Dead Like Us

by theoriginalicecreamqueen

Summary

Barry Allen had a great life. He loved his job, his family, and his best friend (even if he hadn't told her yet). When Barry died, he never would have guessed that his afterlife as a Grim Reaper would be more lively than his time alive ever was.

Or the Dead Like Me AU no-one asked for (Don't worry, you don't need to watch Dead Like Me to understand this fic!)
Barry Allen arrived at the CCPD his last morning alive the same way he usually did. Late for his shift (not his worst arrival time at only seven minutes after his 9:00 am shift had started), and looking around anxiously for Captain Singh so he could run in the opposite direction if Singh was coming in for a lecture. Barry was damn lucky he was so good as his job, otherwise he was sure to be unemployed by now with how consistently late he arrived. Luckily, the Captain was nowhere to be found so Barry was able to scurry towards his lab in peace. Unfortunately for Barry, there was someone already waiting at the top of the stairs blocking his path.

“Late again Barr?”

Joe West may be his father in all but name, but that did not mean the best detective of the CCPD was pleased with his tardiness if Joe’s unusually deep scowl was to be believed. Barry did not have time to do any more than grimace in Joe’s direction before the detective started up again. His partner, Eddie Thawne, flashed his usual smile at Barry. While Barry appreciated the gesture it would have been a lot more convincing if Eddie simultaneously didn’t look like he bit straight into a lemon.
“We’ve got another one, son. Call came in last night. Julian was on duty, so you need to get the information on the scene from him.”

“Great, c’mon.” Barry replied, his grimace declining into a full-fledged scowl to match Joe’s as he quickly pushed forward into his lab. Joe and Eddie followed swiftly, Joe glowering at the world around him, but still managing to match his partner’s amusement at Barry’s put upon expression.

Barry knew that look well. Growing up with the man, it was hard not to recognize Joe’s expression. It was the same look he received after Joe picked him up from his first real college party, laughing at how oblivious Barry had become with his first sip of alcohol with a look on his face that said Barry was in for a world of trouble when he sobered up, and Joe was able to fully lay into him about drinking three years before the legal age. Between Barry, Iris, and now Wally, Joe had really perfected looking completely chagrined and amused at the same time.

Usually, Barry would reply with a quip about Joe’s amusement at Barry’s misfortune. Dealing with Julian Albert was the surest way to ruin even the best of Barry’s moods. Today, Barry just didn’t have it in him. While Joe may have been trying to lighten the mood, he knew the true meaning of what the detective was telling him; Joe wasn’t trying to warn him about the unfortunate circumstance of working with Julian. While Barry may have hated the pompous British CSI, he knew what Joe was really saying. There was a new murder by the Butcher, but it had yet to be confirmed. Not only that, but as the lead CSI on the case it was probably going to fall to him to make that call.

Barry rushed towards the lab he shared with Julian, with Joe and Eddie at his heels, silent yet obviously itching to say something. Barry figured both were probably wanting to ask how he was, but he sure as hell was not about to open that can of worms. He had a job to do.

Instead, Barry address his most despised co-worker as walked into the CSI lab. “Joe said we had another murder last night. Do you think it’s the Butcher again?” Barry could feel his stomach coiling as he spoke. Between his work as a CSI and his own history, Barry was used to violence, but the Butcher case was really starting to grate him. The level of violence, combined with the complete and utter control necessary to complete these crimes without a trace of evidence was beyond chilling.

Julian rolled his eyes at Barry’s bluntness, obviously not a fan of his abrupt entry and assumptions, but nevertheless replied, “The deceased is a Caucasian male, roughly 30 years old, who died from blood loss originating from slicing and stab wounds, consistent with a high-grade butcher knife. Based on the variations in the wounds, it looks like the heart was stabbed last - the fatal blow - after several wounds made to his abdominal area, thighs, and groin. There is a high concentration of homemade anesthesia in his bloodstream, likely used to keep the victim immobile but conscious. There is also several burns present. It was carried out over the course of 12-18 hours based on the variation in the scaring. He definitely fits the pattern.”
Julian heaved a dramatic sigh as he finished his speech, looking at Barry with a look of contemptuous superiority, “Of course, as a CCPD employee I would have thought you would have had the tack to avoid such callous nicknames.”

Just barely resisting the urge to roll his eyes, Barry started to reply when Joe cut in, “Forget the name Julian, it’s him isn’t it.”

“He was found in a dumpster, nude, with no ID or other markers. There are burn are definitely consistent with electric shock, and they are mainly present along the victim's erogenous zones. It looks like the work of a cattle prod.”

Julian may have used his usual overly confident tone, but even Barry could see his reluctance. No one in the CCPD wanted to think this was The Butcher because if it another person was going to die this week, assuming they couldn’t find any evidence. It was a pretty fair assumption too, since the only thing they had to go off us was the type of weapons, the style of the murder, and the newest dump site - sure to be somewhere along the waterfront warehouse district, with no cameras or witnesses. Every scene and every victim had yielded the same thing. So chances were that this poor man’s death meant someone else was about to be tortured and killed in Central City.

“So it is him,” Barry stated. He knew it was. If the victim was really tortured with electricity along his erogenous zones, there was no doubt in Barry's mind. Based on the looks on his coworker's face, they were all in agreement. While most of the details of this case were splashed along the front page of every newspaper in the country, they had so far been successful at managing to keep these electric burns used specifically for torture a secret. No one wanted the families to know how much these victims suffered, and they had enough worries about copycats with the rest of the Butcher’s M.O.

“Alright then,” Eddie began, sounding optimistic in a way no one in the room believed. “We’ve got at most 72 hours to find some evidence on this son of a bitch before the next victim is found.”

“Assuming he stick to his pattern.” Joe adds, not even trying to match his partner's false optimism.

For a moment, Barry really hated his job. But then again, Barry thought, at least he was helping. Later than they could help this man, but late really was Barry’s style anyways.

By two o’clock, Barry’s mood had only gotten worse. Julian had found nothing at the crime scene
that they didn’t already know, and the only new thing they two had discovered working together was the dead man’s name - Ronald Raymond.

If anyone else had examined the scene, Barry would have been maybe tried to go back to the scene to pick up something another CSI may have missed. However much of a dick Julian may have been though, he was an excellent CSI. The information Julian brought was what there was.

Just as Barry was about to suggest they go back anyways, despite his strong disbelief in there being anything useful at the scene, the lab door burst open with a force that should not have been possible coming from the petite young women who stepped through.

“Hey Barr, Dad told me the news on the way on in. On the bright side though, something out there let me know you might be having a bad day, and I come bearing gifts,” Iris let out in a rush, already grabbing Barry, and dragging him towards an empty table.

As much as Barry wanted to complain about being dragged away from his work, he wasn't going to complain about it too much to Iris. Particularly when she came waving a bag of Big Belly Burger. After all, who was Barry to complain when the most beautiful woman Barry had ever met - who was coincidentally the woman of his dreams - came baring the very food his mind had been wistfully drifting towards for the past hour. Nevertheless, he felt the need to protest a little. After all Barry really did need to stay on this case.

“Iris… As much as I appreciate the Big Belly Burger, which you know I always do, it's really not the best time.”

“Nonsense Allen,” Julian cut in. “You are already well over an hour overdue for lunch, and I am far later leaving.” Julian sniffed a little, obviously forcing the next words out. “As much as this pains me to admit it, you deserve a break almost as much as I deserve to take my leave. Have a great lunch, Iris. Allen, I know this will be difficult for you, but do try to not to need me for the next 12 hours so I can actually get some sleep.”

Julian practically ran out the door with Barry glaring behind him. Despite his annoyance, he knew Julian is right. They had been working non-stop for five hours, well after Julian was supposed to leave. Not to mention Julian would be back again that night. Plus at some point over the next three days, one of them was going to be processing another crime scene almost completely identical to Ronald Raymond’s.

“So Barr,” Iris starts, “Find anything helpful?”
“Iris, I’m not talking about an open investigation with a reporter,” Barry retorted rolling his eyes. Iris may be his best friend and more, but Barry knew how important secrecy was with this case.

“I’m not asking for the Central City Picture News. I’m asking because I know how this case is getting to you. You and Dad. I’m worried Barry. I know this guy is seriously bad news, but you have got to take care of yourself. You are no use to anyone if you collapse from hypoglycemia because you got so wrapped up in this case you forgot to eat,” Iris stated as she pulled out their food, practically forcing his burger into his hands.

“You’re being dramatic. I am taking care of myself, but you know the CCPD is working on a time limit right now. Meaning that while I am working, I need to actually be focused,” Barry replied as he pointedly looking at their lunch set up like what it was - a pleasant yet altogether unnecessary distraction.

Despite his words and expression towards the admittedly nice lunch spread, Barry could not tear his eyes away from Iris, nor did he stop eating. Now that he had started, Barry realizes Iris made have had a bit of a point about the food. He’d mention that over his dead body though - Iris would never let it go if he did.

“You say that Barry, but I’ve barely seen you lately, and Dad told me you are planning to skip out on family dinner night again.” Iris replied.

“I’ve got too much to do,” Barry continued, “Besides, I think Wally would prefer if tonight was a West-only night.”

“Barry, you are family too. Don’t you ever think different. I know you and Wally are still having trouble bounding, but if you would just spend a bit more time together then I’m sure you would work something out,” Iris was quick to refute Barry’s argument.

He felt a twinge of guilt in his chest at her complaints, but Barry knew he was right. It wasn’t fair of him to be around hogging all Joe and Iris’s time when Wally needed them. Francine was sick, and having someone who was obviously not a West - despite what Joe and sometimes Iris liked to pretend - was only making things harder on the kid.

“C’mon Barry. Promise me you will at least try to make it tonight.” Iris pleaded, giving Barry her best puppy dog eyes.
“Okay Iris, I’ll try to make it,” Barry conceded. He had never been able to say no to her. Barry always assumed that was just part of being in love with her; he had been for as long as he could remember, so Barry knew better than to try to start an argument with her he was sure to lose. Barry decided to take a different tack.

“But, I do have to go see my dad tonight,” Barry continued.

“Really Barry?” The smile Iris formed after his agreement shifted quickly enough to give Barry whiplash. “It’s been months since you have seen him, but now that work is killing you, and you don’t want to come to dinner, you just have to see your dad?”

“Yeah, I do Iris. Don't you know what today is?” Barry replied somberly. He was fairly certain Iris knew, and was - like him - desperately trying to avoid acknowledging it.

“It’s the anniversary. Of course I know. Just like I know that you are digging yourself into the Butcher case today to avoid your feelings as much, as you are to catch the guy. I get why you are worried about your dad, I really do, but I think you are forgetting that you need to take care of yourself today with people who love and support you. So go see your dad, and make sure he is okay. Then you had better show up for dinner before Wally leaves. We are your family too, and you deserve to have some support today too. Henry may have lost his wife, and he may not have handled it that well, but you lost your mom. We are not letting you spend the whole evening taking care of him, when you need someone to care for you too. The best kind too. Dad’s promised to make Grandma Esther's chicken tonight. So promise me, Barry, that you’ll let us be there for you. Otherwise, we are eating all the chicken”

Iris may have been offering her support, along with an extended pinky to really make sure Barry would show up, but she was also stealing some of his last remaining fries. She wouldn’t be Iris is she wasn’t. Barry knew that Iris’s kindness was her nicest way of telling him that he did not have a choice about tonight. Between the anniversary of his mother’s murder, and the newest Butcher victim Iris was way too worried to let him spend the night moping.

“Oh Kay Iris, you win. I’ll be there tonight as soon as I’m done checking up on my dad. I promise. But you have got to let me get back to work if you want me to make it,” Barry replied as he pointedly starting to clear the table.

“See you later Barr.” Iris took the hint, leaving Barry to clean up his lab. Barry was too busy staring at her retreating figure to jump back in. He knew that once he reopened his case files, his elevated mood from Iris’s presence was about to disappear. So Barry sat for just a few more minutes, and he gathered himself before diving back into Ronald Raymond’s life and death.
“Hello Barry!” Officer Patty Spivot exclaimed cheerily as she walked into the forensics lab.

“Hey Patty,” Barry responded, trying to match the peppy blonde’s enthusiasm. While he wasn’t completely successful, Barry knew he had perked up considerably at her entrance. Even on a day as truly awful as Barry’s had been so far it was difficult to not perk up around the CCPD’S most cheery soon-to-be detective. Especially since she was one of the few officers on the force to both understand and appreciate the forensic teams role.

“I saw your request for the Butcher files, and I thought I would hand-deliver. Do you think you may have found something?” Patty inquired, setting the large stack of files in her hands on his desk delicately, keeping them from tumbling to the floor through sheer force of will.

“Nothing to distinguish it from any other Butcher case so far, but I just wanted to be really sure. We’ve only got a couple of days to find something, and that’s if we’re lucky,” Barry replied.

“Well then why aren’t you going with Detective West and Eddie to check out Happy Times?” Patty inquired.

“What the hell is Happy Times?” Barry responded, bewildered. If Patty had said that phrase about anyone else, Barry would have assumed she was referring to some new drug fad. It certainly sounded like Barry’s - very brief - exposure to drug culture in college. Well, the one party he accidentally ended up with that had some students smoking pot. He was going to school to work with the police, so he wasn’t exactly itching towards the wild side.

“It’s the temp agency where Ronald Raymond and his fiancé work. Not really sure why temp work qualifies as a ‘happy times’, but I guess this place is trying to bring some brightness into their work. Anyways, the are going to question the office, and inform Caitlin Snow, Raymond's fiancé, about his death. Apparently they hadn’t gotten a chance to change her to his next of kin yet, and Raymond’s mother was not fond of Snow. So his mom decided we get to be the bearers of bad news. At the poor girl’s workplace.” Patty replied, obviously annoyed on behalf of the girl in question.

“Did she not notice he was missing?” Barry asked.

“According to the mother, Ronald was supposed to be visiting his old college roommate in National City. When we checked his phone logs though the last thing sent from his phone was a text to the
friend saying something came up, and he’d have to visit later. Detective Thawne already spoke on
the phone with the guy, and said he sounded clean. I’m sure he will end up with a follow up-later. I
think they wanted to see what the fiancé knew first.”

“Well I guess I am going then. Although it would have been nice if they had bothered to inform me
of any of this.” Barry replied gathering his kit and sharing a knowing look with Patty. Both knew the
Detective West was probably trying to rush out the door before Barry caught word.

Barry’s foster-father had always been protective of his children, but the Butcher had Joe stretching
that behavior to his work now too. Joe had always wanted his children away from the violence of
police work, and despite his eventual acceptance of Barry’s job as a CSI, he was still reluctant to take
Barry with him on any scene Joe had deemed might be “risky.” That definition had been expanded
to almost any location associated with this investigation.

“Joe! Eddie! Hold up! I’m coming too,” Barry all but shouted as he saw the two detectives making
there way out of the precinct.

Eddie gladly halted, probably pleased he was not going to forced into Joe’s plan. Joe stopped as
well, although with far less enthusiasm.

“You sure you want to come with us Barry?” Joe asked. “We aren’t too likely to find anything we
need a CSI for, and we are having to inform the guy’s fiancée while we are there too,” Joe asked,
obviously hoping to dissuade Barry.

“You never know Joe. Won’t it be so much better to have me there just in case? After all, you know
another person there to look around will be helpful,” Barry forcefully answered. He was not staying
behind on this one.

“Barry…” Joe started, but Eddie briefly cut him off. “C’mon Joe, you know he’s right, and we are
just going to a temp agency. You know as well as we do that Barry isn’t likely to run into any
trouble, especially with us there. Plus it’s getting close to the end of all of our shifts, and if there is
something there do you really want to wait for him to have to come out - by himself - to get it?”

“Alright, alright. I hate it when you two are right.” Joe conceded, leading the small group out the
doors.
Despite it’s name, the offices of Happy Time did not look like a happy kind of place. It was a regular office space, with little distinguishing it other than the obnoxious yellow smiley faces that seemed to be posted throughout the office - posters, signs, and stickers - and perhaps even more grey than usual. Somehow the smiles seemed to make the office even duller, although Barry was positive that was far from their intention.

Joe, Eddie, and Barry all walked to the reception desk warily, the other two men obviously as put off by the garish decor of the office as much as Barry was. Well, maybe not quite. Barry had a feeling his dreams that night were going to involving bright yellow faces stalking him as much as shadowy men wielding knives and his mother’s screams.

“Welcome to Happy Time, my name is Cindy. How can we make your happiness a reality today?” Despite the very obviously generic greeting Happy Times assigned, Cindy the receptionist’s lackluster greeting seemed to fit in with the shades of office. The woman used a complete monotone, and if Barry had to guess her only real motivation for helping them would be to make them someone else’s problem.

“Hello Cindy,” Eddie greeted, smiling charmingly at the woman as both he and Joe both flashed their badges. Barry felt the need to grip his lament as they did so, although he managed to keep himself from showing it. Cindy remained unaffected in the face of Eddie’s charm, something Barry privately felt like congratulating her on. He may have liked Eddie, but seeing anyone resist the detective's suave nature was rare. It made Cindy’s fortitude that much more impressive. “My name is Detective Joe West, this Detective Eddie Thawne, and CSI Barry Allen. We need to speak with a Caitlin Snow.”

“She’s in the second to last row of cubicles, second down on the far side.” Cindy replied, already turning away in what was meant to be a dismissal. Apparently Cindy was one of the few people immune to the kind of workplace gossip that tends to follow appearance by the police.

The three CCPD employees exchanged bemused glances at the odd secretary in the even odder office as the made their way back to the desk of Caitlin Snow. As they approached, they saw Snow was a beautiful young woman - Ronald Raymond had been a lucky man. She was pale, with reddish-brown hair, and was laughing with a man in a goofy t-shirt that did not seem to fit into the monotone feel of the office. He sat at the cubicle next to hers. She had a nice laugh. Barry hated that they were about to stop it, probably for a long time to come.

“Are you Caitlin Snow?” Eddie asked as they drew close. Joe continue for him, “My name is Detective Joe West, this is my partner Detective Eddie Thawne, and CSI Barry Allen. We need to speak with you. Is there somewhere private where we could talk.”

“Um yes I’m Caitlin Snow. What is the about?” She responded.
“It’d really be best if we could talk in private.” Barry responded kindly, trying to reassure the increasingly anxious woman.

“Okay then. I’m sure H.R. wouldn’t mind if we use the conference room. Cisco, could you let him know for me?” Caitlin turned to her no longer laughing companion, who nodded and walked in the opposite direction as Caitlin lead them towards the closest door, leading them into the conference room.

Despite the man’s departure, he obviously did not want to leave his friend alone. Barry had a moment to be thankful the poor woman had a friend here. She was going to need one after they were through talking with her.

Barry shut the door and sat down beside Caitlin Snow, facing the windows, while Joe and Eddie took the opposite side. He would have sat with them, but he figured since Caitlin was about to have one of the worst moments of her life, someone should be there beside her rather than three strange men staring as she broke down.

It was a system the three had unfortunately perfected, although they took turns based on the person getting the news. He figured the other two thought she might need his more sensitive approach. They were probably right. Her nervous demeanor was seeming to grow the longer they were with her. Barry wondered if that was because it had to have been close to a day since she heard from Ronald.

“What is this about?” Caitlin asked quickly. Despite her frazzled demeanor, Caitlin Snow obviously had a bit more brass than they anticipated. She was not waiting for them to start, like most did in her situation. Barry figured most people didn’t want their suspicions confirmed, and would rather have those few moments of doubt over the grief that was sure to follow.

“I’m sorry to have to tell you this Miss Snow, but Ronald Raymond was found dead last night. Right now it is looking as though he was a victim of the serial killer being commonly referred to as the Butcher.” Joe responded quickly. As always, Joe wasn’t one to mince words, but despite the harsh words - and really, there was no good way to deliver this kind of news - his eyes shone through with as much sympathy as his more overt partner.

“Oh my god,” Caitlin gasped, her eyes immediately filling with tears.

It was at this rather inconvenient point the door opened, and two men walked through. The first man Barry was not familiar with. He was a sharply dressed, around the same age of Joe with a large smile
on his face, and he was quickly followed by the t-shirt man, Cisco.

Barry could see Joe about to protest to their presence, but was silenced as Caitlin threw herself into Cisco’s arms her silent tears were turning into sobs. The smiling man’s face shifted, as he stepped in front of the other two in a protective stance, complemented the scowl that now graced his rather handsome features.

“I’m the manager around here. The name is Harrison Wells, but I’d rather you call me H.R. What can Happy Time do to help the CCPD today?” The older man said, his tone filled with the forced cheer his face no longer held.

“It’s Ronnie, H.R.” Caitlin responded in Cisco’s chest immediately, oblivious to the shift in his demeanor. “He’s dead. They say it was the Butcher,” She continued. The man’s face - apparently H.R. - shifted once again to a picture of perfect sorrow as he moved to grab Caitlin's shoulder in a show of support.

Cisco, still holding Caitlin, started to cry as well. “How? Ronnie isn’t even supposed to be in town. He was on his way to National City to see his best man, Jason. We were going to go together, but my brother had a thing. Oh god, I should have just told Dante to suck it and gone with him.”

“I’m sorry, I know this a difficult time for you all, but if you are feeling up to it we really need to ask you some questions. Particularly you Miss Snow, and Mr. um... Cisco.” Joe stated, sympathetic but pushing. As much as he would like to - they would all like to - let these people fall apart, they didn’t have the time. Not with the first death in the Butcher's cycle. They needed answers quickly. Neither seemed up for it yet, despite Joe’s urging.

Barry stood up, starting towards the distraught tangle. “I know this is all awful and overwhelming, but as soon as you can we really need to speak with you. If this was the Butcher, and we really think it was, then we need to know any information you might have. We hate we couldn’t catch him in time to save Ronnie, but you might be able to tell us something that will prevent someone else from going through what Ronnie did.”

Barry’s words seemed to work, with Caitlin and Cisco both trying to pull themselves together, and H.R. relaxing in his protective stance. Caitlin even turned to face them, although still leaning into her friend.

“Okay.” Caitlin stated, pulling together some of her earlier resolve and stepping away the Cisco to retake her seat. Cisco followed directly behind her, taking a seat to Caitlin’s other side.
“Could you get me some tea, H.R.?” Caitlin asked her friend, still standing awkwardly by the door.


“Thanks H.R.,” Cisco responded, while the other three shook their heads, trying to encourage the man to leave.

“Alright Caitlin,” Eddie began as the door closed. “What can you tell us about Ronnie’s plans last night.”

Unfortunately, despite the grueling two hours spent at the unhappiest of Happy Times, they did not get much other than Ronnie Raymond had been planning to leave by bus, and that as far as Cisco and Caitlin - who dropped him at the station - knew Ronald Raymond should have been in National City.

Even worse, their National City counterparts had sent news while inside that Ronald's best man - Jason Rusch - didn’t know why Ronald’s plans had changed. Barry would have suspected the Butcher sent the message, but it seemed unlikely. The killer had worked with much more limited time frames, and he would have had to know the man’s plans.

If that wasn’t enough, Ronnie’s possible disappearance at the bus station was making Joe even more in agreement with Iris about Barry’s evening plans.

“C’mon Barry. Why don’t you just go see your dad tomorrow. We can drop Eddie back at the station, and Iris did tell you I’m making Grandma Esther's chicken right? You know how much you love that chicken, and with an extra mouth eating it I make no guarantees about it still being there if you are late. I can take you out to your dad’s tomorrow after work.” Barry felt a stirring of jealousy stirring in his gut, but he pushed it down. He knew Joe hadn’t meant it like that.

Joe was trying to convince Barry to spend more time with them, especially Wally. He knew that Joe and Iris were right, and he was still being kind of distant, but it was for their own good. It was hard enough bonding with new family when there wasn’t someone who didn’t really belong taking up all their time and energy. Especially when said outsider was the pseudo-son Joe had gotten to raise, while Francine had only told Joe about Wally recently.
Wally had a lot to catch up with the West, and however much he may sometimes wish Joe really was his dad - preferably through a marriage with Iris - Barry did not really belong. It just hurt having Joe accidentally drive that point home. Barry just wanted to make sure Wally knew he wasn’t trying to take his place, just as Joe kept trying to convince Barry that Wally wasn’t taking his.

Barry knew Joe had held them back specifically for this, as it was unusual for the two to simply wait on Eddie to get the car. Unfortunately Eddie also guessed Joe’s intention and jumped at the chance to get away before he could be dragged into this debate. Eddie was a smart man, Barry thought grimly.

“You know why I need to go tonight, Joe. I already promised Iris I’d keep it a short visit so I can make it back before Wally leaves, but I can’t just not see my dad today.” Barry responded. He was an Allen, and tonight that part of his family needed him. His mother’s death was hard on him, but his father took things worse. Henry Allen needed him to be there tonight. “Besides Joe,” Barry continued, a teasing grin forming on his face, “You know you are just as much trying to get me to avoid the bus as you are trying to get me to come to dinner.”

“Guilty as charged,” Joe agreed easily. “If you aren’t riding then go on to the bus stop. It’ll get to your dad’s way earlier then if we try to make it back to the station in this traffic. I’ll see you for dinner Barry.”

“See you Joe.” Barry responded, already jogging briskly towards the bus stop up the road. If he could make it there in the next five minutes, he could catch the bus to his dad’s visit for an hour, and still make it Joe’s by 7:30.

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Barry stood outside of his childhood home anxiously. He may have had a key, but his visits out here were rare enough he still felt the need to wait for his father at the door. Besides Henry Allen was a very private man, and despite his father never taking the key back from the days Barry actually lived at that house, he knew his father preferred the warning of any sort of visitors.

“Hey Slugger. Come on in,” His dad greeted warmly as he swung the door open. He was attempting to smile at Barry, and Barry was attempting a smile at him. Both failed miserably. They had trouble with that since Nora Allen died, 15 years ago that day.

Barry followed his father back through the house, both stopping awkwardly in the living room. He could smell his father’s dinner cooking, and Barry was thankful he had already told his dad he could not stay for dinner.
“Hi dad,” Barry broke through the silence. He wanted to make small talk, and ask how his dad was. He already knew the answer to that though. His dad was not doing well that day.

“You doing alright Barry? You don’t seem quite like yourself today.” Barry might have known better than to ask, but apparently his dad did not. Despite their long separation from each other after Nora Allen’s death, Henry Allen had always been extraordinary at reading his moods. Unfortunately that did not translate to Henry Allen’s ability to react to Barry’s ills.

“It’s just work dad. Butcher struck again yesterday. I really don’t want to talk about it though. I’ve been sorting through the case all day.” Barry responded brusquely. He knew he was being rude. His dad was worried, but Barry didn’t have it to go over this with his father.

“I didn’t realize you were working the Butcher cases.” Henry responded, seemingly oblivious to Barry’s attempt to end that conversation.

“Well I am,” Barry replied, shifting uncomfortably under his father’s calculating gaze. “I didn’t come over to talk about my awful day at work, dad. How are things at the hospital?” Barry redirect, hoping his father would take the out from this conversation.

“Hospital’s the same is it always is. You know things don’t really change around there. Don’t change the subject, Barr. If this case is really bothering you that much, why don’t you stay for dinner? We can talk,” Henry pushed

“Drop it dad. I couldn’t talk about it even if I wanted. It’s an open investigation, and you know I can’t stay. I told you earlier, I promised Joe and Iris I’d make it in time for family dinner night with Wally.”

“Family dinner huh?” His dad spit back, the sharpness in his expression now seeping into his disdainful tone. “I am your family Barry. With your mother gone, it’s just you and me left. Joe West may have taken care of you when I couldn’t, something I will always appreciate, but the West are not your family. It’s just us. Besides Barry, it’s the anniversary. What do you think your mother would want from us today?”

“Really dad? REALLY?!” Barry yelled back, not even trying to maintain the limited composure his father was showing. “I think mom would have wanted us taking care of each other after she died. She would have wanted my father around to make sure I was okay. But that didn’t happen, did it? Joe and Iris took care of me. They supported me. They loved me, and most importantly, they did what was best for me rather than trying to manipulate me into doing things I already told them I don’t want! Something you seem to still be completely failing at after 15 fucking years. So you’re right
dad, I should be with my family today. Mom is dead, and just like the last 15 anniversaries my family wants to be there for me. Just like I’ve been trying to do for you, but if you feel like adding more stuff for me to deal with on top of my already unbelievably shitty day then I’m gone!”

“Barry, wait. You’re right, I’m sorry. We can talk about this,” Henry responded, seemingly shocked enough by Barry’s outburst to try and actually listen to Barry. ‘To little, too late’ Barry thought grimly as he opened the door.

“Call me when you get your head out of your ass enough to actually care what I need for a change, or don’t bother calling at all! At this point, I think I’d prefer if you didn’t!” he responded harshly, slamming the door behind him. Barry wished he was surprised when Henry didn’t follow him to the bus stop. He wished it didn’t hurt almost as much as he wished he wasn’t relieved.

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Barry’s bus ride back to the West house was short. After his day, and his fight with his dad, he wanted nothing more than a nice, quiet dinner with Joe and Iris. He supposed dealing with the awkwardness of being around Wally was worth it.

“Hello.”

Barry jumped, startled, at the word. A man sat down across the aisle from Barry, smiling politely.

“Sorry about that, mate. I didn’t mean to startle you. It’s just you looked so familiar. Have we met?” The man continued.

“I don’t think so,” Barry responded. “There aren’t many Brits in Central City, and I think I’d remember you if we had.” Barry responded, forcing a friendly smile on his face. Barry might not have been the mood to make small talk, but he wasn’t about to be rude to someone who hadn’t done anything to him. This guy wasn’t the reason Barry was upset.

“Are you sure about that?” The man pressed on, “What’s your name?”

“Barry Allen. I work with the CCPD. Maybe you saw while I was working. What about you? You are...” Barry trailed off inquisitively.
“Barry, huh? Short for Bartholomew I suppose. Can’t say I blame you for shortening that one, although mine’s not much better. I’ve never been able to figure out exactly what my parents were on when the decided Rip Hunter was an appropriate name for an infant. I guess I must have seen you with CCPD, although I can’t say I recognize you that well out of uniform,” The man responded with polite interest.

“Yeah.” Barry agreed, laughing at their shared misfortunate names. “I’m a CSI though, so you wouldn’t have seen me in a uniform anyways,” Barry responded. The bus was pulling up to his stop, and Barry, despite Rip’s kindness, was anxious to get off the bus. “Anyway, this is my stop Rip. It was nice talking with you.” Barry said, gather his things quickly.

“You too Barry,” Rip responded, giving his arm a good-natured squeeze as he passed.

Barry rushed off the bus and up the streets. He was only three blocks from the West when he felt a sharp sting in his neck. As Barry sluggishly reached up to brush on whatever bug caused it, he realized he was very drowsy. His fingers brushed against a small, metallic object.

“That’s not right,” Barry mumbled to himself. He wanted to protest to cry out, but he was so tired. Why was he so tired? He tried to take another step towards the West's home, but his legs weren’t cooperating. Maybe he should just call and have Joe give him a ride. Three blocks was feeling just to far to walk. Barry was reaching for his phone when stumbled. He fell unconscious - for the last time in his life - before he reached the ground.
Dying isn't Always the Easy Part

Chapter Summary

Things get worse for Barry. Rip calls in reinforcements.

Chapter Notes

Major character death in this chapter. The first scene of this chapter is graphic. It does not go into much detail about the actual death, but it is still graphic in parts. If you don’t wish to see anything of that, skip past the line. The remainder of the chapter is quiet tame.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Barry had always been the kind of person who woke up slowly. The last time he woke in his life was no exception. As Barry’s brain slowly adjusted, he tried to sit up. He knew he had somewhere to be. Joe’s house, he dimly remembered. Only, he couldn’t sit up. He couldn’t open his eyes either. Was there was something in his mouth. A gag maybe? Why would he be gagged?

Something was forcing him to lie still. Why would something be forcing him to stay in bed? Did Joe’s overprotectiveness finally dip into full on crazy territory? Only, Barry wasn’t in his bed. His bed was soft, and absolutely covered with fluffy blankets and pillows. Whatever he was lying on hard, cold, and it felt like metal. His arms, legs, stomach, and head were all bound to the table.

Barry could barely even squirm, much less get out of whatever was holding him down. He wasn’t going to panic though. Panicking wasn’t going to help him. He had to get out of these restraints, out of whatever building he was in. Barry figured he was probably beyond late for dinner, and Joe would be looking for him. Once Henry told Joe Barry had left for dinner, the full force of the CCPD would be looking for him. Joe, Eddie, Patty, the Captain, they all cared about him. They would do whatever it took to save him. He was going to be alright.

Only now that he was waking up, his system flooding with adrenaline at this strange turn of events, and the situation he found himself in was becoming increasingly familiar. Barry was held down, he was blindfolded, and he wasn’t wearing any clothes. Worse still, he realized he definitely knew these straps. From there feel, where they lay on him, it was all familiar. Barry had spent weeks studying what these straps did to those they held down. Barry was going to have bruises. They would be a deep, dark purple when he was found, two inches wide. He was going to keep squirming, more so later when he was in pain. Of course, by the time the CCPD came for him, none of that was going to matter.
Barry heard a door creak open, then shut somewhere behind him. Barry was definitely panicking now. He may not know exactly where he was, but he knew who brought him there. He knew what was going to happen. The door closed, and the Butcher walked towards the him. He could hear his footsteps. That morning Barry would have given almost anything to find the man. Now he would do the same to leave.

The Butcher had him. Barry was going to die, and it was going to be painful. The cloth covering his eyes was sticking to his skin fully by the time the footsteps stopped right beside him. He didn’t even realize he was crying. He didn’t really care. Barry studied this man, he knew what was about to happen to him. Barry was going to be tortured for several hours. He would be stabbed, sliced, poked and prodded with a cattle prod, and then, after hours of this torment, the Butcher was going to shove a knife through his heart. He was going to die.

Barry had already given up trying to be brave by the time the Butcher started, a shock felt on the sensitive skin of his inner thigh. No one knew anything about the man with him other then this. What he had done to so many people. What he was going to do to Barry.

Barry didn’t bother to hold back that scream or any of the ones after. There was no point - from the moment the moment Barry got off the bus and in the Butcher’s sight, he was already dead.

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Sara Lance was not the kind of woman to be afraid walking alone through Central City’s warehouse district. She had more than one lifetimes worth of experience kicking the ass anyone who messed with her, and she was plenty confident in her abilities to protect herself.

Nonetheless, Sara was not comfortable here either. Rip Hunter calling her out of the blue, and sending her out to random locations was part of her job. It was annoying, sure, but Rip really didn’t have any more control over where she ended up with work than she did. Of course, this time he did interrupt a rather thrilling conversation with her favorite nurse, so she fully intended to give him hell regardless. Lindsey had gotten a haircut, and Sara barely had time to compliment it, much less determine how good it would look mussed. Whether it would look even better. Sara bet it would, but now she would have to wait until their next shift together to be sure. Not to mention it was nearly 6:00 o’clock in the morning, she had just worked a twelve-hour shift, and she was not in the mood to watch the sunrise.

As Sara - finally - caught site of Rip, Sara’s uneasy only grew. Rip had a softness in his face that was rare, generally reserved to their only for team, and then only during dire circumstances. To see that face now during what he assured her in his text was a work-related event was unsettling.
“Sara, glad to you found the place alright. Of course, getting her in a timely manner still managed to completely evade you.” His snippy tone usually would have gotten him an eye roll at the least. However, his expression had still not changed, and her curiosity got the better of her.

“What’s going on Rip? Why did you have me come all the way out here. Did a homeless person die around here somewhere?” Sara asked. She couldn’t think of any other reason someone would die of natural causes in this part of town during the temperate fall Central City was going through.

“Not a homeless person this time Sara. A young CSI is dying in there. I already took care of him,” Rip pointed vaguely to the building he was leaning against. “It’s not natural either. Someone is killing the poor kid. I fairly positive it is that Butcher guy everyone keeps going on about,” Rip responded. His tone softens at these words, matching his to soft expression. Sara hated it instantly. Rip Hunter was not the kind of man that generally used or needed softness.

“You got his soul? Why didn’t one of the Rogues, or Zolomon get it? What’s going on Rip? I just worked a twelve-hour shift. If you try to play a guessing game with me right now I will make you regret it,” Sara threatened harshly. She was not in the mood for Rip’s usual vague bullshit.

“I think this is it for me Sara. I’ve been a reaper for a long time, and I’ve never randomly been switched divisions like this. Never heard of it happening like this either, at least not for anything short of a natural disaster. I think after he dies, this poor kid is going to replace me. Well, both of you will. I brought you here to you can take care of him,” Rip responded, gently smiling at Sara.

“You better not be leaving shit to me Rip. This could be nothing you know. Mix ups happen all the time. Besides, even if this does fill your quota there has to be someone better to deal with this. I don’t mind setting the stray up, but I don’t want your job. We have a whole team, and I’m pretty sure they would all be more suited than me. Except Mick and Carter. Anyone else though.”

“It’s not going to be someone else Sara. I know this is a lot to take on. I didn’t want this either, but it’s not something you get to pick, or that I do. I know you have your doubts, but you are by far the best choice. Probably even more so than me.” Rip responded his usual firm manner coming through. It did nothing to put Sara at ease. This man in front of her was not acting like Rip Hunter.

“I… Rip I don’t know. This is probably nothing anyways. I mean, how do you really know. Maybe the kid is just going to have a heart attack during all that.” Sara waved her arms to illustrate her point. Despite her usual calm approach to death, something all reapers eventually develop, she wasn’t comfortable addressing what was going on in the warehouse. If Rip was right, the kid inside was a hell of a lot worse than dying.
“Sara,” Rip started, grabbing her right hand in both of hers. “I can feel it. I’ve felt it since I reaped him. My quota is full, and I’m going to move on. I know this kid, Barry Allen, was chosen to take my place, just as I surely as I know you are going to be the one to take over the rest of my duties. Sara...I...” Rip shivered, releasing her hand.

“Rip!?!?” Sara was startled. It wasn’t just Rip’s body shivering, but his image.

“Take care Sara,” Rip smiling at her even as he disappeared. It was Sara’s turn to shake as she was suddenly left alone in the alley behind a warehouse currently occupied by a corpse and the most violent and effective serial killer in Central City’s history. So she did the only thing she could think of - Sara sat, and she waited.

After around five minutes, a figure interrupted Sara’s solitude. A slender, pale man burst from the wall behind her with an expression of utter terror on her face. Upon seeing her, he yelped.

“Barry Allen right? I’ve been waiting for you. My name is Sara Lance. If you don’t mind I would like to get a move on. It’s been a very long day, and something tells me it’s not ending anytime soon,” Sara stated, smiling in what she hoped was a reassuring manner.

“What’s going on? I don’t know how I got out here. And how do you know my name? Are you with the CCPD?”

“I not a cop, Kid,” Sara stated, trying not to laugh at him. She was still in her nurse’s uniform, but apparently the trauma of the last several hours killed his critical thinking skills too. The kid cut her off first before she could continue.

“Please help me. He’s hurting me. He left for now, but he’s not done yet. The Butcher never leaves a victim like this. He’s going to come back for me, but you can help me, please.”

Sara’s heart broke a little with his pleading. Barry Allen was about to get a very rude awakening, and fucking Rip had left that job to her.

“You’re right Barry, the Butcher doesn’t just leave like that. He’s already finished. I hate to tell you this, but you are already dead. But it’s okay now, I’m here to help with next step. Come with me, and I’ll explain everything,” Sara responded gently while grabbing the kids hand and pulling him along towards her car. Thankfully for her, the kid was too shocked to protest. They had a lot to go
through, and Sara wanted them gone now. After all, Barry Allen was definitely right about one thing. The Butcher was sure to return soon so that he could dump his latest victim for the CCPD to find, and Barry Allen did not need to watch that.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed. Once again, this is not beta'd so feel free to point out any mistakes you notice.
Chapter Summary

Barry learns what is going on - kind of.

Chapter Notes

Well, that was finished much faster than I was expecting. Hope you all enjoy.

Barry wished he had a better idea of what was going on. He was riding in the car with a strange woman who had taken him away from the warehouse district. She told Barry he died. He really didn’t know what to think about that or her.

Barry didn’t want to believe it, but he couldn’t help but wonder. All he could remember from the last several hours was being in pain and a feeling of utter terror. His whole body had been alight with it, warring between the two feelings. Nothing was hurting him now, though. He remembered when it stopped too. He remembered the sharp, biting pain in his chest just before it ended.

He remembered after. He laid still, being to afraid to move for he didn’t know how long. Once he got up he had no problem getting out of the binding that had vexed him for so long before, and he’s pretty sure he got out of the warehouse by falling through a wall.

But then if Barry really was dead, what was happening now? Sara had opened the door for him, and was driving them through the beginning of Central City’s early morning traffic. If he was really dead, then what did that make Sara, and where was she taking him? Was it hell? Waiting through Central City’s morning traffic with no coffee, no answers, and a night like had certainly felt like it. He had so many questions, and other than their brief conversation outside of the warehouse, Sara had been as silent as he was. He supposed he would have to be the one to change that if he wanted answers.

“Sara?”

“Yes, Barry,” she responded.

“Where are we going? I don’t understand what’s happening, and you haven’t explained anything
yet.”

“I will,” the blonde reassured. “We are about five minutes from my apartment, and once we get there we are going to have a nice, long talk. But I haven’t slept in 18 hours, and traffic is a nightmare. Can you wait until we get there?”

“Okay,” Barry responded. He understood that, much as he wanted to protest. At least he had some answers there. If Sara had an apartment, a car, and the cellphone he had seen her use to send of a quick message before she started driving, then it stood to reason that Sara wasn’t dead. Of course that just added more questions. If Sara wasn’t dead - like he was apparently - then how did she see him? Could everyone? Maybe she was a medium. Barry had been really into the strange and unusual in high school and college. He even ran an embarrassing - never to be mentioned again unless Iris was blackmailing him - blog on these kinds of occurrence. If there was ever evidence that it was possible than he was living it.

He wanted to ask, to demand she tell him what was going to happen to him, but Sara was right. Traffic really was horrible in these early hours, and he guessed that he could wait. After all it was probably not a good idea to piss off a medium. If that is what she was.

Thankfully Sara did not exaggerate the closeness of her apartment. She pulled into a modest, if rather run down complex, parked, and got out. She started walking away and Barry went to follow before remembering he couldn’t open the door. His hand went right through the handle, startling him yet again. He went to call out to Sara for help when he saw her staring at him from inside an open doorway, eyebrows raised as if to ask what he was doing. But Sara knew he couldn’t open the door. His hand went right through.

The blonde sighed dramatically, came back to the car and open the door for him once again.

“You know Barry, you could have just walked through the door,” Sara pointed out. Barry felt she was being a touch dramatic, but she did have a point.

“Oh. I forgot. Sorry Sara.”

He followed her inside the small spartan-styled apartment. Barry wondered if that was just Sara, or if it was a testament to whatever state she was in. She still hadn’t said how she could see Barry.

“Oh hey Sara. Who’s the straggler?” A tall, broad-shouldered man came out of what looked to be
Sara’s kitchen, barely fitting through the door. He friendly smile on his face despite the early hour, and Barry’s apparently unexpected presence. Barry couldn’t help but feel relieved at his presence. Whoever this man was, he could see Barry too.

“Kid’s name is Barry Allen. Barry here filled Rip’s quota.”

“Did you say Rip?” Barry asked, his mind flashing to his strange encounter on the bus. Until Sara mentioned the man’s name, he had forgotten all about the strangely named man from his bus ride. “Did he do this to me? Is he the Butcher? Oh god, you have to tell someone! Call Detective Joe West at the CCPD. We have to warn people,” Barry felt frantic, not to mention terrified. If these strange people knew who the Butcher was and weren’t telling, then what were they planning to do to him?

“You’re a Butcher victim? And Rip was your reaper? Jesus Sara, you could’ve explained to what was going on before now, don’t you think?” The strange man asked, his good-natured mannerism still present even if his words would have sounded annoyed coming from anyone else. He didn’t make any sense.

“Reaper? What do you mean? What the fuck is going on?” Barry asked, trying to subtly inch towards the door. He may not be able to touch anything right now, but seeing as how his two strange companions were able to see Barry, despite him being dead, he didn’t really trust that they couldn’t hurt him. He definitely did not trust that they wouldn’t try. Barry felt stupid for even following the strange woman here, but he was just so scared. He would have done anything to get away from that awful place.

“It’s been a long day for both of us, Ray, I figured he might want a break before we dive into the whole undead thing.” Sara responded, her seemingly ever-present sighing coming out again before she redirected her gaze to Barry.

“Barry, I see you moving towards the door. If you try to leave we will just follow you. Can you please just sit down, and Ray and I will explain everything. Alright?” She motioned to the seating area, starting that way herself. "I promise kid, you really are safe with us."

Despite the woman’s obvious fatigue, she still had a reassuring smile available for him, and a glare clearly directing the man - Ray - towards the couch. Barry did not want to sit with either of them, so he quickly claimed the rocking chair for himself. Thankfully, despite his newfound ability to go through walls, he could still sit. He supposes the car ride here should have proved that to him. That was too much of a headache to sort through now. Maybe Sara would explain.

“So, Sara did at least tell you that you died right?” Ray began, sending slightly disapproving smile a
Sara. Despite just meeting the man, Barry had a feeling that it was probably the pinnacle of unpleasantness Ray was capable of.

“Yes, Ray I told him he died. Although considering how it happened, I’m pretty sure he guessed that.” Sara responded quickly, returning Ray’s look with a far more fierce glare of her own.

“Um… So if I’m dead, then how can you see me? Am I a ghost?” Barry asked. He figured it was probably in his best interest to cut in. He had already been waiting quite a while, and he was done being patient. He figured if his dying - and he was not thinking about that, not now, not ever - hadn’t driven him crazy, Sara and Ray’s arguing might do him in while he waited to find out what he was supposed to do now.

“Kind of? For now Barry you are a basically just a soul. Before most people die, someone like us or Rip - reapers - separate the soul from the body. Like Rip did for you. It’s kinda what we do. We’re Grim Reapers. Awful, outdated name but it works. Anyway after that grim reapers help people reach their inner peace or whatever and move on to whatever comes next.” Ray explained. Despite the incredibly serious words he stated, the man never lost his cheery expression. Barry wished he had.

“Then where is Rip? He umm… ‘reaped’ me. Why am I with you guys? No offense, but this is not helping me feel anything close to peaceful. You two are horrible at this.”

Barry may have felt rude saying this to what seemed to be the only two people who actually knew where he was, but it’s not like he was lying to them. With what happened to him before finding Sara - which he was still very firmly not thinking about - he wasn’t sure he wasn’t hallucinating. If he was, this was way more intense than the one time his college roommate had convinced him to try psychedelic mushrooms. This felt too real, despite the complete absurdity of the situation.

“That’s because we aren’t helping you move on. Like I said before, you filled Rip’s quota. Reapers don’t work forever, we aren’t some great immortal beings. We are people, or more accurately we were people. We die, then we reap, and once we hit our quota than the next person takes our place.” Sara responded. Unlike Ray, the woman seemed forlorn sharing this news. Like it was something important, something that Barry had a suspicion he really did not want.

“So filling Rip’s quota. Please tell me that doesn’t mean what I think it means.” Barry didn’t want to be right. He just went through a lot, too much. If Barry got to live, see Joe, tell Iris he was in love with her, apologize to his dad for being such an ass the night before, solve the Butcher case, and even get through a conversation with Wally without that every-present awkwardness it would all be worth it. He had a feeling he wasn’t that lucky.
“It does Barry.” Ray’s smiled dimmed as he spoke, finally letting the gravity of Barry’s situation come forward. “You’re going to be a grim reaper Barry.”

Barry felt a cold numbness come over him. He felt like he couldn’t breathe. He was fairly sure he wasn’t anyways, not like this. Not dead. He didn’t think he was a reaper yet. Sara and Ray, they were interacting with the world around him, and Barry couldn’t. Barry couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t touch, and he couldn’t feel anything. Maybe if he just stayed like that he would waste away. He didn’t even have a body anymore. He had left that behind. It should be even easier now. He knew Sara and Ray were talking, seemingly to each other as much as him, but he couldn’t make sense of the words. He didn’t want to. He vaguely registered Ray grabbing his keys before moving closer, and Sara leaving the room. It took several minutes of Ray sitting in front of him, moving his mouth with sounds coming out that Barry couldn’t hear,

As Sara re-enter the room, pillow and blankets in hand, Ray’s voice started to come through the fog in his mind.

“... just fine. Being a reaper isn’t so bad. There are plenty of perks. Like not aging, and…”

“Ray, hush. I don’t think that’s what Barry want to hear right now.” Sara cut in, silencing Ray. Barry had a feeling the look she was giving Ray, combined with that tone would work on just about anyone. Apparently that included him. Barry felt his eyes focus on her. It was nice. Barry hadn't felt anything that strongly since the pain, and this was certainly more pleasant.

“Barry, can you hear us?” She continued, this time addressing him. Barry nodded. She felt far away, and nodding for her question seemed like a greater effort than such a small movement should be, but the determination in her eyes grounded him. Sara obviously wasn’t giving him any more of a choice in responding than she gave to Ray when shutting him up. Barry appreciated that kind of strength. It reminded him of Iris. Iris had never let Barry ignore her either.

“Okay Barry. Ray’s going to go now, but you and me, we are going to sleep.” She grabbed Barry’s arm as she spoke, giving him a second to relish in the feeling for a minute.

He couldn’t remember ever enjoying a simple touch so much. He could feel her warmth, the gentle squeeze, the calluses on her fingers, but that wasn’t all. Sara touch him seemed to ignite the world around him. He felt air in his lungs for the first time since meeting the women and the warmth of the sunlight through the window behind him. Best of all, Barry was able to feel the softness of the pillow and the fuzzy texture of the blanket she shoved in his hands as she stood up.

“Okay. I can do that. Just sleep?” Barry asked. He needed to be sure. Barry had a feeling that those
people Ray mentioned earlier did not sleep. Despite his fatigue the night before, the utter wish he would just pass out on the awful table, Barry hadn’t felt tired since he glided off the table and into that dark, dank alleyway where Sara waited for him.

“Yeah Barry, just sleep.” Sara confirmed, dragging Ray towards the door as Barry laid down. He could still hear the two talking. Something about a list, and a hick maybe? Barry couldn’t tell, and he didn’t care enough to try and listen. He knew he probably should. He was in a stranger's home. He was dead, yet no longer fully so. He was a CSI. He had been a CSI. He knew he should be looking for evidence, clues to confirm what Barry was positive was the strangest night he would ever experience. After what happened, what he was decidedly not thinking about now that he was undead, Barry decided he deserved to rest. So he blocked their voices, and the smiling man’s exit, and he fell asleep for the first time in his undead existence.
Legacies

Chapter Summary

David Singh makes an early morning house call.

Sometimes, David Singh really hated his job. The pay was shit, the hours worse, and the responsibilities of being a police captain in a city like Central weighed on him. Despite these obstacles though, David still found pleasure in his work most of the time. What he and his officers were doing made a difference. In this moment though, he had never hated his job more.

He was standing in front of the house of his best detective, trying to will himself to knock on the door. He had to do the least favorite of his duties as an employee of the CCPD, and tell Detective Joe West that his foster-son was dead. He could hear Joe and his daughter getting read for the day in there. If he had to guess, the two were probably in the kitchen.

David was still having trouble processing everything himself. He wasn’t sure he would have believed the sweet, young CSI was gone if he had not come here directly from the scene. He had just seen Barry yesterday, sneaking in late as usual. He had even considered chewing him out - once again - before deciding to let the kid be since he had a horror story of a case waiting on him. Now Barry had lived through that horror too, and David had to tell the man who raised him.

Luckily for him, Officer Spivot had volunteered to tell the Barry’s biological father, Henry Allen. Spivot had been a friend of Barry’s. Usually he would have been reluctant to have such a new officer do a notification like that, but Singh could tell she was itching to help. Spivot wanted in on the Butcher case before that morning, and now that her friend was dead he understood her need to help however she could.

It’s why he was standing outside of the West house at 8:00 in the morning. Joe wasn’t just his best detective, but his friend. They had served as beat cops together, worked they way to the detective shields, and Joe had been his number one supporter within the department since his promotion to Captain. Despite how difficult this conversation would be, he could not let Joe hear the news from anyone else.

With that in mind, David gathered his admittedly frayed nerves and knocked. He heard the noises stop for a minute, shift, and the footsteps that followed.

“Captain? What are you doing here?” Joe asked as he swung the door open. Joe wouldn’t have a
clue what dark news David brought with him. Iris may have still lived at home, but Barry had his own apartment. Until today, David had secretly hated that. Barry was on time far more often before moving out of Joe’s house. Now David didn’t think he could be more grateful for that small bit of extra time before his friend’s world shattered.

“Can I come inside Joe? I need to speak with you and Iris.” David hated to say these words, hated the way Joe’s face hardened.

Joe West was no rookie. He had made many visits to families like the one David was on now. He may not have known what happened yet, but Joe was a very good detective, and he knew that something bad had happened. After all, it is not often that the head of the CCPD makes a personal call to their detectives without warning, much less at this early morning hour in the middle of the week.

“Iris, can you come in here.” Joe called, moving along towards his living room without a backward glance.

David figured it was up to him to shut the door and follow. He wanted to hate himself for being a little relieved that the task. It gave Joe a minute to pull Iris into the den, sit her down, and let her know he was here. Instead he was just grateful that Joe and Iris would compose themselves for a minute, and they would be more hardened for his news.

He was right of course. If he couldn’t guess how a scene he’s seen as many times as this would turn out, particularly with one of his closest friends in the mix, David wouldn’t have earned his captain’s shield. So David sat across from Iris and Joe, in the chair he knew he would usually have been threatened for taking from the man. On this day though, Joe had already taken a seat on the couch with Iris. He was already clutching her hand, and she was returning the gesture. It made David’s heart break for what felt like the millionth time that awful morning.

“Joe, I’ve got some bad new to tell you.” David began, tone holding far more pity than he recognized in his own voice. He guessed that might have been what made the man across from him snap.

“With all due respect Captain, cut the shit. I am due at the precinct in less than an hour. This is not a social call. Just tell me what happened.” David felt like he could hear the emotions in Joe’s voice already bleeding through. Not just the forced anger, but the sort of desperation that seemed to just seep into someone in situations like this. Desperation to be wrong, that everything is alright, that your life wasn’t about to change.
“We found another Butcher victim this morning. Joe, Iris, I’m so sorry. He got Barry.” David forced the words out.

It felt to harsh, to cold to say these words, when all he wanted to do was comfort the two in front of him. When he cared so much about Barry too. He had known the kid since he Joe took him in at 11 years old, and to have it end like this broke his heart.

The Wests obviously agreed. Iris let out a pained sob, and started crying. Other than that, and increasing her grip on Joe’s with a strength that hurt she maintained her composure. Joe clung just as tightly. He didn’t cry, not yet. David knew he would. Barry may have been the biological child of Henry and Nora Allen, but David knew - and it really was knew now, wasn’t it - that Barry was Joe’s son.

“He didn’t come over last night. He was supposed to - he promised, but I just thought it was Barry being Barry. He got caught up at Henry’s. But it was him wasn’t it? Oh god, if I had just called Henry to check… I...”

“Joe,” David cut him off.

He couldn’t bear to have Joe think this was his fault. Of course there was no way to fully alleviate the kind of guilt that occurs when a man out-lives his children, but David knew that as soon as the Butcher set his sights on Barry there was nothing they could have done. They had nothing on the son of a bitch. He left nothing behind. After this though, they would. David Singh and everyone else in the CCPD was going to make sure that the bastard fried for all he had done. For going after one of the own. Barry Allen was just a kid, and he had deserved a long and happy life. David swore to himself, to Joe and Iris too, that they were going to make sure the man who took that away would pay.

So that is what he told his friend. It seemed to help. David hoped it did. At least Iris’s sobs had lessened once again after they had his words, but he wasn't sure if that was because of how long it took to force them out.

“I promise you, both of you, that we are going to make the Butcher pay for this.” David swore.

How could he not? He had watch Barry Allen grow from a traumatized, yet brilliant 11 year old boy to one of the brightest and kindest people he had ever met. It seemed to be the Butcher’s real legacy, taking these light and beautiful people from the world. So as David sat across from those who were left to live on without that light, David knew taking this man down was going to be his.
Barry Allen awoke to the smell of breakfast food. He could clearly make out the smell of bacon, and he could tell there was some sort of bread to go with it. Iris must have come over to cook it. She usually did when she wanted to talk with him about something that couldn’t wait until after work. Barry was not a morning person, and the bribe of breakfast was pretty much the only way to wake him an early enough for them to talk. He decided that Iris would just have to wait. He rolled over, fully intending to burrow himself deeper into the covers.

Barry fell onto the floor as he turned, and he yelped loudly as he fell into a huddled heap of limbs and blankets. Barry’s eyes shot open, as he shifted into full wakefulness suddenly. What he saw was not his bedroom, but someone else’s living room.

“Oh good, you’re awake.” Barry startled as his eye’s met Sara’s blue one. It felt like a wave was crashing over him as Barry abruptly remembered where he was, and why he was there.

Barry had still had so many unanswered questions, but he decided to focus on the most immediate first. “Is breakfast ready?”

He was really hoping it was. He didn’t know how long he slept, but he was guessing a while. He felt absolutely famished. Of course, Barry had never actually gotten to dinner the night before so it wasn’t too surprising. He was taken - it happened before he had eaten. Barry didn’t want to think about that now. Even the Butcher couldn’t hurt a dead man, right?

He wondered if last night even counted towards his gnawing stomach. He had not felt hungry when he went to sleep. Maybe when he was dead everything rebooted?

He desperately wished he had some more answers. Despite what Sara seemed to think, being told he had died and was now a grim reaper did not explain everything. It barely explained any of the strangeness of the last 24 hours. She had told him before Barry followed her away from the warehouse that she would explain everything, and now that Barry had rested and was soon to be full, he was going to get those answers from her.
“Almost. The bathroom is through there if you want to shower and clean up a bit before we eat. I’ve laid out some new clothes for you too,” Sara responded, shooting him a tired smile before waltzing back into the kitchen. At the mention of his clothes, Barry noticed he was once again wearing his clothes from before. He didn’t know how that was possible. He knew that while there, on that table, he wasn’t wearing anything. Now that he thought about it he thinks he was dressed when he met Sara. He is sure he wouldn’t have been so comfortable with her otherwise. How the hell did his clothes reappear?

Barry got up, and headed towards the bathroom. He was relieved that whatever he was he was still real enough to shower. Barry wanted nothing more than to wipe the last 24 hours from his mind and body. It seems that his body had already erased his what should be ugly, scarred, and bruised. Barry was relieved at the chance to wash the rest away too.

After a silent breakfast, Barry and Sara settled into the living room once more. Sara sat in the rocker this time, which left Barry the comfort of the couch.

“So what do I do now?” Barry asked. He figured that summed things up pretty well. He felt like all had left were questions. Way too many to get through, so he started direct.

“First you train. I’ve got work in a couple hours, and Ray took everyone else their assignments already, so I’m going to drop you off with a someone else in the division.”

“There are more of you? And divisions of reaping?” Barry asked. He supposed that answer made a twisted sort of sense. One of his questions being replaced with many more. So far that seemed to make up most of his afterlife. He really hoped that eventually changed.

“Yeah, Barry. There are many more reapers, and a couple different divisions,” Sara responded. “Shit, I’m sorry. I’ve never done this before. Rip was kind of in charge of this, all of this. He gave out the list, trained the new guys. I just… I’m sorry that this is all so shitty for you.”

Sara’s confident nature faded for the first time since he met her. Strangely, this made Barry feel better than anything else had since he died. Sara was new to this too. In a different way than Barry, but taking over for Rip was obviously something Sara felt overwhelmed by. It made him feel less alone.

“It’s not your fault, Sara. I’m pretty sure getting murdered is meant to be shitty, no matter what
comes next. So is losing a friend,” Barry didn’t know what to say, how to relate that he was going to alright. What he said made Sara chuckle. It sounded sad, but hearing it seemed to make both feel a bit better.

“So, how exactly does this all work. Being a grim reaper?”

“For starters, there are divisions. We are in what is referred to as Natural Causes. Our group operate in Central City and Keystone mostly, but we cover the burbs too. It’s kind of an umbrella term. The sick, old, and infirm is where most of ours come from. Really just about anything that would lead to someone getting hospitalized falls under our divisions, unless it’s something immediately fatal like a bad car crash where people die at the scene. That falls under the External Influences Division. Really it should have been someone from that division who got your name, but I guess since whoever the hell our boss is wants you to take over for Rip, he got your name instead. Is this making any sense so far?”

Sara’s words were a lot to take in, but he felt something inside him ease as she spoke. Since he awoke he had been terrified of the idea of taking someone’s soul. It made him feel dirty, like Barry was going to be their killer. He could handle natural causes. Barry was a scientist, and he knew that people had to die. That the longer someone lived often meant the longer they suffered when they were sick, injured or elderly. However, there was one part of Sara’s explanation that deeply unnerved him.

“You don’t know who the boss is?” Barry had to ask.

“Death I guess. I tried asking Rip, but he always just ignored me. The head of External Influences is a friend though, and when I asked him he just said it was a shadow. Every morning a list slides into his room containing everyone’s name, time of death, and a location. He tried to follow it a few times, to talk to it, or even just catch a glimpse. Len said all ever saw was a shadow, and that the list just appears from nothing. Admittedly he is a pretty dramatic fellow, but he’s been at this for longer than most, so I figured if that’s all he could get then that’s all there was to it. This morning when we came in there was list like he describes by the door. I guess that means fucking Rip was right, and I’m the new middle management for Natural Causes.”

Barry did not know how he felt about that. He was just given the kind of knowledge people had spent centuries puzzling over. It just made him feel hollow. Barry vaguely registered he was still probably in shock. So rather than try to sort through any of those feelings he asked about what he wanted to know the most. He was dreading the answer. Barry had a feeling he wasn’t going to like it.

“What about my family Sara? I’ve got - had - a life. They have got to be terrified by now. I never showed up for dinner last night, I am missing work, and someone is going to find my body soon.
Assuming they haven’t already. I’ve got to let them know I’m okay. Relatively at least. Please, I can’t leave things the way I did. There has to be something,” Barry begged. He didn’t care how desperate he sounded. He needed Sara to help him.

Joe and Iris were going to be worried sick if they didn’t know what happened, and if they did, well, he never wanted either to feel that way. He never told Iris that he loved her. He didn’t try enough with Wally. He need to apologize to his dad. God, he was such an ass. Barry couldn’t believe he had yelled at him like that. His dad was just trying to help. Henry Allen may not have always been the best father, but he loved Barry, and last night Barry spit in the face of that. He couldn’t let his dad think that was they way he really felt.

“They already know what happened to you, Barry. Your death has been all over the news. I’m sorry, but the way you left things is how they have to stay. Your family can never know what you are now. If they living ever found out about us it would not be pretty. Think apocalyptic level event. You are always going to love them, but you can’t see them ever again. I’m so sorry, but your that part of your existence ended when you died.”

Barry felt a piece of him break inside as she spoke. He knew she had to be wrong though, there had to be a way. Sara seemed to guess what he was thinking.

“I can see the wheels turning in your brain,” she continued. “Even if you tried to reach out to them Barry we don’t look the same as we did to the living, and there is something in place to stop you from telling them what happened. When I died I tried to reach out to my sister. I went to talk to her. I wanted to tell her a story to prove it was really me, but when I got there they words wouldn’t come out. The harder I tried the more it disappeared. I don’t remember what it was now. It was taken from me to keep me from reaching out to her. The same thing will happen to you if try. You need to stay away. Treasure those memories and your love for them, but that’s it. I really am sorry, Barry.”

With Sara’s words he could feel the split in his heart deepening. For the first time in Barry’s afterlife he broke down. Despite Sara moving to hold him as he cried, Barry had never felt more alone.
The Ride Along

Chapter Summary

Barry starts his training.

By three o’clock on the first day of Barry’s afterlife he and Sara had finished eating a late lunch with two other grim reapers from the Natural Deaths division. They were in a small, quaint dinner that Sara assured him was about to become a daily hang out spot. Apparently Rip had the entire Natural Causes Division of Central City and Keystone - his new operating grounds - meet at Der Waffle Haus every morning for breakfast. According to Sara the reapers regularly meet there for lunch and dinner too. Sara was obviously planning to keep up the tradition.

She wanted Barry to start his training today, which meant following around others in the division while they took souls. So Barry ate a full breakfast for the second time that day while sitting at a table with Sara and two other reapers.

The man sitting beside Barry in their corner booth was an athletic looking black guy. He had a friendly smile for Barry, and apparently shared his affinity for breakfast food. Barry assumed he did at least as he had ordered two full breakfast plates. He had introduced himself as Jax before asking how Barry died. His answer had apparently been too grim for the young man. Jax had offered his apologies briefly diving into a light-hearted conversation with Sara and their other lunch companion.

Nate Heywood, their other companion, looked to be slightly older than Barry. Unlike Jax, Nate did not ask Barry how he died. Nate did offer his condolences though. Barry figured he probably saw him on the news. In the brief few minutes he had turned on the TV before leaving Sara’s apartment he could tell his murder by the Butcher was a major story.

It had been completely surreal watching Captain Singh give a statement on his death, assuring Central City that the CCPD would do whatever it took to get the Butcher, and that he would not tolerate anyone going after his people. Singh’s speech about his death, and his obvious sorrow at Barry’s passing was touching. He hadn’t realized the Captain cared that much.

Barry supposed it did make a kind of sense. He had met Captain Singh when he moved in with Joe at 11 years old. The Captain had still been a detective then. As a detective he had always let Barry and Iris follow him around the precinct and ask a million questions when Joe needed a minute. Somehow he had forgotten that fondness the David Singh had for him during his time as a CSI. Barry hated that he never had the chance to thank him for that affection before it was too late.
Barry was so lost in his thoughts that when he looked up again, he realized he must have missed something. His three companions were all staring at him. Sara looked concerned. He supposed it was probably warranted, since it was not the first time he had completely zoned out in their brief acquaintance.

“Er… Sorry about that. What were we talking about?” Barry asked.

“Checks are paid Barry. You ready to go?” Nate asked kindly, if a bit warily. Barry idly wondered how long they had trying to get his attention. He wasn’t too concerned. He knew he was still in shock over, well, everything. After what happened he deserved some time to pull it together, but that time was apparently time was not now.

Barry nodded, and the four reapers got up to leave. Sara looped her arm through his as they walked out, pulling him behind their two companions.

“You alright, Barry? I know this is a lot to take in. Nate and Jax are good guys though. I promise they will take good care of you.”

“I’m… Well I’m not fine. I don’t know what I am anymore,” Barry responded truthfully. Sara’s face fell. Barry probably said the wrong thing. He thinks he was probably supposed to reassure her. Barry didn’t have that in him right now.

“Are you going to be okay if I leave you with them? I can call out of work if I need to. It’s a little last-minute, but I don’t mind if you need me,” Sara worried, biting her lip as she tried to work through the puzzle. Barry wanted her to. He wanted to go back to Sara’s little apartment and rest.

Instead of admitting that Barry replied, “It’s alright Sara. If you trust them then I can too. I’m just watching today right? I don’t have to actually do it right? I won’t have to take a soul?”

“Definitely not Barry. Today you are just there for a ride along. We aren’t going to throw you into the deep end. I just need you to get a feel for how we operate. If you are sure you are alright then I need to go. I parked this way.” As Sara spoke, she pointed back up the block towards her car. Jax and Nate were waiting for Barry in the other direction. He found himself feeling immensely grateful they chose to walk a ways up the block first to give him and Sara some privacy.

Rather than respond he shot Sara a small smile and nodded as he turned towards his two trainers and walked away. After all Barry had a job to do, and he had a sinking feeling it in his gut that it was not
When Sara told him he was going on a ride along sitting between Jax and Nate in the front of a trunk full of medical supply equipment was not what he imagined. Then again no other part of dying had met his expectations, so he figured he probably shouldn’t be as surprised as he was. He was thrown off even more when Jax and Nate put him to work unloading said supplies at a nursing home. It didn’t abate when they stopped at a private practice after, nor at the dentist office that came next. When they pulled to an ophthalmologist office, Barry decided he had to ask.

“I thought I was supposed to be shadowing you while you worked. What are we doing?”

“Technically Barry, we are working. This is our day job. Reapers have to be able to blend in, and people tend to notice when random strangers visit a whole bunch people directly before they die. We deliver medical supplies so we have an excuse to be in pretty much any medical setting. It’s why Sara’s a nurse too,” Nate explained. He went to continue, but Jax cut him off. In the brief time he knew Nate the man had already proven himself to be a rambler, and Jax must have sensed one coming. Barry could relate to Nate with that.

“Plus we all have bills to pay. We need a place to live, food, and all that good stuff from when we were alive. Almost everyone in the division has a job in the medical field. Except Mick, but the guy is a professional thief, so he’s learned to blend.”

“I supplement my income by working as a yoga instructor too. You would think since what we are doing is a public service we would get paid, but we get nothing. Don’t worry about it for now though. We’ll get you set up with something soon,” Nate continued as he ignored Jax interruption.

Barry’s head was swimming with this new information. For some reason it did not occur to him until now to wonder why Sara was a nurse, or how she paid for her apartment. He was not pleased. He spent most of his life working towards being a CSI, and he had barely begun his career before he died. He had a feeling that without repeating college - something that seemed impossible as he was legally dead - he was going to get stuck with a job like the one he was helping Nate and Jax with.

“Anyways,” Nate cut back in, “Jax has already taken care of his name for the day, and we’ve got about 45 minutes until my appointment. That’s plenty of time to unload this. My appointment is only a block or two from here. The address looks like the guys house, so it should be an easy one. C’mon now. We’ve got to get this out.”
While Barry was processing this new, unpleasant bit of information the other two men got out of the car and started unloading supplies once again. Barry decided that if Jax said he didn’t have to worry for now about his new job then he could wait to think on it. He had too many other new worries to add that to his pile, so Barry followed the other two reapers to the back of the truck, grabbed a box labelled for this office before following them inside once again.

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Barry could feel himself shaking slightly as he stood outside the a modest, two story home Nate had written down on a post-it. Abraham Solivar was set to die in less than five minutes, and they were waiting on someone to answer the door. Barry wanted to throw up.

“What do you want,” a gruff, elderly man stated as he opened the door, white hair glistening in the fading sunlight.

Nate stepped forward and began speaking, “I’m looking for an Abraham Solivar. We work for the city’s premier home security firm, and I was told to speak to an Abraham Solivar about a contest he won entitling him to a free year of our service. Is he available?” Barry was impressed. The man’s closed off nature made it very obvious he was not interested in talking to either of them. The camera’s he had strategically placed to capture anyone coming onto his lawn made this a pretty smart play.

“I’m Abe Solivar, but I didn’t enter any contest, and I sure as hell ain’t interested in having a bunch of strangers watching my house.” The man went to slam the door, but Nate caught it with his foot.

“But your neighborhood as a whole entered, sir. You were just the lucky winner. Are you sure I can’t at least interest you in a pamphlet about our services?” Nate pushed forward.

“If it’ll get you the hell off my property than sure, I’ll take a damn pamphlet,” Abe replied, taking the offered pamphlet pulled from the depth’s of Nate’s shoulder bag. Barry was impressed to see it was actually real. Nate clasped the man’s hands as Abe took the page from him. Barry was suddenly reminded of his bus ride home. Rip Hunter had touched his arm as he left. Was that when Rip had separated his soul? It must have been. At least that explained how he had randomly awoken fully clothed.

Abe slammed the door, and Nate led Barry back up the street where Jax was waiting for them.
“See, Barry,” Nate cut into Barry’s whirling thoughts, “It’s easy. All you have to do is make sure you’ve got your guy or girl, find some excuse for a friendly touch, and then we wait. It’s best to do things kinda like what we did today. You want to really make sure you get the right person, but do so while you are an outside observer. Any interfering with what is going on can be...problematic. It’s not as much of an issue for us as it is the External Influences or even the Animal division, but reapers as a whole are supposed to be outsider observers. We may be mostly still a part of the world around us, but we aren’t active participants anymore.”

“So that was it? You just find out who they are, touch them, and leave everything else to chance?” Barry still felt he had to ask. Somehow that seemed too easy. He didn’t want to do more than that - didn’t really want to do even that much, but it seemed to him that their appointments shouldn’t be so easy. Someone’s life was about it end. It should mean something. Barry didn’t want what he was going to be doing to be easy.

“For now,” Nate looked at his watch before continuing. “It’s not really up to chance though. Every name we get - an appointment we have to make - their time is already up. They just don’t know it yet. It looks like we’ve got another two minutes until Abe kicks it. At that point his soul will appear with us, and we will make sure he moves on.”

“How do we do that?”

“It depends. Most people you just have to confirm or explain what happened, and they go on their own. On occasion you will get stragglers though. People who aren’t ready, or feel there is something else the must do. It’s kind of a case by case basis on those on what you have to do.”

As Nate finished his explanation Abe Solivar suddenly appeared beside them. Barry jumped, startled, but Nate seemed completely nonplussed at his arrival.

“Hello again,” Nate greeted, smiling at a very annoyed Abe Solivar.

“What the fuck?” Barry thought the man’s question summed things up nicely. He was inclined to agree.

“Hate to break it to you, but you’re dead. Dunno exactly what happened, but everything is okay now. Barry and I are here to take care of you.”

“Dead huh? Must have had another heart attack. Damn thing has been giving me grief all day, and
you two annoying fucks visiting me did not help. What the fuck do you mean about caring for me though? Don’t I just kinda move along. I’ve been a good Jew for longer than either of you been alive, and I ain’t about to spend any of my afterlife following around a fucking schlemiel and his mute,” Abe stated, pointing at Nate and Barry respectively. Barry thought Abe was handling things pretty well despite his apparent dislike of the two reapers. Better than Barry handled his death at least.

As the man was speaking lights started appearing behind them. As Abe continued ranting the lights seemed to twirl around each other, forming an image. When Abe turned around and the lights seemed to explode into a beautiful, tropical jungle. Barry could see the fruit and vines hanging from the trees and hear what he supposed the jungle was mean to sound like.

“Looks like you’re right Mr. Solivar. Go on now. That’s all for you man,” Nate stated. Barry couldn’t pull his eyes away as Abe walked into the jungle and the lights seemed to explode once again. This time the jungle and Abe disappeared leaving behind the quiet street.

“Where does that go?” Barry had to ask. He needed to know. The Jungle scene itself did little for Barry, but the lights he could tell were special.

“We aren’t meant to know that yet, Barry. It manifest different for everyone. I guess we find out when our quota fills up. Doesn’t matter to us for now though. C’mon, Barry. Jax is waiting, and we still have one more delivery to make today,” Nate said.

He grabbed Barry’s arm as he spoke, pulling him away from the now boring street and toward the truck. Barry numbly followed not knowing what to think about those lights. He wanted to know what he would have seen, or why he was forced to stay behind and watch people like Abe move along. He didn’t want to be different or special. Barry didn’t want to be a grim reaper, but he wasn’t given that choice. He followed Nate, took back the cramped middle seat, and sat quietly as they drove away from the home of Abraham Solivar. After all they still had a job to do, and Barry couldn’t rest until it was complete.
Barry meets the rest of the Natural Causes division of Central City and Keystone.

