# The Truth Out of a Lie

**Summary**

Barry Allen didn't stop his mother's murder, nor did he prevent Eobard Thawne | Harrison Wells from returning to the 23rd century - and thus, the Singularity never went critical. He's left alone with his grief and his guilt for the feelings he can deny and he can't erase. Eobard Thawne returns home, but finds that the life he'd longed for is no longer the life he wants. And then he discovers a disaster in the timeline, one that only further meddling can fix.

**Notes**

Ahh, where do I begin with these notes?

The origins of this story rest - as so many do these days - with an innocent (or perhaps not so innocent) suggestion by kyele. I had one square left on a Gen Prompt bingo card and thought about something quick and dirty (not sharing the prompt ATM because it's very spoilery) and of course, Kyele flipped the switch and suggested something far more intriguing. And that set the synapses firing, and what was supposed to be a 1000-word fic became the origin story for the entire EoBarry Revealed series.
It was also originally written for the Slashorific 2016 Challenge, for the prompt: "A desperate disease requires a dangerous remedy.” Guy Fawkes

Although I am publishing this in chapters on Wednesdays and Sundays, the story is complete and will be approximately 160k and 40 or so chapters, so buckle up - it's going to be a bumpy ride.

Note - additional tags will be added as the story progresses.

Cover art by kanarek13.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Truth Out of a Lie

by Elrhiarhodan
June 2015

Joe hated that Barry had moved into that huge house - Eobard Thawne's glass and steel fortress of solitude - and that he was living there all by himself. Caitlin and Ronnie, Iris and Eddie, Martin Stein – none of Barry’s friends even tried to pretend that they understood his choice. They didn't accept it and they didn't stop trying to get Barry to move out of there. It couldn't be healthy, they said, to live alone in such a strange house. To live in the house that had belonged to his mother's murderer.

Only Cisco kept his thoughts to himself, but Barry could still read the questions, the concern, in his eyes. He wondered, sometimes, if Cisco saw something that made him keep quiet. Barry half hoped he did, and at the same time, desperately wished he didn't.

But Barry needed this place. Haunted by his failures, he needed his privacy. And more than that, he needed the ghosts of memory that lived here.

He made the choice not to save his mother's life. He’d made the choice not to stop the Reverse-Flash. The only thing he’d managed to do right was keep the Singularity from getting out of control, from ripping apart the universe.

That was something, he supposed.

It was a lot, he knew.

Part of Barry knew that shutting out his friends and his family, cutting himself emotionally off from the team that had supported him through all of the terrible times, was cruel and selfish. But then, he'd learned cruelty and selfishness from a master. From Harrison Wells. No, from Eobard Thawne.

The Harrison Wells he’d thought he’d known had never really existed, and yet Barry couldn't give him up. He couldn't sleep without replaying memories of the man encouraging him, telling him he could do the impossible, treating him like a valued friend. Maybe, even, treating him like something more.

All lies, of course. Lies told for reasons Barry didn't understand, and would never have the chance to comprehend. Wells – Thawne – was gone. Back to the future.

A future that didn't include him.

As soon as the thought crossed his mind, Barry tried to erase it. That was a fruitless, pointless endeavor. One he'd tried a thousand times before and failed with every attempt.

Barry hated himself, hated how he kept longing for the impossible, longing for a dream. Longing for the worst nightmare of his life.

You love the man who killed your mother. And worse, for the first time in your life, you feel desire. For the man who killed your mother.

And yet that man – whoever he had really been – had given Barry the opportunity to undo all the pain, to fix all the wrongness in his life. But Barry hadn't taken that chance. Instead, he'd listened from behind a closed door as the knife had plunged into his mother's heart. He’d held her as she died, as the lightning and the shadows left the room. And then he’d gone home to 2015, to a world without Harrison Wells, without Eobard Thawne. To a world filled with so many questions that could never be answered, and too many memories of shadows and lightning.
With those thoughts echoing in his head, Barry would spend his nights staring up through the skylight in the bedroom he’d claimed, the one once occupied by Eobard Thawne, watching the journey of the moon across the sky, playing hide and seek with the clouds. Or on clear, moonless nights, he clocked the passage of the stars and wondered if Eobard Thawne, a monster yet to be born, might someday regret the death of a woman he’d never known.

Time didn't heal any of Barry’s wounds, but it did shave some of the jagged edges off the pain. Three months passed and Barry slowly managed to climb out of the pit of grief he'd dug for himself. He took solace in his friends' happiness. Ronnie Raymond and Martin Stein flew in and out, leaving happy wives behind. Iris and Eddie were officially members of Team Flash, which was a nice change from having to keep secrets from his best friend and her soon-to-be husband.

Joe still worried about Barry’s decision to live in that house in the forest, and had only recently stopped nagging him to move out, to move home, back to the West home, back with his family. Cisco still looked at him with questions in his eyes.

Barry still managed to ignore them both.

And in the empty silence of the night, Barry watched the stars and remembered. He tried not to take pleasure in the memories, because it had to be a sickness to love and want someone like that. To love and want the man who destroyed his life as casually as swatting a fly.

But he kept hearing Harrison's voice, Thawne's voice. Telling Barry how much he hated him, but refusing to give a reason for that hatred. Barry could not stop remembering those eyes – not the blazing red of the enemy speedster – but the deep, unearthly blue, magnified and enhanced by the lighting in the Pipeline cell.

It hadn’t just been the color. For an infinitesimally brief moment, he’d seen something else there, something beyond the smug satisfaction of achieving a long-held goal. Barry had seen grief and longing and regret.

Or more likely, it had just been his own imagination, wishfully constructing the improbable to assuage the endless longing for the impossible.

Six months after Thawne had gone back to the future, an attorney came and delivered a message. Not in a bottle, not in a letter, but on a data drive. Another layer of Barry’s soul was peeled away as he watched the video that Thawne had left for him:

"You know, when I realize that in all those years helping raise you, we were never truly enemies, Barry. I'm not the thing you hate. And so, I want to give you the thing that you want most. It won't matter. You'll never be truly happy, Barry Allen, trust me. I know you."

The confession that followed had left Barry numb, beyond the instant happiness of knowing his father would soon be free.

Securing Henry's freedom didn't take long. A week and change and his father was released from prison, his name cleared. But Henry didn't stay. Barry understood why, and as selfish as it seemed, he was glad. Barry didn't want his father to witness this despair. He didn't want to have to explain why he was living in a murderer's house, sleeping in a murderer's bed, whispering a murderer's name in the aching silence of the night.

The months added up to become a year, and Barry did his job. He danced with Iris at her wedding. Hell, he even danced with Eddie, too. He did his best to smile for the photographers and was happy for his friends.
He had a life, by all accounts, a good one. He had a job he loved, the satisfaction of knowing his father was a free man. He had good friends and even if he couldn't really feel anything, he was trying to build a new life - one that the didn't center on mysteries and lies and wrong choices.

And sometimes, he actually tried to date, with the inevitable help of Iris and Eddie. There was a new officer on Joe's Meta-Human Task Force, a woman who should have been perfect for him. But she wasn't Iris, she wasn't Eobard, and it all felt kind of sad and hopeless. But no one knew that and Eddie, who had become as close of a friend as Cisco and Caitlin, had said something to Iris, who had pushed him to ask Patty out.

"She'll be good for you, Barry. Eddie tells me she's smart and really a bit of a nerd - that she's read all of your case reports and thinks you're work as a CSI is legendary."

Barry wasn't so sure about that. Be he did admit, "I've had coffee with her, she is nice."

"There, see - you've already gotten over the first hurdle." Iris pushed at his shoulder like they were both sixteen and talking about potential dates for the junior prom. "You like her."

Barry shrugged, and repeated, "She's nice. But I don't think …"

Iris cut him off. "Don't think, Barry. Do. Ask her out. You need someone in your life, you need to get out and be young and stupid."

Barry, helpless as ever in the face of a determined Iris, asked Patty out and watched himself lead her down the path to an emotional dead end. He'd known that any romantic relationship with Patty would was going to be an exercise in cruelty, that he'd end of disappointing her. He was demisexual and absent a strong emotional connection, he never desire her - no matter how smart and beautiful she was.

Logically, Barry knew that such a connection could be forged, given time and intent, but he didn't want to make that connection. He'd loved Iris, but that had always been an impossibility, even more so now that she'd started planning her wedding to Eddie and had asked Barry if he'd been her "man of honor". Yes, he'd lost her a long time ago, but this made it final. As final as Eobard returning to a future that did not contain Barry Allen.

His heart was broken and he just wanted to be left alone with his memories and his dreams of what might have been. He felt like an empty husk, hollowed out and ruined by his own choices.

:::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

2016

The new year brought a whole bunch of new and more powerful meta-humans, mostly into the new wing at Iron Heights.

But there was one that still gave him nightmares.

Cisco had named her Scopolamine, because the poison she spat worked like a truth serum – making her victims tell their deepest secrets, the truths they wouldn't even admit to themselves. She'd used what she'd learned to blackmail a number of prominent citizens, some of whom had later committed suicide in their shame.

Taking her down had been a team effort. Barry had made himself a target, on the theory that his speedster metabolism would best be able to process the toxins in her saliva. Cisco got her from behind with the Boot - the device Cisco had invented to disrupt meta-human powers.
And it had worked.

Except that Scopolamine didn't just spit on Barry's bare skin. Somehow her toxin ended up in Barry mouth and he'd swallowed it. It didn't take long for the reaction to set in. They'd figured wrong about Barry's speedster metabolism quickly processing the poison. Barry had spent three days in a Pipeline cell, helplessly babbling about every single thing he'd done wrong in his life, everything he'd regretted, from every time he'd lashed out at Joe as a child and as an adult, to pressing his affections onto Iris when she was so deeply in love with Eddie, to being so corrosively angry at his father for just walking away, while being perversely glad he was gone.

The majority of the time, though, Barry spent crying about how he'd failed to save his mother, how much he loved Eobard, and how much he hated himself for that love.

His friends and family had taken turns watching over him, making sure that he didn't hurt himself in his distress. When he was finally calm and coherent – and more ashamed of himself than ever – Cisco opened the Pipeline cell door and let Barry out. No one ever mentioned what he'd said and after a while, Barry managed to let it slip out of his waking memory.

A few weeks after the anniversary of his final showdown with the Reverse-Flash, when Eobard had abandoned him for a better future, Barry went to the cemetery, to his mother's grave. It was the first time since her funeral all those years ago. He brought flowers but had no words. Guilt choked him. Self-knowledge strangled him.

It would be so easy to undo all of this. To give himself the life he should have had. To prevent the death of Nora Allen, the moment that set them all down this path. He could stop Thawne. He knew how, now. He could break history, never become the Flash. Yes, people would be different, some might die. But he would have the life he should have had.

There would be no Harrison Wells – at least not the Harrison Wells that he’d known. No Eobard Thawne. No lightning and dark matter and shadows and secrets and friends like family but for blood.

No broken hearts, either.

The rain came down, a gentle whisper against the grass and trees and granite, and for a moment, Barry thought he heard his mother, telling him to be at peace with his choice.

That was how Cisco found him, kneeling on wet grass, soaked by the rain.

Cisco knelt down next to him, murmured a few words of prayer and then waited in silence until Barry got up.

When they got back to the paved path, next to the S.T.A.R. Labs van, Cisco said, "We need to talk."
Barry shrugged in acquiescence. "Okay, but about what?"

"Not here, can we go to your house?"

Barry nodded, but wondered why they would need such privacy. The cemetery was, after all, such a fine and private place.

He let Cisco drive them back to the house, and he tried not to display too much impatience with the sedate pace of the S.T.A.R. Labs van, but he couldn't stop his feet from twitching and his fingers from tapping. He wanted to run.

*Run, Barry. Run.* Eobard's ghost was laughing at him.
Cisco, though, didn't hear and gave Barry a disgusted look, slowing down, to spite him.

Stopped at a traffic light, Barry snarked, "We could have been at the house by now if you’d let me take you."

"And I would have probably puked all over you."

Barry realized something. "Actually, dude, have I ever taken you for a run?"

"No, and that's something I am quite grateful for, thank you very much."

Eventually, the traffic cleared and the rest of the drive to the outskirts of Central City went quickly enough. Cisco pulled up to the house and commented, "Nothing like living out in the middle of nowhere."

Barry shrugged. "It's fine." He was cold and wet, but instead of running off for a quick change of clothes, he shook himself like a supersonic dog, fast enough that the droplets evaporated before hitting the ground or his barely-welcome guest. He unlocked the front door with his palm print and let Cisco precede him inside. "So, you said we needed to talk. Talk."

"What, you don't offer me anything? Not even a drink? A cup of coffee? Some host you are."

Barry rolled his eyes and got a can of Red Bull from the kitchen. "Be grateful it's cold."

Cisco took his time, tapping the top of the can, wiping it twice before popping the tab. Delaying tactics.

"Come on, what's going on?"

Cisco took a sip and gave Barry a sober look. "I've been seeing things."

"You've vibed." That wasn't a question. His friend's powers had manifested slowly over the last year, but they were erratic and disturbing and Barry hated to ask Cisco to use them. He didn't want to ask Cisco what he'd seen.

"Aren't you going to ask what I've been seeing?" Cisco prompted, after a moment went by.

Barry shrugged. "I presume you're going to tell me, whether I ask or not. That's why you ambushed me at the cemetery."

"I didn't ambush you."

Barry gave Cisco a look.

"Okay, all right – yeah, I did. I just needed to talk to you alone."

"And we are alone." Barry made a grand gesture, encompassing the vast central room. "There's no one else here. No one but my ghosts.

"Before I tell you what I've seen, can I ask you something?"

Barry shrugged, "Sure."

"Promise you won't punch me, or anything."

"Why would I do that?"
"Because what I'm going to ask you is kind of rude."

"Dude, seriously?"

Cisco frowned. And sighed. And pulled a Dum-Dum out of his pocket and made a big production of removing the wrapper before sticking it in his mouth. Then he started folding the wrapper, turning it into something that might have been an origami swan. Or goat.

Fed up with these additional delaying tactics, Barry tapped his foot. "Cisco?"

Cisco pulled the lollipop out of his mouth, and said, "Okay, okay. Did you ever …" The sentence trailed off and Cisco just stared at Barry, clearly expecting him to know what Cisco was asking. Unfortunately, Barry had no idea what Cisco was asking. "Did I ever … what?"

"You know…"

"No, Cisco, I don't."

"You and Wells."

Barry blinked and replied very slowly, very carefully. "Me and Wells, what?" God, Cisco knew how Barry felt about the man who'd betrayed them, what was he asking?

"Were you ever – " Cisco took a deep breath, and completed the thought, "lovers?"

Barry felt the tips of his ears burn. But he answered truthfully. "No." He was a little surprised that Cisco had had to ask that. Had he and Thawne been intimate, he'd have babbled about it while under the influence of Scopolamine's truth spit.

"Ah. Just checking."

"Why are you asking me this?" Then Barry asked, slightly nauseated, "Is that what you've seen?"

Cisco made a little wavering gesture with his hand. "You know I can sense timelines. Things that might have happened. Things that might yet happen."

Barry nodded. "It's one of the weirder talents you've got."

"Weird is right."

"So, what are you seeing? Me and Wells?"

"Yes – but it's stranger than that. It's not really you and Wells. It's you and the Reverse-Flash."

Cisco, oddly enough, didn't spit out the words.

"Eobard Thawne?" Barry surprised himself by not choking when he said that name. Eobard Thawne was the only person, other than Iris, that he had ever wanted to be intimate with. Other than Iris, the only person with whom he had formed such a strong emotional connection that he could truly feel desire.

"Yeah." Cisco shoved his hands in his pockets, oblivious to Barry's dark thoughts. He didn't quite meet Barry's eyes. "I vibe him sometimes. And don't ask me how I know it's really him, not Eobard Thawne pretending to be Harrison Wells."

Barry swallowed, his mouth suddenly parched. "Are you seeing the future?"
Cisco nodded.
"From when he's from, from when he went back to?"

"No, not really. He's here."

"Here? Back at S.T.A.R. Labs?"

"No. Here – here." Cisco waved at the room. "In this house. He's here, living here."

"Are you really sure you're not vibing on the past? You've said you've seen alternate timelines. Maybe you're picking up remnants from a past timeline, from when he'd lived here."

"No. It's not that."

Barry pressed, "How are you so certain?"

"Because usually you're together. You're with him."

Barry stared at his friend. "I did visit him here, more than a few times."

Cisco shook his head. "It's not from the past, he's not in a wheelchair, or even pretending to need a wheelchair. You and Thawne, you're with him. It feels like the near future."

Barry felt like his heart was going to burst. "What do you mean? I'm with him?" While he sounded particularly clueless, he knew just what Cisco meant.

Cisco let out a sigh. "I mean, you're with him." Cisco made air-quotes around the word 'with'. "You're together, romantically."

Barry couldn't bring himself to reply to that.

"Look – I know it sounds pretty unbelievable. But it feels real - literal, not something that needs to be interpreted. It's real in ways that many of my vibes aren't."

Barry raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Why do you say that?"

Cisco tapped the lollipop against his lip. "Normally, when I vibe, I don't get a lot of coherent emotions. Usually, my own terror clouds everything else. But the feelings I pick up when I see the two of you together are too strong."

"What sort of feelings? Contempt? Rage? The unstoppable desire to tear apart the man who killed my mother, who destroyed my father's life? Who made me into the Flash?" Barry hated the anger in his voice, the loss of control.

"No, Bar. That's not what I'm seeing at all. It's the opposite. You're happy together."

Barry wanted to walk away. He didn't want to hear this. He couldn't look at Cisco; he couldn't bear to see the compassion and understanding pouring out of his friend.

So he walked over to one of the couches in the great room and flopped down. Cisco followed and sat next to him. After a few too-long minutes of silence, Barry asked, "When do you get these vibes?" He believed Cisco - there was no reason why his friend would lie to him about something as terrible, as important, as this.

"Usually when I'm working on your suit. When I'm making repairs."
"Only then?"
Cisco wouldn't look at him.

"Cisco?"

"I know what you're thinking, and I was thinking that too. That I was somehow vibing on your feelings – not on some future or alternate timeline."

"Why haven't you ever say anything to me?" For some reason that he didn't want to name, Barry felt like he wanted to cry.
Cisco gave him a sheepish look. "Because – it all seemed way too personal. Like if that's what I was picking up just your feelings, what would I say to you? 'Dude, I know you're in love with your enemy? I mean, I already knew that, but this was like – I don't know – worse than hearing you babble about how horrible you felt after you got hit with Scopolamine's truth-spit. The vibes felt like a real violation. How could I tell you I knew you've been fantasizing about building a life with him?"
Barry felt his whole face flush. "Okay, I guess I should thank you for not saying anything, then."
But Cisco continued. "The thing is, I know I'm not vibing on your dreams. Not at all. Like I said, this stuff is real. I figured out how to prove it."

"How?"

"A few months ago, I went to the Time Vault and I tried vibing the Yellow Horror."
Barry sucked in his breath. "And what did you see?"

"The same things – but from the Reverse-Flash's perspective. He was here, with you."

Barry scrubbed his face. "And you're sure it was him?"

"Yeah." Cisco shook his head. "I know this seems really freaky. Believe me, the first time I vibed this, I thought I was going nuts."

"When did you start getting these vibes?"

"Almost since Thawne left. Since you moved in here. At first, they were just flashes of things, nothing really coherent. But in the last six months, the visions have become really strong, really defined. And every time I get a vibe from your suit, I check with Thawne's suit in the Time Vault. The visions I get from that are complementary. The scene from your point of view and then from the Reverse-Flash's."

"So, what are you seeing?" Barry was almost afraid of the specifics.

"Are we having sex?" There, Barry said it.

"Eww, no – that's so NOT what I'm seeing. You're doing stuff – what people do when they live together. Talking, cooking, taking care of each other. Do you want me to tell you that I see you folding clothes and putting away groceries?"
Barry felt the start of a massive headache. This sounded too close the fantasies he went to sleep with every night. "Do you have any time reference?"
Cisco shook his head. "Not really – it just feels like something in the near future. A year, maybe five. You look the same. Eobard Thawne looks just like Harrison Wells – or at least what we think Harrison Wells looked like." Cisco paused, "His suit, though, is different. It's a lot more like yours and a lot less like a medieval suit of armor."

"Hmm." Barry thought of something. "And the emblems?"

Cisco smiled. "You know, I really never paid attention to that, but now that I think about it, the last few times I vibed that you were both in your suits, your emblems were both gold on white. Huh." Cisco paused and added, "Hey, maybe you're even fighting metas together in this future."

"What do you think this means?" Hurting and confused, Barry needed his friend's opinion. Cisco gave Barry an arch look. "I'm thinking that maybe your story isn't over. That maybe there's more to the Reverse-Flash and Eobard Thawne than we've been allowed to see. Sometimes, when I vibe on the Yellow Horror, I pick up really a strong feeling that there's even more secrets – things he's hiding, even from himself."

As much as Barry longed to, he couldn't let himself think that. It was bad enough that he had such conflicted feelings about the man who was his sworn nemesis – but to then discover that just maybe he wasn't? "Thawne traveled back in time to interfere with my life. He killed my mother. He deliberately created the particle accelerator accident. He spent the last fifteen years watching me. Manipulating all of us. What more is there to our story?"

"I don't know, Barry. But I can't shake the feeling that maybe we've been led to accept a very particular set of conclusions."

"He confessed to my mother's murder. Why would he do that if he didn't kill her?" Barry scrubbed at his face, he was so tired. Thinking about this made all the wounds he'd worked so hard heal begin to bleed again.

Cisco shrugged. "Maybe because he going was back to his own time, he knew that it wouldn't matter. He was – for all intents and purposes – dead. The rest … maybe it's all another lie."

"No – it can't be. It can't. He told me why he killed my mother. He confessed to it. What more is there?"

Cisco frowned. "I don't know what I'm saying, Bar. All I know is that for a year, I've been getting visions of you two, together. Happy. Here. I don't know what it means, but I do know what I'm seeing. And I figured it was time you knew, too."

Cisco left and Barry spent another night wandering through the big, empty house, feeling more lost and disconnected than ever. He drifted from room to room, letting Cisco's words put images in his mind.

You're doing stuff – what people do when they live together. Talking, cooking, taking care of each other. Do you want me to tell you that I see you folding clothes and putting away groceries?

It was so easy – too easy – to give those words life. To hope that maybe Eobard Thawne would come back and want to build a real life here. That he'd want to be with Barry as an equal, not as an enemy.

"And what would you like for dinner?" Eobard asks, his head in the refrigerator. "We have
Porterhouse, New York strip, sirloin, a chuck roast ready for the grinder – "

Barry laughs, "What about chicken?"

"Eh. No."

"Salmon?" He knows he's winding Eobard up.

"Seriously, Mr. Allen?"

Barry ignores the warm jolt that appellation gives him. "Man can't life on beef alone."

"Yes, they can." Eobard takes out the chuck, an onion, a head of garlic and some herbs and spices and proceeded to make his own hamburger meat at speed. "I still prefer Big Belly Burger, but I think this will do for tonight."

Barry enjoys watching the process through the time dilation, but he can't help but needle him about his food choices. "What about a salad with it? Salad is healthy."

Eobard laughs, "Salad? What are you, my nutritionist now?"

"I like salad." Barry pretends to pout. "If you eat a salad, I'll give you a blow job."

"You'll give me a blow job anyway." Eobard is smirking now.

"Outside, under the stars." Barry bites his lip and looks at Eobard from under his lashes. He knows just what this expression does to his lover. Barry feels confident in his desire, in his place here with Eobard. He can tease and know that Eobard truly wants him. "I'll make you come so many times, you'll go blind." He vibrates his hand and lets a tiny spark of lightning web between his fingers. "Imagine how that will feel on your balls."

Eobard heads back to the refrigerator and pulls out a head of lettuce and an assortment of other vegetables. He uses his speed to peel and slice and chop. Barry still watches everything through the time dilation, smiling as his lover gives into the sexual bargaining.

Barry shook himself free of the fantasy and headed outside. As many times as he'd let himself imagine some type of life with his mother's murderer, he'd never allowed it to go this far. Sex was always the line Barry was afraid to cross, and right now, he was both sickened and aroused. Hadn't he just spent an hour kneeling in the rain at his mother's grave, begging for her forgiveness for the terrible choices he'd made?

The rain had cleared and the sky was filled with a wash of stars. He pulled the cover off of one of the loungers and stared up, looking for answers. Even after a year, Barry didn't know which choice was worse – not saving her, or letting her murderer go home. As that thought crossed his mind, another one followed – one he'd been trying to avoid, but one that Cisco's vibes had made impossible to dismiss.

Maybe Eobard Thawne didn't kill his mother. Maybe he'd lied.

It was ironic, but Barry could hear Thawne – in Harrison Wells' implacable and gentle mentoring tones – encouraging him to examine the evidence. To look at it with all of his scientific skills and training. It was hard. There were so many emotions. Fifteen years of grief and terror and the burning need to discover the truth made detachment difficult.

But not impossible.
Barry sorted through his memories and focused on only the ones he knew to be real. The red and yellow lightning swirling around his mother. The moment when the Man in Yellow had stilled for a few heartbeats. The breath-stealing rush of speed as his eleven year-old self was grabbed and taken to safety.

And then …

He remembers seeing the other Barry shake his head, telling him not to save his mother. He remembers closing the door behind him and hearing the fight, the screams, the sickening sound of the knife plunging down. Then silence as the speedsters left.

He remembers going to his mother, holding her as she died.

What he doesn't remember, what he can't remember, is seeing Eobard stab his mother. He can't remember seeing it happen because he wasn't there, in the room. He had no direct, observable proof that the Reverse-Flash killed Nora Allen. Another Barry – maybe the one who'd battled with the Man in Yellow – had seen the act, but he hadn't. All he had was a ‘posthumous’ confession and circumstantial evidence – the same type of evidence that sent his father to prison for fifteen years.

Barry let out a slow and careful breath. Was it possible that that Eobard hadn't killed his mother? Was it possible everything he believed was a lie? Was it possible that Eobard had confessed to a murder he hadn’t committed for reasons that he – Barry – would never know?

Despite the warm night air, Barry shivered. He looked up, but the stars didn't have any answers. They never did.
Eobard Thawne had known that the life he'd had in the twenty-second century wasn't going to be the life he returned to. There had to have been too many downstream changes in the timeline, too many changes to him, in him, to make it possible to easily step back into the life he'd spent the last fifteen years trying to get back to.

His family didn't recognize him, of course. Before he'd even been conceived, his parents had used their wealth and science to create the perfect child, giving their first born son the Thawne family's ideal of physical beauty and unparalleled intelligence. To his family, he was now a horror, with his dark hair and his long face. Though his eyes were still blue, they were the wrong blue. There was no trace of the engineered Thawne beauty left.

Eobard wondered how he could ever have thought his changed appearance wouldn't matter. As ever, his parents looked at him and only valued his looks. The intellect they'd cultivated in the genetics labs was secondary, an afterthought. They saw his dark hair, the age on his face, and considered all of that careful bio-engineering gone to waste.

Eobard didn't care, though. When he'd absorbed Harrison Wells' DNA, he had a contingency in place: a small encapsulation the large knob of bone at the upper end of his left arm held his original DNA. The extraction was quite painful, but it proved to his family that the prodigal son had, in fact, returned.

His father politely suggested that he take advantage of the retained DNA and restore his proper appearance. When Eobard politely declined, his father reiterated the request as a demand. After all, to take Harrison Wells’ appearance, he'd used a technology deemed "questionably unethical" by the Science Police. Which was a change from the original timeline: when Eobard had last lived in the twenty-second century, such DNA transfers were strictly prohibited.

When Eobard refused again, both of his parents insisted that he take up residence elsewhere. Not only was it too shameful to be associated with such a dark and ugly and old creature, there would be the inevitable questions about why Eobard no longer looked like a perfect Thawne.

Eobard didn't mind that request at all. He'd never truly cared for the blond and blue-eyed template that his parents had engineered - it had always felt like eugenics, that he was unknowingly – and unwillingly – made a part of a supposed master race. Keeping these dark looks – so diametrically opposite to his family's norm – was freeing, and Eobard was delighted that his family was disgusted by his changed appearance.

His younger brother, Robern, read him the riot act about using unethical technology, and then gave Eobard a half-hearted welcome back, which was all Eobard expected. The man had always been a thorn in his side, even from the time he was born. His parents had thought that having a sibling would make Eobard less anti-social, more acceptable and relatable as a child. As experiments went, it had been a failure. Eobard had never bonded with Robern, never had any interest in his doings. Never felt the urge to protect him or nurture him the way brothers were supposed to.

When Robern mentioned that he'd joined the Science Police, Eobard had a moment's panic. While his brother was willing to ignore his use of a DNA transfer, Robern wouldn't be able to overlook Eobard's other crimes, especially how he'd played fast and loose with time. Robern could have him arrested, or worse. But whatever effects Eobard's actions had on the timeline, Robern was ignorant
of them, and only seemed to want to spend as little time in his brother's company as possible.

Eobard was relieved at that. He didn't have his speed and couldn't travel back in time to prevent his brother's conception, a horrific thought. That reaction surprised him – once, not so long ago, that would have been quite in keeping with his usual way of dealing with obstacles: killing them. Eobard blamed his prolonged association with Barry Allen for that.

His changed appearance was a blessing in other ways. Friends and colleagues – former friends and colleagues – no longer wanted to associate with Eobard. His position at the university, in the chronodynamics department, was revoked. Eobard wasn't sure if it was because of a damaged timeline or if they were just too disconcerted by his changed appearance.

What he was certain of was, was that he didn't care.

Eobard didn't need his family. He didn't need his so-called friends and colleagues or a university position where he'd teach theories he now knew were wrong. He didn't need anyone, not anymore. What he'd built in the start of the twenty-first century had grown into an empire by the twenty-second. Almost from the beginning, he'd planned for his return to his own time, using the generations of data stored by Gideon to build a fortune to get S.T.A.R. Labs going and then set it on the path of growth for the next century and more. In this new 2186, Eobard Thawne had more money than the rest of the Thawnes put together.

There was a large swathe of preserved forest somewhere north of the city, property that had once been owned by "Harrison Wells" but had been put into a living trust. Barry Allen had been the initial beneficiary, but the trust itself was owned by many layers of private corporations, all designed to ensure the preservation of the property and the environment until he, Eobard Thawne, returned to this time, and made his claim to the land and the financial accounts as the final beneficiary of that trust.

For nearly a hundred and seventy years, the caretakers had done a good job with the maintenance of the house, performing all of the upgrades on the schedule he'd provided. It felt strange, walking through the front door, a century and more later – but without any sense of the passage of time.

Eobard felt like a stranger, though. Interfaces once as familiar as his own face (and wasn't that an ironic simile?) now required exacting attention. The music that Eobard had come to love was no longer easily accessible, the files deleted or corrupted or lost through the relentless tide of technology. That was more of an annoyance than a real loss; they could all be replaced, with time.

Something Eobard had plenty of, now.

According to his attorney's records, Barry Allen had lived here for a while. Eobard hoped that the house had preserved data from that time. He'd had cameras installed everywhere, and on his final day in that house, he'd activated them. He wondered if Barry had found and removed them, or if they had recorded his day-to-day activities. Perhaps, like the lost music, those records had been sacrificed to the intervening passage of years and the changes in technology.

Eobard needed to readjust; he needed to relearn this time before doing what he really wanted – to discover just how much everything changed; to discover the rest of the Flash's story, to learn just how Barry managed the rest of his life without Eobard there to watch over him, to protect him, to guide him.

The day after Eobard’s move to the house in the forest, his father came for a visit. Eobard thought it was interesting, that despite the man's anger, that he still couldn't look at Eobard.
"You leave without a word to your family, you disappear for a year, and you come back with the face of a stranger. And you refuse to tell your family why you've done this to yourself. Your family finds this behavior inexplicable. Inexcusable."

Eobard thought his father's rage amusing and wondered what the man would say if or when he learned that his son had been gone for fifteen years, not just the twelve months in their own timeline. Eobard ignored the temptation to rub that truth in his father's face and simply said, "You sent me away from the family, not that I minded. Everything here is as I planned. I owe you nothing more."

"What do you mean? And how is it that you can claim this place as yours? On your paltry salary from the university? Everything you have comes from me; I've kept you on a strict financial leash to prevent you from pursuing your foolishness. You have neither your own money nor the means to own this." His father made a sweeping gesture to encompass the land, the house.

Eobard smirked. "You always said my dreams were foolish, my ideas unrealistic, my goals unachievable. And yet, without anyone's help, I made my dreams a reality. I proved my theories, and I attained my goals."

His father stared at him. "That nonsense about time travel? You're telling me you traveled to the future?"

"I'm telling you nothing of the sort." Eobard wasn't going to give his parent, especially one who never truly cared for him, the gift of the truth. "And that isn't relevant. This house, this property, is mine. How I obtained it is not your concern. In fact, as of right now, I am no longer your concern."

"You are a Thawne and as long as you bear that name, you are – despite your unfortunately altered physiognomy – still a part of this family. You are expected to comport yourself accordingly. I will have a word with the Regents at the University and your position there will be restored, provided you behave yourself."

Eobard couldn't help but remember his ancestor, the one he'd kidnapped and belittled, the lowly police officer, Edward Thawne. In comparison to his father, that man now seemed an intellectual and moral giant.

"I have grown out of you and your expectations. I have no need for your intervention or assistance. But – " Eobard found himself slipping into the courtesies that he'd practiced for so long as Harrison Wells, "Thank you. I think, at this juncture, we would do best to permanently part ways. You can, if you feel the need, strike my name from the family history. Let Robern carry on the glory of the Thawne legacy."

It was an immensely freeing declaration. As much as Eobard had idealized his family and their achievements during his years in the twenty-first century, he'd resented them, too. And now, back home for good, Eobard realized that he didn't need them. He'd grown out of the childish need for their good opinion.

His father looked at him as if he'd lost his sanity. It was possible that he might have. "What do you intend to do?"

"I will live here; this is my home. Perhaps I will travel. Whatever I choose to do, I will keep my distance from the family. As you have requested." Now independently wealthy, his father and family had little leverage over him.

Eobard could tell his father was barely containing his anger. "Your ridiculous obsession with the
Flash – is that done now?"

"With the Flash, yes." Eobard wasn't going to say anything about Barry Allen.

He watched his father leave and was struck by an interesting question. Why had he even bothered to tell his family of his return? Eobard Thawne in the twenty-second century was almost irrelevant.

Left alone, Eobard let the changes that his journey to the past had wrought settle into his own timeline. At the end of his patience, Eobard finally gave himself permission to look into the rest of the life of Barry Allen.

He'd spent fifteen years protecting first the boy, then the youth, and finally the man. Eobard had been father, friend, and mentor. Despite those harsh words he'd spoken from that cell in the Pipeline, Eobard did not hate Barry. Far from it. And even a hundred and seventy years into the future, he would never be able to simply cut the Barry Allen of the early twenty-first century out of his life.

Like S.T.A.R. Labs, this house had a hidden vault. It wasn't as big as the one Eobard had created there, but it served a similar purpose – to protect his secrets. In the extensive master bedroom closet, there was a panel keyed to his DNA – *Harrison Wells' DNA* – and it required a small donation. A pinprick, a drop of blood, and the wall opened to display a myriad of computers, all still running.

Another drop of blood and Gideon appeared, its familiar voice a welcome note. "Welcome home, Professor Thawne."

"Thank you, Gideon. I am most pleased to see you again."

Of course, Gideon didn't smile. But the A.I.'s avatar did nod in acknowledgement.

"Have you continued to collect information on Barry Allen? On the Flash?"

"Yes, Professor. Your instructions have been carried out. Do you wish to see the timeline?"

"Please, start with the endpoint."

Eobard expected to see the familiar "Flash Missing – Vanishes in Crisis" headline from April, 2024, a moment he was longing for. A random thought occurs – if Barry ever finds the Time Vault and that headline, does he think he'll die? Eobard had never believed that was what happened, he was certain that this was the date that Barry jumped forward in time to be with him.

Except that this was not the headline that appeared. The one that Gideon displayed was older, darker, bordered in black. Eobard couldn't believe what he read, but as the meaning of those words penetrated, he collapsed in horror.

FLASH DEAD – CENTRAL CITY MOURNS

The date on the headline was March 16, 2017, and by-line was simply "Iris West", not the more familiar "Iris West-Allen".

Eobard stared up at the image that Gideon projected. There were multiple pictures on the digital page: mourners surrounding a coffin that bore Barry's lightning emblem, a portrait-like picture of Barry as the Flash in his prime. There was a photo of a monster in black, holding Barry, bleeding and broken, like he was a trophy or a carcass, and one more picture of that monster – his mask off, revealing a surprisingly handsome face – as he and Barry fought.
Unable to focus on the words below the caption, Eobard commanded, "Gideon, read the text to me."

"On March sixteenth, three days after the epic battle to defeat the evil speedster, Zoom, the Flash succumbed to his injuries. The Savior of Central City sacrificed his life to ensure that Zoom and his legion of evil meta-humans would no longer be able to hurt anyone ever again..."

The words flowed over Eobard like a tide. No, a rip current, pulling him far from shore. He was drowning in a dark sea of grief, consumed by the agony of regret. Barry, gone. 2024 would never happen and Barry would not live to make that great leap forward. Eobard would never have that chance to heal the pain he'd caused, to undo the lies, to forge something better than the legacy of hate he'd left behind.

Everything was gone, gone, gone.

Gideon continued to read, oblivious to Eobard’s devastation. "The Flash, badly wounded in his initial battle with Zoom six months earlier, never fully recovered either his speed or his strength. He refused to stand down, refused to let the people of Central City continue suffer at this monster's hands. Other heroes joined in the final battle..."

Eobard couldn't bear it anymore. "Gideon, stop."

The recitation came to an abrupt halt as the A.I. obeyed his command.

"Professor?"

Numb, Eobard didn't answer immediately. But finally, he was able to gather his thoughts. "Did you preserve any visual records of Barry Allen when he was in residence here?"

"Yes, Professor. I have assembled a complete record."

"Did Barry know he was being observed?"

"No."

"Was he – happy?" Eobard’s voice caught on the last word.

Gideon’s voice was emotionless. "As happiness is subjective, I am not equipped to make such judgments, Professor. However, I have analyzed Barry Allen's behavior during his residence here, and I have been able to conclude that he was mildly to deeply depressed in the months following your return to the twenty-second century."

That shocked Eobard. "I am curious, Gideon, if you cannot judge if he was happy, how the hell can you determine if he was depressed?"

"Depression, unlike happiness, is a clinical condition, with numerous behavioral and physiological markers. Typical of the state, Barry Allen demonstrated a lack of interest in socialization, food, and activities which had previously provided pleasure. He additionally exhibited poor sleep hygiene and extreme restlessness during the night hours."

"Show me." Eobard was shaking. "Please." The added courtesy was involuntary, a legacy of his time as Harrison Wells.

Gideon started at the beginning, with Barry's arrival, duffle bags on each shoulder. Barry had dropped them near the door and wandered from room to room, looking for something. Eobard knew what Barry had been searching for – some hint, some clue, a reason why Eobard had done what he
If Barry had been clever, if his natural curiosity and that sharp mind had been put to work, he’d have found the clues that Eobard had left for him. But he didn't. He’d poked and prodded at the surface of things, but given up quickly.

Eobard watched and found himself urging Barry to try harder, to look beyond the surface. But there was no point. Barry couldn't hear him. Barry Allen had been dead for more than a century.

"Gideon, stop."

The playback ceased.

Eobard levered himself off the floor and closed the vault. He needed to run. He longed for the Speed Force, to lose himself in it, forever. To have the power go back in time again, to try – and this time succeed – in fixing the problems he created.

To save Barry, again.
"Any change?"

Even before asking, Cisco knew the answer. He didn't even need to be in the med bay to look at the monitors and see the artificially steady heartbeat. This was too familiar, and yet horribly different.

Caitlin looked up from Barry's chart, and said, "No." Nothing else, because there was nothing else to say.

Last time Barry had been in a coma, after he’d been struck by lightning, he’d been able to breathe on his own. He had been like Sleeping Beauty, just waiting for a kiss. This time, the team needed every bit of medical science to keep him alive. Zoom had all but torn him apart – broken back, broken neck, punctured lungs, damage to every major organ. Barry was healing, but slowly. Too slowly. He might die before his body recovered.

Like Cisco, Caitlin had been all but living here for the last three weeks. Concerned that Caitlin was skirting the edge of burn-out, Cisco gently suggested, "You should go home, get some sleep."

She shook her head. "I can't. What if he goes into cardiac arrest again?"

Not for the first time, Cisco wished they had backup. Another doctor, or even a nurse – someone who could relieve Caitlin for a few hours. Iris had been trying to find Henry, but had had no success. But as much as Henry's medical expertise was needed, Cisco wondered if it would be better if Iris didn't find him. Zoom might target anyone close to Barry, the way he'd slaughtered the people who'd fought back on the world he had come from. This was a monster on a scale they'd never encountered.

The mannequin where the Flash's suit was normally displayed was bare. While there were usually four suits ready and waiting for Barry, it didn't feel right to put any of them on display.

It also didn't feel right that the suit Barry had been wearing in his fight with Zoom was in a box under a blanket in Cisco’s workroom, torn and bloody and burnt. Cisco couldn't bring himself to touch it. He was too afraid of what he might see.

But hiding his head like an ostrich wasn't going to help Barry, or anyone. It was time to fix that suit. "Caitlin – I'm going to head down to my workroom for a little while. Call me if you need me."

"Okay. You should get some rest, you know."

Cisco shook his head. "What's the expression, 'physician, heal thyself'?""

Caitlin waved him off. "I'll get some rest once Joe comes in."

"Okay." Joe wasn't a medical professional, but like Cisco, he did have advanced EMT training and could handle the first stage of a medical crisis. Eddie and Iris, also trained, would come in for the fourth shift. But truthfully, the entire burden of keeping Barry alive fell on Caitlin's shoulders.

Cisco went down to the workroom. Before beginning the repairs on the suit, Cisco meticulously cleaned his workbench, the computer station next to it, getting out all of the tools he'd need, plus the fabric for the repairs. All delaying tactics.
When everything was ready, he took a deep breath and went to retrieve the damaged suit. He removed the blanket and stared at it for a long few minutes. His adrenaline levels were high, which were going to make him more susceptible to visions. He almost tossed the blanket back over the suit, telling himself that no one would ever know about his cowardice.

But I'll know.

Cisco didn't close his eyes. After a year of vibing on the suit, he knew that wouldn't help. He picked it up, and as he’d expected, he was immediately plunged into the shadowlands.

He wasn’t given a vision of an alternate timeline or a future yet to come. The suit resonated with the pain and fear and anguish of Barry’s battle with Zoom. The tiny part of Cisco that wasn’t consumed by terror realized that doing this alone had been a terrible idea. Cisco could so easily get sucked into the horror of what had happened to Barry, forever looping into the pain and fear.

Cisco!

He dropped the handful of suit he was clutching. He knew that voice. He knew it. Had feared it. Had loved it, too.

"Doctor Wells?" Cisco whispered.

There was no answer. Cisco looked at the suit, his hand hovering over the fabric, which was still stiff with dried blood. He let just a single finger make contact, and was immediately overwhelmed.

"Cisco, what is going on?"

The voice was demanding, but that demand was as comfortably familiar as the voice itself.

"Doctor Wells?" Cisco could sense irritation at that name. "Eobard Thawne?"

"Yes, it's me. Now, tell me what's going on. What has happened to Barry?"

Cisco didn't bother with words. He let the memories of the battle – what he'd directly observed, what he'd seen on the monitors, the footage captured by the news crews, by idiots with cell phone cameras – speak for themselves. He felt Thawne pick at each event, each perspective, going back and forth in the timeline, taking command – as if Cisco were merely a repository, and Thawne had a remote or a joystick to control what he saw.

By the time Thawne relinquished control of his mind, Cisco felt like he needed to hurl.

Then Thawne demanded, "Show me Barry. Now."

That was even harder; summoning the memory of Barry as Caitlin treated his wounds. Cisco pulled up images of Barry's medical charts, the detailed notes that Caitlin made, the status reports on all of the damage Zoom had inflicted – hourly and daily summaries of Barry's progress. Or lack thereof.

"Why isn't he healing?" Thawne demanded.

"We think it's because Zoom ripped out his speed."

That gave Wells – no, Thawne – pause. "How?"

