the worst that can happen?*

She shrugs and rattles off her replies.

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:28 am

Oh.

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:28 am

Caaaaaaaan I start again? (Deep breath?)

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:28 am

Is this steel storm? 🦋? <-btw totally supposed to have blue wings I just can't find an emoji with blue wings your cape is epic by the way?

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

Cause I'm looking for heroes in the area

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

Cause im also a hero?

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

well becoming ahero

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

And I herd that your a hero

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

I got sources... 😎

And then Pass's thoughts skid to a halt.

*Butterfly Blue asked who I am. So codenames right? Hero names?*

*Like, "Steel Storm" levels of epicly and proffessionaly heroic hero names?*

*YES!*

Pass' punches the air and immediately overbalances, almost rolling onto her back before catching herself. A mild danger of messaging while lying on a very bouncy

mattress.

*What to choose what to choose what to choose...*

*Something awesome... but also profesh. Heroic. Cool. Uuuuuuum...*

Kara receives several messages in quick succession that almost immediately get deleted. If she happened to see and actually manage to process any of them, she would have seen names like "Pata", "Blade mistress", "Hidden blade". Eventually the stranger actually pauses for a few seconds, three dots hovering on the screen, before finally going with:

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

UUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMM... I haven't actually chosen a name yet.

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

I'm a herointraining?

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

yeah. Who am I? A hero intraining!

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

(name to be chosen soon)

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:29 am

(ish)

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:30 am

WHOO!

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:30 am

👉?

...which was totally not professional. Also there are probably spelling mistakes.

*Smooth much? Oh pumpkins she's going to think I'm an absolute child!*

*And I even asked for a fistbump! Which hero asks for fistbumps?!*

*The cool ones.*

*But only once they're cool with people! Like, they don't bump strangers!*

*When I become a hero I'm gonna bump civvies!*

*No way Epic Blue bumps child-strangers.*

*Uuuggh...*

Pass' turns get up, turns around and throws herself into her pillow with a groan. Which

feels surprisingly good. Because she's a child. In a very fuzzy comfortable bed. That she enjoys. Hmmph.

---

Kara's instantly wide awake, like someone dumped a bucket of cold water over her head.

*Someone knows I'm a hero. They might be able to track me down if they want to.*

She's mentally checking all her previous posts on the account.

*I follow too many people from school, this stalker could track me down without much effort.*

It's the strange mix of cheerful and awkward messages, combined with the overtly threatening undertones that really confuses Kara.

Is this a professional blackmailer hiding behind a fake persona, or a genuine uh.... "hero in training" who just happens to be using all the wrong words.

Either way, the best thing to do was stay friendly and find out more. Confirm she's Steel Storm.

Worst case Kara just confirms their suspicions, but if they're already that close it wouldn't make much difference.

coins&wing5 | 1:45 am

Really, another superhero?

coins&wing5 | 1:45 am

I'll be honest, I've never just had someone message me out of the blue like this.

coins&wing5 | 1:46 am

But I'm glad you did find me

coins&wing5 | 1:46 am

it's a rough world if you're not used to it

coins&wing5 | 1:46 am

but yeah, I'm Steel Storm

coins&wing5 | 1:46 am

Hi!!

coins&wing5 | 1:46 am

It's waaay too late to meet up tonight, but I'd love to chat tomorrow.

coins&wing5 | 1:47 am

I'm a bit busy though.

coins&wing5 | 1:47 am

I'll message you when I have an hour or two free!

---

Pass' has almost convinced herself that maybe she does actually have the energy to do just the tiniest bit of homework. Just to pass the time while she waits for Steel Storm to respond. Soon she'll do it, definitely. But after like... one more level of Hopper.

And then her phone pings. And pings. And pings.