Barry could not sleep the first night of his new existence. He was sleeping in Ray’s bed this time. He and Nate were roommates, and Nate assured him that Ray was sleeping at his not-boyfriend’s house. Ray, during their brief meeting, did seem like the kind of guy to stay away from his own home for a complete stranger, so that wasn’t what was causing Barry to stay awake. Truthfully, he couldn’t pinpoint what was. Barry figured it was probably a combination of everything.

Barry wished desperately that things were different. He wanted to be 11 years old again, and have his mother and father tucking him in. He wished he was still a teenager and living at the West house. Whenever he had trouble sleeping Joe would let him and Iris have a sleepover in the living room. They’d watch movies, drink cocoa, and Iris would always know how to get him to fall asleep. Iris never cared that Barry always wanted to watch musicals when he missed his mom, and Barry returned that patience by sitting through countless scary movies he hated. Barry would watch every last one again to have another movie night with Iris.

He wished he had done what Joe asked him outside of Happy Times. He should have let Joe drive him to the West home for dinner with Wally, and checked on his dad the next evening. Maybe the Butcher wouldn’t have taken him them. Barry knew now that he hadn’t been in any condition to take care of anyone the night before. He couldn’t believe it was barely over 24 hours since his fight with his father. He hadn’t even been dead a full day.

Every time Barry closed his eyes the last 24 hours started to be playing on repeat inside his mind. He felt like he was reliving his meetings with the five grim reapers, his conversations with Sara in her empty apartment, and watching Nate take the soul of Abe Solivar.

Worse of all Barry couldn’t seem to stop reliving his time with the Butcher. It was just easier for Barry to keep his eyes open. There was a light coming through Ray’s bedroom window, so Barry could easily see with his eyes open. Ray’s bedroom was safe. When his eyes were closed everything went dark. It was just like when he was lying on that table. He was afraid, and in pain, and he couldn’t see or move. Everything hurt when his eyes were closed.

Barry knew that his body wasn’t broken anymore. The one he was using now wasn’t at least. Barry had another body out there. That body would be in the morgue at the CCPD. The medical examiner would be working on his autopsy. Maybe he had already started. That body would show everyone -
all his colleagues at least - what Barry went through. That body was as broken as Barry felt as he laid awake that night.

Barry immediately spotted the Natural Causes division when he walked into Der Waffle Haus with Nate the next morning. He recognized a few faces, but several of them were strangers. Barry couldn’t believe the two cities needed that many reapers, especially not since this was only one of the divisions.

“You’re late,” Sara said as soon as she spotted them, waving them over from her seat at the end of their large table. She smiled at them with a mischievous look in her eye, letting Barry know she wasn’t upset. He was grateful for that. It was Barry’s fault they were late. He had been moving sluggishly due to his lack of sleep. Thankfully Nate seemed to understand, and he hadn’t seemed to mind.

“That’s the whole reason I took in the new guy,” Nate stated, winking at Barry as he spoke and taking a seat between Ray and someone Barry didn’t know. She was beautiful woman, but the annoyed expression she gave Nate he spoke made Barry uncomfortable, especially since it was really Barry’s fault they were late. “After all you got to skip yesterday. It seemed only fair that Barry and I sleep in a bit.”

“Uh, huh,” Sara started, obviously unimpressed at Nate’s excuses. She turned to Barry before starting up again. “Hey, Barry. I saved you a seat. C’mon, we need to hurry. Nate’s got to leave soon if he wants to make to his post-it. His time is coming up, and he’s got to get to the other side of Keystone.” As she finished speaking she handed Nate a single, yellow post-it note like the one he had yesterday with Abraham Solivar’s information. Barry sat at her words in the seat between Sara and the only other woman (excluding the one down the table from him by Nate).

“For real? There’s no way I’m going to have time to eat,” Nate stated, frown deepening as Sara smirked at him.

“Well that’s a shame,” a waitress stated as she walked up the table, obviously overhearing Nate’s misfortunate. “What about you, honey? You gonna eat?”

“Umm…” he looked at Sara hopefully. Barry was hungry, but he didn’t have any money.
“Get him the Full Country Breakfast, and please put it on my check. Thanks Gideon.” Barry gave Sara a grateful look as she spoke. Not only was Sara getting his breakfast, but she remembered his preference from his order the previous day.

“So you’re the new kid? You’ve got some shit luck.” Barry wanted to snap at the rudeness the man displayed. He was tired of everyone calling him a kid, and he really did not want to think about his admittedly shitty luck. He was 26 damnit, he was not a child.

However, when Barry saw who had spoken he decided to let things slide. It was the man directly across from Barry. He was sitting between Ray and Sara, and somehow this man managed to dwarf even Ray’s large form. He was tall, broad, and incredibly muscular. He also had a gruff voice, and seemed to have an annoyed expression stuck on his face. Barry had enough bad things happen to him over the last couple days, and he was not anxious to add getting his ass handed to him to the list.

“Mick, Barry’s been through enough. He doesn’t need your commentary too,” Ray chastised the large man as Sara glared at him, neither seeming to be threatened by the larger man. Barry was simultaneously very impressed, and afraid for both of them. He was also afraid for himself.

“Just making conversation. No reason to get all twisted up,” Mick muttered back. Despite the words themselves, the man did seem slightly apologetic.

“Can we not get into another lover’s spat please. Some of us have shit to do,” Sara cut in. The two seemed to quiet down, although Barry did hear Mick muttering something unintelligible under his breath.

“Anyways, before we all get sidetracked again,” she shot Mick a look at this, “I want to introduce all you guys to Barry. Barry, this is our team. The woman to your right is Kendra Saunders. Beside her is husband Carter Hall. You already know Jax, Nate and Ray. Martin Stein at the other end of the table, Amaya Jiwe is beside him, and then across from you is Mick Rory. So this is everyone in our division.” Sara pointed each person out in turn, and each smiled at him kindly as he spoke. Even the gruff man across from him - Mick. Barry suspects that is because Sara kicked him under the table. The thunk he heard, as well as the pained expression that shone through under his forced smile seemed to indicate so. Barry wasn’t sure if he was more surprised by the sheer number of reapers at the table, or the fact that cheery Ray was apparently dating the angry man.

“Er… Hello,” Barry stated shyly. The combined looks from everyone at the table was reminding him of the public speaking class Iris forced him to take with her their freshman year of college. He felt just as uncomfortable in front of their gazes - ranging from calculating to concerned - as he did being forced to speak in front of all those people. Being the focus of so much attention was not something he was used to, and he did not like it.
The group quickly chorused their greetings back before going back to their previous conversations. Barry was incredibly relieved to be out of the spot light.


“I didn’t sleep much last night,” Barry admitted to her. Opening up to a woman he barely knew was odd for Barry, but he didn’t feel like he had anyone else he could talk to. Sara had been there for Barry since he first wandered out of that awful place, and she had been nothing but supportive of him since then. He figured he owed the woman some honesty. It didn’t hurt that her straightforward, tough-as-nails nature reminded him of Iris. Barry was used to giving into the whims of women like that.

“It’ll get better,” Sara stated simply, giving his hand a reassuring squeeze. Barry appreciated that. He didn’t want to be told that everything would be alright. He wouldn’t have believed it, but he could trust that things would improve. He didn’t really see many ways they could get worse at least, so he figured there was probably some truth to Sara’s words.

“On the bright side today should be a little easier for you. You’re going to go with Kendra to Keystone Memorial. She works in the cafeteria there, so you will be able to hang out most of the morning. Her appointment is at the hospital at 11 am, so after that you be free to relax a little. Maybe you can get some sleep then. I’ve got you a key to my place so you can crash on the couch. We’ll work on getting you something more permanent next week. There isn’t really an exact science to when you get your first name, but a week is usually the longest training period. I have a feeling that’s probably what you will get. My appointment for today is almost at midnight, so you can rest between Kendra’s and mine,” Sara finished his assignments with a gentle suggestion. It wasn’t a bad idea. Maybe since it was light out he would be able to sleep.

“You sure you want to let some strange kid into your place like that? He can come with me for my two o’clock, and hang out with at the Rogue’s place for a bit until you get off work. Kid could be all sorts of a creep,” Mick cut in, leering at Barry with a look that made Barry’s skin crawl. He really hoped Sara did not take him up on that. He did not know what the Rogue’s den was, but he didn’t think he wanted to find out.

“Lay off him, Mick. Barry been through enough without your nosy ass butting in. Ray, I don’t suppose you can go fuck the asshole out of Mick for us?”

“I wouldn’t dare,” Ray responded with a wink. “I’m personally quite fond of it.”
“For fuck’s sake, Ray. Keep it in your pants,” Sara proclaimed loudly, earning her several dirty looks from other patrons of the restaurant, and an amused giggle from Gideon the waitress as she placed Barry's breakfast in front of him.

“I did not need those images in my head,” Jax mumbled in agreement with Sara. Martin, Carter, and Amaya nodded along beside him. Kendra just looked intrigued, and she shared an amused glance with Nate.

“Well as much fun as this has been, I should probably head out. See you all later,” Nate proclaimed as he quickly left their table. Barry had a feeling his pace had a lot more to do with the bacon he stole from Amaya’s plate on his way out then it did the upcoming appointment. Several people at their table laughed at Amaya’s murderous expression, and Sara used the moment to pass Barry a key.

“Thanks, Sara,” Barry mumbled. Things for him may have taken a turn for the shitty, strange, and downright unbelievable, but was grateful he at least had someone looking out for him.
Wally West did not know how he was supposed to act. Most of the time he was a very confident, self-assured person. He knew who he was, what he wanted, and how he planned to get there. As Wally sat in the front row of Henry Allen’s church all of those social skills seemed to fade leaving him an awkward, blubbering mess. As much as he hated the feeling, Wally couldn’t help but appreciate the irony. It was the same way he and Barry had usually reacted to the each other’s presence.

It had been six days since Barry Allen was murdered, and Wally wasn’t sure how he felt about it. Barry had been nothing but kind to him in the brief time they had known each other, despite the awkwardness that colored each of their interactions. The older man had done everything in his power to make Wally feel welcomed, even going as far as keeping his distance to let Wally get to know Joe and Iris. Wally was not an idiot; he knew that Barry wasn’t suddenly flooded with plans every time Wally reached out to his new relatives. Wally had been grateful at the time. Now that Barry was dead, Wally felt absolutely shitty at how he had behaved towards Barry.

Meeting his estranged family had been difficult enough, but seeing how Joe interacted with the son he had raised had been uncomfortable for Wally. His mother had told him for a very young age Wally’s father did not want him. Even when he discovered that Joe West would have loved to be involved in his Wally’s life, Wally couldn’t help but feeling slightly jealous of Barry. Joe loved Barry with the fierce kind of a love only a parent could have, and Barry was lucky enough to have lived with that affection for so many years that Wally had been without it. Wally felt that kind of love from his mother, and he was beginning to feel so from Joe as well.

Now that he was sitting at Barry’s funeral Wally wanted nothing more than to have Barry sitting with them. Barry had always seemed to lift Joe and Iris spirits when he was around. Wally wished he could do the same for them, but he didn’t know how. He understood now in a way he hadn’t before how much Barry had been a part of Joe and Iris’s family. Both of them barely seemed alive in the past week. His sister, who had been so strong and self-assured when they met, seemed to be stuck. She had mostly been walking around numbly, and the only time Wally had seen her emotions coming through was when she broke down, sobbing and occasionally hysterical at the lost of her best friend.

Joe had not been any better. He had spent his week split between a few task, and Joe had been completely devoted to each with a kind of ferocity Wally had never seen from anyone. Joe had been fighting the entire week to be reinstated to the Butcher case, spending time with Iris and Wally, and helping Henry Allen prepare for Barry’s funeral. On the few occasions Joe thought he was alone, Wally had heard him crying too. He always waited until late at night, but Wally knew what he heard. Joe West was falling apart just as much as his daughter was, but he refused to show it. It made Wally’s heart hurt.
Wally was sitting between his sister and his mother, as Iris leaned in to their father. Joe had one arm around Iris, and his other was tightly gripping the hand of Henry Allen. All three had tears in their eyes since they had arrived. The preacher was talking, and Wally had a feeling he should probably be listening. He couldn’t. His mind felt too muddled. Wally’s heart was aching for Joe, Iris, and Henry Allen. It was aching as he sat there knowing that the next funeral he would be attending would probably be for his dying mother. It ached because Wally had lost the brother who he hadn’t bothered to get to know, and it was that realization that made Wally start to cry too.

Six days after Barry died he Sara gave him his first day off, and she stayed in her apartment with him for the day. Barry had spent his entire week following his fellow reapers around to see how they operated, and he was exhausted. The reaping itself wasn’t that bad thankfully. Since they were all taking care of the people who died a natural death most of them were ready to die. He hadn’t seen a death like his was yet. Someone that had no clue what was coming for them, and someone that was utterly not ready to be dead.

The only person Barry had yet to shadow was Sara. Sara’s names almost always came from Central City General Hospital where she worked, and Barry was not allowed anywhere near that hospital. Henry Allen worked there too, so she insisted he spend his days with the others in their division to avoid any run ins with his father.

Barry appreciated his day off. Barry needed the day to say goodbye to his life. His death had been so publicized that his funeral was being aired lived on CCPN’s website, and Barry was sitting with most of the Natural Causes Division in Sara’s small living room to watch.

Sara, Ray, and Mick on the couch with Barry leaning against Sara’s legs on the floor. Kendra was beside him, doing the same with Ray’s legs. Barry could hear her husband in the kitchen cooking a late lunch for everyone with Martin. Amaya had pulled the rocker around by Mick so she could watch as well.

Nate and Jax were the only two missing as both of their appointments were during the service. The two had already stopped by that morning to check on Barry, and they had informed him that he was going to dinner with them later. Barry wasn’t given the choice of staying in. While would have preferred to do so, he knew he would have just stayed in and grieved. It was probably for the best he wasn’t given the chance.

Barry appreciated the concern he was seeing from his team. Over the past week he had gotten to know them pretty well, although he had yet to meet any of the other reapers in town. Mick mentioned them a lot as he apparently lived with most of them. He barely had a minute to himself
over the past several days as every spare moment was spent following around the various reapers to learn what he was supposed to be doing. Tomorrow he would get his first name, and it would be one of the other’s turn to follow him. He didn’t know how to feel about that, and he didn’t have the capacity to try and sort through those feelings as he watched his own funeral.

The whole situation was just strange. It was making him as uncomfortable as it was upset. He couldn’t seem to stop externalizing those feelings as he picked the the label of the beer Mick insisted he drink, despite the early hour. He generally would have protested more, but Mick made a good point. Alcohol was definitely making the odd feeling of mourning himself easier.

That is what he was doing. He was mourning the life of Barry Allen because even though he wasn’t gone, not really at least, that life was. He imagined his face probably looked a lot the expressions he saw his family had from their seats in the front row.

He hadn’t felt grief like this since his mother died. It made him feel selfish to feel this way about himself. The night before he confided in Sara about this, and she had quickly shut that line of thought down. After all, she had explained with a fierce determination in her eyes, Barry hasn’t just been killed, which by itself was traumatic enough. He lost everyone he ever loved after the single worst experience of his life. Being undead meant he had to completely rebuild his life the same way he had to after his’s mother’s death. He had to rebuild again like he had after his father had been committed, driven to the brink of insanity by Nora Allen’s death. Sara’s assurances hadn’t alleviated Barry’s guilt even though he suspected she was right.

“That your foster-father right? He has a lovely voice,” Amaya commented as Joe sat back in his seat.

Barry had always liked Joe’s voice. He remembered him singing Amazing Grace at his mother’s funeral too. Barry just nodded his agreement. He was too choked up to speak. Thankfully Amaya and the rest seemed to understand his silence.

He wondered if his dad or Joe remembered the performance from Nora Allen’s funeral 15 years ago, or if it was just a coincidence. He thinks it was probably Joe. Watching through the computer screen Barry could see his foster-father was crying as he sang. Barry cried silently too. He was grateful none of his compatriots mentioned anything, although Kendra had handed him multiple tissues from her giant purse for every sniffle she heard or tear she saw. Ray and Sara both grabbed one of his shoulders as the service went on, and Barry felt himself leaning increasingly into their grasp.

The preacher was currently talking about Barry’s life. He hadn’t the man but once or twice since his mother died, so Barry had no clue why or how he was sharing all these stories. Most of them sounded like they came from Iris, although he recognized one or two from Joe and his dad too. The ache in Barry’s chest that had been present since he died felt like it was swelling inside him.
It felt like all he had wanted for the last several days was to see his family, but watching them on Sara’s laptop just made his heart hurt more. They were so upset. Barry had known they would be, but seeing it was different for some reason. He could see it in their expressions, their hunched shoulders, and the way they were all leaning on each other. Joe, Iris, his Dad, and even Wally were all crying. Barry, across town yet worlds away, cried with his family.
Barry gets some surprising news.

It had been exactly one week since Barry had died, and he was not going to get out of bed. Technically he wasn’t getting off Sara’s couch. Barry didn’t have a bed anymore. He could refuse to get out from under the covers at least. It would have been easier without Sara trying to rip them from his grasp.

“Seriously, Barry? Are you five? Get off the damn couch. We have to talk.” Sara wasn’t quite yelling at him, but she wasn’t far from it.

“You’re sleeping, huh? Okay, Barry. O-fucking-kay,” Sara spat at him as she let go of his cocoon. He figured he should probably care that she was that upset with him, but she let go of his blanket and walked away, so he decided he would just make things up to her later. For now Barry decided he would cuddle further into the couch.

He could hear Sara making a ruckus on the kitchen. She was probably going to try making breakfast to entice him out of bed. It had worked for her in the past, but it was not going to this time. Barry was not getting out of bed.

“You sure you aren’t getting up, Barry?” Sara called from the kitchen. Barry grunted in reply.

“Arghh…” Barry yelped in surprise as he scrambled to stand up. The tangle of blankets that had been his shield decided to betray him, and instead of landing on his feet Barry tumbled into a sopping wet heap on the floor at Sara’s feet. Sara had not been starting breakfast. The woman was standing above him laughing loudly, and holding a now-empty pot.
“Great, you’re up! Go shower and get dressed. We need to talk before breakfast,” Sara ordered sternly. Rather than continue to fight against her, Barry decided it was probably in his best interest to do what she said. He glared at her as he untangled himself. Sara just smirked at him as she put her pot in the drain tray, and he went to shower.

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“Come sit with me for a minute, Barry,” Sara called to him from the living room as he exited her bathroom.

“Don’t we need to get going? We’re already going to be late,” Barry responded, annoyed by the woman’s strange behavior. Sara had - literally - forced him out of bed for breakfast, and now she wanted to talk. If she was so determined to ruin his day he at least deserved a waffle.

“We’re not going today. Well, you aren’t at least, and I pushed everything back until lunch. Martin was the only one with an early appointment today, and I already texted him what he needed. Now grab your coffee, and sit your ass down,” she stated safely from the rocking chair as she pointed to the still soaked sofa.

Barry wanted to protest, but he had already learned by now that when Sara was in this kind of mood the woman was not to be trifled with. It was no wonder she had been chosen to replace Rip; no one was really able to say no to Sara Lance. Barry grabbed his coffee and sat across from Sara on the coffee table. He wasn’t in the mood to get wet again, and he figured Sara would probably forgive him for slightly altering her orders. Luckily for him, she let it slide other than raising an eyebrow at him.

“Why am I not going too? Did you find a job for me?” Barry asked hopefully. While he appreciated Sara and the other’s generosity the past week, he really did not like being dependent on them for everything.

“I don’t have anything for you. That’s actually the problem, Barry. You see when I checked my list this morning you weren’t given an appointment,” Sara responded gently. Barry felt his heart soar at her words. Sara had told him a week was the longest she had ever heard anyone having before they got their first name. If Barry didn’t have one that day there must have been a mistake. He was going to get to pass on. He didn’t know why this was making Sara’s face a picture-perfect expression of sympathy. This was the best thing that happened to him since he died.

“I don’t have a name? Does that mean I’m free?” Barry didn’t know what else it could be, but he had to make sure. He may have liked his new friends well enough, but Barry was okay with dying. Well,
that’s not quite true. He was not okay with how he died, and all the things he left behind. If he got to
move on though, go through those lights he had been watching others go off into all week, then he
was okay with being dead.

“You have a name Barry. I just didn’t get it. Do you remember Mick and I talking about the External
Influences Division?” Barry did remember. Mick lived with most of the people in that division. Sara
and Mick were both friends with head of that division. They were the ones who took care of
accidents, murders, and suicides. On the first day of his after he died Sara said they were the ones
who should have gotten name. Barry felt like the hope that had blossomed in his chest burst, and the
weight of what it left behind was crushing him. He could only nod at Sara in response.

He was suddenly reminded of his meeting with Caitlin Snow the week before. She had known when
they spoke with her that they did not come with good news. Barry knew Sara didn’t have good news
for him either. He wished he was as brave as Caitlin had been, and could push Sara to tell him, but
Barry wasn’t that kind of person. He wasn’t that strong. He didn’t want to know what Sara was
about to tell him.

“Len called me early this morning. He got your name on his list. We had all assumed that since you
were replacing Rip that you were going to work with Natural Causes, even though most work with
whatever division they died in. It turns out Barry that you are following that pattern. I am so sorry,
but you are going to be working with External Influences from now on. Len and Mick are coming to
pick you up. They are going to get you set up at the Rogue’s Den. “

“The Rogues Den? What is that? Is that like their Der Waffle Haus?” Barry asked. He figured it must
be.

“No, it’s not. External Influences, two of the area’s Animals Division, and Mick all live and work
together. They are picking you up so you can move in,” Sara replied.

“Move in? I don’t want to move in with them. Besides isn’t Mick a professional thief? I can’t work
with them Sara. I am - was - a CSI. Just because I’m dead doesn’t mean I can forget all of that.
Please, can I just stay with you for a little while longer? I’ll get a job, I promise. Just don’t make me
go.” Barry felt like it was the millionth time he had begged Sara for something since they met. Just
once he wished it would actually work. Barry didn’t mind being around Mick, but he couldn’t
imagine actually living with him, much less any of his roommates. Barry had heard stories from the
man all week, and they sounded terrifying.

“It’s one of Len’s rules. If you work for External Influences you have to stay with them. They won’t
make you steal though. I’ll kick Lenny’s ass if he tries. I promise they will take good care of you,”
Sara replied, smiling reassuringly at him. He didn't want her to do that. Every time she did it was
because of something like this. Something awful happening to him.
“Why do I have to transfer though. I don’t… I was ready to work with people who died naturally. Sara, I don’t think I can take someone who died like me. I won’t do it,” Barry responded stubbornly. He needed Sara to understand.

“I’d keep you if I could,” She responded simply, grasping him hand.

“You can, though!” Barry sneered in response as he stood up, pulling his hand away. He need to some space. It felt like he couldn’t breathe. It was like Sara’s very presence was smothering him. Sara rose too, but she let him back away.

“You don’t want to help me. You are the boss aren’t you? You could, but you don’t care enough to try. All fucking week you have been trying to butt in, to be there for me, but the second I really need something you won’t do anything. I don’t want to be a reaper at all, but I can handle someone who already have to die. People who are sick, or old, or just in pain. I can’t take people like me Sara. I won’t do it.”

“I’m not the boss; I’m middle management. Reapers have no control over who dies when, and who gets whose name. The way you died… I can’t even begin to imagine how awful that was. Even though the people you are going to be working with don’t know it, they are just as much destined to die as the people who die in my division. It sucks, and it can be difficult for you and for them, but every single name on every single list that reapers work with is put there for a purpose. I know this is going to be difficult for you, but you are one of the strongest people I have ever met. You will get through this.”

“I won’t, Sara. I’m not that strong. It already feels like I’m break apart. I can’t…” Barry sniffed, the tears that had formed in his eyes threatening to spill over, “I can’t do it.”

“Yes you can,” Sara responded, grabbing his hand once again and forcing him to look at her. “You have been through absolute and utter hell in the short time I’ve known you. You still smile though. You’ve laughed. You have tried to make things better for the team, and for the souls you helped. You haven’t let anything break you, and I refuse to let this break you now.”

“Why do you get a say? You are letting me go,” Barry responded angrily.

“I’m not letting you go, you idiot. Just because you are going to be living with the Rogues, and working in a different division it does not mean I won’t be there if you need me. I’m still your friend,” Sara stated firmly. Barry wished she would get mad too. He could handle it better if she was.
“I don’t want to go,” Barry had to say it again. He needed it.

“I know. You didn’t want to die either. It’s not our choice, but it is your choice what you make of it. You could use it you know. We all do. Do you know why I work as a nurse?”

The abrupt topic change threw Barry off. Of course he knew. She had to have access to sick people, and it was one of the easiest ways to get it. He nodded.

“Why?” She asked again.

“It gets you close to them. They people you are supposed to reap,” Barry stated aloud.

“That’s part of it,” she replied before continuing, “That’s not even most of it though. I could do something like the others. Volunteer like Ray, deliver supplies like Nate and Jax, or work as support staff like the rest. I have to keep going back to college every couple of years. I can usually stretch things about a decade, but we don’t age. I keep going back, keep working like this because of how I died.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“You ever hear of the Influenza Pandemic in 1918?” She asked.

“Yeah.... Wait, are you telling me you are over 100 years old?” Sara couldn’t be. She looked so young, and she was alway so full of energy. She laughed at his words.

“Reapers don’t age. You know that,” She replied, giggling lightly. “I actually contracted it in Europe. I’m from Starling City, but my family was German. Even before the United States entered the Great War I worked for the US government as a spy.”

“Are you serious? You were a spy? What the hell, Sara!” She thwacked him as he spoke.

“Stop interrupting me. But yes, I was a spy. I was working at a nightclub in Prague as one of the
dancers gathering intel. Soldiers talk a lot when there is are pretty, half-naked girls around. Anyways, I was in the club when I got sick. Almost all the girls working there caught it. I was able to meet up with a contact so I could relay everything. I wanted to go back out, but my supervising officer overruled me and sent me back to the US. I was put in the military hospital here in Central.”

Sara tone changed as she continued, her annoyance shining through.

“The doctors back then were even more self-obsessed narcissist than they are now. That doesn’t even begin to cover the fact that I was a woman at a military hospital, and my mission records were too sensitive to let my doctors know who I was. They barely even looked at my chart, much less actually helped me. The nurses were amazing though. It was almost all women, which was incredible enough to me at that age, but they were so smart, and they worked so hard to save me. They couldn’t of course, but what they tried to do for me just stuck. So I thank them every day by being that person for someone else.”

“That’s… Well actually that’s kind of an awesome reason, but I don’t get why you are telling me now,” Barry admitted.

“I’m telling you because what I went through sucked. In a different way from what you did, but it allows me to be compassionate in ways I couldn’t be otherwise. I know what my patients are going through, and I know how to help them through it. It is the same way for the souls I help. It’s going to be the same for you. You are familiar with dying horribly. You know the pain, the confusion, and the anguish. You are perhaps the last person in the world that deserves to go through what you did, but now that you have you can help others who go through the same thing. I think that is why people usually end up working in the same division that they died in.”

“Oh,” Barry hated it when Sara made a good point. It usually meant something bad for him. “I see.”

“I know this isn’t what you wanted Barry, but you will get through this. I’m going to go get us some more coffee now. Len and Mick are going to be here any minute, so you should go ahead and grab your stuff. I put a bag for you by the bathroom,” Sara told him.

Barry was not happy about this change of plans, but once again Sara was right. He didn’t have a choice. Death didn’t care what Barry or that person wanted. Death didn’t care if Barry was ready to take someone’s soul, and it didn’t care if that person shouldn’t have had to die. Somewhere, there was a person in Central City who was going to die a death they did not expect today, and Barry was separate their soul from their body.
Well, I did not expect to be done this fast, and I really didn't expect the chapter to end up that long. I hope you guys enjoy. I absolutely love Sara's back story though, so I couldn't resist putting it in earlier than I was expecting to. It was just too perfect here though.
Leonard Snart was not impressed with the newest member of his team. He knew that Barry Allen was 26 when he died. Young and tragic, but it was not unusual in his experience. Meeting the guy, Len realized why Mick called him “kid” constantly. He was thin, tall, and had a young-looking face. If Barry’s story hadn’t been plastered all over the news as the latest Butcher victim Len doubts he would guessed the man’s age.

It wasn’t just Barry’s youthful look that made him seem childlike. He was hunched down and hiding behind Sara’s smaller frame. It was as though he was trying to make himself invincible. The posture, while uncomfortably familiar, spelled trouble. Len wondered how the hell a guy like that was picked to work in External Influences. Since making sure Barry actually did his job was about to be Len’s responsibility, Len was irked. He figured it was likely showing since Barry had continued to shrink into himself with each passing moment, and Sara was glaring at him.

“You ready to go, kid?” Mick asked gruffly. Despite the harsh tone his oldest friend was employing, Len could tell he was actually worried about Barry. Odd for Mick, but then again his friend always had been bad about picking up strays. He did not think said kid actually got Mick’s concern as he jumped - like a goddamn rabbit - at Mick’s words, clutching tighter at the straps of his bag. The kid nodded in response after he settled though, so at least he potentially wasn’t completely useless.

“He is Mick. Why don’t you go help him get everything in the car. I need to have a word with you, Len. He’ll meet you out there in a few minutes,” Sara responded for Barry, smiling sweetly at Mick and completely ignoring Len. She turned to away from them and forced the kid into a tight embrace before continuing. “I’ll see you later. Okay, Barry? You’ve got my number, so you better call me if you need anything. You go on with Mick now. I’ll send Len out in a minute.”

Sara had obviously grown attached too. Len noted it with amusement as she shuffled the two men out the door with purpose. She had always been the kind of woman to command a room. It was no wonder she was chosen to take over for that pompous British ass. Len had been convinced for decades that if Sara had been a dead when the guy before Rip reached his quota she would have been given the position. She had no more problems bullying the Brit around then she did anyone else. It was one of the reasons he enjoyed younger woman’s company so much.

“What the hell,” Sara exclaimed, smacking his arm immediately - with much more force than Len felt...
warranted - as soon as the door shut behind Mick.

“What the hell, me?” Len replied, annoyed. “You are the one randomly assaulting people. What the fuck was that for? I agreed to disrupt my whole schedule for you this morning, princess, so you didn’t have to bring the kid to me. You could at least pretend to be grateful.”

“What was that for?” Sara asked, smacking his arm again as she completely ignored his response. “Why the fuck are you acting like such a cold-hearted bastard. I told you Barry isn’t handling things great, and I know Mick must have said something as well. So what do you do? You come in acting like Barry personally pissed in your cheerios. He is upset enough about all of this, and he does not need you acting like your usual dickish self to make things worse.”

“He’s an adult, Sara. I don’t think you need to coddle him. If he’s going to be able to do this job he needs to be able to handle a hell of a lot more than an annoyed expression. Which he quite frankly deserves seeing as how he’s completely thrown off my plans, disrupted my morning coffee, and can’t even get a fucking word out.”

“For fuck sake, Len. Are you really surprised? I know you know how he died. Everyone in Missouri has to by now with the non-stop media circus on the Butcher. He’s traumatized you twat, and you coming in angry is just making it worse. Can you at least pretend for five minutes that you have an announce of sympathy?”

“In case you have forgotten, I actually know a hell of a lot more about traumatic deaths then you do,” Len replied pointedly. Sara might have been a grim reaper for a long time, but he had been at this for much longer, and in a division that actually dealt with deaths like Barry Allen’s. Not to mention his own death, which hadn’t exactly been pleasant. “Now, if you want to treat all the people in your division like precious little babies I don’t give a rats ass, but if Barry is going to be able to work in External Influences he is going to need to toughen up. Now can you calm down for two minutes so we can actually talk, or are you going to keep yelling at me?”

“I’d like to yell some more,” Sara responded snottily and with plenty of malice. However, the woman did not hit him again, or continue on her protective spiel so Len figured he was allowed to speak.

“Is he going to be able to do this, Sara? I know you think I’m being a dick,” Sara gave him a look at that would have made a weaker man crumble at her feet at his words.

“Alright, fine. I was definitely acting like a dick, but I’m being serious now. The kid is too afraid to speak to me, and he was reluctant to go out alone with Mick, who he’s been around for a week.
External Influences… it’s a lot messier than what you are used to. Hell, this morning my guy was literally crushed by falling piano. I didn’t even know that was really a thing outside of the shitty cartoons Lisa used to make me watch with her. If Barry is so… traumatized, do you really think he can do this?”

To Sara’s credit, she didn’t respond right away. She considered his question, and she obviously struggled with her reply. He had always appreciated that thoughtfulness about her. It was yet another reason he felt she was more qualified then Rip Hunter to lead the Natural Causes division.

“He can. He doesn’t want to, and it won’t be easy for him. He’s going to need your help. Once he gets it though, he’s going to be good. He’s strong, and he’s compassionate, and he’s smart enough to be able to figure this out. Plus he was a CSI when he was alive, so it isn’t like he’s a complete novice around gorier deaths. He just needs you to not be a complete dickhead. Think you can manage that?” Sara seemed confident enough in the kid. He wasn’t sure he agreed yet, but he had already pissed off the woman enough for one day.

“Are you sure about that? I’ve seen what happens to reapers like that when they can’t handle the job. It’s… not pretty.”

Len had to be sure. He hated to ask. He didn’t want to let through he cared about some kid he had barely met, but it wasn’t about Barry Allen. At least it wasn’t entirely about him. Len had seen it before. A reaper who died a harsh, tragic death like Barry’s. They either toughened up, or they went insane. Hell, Zolomon should be proof enough for Sara. She may not have met the guy before he turned into the psychopath he was today, but he knew she had heard stories. Len had told her several of them.

Sara huffed, glared mildly, but seemed to accept that he was sufficiently chastised enough.

“I’m sure, Len. I know you aren’t a stranger to rough deaths, but I’m not either. Most of my exposure may have been before I died, but I’ve seen how things like that can break a person. Barry might be little lost right now, but he is not broken.”

Sara’s serious expression faded to one he recognized on the woman. It usually did not bode well for him. “Now, if you keep behaving like a dick, I’m going to tell Lisa what really happened with her last boyfriend. So you will be nice, and actually help him, alright?” She threatened, smiling more sweetly at him as she spoke than she had directed towards him the whole day. It made sense. The woman did always enjoy her dalliances with deviousness.

“I’ll behave,” he quickly agreed. As much as he wanted to at least put up a token protest, he knew
better than to risk her acting on that threat. Sara or Lisa being pissed at him was usually a painful event. They made sure of it. When they worked together in the anger, they tended to be lethal. Worse actually, he guessed, since they couldn’t actually kill him. Having to extract their revenge in a much more drawn out manner tended to make them even more spiteful.

“Great! Thanks, Lenny. Call me tonight and let me know how it goes. Now, shoo, Barry and Mick have been waiting long enough, and I need to go soon anyways. My appointment is coming up,” Sara all but pushed him out the door, giving him a quick peck on the check before slamming the door behind him.

Len may not have been pleased with the turn of events, but he supposed he would actually have to listen to Sara. Even disregarding Sara’s threats, which was never wise, she made a good point. If Barry Allen had a chance in hell of making it in the External Influences Division he was going to need some help, and unfortunately for Len that job fell to him.
Barry moves in with the Rogues and goes to his first appointment as a grim reaper.

Barry lay quietly in his new bedroom, staring at the clock. He had been at his new home for about three hours now. It had taken him less than half an hour to unpack his meager belongings, so he had been laying on his bed for a while now.

Most of his new roommates had been out, and he had barely greeted the rest before retreating to his new room. He couldn’t remember any of their names. He could barely remember their faces. Being in a room full of men had been unbearably uncomfortable. That had never been a problem with him before. When he was alive and working the CCPD it had been fairly common, and even with the Natural Causes Reapers Barry had been able to push aside his unease. Now though, despite how much he felt like a coward, Barry couldn’t force himself to go back out there.

The Rogue’s Den was apparently a warehouse not even a full 10 blocks from where he died. Realizing he would now be living so close to his murder scene was not pleasant. He had his own room with a bed, a space for his stuff, and best of all a lock on the door. His new room should have been an improvement from Sara’s couch. Instead the isolation just made him feel more alone. Barry wanted Sara. She had taken care of him. He did not think Leonard Snart was going to.

Meeting Leonard, his new boss, was not a pleasant experience either. Sara had assured him that as he packed his things that, despite his occasionally prickly exterior, the man would be there for Barry. She said he was caring towards those he valued in his life, and that the man was a good reaper. Barry could see where he would be a good reaper as he was cold as ice, but he hadn’t seen the caring part yet. Maybe Leonard just didn’t care about him.

Barry was pulled from his thoughts by a knocking on his door. Thankfully, whoever it was didn’t even try to pull on the locked door handle. The inaction put Barry ease.

“You ready to go, kid?” He heard the already familiar draw of his new boss’s voice coming through the door.

“Yeah,” Barry responded, forcing himself towards the door. That was a lie. Barry had never felt more unprepared for anything in his life. Well, in his existence. Barry wasn’t alive anymore. He should really work on his word choice. Referring to himself as alive, even within the comfort of his
own mind, was just too painful.

Leonard’s face showed no expression when Barry caught sight of it. He didn’t want to know what his own face looked like.

“C’mon, kid. I’ll drive you,” Leonard offered, a small being forced onto his face. It looked more like a grimace, but Barry appreciated the effort anyways.

Barry nodded in response, and allowed the older man to lead him out through the communal area. They passed the communal area - full of people now for what appeared to be a game of poker - and back out to his car.

As Len drove Barry Allen to his first appointment, he was worried. The kid, who had been pale as a sheet since they had first driven into the warehouse district, looked deathly pale now. While ironically amusing, it was not a good sign. Barry’s anxiety was visibly increasing is they got closer to the train station.

“Barry?” Len started. Once again, the kid flailed slightly when addressed, but Len could see in his periphery the kid turn to face him right after.

“Yeah,” he finally replied. His voice was soft and hesitant, but Len was just pleased he managed to speak this time.

“Are you alright?” It wasn’t really what Len wanted to ask. He already knew the answer to that question. Sara, Mick, and hell even Len himself all knew Barry Allen was not alright. Len wanted to ask if he could do this is, or how he could help. Len wanted to know if the kid was going to throw up in his car. None of those questions seemed appropriate, particularly in light of his conversation with Sara earlier.

“I… yeah, I guess,” Barry replied. He seemed surprised Len asked. He was lying. He had a feeling if Sara was the one asking then Barry would have been honest. Len didn’t know how to fix that. He should. Barry needed to be able to trust him.

Len wondered if it was because he was a man like Barry’s killer had been. He could tell just from his
brief interactions with the younger man how much more comfortable he was around women. Even Mick had told him he should have the kid hang around Lisa and Bette. That suggestion from Mick might as well have been a blaring warning. Mick didn’t really make suggestions like that. About jobs, heist, sure. Mick was a vocal as anyone, but not about reaping. Since Mick operated in a different division than the rest of the Rogues, he never joined that kind of shop-talk.

Then again, it could be something different. He knew Sara had left Barry alone with every member of her division before he was transferred. It may have been Len causing Barry's discomfort. He knew he wasn’t the most approachable of people. It had never bothered any of the Rogues before, but Len didn’t think he had every worked with a reaper as sensitive as Barry Allen.

“You should work on your lying, kid. It can be useful for what he do,” Len responded. The kid seemed to fold in on himself at his words, and Len instantly felt a little guilty. He was supposed to be calming Barry down, and not making him more uncomfortable.

“Do you mean reaping or thieving?” Barry asked.

The question surprised Len. He figured the kid already knew how the Rogues supported themselves. With how timid he was, Len had assumed - apparently incorrectly - that Barry would avoid mentioning their less-than-legal means of support in hopes that Len wouldn’t demand he help. Not that he would. He may not be the nicest of people, but he was not a monster. He wouldn’t force anyone into criminal behavior. After all, Len knew better than most how that felt.

“Both. I meant reaping, though,” Len responded. He decided to play things safe. He didn’t want Barry to have to divert his attention right now. Barry apparently did not agree.

“Good. Because I can’t help with the other stuff. The thieving I mean. I was a CSI, you know. Just because I died does not mean I am going to become a criminal,” Barry told him. He had a strength in his voice with those words Len hadn’t heard yet. He was pleased. That tone, that determination to tell a man he was obviously at least a little frightened of no must have been some of the strength Sara swore the kid had.

“I didn’t think you were going to. I’m not a complete asshole, you know. Living with us does not mean you have work with us like that. I had already started on getting you a new identity for Sara. It should be done in a couple of days, and I figured you can get a real job then,” Len told Barry.

“Oh. I don’t… Thank you,” he responded to. Barry seemed surprised and grateful at this revelation. He also relaxed a tenfold, so Len counted it as a win.
The two drove in silence from that point, and Barry continued to tense up as they got closer and closer to the train station. Len couldn’t have that, he thought. So to calm the kid down, and help Barry maintain a bit of composure he did the only thing he could think of.

Barry jumped just a bit when Len grabbed his hand, obviously not expecting the contact. Len was about to pull away when Barry turned his hand over under Len’s palm, and grasped at the offered support like Len was a lifeline. Barry didn’t turn his gaze away from the window he had been staring out of since the conversation in the car fizzled, and the kid barely relaxed, but Len decided the tight grip Barry maintain with him until they pulled up at the train station was better anyways.

Barry stared with a single-minded determination at seat on his post-it. It was the aisle seat on the first row. Len had already direct Barry to their seats.

He had already had a few false alarms, but so far the seat remained empty, and they had less than a minute until the train left the station. Barry was just starting to really hope that no one was going to sit in that deadly seat when a new man joined them in the back car.

That had to be him - Carter Grant. Barry was already making up an awful back story for Carter Grant. He was going to be an awful person. He beat his wife and kids, was a criminal, and cut in every line he came across. If Barry was going to do this then he needed Carter Grant to be an awful man. Barry was about to get up and do his job when the man turned around, and Barry saw something truly horrible.

That man was wearing a uniform that all the employees had on, and he was not about to sit down. Instead, the man Barry had mistaken for Carter Grant helped to situate a small boy - no more than 11 or 12 - into the seat on Barry’s post-it. Barry felt like his body was flooded with ice when he realized what was about to happen. Barry was supposed to help a child die.
The Boy on the Train

Chapter Summary

Barry deals with the fact that his first appointment is for a child.

Barry felt Len give him a small push, obviously expecting Barry to get up and do his job. Couldn’t he see that it was just a kid? Barry couldn’t do this. Barry couldn’t be the reason a child died. Len obviously did not agree though, so Barry got up and walked over to Carter Grant.

“Hi, could I sit here?” Barry asked the boy. He couldn’t just do it, touch his arm and end his life. He had to do something, so for now that meant Barry was about to stall.

“I’m not supposed to talk to strangers,” the boy replied lightly. Despite the words, he didn’t seem that wary of him. Barry figured those words came from the boy’s parents. The parents that were about to go through what Joe and his dad did. They looked so broken when Barry saw them last on Sara’s computer screen the day before. Barry was going to do that to this kid’s parents. He felt like he couldn’t breathe. He didn’t want to scare Carter though, so he held his panic inside.

“My name’s Barry. If you tell me your name too, then we won’t be strangers,” Barry replied. He felt desperate. He needed for Carter to let him in. He couldn’t help if Carter pushed him away like every stranger-danger video the child had probably watch told him to.

“I’m Carter, and this is McSnurtle the turtle,” Carter responded with a big grin as he pointed to the animal in his lap.

“McSnurtle, huh? That’s a great name. Is McSnurtle yours?” Barry promoted Carter. He needed the kid to keep talking. If Barry was here with Carter than he could maybe help. Carter shouldn’t have to die. Barry was already dead, it didn’t matter what happened to him.

“Yeah. He’s the greatest. My mom got him for me when I got all A’s on my last report card. He…” Carter cut off abruptly when Len came up behind him. Barry had almost forgotten the other man was with him.

“Barry, I need to use the restroom. Come with me?” Len might have phrased that as a question, but he knew the older man intended it as an order. He didn’t care. Barry wasn’t leaving Carter Grant.

“Sorry, Len. Carter was just telling me about McSnurtle the turtle. I’ll see you later,” Barry responded as he tried to force the other man to leave. Surely Len wouldn’t cause a scene. Barry knew reapers were supposed to stay on the periphery, and make Barry leave would draw a lot of attention to them.

“Is there a problem, gentleman?”

Shit, oh shit, Barry thought. It was the train employee who was supposed to be watching Carter, and he did not seem pleased that two strange men were crowding the child. Barry was scrambling to think of an excuse, anything that would keep him close to Carter, when Len started talking.

“None at all. Sorry about this. My friend here just loves animals, but we are leaving now. Barry and I need to use the men’s room.” Len grabbed Barry’s arm as he spoke, forcing him out of the with
surprising strength and subtly. Barry was pushed in front of Len and forced into the restroom in the car in front of them he could protest.

“What in the hell do you think you are doing?” Len rounded on Barry. He barely managed to keep his voice down, but he could tell the sheer anger in his voice was scaring Barry. It was a good thing. If Barry Allen was planning to pull this kind of shit then he needed to be scared of Len.

Unfortunately for Len, the earlier conviction Barry showed in the car came around in the worse kind of way.

“I’m not doing it. I’m not killing a kid, Leonard. We know what’s going to happen. I can save him.”

“You’re right, Barry. You aren’t killing anyone. You are helping that kid. Do you think that just because you don’t separate his soul that Carter Grant isn’t going to die? Because he will. The only difference will be that the poor kid will be stuck inside his body when he dies. He’ll feel everything, and when you do finally pull him out then his soul will have those marks. How do you think that’ll help him?”

“I…” Len’s words obviously gave Barry some pause. Not enough unfortunately.

“Then we move him, or stay with him and cushion him from whatever is going to happen. We can stop whatever is supposed to kill him before it gets there.” Barry was digging his heels in on this. Len couldn’t let that happen, especially not to a child.

“Well… I suppose that might work. He wouldn’t die.” Len could see Barry picking up at his words, and it hurt Len to drive the knife in after that look. Of course it didn’t stop him from doing it anyways.

“Of course for the rest of Carter’s short, miserable life his soul would be slowly rotting inside of him. His body would eventually follow of course, no way it couldn’t with something like that going on inside, but it wouldn’t be until after the soul, the bit that makes him really human, died inside of him. I’ve seen it happen before. It’s not pretty. If you want to leave him in there, I guess we can just wait for that. One of the Legends could take care of it then, and you wouldn’t have to do a damn thing. Will that work for you?”

Len’s words were harsh and cruel, but he didn’t know what else to do. He had less than five minutes to convince Barry to do his job, or Carter Grant was about to go through hell. Len wanted to protect that light and hope he saw in Barry’s eyes as he was trying to help Carter Grant. It was beautiful in a way Len hadn’t seen in a long time. Instead Len watched as his words killed that sparkle.

“I… Leonard, please. There has to be something I can do to help.” Barry was begging Len now.

“There is Barry. What we do, taking souls, it’s a public service. I know it doesn’t seem like it right now, and this is an unbelievably shitty job for your first time out, but the best thing you can do for Carter Grant is make sure his death runs smoothly. This is going to suck for you, and everyone that loves that kid, but for him this is the best thing him. He’s going into those lights, and wherever he ends up he’s not going to care about the pain he left behind. You can give that to him, Barry.”

Len’s words sounded soft to him. It felt weird after berating Barry. He wasn’t used to using that tone, and he could count on one hand the amount of times he had needed to use that kind of approach with most of his reapers. It seemed to work though. Barry’s resolved face was put back in place, and he nodded at Len’s words.
“So what do I do?” Barry asked Len. He may have decided to do this, but Barry was obviously still so unsure. Len knew he knew what he had to do when he got out there, but apparently he needed to hear anyways.

“We are going to go back out, and when we pass by Carter’s seat you are going to graze his arm, and pull his soul out. Then in about 30 seconds something is going to cause Carter to die, and you and I are going to help him get those lights. Okay?”

Barry didn’t respond to his words verbally. He nodded again - it seemed to be Barry’s default - and walked back towards their seats. Barry grazed Carter’s arm and gave the kid a smile which Carter returned. They had just sat back down when the heard a loud, screeching sound. Len had being doing this long enough to know what that meant, so he grabbed Barry and pulled him under his body as he forced them onto the floor just in time for their car to completely separate from the rest of the train.

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“Is everyone alright?” Barry heard the train employee calling out as the car finally stopped moving. He was trapped under Len, and the weight was terrifying. Barry couldn’t move. He couldn’t move, and he couldn’t breathe. It was so dark, and everywhere hurt.

“Barry?” Len murmured softly, the worry in his expression causing an obvious crinkle to form in the middle of his forehead.

“Get off,” Barry demanded desperately. He started pushing at Len with what little force he could get in the position. Thankfully Len seemed to understand. He pushed off of Barry quickly, and offered Barry a hand to stand as well. He wanted to ignore it, but his leg was stuck under the seat. So despite how much Barry did not want anyone touching him, he allowed Len to pull him to his feet, as the older man carefully helped to pull his leg out.

“Mr. Barry? I can’t get McSnurtle. Can you help me?” Carter Grant asked politely. The child was repeatedly trying to grab his turtle carrier, but his hand was going straight through it. Somehow the turtle and it’s cage remained unharmed in Carter’s tight hold. Carter’s body was sitting peacefully in his seat, looking almost exactly as he had when the train was in motion. If it wasn’t for the twisted angle his broken neck had taken then Carter would have looked like he was only sleeping.

He vaguely registered Leonard telling the employee that he and Barry were both alright, and trying to shield his interactions with the dead boy for a moment. Barry wasn’t worried about that. He trusted the other man to give him the time he needed. Barry grabbed the turtle cage from the dead boy’s hand, and the boy’s soul smiled beside him.

“Can you look out for him? I don’t think I can anymore,” he stated. The words were sad, but Carter’s tone was not. He seemed to be taking his death much better than Barry did.

“I can do that,” Barry responded quietly. It seemed like the least he could do. He believed Leonard when he told Barry why Carter had to die. The pained look in his eyes told him he was telling the truth, even with the man’s warning that reapers had to lie. He didn’t think that Leonard wanted Carter to die any more than Barry had.

At Barry’s assurances a beautiful carnival made of pure light seemed to form away from the wreckage. Carter laughed at the sight and ran towards it as the fellow passengers from the train car noticed the boy’s body. There were shocked explanations, some tears, and many sad faces from their fellow passengers, but Barry didn’t look. He watched Carter Grant go into his lights, and he continued his silent vigil until the sky turned dark once again.
“You ready, Barry?” Leonard asked him. He didn’t realize that Leonard had returned to his side.
“We need to go before the authorities get here.”

“Okay,” Barry responded. He grabbed his companion's hand with his free one, and the two men silently made their way away from the wreckage and back towards the tracks.
Barry and Len make their way back towards civilization, and the two hitch a ride.

Len leads Barry away from the wrecked train car, and back towards the main tracks. Luckily for them, his cellphone had survived the crash, and Lisa and Mick were on the way to pick up his Jeep as well as him and Barry. He did not feel like hiking all the way back to the train station. Getting back the road was going to be long enough.

Barry followed him quietly, holding Carter Grant’s turtle cage in his hand. Even the dark Len could see that Barry’s knuckles were white from the death grip he had on the handle. Len’s hand that Barry had grasped was receiving the same treatment, but Len didn’t care. Barry was obviously taking comfort in his hold, and despite how much it slowed their pace Len decided that the tension that was slowly leaking out of Barry was worth the slight ache it caused.

Len should probably say something about the turtle. Barry taking him like that wasn’t a good idea. It wasn’t going to be the last time someone asked him to take something, do something, or get involved in something he shouldn’t. Reapers shouldn’t get involved like that. It makes the job too hard. Everyone did things like Barry was now on occasion though, and Len just couldn’t bring himself to mention it now. He’d say something next time.

“Leonard?” Barry started.

“Yes, Bartholomew?” He responded.

“Really? What’s with the full name,” Barry pouted, distracted by Len’s use of his full name. Len counted it as a victory. He had a feeling that whatever Barry was about to ask, it was best for both of them if he didn’t.

“You keep calling me Leonard. It seems only fair.”

“It’s your name. Am I supposed to call you something else?” Barry asked, confusion evident in his expression. It was too adorable for a grown man to be displaying, but for some reason Len didn’t mind.

“Call me Len, and I won’t call you Bartholomew,” Len responded with a slight chuckle.

“Okay. Len?” Barry started again, his face once again going back to his serious expression.

“Yes, Barry?” Len prompted back. He wished his quip had distracted the kid more, but he supposed Barry stubbornness was coming out again.

“It is always going to be this hard? Taking souls, doing what we have to do?” Barry asked.

Barry seemed scared in a way he hadn’t been earlier. It was different the panic he had seen in Barry after the train car crashed. His earlier fears had been strong, visceral, and deeply physical. He was afraid Len was going to hurt him. Len could see a different kind of fear in Barry’s eyes as he asked this question. Barry was afraid for what Len’s response was going to be. He got the impression
Barry was afraid of both answers, so rather than try to guess what the kid wanted to hear Len answered honestly.

“No. It’s rarely that hard. Kids are always the worse. It’s not like what you saw with Natural Causes. People don’t know they are going to die, and you are good enough person you will struggle with this for a while. It gets easier though. You just need to remember that we aren’t the ones hurting people. What you said in there, about you killing Carter, you are going to have to stop looking at it like that. Reaping is a public service, and as soon as you can see it as that things will get a lot easier. Things get a lot messier for the souls of the people we are supposed to protect when we screw up, and what we do saves them from that.”

Barry nodded again. Len wished he would stop doing that. He has a feeling it not a good sign.

“Did that help?” Len ask. He needs to know. Len needs Barry to understand what he said.

“Yeah. I think so. It’s just, how are you sure? That we are helping I mean. Sara said we don’t know what comes next, so how do you know?” Len was suddenly reminded that the kid had been a scientist. Hartley always needed the extra answers too.

“Faith, I guess. I’ve been doing this for a long time. I’ve seen just about every variation those lights can be, and I don’t think they could ever lead somewhere bad. They aren’t just physically lights, but whatever they show it’s always exactly what that person needs. I don’t think death would bother if it wasn’t for a good reason.”

Len hadn’t shared this theory with anyone before. He always guessed that most reapers held it. Lisa was the one who had first pointed it out to him so many years ago, and he hadn’t been able to think anything else of the lights since then. When reapers fucked up the souls were always the ones who suffered. He didn’t think that what they did would be important if the next step wasn’t too.

“Oh. Well, I guess that makes sense. It does seem like a lot for whatever comes next.” Barry responded eventually. It took the kid several minutes, and he thought Barry wasn’t going to answer.

Len just smiled at Barry this time as the two crossed the tracks. They still had about a mile to go until the reached the road, and farther than that until Barry really believed what Len told him, but for now Barry was going to be alright, and Len was able to really smile with both of their jobs being well done.

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“You boys need a ride?” a woman called out as she pulled up in a bright yellow convertible. The top was down, and the woman was obviously enjoying the crisp night air. Len frowned beside him, and the older man dropped Barry’s hand and stepped out in front of him protectively. It set Barry’s teeth on edge. Whoever this person was, Len wasn’t comfortable with her there. Barry felt himself stepping closer to Len. Len would protect him, he was sure of it. Len shielded him from the wreck, and Barry had to believe he would protect him from this strange woman too.

“Lisa, what the fuck are you doing here? I told you to bring my car back, and Mick to pick us up.”

Barry relaxed minutely at Len’s words. However this woman was, she was probably safe to be around if Len had told her to come help. The almost hungry expression in her eyes as she looked at Barry around Len was still making him uncomfortable though.

“Well excuse me, brother dearest, for trying to meet our newest recruit. Mick’s already had his turn.”
She winked at Barry before continuing. “Hello, Barry. I’m Lisa Snart, Lenny’s sister. How about you ride up here with me since Lenny’s being such a sour puss.”

Barry did not want to ride up front. Lisa Snart was apparently a very forceful woman, and the look she was giving him made it seem like she was trying to see through Barry. He didn’t like it. Besides, there would be more room for McSnurtle in the back seat.

“Back off, Lise. Kid just had a hell of a first time out. He doesn’t need your nosy ass harassing him now.” Len must have been able feel Barry tensing at his sister’s words. Len stepped away from him and around the car. Barry didn’t move. He missed the warmth from Len’s back. Their little spot on the side of the road seemed colder without Len’s presence.

He heard the two whispering quietly at each other, but Barry couldn’t bring himself to listen. Len had been grounding him, and despite the man still being where Barry could see him, Barry still felt like he was slipping.

“Barry,” Len called out, the concerned expression he had seen after the crash making an appearance once again. Barry realized Len had been waiting for him. He had pushed the seat forward, and was waiting for Barry to climb into the back. Barry flushed, annoyed at himself for fading once again. He tried to apologize, to hurry forward, but all he manage was a shrug.

“You know what,” Lisa’s sister responded quickly to Barry’s apparent ineptitude, willfully ignoring the annoyed expression that crossed her brother’s face as she spoke. “Why don’t both you boys ride in the back and we can buckle the turtle in up here. You are both kinda gross, and I’d rather keep the muck contained.”

Len nodded at her words, and gave his sister an appreciative smile. Barry had a feeling the woman had made that suggestion for him more so than their admittedly disheveled appearances. He supposes that it was finally broke him from his trance.

“McSnurtle. That’s his name,” Barry told Lisa as he finally started towards the passenger's side. He carefully handed the container to Lisa as he spoke. Len climbed in first, allowing Barry the extra bit of freedom. He figured that was likely on purpose too if the concerned looks Len was still sending him were to be believed, so he gave Len a small smile in thanks.

“McSnurtle, huh?” Lisa snorting as she restarted the car. “Did Doctor Seuss name your turtle?”

“Carter did. The kid on my post-it. He didn’t want to leave him, so I told him I’d keep him.”

Barry felt numb as he spoke, and both of his companions tensed at his words. He didn’t know why he told them all that. He could have just said it he didn’t name McSnurtle.

“Does that mean we get a pet at the Rogue’s Den now?” Despite the change in the woman’s posture, she seemed to be softening. Barry appreciated that. Her forceful nature was too much right now. He didn’t know what to do after what had happened, and he appreciated Lisa moving the subject away.

“Shit, I didn’t think about that,” Len responded, a smirk forming on his face. Barry felt a second of panic that Len was going to make him leave McSnurtle before the man squeezed his knee comforting and continued, “You lot are going to be insufferable about this aren’t you?”

“Oh, hush Lenny. A pet will do us some good. Do you think you can try for a kitten next time, Barry. I’ve always wanted a kitten, but every time I try to bring one home Len makes some big fuss.” Lisa sounded so hopeful as she spoke that Barry couldn’t stop the small laugh that escaped him.
“I can try,” he agreed solemnly before a smile broke out. He never had been good at staying straight-faced. He had lost abysmally every time Joe tried to include him in the CCPD poker night.

“If you bring home a kitten, Barry, you are taking care of it. Which means keeping it far away from that one,” Len’s pointed as Lisa as his smirk shifted to something positively wicked. If it wasn’t for the way his eyes sparkled with amusement as he spoke then Barry would have been frightened of that look. “Do you remember what happened to the kitten I did let you keep, Lisa? Because I’m still pretty sure that thing jumped into the fire on purpose. You drove it to suicide, Lise.”

Len cackled as he finished speaking, nudging Barry’s ribs playfully, and skillfully avoiding Lisa’s hand as she attempted to swat him. Barry laughed as the siblings ribbing continued, and for the first time since Barry died he felt something like hope spark in his chest. Barry could do this. He was helping people, and he wasn’t alone. He may not have his life or his family with him anymore, but maybe Barry could build something new.
McSnurtle's New Home

Chapter Summary

McSnurtle the turtle is settled into the Rogues den. Lisa, Barry, and Len react to this.

Lisa tried to hold in her laughter as she and McSnurtle, tucked safely in her arms, followed Barry and Len inside. Her brother’s lack of a hissy fit at one of the Rogues for bringing home an animal was amusing enough, but Len helping the younger man carry in everything necessary to set up a comfortable turtle habitat was downright hilarious. Of course if Lisa let herself laugh, Len was likely to pull out his usual gruffness and change his mind about the turtle, so Lisa kept quiet.

Personally, she could see why Len thought the kid needed the turtle. In her opinion a dog or a kitten would have been better, but it was obvious to her as it was to Len that the kid could use some sort of therapy animal. He had been shaking like a leaf when Len first introduced him, and Barry had rushed inside his new room to hide until Len forced him to the train station. Standing behind Len on the side of the road after his first reaping - and really, who the fuck thought it was a good idea to send someone as obviously shaken as Barry a child for his first time out - Barry had not seemed to be any better. Since the turtle was literally given him to him after his first job, she supposed the turtle would have to do.

Regardless of how much Barry needed McSnurtle to brighten his coming days, Lisa still fully intend to give Len all kinds of shit about the turtle once it was too late for him to change his mind. She had been trying to get a pet for ages, and one day with Barry Allen and Len was suddenly fine with an animal in the Rogues Den.

She knew Hartley would help her too. He had been trying to convince Len to let him have rats for ages so he could run some test or another. Lisa didn’t particularly want to invite even more rodents into their home, but she figured siding with Hartley on this one might finally yield her some results. No matter what Len claimed, the incident with her first kitten was not her fault, and it had been more than enough time for him to get over it.

Barry Allen was in desperate need of some kind of help though, so she was grateful that her brother, who was generally about as emotionally intelligent as a lump of coal, seemed to be reaching out to Barry. Then again, she mused, her brother always had been a sucker for the tragic and beautiful type. Barry, with his sweet little face, slender yet surprising fit body, and brutal death was definitely Len’s type. Not that Lenny had figured it out yet. He was always slow with those things. The idiot was over 100 years old, and he was still horrible at flirting.
That was probably for the best anyways in this case. Len had never been the type to have real romantic relationships even before they died, and Barry was obviously in a fragile place. It was a pity though. Len would probably chill out if he got laid. Lisa knew he and Sara had stopped hooking up as Sara’s relationship with the bitchy doctor continued, and her crush on the cute nurse grew. Len had decided - wisely - to stay the hell out of that mess.

The other Rogues had thankfully opted to go to Saints and Sinner earlier that evening, so the communal area was blessedly empty as the boys lugged Len’s latest purchases to Barry’s room. Mick must have decided to rejoin them after retrieving Len’s Jeep. Lisa thanked small favors, and potentially Mick’s interference as he had seemed as protective of their newest recruit as Len was shaping up to be. Seeing as the kid was scared of his own shadow it was probably for the best.

Lisa and McSnurtle detoured to the kitchen rather than continuing to follow to boys, leaving Barry and Len to begin setting everything up without her. She decided that rather than completely avoiding work she would be helpful, so she sat Barry’s new friend down, and started pulling together ingredients for margaritas. After the day Barry had tequila would do wonders. Besides, the two men had ruined her night and the back seat of her car, so Lisa deserved a treat too.

Barry and Len worked silently to set up the new turtle habitat in his room. While it made him slightly uncomfortable to be alone with the other man in his room, Barry appreciated the help. He definitely appreciated the huge sum of money Len had paid without complaint to get McSnurtle his new home.

Lisa hadn’t followed them in, instead taking McSnurtle with her on a detour. She was making a racket, but Barry appreciated it. It helped the room from getting too quiet without forcing him and Len to talk. He could tell their whole way back to the Rogues Den that Len was holding something back. The man didn’t seem to do so often, so Barry figured he probably didn’t want to hear whatever it was anyways.

“Oh, boys!” Lisa exclaimed, loudly announcing her entry into the room. She dropped McSnurtle’s carrier by his tank before continuing “I brought drinks. I think we all need some tequila in us, so drink up.”

The woman’s words were accompanied by her forcefully shoving a drink in each of their hands, all while sipping from her own. Barry was impressed. If he tried anything like that he was sure all three icy drinks would have end up all over them, but Lisa accomplished all this with an easy smile. She also managed to look around Barry’s room after, skillfully avoiding helping him and Len put the finishing touches in turtle tank.
“Is this all you’ve got?” Lisa asked, her nose wrinkling as she spoke like the room and its contents were personally offending her.

Barry was suddenly embarrassed by the space. He had no source of income since he died, so everything he had been given to him by people in the Natural Causes Division or Len. His clothes were all second-hand, and ill-fitted as he was more slight than any member of that team. The bathroom that was attached to his room had only a toothbrush, a single ratty towel, and a clear shower curtain. Besides his clothes, the bathroom equipment supplied entirely by Sara’s surplus items, and things for McSnurtle he did not have much. The only other thing Barry had in his room was his raggedy bed - covered by even worse blankets and the lumpiest pillow known to man - and a well-worn copy of a sci-fi thriller Martin had let him borrow. The nicest things he owned were the pieces for his turtle. He could feel his cheeks flushing at the space, which just made him more embarrassed.

“Lay off his Lise. He’s only been dead a week. It’s not like he’s had time to go shopping,” Len glared at his sister as he spoke.

Len’s defense just made Barry more embarrassed. He felt weak, constantly needing everyone to jump to his defense. Before he died Barry hadn’t been that way since elementary school, when Iris beat up his bullies for him. Barry joined track in middle school, and with his new-found skill Barry had come a confidence that Barry had carried with him. After what the Butcher did to him, when Barry saw how vulnerable he really was, he couldn’t stop himself from seeing how every person around him was a threat. He hated it, but he couldn’t seem to help himself.

“I wasn’t judging, Barry. I was judging you, jerk. He hasn’t gotten a job yet, and I don’t think he’s going to manage with those for interview clothes. Bette, Shawna, and I can take you shopping tomorrow, Barry. It’ll be Lenny’s treat.” Lisa declared.

“It will? Why don’t you get it if you want him to have new clothes so badly?” Len responded. It made Barry’s discomfort grow. Len had already done so much - too much really. He could ask the man for anything else, and he didn’t want to be in Lisa’s debt too.

“It was just teasing Lisa, Barry. It’s my prerogative as her older brother. Of course we’ll get you some stuff, Barry. Not that Sara wasn’t… generous,” Len made a slight face at the word and it made Barry’s self-consciousness rise again.
“You’re a Rogue now, and we take care of our. Until you get a job, we’ve got you covered, Barrry,” Lisa finished for her brother, nodding firmly before she continued. “Unless of course, you’d like to start really working with the Rogues. Then you won’t need a job. Think of what all we could get with a CSI on our side.”

“No, I’ll get a job. I can pay you back too, once I get the money. I…” Barry rushed to explain, but Len cut him off.

“I already told you no, Lisa. Barry’s not working with us, so lay off it, okay? And Barry, don’t be daft. You don’t have to pay us back. It’s not like we don’t have more than enough money to go around. Consider it your welcome present okay? You save that money for things you are going to need later because it’s going to have to last you a long time.”

Len’s tone left no room for arguments on either of their parts. He could hear Lisa muttering under her breath, but he couldn’t make out the words, and her brother was obviously ignoring her. He was gazing intently at Barry, letting him know that Len was just as set on taking care of Barry as he was keeping Lisa from trying to force him into a life of crime. It was touching, but Barry couldn’t do more than nod his thanks. He could feel his throat closing, emotions he wasn’t ready to try to understand brimming beneath the surface.

“C’mon, Lenny. We should let Barry shower and get some sleep. Who knows what time his appointment will be for, and we’ve got lot of shopping to do. Sleep tight, sweetie. We’ll see you in the morning,” Lisa decided for them, dragging Len from the room. The man barely had time to say goodnight as well before Lisa slammed the door shut behind him, and the two siblings left Barry alone in his room once again.

Lisa continued to drag Len behind her after she shut Barry’s door. His sister did not let him out of her grip until she pulled him to the other side of the room, through the hallway where the girl’s all kept their rooms, and down to the farthest and largest bedroom in the place - Lisa’s room.

“So?” Lisa prompted after shoving him down beside her on her golden-threaded couch.

Len was not amused at his sister’s antics. He did not feel like guessing what exactly she was trying to get from him, so rather than respond to her unnecessarily bossy tactics he merely raised an eyebrow and waited for her to crack. It took a whole 30 seconds, a decent amount of time for his overly
involved little sister.

“What the hell happened out there? Before you took him out there the kid was obviously pissing you off, and now you are suddenly his white night? What gives, Len?”

“I’m not anyone’s white night, Lise. Except for yours, of course,” Len responded with his deepest and most sarcastic drawl.

Rather than appreciate his - admittedly truthful - statement, Lisa punched him on his arm. He was suddenly pretty glad for his accelerated reaper healing. Lisa was not pulling her punches, and she managed to find the exact spot Sara had hit him earlier this morning. Sometimes Len would swear they coordinated little ways to torture him. Well, he knew they did. He just didn’t think this was one of those times.

“Cut the shit, Len,” Lisa continued. “What is the deal with Barry? I’m not saying it’s a bad thing, but I want to make sure you know what you are doing. If you are going to start this with him - supporting him, being there for him, all of that - you can’t just decide be there you can’t just back out one day. The kid is obviously a wreck, and if you want to start helping him fix then you need to commit.”

Lisa’s words made no sense to Len. Of course he wasn’t just going to back out. He was Barry’s boss, and his guide to being undead. It was his job to watch out for the kid, and that meant in this case helping him push past what had happened to him.

“I’m doing my job. Do you really think Barry is going to make it as a reaper without some help? Kid obviously needs some guidance. Sara told me when I picked him up that she thought Barry could be great at what we do, and she was right. Barry’s kind of fucked up from his death, but he hasn’t let it beat him yet. Every time I start to see something from him, something real and strong, it’s been because he was pushing to help or at least not harm anyone. Traits like those, especially with what he’s been through, are going to make him good at this, and I don’t mind pushing him to get there,” Len finally responded.

He could tell that the minute or two it took him to compose his thoughts had started to grate on Lisa, but he needed to make her understand. She was right after all. Barry probably couldn’t take it if one of his supports backed out on him. That didn’t matter to him though. Len wasn’t going anywhere, and he didn’t think any of the other reapers who had taken to Barry were either.

“Okay, Lenny. As long as you know what you are getting yourself into to. For what it’s worth though, I’m proud of you.”
Lisa pulled him into a tight hug, and Len felt himself melting into her a bit before they each pulled away. Len may have loved his sister more than anyone else in the world, and she returned the sentiment, but the two were not the touchy-feely types, and it seemed both had pretty much maxed themselves out with Barry.

“If you are done with your interrogation, can I go shower now? That hike we took was not exactly short, and I would like to sleep soon.”

Lisa pouted slightly before shooing him out the door. Upon his return to his own bedroom, Len started his own nightly routine.

He tried unsuccessfully to push thoughts Lisa, Barry, and the strangeness of his day as he cleaned the evidence from his body and prepared to sleep. When he finally drifted into unconsciousness thoughts of train crashes, dying children, his sister, and Barry Allen followed into his dreams.
Wake Up Calls

Chapter Summary

Barry and the rest of the Rogues wake up to unpleasant surprises.

Someone grabbing Barry. He didn’t know who it was. Why was someone trying to grab him? Did the Butcher find out where he was? Barry screamed as he lashed out blindly. He couldn’t let it happen again. He couldn’t go back.

Barry heard someone cry on in pain, but it wasn’t enough. There was a man in his room, and he couldn’t let him hurt him again. It wasn’t enough. If he couldn’t stop the Butcher, he was going to do a lot worse to Barry. The man was stronger though, and he managed to push Barry under him on the floor. He had him pinned. Oh, god. Barry couldn’t go through this again, but he was going to have to. It was going to be so much worse this time because Barry couldn’t escape the same way he had last time. He was already dead.

The man was speaking to him, but he couldn’t hear the words. He didn’t care what the man said. Barry was thrashing, trying to get out from under him, but it wasn’t working. He was terrified.

“Barry… For fuck sake, Barry, you have got to calm down. You’re alright, okay. I just need you to stop fighting.”

He didn’t care what the voice said, Barry wasn’t going to calm down, and he was definitely not going to stop fighting back. He wasn’t given that option the first time, but the man’s grip was not as controlling as the straps had been. He was not alright, and he had to get away.

He heard someone burst into the room, and he screamed again. He begged for help, but whoever it was didn’t pull the man off him. Did the Butcher have a partner? Barry wanted to die again. He wanted anything to keep them from hurting him.

“Sam, help me out. He won’t calm down. I don’t think he can hear me,” he heard the voice saying. It was starting to sound familiar. He didn’t think the Butcher had talked to him, but he must have.

More men started walking into his room. They sounded loud and angry, and Barry was even more scared. Some of them were helping the man on top of him hold him down, and none of them moved
to pull the others away. Barry couldn’t let this happen again, but he didn’t know how to stop it.

“Fuck, Len this isn’t working,” he heard one of the voices say. It sounded like a woman. He didn’t remember any women from before, but then again last time it was just one man. Now there were so many, and he couldn’t get away.

He thrashed harder at the words. He recognized that name. He knew a Len. He didn’t know where from though, and he couldn’t worry about that now. Barry had to get away first. If he was too difficult then maybe they would leave him. He couldn’t go back in those straps again. God, he would do anything, just please don’t let them hurt him again. He thinks he might have been begging out loud, but no one one was listening to his cries.

“Well we can’t let him go. He’s going to hurt himself or one of us. Hart, go get Sara,” the man straddling him yelled. Who was that? Were they going to hurt her too. He didn’t want them to hurt her, but he had to save himself before he could help.

Barry couldn’t breathe. These men were going to hurt him, and they didn’t seem to care how much he was begging them not to. He could feel himself fading though. He was petrified, and he couldn’t breathe.

Barry could feel the fight draining out of him as much as he tried to stop it. The last thing Barry registered as he slipped into unconsciousness was a tender hand running through his hair. Barry hoped that whoever did it ran before they were dragged them under with him.

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Barry awoke slowly. His head was in someone’s lap, and there was hand running through his hair. It felt like a woman.

“Iris,” he called out. It had to be her. No one else would have been able to get into his apartment besides Joe, and the person below him felt to small.

“It’s Sara, Barry. You with us?” the woman stated.

Sara. He knew Sara. Sara was a grim reaper, and she helped Barry after he died. Barry wasn’t with Sara anymore though. Why was she here?
Barry forced his eyes open, and he was surprised to see Len, Lisa, Ray and Mick all crowded into his dingy little room at the Rogues den with Sara and him. They were staring at him warily by McSnurtle’s tank. Why the hell were they looking at him like that. They were the creeps watching him sleep.

“I thought I locked the door last night?”

Barry supposed he maybe should have started with what the hell they were all doing in his room, but he felt the might be too rude.

“You mean you don’t remember what happened?” Lisa asked him, frown deepening.

“Give him a minute, Lisa. You feeling okay, Barry?”

Sara’s hand hadn’t ceased its movements as she spoke. As much as it weirded him out to wake up with an audience and a woman in his bed who wasn’t there when he went to sleep, he couldn’t deny Sara’s gentle massage was comforting. He didn’t particularly want to be to continue being coddled, or let them think this was acceptable behavior so he pushed her off.

“You need anything, kid?” Mick’s words were kind, although he used the same gruff manner as always. He had a fervently nodding Ray wrapped in his arms, which was a sure sign that one or both of the men was upset. Mick usually hated such public displays of affection, but he seemed to be clinging to his partner now. Barry was starting to get worried. What was going on?

Barry shook his head no, although he did sit up and take the water from his bedside table. He didn’t remember putting it there the night before, but he figured someone in the room must have brought it with them. His throat felt scratchy, and he decided he could wait a minute to wake up a little more before scolding them for their odd behavior.

“What are you all doing here, and why are you all watching me sleep? You do know that’s considered stalking right?” Barry figured the direct approach was probably for the best since they hadn’t responded to his more subtle inquiry.