"We're not sure. He shoved his claws into Barry's chest and seemed to suck the life out of him. Zoom looked like he grew larger. He dropped Barry like a used tissue and vanished. After we stabilized him, Caitlin was able to measure the rate of regeneration in Barry’s cells; it had dropped by
almost eighty-two percent."

"Has Barry been able to recover any of his speed?"

"Caitlin's been able to detect some increases in his cellular regeneration rate, but it's too slow – only eight percent since the attack. Barry's still not able to breathe on his own, and it's been three weeks."

The next question was asked with a level of delicacy that Cisco wasn't expecting, but it was appreciated. "Brain function?"

This at least was good news. "It seems unimpaired. Caitlin says it's equivalent to his neural activity during the last three months of his original coma."

A vast sense of relief came through the connection. Which brought up a very important question, and Cisco didn't hesitate to ask it. "How is this happening? How are you able to communicate with me? You did go back to your future, right?"

Thawne didn't reply.

"Don't you know how?" Cisco pressed.

Silence reigned. If Thawne knew how he was able to communicate through the centuries, he wasn't willing to share it with Cisco.

Cisco put aside that question and wondered if he was about to make the biggest mistake of his life. "Will you help us?"

"How?"

"Can you come back?" Cisco winced, remembering his last words to the false Wells.

"You told me not to." Apparently Thawne remembered them, too. Despite the gravity of the situation, mingled with the worry that bled through, there was a bit of smug satisfaction in Thawne’s voice.

"Circumstances warrant a change of heart." Cisco tried not to think of how inappropriate that metaphor was, given what Thawne had done to him in that alternate timeline.

And now, indeed, Cisco felt a small trickle of shame through the connection.

"I'm sorry for that," Thawne said.

Cisco was so startled by the apology that he almost lifted his hand from the suit. He wasn't ready to deal with a past that had actually never really happened, not with Barry's life in jeopardy. "We can talk about this another time."

"Time – that is something I have in abundance. And it's that something you lack."

"Yes, it is. We don't know when Zoom will be back. He'd been sending meta-humans from his world through the breaches, but it's been mostly quiet since Barry was injured."

"Breaches?"

Cisco realized that he'd skipped over the most important part of the story. "When we opened the wormhole and you went back through, it didn't close properly. Barry came back right after you left – he didn't save his mother."
"That I know."

"How?"

"Gideon has keep records of everything related to Barry Allen – including his family."

Cisco sensed there was something else there, but he didn't have the power to pry into a mind that franklyterrified him. Instead he said, "Then you know that the wormhole expanded into a Singularity. Barry was able to keep it from going critical, but as a result, there are over fifty breaches – portals – between this world and another, parallel Earth. That's where Zoom is from."

"I need to know about this Zoom."

Cisco tried to organize his thoughts about the monster, but the lack of sleep, the stress and worry, the contact with the suit and the connection it hasZoom, sent him spiraling back into the horrifying vision he'd had when he first touched the suit.

"Cisco, get control of yourself."

At those sharp words, Cisco was able to pull out of it.

"Listen to me," Thawne said. "I need you to follow these instructions …"

Thawne mapped out what he needed from Cisco. Nothing obviously nefarious, but certainly unusual.

"Can you do this?" Thawne asked.

"Yes." Cisco sensed more than heard someone's approach. "I need to go."

"Understood."

"Cisco?" That wasJoe.

Cisco pulled his hand off of the suit and the connection withEobardThawne vanished. He looked at the mass of stained and broken fabric on the workbench, not quite believing what just happened.

"Are you okay?" Joe asked. "You've been gone a while – just wanted to check on you."

"Yeah, I'm fine. And thanks."

Joe looked at what Cisco had just been touching. "That's Barry's suit. The one he was wearing when …"

Cisco nodded. "I thought I should repair it."

Joe reached out, as if to touch the suit and then pulled his hand back. "Are sure you're all right?"

Cisco smiled just a little, knowing what Joe was asking. "Yeah – I am."

"Okay. I'm going to go back upstairs. Caitlin looks like she's about to drop."

"Yeah. I told her – " Cisco checked the time, shocked at almost two hours had passed since he came down to the workroom, " - a while ago that she needed to get some rest. She said she was just waiting on you."
"Okay. I came down to tell you I brought some dinner. That's why I'm a little late. I thought you might want something other than Red Vines and energy drinks."

"Thanks, Joe." Cisco actually felt hungry, a sensation that had been largely absent since Barry was wounded.

He followed Joe back to the Cortex, where a pizza box was waiting. Before Barry had been hurt, that box would have had at least two or three companions, plus an assortment of sides. But no one had much of an appetite these days and Barry's nutrition came in liquid form, delivered through an N-G tube.

Caitlin looked like she was about to collapse, but insisted on giving everyone a full report on Barry before going off duty. At least she had some good news today. Barry's lung function was slowly increasing, as was his rate of cellular regeneration – albeit in fractions of percentage points, but the progress was real. The damaged tissue in his spinal cord was slowly regenerating, which would be a miracle in anyone who wasn't a speedster.

Cisco helped himself to a slice of pizza and started to work on the tasks that Thawne had set to him, losing himself in the work so not to think about who exactly had asked him to do this. Or worse – how he'd managed to communicate with a man who wouldn't be born for another hundred and thirty-four years.

Cisco remembered to interact with Joe throughout the evening. They always talked about random stuff to take the edge off. Joe wouldn't be curious about what Cisco was working on unless his behavior was different. They discussed improvements to the meta-human suppression tech that he'd created for the CCPD, plans for upgrading the security in the station's holding cells, and other equally unimportant things. Neither of them wanted to talk about what was going to happen when Zoom came back.

Conversational topics exhausted, Joe picked up the book he'd brought a few days ago – a thriller that Barry probably wouldn't waste his eyes on – and started reading out loud. The story was ridiculous, but Cisco liked the sound of Joe's voice. It brought back memories of less fraught times when Joe would come over and read to the comatose Barry. Back then they hadn't yet melded into Team Flash, and Caitlin had still been grieving for Ronnie, but thinking back on it, there had been such a sense of imminence. That they had all been waiting for something miraculous that was yet to happen.

Maybe it had been the way that Doctor Wells would look at Barry, question them about his vitals, about the incomprehensible changes in his physiology, what that would mean to everyone, that had given them that sense of hope. Of course, Cisco now had the benefit of perspective, knowing that Wells wasn't Wells, but Thawne, and everything had been carefully planned – down to the last detail.

Now they were waiting and hoping that the inevitable wouldn't come to pass.

Cisco worked for hours, gathering data – anything and everything he and the team had managed to learn about Zoom. Much of it was supposition, but there were a few hard facts. The Central City on the other side of the breaches had its own version of S.T.A.R. Labs, and it also had had a particle accelerator accident. But unlike the one here, the dark matter had been directed down, not up and out. That had had the effect of concentrating it, creating far more powerful meta-humans. Two weeks after the explosion, Zoom had appeared, first murdering police officers, then wiping out the city's government, and finally destroying the scientific community.

They'd learned this from a young scientist – a research chemist – who'd been attacked by Zoom. He had managed to find a way through the big breach in one of the S.T.A.R. Labs basements, shared
what he’d known, and then died.

Cisco packaged all of the information he had gathered onto a data drive, and with a nod to Joe, excused himself. He didn't go to the Time Vault. Instead, per Thawne’s instructions, he went to Wells' old office. Despite the intervening months, no one had been particularly interested in claiming the space or repurposing the equipment there.

Which was a good thing, because Thawne had – according to what he'd relayed to Cisco – future-proofed his personal computer system. It would link into Gideon’s neural network and enable the AI to preserve the data until Thawne could access it in his time. What truly surprised Cisco was that Thawne, while he'd been masquerading as Wells, had enabled Cisco’s biometric data as a security override. A thumbprint, a retinal scan, and Cisco was able to upload the information about Zoom, copies of all of Barry's medical records since the injury, and transfer every bit of data about the meta-humans that came through the breaches.

"Cisco?"

He almost shrieked when Iris called his name. "Hey there," he said instead, fighting to keep his voice steady. It could have been worse, the adrenaline rush could have sparked a vibe.

"What are you doing in here?"

Cisco wasn't prepared to tell anyone about his conversation with a super-villain who wasn't born yet, but he did have a lie prepared. "Wells – or whoever he was – had been collecting data on Barry for years, and especially when he was in a coma the first time – I thought maybe there was something in there that could help Caitlin. It's not on any of the S.T.A.R. Labs servers, so I thought maybe his personal computers would have something."

"Did you find it?"

Cisco got up and casually turned off the monitors. "Nope – if it's here, it's not accessible. At least not by me. It's locked with Wells' – Thawne's – fingerprint."

"Couldn't Felicity hack into it?"

Cisco blinked as Iris poked a huge hole through his carefully thought out lie. "Probably. But these computers are off of the main network and I'm afraid what will happen if I start playing around with them. They could self-destruct."

Iris nodded. "He was such a bastard. I wouldn't be surprised if he rigged them to explode."

"Yeah." Cisco sent a silent apology to his former boss, former mentor, possibly former adversary and quite probably the only man who could save Barry's life. He made sure everything was just as he’d left it and walked out with Iris. He had his reservations – deep ones – about working with the Reverse-Flash, but if there was anyone who could save Barry, it was him.

2186

"I have access to the data you require, Professor." Gideon's interruption was a welcome distraction from the dark spiral of grief.

"Display, please."
As he reviewed the data, Eobard found himself mildly amused – not at the information itself – but at Cisco’s meticulous organization of it.

It was strange to think that Eobard was communicating with a man who was long dead. Or possibly not; there was no record of Francisco Ramon’s passing in any of Gideon’s databanks. No record of his life for that matter, after March 2017. He’d just disappeared after the Flash’s death, when the team had lost its purpose.

Snow and Raymond had lived happily and died in due course. As had Iris West and his ancestor, although not together. They’d divorced after five years of marriage and both had found other mates. Edward had spawned with his second wife, creating three wee Thawnes to carry on the illustrious name and thus engender his own existence.

But Cisco – he could be alive. The boy had so much power in him.

Just like Barry, who should have been immortal. Who was supposed to be immortal. The Speed Force should have preserved him for eternity, but it had failed Barry Allen, just as it had failed Eobard himself.

No. No. No.

Eobard stopped that thought. He was going to fix this. Barry was not supposed to die. Eobard had worked too hard, for too long – he’d given up too much – to let some monster steal what was his.

Eobard studied the data and began putting the pieces together. Zoom had been created by a particle accelerator explosion, but there had been no electrical storm. Just waves of dark matter rising through the earth on this alternate world. According to the data from the helpful chemist who’d manage to traverse dimensions and drop dead, there had been another S.T.A.R. Labs and another Harrison Wells on that Earth. One who’d been just as arrogant as Eobard had been during the years of his masquerade – maybe more so.

That Harrison Wells had denied the correlation between the failure of his accelerator and the rise of the meta-humans. He’d died with that denial on his lips as Zoom had first killed his daughter, then eviscerated him, and finally slaughtered the remaining staff at that S.T.A.R. Labs, with one of his meta-human minions capturing it all in a live video feed.

Eobard was heartbroken by the death of his doppelganger and that man’s child. It struck him as profoundly unfair that yet another Harrison Wells had had his life cut short. This grief was something else that Eobard needed to put aside, because unlike Barry’s life, he couldn't save that Harrison Wells’.

Missing from the files was any biological information about Zoom, and Eobard was surprised by this oversight. He'd need to discuss this with Cisco, but there was no way of knowing when he'd be able to connect with him again.

Eobard reached under his shirt and touched the piece of fabric he always kept next to his skin – a swatch from one of Barry’s suits. Not the thick red exterior – the tri-polymer fabric that Cisco had kept modifying and upgrading – but a piece from the lining that had rested next to Barry's flesh. It had been filled with sensors, picking up Barry's innate vibrations, the electromagnetic pulses that were the very rhythm of his cellular structure. Given Barry's metabolism and the daily stresses the suits underwent, the lining and the technology infrastructure had tended to wear out rapidly. One evening, after the team had departed for their homes, Eobard had taken a large piece of the discarded material, the part that had covered Barry's heart. At the time, he had no use for it, but it had seemed – in a moment of romantic foolishness – something worth saving.
He'd attached it to his own suit, the one he kept in the ring, the one he wore on the trip home. Now, he wore it against his skin, a constant reminder of everything he left behind, everything he'd lost. It was the only tangible connection he had allowed himself to have to the Barry Allen of the twenty-first century. At the time, it had been an incomprehensibly quixotic gesture.

It was pure serendipity that it had become his conduit to the past. A few days after learning of Barry's death, he'd held the swatch of fabric, closed his eyes and tried to reach out for a miracle. To connect, somehow, to Cisco – who had the power to see through timelines, and although he didn't know it, through time itself. He was untrained, something that Eobard deeply regretted, but the lack of training only meant that his talents were raw and needed the right conditions to blossom.

It had taken months of patience and perseverance for Eobard to finally make that connection, and it had paid off brilliantly. Or as brilliantly as it could in such terrible circumstances. He'd finally touched Cisco's mind and held onto it with an iron grip, his fear for Barry overriding any consideration for Cisco's well-being.

He knew, though, that he couldn't keep that up, not if he wanted Cisco's sanity to stay intact. Until the pathways became more familiar, and Cisco was more comfortable with Eobard in his head, he had to be very careful.

Now, with a single, delicate thought, Eobard reached out again.

"Cisco?"

At first, there was nothing. But then, a dawning awareness – a hint of fear, quickly masked and then lost in a tidal wave of curiosity and … gratitude.

"Doctor Wells – "

Eobard banked his irritation. He had nothing against the name or the man who rightfully owned it. But it wasn't his name.

"Sorry," Cisco says. "Is it Doctor Thawne?" There was an emphasis on the academic title.

"Technically correct, but if you wish to be formal, it's Professor Thawne. I don't mind if you call me Eobard, though."

Eobard could feel Cisco's relief at the lack of a rebuff and his surprise at the non-combative nature of their communication. "How are you?" Eobard asked. He'd been brutal to Cisco in their last encounter, a regrettable necessity.

"I'm okay. And thanks for caring."

Eobard couldn't wait any longer. "How is Barry?"

"A little better, not much – but any improvement is a cause for celebration. Caitlin thinks that if he continues to heal at his current rate, he could be breathing on his own in another few weeks."

Eobard ruthlessly suppressed any feeling at this news. Unlike Cisco, he couldn't take joy in this prognosis. How could he, knowing that Barry Allen was on life support? That he'd nearly died. That he would die.

"Did you get the data I sent?"

"Yes, and thank you. It has been very useful."
"But?"

"It's incomplete – there is no biological information on Zoom."

"That's because we haven't been able to obtain any. He doesn't bleed, his suit covers him completely. There has been no way to get a DNA sample from him. We don't even know for sure if Zoom is human – or meta-human or something completely different."

"What about from the dart you shot him with?"

There was no answer from Cisco, just a sense of confusion.

Eobard said, "Just before he dropped Barry in the Cortex, you shot him with something. He pulled the dart out and flung it away. You should be able to get a DNA sample from the point of the dart, if you still have it."

"Yes." Cisco's mental voice is small, ashamed. "I kept it, but I never thought about …"

"It's okay," Eobard reassures. "I think you've had other things on your mind."

The give and take between them was familiar, welcome, and on Eobard’s part, greatly appreciated. Here in 2189, most of Eobard’s time was spent alone in this house. His only companions were Gideon, and the very occasional and very unwelcome visits from either his father or Robern. They were checking up on Eobard, making certain that he was doing nothing to disgrace the family name. Frankly, Eobard was lonely. Even through time, conversing with Cisco filled a hole in his soul that was surprisingly deep.

"I'll run the tests and get the data uploaded as soon as I can," Cisco said.

"Thank you, Cisco."

There was a pause in their communication, but Eobard could feel the question forming down the line.

"When will you come back?"

Under different circumstances, Eobard might have given Cisco some grief for that question, based on their parting, but the situation was too desperate for snark. "I don't know. My connection to the Speed Force is still … erratic. If I could find a way, I'd be back before you knew I was gone."

"Thank you." The sense of relief Eobard was picking up from Cisco was as flattering as it was disturbing.

"Have you told anyone about this?" Eobard asked, already sure of the answer.

"No. I think they'd think I'd finally snapped. You are not remembered with much fondness at the moment."

Eobard sensed something else there, that there was something not completely true in Cisco's thoughts. "I understand. And unless I solve the problem of my speed, Team Flash's good opinion isn't going to matter much, is it?"

"No. But you'll solve it. You have to solve it. We need you. Here. Now. As soon as possible." With that thought, Cisco broke their connection.

A few seconds later, Gideon advised Eobard that there was updated information regarding Zoom,
and did he want to view it?
Chapter 4

In the Speed Force

The pain was without end. There was no part of Barry's body that did not seem to scream in agony, maddening and inescapable.

And for all of the torment in his body, the psychic anguish was worse. Barry was shredded from the soul, his connection to the Speed Force damaged. It would have been kinder if the monster had taken everything, but Zoom had ripped out Barry’s speed like a child tearing wrapping paper off of a birthday gift, leaving tattered remnants behind.

The emptiness, the holes in his being where his speed used to exist, was a profound torture. In more cogent moments, Barry imagined that this was what Eobard had felt when he'd lost his speed. He tried to draw strength from that idea, that if Eobard Thawne, if his reverse could exist – even thrive – for fifteen years with a broken connection to the speed force, then he could, too.

Trapped in the darkness, Barry tried to rebuild himself. He thought about Eobard as masquerading as Harrison Wells, spending endless hours perfectly still in his wheelchair. From the power module they'd found under the seat, Barry had realized that although the paralysis was a fraud, Eobard was still disabled – in ways far crueler than simple paraplegia. He’d been cut off from everything that made life as a speedster worth living, and in the screaming, pain-filled darkness, Barry wondered how Eobard hadn't gone mad, how he'd managed to keep living. How he'd managed to thrive.

Maybe Eobard had managed because he'd had a goal, an end-game that would be worth all of the pain. A future without his enemy, without the Flash. A future with someone who was his equal, not some pathetic, needy child constantly seeking validation.

At that thought, the pain coiled around Barry like a snake, squeezing tighter. Barry couldn't fight it anymore. He didn't have any reason to. Although he had friends and family who loved him, a city that needed him, in the end he had nothing. There was no one who would hold him in the dark and whisper the names of the stars to him.

There was no surcease from this agony, short of death.

Barry screamed to the void, "Let me go."

And for the first time, the void answered back, "No."

Barry didn't question why he'd gotten an answer, instead, he just begged, "Please let me go, it hurts so much."

The void was implacable. "Pain is not without purpose. You will bear it."

"I can't. I want to die."

"We cannot permit that."

The pronoun distracted Barry from the torment. "We?"

"Yes, 'we'. We are not singular, what we are is too vast to be contained within an individuality."

Barry was intrigued, and to his surprise, the pain receded. "What are you?"
"We are."

"That's not an answer." Barry was irritated by the evasion. But curious, too.

"Think, Barry. Think." There seems to be amusement in that almost-familiar command. "You know us, Barry. We are a part of you."

Pieces fell into place. "Are you the Speed Force?"

"Now, that was not so hard, was it?"

"That still isn't an answer."

His interlocutors' amusement grew. "You are a smart one. It is always the smart ones who cause the most trouble."

Barry wasn't sure if he had just been insulted or complimented. But as he reached forward, trying to puzzle out the identity of his interlocutor, the pain receded even further.

"Oh, that was definitely a compliment, Mr. Allen."

Barry felt himself grow hot, then cold. Why was the Speed Force talking to him with the voice of his mother's murderer? The voice of the man who had created him for the sole point of betraying him?

"Things are not always what they seem, Mr. Allen." The Speed Force now sounded sad.

"Things?"

"Take time, for instance. Because you are biological life, you need to see time as a linear construct, one that starts with the creation of the universe and moves forward at the speed of light. Or just beyond the speed of light. Or maybe slower than the speed of light. But maybe time doesn't exist at all."

Barry didn't have a reply for that.

There was more amusement. "Thank you for avoiding the obligatory quotation from Einstein."

In the darkness, Barry shivered, restless as the agony crept back. "Why are you here, now? Why not before? I've been in pain for so long."

The voice now seemed a touch sad; it lacked that familiar mocking tone. "You have finally reached deep into yourself; you have nowhere else to go. We could not come to you until this point. There are rules and we must obey them."

"So, an essential power of the universe still has to answer to someone? Something?"

" Exactly, Mr. Allen. Now, how about some light? Will that comfort you?"

With that, Barry found himself in quasi-familiar surroundings in a lab eerily similar to S.T.A.R. Labs. This place was softer, bathed in a warm golden light and draped in silence. There were people working – unfamiliar faces that ignored his presence. This might have been S.T.A.R. Labs before the particle accelerator explosion, but that didn't feel like the right answer. Barry walked around, observing the work being done. It seemed pointless – computer displays were blank, monitors were tuned to a repeating pattern of the S.T.A.R. Labs logo morphing into a supernova – soothing but without any meaning he could discern.
Barry was wondering how long he was going to be here when a voice broke through the muffled silence.

"Welcome, Mr. Allen. We have a lot to discuss."

Dr. Harrison Wells spoke, but while the words were the same, it wasn't the Wells that Barry remembered from that first encounter. That Harrison Wells, despite the wheelchair, had seemed a paragon of physical perfection – strong shoulders and arms, a broad chest clearly delineated under a tight black sweater. The wheelchair had been an effective disguise and the strength very real.

Other than his face and voice, this version of Harrison Wells had little in common with that man. He was walking, although he leaned heavily on a cane. He also looked like someone suffering from a long and debilitating illness. His face was gaunt, and the pale blue sweater he wore hung on him in soft, loose folds. He looked like a man alive only through the force of will.

"You seem surprised to see us," this Dr. Wells said.

"I am. I didn't expect the avatar of the Speed Force to be wearing the face and using the voice of a murderer." Barry lashed out, hurt at the sight of the man he'd loved and hated and still had too many feelings for.

Ignoring the insult, it gestured for him to follow. "Avatar – we like that. Let us go for a walk."

They were definitely not in the real S.T.A.R. Labs. Once they left the confines of the Cortex, Barry found himself in a large garden instead of dimly lit curving corridors. It was like nothing he'd ever seen before – formal and stylized, divided into squares, with plants trained to grow into intricate patterns.

The avatar explained, "It is a knot garden. Nature bent to man's will."

"This is a metaphor, isn't it?"

"We did say you were a smart one." The avatar moved slowly, leaning on the cane, taking careful steps on the pebble-covered ground. "And please, call us Harrison. Thinking of us as 'the avatar' is clever, but tiresome."

"But you're really not Harrison Wells, are you?"

"Of course not."

"Because Harrison Wells and his wife died on an empty road outside of Starling City. Because Eobard Thawne killed them both."

"Did he?"

Barry paused, shocked. "You're saying he didn't?"

"If you find this appearance unnerving, it can be changed."

In a heartbeat, it wasn't Harrison Wells standing before Barry, but his mother. She was wearing a gentle smile, but her eyes were filled with terror, with the reflections of gold and red lightning, of incomprehensible shadows.

"Does this bring you comfort?" the avatar asked.

Barry looked away, horrified."No – no." This was something he couldn't bear.
“Then maybe a stranger.” The avatar took the shape of another woman, about the same age as his mother had been, and just as beautiful.

It took a moment for Barry to recognize her. "Tess Morgan."

"Not such a stranger, it seems."

"I've seen photos of you."

"From the accident? The post mortem?"

Barry nodded.

"Fairly gruesome." They sat down and patted the bench that conveniently appeared. "We think you would be best served talking with Harrison, but perhaps in a little while."

Barry sat. Tess placed her hand over his, but all Barry felt was a strange coolness.

"So, as we were saying, you are clever enough to figure out what this is."

"A metaphor – but of what?"

"You do not know?" The avatar seemed worried by that.

Barry tried to figure it out. "You said this was a knot garden, nature bent to man's will. A metaphor for the Speed Force? For existence?" Barry struggled. "For everything?"

"In a way, yes. The Speed Force is an essential power of existence, but sentient life can, with care, bend us to its requirements. We are like gardeners, we preserve what is important and we let go of what is not needed."

Barry looked into Tess Morgan's eyes and found whole universes. "Are you preserving me?"

She smiled. "You are important to us, Barry Allen."

"Why?"

The avatar's smile turned wry. "You ask important questions, but rarely at the right time." The avatar stood and Barry followed suit. "You will eventually ask the right questions at the right time, and when you do, you will get the answers you need. Now is not the right time." She looked at him, still smiling. "You do not yet understand, do you?"

Barry was confused and in his confusion, pain began to roll over him. "No, I don't."

"Then stay for a while, relax in the sun. Listen to the plants grow. We think you will find their music pleasant. We will be back."

Tess brushed her lips against his cheek and Barry wanted to cry. "Wait – please." Barry was scared – of the pain, the loneliness, the utter helplessness of this eternity in the void.

"We will be back." The avatar vanishes into mist.

Barry sat back down and tried to follow the avatar's instructions. He tried to listen but all he could hear was the aching loneliness that had been the constant refrain in his soul for so long.

The garden began to change. The formal parterres softened and took on bright color, the stone
pathways turned to inviting green grass, and the air became sweet. Tired of sitting and curious about the changes, Barry got up and began to explore the garden, following one of the paths into the deeper greenery.

He found roses, blossoming in riotous profusion – white and golden-yellow and pink and blood-red – but protected by thorns as long as the first joint of his thumb. A yellow rose on a black stem, in full bloom, blocked Barry’s path. But there were no thorns guarding it. Barry stopped and the rose dropped at his feet.

Barry could have stepped over the blossom, but its symbolism was all too obvious. He heard the Speed Force whispering, "This is an invitation, Mr. Allen. One we urge you to accept."

He picked up the rose and it immediately shed all of its petals, which scattered in a quick and unexpected breeze. But the scattering wasn't random and Barry followed the path they made deeper into the garden. He found a small, sunlit clearing. It was like something out of a painting. An idealized image of peace and beauty. It helped to soothe the pain.

He was afraid to trust that image, but he was so tired.

"Rest here, Barry Allen. In this place, time is forgiving."

Barry was uncertain, but that was always the problem. He could never make the right choices.

"There are no right choices. Or wrong ones. Not here."

He sat down, the grass was warm and soft and the need to sleep was seductive.

"We will watch over you, Barry Allen. You are important to us."

He didn't think he'd be able to sleep, to let himself be so vulnerable in an alien place. But he closed his eyes and listened, as the avatar had recommended. Barry could hear the rustle of leaves, the movements of small insects, the sound of animals burrowing. It was peaceful, beautiful, like the recollection of a perfect day from a long lost childhood. The pain retreated even further.

When Barry woke, consciousness came in a swift rush. So did memory.

"Welcome back, Mr. Allen."

Barry struggled and sat up, fear and adrenaline making the movement awkward as he scrambled away from that voice. The avatar was Wells, again, in that strangely transfigured form.

The face it bore was filled with regret. "We are sorry. We do not mean to distress you."

"Then why do you keep appearing like him?"

"Is he not what you desire the most?"

That question was asked with casual regard, as if the Speed Force wanted to know what flavor of ice cream Barry preferred.

"But you're not him," Barry protested.

"We are not the Harrison Wells of your memory. After all, that man is not Harrison Wells, but Eobard Thawne."

Barry shook his head, frustrated. "I know you aren't Eobard Thawne."
"We are not even a representation of the man you once believed to be Harrison Wells."

"I don't understand." The words formed in Barry’s mind like a sob.

The avatar reached out to Barry. Caught in the resurgence of pain, Barry didn't struggle as they pulled him close. "Understanding will come, in time."

Barry found himself with his head cradled in Harrison's lap, Harrison's hands carding through his hair, stroking him, soothing him, easing the anguish of his lost speed. It felt all too real. "What do you want from me?"

"We want you to continue. We want you to heal."

............................................................

2186

The biological data that Cisco had transmitted was a fascinating revelation. Whatever Zoom was, most of his speed was artificial. Even accounting for the disintegrated state of the biological residue, Eobard could read it like a book.

Zoom did not get his speed from the Speed Force – at least, not any more.

Zoom had originally been a speedster like him, like Barry. The necessary markers in his mitochondrial DNA were there, but they were depleted. What was more telling was that Zoom's mitochondria were failing. His – and yes, Zoom was definitely male – cellular structure was on the verge of collapse. He should be dying.

This was not a product of the Speed Force or even a lost connection to it. Eobard had studied his own cellular structure, and Barry's too; he knew what the Speed Force looked like, how it enhanced the living material of its host. Whatever was in this monster, it was not the Speed Force that was killing him. If Eobard were the fanciful sort when it came to science, he'd say that it was an anti-Speed Force – negative energy, if such a thing was possible.

And yet, that wasn't the right name for it either; if just for the artificiality of it…

When Eobard’s childhood dreams of meeting the Flash had turned into the adult obsession of becoming the Flash, he'd first wondered if the hero's speed had come from some form of chemical enhancement. There were ways to speed up cellular regeneration, to give the human body enough fuel to enable speed, but those avenues of research had always ended in irreversible failure – all too similar to what Eobard saw in Zoom's cellular structure.

Eobard asked, "Gideon, please bring up my notes on the use of sodium chlorate as a speed enhancer."

"As requested, Professor Thawne." The monitors displayed the data Eobard had collected almost a decade ago – or twenty-five years in his own lifetime – and it confirmed his hypothesis.

"Overlay the cellular structure from the ninth variant with that of the biological sample."

Gideon complied. Eobard couldn't keep the smile off his lips. "Conclusions, Gideon?" He believed his eyes but he wanted confirmation.

"The biologic sample displays a pattern of cellular degradation that is consistent with long term exposure to the ninth variant."
"What are the projected risks with short-term usage of the ninth variant?"

"Please define short-term usage, Professor."

"A single dose."

"Minimal physical risks to cellular structure, but significant potential for damage to the natural speed force, as well as a high risk of addiction and addiction-related psychoses, as determined in the initial research. That dosage will only provide speed for approximately seventeen minutes, at maximum velocity."

"With tachyon enhancement, what is the maximum velocity?"

"Mach-20."

That was more than fast enough to get him back to Barry, but the cost would be too high. Eobard didn't want to return to the twenty-first century as a real sociopath, a monster worse than the one who'd injured Barry.

It was going to be difficult enough convincing the team he'd left behind that his crimes weren't legion, especially with his confession to the murder of Nora Allen. He could go back in secret, build the instruments he needed to extract his speed and give it to Barry, all without anyone knowing. But that would require diversions; he'd need to keep Cisco out of his own workshop, where all of the precision tools had migrated in the year since the particle accelerator accident. He'd also need to get to Barry while he was unguarded – which would be even more difficult. There was something tempting about this plan, to return like a deus ex machina. But it was a foolish, selfish fantasy. Cisco could easily build the devices he needed, and the idea of leaving Barry vulnerable, even for a few minutes, was untenable. He'd have to do this the hard way: go back to the twenty-first century and enlist the assistance of the team – who have every reason in the world to despise him.

With his plan set, Eobard spent the next five months working through the myriad of potential problems the speed enhancement drug could bring. In the hours when he wasn't working, wasn't reaching out to Cisco, he felt his emotional control slip further and further away. Eobard was consumed with the need to go back, growing more anxious with each day. The patience he'd cultivated for fifteen years was failing him, no matter how many times he reminded himself that he had an eternity to fix this.

Every time Eobard looked at Snow's medical notes on Barry's slowly improving condition, or watched the video footage of Zoom destroying Barry, he wanted to kill something. He relished the memory of plunging that knife into Simon Stagg's belly, knowing that as wrong as that deed had been, it had been the only way to keep Barry safe. Eobard wished he could do that to Zoom. To anyone who threatened his Barry's existence.

The speed drug was going to be the best solution to take Eobard back to the twenty-first century, but it had to preserve the last of his connection to the Speed Force, too. Without that, he couldn't help Barry. He would be running back just to watch him die. And that was not an option Eobard would ever consider.

"Professor Thawne, the simulations for the forty-second variant are complete."

Gideon's news distracted Eobard from his violent ideations. He looked at the results and examined them again.

"Thank you, Gideon." Eobard sighed. "The new formulation results in a twenty-seven percent
reduction in natural speed force. That is unacceptable."

Eobard wanted to throw something, but restrained himself. Anger was counterproductive. So he set to work with another variant, another set of parameters, testing and retesting through long days and longer nights. He'd never needed much sleep, but now he needed none. The thought of that headline, of Barry dead and gone, drove him like a whip to his back through the long months of testing and experimentation. This was going to be his final gift to Barry Allen, the remnants of the speed force in his own body – a fitting coda to everything he had ever done to him.

After another month of reformulations, he set the fifty-second variant to test and waited for Gideon to process the results. This time, the AI just announced the completion with a soft ping. Eobard rubbed his eyes and looked at the data. He wasn't sure his mind wasn't playing tricks on him. For the first time in nearly six months of testing, it seemed that he had a viable solution. "Is this correct?"

"Professor, why would I display incorrect data?"

"Disregard that, Gideon. I am just … surprised."

"This formulation meets the requirements. One dosage will provide enhanced speed for a single trip to the target date in the twenty-first century and it will not damage the remnants of your natural connection to the Speed Force."

"What about addiction?" The multiple reformulations were a balancing act between speed and psychosis, cellular degradation and destruction of the natural speed force.

"The psychological effects of the drug have been minimized as much as possible, but as with using natural speed, there will be increased dopamine and serotonin levels, deep stimulation of the pleasure centers within the cerebral cortex. This cannot be fully neutralized."

"Nor should it be." The pleasures of running were only surpassed by that of sex – or so he had been lead to believe. His own experiences in that realm had left much to be … desired. He'd long since reconciled himself to a life alone, except for his dreams.

Gideon – at least this module of the A.I. – was all too familiar with the state of Eobard's sexual history, but had no clue about the state of Eobard’s thoughts and blithely continued, "The faster you go, the greater the stimulation to your pleasure centers and the likelihood of addiction and addiction psychoses."

"Gideon, are you using 'you' generally, or are you referring to me specifically?"

"This is a conclusion borne out of the targeted simulations. The results do not correlate to your specific brain chemistry, Professor Thawne."

"Then please run the simulation again, using my neuro-chemical profile."

"Certainly, Professor Thawne."

Although this variant was the one Eobard would end up using to give him the speed to travel through time, he still needed another three weeks of reformulation, three weeks of testing and retesting to get it perfect. He was less likely to develop a speed addiction, but he didn't want to take even the slightest risk of returning to the twenty-first century in an impaired state. There was just too much at stake. Eobard just kept reminding himself that he had the advantage of time. And that he had just one chance to get this right.
October 2016

Today was a good day, or as good a day as it could be with Barry still in a coma.

Today was the day that Caitlin announced that the damage to Barry's cervical spine had sufficiently healed and his lung function had improved enough that she could safely extubate him.

The procedure took a little less than ten minutes and yet everyone was there. Joe and Eddie and Iris stayed in observation while Cisco and Caitlin did the work and waited for Barry to either breathe or code.

Barry breathed, he lived, and the team celebrated the victory.

Joe bent over Barry and kissed his son's forehead. "Please wake up."

They watched, but nothing happened. If only life were as simple as a fairy tale. Cisco suggested that Caitlin and Joe and Eddie and Iris get some rest. He'd be happy to take the overnight shift. If just so he didn't sleep, didn't have to have those all-too-realistic nightmares.

Caitlin, of course, struggled with the decision. "I don't know – it's too soon."

"Caitlin – go. Barry is stable, his vitals are strong. You can take a break for a couple of hours."

She looked from him to Barry to the rest of the team and back to Barry, before nodding. "Okay, but if there’s any change at all, call me."

"Of course I will."

Cisco watched the security cameras in the garage, making sure that everyone had driven off before he unlocked the bottom drawer in a cabinet in the side lab, and took out the old red and gold Flash emblem. He'd been using this instead of the damaged suit as his nexus to Thawne for the last few days. It was easier to work with and provided a cleaner connection. He didn't have to suffer through the background trauma of Barry's fight with Zoom, which sometimes had seeped in and corrupted the link between them.

He went back to his workstation, cleared his mind and touched the emblem. "Thawne?"

"Cisco. What is going on?" As usual, Thawne didn't bother with pleasantries.

Cisco responded, "Barry is breathing on his own. Caitlin took him off the respirator."

Cisco was nearly knocked out of his chair by the overwhelming sense of relief that came across the connection, until he added the caveat, "Barry isn't awake yet."

"Ah."

"But he's definitely improving. His cellular regeneration rate is up by seven percent over last week."

"And the total percentage delta from before Zoom's attack?"

"He's still down fifty-two percent." Cisco took a deep breath and carefully composed his thoughts. "Caitlin doesn't think he'll be able to regain more than another ten or fifteen percent. Zoom did too
much damage at a chromosomal level.”

Thawne’s silence was disconcerting. Finally, he asked, “Can I see him?”

“How?”

“Through your eyes, Cisco. Will you let me see him?”

Cisco wasn’t even certain that was possible.

“Please try.” Thawne was begging.

Still holding the emblem, Cisco went into the med bay. “Can you see him now?”

“No, damn it.”

“Okay, let me try something.” Cisco placed the emblem over Barry’s heart, maintaining the physical connection, and opened himself up in a way he never had before. For a moment, he went blind within the vibrations, and then everything began to coalesce. He could see out of Thawne’s eyes – a laboratory similar and yet much more sophisticated than the one here. The holographic avatar of the Gideon A.I. was in the corner of his peripheral vision. He looked down and saw hands not his own. Wells’ hands. Thawne’s hands. The hands that had once killed him.

Cisco could feel Thawne’s regret through the link.

“My hands.”

“Sorry.”

“Look at Barry. Concentrate.”

Cisco obeyed, drawing back, retaking control of his sight, focusing on Barry’s face. Barry was so pale and still, but other than the nasal cannula feeding him oxygen, he looked like he was sleeping. And once again, Cisco was overwhelmed by emotions that were not his own.

Grief.

Protectiveness.

Anguish.

Regret.

Covetousness.

And overriding everything, love.

Then nothing.

Cisco wasn’t surprised by any of those feelings, not after the year he’d spent vibing a relationship between Barry and Thawne, the two of them living in domestic bliss in that house in the forest.

“What relationship?”

“Uh. Sorry – must be thinking of something else.” Cisco hadn’t realized that this connection worked two ways. That Thawne could read Cisco’s thoughts – not just the ones he projected.
"Cisco?" If Cisco had expected Thawne to hammer at him, he appeared bound for disappointment. The inquiry was gentle, tentative, unlike any that Cisco had had with Thawne before – either within a vibe or when Thawne had been masquerading as Harrison Wells. "What have you seen?"

Cisco didn't want to answer. He'd seen too much – death as well as love.

"Please."

"If I tell you, it could change the timeline." That was the best excuse Cisco could come up with. It was also the truth.

"Yes, it will." Thawne seemed resigned. And approving. "You've learned something since I've been gone."

"Not an impossibility." Cisco took the emblem and left Barry's bedside, and that seemed to put a barrier back up between them. He could no longer feel Thawne's emotions. "Are you any closer to finding a way to come back?"

"Actually, yes. I'm almost ready. And there's something I'm going to need you to do for me."

"What?" Cisco couldn't begin to imagine what Thawne would need from him, but he was willing.

"There is something I'll need you to build."

Cisco's mind was flooded with diagrams and schematics. "Stop, stop," he said, overwhelmed. "What is this?"

"It's a speed extractor. It will remove a speedster's power, their connection to the Speed Force."

"What?" Cisco was revolted by the very concept. "Hell no, I'm not building this." He nearly let go of the emblem to break the connection.

"Why?" Eobard was surprised at the rejection.

"You're coming back to steal Barry's speed. I've been helping you so you can suck him dry." And yet, Cisco couldn't bring himself to sever the connection, not when there was so much at stake – like Barry's life. Thawne didn't reply, but Cisco could feel his emotions – pain, grief, anger – leaking through. "I'm wrong?"

"Yes."

"If you're not taking Barry's speed, then what do you need this for? Is it a way to de-power Zoom?"

"Zoom's not the only speedster in this equation, Mr. Ramon."

"You?" Cisco was even more shocked than when Thawne showed him what he needed him to build.

"Yes, me. I'm convinced that Barry won't fully recover until all of the Speed Force is returned to his body, but he doesn't have time to regenerate naturally. The only way to do that quickly is to replenish what was stolen."

"From you? You're going to use your speed to top him up?"

"Yes – that's a good way to put it."

"What will that mean to you?"
"Those consequences are not important."

"I think they are." Cisco wasn't going to let this go.

"Then we can discuss the consequences later. Right now, I need you to get started on the device. There are schematics on my computer. You know how to get into it now."

For the first time since he'd been communicating with Eobard Thawne, Cisco wasn't the one to break their connection.

Cisco shook his head, clearing out the fuzziness and picked up a tablet. As he sketched out the plans Thawne had relayed, he thought about what Thawne has told him – that he's going to just give Barry the last of his own speed. It seemed such a generous and unselfish thing to do, so very much unlike the Eobard Thawne he'd briefly gotten to know, and yet very much in keeping with the man he'd called as Harrison Wells.

In the Speed Force

Barry realized that time had no meaning within the Speed Force.

Whether he was at peace or in pain, whether he were comfortable and incurious or restless and disturbed by questions that could not be answered, the days were endless. Barry wandered through the gardens, or else through places that seemed familiar but on closer examination were like fragments of someone else's memory. Playing fields and classrooms, populated with children that he thought he knew, but didn't.

The avatar usually accompanied Barry. They were rarely a silent presence, but for all their verbosity, they provided little useful information.

Barry had been walking with the avatar, today wearing Tess Morgan's face, and said, "You couldn't be more cryptic if you tried."

They laughed. "Knowledge, especially self-knowledge, doesn't come easily or without a price. There are no shortcuts."

"And now you're speaking in epigrams. I think my professor from freshman philosophy had that on a poster in her classroom."

The avatar didn't answer, but to Barry's surprised, they asked him a direct question. "How are you feeling?" A bench appeared and they gestured for him to sit.

Startled, Barry asked for clarification to the question, "Spiritually? Emotionally?"

"What about physically? Are you still in a great deal of pain?"

For the first time in what seemed to be a very long while, Barry took stock of his body. It still hurt, but not the way it had when he first arrived here. "Parts of me still feel like they're missing. There are still empty holes where my speed used to be." Barry tried not to panic.

"Yes, your ability to access the Speed Force has been damaged."

"That doesn't make sense. I'm here, I'm – " He gestured around him, "enveloped by the Speed Force."
"Because we are protecting you, preserving you. You are important to us and we have extended ourselves over you. When your body and your consciousness return to their more typical state, your connection with us will once again be governed by your body's ability to access the speed force."

Barry dropped onto the bench that had conveniently appeared. "So, I won't be a speedster anymore?"

"You will be a speedster, Barry. You may even be as fast. But you will not be as invulnerable as you once were. You have suffered a terrible trauma and the speed force in your body may not respond as it once had."

Barry looked at the avatar, at Tess Morgan's face with the eyes that reflected infinity. He needed comfort, reassurance – two things that this version of the avatar couldn't give to him. "Can I talk to Harrison?"

They smiled at him. "Of course you can, but you know that this is the first time you've asked for that."

Barry ducked his head. "I know that there's no difference between you and Harrison. You're both manifestations of my subconsciousness."

"No, Mr. Allen, we are not." Tess Morgan had been replaced by Dr. Harrison Wells.

Barry was surprised, "No? You aren't?"

"Not at all." Harrison was wearing an enigmatic smile, an expression that Barry was all too familiar with.

"I don't understand. If you're not from my head, then what are you?"

"Is it really so important?"

Barry stifled a sigh. After so many conversations, he knew that when the avatar would answer his questions with more questions, he was running into a dead end. "I guess not."

Harrison reached out and took Barry's hand. "Are you afraid?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"Not being fast enough, not being able to defeat Zoom. I wasn't fast enough when I had all of my speed, and I won't be fast enough now that he's damaged me."

"Zoom is the immediate threat. And one that cannot be discounted or minimized. But he is not what you really fear."

"Of course he is. I'm afraid he'll kill me the next time. Then he'll kill everyone I love."

"Or maybe that he will kill those who you love and let you live."

Barry sucked in his breath. The pain from that thought was like a knife wound. "You are merciless, aren't you?"

The avatar shrugged. "We are truthful. But we do not think this is what you are truly afraid of. It is part of your fear, but not the totality of it."
Barry didn't respond.

Harrison squeezed his hand. "It is just us here. There is no reason to keep denying the truth."

Of course there was reason. If he admitted the truth – even here, especially here – there would be no way to deny it later.