*OH MY GOODNESS YYYYYYYYYYYYYEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEESSSSSSSSSSSS!!!!*

Pass' kicks her feet rapidly against the bed, gripping her phone tightly as the answers stream in. And yes, it looks a lot like this totally legit, kinda-maybe-similar-ish age superhero is actually agreeing to meet up. With *her*. A totally rookie hero. Which of course is an epic heroic thing to do, but like... it's actually *happening*. Like, they're making time in their busy-ness to meet up with her. Tomorrow. And yes, the hero hadn't returned the fistbump, but like, what did you expect? *Duh*. A totally mature hero? Heroes don't fistbump. Apparently. Which is fine! And like, totally ok.

Act cool act cool act cool.

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:47 am

Yeah yeah cool

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:47 am

Awesome!

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:47 am

Cya tomorrow then!

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:47 am

And good luck with...

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 1:47 am

Stuff?

She looks at her replies with a frown. Far too boring, far too... meh. But it's not like she has anything else to ask yet.

*OH MY GOODNESS I JUST MESSAGED A PROPER SUPERHERO!*

*AND THEY NOW KNOW MY ACCOUNT!!!!*

YYYYYYYYYYYYEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEESSSSSSSSSSSS!!!!!!!

Pass' rolls onto her back and hugs her phone to her chest, beaming at the ceiling. This is awesome. From zero to a hundred in like, one night.

She really needs to work on a proper costume design.

Also, when Steel Storm says "meet up", does she mean like meet up meet up? Or like talk on the phone meet up? Cause does this mean she's gonna, like, actually get to "meet" meet a hero? For real? Or even get to just phone call a proper honest-to-goodness hero? Well, a hero besides for dad and Krilya, cause they don't really count. But like, real proper hero! For "an hour or two"!!!!

Somehow despite the energy rushing through her -or maybe because of it?- she slowly winds down and drifts off to sleep...

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[Next day]

coins&wing5 | 3:53 pm

Hey



coins&wing5 | 3:53 pm

I'm at the big mall, the one in the centre of 17th ward

coins&wing5 | 3:54 pm

Meet you at a shop named Sora No Ramen?

coins&wing5 | 3:54 pm

I'm wearing a bright blue jacket with silver lines, you can't miss me

Kara is in fact not wearing that jacket currently. It's folded up neatly in her backpack, while she lounges at a bench fifty metres away with an excellent view of the entrance to the Ramen Shop. She's wearing a grey hoodie over the head, the shape of headphones clearly visible. Nothing like either Kara or Steelstorm, but it'll take her less than a minute to become herself when she knows it's safe.

---

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 3:54 pm

COMING!

Eldr1tchUnicorn wasn't exactly subtle about their arrival. A little after Kara's message, a teenage girl came sprinting towards the shop, red and white sneakers thumping hard on the ground. She came to a staggering stop against the wall of Sora No Ramen, hands on knees, panting hard. Wearing an orange sleeveless dress with red highlights and a white shirt underneath, she wasn't exactly hard to spot. Eventually she recovered enough to stand up to her full height, which... wasn't exactly impressive. Somewhere between four and five feet at best. She glanced in a window reflection and patted down her ponytail, wiped some of the sweat from her face. She bounced on her toes a few times, nodded at her reflection. Grinned and gave herself a thumbs up. Then she turned and walked into the shop.

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 4:12 pm

Came as soon as I could.

AnEldr1tchUnicorn | 4:12 pm

Wait where are you?

---

Kara can't keep the incredulous expression spreading over her face.

*Either this is the worst set-up I've ever seen, or she's much more dangerous than she looks.*

*...not that that would be hard.*

*Or she's just a new hero Kara, don't forget that's an option.*

Kara makes sure she's not directly in the operatives line of sight before unzipping the hoodie and dropping it together with the rest of her cover, shrugging on her jacket, and walking up to approach the other girl.

*"Hey, um...pretty sure I'm supposed to be meeting you, but I don't think I got a name.*

*I'm Kara."*

She says this with a playful smile, standing loosely while she rolls a coin over the knuckles of her left hand.