“We were worried about you. Len tried to wake you up earlier for a job. Do you remember what happened?” Sara sounded more worried every time she spoke. It was putting him on edge.
“I…” Barry was about to say he didn’t know, but it felt like something was there, at the corner of his mind. He was remembering a nightmare, only it felt so real. Someone was here. They held him down, and they were going to hurt him, and then others came in to help them. He screamed and screamed. Was that real? Was that why his throat was sore, and why they were all giving him funny looks.

Sara gently grabbed his hands, and it was only then that he realized he was pulling his hair.

“It’s okay now, Barry. Do you remember?” Sara was talking, but the others all seemed to start at her words. He could see Len inching forward, but Lisa stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. He didn’t like that. He wished Len would come sit with him. Len was like Sara; he wouldn’t let anyone hurt Barry.

“Someone was in here earlier. A lot of them, actually. They… what were they trying to do to me? They held me down. Len?” He needed Len to answer. At the train station Len had protected him. He shielded him from the wreckage, and helped him get McSnurtle home. Did Len run them off?

“Barry… I… I didn’t mean to upset you. I was just trying to wake you up for an early morning appointment, but you started lashing out at me, and then at yourself. I just didn’t want you to get hurt. I didn’t mean to scare you. I’m so sorry.”

Barry felt like he couldn’t breathe. It was Len? It was only at his words that he noticed what looked like dried blood all down the front of Len’s shirt. He couldn’t see an injury on him though, and the only place on Barry that hurt was his throat.

Did he do that? He hurt him, but then again Len held him down. Len had done that at the train too, but he got off as soon as Barry asked. Why wouldn’t he this time? Is it because he hurt Len or because he was hurting himself. He was shaking, and he could feel Sara trying to pull his hands towards her. He dimly registered that they were burying themselves in his hair once more, but he couldn’t bring himself to care.

“Barry, please talk to us,” he heard Ray’s voice cut through. Lisa and Mick both seemed to be trying to pull Len back as he stepped towards the bed, but Len was obviously ignoring him. He sat on the edge of the bed, still giving Barry plenty of space, but close enough now he could see the hurt look in his eye.

Len looked scared too. Was he scared of Barry? Barry didn’t want anyone to be afraid of him,
especially not Len.

Barry threw himself into Len’s arms before he could think better about it. He wanted to say he was sorry for hurting him. He wanted to ask why Len would hold him down. None of that came out though. Instead Barry started crying into the other man’s shirt with one hand clinging tightly to the back of Len’s shirt, and he held tightly to Sara’s too. Her hand was still clasped tightly in his left hand.

Barry was about to pull away as Len completely froze at his actions, but Len pulled his arms around Barry in a firm embrace before he had the chance. Sara came up behind the two and rubbed Barry back as he cried. He vaguely registered the others sitting on the bed too, but they didn’t moved to touch tightly wound trio.

Barry wanted many things in that moment. He wanted to feel normal. He wanted to be able to be woken up without turning into a psychopath that hurt his friends. He wanted - as he had since he died - to wake up and have everything from the past week be a dream. Death was turning out to be even less fair than life though, so instead Barry let his friends comfort him through his tears.

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Even though Barry had cried himself to sleep, Len couldn’t force himself away from Barry. The kid’s hands were still clinging tightly to his shirt and to Sara. She looked as reluctant as he felt to make Barry move now that his face was blissfully free from its earlier tortured expression.

“What are we going to do?” Raymond broke the silence, apparently did not get the memo about not disturbing Barry. Luckily, Barry didn’t so much as stir. Len, Sara, and Lisa still glared fiercely at the man currently cocooned in Mick’s arms, while Mick adjusted his hold enough to poke his lover’s side gently.

“Oh, come on. You all know I’m right. We’ve got to do something about this. I know Barry had a rough… well lately he’s had a rough everything, but this can’t keep happening, and it’s not like we can take him to the shrink he so desperately needs.”

Len continued to glare at man, but the others seemed irritatingly to be taking what he had said under consideration. Len would admit that Raymond may have made a good point, but now wasn’t the time to talk about this. Barry needed to rest, and their conversation might wake him. He opened his mouth to voice this when Lisa cut him off. He huffed, knowing she had seen he was about to say something, but let it pass.
“Well what do you suggest we do, Ray? We can be there for Barry, but it’s not like they have something in place to deal with stuff like this.”

Mick nodded at her words, and Len couldn’t help but agree. He didn’t want to. Len was supposed to help Barry. He was his boss, and it was his job to make sure everyone in his division was capable of handling the work. Right now, Barry was definitely not. Bette had to take Barry’s appointment this morning, and as much as he wanted to he couldn’t allow for that to keep happening.

“He’s got PTSD. Not exactly a great problem for a reaper, but we can work with it. We just have to make sure it doesn’t completely stop him. During the war I saw many men with that disease march straight into their biggest nightmares when they had the right motivation and support. We just need to make sure he has that.”

Sara spoke surely and with a sense of finality. Len had always appreciated that about her. He especially appreciated it right now as it worked in conjunction with one of her more annoying traits; Sara was almost always right.

“We stick with him then. There’s nothing else to it. Shit like this doesn’t get better overnight, and Barry shouldn’t be forced to try. If that’s a problem for you, Raymond, you can fuck off. Same goes for the rest of those idiot out there, and yours too Sara,” Len told them fiercely, frosty eyes daring any of them to disagree.

Len could tell from the way the rest were looking that they were in this as much as he was. Raymond looked perfectly contrite, which suited Len just fine. If half of what he had heard from Mick, Sara, and Raymond was true the entirety of Natural Causes was with them. He had a feeling that the rest of his Rogues would be with him too after their startling wake up call.

Barry’s panic attack had been utterly terrifying for Len too. He had just wanted desperately to help, but he had been unable to reach Barry. Len’s own death had been violent and brutal, but even with those memories still stuck in his head Len had never felt terror like what he had seen in Barry’s eyes or heard in his screams as the kid had tried so desperately to fight back against an enemy that had already won.

Barry Allen had a new weapon for his fight now. He had his new family. The West and Henry Allen were permanently lost to Barry, but the Rogues and Natural Causes had adopted Barry into their fold. He was their family, and they were going to make sure that Barry was the victor in his fight against his memories.
Before meeting Barry Allen, Len would have sworn the only part of his heart that hadn’t frozen over was the piece saved for his Rogues and Sara. Len knew now he was right, just as surely as he knew that Barry was breaking into that icy facade and forcing his way in. For the first time in a long time, Len didn’t mind the softness that was coming out in him in response to Barry’s presence. He welcomed that feeling home because it was what was allowing him to help hold together the pieces of the broken boy in his arms.
Girl's (and Barry's) Day Out

Chapter Summary

Barry gets some new things for his afterlife.

Bette waited patiently outside of the fitting rooms with Lisa, Shawna, and Sara. Barry was taking several minutes longer than necessary to put on the smart suit they had picked for him, but Bette figured after this morning Barry was still shaky enough to need the extra time to compose himself.

“Barry, get that shapely ass out in here before I come in there. I know you’ve got that on by now.”

Apparently Lisa was not feeling as patient as she was. Bette snorted at her friend’s impatience, and she heard the others start to laugh as well. She understood where Barry was coming from.

“I don’t know about this one Lisa. I think we should try a different one. This one’s not going to work. Can you give me the next one? Or my original clothes,” Barry called out from behind the still-locked door of his changing room.

Bette could hear the insecurity in Barry’s voice, as well as the annoyance at the shopping spree they had forced him in to taking. Bette didn’t think it was necessarily a good idea after the panic attack she had witnessed that morning, but she was not going to turn down a chance to get to know their newest recruit better. Besides, it had given her a chance to pick up the new leather jacket she had been eyeing. It was a win-win as far as she was concerned. She wished Barry agreed.

“Not until we see it Barry. I know that fits, we took your measurements,” Sara order the young man sternly.

She and Shawna shared a bemused glance at the annoyed groan coming from behind the door at Sara’s words. They had already been on the receiving end of this kind of treatment plenty of time, and knew that Barry was not going to win this argument. Lisa was the human equivalent of a hurricane, and Sara’s bossy nature combined was enough to terrify anyone. Hell, it worked on Len and the man was practically a robot. Still, the kid was lucky to have both women on his side, even if it didn’t feel like it at the moment.

Barry stepped sheepishly out of the fitting room. He was tugging anxiously on the sleeve of the grey
jacket they had put him in, and he was hunching his entire body as though he was trying to disappear. It was easy to see why he didn’t like the interview suit they had picked out for him; the kid looked fucking delectable.

The grey pants were tightly fitted, showing off the aforementioned ass Lisa had been threatening. If the man it belonged to wasn’t so skittish Bette would have been tempted to take a bite. The cherry-red button up they had on made him stand out sharply, and the jacket sleeve the kid was fiddling with did nothing to hide his form. In short, it was pretty much the opposite of the clothing Barry seemed to wear before his death. The man was wearing a fucking sweater-vest in his CCPD photo though. Bette figured it was best he wasn’t given a say in his afterlife wardrobe for now.

“We are getting you that one. I think we should get the pants in black, brown, and blue too. What do you think about the shirt, ladies? The shade of red isn’t quite right,” Shawna declared happily. Bette guessed her friend’s thoughts were about in the same place as hers. The grin she had as she was ordering Barry to get those pants had a touch of filth. Thank god Lisa had declared this a girls day, or Barry would be dealing with a pissed of Mark.

“I think you’re right, Shawna. What about a scarlet red? It’d match his complexion better,” Sara mused, pulling Barry towards the dress shirts to hold up various shades against his skin.

“Definitely, Sara,” Bette agreed with a giggle before continuing, “That way it’ll match his blush too.” She winked at Barry as she spoke, and his blush deepened. Bette liked that about Barry. He was sweet in a way most reapers seemed to lose.

“Don’t I get a say in this?” Barry pouted as he spoke. They all started laughing at that, but Lisa managed to hold herself together enough to reply.

“No. I’ve seen the photos from before your death. If we let you dress yourself you will end up with wardrobe entirely of sweaters vest, cardigans, and khaki pants. That is not acceptable if I’m going to be seen in public with you.”

Barry rolled his eyes at her words, but allowed them to continue fussing over him. He barely even complained as they shoved him back in the dressing room completely laden down with clothes for them to judge.

Barry dipped a fry in his chocolate milkshake quietly as the girls chatted around him. They were eating at the mall’s Big Belly Burger. Amaya and Kendra had joined the group, and the two had
been peppering them with questions about their morning shopping spree. The trunk of Lisa’s car was full of new clothes for Barry, and he was grateful they had gotten him a new wardrobe and attempted to take his mind off of his awful morning, even if he would have rather stayed home that day.

“So where to next, Barry?” Kendra asked, pulling Barry back into their conversation. He was stumped.

“We aren’t done?”

Apparently his question was funny for them as they all burst out laughing. If it was the first time that day they had done so, he might have been amused. As it was closer to the 100ths, he just leveled them all with a flat, unimpressed stare. He didn’t know why they would need to go anywhere else. They had already bought him so much. It was really too much. He was fairly certain his new wardrobe was larger than the one he had when he was alive. It was definitely more expensive, which was causing him enough discomfort. He didn’t want them - or Len since he had a feeling that the main credit card he had seen Lisa using belonged to her brother - spending any more money on him. They had already done too much.

“Are you being serious, Barry? All we’ve gotten in clothes. We still need to get you stuff for your room, and Sara mentioned you might like a trip to the bookstore,” Lisa informed him.

Barry could feel the color drain from his face. He wished he could hide it, but the horror her words caused to rise in him was too much. They were doing too much for him already. All that stuff was unnecessary. Not to say he didn’t want more things, but what they were suggesting was way too much. He would have a job soon. Len told him he was going to have his papers soon. He could get a job, and he could buy what he needed for himself.

Barry was already such a burden to Len and the Rogues. He had already been the same with the Natural Causes Division. They would get tired of him needing him like this. Everyone always had. Everyone had left him except Joe and Iris, but they were gone now too. Even his dad couldn’t stand to be around him after his mom died. If his own father had realized that Barry was too much of a burden without his mom, how could his new friends not? He couldn’t make the Rogues and Sara do all this for him.

“Barry? Are you okay?” Amaya’s voice sounded far away.

It reminded him of swimming with Iris in grade school. They had both been on the swim team, and Iris, per usual, used the occasion to tell Barry everything in her life and on her mind, and she had not cared to stop talking while his head was underwater. He could always hear the words through the
heavy fog the water caused, even though everyone else’s words had sounded like gibberish. He always guessed it was because even then he always wanted anything Iris was willing to share with him. Amaya’s voice had that far away quality to them.

Barry just nodded. He was fine. He just needed for them to let him return back to the Rogues Den. He could go home, unpack his new clothes, and start looking for jobs in the paper. Len had already assured him before they left that Barry no longer had an appointment for the day, so he should have plenty of time.

“I’m okay. I just want to go back to the warehouse. I’ve already got so much to put away, and I really don’t need anything else. I should get my new identity soon, so I can get all that later. The stuff for my room and maybe even a library card. Let’s head back after this,” Barry pleaded with them.

They all frowned at his words; the synchronicity these women were displaying was really starting to freak Barry out. Iris had never been this bad with her girl friends. Then again, Joe was constantly complaining that she and Barry were practically of the same mind most of the time, so maybe it was just a side effect of spending so much time together. Barry felt a dull ache in his chest at the thought; he wasn’t going to have more time with Iris like that, and he didn’t appreciate her enough when he did. He didn’t do a lot of things he should have done.

“That’s not the point,” Lisa responded to his protest as she cut into this musings. She was annoyed, and Barry did not like that. This was why he couldn’t let this behavior continue. Barry wasn’t trying to increase the burden he placed on those around him.

“I’m alright, really. I appreciate the clothes, but we’ve already gotten more than enough,” Barry tried to explain.

“Your bed is a literal pile of shit though. I know your placement with us was a little unexpected, but Len could have done better than that,” Bette stated with slight laugh.

“No kidding, Bette,” Shawna chimed in, giggling with her friend, “I wouldn’t have a dog sleeping on that. That mattress spring sticking out is a major hazard, Barry. Just because reapers heal fast doesn’t mean you should be trying to test it in your sleep.”

“Reapers heal fast?” Barry was floored. It felt like every time he had a grasp on his new existence something new came along to shake things up for him. Admittedly, this was a nicer surprise than most of them were.
“For real, Sara? Ray said you were leading him into things slowly, but you might should have mentioned that one,” Shawna said, throwing a fry at the woman in question as she spoke.

“How does it work?” He butt in before Sara could retaliate. He wanted answers, and he had a feeling that the murderous expression Sara took on as the french fry hit her square in the center of her forehead that he wasn’t going to get those answers without distracting the women from bothering each other.

At least that explained why Len had looked so bloody this morning, and he couldn’t find an injury on either of them. He had been worrying all day Len had been hiding one under his many layers. Barry didn’t know if it was better or worse that apparently he had managed to injury his friend, and that Len had just healed already.

“It just does, Barry. We’re already dead, so our bodies can devote a lot more resources into fixing us quickly. Hartley can explain things better. He’s done some test over the years. Personally, I’ve coughed up bullets an hour after being shot,” Sara explained, shooting a dirty look at Shawna as she did so, before she continued, “Now stop trying to change the subject. You want to go to Bed, Bath, and Beyond next? It’s right by the food court. We can ahead and get you some new bedding and things for your room, and we can stop at the mattress store on the way home.”

Barry open his mouth to protest. Before he could get the words out Lisa used the moment to shove several fries in his mouth, and she used the her ill-gotten opportunity to completely shut him down.

“Great idea, Sara. We can go to the library tomorrow. See, Barry, we can compromise. Now swallow those fries. You really shouldn’t chew with your mouth open.”

Barry glared at Lisa as he shut his mouth. It was completely full of fries still, but who was he to say no to free fries? He did nod his head as he did though. Barry figured that this was likely to be the best deal he got. It still made him uncomfortable. Sure, they made some good points. He is fairly sure his current mattress came from a dumpster, and he had a suspicion the cheap sheets and blanket were older than he was. They still worked though, so long as he avoided the spring. It was in the left corner by the door, and he did always prefer to sleep farther from that anyways.

“That’s great. I could really use some new candles. Carter’s smoking has been picking up lately, and if I don’t get something to mask the smell I may strangle him,” Kendra responded excitedly. Barry was a bit perturbed at how easily she was talking about strangling her husband, but no one else from their table seemed to find it odd so he let it go.

Barry joined in on the laughter that erupted at Kendra’s complaint, and he found himself relaxing.
His day may have been completely subject to the whims of the women of the Keystone and Central City reapers, but Barry supposed that was alright. He spent his entire life bending to the wishes of Iris West, so it made since his afterlife would be spent doing the same for the new women in his life.

Len watched Barry put his new sheets on his new mattress from the doorway of Barry’s bedroom. He was cursing lowly, and he didn’t seem to realize yet that he had an audience.

“Need some help?” Len drawled lowly. While he did feel a small amount of guilt at Barry’s giant leap at his words, he couldn’t hold in the laughter that escaped at his gobsmacked expression. He schooled his face as Barry’s moved into a deep frown. After all, Len wasn’t trying to upset the kid. He was merely trying to check in with Barry after his long day of shopping with the ladies.

“I’m fine. You’ve done enough today,” Barry responded quickly. He shifted nervously as he spoke, abandoning his task as the fitted sheet managed to curl into itself on the mattress.

Len frowned at the words, rolled his eyes, and moved to the opposite corner of the bed from where Barry stood. He had been watching Barry struggle for several minutes - longer than he probably should have - and so he knew Barry was just being too stubborn to ask for help.

“They didn’t bother you too much? I know they can be a lot to handle - especially Lisa and Sara - but they do mean well. Most of the time. Well, they do for you at least.” Len didn’t know how to ask what he wanted of Barry. The questions he did ask didn’t even begin to cover what he really wanted to know.

“It was… well they are a lot, but it was alright. Good even. They just… I’m sorry they got so much, Len. I know Lisa used your money to pay for it all, and I tried to stop them from getting so much, but they wouldn’t listen. We can return any of it if you’d like. All of it. I don’t need it. You’ve all done so much already. It’s…”

“Barry,” Len cut him off sternly. He hated to keep doing so. Barry was having enough trouble expressing himself as it was, but he couldn’t let him continue on this track. “I told Lisa to get you all this. I’ve probably got more money in my accounts than you made in your entire life, okay? Don’t sweat it. Actually, I seem to recall asking them to get you more than what I see. You need a cell phone. You should really have a computer too and some books that aren’t Martin’s. I take it you managed to worm your way out of the electronic and book stores?”
Barry’s frown deepened at his words. Len was not pleased at his reaction. Lisa had warned him that Barry was uncomfortable with how much Len was spending earlier, but those were the things he had told her Barry really needed. If he was going to get a job, he needed a phone at the very least.

“It’s too much, Len. I didn’t need all this. I know you feel responsible for me, but I’m not a child. As soon as you get me my paperwork, I can get a job and get those for myself. After all, it’s like you said earlier. Time is not something I’m going to be short of now, is it?”

Len decided to tackle the easiest issue first. He figured that is was going to take time to get Barry used to the cloths, bed, and set up of his new room. Instead, he decided to address his most immediate concern.

“It’s not about that, not entirely at least. How are potential employers going to get ahold of you without a phone or computer? What about if I have a job for you? It’s not often, but sometimes they do come in last-minute. Or what if you run into trouble? Tech is a pain in the ass - believe me, I’m old enough to really understand that - but it does have it’s uses.”

“That’s not it though. I didn’t even… I can get a cell phone if you need me to. The clothes and stuff though? I don’t want to be your charity case,” Barry stated firmly. Len sat down on the edge of his bed as Barry made his argument, gesturing for his companion to do the same.

“You aren’t a charity case,” Len told him quickly. Barry’s word’s made all of his protest from the day’s excursion - protest which he was constantly updated of through Lisa’s insistent text/nagging - gain meaning.

“We want you here, which means we want you comfortable too. We all died too, in case you forgot. Our deaths may not have been exactly like yours, but we do get some of what you are going through. When we went through it, someone supported us too. So please, Barry, let us be there for you okay? I don’t want you to be some random charity case. I want you to be one of us: a Rogue. We take care of our own, okay? Reapers, Rogues, all of it. Could you please let us?”

Len felt foolish. His words were felt like downright begging, but he didn’t know how else to get through to Barry. None of the other reapers he new needed this much assurance. In his experience, new reapers had just been grateful for the support. He was trying not to think why Barry had such trouble accepting this. He had a feeling he wouldn’t like the answer, and he had no more business than Barry did butting into the people from Barry's life before he died. Len didn’t need - or want - to know why or how Barry’s life made him think this way. Len couldn’t interfere any more than Barry could now.
Barry didn’t seem to know how to respond to Len’s words. He was staring at Len with a look he didn’t understand. Barry’s face seemed to show a million emotions at once, but none of them showed Len enough to know where he stood.

“I’ll take one if you’ll let me pay you back,” Barry seemed unhappy at his own words, but Len couldn’t help but feel relieved regardless. He knew as Barry spoke that he wouldn’t take money from the younger man, but he decided just as quickly that he would let Barry think he would.

“Oh, okay,” Len lied. He didn’t feel guilty for it. He knew that Barry was only trying to find his new place in the strange new world grim reapers seemed to balance. That was fine as far as he was concerned.

“Okay,” Barry agreed. He smiled at Len as he spoke. It didn’t sound like the rest of Barry’s false pretences, assuring Len he was fine when he was obviously everything else but fine. This time, Barry had a solid strength behind the simple word. Both men grinned at their agreement. Despite Len’s lie and Barry’s unique situation, the two men managed to smile mostly false grins to assure the other.
Chapter Summary

Barry and Len go to Barry's second appoint. Things do not go as expected.

Chapter Notes

The scene itself and large portion of the dialogue is inspired by the Pilot episode of Dead Like Me.

Barry sat with Len in the lobby of Keystone National Bank the day after his forced shopping spree. He was trying very hard not to fidget with the yellow post-it in his hand. He had a feeling he was failing since Len was shooting him all kinds of annoyed looks.

“You’re not doing what we talked about,” Len murmured to him. Despite his quiet tone, Barry still jumped at his words.

“I already checked out all the name tags. I didn’t see a ‘Carmine Broome’ anywhere,” Barry responded.

He had checked, and he had tried listening in on the gossip around the bank. He learned many things about the employees - from Curtis the loan officer’s affair with Shay, the office slut, the bank tellers betting pool about when Gail the wife would find out, and that the bank manager was an embezzler. None of that helped him figure out who was going to die there in 10 minutes. The estimated time of death was in 2:36, and it was creeping up quickly.

“What else are you supposed to be doing?” Len prompted. Barry could hear the patience wearing out in his voice as Barry got closer to his appointment time. He wishes he knew the answer so he could help soothe the older man, but he didn’t so Barry just shook his head. Len rolled his eyes dramatically at Barry, but he did at least explain his frustration.

“You are supposed to be looking for high risk factors. We went over this, Barry. Tell me what you see.”
Barry looked around the bank, trying to see what Len was telling him. Truthfully, nothing looked deadly to him.

Just as Barry was about to tell Len that, he saw what looked like a shadow push a banana peel from the trash and onto the floor. It was the weirdest shadow he had ever seen, and it was not only due to the shadow moving a solid object. It looked inhuman and demented. It was smaller and hunched over. It’s eyes were too big, and it’s hair looked like brushed porcupine spikes. It kind of reminded him of Gollum from Lord of the Rings. He hated it immediately. Gollum had given him nightmares as a child.

“What the fuck was that?” Barry asked Len loudly. They attracted a few looks, but Len waved them off with a soothing assurance. He then glared at Barry. Barry didn’t give a care. He was too freaked out.

“What was what?”

“I saw a… I don’t know what it was. It looked like some kind of shadow, but it moved the banana peel on the floor.”

Len frowned deeply at his words.

“It could be the graveling, but I wouldn’t bet a banana peel is the cause of death here. You can see them sometimes out of the corner of your eye. Little shits tend to cause a good bit of accidental deaths, but sometimes they are just there to stir up trouble. Considering all it did was move a banana peel, I would bet on that being the case this time. Look at the people behind the counter. They are all miserable. Any one of them could be about to go off the deep end and shoot the place up. Look at the guy on the ladder. He could fall and kill himself or someone else. Beside him, you see that woman. Definitely a tweeker. Maybe she’s about to OD in the bathroom. With a name like Carmine I wouldn’t try to bet on gender.”

Gravelings? How many things had Sara and Len been leaving out of their earlier explanations? He was about to ask when Len placed a hand on his knee, pulling his attention.

“Focus, Barry. I know gravelings can be a bit of a shock, but you need to be watching the people right now.”

“It’s the banana peel.”
Barry was sure. That thing - the graveling - had a look in its eyes. It was doing more than causing trouble. He was sure of it. He may not have had a clue what gravelings were a minute ago, but he recognized that look. Barry had been a CSI. He had meet his fair share of killers, and he knew the look they got when they were pleased with their work. Despite the creature’s inhuman characteristic, it had the same look.

“It’s probably not,” Len responded firmly, rolling his eyes yet again in Barry’s direction.

“If you are so sure, then why don’t I go throw it away? There’s no harm if it’s not going to be the peel,” Barry responded, forcing his most innocent expression on his face. He wasn’t sure what he was hoping for; Len to acknowledge Barry was right, or for Barry to be able to throw the peel away. Maybe if he threw it away than Carmine Broome could get a new appointment.

He stood up when Len did nothing but level an unimpressed stare back, but he had not made it a step before Len pulled him forcefully back down.

“Alright. I’m willing to entertain the possibility that it might be the banana peel. Now stay down.”

Barry frowned. While it was nice Len listened to him, he really did wish he could have just thrown the damn thing away. It may not have made a difference, but at least he could have tried to help.

“This is stupid Len. Why don’t we get more information so we can actually tell who the fuck this is supposed to be,” Barry exclaimed. If he was still alive, he would have sworn he could feel his blood pressure rising. Barry had been to afraid too check his heartbeat since he died. He didn’t want to find out he no longer had one.

“Less is better. It’s easier not to give a shit if we don’t know about them. Once you get the hang of it, it’s easy to spot your target. You just need practice. Don’t blame the system because you haven’t picked it up yet,” Len defended. It was Barry’s turn to roll his eyes, but he let it go after that. He didn’t have time to pick a fight with Len. This wasn’t the place anyways.

Before Len could snark back at him they were both distracted as a man pulled the gun on the tellers. Barry felt his heart sink a little. Len was right. This was going to be so much worse. Len squeezed his hand tightly, surprising Barry. He didn’t even realize he had grabbed Len’s hand. He was fairly certain he had initiated this though as Len’s hands had not moved from his lap.
“Everyone listen to me,” the man started. Even with Barry’s spike of fear, he had to admit the robber was not that impressive. He may have had a gun out, but the other hand was holding a sheet of paper he began to read from and a weird looking device Barry didn’t recognize. He was a slow reader who kept stumbling over his words. Barry couldn’t help but think the man might should have memorized his speech if those were his reading skills.

“This device is designed to detect the activation of a silent alarm. If a silent alarm is detected, I will start killing everyone. Then… I mean… I’ll start killing people.”

The robber shifted his gun to the elderly security guard, who had not even twitched towards the gun in his belt.

“Put down your weapon. On the floor.”

The guard didn’t move.

“Now! Now! Put your goddamn weapon down now.”

Len shifted in his seat towards Barry. It made him feel slightly better until he opened his mouth.

“Still think it’s the banana peel?”

The guard kicked his weapon towards the robber, his hands held high. The robber put the gun in his belt. Barry glared at Len. They had more important things to worry about right now than the other man’s (already enormous) ego.

“Everybody down on the floor. Now!” The man waved his gun around to punctuate his statement.

Barry and Len joined the rest of the hostages on the ground. Barry could feel his nerves rising. He was suddenly glad for his conversation at lunch yesterday. Sara told him she had spit up bullets an hour after being shot. Even if the man shot him or Len, they would be fine. He kept trying to remind himself of that. That didn’t make him feel much better, so Barry made sure he was still holding Len’s hand. It made him feel like a child, but he needed to be reminded of the other man’s presence. He could feel the panic creeping up on him, and he knew the last thing he needed was to let that in right now. It would just draw unwanted attention, and Barry really did not want that with a gun-wielding robber in the room. Not to mention he still had an appointment coming up, and Len would be angry.
with him if he messed this one up too.

Than man rounded everyone up toward the center of the room. Len moved Barry as behind him as possible in their current situation. That, unlike his own efforts, managed to provide Barry with a bit of comfort.

The bank workers will still rounding up cash when a woman walked into the bank with three young children. Barry felt his blood run cold. What if one of them was Carmine? It definitely sounded like some bullshit new-agey name that was so popular with new parent these day. He didn’t want to reap another child. Barry would have to eventually, he knew that, but this was too soon. Carter Grant had only died two days ago; they hadn’t even had a funeral yet.

“Curtis? Curtis? Baby?” The woman called out. Oh no. Couldn’t she see what was going on? The man was going to kill her in front of his children.

“Down on the floor!”

“Don’t you point that gun at me,” the woman responded quickly, more scorn in her voice than any sane person would have with gun pointed at them. “I’m holding a baby here!”

“Shut up,” the man responded, annoyance in his voice growing. Barry wanted to look away, but he couldn’t make himself take his eyes of her. He figured that was probably a good thing when the woman pulled a gun out of her baby carrier and pointed it right back at the robber. Barry had a feeling his eyes were close to popping out of his skull. What kind of nut job stored their gun in a hand-held carrier with an infant?

The robber seemed at a lost too.

“No one told you to stop what you’re doing. This man is still waiting for his money,” the woman spoke to the bank workers who had frozen as the new gun was put in play. They quickly got back to work.

“How many people are supposed to die again?” Barry had to ask. Len had only given him one name, but that didn’t seem right. Not in their tense situation.

“Just one. I think,” Len whispered. He sounded way to amused for Barry’s taste.
“You. You know Curtis?” The woman asked.

“Yeah,” the man she was pointing her gun at replied simply.

“I’m his wife.” Barry felt his heart drop. The cheating loan officer. He wondered who was winning that bet right now. At least someone was going to have a good day; that was assuming, of course, Carmine Broome didn’t win. From what Barry overheard earlier, there was a lot of money in that pool.

“Gail? Oh. Oh!” Barry did not have a lot of faith in that man’s intelligence either. Was everyone in this bank completely off their rocker?

“Yeah, oh. Is my baby cheating on me?” The crazy, gun-wielding mother asked. In any other circumstance, Barry probably would have felt bad for her. Her eyes were filling up with tears as she spoke.

“Ah,” the man did not seem to know how to respond. Barry did not blame him one bit. He wouldn’t want to tell that fucking psycho about the affair either.

“Tell me the truth. Is he?” The woman was persistent. Even the robber looked impressed. Although, Barry thought sardonically, that probably wasn’t difficult to accomplish. The man was an idiot.

“Yes ma’am. Yes. The whole bank knows about it.”

“Fuck. Oh my god,” once again, Barry wished they were in a different circumstance. He didn’t want to feel bad for the philandering loan officer, but it was hard not to. He would do some stupid shit too if he was married to that woman.

“Oh, mother fucker,” Gail exclaimed. She moved seemingly in a trance towards her husband’s desk and sat down in the seat across from Curtis’s chair. She had just sat the baby down beside her when she sprung back up and pointed the gun back at the same counter man.

“How long has he been cheating on me?”
“Oh. I don’t know. About two years.”

“It’s been two years at least,” his coworker cut in as she passed the last bag of money to the robber.

“Did you make love to my husband?” the woman inquired as she rounded the gun on the startled woman.

“No. God no,” she quickly assured. Barry may have thought she was lying for her own protection, but the disgust in her voice made the truthfulness of her statement obvious.

He heard Len laugh quietly beside him, and Barry dug his elbow into the man’s side. He did not want the woman to notice them, and Len’s laughing at her did not seem a good way to keep them from being shot.

The woman thankfully didn’t hear him as she had renewed her calls to her husband, twirling around the bank for a sight of him. She wasn’t going to have any luck with that. Barry had seen the man slip out with his mistress before all this started. If the gossip he had heard was to be believed, the two were probably off screwing in the bank. It seemed pretty unfair to Barry that those two asshole managed to avoid all this while he had to sit through this whole clusterfuck.

“As the woman breathed in deeply in her ranting, she accidentally pulled the trigger. Everyone in the bank jumped as the bullet lodged into the ceiling. He heard it connect with something just before the side of the bank exploded. He and Len exchanged startled looks. What if whoever he was supposed to be reaping was caught in that? How would he get their soul out without a body?

Pieces of the ceiling started to fall in. Once again, Len shifted himself on top of Barry. The debris mostly missed them, but he appreciated it all the same. Especially since Len shifted off him as soon as the pieces stopped falling.

The bank robber used the chaos to run towards the door as Barry, Len, and their fellow hostages all pulled themselves up from the ground. The robber stepped over the banana peel, and then back over as rescue workers started to flood into the bank. Barry looked over hopefully, but it was mainly firemen. He couldn’t see anyone he knew. That made since. After all, they were in Keystone, not Central.
Len didn’t say anything, but he did pull Barry close as he checked for injuries. Len’s attention made him flush. If anything, Barry should be making sure he was alright. After all, Len was the one who had pieces of the marble ceiling fall onto his back.

The Security Guard used the time wisely too. He tackled Gail, and her gun slipped from her grasp as they fell. Len caught it with his foot.

Once the rescue crew was all inside, the bank robber stepped back over the peel and ran out the revolving door. Barry was amazed. As far as he could tell, no one had died. Maybe his post-it was wrong.

“Nobody died. Does that mean we can go?”

“It’s not 2:36 yet. Whatever is on that note hasn’t started,” Len replied. The usually stoic man sounded surprised. Barry had a feeling that this death was a weird one, even by reaper standards.

A young man walked into the bank, staring at the check in his hands. Barry wouldn’t have paid it any mind, but Len stepped down on his toes, and nodded his head.

“Bank’s closed,” the guard informed him.

“ATM’s busted. I gotta cash my check.

“Sorry, Bank’s closed,” the guard shot back sternly.

“C’mon, man” the young man said.

Barry didn’t get why Len was making a big deal about that. So what? After what they just saw, why did Len want him to watch this? He tried to convey that with his eyes, but Len just shot him a look and pushed him into the complaining man. As Barry crashed into him, he saw the name on the check; this was Carmine Broome. His heart dropped, but Barry brushed his back as he hurriedly said his apologies.
Carmine slipped on the banana peel on his way back out the door, and he fell face first. His neck was snapped when a fireman tried to force his way through the revolving door.

“Huh. Guess you were right, Barr. It was the banana peel,”

“Aw. Dude that is fucked up. I just got paid. Man, this sucks. Did you know I was going to die, Len?” Carmine Broome snuck up behind them. Len just snickered a little.

“Do you two know each other?”

“Just a bit. We run in the same circles,” Len responded to Barry quickly before turning toward the now dead man with them. “C’mon, man. Sorry about the dying thing, but we can get you to your next destination.”

Barry was fidgeting in the passenger seat of Len’s Jeep. The kid obviously had something on his mind. It was starting to get on his last nerve.

“Spit it out, kid,” Len told him gruffly as he pulled to a stop at the light.

“If you knew who was on my post-it, why did you make me look around the bank so much? You knew him. You knew he wasn’t there yet. Why would you make me sweat it out? I thought it was going to be another kid.”

Barry spoke slowly. He sounded confused and more than a little hurt. Len was afraid of that. He chose his next words carefully. He didn’t want to upset Barry more than he had to, but they both had jobs to do. Len wouldn’t be doing his if he took this burden from Barry. He would just be making things worse in the long run.

“You still need practice. I know you shadowed the Natural Causes for a while, but before today you had only been on one job with External Influences, and that job ended up messy. It wasn’t necessarily your fault, but it can’t keep happening. You need to be able to spot your appointments, and for that you have to practice.”

“I did spot it though. Before you did even,” Barry responded to him. He was pouting as he spoke.
His lower lip was sticking out petulantly. Len had the sudden, strange urge to bite it, but he quickly shoved that down. This was not the time or the place for those kinds of thoughts. It was definitely not someone he should have them about either.

“I know you did,” Len sighed before continuing, “That was this time though. Are you sure you will next time and the times after that?”

Barry didn’t respond verbally. He just turned away from Len, shaking his head subtly as he did so. Len tried to reach out to Barry, squeezing his knee. Barry flinched at the contact, and Len hated himself a little in that moment.
Barry was confused when he walked into the main room for breakfast and found it almost empty. In his entire time at the Rogues Den - admittedly less than a week - he had never seen it so empty for breakfast. Natural Causes met at Der Waffle Haus every morning, so Mick was almost always out, but every other member of the Rogues usually ate together. Len and the occasional helper cooked for them every morning. It was the only meal of the day that was taken care of for them, so the Rogues rarely missed.

This morning, only Bette and a younger-looking man whose name Barry had forgotten were present. The man was completely engrossed in something on his computer screen, and the headphones he had on made it obvious he was not in a chatty mood. Bette was quietly eating cereal. She was already dressed her day job as a meter maid. She smiled at Barry as he entered.

“Morning, Barry. There some more frosted flakes on top of the fridge if you’d like some. I don’t mind sharing.”

“Where is everyone?”

“They had a job this morning. Armored truck robbery I think. Hart is working the comms, and the rest are all out,” Bette replied, sounding completely uninterested.

Barry froze. He knew how the Rogues supported themselves. They had all been very upfront about it. Somehow, knowing that right now they were all out stealing was different. It was where all his stuff had come from. Barry had the sudden urge to rip his clothes off, to go through his room and take it all back. The mattress, his wardrobe, and all the stupid little knickknacks the girls had insisted he needed. The Rogues were criminals. Barry was one too. Receiving the amount of stuff he had with stolen money was a Class C Felony. Barry had devoted over half of his life to stopping crime, only to become a criminal right after he died. A felon at that. What was wrong with him?

“Barry, are you alright?” Bette asked him, face pinched with concern. She had moved in front of him, abandoning her breakfast. The man - Hartley, but several of the Rogues called him Hart, Barry remember that now - was shooting him odd looks too, but he didn’t move away from the screen. He was still speaking softly into the microphone on his headset. He was still directing the Rogues. They
were stealing *right now*. He had worked more than one unsolved robbery case involving armored cars. Some of them had serious injuries of civilians attached. How many of those were the Rogues?

“I… did Len leave me a post-it?” Barry couldn’t think about what the Rogues were doing. What Len was doing. Len, who had been so kind and supportive to him even if he was kind of a dick. Lisa, Mick, and Shawna were out there too. He didn’t want to think about that.

“No. The list is still in his room, I think. Mark and I the only ones who had an earlier appointment today, and he took care of his before they got started. Len said he’d give you yours at lunch. Are you sure you’re alright, Barry? You seem kind of tense,” Bette told him.

“I’m fine, Bette. Thanks for asking. Since everyone is out I think I’m going back to bed. Have a good day at work,” Barry told her, rushing quickly back to his room.

Barry took of the clothes laid down in his new bed. It was all stolen, everything in his room. Paying for it at the store didn’t change that. He didn’t know why he had been pretending it did before now.

Barry laid down for a long time, but he did not go back to sleep. He was trying not to add up how many jobs the Rogues pulled off to pay for his new stuff, and he was hoping their job today wasn’t because of it. He was trying not to think about Joe and Iris and how they had once done this for him too, only when they did it all came from Joe’s CCPD salary. He was trying not to think of how disappointed Henry and Nora Allen would be if they knew what he had been doing for the last two weeks. Mostly, Barry was trying not to think. He did not succeed.

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Iris couldn’t stop fiddling with the ring on her hand as she waited for Eddie to return with their coffees. It felt weird being at Jitters again. She and Barry had practically lived in the shop all through their college years, and their love for the place had followed them into their professional careers. They usually met there at least a three or four times a week.

Being here without him now felt like she was betraying him somehow. It was an odd feeling. She hadn’t always come here with Barry, so it shouldn’t feel this odd to be here without them now.

“You alright?”
Eddie’s return pulled her from her thoughts. She tried to smile at him as he sat down and handed her drink to her. She didn’t feel like she really succeeded, but Eddie smiled back at her anyways.

“Ignore me, I’m getting lost in my thoughts again,” Iris told her companion. She smiled at him again. It felt a little more real this time. Eddie’s smile widened, little dimples forming in its wake.

“Thanks again for the coffee. It’s really good to see you, Iris. How are you holding up?” Eddie asked. Everyone had been asking Iris how she was lately. Everyone who wasn’t a West had wanted to hear that she was doing okay. She was hurting, but strong enough to bear it. It was what she told them when they asked.

Iris didn’t feel okay though. She felt empty most of the time. It was nearing two weeks since Barry died. Her best friend. The sweet little boy who always had a smile for Iris, a story, or a shoulder to cry on when she needed it. As they aged that had never changed. Barry was always there for Iris. He helped her with all her problems, big or small. She hadn’t been this long without seeing him since they met on the first day of kindergarten. He had offered her a smile and use of his crayons and that had been it. It felt like the worse kind of irony that Barry being gone meaning she needed him now more than ever before.

When Eddie asked her how she was doing she didn’t think he wanted her go to ‘I’m fine. No, really,’ response. He seemed genuinely concerned about her. His eyes were incredibly expressive. Concern was the most obvious, but she could see other emotions too.

Grief shined through his false optimism in a way she never expected to see from the handsome detective. She was reminded in that moment that Eddie had cared about Barry too. They had worked together for almost a year, and Barry had displayed a fondness for Eddie he hadn’t had for most cops. She always guessed that was because most cops didn’t realize how special Barry was. How special he had always been. Eddie was different.

“I feel like I’m drowning. Most of the time I’m feel numb, but then something sets me off, and all I can think is that I need Barry. He was the one who could always get me out of these funks, but he’s not here this time,” Iris told Eddie truthfully. She started dabbing her eyes as she spoke, trying fruitlessly to keep the tears from falling. She felt that she should be embarrassed. It was less than a year ago she worked here, and she could feel the concerned eyes of her old co-workers on her. She couldn’t bring herself to care though.

“Iris, I know I’m no Barry, but I’m here whenever you need me,” Eddie responded earnestly as he reached for her hand. She squeezed it, grateful for the support.
Many people had been claiming this recently. Promising Iris that they were there for her. What they really meant was the would bring by a casserole or what not. Something to make them feel better about themselves, regardless that Iris’s whole world was still shattered. The really odd thing was, Iris actually believed Eddie’s offer.

“Thanks, Eddie. That’s not why I brought you here though. I’m supposed to be thanking you for taking all my dad’s shifts. Crying on you isn’t exactly what I was going for here,” Iris forced out, choking slightly as she was working to push back the tears threatening to spill.

“I don’t need a thank you. I cared about Barry too. Being here for you and Joe, it’s the least I can do.”

Iris smiled a little through her tears at Eddie’s words. The man had more sincerity in his words and face then Iris had seen from any of her other well-wishers. It was nice. For the first time since Captain Singh showed up at the West house almost two weeks ago, the smile Iris gave Eddie was a real one.

When the Rogues returned back to the warehouse around lunch time they were all in a great mood. Their job had gone splendidly. Barry felt sick.

“You look green, kid,” Mick informed him when Barry joined them in the common room. Barry ignored him and headed straight for Len instead. Len who was laughing with two men Barry only vaguely recognized. Mark and Sam were the names, he thinks.

“Len, can I get my post-it. I’m on my way out,” Barry cut in. Mark and Sam were giving him odd looks as they greeted him, but he paid them no mind.

“I can get it in a minute. Where are you going in such a hurry?” Len asked, puzzled. It was a fair question. Barry hadn’t gone anywhere he hadn’t been forced to since he died. He didn’t particularly feel like going out now, but staying here just made him feel suffocated. So Barry answered with the one place he had felt truly safe since he died.

“I want to go see Sara. I figured you can get a day off, and she could take me to my appointment. Can I get my name or not?”
“Don’t be daft, I’ll take you. We’ve still got about an hour. Why don’t you hang out here, and I’ll drop you by Sara’s tonight,” Len offered Barry, smiling at him kindly. Len was treating him with the kid gloves, once again. Barry kind of wanted knock the smile off his face.

“I’d rather go now. The bus can get me there in time,” Barry told him. Mark and Sam walked off, obviously not wanting to get in the middle.

“Well, tough shit. You can’t go now,” Len’s smile was waning, and there was iciness to his tone. His words were meant as an order. He may have to work for Len as a reaper, but that didn’t mean Len could dictate his schedule.

“Why not?”

Len didn’t answer Barry this time, he just grabbed his arm and pulled him into Len’s room. It made Barry’s skin crawl. He wanted to protest, but he forced the words down. Len’s room was where his post-it was, so maybe he could leave if kept quiet.

“You can’t go right now. I’ll take you to your appointment in an hour, and you can see Sara tonight.”

“I wasn’t aware I was your prisoner, Len. Let me go,” Barry forced his hand from Len’s grasp, and he started moving quickly towards the door. Len scared him when he was like this.

Len didn’t let him go though. Instead he slammed his hand on the door Barry was trying to reach, and forced Barry back.

“What the fuck has gotten in to you?” Len asked Barry. He sounded pissed. Barry really wanted to get out of there.

“Please, Len. Just give me my post-it, so I can go to Sara’s. I’ll be back later,” Barry pleaded. Len was still blocking him in. He really hated that.

“Sara’s at work.”
“Then I can visit with her there,” Barry tried. Surely it wasn’t that big of a deal. Sara hadn’t taken him with her before, but that was because he was still so new to all this.

“Barry, it’s your dad’s first day back. She’s been working with him all day. I’m sorry you are so upset, but I’m going to need you to act like an adult for a minute. You have a job in about an hour, and you still can’t go by yourself. Chill the fuck out for a bit, okay? I’ll take you to Sara’s when she gets off,” Len spoke sternly.

Barry could tell Len’s patience was fading quickly. He wanted to keep arguing, but he knew it would be useless. Len didn’t trust him enough to let him leave. Len thought he was going go see his dad. Truthfully, he wasn’t wrong. Hearing where his dad was, he wanted to force his way out the door more than ever, but Len wouldn’t let him. Sara wouldn’t either, on the off-chance he could make it to the hospital.

So Barry, knowing he was beat, deflated, and took a seat on the small couch. Len sat with, giving him a bit of space, but still in arm’s reach. Len reached out and bumped him lightly.

“You going to tell me what this is about?”

“Do I have to?” Barry didn’t really want to, but Len hadn’t been giving him to many choices lately. He was tired of it.

“I’d rather you did, but I can’t make you talk. I can’t help either, not if I don’t know what the problem is,” Len told frankly.

He didn’t move his arm off Barry’s. Barry wished he would. After this morning he did not want to be close to Len. If they had met a month ago, it would have been Barry’s job to get him arrested. He wondered for what felt like the millionth time that day how many of his unsolved cases Len was responsible for. It was that thought that caused him to force his arm away and stand up.

“Right then,” Len started, annoyed, “Guess I get to figure this one out on my own. You pissed about our job this morning?”

“Your job,” Barry sneered back. “I didn’t know thieving counted as a job.”

“Ah. So that’s it. You already knew what we do. I know you were a cop...”
“CSI” Barry cut him off, glaring. Len glared back.

“A CSI,” Len conceded, nodding his head slightly at Barry. “You’re not anymore though. You’re never going to be again. Your new identity isn’t going to have a degree, and even if you decide to go back to school - something I don’t think you’re going to be able to pay for unless you start working with us - your identity isn’t likely to hold up with the CCPD background checks. Our jobs have been feeding you, buying you all your nice new things, and every other little thing you’ve been enjoying this week.”

“What about when it was my job, Len! How many unsolved cases did you guys give me? I wonder how many victims of yours I have had to comfort. How many bodies did I help examine? I can’t just forget about all this because I died.”

“I don’t know about the cases and your poor little victims, but you didn’t have any bodies from us. We don’t kill. It’s part of the Rogues Code. Didn’t bother going over that with you since you aren’t exactly the killing type,” Len sneered, disdain dripping from every syllable.

“So you don’t kill anyone. Is that supposed to make me feel better?”

“I’m not trying to make you feel better. You’re going to have to get there on your own for this one. Sucks you don’t like what we do, kid, but you’re going to have to get over it. It’s not changing just because you’re soft,” Len bit back. Barry couldn’t believe Len was being such an ass. Well, that’s a lie. Len did run a criminal enterprise, so it wasn’t that surprising. It was hard to mesh the Len with the man who had been so caring with him.

“I don’t think wanting to be a law-abiding citizen makes me soft.” Barry couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“Bette is one. So are most of the Natural Causes, and none of them get all uppity like you are. We aren’t going to make you help us out, and you can’t make us stop. So I don’t care how you do it, but you need to get over this. You should go get your shit together. Your appointment is across town, so we should leave soon.”

Len’s earlier reluctance to let him leave vanished entirely. He all but shoved Barry out the door. Barry ignored Lisa’s greeting and quickly went back to his room. He slammed the door, and he did what Len told him. After all, it didn’t matter how he was feeling. Barry still had a job to do in - he checked the post-it Len had finally given him - 45 minutes that was half way across town.
Chapter Summary

Len and Barry deal with their argument.

The day after their fight, Barry was avoiding Len. He had stayed at Sara’s late into the night, and he had practically ran out the door with Mick and Raymond this morning so could go to some comic book thing with Raymond, Nate, and Jax after breakfast at Der Waffle Haus.

Raymond - the bastard - had assured Len that he would watch Barry’s reaping today, so Len was ‘off the hook’ from that too. Len wanted to wring the man’s neck for it. He didn’t want a free couple of hours. He wanted to talk to Barry, and Raymond stole his opportunity.

It made Len want to hit Raymond even more than usual. Off course, with Barry still being so twitchy he was forced to let it slide. Barry wouldn’t take it well right now if Len was to let his more aggressive side. Besides, it wasn’t worth pissing off Mick. Mick tended to get touchy when anyone messed with the man, despite the fact that he refused to admit they were together most of the time. After all, they had only been sleeping with each other for 30 years. Mostly exclusive during that time too. Len couldn’t remember the last time he saw either man stray from each other, not that Mick would admit to it.

Despite that fact Len was supposed to be free of Barry today, Len was still being forced to wait for what was getting close to an hour at the Motorcar for his contact to meet him with Barry’s new identity. The man was running very late which just seemed to fit with the tone of the rest of his shitty day.

At least after this meeting, Len would have an excuse to pull Barry home. It was nearing 9:00 pm meaning that their argument was over 36 hours ago. Len was getting beyond tired of Barry’s avoidance, and as soon as the late fucking bastard he was meeting arrived, he was putting an end to it.

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Len was calling Barry for the third time in a row. He knew he should probably answer it. The silent treatment he had been using was not a mature or rational response to their argument yesterday. He may have meant what he told Len, but even he had to admit that he freaked out more than necessary. He already knew what the Rogues did, but seeing them in action - even from a distance - was awful.
He had not handled it well.

Barry’s phone stopped vibrating, and he let out a quiet sigh when it kept still. He needed more time before he faced Len. He needed to sort out his feelings because he couldn’t tell what they were at the moment.

He turned his attention away from his phone and back towards his companions. They were all staring at him. It was unsettling since they were basically sitting in a circle at their table at Der Waffle Haus. He must have zoned out too far again.

“You should answer that,” Jax spoke, breaking their silence.

“It’s nothing. What were we talking about?” Barry tried, shifting the subject. He didn’t want to talk about his fight with Len. Especially not to anyone besides the man himself.

“You can’t ignore Len just because you got in a fight. He could have been calling with a last-minute appointment,” Ray told him.

“How…” Barry doesn’t know what he was going to ask. How did Ray know about their fight? How did he know who was calling? Ray seemed to understand.

“Mick told me about your fight. Len was.... not pleased after it. I’m not supposed to say anything, but Len feels terrible.”

“Plus, he probably could have guessed from the messages Len has been sending him since those phone calls started. There been a lot by the point. The ones he’s getting now are pretty colorful. I kind of impressed with how prolific Len gets with his cursing. Barry, you should go call him back, and let him know we’ll drop you back after this. I’ve got your check,” Nate butt in, chuckling in the direction of Ray’s lap. He was apparently reading Ray’s incoming text.

Barry - mostly in the interest of stopping his conversation with the three reapers around him - took Nate’s advice and went outside to call Len. He guessed he might have been in trouble as the other man answered on the first ring, and he did not sound happy.

“You can’t just ignore my calls because you’re pissed.”
“I know. Sorry. Ray, Nate, and Jax already gave me the lecture,” Barry assured quickly. He didn’t want to get in to a fight again.

“I just got back from picking up your new identity. You going to come home so I can give it to you, or are you going to keep pouting?” Len spoke frankly. Despite the annoyance he could hear in the older man’s voice, there was a strange note of something else. Nerves mixed with something that sounded an awful lot like longing. Barry had a feeling he was probably projecting. Len wasn’t the nervous type, and he didn’t need Barry the same way Barry needed him.

“We just finished eating, and Nate said he’d drop me off. I should be there soon,” Barry replied. He ignored the comment about his behavior. As much as he would like to deny it, Barry had been pouting.

“Okay. See you soon,” Len replied quickly. He seemed relieved, which lifted a weight off of Barry’s shoulders,

“’Kay. Bye Len,” Barry said. His voice was soft with the relief he was feeling. Len didn’t sound angry at Barry’s outrageous behavior. Barry didn’t know what he would do if Len had been.

“Bye, Barry.” Len ended the phone call right after his reply. Barry was grateful. While he appreciated that Len was not as mad at him as expecting, he had still felt some discomfort at their conversation.

Their timing ended up working out perfectly, as it was right as he was hanging up that his companions joined him outside. He was quickly wrapped up in a conversation about the comic signing they had attended. Barry allowed himself to be distracted.

Len did not look pleased with Barry. He didn’t blame him. Barry had been acting quite odd, and Len had already shown more patience with him than most people bothered. Still, seeing the annoyed expression on Len’s face was putting him on edge.

“Sam Albert? I always wanted a more normal name, but I don’t feel like a Sam,” Barry told him. He just wanted to break the uncomfortable silence between them.
Once again, Barry seemed in an odd sort of fugue state. They had both been avoiding talking about their argument from the previous day, but it showed in their interactions. He felt like they were both walking on eggshells around the other.

“It available short notice, and a name like Sam Albert fades into a crowd. Sorry, Bartholomew, but the fading part is important to being a reaper,” Len informed him. Len was teasing him lightly, a small chuckle accompanying his words.

Barry wasn’t a big fan of the name, especially Albert as the only person he knew that shared the name was a complete dick. Even if Barry did miss the other CSI’s snide comments - a fact he would never admit aloud - he didn’t want to share his last name with Julian. His distaste must had showed on his face, as Len took a more serious tone and continued.

“You’re going to have to get over it. New identities aren’t easy to come by, and they are not cheap either. You are going to have to use it, or you will need to pick a job that doesn’t need supposedly valid information.”

“‘Kay,” Barry accepted before forcing himself to continue, “Thanks, Len.”

Barry went to leave Len’s room when the older man grabbed his arm. Barry felt panic flare inside his chest for a second, but he pushed it down. He was safe here. Len wouldn’t hurt him. He must not have pushed it down soon enough though, as Len dropped his arm quickly, an uncharacteristically apologetic look on his face.

“Sorry about that. Can we talk?” Len mumbled. It seemed to Barry like the man had to force the words out. Barry wished he hadn’t. He wasn’t ready to talk about this yet, but Barry had a feeling that he wasn’t going to be able to avoid this conversation any more than he had been able to avoid their argument. So rather than retreat to his own bedroom like he so desperately wanted to do, he took a seat on the couch beside Len.

“I guess,” he replied, voice equally soft. Barry needed Len to be like this right now. His earlier annoyance, while obviously still present, was brewing beneath the surface. Barry didn’t know what he’d do if Len let it out right now.

“I meant what I said yesterday,” Len told him. Barry frowned. That was not what he was expecting to hear. “I was an ass about it though. I know this is a lot for you to take in, and I could have handled things better. Lisa and Sara both explained this to me earlier. Ad noiseam.”
“We both were. Acting like asses I mean. I already knew what you did. I’m not okay with it, and I don’t know that I ever will be, but I should have just exploded like that. I’m really sorry, Len,” Barry felt like the words were tumbling out of him. Hearing Len’s remorse made it feel like floodgates opened in his mind. Being around Len tended to do that to him.

Len smiled at Barry’s words, and he felt like a weight lifted off his shoulders. He had a feeling that he and Len were far from done with the subject, but this was still better. He could handle disagreeing with Len, but Barry needed the other man too much for them to stay angry at each other.

Barry hadn’t retreated to his own room for more than a minute before Hartley burst into Len’s room, and took Barry’s place on Len’s sofa.

“So, did you and Barry kiss and make up yet?”

Len did bother dignifying that bullshit with a response. He just raised an eyebrow in Hartley’s direction and waited for the man to crack. Luckily for him, Hartley never took too long to cower before Len’s glare. He spent a good bit of his time wishing that Sam, Mark, or Hunter had been put in the Animals Division so that he could have Hartley instead.

“Fine, fine. I’ll play nice. Seriously though, you figure things out with the kid? You can play this off all you want with everyone else, but Bette and I saw how fucked up that kid looked when he found out we pulled a job yesterday.”

“Who the fuck are you calling a kid? You’re the same age as Barry,” Len pointed out in lieu of proper response. He hadn’t even wanted to have this conversation with Barry, so there was no way in hell he was getting into things with the young reaper who seemed so determined to invade their privacy.

Besides, Len couldn’t even begin to explain things with Barry if he wanted to because Len had absolutely no idea where they stood. He knew that he hated being in a fight with him. That seeing Barry upset drew out a kind of fierce protective instinct he hadn’t known he was still capable of forming. He knew that Barry needed him, and he was starting to think he may need Barry too.

“I may have been 26 when I died, but I died in 1969. I think that gives me the right to call him ‘kid.’
Or is that name limited for you and Mick?” the younger man took Len’s bait, responding with a sneer.

“Call him whatever you want, Hart. Just do it somewhere else,” Len told the younger man pointedly.

“You still didn’t answer my question,” Hartley responded. At least he got off Len’s sofa as he spoke though. Hartley may be an annoying asshole at times, but at least he knew when he wasn’t wanted.

“I’m not planning to. You want to gossip, go find Lisa or Shawna. I’m sure they’ll indulge you,” Len told the man, pulling his signature smirk in place. Hartley starting smirking back at Len, but he supposed that was okay since he also moved towards the door. He was just about to shut Len up in his room when he turned around to bite back.

“Well I guess that answers that. You wouldn’t be nearly this amused you two were still fighting. You’ve been acting like a puppy that lost its favorite chew toy all day. Guess you got it back.”

Unfortunately, Hartley managed to escape before the paper ball Len threw hit him. Len decided he would have to get his revenge the next morning, as Hartley was partially right. Now that Len had made up with Barry, he couldn’t bring himself to care about Hart’s insolence.
Barry Gets (Another) New Job

Chapter Summary

Barry starts a new job outside of his work with the Rogues.

Barry walked into the Happy Times offices for his meeting with a sense of dread. It was not unlike his first time there in that regard. Cindy the receptionist was just as dismissive of him, and she sent him to his meeting with H.R. Wells quickly.

“Sam Albert, what a pleasure to meet you. I’m Harrison Wells, but please, call me H.R.”

H.R. greeted him quickly as he strolled into the small office. He was much more friendly this time, Barry noted. It made sense. Last time he had met the man just after making one of his employees cry. Sam Albert wasn’t a threat to the Happy Time environment in the way Barry Allen had been. Sam was a 19 year old kid who was coming in for his first real job. He was still not pleased about his fake age, but that Len assured him that the younger he was when his id started, the longer he could keep it. As much as he disliked it, Len had made a good point.

“Hi, H.R.” Barry responded. He wasn’t sure where to go from here. The man already had his resume, which now consisted of nothing but a fake high school diploma and a pretend job working at the delivery service with Nate and Jax.

It irked him to lie about past job experiences, but they had made a good point when they offered to lie for him about it. Barry was likely to get a better position if this wasn’t his first job, and since he was having a hard enough time losing his degree and profession as it was, he was willing to stretch the truth this time. After all, Barry had spent a whole two days helping the men for free, so he could fake it well enough for an interview.

“So, I’ve looked over your resume, and I have a few positions available that I think may suit you. Before I make up something formal for anyone, I like to chat with them for a bit. I find I can place people better if I get a feel for who they really are. So tell me, Sam, who are you?”

Barry knew he had to look surprised. This what not what he was expecting. Every instinct he had was screaming at him to get away quickly, but he forced himself to stay seated. H.R. was an odd, yet personable man. He was just trying to get a feel for ‘Sam.’ Regardless, the only answer he could think after hearing H.R.’s question was ‘Oh, shit.’
H.R. loved his job at Happy Times. Every new temp was a chance for him to search through who a person was, and what each of them could offer to the world. He could look through their skills, resumes, and references all day long, but he had found the best way to truly gauge who was best for what job placement was to sit down and have a conversation with them. It was that personal touch that made him the best in the business.

He had a good feeling about the young man in his office. Sam had been incredibly nervous throughout their interview, that much was plain to see. H.R. was sure that at some point in his life that he had people more nervous to meet with him, but none of them came to mind. However, despite Sam’s nervous disposition, he saw a lot of promise in the young man. He remarkably bright, and he was also a kind and charming young man. He had many openings that Sam might be well suited for, but he knew without a doubt where a personality like Sam’s could do the most good.

H.R. was determined that the young man in his office was the perfect new filing clerk for Happy Times. He was smart enough to pick up the job despite his lack of experience, and Caitlin and Cisco could really benefit from having someone like Sam in Ronnie’s old workspace. After all, as much as he hated to replace one of his favorite co-workers, it was time for Happy Times to get a new member of the family.

So while he decided on how best to make his offer, H.R. was making the pair some espressos. Luckily Sam had accepted his offer for a coffee, as he was just in need of a caffeine fix as he was time to formulate his offer. He was determined to get Sam to join their family, but it was obvious that the man needed something to make him more comfortable first. He wasn’t too worried though. After all, it was Happy Times! With a place like this, who wouldn’t want to stick around?

“Let me get this straight. Rather that giving me a temp position somewhere else, you want to offer me a job here at Happy Times?” Barry couldn’t believe his luck. Then again, he also wasn’t sure what kind of luck this was, so he decided for now to just go with it.
On the one hand, a guaranteed $12.50 an hour starting rate with a guaranteed 25 hours a week and flexible hours was better than he had been hoping for. Since he didn’t need to worry about rent, that wage would be able to more than cover his needs. It would still take awhile to pay Len, Sara, and the others back, but it was more than he thought he could make as Sam Albert.

On the other hand, this place gave him the creeps. Plus, something about taking the job that belonged to a man whose murder he had helped investigate was unsettling, especially since they shared a killer.

He had no clue how this offer even happened. Barry had been so uncomfortable since arriving at Happy Times, and he knew it had to have shown. It felt like he could barely force words out, but apparently the man had seen something in him.

“Yes, sir-ee. I think you would be the perfect addition to the Happy Times family. I know you don’t have any experience with a position like this, but I am fully confident you can pick it up in not time. You seem like a bright kid, and here at Happy Times we always want to encourage talent wherever we find it. So, what do you say?”

Barry wanted to tell H.R. thanks but no thanks, and he wanted to leave the creepy office. He didn’t want to spend his afterlife in a place with this much false cheer. He wanted to be able to work in a place where he wouldn’t have to see the fiancee of a man whose life he hadn’t been good enough to save. He didn’t want to see nice, normal people and be reminded what that monster had done to him, Ronald, and so many others. Life didn’t tend to work out for the way he wanted though, and his afterlife was proving to be the same way.

“I’ll take it. When can I start?”

Cisco was bored out of his skull. Caitlin was sitting quietly next to him, and as much as he wanted to bother talk with her, he could tell it wasn’t the time. It never seemed to be anymore. She had been so subdued since Ronnie was killed.

He couldn’t blame her. Cisco hadn’t been normal since then either, and Ronnie had just been his friend. One of his best friends, sure, but Caitlin was supposed to spend her life with Ronnie. It was only three weeks before they were supposed to be married. Cisco’s heart hurt every time he thought about them. He imagined Caitlin couldn’t stop thinking about it at all.
“Cisco! Caitlin! Just the two people I was looking for!” H.R. pulled Cisco from his thoughts. Behind him was a tall, skinny young man. He was crossing his arms protectively in front of himself, and Cisco could feel the tension bleeding from him.

“H.R., what do you need?” Caitlin asked. She sounded tired. She usually did these days.

“This is Sam Albert, our newest file clerk. I was hoping you two could show him the ropes around here,” H.R. responded, enthusiastic as always.

At his words, he could see Caitlin tense. Cisco was tempted to yell at the man. Couldn’t he see that Caitlin was not ready for that yet? Then again, H.R., for all his attributes did tend to see what he wanted in the people around him. Cisco understood that they needed to replace Ronnie, but Caitlin shouldn’t have to train the guy to replace her dead fiancee.

“I’ve got it. Cisco Ramon, nice to meet you.” Cisco hurriedly introduced himself. He also stepped out of his cubicle and into the one H.R. shoved Barry in to, making it obvious that he was going to take care of this.

He knew that if he did not jump on this right away then Caitlin would. She had been working with a kind of obsessive fervor since returning to work the week before. Considering they had been down two clerks the week before, and most of the office for Ronnie’s funeral, the help had been nice at first. It had only gotten worse since that first day, and it had long since reached the point that Cisco was concerned.

“Sam,” the man said, nodding shyly at Cisco. His arms tightened around himself and his bag. The poor guy was as high-strung as Caitlin. Cisco just hoped that Sam’s reasoning wasn’t as bad as Caitlin’s.

Barry and Len were driving in his car quietly. It was about five minutes until 10:17 pm, and Barry needed to be another mile down the road for his appointment. Len had already tried to ask Barry about his meeting at Happy Times, but Barry couldn’t bring himself to tell him anything much. He was only able to say that he started a new position Happy Times that day.
Len had seemed excited for him, and asked him for more details about the job, but Barry couldn't make himself talk about it. He had spent his day at another dead man’s desk. The desk of the man the Butcher brutalized the day before he did the same to Barry.

Barry had mentioned that he knew about Happy Times through work, but he had refrained from telling his boss that it was because of the Butcher case. He had a feeling Len would not be pleased that he went to a place connected with his killer for a new job. Len would probably be even more displeased that he had taken a job there.

Caitlin Snow had still been so upset. It made sense, he supposed. When Barry had told her that Ronald died, she had been heartbroken. He knew that she wouldn’t recover easily, but after leaving Happy Times that day he hadn’t spared the woman another thought. His own day had been too tumultuous, and the days since his death hadn’t been any better. Barry wished desperately he could help her, but how could he when he couldn’t even help himself?

Barry couldn’t talk about Cisco either. The man had been kind and helpful, but he had obviously been overcompensating. Barry would have known that even if he hadn’t known something was off even if he hadn’t known that he was taking Cisco’s dead friend’s old job. Cisco’s kindness, even if forced, had helped him ease into his new job, but Barry knew the other man had picked up on his discomfort too. Barry had tried not to show it, but watching the grief play out around him while pretending he didn’t know the cause was a strain on his already fragile nerves.

So Barry stayed quiet, and Len politely followed his lead. Barry shook himself out of his out his head when Len pulled over.

“We’re here. You ready?” Len, thankfully, read Barry’s mood and kept things simple. Barry was a little confused. They were in the middle of an empty highway.

“Who are we supposed to be reaping? There is nothing around here,” Barry asked. He may have been ready, or as close to it as he was to reap someone, but he wasn’t sure what he was supposed to do here.

“I don’t know yet. Someone’s coming though. C’mon. Follow my lead on this one,” Len told Barry. He stepped out of the car, and Barry did the same. He followed Len around to the front of the car. He was impressed when Len opened the hood. He had to admit, playing the abandoned motorist seemed like a good play here, even if it did remind him of a serial killer kind of move.

“Does this actually work?”
“Not always,” Len told him. As usual, his voice was measured. “Works better with the girls than with us too, but it’s our best bet. Come a little closer, and pretend like you are looking with me. We’ll have better luck.”

Len lightly pulled Barry closer as he spoke. The older man was considerate with his movements, giving Barry plenty of room to move away if he needed to, despite their proximity. Their arms were brushing, but otherwise Barry still had his space. He appreciated that. After his day he really did need it, but Len’s solid presence beside him was grounding.

They didn’t have to wait long before a car pulled up beside them.

“You boys need some help?”

The man who spoke was a middle aged man with a southern accent. Considering he was likely the only other person around for miles, Barry had a feeling this was probably his guy. Len seemed to agreed.

“Well thank you for stopping. My name is Len, and this here is Barry. Engine’s having some trouble. I don’t know that we can fix it from here, but we’ve got someone coming to pick us up. Say, you look so familiar. Are you one of those Bronwen boys? I think I know your old man.”

Barry was absolutely floored. Not only did Len pull a very convincing southern accent seemingly out of his ass, but he was going to get a name confirmation too.

“I am! The name’s Clark. How do you know my pops? We do see too many folks around here from Mississippi.”

The man shook Len’s hand as he spoke, and he happily relaxed into pleasant small talk. Considering how much of an ass Len tended to be towards anyone that wasn’t a Rogue, Barry was always amazed watching him work. His standoffish manner tended to disappear around the people whose names ended up on their post-its.

“I’m actually from Mississippi. I’m just here visiting my little cousin, Barry. Barry, stop being rude and say hello. It’s not every man who would stop on the side of the road to help two strangers.”
Len’s continued use of the southern accent was starting to weird Barry out a little, but he pushed that down in favor of shaking the offered hand. He allowed his grip to linger for just a second, separating the soul of Clark Bronwen from his body as he went.

Len waved the man off for them before they both climbed back in the car. They had barely shut the doors before Clark Bronwen’s car drove off the side of the road at the upcoming bend, and the soul of the now deceased man popped up in the back seat. Len seemed completely nonplussed, merely starting the car and turning back towards Keystone.

“Hello again, Clark. You alright back there? Barry and I here to get you to your next stop.”

“That’s not how I thought dying would be like. Oh, well. I take it you boys aren’t really from Mississippi then.”

Barry went to answer, but Len thankfully took care of it for him. He had been pushing Barry to take a more proactive role lately, but his quiet discomfort from their ride earlier must have stuck with Len. Thankfully Len had stopped using the accent after Clark’s death. It had been odd hearing it come from Len instead of his usual drawl.

“Dying’s not so bad, but it’s the next part that I think you have really been waiting for. Your lights should be popping up any minute now. To answer your question though, Barry is Central City born and breed. I’m from Alabama, though, if it helps. I haven’t been around that way in a long time though.”

Clark Bronwen, seemingly appeased by Len’s words, disappeared in the lights that formed beside the car before he or Barry could respond. Barry paid him no mind.

“You’re from Alabama?” Barry was surprised. Apparently that accent wasn’t as fake as he thought.

Len just laughed at Barry’s surprise.

“I haven’t been to Alabama since 1880, but yeah. Lisa and I were both born and raised down in Mobile. We didn’t make it up to Central until right before we died. Believe it or not, kid, there is still plenty you don’t know.”

Barry agreed with Len’s statement. Sara had told him that Len was one of the oldest reapers she
knew, but somehow he still didn’t think that Len could have died almost 140 years ago. He didn’t think Len could have been from anywhere but Central with the deep, Central City accent. Apparently, Barry still had a lot to learn about his afterlife, and about a lot more than just his job.
Shocks

Chapter Summary

Barry goes through another week in his afterlife.

Working at Happy Times was, unsurprising, a rather dull endeavour. Other than the first half-day Barry had worked on the previous Friday, Barry spent his entire tenure at Happy Times so far helping Cisco and Caitlin collate thousands of documents on this quarter’s job placements. Caitlin had assured him this was only done about four weeks out of the year - one for each quarter.

Barry would have been encouraged by that news if they were more than two days into the task, but her statement meant he had three more days of mind-numbing boredom ahead. They were less than half way through, and despite Cisco’s attempts to entertain the trio, Barry was about ready to start pulling his own hair out for entertainment. Luckily, this boredom was accompanied by an extra two days of work for the week, so at least when he died again from the boredom he would have some money this time around.

“Cisco, I swear to god, if you don’t stop with the puns I’m going to shove this entire stack up your ass. There is absolutely no reason to pun about paperwork!”

Barry struggled to hold back his laughter at Caitlin’s fiery yet shrill admonishment. He was not entirely successful. While he definitely agreed with the woman, as he never needed to hear the kinds of awful punning capable about filing, he also didn’t want to upset Cisco.

“Aw, Cait. Don’t lie you love my punning. See, even Sam is amused. My puns are the shit,” Cisco told her proudly. The dramatic hair flip he added to the statement made Barry’s quiet chuckles turn into full-fledged laughter.

“Oh, god Sam. What have you done. It’s never going to stop now,” Caitlin bemoaned. She winked at Barry conspiratorially as she spoke, and Barry just laughed harder. It wasn’t nearly that funny, but after two full days of collating even Cisco’s puns were almost amusing.

“Sorry, Caitlin. If it helps, I was laughing because the next time Cisco puns I had decided to hold him down for you.”
Caitlin joined in on his laughter, and Cisco gasped dramatically. The man then pretended to faint into the chair behind him, tucking his head into his arms on the table as sobs began emanating from his small frame. If Barry hadn’t been able to tell his new position was to cover him his own laughter, Barry would have felt terrible.

As it was, Barry continued on with his pile. He was almost back into full swing when Cisco broke their silence once again.

“My puns aren’t just bad. They’re tearable.”

His words may have smoothed things over, had the man not ripped a sheet of paper as he spoke. Barry burst out into laughter once again, and Caitlin threw her most recently bound stack at him.

Lisa sat with Barry and Sara at Der Waffle Haus, spinning her seat back and forth as they waited on their food. The two were chatting idly about Barry’s new job, and she had long since tuned out their words. If Barry was so bored with the new gig, she didn’t know why he was staying there. Much less why he was bothering to talk to for the past ten minutes about it.

She had a fabulous day herself, not that either of her friends had bothered asking. She having good luck with her most recent boyfriend. The diamond bracelet he bought her day was easily worth $10,000, although she would have prefered yellow gold to the white gold he had chosen. She definitely wasn’t going to be keeping it, but at least it was shining prettily on her wrist for now.

He was the CEO of some boring ass tech company, and she was completely confident that by the end of the month she would she would have everything she needed for the $100,000 pay off she wanted from him. After all, it was never a good idea to violate your pre-nup when your company is based off your wife’s family fortune. Then she could trade her current bling for something more her style.

“Lisa, you know it wouldn’t kill you to pay attention,” Sara cut into her musing. Lisa, resigned to join their conversation, pulled her attention away from the pretty trinket on her wrist, as she raised a single eyebrow at the blonde.

“If Barry keeps talking about filing, I think it might.”
Sara looked affronted for Barry at her words, but the boy in question simply flushed. She felt slightly guilty as at the hurt look that crossed his face, and she briefly considered apologizing before the Vincent Steelgrave, the counterman, placed their meals in front of them.

“Vinny, do you happen to have the time,” she inquired.

“Quarter till 8, doll. You got something to be doing instead of eating up that food we just cooked you?”

“I’m right where I need to be. Thanks Vinny,” she responded, squeezing his arm affectionately. Sara noticed what she was doing, and quickly stood up, dragging Barry to his feet as well.

“Why are we moving?” Barry asked as he scrambled to pick up his plate before Sara dragged them to far out of range. Lisa followed them much more leisurely. Assuming Vinny rounded they probably had a minute or two to get seated.