"I'm afraid to go back. He won't be there. You won't be there." Barry didn't know why he made that last statement. He knew that this representation of Harrison Wells was never meant to be Eobard Thawne.

The avatar didn't pick up on his mistake. "As we have told you, I am not him, Barry. I would never have been there."

The pronoun startled him. "I am? This is the first time I've ever heard you refer to yourself in the singular."

Harrison smiled. "Consider it an existential conundrum. We are the Speed Force. But in this appearance – at this moment in time, I am Harrison Wells."

"Wait – you've said you are not Harrison Wells. Why are you lying to me?"

Harrison let out a little sigh. "There is no lie. This shell – this avatar – is not the Harrison Wells of your memory. That is what we have told you, several times. None of this is built from your memories. But I am a true representation of a Harrison Wells."

The avatar still held Barry's hand, turning it over so it lay cupped in its palm. It stroked Barry's pulse point, a gentle and unnerving caress.

Barry stood up, freeing himself. "No."

"You are being rather willfully blind, Mr. Allen. You know the answer to this; you are just not willing to think that far. We have given you all of the clues. You are just unwilling to put them together."

Barry snapped, "Sorry to be such a disappointment."

Harrison shook his head, the smile never leaving his face. "You never disappoint me. You could never disappoint me. Or us. We love you."

When the avatar – in that form – used the word "love," Barry felt his control – already worn thin from this too-emotional conversation – fracture. He walked away, leaving Harrison Wells, with his gaunt body and his cane and his tentative limp. Leaving his bright smile and blazing eyes and existential conundrums to sit on a sun-warmed bench in a garden that only existed in his mind.
"Gideon, should we run one last simulation?" Eobard picked up a sera extraction kit and frowned. He had taken so much blood the last few days that the veins in his inner elbows were failing.

"This will be the thirtieth trial on this variant, Professor Thawne. All previous trials have resulted in the same outcome."

Eobard put down the kit and sighed. "I guess there is such a thing as over-testing." He called up the headline from March, 2016. It still destroyed him. "Are we ready?"

"The dosage has been measured, Professor." A drawer popped open with a mechanical whoosh, revealing a pressure syringe.

Eobard toyed with his ring. He'd put it away as soon as he'd moved back into the house, but this morning, knowing that he was ready to make the final journey, he'd taken it out again.

He felt nervy in ways that were utterly foreign to him. Excited and worried in equal measure. There would be no return trip to the twenty-second century, no Time Sphere, no miraculous restoration of his ability to access the speed force. This was a one-way trip, likely to his death – either at the hands of the team that despised him, the people he'd betrayed, or by the monster who had nearly killed Barry.

Or by Barry himself, as an act of retribution for the death of his mother.

But as soon as that thought crossed Eobard's mind, he negated it. Barry Allen doesn't kill. That's want makes him a hero.

Eobard took hope from that thought. Perhaps that could mean that they had a possibility for happiness at the far end of this journey. Until now, Eobard hadn't let himself dwell on that stray thought he'd picked up from Cisco, that Cisco had been vibing on a relationship between him and Barry for over a year. But now, as Eobard prepared to travel back in time, to save Barry Allen at all costs, he allowed himself to imagine just what Cisco had seen – he and Barry living happily together.

He had the luxury of time right now, and Eobard let his mind wander, weaving a fantasy built on a single stray thought.

It's wintertime and it's not the first year that he's felt the cold in his bones. Just small aches and twinges – the price of his years as a crippled speedster and the accretion of age in the years after he'd given up the rest of his speed to Barry. Today, his shoulder aches. Tomorrow, it might be his knee. But he doesn't care.

He's home and soon, Barry will be here, too.

Eobard enjoys the satisfaction of that thought. Barry, his speedster, his heart, his life. Eobard had messed up so many times in the past, in the future, too, that he still cannot believe he deserves this.

The firelight glints on the gold ring on his finger – not the miracle of miniaturization – but his wedding band. He closes his eyes and conjures the memory of their wedding day. Of course, it had had nothing to do with tradition – not when the celebrant had been an irreverent genius engineer with a gift of foresight and a talent for naming. Nor when the ceremony had taken place in the
S.T.A.R. Labs Cortex and Eobard's best man had been his own ancestor.

Eobard hears Cisco say the words that make their relationship legally binding, and then he recites his own vow – bits of poetry cobbled together with too many emotions. Barry speaks his vows, and his voice cracks, too …

A rush of cold air interrupts his musings, and suddenly, Barry's standing in front of him. He presses a soft kiss against Eobard's cheek and Eobard steps back – Barry's lips are just a little cold, and although he's radiating heat, he's also soaking wet from the melting snow.

Barry announces with a smile, "Driveway's clear. It was no challenge – ran back and forth a few times and everything melted. The roads are another story. I'm not risking a flood to clear the highway."

Eobard strips off one of Barry's gloves – the one on his right hand – and rubs the wedding band there. "Hmm, no, you shouldn't. And it's not like we have anywhere to go." Eobard smiles at the thought. A whole weekend with his speedster. No patrols, no meta-human threats, and, although Eobard still loves to be the voice in Barry's ear when he's out running, he much prefers the time when Barry isn't risking his life to save some unworthy soul. Just the two of them. There is nothing more that he needs to make his life complete.

This fantasy would be part of Eobard’s talisman. The image of he and Barry, both of them happy and together in a future that might never happen – one Eobard had no intention of trying to force into being – would take Eobard back to his Barry, the speedster he'd created. Back to a world that had been changed after Eobard’s departure. It should be enough to shield him from the Time Wraiths. It would be enough. That, and Eobard’s unbreakable conviction that he was repairing, not altering, the timeline.

"Gideon, please prepare to shut down."

"Yes, Professor. Good travels."

Eobard spared a moment for regret at what he has to leave behind; Gideon had been his constant companion during this long exile in a future he had come to despise. The A.I. had grown and changed, just as Eobard had. This module, the one he’d carried with him during that last, disastrous trip to the twenty-first century, was vastly more powerful than the one he’d left behind in S.T.A.R. Labs. That one was a clone. It contained the same data and the same abilities to reflect the changes in the timeline, but it did not have the same level of intuition as this unit.

It would be relatively easy to bring Gideon's core with him. Easy, but dangerous. The trick to avoiding the Time Wraiths was traveling without the intention of damaging the timeline. Taking the twenty-second century's version of a powerful A.I. back to the past would be like dumping a bucket of bloody chum into shark-infested waters. The Time Wraiths would devour him before he arrived.

Eobard pocketed the syringe and summoned his personal transportation to take him to S.T.A.R. Labs. Like the house in the forest and other assets, after Barry Allen’s death, S.T.A.R. Labs had reverted back to the Trust and been turned back into a profit making venture. In the last hundred years, S.T.A.R. Labs had become a center for the greatest technological developments in the country – the world. Harrison Wells' dream had been made real.

But Eobard himself hadn't gone back there since his return from the past. The Central City facility and ones like it in a dozen other cities were controlled by a series of anonymous corporations responsible for carrying out Eobard’s carefully mapped out instructions. And they would continue to do so without Eobard’s interruption or intervention.
Eobard timed his arrival for a few hours after the end of the business day, when there would be few people around to notice him. There was a small outbuilding at the far side of the transportation terminal, a plain bunker without windows or discernible purpose or even a visible door. But those responsible for overseeing the Labs and fulfilling Eobard’s wishes had observed them perfectly when constructing this. The entryway was – like the vault inside S.T.A.R. Labs – keyed to Eobard’s palm print. He placed his palm on the sun-warmed wall and it slid open without a sound. This building was nothing more than a secure access point to the particle accelerator tunnel.

Eobard had left no instructions regarding that part of the Labs. He’d felt it would be too dangerous to draw attention to them, and hopefully, more than a century and a half after the accident, they’d mostly be forgotten. Of course, there was the risk that the tunnel was blocked, or used for storage or for other experiments. But it was still the best place to get up to speed, to create the path back to 2016.

He climbed down the ladder and was struck by an unnerving sense of déjà vu – no, not déjà vu – because it was an actual memory. He’d climbed down a similar ladder and taken far too much delight in tormenting his ancestor. Eobard added that to the list of sins he’d need to do penance for. In hindsight, Edward had been the best of the Thawnes. Better than the man who’d sired Eobard. Better than the cold-hearted and suspicious brother who’d spent his life deriding and humiliating Eobard. Edward Thawne might have been just a lowly cop with an undistinguished career ahead of him, but he’d been a man who hadn’t needed lessons in compassion. If the rest of the Thawnes had been in his mold, Eobard might not had grown up feeling so alienated, needing a hero so badly he’d traveled through time to find one and ended up leaving tragedy in his wake.

Eobard reached the bottom of the ladder and found the light switch. The power was still connected and according to the display on the wall, the particle accelerator tunnel was clear and unobstructed. Eobard wasn’t going to take any chances and walked the entire circumference before making the run. It was time.

He activated the ring, and his suit, complete with the tachyon device, popped out. Eobard got into it, making sure that the worn and frayed piece of lining he’d taken from Barry’s suit – his nexus back to the twenty-first century – was in place. The pressure syringe in hand and poised against the bare flesh at the base of his throat, Eobard took a deep breath and concentrated on his memories of Barry Allen. Not the hero he’d dreamed of and worshiped as a child, the one who’d brought him so much pain. No, Eobard concentrated solely on the man who’d brought him nothing but joy, the man he’d left behind.

Eobard activated the syringe and the drug entered his system with a powerful rush. His hands shook as he lifted the cowl over his head, the chemicals commanding him to run, run, run and to never stop. But he was better than the drug. He was stronger than that. He was Eobard Thawne, the Reverse-Flash, and it was his destiny to save Barry Allen.

With that single thought driving him, Eobard ran faster than he ever had. As he breezed past Mach-One, he heard the faint and familiar sound of a sonic boom. A few heartbeats later, more percussive noise as his speed doubled and tripled. He didn't worry about damaging the structure – it had been built just for this very purpose, the pressure of his speed venting up and out. Eobard had lost count of the number of times he'd circled before, finally, the portal appeared – a shining blue doorway towards his heart's desire.

Eobard made that leap, letting the momentum propel him back through time. He closed his eyes against images of a past he’d never experienced, focusing on Barry, always on Barry. On the hope that this would fix the abomination that should never have occurred.
He could feel the speed drug in his blood wane, but he kept going. He was so close. Eobard could see Barry ahead of him, lying on a hospital bed. Eobard could see the monitors registering life. He could *feel* the call of Barry's speed force pulling him forward, irresistible in its perfect, but damaged, beauty.

Eobard made the final leap and tumbled out of the time stream. His chemically enhanced speed fully depleted, he landed without grace or style or even the slightest hint of control, tumbling against the concrete floor before coming to a stop.

Panting and sore, Eobard got to his feet and did his best to shake off the aftereffects of his trip. Looking around, he couldn’t see much difference between the particle accelerator tunnel he’d started from and this one. Maybe the lights were a little brighter, the air a touch less stale. But until he left the tunnel, he had no way of knowing how successful this journey really was.

Eobard headed for the nearest exit point, hoping that he'd arrived at the right moment. That he wasn't too late to save Barry.

October 2016

Cisco studied a map of Central City with an overlay of dimensional breaches. Over the last few weeks, Zoom had been sending metas through at a rapid pace and they were wreaking havoc on a city without its super-powered guardian, but the past few days, everything had become quiet. There were no signs of any breachers, there was no other meta-human activity. Cisco had managed to reconfigure the Boot into a more manageable tool for use by the CCPD, and they'd mostly been able to keep the metas in check. He'd also been able to adjust the S.T.A.R. Labs satellites to alert them when a breach was activated. Maybe their vigilance was giving Zoom second thoughts about whatever he was planning for this Earth.

If only they could figure out how to close the breaches, to keep Zoom on the other side and away from here. But Cisco could hear Barry telling them that doing that was the wrong thing. That they needed to stop Zoom, not contain him. That they had to rescue that other world, too.

Cisco looked over into the med bay, at Barry who was so still, so void of that spark that made him Barry, his best friend.

It had been two weeks since Caitlin removed the breathing tube. Two weeks since Barry had been breathing on his own. Two weeks of stable vital signs and increasing Speed Force. The wounds that Zoom had inflicted – the broken back and neck, the damage to lungs and kidneys and liver, to his heart and to his bones – they had all healed. But Barry was still in a coma.

There was no reason why he hadn't woken up, other than the missing quantity of Speed Force. Caitlin estimated that it was still thirty-nine percent less than what it had been before Zoom's attack. She'd hoped that Barry would have recovered more of it, but as each day passed, each test registered the same data, her hope – and the team's – began to waver. Barry’s body was just too damaged.

Cisco hadn't heard from Eobard Thawne since their last conversation, when Thawne had commanded him to build the speed extractor.

"Barry won't fully recover until all of the Speed Force is returned to his body. He might recover fully in time, but he doesn't have time. The only way to do that quickly is to replenish what was stolen."

"From you? You're going to use your speed to top him off?"
The very idea of mechanically removing the Speed Force from anyone was sickening. The thought of it seemed like something out of a Japanese horror movie – no, worse – because those movies were just terrifying fantasies. This was reality, it was something that General Eiling might have done to Barry if he'd ever caught him.

And yet, the fact that Thawne knew how to do this and never used it on Barry… it gave Cisco pause.

Thawne had created the Flash to give him a way home, back to the twenty-second century, because he didn't have enough speed to do it himself. He could just have taken Barry's speed without anyone knowing it. Taken it and gone home. No need for an elaborate masquerade, no need for Thawne to pretend to be something he wasn't.

Why, then? Why the lies, why the masks? What did that get Thawne?

"You okay, Cisco?" Caitlin was hovering over him.

"Yeah, just a little worn out."

"Maybe you're the one who needs to go home and get some rest."

He shrugged. "Maybe in a little while. I need to go down to my workroom. Joe's sent over some specs for improvements on the Boot. I think they're doable, but I need to run some tests."

"It can't wait until tomorrow?"

"No. Everything seems quiet on the breach front. No new meta sightings. This is the time to get it done."

Caitlin patted his shoulder. "Okay, but don't overdo it."

"I won't."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

Cisco headed down to the workroom, hoping that Caitlin wouldn't say anything to Joe. Yes, the CCPD had asked for further improvements to the Boot, but Joe had told him that there was no rush – not at the moment. He had to finish the final calibrations on the speed extractor, and he needed a few hours of uninterrupted time.

Lost in his thoughts, Cisco didn't sense anything when went into his workroom and turned on the light. He had no premonition, no vibe, no feeling that anything was out of the ordinary.

"Hello, Cisco."

At first, Cisco wasn't sure how he heard that voice – was it a vibe? Or …

No, definitely not a vibe. Eobard Thawne, dressed in the yellow horror, was perched on a stool in the far corner of Cisco's workroom.

Cisco was caught between utter joy and utter terror. Yes, the last few months had cast a different light on just who Eobard Thawne was, but Cisco couldn't stop the memory of that alternate timeline. The one where Cisco had ended up dead with this man's hand through his heart.
He swallowed down the memory and found his voice. "You made it."

"Yes, I did." Thawne didn't move from his position. His hands were open and resting on his knees, palms up, but then he placed them on the back of his neck in a gesture of surrender.

Cisco approached Thawne with care, wishing he had some kind of weapon, even though weapons were useless against a speedster.

Thawne must have noticed his apprehension, and he also apparently read his mind when he said, "If you used your powers, you could have me helpless and begging for death." Thawne's tone was gentle, even a touch wry – too much like Harrison Wells for Cisco's comfort.

He snapped, "What the hell do you mean? My powers?"

Eobard just shook his head. "That's for another time, perhaps. We have other things to concentrate on."

He smiled – it was like Harrison Wells was back – and at that moment, Cisco felt that despite everything that Thawne had done, to him, to Barry, to the world in general, this was the one person who had the power to make everything right.

Cisco stood right in front of the Reverse-Flash, so close he could smell Thawne's sweat and see a bruise forming on his forehead. Cisco couldn't help himself – he'd been so close to losing hope, so desperate for someone to come in and make everything right – he flung his arms around Eobard Thawne, not caring at all that this man was a murderer. Suddenly, Cisco could see a future that didn't end with Barry's funeral. "I'm so glad you're back."

Thawne hugged him back, and for the first time since Zoom had nearly killed Barry, Cisco felt safe.

"Truthfully, Cisco, I'm glad to be back, too."

Cisco felt laughter burble up and couldn't stop it, not even when the tears started, not even when he couldn't take a breath. In that moment, the only thing he could hold onto was Eobard Thawne, and that if he let go, he'd shatter.

"Shh, Cisco, it's okay. I've got you. I've got you."

Worn out and aching, but finally dry-eyed, Cisco pulled away. He couldn't quite look at Thawne, at least not until the man tucked his fingers under his chin and gently forced him to meet his gaze.

"I promise you this, Cisco Ramon, I will do everything in my power to fix this. To earn back your trust. Whatever happens, never forget that."
Chapter 7

Eobard couldn't quite believe how good it felt to be back here. To be back in a century he'd cursed for fifteen years.

*I never should have left.*

Yes, well, hindsight was twenty-twenty, wasn't it, or so the expression went. And Eobard didn't yet know if the future he had once hoped to return to would even happen now, or if the timeline were irretrievably broken. Eobard could go into the vault and ask this century's version of Gideon, but honestly, he was afraid to. What if he *couldn't* fix this? What if his presence here only accelerated Barry's demise?

Yesterday, and for a year's worth of yesterdays, Eobard had been so certain that giving Barry the remainder of his speed would be the cure. Would restore him to full health and power. But now he was having doubts. Strong ones.

And then there was the siren's call of speed itself crying out to Eobard. It would be easy to create another dose of the drug, to be fast-faster-fastest. To always win. To rip Zoom apart and bathe in the monster's blood.

*No. Stop it.*

"Are you okay?" Cisco was standing at his elbow.

Eobard shook his head, trying to dispel those thoughts. "I'll be fine."

"What's the matter?"

He looked up, warmed by Cisco's concern but irritated, too. It had been a long time since Eobard had worked with anyone. A lie formed on his lips, an easy explanation. But this was Cisco, who could reach across centuries to communicate with him, who'd seen parts of Eobard that he never thought he'd share with anyone.

"It's the aftereffects of the time travel." *And the speed drug.*

"Can I ask, how did you get back? Have you gotten all of your speed back?" Cisco seemed unusually hesitant.

Eobard sighed, he wasn't quite ready for this. "You can ask, but I'm not going to tell you. Not yet."

"Why?"

"Joe West, Caitlin Snow, Iris and Edward Thawne. The story is long and complicated and I don't want to tell it more than once."

Cisco nodded. "Okay. I get that. But you're going to have a fun time convincing Joe not to shoot you on sight."

*And Joe's partner, my ancestor.* "What about Edward? Do you think he'll shoot me on sight, too?"

Cisco's tone was as dry as the desert, "Eddie? Let's see. You kidnapped and tormented him. You planted evidence to ruin his life. You belittled and demeaned him."
"So, yes. I'd guess he'd just as soon as shoot me as accept an apology?"

Cisco chuckled. "Maybe. I think you'd have a better shot – excuse me, better chance – with him than with Joe, though."

"How would you feel about being my advocate? Softening them up." Eobard wasn't above begging.  

"Had a feeling you were going to ask me to do that."

Eobard grimaced. "I need them on my side. We need them on my side. If Joe or Eddie shoot me, Barry's never going to fully regain his speed. Zoom will …" Finish what he started.

"Zoom will kill him." Then Cisco quietly adds, "I know that."

"You know?"

"I've seen it."

Eobard let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding. "Even recently?"

"Yes. I've seen Barry's funeral too many times in my dreams for it to be ordinary terror." Cisco laughed, and the sound was nasty. "Those dreams are too much like the dreams I had of you killing me."

Eobard felt himself flush at the reminded of one of the worst decisions he'd ever made, and he apologized again. "I'm sorry for that."

Cisco shrugged. "We'll have our reckoning for that eventually. Right now, you're going to save Barry and help us defeat Zoom. Consider my grudge suspended until those events happen."

"You are something else, Cisco Ramon."

Cisco laughed, the sound bright despite the grimness of the situation. "That I am."

Trying not to think about Barry Allen, comatose in a bed three floors above, Eobard turned his attention to the speed extraction device. He was pleased at how well Cisco had followed the instructions. "This will need calibration before I use it, but other than that, it's ready."

"I'd give it a name, but it's a disgusting thing."

"Yes, it is." Eobard hoped that his terse agreement of that sentiment would stifle further discussion. But this was Cisco and of course it didn't.

"You used Blackout's powers as a model for this, didn't you."

"Yes, I did, and another meta-human, one you had been tracking. You called him 'The Turtle'. I hunted him down and took care of him. He was too much of a danger to Barry."

"You never expected to use it on yourself, though," Cisco said with surprising confidence.

Eobard was surprised that Cisco didn't interrogate him on the Turtle’s fate. He shrugged. "I considered the possibility."

"As well as the possibility of using it on Barry?"

Eobard refused to answer.
"Silence gives consent."

"Qui tacet consentire."

"Yeah, 'A Man For All Seasons'. We watched that together, remember?"

"I remember everything, Cisco." He sighed. "Yes, I thought about using it. I thought long and hard about stealing Barry's speed. But every time I did, I rejected the idea. There's an expression from the last century – your last century – the 'nuclear option'. Using it on Barry was always an untenable option."

"And yet, you explored the idea."

"Of course I did. Explored it, never pursued it." Eobard was getting angry. "Why are we even discussing this?"

Cisco took the verbal gloves off, and then the metaphorical ones as he planted himself in front of Eobard, fists clenched. "Because I'm trying to understand you. You spent fifteen years playing games, manipulating Barry, manipulating circumstances. You lied and cheated and killed in order to get home. And yet you had the power to do so without all of the sturm und drang that you went through with the Time Sphere. With restarting the particle accelerator. This would have been the easy way, but you didn't use it. I don't understand why."

Eobard shook his head. "There are some things, Cisco Ramon, that you're just not meant to know."

"That's a fucking lame-ass answer, Eobard Thawne."

"And it's all you're going to get." Eobard wasn't going to tell Cisco that taking Barry's speed would mean the death of his dreams. Instead, he focused on the device, at least until the intercom crackled. It was Caitlin laying down the law.

"Cisco, Iris and Eddie are here. I'm going to head home for a few hours. And you should, too. Remember, you promised to get some rest."

Eobard hit the mute button and spoke for Cisco's ears alone. "Get Edward down here. I don't want to delay this any longer than I have to."

Cisco didn't fight him on it, just pushed Eobard's hand away from the intercom. "Caitlin – can you ask Eddie to come down to my workroom? I need a cop's opinion on these upgrades."

*That's my clever boy,* Eobard thought approvingly.

"Okay," Caitlin said. "I'll hang with Iris until you're done with Eddie."

"Great, thanks." Cisco disconnected and pointed to the stool in the corner, where Eobard had waited before. "Go. Sit and keep your mouth shut. I'm about to save your sorry ass."

Knowing just what was at stake, Eobard retreated back to the corner and put his hands on the back of his neck. He could probably dodge a bullet, but he'd rather not have to.

He didn't have to wait long for his ancestor to arrive. The last time he'd seen the man, he'd thought Edward was a weak and pallid imitation of the Thawnes, small and insignificant. Looking at him now, with more recent memories of his family to compare him to, Eobard discarded those earlier opinions once and for all. His ancestor wasn't weak, he wasn't useless. He was a good man with a loving heart and far better than so many of the Thawnes who came after him.
"Hey, Cisco," Edward said. "Caitlin said you're working on some improvements to the Boot and have a couple of questions for me?"

"Yeah, about that." Cisco rubbed the back of his neck. "Kinda not really. I just needed to talk to you alone for a few minutes."

"Sure, what's up?"

Eobard watched as Cisco casually positioned himself at Edward's right hand, close enough to stop him from pulling his weapon. Eobard took that as his cue. "Hello, Edward."

He watched his ancestor's expression through time-dilated vision, and in other less fraught circumstances, he might have been amused at the expressions that crossed Edward's face. First shock, then horror, then fear. Finally anger. Then: "What the hell are you doing here?"

"I came back to save Barry Allen."

In the Speed Force

Head resting in Harrison's lap, Barry was stretched out on the grass, staring up at an endless blue sky and drifting high clouds. Harrison was combing his fingers through Barry's hair and Barry was so relaxed and content that he wanted to purr.

"What do you see?" Harrison asked.

Barry hummed."A dragon. Or maybe a butterfly. The clouds don’t hold still long enough."

"No, they do not."

"This is another metaphor, isn't it?"

Harrison didn't answer, which was answer enough.

Barry mused, "The Speed Force simply is. Everything around it changes."

"It is good to see that your time here has not been wasted, Mr. Allen." Harrison's hands never stopped stroking.

"It's coming to an end, though. Isn't it?"

Yes, soon. We will miss your presence. You bring us joy."

"I guess I can't stay." Barry's heart ached at the thought of leaving, of returning to a world that lacked this peace.

"You are needed."

"I wish I weren't." Barry whispered those words. Or were they merely a thought?

The avatar sounded regretful. "Staying here will have a price. But you do have a choice. You will always have a choice."

"And I always make the wrong choices."
"Why do you say that?"

"I let my mother die. My father spent fifteen years in prison. I chose not to save her."

"Two lives weighed against the thousands that had already you saved. The millions more that you will save. We do not think that was the wrong choice."

Barry sat up and looked at the avatar. There was something in its voice. A hint of censure. Even, anger.

"Saving my mother would have been a selfish thing," Barry said slowly.

Harrison smiled, just slightly. "We value you, Barry Allen. You are special to us. You bring us joy. Do you finally understand why?"

"Because I put others before myself, before my own needs?"

Harrison nodded. "There are, there have been, and there will be, many other speedsters, throughout time. Most we have tolerated in our midst. Others we have tried to remove from the Speed Force. There are very few that we have loved as much as we love you. The choice you made was difficult, but it was not the wrong choice."

Barry still couldn't find peace with his decision.

"We will give you something – a reward, if you will, in exchange for this realization."

Barry stared at Harrison, but the avatar's face was smooth – despite the signs of illness – and gave nothing away. "What is it?"

"Knowledge. About the future you did not choose."

Barry gasped. "You're allowed to do that?"

The avatar chuckled. "Generally, we avoid this, but since you have already made the decision not to save your mother, we believe that it might help to understand why that was – from our perspective – the right decision." Harrison cupped Barry's cheek. "Unless you can figure it out?"

Barry wrapped his hand around Harrison's wrist and gently pulled it away. He couldn't think when the avatar was touching him. Harrison smiled and rested both hands in his lap.

Letting his mind run through the history of his life, from the moment his mother died to the point where Zoom attacked him, he came to a horrible, inevitable conclusion. "My mother had to die. I had to become a speedster. And that had to happen now – not at some uncertain date in the future."

Harrison nodded. "If you did not become the Flash in 2014, Zoom would have free rein to destroy the entire multiverse."

Barry felt a hysterical bubble of laughter well up. "So the fate of the entire multiverse is contingent on my mother's death."

"Yes, it is. Can you live with that?"

Barry whispered, "I'll have to. Can you tell me one thing?"

The avatar shook their head. "You want to know if the Reverse-Flash killed your mother."
"Yes."

"That is not something we can tell you. When the time is right, you'll learn the truth."

Barry didn't want to talk about it anymore, and changed the subject to something only slightly less painful. "Will it hurt?"

"Will what hurt?"

"Going back, dying."

"Life is meant to be lived, Barry Allen." The avatar tugged at him. "Now come and relax. There is still time to find dragons in the clouds."


October 2016

Eobard had to fight with himself not to barge past Caitlin. To force his way into the med bay. To stand by Barry's bed and let his eyes and his soul drink their fill.

Instead, he stood patiently in the center of the Cortex, the cynosure of some very hostile gazes.

Joe West hadn't yet pulled his gun, but that could change in a heartbeat. "How did you get back here?"

"How does anyone travel through time?" Eobard shrugged, pretending a dangerous level of insouciance.

Joe shook his head. "No, you don't get to play word games with us. Not after everything. Why are you here? Why are you here now?"

Eobard tilted his head over to the med bay. "He needs me. You need me."

"I don't understand how you could know that Barry was injured." That bit of stupidity came from Iris, of all people.

"Really? How could I not know?" Eobard went over to one of the terminals and called up the edition of the CCPN with the headline about the Flash's first and terrible battle with Zoom. "You wrote this. And I am from the future. Time is – for the most part – linear. I checked for records of Barry as soon as I got back. This – "and other, more terrible news" – is what I found."

Joe asked, with slightly less hostility, "So you've been checking on Barry? You saw he was hurt and just like that decided to come back and try to fix things?"

"It wasn't 'just like that', Joe. It took a lot of work to get back here." Eobard didn't look at Cisco, not quite sure if he should reveal the boy's part in all of this.

And of course, Joe – not a genius, but still way too smart and canny – didn't let it rest. "There's a whole lot that you're not telling us. You are a devious bastard, you played this entire city for fifteen years, you played all of us. And now you expect us to believe that you've come back to a time that you couldn't wait to leave just to save a man you loathe? No, you've got something else up your sleeve, Reverse-Flash. Something that's going to end badly for all of us, and especially for Barry."

Before Eobard could defend himself, Cisco stepped in. "You're wrong, Joe."
"How the hell could you know?"

Cisco gave Joe a look, eyebrows raised.

Joe finally caught on. "You've seen this? You've vibed this? Him?"

Eobard hoped that Cisco would nod and leave it at that. Telling the team that he'd been in communication with a man not yet born, and worse, with someone who'd been their sworn enemy, could break their trust in him.

And of course, Cisco did just the opposite.

"Thawne and I have been in contact for almost a month – on this side of the timeline." Cisco looked at him, "It's been a lot longer than that for you, hasn't it?"

Nothing for it now. "About a year on the other end, a year of testing and planning. It was almost six months from the time I found out what happened until you and I first made contact."

"And how did you manage that?" Joe directed the question to Eobard, but Eobard could read the man's anger at Cisco.

"Luck, mostly. I knew that Cisco had powers, and I had reason to believe that his powers could reach across time. I just kept trying until we connected." He hoped Joe wouldn't continue to press him on the how.

And thankfully, he didn't. Joe just glared at him, and then turned to Cisco. "And you didn't mention this to us? You kept this a secret?"

Cisco stood his ground. "I didn't want to worry you. Or give you any false hope. I didn't know if Thawne would be back able to come back, or when he would arrive."

"You wanted him here?"

"Yes, I did." Cisco looked at Eobard, but didn't smile. "He knows speedster biology the best – I'm sorry, Cait, but it's the truth. We've done a good job of keeping Barry alive, but we don't know enough to actually heal him, to get him out of his coma. We've always relied on Barry's ability to heal himself, but he can't now. Thawne is another speedster – "

"Who tried to kill Barry – "

"I never tried to kill Barry!" Eobard interrupted, hurt at the accusation.

Joe glared at him, and took a step closer, fists clenched. "Really? And all those attacks by 'The Man in Yellow'? What you did to his mother?"

Eobard felt the hunger to protect himself grow like a fungus in the dark. It would be so easy to end this…

No – that was the speed drug in him. He didn't kill the people Barry loved.

Cisco stepped between them. "Joe, listen to me, please."

Joe nodded, but the still anger rolled off him in waves. "Okay, you tell us why we should trust this bastard."

Eobard waited for Cisco to humiliate him. To reveal everything he had read from him over the last
six months. But Cisco didn't, or at least, not as Eobard expected.

"When I first made contact with him, Thawne's first thought was about Barry, about what happened. I could feel what he was feeling." Cisco shook his head. "It was grief, Joe. Profound grief. And regret. And desperation. The need to make everything right."

Joe stepped back as if he'd been slapped. "You know what happens to Barry, after this? You know the future. His future, don't you."

Eobard didn't say a word. He couldn't.

Joe said it instead. "Barry dies."

Eobard shuddered and clenched his fists, everything in him denying the inevitable. But he couldn't.

Joe crashed backwards, all but collapsing against one of the desks. Eobard heard a sob — that was from Caitlin, and then another from Iris. A third from Edward.

"I will not let that happen. That future is an — " Eobard scrubbed at his face — "an abomination. It is not supposed to happen. Barry Allen cannot be allowed — " Eobard cut himself off, refusing to utter those last two words — to die.

Silence fell over the Cortex. Silence except for the low and steady ping of Barry's monitors. Eobard couldn't stay away any longer, and God help anyone who tried to stop him. He went into the med bay and looked at Barry. So still. Too still. Too pale, too thin.

Eobard sensed Cisco behind him and spoke without turning around. "This is all so wrong."

Cisco said with terrifying faith, "You're going to fix it."

Eobard took a deep, shuddering breath. "I will. I swear to you, I will." Cisco might be next to Eobard, but the promise was made to the man on the bed, to Barry Allen. Eobard reached out and touched Barry, a brush of fingertips on his wrist, a few centimeters above his pulse point. There was a spark, a tiny crackle of braided red and gold.

It hurt and Eobard gasped and pulled away.

"What's the matter?" Cisco, apparently, didn't see it.

"Nothing. Just — " Eobard shook his head. "It's painful to see him like this. In the flesh."

Joe joined them, a solid and steady presence on the other side of Barry's bed, much less hostile, but still very wary. "Okay — what are you going to do? How will you fix this?"

"I'm giving Barry what is left of my speed."
In the Speed Force

"It's almost time for me to go back, isn't it?"

The avatar – in the form of Harrison – took Barry’s hand, his thumb stroking against his palm. They answered, "Your body and your speed have healed as much as they can. We cannot protect you anymore."

"I know." Barry did, and he'd come to accept the inevitability of it. Zoom would be defeated, but there would be a price for that. There was always a price.

"Yes, there will always be a price," the avatar said, "but no more than you can bear to pay."

Barry relaxed against the avatar, taking all the comfort they offered. And the avatar, especially in the form of Harrison Wells, seemed to relish physical contact, whether it was the gentle stroking of hands, or carding fingers through his hair, or letting their lap serve as Barry's pillow when he relaxed and watched the sky.

But then, suddenly, something disturbed Barry’s ease. He stood up and looked out over a landscape that had changed. Not a garden anymore, but a wide open vista of rolling hills. In the distance, there were heavy dark clouds, but the light was breaking through, like fingers reaching out to him. Barry tried to figure out what it was. He felt no pain – definitely no pain – but there was – a calling. Something, someone, from outside the Speed Force, was calling Barry.

"Did you feel that?" Barry asked.

Instead of their usual expression of detached affection, the avatar wore an expression of puzzlement and then wonder. "Oh, oh. Oh my." The avatar smiled in purest joy. "This was not expected. This changes everything."

"What do you mean?"

The avatar, Harrison, touched Barry’s cheek. "Everything you have ever wanted is waiting for you, Barry Allen. You will have everything you desire and all your questions will be answered."

Barry stood there, confused, worried, and for the first time in a long while, frightened. The avatar continued, "You are and you always will be beloved of us. We have seen your dreams and they please us. You will continue. And you will not be alone. He has returned to you, and he brings you a great gift. We hope to have the chance to honor that grace. We know that you will."

Harrison leaned in and, to Barry's great shock, kissed him. Not as mild gesture of affection, either. Harrison kissed Barry like a lover, full of intent and promise. It fed and nourished him, filled all of the empty spaces in his soul, the parts that had been drained by Zoom.

Harrison broke the kiss, but only to give Barry that familiar, beloved command. "Now, run, Barry. Run."

October 2016
Eobard watched the team’s reaction to the almost-complete apparatus that Cisco brought up from his workroom. Eobard even named it, if just because there was a tradition to uphold. "It's a Speed Leech."

That name earned him an impressed nod from Cisco.

Joe, of course, was the spokesman for the team, and asked, "What does this Speed Leech do?"

"It's going to remove the Speed Force from my body and store it so it can be administered into Barry. That will complete his healing."

Joe glared at the contraption and then at him, "Wait – you have a way to suck out someone's speed? Did you always have this?"

Eobard sighed. He didn't want to have this conversation again. "It was a concept only, something I never built. When I was working on my return trip to this time, I asked Cisco to handle the construction."

"So you don't know if it works."

Ever confident of his skills, Eobard replied with insouciance, "Oh, it works, Joe, it definitely works."

Just as Eobard struggled not to fall back into the obnoxious know-it-all persona of Harrison Wells, he knew that Joe was fighting against the urge to beat him to a bloody pulp, and Edward – and quite likely his bride, too – was not far behind. Then the expression on Joe's face changed, shifting from anger to a dawning realization. "You could have used this on Barry at any time. But you didn't."

"No. That would never happen."

Joe looked from the device, to Eobard, and back again. "I don't understand you."

"I'm not asking you to."

"But you want me – us – to trust you."

"If you want to keep Barry alive, yes."

Caitlin, who'd kept her thoughts to herself thus far, finally spoke up. "I've looked at the schematics of this. It's going to change your mitochondrial DNA, revert it back to its pre-speedster state. She shook her head. "This isn't like what Blackout did to Barry two years ago, or even like what Zoom did to him. There's something else here."

Eobard nodded. "I'd encountered another meta-human – one I didn't bring to your attention, one who could have been fatal to Barry's powers. He could slow time by sucking the energy out of living tissue at a molecular level. He wouldn't kill a speedster, but he'd drain him dry."

Caitlin actually looked worried when she told him, "You know that there will be no way to get your speed back once it's fully drained. There will be no going back from this, Doctor Wells."

"Professor Thawne, please."

Caitlin flushed at the reminder.

"And yes, I know this will be permanent. I came back here and now specifically to do this. There's nothing to discuss." Eobard was losing patience with the questions, with the doubts. Barry needed him, and if he didn't give him his speed, Barry Allen would die.
"I still want to run tests before you use this. It goes against everything I believe in." Then she shook her head and gave a bitter laugh. "But I don't know why I'm balking now. So much of what you've had me do was ethically questionable and somehow I never saw it."

Eobard took a deep breath and schooled himself to patience. Losing his temper wouldn't do Barry any good. "This is necessary, Doctor Snow. I will be fine, and more importantly, Barry will recover."

He submitted to Caitlin's not-so-gentle ministrations with as much graciousness as he could manage. He remembered another time under her care, a time when every injury was a product of deception, when he hadn't deserved her gentleness. This was balance.

"There's something in your blood, Doctor – Professor Thawne." Caitlin looked at the monitor and then ran some queries. "It looks like a massive dose of amino-bonded choral hydrate. What is this?"

"That's how I got back here. It's the key ingredient in an artificial speed drug."

No one said a word until Joe – of course it was Joe – broke the silence. "A Speed Leech, now a speed drug? What else have you got up your sleeve, Thawne?"

Cisco jumped in before he could answer. "You got that from Zoom, didn't you – from the biological data I recovered from the dart I shot him with. His speed's artificial, right?"

"Yes. I was going to tell you. I've just been focusing on more important things – like saving Barry." Eobard gestured to the med bay. "The drug had no effect on the natural speed force that will be drained from my cells. I was very careful about that."

Caitlin confirmed what Eobard already knew. "No, it works differently. The choral hydrate provided extra energy to your cells, but you still need the speed force in your cells to use it. Using a speed drug is very dangerous – you could die if you use too much of this. Your cells would break down from the heat and stress."

"I know, Doctor Snow. I had discovered the speed enhancement potential for amino-bonded choral hydrate when I first started experimenting with speed. Discovered and discarded it as a viable option because of the dangers of cellular collapse. I only went back to it when I recognized the breakdown of Zoom's cellular structure. It wasn't hard to deduce what happened. Zoom started out as a natural speedster, but then used a similar drug to boost his speed – it made him faster and drove him insane."

His ancestor picked up on that last item, "Insane?"

"Yes, Edward. Speed, even natural speed like mine, like Barry's, has a strong dopamine output."

Caitlin filled in for the novices, "It provides intense pleasure. A highly magnified runner's high. Massive doses of dopamine can become seriously addictive."

Eobard added, "The problem with using the drug was not just the threat of cellular collapse and damage to the natural speed force, but addiction and addiction psychoses. It took six months of experimentation to get a formulation that would give me enough speed to get back here but wouldn't kill me outright or drive me insane, even after one dose."

Once again, silence reigned, until Edward commented, "Well, the jury's still out on the insanity plea."

Eobard didn't bother to stifle his laugh.
Joe cut in, "Wait – are you saying that Zoom's a drug addict?"

Eobard nodded. "A speed drug addict, yes. He's so much faster than Barry because he is giving himself artificial energy boosts, but he can't sustain that without some replenishment of his natural speed."

"Which he took from Barry."

"Yes." Eobard felt the old impatience rising in him, the need to put his plans into action. "Let's get Barry out of the coma and then we can speculate on Zoom's origins and how we can bring him down without killing everyone in the process." He pulled the cowl over his head, ignoring the expressions of horror on everyone's faces. "To the treadmill room?"

He let Caitlin hook him up to monitors, mainly for her own comfort. The Speed Leech worked from the emblem on his suit, sucking out the Speed Force energy and transmitting it to the device he had Cisco built. He stood in front of the treadmill and thought of the first time Barry ran on it. He remembered the sweet scent of ozone as the speed force had begun to surround the nascent speedster. He'd wanted to bottle it, to carry it with him as a reminder of a moment of perfect happiness when everything would grow dark, when the inevitable battle would come.

There was still going to be a battle, but not the one he’d expected. And he didn't need a sense memory; he would – for a time – have Barry in the here and now. That made this sacrifice worth everything. There was no need for regrets.

Eobard hadn't run on a treadmill since the earliest days after he'd transformed himself into the Reverse-Flash, since he'd started training and testing and pushing himself, and he'd forgotten what it was like. At first, the sensation of sustained speed was too much like the jolt he'd gotten from the speed drug, the need to run faster than the lightning, but that artificial high didn't last. Eobard could feel the Speed Force in his cells working harder, trying to bridge the damage that had been done all those years ago. Trying and failing. Eobard pulled on that power. Pulled the Speed Force from the very atoms and subatomic particles that made him part of this universe. Eobard ran until all of the Speed Force had drained out of him into the Leech, and he couldn't take another step.

Someone turned off the treadmill and Eobard collapsed.

It was done, the very last run of his life.

Eobard levered himself upright and went over to the Leech. The vessel was full. Flashing bright, as if it were bottled lightning. This was the essence of him. The product of a lifetime of dreams. Of mistakes. Of desires turned inward and corrupted. But it was also the only thing he could give Barry now. The only way to save Barry’s life.

Eobard took the vessel and slid it into the delivery mechanism, a typical Cisco device – beautiful and deadly.

No one stopped him as he went into the med bay. No one said a word as he pressed the device against Barry's forearm and emptied the power into him. The Speed Force crackled around them both, scenting the air with the perfume of power.

Barry opened his eyes and gasped.

"Now, run, Barry. Run."
With the avatar's words ringing in his brain, Barry ran. He felt the lightning in his veins, the Speed Force crackling around him, loving him and pushing him forward, outward, back into the world. He ran through the field of bright green grass to the edge of the sky and as he reached forward into the horizon, the rolling plains became a near-wild garden of roses, their thorn-tipped blossoms giving way to his speed. And beyond the rose garden was that other garden, the first one, with its complicated knot of manicured shrubbery.

Barry didn't slow down. Not until he arrived at a familiar set of doors. The entry to S.T.A.R. Labs.

He could turn back. He could linger here forever. It was beautiful and safe. The avatar was a challenging companion. But they weren't who he wanted. Who he needed.

Barry remembered the promise the avatar had made to him: "Everything you have ever wanted is waiting for you, Barry Allen."

He took a breath and pushed open the doors.

October, 2016

Barry opened his eyes, and yes, everything he wanted was here. Eobard Thawne, unmistakable in the yellow suit, his expression blank but his eyes blazing as blue as the sky Barry had spent so many hours gazing into.

Barry smiled at him. He knew he wasn't dreaming, not with the avatar's promise still ringing in his brain. Yes. Everything I wanted is waiting for me. And for the briefest heartbeat, Eobard smiled back.

Then Eobard was pushed away and Caitlin's face filled Barry's entire field of vision. She ran through all of the necessary medical checks – everything except asking Barry to pee in a cup. She looked so tired.

"Bar?" Caitlin stepped away and Joe was there. There was gray in his beard and his face was drawn. A whole cart full of baggage had taken up residence under his eyes.

"Hey, you don't look so good." His own voice sounded so strange – the words were thick, echoing in his head, and outside of it, too. Because he was actually speaking – not merely thinking.

Joe smiled and some of that weariness vanished. "It's been a rough time. But it'll get better now."

"How long was I out?"

"Eight weeks."