---

The girl spins around to face Kara a second before Kara opens her mouth. There's a fraction of a second of confusion in her smile as she looks up at her, of 'who are you exactly and why are you bothering me do we know each other?' And then she processes what Kara's saying and a proper grin spreads over her freckled face.

*"Oh yeah! Hello! Didn't see you befo- ohmysixyourjackets'ssocuuuuuuttteeeeeee!!!!!!!"*

Her right hand darts out as if to snatch at the fabric and feel it, then just as suddenly snaps back to halt near her face as she thinks better of it. Not that it stays still there though. The girl is practically vibrating she's so full of energy, hands squeezed tight in excitement.

*"Eeeeeeehl'mtalkingtoStee- sorry, sorry. Right. Public. Totally cool. Normal stuff.*

*Whoo!"*

There's a quick fistbump and then her hands drop to her sides and unclench slightly. Her dark brown eyes briefly flick straight to follow Kara's fingers and the glinting coin before jumping back up to Kara's face.

[Steel Storm. Steel=metal of iron and carbon or prepare self; storm=wind, hail, lightning, thunder. Not a steely storm, but stormy steel. Storm of lead?  
What's her power? Spikey metal hail-storm?]

*Be cool be cool be cool you're talking to an honest-to-goodness hero just introduce yourself and act totally cool. Even though you are talking to a hero. Who is like at least a head taller than you. And like a lot older and experienced-er than you. We're cool. She's just... you know, ordinary. She's called Kara.*  
*Shetoldmeherfirstnamewe'refirstnamefriendsalreadyYYYYYYYYEEEEEEEESSSSSSSSSS!!!!!!*  
*!*

Grinning like a kid in a candy shop she takes a deep breath and rocks forwards and back a few times as she starts to speak.

"Ssoooooooo... hi! I'm Pass'. And I'm still growing! And I'm like..." She looks around, her voice dropping and her face taking on a more serious look for a moment.

"Kind of becoming a superhero?"

She shrugs and the grin pops right back.

"And I figured it'd be cool to talk to someone who knows what they're doing? And who doesn't already know me and think I'm still just a kid?" She rolls her eyes at the last bit.

"So uh... hi." She hesitates, the grin turning sheepish. "I didn't *really* think past this bit...? Oh would you like to eat? And uh... ok can I have your autograph?"

---

Kara steps back as Pass reaches for her jacket, but otherwise keeps the smile on the face. If anything it grows slightly wider. She just can't help it. There's something so contagious about the other girls whole... well, just her whole thing. It's like standing next to a campfire, it's impossible not to feel the warmth spreading through her.

*"Uh, maybe a walk would be better, unless you're hungry."*

Kara doesn't think Pass is capable of sitting still for very long.

*"And um... don't take this the wrong way, but I'm not... I'd rather not give you an autograph. I'm not some sort of celebrity, with thousands of fans. I'm just..."*

*A murderer?*

*A victim?*

*A pawn?*

*A manipulator?*

*A villain?*

*A hero?*

*"I'm just Kara. Just someone trying their best with...with everything the world's thrown at her."*

*It's only been a day, don't think about the envelope.*

But of course Kara does.

*"But anyway, I think you know a bit more about me than I do about you. So tell me a bit about yourself, I'm curious?"*

---

"Oh yeah, sure sure. No autographs. That's cool. And I mean, mom has rules about snacks before dinner so..." Pass leans into her first step and swerves around Kara, coming to a stop with a graceful twirl. "Walking's cool? Uh... I dunno... this way I guess?" She takes a few hesitant steps in a random direction. Once the two get walking she bounces along happily.

Electric Blue doesn't fit as a nickname for Steel Storm. Not right now. Not that Pass' would nickname a hero she only just... ok, she totally would. But still. This hero seems... tired. Down. Like Dad after a long day at work. Or a not-so-great day at work.