They moved to a corner both by the bathrooms, and their food was undisturbed although two running teenage punks did almost knock down Barry. Her icy glare caused them both to flee to the bathrooms, so by the time she joined the other two at the table, Sara had already started eating again.

“Please tell me Sara is bullshiting me, Lisa. Did you really only drop me off because you have an appointment?” Barry’s hurt expression was back at his words, alongside a hint of anger. That just wouldn’t do.

“Don’t be silly, Barry. It’s not the only reason I dropped you off. It’s just happened to be convenient.”

Barry went to argue. She could see the petulant expression gearing up, but before he had a chance there was a loud bang coming from the men’s room. She knew those little punks were up to no good. After all, anyone that had firecrackers stuffed in their pockets rarely were. She would know; she had swiped a few from them.

There was a great rumbling noise from below, and something seemed to shoot up in the floor in front of the counter right where the three reapers had been sitting. The water completely dampened the area, and it shook the building heavily too.
The neon “Der Waffle Haus” sign fell lose as the tremors abided. It fell directly behind Vinny, barely missing the man. Unfortunately for him, it fell directly in the giant puddle of water. Vinny stiffened before he fell, the shocks still echoing faintly along the water’s surface.

Most of the patrons looked shocked too, but she and Sara were completely unaffected. That is, until they looked at Barry. Their young companion had gone completely white, his fork was fallen onto the plate, and he looked terrified.

Lisa was itching to pull Barry away, but Vinny showed up beside her.

“Well that just fucking sucks,” he stated, staring at his own body across the restaurant with a look of disbelief.

“You go, Lisa. I’ve got him,” Sara told him, dragging Barry behind her once again. This time the duo left the restaurant behind. Lisa followed them once again after leaving a bundle of cash on their table for Gideon. The woman was a little preoccupied at the moment, so she figured she wouldn’t bother her for a check.

Lisa wanted to follow Barry and Sara, but she had her job to do so instead. She turned to Vinny before speaking.

“How about you and I get out of here? I’ve got some things to show you that are going to blow you away.”

Unfortunately Vinny didn’t get the pun, but he followed her up the road anyways.

Sara was worried about Barry. He was basically catatonic, now that the fear had faded from his face. She felt a wave of anger for Lisa’s carelessness, but she shoved it down. It wasn’t Lisa’s fault that Barry was this way. The other woman, while she could have warned them that she joined them for a job, hadn’t known that Vincent dying would affect Barry this much. Truthfully, she was a confused about it herself. Barry had been around plenty of deaths since his own. It was a requirement of being a reaper, and none of the other seemed to affect Barry the way this one was.

Thankfully, Lisa had texted her that Len was on his way to meet them. She had managed to get
Barry to her apartment, and he was bundled tightly in her softest blankets beside her on the couch. She had tried to give him a sugary coffee - Barry’s favorite - to soothe him, but he hadn’t done anything other than stare at the cup since she handed it to him.

Len pushed his way through her door without slowing down, and Sara frowned at him.

“You don’t have a key,” she stated. He just looked at her like she was an idiot. She did not appreciate that.

“I’m a professional thief, and picking a deadbolt isn’t exactly difficult. I thought you wouldn’t want to be pulled away,” he told her as he approached. He kneeled down in front of Barry, moving the untouched drink to the table behind him, and replacing it with his own hands.

“Barry? Are you alright?”

Sara was tempted to smack Len. Of course Barry wasn’t alright. She was about to do so when Barry seemed to jolt out of his daze.

“Len?”

“Yeah, Barry. I’m here, and so is Sara. What do you need?” Len tone was smooth and gentle. Sara was calmed a little, and she could see his tone relaxing Barry as well.

“Where’s Vincent? Is he alright?”

Sara’s heart squeezed painfully in her chest. Of course that was it. Barry like Vincent, and the older man had returned the affection. Barry was the only adult she knew of the Vincent had taken the time to make his breakfast’s into smiley-faces. When she asked the man about it he had told her that Barry needed some more brightness in his life.

“Vincent’s fine. Lisa’s taking care of him. I’m sure he’s already gone to the other side,” Sara told him.

“What about before though. The shocks. He had to have been hurting so bad.” Barry’s voice was so
soft, like he was afraid of his own words, or more accurately afraid of Sara’s answer. Luckily Len took this one.

“He was fine. Lisa told me she got him out before he died, so he wouldn’t have felt a thing.”

“I did though. I felt everything. Rip reaped me hours before I died, and I felt every little thing. The cuts and slashes hurt, but the shocks were the worst. I don’t want Vincent to know what that feels like,” Barry told them, looking down ashamed as he spoke. His eyes were filling with tears, and Sara’s known hers had to be too. Barry’s words didn’t add up though.

“I thought Butcher was known for knives,” Len asked. He looked, well, Sara didn’t know what was going on in the man’s head. He looked so sad for Barry, angry, and like he wanted to wrap the younger man in his arms and never let go. Sara was inclined to agree. She also was inclined to kick Len for the thoughtless question, even if she too wanted to know the answer too.

“We kept the shocks out of the papers. There has already been a couple of copycats attempts, so the CCPD kept a tight wrap on everything they could with the Butcher. He uses a cattle prod, along with the knives. I always thought the prod was odd addition while I was working the case, but it makes sense now. It hurts so bad, in a way the knives just can’t. I don’t want Vincent to know how the shocks felt,” Barry told them. His voice was completely monotone, but he had started crying harder as he spoke.

Len couldn’t hold himself back more at Barry’s words. The man flung himself upwards, beside Barry, and wrapped the younger man in his arms tightly before Sara had even processed the horror that arose in the wake of Barry’s words. Barry leaned into Len’s arms, seeming to collapse on him. Sara, not knowing how else to help, rubbed Barry’s back as he cried into Len.

__________________________________________________________________________

As Barry sat at the public library computer he couldn’t stop himself from looking around every five minutes. He knew he wasn’t supposed to be doing this, but he couldn’t stop himself. Other than hearing that his father was now officially back to work, and he hadn’t heard or seen anything about his family since he watched them all Sara’s tiny computer screen. He had to know what was going on with them, so Barry decided to use the best tool in his arsenal to get what he needed: social media.

After watching what happened to Vinny earlier that week, Barry felt like his mind was in a fog. The CCPD had worked so hard to make sure the families and loved ones of the Butcher’s victims didn’t know how badly they had suffered at that bastard’s hands. Barry had known that was a blessing, which made it that much worse to him that Joe, Eddie, Patty, and the rest of his friends at the CCPD
didn’t have the same luxury. He just hoped Joe hadn’t told his dad or Iris. At least they could be spared.

Between this worry, and his week watching Caitlin, Barry had to see how the people he loved were holding up. Caitlin had seemed so sad, but she wasn’t completely lost. She had Cisco and H.R. watching out for her at Happy Times, and now she had Barry too. He hoped she had someone at home as well.

He checked Wally’s accounts first. He wanted to ease himself in, and after seeing how upset Wally had been at Barry’s funeral he was worried. Wally’s stuff looked the same as he remembered, other than a letter he posted stating his acceptance to Central City University in the fall. Barry was happy for him. He had loved his own time at CCU, and he had a feeling their engineering program would be excellent for Wally. He had always shown such joy at engine work.

Iris’s accounts were next. He knew Iris’s pages were going to be hard for him too look at, but he never felt the need to see his best friend more so than ever before. Since Barry wasn’t allowed around her anymore, this would have to do. She hadn’t posted much, and what little he saw seemed to be related to her work CCPN. A few of her articles were doing well, including a piece she wrote about him. Barry tried to read it, but he hadn’t gotten past the first sentence. It was too much right now, so instead he wrote the title on a piece of scrap paper so he could see it later.

Joe’s didn’t have much more than he remembered. He had never posted much that wasn’t about his kids and that hadn’t changed. The only real difference was that their were several more post about him. Joe had never been fond of social media other than what it could do for his cases. Barry and Iris had to force him to get a Facebook. He printed out a picture Joe posted of Barry’s first day at with CCPD Joe had put online. Iris brought them lunch, and the three were smiling happily at the camera. He didn’t care for once that he was spending Len’s money, as his own had yet to come in. Barry was just happy he was going to have a picture of his family again.

Barry hesitated before bring up Henry Allen’s page, although he did bring it up for his last few minutes. His dad’s page was nearly identical to Joe’s. He had posted one or two things relating to his field, but every other post had been about Barry or calls to bring the Butcher to justice. His dad seemed so heartbroken, and Barry finally stopped holding his tears in. The obvious grief Henry was displaying was bad enough, but it was his father’s most recent post that broke him. Henry Allen was having a yard sale the next Saturday, and he could already tell from the pictures posted that some of what would be disappearing from Henry’s life were Barry’s things.

He couldn’t believe that the last conversation they would ever had was Barry being the world’s largest piece of shit to his father. Henry had only been trying to help, and Barry had spat in the face of that care. He quickly printed a second picture from Henry’s page. This one was from his 11th birthday with both of his parents smiling happily behind Barry as he blew out his candles. Barry paid for his two pictures, and quickly left the library.
He understood why Len and Sara were so adamant he leave his own life behind. The hole in his chest that had been there since he lost his life and his family felt larger, more raw. Barry didn’t care. He may be dead, but he wasn’t letting go of his family any more than he had too.
Wally, Joe, and Henry finish preparing for the yard sale. Barry spends an evening with Sharks.

When Wally helped Joe drop off the last couple of boxes off at Dr. Allen’s home, he couldn’t stop the relief from welling in his chest. It was the last of the things from Barry’s apartment. Joe, Iris, Henry, and some of Barry’s other friends had grabbed some of the pieces from his life, but the rest of Barry’s things were currently taking up Henry’s living room. It was all priced, sorted, and ready to be sold later that week at Henry’s yard sale.

“Thanks for all the help, guys. Can I get you anything,” Henry offered them quietly. Henry tended to do everything quietly these day. Wally hadn’t know Henry Allen before Barry’s death, but he had a feeling that the man’s subdued demeanor was new. He supposed that made sense for a man who lost of his son, especially since Henry now had no family left.

Unlike Henry, Joe’s response was much more vibrant. Not to say that Joe wasn’t obviously feeling Barry’s absence, but he expressed it in a different way. His father had been relentlessly pushing forward in every aspect of his life. He had been demanding a good bit of family time which Wally and Iris both were only too happy to give, and he had been pushing the CCPD to let him back on the Butcher case.

Wally knew that no one else from the precinct, including Joe’s partner, had been taken off the case, but Joe was deemed too close. Considering Joe had raised Barry, he privately agreed it may have been a smart call. Wally was never admitting that to Joe.

“A beer would be great if you’ve got any. What about you Wally?”

“I’ll take a beer too,” Wally directed at Henry. The words were barely out of his mouth before Joe smacked him lightly upside the head. He probably should have expected that. His mom never cared, as long as he was careful, but he supposed it made sense his cop father wouldn’t be okay with underage drinking. Thank god Joe hadn’t figured out about his other proclivities yet.

“Get him a coke.”
The doctor chuckled lightly as he pulled out two drinks - one beer and one coke - and handed them out.

“Thanks. How are you holding up, Henry?”

The doctor’s small smile dropped at Joe’s question. The look that replaced it was something Wally didn’t recognize. It was dark, angry, and there was more heartbreak than Wally knew what to do with. Wally suddenly felt a strong urge to run out of the house and wait in the car, but he pushed it down. Henry Allen chuckled darkly before he answered.

“How do you think I’m doing? I just lost my child. Barry was the only family I had left in this world, and now he is just gone. Seriously, Joe, I can’t… I can’t get into this right now. Take your time to finish your drinks, I’m going to go lie down. You can let yourself out.”

The doctor was out of the room and halfway up the stairs before the shock on Joe’s shifted towards remorse. Wally didn’t know what to make of that. He hated seeing the man vulnerable, something he had unfortunately been getting increasingly used to after Barry’s murder. He was sure Barry would have known how to fix this, but Wally had no idea.

“Sorry about that, Wally. I shouldn’t have brought things up with you around,” the guilt in Joe’s face increased at his words. His father must have been able to read something of the mess of emotion he was feeling. He couldn’t take it. He chugged the rest of is coke, threw it away, and wrapped his arms around Joe. His father jumped before tightly returning his embrace.

“It’s fine, Joe. Can we go home now?” Wally asked. Joe’s grip tightened, and Wally slumped into the tight hug. He really hoped he hadn’t just made things worse.

“Yeah, son. Let’s go,” Joe pulled back after he finished speaking. The watery look in his eyes contrasted with the bright expression he shot Wally. Joe put his unopened beer back in the fridge, and pulled Wally by his hand towards the door. This time it was Wally’s turn to tighten their hold.

Bette was surprised when Len asked her to take Barry to his appointment today. Other than Barry’s day with the group of Natural Causes nerds, Len had taken Barry to every appointment so far. It would have been amusing to watch, if Bette wasn’t worried the reason Len stuck with Barry so
much had more to do with the fragility of Barry’s mental health then Len’s poorly concealed attraction to the new reaper.

It was understandable that Len was finally starting to give Barry a bit more independence, or at least a different babysitter. He hadn’t been like this any new reapers before her, and while Barry obviously appreciated Len’s attention, it seems Len had finally decided to step back a little.

Even though it really was past time for Barry to be working with other reapers, Bette still could not figure out while she had been chosen. She and Barry got on well enough, but he was far closer with the Natural Causes group and Lisa. She had never spent time with Barry outside of a group until now. They were having a lovely time at the aquarium though, so maybe this was why Len had chosen her.

Bette was off that day, so she picked up Barry from work around midday, and the two reapers had been making their way through the aquarium for nearly two hours now. It was getting close to Barry’s appoint though, so the two had made their way into their final destination. Bette had a bad feeling about it being the room with the Great Whites, but Barry was too excited about all the animals to notice her unease.

Barry’s love for science apparently was not related solely to his work as a CSI. The kid was better than a tour guide, prattling on and give her an astonishing amount of information about every animal they passed. Bette never would have expected to be so amused at what was basically a science lecture.

“... Great Whites really are incredible animals. They are the largest predator fish in the world, but humans give them a bad rap. Well, Jaws did and people followed. They don’t even like to eat humans most of the time. Most Great White attacks are really just sample bites. Kind of sucks for the people they take a chunk out of, but there is a reason most shark attack victims live. Human meat just isn’t that great, and…”

“Barry,” Bette cut him off.

“I’m sorry. I know I’m rambling to much again. Iris is always telling me - told me - to scale it back, but I just get so excited about this kind of stuff. You really could have shut me up before now,” Barry told her sheepishly.

“It’s not that. It’s just getting close to time, and we still have no clue who ‘Shay Lamden’ is. I’d love to hear the rest later though,” Bette responded, smiling kindly as she looked around them for potentials.
She really wasn’t sure she actually did want to hear the rest of his talk. He looked like a kicked puppy when he was apologizing though, and she couldn’t stand those sad doe eyes. Besides she did have fun with the rest of their aquarium visit, and the Rogues always had enjoyed Shark Week together, so she figured it couldn’t be too bad.

“Okay. Any clues?” Barry agreed easily as he joined her in her search.

“Maybe, but I really hope I’m wrong. I think that guy is about to feed the sharks,” Bette nodded her head subtly as she spoke. Barry locked onto the man, and he grimaced too.

The man she spotted looked to be in his late 30s or early 40s, and he was dressed in a sporty white button up and khakis. Even if his clothes hadn’t given away his profession, which they did seeing as he looked completely interchangeable with every white man she had ever seen in a nature documentary, the bucket of what looked and smelled like cut up fish carcases would have tipped her off.

Bette hung back, and let Barry approach the man.

“Excuse me, I had a question about the sharks, and someone in the last room told me to look for someone named Shay Lamden for the answers. Could you point him out to me?”

Bette was impressed with his technique. Len may have changed up his teaching style with Barry, but at least he wasn’t letting anything slip.

“I’m Dr. Lamden. I’ve got to feed my sharks in there, but I’ll come find you when I’m done. You’ll want to watch this anyways. It’s a hell of a site,” the man explained.

Barry agreed with a handshake before making his way back to Bette.

“I hope you know I’m not actually stick around for this one. Want to make our way towards the gift shop? I think we need some t-shirts to commemorate our trip,” Bette told him. Barry looked relieved at her words, and he quickly agreed with her.

They had barely made it out of the room before the large splash, and the screaming followed them
almost the entire way to the gift shop. Luckily for them, although probably not for Dr. Lamden, they had both gotten a shirt and were waiting in line before the soul popped up with him.

“Hey. I’m Barry and this is Bette. I hate to make you wait, but any chance you we can get these before we go? I really like this shirt,” Barry spoke kindly as they moved forward in line. Bette quickly paid for hers.

She wasn’t paying attention as she checked out, but since Barry moved forward after her she assumed the man didn’t mind.

“So, I’m dead huh? You know, I would have thought a shark attack would have hurt more,” the Dr. stated. Bette just shrugged.

“Barry made sure to get you before it happened so you wouldn’t feel anything,” Bette informs him.

“Well that make a twisted sort of sense I guess. I did think it was kind of odd he wanted to shake my hand. Most people are more grossed about the fish guts. Barry said I’m supposed to be going into some lights. Any clue how to get there?”

“You’ve just gotta want it. Any reason for you to stick around?” Bette asked him.

Her words must have jarred something loose, as she had barely finished talking before the wall of windows transformed into a beautiful, shining horizon over the ocean.

“That’s awesome! Can I go now?” Dr. Lamden seemed mesmerized at the scene in front of him. Personally she thought the guy may have been a little off his rocker to want to go into what looked like the ocean right after being torn apart by a shark, but it wasn’t her place to judge.

“You definitely should. Enjoy the other side, Doc.”

Barry joined her in time to watch the man disappear into the scene in front of him.

“Since we are done here, you mind stopping for some ice cream on the way back? Seeing the beach gave me a craving,” Bette suggested. Barry enthusiastically agreed, so Bette linked their arms and
Barry joined most of the Rogues in front of the television that night after his trip to the aquarium. Bette had insisted on watching a the shark documentary playing that night since they missed the end of that exhibit, and much to his amusement Len, Shawna, Hartely, and Sam were just as excited as he and Bette were for the movie. Mark joined them as well, although he didn’t seem to happy about it.

“I can’t believe that you all are making me watch this shit. Shark week with you fuckers is bad enough,” Mark grumbled from his spot on the loveseat beside Shawna, taking a long gulp from his beer as he finished speaking.

Lisa threw a pillow at the couple. Sam snorted at their squeals before retorting.

“You don’t have to watch with us. You are free to leave at any time. If you fuck off I can take your seat. C’mon, Shawna, wouldn’t you rather cuddle with me than that twit?”

This time it was Mark’s turn to chuck the pillow. He was much more forceful with his throw at Sam than Lisa had been, but the man didn’t seem to mind. He merely rolled over, placing his new pillow between his back and the arm of the couch that he was leaning against from his spot on the floor.

Barry tried not to join the others in their laughter at Mark’s irate expression. He didn’t really know the other man yet, and he didn’t want to get on his bad side. However, when Shawna patted his head like a child and ruffled his hair, he couldn’t hold it back. Luckily everyone else’s thundering amusement drowned out his quiet chuckles.

“Aw… Don’t worry honey. I still love you best,” Shawna told him as she managed to simultaneously flatten and ruffle the man’s usually impeccable hair.

“After me of course,” Hartley retorted snidely from beside Len. The three were packed tightly onto the couch, along with Bette all but sitting in Hartley’s lap, and her feet hooked over Sam as a footrest. Barry wasn’t sure which he felt more: envious of the rest of the Rogues obvious comfort with one another, or grateful that Len had thoughtfully giving Barry the far seat and made sure he had room too.
“Sorry Hart. Mark, you’re totally my favorite after Hartley.” Shawna agreed easily, winking flirty at Hartley.

Mark continued to protest his supposed mistreatment, and the rest of the Rogues continued their verbal assault. The man either didn’t know or didn’t care that with each protest their insults only grew. Thankfully, they did start to quiet down once the commercial break ended. Shawna had to place her hand over Mark’s mouth to make it happen, but other than the laughter the act caused, it did work.

Barry was shaking with suppressed mirth when Len caught his eye. Len slowly, as if gauging Barry’s comfort, put an arm around him and pulled him closer before whispering in his ear.

“Ignore Mark. The ass just refuses to admit his distaste for our shark nights is cause he’s petrified. You’ll just have to tune out the whining.”

Len had a mischievous look on his face as he spoke. Barry had a feeling that it was due to the fact that Len’s whispering was actually quite loud, and it was obvious from the smirk he shot Mark his words were just as much to piss of the man as they were to explain things to Barry.

This time, Len had to lean over Barry to dodge Mark’s pillow assault, and the entire group dissolved into laughter once again.
Caitlin was worried about Sam. He had been a jittery mess when he arrived, and it was only getting worse as the day went on. She wanted to help the poor boy, but since they didn’t know each other that well she wasn’t sure what to do. She desperately wished it was her off day and not Cisco’s. He was always so great at these things, whereas her social skills were still in shambles. Everything about Caitlin was now.

After he had accidentally stapled his jacket to the packets they were creating for the third time that day, she decided that didn’t matter. She quickly found an excuse, and pulled him with her into the stairwell.

“Sam, is everything alright? You seem distracted today.”

Sam’s expression at the question made that concern grow a tenfold. His face filled with anguish, guilt, and a deep kind of longing that she related to on a level she wasn’t ready to dive in to. He looked down, trying to shield his face, but Caitlin knew those looks too well to be fooled. She had seen them every time she looked in the mirror.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m alright. Let’s get back inside. We’ve still got a good bit left in there,” Sam went to step back towards the office. She was not about to have that. She might have been as uncomfortable as Sam looked having this conversation, but some things were worth it.

“It’s nothing, Caitlin. I promise.”

“I’m not buying that Sam. I know that look. Hell, I’ve got a look just like it to match. I know I may not be as open about things as Cisco, but I’m here for you too. I know H.R. is generally pretty hokey, but he’s always been right about one thing. Here at Happy Times we are a family. You just have to let us,” Caitlin didn’t really know what she was saying, but she needed to say something so he would understand.
She had felt so alone Ronnie died, and the people at this shitty little office were about the only thing that seemed to help that. It was all she could do to pay that love and care they had given her forward now.

“Can I ask your advice about something?” Thankfully it seemed to work. Sam looked back at her as he spoke, his intense gaze softening to something more familiar. Before it seemed his emotions were fighting within him, but now he was letting them out. He was letting her in.

“Of course. Whatever you need,” she responded frankly.

Sam was silent for a long moment. She was starting to wonder if he was going to leave things there before he seemed to force the words out.

“There is thing tomorrow. I really want to go, but it’s an awful idea. Like, it’s truly terrible, and I know that. There is going to be people there I don’t need to see. I want to though, more than I’ve ever wanted to before.”

Caitlin frowned at his words. That was not what she was expecting. H.R. had told her and Cisco that he was an orphan, but he sounded like he loved these people in a way generally reserved for family. She hated seeing her new friend sound that broken.

“If you don’t mind me asking, why is it such a bad idea? Because that has a lot to do with what you should do,” she urged.

“I… I don’t think I can do that. It’s kind of private. Not that I am trying to say I don’t trust you, but I just can’t really talk about it. I like you and everything, but I…”

“It’s fine. You don’t have to explain yourself from me. Maybe I can tell you something about my experiences, and it can help?” Caitlin had to cut him off. The poor boy was rambling wildly, and she didn’t want to make him more upset than he already was. Sam just nodded, so she continued.

“Do you know what happened to me, Sam? To my fiance, really. Before you started, I mean. I haven’t heard any of it myself, but I’m sure people are still gossiping.”
Sam just nodded again. She could see the distressing growing in his face, but so was his curiosity. She could see in it the way he was leaning towards her, and the way his eyes were boring into hers.

“I wanted to spend the rest of my life with Ronnie, and not just because he was a handsome man who proposed. He just got me, you know? Everything about me. He knew when to compliment me, when I needed him with me, or some alone time, and more than anything he got me. I wanted to spend every last minute of the rest of my life with him, and I wanted that to start from the minute he proposed to me.”

Caitlin had to take a deep breath before she continued. Talking about Ronnie like this felt like she was digging into her the still gaping wound inside herself, but she needed to let this out as much as she had a feeling Sam needed to hear it. She could feel the tears gathering in her eyes, but she refused to let something as foolish as tears slow her down. She had spent to much of her life doing that.

“I was stupid though, and I let everyone else’s opinions get in the way of that. I would have been happy to go down to the courthouse that day and elope, but I knew my mom was expecting me to have a big wedding. So we waited to plan a big wedding. Ronnie and I were going to move in together while we planned, but his mom pitched an enormous fit about us living in sin, so we waited on that too. Now that Ronnie’s gone, all I can think is that it was all such bullshit. We should have done what made us happy, and fuck what everyone else thought. I missed out on so many special moments with the love of my life, and now I’m never going to have a chance to make new ones. It’s kept me up so many nights. So you want my advice, Sam? You need to do whatever is going to leave you without those regrets.”

Sam wrapped her in a tight hug as she finished speaking. She collapsed into the younger man. His hug felt so familiar, which was odd considering they hadn’t done so before, but more than welcome.

“Thank you, Cait. That really helped. Are you going to be okay now?”

This time it was her turn to nod. He seemed to believe her about as much as she had believed him, but he let things slide. The two composed themselves and re-entered the office together.

Barry knew that coming here was a good idea, but actually being able to see his family made all the doubts left after his talk with Caitlin completely disappear. God, even with their odd, somber air,
Barry had never been more relieved to see them. He missed each of them every day since he died, but he hadn’t realized how much until now.

He was having to take small looks as he browsed idly through his old belongings. He may have convinced himself into coming, but Sara’s warning was still in his mind. If he tried to show them who he was, he would only lose pieces of them. Considering he was literally watching his father and the West sell off most of his belongings, it felt a little too ironic.

His father was locked in what looked to be a fairly heated debate over the price of Barry’s old bedroom set. They must have cleaned out his apartment before the sale. Iris and Wally were both making the rounds to the prospective customers, and Joe was finishing the sale of what looked to be his X-box. Well, the sale of his old X-box.

Barry’s fingers stilled over the DVDs. He couldn’t believe all these were out here. Some of the ones, sure. Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan wasn’t his dad’s style, and the only reason Iris or Joe had seen it was because he had forced them too. It was the large collection of musicals that surprised him. He couldn’t believe his dad had these out there, and for twenty-five cents a piece at that.

He remembered watching the musicals what felt like a million times with him mom. Henry had joined them some of the times, but it he hadn’t loved them like Barry and his mom had. He guessed that was really showing now. Barry felt like his dad was tossing out a piece of him with these.

“Can I help you?”

The voice of an angel broke through his thoughts. Iris was standing before him, looking more beautiful than he had ever seen before. She was wearing what he knew she called her lazy clothes: a simple flannel shirt and her yoga pants. In the 20 years he had known her he had never seen her wear clothes like that outside of the house or a work out. He had never seen dark circles under her eyes that large before either, and definitely not without makeup. It hurt that much more that she was showing this to strangers, not to Barry. She didn’t know who he was.

“Hey? Are you alright?”

Barry shook himself out of his stupor. This was Iris in front of him. He wasn’t about to waste this opportunity.

“Yeah, sorry. Just in my head a little bit. How much for the musicals if I want all of them?”
Iris’s face shifted from her fake smile, he one she used her years at Jitters, into a dark frown. She hadn’t looked used either of those looks on Barry until now. He didn’t like being on the receiving end, even if she didn’t know who he was.

“Those must have been put out here by mistake. They aren’t for sale.”

“Is there a problem?” Joe joined the two, stepping protectively between Iris and Barry. He wanted to scream. Joe didn’t need to protect Iris from him. He wouldn’t ever hurt Iris. But God, he had missed Joe so much too.

“No, no. Everything is fine. Totally fine. If you don’t want to sell the tapes, I can go. I’m sorry,” Barry forced out, scrambling away.

“Hold up, son. What tapes were you looking at?” Joe asked, lightly grabbing Barry’s shoulder before he could get too far. Barry wanted to lean into it so badly. He wanted to wrap his arms around Joe and never let go.

“It was Barry’s musicals, dad. Those must have been put out here by mistake,” Iris answered for him.

“It wasn’t a mistake, baby girl. Did you want the whole set? Henry said if anyone wanted the set that we could take $5 for them. Will that work for you?”

“I don’t want to cause any problems,” Barry told Joe quickly. He didn’t, really. While it would have been nice to these small pieces of his past, nothing in the world would have been worth upsetting Iris even more.

“No, no. My dad’s right. I’m just being stupid. I was never really a fan of musicals. If we keep them they would just be collecting dust on a self. Barry would want them to go to someone who’d actually watch them,” Iris told him. She forced that wrong smile back on her face.

“Who’s Barry?”

Barry wanted to smack himself as soon as the words left his mouth. Could he get any stupider? He
wasn’t even supposed to talk with Joe and Iris, much less bring himself up. He didn’t want to hear what Iris and Joe said. He really didn’t want to see the twin looks of anguish that appeared of their faces at his question.

“Barry was my son. He died not too long ago. This stuff, most of it at least, was his. We aren’t out here to talk about my kids though. You want the movies or not?” Joe grabbed Iris as she spoke, and she leaned completely in to her father. Barry wanted to fall into that grasp as well, but those times of comfort were long gone for him.

“I’ll take them. Five bucks right?” Barry all but slammed the money into his hands and ran from the house with the offered bag completely laden in these lost pieces from a life that was no longer his. This whole thing was more painful than he imagined, but he couldn’t bring himself to regret it. He got to see the his family, and even if he would never get over the pain of their complete lack of recognition, he still found comfort in being with them.

That comfort was a lie though. Joe and Iris may have loved Barry, but they hadn’t even asked the odd stranger they had met for a name. He was just some a nameless nobody to the West, and that was all he was ever going to be to his family now.

Mick waited a block away from the kids childhood home. He knew that he was going to the yard sale that morning. He had caught Barry checking out the Facebook page when the kid thought he was alone. He should’ve known better than to think he was ever alone in the kitchen. They were going to work on his skills sneaking around if he was going to be a Rogue, but it was probably best to hold off on that until he stopped pulling shit like this. Mick probably should have told Len and let him deal with it, but he was never really one to follow the rules anyways.

Barry was a smart and loyal. He was never going to stop wondering about his family, not until he saw for himself how futile things really were. So Mick waited in his truck until he saw the kid barreling around the corner. He had a large bag full of something in his arms, and even from up the block Mick could see the tears in his eyes. Mick started his car, and didn’t stop again until he pulled level with him.

“You need a ride?” He asked. He tried to sound softer than his usual tone, but he didn’t think he was successful considering how much Barry jolted at the sound of his voice.
“Mick?! What are you doing here?”

“Figured you were coming here, and I thought you might want some company after. Was I wrong?”

Mick knew he wasn’t, but he figured he’d let the kid pretend he still had some dignity left after what was sure to be a pretty shitty scene. Barry nodded jerkily, and climbed in Mick’s passenger seat. They rode in silence for a while. He wanted to talk with the kid, but he figured that if he was silent long enough the kid would start on his own.

“Are you going to tell Len?” Barry asked quietly.

He was still clutching the bag in his arms like a little kid with a teddy bear, so it wasn’t the first question Mick thought would come up. It did make sense for Barry though. The kid wasn’t exactly a born rule-breaker. Mick hadn’t decided what he was going to do yet, so he decided to be honest while he figured out. After all, that’s what Mick was going to need from Barry to decide.

“Dunno, yet. You going to tell me what happened back there?”

“I didn’t say anything. I promise! Sara already warned me what would happened if I tried. I just wanted to see them,” Barry voice went from that little stubborn bit of defiance he used when he was conning Len into getting the last cinnamon roll for breakfast to absolutely heart-broken.

Mick suddenly wished he had brought Lisa for this. He knew Len or Sara would freak out, but Lisa would have been more understanding. Kid was going to give him emotional whiplash with this shit. He wasn’t equipped to deal with this shit, at least not without getting completely smashed first.

“I know you didn’t say anything. That’s not what I asking about. Are you really going to make me say it, kid?”

Barry shot him an absolutely bewildered look. As things seemed to click for him, he looked amused.

“Are you trying to ask me if I’m okay?”

Mick just grunted in response. Kid was smart enough to figure shit out from there.
“I’m alright. Well no, I’m really not. Seeing them again was, well, I don’t even know how to describe it. It wasn’t the same. I love them all, so much, but they don’t know that. They looked right at me like I was some stranger. I guess I am to them, but I didn’t think it would hurt so bad. I will be okay later though. It hurts right now, but I still feel better having seen them. I know I shouldn’t, and I won’t again, but it helped.”

Well, that answered most of Mick’s questions at least. Course he could tell the kid was lying about going to see his family again, even though he didn’t think Barry realized that wouldn’t be his last visit. He hadn’t really cared about his family or friends too much, but he had watched Ray do the same thing.

Mick watched it break the man a little more each time, and he watched him gather strength from that. Mick didn’t think it was any more his business to interfere this time, even if the main reason he hadn’t interfered before was because he wanted to fuck haircut. While he had absolutely no desire for the skinny kid riding beside him, he figured after what he saw it do for Ray it might help Barry too.

“Still didn’t answer my question. What happened while you were there. You obviously spoke to someone, cause I know you didn’t leave with that bag this morning. What’d you buy?”

Barry clutched the bag tighter at his question, like he thought Mick might rip it from his grasp and throw it out of truck.

“I was just looking at first, but then I guess I got distracted looking at my old movies. They were selling my old musicals.” Mick let out a snort at that, but quelled himself at Barry’s injured expression so the kid would keep talking.

“I know it’s stupid. Iris asked me if I needed any help, and Joe joined her. I couldn’t leave them there, not when my family was telling me to take them. It’s just, I always watched them with my mom before she died, and after she was gone I’d go watch one when I missed her or needed to feel close with her again. I know no one else was really a fan, and they just watched them to make me happy, but I don’t know. It was just too much. I couldn’t leave them.”

“That’s it?” Mick needed to be sure. If what Barry said was it, he wasn’t going to get in the way.

“Yeah. That was it. I left right after that. I didn’t even talk to my dad or Wally. I couldn’t, not after Joe and Iris,” Barry told him. The kicked puppy look was back. Mick decided they were going to
need to do something about that.

“Alright then. Good enough for me. I’ll keep your secret, kid. Now, you up for eating a second breakfast? Since your appointment is on this side of town, there’s no point in heading back home yet. I’ll take you after we eat.” Mick offered, turning sharply towards Der Waffle Haus before he had an answer.

Barry wasn’t one to turn down breakfast, so Mick didn’t even bother to check for the nod he figured would be his answer. The kid’s shared appreciation for breakfast food was one of the reason’s Mick didn’t mind him. After all, he really wouldn’t fit as a Central City reaper otherwise.

Chapter End Notes

Now that the chapters is done, time for some shameless self promotion. Please check out my new story, Golden Slippers, and let me know what you think.
Shitholes, Shopping, and Sibling Chats

Chapter Summary

Barry isn't doing well the day after seeing his family.

Lisa and Barry walked silently towards apartment G7 in what may have been the shittiest apartment complex Lisa had ever seen. Considering how long she had been alive, that was pretty concerning. She may be dead, and therefore thankfully immune to all the diseases she was sure were festering in these halls, but she really liked the shoes she was wearing. It was a shame she would have to burn them after this.

The lost of her current favorite Louis Vuitton shoes wasn’t what was bothering her at the moment. No more than they should be at least. It wasn’t the dump masquerading as living quarters that she was wading through either. Something was not right with Barry.

The young reaper was being unusually quiet. When everything was well with Barry, he hardly shut up. He had been this way several times since they met, however, and each one of them was because something was deeply bothering him. Usually it was caused by Barry’s shock and discomfort left over from death, but Lisa had a feeling that wasn’t the case this time. He was quiet, but the far away look of terror wasn’t in his eyes, and Lisa knew that if he was afraid again then she would have been able to see it.

Unfortunately, Barry had been resilient to her numerous attempts to make him fess up, even after she graciously agreed to follow him to this complete and utter shithole. She was not pleased.

“This is it. You want to stay with me for this one?” Barry mumbled. It was yet another sign something was wrong with Barry. Happy Barry was animated. He spoke quickly and with ease, often times to the point of rambling boisterously. Happy Barry wasn’t a mumbler. Not to mention his request for her to stay close. Barry had been starting to find his own way on the job more and more each day. Then again, that request could have just been a product of their creepy-ass location.

“Might as well,” Lisa replied, giving his arm a light squeeze to show her support. She had a feeling that she didn’t actually want to know what kind of strung-out person (Lisa seriously doubted someone could handle a place like this without some form of mind-bending relief) lived here, but she wasn’t going to leave Barry alone for it either.

Barry nodded in reply and knocked on the door. She kept her hand in the crook of his arm to brace
them both for whoever was going to open the door. Barry pulled the arm closer, so she figured he didn’t mind. She wasn’t letting go anyways even if Barry had minded. If she needed to pull them out of there, it would be a major waste of time finding a hold.

“What the fuck do you want?”

Lisa hoped this was the guy on Barry’s post-it. The grimy man who answered the door was a complete and utter ass. After all, what kind of man scowled at a woman like her? Or Barry, she added mentally. Man was such an obvious sweetheart, and she could feel slight tremors coming off his small frame, so she decided to take this one.

“Hello. My name is Lisa, and this is Barry. We are here for a survey about your internet provider. Are you Hendrick Von Arnim?”

Lisa put as much false cheer and genuine charm as she could muster into the fib. She really didn’t want try and make up some bullshit survey off the top of her head, but she need a name out of the man before he slammed the door in their faces. Luckily, her tactic worked. Unfortunately it was joined with look that could only be described as a leer, but what’s a girl to do? You win some, you lose some.

“Yeah, baby. I’m Hendrick, and I’d love to answer any questions you’ve got for me. Why don’t you ditch the stick, and we can do whatever you want.”

Well there may have been a God after all, Lisa thought, trying to keep in her both her disgust at Hendrick and giddiness that he was the one of Barry’s post-it from showing in her expression. Today the world would be losing one more douchebag, so hopefully Barry would be comfortable with this one.

“You know what? I think we are going to have to take a pass. Thank you for your time though,” Barry answered Hendrick’s inquiry quickly, forced a handshake with the still-processing oaf, and starting pulling Lisa down the hall with a strength she didn’t know his slight frame held.

The soon-to-be-dead weasel calls out behind them, but Barry’s got them through the staircase before he can do more than that.

“You know Barry, I think we can slow down. The guy is going to be dead in a few minutes, so I don’t think we need to run. I’m not in shoes for this,” Lisa told him, digging her heels in a little to
force Barry to slow down.

“Sorry. You’re right. I’m just, I’m a little on edge today, and I did not like the way he was looking at you. I used to see what happened after looks like it too much as a CSI,” Barry told her, scuffing his shoe against the floor and refusing to meet her eyes once again. She felt her face softening at his words. She wished he was looking at her so he could have seen it.

“Aw, sweetie. It’s nice you are worried about me, but I’ve been doing this long time, and Len made sure I knew how to handle men like him ages ago.”

She bumped his shoulder as he looked up again, and pulled on their still attached arms to get them moving down the stairs once more. He smiled at her in response. It was a small smile, sad and forced, but it was better than Lisa had seen from him all day, so she decided that for now it would have to do. She would get a real smile from her friend later, but for now it appears they had a job to do.

“What happened? How am I out here? What did you freaks do to me?”

Lisa was really not impressed with Hendrick. Barry, it seemed, wasn’t either. His voice was tired and annoyed when he addressed the now dead man in the stairwell with them.

“We didn’t do anything to you. You just died. I don’t suppose you remember that?”

The man frowned, but he did seem to have a spark go off in his brain after a few moments. Lisa was impressed there was enough in grey matter in his head to accomplish the feat.

“I went to grab some shoes to come after you - the hot one - and there was a ton of spiders in my closet. They started biting at me. Did those tiny fuckers kill me?” The man was spitting with rage by the time he finished talking. Lisa was glad this happened after he died as she didn’t want a shower in whatever germs resided in that man’s mouth.

“Apparently they did. I don’t suppose you could just move along now. You wish for it, and your lights will appear to take you to a far better place,” she drawled, scowl firmly in place.

She really wanted this job to be over, so she and Barry could do something more fun with the rest of her day. Her reaping was already over with, and she was feeling like shopping. Barry was sweet
enough that he wouldn’t complain about carrying her bags. It was a win-win for her, as long as this
dude moved along.

“I really am sorry about all this, but Lisa’s right. It’s too late for you here, but something is waiting
for you on the other side,” Barry continued, smiling earnestly at the man. That boy really was too
sweet, she thought. At least his words seemed to work as the man disappeared into what looked to be
a rather intense acid trip in the form of his lights.

“Great! You’re off now, right? Because I’ve got a wicked idea, and I think you’ll enjoy it,” Lisa told
Barry. Enjoy it may have been a stretch, but Barry still needed some more clothes, so she didn’t
really mind the white lie. Last time they went shopping he had refused to get more than one or two
sets of casual clothes, claiming he needed things for work. Really, this shopping trip would do him
good too.

Barry was not amused at Lisa’s idea of a good time. Generally speaking he enjoyed the woman’s
company. It was usually hard to be bored around her, but apparently shopping with Lisa was the
exception to that rule. They were into the third hour now, and he was getting restless.

Worse still, she had somehow managed to convince him into buying several pairs of pajamas and
clothes that he couldn’t even wear to work! Sometimes around Lisa he wondered if reapers might
have had some magic power of persuasion he hadn’t managed to tap in to yet. Then again, the rest of
the Rogues seemed to have the same problem with Lisa, so it was probably just the woman herself.

“Lisa, are we going to be done soon? I know I told you I was free, but this isn’t exactly how I want
to spend my off day,” Barry called out. She had been in this fitting room now for nearing half an
hour, and Barry had to evaluate several outfits for her in that time.

He had done the same many more hours of his life for Iris, but that was different. He was in love
with Iris, so seeing her in anything was special. Lisa may have been an attractive woman - he knew
that, objectively - but he didn’t have the same connection with her. Even if their personalities meshed
more, he didn’t think he could be attracted to someone that he instinctively feared that much. He
enjoyed being around her despite it, but he knew how dangerous she was. In a way different than
most, sure, but Lisa had a power he knew to respect.

“I’m almost done, Barry-Bear. We’ve just got one more stop after this,” Lisa called out to him.
Barry wrinkled his nose in response, and made a vague noise of acknowledgement as he settled farther into his seat. He wasn’t sure what disturbed him more: the next stop or the nickname. He would have protested, but he’s seen how the Rogues treat protest like that. If he said anything about the awful nickname, it was sure to be a new favorite of all of his roommates by dinner.

Barry wished she would hurry up. He wanted to go home, to his room, and maybe work some more on McSnurtle’s cage. He still wasn’t pleased with how the water filtration system was working. Really though he just wanted to be alone. He hadn’t wanted to be around the others ever since he and Mick returned from the diner yesterday.

He knew before he went to that stupid fucking yard sale that going to see his family was a bad idea. When Sara had told him about her own disastrous visit with her sister, she had forgotten to mention how badly it hurt. The memory loss, sure, it was great to avoid that. He couldn’t seem to fill the hole inside him since he saw them, not even with the ever-present grief that consumed him before. Barry felt hollow, and he didn’t know to fix it.

“You ready Barry? After this we need to make a quick pit stop at the Louis Vuitton store so I can make the order to replace my shoes from this morning, and then we can head out,” Lisa announced, flinging open the dressing room door with enough force to rattle the frame.

Barry frowned before he nodded his acknowledgement and followed Lisa to the checkout counter. He wasn’t going to get his way for a while, so he might as well make this trip as painless as possible.

Len could feel the pain behind his eyes sharpening as his sister continued to go on about her shopping trip with Barry. He had already tried several times to get her to leave his room, but she was completely ignoring his request. It was so typically Lisa he would have been amused if he hadn’t been forced to participate what was nearing a 30 minute (one-sided) conversation about a trip to the goddamn mall.

“For fucks sake, Lenny could you at least pretend to listen to me,” Lisa shook his shoulder as she spoke, forcing his attention back on her.

Len gave a flattest, most unimpressed stare before he drawled a simple reply.
“No.”

She glared back at him, her lips quivering in a pout as she sighing dramatically. She used that expression to successfully con her way into millions over their lifetimes, and with far more people than Len, so he never felt too bad that it was so effective.

“Fine, Lisa. Could you please tell me again what you were saying. Maybe in less detail this time,” Len forced himself to say through his still gritted teeth. Lisa smile back happily at his words, relaxing him despite his best efforts.

“I think something is wrong with Barry. He was acting really weird all day,” Lisa told him, her smile disappearing into a worried frown. Lisa always hated the way that particular expression caused a wrinkle in the middle of her forehead. If she was allowing it to appear now, she must suspect something serious.

“So that is why you’ve spent however the hell long talking about your shopping trip?” Len asked, eyebrows raising. Lisa frowned deeply at his words. Admittedly he probably shouldn’t have said that, but it was the first thing that popped into his mind.

“I was giving you the play-by-play of our day so you could see how off his reactions were, you jerk. I don’t know what is wrong with him, but there is something. He was so quiet is withdrawn all day that I almost wondered if he was going to have another panic attack, but it was too different from that kind of quiet. He didn’t seemed scared, just withdrawn.”

Lisa’s worried crease came back with her words, and Len had a feeling he had one to match.

“Thanks for letting me know, Lise. I’ll take him on his appointment tomorrow, and see if I can get something out of him, alright?”

Lisa shot him an unimpressed looked before she responded.

“Why don’t you go check on him now?”

She made a good point, and truthfully he was pretty tempted to head straight to Barry’s room. He
wanted to demand answers. Len couldn’t help if he didn’t know what was wrong. He knew now
wasn’t the time to broach the topic though, however much he may have wanted to.

Barry had almost immediately gone straight to his bedroom once he and Lisa returned to the
warehouse. The young reaper was in the habit of secluding himself, and he hadn’t responded well to
being forced to break that. Len didn’t want to make things worse by aggravating Barry. After all,
they younger man had even skipped dinner.

Sam lost a bet with Mark that led to him having to provide all the Rogues with take-out for the week.
It was possibly Mick’s favorite bet ever. Barry, who was still getting his finances together even with
his new job, hadn’t missed any of the offered dinners until that night. He had barely even responded
when they told him the food had arrived.

Len told his sister as much, and Lisa - for once in her life - agreed with Len that his inquest could
wait until tomorrow.
Barry's Day Off

Chapter Summary

Barry takes a day off from work.

Chapter Notes

There was a double update today, so some of you may need to go back to chapter 24 first.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Barry had always loved Chubbuck Park. His dad had proposed to his mom at the bench Barry was sitting on now. His parents had brought him here more times than he could count when he was a child, and he came back many more times over the years since Nora Allen was murdered. He always felt close to her here. It’s why he was here now, at least partially. He wanted to feel close to the only family he could.

Barry was also avoiding Len and the rest of the two cities’ reapers. He had slipped out of the warehouse at 4:00 that morning, before even Len was up. He couldn’t be there today. He couldn’t have breakfast with the Rogues, go to Happy Times, and he couldn’t take a soul that day. He needed a break, so he took one the only way he knew how. Barry was taking a day off.

He had called Happy Time around an hour ago, claiming he had food poisoning. He was also steadfastly ignoring his phone. It was nearing 9:00, and Barry had to have missed somewhere around a hundred calls from Len before he turned off his phone. Len had sent him a message with his appointment too, threatening an unpleasant result should he not show up.

So Barry sat on the water, enjoying his first Jitters coffee since his death. Someone may have made an appointment for Barry, but he never agree to show up.

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Len watched from a distance as Ted Gaynor was hit by a car before the vehicle sped away. Barry never showed, and Len hadn’t thought to track his phone before Barry apparently shut it off, so he
had no way of finding him. This was going to be a problem.

It already was one. Ted Gaynor’s soul was still in his body. Len could have taken him out of there. Maybe he should have. He was feeling guilty enough it may have been worth it for that alone, but if he had then Barry wouldn’t learn his lesson. If Len bailed him out, Barry wouldn’t realize the gravity of skipping out on an appointment.

Barry had already been giving much more handholding than any other reaper Len had trained. After meeting Barry and seeing first-hand how much he was struggling with his death and new existence, Len couldn’t stop himself from wanting to help.

It reminded him too much of his and Lisa’s death. The trauma, the utter loss as to how to keep going. They hadn’t had any support other than each other. He had his own trainer for about a week before the man had gotten Lisa’s name and she took his place. Rip had come along within their first year, but the first months had been just him and Lisa.

Watching Barry struggle brought up to many memories that he thought he had let go of decades ago. It made Len soft with the kid. Barry should have been going on jobs alone by now, but Len had barely started to let people other than him take Barry. It turns out the supervision may not have been the worst idea he had ever had, but this constant catering to Barry’s sensitive side was going to have to stop. Barry was proving that now.

So Len was determined to teach him the importance of showing up for his appointments the hard way. Unfortunately that meant the next couple of hours was going to be rough for Ted Gaynor. He was going to have to stay in his body and feel every moment until Barry was willing to take him out.

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Bette sat down beside Barry’s bench around noon, jarring him from his thoughts. Barry was surprised to see her. He was hoping he could avoid all this until tomorrow. He was planning to stay out all day, and he didn’t expect any of the Rogues would find him. At least not this quickly. Bette was in her Meter Maid uniform, so he figured he probably just hit bad luck.

“You fucked up big time, Barry,” Bette told him, not bothering with a proper greeting.

“I didn’t do anything,” he contests.
“That’s kinda the point. You missed your appointment. Len is beyond pissed, I hope you know. He should be too. Do you have any idea what you did?”

“I didn’t make any appointments,” he stubbornly challenged her. He didn’t. Barry never agreed to any of this, and he was tired of not having a say in anything. It was time for him to take control.

Bette apparently did not agree. She punched his arm roughly.

“What was that for?” He protested. “That actually hurt.”

“Fucking good. Are you really trying to pull the petulant child act, because you so don’t have a leg to stand on. Do you have any idea what you did? That person still died, you know. Only you weren’t there to take care of it.”

Barry’s heart sank. He thought - hoped - that whoever’s name he had would live. It wasn’t his fault though. Barry couldn’t let himself worry about that. He didn’t kill that man, and it isn’t like his presence would have saved him.

“So what? I’m sure Len did,” Barry told her. Len, Bette, and the rest may have accepted this fate, but that didn’t mean he had to. He didn’t want to do this anymore.

“No actually he didn’t. He’s still waiting for you, and he is going to explain to you why exactly you are such a fuck-up. So get your ass to my cart while I call Len to tell him I found you, and you better not even think about running because I swear to god I’ll make you a grill ornament if that what it takes to get you out of here,” Bette ordered him.

He hopped to it. He wholeheartedly believed Bette’s threats, and it wasn’t like he knew he wasn’t going to have to face Len. He was being a coward. If Barry wanted out then he was going to need to quit in person.
Len’s could feel the blood on his hands squelching through his clenched fist. The sting was keeping him from snapping at Barry as he sweet-talked the coroner into letting them in to see the body, claiming all three were relatives of Ted Gaynor. Thank god the man was still a John Doe, or this would have been a lot harder.

The pain in his hand was nothing compared to what he felt trying to be so charming when all he wanted to do was unleash all this anger on Barry. He still couldn’t believe how fucking selfish he had been. He could let the kid have it though, as soon as he could get the pathologist to leave them alone with the body.

Thankfully, the man seemed to be listening. He wasn’t sure how much longer he could keep his cool.

“Oh, god! That’s him. That’s our Ted,” Len internally rolled his eyes, but he played up the drama anyways. The needed the sympathy. Bette and Barry helped out, with Bette pretending to cry and Barry turning green at the ghoulish display. That was good. He needed Barry disturbed to keep something like this from happening again.

“Could we get a moment alone, please. We’d like some privacy to say goodbye,” Bette tearfully pleaded. This is why Len liked Bette so much. She always got the job done.

The coroner left them alone. He waited until he could no longer hear the man’s footsteps before rounding on Barry. He gripped Barry’s arm tightly, pulling him forward and forcing him to get a good look at the man he failed. Barry tried to flinch backwards, so Len stepped behind him to force him in place.

“What the fuck made you think it was acceptable to drop of the grid like that. Do you have any idea what you’ve done,” Len hissed.

“I can’t do it anymore, Len. I’m sorry I just skipped out like that, but I didn’t know what else too. Please, you have to understand.”

Barry was pleading with him. Even through his anger, he could feel himself wanted to lean into Barry. To change his rough grasp into a comforting touch and tell Barry it was all going to be okay. It wasn’t through. Not until Barry realized what he did, and until Len could be sure it wouldn’t happen again. So Len forced himself to hold on to the anger as he let icy detachment seep into his veins.
“Tough shit, kid. Quitting isn’t an option. Do you know what you did by skipping out?” Len prompted Barry.

He had a feeling Barry hadn’t grasped things yet. Kid was too kind-hearted to do this intentionally. It was why Len had to do things this way. After Barry realized that his playing hooky meant that Ted Gaynor was still inside there, he wouldn’t do this again. He wouldn’t leave someone to suffer.

Maybe Len was wrong though. Barry was hanging his head low, refusing to look at the body. Len could still feel Barry vainly pulling against his grasp. He wanted Len to let him step away from the corpse, but Len wasn’t letting him off that easy.

“C’mon, Len. You know he doesn’t. Just tell Barry so we can get out of here. It’s only a matter of time before the Doc comes back. We really should be gone by then,” Bette sternly ordered.

The look she was shooting him was full of disapproval. He knew the woman didn’t agree with his decision to handle Barry’s day off this way, but Len didn’t care. Bette had been the main one telling him he was being too soft and Barry, and now that she was proven right she seemed to disapprove of his tougher approach too. She did make a decent point about their time frame though, so he acquiesced to her request.

“He’s still in there, kid. Appointments aren’t transferable like that. You didn’t take him out, so he was in there for the crash. It looks like he was still in there for the autopsy too. Must have been pretty traumatic, not to mention painful. You know they still feel everything if you don’t get them first right,” Len reveals.

Just like he expected, Barry turned even greener. He wasn’t expecting the anger that flashed in his eyes though, nor that Barry finally forced him back, painfully twisting his own arm to escape Len’s hold.

“Really? So that’s what you’re worried about. I’m sorry he went through some shit because of me, but you could’ve helped him too if that’s what you were worried about. It’s been a long time since you died, so let me remind you, Len, that just because dying part doesn’t hurt it doesn’t meant that he didn’t feel everything else. I know I sure as fuck did. So you want me to get him out, fine?”

Barry reaped the guy, who came out and started babbling. He was obviously traumatized, but Len felt the anger that had been clouding his mind all day disappear. Fuck, he hadn’t realized that. He knew Sara had been spotty with her explanations, but he couldn’t believe she hadn’t told Barry. That fucking bitch had left this to him. Shit, no wonder Barry didn’t understand the gravity of what he had done. Luckily for him, Bette did.
“Hey, Ted. I’m Bette. What do you say we get out of here, and I can show you a much better place to work through all this.”

“What? So now that he’s out things are all fine? I thought I had to be the one to take care of Ted,” Barry challenges. Len really wished Barry would stop being such a little shit. It would make their upcoming conversation so much easier.

“Not now,” Len tells Barry before turning to Bette. “Bette, take care of Ted here. I’m going to go finish this up with Barry back at home. I owe you one.”

Barry protested as they left, but thankfully he started to let things go as they drove down the road. Barry was obviously still angry, guilty, and a whole lot of other things Len couldn’t place with Barry facing away from him to stare out at Central City as they drove past.

Len knew he needed to tell Barry what was going on. Why what he did was so wrong. More importantly, he needed to tell Barry why his own death had been so awful. It was going to wound the young reaper, and Len needed to get Barry home first so the younger man could fall apart in private. He had to gather himself up too. Even with his still present ire Len towards Barry, he never wanted to Barry to feel the kind of heartbreak Len’s words were going to cause. So Len and Barry stayed silent.

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Len was sitting across from Barry at the end of his bed, wringing his hands together nervously. It was starting to freak Barry out. Len’s behavior that entire day had been unpleasant, but this was worse. The anger from earlier was frightening, but this uncertainty he was displaying unsettling Barry even more. Len didn’t do nervous, except for now he apparently was.

“What is it? If you are going to yell at me more go ahead. I get it. I shouldn’t have just skipped out like that. I didn’t realize that my guy would just be stuck in there. I thought you’d take care of it, but once again I was wrong. So if that is all can you either just start yelling again or leave? You are really started to freak me out,” Barry breaks their silence.

He realized he was rambling, but it was better than the uncomfortable quietness that formed between the two. Len didn’t seem to agree. His face slipped into a scowl before he schooled it back to a
neutral expression. Len fought through his obvious hesitancy though, so at least Barry accomplished something.

“I’m not going to yell anymore, as long as you really don’t pull that shit again,” Len told him. Barry nodded, and Len continued.

“We still need to talk, kid. About what you said at the morgue. There’s something I didn’t realize Sara never explained, and you aren’t going to like it. It’s about your death, Barry.”

Len told him. He grabbed Barry’s arm again. Unlike his bruising grasp earlier, this hold was gentle. Len was trying to comfort him, and it made him feel sick. He didn’t want to hear this, but he never got what he wanted anymore. Barry nodded at Len, and forced himself to hold the other’s gaze. He thinks that Len wanted to him say something, but Barry’s throat felt too tight. He couldn’t force any words out, and definitely not the ones he knew Len wanted to hear.

“Barry your death wasn’t normal. Well, shit you obviously know that. What I a mean is your reaping was… unusual, and it wasn’t just because you took Rip’s place afterwards. The pain you felt before you died, when you with the Butcher, it isn’t usually like that. Once we do what we do, it really and truly separates a person’s soul from their body. That means that they don’t usually feel what happens,” Len told him.

Barry felt like someone had dumped him in an ice bath and was holding him under. He was cold all over, and it felt like he wasn’t breathing.

“Len… What does that mean? Rip reaped me hours before I died, but I felt everything. Why did I have to feel all that? Did he do something wrong? Did I?”

Barry knew he was saying the words, but his voice sounded far away. He could feel himself drifting. Len must have too, as his hand moved up from his arms to grasp Barry’s face. Len raised his other hand as well, and he gently tilted Barry’s face to connect their eyes. Len’s eyes held deep anguish, and Barry knew it was for him. He didn’t want to know what Len saw in his.

“You did nothing wrong, okay? This isn’t your fault. It’s his, Barry. This is all on the Butcher. The thing is with deaths like yours there is no way for reapers to get close to you at your time of death. So the times are given with a delay. It’s why Rip met you on the bus. Thing is, your soul couldn’t really separate that early. Your body wouldn’t have lasted as long as it was supposed to, and the man who killed you would have known something was off. He was watching you, Barr. He wanted to see you in pain. It’s what sick people like him look for in all the people they killed, and he would have known if it wasn’t there. Killers like yours, they would have figured out about us a long time ago if
there wasn’t something in place to prevent it. So people that die like you have to feel everything so the living don’t find out about what we do.”

What was Len saying? Did he really mean that? Barry wasn’t supposed to have to feel his death, but because the bastard who killed him was looking for pain Barry had to feel it.

He couldn’t breathe. It felt like he was back on that table. He could see Len in front of him. His mouth was moving. He was probably talking to Barry. His grip on Barry’s face had tightened, so it seemed likely.

Everything was hurting too much for him to focus. He had to feel that way. Barry was supposed to be damaged so the Butcher didn’t find out about death. Serial killers were only supposed to cause death apparently, not be involved in the rest of the process. The Butcher wanted him in pain, so he was. Barry was supposed to go through this agony, and he hated to disappoint.

Len’s image was swaying in front of him. Why was Len moving like that? It was making Barry nauseous. He tried to reach out to force Len still, but he couldn’t move his arms. Was something holding him down?

Barry closed his eyes. He didn’t want to feel like this anymore, so he let himself drift away into the welcoming oblivion.

Chapter End Notes

Well I've been waiting on this one for a long time, and I know some of you have been as well. I hope my reasonings here didn't disappoint.
Sara and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

Chapter Summary

Sara has a very bad day.

Chapter Notes

I want to thank cassandrasfisher for all her help with this chapter! I have no clue how to link her username, but check her out through the related works at the bottom of the page. You have been absolutely amazing, and I would still be agonizing over this without your help. The title comes from the children’s story Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.

Sara woke up wrapped in the warm body she was sharing a bed with. It made her scowl as she quietly slipped out of bed. Her clothes were strewn throughout the room, and she quickly grabbed them before heading into the hallway to throw them on. Luckily, Sara made it out the front door without waking Nyssa.

She shouldn’t have stayed the night. Really, Sara should have known better than to fuck her again too, but she had long since lost the willpower to say no to the gorgeous doctor’s amorous advances. Actually, that was a lie. She said no too the romance well enough, but the sex was starting to become an issue. She made love with the same ferocity she put into every patient, and Sara was addicted.

Nyssa’s single-minded determination in every task she took on attracted Sara like few things in her existence had. It’s what made her one of the best cardiothoracic surgeons in the Midwest too. She would have been the best in whatever hospital she ended up if she hadn’t chosen to stay at the same hospital as her mentor, Dr. Allen. It was also what made Sara keep making the same mistakes with her.

The woman’s amazing prowess in bed did not mean Sara should have fallen into hers again. It wasn’t a good idea for reapers to keep sleeping with someone like she had been with Nyssa. Attachments started to form after a while, and she knew Nyssa was getting there. Besides, it wasn’t fair to either of them, not when her crush for Lindsey was growing daily.

So Sara did what most reapers did when confronted with the living in ways they were no longer allowed. Sara ran, and she wanted.
Her eggs were not great today. Sara had ordered over-easy eggs at Der Waffle Haus more times that any sane person should eat a single meal, and they usually hit the spot just right. Today they were too runny, but she knew better than to complain to the crotchety new cook. She ate there way too much to piss off the staff.

She was listening to the quiet chatter around the table, barely paying attention. She was too focused on Mick’s relayed message from earlier. Apparently, Len thought she had fucked something up with her new duties. Considering the source, she figured it probably had something to do with Barry. After all, she doubted Len would have gotten involved in Natural Causes business, and Mick would have said something if she was pissing him off.

“Sara, could you pass the salt?” Nate asked, bring her out of her musings.

She passed it down silently, and Mick shot her yet another dirty look as she did so. Sara wouldn’t have been worried, but Ray seemed to agree with him. If Ray was annoyed with her too, she had probably really messed something up. Truthfully, Sara had a feeling she had messed up a lot of things with Barry. She hadn’t known what she was doing when Barry first died. She still didn’t, but at least things were starting to settle now. Barry being with Len had made things infinitely easier for her, even if the guilt that came with that was strong. Apparently his transfer hadn’t been soon enough.

At least she wouldn’t have to wonder for much longer. Len was insisting they meet up in about half an hour. He had an early appointment, as he had apparently wanted to meet much earlier. Considering her frosty reception from Mick and Ray, and the even colder messages she had been exchanging with Len, she had a feeling she was not going to enjoy this.

Len was really starting to freak Sara out. He had let himself in once again (one of these days she was going to find a way to send a shock through her lock for anyone picking it, but it really wasn’t the time to be worrying about that), but he had refused to say anything. Sure, he had taken the time to steal the ingredients to make himself a pretty decent looking cocktail, but not to use his fucking words. He didn’t make one for her too like he usually did, so she figured he was probably pretty
“Are you actually going to talk to me, or can I get some sleep?”

Len smirked back at her. It wasn’t a pleasant look. He may have forced amusement onto his face, but his eyes were dark and foreboding. Fucking asshole was baiting her.

“I don’t know, Sara. You don’t seem big on talking lately,” he remarked calmly. She would have thought it was a casual observance if it wasn’t for the intense look in his eyes and upturned, sneering expression. Well, at least she had some idea what she did to piss him off.

“And what did I not say to Barry? This is about him, right? You wouldn’t be so touchy otherwise,” Sara asked, not bothering to keep with Len’s games. She was too tired for this shit. She never got much sleep at Nyssa’s. Len scowled deeply, so she knew she was right.

“I’m sure you forgot a lot of shit. This one is pretty bad though. You didn’t tell him about his death. Why it was different, and why it hurt for him. More importantly, you didn’t tell him how what we do helps the people we reap. As in that what we do saves them from feeling that way, and what happens to them when we don’t do our fucking jobs” he explained.

Len’s agitation seemed more pronounced with every word he spoke. By the end, he was almost yelling, only without the volume to accompany the sheer venom in his words.

She wanted to protest, but she found it impossible. She hadn’t told Barry. God, how could she have been so fucking stupid? Sara knew why she hadn’t explained things that first night. Things had been too raw for Barry, and for Sara too. She had lost a friend, inherited his shitty job, and been left to help one of the most traumatized souls she had ever met transition into a reaper.

“He doesn’t know?”

Len just glared at her squawking, completely unimpressed. If Sara hadn’t told Barry that, he probably should have been. She just didn’t think. God, with Natural Causes death was the relieving part. The pain before they all felt was natural. Barry’s wasn’t though. She was such an idiot.

She was suddenly glad that Len had such a strong rule about violence against the people he cared about because she was sure that was the only reason he hadn’t socked her in the face. Then again,
she really did deserve it. She was going to need to spar with Mick later, or maybe she could just stand here and let Len send her that glare forever.

“I took care of it, but it was too late. He skipped his appointment yesterday. You see, Barry didn’t see the harm because no one ever explained to him why what we do matters. Something he should have been told from the start. Now, I know Rip leaving you this gig was unexpected to you - for some stupid fucking reason, but that is not an excuse. You could have at least told me, and I could have fixed this. Now, Barry’s having to go through this on top of the guilt of making someone else go through the hell of being stuck in their own body for hours after they died.”

At that, Sara’s guilt seemed to spread throughout her core. Poor, sweet Barry didn’t deserve to go through any of that, especially not because of one of her screw ups. Something wasn’t quite right about that though.

“I thought you were still going with Barry to his appointments? Why didn’t you take care of it?”

Len’s glare turned colder at her words, but his expression shifted slightly. Was that guilt? Sara couldn’t tell. It was not an expression she saw on her friend very often, whatever it was.

“You didn’t tell either of us what we needed to know. I thought Barry was just being a selfish kid, so I wanted to make sure he didn’t screw up like that again by thinking he had a safety net. I would have taken care of it if I had known you hadn’t told him about the process, you ass,” he counters.

There was heat coming back into his voice. Len probably did feel guilty then. He shouldn’t. The blame for this landed on her shoulders alone. She would have told him if she didn’t know it would piss him off more.

Shit, Sara really fucked up.

Sara was absolutely exhausted. After her awful conversation with Len earlier she had been completely unable to sleep. She was just thankful she was only in for 6 hours today to cover half of someone else’s shift because there was no way she could have made it through a full 12 hours.
Unfortunately, she still had four hours to go, and giving pervy Mr. Chen his daily sponge bath was not exactly making the time fly by. She had long since perfected the art of sassing back to the lewd remarks, but today she let it fly. After all, his open heart surgery started in two hours, and Sara had his name on the post-it in her pocket for 20 minutes after the surgery started. As long as he didn’t try to grope her again, she figured she would let it slide.

Usually she wouldn’t have minded working, even despite her fatigue. It would be something to throw herself into so she could forget the worries of her world for a while. Unfortunately, today had the opposite effect. She was on the cardio ward with Henry Allen and Nyssa today, so every time she turned around she was confronted with one of her recent failures.

Henry Allen was a nice enough man, but his soft eyes and gentle smile were too much like Barry’s. Before the man died, she had liked working Henry. He was a no-nonsense kind of doctor and a damned talented one at that. Not to mention he wasn’t one of the assholes who thought that nurses were basically their servants, and therefore treated them as such. Being around Dr. Allen now that Sara was actively hiding his dead son from him was a whole different matter. Between the guilt about lying to Dr. Allen, and his presence being such a sharp reminder of what was going on with Barry, every minute spent with the doctor was a test in the abilities of Sara to torment herself.

Being around Nyssa wasn’t helping things, either. She wasn’t Nyssa here. She was Dr. Al Ghul. It was Sara’s own rule. Nyssa would have been happy to always be Nyssa and Sara, never Dr. Al Ghul and Nurse Lance. Sara told Nyssa she didn’t want people thinking she was sleeping her way into a better career. Nyssa hadn’t believed that any more than Sara had expected, but at least the woman assumed it was because of Sara’s other hospital crush. After all, Nyssa could have figured out that Sara’s reluctance to have a real relationship was due to being dead and around a hundred years her senior.

“You know, honey, after my surgery today I’m going to be getting out of here, and I’d love to take you to dinner as a thank you for all you’ve done for me. Wherever you want to go,” Mr. Chen offered.

“Tell you what, Frank. You get through this surgery, and I’ll actually let you,” Sara told him with a smile. There was no way in hell she would have actually gone, but she figured she’d give the dying man a nice memory.

He gave her ass a nice firm squeeze at her words though, so apparently Sara made yet another mistake today. At least the bruises she gave him for it wouldn’t have time to properly set before he died.
After Mr. Chen’s surgery, Nyssa’s mood was even fouler. Despite how much she enjoyed their tryst, Nyssa tended to be in a bad mood afterwards if Sara wasn’t there when she woke up the next morning. It probably didn’t help the doctor had caught the one conversation she had managed with Lindsay that day before the other nurse had left.

Between the two, Nyssa had become stand-offish. It wouldn’t have been so uncomfortable if they weren’t currently with the same patient. Yet another thing Nyssa was good at was the silent treatment. They had been prepping a patient for a surgery tomorrow 20 minutes, and the woman still hadn’t said a word to her.

They finally left the patient's room, and Nyssa all but bolted. Sara frowned. It was for the best really, but Sara couldn’t seem to stop herself from fucking that up too.

“Dr. Al Ghul! Can you wait? I need to talk with you about tomorrow’s surgery.”

Sara did not need to talk about the surgery, but she knew Nyssa wouldn’t risk patient care because she was pissed. She should probably feel a little guilty for taking advantage of that. It worked though, so there would be time for that later.

“What can I help you with, nurse?”

Sara winced internally at Nyssa’s words. She only called her nurse when she was really pissed, or when they were adding some fun to the bedroom. Since they were and public, and she wasn’t getting bedroom eyes in her direction she was going to have to guess it was the former.

“Can we talk in private?” Sara asked, smiling in Nyssa’s direction hopefully. Nyssa did not return it, her features instead twisting further downwards.

“I’d rather not. Did you have a question for me or not?”

Sara didn’t. She wanted to make something up, but she knew Nyssa would see through it in a heartbeat. It seems that didn’t even take words, as the woman left before Sara could think of an excuse to have her stay.
Sara watched Nyssa walk away, leaving her alone once again.

“Sara? Are you doing alright?”

Sara was pulled from her musings by perhaps the last person at the hospital she wanted to talk to. Dr. Allen was smiling kindly at her. She wanted to run away, but that wouldn’t exactly stick with her plan of staying under his radar. It wasn’t like he was likely to guess what she was hiding from him, but it made her uncomfortable nonetheless.

“Dr. Allen! Of course. Sorry, I’m just getting off in my head. Did you need something?”

The doctor frowned at her, obviously not buying her - frankly terrible - lie. He was giving her a small smile. She kind of wanted to smash his face in for. It was the same look Barry gave her when he thought she was being ridiculous, but he didn’t want to say anything. He gave her the look every time she made him watch reality TV with her. Thankfully for her, they had a lot more than that in common, like the fact that he was too nice to push her into telling the truth.

“No, I’m alright. Thanks for asking Sara. I was just worried about you. You’ve been acting a little off all day. I just wanted to let you know that I’m here if you need to talk,” Dr. Allen told her, squeezing her shoulder supportively as he spoke.

Sara would have loved a friendly ear, but Henry Allen could not be that person. She knew better than to talk about Nyssa to anyone at the hospital, and she definitely couldn’t talk to the man about her problems with his dead son.

So Sara put on yet another fake smile, thanked Dr. Allen, and got the hell out of there as fast as possible. After all, Sara still had another hour of this shit ahead of her, and if she was going to make it to midnight she needed something to right in her day.

It seems that was a pipe dream for Sara. She had a suspicion her bosses - the big, bad ones - might have been pissed at her. She didn’t make it down the hallway before she slipped and fell into a pile of vomit. Well, Sara thought to herself grimly, it really was one of those days.
Sweet Fixes

Chapter Summary

The Rogues enjoy some peaches and marshmallows.

Len hadn’t felt this awkward in a long time. He was standing outside of Barry’s room waiting for the man to open the door. It had been 87 seconds since he knocked, and he received no reply. He knew Barry was in there, but the man had not made a peep. Len really wished he left the bowl he was holding in the kitchen. It suddenly occurred to Len that bringing the man his own comfort food when Barry was so obviously still avoiding him might have been a bad idea.

“Oh, hey Len. Did you want something?” Barry answered. The younger man had barely poked his head out, but even with the limited view Len could tell he was rubbing the back of his neck. Fuck, Barry only did that when he was uncomfortable or stressed.

“I brought you something. Can I come in for a minute?”

Why did he wave the bowl as he spoke? Sometimes Len really wondered about his own intelligence, but it worked at least, so Len decided to shelve those doubts for now. Barry stepped aside wordlessly, and Len followed him into the room.

Len, not knowing what else to do now that they were both standing awkwardly in Barry’s room, shoved the bowl in his Barry’s hands.

“What is this?” Barry asked. He took the bowl, but was holding it away from himself. Len wanted to snatch it back, but he had a feeling Barry would hate that even more.

“It’s peaches and marshmallows. Lisa’s always loved it, and I thought you might like some too,” Len mumbled.

It wasn’t the full answer, but it’s the one he thought Barry would want to hear. The dessert had been one of his sister’s favorites since she was a small child. Lisa’s mother, always one to show off her wealth, had been happy to shower Lisa with sweets so long as it kept her quiet and obedient, and their father agreed to keep them both from bothering him.
Len had made it many times over the years to keep Lisa’s parents from tarnishing as many things as possible for her, so he had long since perfected their favorite dessert. Even when the two of them had been barely scraping by in their early years as a grim reapers, Len made her this dessert every time he screwed up and hurt her. It had been an expensive apology at the time. Peaches nor marshmallows were cheap back then, but Lisa was worth every dime he spent on her. She always was.

It was stupid of him to make this for Barry now. He should have just made Barry something else, or apologized without food. Of course, since this was Barry the food probably helped.

“Oh my god this is so good,” Barry moaned around his first bite. It had taken him some anxious stirring before he ate any, but it seems the first bite had completely loosened the younger man up.

“Why haven’t you made this before? Seriously Len, what the hell? I feel deprived right now,” Barry told Len. He was impressed that he was able to make out the words considering Barry hadn’t allowed his mouth to empty since his first bite.

Len chuckled at Barry’s reaction, thanking whatever was out there that Barry seemed to melt to quickly in the face of his dessert. It was good having a reminder that he didn’t completely fuck up everything he touched.

“You haven’t had it yet because I usually only make it when I’ve fucked up,” Len told Barry honestly. These day, unless Lisa begged, it was the only time he made the treat.

At Len’s words Barry tensed. He didn’t stop eating though, so Len took it as an invitation to continue.

“I’m sorry, Barr. I know I crossed a line. I didn’t know what was really going on, but even then that is no excuse. I’ve been trying to keep my distance and let you get over things on your own, and not just because I’m worried about the awful things Bette and Lisa will do to me in my sleep if I don’t. Can you forgive me?”