Iris pushed Joe out of the way. "Oh, god – Barry."

Barry managed a smile and reached for her hand. "Hey, you. Sorry."

"For what?"

"Just – for everything." Barry tried to sit up, and to his surprise, found that he could. He felt as if he'd just woken up from a nap – a little groggy, but nothing more than that. He looked around, trying to find Eobard, to find Cisco.

Cisco was there, and like everyone else – everyone but Eobard – the happiness was pouring out of him. "Dude – don't you ever do that again!"
Barry reached out, ignoring the tug from the IV, and wrapped his arms around Cisco. He knew—without words, without even a hint from the avatar—that Cisco was the one who made Eobard's presence here possible. Cisco was the bridge to his dreams.

Before Barry could say another word, before he could find Eobard among the rest of his family, Caitlin shooed everyone out of the med bay and turned on the privacy glass.

Her tone was ice-cold. "You nearly died, Barry. And I'm not speaking metaphorically."

Still a little caught up in his return to the physical world, Barry simply said, "I know."

She gave him a rundown of the damage Zoom had inflicted on him. "There was damage to every major organ. But even worse, he stole your speed. You needed a month and more on a respirator because you couldn't breathe on your own. And even after you healed, you wouldn't wake up. We thought you were going to die."

"But I didn't." Barry wanted to tell her about the Speed Force, how it (no, they) had loved him and preserved him. But he couldn't find the words. And truthfully, telling Caitlin would be meaningless. She was a scientist, a doctor—she wouldn't understand the metaphysics. He wasn't sure anyone would.

"Take all of this out of me," Barry said instead. He gestured to the IV, the N-G tube, the catheter, the leads to all of the monitors. "I don't need them anymore."

Caitlin looked like she was about to argue, then just shook her head. "I guess, if I don't, you'll pull them out yourself."

"Yeah."

The process of unleashing him from the mechanics that had sustained his body was too slow. Barry didn't ask any questions and Caitlin didn't chatter, but Barry could feel the tension. There was a small mark on his forearm. Caitlin frowned at it and when Barry touched it, he could feel something resonate in his entire body. But he still didn't ask. This was what the Speed Force had felt. This was what they had promised him.

"You don't want to know how you came back?" Caitlin demanded. "You were unconscious for weeks after your body healed."

"I know how I came back." Eobard brought me back. He came back for me.

"You do?" Caitlin paused as she started to remove the catheter.

"Can we finish this?" Barry gestured to his exposed groin. "I have something to do."

"No—you have nothing to do but finish recovering."

"I have. I'm well, Caitlin. I'm alive and I'm fine." He took a deep breath as she finished that last task. He hopped down from the bed and while the floor was cold under his bare feet, he felt like he could skate across it, vibrate through the closed door and out into the Cortex. Out to Eobard.

To everything I ever wanted.

"I think you might want these before you go anywhere." Caitlin put a stack of S.T.A.R. Labs sweats on the bed. "Take your time. No one is going anywhere."
"No one?" Barry was suddenly struck with the feeling that Eobard was getting ready to go back to his century and sped into the clothes and then out the door.

Barry was mobbed, but he pushed his family aside, searching for the one thing he wanted more than anything else.

And there he was, against the wall. Still wearing the yellow suit from Barry’s nightmares, but it was hanging open, revealing the all-too-mortal man inside it.

Time dilated, much like that moment when Barry had woken from his first coma, when he hadn’t yet known what he’d become. Barry knew what he was, now, but he still didn’t know what path the future would take.

As fast as light, Barry was within reach of Eobard. The man didn’t flinch. He didn’t react.

No, he did. In the time-dilation, Eobard’s feelings were as legible as a billboard: the lines that bracketed the sides of his mouth deepened, his lips tightened as he looked him in the eye, and then his gaze dropped.

Barry whispered, more to himself than to Eobard: "They promised that I would have everything I dreamed of, everything I wanted when I came back. That you would be here, waiting for me."

Eobard looked up, like a falcon, wild and ready to take flight. "So you could kill me? To have your vengeance at last?"

Barry knew that they would have to have a reckoning for that crime and for the others that still lay between them. But his heart could no longer be denied. "No."

"No?" That earned him an eyebrow raised in a parody of sardonic amusement.

"No. You are here because I wanted you here. Because I needed you. Because I need you." Barry wanted to say, "because I love you", but that declaration needed privacy. It needed the truth and all the questions that had to be asked and answered. Instead he said, "You said you were not the thing I hated."

Eobard flushed.

"And I would never be happy."

"I'm sorry for that," Eobard said.

"It was true."

There was something different about Eobard. It wasn’t just that he was truly Eobard Thawne. Barry would never, could never confuse him with the persona of Harrison Wells, whom he loved just as fiercely, but Harrison was gone. In his mind, that man was more like the avatar – although the avatar often told him he wasn’t the Harrison Wells of his memory.

"Barry – " There was so much desperation in Eobard's voice, barely a whisper.

Barry couldn't hold back anymore and he wrapped his arms around Eobard, clinging to him for life, for hope, for love. This man, despite his sins, his crimes, was Barry’s anchor, and Barry knew now that wherever he ran, whenever he journeyed, Eobard would bring him home.

Slowly, too slowly, Eobard relaxed into Barry’s arms and a heartbeat later, hugged him back, his
grip impossibly tight. Barry buried his face in Eobard's neck with a shuddering sigh, reaching out with the Speed Force, instinctively trying to forge that final binding.

There was nothing there. No answering call, no power just under the skin, no speed reaching to speed.

No reverse.

Barry pulled back, breaking their physical connection. He couldn't keep the horror out of his voice. "What have you done to yourself?"
Chapter 9

Of all the things Eobard had thought might happen in the hours after Barry regained consciousness, sitting next to him in the passenger seat of a S.T.A.R. Labs van as Barry drove was not even on the list.

Barry was driving them home. There were going to his house. No, Barry's house. No – their house.

Eobard's ears were still ringing with the shouted arguments the team – including Joe, Iris and his ancestor – had had with Barry. Well, they had been the ones who had been shouting. Barry had just leaned against one of the consoles, arms folded across his chest, a small, distracted smile on his lips.

While not the loudest voice, Caitlin had been the most adamant. "You just spent eight weeks in a coma, Barry. You don't just walk away from that."

Barry had met Eobard’s eyes and they’d shared a smile at the memory. "Last time, it was nine months, and I recall walking away from that one, too. This time, I don't have to ask about keeping the sweatshirt. I own the whole building."

Eobard had smiled at the irony. He was the one who'd needed the sweatshirt. Actually – he'd needed clothes from the skin out. His yellow suit had unnerved everyone. But more than that, without his speed, wearing it felt wrong.

Joe had tried to reason with Barry. Apparently in the intervening year he still hadn't learned just how impossible that was. "Bar – the situation is different. Your body was broken."

"And it's healed." Barry had made a point of going over to the monitors and setting them to display his injuries and their current status. "Back – healed. Neck – healed. Kidneys – fully functioning. Liver – fully functioning. Lung capacity – one hundred percent. Speed force – " At that, Barry had looked at Eobard and pursed his lips before completing the report, " – one hundred and forty percent."

Joe had conceded Barry's logic, but continued the argument. "You may be healed, but running off is a bad idea. Zoom's still out there. He's probably watching for you."

That had given Barry pause. "You think he can sense when I use my speed? Even from his own Earth?"

At that, Eobard had stepped into the conversation. "Yes. Speed calls to speed. He'll know you're awake and using your speed." That was something he hadn't yet taught to Barry, and a phenomenon they would never share again.

Barry, the beautiful idiot, hadn't quite realized what Eobard had been saying and had focused on something else entirely. "Then wouldn't Zoom have sense you when you ran? Are you in danger?"

"Not here, no. There are protections I've built into the facility. This is a safe place for you. You should stay here." And I don't have any speed left. Nothing for Zoom to take. He had no regrets and he never would, but knowing that he'd never again be Barry's equal hurt almost as much as knowing that his time was now finite.

Barry hadn't agreed. "No – we all need to rest, recover. Get back to normal. How many nights have all of you spent here watching over me? You have lives to lead."
Cisco had agreed, "We do, but without you, our lives aren't worth jack shit." He’d gone to Barry and given him a tight hug.

Eobard had understood and agreed with that sentiment completely. Although he still would have preferred that Barry remained at S.T.A.R. Labs, which had the medical facilities the house lacked, Eobard suggested, "My house – your house – has similar protections. Not quite as extensive, but they will keep your restored powers hidden from view."

Barry nodded. "Good, because I don't want to let you out of my sight." Eobard was startled by that pronouncement. He’d expected to spend the night – and all of the foreseeable nights in the future – here at S.T.A.R. Labs.

Joe had made a rude sound, obviously annoyed at the sentiment.

Barry had made his stand. "Guys – I'll be fine. Go home. Rest. Zoom's going to be back soon and we've got to be ready to stop him."

Joe had looked from Barry to Eobard, and the message had been clear: hurt Barry and you die. Eobard had nodded, accepting the warning for what it was. And the truth was that now, there was little he could do to stop Joe from beating him to a bloody pulp now.

Eobard and Barry had waited while everyone had left, and there’d been a very awkward moment while Eobard had removed the rest of his suit at normal, human speed. Over the years, he’d learned not to rely on his damaged power, but there were still some things that he’d taken for granted. Getting out of the heavy material without his speed had been difficult and he’d nearly landed on his ass more than once.

Without a word, Barry had given him a hand and watched, with an appreciative smile, as the suit had been sucked back into Eobard’s ring. He’d said, "Someday, very soon, you're going to have to teach Cisco how to make that. It's still pissing him off that he can't figure it out."

"It will be my pleasure." With that, Eobard had looked down at his ring and blinked, then gazed around the room. Everything was slightly fuzzy, out of focus.

"What's wrong?"

Eobard had chuckled at the irony. "You're not going to believe this, but I think I need glasses. I actually need those damn glasses."

Barry hadn't laughed, he'd just stared at Eobard for a too-long moment. "I still have a pair at the house."

Eobard had not wanted to consider why Barry would have kept anything of his, let alone something so intimate and useless as a spare pair of glasses.

Without further comment, Barry had fished a set of keys out from one of the desks and they’d headed down to the garage and out into the night.

For the duration of the ride, Eobard kept his thoughts to himself, it was a natural state for him. Barry – usually inclined to share almost every thought – was surprisingly quiet. But whenever Eobard glanced over at him, Barry was smiling.

Stopped at a traffic light, Barry finally said something. "What are you thinking?"

What Eobard was thinking was impossible to explain. So he took refuge in annoyance. "I'm a little
peeved that no one warned you not to be alone with me. It's quite a come down from my status as a villain."

"Seriously?"

Eobard shrugged. "I was once the most dangerous man alive."

"That's not a title to aspire to."

Another reminder of Eobard's crimes, all the pain he'd caused, and regret was like bile in the back of his throat, bitter and painful. "No, I guess it isn't."

Barry pulled out into traffic and then onto the highway. "For the record, you are still fearsome. You were always fearsome, whether you were the Man in Yellow or Harrison Wells. Especially when you were Harrison Wells."

"Why?" Eobard never thought of Harrison Wells – the real man or his own portrayal – to be particularly frightening.

"Your determination. Your focus. Your steadfast belief in yourself and your superior intellect."

Eobard felt his face grow hot. He'd forgotten this – he'd forgotten how much he'd come to need Barry's admiration. "Ah, well – thank you."

The hour was late, or rather early, according to the clock on the dashboard. Nearly two AM. Eobard was tired. And cold. He must have shivered, because Barry reached out and turned up the heat.

The rest of the drive continued in silence, but Eobard found it hard to think. There were no plans to execute. No plots. No schemes. No future except for the road ahead of him.

Soon enough, Barry pulled up in front of that too-familiar house. There were differences from the one Eobard had left just this morning, a hundred and seventy years in the future, but it looked the same as the one he'd left behind more than a year ago.

Barry jumped out of the van, an action far too vigorous for someone who'd just spent the last eight weeks in a coma, and led the way inside. "The place is probably coated in dust and I doubt there'll be any food. I'm kind of dreading what I'm going to find in the fridge, after two months."

"It's okay." Eobard wasn't hungry. "I'm surprised you didn't notice, but the house is programmed for basic self-maintenance."

Barry smiled and ducked his head. "Ah – right. Yeah – I did notice, but kind of forgot about that. Those little robot vacuums freaked me out the first time I saw them. And the drones flying around, cleaning all of the surfaces. Seriously cool and seriously creepy."

Eobard, unexpectedly charmed by Barry's embarrassed admission, shrugged a little ruefully. "I didn't want a cleaning service."

"No – I suppose not. No point giving someone a chance to pry into your secrets."

Eobard didn't bother to look around the house. There'd be time enough for that tomorrow, and all of the rest of the tomorrows, until this – the coming battle with Zoom – came to an end. Out of habit, Eobard headed towards the master bedroom suite.

Barry stopped him. "Nope. That's my room, now."
Eobard managed an "Ah." He was consumed by the thought of Barry sleeping in his bed, on his sheets. Barry’s head resting on the same pillows Eobard had used. The very thought made Eobard feel things he knew he shouldn’t feel. And then he discarded the idea – Barry would have replaced those things, wouldn’t he have?

Of course, Eobard would have to get into the room soon. Gideon was in the closet and he needed to check the timeline.

Barry opened the door to the suite next to the master, one equally luxurious. Unless Barry had had guests, this room had only had one previous occupant. Eobard couldn't bear to even think about that, and the loss it represented. In the intervening years, Eobard had had the suite completely made over. There were no ghosts, except those of his memory, lingering here. So Eobard did what he did best; he compartmentalized the past and pretended it didn't matter. Giving Barry a meaningless smile, Eobard said, "I guess I'll say good night now. Or good morning."

Barry smiled at him and it wasn't meaningless. Eobard was again struck by something in that expression – it was not just happiness, but an awareness, a lucidity that he'd never seen before in Barry's eyes. Eobard wondered at that – was it a consequence of his near-death experience, or something else? Like everything else about Barry Allen, it called to him.

"We'll talk later," Barry said.

Eobard nodded and turned, letting the door close behind him.

The air in the room was cool. Too cool for his comfort. Eobard turned on the fireplace, but like every fireplace in the house, it was meant for show, not warmth, and he turned it back off. The heating was centrally managed, but when Eobard went to adjust it, he found he didn't have access to the controls, which Barry must have reset.

He stripped to the skin and crawled under the covers. The sheets were soft, but there was a slightly musty odor to them. If this room hadn't been used since Barry moved in, it was unlikely that they'd ever been changed. Eobard sighed and rolled over, wrapping himself in the covers and tried to get warm. But without a source of heat, that seemed like it was going to be an impossible task.

So he resigned himself to an uncomfortable night and concentrated on everything that had gone right today. Most of all: Barry Allen. Who was alive and well and shockingly happy that he – Eobard Thawne – was here, in 2016.

His body might now be slow, but his mind still raced, and thoughts and feelings long held at bay were clamoring in his brain.

He had spent fifteen years trying to get home, to be present for a meeting that fate had ordained for him, only to learn that fate, apparently, was a trickster who had had no intention on delivering that promise. Maybe because he hadn't earned the right to that fate. He’d interfered with the timeline and tried to re-engineer history, and although he’d watched for changes in that timeline every day of those fifteen years, he shouldn't have ever expected a happy ending. But now, in this cold bed, in a room once occupied by the only friend he'd ever had and the only other person who had known the truth about him, Eobard could dream and let himself believe that coming back to 2016, that surrendering his speed so Barry would live, would be a way to earn the expiation for the damage he'd done.

Not even close to dozing off, he was still surprised when the bedroom door opened and Barry came in, carrying an extra comforter. He draped it over the bed and when Eobard was about to say thank you, Barry shocked him to silence by sliding under the covers.
But Eobard found his voice when Barry curled his body around him and he spluttered, "What are you doing?"

"I remember what it was like when Farooq took my speed. I couldn't get warm."

"I'll adjust." Eobard rolled over and tried not to let himself relax against Barry.

"Yes, you will, but you don't have to suffer through it tonight."

"I'll be fine. You should go back to your own bed."

Barry didn't go anywhere. He just curved his body around Eobard and draped his arm over Eobard's waist, holding him loosely. "You've had a long day. Get some sleep."

Eobard wanted to protest. He wanted to tell Barry that he always slept alone, that he'd never be able to sleep with someone else in the bed next to him. Except that that would be giving too much away. And truthfully, he didn't have the strength to fight against this. Not now. Maybe tomorrow. But not now.

Barry's natural warmth drenched him. The clean scent of Barry's skin, a lingering tang of soap and shampoo and clean clothes, filled his head. Eobard shivered again, but not from the cold.

And to his surprise, he fell asleep in Barry's arms.

Eobard was warm. He was comfortable. His brain felt sluggish, the urgency that had driven him for so long absent. Maybe this was a dream?

Yes, it was definitely a dream. Under Eobard's hand, another heart was beating, a steady, rapid pulse of joyous life. Eobard opened his eyes, just a bit – oh, yes – a dream. The Flash – Barry Allen – in Eobard's bed, just as he had so often imagined. Sleeping next to him as a friend and boon companion, their bodies and heart and minds in perfect synchronicity.

His parents, his brother, those fools at the university, they were all wrong. The Flash was real, he was human, and he cared for Eobard. He respected Eobard's intelligence, he admired him. He thought they were equals.

Eobard let out a tiny sigh of contentment and relished this closeness. He hoped the Flash would stay here for a little while longer. That he'd talk to Eobard. Tell Eobard about the Speed Force, about being a hero.

Eobard moved a little, enjoying the feel of the cotton sheets against his skin; he didn't normally sleep naked, but maybe this occasion had called for it. As he moved, he accidentally rubbed against the Flash and he held his breath. Would his hero wake, would he be upset?

Barry Allen didn't wake. He just let out a small sigh and moved closer. So close that they were now sharing a pillow.

Eobard thought his heart would burst out from his chest, from the sheer joy of this impossible moment.

Then disaster struck. His stupid, unruly body began to react. It was wrong, it was disgusting. How would the Flash react, knowing that Eobard's body was so base, so vile? Why was this happening to him, now? Eobard had remade himself into his hero, and certainly the Flash, purity made flesh, never
had to deal with the dirty, low call of sex and desire.

Eobard rolled away and threw back the covers, looking down at his traitorous body, and recoiled in disgust. Why was his body so old? So dark?

With a gasp, he woke up, utterly disoriented in a near-pitch black room.

"Eobard, what's the matter?" He must have woken Barry, who turned on the lamp – shattering the darkness. "Are you all right?"

"Fine – I'm fine." Eobard flung himself out of the bed. Like his dream-state teenaged self, he was aroused, and revolted by that arousal. "Excuse me."

Eobard bolted to the bathroom and took a long, hot shower, scrubbing away the shame. Back in the now empty bedroom, he found a small pile of clean clothes. His clothes, the garments he'd left behind in this century. Barry had, for some inexplicable reason, saved them. And the pair of glasses.

He dressed, donning black from the skin out, like a suit of armor. And wasn't that ironic? His suit – the Reverse-Flash's suit – had taken many of its features from medieval armor. But he had no use for it anymore.

The Reverse-Flash was dead. Long live the Flash.

Despite the relatively early hour – the sun had barely crested the horizon – the house wasn't quiet. Dressed, Eobard followed the noise into the kitchen. Barry was talking with Cisco and putting away some groceries.

"Good morning," Eobard said.

Barry looked at him, an indecipherable expression on his face. Cisco, however, was grinning like a fool.

"Hey, Thawne," he said cheerfully.

"Cisco." Eobard went over to the coffee pot and poured a cup. Barry handed him the cream without a word.

"Ask me how I slept last night," Cisco said, bouncing on his toes like he'd had way too many energy drinks.

Eobard felt his hands shake and put down the mug before he spilled the hot liquid all over himself. He found himself fiddling with his glasses to hide his nerves. "And how did you sleep, Cisco?"

"Like a log. I don't think I even dreamed."

Eobard nodded. Of course Cisco knew that he had to have dreamed. But he hadn't dreamed. He'd had no nightmares of the future, a timeline yet to exist. "Good. That's good to hear."

Barry looked puzzled briefly. Then another expression crossed his face. Too quick for Eobard to perceive any more.

"You must be hungry," was all Barry said.

"Yes, I am," Eobard agreed.

"Cisco brought food."
"I can see that." Eobard didn't quite understand the emphasis Barry placed on Cisco's name.

"Eggs and bacon? Toast?"

"Sounds fine and thank you." Again, there was an odd tension in Barry's tone. Eobard glanced over at Cisco, who was looking at something on his phone.

Barry was making breakfast and working at super-speed. Feeling a little out of his depth, Eobard wandered out of the kitchen, taking in the changes that Barry's occupancy had wrought to the house. There wasn't much, which surprised Eobard. In his years of observation, Barry had always displayed a certain casualness with his surroundings. He wasn't a slob by any means. Joe West had been a good parent, and part of that meant he had rules that he'd required both of his children to observe, like cleaning up after themselves and not treating their personal space like a pig sty. But Eobard had expected that Barry – like anyone who lived in a place for a while – would have put his stamp on his environment. That he'd find photos, a book, a handful of change in a small bowl. Mementos of a life being lived. But it seemed that Barry had kept this place as much of a museum space as Eobard himself had left it, with no obvious clues about the resident. Eobard found that disturbing, and wished that he'd forced himself to watch more of the surveillance video Gideon had stored.

It had just been too painful to watch, knowing that Barry was dead.

Except Barry wasn't dead. And if Cisco's not-so-subtle hint was to be believed, Barry wasn't going to die. Not anytime soon.

Which meant that all Eobard had to do was get to Gideon, reestablish the link between the AI's core here and the one back at S.T.A.R. Labs.

"Breakfast is ready," Cisco announced, but it looked like he wasn't joining them. He had his backpack slung over a shoulder and was heading for the door. "See you later?"

"Certainly."

Eobard went back into the kitchen and true to Cisco's word, breakfast was ready. Barry placed some bacon on a plate that already contained eggs and toast and put it in front of him.

"I didn't know you were so accomplished in the kitchen," Eobard said tentatively.

"No? Not even after fifteen years of watching me?"

Eobard was pleased that Barry wasn't going to gloss over the past. "I didn't have a camera in Joe West's kitchen. And I don't recall too many culinary efforts when you were living on your own. Just a lot of take-out."

"Well, it doesn't take a lot of effort to scramble eggs and make some toast and bacon."

Eobard took a bite. "You'd be surprised at how difficult it is to properly cook eggs."

"You would know," Barry snarked as he toyed with his own food.

"What's the matter?" Eobard had to wonder if Barry's bizarre and vaguely hostile attitude stemmed from what had happened in the bed this morning. He forced himself to keep eating, although he was nauseated by the memory of his body's reaction to Barry's physical closeness.

"You and Cisco have grown very close. I guess spending all those months vibing with him brought back some of the good memories."
"What?" Eobard was confused, not by Barry's statement, but the barely veiled hostility.

"You and Cisco – vibing. Across centuries. How did you manage that? Is that another power you have?" Barry pursed his lips, then added, "Had."

Eobard didn't even feel a sting from that correction to the past tense. "Not really centuries. A hundred-seventy years, to be precise."

Barry poured a cup of coffee for himself, but didn't take a sip, instead, all but slamming the cup on the counter.

Eobard winced.

Barry’s eyes flashed – not with lightning, but with some kind of terrible emotion. "You're splitting hairs. You were communicating with a man already dead in your timeline and Cisco was talking to someone that hadn't yet been born."

The veiled hostility was not so veiled anymore. Barry was annoyed. "So?" Barry repeated, "How did you do it?"

Yesterday, when Eobard had arrived back here, he’d been reluctant to tell the team how he'd managed this particular feat. What had made it possible was too intimate, too revealing. Not even Cisco knew. Nor had Eobard planned on telling Barry; at least, not right away. Maybe later, after they’d finished off Zoom and secured this timeline…

But Barry seemed so disturbed by the connection he had with Cisco. Almost – jealous.

Then it hit Eobard. Not almost. Barry was jealous. Painfully – and unnecessarily – so.

Perhaps it was wrong, but Eobard couldn't help but take hope at that. That maybe Barry felt something for him, something more than gratitude, something more than the once-upon-a-time affection he’d had for his mentor, Harrison Wells.

Chapter 10

If Barry were the same person he’d been before spending an eternity under the protection and
guidance of the Speed Force, he’d have been disgusted with himself for the sheer pleasure he’d taken
in sleeping next to Eobard Thawne – his mother's murderer.

But the man Barry was now couldn't feel that disgust. It was a strange and terrible thing, loving the
man who had brought him such grief. Who’d created him. Who’d made him the center of his
existence. Who'd professed to despise him, and yet seemed to do everything in his power to ensure
his continued well-being. Who had returned from the future to give him the one thing that mattered
most to both of them – his speed.

The Speed Force, practically Socratic in nature, had guided Barry to this conclusion: the death of his
mother at this man's hands had been a terrible, horrible thing, and Barry had every right to be angry,
but truth was undeniable. Barry’s mother's death, even if it had been by a knife wielded by the
Reverse-Flash, had served a powerful and unavoidable purpose. Barry had to become the Flash, he
had to exist. Otherwise, how could the Reverse-Flash come into being to create him?

Egg, meet chicken. Chicken, meet egg.

Barry had spent much time contemplating the terrible paradox and discovered that like all paradoxes,
it could not be solved. Hammering against it, denying it, trying to undo it would only bring pain and
grief. It had to be accepted.

So he'd slept next to Eobard, and in doing so, Barry had felt so much love, so much rightness. It was
as the Speed Force had told him. Everything Barry had ever wanted would be waiting for him. And
it had been.

What Barry hadn't expected to feel in the unforgiving light of dawn, however, was jealousy. The
Speed Force might have known Barry’s heart, but that so obviously didn't mean that they knew
Eobard's, or that Barry's feelings would be reciprocated.

And it seemed that they weren't.

It all added up. First, Eobard's horror this morning, waking up in bed next to Barry. Then his
closeness with Cisco. And now, this vaguely condescending manner. Just one more disappointment
in a life filled with them. Today was no different from any other day. Barry might have had what
he'd wanted – Eobard Thawne back. But it was clear that Barry wasn't who Eobard wanted.

The universe asked Barry, He gave you his speed, what more do you want?

And Barry answered the universe back, His love.

Barry tried to play it cool. He didn't even have to feign curiosity, asking how Eobard and Cisco and
communicated across centuries. Eobard tweaked him about the timeframe, and Barry could feel
himself getting angry, the dark monster of jealousy swallowing all of his joy.

He snapped, "You were communicating with a man already dead in your timeline and Cisco was
talking to someone that hadn't yet been born. How did you do it?"

Eobard didn't answer. He finished his breakfast. Took his time with the last of his coffee. Wiped his
mouth and put the dishes in the sink.
"It bothers you?" Eobard said at last.

Barry ground his teeth and kept quiet. He wasn't going to lie, but he couldn't admit to the truth.

"It shouldn't," Eobard said.

"Cisco is special to you." Barry tried not to sound like a petulant child. He failed miserably.

Eobard shrugged and replied, his confirmation like a knife to the chest. "Yes, he is."

Barry couldn't stop the words. "He's like a son to you, right? He showed you what it was like to have a son. Wasn't that what you told him, before you murdered him?"

Eobard flushed dark red. It wasn't just anger staining his face, but shame, too. "That is a crime I will always have to pay for. One of the many crimes."

Barry turned away. He couldn't look at Eobard and see his own failure. The Speed Force might have taught Barry not to remain anchored to the past if he wanted to keep moving forward, but what was the point if the future held nothing?

"Barry."

He could feel Eobard behind him, so very close, and it was a terrible torture.

"Look at me, Barry."

Barry busied himself with the dishes.

"Please."

Barry couldn't ignore the quiet plea. Even if it were going to cost him his dignity, he turned around. Eobard was holding something in his hand. A scrap of material.

"Do you know what this is?"

Barry shook his head.

"It's from your suit – a piece of the lining. The part that rests over your heart. I took it with me."

Confused, Barry looked at the fabric and then at Eobard's face. There was no mockery there, just a horrible kind of hope.

"I took this a few months before you discovered who I was. I kept it, and it was the only tangible thing I took back with me. This moment of quixotic foolishness is how I've connected with Cisco. I could only reach him through you. Only you."

Barry nodded. He was overcome and afraid that if he said anything, he'd break apart.

"I would have come back without this." Eobard tucked the swatch of fabric back under his shirt. "As soon as I found out about Zoom, I started working on a way to come back to you. Connecting with Cisco made it easier, that's all."

Barry wanted to do what he'd done last night. Wrap himself around Eobard and never let go. But it all felt like too much, too soon.

They stared at each other for countless moments until Barry looked away, suddenly needing some
emotional distance before he did something stupid. "Let's get back to S.T.A.R. Labs. We've got a lot of work to do."

On the drive back to Central City and S.T.A.R. Labs, Eobard did his best to ignore the tension between them and told Barry how he'd managed to run back through time. About Zoom. About the speed drugs.

Barry didn't ask any questions, but it wasn't hard to see how this information affected him. He seemed shaken, and even more than that, angry. But the only thing he said was, "So, Zoom's a cheat."

"Apparently so."

"I don't know why, but I find that highly offensive." Barry actually sounded piqued.

Eobard could understand that. Even when he was playing a deeply covert game of chess with Barry, he'd never cheated. And as much as he'd hated the Flash, as many times as he'd cursed the Flash, he could never bring himself to take a shortcut, to stack the deck. The idea of another speedster taking shortcuts still disgusted him.

Upon arrival, it appeared that everyone but Cisco had taken Barry's advice and stayed home. Cisco was in the Cortex, dismantling the Speed Leech, and he wasn't being gentle with it. Eobard pushed Cisco aside and finished the job, taking care out of respect for the craftsmanship that went into the creation of this technology, if not for the tech itself.

When Cisco grabbed Barry and headed down to his workroom, Eobard took the Leech – both the transmission unit that attached to his suit and the speed container – to his office. Although he never planned to use it again, he couldn't bring himself to destroy it. It – or at least the technology – might somehow be useful in the coming battle against Zoom.

Eobard wasn't surprised to see signs of Cisco at his desk – rings from beverage cups staining the surface, sticky notes with bits of formulae, mildly obscene sketches on the backs of a few of the folders Eobard had left behind. But he was surprised at the lack of vandalism. His wheelchair was tucked into a corner; the power supply he'd used to recharge his speed had been cannibalized for who knows what, but the rest of the chair was intact. He'd figured that the cushions would have been slashed, the tires deflated, the control panel smashed. But it was as he'd left it.

Eobard smiled as he put the box with the Speed Leech on the wheelchair – a fitting place for it – and left the office. He needed to get to Gideon.

Except that Barry and Cisco were waiting for him at the no-longer-secret entry to the vault.

Cisco said, "Figured you'd head here at the earliest opportunity."

Eobard elected to go with honesty. "I need to check the timeline."

Cisco snarked back, "That's cheating."

Barry didn't say anything, he just stood there with arms folded across his chest and a thoroughly unreadable expression on his face.

"Of course it is. But if I don't know what's going to happen, how can I prevent a disaster?"
Barry shook his head. "That's not how this works anymore. No more fiddling with the timeline."

"Not even if it means saving your life? Saving everyone's life?"

Barry put his palm against the access panel and the vault opened. He gestured for him to enter, then followed with Cisco.

Eobard put his hand on the podium and Gideon's familiar face appeared. "Good morning, Dr. Wells."

Before he could say anything, Barry gave Gideon an instruction, "Call him Professor Thawne. There's no need to continue that lie."

"Very well. What can I do for you, Professor Thawne?"

This version of Gideon seemed so bland, so incomplete, but it was all Eobard had to work with. He issued the once familiar command, "Show me the future."

"I cannot do that."

"Why not?" Eobard looked at Barry, who was now wearing a tight smile.

"I have received instructions from Barry Allen not to display any data that might impact future events. That was a core instruction that could not be overridden, even by Barry Allen himself."

Barry commanded, "Gideon, tell Professor Thawne when this instructions were issued."

"May 17th, 2015."

Eobard shook his head. "Two days after I left. That was foolish, Barry."

"I seem to recall a conversation with you about the future and the damage I could do to the timeline. Something like 'Time is an extremely fragile construct. Any deviation, no matter how small, could result in a cataclysm.' I think those were your exact words."

Eobard was as impressed by Barry as much as annoyed. "Hoisted by my own damn petard." He turned to Cisco, "Did you agree to this? You see the future and you act on it."

"I see hints of possible futures, not futures written in newsprint and stored in databanks."

Eobard conceded the point with a laugh, then sobered. "You are a menace to yourself, Barry. If you'd known Zoom was coming, you could have stopped him."

Barry cut him off. "I know, and I've thought about that. If I did, I'd spend my whole life course-correcting, trying to prevent a future that keeps trying to happen. I'd go insane. I'd become a monster."

That hurt. "Just like me."

"Eobard – "

Eobard left the vault, but didn't go far. He felt strange. Unhappy. Betrayed, even. Gideon, even the module here, had been his companion from almost the beginning, and to discover how thoroughly its loyalty had shifted actually hurt. And more than that, he was stung by Barry's not-so-subtle implication that he was a monster.
Except that it was the truth. He was a monster.

He was a time-traveler who had committed the ultimate sin. He'd deliberately tried – and succeeded – in changing the timeline. And he was still paying the price for that sin.

Barry and Cisco followed him out and stopped when they saw him leaning against the wall. Cisco glared at the both of them, muttered something about cleaning up his workroom, and left the two of them there.

Barry leaned against the wall next to him. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

"But it's true. I am a monster – for just those reasons. I spent a lifetime knowing the future and trying to prevent it from happening."

That seemed to puzzle Barry. "I thought you knew the future and tried to make it happen, just in your own timeframe."

Eobard shrugged, pretending a confidence he wasn't quite feeling. He did his best to cover that slip. "Same thing, different perspective. But the end results were the same. I did exactly what I told you not to do. I played god and catastrophe followed in my wake."

Barry's reply was a barely audible whisper. "You don't have to stay a monster, though."

Eobard wanted to shout at him, to give vent to a sudden rage. He wanted to shake some sense into Barry Allen. He wasn't redeemable, he was past saving. But he kept quiet, at least on that score. Anger and such obvious self-loathing were counterproductive.

"Come on, we still have a lot of work to do." He walked away and Barry followed.

Everyone had counseled Barry not to run, not to do anything that would attract Zoom's attention, but there was so much power under his skin, demanding to be used. Barry felt like he was riding the edge of a storm front, that the least thing would set off the lightning. The whole morning had been a disaster, one unresolved confrontation with Eobard after another. And all the while the Speed Force whispered their promise to him...

He needed to run. To get away. From Cisco's knowing eyes, from Eobard's dark silence.

But they were right. He wasn't ready to face off with Zoom, again. He was healed, he had his speed – and then some – but the very idea of Zoom terrified him.

The Speed Force had given Barry a full measure of comfort, but they had always been careful about not letting him believe he was invincible. Until that very last moment, they'd never denied that when Barry went back out there, back into the realm of living matter, he’d be going to face his own mortality.

And until that same moment, Barry had understood. He'd accepted and had been prepared to die. The sacrifice was inevitable. But it wasn't any more. Not with Eobard here, and – except for his fierce and unparalleled intelligence – powerless. Vulnerable. Mortal. He remembered what Zoom had done to the Harrison Wells of that other Earth and it wasn't hard to imagine something worse happening to Eobard. He could practically see the monster defiling, destroying Eobard, if just because Eobard was someone Barry loved.

Zoom was going to die. By Barry’s hands. Barry had never gone into battle against anyone – a
criminal, another meta-human – with the intent to kill, but he had no choice with Zoom. He couldn't risk letting that monster live. Zoom had made it clear that he'd destroy everyone and everything Barry had ever loved – his family, his friends, his city – and now Eobard. No. Barry would have his reckoning with Zoom. He would kill him.

There simply was no other endgame. No life sentence for that monster, no cell in Iron Heights. Not even a cell in the Pipeline would be secure enough to hold him for an eternity.

"You're looking extremely fierce, Mr. Allen."

Barry spun around, startled. He'd been staring out into nothingness while Eobard worked on something in the side lab, and Barry hadn't heard him come back into the Cortex. He felt so much pleasure at hearing his name spoken like that. It had been so long…

"Everything all right?" Eobard prompted.

"Just thinking."

"About Zoom?"

"Of course." It was the truth, but not the whole truth. "He's going to come after me again."

"Yes. He needs your speed – the natural speed force in your cells. Otherwise, he'll die. He's going to come after you sooner than later. As soon as he knows you're awake and your speed has come back, he's going to escalate."

"The whole city is at risk."

"Which is why we have to stop him." Eobard put up a diagram on one of the monitors. "This should close the breaches."


"In 2016, yes."

"But not in 2186?"

"No. Not in the least. It can stabilize the breaches or close them, depending on the locked orientation of the particles."

"What are you suggesting?"

"One way to prevent Zoom from destroying you is to make sure he's on the other side and close all of the breaches. Make it so he can't come back here." Eobard had his hands in his pockets and he was rocking back on his heels.

"You're not serious, are you? Just let that monster roam free, let him destroy another world while we stay safe here? No, I won't allow that." Barry clenched his fists, tensing up at the very thought of letting Zoom go unpunished.

"I did say 'one way' – not the only way."

"You – you're – " Barry couldn't quite form the words.

"Testing you, yes. This – " Eobard gestured to the diagram – "is something the Reverse-Flash would do. Not the Flash. Not the hero. Of course, if you want to stand down and let me handle it…"
"Stop with the mind-fucks, okay?"

Eobard just laughed.

More out of a loss for anything to do than as a potential solution, Barry pulled up the blood work that Caitlin had done on Eobard before the speed transfer. Eobard had told him about the drug, and of course, about Zoom, but Barry was curious as to its effect – and side effects.

"You'll want to compare it to this – " Eobard called up additional data. "This is from Zoom. Cisco had shot him with a speed-dampening dart when he'd dragged you back to S.T.A.R. Labs. It seemed to slow him down for a couple of seconds."

"Yeah – we had thought that using cold tech might work as a speed dampener. It's similar to the Cold Gun," Barry couldn't help but remember his introduction to Cisco's fascination with weaponry, "but with a faster delivery mechanism. It didn't go too well."

"I beg to differ – it worked long enough for Zoom to drop you. And it provided valuable information for me."

Barry remembered Eobard's statement from this morning. "As soon as I found out about Zoom, I started working on a way to come back. Connecting with Cisco made it easier, that's all."

"You were the one who figured out that Zoom was a speed drug addict?"

"Yes. I'd looked into the use of chemicals and drugs early in my explorations into speed."

"You mean turning yourself into the Reverse-Flash."

Eobard nodded, conceding the point. "It was a false start, one I quickly abandoned. But the cellular matter that Cisco was able to pull from the dart showed me just how Zoom got his speed."

"So, is this an avenue we can explore? A weakness we can exploit?"

"Given time, yes."

"But we don't really have time, do we? Zoom must be getting desperate. He's going to try to draw me out once he realizes I'm out of the coma."

"Likely." That terrifies Eobard, bringing back all of the instincts to protect Barry from harm.

Soon enough, Cisco joined them in the Cortex and the three of them tossed around ideas. Most were ridiculous in the extreme, but the give and take between them felt good. Normal, natural, as if Eobard had never left, as if Barry hadn't spent the past year and then some grieving and hating himself.

And just like that, Barry’s equilibrium was shattered. He stood up. "I've got to go."

Cisco asked, "Go where?"

"For a run. I can't – it's too much."

"The treadmill –"

"No – not the treadmill. I need distance."

"You heard what he – " Cisco pointed a thumb at Eobard, "told you. You don't want to alert Zoom to your recovery."
"I know." Barry paced. "I just need to let go. I need to really run." Cisco probably wouldn't understand, but he hoped Eobard would.

And he did. Eobard told him, "The particle accelerator tunnel is completely insulated. Zoom won't be able to sense your speed in there. It will give you the space you need."

Barry nodded. "Right, right." Without letting himself overthink things, he started to nyoom into the suit, but stopped in mid-change. "Guys – something's missing." There was no suit on display – the alcove was empty.

Cisco looked chagrined, saying "Oops" before running off to get a suit for him.

Barry stood there in nothing but his boxers while Cisco went to fetch a suit from his workroom. Eobard was staring at the back of his hands, flags of bright red decorating his cheeks. He thought that odd – Eobard had seen him in various states of undress many times – not only from the surveillance cameras, but all the times he'd sped into his suit, not realizing that the Reverse-Flash was sitting there, watching him through the time-dilation.

Cisco came back with the suit. "Here you go – it had felt too weird having this on display when you were in a coma."

Barry was touched by that sentiment and after he finished changing into it, he gave Cisco a quick hug. "Okay, I'm good."

As Barry speed down to the tunnel, he thought he heard Eobard mutter, "Yes, you certainly are."
Eobard watched as the sensors tracked Barry as he ran the loop – a bright red dot moving in the wireframe diagram of the accelerator. He didn't have to look at the speedometer to know that Barry was running faster than he ever had.

Cisco, of course, was tracking everything. "Holy crap, he just broke Mach-5. Barry's never gone Mach-5. That's almost four thousand miles an hour!"

Eobard kept his pleasure to himself. With tachyon enhancements, Barry could go a hundred times that speed without breaking a sweat. With the right focus, Barry would be able to slip between dimensions as easily as sliding between the sheets.

No – don't think those thoughts.

Eobard said, "There are speedsters who move at near-luminal speeds, Cisco. Barry's just getting started."

"Near the speed of light?" The boy's eyes practically bugged out of his head. "Not even Zoom goes that fast. Will Barry eventually be able to travel faster than the speed of light?"

"No, that would be too dangerous."

"Other than the whole Einsteinian problem about superluminal travel – and please don't tell me that Einstein got it wrong – " Cisco seemed very concerned about that.

"No, dear Albert didn't get it wrong." Eobard was quick to reassure him.

"Thank god, but other than that – why would traveling faster than the speed of light be dangerous?"

"Because of the very nature of time." Eobard leaned back in his chair, enjoying the moment. It felt like the early days, when Barry had first woken from the coma, when Cisco had still looked at Harrison Wells like he was a god. Eobard wasn't quite sure that he didn't miss those days.

"But you've traveled through time. So has Barry."

"At the speeds we've traveled, time remains docile and behaves in accordance with the laws that all biological life require – it is linear. Superluminal speed makes time liquid. It stops behaving… rationally. Time becomes like molten glass, dangerous, unpredictable and almost impossible to control." At Cisco's sharp look, Eobard added, "Or so the theory goes."

Eobard turned back to the monitor. As he watched the red dot circle and circle around the accelerator, he felt a deep tug of longing. For fifteen years, he'd disciplined himself not to think about his lost speed, to content himself with the occasional sprints that barely allowed him to connect with the speed force. There were so many things he'd either willingly sacrificed or had taken from him in his single-minded pursuit of a very specific future, and at the time, he'd counted most of them well worth the cost. Now with that future beyond his reach, his self-control was in tatters.

Just seeing Barry stripped to the skin made Eobard feel like the maladjusted loner he'd once been, stupidly longing for the impossible, instead of a grown man in full control of his destiny.

It would be so easy to go down to the accelerator and watch Barry run, to bathe in his speed like a cat sleeping in sunshine. He'd gain nothing from it except second-hand pleasure. But perhaps that...
would be good enough...

Eobard had actually gotten up and started to head out of the Cortex, when he was confronted by – of all people – his ancestor.

"Edward." Eobard stepped back, hands down and palms facing out.

Cisco turned around and bounced out of his chair. "Eddie – you're a god amongst men. You brought lunch."

Only then did Eobard notice the white Big Belly Burger bag in Edward's hands. His stomach rumbled, but he wasn't going to allow himself to hope that there was a double-double with cheese for him. Edward had no reason to buy him food.

Except that Cisco pulled a burger out of the bag and handed it to Eobard. "This one's for you, I asked Eddie to get your usual."

"And don't worry – I didn't poison it," Edward snarked.

"I didn't think you would have," Eobard said.

"Why, because I'm a waste of a life? A waste of a man?" Edward was on the attack.

Eobard sighed at the reminder of his past cruelty. "No, you're not. I was wrong, Edward. You're not a failure. On the contrary, you're a good man, better than the Thawnes of my generation."

His apology was met with a spectacular amount of skepticism. "What do you want, Eobard?"

"Nothing, Edward. I'm sorry for what I said to you, what I did. It was wrong."

From the corner of his eye, he saw Cisco, mouth open and a stunned expression on his face.