*Also it breaks the syllable rule. Also also it's longer than her hero name.*

*Also also also, she made time for me anyways. Even after a long day. See? Heroes are awesome.*

*And she's curious about meeeeeeeee!*

She grins and giggles a little at that. "Right. So... about myself. Uh..." she tilts her head up and a little to the side as she thinks about that. There's a look of concentration for a few seconds, then the old carefree smile's back yet again.

"I didn't actually read that much about you? Long wordy words... Also I prefer to meet

people over hearing about them. No pre-pre-precon... precon...? Ugh, like, you go in with your own eyes."

*Smooth.*

*Ugh, stick to words you know, no need to impress, we're just walking and talking. Be cool.*

"But uh, my whole family has powers. Well mom doesn't, but she has mom-powers. Like, knows I'm not in bed even when I sneak out the window. And dad's like a proper hero. Got a team and stuff." The smile turns inwards and warmer as she thinks about her family. "Krilya's got a team- oh, she's my older sister? And she's kinda licensed or whatever?" The smile drops and Pass' kicks scuffs her shoe against the payment. "Yeah, licensing..." She throws her head back and lets out a looooong, dramatic groan. "So *that's* a whole thing. Come on, I'm not waiting three years to hero!"

*Oh my- Pass', that's not what she meant when she said to talk about yourself. Come on. She's probably licensed by now.*

*Oh gourd I just said I'm not licensed yet.*

*Pumpkiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiin!!!!!!!!!!*

"Right but like I'm totally gonna get that done. Soon. Ish." There's a pause as she thinks that through. "Is there a minimum age for heroing? It's not like driving is it? I'm not waiting three whole-ish years to hero..."

*Smmmmmmooooooooooooottttttthhhhhhhhhhh.*

"Anyways. Um... oh yeah also I've got powers!"

Pass' raises her hand, palm turned up, fingers cupped as if holding something. She flexes them slightly and a wave of energy flows up them, her fingertips glowing and reshaping themselves into curved serrated blades of energy. She holds it for a second before flexing again and turning her fingers back to normal.

"Like, nothing flashy, but... come on. I'm basically a living sword." she grins and strikes a pose.

The grin turns into a frown.

"Wait no. Living swords? Blades?" She rolls her eyes. "Ugh, basically I can turn into cutty things."

*SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP SERIOUSLY YOU ARE BLOWING THIS!*

*ALSO YOU ARE TALKING WWWWWWAAAAAAYYYYYYYY TOO MUCH!*

*...she did say to tell me about myself?*

*THIS MUCH?!*

*It's probably fine...?*

*Wait wait wait, the word was preconceived! Thaaaaaat's what it was. Oh I should have used that. Preconceived notions. "Going in without preconceived notions". Six it.*

---

*"That does make sense I guess, to meet something without relying too much on previous research" Kara says, barely managing to keep the incredulity from her voice.*

*Did this girl seriously just blow my cover, show up in person on my terms, without doing any research because uh... because the words were too long. And is just giving away her powers to me? Her family?*

And yet it's working. Kara is struggling to keep her walls up, to not lower her guard.

*She could still be dangerous, this could be part of her long game, Kara.*

But she doesn't really believe that.

*"You're what... 14? 15? I guess yeah, I was doing something like this at your age. There isn't really a legal age for all of this. But that wasn't... I don't know if that was a good thing."*

Something else jumps out to her, derailing that thought.

*"Wait, you said licensing? Is that an AEGIS thing?"*

She's totally bugged isn't she. There's no way this little rainbow would check her things for bugs.

---

"An AEGIS license?" She looks up as she thinks. "...I dunno? Like, Krilya has some sort of card or something she shows cops that lets them know she's safe. Trustworthy. Not a villain? But I dunno if it's AEGIS licensing or what, 'cause she sometimes complains that some agents don't make fun of it?"

*Would have been helpful to have something like it last night though.*

"I'm... pretty sure there are heroing rules? Like, they need to know you're compe- good enough, know how to work in a team or on your own. Don't need rescuing yourself." She kicks at a pebble, watches it skitter across the path. Walks over to it and kicks it again.