Barry stopped eating, and Len felt the discomfort rise in his chest once more. If Barry was willingly separating himself from food he was enjoying that much then Barry was more upset than he thought.

Or maybe Len was wrong once again, because when Barry sat down his bowl beside a sleeping McSnurtle’s tank, he grabbed Len’s hand in his own.
“You don’t need to apologize. I screwed up, Len, and it’s your job to let me know that. Admittedly, you could have been nicer about it, but I’m not holding it against you,” Barry assured him.

He was doing that smile again. The one that made it feel like Len’s stomach was doing somersaults. His eyes crinkled, and small dimples formed. For the first time in day, Len didn’t completely hate himself. He wanted to tell Barry that he really did need to apologize, because Barry should have been angry with him. Len should have let Barry know that these last couple of days of the silent treatment were driving him absolutely crazy because somehow despite knowing each other for such a short time, Len’s days felt incomplete without Barry. None of that is what came out. Instead, Len was an idiot once more.

“You’ve been avoiding me. You wouldn’t be avoiding me if we were fine.”

Len wanted to bang his head against the wall. Seriously, his brain was not working right today. He should have left Barry alone for a while longer, at least until this mess in his own head was sorted out.

“It’s not because of you, Len. It’s what I did. I’ve been… struggling because of what I went through. You know that. I’ve been so selfish though, and that just came to head on Monday. I was worried about my own torment that I put someone else through something awfully similar. I forced Ted Gaynor to be still while people poked, prodded, and hurt him. It’s just been a little too familiar,” Barry confided.

The young reapers admission made Len feel a million times better and a million times worse all in the same instant. He was so relieved that Barry wasn’t upset with him, and that he hadn’t completely damaged their relationship by being his usual dickish self.

On the other hand, Len hated that Barry hadn’t come to him with this before now. Until Monday, Len and Sara had been the ones Barry came to when he felt this way. Now it seems Bette may have replaced that role. She and Barry had spent almost all of the last three days together, at least when they were both off work. Bette had even taken Barry to his appointments, saying Len lost the right for a couple of days. As their boss he probably should have protested, but Bette had made a good point.

“I’m still sorry,” Len told him, carefully thinking this time before he spoke. He obviously needed to. “It may not have been entirely my fault you’re upset, but you know it isn’t yours either right? You didn’t know what was going to happen. This one is on Sara and I. We should have made sure you knew everything about what we are doing before this became an issue, and I’m sorry I failed you like this.”
Barry frowned at his words. He opened his mouth several times, closing it before any words came out. Barry seemed at a loss. Len got that. He was too.

“Want to help me finish this?” Barry grabbed the bowl once more as he spoke, holding out the spoon towards Len. “Sara already warned me that reapers can still gain weight, and as delicious as this is I’m going to need help finishing this if I want some more later.”

Len laughed as he took the offered spoon. Barry protest at his marshmallow heavy bite, but the kid really shown have known better than to share his treasures with a thief. Len didn’t mind one bit. He would take whatever Barry had to offer.

Cisco wouldn’t stop twirling in his office chair as he loudly sucked on what had to be his 10th lollipop of the day. Assuming Caitlin didn’t get to it first, Barry was about ready bodily removed Cisco, his squeaky spins, and the world’s loudest licking sounds from their office. He liked the man, he really did, but Cisco’s attention span issues may be the death of him. The real questions was rather ‘him’ meant Barry or Cisco.

It would probably be Cisco, because it looked like Caitlin was about to snap. She got up from behind her desk, and quickly walked to Cisco’s, stopping the chair with her high-heeled foot as soon as she was in range.

“What was that for, Cait? You broke my concentration,” Cisco complained. Barry snorted at the man’s words, but Caitlin’s response thankfully drowned him out.

“What was that for, Cait? You broke my concentration,” Cisco complained. Barry snorted at the man’s words, but Caitlin’s response thankfully drowned him out.

“Your concentration? I broke your concentration?”

“Yes, you banshee. I was almost done reworking this system,” Cisco told her, eyebrows raised in her direction.

“Yeah man,” Barry butt in, sensing a huge rant bubbling inside Caitlin, and trying to save Cisco from it, “But you’ve been distracting us the entire time. You do realize your chair is, like, the loudest in the office?”
“Plus your stupid suckers. You do realize it’s possible to eat one without slurping?” Caitlin concurred.

Cisco gasped and leaned back in his chair like he’d been slapped. The effect was somewhat ruined by the ear-splitting screech his chair gave as it shifted.

“Wait, does it always do that?” Cisco asked.

“Seriously? Cisco, we have been complaining to you about for years! You need to stop moving or get a new chair,” Caitlin told him sternly.

Barry just laughed at the twos continued bickering, vaguely paying attention to make sure it didn’t get worse. After all, he had only had a half hour until Mark picked him up to take him to his appointment that day, and Barry didn’t want to have to finish tomorrow.

Mediating their argument did mean he was almost late to meet Mick, but it was worth it in the end. He got three Tootsie Pops and a bag of Cisco’s precious Twizzlers, plus Caitlin’s Cherry Jello, to trade chairs, and he didn’t miss his appointment, so Barry still counted it as a win. Plus, Len had promised to save him more of the peaches and marshmallows. All in all, it was turning in to a pretty sweet day.

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Hartley could listen to Ray talk for hours on end most of the time. The man was brilliant, yet kind in a way Hartley had never encountered anywhere else, and Hartley knew himself well enough to figure out that he was more than a little in love with Raymond Palmer.

Regardless of his feelings for Ray, or more precisely because of them, Hartley did not want to talk with him right now. It wasn’t the conversation itself. Hartley never minded listening to Ray talk about work, even if working at a hospice was about the most depressing job someone could have. Ray rarely focused on those aspects. He always focused on the good day one of his patients was having, their strength, or even just funny stories.

No, Hartley current problem with Ray’s attempts at conversations was the way the man looked. He had walked out of Mick’s room at two o’clock in the morning in pants that weren’t his own, a still-forming bruise peeking out by his collar, and hair so mussed it could only have been caused by sex.
“Ray, do you mind?” Hartley cut the man off mid-sentence. He figured it didn’t matter since he hadn’t been listening anyways.

Unfortunately, he made the mistake of turning back towards Raymond as he spoke. The man was blocking his way to the fridge, but Hartley still should have known better. Grown men should not be able to look that sad at something so simple, and it should have annoyed him to see it. Damn, Barry at least had an excuse for constantly looking like the world’s saddest kicked puppy, and it still annoyed him on occasion.

“I’m sorry, Hart. I can get out of your hair,” Ray solemnly assured Hartley as he started to walk of the kitchen.

And fuck, Hartley could leave it at that. Of course Ray would assume it was his fault. The man had been fucking the Mick almost exclusively for three decades, and Mick still wouldn’t say they were dating. Ray, sweet soul that he was, just shrugged it off, but Hartley knew it bothered him. Ray had confessed it to him more than once, but only as drunken whispers of lonely nights. Hartley knew how much it messed with Ray’s head. He pretended otherwise, but Hartley knew the truth, and the truth was the Raymond Palmer had spent so long letting Mick walk all over him that he had forgotten how to get mad when people acted like a dick to him. Ray and Mick never would have made it otherwise.

“Sorry, Ray. That was uncalled for. I’m just in a bit of a mood. Why don’t you split some of this with me, and you can finish your story?”

Hartley may not have felt like talking to Ray, but he couldn’t bring himself to mind when the smile he got in return for his words was far sweeter than the leftover peaches and marshmallows.

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Lisa was awake earlier than her brother. It was because she never went to bed, but she figured the details weren’t that important. It was 4:30 am, and she really wanted to be asleep. Unfortunately, she needed to talk to Lenny, and she knew he wouldn’t say anything to her later in the day. The best time to get him to talk was when they were alone, and his defenses were down. She had long since learned that the best time for that was before his morning coffee, and so as much as she hated early mornings like this, Lisa was awake. Luckily, she had the last of the peaches and marshmallows to keep her up.
She had been out all of the previous day, finalizing the down of her latest beau. It was going to be beautiful, and the best part was he was enough of an asshole she didn’t have to worry about anything pesky like guilt getting in her way. When she had gotten home, she had been absolutely tickled to find her favorite dessert in the fridge, and not just because by now Lisa was on her third helping of it. No, she knew exactly what this dessert meant, and she was going to make her brother talk about it.

“Hey, Lenny,” she greeted him as he flicked on the overhead light in the kitchen.

“Jesus fucking Christ Lisa! What the hell are you doing sitting in the dark kitchen at 4:30?” He startled. She was very amused to see him jump. It was never easy to get the drop on him like that, which made it that much more enjoyable when she was successful.

“I’m eating, obviously. Duh,” she laughed as she gestured to her almost clean plate. Just as she expected, he scowled heavily in her direction as he saw the cleaned out dish beside her. He didn’t say anything though, turning on his morning coffee without comment.

“How did you lot manage to eat a double batch in less than 24 hours? Just because diabetes is off the table, it doesn’t mean we should be eating like children,” Len scolded. Lisa rolled her eyes at her brother, carefully ensuring he could see the action. He still ignored her.

“So you are worried about the Rogues health, huh?” She asked, putting as much innocent curiosity in her voice as she could muster. Len knew her well enough to narrow his eyes at her tone.

“I don’t give a damn what you all do,” he answers her slowly, forcibly accentuating his ridiculous drawl.

“Well that’s good. I thought you were upset because we ate the rest of Barry’s apology sweets. Good to know I was mistaken then,” she cheerfully goaded before taking the last bite of the heavenly goodness formerly on her plate.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Lise. I just felt like baking,” Len lied. Lisa rolled her eyes again. If Len didn’t stop being such an idiot, her eyes were going to get stuck like that.

Yeah, and if you made anything else I’d believe you. I know you like to think you are mysterious and all, but I’ve known for over a 100 years, you doof, and you only make peaches and marshmallows when you are feeling guilty. So does this mean you apologized to Barry?”
“What I do with Barry is none of your business,” he retorted. Usually she would have assumed an answer like that meant Len was still being too stubborn, but he was smiling lightly as he started to fry the morning’s bacon.

“Oh good. You really were an exceptionally large ass this time. Barry really did deserve some apology peaches and marshmallows,” she praises. This time it was Len’s turn to roll his eyes.

“I did no such thing, you twat. I just wanted to make something sweet. Did you completely forget I actually like peaches and marshmallows too?”

“Methinks the lady doth protest too much,” she sing-songed at him.

“I’m not a lady,” Lenny huffed. Lisa couldn’t hold back the giggles at that.

“So then you admit you are protesting?”

“You are suck a fucking pest. Please go to bed,” Len begged. He even turned away from the bacon he was flipping, so Lisa figured it was pretty serious.

“Fine, fine. I’ll go to bed, but only if you promise to save me some of the bacon,” she generously bargained. Lenny consented to her request, and Lisa was finally able to go to sleep.
Bary has a job deep in Central City's woods.

Bette was not impressed with Barry’s office. It was incredibly creepy, and Cindy the receptionist was downright chilly. She was impressed receptionist could get away with glaring that. Of course, it’s probably because when Barry’s overly friendly came out, Cindy suddenly seemed to develop some personality. She would too if it meant the espresso she had literally forced on her would disappear. Barry’s job was deep in the woods outside of Central, and they really needed to get a move on.

“Bette! You were supposed to wait for me downstairs,” Barry greeted as he stumbled up to her.

“Nonsense, Sam. Why would you keep a pretty lady like this waiting for you downstairs? No, up here is better. How are you liking your coffee, dear?” Barry’s boss cut in, throwing an arm around Barry’s shoulders as spoke.

Bette really didn’t like hearing Barry called Sam. It was too weird. The boy was way too sweet, not to mention young, for the associations with Scudder that brought to her mind. Len really should have picked a different name. It wasn’t the time to worry about thoughts like that, so she simply threw back the remainder of the admittedly good beverage.

“It was marvelous, thanks. You ready, Sam? I’m in a bit of a rush,” she tried hurrying them, but it seemed a timely exit was not going to be working in the reapers favor.

“Sam, my man. Who’s your friend?” a young Hispanic man greeted as he joined them.

The man was about Bette’s heights, with long dark hair, a sweet grin, and a shirt that in no way seemed appropriate for the office. Based on Barry’s descriptions, this must be his friend Cisco. Bette was a fan. Anyone that could pull a smile out of Barry like the one he had now was good in her books.

“I’m Bette, and you must be Cisco. Sam’s told me about you,” she smiled at him as she spoke, holding out her hand. Cisco seemed to have to shake him himself out of a revere before he remembered how to shake her hand. It was precious.
“Yeah, I’m Cisco. Sam, why haven’t you mentioned your very beautiful friend before?”

“He was going to have her wait downstairs too,” the boss cut in, squeezing Barry to his side one last time before releasing him.

She could practically feel Barry’s sigh of relief at being released. She knew he was still having issues with most people touching him after everything, and she was more than a little surprised he hadn’t thrown of the arm in the first place. Barry tended to avoid touches that came from men that weren’t Len.

“Thanks, H.R.,” Barry mumbled out of the corner of his mouth before continuing louder, “Guys, this is Bette. We were just leaving. I’ve got an appointment across town coming up she is taking me to, and if we don’t leave now we are going to be late.”

Barry quickly moved towards the door, leaving Bette to wave awkwardly at his co-workers before catching up. She waited until they were alone in the elevator before she started speaking, not wanting to be overheard by Cindy.

“What is wrong with that place? I think you may have uncovered the human version of the Island of Misfit Toys.”

Barry just laughed at her words, apparently not how serious she was being. She was a goddamn grim reaper. An office should not be able to creep her out like that.

“Seriously Barry, I work as a meter maid. How in the hell did you manage to find a worse job?”

“It’s not so bad,” Barry disagreed as the stepped off the elevator.

Bette wanted to argue against that, but she had a feeling Barry wasn’t talking about the mind-numbing work of data entry, or even the world’s most unsettling office space. Although really, she thought, what the fuck was up with all the smiley faces? Her dreams were going to be haunted with a bunch of little smiling pacman coming to eat her after seeing Happy Times. She had no doubt.

Barry didn’t seem mind the oddness of the Happy Times office because his co-workers were
becoming his friends. The overly involved boss who was apparently some kind of coffee god, the little cutie who apparently wouldn’t know proper office attire if it bit him in the ass, and the sad-looking redhead who waved him goodbye on their way out the door all seemed fond of Barry, and she was starting to think he may return the affection. She wasn’t going to make him argue with her on that, so she simply agreed. After all, Barry deserved some friends outside of the grim madness that was life as a reaper.

It took Barry and Bette two hours to hike out to his designated appointment, and they hadn’t seen anyone since their first half hour. They had been waiting for several minutes now, and neither had heard or seen anything that seemed like it could lead them to Jacob Davenport. It was officially now 6:47 pm, and there was no one around for Barry to reap.

“Bette, I think there might have been a mistake,” Barry finally admits.

“I sincerely doubt it. I’m sure something will,” Bette began.

A loud thump interrupted them from above, and Bette threw herself and Barry out of the way of a falling tree limb.

“... turn up,” Bette continued, slightly dazed. Barry didn’t blame her. About 20 feet above them, Jacob Davenport was hanging limply from the tree. Even from the distance, Barry could see his neck had snapped on impact. Luckily, he seemed to be dead from the moment of impact.

“Bette… How in the hell am I supposed to touch that guy? We don’t exactly have any climbing equipment, and it took a couple of hours to get out here,” Barry wondered. He really didn’t want to hike back out there.

“This should do it,” Bette told him. He had a bad feeling about Bette’s response being to hand him a rock.

“What am I supposed to do with this?”
“Throw it at the chute, dummy. You just need to knock it down. The impact of the guys body took down the branch below, so throw the damn things and let’s get out of here. Mark promised if he’d get us if we are out by 9:30 since he has a job close by, and I don’t feel like playing phone tag with the rest of the Rogues to see who can come get us in the middle of nowhere because this damn guy is stuck up a tree,” Bette explained impatiently.

So Barry, not knowing what else to do, threw the rock. He missed miserably, hitting a tree to the right five feet lower than he was aiming. He and Bette both burst out laughing.

“Oh my god. That may be the worst throw I have ever seen. Here, let me try,” Bette offered as she grabbed another rock.

Barry was more than a little annoyed when her first throw landed perfectly, but it still didn’t fully dislodge the body. After two more perfect tosses, the rocks did finally work and the body of Jacob Davenport fell two feet in front of his face.

“Shit! I’m sorry. You okay?” she traitorously giggled at his unmanly squealing.

Barry flipped her the bird with one hand as he pulled Jacob out of his body with his other.

“Whoa man. That was so sick. Thanks for the assist, red,” their newest soul tried winking at Bette as he spoke. It probably would have worked better if he had used the side of his face that hadn’t hit the tree, a fact which Barry felt very guilty for blurting out.

“You make a good point. The name’s Jake. I don’t suppose you guys could help a brother out? I don’t think I’d want back in there if I could, but even you, Red, aren’t enough for me to actually become a spook. I hope at least,” Jake told them.

The words had barely left his mouth when the ground stretching away from the road turned into a beautiful blue sky. Considering it looked like they were above the earth far higher than he wanted to guess, it made him a little nauseous, but Bette was looking at it like she wanted to follow Jake in, even after it disappeared.

“Wasn’t that just beautiful,” Bette breathed. Her voice was strained, yet completely in awe.

“I don’t know. I don’t think I’d want to fall like that,” Barry disagreed.
“It’s not about the falling. It’s about the jump,” she told him before she starting walking back towards the trail.

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“Can we break for a minute?” Barry panted. Bette looked back towards him, not even a little winded. He hated her for it. They had been walking through the woods for nearly 4 hours, and Barry was exhausted.

“Do we have to? We’ve only got another 20 minutes, and we took a break a half hour ago. We’ve only got a little bit before Mark gets tired of waiting around,” Bette stated.

Barry decided he did not care. Someone else could get them if Mark left.

“If I have to take another step in the next 5 minutes, I’m gonna die again,” Barry insisted as he took a seat on fallen log. Bette laughed, so Barry threw a stick at her. He tried at least, but apparently his aim had not magically improved since his appointment. Bette laughed harder.

“How do I do all this?” he asked. He may not have worked out the way he used to anymore, but Barry had been in decent shape when he died. Somehow, despite his workouts stopping, he hadn’t actually lost any muscle mass. Maybe he was still feeling loss, even if it didn’t show.

“How do I do what? Do you mean walking through the woods without breaking every five minutes?” Bette teased, lightly punching his arm as she joined him on the log.

“It has not been every five minutes,” he protested quickly, continuing at the same speed before she continue ribbing him, “But yeah, I mean the fact we’ve been walking around the woods for four hours without you breathing heavily, and your weirdly accurate throwing arm. That is not natural. Please tell me it’s some sort of reaper side effect that just hasn’t kicked in yet.”
“It’s not a reaper thing Barry. You should see Sam try to throw. I think he’d make you look athletic,” she said.

“I am athletic, this is just crazy.” he retorted, trying to ignore the continued laughter that caused. “I am! I’m a runner. I was, at least. I haven’t been out since I died. Seriously though, what’s with the rest of it?”

Bette snorted inelegantly before she answered.

“I had four older brothers growing up. I served in the army. Plus, I’m not a complete wuss. Take your pick.”

“You were in the army?” Barry couldn’t believe it.

Except, maybe it did make a weird sort of sense. She was by far the most orderly of the Rogues. She was also able to seamless take charge or work with the others with a kind of shocking back and forth. Plus after seeing her aim he could totally see her as a soldier.

“Army, huh? When did you serve?”

“I signed in up 1989. Finished up my training as an EOD specialist shortly before the Persian Gulf War.

“You’re an EOD specialist? That’s so cool,” Barry exclaimed. He flushed when he realized he geeked out over his own friend for dealing with bombs almost two decades ago, but it made her smile, so he decided he didn’t care.

“I was an EOD specialist. I haven’t disabled a bomb since the 1990s. I loved it though. It was always such a rush,” she informed him calmly, like it wasn’t completely badass.

“It’s still neat. Is that what killed you?” He inquired. It felt kind of rude, but he blurted it out before he realized what was coming out of his mouth.
“No, I didn’t get blown up. At least, that isn’t what killed me. I had some good runs right up until January of ‘91. It was a month before the war ended, and the transporter I was in ran over a bomb. I ended up at the Veteran’s Hospital here in Central to heal up, and I was doing pretty well with my recovery. Eight months later I was almost ready to go back in when I went out on a walk with one of the nurses. Docs all said it was good to keep moving, so I asked her to stretch things out, and we went around the block that day. We ended up getting mugged, and the bastards shot us both. I died on the scene, and she kicked it a week later at the hospital.”

Barry didn’t know what to do with that. He leaned over on her, and rested his head on her shoulder as he grasped her hands in his. Fuck, he didn’t know what to make of all of that. He knew on some level the rest of the Rogues couldn’t have died peacefully. Sara had told him early on that most reapers ended up in the division they died in. It made sense the Rogues’ deaths wouldn’t be peaceful.

“Stop with that face, Barry. It’s been almost 20 years. I’m fine with it. Things sucked for a while, but I like my life now. Sure, my job could be better, and I miss the things I could do when I was alive, but the people in my life have always been what mattered most to me, and I love you guys. Even if most of the Rogues are dicks,” she assured him, squeezing his hand comfortably before using it to pull them both up.

“Do we have to?” he complained, pouting overdramatically at her obvious attempts to restart their hike. He felt a little ridiculous, but it had his desired result. Bette started laughing, and Barry didn’t mind any silliness he felt.
Chapter Summary

Barry, Sam, and Bette go for drinks. Joe and Patty talk.

Barry lead Bette and Sam into a dinky Irish Bar, trying and failing to not think about all the diseases this place likely held. It was almost as bad as that awful apartment he and Lisa went to a while back for a job, only he hadn’t been expected to eat and drink there. He really wasn’t sure he wanted to consume anything from this place now.

“C’mon Barry. You’re blocking the doorway,” Bette states, nudging Barry forward lightly.

Barry let Bette direct him towards the in the back while Sam went to the bar to order their drinks. Barry picked what he hoped was a clean table and sat back to enjoy the pub. At least, as much as he could enjoy a place like that before alcohol. He hadn’t been in the mood for going out after work, but Sam had insisted they have a few beers before Barry’s appointment, and Bette agreed to keep them company.

“You both should probably stop making those faces. It looks like you bit straight in to a lemon,” Sam informed them as he rejoined their table.

“Screw you, Sammy. You’d be making these faces too if you had a day like we did,” Bette retorted without any heat.

Barry wanted to protest on principle, but it had been Cisco and Caitlin’s off day, and he had to spend the entire day in the filing room downstairs. He had thought the office itself was a miserable place when he started, but the filing room made the office itself seem like paradise. It was dark, dank, and moldy. He was fairly certain pre-death him wouldn’t have been able to stomach the space for more than five minutes without his nose turning into a faucet. While not having allergies any more was an unexpectedly nice perk of death most of the time, it would have been nice to have them again to get out that room.

“Well that your own damn fault. It’s not like Len hasn’t offered you an in, but you’re too damn stubborn to take it,” Sam reminds them with a smirk, passing the pitcher to Barry now he had poured his own beer.
“I wouldn’t call refusing to be a criminal stubbornness,” he replied, frowning much more seriously than the other two.

“It’s a choice though. Personally, my day was great, and I’d be willing to bet I made a hell of a lot more than you two did,” the criminals smirk turned darker as he spoke, but before he could continue a thunk from under their table interrupted him.

“Fuck you too, asshole. That’s why you are buying all the drinks,” Bette ordered.

“Course I am, Betty-Boop.” Sam ignored the second kick to his leg to continue, “It doesn’t mean you two aren’t screwing yourselves over with this whole morality bullshit. Seriously, when is the last time you two went out for a good time that wasn’t associated with someone’s death? Fuck, you two couldn’t even go to the aquarium without some poor sap getting eaten by a shark. Me and Mark have broken in three times this year alone,” Sam bragged.

“What are you stealing at the aquarium?” Barry wondered. He knew they did jobs all over town, but something about robbing an aquarium just felt wrong to him. Apparently not the rest of the Rogues, if Bette’s laughter was to be believed.

“We don’t steal from the aquarium. It’s not like we are monsters, kid. We just break in to go swimming with the critters. You should’ve seen the penguins last time. They fucking hated Mark. It was glorious,” Sam laughed.

Barry wasn’t sure what was more surprising. The fact that these idiots regularly broke in to the aquarium to go swimming, or that the aquarium was apparently off limits, but Central City Museum, the site of their last job, wasn’t. He wasn’t nearly drunk enough to question it, so he just threw back his beer to get there. Apparently Bette did not agree.

“So Barry and I are lame because we refuse to break the law, but it’s cool to get attacked by penguins? Is that really the argument you are going for here?”

“I didn’t say you were lame, but if the shoe fits…” Sam trailed off. The man very intentionally ignored their twin eye rolls before continuing, “Of course you two are focusing on my stories. You aren’t making any for yourself other than your jobs, and you’re refusing to admit I’m right. In case you’ve both forgotten, one of the benefits of being dead is supposed to be enjoying the world around us, and you two are just being all pissy with me because you know you aren’t.”
Barry wanted to argue with Sam, but he found he couldn’t. Even now, they were at the pub because Barry had a job in two hours. They may have come early, but he would have refused the trip entirely if it wasn’t for the post-it in his pocket. It seemed Bette was having the same thoughts, as she, like Barry, was taking a long swig from her drink to avoid the question.

“See, you know I’m right,” Sam persist. Barry had a feeling Bette kicked Sam harder that time.

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“Detective West, could I talk with you for a minute?” Officer Spivot interrupted him. Joe was on the way out the door for dinner with Iris and Wally, and he did not feel like stopping to talk. Something about her face made him pause though. She didn’t seem like she was about ask about a case, a favor, or of the millions of other questions he got day in and day out from beat cops.

She was nervous, shifting on her feet, and obviously forcing herself to maintain eye contact. From other officers that behavior wouldn’t be that unusual, but Spivot never had a problem talking to him before. If anything, she should be more comfortable with him now that ever. She was one of the few cops who hadn’t shied away from talking with him about the Butcher case, and the insights she had were damn good. She was going to make a great detective someday.

Still, Spivot’s talents, loyalty, and obvious need to talk wasn’t the reason Joe nodded his head, and lead her in to an empty conference room. The young woman had been fiddling with a chain around her neck the entire time she spoke with him. She didn’t even seem aware of the action, but Joe certainly was. He knew what that chain held. Patty, because she was Patty right now and not Detective Spivot, was fiddling with Barry’s old ring.

Patty had bought it at a police auction for him. Barry had wanted the ring, but was too embarrassed to bid on it. It was some collectors thing from some movie series Joe didn’t even try to understand. Patty had. She had bid on the ring herself after talking with Barry about it, and then insisted Barry keep the ring. It was right after Patty had joined the force, and Barry was still trying to fit in more at the station. She didn’t think he needed to, and she didn’t see why she should if the men at the station were going to be such jerks about some stupid fantasy ring. It was one of the first things he had set aside when cleaning out Barry’s things.

“What do you need, Patty?”

If she was surprised at him using her first name, she hid it well. Patty probably wasn’t. At work she
was Officer Spivot, and they both knew it well. It was only when things got personal he used her other name.

“I need your advice, Joe. Something’s come up, and I don’t know what I should do,” she confessed.

“I’m going to need more than that if you want me to help,” he replied.

He was there for her, really, but he couldn’t do anything if she didn’t tell him what she needed. Therefore, he was surprised when rather than answering him she simply handed him an a piece of paper. When Joe read it, he suddenly understood why she was so nervous.

“Midway City University, huh? That a great school. Good forensic program too. Barry almost ended up going there,” Joe responded. He knew what she wanted to know, but he didn’t know what to tell her. He didn’t know what she wanted to hear.

“I know. I mean, Barry’s the one who told me to apply there. He said they offered really good scholarships. Things have changed so much since then. I don’t know what to do. I’ve wanted to be a CSI for so long, but I don’t know if I can leave Central City yet,” Patty confessed quickly. It made Joe’s chest ache painfully, and not just because of the mentions of his dead son.

Joe knew what he wanted Patty to do, and he knew it wasn’t the answer he needed to give her. Joe wanted Patty to stay behind. She was his main source of information on the man who killed Barry, and she was proving herself to be a damn good cop. Unfortunately for Joe, she was also Barry’s friend, and because of that Joe knew he couldn’t tell her to stay. Barry wouldn’t have wanted that.

“You’re worried about leaving with the Butcher case unsolved?” Joe asked, wanting to confirm before he told her what she needed to hear. He waited for her verbal agreement before he continued.

“That’s not enough reason to stay. I want that bastard caught, you know that. I want to be there when we find him. I’m gonna watch when they put him down like the mangy dog he is, and I’m gonna have a smile on my face when they do. I know you want to be with us for all that, and as much I’d love to have you there, I can’t tell you to stay. Tell me, Patty, what do you think Barry would tell you if you were having this conversation with him instead of me?”

Patty, to her credit, didn’t answer right away. It was yet another reason Joe wished he had it in him to tell her something different.
“He’d tell me to go. Barry was alway encouraging me to do what I wanted to do. He was the one who talked me in to taking my detective test so early. He helped me fill out this application too. I just thought he’d be here with me to celebrate,” Patty admits, wiping the tears from her eyes.

“Damn straight. You know, he would have wanted you to do what you thought was best. Besides, without Barry we are going to need good CSI’s taking over. Julian can only do so much, and you know the rest aren’t nearly to their level,” Joe pointed out. They both let out a small chuckle at his words. Joe was sure she was just as amused by his not-so-subtle encouragements as she was his comparison of Julian and Barry. He was fairly positive both men would have turned purple if they heard it, but Joe wasn’t ever going to have the chance to test it.

“I was hoping you would tell me to stay,” she confessed after a moment.

“I know,” he replied, “Barry wouldn’t have wanted that though, and you and I both know it. So you honor my son properly, and when you come back you can make him proud catching other bad guys. The Butcher is still going down, Patty. I can promise you that,” Joe swore.

“Okay, Detective. Then I guess I better go hand in that resignation I’ve been working on all day,” Patty tells him as she left. Joe allowed himself a moment alone before following her out the door. He might be grieving, but he still had two kids at home, and they needed him in a way Barry never would again.

“…You think Sam is ever coming back from the bathroom?” Barry asked Bette. The man had been gone for a while, and Barry’s appointment was in five minutes. He had already identified the name on his list, and he really wanted to get out of there after this one.

Sara Neil was a lively woman, celebrating vibrantly with all of her guest. She was going to die at her fiftieth birthday party, and all of these people who loved her were going to watch. He didn’t want to stay at the bar to watch afterwards.

Bette, classy lady that she was, snorted inelegantly into her glass before she responded to his query. “He’s not in the bathroom, Barr. Well, he is, but he isn’t using it for its intended purpose. Did you not notice the blonde he was making bedroom eyes at all evening? She followed him in.”
“Great,” he groaned, dropping his head into his hands. “How long do you think we are going to be stuck here?”

“Longer than we’re going to want to be,” Bette replied, sounding as put out by the fact as Barry felt.

“This one is going to suck, isn’t it?” Barry knew he wasn’t going to like the answer he was asking for, but for some reason that hadn’t stopped him from voicing it anyways.

“Which part? You mean the fact you are killing that badass lady on her birthday, or the fact that everyone who cares about her is in the pub to watch it?”

“At least there’s beer here,” he sighed, before taking a deep gulp. Sometimes, Barry wished Bette was a little less honest.

Bette was a war veteran, and she had been reaper for nearly two decades now in External Influences. She figured that with all the deaths she was around that death shouldn’t surprise her as often as it did, but sometimes things just got weird.

Barry’s current appointment seemed like it was going to qualify for the category. For starters, birthday reapings were rare, especially during the middle of said persons giant 50th birthday party. What really made this one strange was what Sara Neil was doing now. The lady had maybe 30 seconds left, and she was doing what appeared to be a traditional Irish dance on top of the bar. Bette would have bet that she was going to fall off the bar to her death, but Sam was still too busy fucking in the bathroom. It’s a shame Barry wouldn’t take the bet, still too green to not look all offended when she offered. He had guessed something from above would cause it, and she would have appreciated the extra cash.

“Soara!” The cry came from all around the restaurant as the swordfish swooped down, and the nose stabbed her through the heart. Shit, that was kind of gross. At least she was far enough away to avoid the blood.

“Well I’ll be damned. Good thing you didn’t take that bet, huh,” she joked. Barry scowled at the crassness of her words. She willfully ignored the glower.
“C’mon. Let get out of here. I see Ms. Neil over there, and I think this would be best for everyone to take care of this out back.”

Bette decided Barry had things in hand, so she headed out back like he suggested to wait. She didn’t feel like dealing with a weepy lady watching her family mourn. She felt a bit bitchy for leaving it to Barry, but he did need to have the training wheels off a bit more anyways. She must have guessed right, because Barry joined her only a few minutes later with the world’s most unfortunate birthday girl trailing behind him.

“Thanks for helping, Bette,” Barry drawled sarcastically the door shut behind him. God, he was really spending way too much time with Len. If their playdates continued, the Rogue’s new sweetheart would be just as much of an asshole as the rest of them in no time. Then again, maybe Barry wouldn’t. He had held the door open behind him for Ms. Neil despite the fact he knew she could have walked through.

“Sorry, Barry,” she lied before switching back to the truth, “I just figured you had it covered, and I didn’t particularly feel like dealing with the waterworks tonight. Sorry you kicked it at your party, ma’am.”

“Bette!” Barry hissed, an adorably indignant expression gracing his face on behalf of the dead lady.

“Don’t worry about it, Barry dear. I can’t say I blame your friend. It really has been a lovely evening, and it would be a shame to have something so silly ruining it for everyone,” Ms. Neil told them.

She seemed to be taking her death fairly well. She didn’t even make a face when her hand passed through Barry’s back as she attempted to pat it. Hell, when Bette told her as much, the woman laughed before she spoke.

“Well sure, my poor men probably won’t take it too well, but I’m sure you know how that goes. At least I had enough to comfort each other,” she giggled again before she continued. “I’m sure you understand. A pretty young girl like you is sure to have all kinds of boys trailing after you. I’m happy with how my life went, so what’s the point in pouting now that it’s over. Just because it ended a little earlier than I expected, sweetie, it doesn’t mean I didn’t enjoy the ride.”

Bette felt cold at Ms. Neil’s words. She remember the feeling she had when she was alive, with more than one good man she loved. She remembered being happy too. She had to remember, because neither of those applied to her anymore. Bette was stuck, and had been since she died in 1991.
Ms. Neil’s lights popped up as she spoke, and Bette couldn’t tear her eyes away. They were a beautiful sight, and one she had thought she would never get to see again.

“It’s the Cliffs of Moher,” she said aloud, surprising even herself.

“Oh, I should have guessed you were Irish. Fiery personality like that with the hair to match and all. I grew up close to them myself,” Ms. Neil confided, moving closer to the beautiful sight. Bette did too, wanting to get a better look.

“I’m American born, Irish on my mom’s side. Her family lived close by the cliffs too,” she told Ms. Neil.

“Bette, maybe you should come back here. We’ve got to go find Sam” she heard Barry say. She could hear nerves in his voice, and it was only then she realized why. She had gotten far closer than she meant originally, standing right next to Ms. Neil at the edge of the lights. She and Ms. Neil exchanged a look, both ignoring Barry. It seemed they both understood what was going on here too.

“I’m sorry, Barry,” she called over her shoulder, “But Sam’s right. They all are. What we are doing now isn’t really cutting it anymore. The doors only going to open for so long, and it feels like a day for jumping.”

She heard Barry call her name one more time. It was too late. She was a jumper, and she had finally made her leap.
Sam was quite pleased with the way his night was going. Whoever the hell he had just fucked (Jennifer? Jessica?) had been wonderfully enthusiastic, and from the sounds of things he had missed Barry’s appointment. Hopefully with that taken care of he could drop the two back by the Rogues den. He would have been tempted to go back out, but the hellacious woman he had just fucked into the wall really took it out of him. Then again, maybe it was just the wall sex. It did tend to wear him out more than he liked to admit, but there was no way in hell he was touching the floors or toilet in that bathroom.

Sam’s plan to head out would work a lot better if he could find Bette and Barry. They had left their table, and there was no sign of them anywhere in the bar. Plus, everyone was too busy freaking out of some dead broad to know where they went. The old bitty must have caused them a bit of a problem. Barry was soft enough to give her privacy, so he was guessing Bette must have followed them out back. It would have been nice if she’d stayed behind to warn him. He could have just left them, and as much as he was tempted, he decided to be nice and check for them first.

Luckily for him, it looked like he was at least partially right. Barry was kneeling on the ground by the back door, slumped over slightly. Bette was nowhere to be found though. At least that means the violent shrew didn’t kick him again for rolling his eyes at Barry. He knows the kid’s death sucked, but he didn’t have to freak out every time someone kicked it. It wasn’t exactly a feasible for a reaper.

“Kid, where is Bette? I’m ready to go, and it looks like you are too,” Sam tells him, leaning back against the wall.

“Bette?” he replied dazedly, “I don’t know where she went.”

“Well can you give me some ideas? That’s not exactly helpful, and I’m not waiting around all night,” Sam asked. Shit, he was not in the mood for this. He should have known better than to go drinking with Barry. He liked the guy well enough, but he was not equipped to deal with these constant breakdowns.

“She followed Ms. Neil.”
What a fucking joy. Barry was really not being helpful today.

“Who the fuck is Ms. Neil, and where did they go? Seriously, Barry, you’re going to have to help me out here. We’ve got about another five minutes before I’m giving up on this shit, and Bette can get her own damn ride home,” Sam pushed.

“Bette isn’t going to need a ride. Ms. Neil was my name. They jumped into the Cliffs of Moher together. It wasn’t… I don’t think she was supposed to do that, Sam. The lights didn’t seem to like it,” Barry admitted.

What the everlasting fuck? Bette couldn’t have been that stupid, could she? He knew she was struggling lately, but this was a whole different kind of crazy.

“That’s not… Are you sure? Bette knows that’s not okay,” Sam counters. He pushed of the wall as he spoke, walking around Barry to get a look at his face. The kid was obviously messed up right now. Sam needed to get a read on him.

Bette was always these most sensible of the Rogues. She may not have liked everything about what they did, but she followed the rules. It what she always did, even going so far as to follow laws that weren’t meant for the dead.

Barry nodded before he spoke, looking up to meet Sam’s eyes. “I saw her jump in. I tried to tell her, but I didn’t… I should have stopped her. She really wasn’t supposed to do that. The lights… They didn’t just disappear this time. They turned red and exploded, but she didn’t come back out.”

“Shit. I don’t… We’re calling, Len okay? He’ll know what to do.” Sam hoped he was at least, because he was not fucking equipped to deal with this bullshit. Honestly Sam didn’t know that Len was either, but it calmed Barry down for now, and it was all he could hope for at the moment.

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Len did not know what the fuck he was supposed to do. Sam had called him claiming Bette had followed Barry’s appointment into her lights. He had been a reaper for well over a hundred years, and he had never even heard of this happening.
He did not expect his kind of bullshit from Bette. She wasn’t a fan of what they did, and she hadn’t been from day one. Nevertheless, she was good at it. She was a soldier, through and through, and dying had not changed that. She followed orders, and she helped people. It’s what she always did. She had until now, at least.

Rather than dealing with that clusterfuck, he focused on what he knew he could fix. Barry was kneeling on the ground, staring blankly ahead at where he assumed Bette had went into someone else’s lights. Considering the looks Sam was shooting him, and the fact Sam was actually sitting beside him, Len doubted Barry had moved.

Len knelt down in front of Barry before he spoke, gently moving his hands to Barry’s face. He guided the other man’s gaze back towards him too. Barry always responded to Len better when they held each other’s gaze. Sometimes, Len had to make that happen. “Hey Barr. You with us?”

Barry nodded. Len wasn’t sure what that actually meant. He knew it meant Barry heard him, sure, but Barry when he got nonverbal it was rarely a good sign. At least it was something.

“Can you tell me what happened?” Len asked. He figured it was probably best to get right to the point.

Barry nodded again before he started speaking. Len had to suppress a frown at the action to avoid spooking Barry. Luckily for him it was successful, and Barry pulled himself together enough to speak.

“She just jumped. I couldn’t tell what she was doing at first, and by the time I realized it was too late. The lights though… I’ve never seen them do that before. I know I’m new to this, but I don’t think they were supposed to do that. The lights didn’t just disappear. They turned red, and it seemed like they exploded. What happened to her, Lenny? Please, I need to know.”

Len needed to know too. Bette was his responsibility. All of the Rogues were, but that was especially true for his External Influences reapers. If what Barry was saying was true, and he had no reason to believe otherwise, then Len had failed.

“I don’t know. I’m going to try and find out, though. I promise.”
It was six hours since Barry watched Bette jump into Ms. Neil’s lights, and he couldn’t sleep. He could barely close his eyes after what he saw. He had work in a few hours, and he didn’t know how he was supposed to manage. He didn’t know how to be normal right now.

Before Barry died, he knew how to solve this problem. When he was little, he would sneak into his parents room after a nightmare. His father was never a huge fan of it, but his mother would always let him stay and soothe those dreams away. After she died, Iris became his knew nighttime safe haven. He would go to her with his nightmares. It was during those nights that Barry fell in love with her.

The older Barry got, the less he needed to keep using her as his security blanket. It was probably for the best anyways. Once Joe realized he was in love with Iris, he hadn’t been a fan of Barry’s nighttime visits. Joe never stopped them, regardless of how he felt. He knew that Barry needed that comfort, and as much as Joe may have privately disapproved, he would never stand in the way of what his children needed.

Barry knew that he wasn’t going to get any sleep if he stayed in his room. Even the knowledge of McSnurtle’s company across the room wasn’t enough to soothe him to sleep. With that in mind, Barry knew what he needed to do.

So Barry got up, then left his room as quietly as possible. He didn’t bother knocking when he entered Len’s room. It felt rude, but he didn’t want to risk waking the rest of the Rogues. Besides, he doubted Len was sleeping any better than he was.

“What the fuck?” Len’s gruffly questioned. It made Barry want to retreat. He was tempted to run back to his own room, and his own sleepless night, but he knew if he could convince himself to stay then Len would tone it down. He always did for Barry.

“Can I come in?”

Even from his spot by the door, Barry could hear Len sigh loudly. He was starting to think this might have been a bad idea.

“Barry? C’mon in. Just don’t hit the lights,” Len agreed. Luckily for Barry, Len turned on the lamp by his bed. There is no way he could have made it across the room to join Len otherwise.
Barry was worried that he might have guessed wrong. Len may have sat up, but he was still shielding his eyes from the lights, and he didn’t get out of bed. He probably should have sat on the couch and given Len his space, but that wasn’t going to cut it tonight. Barry took a seat on the opposite side of Len’s bed, wrapping his arms around his legs as he sat against the headboard. Sitting with Len was already making him relax, but he couldn’t bring himself to vocalize the mess in his head yet. Since he didn’t know what all of it was, it wasn’t surprising.

“What’s wrong, Barr?”

“I can’t sleep. Can I stay in here for a while?” Barry decided to go with simplicity and honesty for this one. He couldn’t bear it if Len wanted him gone. He’d leave if Len wanted, of course he would, but Barry really didn’t want to go.

“You want to talk?” Len offered. It was a nice gesture, but Barry really did not want talk about anything. He just wanted to have Len with him.

“Do I have to?” Barry needed to know. If that’s what Len wanted, Barry would. He’d do anything to stay right now. He couldn’t be alone after losing Bette.

“You don’t have to do anything. Barr. I can’t guarantee I’ll stay awake if we’re quiet though,” Len told him.

“That’s okay. Do you mind if I stay anyways?” he hesitantly asked Len. Len laughed lightly, and nodded before he turned off the lamp and lay back down.

“Thank god. I’m here if you need me, but I really need some sleep.”

Barry tried to settle in too, but it wasn’t as comfortable from where he was sitting.

“For fucks sake, if you’re staying here, you’re going to have to lay down. Don’t you have work in the morning?”

Well, Barry couldn’t argue with that logic. It was the whole reason he sought Len out in the first place. So Barry laid down gently beside Len, trying to make himself as small as possible, so he wasn’t intruding on Len’s space.
Len did not seem to share the same mindset. Barry had barely laid out before Len was rolling over and reaching into the space Barry had claimed. He found himself being manhandled to the other man’s side, Len’s arm pulling him into his chest. With the invitation fully open, Barry tucked himself closer, and his slipped his face into the opening by Len’s shoulder. It was there, fully embraced by Len, that sleep finally claimed him.

Len did not want to wake up when the time came. It was an hour earlier than the already obnoxious hour he usually woke up at, and he had barely managed to sleep last night. He could physically feel the exhaustion in his bones.

His reluctance to get out of bed was more than simple fatigue. Barry was lying in his arms. It had taken him a long time to fall asleep, and now that he was resting, Len didn’t want to wake him. If Len got up, it seemed pretty likely. During the night Barry had completely burrowed into Len. Barry’s arms were wrapped tightly around his waist. As if that wasn’t enough, Barry was also lying half on top of him. It was good thing Barry was slender, because he was already squashing Len as it was.

Sighing quietly, Len started to extract himself from Barry. He may have been tempted to stay in bed, but he had a job to do. It was one he had already failed at enough in the past 24 hours. Getting up would have been easier if Barry wasn’t trying his hardest to be a human barnacle, but he eventually succeeded without waking the younger man.

Len maneuvered his way quietly out of the warehouse, and into the building next door. The roof of the shitty little warehouse is the best place to see his bedroom window. Since that is where his list has been coming to lately, the roof was where he needed to be to see it’s delivery. He’s tried this before on more than one occasion. He’d even tried this tactic. Len isn’t expecting for to get a real view of whatever leaves him the list, but it doesn’t mean he isn’t going to try.

He is expecting better results from the note he left on the window before he went to sleep. Well, before he went to sleep the first time. He checked that it was still there before leaving his room. He could see the yellow sheet fluttering faintly in the breeze. The page was larger than his usual yellow notes. He had stolen a piece of Hartley’s legal pads. He wanted to be able to if from his current perch. Despite the size of the page, the note itself was small.

Len knew better than to try and ask something long and complicated. He never got a reply on those
inquiries. Hell, Len barely got answers when he asked simple questions. He just had to hope this time he got something.

Bette was more than just his responsibility; she was his friend. From what Barry told him, Bette might be in serious trouble, and he had absolutely no clue how to help her. So for now, Len waited on the rooftop of the building next door for a shadow to drop off a list that came from the beyond. Sometimes Len really hated his life.

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Len had almost drifted back to sleep by the time he saw a movement in the alley below. It was barely a shadow, as he had expected. In theory, Len always felt these things should remind him of gravelings. They appear to reapers almost the same.

The things that drop off Len’s list every day are dark shadows that don’t look human, and even reapers can’t see them when looking directly at them. Gravelings tend to slink, slither, and crawl. Plus, now that Barry told him the comparison, Len can’t stop picturing them as spiny gollums.

These things are different. Parts of them seem more human. The overall shape certainly is, but there is something still jarringly inhuman about them. For starters, what Len assumes are the limbs of these creatures are longer and wider. They are taller than human should be too. It reminds him of those Sasquatch images from a documentary Barry had somehow gotten him and Mark to watch with him.

The things shoved the list through the bottom of Len’s window, barely pausing to glance at his note. The thing turned his head back towards Len before sliding his fingers over the page as it watched him. Well, Len thinks it was staring. Considering the damn thing didn’t have visible eyes it was impossible to tell for sure.

Len rushed back down to the ground floor, barely slowing down as he slunk between the abandoned pieces of machinery on his way down. He ran all the way across the alley until he could see the note on his window. Len was right. Whatever that thing was doing left him a response. There were now two sets of writing: ‘What happened to her?’ was followed by ‘It is none of your concern.’

Len’s chest constricted at the words. He recognized a warning when he saw one. So Len let his heart grow cold inside his chest as he prepared to share what he hadn’t found out with everyone else who cared for Bette.
Chapter Summary

The Rogues continue to deal with Bette's decision.

Barry woke up feeling oddly cold. He didn’t know why, but he knew some kind of warmth was missing. Rather than wasting useless energy trying to figure that out, Barry decided to fix the problem by burrowing even further into the covers. His alarm hadn’t gone off yet, and Barry wasn’t waking up until it had.

“You up, Barr?”

Barry flailed up suddenly, startling at the unexpected but not unknown voice in his room. What the fuck was Len doing in his room?

“Len!” Barry exclaimed, his voice coming out several octaves higher than Barry expected, “What are you doing in here?”

Len busted out laughing at his words, so Barry finally opened his eyes to glare at the other man. It as then he realized that Len had not come into his room while Barry was sleeping (again), but that Barry was actually in Len’s bed. Suddenly the night before rushed back into Barry’s mind with a clear focus. Hanging out with Sam and Bette at the shitty pub, Bette jumping into someone’s lights, and Barry crawling into Len’s bed for comfort in the early hours of the morning.

“If you weren’t already dead, I’d be worried about what turning red that fast was doing to you,” Len started to huff out as his laughter died down.

“I’m sorry Len!” Barry jumped up as he spoke, quickly moving towards the door. His phone, and therefore his alarm, was in his room, and Barry was probably beyond late for Happy Times. Not to mention the fact that he had apparently taken over Len’s room last night. He definitely wanted to get out of there. Len, it seemed, did not share his mindset as he moved in front of Barry to block his way, gently grabbing one of his wrist as he did so.

“Don’t be stupid. It’s fine. Are you alright?” Len asked. There was so much concern bleeding through Len’s eyes and his tone that Barry forced himself to stay put. Happy Times was going to
have to wait a while longer.

“I’m fine. Although I’m probably super late. God, I so don’t feel like a H.R. lecture right now,” Barry groaned. Somehow, the man managed to make his disappointment worse than actual anger. Not through the traditional means of guilt, although that did play a minor role, but by how goddamn nosy and caring he was. Barry knew, in theory at least, they should have been good traits, and most of the time Barry appreciated those parts of his boss. He knew he didn’t have it in him today to listen to it though, regardless of the man’s good intentions.

“You’re not late. Sam called in for you. We’re lucky the asshole is surprisingly good at impressions, even if he is a bit of a dick about it. You have a terrible stomach bug by the way, so you’ll need to remember that tomorrow,” Len informed him. Barry wanted to be annoyed that Len called him out from his day job when he still really needed the money, but after the night they had he couldn’t help the small smile at formed on his face at Len’s admission.

“That’s not going to become a habit for you guys, right?” Barry asked.

“Don’t worry about it Barry. We aren’t going to mess up your boring ass job, okay?” Len rolled his eyes as he responded. Between that and Len’s smirk, he had a feeling he should be worried. He decided to leave it as a problem for another day. Right now, Barry was too grateful for the day off and extra sleep.

Barry went to speak again. Len had told him last night he had a plan to find out what happened with Bette, but he hadn’t gotten any details. Considering how Len started shifting and immediately looked away, Barry had a feeling he wasn’t going to like what came of it. Len cut him off before he could get any words out, all but confirming Barry’s suspicions.

“It’s still early for you, and I’ve got to go across town for a job. You should get something to eat, and we’ll talk when I get back. I’ll take you to your appointment so we can talk,” Len informed him. Barry barely had time to agree before Len was running out the door.

Yeah, Barry thought to himself, he really wasn’t going to like this.

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“What the are you two doing in my car?” Len questioned.
Hartley smirked widely at him. Sometimes, Len really missed Hartley as a new reaper. The longer he was dead, the more he tended towards being an annoying little shit. Exhibit A, Hart’s presence in his car. Worse than what was likely meant to be a forced questioning, Hartley had somehow got Raymond in on this mission of his too.

“We thought you might want some company,” Raymond cheerily replied. Len wanted to reach into the back of his jeep to slap him. The stupid fucker was way to cheery without Mick to temper him on the best of days, and today was shitty enough as it was.

“Well, I really don’t. Get the fuck out,” Len ordered. He didn’t have time to argue with them, so he needed them gone. It seemed like they knew it too, since both men ignored him in favor of buckling their seatbelts.

“You two are such shits, you know that right?” Len informed them as he started the car. Something really wasn’t in his favor today, apparently.

“Don’t be stupid, Lenny. You love us,” Hartley dismissed with a wild wave of his hand from beside Len. The words only made his frown deepen. This time, Len did give in to the urge to scruff the man in his passenger seat.

“Lisa’s the only one who gets to call me that,” Len tightly threatened, letting his expression turn colder before he continued, “It’d be a damn shame if I had to show you what happened to anyone else that tries.”

“So what did you to Barry then? I know I’ve heard him use it before,” Raymond pointed out. He slammed on his brakes more harshly than strictly necessary at the man’s words, and he was rewarded with a dull thud against the back of his seat. Raymond’s pained cries were well worth the effort and the abuse to his brake pads.

“Is it physically impossible for you to not be grouch if you aren’t around Lisa or Barry?” Hartley asked him, obviously outraged at Len’s perceived (real, but very justified) attack on Raymond.

“It’s physically impossible for me to not to be annoyed when I’ve got unwanted tagalongs on my jobs,” Len insisted.

He knew that Hartley and Ray were trying to get him to rise to some sort of bait about his
relationship with Barry, but he wasn’t going for it. If anything, it just pissed him off. Both of these assholes had known Bette for two decades, and they were more concerned with gossip than their friend. He didn’t want to bring that up either though, so he let things slide.

Len had told the Rogues, except the still sleeping Barry, what little he had learned at breakfast that morning. He wondered if this forced time together was the Rogues attempt at prodding him for further information. They had not been please with the complete lack of intel their fucking asshole bosses had given him, but Len didn’t know what else to do. He’d been trying for a long time to figure out the specifics of their work, and so far the only time he had ever picked up new bits and pieces had been directly related to the work, at least until there was a screw up. It took something like Bette’s decision last night, or his own stupidity in the past to introduce the nasty pieces of the job that reapers weren’t really supposed to know about. Len didn’t know where else to turn for information, and it was clear to him after last night that he wasn’t supposed to be digging anyways.

“Really Len? Because I thought you were acting like an asshole because of Bette,” Raymond, never one for tact, said.

“I swear, if you two assholes try to start a heart-to-heart, I’m going to throwing you out of this moving vehicle,” Len promised them. Raymond had the good sense to look a little afraid, gulping loudly and creating a loud ticking sound from the ferocity he used to close his mouth. Len was tempted to go ahead and make good on his threats when Hartley merely laughed at his words.

“Fine, fine. We’ll play nice if you promise to tell Lisa we fought you a lot harder on this,” Hartley bargained.

Of-fucking-course this was Lisa’s fault. His nosy sister had been trying to butt-in to things since this morning. He had been forced to take refuge in his bedroom to avoid her, and even then Len was positive the only reason Lisa hadn’t disturbed him was because he had already severely threatened any of the Rogues should they wake Barry. Now that Hart fessed up the true reason for their unwanted presence, things made perfect sense. Lisa had sent the two buffoons after him because her own appointment time was too close to his for her to properly stalk him.

“You throw in a quiet ride, and you’ve got yourself a deal,” Len agreed. He was sure Raymond would have and break that particular clause, but it was worth it for the few minutes of blissful silence Len had finally attained.
Barry could tell his fidgeting was starting to annoy Len, but he couldn’t seem to stop it regardless. Len had barely spoken on the ride over, and what little he had said didn’t make any sense. The older man had told him that he, apparently, knew nothing. He claimed to have tried asking the “big bosses” that morning, and that they told him under no uncertain terms to drop it.

Barry had wanted to ask more, but they had arrived at the gynecologist office that was on his post-it. He was incredibly grateful that the death was stated to be in the lobby as he didn’t feel like getting labelled as an awful creeper. Sitting in the lobby waiting for his pretend wife, Barry was still wishing he and Len had thought to bring Lisa or one of the other girls with them. It would have made the wait much less uncomfortable.

At least the office did work slightly in their favor. He was looking for a man named Hannibal Bates, it had been very easy so far to discount almost everyone in the room. There had been only three men in and out of the room, and none of them were named Hannibal Bates. A few weeks ago, Barry would have held out hope about there being some sort of mix up with his appointment. He knew better now, so he was watching the door. They had about a minutes until his appointment hit, and Hannibal Bates were sure to arrive soon.

“You paying attention?” Len whispered in his ear, leaning closer so he could lower his voice more. Even annoyed at Len, hearing the man’s voice sent a wave of something through him. He felt more relaxed, open, and just the tiniest bit excited. There was a hint of mischief in Len’s voice that was usually a good sign for Barry. He tried to hide his instinctual reaction to Len’s word in favor of a scowl, but he didn’t think he was successful. Len certainly didn’t at least, considering he was sending him a genuine smile in return.

“Of course I am. It’s none of these guys, so I just have to wait for another man to enter. Considering the location, it’s probably him,” Barry told him. He was intentionally letting his annoyance seep into his tone, and he was quite pleased when Len seemed to flinch back slightly at it. Len deserved it.

Len looked like he was going to say something, but close his mouth in favor of subtly pointing Barry’s attention towards the door. Barry turned to see a man holding a large jug of water for the office’s water cooler walking in. His company shirt has Bates stitched in, and so Barry watched for his moment. He stopped the man right after leaving the counter, barely pausing to think of a proper story before he began to speaking.

“Excuse me, I was just wondering how much your services cost. We have been thinking of getting a water cooler installed in my offices,” Barry bullshits, flashing a fake smile at man as he speaks. He nods along as the man speaks without bothering to listen to the response. It doesn’t matter what he says.

“Oh, cool. Can I get a card?” Barry interjects at the first opportunity. He takes a second to slide his
fingers along Hannibal’s as he takes the card.

“Nice one, Kid,” Len compliments as he returns to his seat.

Barry smiled lightly in response. This time, his smile was real. At least, it was real before Hannibal Bates tripped and fell. The gruesome sight of the water jugs entire contents emptying itself in Bates’s open mouth where it fell was too gruesome, even with Barry’s ever increasing threshold for gory deaths.

“Oh, that’s a nasty one. Let’s get out of here,” Len stated, pulling Barry from the office while all the ladies were distracted with the now dead delivery man. Barry barely had time to gesture for Hannibal to follow before he and Len were out the door.

Mick awoke to the sounds of someone cooking in the kitchen. It was 3:23 am according this is alarm clock, and he was pissed. He practically threw himself out of bed to get to the kitchen, fully intended to punish whoever the fuck woke him up.

He was completely unsurprised and unimpressed to discover Len baking the kitchen. He was, however, a little shocked it took over 24 hours after Bette’s death for him to take out the Peaches and Marshmallows recipe. Mick just wished the asshole could have done it normal fucking hour of the day.

“Seriously, you fucking jackass? Couldn’t this have waited until morning?”

Len jumped about a foot in the air at Mick’s words. He nearly dropped the casserole dish in his hands. Mick had to force himself not to laugh at his usually unshakeable friend’s uncharacteristically startled expression. He had a feeling it might have ruined his very serious need to tell Len to keep his guilt baking to normal hours of the day.

“I couldn’t sleep,” Len confessed after a moment. It was obvious he was hoping Mick would just leave things alone, but he had absolutely no intention of dropping this.
“Well no shit. Doesn’t mean you had to wake me up too,” Mick rebutted.

“Figured Raymond would have wiped you out earlier,” Len snarked back, resuming his baking. Mick wanted to smack him.

“Haircut left early. He and Hart went to some lecture or another, and he went back to his place after. I think. I wasn’t really paying attention. If you weren’t hiding in your room as soon as you and Barry got back you would’ve known that. Of course, then you’d have to talk to us about Bette, and tell us why you are so certain you aren’t going to get anything,” Mick pushed back.

“There’s nothing to tell, Mick. I asked, and I got told to back off. Bette was my friend too. You think I wouldn’t push this if I thought I’d get something out of it?”

Mick, not that he would ever admit it out loud, was actually starting to feel bad about his questioning. He could see Len was feeling guilty. If Len was telling them he couldn’t get information about where Bette went, he was probably telling the truth. They may not have like it, but it wasn’t their choice. The big bosses weren’t big on sharing, and they all knew it.

Bette was Len friend, and, more importantly, the man saw all of the External Reapers as his responsibility. Hell, he and the rest of Central Reapers (except maybe Zolomon, but who cares what that fucker thought) knew Len felt it was his fault she jumped, but none of them had been successful at getting him to talk. He had managed to avoid his sister, and even Barry’s questioning didn’t get anywhere.

“It’s not your fault, you know. Bette knew the rules, and she chose to break them,” Mick pointed out, knowing that it was probably pointless. Considering he was awaken at three-thirty in the morning for this he decided he wasn’t going to even try for tact.

“I know that,” Len snapped back.

“No you don’t,” Mick snorted before he continued, “You wouldn’t be making that at this god forsaken hour or avoiding everyone but Barry if did.”

Len shot him a look that would make weaker men turn to dust. Mick just raised an eyebrow and waited for Len to talk.
It didn’t take long for Len to deflate slightly before admitting, “I knew she was having a rough time of it lately. She never liked what we did. She adapted to it, sure, but not the way most of us do. I thought maybe pushing her toward Barry would help them both, but it made things worse, didn’t it?”

“You didn’t make shit worse. She liked the kid, but that wasn’t enough to fix things for her,” Mick told him.

“I should have been though. I’m supposed to be the one who keeps them working and stops stupid shit like that before it starts. I’ve been too distract with Barry, and I wasn’t there when she needed me,” Len finally admitted. Thank fucking god, Mick thought. Maybe he would be able to get some sleep.

“You’ve been doing your job with the kid. Barry’s new to the schtick, and he needs all that extra handholding you’ve been giving him,” Mick stated calmly. “Well, he needed most of it, but we all know you need the extra stuff.”

Len threw a towel at his head in retaliation for his wink, but at least he didn’t try fighting him on that one. Mick fully intended to let Lisa take care of that argument.

“I could’ve done more,” Len stubbornly insisted.

“And what is that? Because from where I’m sitting, you did all you could. Bette made her choice, so stop taking away from that because you miss her. It’s not your fault, and you need to stop acting like it. Now I’m going back to bed, and you better follow as soon as that’s done. I’d say you should go ahead, but I fucking deserve your guilt baking for waking up,” Mick informed Len.

He gripped Len’s shoulder as he spoke, forcing the smaller man to pay attention to his words. Len obviously still had his doubts, but Mick knew it was the best he was going to get for now. So Mick left Len to brood and returned to his room. He had barely fallen back in to his bed before sleep overtook him once more.
Sara sometimes really hated the people in her life. Right now, she specifically could not stand Len. She had just arrived back home after sneaking out of Nyssa’s once again, and she was dying to get some more sleep. Len’s unexpected presence in her kitchen made that plan difficult. Her mood was already horrible, and the last thing she felt like doing was easing Len’s guilty conscience. Sara had her own to deal with.

“What the fuck are you doing here?”

She couldn’t - or didn’t want to at least - believe Len had once again broken into her apartment. At least this time he already made coffee. Even better, it looks like he brought her a helping of peaches and marshmallows. None of that meant she was going to go easy on the asshole who broke into her kitchen at 5:00 am, decades of friendship or not.

“Needed to talk. You busy?” He asked her with a small grin, offering her a cup of coffee. She was careful to get it out of his hands before kicking him roughly in the shin. His cry of pain only mildly eased her annoyance.

“God, you are such a bitch sometimes,” he told her as his cursing died out. She was willfully ignoring it in favor of her coffee. Len did make a damn good cup of joe.

“You broke into my house, dick. Be glad I didn’t go for my gun,” she sneered back.

“I do this all the time. You can’t seriously be surprised,” he retorted, smirking cheekily as he finally placed the peaches and marshmallows between them. He was kind enough to grab both of them forks, so she decided not to steal it all for herself.

“Are you seriously trying to use that as an argument for why I shouldn’t shoot you? Cause I gotta tell you, it’s not helping your case,” she berated him. Sometimes Sara seriously wondered how the hell Len made it as long as he had, even as a dead man.

“Fair point. You didn’t answer me though. Can we talk?” Len pushed.

“I didn’t think I had a choice, what with all the breaking and entering,” she prodded. She rolled her eyes slowly as she spoke, making sure that he caught on to her current levels of annoyance.
“Fine. I’m sorry for breaking in. I tried knocking, but you weren’t home. Now can you please stop being a cow, or should I just go?” he finally broke under her stare. Shit, things must have been bad if Len was actually apologizing. Sara really wanted to check her list and go to sleep, but apparently that wasn’t going to happen.

“Let me check the list first. Then we can talk,” Sara reluctantly allowed.

“I’ve already gotten it, and I texted it out to all of Natural Causes,” Len smirked as he spoke. The shit was obviously pleased with himself for undermining Sara’s system (well, it was Rip’s system but she liked it). She was seriously contemplating shooting him in the foot, but she decided stomping on it would do for now. The pain yelped he let out made her feel slightly better. Sara knew she should probably feel bad about that, but Len was well acquainted with the fact that she was a bit of a sadist in the mornings, and he chose to visit her anyways.

“Which I won’t be doing again?” Len told her, a question evident in his tone.

“Damn straight. Now talk. You’ve got until the coffee is gone, and then I’m going to bed,” she informed him.

“You think they’re right?”

Goddamnit. Sara did not have the patience for his cryptic bullshit right now. This kind of terrible communication was she had stopped sleeping with him, and if he wasn’t careful about timing his visits to usual waking hours she might have to do more than that. It was way too early in the morning for these kinds of conversations.

“Do I think who is right about what, you ass? It’s too early for guessing games,” she prompted.

“Everyone. About Bette. Do you think it was my fault, Sara?” Len’s tone was as clipped as she had ever heard. He was obviously forcing himself to say these words.

Yet despite the Len’s obvious reluctance, he was still looking at her like she held all the answers to the questions he was to afraid to ask. She didn’t know why the hell he’d be so foolish as to as to think something like that. He’d been at this for a hell of a lot longer than she had, especially in the role of middle management. Something about the lost expression on his face stopped her from being able to vocalize that very obviously truth though, however much she may have may have wanted to.
She wished, once again, that Rip was still around. He would have been much more help with this particular extensional crisis.

“Don’t be daft, Len,” she reluctantly put down her fork to grab his hand as she spoke. He was staring at their joined hands funnily, but she knew from how often he did the same with Barry that he likely appreciated the gesture. “Our job is to make sure everyone knows the rules and does their job. Bette was fully trained, and she had a support system in place that you gave her. We are their bosses, not their guardians. The woman was a damn force of nature, and there isn’t a thing on this earth that could have stopped her from taking what she wanted.”

“Oh. Right. Well then, I should be going,” Len decided, awkwardly rubbing the back of his neck as he quickly got up and walked towards the door. Of fucking course. He kept her up for this bullshit, and then ran as soon as he gets confronted with something even remotely emotional.

Sara was sorely tempted to stop him, but she decided that sleep was going to get the priority over getting Len’s head out of his own ass. Instead, she called out to him, “You owe me more peaches and marshmallows for this one!”

The sound of Len’s laughter coming back through her house as he let himself out was almost worth how exhausted she was going to be that day.

“So Sam, are you in?” Cisco asked him, as he bounced excitedly on the balls of his feet. He looked so hopeful that Barry hated to disappoint the man, but since as he hadn’t actually been listening for the past five minutes, he was justifiably apprehensive about agreeing to whatever Cisco was talking about.

“I… I don’t know, man,” Barry replied. He probably should have been listening, but Cisco had lost him during his debate (with himself) about the merits of Twizzlers over Red Vines.

“You should really think about it. I know joining a company bowling league is kinda hokey, but it’s a lot of fun. We’d love to have you with us. Plus if you don’t come, H.R. is going to let Sherry from accounting rejoin, and she is really awful. We are so close to getting ahead of the damn copy place up the road too,” Caitlin cut in breathlessly.
Barry Allen had loved to bowl. Joe had taken him and Iris to the crappy little bowling alley by their school more times than he can count after he moved in the West, and he and Iris had continued that tradition as they aged. It was the only remotely athletic thing Barry had been any good at until he discovered he could run in Junior High. None of that mattered any more though.

Sam Albert wasn’t Barry Allen, not really at least. Barry didn’t know if Sam liked bowling. He didn’t really know anything about Sam, other than candy preferences and the stuff he needed to get a job at Happy Times. Even then, he only found out about the candy because he and Caitlin had made a game out of pilfering from Cisco’s never-ending candy stash. Barry couldn’t explain why, but the fact that Sam Albert didn’t really have anything of his own made him sad. It was probably what prompted him to suddenly throw out all of his careful rules for working at Happy Times.

“You know what? I’m in. My uncle owned a bowling alley when I was a kid, and I worked there in high school. I’ve still got some skills, if I say so myself.”

Barry Allen did not have any uncles, and he had never work at a bowling alley. He was too busy with track, extracurriculars, and his weekend science classes to get a job in high school or college, and he had jumped straight from there to his job with the CCPD. None of that could be true for Sam. Why shouldn’t this version of him get his own story? The rest of the reapers he worked with did it all the time, and the constant trips to the bowling alley with Iris to de-stress and talk about their dates away from Joe meant that he should still be good enough for Sam’s story to work.

“Sweet! I’m going to go tell H.R., and we can get you fitted for a shirt. You’re a lifesaver, bro,” Cisco hugged him quickly as he spoke before running towards H.R.’s office.

“Thanks Sam. Not everyone is willing to commit to weekly practice on Saturday at 7:00 in the morning. You won’t regret it though,” Caitlin excitedly informed him as she patted his shoulder quickly before moving to follow Cisco to H.R.’s office. Unlike Cisco, she started dragging him behind her when it was apparent he was staying in place. Barry didn’t mind one bit. This was one of the few times he felt alive in a long time.

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Eddie couldn’t believe his luck. He was sitting across from Iris once again. This time though, things were a million times better than he ever could have hoped for. He’d always thought that his partner’s daughter was an exceptionally beautiful woman, but he hadn’t gotten to know the woman until after Barry died.
Eddie missed the goofy CSI every time he went in to work. He had always been bright, enthusiastic, and able to bring a smile to his coworkers' faces no matter how grim things got at the CCPD. Helping Joe and Iris after Barry’s death had felt like the least he could do. Joe was his partner, and Barry had been his friend. He wanted to help, and since things were moving as slow as ever in the Butcher case, covering for Joe and being there for Iris was something he could do to honor that friendship.

Somehow, being there for Iris led to them going for coffee to talk several times a week. They went from there to moving to actual restaurants, watching movies and shows she missed Barry too much to watch alone, and even visiting Barry’s grave together. Eddie never expected his time with Barry’s sister would lead him to fall in love with her. Iris West was the most incredible woman he ever met, and Eddie still hadn’t figured out how in the hell he had managed to get her to go out with him on a real date.

“I’m thinking the shrimp tacos. What about you Eddie?” she asked him, a sweet smile on her face as she looked at him over the top of her menu.

Eddie was thinking that he wanted to marry her, but he was not about to tell her that on their first day. Instead he pointed randomly at the menu, and started to ramble about all the fake reasons he wanted it. It made her laugh at him, so he didn’t mind one bit he was now stuck eating something random from the menu instead of the fajitas he had been craving.

“So… now that you are done with your ode to these cheese quesadilla, also known as the whitest Mexican dish ever, what else did you have in mind for this evening? Seeing as how we eat dinner together multiple times a week, I know you’ve something up your sleeve to make this first date-worthy.”

Eddie laughed at her words, and the coy smile that accompanied them before he responded to her. Iris trying to get clues out of him for the rest of their evening was so like her that his heart hurt a little. It’s what he got for dating an investigative reporter. He was impressed she lasted this long before cracking.

“I have been planning this surprise for you all week. You really want me to ruin it now?”

“Oh god, yes! I’m dying here. Do you know how hard it was to plan my outfit for tonight without any clues what we are doing?” She urged him.

Iris sighed dramatically at her own admission. She was being completely ridiculous; the woman was always gorgeous. Eddie was positive she was incapable of looking anything less than breathtaking.
He was very glad he admitted it when his words led to Iris squeezing his hand softly. Of course, she swatted that hand when he refused to tell her where they were going next, but he wasn’t going to ruin the sight of her face lighting up at the Monster-Night drive in for anything. Amazed was an expression he had yet to see on Iris West, and he was determined to get there that night.

Patty was in a great mood as she left work, despite how thoroughly exhausted she felt. She had spent all day working with Detectives West, along with CSI extraordinaire - and class A douchebag - Julian Albert on a serial rapist case, and they had gotten a confession. It was probably going to be her last big collar as a cop with CCPD. Getting a succumb like Anthony Ivo was a great way to end her work in Central City. Catching the Butcher would have been better, but she had no delusions about accomplishing that before she for CSI training. As it was, she was grateful that creep was in for a long stay at Iron Heights.

Patty was so lost in her thoughts that she completely forgot to pull out her keys, and so standing in front of her car, she was forced to dig through her overly large purse to locate them. As awesome as her day had been, she was exhausted and wished she could be home already.

“Seriously?” she exclaimed out loud as a sharp sting started in her neck. It was late fall, and she should not have to worry about mosquitoes. Fuck she was way too tired to be dealing with this. It seemed like the longer she stood there the more she could fall asleep where she was standing.

Then again, with a sting that sharp it may have been a stinger. Her lifelong allergy to wasp was enough to startle her in to checking for one, even though all she wanted in life at the moment was to be able to sit in her comfortable leather seats. God, she was really beat.

Patty finally managed to locate where the stinging sensation was coming from. She was right; it was a stinger. She barely had time to wonder why it felt cold against her fingertips before she collapsed. Patty was unconscious before she hit the ground.
“Woo hoo! Man you are seriously awesome at this!” Cisco exclaimed loudly.

He and H.R. laughed as Sam hit another strike. Caitlin was trying her hardest not to roll her eyes at their excitement. She may not have been so exuberant about her joy, but Cisco knew Caitlin was just nearly as thrilled as they were. It hadn’t even been a full 48 hours since Sam joined the Happy Times Bowlers, and it looked like he may be their most talented member. Sam had not been lying about his bowling skills. Even Cindy looked mildly impressed; it was probably the most emotion he had ever seen from the usually stoic receptionist.

“Sam! My man, you are truly spectacular. Why did I not know this when you joined us at Happy Times?” H.R. cheered.

Sam rather predictably turned bright red at the praise. Cisco sometimes wished he could hate the man for being so adorable as it fringed in on his niche with the ladies, but he was just as sucked into the man’s charms as much as everyone else. The guy may have only been 19, but he was still old enough that the level of sweetness he gave off was unusual yet incredibly pleasant vibe.

“It’s nothing. I bowled a lot growing up, and I guess I haven’t lost the skills,” Sam insisted humbly.

At his words, Cindy snorted loudly before finally joining their conversation. “Growing up? You know that implies that you aren’t still a kid?”

Sam’s flush turned darker still, and he started frowning unhappily. It made Cisco want to yell at the woman. Why did she have to pick on Sam? The kid was a an awesome bowler, and if she didn’t chase him off they actually stood a chance at beating Frankie’s Copy and Supply. Cisco could taste
their victory already. At least, he nearly could assuming Cindy could be nice for once in her life. He was way too afraid of the woman to tell her that though, regardless of how much he liked Sam and wanted them to beat Frankies.

“Knock it of, Cindy. You shouldn’t be catty just because he’s better than you,” Caitlin berated her. Cisco was, for the millionth time, infinitely grateful for Caitlin. The woman was like a mama bear sometimes, and he was glad she was brave enough to stand up to Cindy. He’d miss her if the death glare Cindy was sending her way actually worked, but he was (mostly) sure Caitlin would be fine.