Edward frowned. "I don't believe you. You're still playing games with me."

"No, I'm not. For some stupid reason, I spent fifteen years idealizing the memory of my family. When I got back, I realized I'd forgotten just what they were like."

"Oh? And what were they?"

"Assholes. All of them."

Edward let out a startled laugh. And Cisco chuckled. Edward laughed again and Eobard covered his mouth, trying not to join in, but it was pointless. He laughed until his whole body ached. When he finally caught his breath, Eobard held out his hand and the other man took it.

"Thank you, Edward."

"It's Eddie."

Eobard nodded, "Okay, Eddie."

He knew that forgiveness wasn't as simple as this, but it was a start.

Eobard had finished his burger – now cold, yes, but still delicious – when Barry returned to the Cortex, cowl down, flush with good health, the remnants of the speed force clinging to him like perfume.
Barry looked at Eobard, then at Eddie – noticing the lack of bloodshed or other grievous bodily injury – and just smiled.

"Feeling better?" Eobard asked.

"Yeah. A lot." Barry reached into the Big Belly Burger bag and helped himself to the triple-triple that Cisco had reserved for him. "Thanks for lunch, Eddie."

"No problem. Just wanted to check in and see how everything's going." Eddie glanced over at him, then back at Barry. "Iris wanted to come too, but there's a new editor at the CCPN and he's making waves."

Barry had wolfed down the burger without any regard for its deliciousness. "It's fine. And maybe she shouldn't hang around here so much. You shouldn't, either."

"What's going on, Bar?"

Eobard found he utterly disliked that Edward – and despite the offer of informality, Eobard couldn't bring himself to think of a grown man by such a childish diminutive – was quite so casual with Barry's name. It implied a level of intimacy that made him … unhappy.

No, made him jealous. Which was ridiculous. His ancestor was married to Barry's foster sister, and for the moment, it was quite obvious that the match was one of love. Whatever Edward's feelings for Barry were, they weren't romantic.

Barry continued, oblivious to Eobard's momentary emotional crisis. "Is there any chance you and Iris and Joe could go out of town for the next few weeks?"

Edward looked suspicious. "Why would we do that?"

"Zoom. He's got to know that my friends and family can be used against me. If you're not here, he won't focus on to you."

Edward shook his head. "Hell, no. We stand with you, Barry."

"Even if it could get you killed? Iris or Joe killed?"

"What about Cisco? Caitlin? What about … Eobard?"

Eobard covered his smirk as Edward nearly tripped over his name. Bygones were not quite bygones, yet.

Barry said, "As for Caitlin, I'm going to send a message to Ronnie and Doctor Stein, so they'll come and take her to someplace safe."

"Does she know you're going to do this?" Edward challenged.

"No."

Edward looked at Eobard, at Cisco. "Even if I get Iris and Joe to leave Central City, that still leaves these two. Are you sending them away, too?"

Eobard spoke quietly and emphatically. "No, he's not."

Cisco added, "Like hell he is."
"Guys – " Barry tried.

Cisco shook his head, "No, Barry. You know you can't do this alone."

"I can't let you stay."

"It's not your choice, Mr. Allen. And for the record, I didn't run all the way back here just to die," Eobard said firmly.

Barry exploded, "If Zoom gets you – any of you – that's exactly what's going to happen. He'll kill you, or hold you hostage for my speed and then kill you." Barry pushed Cisco out of the way and called up the video that was all too familiar to Eobard.

"This is what he did to the Harrison Wells of the Earth where he came from. Watch and tell me that I don't have a right to be worried. Terrified."

The images on the screen were horrifying, perhaps more so because Eobard was looking at his doppelganger screaming and struggling to get to his child as the monster tore her throat out. In the background, there was the sound of insane laughter from the meta-human recording the carnage. Then came Harrison Wells’ own death as Zoom punched his hand through his chest and ripped out his heart.

"I can't let this happen to any of you." Barry was speaking to the three of them. But he was looking at Eobard.

......................................................

Barry argued with Eddie, with Cisco, with Eobard, trying to get them to see his point of view. Eddie tried to be the voice of reason, but his position was unreasonable. "We're not abandoning you, Barry."

"You're not abandoning me, I'm telling you to go. Zoom could take any one of you and hold you hostage. He has to know that if it's a choice between your lives and my speed, I'll give him my speed without a second thought. And once he has my speed, he'll be unstoppable."

Eddie shook his head. "Then we have to make sure that he's stopped now. Can't you figure out how to close the breaches and keep him on the other side?"

Eobard let out a sharp bark of laughter and ignored Barry's glare.

Eddie, of course, was annoyed. "What's so funny?"

Barry crossed his arms. "Eobard suggested the same thing earlier. He has a way of closing the breaches, but that means that Zoom will still have free rein to destroy the other Earth, to keep killing. We can't let that happen."

"Even if it means risking everyone here?"

Barry knew that Eddie and Eobard were right. But they were wrong, too. He had a responsibility to the Speed Force – they’d protected him when he needed it, and now he needed to do the same. Zoom was defiling the Speed Force and needed to be stopped, regardless of the cost.

He just needed to figure out a way to minimize the cost – closing all but one of the breaches was a start. Forming a proper battle plan was the next item on the list. Maybe Eobard had ideas on how to accelerate Zoom's bodily decay from the speed drugs.
They argued for an hour and Eddie eventually left, making a half-hearted promise to talk to Joe and Iris about leaving Central City.

Whatever peace and clarity Barry’s run had brought was now gone, swamped by a tidal wave of frustration. Neither Eobard or Cisco were interested in listening to him.

Eobard said, "Like I told you earlier, Mr. Allen, I didn't come back here to die. We'll figure out a way to stop Zoom – together."

Cisco tried to get through to him. "Barry – listen to us. You can't take on Zoom by yourself. You know that. You nearly died the last time you tried."

"I know." Barry dropped into a chair, frustrated and angry – at himself, at the unfairness of everything. He was so close to happiness, but like always, it was going to be ripped away from him again. He could see Zoom destroying everything and everyone he loved. Not just Eobard, but Joe and Iris and Eddie, Cisco and Caitlin, his friends at the CCPD. No one was safe. No one.

Eobard was looking at him, his expression a mirror of Barry's own frustration.

"What?" Barry snapped.

"It's a pity you gave Gideon that command. We could know if you were successful and how with one simple question."

Barry wasn't surprised. Eobard – like the proverbial leopard – wasn't going to change his spots. "No – what if the future is bad? What if we learn that I died defeating Zoom?"

Eobard's lips tightened and his eyes blazed, conveying too much information.

Barry froze to his soul at a sudden realization. "I did die, didn't I?"

Cisco wouldn't look at him.

"Guys?" Barry tried again.

Eobard commented, all too casually, "I thought you said that you didn't want to know the future."

"I don't – but..."

"But nothing, Mr. Allen. You can't have it both ways. You don't want to become a 'monster'. All right, I get that. But yet you still need a solution to a rather difficult problem."

Barry buried his face his hands. "I know."

Eobard got up and pressed a hand against Barry’s shoulder, a gesture likely intended to convey comfort. But this was the first time Eobard had initiated physical contact with him since – since, well, forever. Barry looked up, his heart racing faster than normal from that simple touch.

"How about this," Eobard suggested, "we close all of the breaches but one."

Cisco interrupted, "You mentioned that before. How do you plan to do it?"

Since Cisco hadn't been in the Cortex when he'd first broached the idea with Barry, Eobard backtracked and explained his idea for a breach-busting device.

"So – we close all of the breaches, leaving just one opened? And we monitor that one?" Cisco asked.
Eobard nodded. "That's the idea. But the question is – which breach? I understand that there are a lot of them throughout the city."

Barry looked over at Cisco and grinned. Cisco smiled back and said, "Come with us."

It was almost worth all of this afternoon's aggravation to see the expression on Eobard's face when he was introduced to "Blue Bell", as Cisco had taken to calling the large, amorphous mass that was "living" in one of the S.T.A.R. Labs basements.

Eobard stared at it, speechless.

Barry noted, "It's highly unstable." And at that, the mass flickered twice and disappeared, only to reappear a few seconds later.

Cisco muttered, "You shouldn't insult her like that."

"Her?" Eobard finally seemed to find something to say.

Trying not to burst out in inappropriate laughter, Barry took refuge in science. "Before he and Ronnie had to leave, Doctor Stein helped us map and measure all of the breaches. While this one has the highest energy output, it also has the highest level of frequency fluctuations, making it almost terminally unstable."

Eobard mused, "So Zoom can't use her. It."

"Nope. We're monitoring it. Other than Jay Garrick, the guy from Earth-2 who gave us the data drive with the information on Zoom and the Earth-2 meta-humans, nothing and no one else has come through Blue Bell."

"But you've taken precautions." Eobard was referring to the blast-proof doors and three-factor security locks they'd installed. "It's good to see that you've learned something since I left."

To Barry's surprise, Cisco snarked, "We were taught by a master."

And to his greater surprise, Eobard took ownership of that. "Yes, Cisco, you were. And you won't be caught unawares again."

Cisco accepted the not-so-subtle apology and moved on. "So, if we can close off all of the other breaches, and if we can stabilize this breach, we can use it as a trap. Force Zoom to come to us, fight him on our terms. On the battleground of our choosing."

Barry looked to Eobard, who agreed, "Yes – that is essentially it. But it's not without risk – big risk. We're not only inviting the monster to come and play, we're opening the door and letting him in."

Barry nodded. "If it works, we're basically issuing Zoom an engraved invitation into S.T.A.R. Labs."

"Exactly. Or we can close all of the breaches and call it a day." Eobard noted with studied casualness.

Barry didn't dignify that with a response.

Back in the Cortex, Eobard gave them an intensive lecture on color-flavor-locking strange matter – the mechanism they would use to close the breeches. "Forget about the Cooper pairing system, it's all wrong ... " 
Barry listened as Eobard practically waxed poetic on the subject and thought that this was yet another facet of a man he was finally getting a chance to know.

"Mr. Allen – are you paying attention?"

"Yes, Professor Thawne, I am."

Eobard took a step back, as if he'd been struck. Or kissed. He cleared his throat and continued the lecture.

They might even have gotten to the point of building a prototype, except that Joe arrived, breathing fire.

"What the hell do you mean by having Eddie tell me that I should leave town until Zoom's defeated?"

........................................

Eobard had never thought he'd be happy to see Joe West at S.T.A.R. Labs, chewing out Barry.

From the earliest days, it had been difficult not to interfere with the father-son relationship, not to undermine Barry's trust in his foster father to further Eobard's own ends. Once he'd settled in Central City, Eobard could have easily manipulated the system and gotten control of the young, traumatized boy. But the idea of having any sort of parental relationship with Barry had been revolting. So he'd watched and prayed that Joe had remained the type of parent Barry had needed. And he had been. Not a perfect parent because that would be unrealistic. He was, however, the type of father Eobard once wished he'd had himself. Loving, non-judgmental, and happy to let his children forge their own paths.

Now, Eobard just stepped back and let Joe take Barry apart.

"Joe – " Barry tried.

"Don't 'Joe' me, Barry. I don't think I've ever been this angry with you."

"Not even when I came home from the junior prom, stoned and drunk?"

Eobard remembered that night. He'd even gotten sympathy munchies just watching the boy.

Joe gave vent to his fury. "This isn't the time to make jokes. Yesterday, you were in a coma. Today, you're telling your family to get out of Dodge so you can have a showdown with the monster that tore you apart. I watched him do that to you – I saw him break your back, your neck. I saw him suck the life out of you. Now you want me to run away?"

"I don't want Zoom to hurt anyone I love. He can take you like that." Barry snapped his fingers. "He can hold you hostage. I'd do anything to get you back, even knowing that he'd probably kill you anyway. You want me to be safe? I need you and everyone else to be safe – as far away from here as possible."

"Not happening." Joe turned to look at Eobard. "You – are you encouraging this?"

Eobard leaned back in his chair and laced his fingers behind his head. He was going to enjoy this as much as he'd once enjoyed movie nights with Cisco. "Not in the least. I've made my position clear about this. I'm going nowhere."
"Good." Joe actually gave him a look of approval.

Barry, on the other hand, was doing a very fine imitation of a frustrated toddler. "Don't you get it, Joe? Aren't you listening? You're all in the crosshairs. What about Iris? Are you willing to risk her life?"

Joe actually laughed. "We've already gone done that path. You have to remember how that ended up."

"That was at your insistence!"

"And I learned a lesson from that, Barry – and I thought you did, too."

"You're a cop, Joe! You should understand about the need to get civilians out of harm's way."

"I'm not a civilian, nor is Eddie."

"In this, you are. The entire police force is a target. You saw the footage of what Zoom did to that other Earth. You can't shoot him, you can't capture him. He killed six police officers the night he attacked me. How can you think you can stand up against him?"

"Because it's my job, Barry. It's Eddie's job. And if you don't think that we're not terrified of what Zoom could do to us, think again. But – unlike you – we took oaths to protect the people of this city. Even with our lives."

"But I don't want you to get hurt." Barry was practically in tears. "What if you died because of me?"

Eobard understood Barry's fears. He'd lived with similar fears – for Barry himself – for a very long time. Maybe it was time to step in. "Barry – Joe is right. You can't send them away – any of us away. We – Cisco, Caitlin, myself – haven't taken oaths like Joe and Eddie have, but we're part of your team. You can't play the lone wolf, Barry. You'll – "

Eobard didn't see it coming. How could he, without his speed?

Barry punched him. Right between the eyes. Not hard – just hard enough to knock Eobard to the floor, to make his head spin.

Barry stood over him, an avenging angel in red, fists clenched. "You left. You set everything in motion for the sole purpose of leaving. You don't get to lecture me about the value of teamwork."

As angry as he was, Barry still held out a hand, and helped Eobard to his feel. "Barry – " Eobard began.

Barry shook his head. "You left me."

"I won't leave again. I promise." At least not until you make me go.

The look on Barry's face was half-hope, half-skepticism, and pure heartbreak, but this wasn't the time to work through those wounds.

Barry turned back to Joe. "I can't make you leave, but please consider getting Iris out of harm's way."

Joe refused. "No – if you want Iris out of Central City, you're going to have to ask her yourself."

If his face hadn't hurt so much, Eobard would have grinned.
Joe left after a few more rounds of pointless arguing. Barry changed out of his suit, went into the med bay and came back with an ice bag. And an apology.

"Sorry I punched you."

Eobard held the bag against his nose. "I think I deserved that."

Barry didn't say anything, but Cisco – bless him – chimed in with a "Hell, yes you did."

That seemed to break the tension and they worked on the prototype design for a few more hours, until Cisco called it quits.

"I'm done. The CNC is set to mill out the housing and that's going to take at least fourteen hours, since someone is insisting that we use high-carbon steel instead of titanium. The parts won't be ready until the morning." He hefted his backpack. "See the two of you then, if you haven't managed to kill each other first."

Both Barry and Eobard laughed, but with Cisco gone, the tension returned and felt like a living thing.

Eobard broke it first. "I meant what I said, Barry – I'm not leaving."

Barry shrugged. "It's okay." He put on his jacket. "Let's go home."
Chapter 12

That tension followed them like a loyal dog into the borrowed S.T.A.R. Labs van, and then into the house.

Eobard wasn't sure what to say or do. He thought about pitching a small fit to get Barry to move out of the master bedroom.

And of course, Barry had to do what Barry usually did to him. He pulled the rug out from under Eobard's feet. "Give me a few minutes and you can have the master bedroom back. You'll probably sleep better there."

"Um – thank you." Eobard let out a tiny sigh of relief. He'd finally have access to the timeline.

Barry's next words not only pulled the rug out from under Eobard again, they dropped the whole damn floor. "And just so you know, the Gideon module in the closet isn't going to give you the timeline, either."

Eobard was dismayed, but in a way, not surprised. "Ah, I should have figured that you'd found the data closet. I am surprised, though, that Gideon didn't mention your incursion when I was back in my own time. How were able to access the module here? This one needed my DNA."

"I hadn't gotten into it." Barry shrugged. "I only know there's a module in the closet; the Gideon unit in the Time Vault told me where it was. It also said that while they are not fully synced in terms of processing power, they are aware of each other's existence and they maintain each other. I created the core instruction on the one at S.T.A.R. Labs and that was replicated in the module here. Everything else is just as you left it."

"You are determined to keep me honest, Mr. Allen."

"Yes, Professor Thawne, I am."

Barry zipped off; completely unaware that Eobard had experienced another moment of disorientation at the use of his academic title. He'd never had any particular reaction when Barry had called him "Doctor Wells", but there was something in Barry's tone when he called him "Professor Thawne" that set Eobard off.

Like Barry was challenging him, egging him on, forcing him to prove himself.

Needing to put that troubling thought from his mind, Eobard poured himself a glass of scotch. He took a sip, letting the complex flavor and aromas fill his head before enjoying the mellow burn as he swallowed. What he didn't enjoy was the sudden rush of dizziness.

Eobard blinked, put the glass down, and wiped the sweat from his brow. It had been twenty-seven years since he'd turned himself into a speedster. Twenty-seven years since alcohol could have any effect on him. Twenty-seven years since he could get drunk.

"Eobard?" Barry was back in the great room.

"Yes?"

"I've moved everything over. It's ready for you, whenever you want."
Eobard nodded, and as Barry turned to leave, he reached out and grabbed Barry's arm.

"I won't let anything happen to you, Barry Allen. I swear." It was the alcohol talking, and it was the truth.

Barry looked at Eobard’s hand on his arm. He replied with a frightening amount of sang-froid, "Don't make promises you can't keep."

What the hell is wrong with you? Isn't it enough that you have Eobard back? You have to behave like a four-year old spoiled brat because things aren't falling just the way you want?

Barry tossed and turned, replaying the day's events in an endless loop of humiliation. From the jealous snit in the morning over breakfast to punching Eobard in the afternoon to the way he’d behaved – and Barry wasn't even sure what that display was – when they got back home, his own passive-aggressive behavior was ridiculous.

He rolled over, punched the pillow and tried to forget everything. This wasn't like the last years' worth of sleepless nights that he'd suffered through before Zoom's arrival, nights of endless longing and self-loathing. No, this was worse.

And it didn’t help that he hadn't changed the bedding from last night, it didn't help that he was breathing in Eobard's scent – spicy and rich like the forest that surrounded the house. He was suffocating on it.

Barry rolled over again and stared up at the night sky. It was bleak and empty of stars, obscured by a thick layer of clouds. Then the rain came.

How fitting.

In the few quiet moments he had over the next few days, Eobard wondered if he were going insane. Maybe he'd gotten the formulation wrong for the speed drug. Maybe he'd missed a whole range of addiction psychoses.

Like uncontrollable lust.

Eobard ran back through the data that Cisco had collected for him, searching for answers, a rationale for his body's behavior. He looked at Zoom's crimes, and they were legion. And vile. Murder upon murder – most targeting people of influence and power. Police, politicians, scientists. All dying in the most horrible ways.

But no reports of sexual trauma. No reports of rape.

So, why did Eobard have such a hard time controlling himself, controlling his body, whenever Barry was near?

Eobard had long thought that he lacked a proper sex drive – an unacceptable deviancy in the twenty-second century. He'd had little interest in sexual activity and found the idea of intimacy – with men, with women, even with his own hand – to be vaguely revolting.

It was the bitterest of ironies that only the Flash had interested him, had aroused him.
When Eobard was seventeen, he'd found a picture of the man that might have been the Flash. Not of the masked hero in the red suit with lightning bolt on his chest, but a picture of a man called Barry Allen, which had been the name most commonly associated with the Flash.

The photo had been grainy and flat and time-blurred, but Eobard had been able to enhance it, and the results had been startling. Once Eobard had blocked out the facial features normally covered by the Flash's mask and cowl, it had become clear – to him – that this man was identical to the Flash.

And the unexpected truth was, the Flash – Barry Allen – was beautiful.

Eobard has been called beautiful, too. Generations of genetic engineering had assured that he was the "perfect Thawne," tall and blond and blue-eyed, the very image of a man fit to eventually rule the family empire.

But Eobard had always been vaguely disgusted by his appearance. It had struck him as a lie, as much a laboratory creation as the manufactured protein slabs that made up the bulk of humanity's nutritional requirements in his home century. It smacked of eugenics.

Barry Allen, though. He was truly beautiful in the way that supernova was beautiful. A natural phenomenon – wild and uncontrolled – not manipulated to be someone else's ideal.

At seventeen, for the first time in his life, Eobard Thawne had felt the stirrings of sexual desire, when he'd looked at the picture of Barry Allen.

Those feelings and Eobard’s body's reaction had frightened him. How could he have such impure thoughts about the stainless, perfect hero of his childhood? If Eobard were able to make his dreams a reality and travel back in time to meet Barry Allen, wouldn't the Flash be disgusted? Eobard had disciplined his body and his mind to ignore those desires, to channel that energy into something more acceptable – such as transforming himself into a speedster.

By the time Eobard was twenty and on the path to transforming himself into a speedster, that inappropriate lust for Barry Allen had become a vague and embarrassing memory. Eobard had told himself that the lack of a sex drive was to his benefit, that he didn't need or want a distraction from more important pursuits. But the truth was, this lack was just another way Eobard was different, strange, and to his family and to society, unacceptable.

Just look at his brother, Robern, who was such a social creature that his parents had been fielding offers for their second son's hand since he was sixteen. Eobard, however, was a loner and had gone out of his way to squelch the interest of any suitors. His parents, of course, had put pressure on him to expand their family's power and prestige. Even if he was uninterested in sex, he could still contract a politically beneficial marriage. But that was the last thing Eobard wanted – someone permanently in his life, someone who wouldn't understand him.

Someone who wasn't the Flash.

And as much as Eobard had disciplined himself to ignore the unseemly lust for a man he could never have, in the quiet of his mind, he’d believed that there was something wrong with him. He'd been taught that sex and the need to procreate were a basic part of human nature, and the lack of such needs indicated some type of malfunction. As he did with any problem, he'd researched and studied and looked for a way to fix it. Eobard became a theoretical expect in human sexual practices, hoping to find something – other than the Flash – to spark his interest.

There were drugs, of course, that would stimulate sexual desire. Other drugs that would lower his inhibitions. There were counsellors and therapists who he'd engaged to try to make him normal,
acceptable, worthy. But nothing worked and everything he'd tried left him feeling revolted and revolting, unfit and unclean. Now, chronologically in his middle thirties – or early fifties, once those years spent trapped in this timeline were added in – Eobard was worse than he'd been at seventeen and waking up spent from his dreams about the Flash. Back then, Barry Allen had been a static image in an ancient photograph. A dream. An ideal, perfect and pure, and Eobard's lust had seemed a defilement to be suppressed. Now Barry was flesh and blood and bone. All eyes and anger and longing – for him – and Eobard didn't know how to handle it.

It was strange, but during the year and some that he'd spent in close physical proximity to Barry under the guise of Dr. Harrison Wells, he'd occasionally felt mild stirrings of desire. He'd been able to ruthlessly quell those feelings in the name of the greater goal. But now there was no greater goal, no secret future, no Flash and his Reverse.

Just the Flash and Eobard Thawne.

Eobard was constantly in state of sexual arousal, his brain spontaneously creating scenes of the two of them in all kinds of sexual situations – romantic and obscene at the same time. During the day, Eobard was mostly able to distract himself with the work, but nights were filled with fantasies of every damn kink he'd once researched, every pornographic video he'd forced himself to watch. All of them now starred Barry Allen.

Barry himself didn't help matters. The house they shared was vast, there was no reason why Barry seemed to need to constantly occupy the same space as Eobard, to casually wander around shirtless, sometimes pants-less, wearing just skin-tight boxer-briefs that left nothing to the imagination.

And earlier this evening, after an excruciatingly long day reworking plans for the still non-functioning breach bombs (Cisco hadn’t yet named the devices), Barry had invaded Eobard’s bedroom, wearing nothing more than a pair of tissue-thin sleep pants that rode low on his almost non-existent hips. Apparently, he'd left behind the charging cord for his phone and it had dropped behind the nightstand. Barry had refused Eobard’s offer of assistance, leaving Eobard to stare at that perfect ass as Barry bent over the furniture.

Eobard had had to shove his hands in his pockets, fist them to hide the sudden tenting at his fly. This was ridiculous.

After too many excruciatingly long minutes, Barry had found that damn cord, thanked him, and left.

Now, working with Gideon deep in the closet – and wasn't that an interesting metaphor – Eobard tried to focus on the equations that would resolve the issues with the breach closing devices. This should have been child's play for him. In his own timeline, Eobard was the recognized expert on the real-world application of strange matter. In this timeline, Eobard couldn't seem to focus on anything but his body's demands.

Exhausted from this constant fight with his body, Eobard asked the only entity who could help diagnose the problem, "Gideon, what the hell is wrong with me?"

"Your blood pressure, breath rate and heart rate are slightly elevated, as is your skin temperature. You also seem to be producing higher levels of testosterone. There is increased blood flow to your genitals and your nipples are erect. None of these physiological manifestations of sexual arousal are out of the ordinary for a man of your age and physical condition."

Eobard buried his face in his hands and muttered, "That was a rhetorical question."

"My apologies, Professor Thawne. If you perceive this condition as a problem, do you wish me to
”Are you certain, Professor? That programming is still part of the neural matrix for this core. ”

In his quest for all things related to the Flash, Eobard had tracked down this version of the Gideon A.I. to a run-down sex parlor in Old Town and "liberated" it. A generation of hackers had layered on crude sexual VR programming, which Eobard had easily been able to erase, but this core had once been part of a mental health practice specializing in sexual dysfunction, and Eobard couldn't fully eliminate that programming. Eobard politely declined Gideon's offer. "No, no thank you. I don't think that will do either of us any good."

"Acting as a sexual surrogate will not bother me, Professor. I am incapable of such feelings."

Eobard smiled, although he wasn't particularly amused.

On a whim, he'd once – and only once – made use of that function, thinking it might help cure him of his own self-diagnosed dysfunction. The "session" had done more harm than good, and it had taken Eobard weeks before he could enable and work with Gideon's avatar again.

"Very well, Professor. Please do not be afraid to ask for my assistance in such matters in the future." 

"Of course."

Eobard tried to will his body back into an unaroused state, but his body wasn't obeying his mind. Maybe this was an area where Gideon could assist – give him answers about his body's sudden sexual blossoming. He summoned the A.I. again.

"Yes, Professor Thawne?"

"Does the depletion of natural speed force in my cellular structure have any relation to my inability to control this condition?"

"No, Professor. It does not."

"What about the usage of the speed drug? Is this a side effect? An unanticipated addiction psychosis?"

"No, Professor."

"What then? Why am I like this, now?"

Gideon's answer was unsatisfactory. "Your state of sexual arousal is a normal condition brought on by exposure to stimuli you find pleasing. The goal of negating this state is unhealthy and may cause mental instability."

"Thank you, Gideon, for stating the obvious." His tone was harsher than he normally used with any version of the A.I.

"If that will be all, Professor, I will shut down and perform routine maintenance on my core."

Eobard sighed. He'd managed to offend an artificial intelligence. Just great.

He looked down at his lap. At least he wasn't aroused anymore.
Restless beyond words, Barry abandoned his bed shortly before midnight. The rainy weather had cleared and although the late October night was cold, he went outside. In the time since he'd moved in here, the large patio at the back of the house had become something of a refuge. A place where he could escape his memories and his ghosts in the vastness of the night sky.

Tonight, Barry wasn't so much haunted as confused and disappointed. And scared.

He loved Eobard. But the peace and rightness he had felt when he'd woken from his coma seemed to have gotten lost in the daily struggle with reality. Caught up and protected by the Speed Force, Barry had accepted Eobard's part in his mother's death, and the necessity of it. And by accepting those terrible facts, he'd accepted his feelings for Eobard – there was no shame in loving this man. But now, Barry felt like he was standing on the edge of a cliff and the ground was shifting under his feet. If he breathed the wrong way, he'd fall and never hit bottom.

Barry shivered in the chill night air and collected a few logs for the fire pit. He was glad this wasn't plumbed for gas, like the fireplaces inside. He liked the scene of wood smoke, the crackle of the logs as the flames consumed them. One evening last year, shortly after Iris and Eddie had gotten married, he'd invited the whole team over. They'd sat around this fire pit, toasting marshmallows and making jokes – just being friends. It had been one of the few moments of pure happiness Barry ever could remember since his early childhood.

Normally, Barry wouldn't have bothered with matches; he'd light the fire the old-fashioned way, by rubbing two pieces of kindling together at super speed. Since he wasn't supposed to use his speed, he needed a half-dozen matched to get the fire going. But soon enough, the flames licked at the darkness, although not brightly enough to drown out the rich blanket of stars.

Barry had come out prepared to spend the night, with a heavy wool blanket and a pillow. He pulled one of the large, double-wide loungers close to the fire pit and settled in.

It was a clear and moonless night and the stars seemed close enough to touch. Gazing into the distance, Barry almost felt like he was back in the Speed Force, and that the avatar – in the shape of Tess Morgan – was on the other side of the fire pit, watching him, waiting for the inevitable questions that they'd then refuse to answer. If the avatar were wearing Harrison Wells' form, they'd probably be curled up next to Barry, hands gentle and soothing on his body.

Until that very last moment, when they'd kissed him with such surprising passion, Barry had felt nothing but comfort and contentment from the avatar's touches. He missed that. Although if there was a choice between the avatar and Eobard, he'd take Eobard without question.

Right now, he had neither. He had the fire and the night sky and his speed. That would have to be enough.

"Barry?"

And just like that, Eobard inserted himself into the equation. Barry could just make out his silhouette on the other side of the fire pit, about ten feet away. "Hey."

"What are you doing out here?"

"Thinking." Dreaming.
"It's cold."

Barry tossed the blanket aside and got up. The fire was burning down and needed a few more logs. When he passed Eobard, he wasn't surprised that the man hadn't bothered with a jacket. "Go, get under the blanket. I'll be right back."

Barry added the logs and stoked the fire until it was once again a bright, merry blaze.

Eobard was sitting on the edge of the lounger, next to Barry, his expression hard to read in the flickering light.

Barry asked with studied indifference, "What's the matter?"

"Couldn't sleep – nothing new." Eobard shrugged

"I know the feeling. That's why I like to come out here. It's easier to stay awake in the fresh air. Easier to think, sometimes."

"You know, I don't think I ever came out here at night. At least just to think."

"Why?"

Eobard shrugged. "It wasn't part of my life. I guess I didn't need the comfort of the stars for my introspection."

"Didn't think you were much for introspection, to be honest."

"Really?"

"You never seemed like the type of person who worried too much. You made up your mind, you had a plan, you executed it."

"That's quite an indictment, Mr. Allen." Eobard's voice was as chilled as the night air.

It was Barry's turn to shrug. "Not an indictment at all. You enjoyed being Doctor Enigmatic J. Inscrutable. You deliberately fostered that impression and did nothing to contradict it. You weren't — you aren't — the brooding hero, obsessing over his mistakes. That's my role."

"You're wrong about me."

Barry shifted around, stretched out, pulled Eobard down on the cushions and tugged the blanket back up over them. "Really?"

"I'd watched and worried and 'brooded' about you every step of the way. I spent fifteen years worrying that I was doing everything wrong. And I guess, from your perspective, I was. I was, in your words, a monster." Eobard wasn't quite relaxed against Barry.

Barry wasn't sure how to respond to that. Instead, he rolled onto his back and gazed up at the sky, fully conscious of Eobard next to him. Orion was clearly visible above the tree line for the first time this season. Desperate for something to say, Barry commented, "The Hunter's rising."

"Ah, Orion. I didn't know you liked astronomy."

"I think it's a requirement for every baby science geek. Constellations and dinosaurs."

"I did like astronomy, but I wasn't particularly interested in paleontology as a child."
"Somehow, that doesn't surprise me. I suspect you were too busy at seven or eight trying to disprove the Theory of Relativity to be interested in apatosaurus and maiasauras."

Eobard chuckled at that. "Not quite, but close."

"What were you like?"

"As a child?"

"Yeah – I have a hard time with that, seeing you as anything but a fully formed adult."

"Trust me; I did not burst forth from my mother fully formed like Athena from the head of Zeus."

"So, what were you like?"

"Smaller." Eobard paused. "Lesser."

Barry could hear a universe of hurt in that single, ambiguous sentence. He could let it go. Or he could try to discover what made this fascinating man tick. "After you left, Eddie told us what you said about the Thawnes, your illustrious family."

"And did he tell you what I said about them when I got back?"

"No." Barry hadn't spent a lot of time with Eddie this past week. "What did you say?"

"I told Edward the truth about them. That they are – or I guess technically, they will be – assholes."

Barry leaned up on one elbow and looked down at Eobard. "Really?"

"They are. I let myself forget just how… narrow-minded and judgmental they were. How much I didn't fit into their expectations."

Infinitely curious, but wary of opening up old wounds, Barry asked with studied gentleness, "Could you tell me about them? About childhood, what it was like growing up in the twenty-second century."

Eobard sighed and looked up at the stars. "My childhood was typical for a young person of my … class."

"Your family was wealthy?"

"Yes, but their status came from more than money. The Thawnes were – or will be – like the Rockefellers, the Morgans, the Vanderbilts of their day. They controlled vast swaths of industry, politics, commerce. I was supposed to be the heir to all of that. I was bred very specifically for that role."

"But you didn't want it."

"No, never. My parents wanted a pretty child, one with the intelligence to do what they needed, but one who would be biddable. I was expected to fall neatly into the slot their expectations carved out for me. I wasn't supposed to be a scientific genius, I wasn't supposed to have dreams. So they left me with my tutors – all robotic, no humans to get attached to – and the programmed course of lessons. I was five when I finished the curriculum for twelve year olds."

Barry's heart ached. "You had no friends."
"It is that obvious? I was a Thawne and there was no one worthy of my time except other Thawnes. I was nine when my brother was born, but we were never close. Robern ended up being the child my parents really wanted."

"I'm so sorry."

"Why?"

Barry knew he was heading into dangerous territory, but he hurt for the child that Eobard had been. "Even after my mother died, after my father... " He felt Eobard stiffen and try to pull away, but Barry wouldn't let him. "...went to prison, I still had a good childhood. I had Joe and Iris, I had people who loved me, who were there when I had nightmares, who celebrated my successes and picked me up when I fell and pushed me forward when I failed. I am sorry that you didn't have that; that you don't know what that's like. To grow up with love."

Eobard sighed and Barry looked at him. The firelight cast shadows over Eobard's face, but there was one emotion Barry could read: regret.

"You're a lucky man, Barry. To have had loving parents, to have had Joe to love and nurture you. I can't tell you how sorry I am for what happened, for what my arrogance and anger brought into your life, how it destroyed your family."

This wasn't the first time since Eobard had returned that they'd danced around Barry's mother's death and Eobard's role in it. But it was the first time Eobard had admitted to regret.

Barry picked up on the ambiguity in Eobard's statements and remembered what the Speed Force had told him: that he needed to ask the right question at the right time. Somehow, he knew that this wasn't the right time, and that if he pressed the issue, Eobard might close down and Barry would never learn the truth. With some effort, Barry relaxed back on the cushion and watched the sky.

There was a tiny burst of light as a meteor burned through the atmosphere.

Eobard must have seen it, too. He said, "You should make a wish."

Barry laughed. "I didn't think you – of all people – would subscribe to such magical thinking."

"Sometimes you do have to believe in magic."

"Like believing in the impossible."

"Yes." Eobard let out a small sigh. "As I once said, you are the very definition of impossible, Barry Allen."

"And you are not, Eobard Thawne?"

Eobard ignored that in favor of watching the sky. "There's another one. Make a wish."

"Only if you do, too."

Barry felt more than heard Eobard's laughter. "Okay, I will."

As another star fell, Barry wished for the impossible. Or maybe not.

Eobard was surprised at how comfortable he was, curled up next to Barry, suffused with warmth
despite the cold night air.

The arousal that had been riding him hard for so many days seemed to have finally subsided. It wasn't completely gone, but it wasn't embarrassingly obvious, either.

"Did you make a wish?" Barry's voice was low and pleasant against his ear.

"Yes. But I won't tell you."

"Of course you shouldn't. Then the wish won't come true."

"Mmm, yes, of course." There was no way Eobard’s wish could become reality – to have all of Barry Allen forever. Not now, not with the future so drastically altered.

Barry sighed. "You know, I used to feel like we were Orion and Scorpio."

Eobard smiled. "I think I remember that myth. Orion had been killed by a scorpion for his boasting, and when the gods placed the hunter in the night sky, they made it impossible for the two constellations to appear at the same time. Yes, it does feel a little too much like the Flash and his Reverse, forever chasing each other."

"Maybe. Maybe once."

"True. I can't exactly chase you anymore. Unlike you, I'm mortal now. And slow. Perhaps I'm now destined to be like the hunter's faithful dog, content to sit at your feet until I die of old age." Eobard tried his best to keep the regret out of his voice. While he'd never regret giving Barry his speed, he'd lost his chance for an eternity with Barry.

Barry heard the regret and misinterpreted it. "I'm sorry. So very sorry."

"For what?"

"For taking your speed – the one thing you valued so much."

Eobard shook his head. "No, Barry. You didn't take anything. I gave it to you. I value your life more than I ever valued my speed. I just regret other things. The loss of a future that will never happen. But that loss pales in comparison to what I've gained."

"You may not have your speed anymore, but you're not slow. And we're both mortal." Barry sounded surprised by Eobard's statement. Did he not know...?

"You can be killed, Barry – you're not invulnerable. But mortal? No."

Barry leaned over him. "What do you mean?"

"You haven't realized, have you? Time has little effect on speedsters. You are now as you always will be, Barry." Eobard traced the strong planes of Barry's face, memorizing how the firelight gilded his beauty. He knew that when he closed his eyes for the very last time, this would be what he would see.

Barry was incredulous. "Are you saying I won't age?"

"Yes. Time won't affect your body or your mind. You will live forever."

In the firelight, Eobard could read Barry's shock, then his horror. "No – no. I don't want to. To live forever, while everyone I love dies?" Barry shook his head and Eobard could understand the need
for denial, the anticipation of grief. Those beautiful eyes filled with tears and Eobard couldn't bear to see Barry in pain.

"Shhh. Don't – " He reached up to wipe them away, to soothe away the pain.

Barry brushed his hand away. "How can you leave me?"

"I'm not going anywhere just yet. We will defeat Zoom and take whatever years together that we can." Eobard was shocked by his own words. He was promising Barry a future – a future that would be filled with too many questions, too many lies. But he couldn't deny Barry this promise, not when it was something he'd longed for, too.

Eobard closed his eyes and remembered that headline, remembered all the hopes and dreams he'd had. In retrospect, they were foolish, childish, selfish dreams. This was a reality worth suffering for. He cradled Barry in his arms, and when Barry buried his face in Eobard's neck, the hot tears scalding his skin, Eobard felt a rare sense of completeness.

That in this moment, he truly existed as a person.

Then Barry murmured, "They promised me I'd have everything I wanted. But I didn't want this."

This wasn't the first time Eobard had heard Barry say that. "Who are 'they'?" It was easier to try and solve this puzzle than deal with a too-short future.

Barry shook his head, dismissing Eobard's question. "No, I don't want this future. Not without you."

"Barry, don't – " It hurt too much, seeing Barry grieving far too soon.

"You had to have always known how I felt." Barry's words were heartfelt and heartbreaking.

"That was hero worship." Eobard doesn't want to dismiss Barry's feelings, but he doesn't want Barry to think that "Wells" had been real. He'd known how Barry had felt – it had been hard to escape it, but Eobard had always told himself that it wouldn't last, that those feelings would soon turn to hatred and disgust. "Hero worship for a man who didn't really exist."

"Maybe once, but not now. I love you, Eobard."

Eobard’s breath caught at that simple declaration. The way Barry said his name sent shockwaves of feeling through him. "You can't – " The denial was necessary. Barry would – soon enough – recover from this selective amnesia and remember who Eobard Thawne was, what he'd done. Barry would remember that he needed to hate Eobard.

But Barry's next words blew Eobard away. "I do – and I know that it should be wrong and I should hate you, instead. But I don't. You are who I want, who I love. I came back for you."

"Came back? What do you mean?" He could feel Barry trembling. Or maybe it was him.

"Before, when I was in the coma – I knew I needed to come back, but I didn't want to. I knew if I was going to have to come back, I would probably die. They wouldn't deny it. And then you came for me. You touched me and I couldn't stay away for another heartbeat. You pulled me back."

Barry's constant reference to "they" was confusing. "I don't understand."

Barry stopped protesting. His voice became steely and determined. It was the voice of a hero, of someone who wouldn't let something as simple as human mortality stand in his way. "You don't
have to. I love you and I'm not going to let you die. I'm not going to let anyone or anything, not even
time, take you from me. You're here, you're mine."

Eobard’s heart felt like it was about to burst from his chest. In his most secret dreams, the ones he'd
barely let himself admit to, the ones that drove him to acts of madness, Barry Allen would tell Eobard
he loved him, that he'd want to have a life together. But Eobard had never imagined this fierceness.
Eobard had never imagined Barry looking at him with such unwavering devotion. He'd never
imagined Barry loving him in return.

Eobard reached up and touched Barry's face. He wiped away the tears that were pouring down
Barry's cheeks. The dampness sparked something in Eobard, a profound need that had to be filled.
Without thinking, without planning or considering, or laying out his moves, Eobard pulled Barry
down and kissed him.

He'd kissed people, other men and women – strangers – in his long-ago search for a so-called sexual
normalcy, and had been disgusted by the act. He'd been kissed before, by a friend in a moment of
deep sadness and confusion. That hadn't done anything for him, but he hadn't been repulsed. He'd
thought that such a non-reaction would be best he would ever experience. He never expected to truly
want this.

But Eobard had never done this before. He'd never kissed someone he loved. He'd never been kissed
by someone who loved him. He'd never tasted true joy.

Barry filled all of Eobard’s senses and the scientist in him wanted to stop and catalogue each feeling,
each reaction, but when Barry cupped his face, all rational thought left Eobard's mind. He became a
creature of pure sensation and he let his body and his instincts take over.

It was nothing for Eobard to push Barry onto his back, to lay over him, to press him into the cushions
and kiss him. To taste him, to feel him. To take Eobard's fill and breathe the essence of this man.

Barry pushed up against Eobard and Eobard could feel Barry’s arousal against his own. For the first
time in Eobard’s life, he wasn't revolted by the very idea of sexual excitement. He wanted and he
was wanted and nothing felt wrong or dirty.

Barry broke the kiss and whispered urgently, "Tell me you want me as much as I want you."

"Yes, yes – I do. Of course I do." Eobard captured Barry's mouth and rocked against him, letting the
rhythm of his tongue match that of his body. The night air was cool against his back as Barry kicked
away the blanket and wrapped his thighs around Eobard. Everything that had once felt wrong about
his own desire was now right. And perfect. And wonderful.

Barry clutched at Eobard’s back, the scraping of his nails blunted by Eobard’s sweater, but then
Barry reached under Eobard’s clothing and the feeling of skin on skin was almost too much to bear.
Yes, it was too much and conversely, it would never be enough. Eobard rutted between Barry's
thighs helplessly and swallowed Barry's moans of pleasure. He'd never imagined he could feel this –
this desire, this pure sensation, pure need – without the complications of guilt and shame.

Barry bucked up hard against Eobard and tore his mouth away, repeating his name over and over
and over again. Hearing those three syllables were like a whip to his own desire – how did Barry
know how important his name was, how often he'd longed to hear it? He'd lived with another man's
name for too many years to not take pleasure in hearing his own from the one person he'd most
wanted to say it.

"Love you, Eobard, love you so much."
Eobard couldn't keep the words back. "I love you, Barry Allen. You are everything to me."

At that, Barry stilled, head thrown back, eyes staring sightless into the night sky, as he climaxed.

Eobard looked down into Barry's eyes, drowning in the lightning as he followed Barry over the cliff, letting everything go.

He fought against the creeping post-orgasmic lassitude, the urge to just collapse and wondered if anything would ever be this perfect again.

Eobard finally relaxed against Barry, his face buried against Barry's neck, his body a warm and welcome weight. But too soon, Eobard rolled off of him and sat up. Barry watched Eobard stare into the fire and wondered if what had just happened was going to be problem.

"Are you all right?" Barry asked.

Eobard turned back and looked at Barry. The light from the dying flames cast deep shadows across his face, adding something sinister to his expression. Then he smiled and Barry was stunned by the happiness in his expression. "I'm… surprisingly good."

"Why 'surprisingly'?"