"Yeah right, like I need rescuing. Been doing this for... I dunno. Stuff."

*I took 'em out all on my own. Didn't need any sixing-*

The smile slowly morphs into a scowl as she rambles on. "That van was *totally* not my fault anyways. And there was only one meta, so like, no sweat right? Easy stuff?

But *noooooooo*, I walk out of a crashed and slashed van with a glowy sword and it's all: quick arrest the little girl, call her parents, wow so reckless what were you thinking, yeah *right!* You know I actually *check* before I rush into things?!" She rounds on Kara and rolls her eyes, throwing her arms up in exasperation. "Seriously! I'm not some totally clueless... ARGH! I was totally safe! Not a scratch!" She jabs at her right arm as if, if there were any place there should have been a scratch, that would be the place. "It was just a small car crash 'cause some *nutjob* thought, thought, thought... I don't even know! Why would he- MMPH!"

She spins around and flicks the pebble into the air with her foot. Still spinning, she whips her other foot up, knee to her chest, leg thinning and elongating into a long, thick, flat-topped blade. Her sword-leg snaps out and straight and sends the pebble rocketing away almost too fast to track. There's a distant clang as it crashes against a distant garbage can. Pass' holds position for a second, breathing hard. Slowly she lowers her leg, metal shifting back into flesh and cloth, trying to control her breathing.

*Sixing gouredd PUMPKIIIIIIIN!*

YOU JUST LOST CONTROL IN FRONT OF STEEL STORM! AAAAARRRRRRRRRRGH!

*Uuuuuuuuuuuugh. She definitely would have taken everyone out twice as fast with half the mess and been totally calm about it later.*

*See, a proper actual hero? Been doing this for what, four years? And got her own team probably too. And a cool costume.*

*Oh wait costume!*

She spins back and it's like whatever just happened is over, an expectant grin on her face, hands clenched in excitement held by her side and shaking slightly with suppressed energy. "OH WAIT YOUR-! Sorry, your costume is *awesome!* How do you choose hero costumes? 'Cause like, I

need a hero costume? And yours is awesome?"

Her eyes flick to the garbage can. "And uh... sorry 'bout that. *Probably* didn't dent it...?"

---

They're suddenly in her right hand like a magic trick. Even if Pass had been studying her arms, she would have struggled to see how the six coins teleported into Kara's clenched fist, 2 between each finger.

The other hand is in her jacket pocket, clinking as she prepares to unfurl her wings. All the pent up emotion from yesterday eagerly prepares for the fight

But before the clang has even finished echoing, Kara has relaxed.

*The attack wasn't targeted at you Kara, get a grip. You're still too jumpy.*

The coins are back in her pockets, the walk casual again like nothing happened

(Up to you how much of that Pass would have caught of that.)

Kara is scanning the crowd for onlookers, but no one seems to have noticed Passs's show.

*Good. But we should keep moving.*

She silently picks up the pace a bit, trying to pick through the ramifications of what had triggered that outburst.

*She doesn't seem too stable. Something happened yesterday, but she's not making sense.*

*She's saying something idiot, focus. Come on Kara.*

She tunes back in to that conversation, catching half a sentence and reverse engineering the context while her mind still races on seperate tangents.

*"Uh, costumes..."*

*Wait, 'meta'? Is that a word for serum mutant?*

*"Yeah, I made my own and repair it if...well, I guess when is more accurate. Whenever it's needed."*

*'Car crash'? That can mean a lot of things.*

*"I don't really do commissions through, just don't have the time."*



*Something about that brings back a memory for Kara. A sinking feeling in her chest.*

*"Although maybe I can make an exception, if you're okay with me not knowing exactly how long it'll take... I'll have to think on tha...."*

Kara stops on the spot, swiveling to meet Pass's eyes. There's a strange expression in her narrowed grey eyes, somehow a mix of burning fury and coolly studying what she sees.

And something else hides behind her gaze. Softer, quieter than those two. Like a star during the day, barely visible past the blinding light.