“It’s fine, Cait. I’m sure Cindy didn’t mean it like that,” Sam, the dear boy, insisted. Cisco kind of wanted to squeeze his cheeks.

Before he gave in to the urge, two police officers walked up to them. Cisco stepped closer to Caitlin before he noticed, and it looked like H.R. did the same on her other side. With the way they were looking at her, he didn’t think they were going to like what they wanted to talk about.

“Ms. Snow. Can we speak with you in private?”

Hell fucking no they could not talk to Caitlin in private. Cisco knew that he and H.R. weren’t going anywhere, and it looked like Sam agreed. He stepped up behind them, moving closer to the group.

“Right then. I’m getting us a pint,” Cindy quickly volunteered, rushing towards the bar. Cisco had a feeling that someone should probably protest to her getting them beer before noon, but if Cisco was right about why these cops were here then they were going to need drinks anyways.

“I’d rather my friends stay with me, if you don’t mind,” Caitlin informed the offers. She spoke quietly, but with a conviction Cisco knew well. It seemed the cops were able to hear it too, as they didn’t try to make them leave. It didn’t really matter; Cisco had already learned his lesson about balking of the responsibilities of friendship when he bailed on Ronnie. He owed it to him to make sure he didn’t do the same to Caitlin.

“Right then. Sorry to interrupt you while you are out, but your landlady said we’d find you here. We regret to inform you that the Butcher has struck again. We found one of our own, Officer Patty Spivot, dead this morning. We’d like to ask you some more questions.”

“The Butcher killed Patty Spivot?” Sam exclaimed. Cisco stepped back on top of Sam’s toes. He was just as curious about the new Butcher murder as anyone else in Central City, but it was so not
the time for those questions. He could feel Caitlin starting to shake beside him.

“I… yeah, I can come. Can my friends come with me? I just… I need…”

Caitlin was quickly losing her ability to speak, and Cisco was not about to wait for her to struggle. “I think what Cait is trying to say is that she shouldn’t be alone now. Why don’t H.R., Sam, and I drive her to the station, and then you can talk to us there. After all we were all close with Ronnie.”

H.R. and the officers were barely voice their agreement to Cisco’s awesome plan before Sam excused himself. Cisco was disappointed. He really thought Sam was starting to bond with them, but some things were just too much strain on a new friendship. It was a shame since Caitlin probably used his support there too, but they would be alright. Cisco was going to make sure Caitlin was okay, no matter what it took.

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Barry could barely breathe. He all but ran out of the main part of the bowling alley to lock himself to the bathroom. He thought it would help to lock himself in the bathroom by himself for a minute, but it was only getting worse. So Barry sat, curled up in the fetal position by the locked door of the men’s bathroom, desperately trying to calm down. It was not working.

He couldn’t believe Patty was dead. He couldn’t lose another friend so soon after Bette. Well, lose wasn’t the right term. He had already lost Patty, but this felt a million times worse. What he went through was so earth-shatteringly horrible, but somehow it felt even worse knowing that last night one of his best friends had gone through the same thing.

Barry couldn’t… god he couldn’t do anything. He needed something. Shit he needed Len. Len would know what to do. He didn’t know where Len was though, and he didn’t think he could make his way back to the Rogues hideout like this. He could call Len though. If he could just talk to Len, he’d tell him what to do.

Getting his phone shouldn’t be this hard. His fingers were heavy. They weren’t moving right, fumbling in his pockets. He dropped it too once he finally grabbed on. Thank god Len was on his speed dial. He couldn’t see to make the call; everything was so blurry.

“Hey. What’s up?”
Thank god Len answered. It seemed Barry had lost the ability. The only sound he could force pass his numbing lips was a pained whimper.

“Barry? What’s wrong? Where are you? I’m heading your way. I just need you to tell me where to go.” Len sounded so worried. Did Barry sound that bad? He probably did. He certainly felt like it.

“It was the Butcher, Len. He killed her. He killed Patty. Oh my god, he going to kill somebody else too. Lenny please. I can’t…” Barry told Len.

He heard mumbling on the other end, but he couldn’t make out any words. Another frightened sound filled the bathroom. Was someone else in here with him? No, it was him. Just Barry.

“...I need you to focus Barr. Tell me where you are. As soon as you tell me where I’m coming for you, okay? Concentrate,” Len reassured. It was kind of working, but probably not as well as the other man had hoped.

“I’m at a bowling alley on the corner of Third and Franklin. Please hurry,” Barry managed to gasp out. Speaking felt so difficult, which was completely absurd. He wanted to tell Len where he was. It would get him here faster, and Barry needed Len.

“The one by your office?” Len asked.

Barry managed to confirm. He was slightly impressed that he managed to do so without uttering any real words, but Len got the message. Even better, Len didn’t stop talking to Barry even after Barry lost the ability to respond.

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Len was very unimpressed with the kind of crowds the hung out at a bowling alley early on a Saturday morning. He had the distinct impression that these stains weren’t meant to be seen in the light of day. Len didn’t have to wonder why anyone would this place was open right now. He had already checked the first two men’s rooms he had come across, and Barry hadn’t been in either. He had a feeling that the bathroom a rather impatient man was pounding on as he yelled obscenities may have been the one Len was looking for.
“You got a problem sir. Cause I’d be happy to help,” Len offered.

He shot a razor-sharp smile at the man in question, who turned to continue his tirade at Len. The man thought better of it when he realized Len’s sharp grin was accompanied by a blade he was openly fiddling with. Len didn’t bother listening to whatever excuse the punk made as he scurried away from the door. If he had Len probably would have been even more tempted to use the knife in question since the asshole’s shouting had probably made Barry’s panic attack even worse. Len couldn’t be sure. The call had dropped, and Barry hadn’t responded to Len’s repeated attempts to call him back.

“Barry? Are you in there?” He called out. Len knew he had the right door this time, but he wanted to make sure Barry knew he was out here. He needed the kid to listen to him enough to open the door. Len would have kicked it down if he thought it would help, but he was worried that it would scare Barry further. Not to mention what it would to Barry if he was sitting by the door.

“Len?” Barry’s voice was quiet, barely permeating the door. He sounded absolutely wrecked too, and Len felt his himself mimicking his friends despair from the sound alone. Len didn’t have time for such foolishness though, so he pushed it aside.

“It’s me,” Len replied. He waited a few moments before speaking again, realizing that Barry hadn’t moved beyond the still locked door. “You going to let me in?”

“No thanks. I think I’m fine now. I’ll see you at home.”

Len was completely baffled by Barry’s odd response. The kid called him in hysterics, and now he suddenly wanted to pretend he’s fine. Len might have had an easier time believing him if he wasn’t still locked inside the men’s room of a bowling alley at ten-thirty on a Saturday morning. He was starting to worry that Barry may have actually lost it this time.

“You’re an awful liar, Barr. Now cut this shit out and open up. I’m not going to make you come out if you aren’t ready, but I really don’t want to have this conversation through the door. People are starting to stare.”

“Do I have to?” Barry implored. Fuck, Len didn’t want to upset the kid any more than he already was, but something was too wrong for Len to be able to leave him alone in there.
“Afraid so,” Len insisted. He heard some shuffling behind the door as Barry moved to comply. When he opened the door, Len almost wished he hadn’t.

Barry looked awful. He had obviously been crying. His was a splotchy red mess, and the expression on his face seemed to be a completely turnaround from the excited grin he had held this morning. Hell, the kid was still crying a little it seemed. Barry was furiously rubbing at his eyes to try to stay his tears, but they were still a watery mess.

Len wanted to wrap Barry in his arms and shield him away from what was causing that sorrow, but he didn’t think it was an option. He hadn’t understood much of what Barry had said earlier, but he had figured out enough; the Butcher had struck again, and Barry knew the victim. Len would have been tempted to try anyways despite the impossibility of actual success if it wasn’t for the guarded way Barry was regarding him. So Len gave him his space as he pushed past Barry into the bathroom. The younger man slammed the door shut again as soon as he was through.

“You gonna talk, or should I?” Len prodded. He could tell from the look on Barry’s face that he wasn’t going to say anything unless Len did.

“Did you get it?” Barry asked. He was finally drawing power back into his posture, and it looked like it was coming out from a shaky rage. Fuck, they did not need to be having this conversation at the moment. It was the time, and it definitely was not the right place.

“She was on the list. I didn’t know who she was though, not that it would have mattered if I did. You know we don’t get a choice about these things,” Len admitted.

He tried to step closer to Barry as he did so. He wanted Barry to understand. Really Barry did know how this worked, and Len knew it. That doesn’t mean the young reaper was taking this well. Barry flinched away from his grasp, and Len forced himself back.

“That’s not what I meant. I’m not an idiot, Len. I know she was on that list. I meant was she your appointment, huh? What about the rest of the Butcher Victims. Obviously I’m an exception here, but you would’ve gotten the rest of their names,” Barry accused him.

“Barry, I…” Len started. Barry was obviously working himself even further into a fit, barely letting him get that much out before cutting him off with a shove to the chest.

“Don’t you fucking dare. You know what? I take back what I said. I must be beyond fucking stupid
trusting you lot. Tell me Len, who got what names? How many of you guys already know the bastard who did this to me? Have you all been sitting around laughing at poor little Barry. He’s such a stupid kid, right? I can’t believe I’ve been listening to all your bullshit. I spent months of my life trying to catch this guy only for him to fucking kill me too, and somehow or another I let that cloud the fact that you probably already know who he is. Fucking save your self-aggrandizing charity bullshit and leave me the hell alone!”

Barry was yelling by the time he was finished. His beautiful face twisted into something pained and angry, and Len absolutely hated it. Barry shouldn’t look like that. He should know how those things feel.

“It’s not charity, man. I want to be here for you. Can you calm down for a second so I can explain things?” Len tried, hoping he could get Barry to tone it down.

They couldn’t have this fight here. There was no way these walls were thick enough to hold in Barry’s yelling if he got any louder. Hell, Len probably should have stopped him before now, but he was too shocked at Barry’s words.

“Fuck that Len, and fuck you too! I’m out of here,” Barry told him, turning around and moving to switch the lock. Shit, Len really can’t let him do that. He grabbed Barry’s hand, forcing him back towards the door before he could get out.

“What the hell? Get off me!” Barry demanded as he struggled against Len’s grasp.

It wouldn’t do him any good. They may have been about the same height, but Len had several pounds on Barry that was made up almost entirely of muscle. He hated to do this to the younger man since Len was all too familiar with Barry’s aversion to having his movement limited, but he was a danger to himself and the Rogues this angry.

“Give it a minute. You’ve got to calm down first and let me explain. Can you do that?” Len asked hopefully. Barry kicked his shins in response, almost making him lose his grip on the slighter man.

“Fucking hell, you really can kick. I don’t know who killed you kid, and neither do the rest of the Rogues. I swear, Barr,” Len tried to reassure. It didn’t seem to fully work, but at least Barry stopped struggling against in his grasp. Len still didn’t trust him enough to let go for the time being, but at least that was somewhat of an improvement.
“That’s such bullshit. There’s no way with that many people none of you have gotten a look at who is doing all this, especially not if you are having to wait around until he’s done with them like Sara and Rip did,” Barry sneered back, leaning into the door and further away from Len to level him with a glare to match his heated words.

“No one you have met has gotten any of the Butcher Victims, okay? I swear! They’ve all gone to Central’s other reaper, Hunter Zolomon. I’m pretty sure you’ve heard his name at least before. Lisa and Sara in particular are fond of cursing the guy. It’s not exactly usual for all of a killer’s victims to go to one reaper, but I have a feeling he’s been getting them all because he’s the only one of us who is enough of a dick not to care about seeing the guy who killed you. For fuck sake, Barry, do you really think any of us would be that calm about this shit if we knew who the Butcher was?” Len rushed to explain.

This time Barry seemed to really listen to his words. He deflated in Len’s grasp as he spoke although the heat didn’t fully leave his eyes.

“I’ve heard the name. I didn’t know he worked here though. Why would he be getting them instead of someone in External Influences? I thought murders went to us?” Barry cautiously questioned. Len could still see the apprehension in his friend’s expression had yet to disappear, but it was drastically better than the righteous fury he had been dealing with moments ago. He knew how to handle this Barry.

“Zolomon is in External Influences. He’s just not a Rogue. The ass stayed with us for a while, but none of us can stand him, and the feeling is mutual. He sticks to himself most of the time, and I text him his assignments to keep him the hell away from the rest of us,” Len stated.

Honestly Len forgot tried to forget about the gigantic tool they were forced to work with as much as possible, so it had never occurred to him to let Barry know who had been getting the rest of the Butcher’s names. He really should have known better. Barry had told him that he was the lead CSI on the Butcher case before he died. Of course he’d still care to know who it was even after he was dead. For the first time in his life, Len was actually grateful to Zolomon. He knew that it was probably for the best Barry didn’t get involved in that case again, but there is no way he could have turned Barry down if he turned his now pleading eyes in Len’s direction, and he actually knew who the killer was.

“Oh. No one else has gotten any of his victims?” Barry ensures one last time. Len didn’t mind. He didn’t want Barry having doubts about them, and if this is what it took then he was fine with Barry questioning him like this.

“No, Barry. We were actually debating why that was until you came to us. The big bosses must have been preparing for you,” Len determined.
He moved to release Barry from his grips, but Barry, as usual, had different plans. As soon as he let Barry go, the smaller man threw his arms around Len’s neck and buried his face in the junction of Len’s neck and shoulder. It wasn’t exactly comfortable, but that was fine with him. Len just wanted to be there for his friend, however Barry needed him. They stood together in each other’s arms for a long time before Barry broke the silence.

“Can we go home now?”

“Yeah. Let’s get out of here,” Len agreed, finally moving them both out of the grungy little bathroom into the main bowling alley once more. Neither men let go as they left it all behind for Len’s Jeep once more.
Rosalind “Rosa” Dillon was a very beautiful woman, and it showed in every aspect of her appearance. Her long blonde curls that contained a dainty beauty capable of rivaling even Lisa’s hair. The clothing she wore as carefully curated as any exhibit ever held, with the pieces designed to show a (supposed) careless beauty and to frame the delicate-looking woman they held. Even Rosa’s smile gave off the air of elegance as she greeted the Rogues who had deigned to stay and meet her.

Mick, Barry, and Hartley had more important things to do apparently, but the remainder of their crew was there to meet their newest member. Most of them appeared impressed with her obvious splendor. Len was not; he knew from the second that woman walked through their door she was going to cause them all kinds of trouble.

Rosa was regaling her new companions with the story of some great con or another she had pulled in New York on one of her many wealthy names. Len supposed that was the benefit of working as a reaper in one of the richest areas of the country. Lisa, god bless her troublesome and foolhardy soul, may have met her con-woman match in the bottle-blonde who was currently taking up Barry’s favorite seat in the living room - a rocker almost as old as he was. Len was tempted to dump her out with a hard kick to the back of the rocker; he’d barely have to move his waiting foot to stomp on it.

She was getting mixed reactions from the Rogues, but Rosa couldn’t tell. She obviously thought she had them all hooked. Sam and Mark were eating up her lavish tales, entranced by the her glamorous stories of life in the Big Apple. Shawna’s sweetness seemed to be prevented her from fully being swept up in Rosa’s drama, although she did appear to enjoy the anecdotes regardless. Lisa seemed to be the only other Rogue to fully grasp exactly what these tales meant for Rosa’s role in Len’s division.

“That all sounds fine and dandy for the New York City, but you should know Central doesn’t work
that way,” Lisa drawled, cutting on Rosa mid-sentence.

Len had reached his tolerance for these con stories about an hour ago, but he had forced himself to keep listening. By now, he had learned what he needed to know, so he didn’t see the point in letting her continue her pointless drabble since his darling sister was kind enough to cut her off. The woman had some solid plans, and Len had learned a lot from her bragging. Her plans didn’t matter anymore. Rosa would not be using any of them in his cities.

The newest Rogue had been visibly pleased to discover that most of the Central/Keystone External Influences Reapers were criminals. She had yet to figure out this conning business could not and would not work the same as their high-end thefts. Lisa may have regularly pulled cons on the wealthy men of Central and Keystone, but what Rosa was talking about was a whole different game, and they were not acceptable for a reaper.

Len allowed members of his division a lot of leeway in how they operated, and that included rarely getting into their personal methods of support. The Rogues did have a few rules though, and everything he knew about Rosalind Dillon - both from the woman herself and her supervisor in New York - told him she wasn’t going to want to follow her new orders.

“And why won’t they work here?” Rosa asked Lisa.

Mark and Sam both noticeably shifted away from Rosa at his sister’s words. They might have been enchanted by her grand New York City lifestyle, but they both knew the Rogues rules well enough to guess what was coming. Shawna used their shifting to settle more fully into Mark once more, shooting Len a grateful look. She knew what Rosa had yet to realize; her question should have been addressed to Len. He imagined Shawna was probably not happy with how interested Mark was in their new co-worker, but that fact hadn’t factored into his own plan.

“The plan you are on about right now? It’s brilliant. See, I never would have thought of getting money from Fortune 500 CEO by working as psychic to communicate company secrets from his dead mother. It’s horribly efficient,” Len conceded. He needed to hook her the same way she was trying to hook his crew.

“Aww… thanks,” Rosa smirked at him as she spoke, falling for his compliments. She shot him a grin as they exchanged words, and he had to force himself not to roll her eyes at her horribly timed flirting. He wouldn’t have been interested in Rosa even if his attentions weren’t currently occupied elsewhere. She continued after a moment, leaning towards Len as if she was hoping to draw him into what he was sure was her newest con “I gotta ask though. If you think my plan was so good - and it really, really was - then why isn’t it going to work just as well here as it did in the Upper East Side?”
“We have rules here, Rosa, and a lot of them are the same ones you kept breaking in New York. I don’t give a damn what laws of the living you break, but if I ever hear about you trying to pull jobs dependent on the souls you take then I’m gonna make you pay. I’m not like your last boss, little girl. I will fucking put you in the ground if you ever try to take advantage of the dead in my city,” swore Len.

Rosa’s flirty smile shift to a darkened glower at his words. It made Len’s own smile more genuine, and he could see from the corner of his eye Lisa and Shawna had matching expressions. It was nice to see all of his Rogues weren’t complete idiots.

“You do realize that threatening to kill someone only works on the living?” Rosa contested.

According to her old boss in New York, Rosa had been pulling these scams for decades no matter how much he tried to get her to stop. He hadn’t expected her to back down easily here. After all, she was transferred for a reason. Len made sure to pull up his shift to his darkest eyes and iciest glare before he continued.

“I didn’t say I was going to kill you. I said I was going to bury you,” Len stood up slowly as he spoke, pulling himself up to his full height before leaning down to frame her in the rocker. “... and if you don’t follow my rules, I’ll make sure you stay there for a very long time. We clear?”

He waited for her reluctant nod before smirking one last time and leaving the room. Len had an appointment of his own to get to now that this job was done, and death waited for no reaper.

“I cannot believe you are making me visit Hunter-fucking-Zolomon right now instead of meeting the new chick with the rest,” Mick complained as they waited outside of of Hunter’s surprisingly cozy suburban home.

“You didn’t have to come with me, you know,” Barry responded.

“Don’t be stupid Barry. We have all been telling you for months that this guy is a bad news. Now, with that in mind, why the hell would you think we would let you meet him alone? Len would kill us deader,” interjected Hartley.
“Yeah Barry!” Ray enthused, beaming as he slung an arm around Barry’s shoulders before he continued his speech. “We’re your friends, and friends don’t let each other go meet psychopaths alone.”

Barry winced at Ray’s volume, but he appreciated the sentiment regardless. He was starting to become appreciative of the company. Barry needed to know who killed him and Patty, and if Hunter Zolomon was the only one who could tell him then he was willing to meet the man. It didn’t mean he wanted to face someone like him on his own.

“I’m no one’s friend,” Mick protested. Barry might have been more likely to believe him if Mick hadn’t insisted on coming with him when he caught Barry snooping in Len’s room for Hunter’s address, proceeding to join him and drag Ray with them. He hadn’t even protest to Hartley coming along, as he had been with Ray when Mick had forcibly recruited his boyfriend. Even now, Mick had positioned himself in front of the rest like a protective shield. Ray giggled, patting Mick’s shoulder from his spot beside Barry and directly behind the wall that was Mick Rory. “Sure you aren’t, buddy.”

Before Mick could protest further, or Hartley eyes could get stuck in their increasingly dramatic rolls, the door opened up to reveal what Barry assumed had to be Hunter Zolomon. He was not what Barry had expected. He thought he was about to meet some antiquated monstrous reaper from all the stories he heard. He was shocked enough by the quaint neighborhood Hunter lived in, but seeing the man himself was an even bigger surprise.

Hunter Zolomon was an attractive man, somewhere around his thirties when he died, and he was smiling broadly at the reapers on his doorstep.

“Hello boys. I figured you would be stopping by eventually. I’m guessing you’re Barry Allen?”

Barry nodded his head, apprehensive of the stranger in front of him. In theory, seeing such a normal, if handsome, man open the door should have put him at ease. Somehow, it made his anxiety of this meeting a million times worse. The man at the door seemed kind-hearted enough, so what exactly was so horrible as to make the rest of Central City and Keystone’s reapers hate him? They all put up with his panic attacks, Sara’s morning temper, Len’s brooding, Mick’s bluntness, and Mark and Sam’s constant trouble making, but something about the man in front of them turned them all away. It had to be something truly awful.

“Well then, why don’t you all come on in? I can make us some tea,” he told them as he ushered them inside to a cushiony living room.
“Cut the shit, Zolomon. You know exactly why we’re here, so get on with it, and stop trying to string the kid along,” Mick insisted as he moved towards the other man threateningly. Barry was absolutely positive he would have peed his pants if Mick tried that with him, but Hunter merely smiled at Barry over Mick’s shoulder. It made Barry’s skin crawl.

Barry, for a lack of anything better to do, sank in to the sofa behind him. Ray and Hartely quickly joined him, one and each side. Between the two of them at his sides and Mick standing in front of them it felt like Barry was being physically shielded. He had the distinct impression that wasn’t going to be enough in this case.

“Now, now Mick. That kind of hostility isn’t necessary. We’re all friends here,” their host insisted

“We aren’t friends,” Ray denied. Barry had the distinct feeling he really was in over his head here. Even Ray didn’t like this guy, and he had yet to meet someone who Ray didn’t have a nice thing to say about.

“You wound me deeply, Raymond. If that is what you want, Barry, then that is what we can do,” Hunter agreed easily. He still hadn’t shifted his eyes from Barry as he spoke. He really did not like the intense focus of the man’s stare.

“Who is it? Who’s the Butcher?” Barry could hear the tremors in his own voice, despite how hard he was trying to steady it. He had a feeling Hunter noticed as well since the man’s smile widened at his words.

“What makes you think that I know that?” Hunter countered. He barely got the words out before Mick shoved him forcefully against the wall. Ray jumped up to grab his boyfriend and try and force him back. It didn’t work, but it was a nice effort on Ray’s part. Hartley felt as tense as he was, but he tried to comfort Barry regardless with a hand on his shoulder.

“I thought Mick told you to cut the shit? We know you’ve gotten all the Butcher’s victims’ appointments,” Hartley cut in.

Barry was thankful for the intervention. His throat was closing up the longer they were in this place, and Barry was sure by now that he’d barely be able to speak. It seemed for once Barry’s constant panic attacks were useful; his companions had already figured out that he was starting to slip. He may not have wanted them to come with him originally, but now that he was actually here he understood why Mick had insisted he have company. Barry couldn’t have done this by himself.
“Every one of them, except for Barry here. Doesn’t mean I know who he is,” Hunter countered. Despite being held into the wall by the full force of Mick Rory, now that Ray seemed to have given up, Hunter was completely calm. Barry hated it almost as much as he was jealous of that ability.

“You do remember I’ve been at this a hell of a lot longer than you? There is no way you have taken that many of his victims and haven’t seen his face,” Mick bit back.

“Fine. I’ve seen him, more than once actually. Even talked with the guy a few times, and I got his name. It doesn’t mean I’m telling you lot though, and there is nothing you can do to change my mind. I’ve been getting all these people because you “Rogues” are too soft, and you’d tell Mr. Bleeding-Heart CSI over there who’d shout it from the rooftops if you could. Isn’t that right, Barry? You can’t actually speak to me anymore, can you? Trembling like a goddamn child. I’ve heard you’ve got a...,” Zolomon admitted. He was cut off abruptly by Mick’s fist connecting with his face, but the punch didn’t stop the other reaper from cackling.

Barry felt like Mick had hit him instead. The air seemed to rush out of his lungs at Hunter’s words, and no matter how much he gasped it wouldn’t come back. Fuck, why did he think this would work? Everyone had warned him already that the guy was a complete psychopath, but Barry tried to force these answers anyways. If Zolomon wasn’t going to talk, he would have done so already. Maybe not as soon as all this started, but most people with a conscience would have said something after Barry died. Len was right. Zolomon got all the Butcher’s names for a reason, and it was because he would never tell Barry what he needed to know.

“Fuck this,” Hartley muttered under his breath, pulling Barry up and out of the house as he spoke. He didn’t hear footstep behind him, but that didn’t matter right now. Hartley sat him in the car, and he didn’t seem to mind when Barry ruined his shirt with tears.

“Mick, stop! This isn’t going to make him talk!” Ray shouted at Mick as he tried unsuccessfully to get him off the other reaper.

Admittedly Zolomon did deserve a beating, but it was still a bad idea. It was always best to just keep separate from the unsavory reaper. They all had to work together, regardless of how much of a complete and utter dick the man was. There were forces at play that didn’t tend to react well when the reapers fought amongst themselves.
“It’s making me feel better,” Mick growled, each word accompanied by a punch.

From the tone of Mick’s voice, Ray sincerely doubt that, but he wasn’t about to push his boyfriend on that. He could barely bring himself to protest to the hitting considering Mick was doing it for Barry. Mick really was a softie some of the time, even if that did sometimes translate oddly. Regardless of his intentions, Ray had always hated this side of his partner. The violent and occasionally uncontrollable rage was frightening no matter the source or reason, and it hurt him every time he was forced to watch Mick this way.

“Mick!” Ray called out in his best no-nonsense tone. Generally speaking his lover ignored it completely, but Mick knew him well enough to tell when Ray was actually putting his foot down over something. So Mick stepped away from the bleeding reaper, still cackling away on the floor of his current squatter’s den in spite of his injuries, and Ray pulled Mick out and back towards the car.

The only sounds in Mick’s truck as the four men drove away were Mick’s pants and Barry’s muffled sobs. Ray wasn’t honestly sure which was more upsetting.

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After meeting Hunter Zolomon, Barry could not wait to get back to his room and shut himself off from the rest of the world. It made Barry that much more upset when he arrived home to Sara, Lisa, and Kendra lounging on his bed with a box of chocolate-covered strawberries.

“You all do realize this is not a common area, right?” Barry sighed, dropping his bag on the ground by McSnurtle’s cage with a thud.

“Barry! You’re boys made it back alright. How are you doing sweetie? I heard your little trip didn’t go so well,” Kendra greeted. Lisa was regarding him with a frightening expression, and Sara simply nodded in his direction with a mouth full of strawberries.

Barry frowned deeply at them, not even bothering to respond. This was not his day. First his earlier meeting with Zolomon, which was apparently no longer a secret. Now the ladies were resolutely ignoring his not-so-subtle request for privacy. Fuck, he really wanted to go to bed and forget about today. That would be a lot easier if there was enough room for him to actually lay on his bed.
“Come sit with us, Barry,” Sara ordered him, offering one of the strawberries his way. He did. Barry knew them well enough to know if he didn’t listen then he was never going to get his way, so he took the offered bribe.

“How mad is Len?” Barry asked. He wasn’t sure he actually wanted to know the answer, but he decided it was best to be prepared. Len had outright ordered him not to track down Hunter Zolomon, and Barry hadn’t even waited a full 24 hours to ignore him. He was not looking forward to that conversation. At least until then he had some of the girl’s treats.

“Len is fine,” Sara assured him, laying her head in his lap as she spoke. She gazed up at him, tugging his eyes towards her by her collar before she continued; “We already calmed him down, and sent him out with Mark, Sam, Carter and Jax to get him tanked. Meeting that fuckboy is enough of a punishment, and even Sir Sourpuss himself knows it.”

“Besides, he is still way more broody about our newest recruit then news about your little visit. It’s really quite impressive since he had to actually talk to Zolomon to find out about it, but he is not a fan of the way she runs her cons. You should have seen him tear it down. It was glorious,” Lisa recalled for him.

Barry was a little surprised Zolomon had told Len, but he guessed it made sense. Mick, Ray, and Hartley had all promised to keep their visit quiet, and it comforted him that they had kept their word. The other reaper was probably hoping that Len berated them. He seemed like enough of a dick to stoop to such petty means for revenge.

“Thanks,” Barry responded.

He didn’t know if he could have taken Len’s anger after his day. Barry had been so close to finding out who the Butcher was, and it slipped through his fingers. He had meet many people like Hunter Zolomon working with the CCPD, and they didn’t talk unless there was something in it for them. Considering reapers couldn’t die, he didn’t think there was anything to offer or threaten. He wasn’t going to find out who killed him from the reaper appointments.

After a day like that, Barry needed things to be alright with Len. He was Barry’s closest friend in his afterlife, his confidant, and Barry was too close to breaking to lose that right now.

“Of course, sweetie. What are friends for?” Kendra responded before taking a prim bite of the last strawberry. He exchanged a grin with her before she continued. “Come on ladies, the strawberries are gone, and I’m sure Barry’d like his rest now. Plus, we left all the wine in the fridge.”
“Later Barry!” Sara called out as she jumped out of his lap, kissed his cheek, and skipped out the door. Kendra followed her with a laugh. Lisa waited for the room to clear before she stood.

“Check your closet. I picked up something earlier when I was out with Shawna and Rosa,” Lisa urged him. She too pecked his cheek on the way out the door.

Barry really wanted to go to sleep, but he was too curious. Lisa had gotten terrible about sneaking him new clothing when she went shopping, but this was the first time she told him about it. He had to see what caused her to break the trend.

He almost cried when he opened the door, but he managed to pull himself together. Sitting on the floor of his closet was a brand new pair of bowling shoes and the coolest bowling ball he had ever seen. Barry’s day might have sucked, and the afterlife could be trying, but as long as he had his friends by his side Barry felt he could accomplish anything. He had no doubts that a team who could find a him a bowling ball that looked like Sauron’s eye on one of the worst days of his afterlife would make sure Barry always had something to smile about.

Chapter End Notes

The last scene is a gift to GoodbyeYellowBrickRoad. Thank you for always letting me know what you think of my writing, and I hope you enjoy seeing your idea in my story.
“Caitlin! Can I talk to you?” shouted Sam from down the stairwell. He was three floors down, and she was already running late, but something about his tone made her pause anyways. Oh well, she decided. H.R. would probably expect most of his employees to be late today anyways since the elevator was down for maintenance.

“Of course. Can you try to hurry though? We are both going to be late,” she called back.

Caitlin forced herself not to laugh or coo at his race up the stairs. With all of Sam’s gangly limbs getting in the way, it was reminiscent of a video Cisco loved of a baby giraffe running. At least Sam didn’t fall like the baby animal had; she would not have been able to hold back her laughter.

“What for?” she wondered aloud.

Sam looked at his shoes at her question, awkwardly shuffling as he rubbed the back of his neck. The poor guy was obviously expecting her ire over something, and his discomfort over the fact was showing. She wished she could comfort her friend, but his behavior was too strange for her to guess how.
“Saturday. I just… I left you to deal with all that on your own. I’m sorry I was such a shitty friend,” he mumbled, forcing his words out at a speed she had trouble following. Once her brain caught up to what she heard she immediately engulfed her young friend in a fierce hug.

“Don’t be stupid. You aren’t a shitty friend for not wanting to hear the gory details of a murder investigation. Hell, I didn’t want to either! If those officers would have let me I probably would run off the second they opened their mouths,” Caitlin assured him.

“That doesn’t matter. I still should’ve been there for you. H.R. and Cisco stayed,” argued Sam.

“Sam,” she called his name, grabbing his arm lightly to call his attention back towards her and away from his scuffed converse. “I’ve known H.R. and Cisco for four years, and we’ve only met a couple of months ago. That’s not to say we aren’t friends too, but it means you get a pass for not wanting to come to a police station to take part in an investigation for a man you never met. Besides, those guys were there for Ronnie as much as they were for me.”

It didn’t seem that Caitlin’s words were effective. Sam’s face was becoming more drawn as his eyes were filling with unshed tears. She couldn’t stand the look on her young friend’s face, so she threw her arms around him once more and forced him into a tight embrace. She ignored his choking sobs, and he did the same for her tremors.

This sweet fragility of her young friend was the reason she could never mind his decision to protect himself. He wasn’t any more ready for the harshness of something like the Butcher murders than she had been before Ronnie’s death. She was just happy to help shield him from that awfulness.

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“So, what is it that you guys do for fun around here?” Rosa asked, shifting forward in her seat at the kitchen table. She was suffering through her first breakfast with the Rogues, something she assured was a daily event in their shitty little household.

She had only been in the Central City/Keystone metropolitan area for a day. It was more than enough to let her know this town was going to drive her fucking insane. Between the utter asshole her new boss had turned out to be, and the complete lack of grandeur this dumpy little city held, she was seriously getting pissed at her new assignment. And to think she had actually looked forward to the move when she heard that most of her new division was criminals. Her crew in New York had
been surprisingly lacking in the that front, at least for Reapers.

“Many, many things, Doll. I’d be happy to show you around,” offered one of her new coworkers.

Rosa didn’t bother hiding her scrunching nose or the annoyed look on her face at the offer. Sure, Sam Scudder was an attractive man, but she knew his type far too well to be impressed with looks alone. The man was a simpleton, and she didn’t bother flirting or fucking if she wasn’t getting anything out of it. He may have been a decent enough thief to steal her a pretty trinket or two, but if she was going to fuck around with a criminal it wasn’t going to be some lackey.

Len called the shots in more than just External Influences, and she had been mildly interested until he had turned an overblown, self-important douchebag. She might have looked past it since he had a pretty enough face on top of all that power, but it had taken less than 10 seconds after seeing him with Barry to realize he was too smitten to bother. It was probably for the best anyways. Someone that bossy was bound to either need all the control or none of it in the bedroom, and that wasn’t her scene.

“Thanks, but no thanks. You really aren’t my idea of a good time,” she countered. The rest of the table burst out laughing at her words, except for Allen of course. The man was so goddamn sensitive.

Rosa didn’t have time for that little crush to grow, especially not since she was supposed to be living with the Rogues until she could find her own place. There was no way in hell she was living in a warehouse for any longer than necessary, so it was sure to be a temporary arrangement. Nonetheless, she didn’t want to deal with some nobody’s pining in her time here.

Not for the first time in her brief stint Central City, she wondered what the hell was wrong with her new coworkers. They were mostly professional thieves who had a reputation as being quite talented. Living in this kind of squalor was beyond unacceptable, and she didn’t intend to put up with for any longer than necessary.

“Ignore him, Rosa. I was planning to head to lunch at the country club today. I’m currently single and could use a new mark. I can show you how to play by Central City rules,” offered Lisa.

Thank god for that woman, she thought to herself as she accepted the woman’s proposal. While most of this shitty city was a disappointment, she was really starting to like Lisa Snart. It was surprise considering her growing feelings of dislike for Lisa’s brother, but she’d been hard-pressed not to see the appeal of a woman with that kind of style. At least everything in her new assignment wasn’t completely foul.
Barry was well acquainted with the uncomfortable feeling in his chest as he snuck in to the off-site forensics lab for the CCPD. It was a mixture of guilt, apprehension, nerves, and excitement. This was the same way he felt when he had taken Joe’s convertible for his first (very unauthorized) spin in high school. He’d felt this when every time he drank before he reached the age of 21. Most notably for him right now, it was the same feeling he got when he had checked out the Cold Case file on his mother’s murder in his first month as a CSI. This was the feeling he got when he knew that whatever he was doing was a terrible idea, and he still intended to see it through regardless.

He had a feeling that sneaking into a place that he had known so well in his life was not what the Rogues had in mind when they kept forcing knowledge of their criminal endeavors down his throat. It wasn’t his fault they kept coming to him to not so subtly figure out ways to make their crimes even more untraceable. Barry was a smart guy; did they really think he wouldn’t find a way to put the knowledge to good use?

Despite the supremely inadvisable nature of his first solo criminal act, Barry knew he was doing the right thing. Patty had been found nearly 60 hours ago. Chance were that tomorrow morning the CCPD was going to find the Butcher’s next victim. He had been too late to save himself, Patty, Ronnie, and whoever was currently lying on the Butcher’s god-awful table. That didn’t mean he would be too late to save anyone else.

Len was worried about Barry. He usually was these days, if he was honest with himself, but today that worry was magnified tenfold. All of the Rogues, barring Rosa, were. The CCPD had discovered Barry’s friend’s body early Saturday morning, and the Butcher rarely waited more than 72 hours in his cycle. Tomorrow morning they were going to find his next victim.

He had tried to talk to Barry after he had arrived home, but Barry had quickly barricaded himself in his room. Even more oddly, he had actually brought home work from Happy Times. Barry must have been desperate for distraction if he was willing to bring home part of his filing job, but he still wouldn’t let Len or anyone else help.

“For fucks sake, go talk to him. You haven’t turned the page of that book in like 20 minutes,” insisted Shawna, throwing her empty soda can at him as she spoke.
“Be serious, babe. That’s far to practical for Len,” Mark teased them both.

“Maybe I’m just soaking up the pages. You ever consider that?” he drawled back.

“Oh, please!” Hartley scoffed.

“You’ve been checking Barry’s door more than you’ve actually looked at your book. Please just talk to him so we can all stop watching your pathetic pining,” agreed Mick.

“You all are such fucking pests,” he growled back. Unfortunately they were all way too used to him to actually be intimidated. The all simply leveled him with stares varying from supremely judgmental to downright gleeful at Len’s predicament.

“Do you seriously think I didn’t try? Kid doesn’t want to talk right now, and I’m not going to make him,” Len admitted.

“Sic Sara on him then,” Hartley suggested with a grin. Len, not knowing what else to do and desperately wanting this conversation to end in case Barry overheard and got spooked, agreed. Of course that started a whole new debate, but at least it distracted them enough that no one commented on his (now much sneakier) glances towards Barry’s door.

David Singh could not be in a worse mood on Tuesday morning as he prepared to address the press. They had gotten a call that a young man was found in the warehouse district, and he had just gotten the confirmation from CSI Julian Albert that their victim, Adam Foster, was the latest victim of Central City’s Butcher.

“Captain!” an all too familiar called out as his office door was thrown open. He forced himself not to let out any of his annoyance as Detective Joe West burst into his office.

“What do you want, Joe?” he asked pointlessly.
He already knew what was about to come out of the detective mouth. Joe West wanted back in on the Butcher case. It was the only thing Joe came to see him about any more unless it was directly related to a different case. He knew his old friend was still angry with his decision to take him off the case in the first place.

It had been the right call, as much as he hated to lose one of his most seasoned detectives on such an important case. Any evidence Joe found after Barry’s death would be too easy for any prosecution to rip to shreds. David wasn’t going to risk this son of a bitch going free due to some technically like that once he was finally in their grasp. He planned to do everything in his power to make sure the State of Missouri inflicted the maximum penalty on the madman who killed so many of Central City’s residents, not to two of the brightest young people in his precinct.

“You know why I’m here. I need to get back on the Butcher Case. I know that case better than anyone else you’ve got, and we need to make a breakthrough on this case soon. He’s accelerated his timeline, and from what I’ve heard he spent more time on the last two victims too. It’s only been two months since his last cycle. That’s six weeks faster than any other time between his kills,” argued Joe fiercely.

David was already uncomfortably familiar with those facts. Joe’s previous arguments had been a lot more personal. Just a true as what the man was claiming now, but they had been so related to Barry it had been that it had become easy to dismiss the request.

“I can’t officially put you back on this case, Joe. You know the DA would have my head if I tried,” David cautioned carefully. Unfortunately Joe was too agitated to actually get his message.

“I don’t give a shit what the DA thinks! We need to get this guy off the streets,” Joe shouted. Even with the door closed, Joe’s volume was starting to turn the heads in the bullpen towards his office, so he quickly got up to walk across the room, and he placed a single hand on Joe’s shoulder.

“I need you to listen to me very carefully, Detective. I cannot officially have you on the Butcher case. This case is Eddie’s now. You know, your partner? He’s a great detective, and we both know it. Of course, he’s still pretty green, and he is a lot better with your guidance. Don’t you agree?”

Joe’s eyes widen with realization as David’s words sunk in. He was grateful. Plausible deniability was very important to his continued employment. However, so was catching the Butcher, and he wasn’t about to let the CCPD’s best chance sit idly by if he could help it. Detective West could not be officially be a part of this case if this case was going to do well at trial, but that did not mean Joe couldn’t actually be involved. David was perfectly content to let Eddie Thawne be the voice for both of their work, and if the small smirk on Joe’s face was evidence, he fully agreed.
“You’re right, Captain. I want that bastard to fry when we find him. I’ll make sure my name stays off the case,” Joe swore.

He nodded at Detective West as he retreated back behind his desk. Joe didn’t bother to watch as he quickly exited. David pretended not to see Joe drag his partner away from his desk and towards the storage room, just like he had been pretending that Eddie hadn’t already been occasionally passing information to his partner he was not strictly supposed to. He’d have to have a similar talk with Eddie later, but for now he was sure Joe would get his message across fine.

David sat back in his chair once more. He was far from relaxed, but that was to be expected. He was a police captain, which was never exactly a low-stress position, but the added pressure of being in charge of a precinct in the middle of a serial killer investigation made his job nightmarish on day like today. Despite all this, he couldn’t help the small smile in this brief moment of respite. With Joe West back on the Butcher Case, David could feel the madman that much closer to falling in his grasp.
The Inherent Beauty of Early Morning Lighting

Barry was riding with Len in his Jeep, and he was absolutely exhausted. It was nearing six in the morning, and they had been driving for two hours to reach the address on Barry’s post-it. Even Len, who was a perpetual morning person, seemed to be feeling their three-thirty wake up call. At least they were finally getting close, both to the address and his appointment time. He was fully intending to sleep on the way back.

“You know what Len?” Barry prompted, sighing in an over-dramatic fashion that was making Len suppress his grin. Barry turned to give him a full smile, and, sure enough, Len smiled fully back at him.

“What?” Len asked, shifting his focus back towards the road as they drove through the brightening streets of the forest outside of Keystone.

“Is there some sort of system in place that sticks the newbies with shitty appointment times? Because if there is, I would like to point out that Rosa joined up way later than I did.”

Len cackled at his question, a look of surprise across his face.

“Seriously kid? You are half asleep over there? I thought that was going to be some deep question about life or some shit. Where did that come from?” chortled Len, barely managing to halt his laughter enough to get the words out. Barry’s scowl did not help, as the man was sent back into a fit.

“This is my third appointment this week between midnight and 8:00 am. These are my sleeping hours, Len. I’m gonna collapse at Happy Times soon, and it’s going to be a mess because I can’t exactly explain to my boss there that my other job as a grim reaper is keeping me up at odd hours when I should be sleeping,” he protested. Barry was sure it would have been a lot more convincing if he wasn’t fighting a smile of his own. He had no poker face, and Len knew him well enough to spot it anyways.

“Well I hate to break it to you, Princess, but placement is random. I’m sure you’ll be able to catch up on your beauty sleep soon enough,” Len teased as his GPS had them turn into a country gas station.

This site was going to be a doozy. He could already tell. For one, there was the inherent danger of being around that much gasoline, not to mention the giant moving weapons also known as motor
vehicles. It also looked primarily like a spot for hunters to stop at, so Barry was sure there were plenty of guns around. He could spot two hunting rifles, as well as a man pumping gas who had a recognizable bulge of the concealed weapon at his hip.

As if all of that didn’t give him enough options, the owners of his gas station decided that the best way to compete with the gas station they had passed up the road was to put a grizzly bear in a cage. A sign above the cage referred to the sleep animal as Dora. He was both impressed and very jealous of Dora the bear’s snooze. It was quite loud in front of her cage due to the string of animal rights protesters hollering to a sea of unhearing customers at the gas station.

“Sirs! Please don’t buy gas from this station. There is one about a mile up the road in both directions, and they don’t inflict the same abuses on our fellow creatures. Help us free Dora!” One of the protestors hollered as he and Len got out of the Jeep.

“Sure thing, Shaggy. We are just stopping for snacks though, so why don’t you and the gang head back to the mystery machine,” Len drawled back. Barry had to bite back a snort as he stomped on Len’s foot. He may have been being an ass, but his comparison was spot-on. The long haired hippy was even wearing a faded green t-shirt with khaki pants.

“Len! Don’t be mean,” he protested. Len, being Len, completely ignored his protest as he snickered at the protesters outraged arguments against their purchasing. Barry went to follow Len towards the pumps and the store when the woman currently handcuffed to the ringleaders left started comforting her friend.

“Don’t listen to them Bastian. Those guys are just trying to get in under your skin.”

Barry abruptly turned around to join make a beeline for the protestors, suddenly thankful Len decided to be a jerk and make his job that much easier. There was no way a tiny place like this currently held two guys with a name like Bastian.

“Hi! I’m Barry. I’m so sorry about my friend. Len’s not exactly known for his sunny demeanor. You guys are so right though! We will be going up the street for our road snacks. I really think what you guys are doing is so cool. I’d love to get your names and shake your hands,” Barry complemented, going for his most wholesome smile.

He could almost feel Len rolling his eyes behind him at Barry’s words, but he ignored it in favor of shaking each hand. He started with the unfortunate Bastian Stryad and his companion Izzy Williams. He made sure to pull them away as their hands touched, then quickly moved down the line. He had only moments left before they kicked it, and he really wanted to put some distance between them. He
had a feeling this wasn’t going to be a clean one. Unfortunately he was not successful. He had barely begun his retreat when the screaming started behind them, and he felt a splash of warm liquid on his back.

“Crap! I really liked this shirt. How’d the bear get them?” groaned Barry as he rejoined Len by the car.

“Shaggy dropped his breakfast by the bear’s cage and tried to grab for it. She wasn’t pleased. Now just what in the hell do you think you’re doing?” Len grabbed his arm as he spoke, stopping Barry from pulling himself into the Jeep.

“Can’t we wait for this one in the Jeep, or do you have issues with those guys getting in?” Barry shot back.

“I don’t give a damn about them getting in. It’s you who is the problem right now. You’re not getting all that blood on my seats,” Len insisted.

Barry stared him down for a moment, thinking Len was kidding. His serious expression never wavered.

“Fine, you ass. This shirts probably beyond saving anyways,” he relented with an eye roll. He pulled off his shirt and tossed it in the trashcan behind them before he climbed back in to Len’s car. “We are riding back with the heat on. It’s too cold without my shirt.”

“Aw man. This fucking blows,” Bastian complained as he joined Barry in the back seat of Len’s Jeep suddenly. Izzy’s agreement seemed to jar Len lose from where he had frozen by Barry’s door as he moved to rejoin them. He and Barry sat in silence once again as Bastain and Izzy bickered in the back seat before they admitted their feelings, made out passionately, and disappeared into a bed made up of their lights.

“Fucking finally,” Len groaned as he and Barry were left alone once again.

“I don’t know. I thought it was kind of sweet they found each other, even after dying,” Barry disagreed. Barry’s admission caused Len to make a face. He would have thought Len was being contrary again because he apparently had a problem with Barry’s names this morning, but there was something too soft on his expression for that to be true.
“Huh,” he huffed. “I guess you’re kind of right.”

No one had every mistaken Mick Rory for the brightest man in any room. In Ray’s completely biased opinion, that made each and every one of them complete idiots. Mick had grown up in a time when farmer’s kids like him weren’t raised with much formal education, as it had been necessary to skip entire months of school during the planting and harvesting seasons. Even after leaving the farm behind to move to Keystone, Mick had kept blue collar positions up through his death in the 1930s. Mick’s lack of formal education in no way made him an unintelligent man though, regardless of how many people around him assumed that is where his country hick and slum language fusion stemmed from.

Mick’s brightness came out in different ways, like how he was the only one actually keeping Ray and Nate’s little porch garden alive. It had turned out all the botany reading in the world had not translated in to an ability to keep his herbs, tomatoes, and assorted fruits alive. Sometimes it seemed like Mick only had to step outside to make the small patch thrive.

That was not to say that botany was Mick’s only talent. It was far from the case actually. Ray didn’t think he had ever seen someone with as much natural talent for reading the people around him as Mick held. He had been able to tell how much Ray struggled after his death when no one else had picked up on his inner turmoil. It seems that Mick had not lost that ability in the last couple of decades, as he was able to pick up on Barry’s troubles just as well. Mick had been keeping Ray, and likely Len and Sara, apprised with Barry’s fluctuating mental state.

Ray would have been worried if he had been in love with anyone else, but this was Mick. They had been together for about 30 years. Mick loved him, doted on him, and made sure all of his needs were met. Ray was well aware it didn’t always look that way to outside observers. He could never forget with the way Hartley regularly pointed things out. Mick could be - was - distant often. Hell most of the time the man refused to even acknowledge their relationship out loud. Of course that would be a lot more convincing if they didn’t spend at least half their nights and many of their days together without fail, or if either of them had sex with anyone besides each other in decades.

It was because of that strength Ray saw in their relationship that he didn’t mind how much Mick was doting on Barry in his own special way. He had been encouraging it actually. Barry was still plainly struggling, and seeing Mick be there for someone else in such a way was making him feel like the Grinch. Not the early part of the movie where he was determinately ruining Christmas of course, but the scene at the end where his heart swelled three times inside his chest.
“What’s bothering you? I can actually feel how hard you’re thinkin’ right now. It’s giving me a headache,” Mick mumbled as he pulled Ray’s back toward him ever so slightly. He shifted so that his words were spoken directly in to Ray’s ear.

“Not a bother, just thoughts. Happy thoughts,” he reassured, gently squeezing the arm around his abdomen.

“That your forehead all scrunched up?” retorted Mick.

“My face is not all scrunched!” He giggled. Mick simply lifted his hand from Ray’s stomach in order to put a finger in the middle of crease in his brow.

“Well dammit.” Ray knew when to admit defeat. He didn’t mind so much when it lead to Mick’s entire frame shaking behind him with suppressed laughter.

“You going to talk on your own, or do I need to make you?” Mick punctuated his threat by gently running his fingers along Ray’s sides. He couldn’t stop the giggles that escaped his lips at the movement, and Mick’s tight embrace meant he couldn’t get away from the dastardly fingers either.

“I’m thinking about you, you dork.”

Ray was unpleasantly surprised to feel Mick tensing behind him. He could even feel the other man’s face shifting downwards from where it was tucked in his neck.

“Thinking about me makes you that upset?” Mick asked. Despite the way he completely forced the emotion out of his voice, Ray could tell his partner was upset. He quickly turned around in Mick’s grasp so they were facing each other instead, his own hands coming up to frame Mick’s face. The older man didn’t pull away from the kiss he gave him, but he didn’t return it either.

“Mick, baby, it’s nothing like that. I was just thinking about how proud I am of you, and everything you’ve been doing for Barry. It reminds me of how you were there for me after I died. Obviously things are a little different, but I’m so glad Barry’s got you there for him like you were for me. Only good thoughts, I promise,” Ray reassured him.

This time when Ray kissed him, Mick responded soundly.
“A warning that you were going to be out all night would have been nice, baby girl,” Joe called out as he heard his front door quietly shutting. Iris’s quiet cursing rang through the house. He barely managed to hold in his own laughter as she joined him in the living room, a picture-perfect contrite look gracing her delicate features.

“I didn’t plan to be,” Iris quietly reassured him as she sat down beside him on the sofa and tucked herself under his arm.

“You feel asleep at Eddie’s then,” he confirmed, forcing a smile on his face. He didn’t exactly like the idea of his daughter dating his partner, but Eddie was a good man, and Joe had seen how much he cared about Iris.

“You know about me and Eddie!” She exclaimed, shifting in her seat to face him. This time Joe didn’t bother to hide his amusement. He started guffawing at the look on her face, only increasing as the shocked expression shifted to a familiar pout.

“I’m a seasoned detective and your father. You really think you can still hide things from me?” He asked her after he got his breath back. “Besides, it not like you and Eddie are particularly sneaky or a good liars. I picked up on how much that boy was falling for you long before you did.”

“Oh my god,” Iris groaned into her favorite throw pillow she brought onto her lap in an ill-disguised attempt at protection.

“What’s wrong with Iris?” Wally’s voice rang out as he trampled down the stairs.

“Did you know about me and Eddie too?” Questioned Iris as she pointedly ignored his latest outburst of laughter. His amusement did not last for long as he heard Wally teasing Iris about her Eddie, and Iris shooting back barbs.

It felt wrong to be so happy when someone was missing, and something was so inherently wrong with the situation. It felt wrong to be like this without Barry there with them, joining Wally in his teasing as he tried to pretend he wasn’t jealous. Hell, with the way things had been going between
the two, maybe if Barry was still with them Wally would be teasing his sister about spending the night at Barry’s house instead.

Joe tried to shake himself out of these thoughts. It didn’t matter how much Joe wished for Barry’s presence here to soothe this wrongness. His son was gone, and he was never coming back. So Joe joined his two remaining children in the kitchen and tried to shove this longing he felt back to it’s usual spot deep inside his chest. He had lost his child, and the ache that caused him was never going to fade.

He still had two wonderful children in his home right now though, and Joe tried his best to focus on them. He pretended this scene felt right, that he was cheerful still, and his kids pretended they didn’t see the way the light of his false smile didn’t reach his eyes. It was as close as they could get to normal without Barry.
Revelations

Chapter Summary

Barry learns many new things at Patty's funeral.

“Stop fiddling with your tie,” ordered Mick. He glared back, but dutifully gave up any hope of it being straight as he leaned back into the pew. Barry was kind of impressed Mick was able to sound so commanding at a whisper.

He tried to force himself to listen to the closing statements Captain Singh was making since he was no longer allowed to shift in his seat. Barry was sure it was lovely. The Captain had never been verbose, but there was an understated elegance to his words nevertheless.

Listening to these speeches was was why he was supposed to be here. After all, there wasn’t many things that could get a grim reaper to church. Barry was supposed to be saying goodbye to Patty. It made him feel horribly guilty that he could barely tear his focus away from Joe, Iris, and Wally, and Eddie who was sitting with them. He and Iris must have gotten close since he died. She was crying into his shoulder.

His family was so close, only three rows up, and he couldn’t do a damn thing about it. Fuck they looked so sad, and he felt like raw nerve seeing them at another funeral. Other than the stupid yard sale, this was the first time he had seen them since he watched them on the computer screen at his own funeral. Joe and Wally were even wearing the same suits.

He didn’t tear his eyes away from them as everyone stood up, and people started to make their ways out of the pews. Barry finally let Mick pull his attention away only after the West family - plus Eddie - made their way out of sight, and he would freely admit that it was only because Mick was pushing him towards the exit as well. Barry was in a haze inside his own mind, and his only salvation was through those doors. Iris was there, and she was with Wally. Joe and Eddie had been apparently chosen as pallbearers, so he’d have to fight harder to find them.

It hurt his heart to think that her coworkers had to take on the duty, but he could almost hear Patty’s voice in his head scolding him for such thoughts. Her father had died when she was 18 in a robbery gone wrong, and she hadn’t had any other family left. Patty never let that get her down. She had always claimed that Barry, the CCPD, and her other friends were her family. The woman had always insisted to him that blood didn’t much matter in family matters. It was part of the reason they had grown so close; he was well acquainted with the concept.
Barry was so caught up in thoughts about his family, he didn’t watch where he was going. He was trusted Mick to lead him. Apparently that was a mistake as the man had rushed off towards the free food, leaving him to run smack into one of the woman currently haunting his thoughts.

“Oh! I’m so sorry, Ir… I really didn’t mean to do that!... Uh…”

Shit! This was the one thing he was really not supposed to be doing. Even Mick, who was by far the most supportive of the reapers when it came to reaching out to his family, told him to steer clear of everyone at the funeral. He was just supposed to paying his respects.


Mick was going to kill him. After Len killed them both of course. Hell, at least it would get him a day off.

“I don’t think so, girlie. We are distant cousins of Patty’s, and we don’t make it to Central to often. My name’s Mick Rory, and this here his Sammy,” Mick butt in, quickly cutting of what was sure to be utter nonsense that was threatening to spill from Barry’s mouth.

He knew he needed to get it together, but it was Iris. God he had missed her so much. She was even more beautiful than he remembered. Fuck, it be definitely be creepy if he touched her hair, right? She had always let him play with it when he felt nervous like this. It calmed him down in a way little else would. Iris had even taught him how to braid it correctly, insisting that if he was going to fiddle with her hair he might as well be productive.

“Iris!” Wally called out, interrupting them. He wondered briefly if the funeral excuse could be used to get in a hug in with both of them somehow, but before he could figure out the logistics Wally started to speak again. “We’ve got to get out of here. We’re supposed to be bringing Eddie’s car to the grave site.”

“You just want to drive his car,” she teased him.

“Of course I do! He’s got a ‘69 Charger. That doesn’t mean we don’t need to leave. You can talk to your new friends…” Wally halted his speech, realizing he had no clue whose conversation with his sister that he had interrupted.
“I’m Sam, and this is Mick. We’re Patty’s cousins,” Barry cut in quickly. He was actually getting to speak to Wally and Iris! He almost didn’t care he was lying. It felt so good just to be around them again. Barry knew he missed his family, but he hadn’t realized how much until he was actually talking to them.

“And this is my rude little brother, Wally. He seems to forgetting his manners all over the place today though. He’s not completely wrong though, although he does seem to be mistaking the driver here. After all, it’s my boyfriend’s car. I get the driving privileges,” Iris teased, leaning toward Barry conspiratorially like she had so many times before. It felt so wrong like this. She didn’t know who she was talking too, and he didn’t know what was going on. Iris was dating Eddie? Last Barry knew, they hadn’t even had a conversation without Barry or Joe as a buffer. Barry felt like he was going to be sick.

“You guys go ahead. Mick and I were headed home. We’ve got a long drive and all. It was nice to meet you.”

Barry rushed out away from Iris and Wally as fast as he could, forcing his way past the flood of funeral goers rushing alongside him. He didn’t even wait to see if Mick was behind him. He was sure the burly reaper could get people out of his way without a fuss, and Barry need to be out of there. Out of the church and the service, the same way he was out of these people’s lives. Barry didn’t belong here anymore, and every time he saw the people he loved it became more and more clear.

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After the funeral, Barry was way too upset. Sure, he had the right to be a little off after going to the funeral of a friend who was killed by the same bastard that got him. It didn’t explain the completely broken expression on his face, or why he had decided they weren’t going to the graveside like they’d originally planned. Something else was bothering Barry too. Mick had never felt right in church, and the feelings had only grown after he died. Still, even his bone deep desire to get out of this supposedly holy place wasn’t enough to make him start the truck. Mick couldn’t bring himself to just leave with the kid like this, no matter how he felt about the damn place. So he sighed deeply before forcing himself to speak.

“Spill it kid? Why do you look like that?”

“We just left Patty’s funeral,” he deflected. Of course Barry couldn’t just let him help. The damn kid was too hardheaded for that.
“Bullshit,” he snorted. “You didn’t get this upset watching your own funeral. Now you can either to talk about it with me, or I’m taking you to Ray. You go home looking like that, and Len and Lisa are going to give me all kinds of shit.”

Barry waited for a moment. Mick wasn’t sure if he was gathering his thoughts, or hoping Mick would drop things if he waited long enough. He wasn’t about to let this go though, and Barry obviously wasn’t in the right state of mind to be winning any battles of willpower. He didn’t care either way, so long as the kid started blabbing.

“It’s just… Iris. She’s dating Eddie. I mean, it’s great for them I guess. Eddie’s just… great, and Iris is - was - my best friend, and all I ever wanted was for her to be happy. I guess I just always thought that she’d end up happy with me. It felt close, you know. I mean, that’s obviously not an option any more with me dead and all, but it still never occurred me she’d be with someone else so soon, or at all really.”

“Are you fucking shitting me?” Mick asked him, completely outraged. Barry shrunk back, looking afraid of Mick for the first time since their first meeting. Mick, rather than turning that anger towards the twit in his passenger seat like he was so sorely tempted, started beating his own head against the steering wheel repeatedly.

“Umm… Mick? Is everything okay?”

No, everything was damn sure not okay! What the fuck was Barry playing at? He forced himself to calm down enough to ask questions. He wasn’t going to get anything out of the kid like this.

“If you are still in love with your sister-”

“Iris is not my sister. She’s my best friend, or she was at least. I didn’t moved in with the West until I was 12,” Barry cut in. Mick glared at him again for interrupting with enough force Barry decided to pipe down.

“Right then. If you are still in love with your still alive best friend, then what the fuck have you been doing with Len?”

“What does Len have to do with anything?” Mick groaned again at Barry’s words, banging his head on down on the wheel once more. He forced himself to leave it there this time. He didn’t think
reapers actually could receive brain damage, but it was probably best not to test that. Barry was certainly proving trying to prove the possibility.

“Oh good god, please tell me I’m not about to get stuck with a babbygay. You do realize the two of you have been flirting for months now right? Do you really think that crotchety old bastard would let any of the rest of have a pet or get away with half the shit you do? Seriously kid, the Rogue’s betting pool on the two of you has gotten higher than even the ones we had on Ross and Rachel in the 90s.”

“What?!”

Fuck, he really should have taken Barry to Ray’s instead of trying to talk this shit out. Ray was much better at feelings. Not to mention he came out in the 80s where this shit was a little more commonplace. It may not have been socially acceptable to everyone, but it was a hell of a lot better that things would have been if Mick had admitted to liking men before he died. He may have been out for a long time by now, but he had never actually had to talk anyone through a gay crisis.

Hell, even Hartley would have been better for this. He could have taken Barry to Hartley for this conversation. Ray could be a little soft sometimes, but Hart didn’t have that problem. Plus guy had been heavily involved with all of the major gay rights movement since he kicked it in the ’60s. Hart would have been great with this too.

Mick was apparently saying some of this out loud, as Barry started scowling deeply at him.

“I’ve been openly bisexual since college, Mick. I don’t need to have a sit down with Ray and Hartley. That’s not the issue here. It’s the Len thing, and the fact that you assholes have apparently been taking bets on our non-existent love life.”

Fucking shit biscuits. This was a million times worse. Mick did not do feelings. He never would have guessed that Barry fucking Allen was even worse with this then he was.

“Nonexistent my ass. Tell me, Barry, who are you closest to now that you kicked it? Who do you go to when something goes right or wrong? Plus you two get those weird eyes every time you look at each other. It’s so fucking sweet I’m going to end up with my first afterlife cavities.”

“But Len isn’t gay! And I don’t look at him like that.”
Mick started cackling at those words. Fucking seriously? The kid was supposed to be one of the smart ones in their crew.

“I literally saw you staring at his ass yesterday for at least five minutes yesterday. You were fucking ogling him in the kitchen.”

“I was not! I was… judging him. Who the hell carries a can opener the back pocket, even if they do plan on using it again?” Barry continued to protest, lying his ass off in the process.

“None of the rest of us was. Except Rosa, but that one is obviously a horndog. Admit kiddo, you want to take a bite. ‘Sides, that order was pretty telling kid. Let me tell you, you’ve got nothing to worry about on that front either. Len doesn’t much care about someone’s packaging. If they’ve got the right combination of smarts, wit, and badassery then Len’s good to go,” Mick told the idiot. The deepening red of Barry’s face and neck let him know just how right he was.

“I don’t… oh fuck. Holy shit. This can’t be…. When did I start having feelings for Len? This can’t… but Iris… Oh fuck everything,” Barry realized. This time it was the kid’s turn to bang his head down roughly, tucking it into his arms on the dashboard as he continued to bemoan his existence.

Mick kept laughing as he pulled the car in gear and headed towards Der Waffle Haus. The kid obviously needed sugar, stat, and if he took them home right now then Barry’s brain may actually break this time. He definitely would if he saw Len. Barry kept mumbling obscenities and surprised explanations to himself, but Mick didn’t bother commenting. He had done his part already, and it was already a hell of a lot more involved with someone else’s relationship than he had any desire to be.
Blown Away

Chapter Summary

Barry tries to deal with his newfound revelations. He doesn't do it well.

It was nearing three o’clock in the morning, and Barry couldn’t sleep. He couldn’t stop replaying every interaction he’d had with Len in his head, trying to figure out exactly what was going on with them. So far, he hadn’t even been able to tell when everything began. Was it really the night of his first appointment when Len and Lisa took him to go get stuff for McSnurtle like Mick claimed? That felt too soon, but he couldn’t be sure it hadn’t then either. Things with him and Len had always been different.

He really shouldn’t be thinking about this now. He had to work in 7 hours, and he would be seeing Len even sooner than that. Barry needed to sleep, and it was entirely Mick’s fault he couldn’t.

Well, Barry thought as he pushed himself out of bed and left his room. If he wasn’t sleeping, then Mick shouldn’t get to either. He was most of the way to Mick’s room when the door to Hartley’s room knocked him in the face as it swung forcefully open.

“Ow!” yelped Barry, holding his nose as he tried to keep the blood gushing from it from ruining his nightshirt.

“Shh, Barry. Sorry about that. You alright?” Hartley whispered as he pulled him away from the bedrooms towards the kitchen. The older reaper didn’t wait for Barry to answer before he forced him into the chair and under the bright kitchen lighting to examine his nose.

“Is it broken?” he asked after several minutes when it became apparent Hartley was planning to stay silent as he cleaned the blood from Barry’s face.

“Fractured, I think. It’ll be fine by morning,” replied Hartley. He finally withdrew the wet cloth he had been using to wipe Barry’s face. Hartley apparently decided it was a lost cause, as he threw it straight in the trash before sitting beside from Barry. “Now, are you going to tell me why you were wondering the halls at this time of night. I suppose it’s too much to hope you were sneaking back to your room from Len’s?”
“I was walking away from my room,” he pointed out.

“Oh, so sneaking in to Len’s room again for another late night rendezvous.”

Barry kicked Hartley in the shin for that one, but it didn’t stop the other man from cackling. “I’m not sleeping with Len, you asshole, and I’m definitely not helping any of you with that stupid bet you made about it. I was going to wake up Mick.”

Hartley started pouting at his words, and Barry couldn’t stop the wave of guilt that crashed over him. Hartley may have deserved the harsh words and the kick, but Barry hated to see his look so downtrodden.

“Not a good idea. Ray’s in there tonight, and they definitely weren’t sleeping earlier if you catch my drift.”

Hartley laughed again at Barry’s scandalized expression, tapping the spot where his nose was wrinkled lightly with his finger. “Seriously? I know we call you kid, but you’re still too old for that,” teased Hartley. Despite the man’s tone, Hartley still looked so sad. Then again, maybe he was just tired. His room was directly next to Mick’s so it’s likely that hearing him and Ray had kept the reaper awake.

“I don’t care about that! I just really don’t want to see them in the aftermath!” He insisted with far more force than necessary. It had the desired effect though when Hartley started grinning as he stifled his laughter.

“Why were you going to wake up Mick anyways? I’m guessing he’s the one who told you about the bet, and you wanted to talk out how much you love Lenny?” Hartley prompted, obviously not willing to let Barry change the subject.

“You’re a dick, Hart. And I don’t love Len. I’ve only known Len for three months. I… I really don’t know what I feel,” admitted Barry. As much as he wanted to wake up Mick for causing his sleepless night, he knew that Hartley was still probably a better option for this conversation. The man had some tact at least, and while Mick was great about being honest with these kinds of things, he had the emotional range of a particularly wet cat most of the time: grouchy to pissed off. Hartley may share Mick’s bluntness, but he at least he could be a little softer. So he grit his teeth as he braced himself for what he was sure was going to be some brutal honesty. It made what Hartley actually went with that much sweeter.
“You’re right, Barr. Sorry about that. I know this is all pretty tough on you right now, and getting in a relationship is probably the last thing that’s been on your mind. Just be careful with him, alright? Len’s way more sensitive than he seems, and he cares about you a lot.”

“I know, I know. Mick threatened me on that earlier,” he conceded.

“If you don’t mind me asking, why was he threatening you? It’s none of my business and all, but it seems pretty un-Mick like. At least for you. I think he’s adopted you. Plus, we had agreed to let you and Len figure things out on your own, but I guess Mick got impatient. On the bright side though, at least his interference made most of the bets invalid,” Hartley inquired.

Barry really didn’t want to talk about it, but he had a feeling this might be his only shot. There was no way in hell he stood a chance of getting Mick to sit down and talk out his feelings for Iris. Barry was about 90% the larger man would just knock him out and leave. So Barry thought carefully on how exactly to tell one of Len’s best friends that he wasn’t over the women who held his heart since the day they meet in Elementary School.

“I… We ran into someone today. I mean that literally too, so I actually had to speak with her. It was my best friend, Iris. I… I know I’m not allowed to see her or anything, but it was an accident. Anyways, she said something about having a boyfriend. Another friend of mine too. Eddie’s a great guy and all, and I’m glad to she isn’t stuck mourning me, but… we were going somewhere. Before I died, I mean. I spent years being too afraid to mess up our friendship to ask her out, but I could tell when I died she was starting to feel something there too. It just… fuck,” he choked, trying in vain to hold back his tears he continued.

He couldn’t believe Iris - his Iris - was already dating someone else. It had only been three months since he died. They may not have been together yet, but she had been turning down dates for him. She started to give him the same smile she gave all of her old boyfriends. Barry was ready to ask her out too, but he wanted to give her some space to sort through everything with Wally and Francine first. That was apparently a big mistake. She didn’t need space from Eddie, and she probably hadn’t from him either.

Barry was jerked out of his thoughts as Hartley half yanked him from his seat with the force he used to pull Barry into a tight hug. He sank into his friend’s arms, letting go of some of his tears for a moment. He didn’t pull back when they stopped, and neither did Hartley.

“You don’t stop loving the people in your life when they are taken away from you. It’s the same, no matter who does the dying. Doesn’t mean you can’t love the new people that come into it too,” Hartley told him as he pushed back from Barry, standing up once more. Barry felt his eyes water up again at Hartley words, but he refused to let them fall. He got up too, and wordlessly following the other reaper’s example.
“You’re right. I’m just... God I’m a fucking wreck, aren’t I?”

“Aren’t we all?” Hartley agreed. “C’mon, Barry. I don’t think either of us is getting any sleep, and I think you could use a distraction. You can help me build a cold ray I’ve been tinkering with. I could use a chemist help with core.”

Barry, not knowing what else to do and knowing he really didn’t want to be alone, followed Hartley back to his room. He may not be getting any sleep that night, but the later it got in the morning, the less he really minded.

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H.R. was getting worried about Sam. His young friend was practically falling asleep desk for the third time this week. Even Cisco’s usual rambunctious energy was failing to rouse their young friend.

“Sam, my man. Do you have a minute?” He called out after watching Sam’s eyes drift close for the third time in as many minutes. His words startled the boy awake, jerking in to the air. He ignored Cisco’s jibs and Caitlin’s concern as he quickly made his way into the office.

“Close the door behind you,” H.R. ordered.

“The door? You never close the door,” Sam replied, worry and confusion all over his face. He was tempted to go ahead and soothe those worries away, but he figured Sam would appreciate the privacy for this conversation more. He regretted that urge when Sam started to speak, rushing to get seated and get the words out before H.R.’s fully registered he finished shutting the door.

“I’m so sorry, sir. I know I’ve been kinda drifting today, but I haven’t gotten any sleep in like three days, and I know that no excuse. I’ll do better! I promise. I’ll get Cisco to share some of his stash…”

Sam cut himself off abruptly when H.R. raised his hand to signal a stop. He had to hold in a snort. Sam was acting like he was called in to the principal’s office. It was a fitting trend for such young worker, but not right for Happy Times. He may have been Sam’s boss, but he was his friend first.

“What’s troubling you, son?”
“I… What?” Sam asked, face a perfect image of sheer perplexity.

“Is it drugs?” H.R. forced himself to ask. He hated to even think it, but it would make a lot of sense. Sam was obviously so bright and talented. H.R. may have loved where he worked, but he knew it wasn’t the most challenging or exciting of places. For him, it was perfect. He wasn’t the most challenging or exciting person, and he liked the way the place felt.

Sam was too good for a place like this, especially since he had accepted it at such a young age. The boy was only 19, but he acted like this was as good as he could get. Sure, the same could be said for some of his other employees as well, but none of them had the mark of a Happy Time lifer the same way Sam had. Like Cisco and Caitlin, both of whom were working on degrees in sciences he couldn’t even begin to understand. Their presence at Happy Times was a wonderful addition, but they were here temporarily.

A person with talents like Sam should have possessed the same markings. Instead, he saw signs that were uncomfortably familiar from his own wayward youth, and he cared far too much about his co-worker to let him go down the same path he did without at least trying to help.

“A person with talents like Sam should have possessed the same markings. Instead, he saw signs that were uncomfortably familiar from his own wayward youth, and he cared far too much about his co-worker to let him go down the same path he did without at least trying to help."

“Drugs? I’m not on drugs!” exclaimed Sam forcefully, eyes just about bulging out of his face.

H.R. cleaned his glasses before he answered, knowing that his companion was horrible was drawn out silences. Maybe if he unbalanced him a bit, he might drop some of these defenses.

“I know the signs, Sam. You are often late, tired, leaving at odd times of the day, and not to mention the fact you are constantly on edge,” he listed, grabbing Sam’s hand in his own across the desk before he continued. “We’re not here for me to judge you, Sam. I had some fun myself with blow back in the 80s. I know the temptations, and I know how bad for you they truly are. I can get you help, a sponsor that you feel more comfortable talking too.”

“You… I… you know what? You are completely right. I’m an addict. Completely and totally hooked on drugs, but I’ve quit! I’ve just been having a really hard time with it this week. My sponsor was going to take me to lunch today, but I think I’m going to have to cancel since I’ve been having trouble with that data entry. Oh well, I guess I can hold off for one more day,” Sam admitted to him in a rush.

“You want to blow off meeting with your sponsor? Don’t be ridiculous! Go get your stuff and get to that meeting. While I love your enthusiasm for Happy Times, I’m sure that just this once we can get
someone else to get that in for you. You go, and take the rest of the day off. Talk with your sponsor. Take a walk through the park. Whatever you need to get back to the you I know is inside,” H.R. insisted.

“Thanks H.R.! You have no idea how much I appreciate this,” Sam informed him as he all but ran from the office.

H.R. smiled to himself as he leaned back in his chair. Sure, his job may not be something many people envied, but it definitely had its perks. Today, he was able to help a friend, and keep a bright young man on a good path. It’s times like these he really loved Happy Times.

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Len may have really like the kid, but there was some parts of Barry he just flat out did not understand, and he didn’t think he ever would. For instance, he knew he would never understand the kid’s fascination with fucking musicals, or why he had been twitching like a goddamn rabbit all morning. Something told Len as he walked into the world’s creepiest office building that Barry’s insistence on working in this hellscape was going to be one of those things. At least he now knew why Barry had managed to avoid his presence at his work so far. If Len thought even for a second that Barry would listen, he’d insist the younger reaper leave this place.

“Welcome to Happy Time, my name is Cindy. How can we make your happiness a reality today?” A droll voice called out from behind the reception desk. Len had to lean over a bit to see the short, angry looking woman it held.

“Oh my god, do they really make you say that every time?” he snorted. Cindy the receptionist didn’t have time to get over her shock at Len’s frankness when Barry came barreling up to him.