Eobard didn't answer right away, but finally replied, "Let's just say that reality far surpassed even my greatest expectations."

Barry sat up and leaned against Eobard's back. "Good."

Eobard asked, "Are you okay?"

"I'm wonderful." Barry hummed a little, an echo of his body's satisfaction. The night was definitely chilly and the dampness in his pants was getting a little uncomfortable. "Do you want to go inside?"

"No, actually I like it out here. I can understand the attraction."

"Okay – just hold on for a moment." Barry was about to speed back into the house, but remembered not to; he wasn't close to ready to tip his hand to Zoom. A few minutes later, he walked back out with two pairs of sweatpants, and a thermos filled with hot chocolate.

They changed, shared a cup of the too-sweet drink, and after Barry added more logs to the fire, he pulled Eobard back down and under the blanket. They lay intertwined with each other, legs tangling, and Barry couldn't remember ever feeling quite so at peace with himself, with the universe.

For the first time in his life, the desire Barry felt was real in ways it had never been, even at the height of his infatuation with Iris. It was almost incomprehensible to know that he was wanted in return was a reality that he wanted to savor. While there were too many lingering questions, Barry didn't feel any urgency about finding answers.

Eobard didn't say anything and his breathing was so even that Barry had to ask, "Are you awake?"

"No."

"I guess that was kind of a stupid question."

"Yes, but I'll forgive you."
"Good."

Barry turned, rested his head on Eobard's chest and watched the sky as a bright spark burned out in a long arc. "It's the Orionid meteor shower." Two more meteors fell in quick succession. "Did you see that?"

"Hmm, yes."

"Did you make three wishes?"

He felt more than heard Eobard's laughter. "Yes, Mr. Allen, I did."

"Good, because I did, too."

Meteors continued to fall, decorating the night sky, and Barry couldn't keep his joy inside him. He leaned over Eobard and kissed him – not with the intention of starting anything – but just because he could. "We're going to make at least one of your wishes come true."

"How do you know what my wishes are?"

"Because they are the same as mine."

"You seem very certain of yourself." Eobard was smiling at Barry, his eyes glowing a pure and unearthly blue.

Barry kissed him again. "I am."

"So what wish of mine – and of yours – will you make come true?"

"I am going to give you your speed back."

Eobard's reaction was instantly, explosively negative – he broke out of the circle of Barry's embrace, pulling away as far as he could, preparing to lock Barry up. Then Eobard remembered that between them, he was now the weaker, the slower one. He only had his words to make his point. "No – you are not giving me your speed. I'll dismantle the Leech, and I can guarantee you that Cisco will have no part in that abomination."

Barry grinned and leaned over Eobard, so their noses were just about touching. "Perhaps I phrased myself poorly. I didn't mean give you my speed. I meant that I'm going to help you get your speed back."

Eobard looked at Barry, utterly confused. "And how to you think you're going to do that?"

"By creating another particle accelerator explosion." Barry smirked.

At that, Eobard didn't react. Not a word, not an expression – just a completely blank face, a still body.

Barry plunged forward, "We have all the data – what you did to me. What you did to yourself. We know how the lightning needs to bond with the dark matter from the particle accelerator explosion and we can recreate the circumstances that gave you your speed, that gave me my speed."

Eobard was still quiet, too quiet, so Barry continued. "We know how to pull lightning – the wand Cisco built to trap Mark Mardon will be perfect for this. And as for the particle accelerator – we can isolate the dark matter and direct it into you rather than let it spread."
And still, Eobard didn't respond.

"Tell me this will work," Barry said, beginning to worry. "Tell me I'm not crazy."

Finally, Eobard said something. "You are crazy, Barry Allen. Why do you want to do this? Why would you want the Reverse-Flash back?"

Barry let out the breath he'd been holding. "This has nothing to do with the Reverse-Flash, but everything to do with the life I want with you, Eobard Thawne. I don't want to live forever, not without you."

"You terrify me."

There was no real heat in Eobard's words and Barry smiled. "Good."

"I don't know if it's possible, though."

"Why not?"

"Because." Eobard seemed to want to end the discussion and tried to turn away.

Barry wasn't giving up. "You don't get to do that, Eobard. You're a scientist – there has to be a reason why you don't think it's possible."

Eobard sighed and explained, "My connection to the speed force was damaged after your mother's murder."

"Like mine was with Blackout?" They'd never actually discussed what happened to Eobard's speed back in 2000, and Barry had made a whole host of assumptions. Likely most of them were wrong.

"No, not at all. Farooq consumed the energy in your cells, like picking grapes off of a vine. With the right 'fertilizer' – the jolt from the generator – your power regrew. Mine – " Eobard frowned and shook his head, "was mutilated. To continue the analogy, someone took an axe to the rootstock. I wasn't killed, but I was badly maimed. No amount of energy could restore my connection to the speed force."

Eobard actually sounded a little blasé about it, unlike the time in the Pipeline cell, when he'd first told Barry what had happened on the night of Barry's mother's murder. Then, Eobard's voice had dripped with contempt and anger. Now, he sounded like he barely cared.

Again, Barry couldn't escape the feeling that Eobard was keeping something vital from him. Remembering the avatar's advice about questions and timing, Barry deliberately focused on Eobard's speed. "But if you've completely depleted all of the speed force in your body – erased it, maybe what happened wouldn't matter."

Eobard laughed and seemed to take too much delight in that metaphor. "So, what? You think I'm a tabula rasa."

"Yeah – a blank slate." Barry swallowed. "So, do you want to do this?"

Eobard rubbed his cheek against Barry's, and whispered, "I've been so accustomed to not having any real speed that I don't know what I'd do if I got it all back."

"You'll be Eobard Thawne, speedster." Barry found that he relished the idea.

"I'll be the Reverse-Flash again."
"And what does that mean?" I hope you don't think we'd be enemies again."

Eobard was serious, "Right now, I don't really know. This timeline is unknown to me. The future is truly an undiscovered country."

"You've spent way too much time watching movies with Cisco if you're quoting Star Trek." Barry laughed, but he kept his own dark thoughts to himself. Even if Eobard wanted to go back to being an antagonist, Barry would still want this – the idea of a long eternity without Eobard Thawne in his life was unbearable.

Eobard, thankfully, couldn't read his mind. "Hmm, perhaps. But do you know the real origin of the expression?"

"Hamlet, right?" Barry shivered. "It's from the soliloquy. 'But that the dread of something after death, – "

Eobard finished the quote, "'The undiscovere'd country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns'. Fitting, isn't it?"

"No it isn't. Death isn't fitting, Eobard. No – we're doing this so you will not die." Barry was adamant.

Eobard stroked Barry’s cheek, his caress soft and gentle, and it reminded Barry of the avatar's touch. "Is this what you want? What you really want?" "Yes." There was no need for explanation or equivocation.

"Then I'll do it," Eobard said simply.
Cisco tinkered with the trigger mechanism for one of the breach busting devices – the fourth prototype – and got nowhere. This shouldn't have been so difficult. Once the bomb encountered the trans-dimensional energy signature, it was supposed to release the quark matter in a small, highly focused explosion, interrupting the vibrational tunnel between the two universes.

The trigger on the other three prototypes worked just fine, it was the quark-matter containment that kept failing. He'd beefed it up on this one. There should be no reason why it didn't work.

Except that he'd tightened the screws too much. Cisco sighed and then thoroughly aggravated himself by stripping the head off one of them, completely ruining the prototype.

He put a new billet of steel on the CNC machine and set it to run. At least this spec would only take nine hours to carve, not the fourteen needed for the original prototype. He and Thawne had argued about the design for hours – something Cisco had never done with "Dr. Wells". It was strangely liberating.

At the end, Thawne smiled at Cisco and told him to put the design – the one that Cisco had championed – into prototype production. It had felt like a watershed moment.

And now Cisco had messed it up because he hadn't been paying attention. Because he'd dreamed last night. One of those dreams – a dream that truly meant something.

But it hadn't been a bad dream; not like the ones he'd had after Zoom had nearly killed Barry and for the months that Barry had been in that coma. Those had stopped when Thawne made his reappearance and given Barry his speed. Cisco had had just about a week of peaceful, undisturbed sleep.

The dream-visions were back now, which meant something was going to happen. Unlike Cisco’s dreams of Barry's death, or the dreams of his own death in the alternate timeline, the dream last night hadn’t been a lucid continuity. It had just been a series of images and feelings. Cisco might have discounted it as simply a strange dream, nothing extraordinary, except for one thing. At the end of the dream, he’d seen himself, which was something that only happened in those dreams. He’d been both a participant in the dream and a bystander. And even more telling was how clearly Cisco remembered what he’d seen, how he’d felt. The Cisco Ramon in the dream had been older, his hair longer – a braid that had fallen past his hips, with dramatic white wings at his temples. He’d been smiling and wearing a suit and holding a book.

The dream had shifted. The older Cisco had been talking and there’d been weight to his words, to the indistinct responses. The watching Cisco could feel joy like a living thing, and while the sound of shattering glass from within the dream had startled him, it hadn’t changed any of the emotions he’d been feeling. Even now, more than a few hours after Cisco had woken up, the dream-joy still lingered.

Cisco tried to dig into his subconscious and pull out better memories of the dream, but they kept slipping away from him like well-oiled ball bearings. It was ironic that the terrible dream-visions he wanted to forget always lingered in his mind, but this one – a vision that seemed to glow with happiness – eluded his memory.
He sighed. Since he couldn’t remember it, he needed to put it away for now. With time on his hands, Cisco looked around for a project to keep him busy until Barry and Thawne showed up. There was still the suit that needed to be repaired – the one Barry had been wearing during Zoom’s attack. Any time he’d touched it, he’d either get locked into Barry’s agony or he’d connect with Eobard Thawne and spend the next few hours as a veritable zombie, ”talking” to a man not yet born. Cisco counted himself lucky that no one had ever come into the workroom when he was deep into a vibe.

Cisco could get to work on that suit now – the circumstances had dramatically changed. Cisco no longer dreamed of Barry’s death. Even if Barry never wore it again, it didn’t feel right that it go unmended. But Cisco was still afraid to touch it, to get caught up in that horror again.

*Don't be such a wuss, Ramon. Just do it.*

He’d just about steeled himself to touch the damn thing when the intercom buzzed.

*Saved by the bell.* "Yeah?"

It was Barry. "Hey, Cisco, can you come to the Cortex? There's something we need to discuss."

That didn’t sound good.

Three minutes later, Cisco found Barry, Thawne, and Caitlin having an epic argument. Actually, it was Barry and Caitlin arguing, not Thawne, who was sitting at one of the consoles, a tight smile on his lips and looking far too much like his alter-ego, Harrison Wells, for Cisco’s comfort.

"What's going on?" Cisco asked. "Is this about the breach devices, because I needed to recut some parts – it'll be another few hours before we can run a test."

Before either Barry or Thawne could say anything, Caitlin blurted out, "Professor Thawne plans to recreate the particle accelerator accident to get his speed back."

"What?" Cisco rubbed his ear, not sure he’d heard right.

"Actually, it's my idea – not Eobard's," Barry offered. "But Eobard wants to do it."

Cisco looked at Thawne. "Really?"

Thawne shrugged, seemingly unconcerned with the prospect of getting struck by lightning and dosed with dark matter. "Yes, really. It *was* Barry's idea – all his idea, for the record. And I'm not sure it will work, but I'm willing to try."

Cisco was surprised. Even when he'd been impersonating Harrison Wells, Thawne had never displayed anything but absolute certainty about any of his scientific endeavors. "Why don't you think it will work?"

"Trust me, Cisco. I know it won't."

Cisco was a little afraid to press. Thawne's tone was only slightly warmer than the average winter temperatures at the North Pole. Despite everything that had happened, Cisco still feared Eobard Thawne.

Barry, though was oblivious to Cisco's minor freak-out, and he noted, "But you don't have any connection to the speed force now. So you'd be starting fresh."

"Yes, the tabula rasa." Something passed between Barry and Thawne, like they were sharing a
private joke.

Caitlin interrupted, "Do you know how dangerous this is?"

"My dear Doctor Snow, believe me – if anyone knows how dangerous this is, it's me. I've done this before, remember?" Thawne was still such a smug bastard.

Caitlin threw her hands up and turned to him. "Cisco, will you talk some sense into these idiots?"

Barry leaned against the wall, arms crossed over his chest, looking like the dictionary definition of stubbornness. "Cisco, we're doing this."

"We?"

Thawne answered quietly, "It needs to be a joint effort, Cisco. It'll go better if we have your help. And yours, Doctor Snow."

Cisco felt sorry for Caitlin. Barry and Thawne were putting her in a bad position, asking her to help cause another particle accelerator accident that could possibly kill someone. Or several someones.

Barry asked, "Are you in, Cisco?"

"Not quite there, yet. First convince me that you're not putting the entire city at risk again."

The four of them spent the rest of the day going over plans and schematics. Of course it got really weird when Thawne opened up his personal archives that had the data from his original experiments, as well as the data he'd collected and the plans from the accident in 2013 that Thawne had orchestrated.

Of the four of them, Barry seemed the most unfazed by the information. He displayed a disturbing level of enthusiasm for this "experiment" and peppered Thawne with dozens of questions that the man answered without hesitation. Cisco was again struck by the feeling that the two of them were talking about something entirely different. The back and forth was so ridiculous that it got to the point where Cisco felt utterly superfluous to the discussion.

Caitlin tried to be the voice of caution. "Professor, in all of this data, do you have records of your physiology from before you played Frankenstein on yourself?"

Thawne didn't comment on her snark. "Of course." A few taps on the keyboard and a complete medical workup was on display. "And you can compare it to this – a work up from 2177, a full year after my transformation."

Thawne then called up Barry's data, and ran a comparison between Barry's last workup – from the day after he woke from the coma, and Eobard's own medical data from 2176 – the notes he'd made on his physical state just after his transformation. They were almost identical.

Thawne noted – a bit too casually, as if he was trying to convince the team that what happened was just a blip on the radar – "And this is from me, about a month after I lost my speed."

Even Cisco, who wouldn't pretend to any expertise on the subject, could see the differences. "And what about now? Didn't you say that the Speed Leech would return your cells to their pre-speedster state?"

"In theory, yes."
"And we're going to find that out for a fact." Caitlin made a big show of putting on a pair of nitrile gloves. "Roll up your sleeve, Professor, and make a fist. We're going to do this the old fashioned way."

Cisco watched with no small amount of amusement as Caitlin tied a tourniquet around Thawne's forearm, stuck him with a hypodermic needle, and filled about a half-dozen Vacutainer tubes with his blood.

Caitlin collected the vials and told them, "It's going to take a couple of hours to get this processed. And before I even think of signing off on this little horror show you're trying to orchestrate, I'll need a full body scan."

"Understood."

Caitlin stalked out – not that she was going very far, since the med bay was right off of the Cortex.

"So – you are really going to do this." Cisco was looking at Thawne but Barry answered.

"Yeah.

"Why?"

Neither Barry nor Thawne answered.

"Is it Zoom?"

Barry was about to say something, but Thawne spoke first. "It is – in part. Giving Zoom two targets will make him vulnerable."

Barry exploded, "What? You're not – "

"Joining the fight? Of course I am. I'm not sitting back and letting you plunge headfirst into danger. I spent a year doing that – and living with the fallout from what had happened. No more, Barry."

Cisco couldn't help but feel that Thawne and Barry were continuing their own, very private, argument. Barry got that very Barry-esque look on his face – stubborn and angry and ready to throw a tantrum. He paced the length of the Cortex but Thawne got up and stopped him. "Remember this, Mr. Allen – I was a speedster for many years, I know what evil is. I was evil."

"No you weren't." Barry looked as if he was about to stamp his feet, like a whiny toddler on the edge of a tantrum.

"Barry – you're too smart to delude yourself. Remember what happened to your mother. Your father."

Cisco watched and listened and held his breath, not wanting to remind either man that he was still in the room.

Barry shook his head. "We're going to get to the truth of my mother's death one day very soon – because I don't find your story believable anymore."

"I confessed, remember?"

"To give me what I wanted most – my father's freedom. It didn't matter – you were gone and hadn't planned on coming back. Confessing to the murder meant nothing to you. Cost you nothing."
Thawne was frustrated and angry and he snapped, "Stop being such a romantic fool. I was not a good man. I did things – terrible things."

Barry looked like he was about to cry. "I don't want you to die. Zoom will –"

"I don't want to die, either. I'm not planning on sacrificing myself. But I need you to understand that I'm better equipped to fight Zoom than you are. I don't plan on playing fair."

Thawne went to Barry and touched his face and Cisco's heart almost broke from the tenderness of that gesture. He was reminded of all of the vibes he'd gotten of Barry and this man sharing a life in some undetermined future. Cisco had seen them together, but never quite like this – at least not outside of a vibe – with such intimacy and affection flowing between them. He wondered, not for the first time since Barry had woken from his coma and taken Thawne home with him, just how close the two of them had gotten.

Barry still looked like he wanted to cry, but he nodded. "Okay. I understand. But you don't take any stupid risks."

Cisco thought that was rather hysterical, since Thawne was planning on being Ground Zero for another particle accelerator explosion. And of course, Barry was the crown prince – no, king – of taking stupid risks.

Thawne seemed to recognize the irony and laughed. "Only if you make the same promise."

Barry's face took on that familiar mulish expression, but he nodded. "Say it, Mr. Allen. Say 'I promise not to take stupid risks'."

When Barry replied as required, Cisco thought that "Harrison Wells" had nothing on Eobard Thawne's level of influence. He wasn't sure why that didn't seem to bother him.

But Barry seemed to have an equal amount of influence over Thawne. "And you – you give me that same promise."

To Cisco's surprise, Thawne did. "I promise not to do anything I consider particularly stupid."

Barry laughed at the loophole Thawne built into his promise. "How about this, 'I, Eobard Thawne, promise not to do anything that I wouldn't want Barry Allen to do'"

Thawne let out a dramatic sigh and repeated the promise. Then they both looked over at Cisco, wearing practically identical smiles.

Cisco just shoved his hands in his pockets and said, "What?"

"Time to get to work." Thawne grinned.

Eobard leaned back, wiped the sweat off his face with a grimy hand, and smiled with satisfaction. It had taken a week of around-the-clock work, but they'd finished the "Iron Throne," as Cisco had named it.

Eobard hadn't gotten the reference and Cisco hadn't hesitated to bring the snark. "It's from Game of Thrones. I don't think we'd watched that. Someone here didn't subscribe to HBO."

Eobard didn't take offense. "Premium cable television wasn't an essential requirement for either a
functioning scientific laboratory or a secret lair for a superhero team." He just gave Cisco a fond look. "Don't worry; we'll have a chance to catch up. I'm looking forward to it."

Cisco seemed a little startled by that. "Really? Since we discovered you were really Doctor Evil, I always assumed that you'd been humoring me during our marathon movie nights and television binges. You weren't?"

Eobard wasn't particularly stung by the "Doctor Evil" reference, but he was a little hurt that Cisco had such doubts about his affections. "No, not humoring you at all. I always enjoyed our evenings. And I guess it's really up to Barry if you want to get HBO. He owns the place now. I have no income; I'm just a kept man, dependent on the generosity of my sugar daddy." Eobard looked at Barry and winked.

Barry turned bright red, but ignored Eobard's comment. "If we survive this, I'll get HBO and Showtime and we can binge watch whatever you want."

The work continued at a frustratingly human pace, but Eobard finally finished the tasks needed to get the particle accelerator working again, reconfiguring the energy output from the particle collisions to a vent just under the Throne. Only the occupant of the Throne would get the full effect of the explosion. No fallout – not this time.

Last night, Cisco had tested the Wand, going up to the roof and pulling down lightning; it had hit one of the rods that directed it harmlessly into the ground. This morning, Barry and Cisco had moved one of the lightning rods to the mounting plate for the satellite receivers, which were then duly connected to the "Throne Room". It had taken only a few more hours to rewire the circuitry and connect it directly to the Iron Throne.

Eobard looked over at Cisco and at Barry, both drooping with exhaustion, and thought that some encouragement was in order. "Good work, gentlemen."

Cisco made a face and asked, "How long did it take you to build this originally?"

"About a three years, from planning through execution. The actual construction took about nine months."

Cisco gave him a dirty look. "Why am I not surprised? You're still quite the taskmaster, Thawne."

"Well, it wasn't like I had a speedster to keep things moving." Eobard grinned at Barry, who grinned back. "And remember, we're on a time crunch. Zoom's not going to wait forever. Barry's been awake for two weeks and Zoom's going to need to get more of his speed. Caitlin's been running models on Zoom’s speed force depletion – it's likely that he's going to need to get topped up very soon."

Barry noted with some distress, "And the meta-human attacks are escalating again. I can't keep sitting by and letting them tear Central City apart."

"You'll have to, Mr. Allen," Eobard said with some heat. "If you do anything to tip off Zoom that you've recovered, you're going to find yourself in a race for your life that you're not going to be able to win." Eobard looked at the Iron Throne and petted one of the supports. "We're almost ready."

Barry came over and stood next to him. "Almost?"

"I still need the right chemicals to ensure that the dark matter will bond with my cellular structure."

Barry gave him a quizzical look that quickly changed to annoyed comprehension. "Like the
chemicals that were in my lab at the CCPD?"

Eobard nodded.

"I never realized how exacting you were in planning out my life. How you maneuvered me into becoming a CSI just so you could make me a speedster."

"Does it bother you?" Eobard couldn't bring himself to feel any guilt.

Barry stuck his hands in his pockets and shrugged. "A little."

Eobard smiled and knew it wasn't a nice expression. "Get over it."

Eobard was almost expecting Barry to pitch a small – or maybe a large – fit over his casual admission of villainy, but instead he smiled. The grin was toothy and full of promise. Of what, Eobard didn't know. It also made the hair on the back of his neck stand up and he found no small amount of pleasure in his body's atavistic response.

But instead of following through – actually a little terrified about what that follow-through might actually encompass, Eobard checked the S.T.A.R. Labs inventory, and found that all of the required chemicals were in stock. "We can do this tonight."

Cisco let out a small harrumph. "You really sure you want to go through with this?"

"Yes." Eobard looked over at Barry, who – for the first time since they'd embarked on this project – looked like he was having second thoughts. "'You look particularly pensive, Mr. Allen. What's the matter?"

"What if it goes wrong?"

"It won't. Remember, I did this to myself before."

"I know – it's just …" Barry trailed off and bit his lip.

Eobard was seized with the sudden urge to wrap his arms around Barry and tell him that nothing was going to go wrong. But he couldn't do that. He couldn't lie to Barry – he hadn't before and he wasn't going to start now. "There are risks. I'm not stupid."

Barry gave him an arch look. "Far from it."

Eobard said, "A desperate disease requires a dangerous remedy."

Barry huffed out a laugh. "Truer words were never spoken. The last time you engineered the creation of a speedster, I spent nine months in a coma. I don't want to spend nine months watching over your comatose body. Unless that's necessary. After all – there was no Iron Throne to strap me into – " He gestured to the contraption behind them.

Eobard grimaced, annoyed and at the same time pleased that Barry was smart enough to figure it out. "Yes – unfortunately I couldn't just kidnap you and tie you down before turning on the accelerator."

Barry let out a shout of laughter. "No, not at all. But I suspect that there's some universe where that's exactly how the Flash was created."

"I'm sure there is." In a fit of loneliness, and quite possibly madness, he'd once thought about doing just that.
Barry looked at him, his heart in his eyes and Eobard realized he desperately needed to have some private time with him. "Come with me – " Eobard tugged Barry out of the Throne Room and down into one of storerooms – where the chemicals were kept. Eobard had to wonder at himself, at what he was doing, because as soon as they were in the room, he shut the door and pressed Barry against it and kissed him.

Barry, of course, kissed him back. Eobard could taste the hunger in Barry's kiss. He could also taste pleasure and joy. In the week since that night by the fire, they'd done this more than a few times – finding darkness and privacy, kissing until they were both breathless, until their bodies almost lost control.

A part of him, the scientist, the explorer, the mad man who'd spent a lifetime chasing down the Flash, wondered at this change. How had he gone from someone who hated the thought of physical intimacy, who was disgusted by his own body's unruly desires, to a man who took every opportunity to engage in these passionate encounters with Barry? But only with Barry. His Barry.

Barry must have sensed his distraction. "What's the matter?"

"Mmm, nothing." He kissed Barry again and relished in every sensation, the heat from Barry, the mass of him, the reality of Barry Allen, speedster and lover, giving himself over to him. Not all the way – not quite yet – but soon. They would have that once, and then maybe never again. Eobard could – despite Barry's declaration of love, his seeming willingness to put aside Nora's death – hear the hoof beats of disaster in the distance. That was the price of secrets, the price for Barry's life.

"Now there's definitely something the matter. Talk to me." Barry pressed one last kiss against his lips. "Tell me what you're thinking."

Eobard shook his head. "It's not important."

"I think it is. Your mind is somewhere else. Which means that I'm not what you want." Barry was pouting, but the expression was playful.

Eobard touched Barry's lips. "Oh, believe me, Mr. Allen – you are everything I want. No question on that."

"Then why – "

Barry started to protest, but Eobard cut him off. "Leave it."

"Eobard – "

"It's all right." He brushed his thumb against Barry's lips. "I love you, Barry Allen. Nothing is ever going to change that." Not even when you remember who I am and what I did.

Chapter End Notes

As always, comments are so greatly appreciated. I read and adore every single one of them - and will respond as soon as I can.
They were ready to go.

Caitlin gave her final arguments against the experiment, calling them all a bunch of mad scientists. Barry understood her position – she was, first and foremost, a medical doctor who'd taken an oath to do no harm – and yet here she was, voluntarily participating in a potentially deadly experiment. Right now, she was down in the med bay, putting the final touches on her emergency resuscitation kit – everything she thought she might need in the event this went badly.

Barry hadn't told Joe or Iris or Eddie what they were planning on doing. It didn't seem fair to worry them. And if he were truly honest with himself, he didn't want to listen to them argue against the experiment. Although it was quite possible that they wouldn't; after all, Eobard Thawne was still mostly the enemy to them.

Barry stared at the Iron Throne and shivered. His gut was screaming at him. What if something went wrong? What if Eobard was killed because he was too scared of an empty future?

"Barry?"

Barry turned around. Cisco had come into the Throne Room and he was carrying what looked like Eobard's suit.

"What's up?" Barry asked.

"Where's Thawne?"

"He said something about wanting a few minutes to himself."

Cisco nodded. "I can understand that. He's about to blast himself with dark matter again. It's actually comforting that he's freaking out."

Barry wasn't sure that Eobard was freaking out, but if that gave Cisco some peace of mind about Eobard, Barry had no objections to letting his friend think that.

"What have you got?" Barry nods at the bundle of fabric that Cisco's carrying.

"As you know – I've become a little too familiar with Thawne's yellow horror and it occurred to me that the suit's composition might be counterproductive to what he wants to accomplish."

"What do you mean?"

Cisco explained, "Thawne's suit is built of materials that repel energy – which makes it useful in battle – but not so much when you're actually trying to absorb energy. This – " Cisco stroked the suit he was carrying, "is designed to do the opposite – to absorb energy only at the required rate and amounts. I can recalibrate the controls for that – " He gestured to the Iron Throne, "to compensate. Basically, with this suit, Thawne will only need about seventy-two percent of the energy he'd originally calculated, based on the yellow horror."

"Cisco, someday you're going to explain to my why you've become so familiar with my suit."

Eobard, wearing his suit, sauntered – and that was the only word for his gait – into the Throne Room. "And I'd appreciate it if you didn't refer to it as a 'horror.'"
Barry tried not to smile.

Eobard took the top half of the suit Cisco had made and held it up. "Although this is really quite nice. Are you sure about the twenty-eight percent reduction in power requirements?"

Cisco gave Eobard a dirty look. "I've never been wrong before. You're doubting me now?"

"This is my life you're talking about, Cisco." Eobard raised an eyebrow, but he was smiling.

"Look, wear it or don't wear it. No skin off my back."

Barry liked how Cisco didn't hesitate to snark back at Eobard, that he didn't treat him like he was still the awe-inspiring Harrison Wells anymore – or the man who shoved his hand through his heart.

Eobard gave Cisco back his creation. "I think, since the machines are already calibrated, let's go with one I'm already wearing. But thank you. I'm looking forward to seeing what your suit can do – but just not today."

Cisco shrugged. "Okay. It's your body." He put the suit on the far console and picked up the Wand. "I'm heading up to the roof. Let me know when you're ready to get zapped."

Barry let out a small sigh. "Just waiting on Caitlin. And here she is." The rhythmic sound of high heels and the clatter of a lab cart's rolling wheels signaled Caitlin's arrival.

As she came in, she said, "I'm going to state my objections for the record, again. This is a very bad idea. You could die, Professor Thawne. Your so-called 'controlled' release of the dark matter could fail. The chemicals you're pumping into your body are toxins. And then you're going to electrocute yourself."

Barry shivered again as he listened to Caitlin enumerate the dangers. He looked at Eobard, who nodded and smiled.

"I know, Doctor Snow. I've done this to myself before, remember? It worked then and it will work now."

Barry looked at Caitlin and she nodded, busying herself with the equipment she'd brought down from the med bay. He then went over to Eobard. "If you have any doubts, any at all, we don't –"

Eobard smiled. "We do. Barry, I want my speed back. I'd long since resigned myself to living with a crippled connection to the speed force, and then when I knew you needed me, I had no second thoughts about giving you what power I had left. But your offer to do this for me – " Eobard made an expansive gesture, "has been a dream come true. You're giving me the chance to be the best version of me."

Barry sucked in his breath; he'd said something like that to Caitlin back when Farooq had eaten his speed. "I just don't want anything to happen to you."

"It won't. Trust me, trust the science."

Barry couldn't argue with that. "It's time, then."

Eobard rested his hands on his shoulders and pulled him close, close enough so they were pressed forehead to forehead. "Yes, it's time. Just think, in a little while, we're going to be able to run together." At that, Eobard kissed him and then climbed onto the Iron Throne.
Barry took a deep breath and headed over to the command console. "Are you ready?"

Eobard grinned. "I feel like I've been ready for centuries."

"You're giving me the chance to be the best version of me."

Eobard winced as the framework for the Iron Throne descended and locked him in. He'd never liked being confined – even for science – and this was no exception. He needed to get control over himself; an elevated heart rate could impact the results.

He focused on his memories of the past two weeks to replace the momentary anxiety of confinement. Not just of the joy between him and Barry, but the pleasure he had with the entire team. Caitlin's concern – her concern and vehement insistence that he was engineering a disaster – was something he didn't quite believe he deserved.

And then there was Cisco. Before, as Wells, he'd spent a lot of time carefully cultivating the aura of a father-figure, a friendly, but somewhat distant mentor. He respected the man, admired his genius, and always regretted that he'd have to leave him behind. Murdering Cisco in that alternate timeline had been a true act of madness; the anger that Cisco had displayed at their farewell had been well-earned.

But perhaps it was Cisco's overwhelming acceptance of him when they communicated through the timeline, his unquestioning willingness to assist in his return to this time, his defense when the rest of the team wanted to string him up by the balls, which floored him the most. They'd never go back to the mentor/student relationship he'd fostered, not possible when Cisco knew the contents of his head and his heart so intimately. He found himself relishing Cisco's snark, the spine of steel that went along with the razor sharp intellect and the boundless well of generosity. The gift of a suit had been completely unexpected and it took some effort not to show how affected he was by it. He had only one reason for not using it – he'd set the piece of the lining from Barry's suit back into his suit, right at his heart.

Although he'd shared it with Barry, Eobard couldn't bear to expose this talisman to anyone else's eyes. It was too important, too sacred a thing.

Eobard sighed, struggled just a bit against the restraints he'd designed, and settled in for the ride of his life.

Again.

The blast doors that protected the command station from the radiation that was going to pour out of the accelerator closed with a resounding finality. Eobard heard Barry through the earpiece, "I'm staring the chemical infusion."

Eobard felt a set of needles puncture his forearms and his thighs, and then the burn as the liquids were pushed. He didn't remember it being this painful.

"You okay?"

Tongue thick, brain sluggish, he nodded. There was no going back now.

"Starting the particle accelerator, initiating particle collision."

In the spaces of his brain uncluttered by the agony in his body, Eobard felt both grief and pride. The particle accelerator was his, he'd had such mixed feelings about giving Barry the authorization to turn
it on, but it was Barry's too – not by operation of law – but moral right. Barry was the rightful heir to this…

"Cisco, bring the lightning. The particles are unstable and beginning to disintegrate."

Through the comm link, Eobard heard Cisco make some silly and highly appropriate quote from a movie, and then the world erupted into a bright white and black arc of lightning.

The torment lasted for an eternity as he felt the dark matter rip through him. He could sense the changes in every single cell, as the DNA rewrote itself, as the atomic structure of his being shifted from normal to meta to something else.

And then the agony multiplied exponentially as the power flooding through him became too much. Reality starting dissolving, revealing the underlayment of existence, tearing him out of the Iron Throne and into some other dimension. The last thing Eobard saw before he departed was Barry's face, terrified and tear streaked, his hand reaching out as he passed by.

Eobard wanted to stop, to take a heartbeat's pause and console Barry, but he felt the pull of the universe and had to obey its command.

Goodbye.

........................................................

"NO!" Barry's scream of denial echoed in the now empty chamber. He hit the release button that opened the blast doors and rushed up to the Iron Throne, hoping against hope that what he saw was just a trick of the eye brought on by the lightning and the dark matter – that Eobard was safe and whole and ready to run.

But the Iron Throne was empty, except for the tattered remains of Eobard's yellow suit. He stared at it in horror.

"Barry? What just happened?" Caitlin was kneeling next to him.

"I don't know. He just evaporated. We killed him." A part of Barry – something cold and detached – was surprised that he didn't stutter over those words. "He's gone."

Caitlin didn't say anything. Barry guessed that there was nothing to say.

"Did it work? Well?"

Barry looked up – Cisco was standing at the doorway. "Eobard – he's gone."

Cisco collapsed onto the steps. "No – that's not possible. What happened?"

"I don't know. He just – dissolved. The lightning passed through him as I released the dark matter energy and he just … " It hit Barry. The reality of it. He picked up the suit – it was still warm, the torn edges were still glowing with residual energy. Something fluttered to the floor and Barry bent to pick it up. He knew just what it was – the piece of his suit that Eobard had taken with him, what he'd used to connect to Cisco. It stunned Barry that Eobard had still worn it – that it had rested next to his skin all along.

Cisco knelt on the other side of him, "What's that?"

"Nothing." Barry shoved the scrap of fabric into his pocket. "I can't believe he's gone. I don't
understand – this is just what he did to himself, what happened to me. This shouldn't have happened."

Caitlin pulled him to his feet. "Come on, Barry."

He shook his head and struggled against her hold. "No – I want to stay here. Just – just please let me be. For a little while."

"Okay – for a little while." Caitlin stroked his arm and he felt her retreat.

"Bar – " Cisco didn't leave.

"Please – just go. I can't talk right now."

He held Eobard's suit and remembered all the times he'd feared the Man in Yellow, all the times he'd cursed the name of the man who murdered his mother. Underneath the acrid scent of burnt polymers, he could smell Eobard's sweat and he remembered the scant handful of nights he slept in Eobard's arms, the few dozen times that he dragged Eobard into a dark corner or an abandoned lab or a storage room for a moment's privacy and a few kisses.

He could still hear Eobard chiding him for his willingness to forgive.

He buried his face in the suit and cursed and prayed and mourned.

"Barry, come on – " Cisco hadn't left his side and tugged at him.

Barry tried to pull away. "Leave me alone."

"No – you can't stay here. Come on."

Barry refused to budge.

"Dude – I know, but – "

Barry stared at the yellow suit in his hands – he stared until his eyes burned and tears clouded his vision. There was no coming back. No Eobard to return from the future. No saving grace. It hurt to even contemplate the time paradox. Eobard was now dead in his own past, but he was going to live in the future.

A future that – unless he ran forward in time and created one holy hell of a paradox – Barry would probably not survive to see.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**In the Speed Force**

Eobard woke with a start. His last clear memory was of pain, of the lightning and the dark matter colliding in his body. It should have been familiar; the recreation of a successful experiment was the hallmark of the scientific process. But something had gone terribly wrong.

"No, actually, it didn't."

Eobard sat up. He was in an unfamiliar bedroom – a young boy's room if he wasn't mistaken. Dinosaurs and constellations and posters of Einstein and Newton decorated the walls. A small fish tank burbled on the dresser. This wasn't his own boyhood bedroom – but Barry Allen’s.

"Welcome, Eobard Thawne."

Eobard tracked the voice to foot of the bed. He wasn't sure how he'd missed a grown woman sitting there when he'd first looked around.

Her face was terrifyingly familiar. "Nora Allen?" he asked.

She smiled and when he met her gaze, Eobard felt chilled to the bone. There was no fear there, no anguish, none of the terrified emotions he remembered from that terrible night. It was her eyes that frightened him; they were inhuman, filled with an infinity of universes.

No, this was *not* Nora Allen. He got up, better to deal with this – adversary – on his feet.

"No, we are not Nora Allen." It seemed to read his mind.

"We?" Something tugged at his memory, something Barry had said.

"Come, we have much to discuss." Nora held out her hand.

Eobard didn't take it, but he followed her down a flight of stairs. He didn't end up in the Allen living room, but a strange facsimile of the Cortex. The displays were flickering – the S.T.A.R. Labs logo would appear for a second or two, but then replaced by the image of a star going supernova – or what he supposed that event might actually look like.

"Is this a metaphor?"

Nora smiled. "You are quick."

"Is that supposed to be funny?"

"We do not understand the concept. What do you mean?" In contrast to her words, Nora's smile broadened.

"We? Who else is here?" Eobard gestured to the empty desks, the abandoned side labs.

"We... are."
"That is not an answer." Annoyance was rising, but Eobard controlled it. Emotion might be taken as a sign of weakness.

"Oh, it is. You need not worry, Eobard Thawne. We are not a threat."

"You know who I am?"

"We have always known who you are. We have watched you and watched over you. We have waited for you."

Something clicked. "Are you the Speed Force?"

"Like we said, you are quick. And smart. We appreciate that."

"You haven't answered my question."

"And you amuse us. Do you know that Barry Allen said almost the same thing to us?"

"Barry? You know Barry?" Eobard couldn't help but look around, as if he expected Barry to appear.

"Of course we do. He is much beloved to us." The voice that answered him was different from the one he'd just been talking with.

Eobard turned back. Nora Allen was gone and in her place was someone all too familiar. A face similar to the one he saw in the mirror every day, the face of a friend who'd given him a gift of incalculable value. Eobard thought his heart might just break.

Harrison Wells.

But this wasn't truly the Harrison Wells of his memory. That face had been younger, more open – but also marked by deep pain and illness and grief.

This face was older, closer to his own age and also deeply touched by illness. But it was a face full of mischief, eyes twinkling (and Eobard wondered, did his eyes twinkle now?), lips turned up in a smile that seemed to be filled with secrets.

"Who are you?"

"Barry Allen has called us the avatar. We like that."

"I am really speaking with the Speed Force?"

The avatar nodded with regal grace.

Maybe he'd spent too much time with Cisco, but all he could say was, "Trippy."

"Yes, we have – as you might say – cornered the market on trippy." The avatar chuckled.

"Why am I here? Why am I here, now? What went wrong?"

"Nothing went wrong." The avatar was leaning on a cane – one that was familiar to Eobard. He'd given it to Harrison in another lifetime. "Come, we would like to show you something."

Eobard was going to follow the avatar, but it – he – took Eobard's hand and threaded it through his elbow, as if he needed support. Two steps forward and S.T.A.R. Labs disappeared behind him as the world dissolved into greenness and sunlight – before him was an open field and there were rolling
hills in the distance. And beyond those hills, a troubling darkness. A coming storm.

"What is this?"

"You do not recognize this, do you."

Eobard shook his head. "No, should I?"

The avatar still smiled, but this time there was something troubled in that expression. "It may be your future."

"Another metaphor?"

"Yes."

They kept walking and a bench appeared. "Do you need to sit?" Eobard knew this was a needless courtesy. The avatar of the Speed Force certainly didn't need a cane, didn't need to sit, but his memories of Harrison, especially in the last months of his life, were too engrained for him to forget the courtesy.

"Yes, and perhaps it would be easier if we did."

They sat and Eobard told himself to be patient, to let the avatar tell him what he needed to know.

"Ask your questions. You certainly have many."

Eobard chuckled. "Should I bother – are you going to provide real information or will this be a Socratic exercise for me to tease out the truth?"

"We did enjoy doing that with Barry Allen, but we do not have the time now."

"Time? Is time relevant in the Speed Force?"

"Time is not just relevant, but essential to all biological life, Eobard Thawne. Despite your talents, you do exist on the linear plane. You have a past and a present and a future. Time, therefore, is relevant to you."

"Very well. Will you answer my question? Why am I here, now? Why not the first time I became a speedster?"

"We have brought you to us now because we need to understand the implications of what you are, of what you've done. Before this, you interested us. While it was not necessary for us to communicate with you, we took pleasure in watching you, in knowing what was to come, seeing you bring completion to us."

"Completion?" The avatar didn't answer, but the twinkle in their eyes was answer enough. "Ah, you mean Barry Allen. The Flash."

"Yes – he is, in this and in many other universes, much beloved of us. We wanted to see you bring about his creation."

Eobard understood, but there was something about that statement that stung. "He is beloved, of course. But I am merely tolerated as his progenitor?"

"Oh, not in the least." The avatar leaned close and cupped their hand around his cheek. "You are essential to us, as the agent of chaos, as the balance, the pivot point upon which everything else
depends. You are also most dear to us for who you are and what you have become."

Eobard wasn't so willing to let go of the hurt. "A murderer, a thief, a liar."

"That is an unnecessarily harsh indictment, our dearest Eobard. You have killed to protect your own. You have stolen only what you were permitted to take. And you have lied to shield those who you love. We find that admirable. We find you admirable. We cherish you."

Eobard sucked in a breath; he didn't want to shame himself with tears. But they came anyway and the avatar wiped them away.

"Eobard – there is no need for this pain."

The avatar's gentleness nearly unraveled him and he desperately needed some distance. Eobard stood up and gazed out into over the rolling hills. The storm clouds were thickening, growing blacker. Growing closer.

"Is that Zoom?"

"Yes."

"You can't do anything about him?"

"The Speed Force cannot do anything. We are. We exist. Like gravity and time and light. We shape and are shaped by all forms of life, but we are unable to directly enforce our will upon life."

Eobard made the final connection and it was like a punch to the gut. "That's why speedsters exist. We are your tools."

"Yes."

"But Zoom is a speedster."

"That… thing… uses the speed force, but it is not our creation. It is not a speedster. You've called yourself a thief, but like we said, you only took what we permitted you to have. Zoom is a true thief, ripping into us, stealing that to which it is not entitled. It is an abomination, maiming the fabric of existence. Without you, we are helpless to eradicate it."

"Without speedsters like Barry and me, you mean."

"Yes. Barry is our shield. You are our sword."

Eobard snaps, growing annoyed, "Your metaphors are growing tiresome."

The avatar replied in a dry, almost annoyed tone, "That really was not a metaphor, Eobard. More an accurate assessment of your strengths. And Barry's. Barry's nature is to protect what he loves. Yours is to eliminate anything which threatens what you love. You play to each other's strengths. He is compassion. You are ruthlessness."

Eobard had to agree with that assessment. How many times had he chided Barry for trying to reason with a meta-human trying to kill him?

The avatar continued, "When Barry was with us, we worried – he is powerful, but he's not battle-hardened. We love him because of his heart, but that makes him vulnerable. We did not want to send him back, but we were prepared to. And then you returned – an event we did not anticipate. You changed everything."
Eobard swallowed, trying to comprehend everything that the avatar was telling him. He quipped, to buy time and distance, "For the better, I trust."

The avatar got up and stood before him, blocking out the coming storm. The avatar's eyes – Harrison's eyes – were piercing into his soul and Eobard felt flayed, summed up and found wanting.

"Your presence back in Barry's life changed the balance. It gave him heart and courage."

"I don't think Barry Allen has ever lacked heart or courage."

"In a way, he did. Barry lacks faith in himself, and that has taken its toll on him. Your return – for him, specifically – gave him more than we, the Speed Force, ever could."

Eobard sucked in his breath. "I will disappoint him. I will hurt him. That is inevitable."

"So he will tell you that you have. And you will move past that. He loves you. The greatest quality of love is the ability to forgive."

This conversation was uncomfortable. "Since when is an essential power of the universe qualified to give out relationship advice?"