*"What exactly happened?" Kara demands "With the van, I mean. Was anyone hurt? What went wrong"*

(Kara's also going to attempt to pierce Pass's mask, because I can. I rolled an 8 (+1 for influence) = 9, so I can ask one question: **How can Kara get Pass to give up on being a hero, and leave that life path behind?**)

---

Pass' is just about to mention she was finding it hard to keep up with Kara's suddenly far longer stride when she freezes, pinned in place by those two cold burning eyes.

(Hmm... powerful blow, I think. 2d6 = 10, plus [insecure] and oof... that's an eleven! Only fair, I guess. Welp, I know which one I'm choosing.)

"I- I- I-"

Anger. Aimed at her. Actual anger this time. Not disappointment or tiredness or condescension or dismissal or...

It's anger.

Proper proper anger.

"-I didn't- I mean I-"

A hundred million answers and half-cooked retorts flash through her brain and melt in

the face of those two high-beams.

*Not again not again not again not again you're different you're not... not...*

*WHY DOES EVERYONE ALWAYS JUST-!!!*

She blinks once, twice as her smile shatters into shock, hurt, denial. Tenses up, hands balling, shoulders rising. The blinks are speeding up and for a moment Kara spots something that she's seen before, around four years ago. A flash of something familiar...

But then it's gone as that warm cozy campfire rises up and swells roars. Pass' takes a step forward, betrayal morphing into frustrated fury as tears she refuses to acknowledge threaten to spill over.

"You weren't even *there* you don't *get*-!"

*YOU DON'T GET TO JUDGE ME TOO!!!!*

*Push her to the wall see what she is underneath see why she thinks what she thinks make her see you*

*But...*

*...but she's a hero...*

*...I...*

She hesitates, unsure where to put herself, still blinking fast. Again, Kara spots a flash of a girl who was the same age, maybe a little taller. Same sort of position. Same indecision and uncertainty. Same fear, of the people looking at her and maybe even of herself. And the same exact words from four years ago:

"I didn't even- it's not like they- I didn't mean to-!"

And then Pass turns and runs. Runs and runs and runs, not caring who she barely misses or what people think of the stupid little *child* running away from her problems and trying not to cry. Stupid stupid *stupid*!

She screams inside at herself and lowers her head and *flees*.

Just like four years before, in a small rural town Kara knows of.

(Methinks Pass' takes the [angy] condition in this case. She's not hopeless yet, she just doesn't know where to put herself.)

(How can Kara get Pass to give up on being a hero and leave that life behind? Hmm... I've had way too long to think about this one. In fact, I knew the answer before I wrote any other part of this scene. So I'm gonna have a little fun if you don't mind:

Pass' is trying to prove to everyone [including herself] that she's good enough, that she can be just as useful as everyone else. That she isn't useless. And especially considering the house she grew up in, having powers gives her a responsibility to use them to help. And fighting is something she's good at and her powers are built for.

"...I'm still growing..." "... cool to talk to someone... who doesn't *already know me and treat me as a kid*..." "...whole family has powers..."

Above scene notwithstanding, she refuses to let an obstacle put her down for long. She gets knocked down, she gets back up. And she's a bit of a naive little font of positivity, so given time she's gonna get herself together, get back up and try again and again and again until she eventually succeeds.

So... really, the only way to get her to stop is to totally crush her. Knock her down so hard and decisively that she sees she can never possibly succeed no matter how hard she tries and she's just as useless as she worries she might be.

Does Kara think she could bring herself to do that? For the greater good?)

---

Kara's frozen for a moment, not anticipating the outburst.

*Don't openly prepare for a fight. Don't show your powers yet, unless she attacks.*

Kara doesn't know whether she wants to spread her wings wide and leave this strange threat far behind her, or use them to shelter Pass. To comfort her. To tell her it's going to be okay. That she's okay.