“You’re here! In the office. We’ve got to go now. Bye Cindy!” Barry hurriedly urged him along, pulling him towards the elevator. He banged fiercely on the button, seemingly trying to will the thing up more quickly with a regimen of overly aggressive button pressing.

“Shit, it’s too late. Play along, alright?” Barry muttered in his early before quickly straightening up and smiling at the man who approached them.

“H.R., what are you doing here. Going to lunch?”
Len was a little impressed. When he first met Barry, he was like a child. Or a puppy. Anything really that was sweet, loyal, and unfailing honest. He knew Barry considered his boss to be a kind of friend, so the fact that he was so able to turn on a reasonably believable (to outsiders at least) deception was pretty impressive. Len couldn’t tell if he was more impressed by Barry progress, or sickened that this previously naive man in his charge had been able to develop this skill so quickly under his tutelage.

“Not yet. I just wanted to meet your sponsor. I have to say, what you are doing for our Sammy is just so wonderful. He is a wonderful young man, no matter what mistakes he may have made. I’m so thrilled he has someone else to help pull him from this dark time.”

Len was 100% positive the only reason he hadn’t already violently ripped his hand from this man’s way over enthusiastic handshake was pure shock. Did this guy really think Barry - former CSI and obsessive rule-sticker - was an alcoholic or on drugs? Hell, he was a lot more inclined to think this overly cheerful middle-aged man was indulging in too much pot. He kinda hoped so. Men in that age bracket shouldn’t behave that cheery otherwise. It was too unsettling.

“Yup! This is my sponsor. Len, this is my boss H.R., and H.R., this is Len. We really need to be going if we are going to make that meeting later, right Len?” Barry cut in, voice high and squeaky in way that Len knew meant Barry was nervous, embarrassed, or upset. He’d guess that Barry was a mixture of them all now.

“Right. I’m just taking Sam here for a meeting. It’s good to know his workplace is so supportive of his struggles too. He’s such a good kid, other than this of course, ain’t he?” agreed Len, trying his best to hold in his snickers until after they were away from Barry’s other boss. Seriously, what the hell was going on in this office?

“Yup! Meeting with us, then with the rest of the group. I can’t thank you enough for letting me go the rest of the day to be there. Bye!”

Barry’s rambling would have been adorable, if the man in question had stomped as inconspicuously as he could - meaning his boss was too oblivious to notice and the receptionist too amused to point anything out - before dragging him into the elevator.

“So? What are you addicted too?” Len tittered as soon as the door was closed, and they were alone once more. Barry joined in with his laughter. His bright, happy laugh made Len’s mocking chuckles sound downright pitiful. Len loved it.

“Don’t be an ass. I need an excuse to get out of there for my appointment, and it’s one H.R. provided
Len raised a single eyebrow, staring Barry down until he finally admitted, “Blow, apparently. That’s cocaine right?”

Len gave up on holding his laughter in, letting the full force of his amusement out. By the time the elevator reached the ground floor, he was hunched over with tears in his eyes. Barry swiftly walked out, not bothering to wait for Len to pull himself together enough to walk again. He kept his hurried pace too. Len didn’t bother jogging to catch up. If the kid wanted to hurry he could wait by the Jeep.

“Slow down, Barry! How am I going to keep your from falling off the wagon again if you run away from your problems,” he joked, forcing his snickers down until after his words.

“I hate you,” Barry groaned into his hands as he waited for Len to unlock his door.

“No you don’t. You love me,” he quipped back, throwing an arm around Barry to pull him into his side before the younger man could slip into the now open car.

Barry jerked suddenly at the contact, so Len went to withdraw his arm. He must have been feeling touchy today. Barry did that sometimes, something else Len couldn’t seem to figure out. He didn’t know if that was something the Butcher left him with, or if Barry was always so odd about being touched. Before Len could fully withdraw, Barry sank into his grasp, tucking his face into the crook of Len’s neck.

“You are such a jackass,” Barry mumbled. This time, Barry joined in on his laughter.
New things come to light for several people in Central City, while others stay beneath the surface.

Wally was a truly terrible son. Anyone could tell that after seeing his still-strained relationship with his father, but he was sure that his most recent stunt completely sealed the deal for him. His mother had been in the hospital for the last 9 days, and he hadn’t gone to see her once. It didn’t look like she would be able to leave ever again, but he still couldn’t make himself go see her. He didn’t plan to try.

Francine West’s health had been failing for a long time. She suffered from MacGregor’s Syndrome, a genetic disorder that was known to affect ex-drug addicts particularly hard, and his mother definitely fit that bill. She had stayed clean while she was pregnant with him, but it wasn’t until he was in elementary school that she had fully cleaned up her act. A part of Wally couldn’t help be resentful of her for it. She had loved him well and fiercely, but it hadn’t been enough to keep his early life from being wrought with tragedy, and it definitely wasn’t enough now. His mom may not be dying if she had loved him enough to quit when he was younger. Maybe if he loved her enough that wouldn’t matter to him now.

Basically, Wally knew he was proving that he was human garbage by not going to see his mother, and the last thing he needed was his brand new older sister - something else Francine had done to fail them both - telling him how awful he was being. That didn’t stop Iris from trying. She had been talking nonstop for the last several minutes about her own visit with their mother, and how much peace it brought her. Finally, Wally snapped. He couldn’t take this.

“I don’t need you trying to guilt me, Iris. I know what I’m doing, and I don’t care. It’s not the same situation, and I’d really appreciate it if you could just stop this. I thought you wanted to have coffee with me, but if this if this is all you wanted then I’m out.”

Wally could tell his outburst drew the attention of everyone at the surrounding tables, but he couldn’t care less what the people at Jitters thought about him. This was Iris’s place, not his, and he never felt completely comfortable here anyways. Jitters was where Iris went with Eddie, her friends, and where she used to come with Barry. The nice, respectable people of Central City loved this place, as did the CCPD staff, since the precinct was right up the road. This wasn’t a place for someone like him, and every time he came in it always felt like he was just trying to pretend he was someone else. So Wally did what he wanted to do from the second he walked into the brightly lit cafe; he left. Of course, it would have been a lot easier if tenacious sister hadn’t followed his storm out.
“Wally, Hold up! I’m sorry, okay. I was just… I just wanted to help you,” she yelled, managing to catch up with him and force him to stop with a tight grip on his arm. He was a little impressed. His legs were a lot longer than Iris’s, and she had managed to keep up with his fast pace in some insane looking heels.

“Stop trying. I don’t need your help. I know exactly what I’m doing, and it’s not something your’s or Joe’s feel-good family shit can fix,” he sneered back at her, trying to redirect every ounce of annoyance and hatred he was feeling towards himself towards her.

“She’s your mother, Wally, and if you don’t see her now you’re not going to ever see her again. Is that what you want? You’re a smart guy, Wally, and I know you’ve figured that out by now. So why in the hell haven’t you been at the hospital with dad and me?” Iris snapped back, losing her patience. Wally felt oddly grateful. This felt more natural. He and his mom had never used the strange forced kindness when they were upset with each other that Joe and Iris always seemed to pull out. He could handle this a lot better.

“It’s stupid. I don’t need you to tell me how much I’m going to regret this. I know I will. I just… I don’t want to remember her that way. I’ve seen it too many times, you know? It’s in my head no matter what, so it shouldn’t really matter. But every time I try and go see her, you know what comes into my head?”

His sister softened at his words, seemingly surprised that he caved so quickly to her stern words. Truthfully, he would have rather not, but he couldn’t help himself. Iris was acting way too much his mom, and Wally could never stop himself from spilling his guts to Francine West. She shook her head at him. He wasn’t sure if she was too surprised to answer aloud or simply unwilling to risk interrupting him. It didn’t really matter, either way.

“It’s Barry. I think about Barry, and you know what I see? I remember the last time I saw him, and well… he was smiling. Sure it was the awkward, doofy smile he did when he was a little uncomfortable, but he was still happy. I like remembering Barry like that. It’s how I want to remember my… our mom.”

Iris’s face broke from the carefully constructed calm she had forced on to prompt his answers as it shifted into a look of utter anguish. Fuck, he really should have kept his mouth shut. His words were making her eyes brim with unshed tears. Iris had been doing so much better lately, but it was a fragile kind of progress. Iris had loved Barry more than even she realized, that much was obvious to everyone. Wally should have known better than bring up Barry like that.

“That’s such shit!” Iris shouted, finally letting go of his arm in favor of shoving his chest. He was too surprised to move out of the way from her second push. “Do you have any idea what I would do or give to see Barry again? I wouldn’t care how it happened, as long as I got the chance to tell him I
love him, and that I’m sorry that we were too afraid to screw things up to give each other a chance like we both wanted and were too afraid to admit. Fuck Wally, if that is what you so afraid of, then let me tell you things from the other side. You want to know what I think of when I think of my last memory of Barry?”

“Iris…” Wally tried to cut her off, but she smacked his arm again.

“Shut up, Wally. You told me what you remember about Barry, and now it’s my turn. I remember talking to him in his lab that day, and he was so upset about his dad and the fucking Butcher, and I was stupid and let him have his space. I should have stayed. I could have gone with him to his dad’s, or told him to stay there all night, or fucking anything else but insist that he take the nightline to come see me. I was selfish, and I wanted him where I could watch him instead of where he told me he wanted to be. I could’ve… I…”

Wally wrapped his arms around Iris and pulled her tightly into his chest as she started to cry to hard to keep speaking. He knew people were giving them funny looks as they broke down on the street corner, but he didn’t pay them any mind.

“Shh… It’s not your fault, Iris. You were trying to help, Barry. He knew how much you loved him, and I’m sure he wanted to be with you that night too. Fuck, just please don’t cry. I’ll go see Mom, just please be okay,” pleaded Wally as he held her close and rubbed her back, just like his mom had always done for him.

“You better, you jerk,” she sniffled in return, pushing herself away from Wally as she worked to compose herself. It wasn’t very successful, but her tired, teary eyes and red-splotched face weren’t enough to keep her from looping her arm in his and pulling him along as she started them back towards her car.

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Barry felt absolutely terrible about keeping secrets from the Rogues. They had all done so much for him, and without them in his life he is sure he would have gone mad. Maybe that is what was so wrong with Zolomon. Thinking of Central and Keystone’s other reaper made him shiver, and not just in trepidation of the man. He was worried that he would end up like him, alone, if the rest of his friends found out what he was doing.

The fear he felt wasn’t enough to stop what him though. Nothing was. He was going to find out who killed him, and make sure the CCPD caught the sick bastard. He was positive that even Mick, by far the most sympathetic and knowledge of Barry’s misadventures with those from his life, was sure to
balk at his investigation. He was crossing major lines here, but he did not care.

Barry only wished that he was having more luck with his search. He had been working for his full day off from Happy Times, locked away in his room as he laid out the investigation. Barry was creating an investigation board, not unlike the one he had at the CCPD. This one was going to end up much larger, however. He didn’t have the luxury of extra storage, so he wanted everything in one place where it could be easily hidden. It why he was now using an entire wall of his bedroom now instead of one side of a corkboard. Thankfully, there was a strictly enforced rule about not going in each other room’s without permission after a rather unfortunate incident that happened before he died. No one would actually tell him what happened, as it was apparently a sore subject for each of his roommates. As near as he could tell, a prank war had escalated far out of control. Rogue wide prank wars were banned at the same time, at least according to Shawna, so he assumed that started his new favorite rule.

The board was close to done. He only wished that he had accomplished more than that with his hours of work. Everything he already knew about the Butcher was laid out where he could see, but new patterns weren’t emerging from any easier here than they had months ago in the CSI lab. He was tired and so far beyond frustrated it was amazing he wasn’t pulling his own hair out. Nearly a full days work, and he had nothing new to go on. He had been holding on to hope that his death at the hands of the Butcher and his life as a reaper would have given him insights.

Barry had just finished tacking up the last piece when a knock broke him from his thoughts. “Just a minute,” he called out as he rushed to had the wall, cursing a little as he realized the time.

Barry jumped onto the chair he had strategically placed by McSnurtle’s cage and pulled down his brand new wall-size constellations tapestry. He rushed over to the door as soon as he was sure his work was covered, messing with his shirt as he threw the door open so whoever was on the other side would think he was getting dressed.

“Everything alright in here, Barry?” Shawna asked, her generally lovely features in concern.

“I’m great. Just lost track of time reading, and I didn’t realize it was time to go to my appointment. You ready?” Barry mislead hurriedly, changing the subject quickly to his upcoming appointment. He may not have been the best liar, but he a king of deflection. Shawna dragged him away, hurriedly chatting with him about her date with Mark the previous night, and Barry smiled along at her description of Mark’s hidden romantics. His title, it seemed, was safe for another day.
Something was up with Barry. Len was sure of the fact, but he couldn’t figure out what it was. He had been twitchy and distant for most of the past week, and it was worse with Len than the others. Then there were also moments when he things were odd with their newest reaper in a different way.

Barry, when he wasn’t acting all startled and secretive like he was in his first few weeks with the Rogues, was laughing with him more, leaning into his touches and initiating more of his own, and generally being more open to Len at a rate that was kind of alarming. He loved it, but it was more progress Barry had made in months, and it was only with him. Len was starting to become foolishly hopeful that Barry might actually return his feelings. There were moments, even before this strange behavior began, that made him wonder.

Len shook his head, trying to will himself not to be thinking about that. His feelings for Barry may have been strong, but they were wildly inappropriate. The kid was still traumatized, not to mention Len was way too old and Barry’s boss. Len had learned a long time ago just how damaging relationships could be. After seeing his wonderful little sister reduced to what her fiancée wanted her to be, he had sworn he would never be that for someone else. The sentiment was especially true now. Len cared about Barry, more than he should. He refused to take advantage of their situation because he had a crush. It was his job to take care of Barry, and getting into his pants was not the way to do it. That was especially true now that Barry was acting all secretive again, he thought as he sneaked a glance at the younger man.

He was sitting on the couch in with Lisa, Rosa, and Shawna. Poor kid must have gotten sucked in to their girl talk. Mark had actually gotten off his ass and taken Shawna on a proper date the yesterday. She had been prattling on about it all day, and while most of the male Rogues had worked very hard to avoid being part of the conversation, Barry seemed to be enjoying himself. Even with his smiles and bright eyes though, he was still holding himself slightly away from the girls, shifting back so far against the arm of the couch on the far end it was a wonder it was bothering his back.

Barry never sat like that with him anymore. That shouldn’t matter to him. Barry was not an option, and probably wouldn’t be for a long time to come, if ever. He needed Len too much for him to let things go the way he so desperately wanted.

“For f**k’s sake, Snart, if you aren’t going to pay attention to the game then go fucking sit with the girls,” Sam grunted, breaking him from his thoughts.

“Barry’s over there too,” Raymond pointed out, beaming at his cards as he spoke. He must have had a good hand. The man had absolutely no filter on his emotions, even after spending decades with the Rogues cleaning him out because of it. It’s why they never minded when Mick convinced him to play with them, despite how shitty he was at the poker. Len, knowing he was beat this round, folded quickly.
“I know, but if he’s listening to that, I’m pretty sure he counts too,” Sam jeered back, laughing nastily. Len kicked him under the table for it, as did Hartley and Mick. Their defense wasn’t enough to keep Barry from flushing. It wasn’t even his pretty, embarrassed red, but the deeper and more sorrowful color he turned when he was ashamed.

“Fuck you too, Scudder. You’re only saying that because Barry’s so much prettier than you,” Shawna replied, leaning back to wrap an arm around Barry. Lisa, ever a charmer, simply spit her gum at him. He was pretty impressed she made the shot from about 15 feet away, much less than she managed to get it in his precious hair.

His squawking made all the Rogues burst out into laughter, but he only had eyes for one. Barry was chuckling much more quietly than the rest, but the brightness had returned to his eyes once more. Barry caught his eye, and his smile deepened as they shared their amusement. Len’s stomach swooped. He was so fucking.
Chapter Summary

Sara gives Lindsey a ride home, and Barry and Len return to see Dora the Bear.

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry about this long break between updates! Real life has been kicking my ass, but hopefully I'll be back on a better schedule soon.

“Sara, wait up!” A familiar voice called out from behind her as she slowly made her way out of the hospital. She was running late to meet Nyssa, but she slowed her steps down anyways. She always would for Lindsey.

“Please tell me Dr. Allen isn’t calling me back. I’m so close to freedom,” Sara begged, for once not caring how desperate she sounded.

Dr. Allen had been in an uncharacteristically foul mood that night, snapping at everyone but his patients. If she had to deal with his mood again, she was going to force whatever stick was stuck up his ass out of his mouth with her foot, and then she’d have to feel guilty about it next time she saw Barry.

“Oh no, it’s nothing like that. I was just heading out too, and I was hoping you might be able to give me a ride again. My car is still in the shop. I’d totally pay for your gas, and offer you my eternal servitude. After dealing with Dr. Allen’s crabby mood all night, I really don’t want to deal with funny bus people. Do you know what kind of people take the bus at 4:00 am in Central City? It’s not pretty. The longer I go without my car, the more I’m really starting to hate public transport,” Lindsey confined, linking her arm in Sara’s as she joined her walk. With anyone else the act would have been far too presumptuous for Sara’s taste, but she loved the feelings of Lindsey’s arm in hers.

“That guy’s insurance company still giving you grief? If you’re interested, I’ve got some friends who might be able to talk them in to paying up faster,” Sara offered, trying to squash the hope blooming in her chest that Lindsey would say no, so they could keep having these private moments driving in her car. It didn’t hurt how pretty Lindsey’s blonde hair looked when the sun shined on it through the slight tinting of her windows, Sara mused as she put the car in gear.
“Oh! Do you have a lawyer friend? Because I’ve got one already, but her rates aren’t small, and I don’t think I like her. She’s kind of shifty, you know?”

Sara resisted the urge to snort at her friend’s sweet naivety, but just barely. Lawyers would only slow down the process. She was sure that if Len, Mick, and maybe some of the other Rogues visited whoever was failing to process Lindsey’s claim, than they pay up quickly.

“I don’t have any lawyer friends,” Sara began, unsure exactly where she was going with her thoughts, but knowing she needed to explain her criminal coworkers abilities without letting Lindsey in on her more sordid affairs. “… but I do have a few who special in retrievals.”

“Retrievals, huh? So are they contractors?” Lindsey asked, all polite smiles and gentle inquiries.

Sara was, as usual, beyond charmed, but she also knew she needed to lie her ass off. She didn’t regret the offer, but Sara was so not telling sweet, lovely Lindsey that she was planning to have professional thieves for thug-for-hire with a simple request.

“Yup! They are contractors, and they do stuff like this all the time. Plus, they owe me about a million favors, so I’m sure I can get them to waive their fee,” she offered.

Sara felt like a damn fool for how much the smile in return made her knees weaken. Not to mention how utterly inappropriate the feeling was. She was literally going to straight to hook up with someone else as soon as she dropped Lindsey off. Her damn heart couldn’t seem to grasp that fact, unfortunately for her.

“Oh really? That would be so wonderful! I can pay them for it too, you know. You don’t need to waste those favors on me,” Lindsey insisted.

Sara snorted at her friend’s ever-present manners even in the face of such an offer. “You, Lindsey, are never a waste.”

Lindsey giggled, tilting her head back and exposing her long, porcelain neck in the process. As much as Sara loved the sound of her laugher, it didn’t stop the white-hot flash in her chest at the sound. Lindsey thought she was joking, and Sara had to let her. She lived in a world of darkness someone like Lindsey should never be a part of, not to mention the fact she had another woman she was far more suited for waiting. Sara belonged in the darkness, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t enjoy the benefits of someone else’s light.
Most of the time, Barry was used to his new gig as part of the undead. Sure, it wasn’t the easiest or most glamorous job, but he was helping people. However, there were still plenty of days where he absolutely despised being a grim reaper, and today was definitely one of those days. To make matters worse, Len was completely unsympathetic to his plight this time.

“I don’t care how much you complain. You are not getting out of work tomorrow because you had to wake up early,” Len insisted, going for sharp but falling short. Despite his sharp words, his playful tone and the crinkling around his eyes let Barry know he was still amused.

“Again Len! I had to get up early again! It’s only been a week, and I’m stuck with another job where the sun barely has risen at the fucking same fucking gas station,” Barry complained.

Len, being the dick he usually was, cackled. “You’re off from Happy Times today. It’s not like you can’t go back to sleep after we get back to the warehouse.”

“I… That doesn’t matter. I’m still up now, and we aren’t going to be home for at least another hour. And that’s assuming that this,” Barry consulted the mostly-crumpled post-it in his hand before he starting speaking again, “… Ishmel Gregor guy moves long quickly. And how do you know my schedule?”

“I always notice you, Barry.”

Barry would have thought Len was being sweet if it wasn’t for the expression on his face. He could see the other man was going for stoic, but the smallest hint of a smirk was peeking through. It was enough for Barry to realize that Len was making fun of him, so Barry forced an over dramatic pout on his face. He felt ridiculous every time he did it, but he had gotten in the habit with Joe growing up. He tried not to think too much about the fact it worked even better on Len.

“That’s not an answer,” Barry responded jovially, poking Len in the side as he tried to stomp down the flair of jealousy that Len didn’t squirm the same way he would have if someone tried that with him. “My Happy Times schedule literally just changed. I barely know it.”

“I may have convinced your boss to give it to me. He’s awfully worried about you, and your rampant urges to indulge in life’s finer urges. It’s great,” he admitted, shooting Barry his most
innocent impression. Len usually did when he was doing something that would piss Barry off. Barry wished it wasn’t so effective, and for once that seemed to work.

“You do realize how creepy that is?” asked Barry. He could feel his playful nature slipping as their conversation continued. God, he was tired, and he didn’t want to get into Len’s stalker-like habits today. That didn’t seem to matter, as his mouth seemed to be shooting off without consulting his brain.

“I’m your sponsor. It’s my responsibility to know your schedule. How else would I know if you were lost in a drug den somewhere?”

Len was obviously feeling playful. Barry didn’t know how he managed it this early in the morning. He sure as hell wasn’t, and the more Len pushed this, the more Barry was sure that his quickly souring mood wasn’t entirely due to the early hour.

“For fucks sake, Len, can you be serious for a minute?” groused Barry.

Len’s face lost all of its previous cocky cheer and slipped straight into the blank mask he had been trying for all along. Barry forced himself to ignore the flare of pain in his chest that caused. He was right to be angry dammit, and Len was just going to have to deal with it.

“My bad, Barr. I didn’t realize that you being tired took meant that I shouldn’t be doing my job,” Len sneered back, his words elongated in a way that was making Barry’s blood boil. If asked, he was going to swear it was the reason he snapped back.

“Really? Because I wasn’t aware that stalking me was a part of your job description.”

“Stalking? What the fuck are you on about this time?” Len responded, a rare expression of shock crossing his face before he slipped his blank mask in place once again. His quickly regained composure made Barry’s blood boil.

Barry tried to will himself to calm down before he answered. He didn’t want to talk about this right now. He had been successfully avoiding bringing any of this up so far, but something about his tiredness, and Len’s confession of overstepping his privacy once again pushed the words out anyways.
“I mean you constantly butting into my business that has nothing to do with you, like fucking making my boss give you a schedule I haven’t even learned yet or calling me out of work without talking to me about it. Or constantly having someone drive me everywhere like I’m a kid who can’t be without supervision and haven’t been taking the bus my whole life. Or hell, Len, what about this? Why are you still coming with me on jobs? Bette told me that most reapers have, like, a week or two of supervised appointments before they are out of training. Why are you still coming with me on my jobs? It is you, you know, almost always too. When you have an appointment of your own or one of your other jobs, you will have the others come with me, but ever since Bette jumped through you’ve pretty much stopped that too. Do you think I’m just a complete failure or something? Or is this about the fact you can’t stand to give me some goddamn space?” Barry’s chest was heaving by the time he stopped yelling, and he couldn’t seem to stop shaking. Then again, even Len seemed shaken up, so maybe it was justified for once.

“You done yet?” Len asked, his voice an icy calmness that Barry wanted to push away. It was too much, too soothing, and Barry didn’t want that right now. There was a storm in his mind, and he wasn’t ready for it to be over yet. Unfortunately, it took him too long to respond, and Len mistook that silence as acceptance.

“Good. We’re going to have to pick this up on the way back. You’ve got about a minute to find Ishmel Gregor. Since you are so ready to be out on your own, I’m sure that won’t be a problem.”

Len was right. Barry hadn’t even realized they had parked, but he got out of the car anyways and started to search the gas station. Len didn’t follow this time. He tried not to focus on how that made him feel. He needed to focused. With a name like this one, Barry’s mark was definitely Russian, probably first or second generation. In backwoods Missouri, so they usually would have been sticking out like a sore thumb. That was not the case on that morning.

The gas station was packed with people for the movement of Dora the bear. Almost directly in front of Barry, a news anchor and his cameraman were catching the scene. A slew of rangers from the Parks Service stood around a Dora’s cage and the giant, rolling container he assumed was to move her. In between the anchor and the Parks People, a slew of protestors stood both demanding the bear be saved and put down after it was delivered to Animal Control’s holding facility. Barry wasn’t telling Len, but he may have been out of his depth on this one.

His first guess would have been the doctor checking Dora’s tranquilizer in her cage, but his dark skin tone and Jamaican accent made it seem unlikely he was Ishmel Gregor. He didn’t have another good guess.

The news crew was providing a running commentary as Barry searched. Iris would have been so jealous of Barry right now. He was so close to the Bill Bright. She loved his work, and though she never admitted it to him, he always suspected she had a crush on the handsome journalist. Barry was sorely tempted to get his autograph while there. Iris may never know, but it would be something safe
of her. That was going to have to wait. He was down to 30 seconds, and he hadn’t found out mark yet.

“It’s always such a relief when I get to my name,” Brill Bright told the crew just after he finished his piece.

“It’s hard to mess up Bill Bright,” the cameraman joked back.

“You should hear my real name.”

Barry probably wasn’t going to be getting that autograph after all. “Ishmel Gregor?” he called out, moving away from the crowd as he moved closer to the crew. He could see Len’s confusion from where he sat, but Barry ignored it. Barry could do his job just fine, and he didn’t need to worry about Len to do it.

Gregor didn’t have a chance to respond. A loud clang filled the air, followed by several screams as Dora suddenly reared up and left her cage. While everyone else fled, the camera crew jumped back in to action. Barry gently grazed Gregor’s arm with his hand as he started to move backwards towards the bear while he started on his new story. Barry knew wasn’t going to make it on the air. Sure enough, the bear moved directly behind the man before he noticed.

“Bill!” the cameraman called out in warning. It was too late though, and Barry tried not to wince too much as he prepared to watch his second bear attack that week. While Barry was busy bracing himself, something much worse happened.

As Dora the Barry and Bill Bright/Ishmel Gregor started at each other, the man’s fear got the best of him. He wet himself, and the liquid dripped down his leg. Gregor hadn’t regained his ability to move before the puddle reached the cords beneath his feet.

Barry felt like the shock he saw went through him too. The man – because it was still a man, Barry couldn’t see the soul separated yet – froze and seized. He was standing in the perfect spot to see the blinding flashing of pain that went through his face. Barry wanted to help, but how could he? The soul popped out, and Barry could tell from his expression he hadn’t really felt it, or if he had it was already forgotten. It wasn’t like what Barry felt. But it was, and shocks like that hurt, and he could feel them all over again.

Barry was in so much pain, and so was Bill Bright. He couldn’t breathe either. Barry fell to his knees
as he tried in vain to pull in a breath, but the more he struggled the more the air seemed to escape from his lungs.

“Barry? I’ve got you. C’mon, we’ve got to go,” Len’s voice called to him, warm arms pulling him up as he was dragged back into the Jeep. Len got him inside and fastened him up. When he tried to pull away, Barry finally came back to his senses enough to cling tightly. Everything was okay as long as Len was with him, but if Len pulled back he was sure to get lost again.

“Hey, it’s alright. I’m just going around to the other door. Can you let me go long enough to get in? I promise, as soon as I get in you don’t have to let go again,” Len soothed, leaning his forehead into Barry’s.

Barry could see in his eyes that Len meant every word he said. He didn’t really want to let go anyways, but he knew Len needed to get them out of there before the cops made arrived, so Barry pulled back. He could feel the fear coming back to him as he sat there, alone once again, but Len made it back before he could truly panic. Calmness radiated through him the longer they drove, starting in his hand where he was connected to Len, and branching through him until he could speak again.

“Where is Ishmel Gregor?” Barry asked softly, breaking through the silence that he had formed between them.

“He went into his lights. Don’t worry about him. You alright?”

“No,” Barry admitted. “I’m getting there though.”

Len smiled at his words for the first time since Barry snapped at him earlier. He hadn’t known seeing it could make him feel so shitty, not when it usually brought him such warmth and safety.

“This is why, isn’t it? Why I’m not on my own yet. Because I’m too weak to hold it together,” Barry asked.

It may have been a question, but he didn’t need an answer. He knew the truth, and Barry hated himself for it. He thought he had been doing so much better. He hadn’t freaked out like this since Patty was murdered, and he had thought that going through the case again he been helping him. Barry was wrong.
He was pulled from his thoughts when Len roughly jerked the car to a stop on the side of the road. Barry didn’t time to process the surprise before Len turned to him and pulled their foreheads together once more.

“Don’t say that. You’re not weak. You, Barry Allen, are one of the strongest people I have ever met, and your PTSD isn’t something that changes that. If anything, it makes you stronger. Despite all the horrible things you went through, you still are so kind and compassionate. You haven’t let any of all this fucked up bullshit break you.”

“That’s the thing though, isn’t it? I am broken, Len. I can’t even see a spark without freaking out. I thought… I thought I was past this,” Barry admitted. He couldn’t keep looking at Len like that, seeing some emotion Barry couldn’t quite place in his eyes. So Barry pulled himself out of Len’s grasp, and twisted just enough to hide his face in the crook of Len’s neck.

“I don’t follow you because I’m worried you can’t do your job. You are an amazing reaper, and I’m saying that as your boss and not your friend. You’ve got a knack for getting people into their lights like I’ve never seen. Hell, you are able to do it more smoothly than most of the Rogues, and you’ve been at this for a lot less time. I go with you because I care about you, and I don’t want you ever stuck like this. Okay?” Len told him, tightening his hold as he held Barry to him

“No,” Barry stubbornly insisted.

Len’s words were making him feel better, but he wasn’t admitting to it incase Len decided that meant he needed to get back to driving. He wasn’t letting go for anything, not right now. Len chortled a little, seeming to understand Barry’s true meaning the way he almost always did.

“You really are doing better, Barry. I just… I knew this was going to happen eventually because the same thing happened to me after I died. I didn’t… I didn’t have an easy death either, and it took me a long time to get over it. I never would have with Lisa,” Len admitted.

Barry forced himself to pull back so he could look at Len once again. He had a theory that Len’s death wasn’t a painless one from little things he heard, and how well Len had been able to help him, but Len hadn’t ever confirmed it like this before. He hadn’t said how much he struggled with it.

“What happened?”

Len smiled at him sadly, pulling him closer once last time before moving back fully into his seat to
restart the Jeep.

“That's a story for another day. One when you aren’t a strung out mess, and it’s late enough in the day for me to get drunk enough to talk about it. I’ll tell you eventually, but not now. Alright?” Len offered.

Barry nodded his agreement as he settled back into his seat once more. He was wiped, even more so than before his panic attack, so he tried to settle enough to sleep. He couldn’t get comfortable though, and his mind wouldn’t clear.

Len seemed to understand. He grabbed Barry’s shoulder, and he was finally able to drift off to sleep, lulled into dreamland by the gentle, soothing circles that continued long after he lost awareness.
The Not-So-Cowardly Lion

Chapter Summary

Mick goes with Hartley on a job.

Chapter Notes

Thanks once again to my lovely beta, vamptigergal.

Mick wasn’t exactly sure how he got roped into this shit. He hated crowds and clowns, and the fucking circus was overwhelming full of both. Yet he was here, still trying his best not to let his rising panic come off as anything but annoyance. Why the fuck did he let Hart talk him into this?

“You alright Mick?” Hartley asked, grabbing his arm and pulling himself up to whisper in his ear. So now the little asshole could tell he didn’t want to be here, but he couldn’t tell back at their place when Mick failed to weasel his way out of giving him a ride?

It was so fucking typical that he was tempted to strangle Hartley. The man was a genius, but he was shockingly horrible at picking up on social skills when they didn’t benefit him. Hartley wasn’t usually this off though.

“It’s fine. Where the fuck is your job supposed to be? I’ve got shit to do tonight that doesn’t involve being at the goddamn circus,” Mick snapped, trying to rush Hartley back to what they were supposed to be working on. The sooner Hartley got his hands on this “Lucky,” the better. Mick wanted to get out of there, and his companion seemed to agree.

“If you’re sure,” Hartley responded with a frown. It was obvious that he didn’t want to drop things, but since they were there for one of Hartley’s appointments it’s not like they could leave yet anyways.

Mick followed Hartley away from the crowded entrance to the main tent and towards the employees only section around back. He tried to be annoyed at the way Hartley was leading him around by the hand like Mick was some kid, but he was too uncomfortable not to want the connection. Thank god whatever they had come for was away from all that mess. It would have been a lot harder if this “Lucky” was in the main act, as fun as it may have been to watch Hartley go for his target.
“So, do you actually have any clue where you’re leading us, or are you just trying to get me alone? ‘Cause you’re cute and all, but Haircut’ll be pissed if that’s what you’re aiming for,” Mick taunted as they finally reached the fence meant to keep visitors away from the animals in the back.

Even with Hartley’s face turned away from him, he knew the younger reaper was rolling his eyes, eyebrow raised, and holding back a smirk. He’d spent enough time with Hartley to know when he was amused with Mick’s usual teasing, even when he ignored the words other than an annoyed “humpf” and releasing his hold on Mick’s hand. At least he could actually see the blush Hartley was sporting as the back of his neck turned pink. So Mick, knowing Hartley wasn’t actually pissed, snickered while he was cutting a hole in the fence for them to sneak through.

“You are such a fucking asshole. How the fuck does Ray deal with you again?” Hartley complained.

Mick continued to laugh, not quite as boisterously as he felt, but probably more than he should have considering they were breaking and entering an area filled with exotic, dangerous animals. “Dunno. He probably just ignores me.”

Hartley rolled his eyes - again, Mick was sure on that - this time making sure that Mick could see the exaggerated movement. Why was he friends with this prick again?

“C’mon, Mick. If we find “Lucky” fast enough, we might be able steal you some of the fire breathers equipment. Or hell, at least take one of the sweets trucks,” Hartley offered.

Well, Mick through to himself, at least he had a reminder of why he put up with this crap from Hartley. With a plan like that, who was he to cause a fuss?

“Do you even have a clue what this “Lucky” is supposed to be?” Mick asked.

Hartley’s idea may have been solid, but walking into the large enclosure where the animals were kept, Mick was really starting to doubt it would be possible. Even in the middle of a show, there were a lot of animals in this back room, and they all looked like they would keel over soon. There were lions, tigers, monkeys, and even an elephant stuck in cages that would make Mick go stir-crazy. It was no wonder hippies were always protesting these things. This place was fucking sick, and not in the good way.

“You know I don’t. I just hope they labels these cages with the animal’s name,” Hartley proposed,
his previously playful demeanor dropping as he prepared to do his job. Or hell, maybe the place was getting to him. It probably was. Hartley was a lot softer than Mick was to others’ suffering, especially when animals were involved. He had always liked creatures more than people. It was probably the reason Hartley had been picked for the Animal Division. Most the animals reapers tended that way.

Mick, for lack of anything else to do, moved towards the cage closest to him. It was empty, but he could see a flimsy, laminated sign attached that he desperately hoped had a name on it. Now that Hartley actually had a plan that didn’t completely suck as much as being involved in the crowds and shows, Mick was ready to get done for a whole different reason. Luckily, the signs held name, species, and some shit Mick didn’t care to decipher about the animal's role in the performance.

“We’re in luck. Looks like this one usually holds a Fanny the chimp,” Mick announced. Hartley nodded from across the way where he was discovering something similar about the cage across the aisle.

The two worked in silence, making their way down the road until Mick realized Hartley had frozen three rows back.

It was no wonder. He was in front of a lion’s cage. It was probably the only animal in the whole damn place that was up and active. It - Lucky, Mick was guessing - also looked very pissed off.

“That it?” Mick asked.

“I fucking hate this job sometimes,” Hartley confirmed. Mick wanted to laugh at how resigned the other reaper sounded, but something told him all that would do was get Hart to force him into helping. He had way too much self-preservation instinct to try for that, even as dead as he was.

“Don’t you do stuff like this all the time?” he tried.

“Not with an angry goddamn lion! Worse thing I’ve gotten stuck with so far was an already injured bear, and its leg was too fucked up to try and eat me,” squeaked Hartley.

Mick couldn’t help it. The laughter he had been holding in exploded from him. He was roaring, probably even louder than the lion could manage, and the irony of that just made him laugh more fiercely. Hartley and the lion both glared at him at first, but even Hartley cracked after a few minutes. By the time they quieted down once more, they were both red in face and only staying up due to their grip on the other. Mick was gulping mouthfuls air, leaning far more into Hartley than he should
have been able to when they both turned back to the lion.

The feline’s stare had only become more agitated through their ruckus. As Mick glared back at the
great animal, he could see Hartley pale beside him, and the gulp his friend took seemed louder than
either of their earlier amusement.

Well, Mick guessed it was going to be up to him to figure out this one. “So what do you say I try to
scare our friend here to the back, and you see if you can play a little grab ass with him while he’s
distracted?”

“Okay,” Hartley grumbled, “... but he better not die from choking on you. I’m so not explaining that
to everyone. Ray would never forgive me.”

Mick snorted at his friend before he pushed him lightly towards the back of the cages. Then he
pulled up his craziest grin and started hollering again, this time with intention. It took a few minutes,
and some pokes from one of the trainers sticks, but they were able to run out of the tent before
anyone came to check on all the noise.

It was pretty irresponsible, and that’s saying something coming from an arsonist and professional
thief. At least it gave him and Hart time to steal the fire-breathing equipment and a funnel cake truck.
It was hard to have a bad time in good company, and Hartley always did his best to live up to that
promise.

Really, Mick should have known. There was very few people that could have gotten him to this
awful place, Ray found this kinda crap actually fun, and he would’ve been too excited noticed he
was miserable. Barry was just as likely as him to get startled, and the rest of the Rogues would have
been too busy shoving him towards all of the creepy-ass clowns. If anyone could have made him
enjoy the fucking circus - of all the godforsaken places in the world - that it would be Hartley
Rathaway.

Lately, Len had been so wrapped up in his own and Barry’s problems, that he had been neglecting
some of his other duties as the head of the Rogues. And his duties were to the Rogues as a whole,
and not just his External Influences Reapers. He was supposed to lead all of them, which was hard to
do when he couldn’t even tell when something was desperately bothering one of them.

It was hard not to, of course. Even if he hadn’t been developing feelings for Barry, the kid still would
have taken up a lot of his attention. Barry was... Len didn’t want to like to use the word damaged,
not for someone was light and beautiful as Barry, but it wasn’t entirely inaccurate either.
Their newest reaper was still struggling with everything that happened to him, which was something that none of them faulted them for. The Butcher was a brutal bastard. Everyone in Central City knew it, but meeting Barry had drawn that into a focus Len couldn’t have imagined. If Len didn’t know how much worse things would be if he tried, he’d kill the Butcher himself for what that monster did to Barry. As it was, all he could do was pick up the pieces.

If only Len could take care of Barry like he need to be without failing at his other responsibilities. He’d thought he’d been managing alright after how drastically he’d failed Bette, but he’d been slowly noticing over the last few days how very wrong things were in their strange little home. Today, Len finally realized what was off.

Hartley had been acting so close to normal - as much as he ever did at least - that Len hadn’t been able to see how bad things were progressing until then. Hartley was always quiet, at least compared to their more-boisterous housemates, but his snark usually made his presence seem larger. It was all but absent now as the Rogues set around playing poker. He was simply taking things. Considering how bad he was about trash talk, that was saying something. Even with Sam being even more dickish than normal to show off to a completely unimpressed Rosa, Hartley wasn’t fighting back.

The more Len thought about it, the more he realized that this behavior was becoming increasingly common with Hartley, even if today’s behavior seemed to be reaching a new low. He was moody (even more so than usual), withdrawn, and without his usual dramatic flare.

“Seriously Len, play your fucking hand! Some of us are actually still in the game,” snapped Rosa, her patience wearing out.

He was sorely tempted to punish her for it, but he had been holding up the game pretty heavily, and he could see the others weren’t far behind the bitchy blonde in terms of annoyance. Well, all of the Rogues except Hartley were at least. He was usually one of the least patient of their little group, but today he was the only one who didn’t look close to snapping at Len’s several minute delay.

“Fold,” Len drawled, rolling his eyes in Hartley’s direction beside him. As he suspected - and feared - Hartley didn’t seem amused back. Generally speaking, Hartley was even snippier with Rosa than Len was. Today, he shrugged passively and played his hand without comment.

“Aren’t you supposed to be the strategic brains around here? I woulda thought you’d be a little faster playing your hands,” Sam groused at him.
“Fuck off, Scudder. Just because you wanna fuck blondie, it doesn’t mean you gotta get a stick up your ass to match her’s,” Len griped back.

Mark, Shawna, Sara, and Lisa were outright howling with the force of their laughter. Even Len couldn’t hold back his amusement at the scandalized look on Rosa’s face, but Hartley’s laughter was quiet and obviously forced. How long had this been going on without Len noticing if things were already this bad?

“Aww… Somebody’s feeling sensitive today isn’t he? Now the real question is who’s following whose cycle? Sam’s definitely following somebody, but is it Queen B or the boss,” Mark joined in, his laughter only dying out when Shawna and Sara jointly elbowed him sharply in the ribcage.

“Don’t be such a pig, Marky,” Shawna bit back.

“Fuck this shit,” Len decided, pushing away from the table as he spoke. “I’m out. You all can keep bitching on someone else’s time.”

He ignored all of collective complaining at him throwing off the game. Even Hartley joined in this time, although he could tell they simply token protest. Hartley was faking whatever this was so no one could tell how off he truly was. The little asshole was too good at acting and misdirection for his own good. Len needed some answers that he knew Hartley wasn’t going to give, so he went for the next best thing.

Len walked through common spaces and back through the hallway, ignoring the now distant protested as he went. He didn’t stop until he reached Mick’s room, barging in without care. Mick didn’t seem to mind, although Raymond did. Raymond jumped up abruptly, and he nearly fell off of the bed he moved to disentangle from his spot straddling Mick. Mick, in sharp contrast to his lover, barely moved. All he did was adjust his grip to keep Raymond from meeting the floor as he flailed.

“Oh my god, Leonard! Don’t you knock?” squealed Raymond.

“My house, my rules. Now scram. I need to talk to Mick alone,” Len ordered, rolling his eyes as dramatically as he could. He crosses his arms with a huff as Raymond sputtered his protest, and Mick growled in his general direction. It seemed neither was happy to have their fucking interrupted. Len couldn’t care less.

“What the fuck happened with you earlier?” Len asked as Raymond finally left them alone.
“Lots of things, Len. Hell, you just walked in on some of it. You’re going to need to be more specific. I’ve no clue what you’re talking ‘bout,” Mick grumbled.

“With Hartley. Did you break him or something?” Len specified.

Mick snorted, finally getting out of bed to find a shirt. Len waited, pretending to be patient, as Mick slowly dressed himself before he started to speak again. “I didn’t do shit to Hart. He’s the one who dragged me with him to the circus, not the other way around. He’s probably just spooked still from having to reap a pissed off lion. Damn thing wanted to eat us for dinner.”

Mick made a decent point, but something in his words felt wrong. Hartley seemed spooked enough, but he was an Animal Reaper, and he wasn’t exactly easily startled regardless. Mick may not have caused Hartley’s foul mood, but Len doubted some pissed off lion managed it either.

“It’s not that,” Len insisted.

“Then what is…” Mick started. Before he could finish, the door slammed open behind Len. Both men turned to glare at the door, fully prepared yell at whatever asshole interrupted them. They both deflated together too when they saw who was standing guiltily at the door.

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean slam it like that. Nothing broke, right?” Barry apologized quickly, rubbing the back of his neck in that way he had that always made Len want to wrap him in his arms and not let go until the pretty pink tinge disappeared from Barry’s cheeks again. He only did it when he was upset, and Barry had no reason to be now.

“No worries, kid. What’d you want?” Mick waved him off.

“Oh, I’m just… uh… I’ve got nothing. Ray wanted me to get Len out so you two could get back to it. It meaning hanging out! Not sex! Not that you can’t have sex or anything! It’s not like Ray gave me a play by play of what he wanted to do with you. Because that’d be way too much information, right? I know nothing. Oh god, why aren’t you guys stopping me?” Barry rambled.

Len tried to keep a straight face, even as he let Barry get out whatever was stuck in that head of his. As fun as Barry’s rambling tended to be, it wasn’t the time for it. Raymond’s apparently active libido aside, he had a job to do.
Unfortunately for him, Mick didn’t seem to agree. His full-bodied laughter brought him back down on the bed, and it was making Barry’s blushing worsen. Even worse, Raymond poked his head in. He was still hiding fully behind Barry, an impressive feat considering how much larger Raymond was.

“Seriously Barry? That was a private conversation!” Raymond whined.

“That’s private for you, huh Haircut? Be honest with me, how many of our friends know every detail of our sex life?” Mick shot back with a grin and a fake groan.

“I don’t… Barry help!”

“Oh for fucks sake, Mick, we’ll talk later. C’mon Barr. I’m feeling the need for something sweet. What do you say we go hit up Der Waffle Haus and see what pies they have left tonight so they can get back to it?” Len offered with a sigh. Between Barry and Raymond, there was no chance that he and Mick were going to be able to finish their talk tonight.

In the end, the grin Barry shot him was worth it. Something was wrong with Hartley. Len was sure of it, but since he was going to have to wait to find out anyway, he decided to take full advantage of the night. Len had a beautiful man shooting him a smile worth more than anything Len had ever stolen, and he’d do just about anything to keep it there.
Barry goes with Mick to an appointment.

Barry missed slow, lazy mornings. It was one of what felt like a million things he lost when he became a grim reaper, since all the bosses he knew gave out their jobs for the day at breakfast. Even days like today, when he wasn’t scheduled to be at Happy Times until the afternoon, Barry couldn’t really sleep in. He could always go back to sleep after breakfast, but it just wasn’t the same.

The constant early mornings weren’t one of the worst parts of being dead. Most of the time, he knew that too. Some mornings though, waking up early felt like some sort of punishment for everything Barry had done wrong as a human. After all, being a reaper was kind of like its own weird form of purgatory.

This was definitely one of those awful, hellish mornings.

“Unlock your fucking door kid, or I’m gonna break it down! I know you’re awake in there. You ain’t that much of a heavy sleeper,” Mick hollered.

Barry forced himself out of bed with a loud groan. He was more than a little tempted to ignore his friend’s wake up call, but he’d spent to much time with Mick to doubt the validity of that threat. As much as he wanted to keep sleeping, he preferred keeping his door more.

“What do you want,” Barry snapped, throwing the door open. He glared in Mick’s direction, but the larger man didn’t seem to mind. He probably figured - correctly - that Barry wouldn’t do anything to him anyways.

“Somebody’s in a mood,” Mick teased cheerfully.

Barry wanted to smack the smile off his face. He was definitely spending too much time with the Rogues. He hadn’t had such violent urges until he met them.

He didn’t bother responding. Instead Barry raised an eyebrow and waited for Mick to start talking.
Even that felt like too much effort when he was this tired.

“Fine, you stay pissy. Just get dressed while you’re at it. You’re coming with me to my appointment today,” ordered Mick, rolling his eyes as though Barry was the one being completely unreasonable.

“No, I’m not. I’ve my own appointment, and I’m supposed to be at Happy Times by one o’clock too,” Barry argued back.

“Hartley already called you in, and I made Len gave you the day off. Now get your shit and let’s go,” Mick told him.

“Seriously? You guys can’t keeping calling me out of work. Forgetting how invasive it is for a minute, you do realize I need the money, right?” he retorted, frown deepening as he tried to figure out how much of a cut this unexpected off day was going to make to his paycheck.

“No you don’t. You know Len’d make sure you had plenty of money if you wanted it, even if you don’t change your mind about working with us. Besides kid, this is important. So get your shit together and come with me. We’ll talk in the car,” Mick shot back.

Barry opened his mouth, let it hang there, and slammed it shut again. Mick probably wasn’t wrong, but something about what he said - the idea of Len supporting him - made him supremely uncomfortable. He didn’t want that. It was bad enough when he first joined the Rogues, but the idea of something like that more permanent made him nauseous.

Mick took advantage of his distraction, shoved him back in his room, and slammed the door. “Get dressed and get your ass back out here in the next five minutes, or I’m gonna do it for you. We’ve got less than an hour until my appointment.”

“What are we doing at Central City General? I didn’t think I was allowed here,” Barry asked as Mick parked the car.

Mick ignored him, again. Of course he did. Mick had been ignoring Barry since he’d forced him from his bed this morning, so why would this be any different? Barry had enough of this bullshit. He
undid his seatbelt and moved to get out of the car, but Mick locked his doors before he could leave.

“Seriously man! What the hell?” Barry yelled, banging on the door in an unsuccessful attempt to will it open.

Mick was his friend, really. There was no need for him to break his car to get out of here. Even if he had Hartley call him out of work, and he really needed that money. Plus Mick had basically kidnapped him, and he was refusing to even give him a reason. Mick wouldn’t hurt him though. Barry was safe here. He was only panicking a little.

“Stop it, kid. We gotta talk,” Mick told him, grabbing his shoulder and pulling him back, away from the door. Barry tried to jerk away from his grasp, but Mick was not letting go.

“I’ve been fucking asking you to talk to me all goddamn morning. Just let me get out of here,” sneered Barry, trying to pretend he wasn’t as unsettled as he felt. He really wished Mick would at least let him out of the damned truck.

“It’s… shit. I really wish Ray or Hart didn’t have an appointment during this one… I’m not fucking equipped for this,” Mick grunted. He still hadn’t let go of Barry, even though Barry was trying to squirm out of his grasp. If anything, his grip on Barry’s shoulder was starting to tighten.

“Just spit it out. You don’t need to treat me with kid gloves,” Barry urged Mick to confess. He needed the answer, just like he needed Mick to let him out. He didn’t care which one came first.

“Francine West is on my post-it. She’s gonna die in 37 minutes.”

Barry was wrong. He was so wrong. He didn’t want to know what was bothering Mick after all. Iris and Wally’s mother was dying, and Barry knew well enough by now that there wasn’t anything that could stop him. It was too soon. Barry knew Iris better than he knew himself, and he was sure that she wasn’t ready to lose her mom yet. They didn’t have enough time to bond, and she hadn’t had enough time to get over his death yet.

None of this mattered though. Death didn’t care when whoever was passing on was ready. It definitely didn’t care what their loved one’s thought. If it did, then Barry wouldn’t have died. The Butcher wouldn’t still be free. And Francine West definitely wouldn’t be dead in 36 minutes.
“Are you sure?” Barry asked.

It was a dumb question, and he knew it. Mick wouldn’t do this to him - put him through this - for some joke. Even with his gruff exterior, Barry knew that Mick really cared about him. They were friends, and Mick had done a lot to prove it over the last couple of months. He wouldn’t do this, right?

“I’m sorry kid. I need to go up there. You coming with me?” Mick confirmed.

Barry wanted to do something. He wasn’t sure what would happen if he opened his mouth: screams or sobs. So instead he nodded, and silently got out of the car. This time Mick didn’t stop him, even though Barry wished he would.

He lead the way into the hospital. Mick trailed behind him, a silent sentinel. He could feel the other reaper’s eyes on him, but he refused to turn around to see it. Barry didn’t want to see pity or sadness. He could see all of those looks later, when he could actually break down.

Barry didn’t bother to turn around when started up the stairs to the cardio ward. He knew that’s where Francine would be. If her MacGregor’s Syndrome had reached the point where she going to die that day, there was over a 90% chance that it was going to be her heart that gave out. He knew the way well. Barry had several memories of meeting his dad in here to guide him.

Mick didn’t correct him, so he figured that he was probably right. It didn’t matter anyways. There were clocks all around the hospital, so Barry knew he still had 31 minutes left. No, that wasn’t right. Barry had a long time left. It was Francine that only had another 30 - now 29 - minutes left. He and Mick had plenty of time, after all. They weren’t the ones with a time limit.

Mick let him keep walking, uninterrupted, until they reached the elevator. Almost as soon as the machine started its ascent, Mick reached around Barry to punch a button. Barry didn’t know what he was reaching for until the elevator screeched to a stop, and the reserve power button light turned on.

“Mick! You can’t do that here. We’re at a hospital. Someone may need the elevator,” Barry worried, biting his lip and leaning back into the railing behind him. Despite his words, he had a feeling that his friend wasn’t about to restart the elevator until they spoke.

“Relax kid. This one ain’t used by doctors or patients. It’s not even big enough for a stretcher,” Mick argued, relaxing into the wall beside Barry with a nudge. Barry nudged him back, trying go for
nonchalant, but he could tell from Mick’s face that Barry hadn’t been convincing.

“You gonna be alright? If this is too much, you can go wait in the car for me. Or I can call someone to come get you,” offered Mick.

Barry shook his head, looking down as the cracked tiling under his converse. He didn’t want to be here, not really. Not as a reaper, where his family was going to be right there, but they wouldn’t recognize him. Not helping Francine die. Well, helping Mick help Francine, but that was just logistics. The truth of it was, Barry was here to help make sure his best friend’s mother died smoothly, and in that moment he hated himself for it.

Still, Barry couldn’t leave either. Even if Iris, Joe and Wally wouldn’t know he was here, he couldn’t bring himself to leave them alone for this. Mick was good at his job, and Barry knew it, but he couldn’t bring himself not to make sure this one went perfectly. He needed to make sure that Francine moved along smoothly.

“Fine then. Stick close to me on this one,” Mick ordered. He waited for Barry to nod in agreement before he turned the elevator back on.

“Mick?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks,” Barry mumbled as the elevator doors opened.

Iris felt like she should be crying, but her eyes felt uncontrollably dry instead. Wally was crying beside her silently, but with a steady stream flowing down his face. Her dad’s eyes hadn’t been dry all day. She’d even caught Eddie crying in the stairwell earlier.

But she hadn’t cried, not in several days. Iris couldn’t remember the last time she had cried. It didn’t feel normal, not when her mom was dying in front of her. She wasn’t sure if she just all cried out, or if something was wrong with her.
“I think I need some coffee. Anyone else want some?” Eddie offered. Everyone else all jumped at his words. It was the first time anything had interrupted the silence other than the mechanical noises of the medical equipment in too long.

“That’d be great,” Joe agreed lightly. “Why don’t I go with you? We can get coffees all around.”

Iris and Wally agreed, although she couldn’t have told anyone what she’d asked for. She supposed as long as it was coffee and it wasn’t decaf, it’d work.

Iris shifted in her chair, pulling the armrest back so she could lean into Wally’s side. With Joe and Eddie out of the room, and her mom still sleeping the room suddenly felt to large - too empty. Wally seemed to agree, shifting so that she was tucked under his arm.

“You okay?” Wally asked her with a sniffle.

“No,” she replied honestly. “Are you?”

Wally chuckled a little, squeezing her tightly to him again. “Hell no. I’m glad you’re here though. You and Joe. And Detective Pretty boy.”

Iris laughed a little with him this time, loudly and more than a little hysterical. She elbowed him too, but her brother didn’t even flinch. Little jerk had too many stomach muscles.

“Oh god, don’t call him that!”

“Don’t blame me. Dad came up with that one!” Wally responded with a grin.

Iris snorted indelicately, but before she could tell Wally off the door was thrown open. She quickly shut her mouth, teeth chattering with the force. She didn’t want Eddie to hear them talking about his stupid nickname.

It turned out the the slight ache in her teeth was all for nothing. The two men that stepped through the door weren’t the ones she was expecting. They weren’t hospital staff either. That much was obvious from their casual clothing alone.
The first man through the door was built like a brick house. He was large, muscular, and Iris probably would have been afraid if she saw him alone on the street at night. She couldn’t be sure if it was the dark look on his face or the burn scars decorating his arms, but something about the vibe he gave off screamed dangerous. Iris probably would have been worried, if the man following him didn’t remind her of Tucker, the King Charles Spaniel she had as a child.

He was as tall as his companion, but was probably only half his weight. His large brown eyes were blown wide, and filled with a wide variety of uncomfortably familiar warring emotions. This man was at Central City General because he was losing someone too, and the large man with his was obviously supporting him, if the way he was protective shielding the man was any indication.

“What do you want?” Wally asked, his voice tired and far more accusatory that he needs to be.

Iris elbowed his sharply in the sides again before sat up. “Ignore my little brother. It’s been a long couple of days. Was there something you needed?”

“Sorry for the interruption. My little brother here got us turned around trying to find our sister’s room,” the larger man grunted, throwing his arm around the other man’s shoulder with enough force to make the puppy-man shake. “Do you know where oncology is?”

Well crap. No wonder they looked like that. Iris was way too familiar with the way they were probably feeling. Hell, she and Wally probably resembled these two men. The stoic older sibling helping their little brother deal with their shared grief.

“Oh yeah. Oncology is in this wing, but one floor door down,” Wally told them, smiling politely. Iris could tell it was forced, but so were the ones on everyone else’s in that room. There wasn’t anything for any of them to smile at.

“Thanks, w… We got really turned around. So yeah, thank you,” the smaller man stuttered, rubbing the back of his neck as he looked down at the new-looking, yet still slightly scuffed red converse he wore.

Iris forced her smile a little longer for his sake. She wasn’t sure why, but something inside her was urging her to help him. The sweet, but despondent look in his eyes was familiar in a way Iris couldn’t place, and she had the bone-deep desire to make it disappear.
“Of course! It’s really no trouble,” Iris assured them.

“So, who’s that?” The larger man asked, stepping in front of his little brother as he spoke.

“Mick!” the younger man exclaimed, lightly shoving his older brother off as he scolded him. It was adorable.

“It’s alright. This is our mom. She’s... well... It’s MacGregor’s,” Iris admitted with a grimace. Wally leaned into her side again as their companions forced grins fell away.

“That fucking blows. We really should be getting out of here though, right Sammy? We’ve got people waiting,” The older man - Mick apparently - told them. He moved forward quickly as he spoke, offering both quick squeeze on the shoulder, as well as one to her mom’s ankle.

Iris went to call out to them at their quick departure, but her dad and Eddie came back through with the coffee’s before she could think of a reason to get the two men to stay. Well, a reason other than the strange urge she felt to make see the miserable younger man grin, and she wasn’t about to try and explain that bout of craziness.

“Hey guys. We found coffee, but no cream and sugar. Will that work for you? Cause I can run to the store up the street if you need it,” Eddie offered, giving her a kiss on the cheek as he handed over her cup of coffee as well. It was sweet, especially since Eddie knew she really wasn’t a fan of black coffee. Today though, the bitter drink had a certain rightness too it.

“No thanks, Babe. I’d rather you stay,” Iris told him, shifting under Wally’s arm to grab Eddie’s hand as she spoke. Eddie grinned at her, bright even in this dark place, and Iris couldn’t help but love him a little more.

Francine West wasn’t going to pull through this, and she knew it. But with Eddie by her side, maybe Iris could.
Chapter Summary

After things with Francine West, Barry gets forced to talk out his feelings.

Barry practically ran away from his and Mick’s hiding spot by Francine’s room the minute she disappeared in her lights. He quickly pushed forward, walking the familiar halls long after he realized Mick wasn’t behind him anymore. He couldn’t stop and wait. Barry needed to keep moving, away from the West family and everything else in this damned place.

He was so focused on running away that he ran, full-force into someone. Barry knocked them both down, tumbling onto the ground with a force that made him grateful reapers didn’t bruise. He scrambled to get up and away from the person, but the sight of the other man stopped him completely in his tracks.

“You alright, son?” his dad asked him.

Oh god. It was his dad. He just called him son. Was something wrong with Barry’s… well he didn’t know what it was called. Glamour? No, that was for vampires. Not that it was important now. Could his dad tell who he was?

“Sir? Are you alright?” his dad asked, a friendly smile on his face, and a hand offered to pull Barry from the ground. He took it, and (barely) managed to keep himself from throwing himself on his dad again for an proper hug. He was being an idiot. His dad was smiling kindly, but there was no recognition. Henry Allen didn’t know him now, and he never would again.

“Yeah. Yeah! Of course I am. Sorry ‘bout that,” mumbled Barry. His dad was here, so close he was still connected with him as through the friendly hand he’d left on Barry’s shoulder. Barry wanted to sink in his father’s touch and never let go again.

But he wasn’t really Barry anymore, or at least not Barry Allen. He was a dead man, the shell of who he once was. Sam didn’t get to have a father. It didn’t really matter that Henry Allen was right there, not anymore.

“I don’t know about that. Now I’m speaking pretty generally here, but when someone at the hospital
is rushing down the halls faster than a surgeon, something is obviously not right, and I think you may need to talk about it,” Henry told him, that same wide, kind smile in place.

Barry wanted to say nothing was wrong and walk away. He was fully prepared to as well, but something in his dad’s tone stopped him. It was the same one he used when Barry was a child and he wanted to know if Barry had stolen a cookie to eat before dinner. It was his ‘you better talk to me now, young man’ tone, and Barry was powerless against it.

“I’ve just lost someone. Someone important, and it’s too soon after I lost some other people. I don’t… I had to get away,” he admitted.

Henry’s smile slipped at Barry’s words, and Barry felt like the biggest jerk around. He really shouldn’t have said that. His dad was still grieving for him, and this was just going to make things worse for both of them.

“Oh. I think you need some coffee. C’mon son. I’ll get you some of the good stuff from the my office,” his dad offered him, grabbing his elbow gently to lead the way. Barry followed along, allowing himself to bask in the simple touch as he pretended to have no clue where he was being led.

He kept letting his dad take care of things, as he had so many times before, once they reached the room. Barry was sat down, and handed a cup of coffee. It was almost like he was really getting coffee with his dad again, ready to talk about work or Iris or something else stupid, but when it came time to fix the coffee, his dad handed him a small pile of creamers and sugars.

It made sense. Henry Allen hated black coffee, but overly-sweet coffee was just as terrible to him. He wouldn’t want to serve a stranger something undrinkable. Barry tried to ignore the growing ache in his chest as he added his own cream and sugar. He took his time, knowing his dad wasn’t going to question him until after he’d taken his first sip. Barry’d been doing this with his dad since the offered drink was warm milk or hot cocoa, and he was trying to avoid telling him about getting in a fight. Henry Allen didn’t change his tactics in the 26 years of Barry’s life, and he doubted that was going to change now. Barry knew how to stall.

“So are you going start talking now, or am I going to have to pry?” His dad prompted him, smiling kindly.

“You know, my dad always told me not to talk to strangers,” Barry shot back, grinning slightly into his mug at his own, horrible joke. It was true, after all. Every since his wife was killed, Henry Allen had been crazily over-protective. Not that it did either of them any good in the long run.
Henry smiled back at him, dark and sad but still a grin. Barry wondered if his dad was thinking about him - Barry, and not this stranger he was talking to - as well.

“Your father sounds like a wise man, although something tells me that advice was meant for when you were much younger. I’m Dr. Allen. Henry, if you’d rather. Now if you tell me who you are, we won’t be strangers, and you can tell me what has you knocking people over in the my cardio ward,” his dad introduced himself, offering a handshake which Barry accepted immediately. All these small touches from his dad were lifting him up in a way he’d almost forgotten.

“I’m Sam,” Barry lied, going for his work name. It was his not-actually-legal identity, now that he was dead, and it’s not like he could tell his dad that he shared the same name as his dead son. He was fairly certain Mick and Sara would find a way to kill him again if he tried.

“Hi Sam. So is that my answer then? You’re just going to drink my coffee and go? Seems a bit rude. I’d be willing to bet that your old man you were mentioning wouldn’t approve,” Henry pushed, trying to play on Barry’s guilty conscience. It worked just as well on him this time as it ever had.

“There’s not anything else to say really. I already told you. I lost someone. Someone else. Sometimes, it feels like I’ve lost everyone,” Barry admitted. He really didn’t want to talk about this. As much as he craved this time with his father, he couldn’t talk about this with him. There were too many lies already.

His dad was still lookin at him, deep and thoughtful. Barry felt like a heart Henry hadn’t decided how to operate on yet. It wasn’t a pleasant feeling.

“They died?” Henry asked.

Barry nodded, not trusting himself to speak. It was as close to the truth as he could answer, and he wasn’t sure what he would say if he opened his mouth. Barry wanted, more than anything in that moment, to tell his dad the truth. He was so close to having his family back, but he couldn’t say anything.

“I’m so sorry, son. Losing someone like that, when you can never get them back, I haven’t found anything less horrible. I lost someone too. Two someones actually. My wife died several years ago, and our son died earlier this year,” Henry admitted to him.
No, not him. Henry was telling all this to Sam, the random man at the hospital. Barry needed to remember that. His dad was here, trying to have a nice, honest conversation, and Barry was just playing a part back.

“Mine’s all gone too,” Barry allowed himself to say back. He may not be able to what he needed from this talk, but how many more chances with his father was he going to have. “Does it ever get any easier?”

His dad didn’t seem surprised at his question. As a surgeon, he was surrounded by death almost as much as Barry was now, and it wasn’t like Barry’s question wasn’t original.

“It does. You’ll never forget them, and they will always be a part of you. But you’ll find ways to cope, to live without them. Some days are harder than others, but there is always a way to make yourself feel better,” offered Henry.

Barry sighed heavily, pointedly not looking directly his dad’s look of annoyance. He always hated it when been Barry did that, and he was sure it probably annoyed him more from Sam the stranger. Then again, Sam the stranger also didn’t have to worry about Henry going into a lecture on how it made him seem like a whining child, so Barry didn’t bother to hold the sigh in.

His father’s words hadn’t been a surprise. They were what everyone was constantly telling him. From his childhood therapist to his fellow reapers. Hell, they were what he told people back when he was a simple CSI, and he was trying to comfort people who lost their loved ones. Barry had forgotten how annoying they were.

“Can I give you some advice?” Henry asked.

“Please,” Barry responded, not bothering to hide the way he was begging. He didn’t even care if his dad told him to knock of the sighing, not this time. He’d missed his father so much, and there wasn’t anything that could make him turn down a chance to get his advice one last time.

“The last time I talked to my son, we got in a got in a huge fight. He wanted me out of his life, and then he died. So I did what he wanted, and I let him go. I’ve felt a lot better for it too. That’s not to say I don’t still love him. Barry was my son, and he’ll always be special to me because of it, but letting him go was the right choice. I feel better than you could guess because of it,” Henry confessed.
Barry felt himself freeze at the words. He wasn’t sure what was worse. That his father was telling him that he’d already gotten over Barry’s death, or that he was telling Barry to snap out of mourning him. God, no wonder everyone was always telling him he needed to avoid his family. Because this here, what his father was telling him, was worse than anything he could imagined about them.

“I don’t… How could you,” Barry gasped, not sure where he was going.

How could you just let someone go like that? How could you do this to me? How could you let me go so easy when you still can’t let mom go?

“Let Barry go?” Henry guessed. It was close enough to the right question that Barry didn’t bother correcting him. “I’m not suggesting you start dropping people from your life. Being loyalty to those you love is important, more so than you can probably understand at your age. But once they’re dead or make the choice to leave you, it’s the only option. How you do so is different for everyone, and I guarantee you my way isn’t the same as yours. You should try to find out what yours is.”

Barry shook his head. He didn’t want to hear any of this. Going with Mick to make sure things went well for Francine, that was alright. It was a death, and for all of Barry’s issues now, he’d learned how to handle those. But this… His dad telling him it hadn’t even taken a year to get over his death, and that Barry really should be doing the same. This was too much.

He could feel his breath quickening, and his dad’s expression was starting to shift to one of concern. Barry went to make some excuse - any reason really - why he needed to leave, when the door flew open and a wonderfully familiar blonde forced her way into the room.

“Sara!” Barry called, startled and relieved. And apparently kind of stupid, as his dad was now looking back and forth between them curiously.

“Hey… you,” Sara started, awkwardly skipping over her words as she tried to puzzle through what name Barry might have given. “Thank god you found him, Dr. Allen. We’ve been looking everywhere.”

“Crap. Sorry about that. Dr. Allen offered to me some coffee, and you not I can’t turn that down,” Barry responded quickly, gulping down his last swallow in a rush before he made his way to Sara, and the door she was obviously trying to get him through from sheer force of will.

“I’m sorry to have kept him. I didn’t realize you and Sam knew each other,” his dad commented.
Despite his light tone, Barry could tell how curious he still was. His father wasn’t about to let it go, and it seemed Sara knew it too.

“Oh yeah. Sam’s an old friend. He was supposed to be here with his roommate, Mick, today. You remember Mick, right?” Sara responded, an air of innocence to her answer that Barry knew was total bullshit. Luckily, his dad didn’t know Sara well enough to pick up that the way she was twirling her ponytail and smiling brightly was an act.

“Yes, right. We really should be getting back though. I didn’t mean to worry you and Mick,” Barry insisted, pulling on Sara’s hand to lead her out the office.

He didn’t let go once they left, and he kept pulling her towards the last place he’d remembered seeing Mick. He kept going, holding onto Sara as tightly as he could until she dug her feet in behind her, returning his grip to pull him a stop.

“What’d he say?” Sara asked him. Her voice was soft and sweet, and it reminded him so much of the first week after he died that he was tempted to spill everything to her once again. He couldn’t though. Repeating what he said would only make it more real.

“Nothing Sara. I knocked him over in the hallway, and he wanted to make sure I was alright after. I’m sorry that I worried you guys.” Barry told her, forcing a smile on his face.

She smiled sadly back at him. It was obvious Sara didn’t believe that was all, but she didn’t push him either.

“Alright then. Let’s get you to Mick then, so I can get back to work.”

Being dead really sucked sometimes, but he was never going to stop being grateful that it also gave him the not-quite human hurricane that was Sara Lance.

Mick was worried about Barry. He had been since Sara had called him early that morning and told him his appointment for the day was Francine West. That worry had only grown after Barry had practically bolted from him the minute Francine had disappeared. Seeing his face now after what Sara had told him was a conversation with his dad, Mick was about ready to wrap the kid in a cocoon of blankets and hide him away from the rest of the world for a while.
A week would probably do, and he was sure he could convince Len to give the kid the time off. He’d be calling in a few favors, but it’d be worth it to get look of utter despair off Barry’s face. Hell, if he showed it to Len he might be able to get Barry away without calling in any IOUs.

Mick was so deep in his planning, he almost missed it when Barry couldn’t keep a tear from escaping his already watery eyes. And fuck - he’d really wanted to let Len handle the talking part, but he couldn’t wait. Not after that. Mick switched lanes abruptly so that he could park them down by the waterfront. Barry was so out of it, he didn’t seem to notice the change until Mick stopped the car, and locked the doors again. He had a feeling Barry might try to run from this talk, and since Barry couldn’t have access to a therapist he so desperately needed, this would have to do.

“What’s going on? I thought we were going home?” Barry asked, voice tight with emotion, and likely the effort he was putting into not crying.

“We are. After you talk,” Mick promised, shifting in his seat so he was facing Barry.

The kid turned the other way, staring at the window with his tightly-closed jaw jutted out defiantly. Mick didn’t care. He waited silently. Barry was an incredibly impatient man, and there was no way he’d outlast Mick.

“For fuck’s sake Mick! Can we please go if you’re just planning to sit here,” Barry snapped less than a minute later.

Mick forced his triumph grin down so he could raise a single eyebrow at the kid. As much as he was tempted to shoot down that stupid fucking start, Mick figured that staying quiet would goad him into talking more easily.

“Of course not, you fucking asshole. Please Mick. Today was really awful, and I just want to go home,” begged Barry.

“I know, kid. It’s why I can’t let it go. Something’s eatin’ you up inside, and it ain’t stopping until you let it out,” Mick told him, breaking his silence. Even he wasn’t enough of a jackass to ignore that pitiful begging. Course, he also wasn’t stupid enough agree to it either.

Barry turned away from the window to glare at Mick. Even if Mick hadn’t met puppies more malicious, it wouldn’t have been an impressive scowl. The kid was pouting too much too be
convincing, and with the way he was shaking, Mick was certain a strong breeze would knock him over.

“Talking isn’t going to fix it either,” Barry pointed out.

Mick didn’t resist the urge to roll his eyes, even if he probably should have. “‘Course it won’t. It’ll make you feel less shitty though, so you’re gonna do it.”

Barry kept scowling silently at him, and Mick resisted the urge to laugh. Kid had no idea how adorable he looked when he tried that, but Mick wasn’t gonna bruise his ego. Barry was too down for it. He’d get the chance to tease Barry later.

Finally, Barry cracked, and Mick found himself regretting every one of his actions that day. Barry was sobbing now, broken sounds escaping from behind the hand he’d thrown over his mouth while his other arm reached around to hug himself. This was what Mick had been trying to avoid.

It was too late to worry about that now though, so he shifted into the middle seat of his truck and pulled Barry towards him. Mick didn’t know how long they sat there, with Barry crying into his chest, and Mick trying to hold the young man together in his arms as gently rocking them both. From the size of the growing wet spot on his now ruined shirt, it wasn’t a short cry.

When Barry’s tears have subsided, and that’s left all soft little hiccups, Mick lets himself speak again. “I’m sorry kid. I shoulda just taken you home.”

Barry shakes his head against Mick’s chest and squeezes him tightly one last time before he pushes himself away from Mick. He lets Barry go, shifting back into the driver’s seat to give the kid some space.

“My dad told me that I should get over whoever I lost, just like he’s already gotten over me,” Barry admitted. He was speaking so quietly that Mick had to concentrate to understand him, as though the louder the words were the more truthful they’d be.

Mick’s mind went horribly, abruptly blank, other than a deep, yet very unwise, urge to drive back to CCGH and punch Dr. Allen in him in his stupid fucking face. The man didn’t know who he was speaking too though, and thought he was helping some random sad kid. That didn’t make things better for Barry though, who’s shining eyes and trembling lip reveal just how much he was still on the edge of a breakdown. Mick wanted to scream and hit things on Barry’s behalf, but it would only
make the kid more upset. So Mick resisted the urge and tried to think of something that would lift his friend’s downtrodden spirits. After what Barry’s dad had told him, he had nothing.

“You can stop looking at me like that. I know there’s nothing to say about it. It just sucks. It’d suck less in my bed with some ice cream though. Oh, or maybe I can get Len to make me some peaches and marshmallows,” Barry told him, shoving his shoulder lightly.

Mick snorted as he started the car back up. “Ice cream we can get you, but I don’t know about peaches and marshmallows. He only makes ‘em when he’s feeling guilty or for Lisa’s birthday.”

Barry laughed with him. It wasn’t his usual laugh, loud and without worry, but it was something. At least Barry was smiling with it, so Mick counted it as a win.

“For you maybe. I bet he’ll make them for me,” taunted Barry. The little shit was smirking at him, but Mick didn’t begrudge him for it. His eyes were still a little watery, so Mick let him get away with it this time with nothing but a noise of acknowledgment.