The avatar grinned. "If we are not qualified, no one is." The avatar rested their hands on Eobard's shoulders and brought their foreheads together, much like Eobard himself had done with Barry just before he'd mounted the Iron Throne. "You do not want see yourself as worthy of Barry's love. Of our love. But you are. And your own doubts and hesitancies, your questions and your insecurities, make you all the more precious to us. You are most human, Eobard Thawne. You bless us."

Eobard pulled away, fists at his side, his whole body clenched and ready to run, to fight, to flee. But he didn't, he just turned away from the avatar and their devastating words, watching the sky and the approaching calamity.

"And yes, you are flawed. That is the nature of time-bound life."

The avatar's words were meant to be soothing. They weren't and Eobard turned back. The avatar's voice was different, again. And it had taken a new form. Female – not Nora Allen again – but someone else he recognized. From photographs, from memories. Her – their – face was oddly static, and like Nora's – but unlike Harrison's – Tess's eyes were incomprehensible.

Tess. He wanted to weep. Harrison's memories – the real Harrison Wells' memories – threatened to overwhelm him.

Of course, the avatar was not Tess, just as they hadn't been Harrison or Nora. This was a form pulled out of his memory.

"Not your memories. Not really." The avatar, again, was apparently able to read his mind.

"Harrison's, of course."

"No, not his either." This edition of the avatar was as terse as the previous one was verbose.

"I don't understand."

The Tess-avatar nodded towards the bench and Eobard sat, again.

"Since we don't have much time and there are still too many questions that you need to ask, I'll be succinct. This is a construct." They made an all-encompassing gesture.
"Of course, a product of my mind. To make my comprehension of the incomprehensible a little easier."

"Yes, but not a product of your mind, but that of your reverse's."

"My reverse?"

"You are the Reverse-Flash. Therefore you have – by your own admission – a reverse."

"So – this construct is taken from Barry Allen's mind?"

The avatar nodded. "Just as his construct of us and this place was taken from yours. He saw us through your memories. He found his mother – Nora – unbearable to look upon, because you had only seen her through her fear on that night."

"And Harrison? Was Harrison a form that you took?"

"Of course. Barry was quite fond of that part of the construct. Your memories of Harrison were most pleasing to him."

Eobard felt himself consumed by jealousy. *Barry and the real Harrison Wells…*

"Not like that." The avatar actually pushed at him – like an old friend chiding him for something foolish.

Eobard packed away his jealousy. For now. "But what about – " Eobard waved his hand. "the Harrison that I was just talking with? Barry Allen never met the real Harrison Wells, so how could he have memories of him?"

"We do like you, Eobard Thawne. Your quickness pleases us."

"Please stop shoveling the bullshit."

The avatar chuckled. "The 'Harrison' you were speaking with was built from the memories of Barry's time here in the Speed Force. So, in a way, your memories. He never confused that construct with the man he had once believed to be Harrison Wells. The man who he knows was really Eobard Thawne. With you."

Eobard felt as if every atom in his body had frozen into perfect stillness. This had always been his deepest fear – that Barry, despite his words, still believed that he was actually the kindly, encouraging scientist. The father figure. The mentor.

The man who'd been dead for more than a decade, the man who'd given Eobard the gift of his face and his DNA and his name. The man who'd made everything he'd accomplished in the twenty-first century possible.

"No, Eobard Thawne, he does not confuse you with the real Harrison Wells. He cannot. Believe that even if you are unable to believe anything else."

:::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

Barry didn't know how long he sat on the steps in front of the Iron Throne, holding Eobard's suit, letting the tears fall. This was his fault, all his fault. If he hadn't made that suggestion to Eobard, if he hadn't wanted to have him forever, if he could have just been content with the time they would have been given, Eobard would still be alive.
But no – he’d had to be greedy and selfish…

"This isn't your fault, Bar." Cisco sat down next to him.

"It is."

"I know you feel that way, because you suggested this. But remember, Thawne wanted it, too. And he wanted it very badly."

Barry knew that. But he couldn't use it to absolve himself.

Cisco said, "I’ve been having dreams, you should know."

Barry's breath stuttered, knowing that this was something important. He looked at Cisco. "What kind of dreams?"

"Happy ones. I don't know what they mean, but you're there. Thawne's there. Actually, everyone's there – even people I don't know. And I can see myself, too. That only happens when it's a real dream. Something from a relevant timeline. But definitely in the future."

"What about those dreams?"

"Everyone's happy. We're celebrating something. I don't know what – it's not clear yet." Cisco chuckled. "I feel like a Magic 8 Ball – 'concentrate and ask again'."

"What are you saying?" Barry swallowed against the hope he was beginning to feel.

Cisco repeated himself. "Thawne was there. In my dreams. You were there, too. It's the future."

Barry felt himself shaking. "But you could dream tonight and it would be different."

Cisco nodded. "Possibly, but I don't think so."

"Your future dreams do change. You dreamed I died fighting Zoom until Eobard came back, didn't you?"

"Yeah – I did."

Barry took a deep breath, unwilling to hope, but desperate for something to cling to. "Would you – could you – vibe this?" He held up the suit. "Maybe you'll see something."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah." Barry wiped his face. "I know I could wait until tomorrow – maybe you'll have that dream again tonight – or maybe you won't and…"

"And you'll have to give up hope."

"Yeah."

Cisco reached for the suit and Barry reluctantly parted with it. He watched as Cisco slipped right into a vibe – his eyelids fluttered, his skin got pale, and his hands shook – before he let go of the suit with a gasp. "I saw him, Barry. I saw him. Thawne's alive."

"He is – where? Where is he?"
Cisco shook his head. "I don't know – everything was swirling around him – stars, matter – the universe. He didn't see me."

Barry's heart leaped. He knew where Eobard was. "He's in the Speed Force, Cisco."

"How? How do you know that?"

"I can't explain how I know, but I do. When I was in the coma – this last one – I was there, too."

"In the Speed Force? How? Why?"

Barry nodded. "They kept me alive. They protected me until my body healed."

Cisco stared at him. "How come you never mentioned this?"

Barry shrugged. "It was personal. And right now, that's not relevant. We have to figure out how to get Eobard back."

"Well, how did you get out of it?"

"They pushed me out when Eobard gave me his speed."

"They? Who's this 'they'?"

"The Speed Force. It's … sentient. It considers itself plural." Barry got up and started to pace. "This isn't the same situation – Eobard's body is part of the Speed Force now, I don't know how to bring him back." He tried to think rationally, to not let hope and despair affect his judgment.

Cisco offered a suggestion. "I think I can help. When you were in the coma and I was communicating with Thawne – I was always touching your suit. Or your emblem – the old red one. It connected us. I don't know how but it did."

"It wasn't just that you were touching the emblem or my suit – it was this." From his pocket, Barry pulled out the scrap of lining that Eobard had taken with him, that he'd been wearing next to his skin before the Speed Force tore him away. "He told me that this was how he connected to you from the future."

Cisco reached out, but Barry didn't let him touch it. "That's from your suit. It's a piece of the lining. I'm always replacing it because it wears out so quickly." Cisco snapped his fingers. "Wait – I remember. A few days after your fight with Oliver, after Bivolo whammed you, I went to repair your suit and was kind of surprised to find an entire section of the lining missing. The part with the sensors over your heart. I thought that maybe I'd cut it out to reuse the sensors or something but just didn't remember doing it. This must be it."

"Eobard took it." Barry clenched his hand around the fabric. "It was the only tangible thing he took with him – back to the twenty-second century." Barry bit his lip. He didn't want to tell Cisco any more – that Eobard had worn it next to his skin. It was too intimate.

And Cisco understood. "Dude – wow. And that makes everything make sense – now that I think about it. This is filled with bio-electric sensors, thousands of them. They each have a small amount of memory that adds up to a whole lot of memory. Of you – your vitals, your speed – " Cisco waved his hand and let out a laugh, "the essence of you. Of anything that might create a nexus between my power and Thawne, this was it. And if Thawne – " Cisco paused at looked at Barry.

"If he – what?"
"Kept this on his bare skin for any length of time, it would probably pick up his own bio-electric data." Cisco stared at him, eyes dark with comprehension.

Barry nodded. "He told me he carried it under his suit."

Cisco gave his a little smile. "You two really have it bad for each other."

Barry blurted out, "He didn't kill my mother. I don't know what really happened that night but I know he didn't kill her."

Cisco nodded, "Yeah – I'm pretty sure of that, too."

Barry closed his eyes in gratitude that someone else believed him, that his best friend didn't think he was sick or crazy. "Have you seen something?"

"Nothing new – it's just the way he talks. He said a few days ago that he was responsible for your mom's death – that's different from saying he killed her. When I was communicating with Thawne while you were in the coma, I picked up things – emotions. He felt a hell of a lot of regret. I can't say it was about your mom, but it was real."

Barry nodded, trying to let Cisco's words soothe him.

"And then there were all those vibes I was getting last year – of the two of you together. It wouldn't make sense for you to be so happy with someone who did that." Cisco took a deep breath. "If you want those visions to come true, we're going to have to get him out of the Speed Force. You're going to have to let me touch that."

Cisco held out his hand and Barry very reluctantly put the fabric – Eobard's talisman – in it.

Chapter End Notes

For a few reasons, I'm putting this story on hiatus until Season 4 starts, and I plan to start again on October 11, the day after the S4 premier. I have a busy few months ahead of me and it will be easier to handle posting with less chaos in my life. Thank you to everyone who's read and left kudos and comments. I hope you'll come back when I'm able to start posting again.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

The Speed Force reveals some unpleasant truths about what is coming, about what Zoom is really doing. But all of that is of secondary important, because Barry gets to punch the Speed Force in the face for putting their hands on his Eobard.

Chapter Notes

And we're back! I know it's kind of weird to be reading a Season 1/2 AU when Season Four just started. But Barry and Eobard and Caitlin and Cisco and Iris and Eddie are my happy place. Hope they're yours, too.

Thank you to everyone who's been so patiently waiting for this story to start posting again. We'll be back to a Wednesday and Sunday posting schedule, barring major holidays, death or dismemberment.

In the Speed Force

Eobard watched the blackness on horizon grow closer. It was a roiling darkness, punctuated by bolts of blue lightning. There was something horrible and compelling about it; he couldn't look away.

A hand on his arm brought his attention back to the present. Not Nora. Not Tess. But Harrison. It led him back to the bench.

The avatar stared out at the coming storm. "It is frightening."

Eobard nodded.

"We fear it like we have feared nothing else since the first moment of creation. It seeks to consume us – all of us."

"That's like saying it wants to own all gravity. Or light."

"Zoom's insanity is beyond comprehension. It seeks only destruction."

Even when he’d been working against Barry, pursing the Reverse-Flash's twisted goals, his aim had never been wanton destruction.

The avatar continued, their voice quiet. "Zoom has become the agent of Nothingness."

Eobard shivered, truly frightened.

"And Nothingness is a vital power of existence. Like the Speed Force. Like Time and Light and Gravity. It serves an essential function, but if it is unchecked, it will destroy everything else. Just so you are clear, Eobard – Zoom is to Nothingness like you and Barry are to the Speed Force. He is its
tool – a tool gone mad."

"How do you fight against something like that?"

"It will be difficult. You will need allies in the coming battle."

Eobard felt completely overwhelmed. How could he even think of letting Barry, or anyone at S.T.A.R. Labs, fight this monster? He knew what Zoom had already done to Barry, what he'd do again – to Barry and everyone else – if he were given the chance.

The avatar, as they had done several times before, divined his thoughts. "We don't mean other speedsters, other meta-humans. You will need dangerous allies that will be essential to defeating that abomination. Allies that – in other circumstances – you would find most inimical."

Eobard tried to think of what the avatar was referring to. "Time Wraiths?"

The avatar grinned and, of all things, bopped him on the nose. "You never disappoint us, Eobard Thawne."

It make a strange sort of sense. "You – the Speed Force – control them?"

"No, not at all. They belong to Time."

Eobard made another connection. "They are tools, like speedsters. They protect the timeline from within the speed force."

"Yes, and not just for the sake of Time. But for all of biological life. Remember what we just told you?"

"That time is essential for biological life?"

"Yes – and not just time, but linear time. You – and by that we mean all speedsters – have the power to cut time and re-knot it. Or break the line entirely. The Wraiths are there to prevent that. To stop speedsters who seek to destroy the linear path."

Eobard remembered his own transgressions against time. "How am I exempt?"

"You have been – except for one moment – very careful about not breaking time, and you paid for that mistake. In your other travels, you have looped time but you have not tangled it. Zoom has knotted the weaving of existence to the point of breaking. We have seen what it has done to its own universe, what tortures it has inflicted on the timeline there, and will inflict on yours."

"Tell me," Eobard asked but he almost didn't want to know.

"It keeps traveling back in time to destroy that world over and over again. To commit murder in more horrific ways each time. It bathes in blood and revels in the agony it causes. Each time it resets the past, linear time becomes more fragile."

Eobard can't help but think of the other Harrison Wells and his child dying over and over again. "Why can't the Time Wraiths stop it?"

"It has become too powerful for the Time Wraiths to stop on their own. Each paradox it creates brings it greater power, greater madness."

"And yet, it needs Barry's speed."
"Not in the way you originally thought. It does not need Barry's speed to maintain its own speed or even to prevent cellular collapse. The drugs and the paradox provides enough energy for that. Barry's speed – and yours, too, now – will give it the ability to access the Speed Force. You and Barry cannot stop it alone, the Time Wraiths cannot stop it alone, but if you work together, Zoom can be ended."

"How?"

The avatar shook their head. "That is not something we can tell you."

Eobard was outraged. "Why? Are you that dedicated to metaphors and mysteries that you won’t cooperate in your own survival?"

The avatar stroked his hand, an attempt to soothe him. "It is not a matter of 'will not' but of 'cannot'. We do not control the Time Wraiths; we cannot predict their actions. But we do know that if they have the chance to enforce their will upon Zoom, they will not falter. It will be your task, yours and Barry's, to weaken Zoom. To bring him to the point where the Time Wraiths can do their work."

Eobard was suddenly consumed by rage at the mention of Barry's name. "He was here, in the Speed Force, but you didn't tell him any of this, did you? You sent him back out into the world with nothing he needed to defeat Zoom except – "

"Except you, Eobard Thawne."

"What do you mean?"

"We would have given Barry some of this knowledge – not all of it, because he wasn't prepared for it. As you've often said, Barry's biggest enemy is doubt. He would never believe himself strong enough to defeat Zoom if he knew what Zoom truly was. And yes, we knew that Zoom's defeat was possible, but we could not see a way to survive without Barry's final sacrifice. But you came back to him, you gave him your speed, and that changed everything."

"Are you saying we will be successful?"

"Nothing is certain, and having foreknowledge will not be beneficial."

"Barry says that such foreknowledge would make him a monster. It had made me a monster."

"He was being a little melodramatic, we think. But not terribly far off the mark. There are risks when you live within your own paradox."

"Like becoming one's own grandparent – for example."

The avatar hummed a little tune and grinned. "Yes. That's never a good idea. But consider this. You are from Barry's future."

Eobard followed the logic. "That only means I survive the coming fight. Not that we both survive."

The avatar said nothing. Of course.

"So, what now? I need to get back. Back to my Barry, to my life."

"You will, soon enough." The avatar smiled, and the hair on the back of Eobard's neck stood up. There was something in that expression that sent all kinds of alarms ringing.

And then, Eobard felt a strange sort of warmth at heart. Not an emotion – but real, physical warmth.
He could even define its edges and the shape of it to the nearest micron. He unzipped the front of his suit and reached in to touch the piece of lining from Barry's suit. He pulled it out and it wasn't the dull beige scrap he was so accustomed to, but shimmering with red and gold lights chasing each other through the sensors built into the weave.

"Is that … Barry?"

The avatar nodded. *He is looking for you.*

Eobard wanted to race off, to find his Flash.

*"He is your anchor back to the world. Just as you are his. You will always pull each other to safety."*

"Safety? I'm in danger now? Here?"

"Hmmm, not quite danger, not here. Just that Barry will come for you soon, to take you back. And we are looking forward to seeing him again."

Eobard stroked the cloth, relishing the warmth, the knowledge that he would soon be reunited with Barry. The avatar moved a little closer to him and reached out to touch the fabric. Eobard yanked it away.

The avatar laughed, a light bell-like sound. *"You are so very possessive of your talismans. And we find it delightful that such a man of science has done something so unabashedly romantic."

Eobard blushed.

*"When do you plan on telling him the truth?"

Eobard knew exactly which truth the avatar was asking about. *"Never."

*"He has a right to know. Why do you want him to believe you murdered his mother? The truth – "*

Eobard cut the avatar off. "The truth is that whether or not I wielded that knife, I caused the death of Nora Allen. I traveled back in time with the intention of ensuring the creation of the Flash, on my terms. I brought disaster down on the Allen family. At this point, there’s no difference between reality and perception."

"Really? You think that Barry does not suffer because he believes he loves the man who murdered his mother? Would it not be easier on him if he knew that your intent was only to – "

"No." Eobard was adamant. "Barry will come to his senses. That’s inevitable. His family was torn apart because of my deliberate manipulations. I don't get a free pass."

"You are always too hard on yourself, Eobard." The avatar sighed. "For someone so brilliant, you are sometimes rather stupid sometimes. But perhaps, in the short amount of time we have left, we can do something about this. After all, there is one more thing we must do before you are ready to return." The avatar pulled him close. "Maybe this will finally convince you of your worth to Barry Allen."

Eobard just shook his head. "There is nothing – "

"We would not be so certain of that." The avatar grabbed Eobard by the back of his neck, pulled him close, and kissed him. They kissed him with passion and promise and intent and Eobard opened his mouth in shock. The avatar took that as an invitation and stuck their tongue in. They held him tight
and he couldn't struggle. There was power in that kiss and Eobard could do nothing but swallow it whole.

______________________________________________________________________________

Barry didn't let Cisco take full possession of Eobard's talisman. Barry held on to part of it, and so only had a scant second to watch his friend fall into a vibe before he followed.

At first, the Speed Force was the mass of swirling stars and rushing space that Cisco had described, like Barry’s own first and immediate experience with the Speed Force, before it had resolved into a manageable mental construct. Barry took a deep breath and tried to rebuild that. It was hard – pushing against the rush of energy that didn't normally host human life – but eventually it resolved into something like a terrestrial landscape. A long green meadow, with hills in the distance, and beyond that, an ominous storm.

Barry instinctively knew that the storm was Zoom, and he – it – was coming. The impending storm made it all the more urgent that he find Eobard and bring him home. But he didn't know where to start. Turning around, he looked for some kind of landmark, something familiar – the garden, maybe, or even S.T.A.R. Labs – but all he could see were the endless hills covered in green grass.

Barry closed his eyes and whispered, "please". He opened his eyes when someone – something – responded, "Welcome back, Barry Allen."

It was the avatar – in the form of Tess Morgan.

Barry breathed a sigh of relief. "Please, tell me that Eobard is here, that he is safe."

"Your beloved is here. Safe, that is … questionable."

Fear, like nothing he'd felt before, rose in him. "What do you mean?"

The avatar gave a gentle smile. "Come with us." The avatar held out their hand.

Barry took it, although he wanted – needed – to run. The urgency was building up in him, a tide of desperation that would only be released through his speed. But he couldn't run – he didn't know where he was going. So he took the avatar's hand and walked beside them.

"It is not far, Barry. Your Eobard is just over this hill."

Barry hoped that the avatar was not playing their mental games with him. It was one thing when he needed to rest and be protected while his body healed, but now – not when everything important to him was at stake. But the avatar wasn't playing games. "Over this hill" wasn't a metaphor. As they reached the crest, he found Eobard, and he was whole and healthy and …

Kissing the avatar in the form of Harrison Wells. Kissing like they'd kissed, a prelude to much greater intimacies. Like the avatar had kissed Barry before pushing him out of the Speed Force.

Barry stood there in shock as his brain digested the scene before him. And then he let his speed loose and ran. He pulled Eobard out of the avatar's arms, spared a glance at his lover, and punched the avatar in the face. One punch to send them on their collective and encroaching ass.

He turned to Eobard, lightning crackling around him, his whole body vibrating. "What the hell was that?" Barry pointed back at the avatar and shouted, "You are that much of a narcissist that you need
to kiss your mirror image?"

Eobard went from looking stunned to angry to … amused? "First of all, they kissed me. And second of all – " He grabbed Barry, hauled him close and kissed him.

Barry clung to Eobard for a moment, until the weakness of relief gave way to the strength of desire, and he kissed Eobard back. Kissed and kissed and kissed until the only thing that mattered was his lover's lips and the lightning crackling around them.

Through his suit, through Eobard's own and much heavier suit, he could feel his beloved's arousal and he ground himself against it, seeking completion. Barry did not care that they were caught within an essential power of the universe, all he cared about was that Eobard was in his arms. That Eobard was alive.

"Barry?" A voice – a human voice – reached out to him through his pleasure. "Do you think you could stop macking on your boyfriend while I'm forced to watch? Maybe save your reunion sex until you've got some privacy?"

Cisco.

Barry licked Eobard's lips and broke their kiss. Eobard's eyes were filled with lightning – not the eerie red glow he'd projected as the Reverse-Flash – but gold and red bolts, and Barry knew that his own eyes held the same power.

He gathered himself enough to ask, "Are you okay?"

Eobard laughed. "I'd venture to say, Mr. Allen, that I've never been better. I don't know what I found more – ahem – arousing. Your kiss, or your caveman-like display of jealousy. You do know that you just punched the avatar of the Speed Force."

Barry turned around and while the avatar wasn't still on their ass, they were wearing a very amused expression and clapping lightly. "Trust a speedster to do the unexpected."

"You don't get to play games with us." Barry had a hard time containing his anger. He could still see Eobard in the avatar's arms.

"We kissed you, too. Remember?"

Barry sucked in his breath. He did. "That was when Eobard was giving me his speed – that was a metaphor."

"And what you just saw was not? Is not this whole construct a metaphor?" The avatar gestured around them. "Eobard needed something we could give him."

"And you knew I was coming. You knew I'd see it."

"Of course."

"What was the point of winding me up like that?"

"We needed to prove a point. Not to you, but to Eobard. He needed some – how shall we put it – objective evidence."

Barry sucked in his breath as understanding hit him and he turned back to Eobard. "How many times am I going to have to tell you that I love you?"
Eobard didn't quite meet his eyes. Barry took his hand and was about to pull him back into his arms when the avatar interrupted the moment.

"You two – if you survive the coming storm – will have an eternity to figure out your emotional issues. But right now, we have a gift for Barry and then you have to go home."

The avatar then leaned close to Barry and whispered, "You must remember to ask your Eobard the right questions at the right time."

Barry nodded. "I will."

"Good. And one more thing. " The avatar kissed him again and Barry could feel the power of the Speed Force imprint itself into his molecules. This wasn't the same as what had happened before. The avatar's mouth was hot and possessive and greedy. And generous too, as they poured themselves into Barry. It was like getting struck by lightning again and it hurt.

The avatar stepped back, an unholy grin on their face. "Time to go, Flash. And you too – Reverse."

They made a little shooing gesture and the construct began to dissolve.

Through the swirling mass of matter and space and time, Barry reached out for Eobard. He was so close but with each heartbeat, the universe was pulling him away.

"NO! I will NOT lose you." Barry anchored himself and grabbed Eobard's hand, hauling him close. "I will never lose you."

"No, Barry, I don't think you will." Eobard collapsed against him and reality returned, in the form of S.T.A.R. Labs and a lot more people than when he'd "left".

Cisco was looking at him, grinning and laughing, but also pale and drawn. Caitlin was there. So was Joe.

"Guys?" He didn't quite let go of Eobard. "Joe? What are you doing here?"

Cisco asked, "Do you have any idea how long you've been gone?"

Barry looked at Eobard, who shrugged. "No, not really."

"Two days, dude. I've been sitting here, holding onto this for two damn days." Cisco held out the scrap of lining.

Barry blinked. "That can't be right. Wait, when did you tell us to – um – stop macking on each other?"

"About ten minutes after you just disappeared – which completely freaked me out, but I could hear you talking – not that I heard responses from who you were talking to. Then that whole thing with the punching and the kissing and right after that, you went dark and I thought I lost both of you. I was afraid to move. This has been an exceedingly unpleasant forty-three hours and fifteen minutes."

Eobard shook his head. "It was the Speed Force – after it pushed us out. Time is … fluid."

Cisco made a face. "Well, you know what? I've just spent two days sitting here, holding onto a piece of fabric. I'm exhausted and hungry and I need a shower." He dropped the piece of lining back into Barry's hands. "I'm going home – you may see me tomorrow."
Eobard stopped Cisco. "You can't go home. Not now."

Barry closed his eyes, dreading the news that Eobard was about to impart.

"Zoom's coming. And it's far worse than any of us thought."
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Barry and Eobard are free of the Speed Force and eager to get to work, but Joe needs to have a conversation with Eobard. He's more than a little worried about his foster son and what will happen when Eobard breaks Barry's heart.

Eobard winced as he looked at Cisco. The man was worn out and suffering from ill use by his speedsters. But Cisco had – like everyone here – staying power and reserves of strength that seemed bottomless. He stopped, leaned against the console and let out a heartfelt sigh. "Okay – spill."

Eobard debated about how much he should share and decided against telling them that Zoom was the tool of Nothingness. He, himself, was still trying not to panic at that. So he ended up providing a highly edited version of what the avatar told him.

"Zoom is destroying the fabric of reality. He is breaking linear time on his own Earth. I was told –"

Joe interrupted, "Told by who?"

Barry answered for him, "By the Speed Force, which was apparently a hell of a lot more forthcoming with you, Eobard, than they were with me."

Joe looked at both of them. "You were talking with the speed force?"

Eobard answered, "Capital S, capital F, Joe. And yes, we had a nice long conversation."

Joe shook his head, "Trippy."

Eobard fought against a smile. "Anyway – as I was saying, Zoom keeps resetting the timeline back on his Earth. He brings it to just before the point of complete destruction and turns back the clock, only to repeat the cycle over and over again. He’s shattering reality and I don't know what will happen to the rest of the multiverse when that happens. It could be like ripples in a pond, causing greatest damage to the universes closes to it."

Cisco mused, "So we can't just close all of the breaches and let Zoom do his worst on that other Earth while we stay safe here. Because we're not safe."

"Exactly – even if Barry would let us. We have to –" Eobard paused, not for effect, but for the terror he felt at the idea, "go with our original plan. Close all of the portals but one, lure Zoom in and defeat him."

"You make it sound so easy, Eobard." Barry frowned. "It's not. I might have all my speed and then some, but he's stronger than I am, faster than I am – by orders of magnitude. I don't know how I can kill him."

"Because you can't, Barry. And I can't either. We need to weaken him and let the Time Wraiths finish the job."

Everyone looked at him like he'd just grown a second head.
Cisco, of course, commented, "Cool name, but what are Time Wraiths?"

Barry looked… perturbed. "Eobard?"

He explained. "Time Wraiths are entities that protect linear time. They look – " Eobard stopped and chuckled, "like those things out of those Harry Potter movies Cisco loves so much. The ones that suck the souls out of people."

Cisco frowned. "Like Dementors, you mean?"

Eobard snapped his fingers and nodded. "Right – except they suck the speed force out of speedsters." He pretended a level of insouciance he really didn't feel, not when it came to Time Wraiths. "And they hate it when speedsters manipulate the timeline. They'll do everything they can to protect it. But they have their own vulnerabilities, and Zoom has been feeding on the power that he creates when he keeps looping time."

Caitlin asked, "Then why did he need Barry's speed? We thought it was because of the speed drugs. To stop the cellular collapse."

Eobard put his hands on the back of his neck. "I was… wrong about that. It's because he needs Barry's connection to the speed force. That's why he didn't kill Barry or take all of his speed. He let Barry live because – "

Barry finished the sentence. "He wants to come back and milk me like a cow."

"Disgusting, but accurate."

"So – how do we get the Time Wraiths to join the battle? I mean, I've time-travelled, but I don't I've ever seen one."

"You've been lucky, and you've also never travelled back in time with the intention of altering the past."

Barry shook his head. "What about last year, when – "

Eobard cut him off. "You really never planned to go through with it, Barry. You knew when you left that you weren't going to do it. That's why the Time Wraiths didn't try to stop you." He prepared himself for the inevitable next question. But it didn't come – not from Barry, nor from anyone else in the room. Eobard was shocked that not one of them had made the connection.

So he continued. "We'll get the Time Wraiths' attention by playing with time. More to the point, Barry will play with time. He'll travel to a moment in the past with the clear intention of changing something, turn around without making that change and come right back. A Time Wraith will pick up his intention and track him down and follow Barry back here, where I'll be weakening Zoom."

"And you hope it will go after Zoom instead of me," Barry concluded, understanding his role.

But Eobard cautioned him. "This is going to require a very profound mental commitment, Barry. You have to truly believe you are going to act on your intentions. There should be no hidden agenda present in your mind when you go to do this. Otherwise, you'll fail. And then we will fail."

Joe had his arms crossed over his chest. "What will you be doing while Barry's playing Dodge the Time Wraith?"

"Doing my damnedest to weaken Zoom. He's not invulnerable, yet. This isn't his turf and he doesn't
have the same resources. Especially if the breaches are shut and there's a speedster who doesn't give a damn on his tail."

"Eobard – " Barry looked like he was ready to explode.

Eobard shook his head. "There's no point to thinking like that, Barry. If Zoom wins, we don't have a future. We play all of our pieces and we play to win. This is the perfect pis aller, our move of last resort."

Now Barry did explode, "Enough with the chess metaphors. Enough with metaphors, period. You don't use your life to buy my safety. No stupid risks, remember? You gave me that promise."

"And consider it revoked. Would you rather the universe ends? The entire multiverse dies? You can't keep anyone safe if Zoom wins." Eobard stared at Barry, willing him to understand and pretending that there was no one else watching. "We have no future, otherwise."

Barry nodded slowly, but there was mulish set to his mouth that clearly signaled his dislike of this plan. They'd have to talk later, in private.

Eobard turned to Cisco. "I know we got diverted from the breach closing devices when we were working on this – " He waved a hand at the Iron Throne, "but have you made any progress on getting any more of the devices built?" In a moment of prescience, he'd pulled Barry and Cisco off the construction of the Iron Throne and had them run a test on the latest prototype of the breach closing bomb. It had worked perfectly.

"Actually, I have. I put the build into full scale production on the CNC machine and all the parts are ready for assembly. But we still need to stabilize Blue Bell."

Eobard couldn't help by laugh at Cisco's name for the unstable breach in another one of the S.T.A.R. Labs basements. "Right – that won't be all that hard. The stabilizing field simply requires the quark matter to be locked into the opposite position, and deployed on a much larger scale. Which, ironically, makes it easier, because we don't have to worry about miniaturization of the power requirements." Eobard could have gone on for hours – this was his field, after all – but Cisco was fading and Joe and Caitlin just looked bemused, as if he – Eobard – had started speaking in Kiswahili. Barry, though, seemed intrigued.

"Do you want to let these guys go – let Cisco get some sleep – and tackle the build tonight?"

Eobard nodded. It wasn't hard to see Barry's play, that he had a point to get across and he wanted to do it in privacy.

At that, Cisco lifted his hand. "I'm outta here – or more like, I'm bunking down in one of the ninth floor labs for a few hours. Wake me at your peril."

Joe asked, "Is there anything I can do?"

Eobard smiled, just very slightly and was about to make a snarky comment about Joe getting an advanced degree in subatomic particle physics within the next twenty-four, but realized that Joe could help. "How are you with precision instrumentation?"

"I can calibrate a gas chromatograph, if that counts."

Eobard wasn't sure why Joe West needed to know how to do that, but now wasn't the time to inquire. "It does. Doctor Snow? Are you up to providing some assistance?"
Caitlin nodded. "Of course."

He turned to Barry, who said, "I'll get the parts from Cisco's workshop. If Joe and Caitlin can put the bomb housings together today – and do you know what time it is, because my watch stopped working – we can shut down the breaches tonight."

Eobard checked the clock on the command console. It was exactly forty-eight hours since he'd mounted the Iron Throne. "I don't know if they'll get them all done, but we can finish what they've started. Two speedsters can knock those out pretty quickly. But remember, this is a two-stage plan. First, we need to stabilize Blue Bell and lock her down. Second – we close the breaches and then invite Zoom for a play date."

Barry's blinked and something in him changed. In the dim light of the basement, he seemed to glow, and then he whispered, "You have your speed back."

"That I do, Mr. Allen." He remembered Barry the day after he'd come back, after Barry had woken up from his coma. He'd been consumed with the need to run. Eobard felt the exact same way. "Go get the parts and I'll get Joe and Caitlin set up in the Cortex. We've got our own work to do."

Eobard's voice sounded so harsh and he felt like he was an eagle at the edge of a cliff and all he wanted to do was spread his wings and fly.

Barry nodded and disappeared in a rush of lightning.

Eobard turned to Joe and Caitlin. The good doctor was blushing but Joe looked – well, not angry, more … concerned.

Joe said to Caitlin, "I'll follow you in a bit, I'd like a few words with … " He paused with deliberate delicacy, "Professor Thawne."

Caitlin looked from him to Joe and back to him, as if she thought he needed her. Eobard smiled and tilted his head towards the doorway. "It'll be fine, Doctor Snow. We'll see you in the Cortex in a few minutes."

Caitlin left and Eobard rocked back on his heels, waiting to see what Joe would do.

And Joe didn't disappoint. "I'm not going to play coy, I'm not going to dance around it. You and Barry are involved."

Eobard nodded because there was no point in denying it. Barry hadn't made any effort to hide his affections over the last week. Barry would touch him at every opportunity and Eobard – who'd spent a lifetime of shying away from such physical contact – found himself relishing it. But such public displays had consequences. Eobard had caught Joe's hostile stare more than once when Joe had shown up at S.T.A.R. Labs and found Barry draped over him like a lazy cat.

But Eobard wasn't a man who took any challenge lying down. "What's your point?"

"If things were normal – and by that I mean, if my son weren't a meta-human speedster and you weren't another meta-human speedster from the future who has played some very serious and deadly games with him – I'd caution you about what would happen if you hurt Barry. I'd express my concern about a relationship with such a large age difference – "

"It's not as much as you think. Technically, I'm only thirty-six." That earned him a confused look from Joe, so he explained. "I was – or will be – born in 2151. I traveled back to 2000 when I was thirty-five. Last year, I returned home to 2186."
Joe, however, saw right through his mathematical manipulations and noted, "But you spent fifteen years masquerading as Harrison Wells."

_Not quite._ "Yes, I did spend fifteen years in this century." Eobard was careful not to lie.

"Which actually makes you fifty-one, if my math is correct."

Eobard shrugged. "It could be seen like that." Of course it could.

"And that's really not even the point. You and my son are involved, and I am concerned about that."

"Because I'm responsible for Nora Allen's death?"

"You parse words the way a brain surgeon cuts out a tumor. You now say you are 'responsible for Nora Allen's death' – and yet you went on record saying to took a twelve-inch knife from the Allen kitchen and stabbed Nora in the chest. That's a little more than being 'responsible'. That's a murder confession."

Eobard did not want to have this conversation. "What's your point, Detective?"

"I don't like you. I don't trust you. But you came back and gave Barry your speed and that seemed like a fair exchange for the misery you caused him. Now you've magically gotten your speed back – "

"It was pure science. Nothing magical about it." Eobard had known this confrontation was coming – albeit a little sooner than he'd anticipated.

Joe waved off his quip. "I can't shake the feeling that you've engineered this to your satisfaction. You have Barry wrapped around your finger, you have your speed back – and from what Caitlin told me – it's at full strength."

"It should be, but I haven't had the chance to test it, yet." Eobard interrupted Joe again, and didn't let him pick up the threads of his tirade. "I know what you're going to say, Joe." He made a point of using the man's name. "If I hurt Barry again, you will do what you can to end me."

Joe took a step forward, fists clenched. "But the problem is – I can't, can I? You're literally faster than a speeding bullet. You could shove your hand through my chest before I finish saying your name. Whatever we'd used last year to trap you, that's not going to work now. You hurt Barry and I'm just going to have to stand by and watch and pray there will still be pieces of him to pick up, that I'll be able to put him back together."

Eobard froze, suddenly realizing that Joe thought he was a greater threat to Barry's emotional well-being than his physical one. That was progress, he supposed. "There is no one and nothing that matters more to me than Barry Allen, his happiness and continued existence in this time and for all the future yet to come. Please understand that."

His words seemed to have made an impact. Joe took a step back, his shoulders dropped and his fists unclenched. "Someday, I'm going to get the truth out of you, Eobard Thawne. About the night that Nora Allen was killed. About what happened to Harrison Wells."

"You already know what happened." Telling Joe West the truth was never on the agenda. Not about Nora's death and certainly not about Harrison's fate. Better that Joe continue to believe what he thought he knew.

Joe, of course, thought differently. "That's debatable."
Eobard let out a small sigh. He wasn't going to score any points off of Joe West. Not today, maybe not ever. "Come on, we have bombs to build."

Upstairs, in the Cortex, Barry was already showing Caitlin how to assemble the bomb housing. Eobard decided to let Barry teach, especially with this pair. He picked up a micro torque screwdriver and began his own assembly, and without conscious thought, started to work at speed. Since Cisco's design was unusually elegant in its simplicity, he had a full dozen units completed without much effort.

He paused and let the feelings roll through him. It had been sixteen years since he'd been able to do this. To use his speed so freely, without worrying about the consequences, about using too much and losing it, about someone seeing what they shouldn't. It was an indescribably intense pleasure.

"Eobard?" He looked up to find Barry standing in front of him, a soft smile on his lips. "Feels good, doesn't it?"

He nodded.

Barry licked his lips and Eobard felt something leap in his chest. "Yes?"

"Caitlin and Joe seem to have a handle on this. Want to …" Barry's voice trailed off, but there was a look of enticement in his eyes.

"Do I want to … what?" Eobard wondered just what Barry was suggesting and he immediately – and surprisingly – thought of a half-dozen highly inappropriate things.

But Barry wasn't suggesting anything of the sort. He grinned and said, "Go for a run. A real run. Like you promised me."

Eobard felt his breath catch. Yes, he had promised that to Barry, and now that Barry had made the offer, it was all Eobard could do to stay seated, to not reach for his cowl and pull it into place. To not take off at full speed and let the Flash chase him.

Instead, he forced himself to nod. Very slowly. "Yes, that sounds like an excellent idea. I should make sure everything is in good working order. And it would be best if I had someone with me to monitor my progress."

Barry smiled and he changed into his suit. Eobard had to finally admit to himself that he truly enjoyed watching Barry through the time dilation as he stripped to his shorts and got into the skin-tight suit. Barry paused in the act of buckling his belt and looked at him with a very sly grin. The little shit knew he was watching – and seeing – and he liked it.

Neither of them said anything to either Joe or Caitlin as they left the Cortex and ran down to the particle accelerator ring.

There had been so many times – before heading back to the future – that he'd longed to do just this. But he could never have risked burning out what little speed he'd had hoarded. He'd needed it to get the Flash "up to speed", to challenge him, to make him want to achieve his goals – and in doing so, enable Eobard's return to his own century. What a stupid idea that had been.

But now, Eobard had his speed back. He had the Flash's respect, but even better than that, he had Barry's love. Eobard knew that he could lose all three of those at any moment. Zoom was coming and could kill him or rip out his speed the way he'd done to Barry. The Flash could find him wanting, that he truly wasn't a hero, an equal. And Barry would – Eobard had resigned himself to the inevitable – eventually remember that Eobard was responsible for all of the tragedies to the Allen
family, and his love would revert back to hate.

For the moment, and all the foreseeable moments, though, Eobard was going to relish in the gifts he'd been given. He was going to run

Barry stood next to him, grinning as he pulled up his cowl and stepped in to the classic racing pose. As he had at the start of the experiment that had given him back his speed, Barry asked, "You ready?"

Eobard pulled up his own cowl and got into position, and once again quipped, "I've been ready for centuries." And he didn't finish speaking that last word as Barry took off.

He was a micro-second behind – but not for long. They were running side-by-side, circling the accelerator ring in perfect synchronicity. Not even with the boost from the speed drug, not the tachyon enhancements, and not even before Nora Allen's death, had Eobard been this fast. Barry had never been this fast. This was a gift from the Speed Force. Barry looked at him, his eyes glowing with golden lightning, his smile just as incandescent.

They ran and ran and kept running. A blue ball formed in front of them – the inevitable time portal their energy wake had created. Barry dodged right and Eobard went left and they were on the walls, like cyclists in a velodrome. Filled with adrenaline, the dopamine from this massive runner's high flooding his brain, Eobard challenged himself and defied gravity, running along the ceiling for a half a lap, until disaster struck.

His foot got caught in a wiring harness and gravity reasserted its mastery over him.

Except that it didn't; Barry caught him before he hit the floor.

"Are you crazy?"

Eobard laughed, the adrenaline still pouring through him. "Of course I am." He grabbed Barry, wrapped his arms around him and held him tight. "Thank you for this. For giving this back to me."

Barry held him back. "We're going to have all of forever to enjoy it, you know. Unless you do something stupid like break your damn neck."

Eobard pushed Barry's cowl back, better to see into those amazing eyes. "You'll be at my side, every step of the way." The dopamine in his brain didn't give him any room for negative thoughts.

Barry pushed Eobard's cowl off and buried his fingers in his hair, pulling him close. So close that when Barry whispered against his lips, "At your side, Reverse. Always," his breath tickled Eobard's skin. It felt hypersensitive – something he'd never before experienced as a speedster. Eobard cupped his hands around Barry's head and brought him even closer and electricity arced between them as their lips met.

Barry pulled back, startled. "Is this what happens when speedsters kiss?"

Eobard licked his lips – and Barry's eyes glowed gold with pleasure – before answering. "I don't know. I've never kissed another speedster."

"Good. And if I have my way, you'll never kiss anyone else. Speedster or otherwise. You're mine, Reverse. Don't ever think otherwise."

Barry's possessiveness sent a hot thrill of arousal through Eobard. And like every recent encounter with Barry, he reveled in it. No more shame in his desire, no more hiding it. Barry Allen might be the
Flash, but that wasn't the sum-total of him. Eobard might have (and might still) revere the Flash, but he loved Barry Allen.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

For the first time, Barry and Eo are equals. In speed, in intelligence, in purpose. And maybe in something else.

As many times as Eobard and Barry had snuck off for some privacy before Eobard had gotten his speed back, Barry didn't want their first moment of intimacy – as speedsters – to take place in the particle accelerator ring. Back in the workroom, Barry helped Joe and Caitlin finish constructing the bomb housings. They did quality control as Barry sped through the build. Eobard injected each device with the CFL quark matter that had been collected during the initial particle accelerator launch.

It took less than an hour to finish everything, an hour during which he and Eobard didn't exchange a single word, but they couldn't stop touching each other. The caresses were on the right side of platonic, but just barely.

Cisco joined them, looking somewhat better than he had a few hours ago, and Barry smiled when Eobard asked if Cisco would work with him on the Speed Canon. Eobard wanted to make things right with Cisco, though it was going to be a long and difficult road.

Barry sat at one of the workstations and for the first time in what felt like forever, he had nothing to do. It was a strange and disconcerting feeling, especially after the emotional intensity of the past few days.

"Bar – you okay?" Joe asked, his voice pitched low. Caitlin had gone back into the med bay and was running some final scans on the bombs.

Barry shrugged. "Just kind of tired. It's been a long day."

"A long couple of days, remember?"

"Yeah." Barry knew that Joe wanted to ask him about Eobard, about their relationship. Barry didn't think he was up to the interrogation.

But Joe surprised him. "We were wrong about him. About what happened to Nora."

"Yes, we were."

"Do you know what really happened?"

Barry pursed his lips and swallowed a sigh of frustration. "No, not yet. There are too many things going on right now. I have to ask the right questions at the right time, and now is not the right time."

Joe agreed. "Let's deal with Zoom first."

Barry wanted to say, "No, let me deal with Zoom", but he kept his mouth shut. There was no way he'd win this argument now.
Caitlin came back into the Cortex and gave them both a speaking look, before letting them know that all of the devices passed muster.

Barry couldn't hold back a yawn, which earned him another admonitory look from his friend.

"When was the last time you slept, Barry?" Caitlin took his wrist and checked his pulse.

Barry made a face. "The night before we gave Eobard back his speed. There's no sleeping in the Speed Force."

"And the last time you had a decent meal?"