But as so often is the case, she chooses the worst option. She does nothing, weathering the storm with a completely passive face, refusing to give away what she's thinking. Until it's too late...

*You weren't even there you don't get-!*

Something about that line shatters Kara's mask, the force of it almost buckling her legs from under her.

*"But I... I was there. I was also the only one..."*

She whispers the words, knowing Pass won't hear them.

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***Kara's falling through the air. Tumbling. Spinning. Wind whistling in her ears, ripping tears from the corners of her eyes.***

***She can see them all around her.***

***Glimmering knives. A cloud of them.***

***But she can't feel them. The storm refuses to answer her desperate demands.***

***It's just her, her storm, and the monster she's sworn to kill.***

***Plummeting.***

***In less than a minute, it's just her and her storm.***

***The only witnesses.***

***The heroes. The villains.***

***They weren't there. None of them.***

***But they would be the ones to write her story. To decide her place in this city.***

***No matter what she said. None of her words would change anything.***

***The only one who was there.***

***She was the villain. She always would be.***

---

***"Pass, wait a-"***

***But it's too late. She's already running away.***

Kara reaches for a handful of coins, prepared to follow the girl. She can catch, she knows it.

***She won't stop trying to be the hero. She'll keep trying and trying and trying until it destroys her.***

*I can stop her. She's already emotionally compromised. She's already **hurting**, she's already in **pain**.*

*I can push her to the edge, make her understand how much being a hero will hurt.*

*Just like...just like me. Just like **my** moment. I can make her feel that as well, **crush** the part of her that sees **any beauty in all of this**.*

*I can show her **the truth**. Just like I learnt in that moment. **I can help her!***

---

***The younger girl who wanted to be a hero. Who though she was one.***

***Who loves her powers, felt like they were a gift.***

***Loved to make objects float around her. To spread her wings as she soared through the city.***

***The child who came to the big city on a noble quest.***

***The one who died the same night Julia had. But in truth, this city...this life had been slowly burying her alive for years.***

---

*"Would that be a good thing though?"*

The Kara of a few month ago wouldn't have cared about Pass at all. That person would have used Pass like a weapon until the magazine clicked empty, and then discarded her alongside dozens of others in the pile.

The Kara of last week would have taught this lesson to Pass no matter what it cost. She would have accepted her place as the monster in Pass's story, if it would keep her safe in the long term.

She would lie and deceive. Manipulate and hurt everyone she cared about, all for that single goal of protecting them.

She might regret it later. It might keep her up. But that wouldn't stop her from doing it. It hadn't before.

But this Kara is someone entirely different.

This Kara saw how Avery looked at her last night. This Kara felt how Will reacted when she'd threatened him. This Kara heard Magnus calling her out for trying to deceive him.

*Would that be a good thing though?*

*Or would that just be forcing Pass to turn into another version of me. Just like this city forced me to become just like the worst parts of it.*

Kara's known there was something wrong with all her new friends for a while now. She'd started suspecting it might actually be something wrong with her ever since her talk with William.

And now as she tastes the salt on her cheeks, realisation of exactly... how *wrong*... how *broken* she is... it threatens to drown her, to crush her.

The edges are still fuzzy. She still can't define what is *wrong* about her. She can't tell where the *wrongness* ends and Kara begins.

But she knows it's there, weighing her down. Turning her into...

*What happened to that little girl who came to this city? What changed?*

Kara doesn't know if she can be fixed. How do you solve a problem when you don't understand it? How do you know what's normal when it's all you know? When it's all you are?

*I might be too far gone. I might be beyond redemption. But Pass isn't. She hasn't lost that inner child, that wonder. That inner drive that tells her she's a good person. The same one that tells Pass I'm a good person.*

Kara doesn't know exactly how she's going to do it. But as she forces herself to walk away in a numb haze, she makes a promise to herself.

*I'll find some way to help Pass. Not to change her. Not to make her more like Kara.*

*To help Pass become Pass. Whatever that means to her.*

And maybe then she'll finally know how to help Kara.