They drove in silence for until they reached the warehouse district. Both of them kept shooting glances at each other the whole way. Mick pretended he didn’t notice Barry’s nervous looks, and Barry ignored Mick’s worried ones. He wasn’t willing to risk upsetting the kid again by asking about it.

He didn’t end up having too. Once the truck was parked, Barry stopped Mick from getting out out with a gently hand on his shoulder.

“Is this another one of those things we have to keep from Len?” Barry asked with a snifflle.

“No, kid. He already knows why you came with me today, and you followed the rules with your dad. Not your fault you got cornered. ‘Sides, Sara would tell Len if we didn’t,” Mick assured him.

“Good,” Barry responded, the beginning of smile lifting his lips slightly upwards.

Mick resisted the urge to snort at the love-struck look on Barry’s face. Mick really hoped those two stopped dancing around each other. They deserved to be happy. Plus, if they’d finally start fucking then it’d be up to Len to fix the kid’s during these little episodes. As much as Mick liked Barry, he usually maxed himself out on dealing with this kind of soft, fluffy bullshit with Ray. He didn’t need
it from Barry too.

Len might though.

“C’mon kid. I bet you $50 you aren’t getting those peaches and marshmallows,” Mick encouraged.

He was probably going to lose, but at least he’d get dessert from it. Besides, the extra cash might soften the kid up about them calling him out of Happy Times again. When Barry agreed with a laugh and another taunt, Mick knew he made the right call.
Hartley was exhausted. It was nearing four o’clock in the morning, and he’d barely had any sleep last night. It was all he wanted now, but he couldn’t even go in his fucking bedroom.

Well, that wasn’t necessarily true. He could, but only if he was will was to listen to the sexathon Ray and Mick were engaging in through their shared wall. They’d been at it for hours, and they hadn’t sounded anywhere close to done when he’d checked twenty minutes ago. Apparently Ray was very appreciative of the way Mick had been caring for Barry, and whatever he was doing to show it was making Mick far more vocal than usual.

It was making him sick. No one should have to hear the man of his dreams fucking his closest criminal associate. He wouldn’t even wish it on… no, that’s a lie Zolomon totally deserved it. Only Zolomon and that Butcher asshole deserve this level of torment.

All things considered, it was a miracle he was able to keep down what his late night snack. Hartley knew that if he was eating anything besides the leftover peaches and marshmallows he wouldn’t have been able to. Even in his funk, Hartley knew better than to waste this dessert. The rest of the Rogues would skin him (mostly) alive for it.

“You alright, Hart? You’re looking a little green,” Barry’s tired voice cut through the silence, jarring him from his thoughts.

Hartley managed to stay in his chair, but only just. He had been completely shocked by the
unexpected intrusion. Worse, he almost knocked his plate of peaches and marshmallows to the floor.

As much as he wanted to be alone, he couldn’t bring himself to try and kick Barry out. If the size of the dark circles around his eyes was any indication, the newest Rogue was still upset about what went down at the hospital the previous day. After all, he thought grimly, it wasn’t like Mick was the only one who cared about their newest reaper.

Plus, Len would probably kick his ass if he hurt Barry’s delicate little feelings. He’d certainly been determined enough to go after Henry Allen for it. Hartley was still amazed that Lisa was able to talk Len down. Mick, Ray, and Hartley had been forced to distract Barry with a shitty cartoon that kid apparently enjoyed long enough for Lisa to get it through her brother’s thick skull that he couldn’t go beat up Barry’s father because he was trying to help a stranger.

At least Len had been so upset baking afterwards that he’d fucked up some measurements and had been forced to make a triple batch of peaches and marshmallows to fix it.

“What are you doing in here? Don’t you have work in a couple of hours?” Hartley sighed, trying not to let Barry realize how much he was admitting defeat to himself by engaging him in conversation.

“Couldn’t sleep. Besides, it’s not like I need a lot of brainpower for data entry,” Barry admitted with a shrug.

Hartley frowned at his friend’s words. He may not be on Hartley’s level of intelligence, but Barry was still too smart to be wasting away at a place like Happy Times. The few times he’d been able to pull Barry into his projects, it’d been obvious how intelligent the other man was.

“I don’t know why you bother with that awful place. You’ve got better options.”

Barry scoffed before answering, looking down at the table with a look of utter petulance way too reminiscent of Hartley’s nephews so many years ago for him to actually take it seriously. “Like being a criminal or a charity case? Because neither one of those is in any way an actual option for me.”

Hartley took back everything he’d ever thought about Barry’s intelligence if he really thought those were his only options. Maybe the kid did belong doing asinine work like data entry. Thank god he’d never been foolish enough to admit having high opinion of Barry aloud. The entirety of the Central City and Keystone Reapers knew that Barry was not cut out for being a criminal, but Barry still seemed to be wary of being forced into it. Hartley blamed his paranoia entirely on the Just Say No
and DARE bullshit he kept hearing was taught in schools these days.

It made Hartley really missed the sixties. The homophobia, racism, sexism, and every other bit of close-minded bullshit were a pain to deal with, but at least he wouldn’t have to deal with the stupidity the modern school system brought out in even naturally bright people like Barry.

“That’s not what I meant,” refuted Hartley. “We all know you don’t want that, or Len would’ve found someway to make it happen. I was just wondering why you don’t bother finding a better job. Happy Times is a creepy fucking cesspool.”

Barry shrugged. Hartley wished he knew whether it was born more from an was an acceptance that he worked in the creepiest place on earth or a hopeless attempt to try and refute the fact. He was certain it was supposed to be a bit of both, but also way too tired to try and figure out exactly what Barry was shooting for.

“Sometimes. I definitely thought so at first. But… I’ve got friends at Happy Times, and something that’s almost like a life. It’s a part of me that being dead doesn’t get to touch.”

His heart wasn’t aching after that. Not even a little. The tightness in his chest was perfectly understandable seeing as how he’d maybe had five hours of sleep in the past 48 hours. It had nothing to do with way Barry was still searching for things the rest of them had long since given up on. Things that he was never going to be able fully grasp the way they lived.

If Barry was finding even a small taste of it at Happy Times, it’s no wonder he dealt with the world’s most unsettling office. Hell, Hartley probably have would too as long as he could get those feeling back.

“I find it hard to believe that anything is life-like in that place,” Hartley said, needing something to say that wasn’t going to crush Barry even more. “You know, half of us are convinced you managed to stumble upon purgatory. I stand to win several hundred dollars if you find out after New Years.”

“God, you guys are such assholes. Happy Times is a perfectly normal job,” Barry replied, voice full of indigent derision he really had no right to.

None of the Rogues believed it, especially not him. Unlike most of Central City’s reapers, he actually had an office job before he died, and even when allowing for the decades between, it was nothing like Barry’s hellhole of an office. Not even if one accounted for the differences between NASA’s
budget in the 60s and Happy Times now.

Hartley would know. He’d certainly spent enough time on the math after a few too many drinks with Mark, Sam, and Bette.

Although Barry may have had a point about them being assholes. When he first came to live with them there was no way Barry would’ve sounded so sarcastic, yet harsh towards him. He was definitely spending too much time with the Rogues.

“You love us anyways,” he shot back.

Barry was obviously trying not to smile at that, but the corners of his lips were turning up anyways. It was utterly adorable, and in that moment it made him get what Len saw in him beyond the cute face and even better ass. Even with all the darkness that surrounded the kid, there was something inherently good and sweet in his suppressed smile. Hell, if Hartley wasn’t so fucked up inside about Ray and Mick screwing each others brains out a couple hundred feet away, he may have felt something for Barry too.

For the first time, Hartley’s hopeless crush on Ray was probably doing him some good. Len was a lot more likely to make his life miserable for his crush than Mick ever head. Mick was either completely oblivious about it or generous enough that he didn’t want to kick Hartley when he was already down.

He really wished Mick would. Then maybe he wouldn’t feel like such a mess.

“I plead the fifth,” Barry teased, giving up on his pitiful attempt at keeping a straight face in order to fully grin at him.

Hartley groaned at Barry’s words, exaggerating his annoyance in order to make the small smile on Barry’s face grow, “Of course you do. You’re a cop.”

“I was an assistant CSI,” Barry corrected, irritation crossing his face briefly as they settled into the familiar argument. “Basically amounts to a lab rat considering I’d only just worked my way up to fieldwork when I died. Besides, you lot are the criminals. I’d have thought you were pretty familiar with that one.”
Poor, sweet little bastard. He had the morality of a still-living person, and was falling for one of the toughest and most talented criminal reapers in existence. Len really needed to work on getting Barry to calm the hell down with his cop-raised ideologies about what was right and wrong. None of that stuff really mattered once you died, if it even mattered before then. Hartley had never seen any evidence that it did.

“I’m sure I would be, if we weren’t too good to get arrested,” Hartley teased Barry gently.

The other man laughed at his words. He wasn’t taking them to heart, and Hartley couldn’t bring himself to mind. If anyone needed some laughter, it was definitely Barry.

At any other time of day, Barry’s laughing probably would’ve sounded like a quiet chuckle, but at the late night hour the sound was practically echoing. Hartley had to suppress a smile of his own at seeing his friend so cheerful again.

“Remind me again why are you up and bothering me? You looked half asleep after we were done with Dragon Ball Z earlier, and that was hours ago,” Barry complained, over-exaggerated in way made Hartley sure he was really enjoying the company.

He was completely down for changing the subject, but not to that. Anything but why he was up in the late morning. Hartley was working very hard not to think about it, so why would he want to talk about it?

“That’s because your show was shitty,” Hartley tried changing the subject again.

“It was not!” Barry sniffed, obviously offended that Hartley actually had some taste. “You’re just trying to deflect.”

Little shit really did belong with Len. They were both nosy motherfuckers. He was not amused.

“I don’t see how that’s any of your business.”

Barry didn’t respond for a while, and Hartley was starting to really settle into his sense of accomplishment when he looked up from his peaches and marshmallows and saw the look Barry was shooting him. He was judging Hartley so much, like he had any right.
The kid was pining as much as Hartley was, and the object of his affections actually returned them. And didn’t even have wonderfully kind and thoughtful lovers to compete with either.

“Oh stop with the judgemental crap. Just because most of us are older than dirt, doesn’t mean we have to swap tales like the fucking Golden Girls. I don’t need to talk out my feelings.”

“So, what feelings are keeping you up?” Barry, the cheeky little fucker, zeroed in on the last thing he was supposed to. Hartley glared in response. Barry’s unprompted nosiness wasn’t worth a proper, verbal reply. “There’s no need to look so sour. We both know I’m right, and if it’s bothering you enough that you can’t sleep, it’d probably do you some good to talk it out.”

He continued to stare Barry down. Hartley was decades older than him, and a hell of a lot more patient.

“I can sleep fine,” Hartley cracked, giving in to the way Barry’s wide-eyed pleading look was shifting into the sad eyes from earlier. He didn’t want to talk about Ray, but somehow Barry’s searching look giving way to defeat was worse somehow.

“Then why aren’t you?”

“I don’t particularly feel like listening the the sexual olympics going on in the room next to mine. It’s not what’d I’d call soothing,” admitted Hartley.

It was a safe answer, even if it was a little too close to the truth. After all, Hartley wasn’t the only one to end up sexiled by Ray and Mick. Their place before the warehouse carried sound way too well. Hartley was still sure that it was the real reason they’d left the apartments they’d squatted in before.

Len had shared a wall with Mick in their last place, he remembered suddenly. Hartley really should have guessed that Len’s insistence that he live isolated from the rest of their rooms was a sign of something, or at least realized that he hadn’t only been trying to move away from the occasional explosions that Mark’s room produced.

“So that’s what bothering you then? Your feelings for Mick?” Barry sympathized, completely off base and far too loudly for Hartley comfort.
For someone so smart, Barry really could be an utter fucking dolt. How did the kid even think up something so ridiculous? Why the fuck would he care what Mick was doing? It was Ray for him, always.

That Ray was with Mick, not that Mick ever could actually admit to it. What Mick was giving Ray, other than unwavering kindness and faith like he always gave everyone without actually admitting to and really great sex…

What a perfect asshole. Hartley never had a shot against someone like that.

“For fuck’s sake Barry! If you’re going to spout utter fucking nonsense, don’t do it so goddamn loudly.”

“I’m sorry, Hartley. I know how hard it is loving someone who’s with someone else. I spent years watching my best friend date a string of guys who weren’t me, and she’s apparently dating a friend of mine from work now too. Which is just… yeah, not gonna touch on that. Too fucking weird. Anyways, what I’m trying to say is I know how you feel, and if you ever need to talk about Mick…”

Hartley snorted, interrupting Barry before he could get too far into middle school girl levels of sharing. “I’m not in love with Mick.”

“You shouldn’t lie to your friends. It’s unbecoming. Besides, you don’t have to worry. I won’t tell anyone about your feelings, especially not while he’s with Ray.”

Barry yelped this time when Hartley’s foot connected with his shin. He went back to glaring afterwards, and while it was 100% ineffective, Hartley figured he should probably make some amends anyways. He offered him a bite of the peaches and marshmallows rather than apologizing. It felt like a good compromise considering he wasn’t actually sorry.

“Seriously Barry, I don’t have feelings for Mick,” Hartley tried, smiling at his friend with a touch of forced flirtatiousness after his mouth was too full to argue. “You, on the other hand, are really causing some feelings of revulsion. Considering how pretty you are, it’s kind of impressive.”

It was worth being sprayed with Barry’s overly indulgent bite for the laughter his comment caused, even if it did lead Barry to take another sizable bite of his dessert before giving back the fork.
“You’re deflecting,” Barry singsoned grossly at him around the bite of food. He was entirely too chipper for an early morning conversation. Hartley had to kick him again for it.

The little asshole was what he imagined would happen if a Disney princess had a baby with member of the Addams Family: kind-hearted, beautiful, and completely surrounded by death and mayhem. It was an odd combination, and one he had way too little sleep lately to deal with.

“There is no need to deflect utter bullshit, you imbecile,” Hartley retorted, catching Barry’s eye with a glare so he could see the pointed eye roll Hartley had been building up to.

“It’s not. I’ve - I mean I had, before all this - spent years in hiding the fact I was in love with my best friend too. It’s not exactly hard to see in someone else,” Barry told him, grabbing his hand firmly an absolutely oozing sympathy.

Unlike when the rest of the Rogues, or even the Natural Causes group, tried something similar, there was something utterly sincere in his open expression. He wasn’t prodding Hartley for information like the Snart siblings, or too close to the situation, or even simply faking to feel more like the nicer people they’d all been before their deaths. Barry was simply there, trying to offer comfort and acceptance, and something a hell of a lot more useful than pity.

Hartley was fully going to blame the voodoo of actual human sympathy, as well as utter sleep deprivation, for what came out of his mouth next. There was no other reason for him to have admitted to anything otherwise. “C’mon Barr, don’t be daft. I’ve had feelings for Ray for decades, alright? I think I’d notice if those feelings shifted to his goddamn boyfriend.”

“What? You’ve got feelings for Ray?!” Barry gasped. Thankfully, he kept his exclamation quiet this time, so Hartley didn’t even have to kick him for the third time.

“You’ve got feelings for Ray?!?” Hartley imitated, pitching his voice to a nasally version of Barry’s high-pitched surprise. Hartley snorted at the outrage expression it provoked from the younger reaper before continuing, taking a vindictive sort of pleasure in seeing some of his own vulnerability reflected back at him in the form of Barry’s sensitivity. “Of course I’ve got feelings for Ray. I’ve had feelings for Ray since before you born, and I mean that quite literally.”

“I thought you had a crush on Mick,” Barry responded, seemingly as much to himself as to Hartley. Even with his rising annoyance at Hartley’s prodding, Barry still hadn’t lost his gobsmacked expression.
“First of all Barry,” Hartley started with yet another eye roll. If they kept this up for much longer, his eyes were going to get stuck like this. It was entirely worth the sacrifice. “I’m a grown ass man. I don’t have crushes. I have romantic inclinations towards compatible individuals. Which means smart, sweet guys who laugh at my jokes and look like greek gods, not crotchety pyromaniacs that who may be kinda nice on occasion, but a rampaging jackass with the same emotional capabilities of his pet rat most of the time.”

“Mick has a pet rat? I didn’t think we were allowed any pets besides McSnurtle? Wait sorry, not important now… I’m always here for you if you want to talk about your… romantic inclinations. Not much I can do, obviously, but if you need me I’m here.”

Hartley laughed lightly, eyeing the window behind Barry as the sky was starting to slowly turn pink. Sunrise was close, which meant Len was bound to be up soon too, and Hartley really needed to stop talking about this. Letting Barry in on his secret was one thing, but there was no way in hell he was going to talk to Len about this. “Mick keeps Axel hidden from the rest of the Rogues. Ray, Lisa, me, and now you are the only ones who know about him.”

“Damnit! I’ve always wanted a cat or a dog, but my dad and Iris are both allergic to anything with fur. I thought maybe Len was loosening up on the pets rule,” Barry admitted with far too much cheer. He trying too hard to go with Hartley's attempt to change the subject. It was awkward as hell, but he appreciated it anyways.

“I’m certain that if you ask Len about getting another animal he’ll tell you no way in hell, but if you just come home with one and pout at him he’ll let you keep it. Especially if you get Lisa in on it with you. She’s always been partial to kittens,” Hartley offered.

Barry’s eyes lit up with at the prospect of a kitten, though he hadn’t managed to force the sympathetic frown off his face. It was a conundrum, yet so very Barry Allen. Which of course is probably what called Len from his bedroom, eyes never leaving Barry’s even as stretched. Barry returned his deeply longing look, particularly at the inch or so of stomach Len’s stretch exposed. Hartley wanted to gag.

“And on that note, I’m going to bed. Goodnight,” Hartley announced, walking off as the two lovesick fools started exchanging the most pining-filled good mornings known to man.

Len didn’t stop him, so the furry, scaly, slimy, or otherwise creature he was slated for that day must be late enough for him to have time to nap. Either that, or he was simply too engrossed in Barry’s (secretly kitten-based) enthusiasm.
Hartley didn’t care either way. Between the blackout curtains and his now silent room, he was finally alone in the dark like he’d been craving all night. It wasn’t as soothing as he’d hoped, but at least he’d be able to finally sleep.
Let Me Count the Way (Our Fathers Screw Us Up)

Chapter Summary

H.R. urges Len to talk to Barry. It doesn't go the way any of them planned.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry again for the slow update! At least this one is longer that usual though.

The name for this chapter comes from one of my favorite sonnets, because for some reason it was in my head as I wrote the first scene. I guess the last line was really sticking in my head for Barry and Len. Here is a link in case any of you want to read it


H.R. genuinely liked Sam, he reminded himself as he stared at the young man in question from between the blinds in his office. He was a great addition to the Happy Times team, and unlike his friends Caitlin and Cisco, Sam had the potential to be a Happy Times lifer. He had a good head on his shoulders and was determined to do the best he could at his job, even if his position wasn’t the most glamorous.

The trouble in his past was inconsequential as long as it stayed in his past. Unfortunately, H.R. was starting to suspect that Sam’s poor decisions were no longer safely in the past.

Sam’s problems with punctuality were getting worse, and there was no way it was because he was oversleeping. Not with constantly-growing dark circles under his eyes. To top off those issues, his attitude lately had become downright abysmal. Unless he was with Caitlin or Cisco, Sam was either withdrawn or snapping at his coworkers.

Admittedly, Ralph in accounting probably deserved it. Management, himself included, knew the guy was a grade-A d-bag, but he was also a wiz with their books, so they couldn’t have Sam scaring him off.

Ralph wasn’t the problem though (not at the moment at least). Something was seriously wrong with Happy Times newest potential lifer. Even if it wasn’t a relapse, it was something that needed some intervention. Lucky for him, the best man for the job chose that exact moment to step off the elevator.
Sam’s sponsor had his usual, surly grimace firmly in place, but with the way Sam talked about him H.R. knew that this Len person really cared about his charge. He was a secretly a total softie, and, as Sam’s boss it was his job to help Len keep the poor lad from slipping back off the deep end.

With that in mind, it took only moments to grab Sam’s sponsor and pull him into the office as he walked past the doorway. His signature scowl magnified by about a thousand, and H.R. may have actually been worried if Sam hadn’t shared a bit a piece of the man’s peaches and marshmallows that very morning. No one who baked like that could be a bad person.

As it was, he grinned at Len and threw a friendly arm around his shoulder. “Len, it’s lovely to see you again! You here for lunch with our Sammy-boy?”

“I was planning on it,” the man drawled coldly, attempting unsuccessfully to get out from under H.R.’s arm. “Course, that’d work a lot better if you’d actually let me go get him.”

H.R. laughed at Len’s scathing wit. Sam was right. His sponsor did have a truly wicked sense of humor. “Don’t be silly, friend. You can grab him soon. I think we need to chat for a quick minute first.”

Len still wasn’t breaking character. If anything, the glare he was sending H.R.’s way was even more severe. The man was such a drama queen.

“I really don’t think we do.”

H.R. forced a laugh, trying to ease the other man. This was a serious issue, and he simply didn’t have the option to play along with Len’s surly disposition today. There was too much potentially at stake for their young friend.

“Nonsense. We are both important men in Sam’s life. It’s our job to make sure that young man is doing alright, and I don’t think he has been.” H.R. informed Len as he pulled the man into the seat at his side, relinquishing his hold so that he could plop himself in his chair.

“What do you mean?” Len asked him.
It was like a switch had flipped in the man. Rather than perched at the end up seat, prepped to spring the moment H.R. released him, the man had settled fully into his seat as a laser-sharp focus was shifted to him. If H.R. wasn’t so relieved to see Sam’s sponsor finally paying some proper interest, it may have been disconcerting.

Luckily for them, his job made him used to dealing with odd characters, so he dove straight into his concerns without regard for Len’s behavior. “Well he obviously isn’t sleeping well, and he’s been particularly irritable at work. Just this morning he snapped at Ralph in accounting, and you know is well as I do that isn’t normal behavior for our little Sam.”

“Oh, our little Sam?”

“Yes, I know,” H.R. continued, ignoring the interruption. The man must be beside himself that he was slipping with his charge. “It’s so out of character. I’m worried the poor boy isn’t doing well. He… he’s acting a bit like an addict, to be frank with you. I think he may have fallen off the wagon.”

“You think he’s doing cocaine?” Len wondered, eyes widening in surprise.

“I don’t want to… But he’s not sleeping, he isn’t eating, he’s irritable, and he hasn’t stopped twitching for even a five minute period today! I sure of it. I’ve been timing him,” he informed Len.

H.R. knew he sounded a little desperate, but how could he not? Sam became family the moment he accepted his position at Happy Times. He wasn’t going to let the boy slip back down a dark path!

“Right then,” Len acknowledged, quickly moving from the seat and towards the door. “Thanks for the concern, but Sam’s fine. You don’t need to time him anymore.”

“I wish I could, but you’re wrong. Something is seriously wrong with him, and it’s supposed to be your job to help him through it,” H.R. snapped, feed up with the man’s blasé attitude. It took some finagling, but he managed to block the door completely before Len could walk out.

If it didn’t go against every NA rule known to man he’d be trying to figure out which group these men belonged to, because this Len character wasn’t doing his job if he was missing warning signs like this. From all Sam’s talk about the man, H.R. had expected more.

“He’s not on anything, okay?” Len assured him, glare shifting to something almost fond as he broke
H.R.’s gaze in favor of staring Sam.

H.R. joined his watch, laughing softly as their young friend worked to steal a couple of tootsie pops from Cisco while Caitlin distracted the young candy fiend. A soft smile played on his lips as he watched Sam pilfer three suckers, only to get caught on his fourth attempt. Cisco’s outrage did nothing to dampen the smile on Sam’s face, not when he was already in the process of sneaking the first three into the bag at his feet.

“He saw his dad again,” Len started back. “...and things went horribly, but he’s going to be alright. Ba… Bastard really did a number on him. Sam needs some time to work through all the damage that asshole caused, and if you really want to help him you’ll treat him like you always do. And maybe help me give him hell for stealing lollipops like a third grader.”

H.R. could feel the relief seeping through him as the words washed over him. Sam (probably) hadn’t fallen off the wagon. He hadn’t heard much about Sam’s relationship with his family, but what little he knew as enough to corroborate Len’s tale. His father hadn’t really been there for him, and he’d completely abandoned his son shortly before H.R. met the boy. A soft-hearted soul like Sam could easily be damaged by an accidental run-in with the man.

More importantly, the softness in Len’s gaze belied his harsh exterior, and H.R. knew in that moment that his young friend wouldn’t be lacking the care he needed. Sam was right about Len after all. The man was as much of a sweetheart as his baking suggested.

Between having all of Happy Times on his side at work, and Len and the other assortment of strange friends that popped up at the office taking care of him the rest of the time, Sam had all the support he needed to make it through this.

“Poor boy,” H.R. exclaimed, a plan already forming in his head as he let Len out of his office door. “Yes, of course, I won’t mention it to him. Although maybe you should consider going easy on him about those tootsie pops. Usually Caitlin, Sam, and I only steal enough for the three of us, so that fourth lollipop was probably meant for you.”

The small smile as Len approached Sam was far more telling than the way he’d slammed the door behind him. H.R. wasn’t about to be fooled by a man who stole four more of Cisco’s tootsie pops while ushering Sam out the door, presenting them to Sam like a bouquet before the elevator doors closed.

Len was a total marshmallow.
“I almost maimed your boss today. I’m gonna need you to keep him away from me before I get you fired,” Len told Barry, scanning the Chuck E Cheese’s crowd for today’s unlucky soul, a Mr. Jeremiah Danvers.

Thankfully the ongoing birthday party kids all had on name tags, so it was looking more and more likely he wasn’t going to have to get stuck with another child reaping. Although pediatric therapist in Central City were probably going to be having a pretty good day after this one, as the arcade was packed and they only had nine minutes until Danvers died.

“Oh no, what did H.R. do this time?” Barry asked him, groaning as he examined a shadow flickering in the corner of his eye by the birthday girl and her parents. He had a bad feeling about that one. There wasn’t anything that he could see that should have caused the shadow, much less made it move so quickly. “I swear, if he tried force you to coming to fucking Ralph’s birthday on Friday I’ll find some excuse to cover you not being there. Hell, I’m trying to find one for me too, so maybe we can make it a two-for-one sort of deal.”

Len stopped looking around the room in order to step in front of Barry, obviously trying to pull his attention. It really wasn’t the right time. That shadow was definitely a graveling, and it was playing with the helium tank.

“The freak put an arm around my shoulder so that we could talk about your emotional wellbeing. It was fucking horrible, Barr. If you wouldn’t have gotten fired for it, I would’ve kneecapped him to get away,” Len whined at him, seemingly oblivious to Barry’s discovery other than the slight shift in his stance to remove himself from Barry’s line of sight.

Barry disagreed, “C’mon, it can’t have been that bad. H.R. is a little strange, but he’s a nice guy.”

As he spoke, Barry started to pull Len by the elbow towards the snackbar. It would walk them right by the happy little family, and the most-likely soon-to-be dead dad. Plus, the pizza smelled amazing. It was a win-win as far as he was concerned. He needed some sort of treat after this one.

“Please Barr, that man is the kind of nice that almost certainly hiding a crazy, violent nutjob inside. Although... he did mention something interesting about you. Said you went off on that Ralph guy, which isn’t exactly like you, is it?”
Barry rolled his eyes, exaggerating the movement with his whole body so he had an excuse to fall into the man who was unknowingly sharing his job messing with the helium tank. It took only moments to apologize for the interruption, confirm that this guy really was Jeremiah Danvers, and shake the man's hand just long enough to separate his soul.

“Not that it’s any of your business what goes on at my day job,” Barry started back, ignoring the interruption to his and Len’s conversation. “… but if you must know he tried to grab Caitlin’s ass. She’s not ready for being normally hit on after her fiancé died, much that creep Ralph’s version of seduction. So yeah, I may have snapped a bit, but he deserved it. Why do you care?”

Len flinched. Barry wished he knew whether it was caused by the harshness in his tone or the blindingly bright sunlight they stepped back into as they walked into the back alley. He wasn’t about to apologize, but he didn’t like the idea of hurting his friend.

“Because I’m supposed to be watching out for you.”

Barry grimaced at the reminder, and at all the things his words implied. Something about Len butting into Happy Times didn’t sit right. Len may be able to tell him what do 99% of the time, but he wasn’t Barry’s keeper. He was an adult, and a dead one at that. It’s not like anything worse could happen to him.

It was bad enough he needed the Rogues to babysit him while he was reaping. He didn’t want Len to do the same thing for him while he worked as a data entryist.

“No, you’re supposed to make sure I can do this job. Happy Times has nothing to do with you,” he pointed out, trying to keep his annoyance out of his words.

“Everything about…” Len started, only to be cut off by the loud and unmistakable sound of a body thumping against the other side of Chuck E Cheese’s wall. Len didn’t bother to try speaking over the screaming, simply rolling his eyes and pulling Barry away from the back door.

Jeremiah Danvers stumbled through the wall, eyes wide with surprise. Barry couldn’t help wincing in sympathy. Everyone inside was still screaming, and Barry didn’t want to think about what kind of way a helium tank might have killed someone to cause that. He was positive it wasn’t pretty.

“Mr. Danvers!” Barry called out, ignoring Len’s derisive snort from in front of him.
“Oh thank god! You can see me! I need help. There was an accident at my daughter’s party, and everyone is panicking so much that they won’t listen to me.”

The man’s was frantic, trying to grab Barry’s arms as he spoke. He was frazzled that he didn’t even notice his fingers slipping right through. Barry felt for him - really, he was doing the same thing a few months back - but he wished the man would get a grip. He couldn’t help Danvers get back to where he was, and if he didn’t calm down then Barry couldn’t get him to move on either.

“I’m sorry to tell you, Jeremiah, but you’re dead. There is nothing we can do for you at this point other than help you get to the next stage,” coaxed Barry, his voice slipping seamlessly into a softer register as though his quiet tone could ease the meaning behind his words.

“Next stage?” The man shouted, voice carrying over the commotion inside the Chuck E Cheese’s for the only two people on the block who could actually hear him. “What is this crap? I’m not going anywhere, especially not on my baby girl’s birthday.”

“Jeremiah, you don’t have that choice. I know it’s...” Barry started back, panicking slightly. What the hell was he supposed to do about this? It’d probably help if newly-deceased father didn’t cut him off.

“I’m not going anywhere! I don’t care what crap you are trying to sell me, buddy. I’m not interested, and if you aren’t going to help me, you need to leave.”

Jeremiah didn’t stick around to listen after to what was sure to be a pitiful argument from Barry, quickly retreating back through the wall. Barry didn’t bother following. He didn’t know what to say. Instead Barry sat down, hand in his hands and carefully not looking in Len’s direction.

“What are you doing?” Len asked, voice tight.

He wasn’t sure if Len was ticked at him or if he was getting angry about Danvers, but Barry needed a minute. Barry knew that eventually he was going to have to get Jeremiah Danvers to his lights, but he needed to pull himself together first. He obviously wasn’t ready to let go of that sweet little girl who’d been smiling and laughing at her party only a few short minutes ago, and Barry certainly wasn’t ready to convince him that he needed to.

“I don’t think I can do this, Len. How can I tell him to let go of his daughter when it’s killing me that my dad did the same thing to me?” Barry asked Len, staring up into his friend’s stormy glare.
“That’s not an option. You know as well as I do that we don’t get that choice,” Len told him, still towering above him. His already pinched expression was turning even darker, but Barry didn’t mind. This was Len; he’d understand where Barry was coming from.

“We don’t get any choices!” Barry snarked back, letting his head fall back into his hands.

“Barry…” Len said, and that was it.

He didn’t bother with anything else. Didn’t tell Barry how to fix this, how to help himself or the poor sucker he got stuck with that day. He didn’t say anything, so Barry was going to have to do it for them both.

“I can’t do this. After everything with my dad… Nothing I say now is going to convince Jeremiah Danvers to leave his daughter.”

Len sighed deeply as he sat. The long, drawn-out breath the Rogues always teased him for being overdramatic with actually felt appropriate for once. He almost wished Lisa was with them to see it being useful.

“If you’ve got trouble with your job - either of them - we can talk,” Len finally told him, his voice cold and brittle as the iron pipe Barry was fiddling with from the wall behind them, “... but I can’t help with your daddy issues, kid. Especially not while we’ve got an errant soul trying to hang around. You need to get a handle on yourself.”

Barry groaned, shoving Len with his shoulder. For such a great friend, Len really was a dick sometimes.

“I just… do you have any idea what it like to say your own father stopped care about you? I can’t - I won’t - tell Jeremiah to do the same thing. There’s got to be another way.”

“No, I don’t know how you’re feeling because my father never gave a shit in the first place,” Len sneered, patience obviously giving over to the anger hardening Len’s crystal eyes. “My father was the biggest piece of human garbage I’ve ever had the misfortune of coming across, and I’ve been around a damned long time.”

Len was breathing heavily after his little speech, chest heaving with the force of anger. He wasn’t the
only one. The man was such a hypocrite. The Rogues had all been pushing Barry to forget about what happened with his dad while Len was apparently using his own as an excuse to be an ass.

“What, so you can’t see how this might be hard for other people? Grow up, Len. You’re the one always preaching how long you’ve been at this, telling the rest of us to be *professionals.*” Barry bit back, glaring at Len as he scoffed.

“Seriously kid? You’re the one flaking on your appointment, not me. It’s not my fault you’re still too hung up on your old life to function.”

Too hung up to function? Sure, Barry struggled with some of his jobs, but he hadn’t screwed up in weeks. Even then it was only because he had a panic attack, but Len had told him that was fine.

He wished it was more of a suprise that Len only meant that while Barry wasn’t pushing him.

“You’re such an asshole,” sputtered Barry, heat rising in his cheeks as he failed not to think about how true Len’s words were. At least of Len wasn’t holding back, he didn’t have to either. “What’d your dad do to fuck you up so badly that you can’t even remember what human empathy feels like?”

“Well, for starters he’s the reason me and Lisa died,” Len confessed, grimacing at his own words and seeming to cave into himself as he spoke.

Barry didn’t know how to handle that. He’d known for a while that Len and Lisa must not have had the most pleasant of lives or deaths. It was too obvious in the way they spoke, and in how well they were able to handle his issues. Not to mention how strange it was that the two siblings had both become reapers.

This though? God, Barry should have not opened his mouth on this one. He definitely shouldn’t have pushed the issues when he saw how much it was bothering Len, but he was - is really - so pissed it didn’t register that he should use a bit of sensativey. Len had never needed it before.

“I... shit Lenny, I’m sorry. You don’t have to talk about him. You’re right, we need to go get Danvers,” Barry told Len, pulling himself up. He still didn’t know what to do about getting the man into his lights, but it was definitely preferable to continuing this conversation.

If only Len agreed. The man dug his heels in, not even budging as Barry attempted to lift him from
his seat and pull him back into Chuck E Cheese’s. Len was so stubborn sometimes.

“I… no, you fucking wanted to know, so now you’re going to shut up and listen. Lewis Snart was a drunken slave owner who got rich off the work we did, beat his wife, Lisa, fucking bragged about how raping my mother because it was a good fucking investment. Which, in case you didn’t catch it, meant he made me.”

“Lenny,” Barry whimpered, drawing into himself as though it would minimize the weight of Len’s words. Len didn’t pay the interruption any mind, too lost in his memories to notice the slight dampness leaking from both of their eyes.

“He spent my entire childhood planning to sell me up the river once I was old enough to make him some serious money for it. Unfortunately, the Civil War ended before that point, and the bastard sold off my sister to a psychopath instead. So no, Barry, I have no fucking clue what it’s like for your father to suddenly stop caring like that. Mine never gave a damn about me or Lisa in the first place.”

Barry didn’t know what to say - not to any of that. He’d been complaining since his death about his dad and his family, and Len had just sat there. No wonder he’d always been such an awkward grouch about it.

He should’ve shut Barry up. Or hell, Barry should have shut himself up. Dying was hard on everyone, there was no doubt about it. Barry had been a CSI though, and he’d known just how difficult living could be too.

“Fuck man, I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have brought this up. I was just…” Barry tried to reach Len, but the man flinched back.

“Shut up, kid. Seriously, I’m not in the fucking mood. You obviously can’t handle Danvers, and I can’t handle you and him both. Fuck off so I can deal with this, and we can work through your bullshit when I actually have the capacity to care about it,” Len ordered him. He shrugged away from Barry last attempt at grabbing him, retreating back into the restaurant while Barry floundered.

Barry wanted to follow. Danvers was his responsibility, and he needed to help him along. He shouldn’t leave it all to Len when his fellow reaper was so obviously messed up. Len had definitely done the same for him more times than he could count, but Barry couldn’t move. It was all he could do to watch Len walk away, body strung tight with the weight of his confession. Barry couldn’t move forward, and it seemed to be all Len could do.
The Cons of Being a Snart

Chapter Summary

Len and Barry work through some feelings.

Chapter Notes

Thank you a-redharlequin for helping me breaking through the weird block I had with this chapter!

Being a reaper really fucking sucked sometimes, especially when you were middle-management. After his argument with Barry, Len wanted nothing more then to go home and complain while Lisa made him watch some stupid reality TV show they both pretended he hated. Instead he was stuck trying not to look like the world’s biggest creeper hanging around the home of the mother-daughter pair who just lost Jeremiah Danvers.

“C’mon, Jeremiah. Watching them mourn you isn’t helping anyone. You can’t do anything else for them,” Len tried tonelessly for what felt like the millionth time.

Danvers rather predictably didn’t bother to respond, even though Len knew he could hear. His head sticking through the roof of the Jeep didn’t matter since it wouldn’t make a difference in this state. He was just being stubbornly petty. Once Danvers realized that Len wasn’t going to help him communicate with his wife and daughter, he’d gone completely mute.

As annoying as it was, Len couldn’t say he didn’t get where Danvers was coming from. His wife and daughter were a complete mess. They were in the house falling into pieces as much as Danvers was outside. It was painful to watch, especially after his argument with Barry earlier.

God, Len was such a fucking asshole. He didn’t know why Barry bothered with him, even if Len did have a good reason for calling the kid out. Barry’s wallowing about his dad wasn’t doing him any good, but Len shouldn’t have brought it up with him on the job.

It was hurting Barry’s performance though, and it would have seriously screwed over Jeremiah Danvers if Barry had been alone.
While his point was valid, he didn’t have a chance in hell of making it stick the moment any of Central City’s other reapers (besides Zolomon and Rosa) saw the sad doe eyes Barry had left with.

“Seriously man, this isn’t doing any good. Even if you could leave them with something, what good would it do? You’ll still be dead,” Len said. His words were still cold, but at least he managed to keep his growing annoyance out of his tone.

“What good would it do? Seriously? What the fuck is wrong with you? They are my family!” Jeremiah yelled, breaking his stoic stance through the roof of Len’s car and his longstanding silence to scream directly in Len’s face.

The move would have been a lot more intimidating if the spittle Len saw flying from Jeremiah’s mouth didn’t disappear into thin air. It was reminder that the other man couldn’t really touch a damn thing in the world around him.

Besides, Len knew he was right this time too, and he wasn’t going to fuck things up for this poor dead sap like he had with Barry. Len could make himself empathize… He may even be able to do it out loud.

“You know you’re not the first person to feel this way, right?” Len admitted, steeling himself for the worst imaginable outcome for his already shitty day. Emotional honesty was the worst. “I see it all the time. Hell, I had the same problem when I died, and trust me when I say that it’ll be better for them in the long run if you go the way you’re meant to.”

“You’re still here, asshole. You obviously didn’t follow into those bright lights you’re trying to make me go into,” Danvers pointed out, simultaneously annoyingly accurate and so very wrong Len could feel the pain of it deep inside his chest.

From the look on Danvers face, Len didn’t hide the feeling as well as he should have. Fuck, Len really should have called Lisa or Sara out here. He shouldn’t have tried to handle this himself, especially after fighting with Barry. Even on a normal day Len didn’t exactly handle this particular issue well.

He didn’t know how to talk about this with some stranger. Len hadn’t even managed it with Barry, but maybe Danvers would appreciate some of he’d held back earlier.

“My little sister was my world, and I didn’t leave her alone like I should have,” Len started, playing
with a thread on the edge of his henley to avoid looking directly at his companion. “Started before I died, and it has stayed that way for a long time after. All I ever wanted to do was keep her safe and happy, and instead I dragged her into this hell with me.”

“What do you mean?”

Danvers finally loosened up a bit, sitting down beside Len in the car rather than of standing or squatting on the passenger seat. He wanted to believe that maybe his words actually made some impact, but he couldn’t help but wonder if the man was simply tired of having his chest stick through the ceiling for the last several hours.

“I had the chance to say goodbye to her, and even though she couldn’t know it was me I took it. Told her to do whatever it took to take care of herself, and that somehow translated to her throwing herself off a moving train and into the Mississippi River. I got her stuck in this in-between nightmare with me.”

Cold, barely barely fingers gripped his as he choked, struggling to find the words to express just how badly he’d fucked up all those years ago. Len had just wanted Lisa to be safe and happy, but that was never in the cards for her life, and she had known it. Lisa had taken what he meant to be his parting words with her as an excuse to bring them back together in death.

“She didn’t get any choice in this, but you do,” Len continued, willfully ignoring the way his voice had barely come back. “You can leave. They’ll follow you, eventually, but I can guarantee that will happen a lot sooner if you hang around and get them involved in what comes next.”

Danvers seemed to deflate, sinking into himself like Len’s words had sucked the breath from his non-existent lungs. “You’re sure about that?”

His throat was suspiciously tight as he nodded, and he had no desire to figure out what would happen if he tried to speak.

“If there is a way… If it won’t hurt ‘em, try to let them know how much I love them,” pleaded Danvers.

Len chuckled darkly at the unnecessary request. “They wouldn’t be that upset if they didn’t already know.”
The dead man nodded, staring at his family one last time as lights started to flicker in the Danvers’ front yard. The merged together in a giant, flickering mass as they started to form a real shape. Danvers waited until they formed into a giant, hulking mass of circular metal before he moved forward. Even as the ship reached down for him in a perfectly formed beam of light, his eyes never left his wife and daughter.

“Huh. I did not expect him to be one of the mothership freaks.”

Sometimes Barry’s timidness gave Lisa flashbacks to her childhood in the worst possible way, and today was no exception. He was completely hunched over, shoulders drawn together like something truly horrible was going to happen to him if anyone noticed him. It was the way she’d been the whole time she was alive, and Lisa hated the reminder, especially since she knew how utterly unnecessary it was in Barry’s case.

Len wasn’t going to pleased with them for breaking this particular rule, but it wasn’t like he’d do anything other than pout in their general direction. Lisa had mastered just how to play her big brother over a century ago.

Back then her parents had been perpetual, never-ending disappointments, so it had been her big brother she’d leaned on. It had been sad at the time, but it had never bothered her too much. How could it when Lenny always to pick up the slack?

Her mother wasn’t too horrible, she supposed. Carolyn Snart had simply been weak. She had buckled under what society expected of her. She’d tried to play the perfect wife, and when she fell short she never recovered. To make things worse, the pressures of motherhood had been too much for Carolyn, so she’d pawned Lisa off on whoever was most convenient. It had never mattered to her mom of that was Lenny, their dad, or a random slave or servant. In the end, even her body had been too weak to fight off the yellow fever that finally ended her miserable existence.

More than anything else about her mother though, Lisa remembered how utterly pathetic Carolyn Snart had been when faced with her husband. Carolyn crumbled under every slight, harsh word, and blow. Lisa had always sworn to herself (and to Lenny) that she was never going to be like that. Lisa wasn’t going to cower from her own husband like a frightened child the way she and her mother did with Lewis. Lisa was going to be strong when it was her turn, no matter what dolt her father stuck her with.

Her plans changed the day Lewis first introduced her fiancé. Vandal Savage had been a monster of a
man. It didn’t matter how brave or strong Lisa was, not if she was married to him. Savage would have destroyed her.

Luckily for her, Lenny really was the world’s very best big brother, and he’d kept his promise to keep her away from Savage. Admittedly it hadn’t worked out the way they had planned, but Lisa still considered being dead with Lenny a much better alternative than a life as Mrs. Savage.

Being undead really was a pretty sweet gig most of the time anyways. If only her idiot of a brother was capable of taking some of the love and care he always treated her with and actually applying it to his other relationships, then Lisa would have been truly set.

At least Lenny had left her with the an acute understanding of all the little ways she could cheer up those around her. Sure, Lisa had adapted his methods over the years, but at the heart of things it was all the same. She knew exactly what she needed to do in order to get rid of those sad little puppy eyes Barry had been sporting since he wandered back into the warehouse without Lenny. It was the same thing Lenny had done when Carolyn died and the day she met Vandal.

“I don’t know about this, Lisa. Len’s already pissed at me. I really don’t think this is the best time to be breaking the rules,” Barry hedged nervously, pulling her both out of her thoughts and against her where their arms locked together.

It was cute he thought he could run away from this.

“Don’t be stupid, Barr. Lenny’s being an asshole. Not to mention he doesn’t own our building, so he can’t actually do anything about this. Now get that cute little ass in gear so we can pick out a kitten. The shelter closes in hour.”

She didn’t give Barry any time to protest any more, pulling him through the door with jingle.

“Hello! My husband and I are here to look at your kittens. It’s time to grow our little family,” Lisa announced as they stepped through the threshold.

Barry promptly choked on his own spit through her quick conversation with the animals shelter’s receptionist, Bettie, giving her plenty of time to charm the woman without Barry’s hesitance getting in the way. Plus, it was absolutely hilarious watching him try to puzzle through pretending to be married to the sister of the man he was desperately crushing on.
He was still fumbling over his words when they were let into the small room in the back absolutely filled to the brim with cages. In each cage there were cats of all colors, sizes, and ages. Lisa loved it here, even if the stench of cat piss was overwhelming. She could get used to the awful smell.

Well, she could get used to it for the next hour. After how much of dick Len was being, Lisa had already determined he would be taking care of the litter box for the foreseeable future, so she didn’t need to worry about the horrid smell for longer than it took for her and Barry to pick a kitten.

“Oh my god, honey! I want them all,” Lisa announced, pulling Barry towards the closest kitten-filled cage.

“Er… Lisa,” Barry choked out, face brightening with blush even further as he stumbled over what exactly he should be calling her. Kid was so cute sometimes she wanted to pinch his little cheeks. “I think we should stick to one.”

Despite his words, Barry already had a small black kitten in each hand, and another feisty little calico with a creepy grin nibbling on his ear from it’s perch on Barry’s shoulder. Lisa really did want to take them all, she thought wistfully as she picked up the last squealing little fluff ball from the back of the still-opened cage.

One for each of them would be sufficient though. If she tried to take them all Lenny really would throw a fit.

“If you say so,” Lisa agreed complacently, already knowing as she spoke that she was going to be getting her way. She didn’t have to argue.

Barry was obviously smitten with the two kittens playing with his fingers, but she could tell from the way he was laughing and nuzzling into the cutie on his shoulder that it was the one he was taking home. In the same vein, she wasn’t leaving without the kitten in her arms.

The animal was older than she planned for, around six months old if she had to guess. The poor creature was also deceptively thin underneath the thick layer of white fur. Lisa loved it already. It was even fluffier than the whipped icing on cupcake she’d bullied Barry into buying her on the way.

“I see you’re already having some luck,” chuckled Bettie.
“This is Cupcake,” she informed Barry and Bettie, telling them her new pet’s name while she snuggled the sweet little kitten to her cheek. “He’s coming with us. Babe, you should pick one too, and then we can start on the paperwork. Unless you want all three of those little cuties.”

“Cupcake is actually a she, but I’m glad you like her so much! I’m going to go get you two copies of the adoption paperwork, and you can meet out front once Barry chooses,” Bettie told her, running a hand along Cupcake’s fluffy little paw before she went back through the door she’d just entered.

Bettie completely ignored Barry’s flailing as she retreated back to the front room. Lisa knew she liked that girl.

Barry was staring straight at Lisa mouth flapping uselessly. The kid was such a damn sap, he was probably trying to wait for Bettie to leave before arguing against rescuing kittens. Not that he had any hope of success, but Barry was sure to put up some token protest anyways.

“Lisa…” Barry started, helpless staring at his arms as he pulled all three kittens into his chest. “We really shouldn’t get more than one. We haven’t talked this over with the guys… or Rosa.”

Lisa didn’t bother with a proper response, simply lifting a single eyebrow. He was already using the rest of the Rogues as an excuse. Lisa had thought it would take him at least a minute to get there. Hell, the dumbass was trying to argue that Rosa deserved to be asked, and there was no way he was actually concerned about their bitchy new roommate.

This was going to be even easier than she thought.

Barry sighed deeply in the face of her raised eyebrow. “I guess two wouldn’t be too bad… if you are really sure Len and the rest of the Rogues won’t mind.”

Cupcake smacked Barry with Lisa’s help, but she was stuck doing the eye roll by herself. The pinched little face he made at least let her know Barry got the message.

“Most of the Rogues are going to be thrilled,” Lisa reminded Barry.

It was a mistake, she realized as soon as the words left her mouth. Most of the Rogues really would be pumped to have the kittens around, but Barry was too sweet to forget about her dick brother.
What a fucking sap.

“...and really, Barry, who cares about the rest. Lenny won’t have a foot to stand on about the no pets things until it’s too late after being such a dick, and nobody cares what the princess thinks besides Sam. Not that we know Rosa will care either way.”

If this was a kill shelter Lisa wouldn’t be having any trouble, but at least they were crowded enough she still had the humanitarian leg to stand on. Of course if this was a kill shelter than she really would need to take all the cats, so it was probably for the best.

It took at least two solid minutes of snuggling each of the three kittens in his arms before Barry spoke up again. Lisa was struggling not to laugh. She could see the debate he was having inside his own head, going back and forth about the fairness involved, his newfound love for the kittens in his arms, and the horror of leaving any of them behind.

“It’s Rosa’s home too. Maybe we should ask what she thinks about cats before we do this, or at least only get one today before coming back.”

“She’s the one who stole your extra pan of peaches and marshmallows last night,” Lisa told him happily, smirking just enough to sell the story.

It wasn’t difficult. The memory of her midnight snack really did bring a smile to her face. Barry really should know better than to leave his things in a fridge he shares with profession thieves. There was a damn good reason the rest of the Rogues had mini fridges in their bedrooms.

“Who cares what that bitch thinks. We’re getting two cats!”
Barry had spent a significant portion of his time - mostly before he died - imagining a beautiful women in his bed wearing just a sports bra and athletic shorts. The reality of the situation did not live up his expectations.

“Your cat keeps smiling creepily at me,” Lisa complained as she struggled to force the poor kitten in a monstrosity of sweater - a fluffy pink thing that was completely covered in animal-safe glitter - that had been too small to fit Cupcake.

His poor kitten was trying to resist, but Barry doubted he’d have any luck. They were sitting cross-legged, with the poor little ball of fur firmly held between Lisa’s thighs as she wrangled him into the sweater.

Barry knew how the poor creature felt. He’d tried to resist Lisa’s attempts to dress him too, but his entire wardrobe still ended up being picked out by her and the other female reapers of Central City. Lisa had even switched his underwear from boxers to boxer-briefs.

The little kitten didn’t stand a chance. Barry was tempted to help, but there was no way he was going to shift Lisa’s attention to him.

“It’s just his face. Little guy hasn’t stopped smiling like that. I think it’s some for of genetic defect - like Grumpy Cat,” Barry informed Lisa, cuddling Cupcake into his chest since Lisa had stolen his cuddle partner. At least this way he could shield one of the cats from Lisa’s crazy, at least for a while longer.
Barry had a feeling Cupcake had already figured it out. The poor creature did not like the blue sweater she’d been forced into any more than she had liked the pink one that was too small.

His cuddling seemed to be helping though. It’d only been five minutes since Lisa threatened him into making her “feel pretty” in her new sweater - whatever the hell that meant. If cuddles were what it took, Barry didn’t mind.

“I don’t think that your cat is grumpy, dummy.” Predictably, Lisa rolled her eyes as she spoke. “We’ve got the opposite problem, Barr. It’s creepily cheery, but we’ll work through it. Even if the little creep does end up being grumpy, who cares? He’ll fit in great with the rest of our sorry lot, and Shawna’ll inevitably try to steal him. You know how she feels about grumps. It’s the only reason Mark ever gets laid.”

Barry laughed with Lisa, trying to keep quiet chuckles since she was making fun of their roommates. It didn’t make a difference in the face of to her loud, body-shaking guffaws. He was sure he’d get some snorts from her once he showed her the meme.

For all Lisa liked to act like a delicate lady, the moments she let out of her roughness were always Barry’s favorite. They made her feel real, or at least as real as possible for the scary dead woman currently dominating the world of kitten fashion through sheer stubbornness.

“No it’s… you know what? Doesn’t matter,” Barry changed his mind as Cupcake trapped his hand with her adorable little face. He could introduce Lisa to Grumpy Cat when he wasn’t being used a human pillow. “I just meant his face always looks like that. I’m think I’m going to name him Leonardo. For the painter y’know, like Mona Lisa’s smile, but more masculine for a little dude.”

Lisa’s indelicate laughter went from almost completely tampered off to full-force once again. He scowled her her direction, knocking her hands away from the poor tortured cat. It wasn’t like Lisa had any room to judge. She’d named a her cat Cupcake. Leonardo was much more dignified.

“I’m sorry… it’s not… It’s a great name!” Lisa forced out. It would have been much more convincing if she hadn’t snorted during her apology. “Giant fucking mouthful for such a tiny creature, but we can work around that. It’s just that Lenny is going to hate it. You should’ve seen the temper-tantrum he had when I told him I was going to name my first son after him at 11 years old, and I can assure you that he hasn’t changed his mind in the century since. He’s always hated any version of Leonard. Says it reminds him of our dad.”

Barry raised an eyebrow at her, gesturing in the general direction of a squirming Leonardo. She still hadn’t stopped shaking, and Leonardo used her distraction to escape. In the ensuing scuffle between
Lisa and Leonardo he almost lost his favorite lamp, but as long as little Leonardo stayed away from the tapestry hiding what was really on his wall, he wasn’t going to intervene.

Watching the kitten triumph over Lisa was worth her potential ire - at least if hiding counted. Barry figured it should when Lisa Snart was your opponent. There has been several times he would have hidden under his bed to stay out of her way if Lisa wouldn’t have punished him for it later.

Lisa did not appreciate her loss or Barry’s amusement with it. She twitched her leg out as soon as she re-joined him on the bed. She kicked was faster than he could scamper out of the way, and her sock-covered foot managing a shocking amount of force where it hit his shin.

“You wanted to name your kid after Len? I guess little Leo is going to have to do instead,” Barry brought them back around to Leonardo’s new name as he rubbed his surely-bruised shin.

Len was already going to have a conniption fit about them getting kittens, so he might as well go for broke. Barry liked the name, and if it happened to further the revenge side of his unexpected kitten acquisition then, as far as Barry was concerned, the name was perfect.

“You’ve got every right to be mad at Lenny...” Lisa replied with a frown.

He cut her off. Barry was having a nice time with Lisa, and the last thing he wanted to do was ruin it because she couldn’t stop herself from defending her dickbag brother’s temper tantrums. “No shit I’ve got every right to be mad. Your brother is an asshole.”

“Still, our father is a sensitive topic for Lenny, and I’d appreciate it if you could cut him some slack. Dad...” Lisa hesitated, wiggling her way under Barry’s arm and stealing Cupcake back from him.

It was disturbing how quickly Lisa’s mood shifted. Barry would do anything to make her smile come back, no matter how likely he was to be trampled in her wake. He didn’t even fight her to get Cupcake back, even though she scared away his cat.

The gratefully look she shot him as she cuddled Cupcake to her chest made it worth it.

“Lewis Snart wasn’t a good man. We don’t really like to think about him if we can help him, so when we get forced to we tend to react strongly. Lenny turns in a rampaging jackass with major control issues, as you got a lovely glimpse of earlier, and I... I turn back into the scared little girl that
always needed her big brother to come save her.”

While it wasn’t his bravest thought ever, Barry couldn’t help but wish he could hide behind Leo’s affection the same way Lisa was with Cupcake. He’d been itching to know what the real story was with Len and Lisa’s father since Len breakdown with Jeremiah Danvers, but somehow hearing things from Lisa felt wrong. Then again, silencing her did too. Lisa was his friend just as much as Len was, so why did it feel so wrong hearing their story from her?

“Shit. I’m sorry Lisa. Len said earlier how much of a jackass he was, and I didn’t even think about how you might be… I can change his name if it bothers you. Who says Mona Lisa can’t be a boys name too?”

“It’s fine, sweetie. You don’t have to change his name. I really do like the name Leonardo for your little freak of a cat, and Len’s enough of a geek he will too once he gets past the whole kitten thing. Arts always been his favorite thing to steal even though turn around is shit.”

He shuddered, trying to forget the new nugget for information about the Rogues criminal careers. The Rogues needed to stop dropping all this criminal information around him. Just because he stopped actively arguing with them, didn’t mean he changed his opinion of their chosen “profession.”

“I don’t want to know about your criminal exploits. Willful ignorance is a beautiful thing,” he reminded Lisa for what felt like the millionth time.

Even the particular eye roll Lisa responded with disturbingly familiar. Every single one of the Rogues had the same one when he showed discomfort with breaking the law.

“God Barr, you’re not a cop anymore.”

“I’ve never been a cop, you harpy. I worked in a lab,” he reminded her, tickling her side just enough to torment her, while not angering Lisa enough for him to incur another frightfully strong kick to his shin.

“Doesn’t mean you weren’t a fucking pig,” Lisa teased between her squeals, wriggling away from his fingers and making Cupcake meow with frustration at the movement. “Don’t worry though, we’ve mostly forgiven you for it.”
“Thanks,” Barry drawled sarcastically. “Seriously though, Lisa, I don’t want to cause anything between you and Len. I can change the name. I don’t want to… Len said your dad killed you both. Len shouldn’t have to be reminded of that every time he sees my kitten. I should just change Leonardo’s name, and not rise to Len’s level of douchebaggery.”

Lisa frowned dramatically at him before snuggling her face into Cupcake’s fluffy belly. Lisa started to speak in her fur, her words muffled but not obscured. “That little cutie pie isn’t going to be a problem, no matter what you name him. Lewis wasn’t the one who killed us either, although I’m not surprised Lenny feels that way. It was my fault we both died, although Lewis certainly pushed it along.”

“Don’t say that. I’m sure you didn’t…”

“It was,” she interrupted him, pulling herself up to glare weakly at Barry. “And I’m okay with it. Honestly, most of the time I’m grateful for it. As horrible as it is sometimes, being dead has worked out of us. There are a lot worse gigs than being a reaper.”

“Seriously? You don’t have to try and make me feel better,” scoffed Barry, raising a disbelieving eyebrow in her direction.

Barry should have stopped her from talking. He didn’t want to know. He had been imagining some truly horrible things since Len first mentioned his father, but the darkness spreading from Lisa’s eyes was haunting. Whatever he had been picturing wouldn’t hold a candle to the real thing.

Lisa wrinkled her nose at him, seemingly ignoring how disturbed he was in favor of swatting his arm. The woman was like a damned hawk - she must have sense his attention drifting. “I know you hate being a reaper, but that doesn’t mean the rest of us do. It’s a hell of a lot better than my other option. Mine and Lenny’s dad was going to marry me off to, well, an awful man. Vandal was a mean drunk, not unlike Lewis to be honest, but it was publicized enough that Len was worried about what was wrong with the man that wasn’t being said.”

Holy shit… What in the hell was wrong with Lewis Snart? Working as a CSI, Barry had seen some truly horrible people, but he somehow never felt such hatred for any of. Except the Butcher, but that man killed him and Patty, so Barry didn’t think that counted.

“Didn’t help that two of wives had already died, supposedly of illness. Lenny wasn’t any more convinced of his stories than the rest of the town was. Everyone in Mobile County knew that man was guilty as sin, but no one could prove it, and our dad just didn’t care. So Len took me away in the middle of the night a week before my wedding. The train we were on made it all the way to Central
City before anyone caught on too. We almost made it too… From Central we were supposed to get on a river boat to New York, but we never made it to the shipyard.”

… and Barry was wrong. His hatred for Lewis Snart was growing by the second. If he wasn’t positive the man had been dead for some time, Barry would have been tempted to send him to hell himself.

Barry suddenly, vividly, wished he had the power to run back through time to rip Lewis Snart soul from his body. That monster deserved far worse than what he’d forced his children into. He had the fortune to have two kind, kick ass children and he literally sold their lives away.

No wonder Len had such issues with dads. Henry Allen had his flaws, but he loved Barry. Besides, Barry always had Joe to pick up the slack. Len...

Fuck, Len was going to be so pissed. Not only did they ignore his order about pet in the warehouse, but he’d gone nosing into Len’s past as well. Barry was going to end up in some deep part of hell when he finally go to the next stage of things.

“You don’t have to tell me this. I’ll drop it, promise.”

“What, you think Lenny should be telling you this?” Lisa guessed correctly. At his guilty look, she leaned into him further, shoving him with a painfully boney shoulder in the process. “Because he won’t, and I don’t think that matters. This is my story too, and - as my friend - I want you to share it with you.”

Barry nodded. Apparently he should not be trusted to speak. He was certainly screwing it up enough.

“The station master at recognized us from a flier sent fliers all along the railways,” Lisa remembered.

Her eyes glazed over as she continued her story, completely disregarding Barry’s supportive cursing. Barry wasn’t sure if she didn’t hear him or if she was ignoring him. With Lisa, it really could be either.

“... and he gathered the townsfolk to stop us from boarding the railway to New York. They… those fucking bastards form a mob to kill him, and forced me on a boat back to Mobile. The guy that
started training Lenny ended up with my name when I threw myself in the water on the Mississippi three days later, Rip showed up about week later to supervise until we were split into divisions, and the rest is history.”


There was no point in crying, but it didn’t seem to stop his eyes from tearing up anyways. It wasn’t his story, and Len and Lisa had lived this such a long time ago - literally lifetimes. Surely they were over it by now.

Just like he’d be over how the Butcher killed him in a hundred years.

(He’d hopefully be over how the Butcher killed him in a hundred years.)

“Stop that,” Lisa ordered, elbowing him in the side as though she could drive her point into him with the world’s boniest elbows. “If you cry, I’m going to cry, and I’m so fucking done letting this upset me. It was a long time ago. You can’t do anything more to help Lenny and me than we can to help you.”

“But that’s… This is such shit!”

She shrugged at his words, once again digging her bony elbow into his side. Somehow, even though it was (probably) an accident this time, Lisa managed to make it even more painful by hitting the exact same spot.

If he was still alive, Barry would definitely have a bruise there.

“We are the External Influences division. You may be new, but you’ve still had enough jobs by now to guess that most of us don’t exactly die nicely. It’s pretty much a part of this gig to come with a shitty death. Hell, some of Natural Causes came from some fucking horrible deaths too. You should get Mick or Ray to tell you about there’s some day.”

If Lisa thought Mick and Ray’s deaths were bad, Barry did not want to know about it. He already felt the need to drown his sorrows in Lisa’s hidden wine stash after hearing about the Snart’s siblings deaths.
“I fucking hate this,” Barry sighed, burying his head in Lisa’s hair as he pulled her further into his side, bony elbows be damned. He had a feeling she needed the closeness as much as he did. “None of this is… Well, of course it’s not fair. No one deserves all this reaper crap, especially not you guys. The Rogues are good people, even if you are undead criminals. You take care of this city when people are at their most vulnerable.”

“I don’t know,” Lisa said with an overdramatic sigh, giggling slightly as she spoke. “Sam kinda does. Dumbass died from drilling a hole in his own head chasing the ‘ultimate high.’ Doesn’t really matter though, does it? We’re still stuck like this anyways.”

Barry snorted in to Lisa’s hair, ignoring her outraged shriek. Before she could get him back, the door slammed open.

“Did I hear my... Kittens!” Sam hollered, jumping onto the floor as he forced his way into his room. Barry was sincerely worried about the man for a minute - especially after hearing how he died - until Sam rolled over with Leo firmly clutched to his chest.

Although he felt horrible for it, Barry was thankful for the interruption. He and Lisa needed a pick-me-up, and Len was probably too mad still to make them peaches and marshmallows. Sam might be an idiot, but at least he was funny.

“Len’s going to pitch a fit,” Shawna announced, stepping over Sam. Despite the obvious disapproval in her tone, she collapsed immediately beside Sam to give Leo scritches the second she had the space.

“Who cares what that grump thinks? This isn’t about the job, so he’s not in charge,” Rosa sniffed, primly walking around the duo on the floor and sitting on corner of his bed with a look of absolute mortification. Barry would have been offended, but she looked the same way every time she sat on any piece of furniture in their home.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but the princess is right for once. Lenny doesn’t get to dictate all our choices,” Lisa concurred.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you vamptigergal for being an awesome beta and getting this back to me so quickly and to Candycanepuppy for little Leo's name. Hope you enjoyed!
Guilt Waffles

Chapter Notes

At this point I don't think I have an excuse for not updating... Sorry everyone, and Merry Christmas!

“What'll it be, boys?” Gideon asked them with a her usual sunny smile only moments after his butt hit the slightly sticky red vinyl that coated all the booths at Der Waffle Haus. Gideon was already pouring two cups of coffee.

Len hadn’t believed in God for a long time, but if he did he would be blessing Gideon’s quick service.

Mick grunted out an outrageously large order without consulting Len. He would’ve complained, but Mick had guessed what he wanted anyways. They’d been friends for way too long, Len thought grimly.

Der Waffle Haus did have the best chocolate chip waffles in Central City, and after a day like today Len needed to indulge himself. He probably didn’t deserve it, but that had never stopped him anyways.

“What with the face, sourpuss? You are not the one who should be pouting,” Sara told him as she slid into the seat beside him, pinning him into the booth as she roughly softly elbowed her way in.

Fuck, he was really not in the mood for this. Sara’s particular brand of self-righteous bullshit was sure to push his burgeoning headache into a full-fledged migraine. Len really wished their healing abilities covered migraines, but he guessed even reaper healing powers were bound to fail when confronted with a woman like Sara.

It seemed everything bent or broke when confronted with Sara Lance - pretty blonde nurses excluded - so why should his headaches be any different?

“Fuck off, Sara. I’m not in the mood.”
Sara, naturally for her, ignored him. Apparently his coffee was more appealing, considering she took several long swallows. He wanted to complain, but he had done the same thing to her too many times to count.

“I’m gonna laugh when she kicks your ass for that later,” Mick told him, already chuckling to himself.

Len stuck his tongue out. Unsurprising, Mick did not seem to care. Mick was a dick.

“Please, she was going to kick my ass no matter what. The girls have all adopted Barry, and since I pissed him off I was already put on all of their shit list.”

“Pissed him off? You didn’t piss him off you…” Sara started, her pale skin turner increasingly red with each word she forced herself not to yell.

“Here’s you a coffee, sweetie. Did you want anything to eat to?” Gideon interrupted them, placing yet another cup of coffee on their table.

Sara’s complexion was suddenly evening out as she smiled charmingly in the way she always did with beautiful women, flirting without intent as she explained that Mick had already ordered for her. At least that explained while Mick had ordered so much damned food before. The bastard was scheming against him.

His friends were the worst.

Len probably should have been pissed off. Instead, he was too busy suppressing his pride with their actions. Either Mick had become a much better liar and meddler when he wanted something - a skill all reapers should have perfected - or Sara had really stepped into Rip’s shoes and learned to control the Natural Causes reapers with unprecedented skill, not that being more competent than Rip wasn’t exactly a difficult thing to accomplish.

He wasn’t sure how, but he knew that both options would be equally horrifying for him in the long run.

Regardless, he cared about them both too much to really complain. It’s not that Len didn’t deserve their ire anyways. He’d royally fucked up, and Barry was once again paying the price of his anger. It
was only fair someone else inflicted some torment back onto him.

Sara smirked at his obvious irritation. The bitch was probably sensing his internal conflicts. She pulled out her flask as she gloated silently, taking healthy swig of what smelled like whiskey for herself. “Well then, I guess I won’t be sharing this then. Lisa was right, you don’t deserve it.”

Despite her protest, she still poured some into Len’s cup partially drained cup. He suddenly felt like even more of dick. Sara - in her particularly annoying way - was trying to be helpful, and he was snapping at yet another person who didn’t deserve it.

“Hey now!” Mick protested. “I’m the one that called you here. I’m deserve the booze way more than that asshole.”

Sara rolled her eyes, but she didn’t give him shit for complaining. She even shared her precious booze. Their silver-tongued vixen was saving all of her self-righteous anger for Len, apparently.

Great.

“I hate you both.”

“Shouldn’t you hate Lisa more? At least we wanted to get you drunk,” Sara pointed out.

Len had to bite his tongue to keep from retorting. Suicidal tendencies may have ran in their family, but asking for a brutal ass-kicking did not. Len wasn’t stupid enough to say anything against his baby sister. Not that he would anyways. Lisa had enough of that bullshit to last her lifetime, she didn’t need him lashing out at her too.

“Where is Lisa anyways? Figured she’d be with you. She usually lives for pointing out my screw ups,” Len muttered, fiddling with the mug that held now Irish Coffee. Sara may have been a pushy, but at least she had the decency to get him drunk while she was prodding him.

“She’s with Barry getting supplies for the new kittens you’re letting them keep as part of your apology,” Sara informed him, sharing a smirk with Mick as she watched for his reaction.
“They’re getting a what?!” Len snapped.

The entire restaurant paused to look. Len went stock still other than a fierce glare he directed around the restaurant until everyone went back to their food, work, or - in the case of the jumpy group of preteen boys who always sat in the tables by the bathrooms after school - fleeing in terror.

Unfortunately his companions weren’t as easily cowed.

“Yeah, Lisa’s new little lady is freaking adorable! The perma-smile Leo’s got going is kinda creepy, but Lisa assures me it’s less off-putting in person,” Sara told him.

“Lisa didn’t tell me that they named the cat after Len. You’re in for it this time, buddy.” Mick told him with a downright gleeful expression.

Len tried to stop himself from questioning the name, but he couldn’t stop himself from tensing. Lisa must be even more pissed than he assumed if she was pulling something like that. It’d been over a century since she’d brought up something like that, and while he didn’t like it any more this time he’d also had time to understand that he wasn’t going to win this fight.

Mick, the bastard, was still gloating, but Len didn’t bother arguing. He’d had been pushing for a pet for so long he was probably pissing himself with excitement.

If he knew what was good for him he’d try put a stop to this, but he already knew the second he made it home and had his best friend, sister, and Barry were all begging him to keep kittens they were already playing with that he was going to fold. There was no point in trying to save face now. Caving to Barry and Lisa’s puppy dog eyes would be way more embarrassing.

“It was Barry who named the little guy, not Lisa. And he’s not named for Len either. It’s Leo as in Leonardo DiVinci,” Sara informed them both. He would’ve thought she was punishing him again, but the comforting hand she placed on his knee let him know he must have been a little too open with his reaction. “You’d think a guy in your line of work would get an art joke.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” Mick bit back, sharp and pointed syllables punctuated by his angry stirring. Even once Mick was through blending he didn’t stop glaring at Sara, although it wasn’t nearly as poignant over the rim of his large, bright blue coffee mug.
Thankful the attention was finally off of him, Len allowed himself to relax back into his seat. He even had a real smile for Gideon when she delivered their dinners and an obscene amount of waffles to their table.

Admittedly, he would have fake one for her anyways. Len wasn’t stupid enough to piss Gideon off. He seen what she’d to done Rip after he’d made the mistake at snapping at her last fall. Len wasn’t about to start eating burnt garbage for the next year. He didn’t know how Gideon had convinced the chefs to serve whatever crap she’d given Rip, and he didn’t want to find out either.

Digging in to his waffles with a pleased groan, Len could almost forget everything. The subtle hint of cane syrup they’d serve him always brought Len back to his childhood.

There were few things from that time Len thought of fondly, but his mother’s cooking had always been one of them. She may have many issues with life in America after her upbringing, but her ability to feed him hadn’t suffered.

“You should really save some of that moaning for Barry,” Mick joked as he tried to steal a bite of his waffles.

Len stole Sara’s fork to stab his hand. Sara, bless her, didn’t seem to mind Mick’s cursing or the blood on her fork. She started on her ice cream instead so Mick could dig the prongs from his hand and the table beneath it.

“Really though, Len, what’s fucking stopping you? Maybe if you’d finally fuck ‘em you’d stop being such an ass.”

“Give it a rest, Mick. That’s not why Len’s kept from making a move on Barry.”

Len glared at his waffles, steadfastly ignoring his friend’s prodding. If he let them keep going, he was sure they’d piss each other off enough to stop bother him. It was pretty much a given with Sara and Mick.

“Really Lance? You know what that stupid bastard is thinking?”

“Not always, but I do this time! I’ve been where you and Barry are before. I know it’s a difficult, but you can find a way to make it worth. For the two of you, it’s probably be worth it,” Sara told him
encouragingly, practically shoving his coffee in his hands.

Len knew it was a ploy to get him drunk enough to listen to her. He also really did not care enough
to deny the drink. He could really use a good ole drunken stupor right about now. Mick would keep
him from doing anything too stupid, no matter what Sara was trying to pull.

“I know you’ve been hung up before, Sara. We’ve all seen you giving googly eyes to that little nurse
of yours,” Len sneered, trying to steer the conversation back on her.

“Not what she means though, is it? You’re talking about your time in Starling, ain’t you? When you
were screwing Oliver?”

Len had to force himself not to spit out his drink. And to stop himself from high fiving Sara. Oliver
was an stuck up prick, but he was also incredibly attractive. Not to mention that he had also been her
boss in Starling before she and Ray had transferred to Central City when Star City’s population
dropped so dramatically in the 90s.

“How do you know… Oh my god, I’m going to kill Ray. That little ninny can’t keep his mouth
shut!”

“You don’t talk about Ray like that. I don’t give a shit what problems you are having.”

Placing a grounding hand on Sara’s, Len interrupted what was sure to be a nasty reply. “So you and
Queen, huh? Didn’t know your standards were that low, Sara.”

“You should’ve. She used to screw you, didn’t she?”

“Fuck off Mick. It’s not like it was the same thing. Len and I may have fucked, but it’s not like there
were feelings in it. Oliver and I were... seriously involved. For years too, you utter dick. I… we
loved each other.”

“Didn’t that end with you transferring city’s and divisions though?” Len asked Sara.

“I didn’t leave Starling because of Ollie. We broke up because we just weren’t in love in that way,
but that doesn’t the risk wasn’t worth it. We may not have been in love, but we do love each other.”

“Whatever,” Mick cut, rolling his eyes. “I still think this is a load of shit. Len, you’re never going to stop coming up with excuses on why you don’t deserve Barry. I never have with Ray, and Sara certainly hasn’t with that sweet little nurse of hers. But don’t you think the kid might deserve to get to be with you, if that’s what he wants?”

And that was… Len really didn’t know. He didn’t deserve Barry, that much was definitely true, but Barry certainly deserved whatever - whoever - he wanted.


“Holy shit, you broke Len,” Sara teased him gleefully.

“Fuck off, Lance,” Len sneered as he got up.

He stumbled, falling roughly into the cook as he yelled at the finicky man in the booth behind him. Walking away, Len didn’t let anything stop him. Not line cooks mocking statements, Mick and Sara’s continued teasing, or the screaming the started as he reached the end of the block.

It took seconds for the Der Waffle Haus’s worst line cook to appear beside him again, but Len didn’t let that stop him either. He had a job to do, and, unlike Barry Allen, Len wasn’t going to let anything get in its way.

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