Barry couldn't answer that. Caitlin retrieved one of the nutrition bars Cisco had formulated. Barry chewed and swallowed and chewed and swallowed. They were pretty tasteless to begin with, but these were stale, too.

When he complained, Caitlin told him that they hadn't cooked up a batch since before Zoom had attacked. "Maybe you should bring one down to Professor Thawne. I'm sure he's hungry, too."

Barry wasn't sure if Caitlin was giving him an excuse to go see Eobard or if she was truly concerned. Regardless, he took the bar and with a nod to Joe, headed to the workroom.

He paused at the doorway and watched Eobard – who'd changed out of his suit and back into his customary black sweater and pants – speed-write formulae on the board. Cisco was actually shouting at Eobard – arguing about materials and power consumption. Eobard rocked back on his heels, erased half the board, and rewrote the formulae. That didn't stop Cisco's arguments, and Barry bit his lip to stop a grin when his friend grabbed the eraser out of Eobard's hand, wiped the other half of the board clean and very slowly wrote out another set of formulae.

Eobard shook his head, took the eraser back, cleaned the entire board and started from scratch.

But apparently, Cisco wasn't having any of it. He took the eraser, the marker and pushed Eobard into a chair. "Watch – "

As Cisco re-wrote his formulae, Eobard shook his head. "You're wrong, Cisco."

"No, I'm not."

"You're not really going to argue with me on the properties of strange matter, are you??"

Cisco muttered something under his breath.

His tone very reminiscent of his days as "Harrison Wells", Eobard replied, "I didn't quite catch that, Mr. Ramon."

Barry couldn't quite believe it when Cisco barked, "You are the living definition of strange matter."

Silence reigned, until Eobard gave a shout of laughter and clapped lightly. "Bravo, Cisco, bravo."

Barry took that as his cue and entered the workroom. He rested a hand on Eobard's shoulder, before sliding it down across his chest. To his delight, Eobard leaned back against Barry and let out a small sigh. Barry rested his head on top of Eobard's and rubbed his cheek against the messy mass of curls.

Eobard covered Barry's hand and squeezed it. Barry relaxed. No matter what tomorrow might bring, they would have this, now.
Barry remembered why he came down here – or at least the ostensible reason for the trip – and handed Eobard a nutrition bar. "You now have the same caloric requirements as I do. Eat this."

Eobard grinned. "No need. Cisco was happy to share some of his stash of junk food with me."

From the board, Cisco snarked, 'I wouldn't say 'happy'. You finished a six pack of jumbo-sized Snickers, a Costco-sized box of Devil Dogs and a pound of Crunch 'n Munch. You're a damn plague of locusts, Thawne."

Barry made a mental to replenish Cisco's stash and watched as Eobard and Cisco argued over the power supply for the Speed Cannon – that seems to have been what they'd been "discussing" when he'd walked in. Perhaps it was Barry's presence, but Eobard stopped arguing, agreed that Cisco's formulae were correct, and offered a few suggestions on the prototype Cisco sketched out before telling him to put it into fabrication.

Cisco looked startled at Eobard's sudden acquiescence. "That's it?"

"That's it, Cisco."

Cisco shook his head and accepted Eobard's surrender before turning to Barry. "This is going to take about nine hours to cut, and probably a full day to assemble before I can even hook it up to power. I want to go home, have a shower, a decent meal and a good night's sleep. Because once you two start closing the breaches, all hell's going to break loose."

Barry agreed. "I think we should all go home, have a decent meal. Get some rest."

Eobard patted Barry's hand – more of a caress, actually. "An excellent idea, Mr. Allen."

Barry insisted on Joe taking Caitlin and Cisco home, on the theory of safety in numbers. Barry and Eobard had a brief and intense argument about whether they should drive or run.

Eobard – probably still filled with the sense of invulnerability from his time in the Speed Force – insisted, "I can protect you."

Barry didn't want to bring Eobard down, he understood that feeling, but: "It's too risky. We have a plan, let's stick to it."

Eobard all but laughed in his face. "You're arguing for caution? For sticking to a plan? Who are you? Who are you really? Because the Barry Allen I know – and love – wouldn't hesitate to run headlong into danger."

Barry blinked. Eobard's casual use of the word "love" put the brakes on his ability to form any rational thought.

And then Eobard grinned and it was clear to Barry that the man knew just what he was doing. "If everything goes according to plan, this will be the one of the very last times – or even the last time – we'll ever need to use such mundane forms of transportation."

Barry had to give in. Arguing about it would only subtract from the time they had together. Eobard might be certain of their success, but Barry – who still had the sense-memory of Zoom breaking him apart – wasn't so sure.

The drive, at this hour, wasn't terribly long, and there was something comforting about pulling up in front of the house, having the lights automatically come on. It felt… normal. Ordinary. As if he and Eobard were a regular couple.
Barry’s thoughts stopped cold. He’d just been about to think, regular *married* couple. He sat in the van, shaken by that concept.

"Barry?"

"Hmm?"

"You coming inside or have you decided you really do prefer traveling by van? Or perhaps living in it." Eobard's tone was both snarky and concerned.

Barry jumped out of the van and followed Eobard into the house, but he couldn’t escape that that thought. *Marriage. To Eobard.* And then he remembered something that Cisco told him so many months ago.


Then another thought comes to Barry. He’d also asked Cisco if he’d vibed he and Eobard in a sexual setting, and Cisco had been unequivocal in his denial. They were definitely living together, Cisco said, but Cisco had never seen them intimate. At the time, Barry had been relieved, if just that his best friend hadn't seen he and his enemy having sex. But suddenly, Barry had to wonder.

Maybe that wasn't a big part of their relationship. Or any part, at all.

Barry knew he could live with that. It wasn't as if sexual desire had ever been a huge – or even small – part of his life. At least not until now.

Yes, they slept together. They often woke up aroused. Eobard loved to hold him, he loved being held. They kissed as easily as breathing. But they hadn't done anything more than cling to each other, rub against each other. And always with their clothes on – at least their pants.

Eobard had never touched his cock, and Barry hadn't felt quite right being the aggressor. Was it possible that Eobard simply didn't want a greater level of sexual intimacy with him? Maybe Eobard was like him. Maybe, just maybe, Eobard was demi.

He didn't think he'd be that lucky, but at some point – very soon – Barry was going to have to tell Eobard that he was a virgin. He didn't think that Eobard would mind – given how possessive he was – but it was still a big step to take.

Just as having sex was.

As the thought crossed his mind, Barry shivered and felt his body stir at the very idea of it.

........................................................................................................
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Barry and Eobard reach a very important turning point in their relationship - Eobard shares something about himself that he's found shameful - unacceptable - for almost his entire life. He expects to be rejected, to be derided and laughed at.

Barry, because he is Barry, does nothing short of handing him the miracle of acceptance.

(Please see spoilery content notes at the end).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

As they'd traveled home, Eobard considered Barry, considered the future, considered what their lives would be like after Zoom was defeated. He compartmentalized the problems of the past, the secrets he would never be able to share with Barry, and tried to figure out how to stabilize their emotional present.

Barry wanted him, and that was still a miracle that Eobard had trouble accepting. He could feel the evidence of Barry's desire every night and every morning. And he reveled in it – as much as he reveled in his own body's natural reaction to Barry's proximity. To his casual touch and not-so-casual caresses.

Eobard kept waiting for Barry to push for more, to ask for a type of completion that Eobard had never enjoyed.

Oh, he'd had sex, he'd fucked and been fucked, with all kinds of chemical enhancements and psychological persuasions to make his body respond, but he'd never actually enjoyed it. His reluctance, now, was more out of a fear he'd disappoint the one person he wanted to please. That he'd betray his experience - or worse, his lack thereof - and hurt Barry. Or even break his trust again.

They were home and supposedly safe and could relax, but Barry was drifting around the great room, looking very distracted. Eobard took pleasure in this quiet moment and poured a glass of scotch. Of course, now that he was once again a speedster, the alcohol had no effect on him. But he enjoyed the taste of it; it reminded him of the best moments in the speed force.

"Dinner?"

"What?" Barry looked at him, as if he'd never heard the word before.

"I asked, do you want dinner?"

"Oh – of course. Do you want me to cook?"

Eobard sipped his drink, and replied, "If you'd like to. I'm in the mood for a couple of burgers."

Barry had to smile. "When are you not in the mood for a couple of burgers?"
"Good question, Mr. Allen." Eobard laughed, feeling like he was truly home. But Barry didn't seem to share his ease, so he asked, "Are you all right?"

"Fine. Just fine." Barry then shook his head, as he contradicted himself. "No, not really. I'm worried about Zoom, about stopping him. About how to bring the Time Wraiths. About… everything."

Eobard put his glass down and went to him. "You need to have more faith in yourself, Barry. You are…" He rested his hands on Barry's hips and leaned against him, his lips gentle at the nape of Barry's neck. "The most incredible person I've ever met. You always have been. And you keep proving it over and over. Do you know what you did?"

"No, what?" Barry asked, his voice breathless.

"You punched the avatar of the Speed Force. In the face. Because he was kissing me. You were jealous. Your first reaction was to protect what you thought was yours."

Eobard could feel the heat of Barry's embarrassment. "I'm sorry."

Eobard turned Barry around and looked at him, his eyes shining. "Why? Why are you sorry?"

Barry shook his head. "Because …"

Eobard cupped Barry's face in his hands, his thumbs sweeping across his cheeks.

"Can I tell you a secret, Barry Allen." Eobard leaned in, his lips at Barry's ears. "I liked it. I liked that you were angry for me, even at me. I liked that you wanted me so much."

Barry shivered under Eobard's hands and Barry buried his face in Eobard's neck. Suddenly, Eobard needed to touch skin, to feel the steady, rapid beat of Barry's heart under his lips.

Barry had a question, and when he asked it, it was barely a whisper, "So, where do we go from here?"

Eobard whispered back. "To bed?" It felt like a cliché - something he'd read or seen in a movie or even worse, in a piece of pornography. But Barry was smiling like he'd just won a prize, so maybe this wasn't all that wrong.

At least until Barry asked him, "Are you sure?"

Eobard froze, heart racing in panic, wanting to deny, to deflect, to stop or even, run away. "Why would you ask me that? Why wouldn't I be sure?"

Barry simply said, "Just checking."

Eobard tugged him towards his bedroom – their bedroom – the one they'd been sharing since that night under the stars. In the week or so since then, they'd done nothing more than what might quaintly be called "heavy petting" – their intimacy hadn't ventured past kissing and frotting, naked above the waist, but somewhat clothed below.

Barry was gliding his hands up and down Eobard's back, petting him, and Eobard almost wanted to purr. But he wanted something more. He wanted to take the chance to explore, to learn Barry's body in a way he never had. He wanted something more than the heady and rushed sensation of desperate neediness – his own, Barry's. He want to savor, take the time to explore. They were supposed to have an eternity for this – a future without a natural end. But the threat of Zoom and the destruction
he could bring to their dreams something that could not be ignored.

It had only been a matter of time, Eobard had known, before Barry would seek something more from him. And he truly wanted to give Barry that more. Eobard wanted to give Barry everything Barry wanted. But how could he tell this beautiful and vital and normal man that he was stunted, that his own experiences were both limited and less than successful? That he knew theory, but had never put truly put it into practice without drugs, without feeling sick to his soul afterwards?

In the semi-darkness of their bedroom, with Barry's hands gently exploring him, Eobard decided that while Barry would never laugh at him, would never think him a freak or worse, he needed to find the strength within him to tell Barry the truth.

This was just one of the many truths he couldn't bear to speak – not because he was afraid of Barry's reaction but because it was so private, so personal. It was something he hated about himself and it had always felt like a betrayal of the man he wanted to be, the man he wanted Barry to care about, to love.

And yet, he needed to do this. If they were going to move forward together, Barry needed to understand this about him. He needed to know just how flawed and damaged this part of Eobard Thawne was.

Eobard pulled away from Barry. He didn't want to bring this delight to a halt, but he needed to tell Barry. Now before he lost his nerve.

"Eobard? What's the matter?"

He closed his eyes and forced himself to remember that Barry was Barry, generous and loving and far too inclined to see the good in everyone.

He pulled Barry to the bed and sat them both down.

"There's something you need to know. Something that might change things between us." Eobard tried to find the right words.

"Things? What kind of things?" Barry sounded nervous.

"I'm not ..." Eobard paused, trying to find the right word, not wanting to take refuge in what would be easy, like clinical diagnoses. "Normal." There, he said it. He put it out there and waited for Barry to draw back in horror. Or if not horror, then shock.

Of course, Barry did nothing of the kind. In fact, he barely reacted. "That's a kind of sweeping statement. And for the record, you're a time-traveling speedster. You're a meta-human, so by definition, you are definitely not normal."

Eobard laughed at the utter truth of that statement. "Very observant, Mr. Allen."

Barry bit his lip and his eyes glowed as he looked at Eobard from under his lashes. Barry always reacted like that when Eobard used the formality of his name in such intimate settings.

But the moment passed when Barry blinked and looked at him again, his head tilted like a curious raptor. "What do you mean, really?"

"In the twenty-second century, there is no prejudice or stigma against people who desire their own sex."
Barry raised his eyebrows and smiled. "Score one for the march of progress."

"Unfortunately, the same can't be said for people who lack interest in sex at all."

"Asexuality?"

"I believe that's the term used today. Deviant Non-Responsiveness is what it's called in my time."

"That's … " Barry looked outraged, "horrible. To call the lack of sexuality deviant is appalling. So much for progress."

Eobard didn't say anything. He just looked at Barry and waited for Barry to make the connection. It didn't take long.

"Why are you telling this to me?"

"Because I'm not normal, remember. My family had enough influence that I was never officially classified as DNR, but …"

"I don't understand, Eo. You and I – we've done everything but …" Barry licked his lips and then looked like he finally understood. "You don't want to have penetrative sex? Coitus?"

Eobard tried not to laugh. He'd worked hard not to use clinical terminology, but Barry didn't seem to have any hesitancy with it.

When he didn't answer, Barry reached out and touched him. "It's okay. There's a whole universe of pleasure without bits going into bits."

Now Eobard had to laugh. "Bits going into bits?"

"Well, it sounds nicer than saying 'fucking'." Barry chuckled. "I'm trying not to be coarse."

"Barry…" Eobard shook his head, half-appalled, half-delighted.

"I had wondered if this was something you really didn't want. You never, ah, pressed for it. And I had the feeling that you really didn't want it. And I only want what you want. I'd never ask you for anything you find distasteful."

Eobard shook his head, moved by Barry's emotional generosity. It might be easier to let him think that, but it wouldn't be fair. "That's not it. Not at all."

"Then what? You can tell me. I know there's a lot of secrets between us, but this – what do you call it? This Deviant Non-Responsiveness, doesn't have to be one of them. Although I'd prefer to call you 'ace'. That's a nicer term – there's no judgment in it."

Shaken, Eobard stared at his hands, because he couldn't bring himself to look at Barry. He feels adrift - lost in a diagnosis he'd never quite accepted. "I'm not really DNR. I'm abnormal in my abnormality. I'm only DNR – or 'ace' – with people who aren't you. You're the only person I've ever desired and felt good about that desire." Eobard spat the words out. He couldn't imagine Barry finding that at all normal. Or the least bit attractive.

Barry didn't say anything for too many long seconds. Then – to Eobard's consternation – he smiled. It wasn't one of triumph or derision; there was nothing mocking or cruel about it. There was only a terrible, wonderful sweetness, and through the time dilation, Eobard saw something in Barry's expression that puzzled him – joy and wonder and relief.
"Barry?"

"You're demi, Eo."

"Demi? What do you mean?" He had never heard the term before, at least not in context of sexuality.

"Demisexual. You only feel desire for someone when you have a strong emotional connection to them." Barry shook his head. "I guess in a society where it's considered deviant to lack any sex drive, then the nuance of demisexuality would never be recognized."

"A strong emotional connection." Eobard felt hysterical laughter rise in him like bubbles from an uncorked bottle of Champagne. "You might say that I have a strong emotional connection to you."

"Of course you do." Barry scooted closer to him. "Does this make sense?"

"Yes, in a terrible and ironic sort of way."

"Ironic?"

"Did I ever tell you how I acquired Gideon?"

"No."

"The one at S.T.A.R. Labs is actually a clone of the unit here." Eobard tilted his head towards the closet. "In my quest for all things related to the Flash – and Barry Allen – I tracked down this module in a sex parlor in Old Town. It had originally been part of a psychiatric practice specializing in sexual dysfunction."

"Wow. I hope I someday make a bundle out of the licensing fees." Barry chuckled with amusement.

Eobard shared the laughter. It was a kind of release. But then he turned serious. "I'd 'consulted' with Gideon about my problem – "

"Being demisexual is not a problem," Barry was quick to aver.

"It was, to me. I'd accepted – even relished – the fact that I was an intellectual outlier, that I had nothing in common with my family, my social peers, but this difference seemed so… unfair. The one part of my identity that I had no control over." Eobard wasn't ever going to tell Barry that his teenaged-self had been sexually aroused by the Flash, well before he'd discovered the Flash's identity.

Barry looked at him in that quiet way, full of love, of promise and unconditional acceptance. "Let me say this again, Eo, there's nothing wrong with you."

"In some ways, this age is very enlightened." Eobard sighed. "And you are very knowledgeable. I spent fifteen years in the twenty-first century, and I never encountered the term."

"Well, it's not like you were all that focused on twenty-first century sexual identity. Besides, it's not common on the sexuality spectrum." Barry gave him a wry smile. "The term really exists because people who are this way wanted a community. It's only recently become a clinical definition."

"You are a font of obscure knowledge, aren't you? Something you encountered in your work as a CSI?"

"Not in the least." Barry stared at him, unblinking.
"Then how…” He stopped, dead cold. For a man who’d prided himself on his ability to see through even the densest obfuscations, Eobard had to admit to being blindsided.

Barry just smiled.

"You?"

"Yes, me."

Eobard was appalled at this gap in knowledge. "How? How did I not know this? I knew everything about you."

"Have you ever seen me be intimate with anyone?” Barry just kept smiling.

"No, but then I didn't have cameras in every teenage girl's bedroom. Or boy's. You dated in high school.” Eobard searched his memory for the name of that annoying young woman.

"Yes, Becky Cooper. She needed a trophy, not a sex partner. Until I met you, Iris was the only other person I ever wanted to have sex with."

"But …" Eobard still tried to wrap his brain around this. "The reporter – the one who worked with Iris?"

"Linda? It never went anywhere. Not beyond some kissing. The Flash's presence was very conveniently – and urgently – required on the few times we'd dated."

Eobard scrubbed at his face. This was not how he’d expected the night to go. He hates this confused, wrong-footed feeling, but on the other hand - to share this with Barry is something he'd never dreamed of, let alone hoped for.

Barry leaned into him. "Whatever you want, or don't want, is fine with me. Just as long as we can be together. We will have all of our lives to explore what feels good and right and nature and perfect. There's no reason to rush."

Eobard couldn't still his brain; he couldn't stop thinking of causality and chance. "Did I make you like this?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did I somehow make you – demisexual?" The word felt strange on his tongue.

"Like you made me a speedster? Like you manipulated my life?"

Eobard nodded slowly.

"I don't think you can make someone asexual or demisexual or gay or straight. I knew I was gray – that’s another term for demisexuality – since college. Of course it's possible that there's a root cause based in childhood trauma, but that's an analytical trap I don't want to fall into. And I don't think you had anything to do with it. I am who I am. You had some powerful influence over me but I don't think you could have made me demi."

Eobard wasn't convinced.

"Why does that bother you so much?" Barry asked, with quiet curiosity.

Guilt. "I'd already taken so much from you. Your mother, your father, so much of your sense of
Barry didn't dismiss those facts. "Yes, you did, but I'm not convinced that being demi means I've lost anything. I have you. I have, right here and right now, everything I ever wanted. I have an eternity with the man that I love. The man who loves me. Why should I spoil that with pointless regrets?" He touched Eobard's cheek. "With everything that stands between us, all of the obstacles the world has placed in our way, why should this matter? I love you."

Eobard put his hand over Barry's and turned his face so that Barry's hand was cupped over his lips. He kissed Barry's palm, the skin tasting salty and sweet. "I don't know what to say. Other than I love you, Barry Allen. I keep saying it because I find the reality of those words – from your lips – nearly impossible to believe."

"Believe it. Believe it if you believe in nothing else. Even if you lose faith in your speed, or your genius, or even the power of your name, believe that I love you and that I trust you and that there is no one else – no one – who I want to be intimate with." Barry bit his lip and looks a little sad. "I wish I'd told you this sooner. That maybe you wouldn't have felt so alone, so conflicted."

Eobard stroked Barry's cheek. "I know that you are proud of who and what you are, and that you accept that as part of yourself, but I still think it takes a great deal of courage to tell someone this. Especially someone whom you've had many reasons to mistrust."

"I could – and do – say the same about you. You didn't have to tell me."

"This was a secret I needed to share."

Eobard can read Barry's reply in his smile, "As opposed to all the secrets you won't share."

Eobard met Barry's gaze and committed himself. "I've spend a lifetime wanting only you, even when I didn't realize what the wanting was. A wanting that had gone wrong in so many ways. I've even been given another chance and I nearly ruined it, too. A chance to have you, to have your love, but I've doubted it."

Barry looked shocked. "How could you doubt?"

"Because of everything I've done, because of all the lies I've told, all of the damage I've caused. You have no reason to trust me, to love me, and I can't understand why you do. But – " And Eobard sighed, "you really do love me. You seem to see past everything and you seem to want me."

"Not seem, but do. I do want you, but you make it difficult for me, you know." Shaken by this unexpected moment of vulnerability, Eobard lets Barry pull him back against him.

Eobard let out huff of self-derisive laughter. "I know." The laughter faded and Eobard turned serious. "I would give anything to keep you safe. I'd give you my speed again. And again. And again. You are the reason I exist, Barry. Wherever I may travel, whenever I may go, you will always anchor me home."

"You're going nowhere. Nowhere, no when, no place or time without me at your side or at your heels."

The intensity of Barry’s voice shook Eobard. It inspired him. Aroused him. Eobard had wanted Barry before, had longed for him, had touched and welcomed Barry's touch in return, but now, he knew one thing for certain, he wanted everything.

Eobard rested his hand on Barry's shoulder before cupping it around his neck, pulling him close.
"We are, wouldn't you say, quite the pair." He kissed Barry and it was like that first time, under the stars.

But unlike that time, Barry pulled back and there was something in his gaze that surprised Eobard – a lack of confidence.

"What is it?" Eobard asked.

"I – I guess it's really not obvious, or maybe it is, but I hope you know what to do, because other than high school sex-ed when we were taught how to put condoms on bananas, I don't have a lot of practical experience with where we're going."

It was as if Eobard had just been hit with lightning, again. Mouth dry, it was hard to form the words, but he finally managed. "You're a virgin?"

Barry nodded, a hopeful look in his eyes. "Like I said, I'm demisexual – and other than Iris, who's awesome and wonderful and not for me – you're the only person I've desired. Kind of hard to fake a boner." Barry let out an awkward laugh.

Eobard thought of the drugs he'd taken, the implanted suggestions he'd accepted, the psychological war he'd waged with himself, and could not believe how unstained was this beautiful gift he'd been given. Swallowing against the hard lump in his throat, Eobard said, "Barry, I know it's going to sound crass, but I'm glad. I'm glad I'm your first – "

Barry put a hand over Eobard's heart, "My first and my only."

"Your first lover." Eobard felt as if he was on the edge of tears, out of pure joy.

Barry leaned into him and Eobard wrapped his arms around Barry. "You know what you're doing, right?"

"Yes – I have some experience." He hoped that Barry wouldn't press, because he didn't want to go into what he'd done to himself in his quest for sexual normalcy.

"Good, because one of us should." Barry bit his lip and looked at him from under his lashes, as flirtatious as a centerfold model, but far more genuine. "You do still want to …"

"Put bits in bits?" Eobard grinned at the silliness of the phrasing.

"You're never going to let me live that down, are you?"

"I don't think so. And to be clear, yes – I want to make love to you, tonight, right now. I want to give you every pleasure and make you happy."

Less flirtatious and almost too earnest, Barry asked, "Would you kiss me? That would make me very happy."

Eobard didn't hesitate to grant Barry's request. And although they'd spent many pleasurable hours kissing and caressing each other, there was something about this moment, something fresh and new and undiscovered.

Barry's hand was under his shirt, hot against already-heated skin. Eobard felt something tingle – the pleasant buzz that the talisman gave off when Barry was nearby. "Hold on, let me – "

Barry gave a moan of frustration when Eobard pulled away to take off his sweater, and the scrap of
fabric fluttered down, landing in Eobard's lap. As he started to put it away, Barry stopped him, his hand around Eobard's wrist.

"What's the matter?"

"How can you have this?"

"What do you mean?"

Barry laughed and reached into his pocket to pull out an identical scrap of fabric. "Because I have it. I was going to give back it to you but we kind of got distracted. And now that I think about it, I'm sort of not surprised you have it. When you got sucked into the speed force, you left your suit behind. It was mostly bits of burnt polymer, but this survived intact. But -"

Eobard finished the sentence, "I was wearing the suit in the speed force. I knew you were coming for me because of this – it was a signal, a beacon your presence activated."

"So, do we now each have one?"

Eobard wondered the same thing, but he still reached out and took Barry's scrap and matched the edges together. The fabric glowed red and gold and silver, tracing the embedded circuitry, and to Eobard's utter delight, it resolved into a lightning bolt – with the double bend – his emblem, and Barry's.

Barry gasped and when he touched the now-single piece of fabric, it started to glow again – not as dramatically as before, but it traced the contact from Barry's fingers. The warmth that flowed from it into Eobard's hands was more than simple thermal-electric reaction – it was more like the touch of the avatar as they kissed him.

"I think I need to put this away, Barry."

"Yes – it's a little unnerving."

Eobard tucked the scrap in the nightstand drawer and turned back to Barry, and asked, with a slightly strained laugh, "Where were we?"

"Well, you were about to ravish me." Barry leaned back, like a romance novel heroine, neck arched and chest thrust forward.

"Would you like me to?" Eobard licked his lips, far too aroused. Not by the idea of unwillingness, but of exercising control. Of not fumbling into the heat of the moment.

Barry looked at him in surprise and no small amount of lust. "I think I would – very much."

Mouth dry, Eobard commanded, "Stand up."

When Barry complied, Eobard issued his next order. "Take off your clothes, slowly. Not a striptease, just... don't use your speed."

Barry nodded and without a word, and with slightly shaking hands, began to unbutton his shirt. Almost too soon, Barry dropped his shirt on the floor and began to pull his tee-shirt off. In the soft glow of the single nightstand lamp and the moonlight pouring in from above, Barry's skin glowed like polished marble, kissed with freckles.

Barry stood still for a moment, hands on his belt buckle.

Barry cupped his hand over his groin, rubbing lightly.

"Do you like that?"

Barry nodded.

"Tell me. Use words."

"I do, I like it, but I wish it was your hand. I've been dreaming of you touching me. Your hands, your mouth." Barry bit his lip. "Is that too much?"

Eobard found himself breathless. "No, no. Not at all. I want to taste you; I want to learn what pleases you."

"Good, because I want that, too."

"Take them off. Take off your pants."

Although he obeyed Eobard's command not to use his speed, Barry didn't bother with any finesse. He pushed his jeans and his shorts off in a single move, only to get them tangled in his footwear. The extra few moments gave Eobard a chance to regain his control, and soon enough, Barry was standing before him, beautifully, exquisitely naked. And aroused.

"I don't think I've ever seen anything so beautiful as you, Barry Allen." Of course he'd seen Barry naked many times before, and had cared for him intimately when he'd been in the coma, but at this moment, Barry was... perfection.

"What do you want me to do now?"

"Come here, let me touch you."

Barry stepped closer to the bed and Eobard did as he promised, letting his fingertips drift over all that warm skin. No, Barry wasn't marble and moonlight. He was speed made flesh and bone and blood, and lightning lived in his veins.

Oh, yes – there was definitely lightning. Eobard hadn't intended to call it forth, but it came anyway, tracing crimson and gold across Barry's skin.

"Does that hurt?"

"Only when you stop."

Eobard's hand moved down, across Barry's abdomen, his fingers circling around Barry's navel before dropping a little lower, tracing sparse trail of hair that led to Barry's pubes. But the path was blocked, by Barry's erection, a very pleasing obstruction.

Eobard closed his eyes for a moment and let out a tiny, wordless prayer. This moment had been too long in the making. "May I touch you?" It felt only right to ask, after giving so many orders.

Barry smiled and took Eobard's hand, placing it on his cock. "Please touch me."

Somewhere in the back of Eobard's mind, a memory surfaced. Something about the exchange of
power between lovers – that the bond between dominant and submissive gets its power not from the one who gives the commands, but from the grace of the lover who gives over to those commands. The trust placed into the dominant partner's hands is what forges those bonds.

"Thank you."

"For what, Eo?"

"For trusting me, for giving me this."

Barry leaned forward and kissed Eobard's head, and then whispered, "I will give you everything."

Eobard breathed out, "Thank you." He wondered, not for the first time, what he'd done right in his life to deserve this generosity, this gift.

Barry took a step closer and Eobard was surrounded, conquered by the lightning that coursed in Barry's veins. All he could feel and breathe and think was Barry Allen. Proximity gave him a gift – Barry's tumescent cock brushing Eobard's lips and Eobard saw no reason to deny himself a taste of this pleasure.

As he sucked, Barry's fingers curled in his hair, pulling Eobard close. Barry's lightning called to his own and he didn't know where he stopped and Barry began and that was good.

But Barry pulled away. "I can't hold back."

Eobard stopped, not wanting to bring this moment to an abrupt end. He pulled Barry onto the bed and stood, pulling off his sweater and his pants. He didn't use his speed, nor did he try for any grace, but when he stood before Barry, naked and erect, Barry's eyes glowed with wonder.

"You are so beautiful, Eo." Barry held out a hand. "Make love to me."

"Always."

Some days ago, Eobard had raided Dr. Snow's medical supplies for a very prosaic tube of K-Y jelly. He'd known she had it in stock because once, a long time ago, he'd signed off on the purchase order. At the time, he'd wondered what she'd need it for but had trusted her judgment. Now, he was simply glad she'd had it for him to steal.

Eo took the precious tube out of the nightstand and knelt between Barry's thighs. "Is this good for you?"

Eyes locked in his, Barry nodded.

Eobard licked his lips. "You have to let me know if anything I'm doing hurts you, or makes you uncomfortable."

Barry smiled. "I know it's going to hurt a bit the first time, but that's not what you're talking about, right?"

"Right." Eobard uncapped the lube, slicked up his fingers, and touched one to Barry's hole, gently, carefully spreading the slick around the tight ring of muscle before attempting to breach him.

Barry moaned, a clear sound of pleasure. "More, please."

By the time Eobard had two fingers in Barry and moving easily, Barry's erection had begun to flag – a natural reaction to the discomfort he must be feeling. "Shall I stop?"
"Oh, no – it's good. It's very good."

"Reach above your head, hold onto the headboard and don't let go. Can you do that for me, Mr. Allen?" Eobard kept his tone firm, commanding.

Barry nodded and complied. The command, and his surrender to it, gave Barry some measure of control.

"You are doing so well. It hurts, I know – but you are so brave."

Barry gasped at the praise and with that, his erection returned. "I want to please you. I want you to be happy."

Eobard could feel the lightning under his skin begin to flare. He pressed forward with three fingers, easing them back and forth before carefully withdrawing. Barry needed more lube and so did Eobard. He slicked both of them up and teased at Barry's rim.

"This is good for you?"

Barry used the leverage from his grasp on the headboard to arch his body forward. "I need you, Eobard. Please, don't make me wait."

As well-prepped as Barry was, it still took an effort to press forward. Eobard fought to keep tight rein on his own needs, not to slam forward until he was buried to his balls and take-take-take. Barry was making it difficult, his body arching and twisting and driving Eobard deeper. Eobard put his hands on Barry's hips to keep him still, to control him.

"I need you so much," Barry begged again. "Please don't make me wait. It hurts and I need you."

Eobard was as deep as he could go and lifted one of Barry's legs over his shoulder, which gave him just a bit more space. Barry rocked back and everything just fit.

"Please…" he repeated.

Eobard rocked into Barry and pulled back, keeping to a torturously slow rhythm, letting the lube and gravity do most of the work.

"Are you all right?"

Barry nodded and said, "Perfect." The two syllables were slurred but there was no mistaking Barry's bliss.

Eobard moved a little quicker, giving into his own need. He grasped Barry's cock with his lube-slicked fingers and stroked in counterpoint to the rhythm of his hips and Barry whined his pleasure.

Time lost all meaning. – It was as if they were trapped within the speed force again; whole universes were born and flourished and died during their pleasure. Barry climaxed in his hands and that set off Eobard's own reaction as Barry's body clamped down around him.

His orgasm was almost painful in its intensity and yet, Eobard didn't want it to end. He'd fought for this moment, in a lifetime that had crossed centuries and dimensions, and he didn't want to ever give it up. Yes, speedster biology was miraculous in its regeneration and endurance, but the feelings he had were too powerful, too intense, and he needed to share them with Barry. He needed to know that Barry felt the same, that this was truly who they were and would always be.
Eobard eased out of Barry, and couldn't help but feel a touch of sadness, post-coital tristesse. It was both perverse and understandable.

"Are you okay?" Barry scooted back up the bed, so he was leaning against the headboard. "You look shattered."

"You look the same." It was easier to deflect than answer Barry's question.

"Well, I've just been well and properly fucked by the man I love. I think I have the right to look shattered. And you've just well and properly fucked the man you love, so I guess you should look the same."

That startled a laugh out of Eobard. "Why am I not surprised that you can take the most complex feelings and make them so understandable?"

Barry just smiled.

"I should clean us up." Eobard made to get out of bed.

"What would you say to not cleaning up? I kind of like your funk all over me. Is that gross?"

Eobard relaxed and pulled Barry into his arms, kissing him. "It's a little gross, but I kind of like it too." He maneuvered them so Barry was resting against him, back to chest, the way they fell asleep most nights. Eobard knew that at some point, Barry would get restless and would turn and drape himself over him. Although it disturbed his sleep, Eobard never minded. He couldn't think of any better blanket than Barry Allen.

But for the moment, they were nestled like spoons and Eobard pulled up the covers. He felt both protective and protected, as if nothing bad would ever happen as long as Barry fell asleep in his arms every night. Barry let out a deep sigh and snuggled deeper under the covers. Eobard kissed that sweet spot at the nape of Barry's neck and followed him into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Cisco's rather pleased with himself. He builds the Speed Cannon and Blue Bell, the breach in the STAR Labs basement, is stabilized. And just in time. It spits out two very unexpected visitors.

Chapter Notes

So sorry for the delay in posting - I was away from my computer all day, and when I finally got home, I was too exhausted to think.

But I think you'll enjoy this nice, long, meaty chapter. It introduces something unexpected into the story (take note of the updated tags). It also happens to be one of my favorite parts. Please let me know what you think of it. Your comments and feedback are greatly appreciated.

Cisco stood back and admired his handiwork.

Constructing the Iron Throne had been something to take pride in. But that had been almost wholly Thawne's design, a replica of what he'd built in the twenty-second century to turn himself into a speedster.

This, however, was a collaborative effort. And while Cisco would never have been able to come up with the design on his own – strange matter wasn't his field – once Thawne had set him on the right path, this puppy was his.

The Speed Cannon.

A trans-dimensional stabilizer that would allow Team Flash to control Blue Bell like an automatic doorway at the local grocery store. No more unwelcome visitors.

Although, come to think of it, only one person had managed to travel through the breach – that so-helpful chemist, Jay Garrick, who’d provided them with their only information about Earth-2. Cisco wasn't even certain how the man had made it through, especially with such terrible injuries. Caitlin had suggested that maybe the portal had stabilized just long enough for the poor man to make the leap, but Cisco hadn't quite bought that. Barry was just grateful to have the information that Jay had delivered.

They had privately concurred that Zoom had used his speed to toss the guy through – that Zoom had wanted them to know that he was coming. It was all part of a campaign of fear. They had just enough information to be terrified, not enough – or so Zoom thought – to make a difference. It's still so weird to know that there was a whole other Earth, with people just like them – wearing their faces but doing different things. Barry had wondered if there was a Flash on Earth-2, if there were heroes fighting against Zoom – a foe they'd never seen on their Earth. At least not until he'd appeared and
all but killed Barry.

Zoom couldn't know that they now had two speedsters, two fully powered speedsters, one of whom was a devious, super-genius time-traveler who had the patience of a lion on the hunt. Nor could Zoom know that the Speed Force itself had given them the way to stop him. That had to count for something, right?

"Ready to turn it on?" Thawne was standing next to him, hands in his pockets and looking like the smug bastard he was.

"Starting the power sequence." Barry was at the control panel – they'd cannibalized the one from the Throne Room, since they weren't going to need to use that again, or so Cisco hoped. "Generators are now on-line and will be ready to feed power into the cells in five-four-three-two-one."

Cisco was about to give Barry the command to flip the switch, but Thawne stepped on his moment. "Turn it on."

Barry turned the direct current on and the four large rings that framed Blue Bell hummed to electrical life. Cisco grinned in satisfaction as Blue Bell turned from an unstable, amorphous mass of energy into a tightly organized blue sphere about three meters in diameter.

Thawne stood there, hands on his hips, grinning with satisfaction. "And it works, so shut her down, Mr. Allen."

But before Barry could turn the Speed Cannon off, someone came through the breach. It wasn't Zoom, but a young girl. She landed with a hard crash on the decking. Cisco stepped forward to help her, but Thawne held him back. Actually, Thawne took him out of the breach room, saying "For your own good" before he locked the doors from the inside.

Never one to just stand by, and thoroughly annoyed by Thawne's protectiveness, Cisco used his override to unlock the breach room doors. And found himself staring at two versions of the same man. Or more precisely, one who was definitely Eobard Thawne and one who might just be Harrison Wells.

Except that Harrison Wells had been murdered by Zoom. And so had his daughter. But the girl who'd arrived first looked just like the Jesse Wells in the video they'd all seen – way too many times – and she was most definitely alive. Cisco is – in a word – startled. The Wells – father and daughter – are supposed to be dead. Cisco had seen their deaths, had felt all kinds of confused grief over the death of the man wearing his murderous - and yet beloved - mentor's face. Then it hits him. Thawne had said that Zoom had been resetting the timeline on his Earth. It seemed that they'd manage to rescue the Wells family before Zoom killed them again.

Right now, there was something of a standoff going on in the breach room. Framed by the once-again-unstable Blue Bell, Wells was standing over his daughter. He was pointing what looked like a pulse rifle at Thawne, who had his hands up, but was – of all things – smiling. The expression wasn't sardonic or one of mildly detached amusement – so familiar to Cisco – but a smile of genuine and surprised pleasure.

Which might explain why Thawne hadn't disarmed his doppelganger.

Then Wells pointed the rifle at him and shouted, "Stay away from us, you filthy meta-human."

"Me?" Cisco pointed at himself. Yeah, he was a meta, but it wasn't like he was evil or anything.

"Yes, you – Rever. I know all about you and your dirty tricks." Wells spat out that name like a
curse. "I killed you once, I won't hesitate to kill you again."

It seemed he was fated to die at the hands of a man wearing that face, regardless of the universe. Instead of laughing at the irony, Cisco held out his hands. "I don't know who this 'Reverb' guy is, but he's not me. Just little ol' Vibe here. And no one means you or your daughter any harm."

Whatever he said seemed to set this Wells off and the pulse rifle glowed blue just before –

Barry disarmed him.

If the circumstances weren't quite so tragic, Cisco might have laughed at the way the man did a double take – first at his suddenly empty hands and then at Barry. He looked so confused.

"You? You, too?" This Wells turned to Barry. "You're a meta-human? And a damn speedster, too?"

Cisco was surprised at how betrayed the man sounded.

Barry tossed the pulse rifle to Cisco and approached Wells, hands outstretched in a non-threatening gesture. "Like Cisco said, we mean you no harm. You're safe here."

Wells shook his head, his voice rising in hysteria. "No, no one is safe from Zoom. He's coming. Zoom is coming and he's going to kill us all."

Cisco flicked a glance over at Thawne. The look of fond bemusement and been replaced by one of deep concern. But unlike Barry, Thawne didn't try to soothe or placate Harrison Wells. He disappeared for a heartbeat and returned with a pressure syringe in hand. "You have to the count of three to calm down."

"Or what? You kill me with that?"

"Because you're also a fucking speedster?"

"Believe me, Harrison – killing you is the very last thing I'd ever want to do. We – all of us – are very glad to see you and your daughter alive."

Harrison didn't believe that, shouting, "You – all of you – stay away from my child."

Said child, however, seemed a bit more rational than her father. "Dad, calm down. Maybe these people really want to help."

"Jesse – they're all meta-humans. You know what they'll do."

Wells was panicked and cornered and Cisco knew this was going to end badly. Barry was poised to intervene. Thawne was still holding the pressure syringe and it seemed that he wasn't going to bother with the countdown.

Wells reached inside his coat and that was that. Barry scooped up the girl as Thawne injected Wells with whatever was in the syringe and caught him as he collapsed.

Barry asked, "Med bay?"

Thawne nodded and they both sped off. Cisco followed at normal speed, absorbing the craziness of the moment. He'd seen some pretty weird shit over the last two years, but this might just take the prize.
By the time Cisco arrived, Wells was on a gurney and Thawne had put some kind of handcuff with a glowing blue light on him. The girl, Jesse, was strangely calm, and Cisco was worried that it was the type of calm that preceded a major meltdown.

Since both Barry and Thawne had retreated to the far side of the med bay and Caitlin was treating Wells, it was up to Cisco to play ambassador to the frightened young girl sitting on one of the gurneys. "Welcome to Earth-1 and S.T.A.R. Labs. I'm Cisco Ramon – not your guy, Reverb." He tilted his head towards Caitlin. "That's Doctor Snow, Caitlin, who's treating your dad." He pointed a thumb at the two speedsters. "Over there is Barry Allen – we call him the Flash. And the guy who looks like your dad is really not your dad's doppelganger. His name's Eobard Thawne. It's a mouthful, I know, but you get accustomed to it after a while. And you are Jesse Wells, right?"

Jesse looked startled when Cisco said Thawne's name, but she didn't give him a chance to wonder about that. "How do you know who I am? Is my doppelganger around?"

"No – we have no Jesse Wells on this Earth. But – " Not sure how much to tell the girl, Cisco glanced back at Barry and Thawne. Both men were less than subtle with their head shakes. "We've had some intelligence about what's been happening on your Earth. Your name, and your dad's, came up."

"You know about Zoom, then?" Jesse's voice became a little shaky.

"Yeah, he's been here."

Jesse looked around. "Is that why there's no one here? Has your world been destroyed, too?"

Cisco really didn't want to go into the whole backstory – not with Thawne standing around, looking like he'd just won the lottery.

Barry entered the conversation. "Actually, Zoom hasn't launched a full-scale attack here, yet. He's shown his face a few times, though. He handed my ass to me on one rather memorable occasion and has sent a bunch of metas through the breaches to cause some chaos, but mostly he's been busy on your Earth."

Jesse wrapped her arms around herself and sniffled. Caitlin finished with the unconscious Harrison Wells and came over to her. "Are you okay? Do you need me to check you out?"

Jesse flinched and took a step back. "No – no." She held up her hands in a stay-away gesture.

Caitlin didn't take offense, but she was concerned. "What's the matter?"

"Sorry – you just look kind of like one of the metas on my Earth."

Caitlin frowned. "Really? I don't know how that's possible – I don't have the meta gene." She looked over at Cisco, then at Barry and Thawne. All of them gave a collective shrug.

"Well, you look and sound like Killer Frost. She works with Deathstorm and Reverb. They – " Jesse rubbed her arms. "helped Zoom when he kidnapped me. They liked to come to my cell and take turns tormenting me. Killer Frost would turn the air so cold it was hard to breathe and Deathstorm liked to singe my clothes, make my skin blister."

Caitlin bit her lip. "I'm sorry. My husband – he is part of Firestorm and he's not evil. He's a hero. He'd never, ever hurt anyone deliberately."

Jesse edged closer to her father's gurney. She didn't look like she believed Caitlin.
Cisco had to ask, "What did my doppelganger do to you?"

Jesse shook her head. "I'd rather not say."

A few minutes ago, when Wells had accused him of being evil, Cisco had thought it was kind of cool. But faced with the concrete evidence that his doppelganger was evil, he felt sick. And yet, this girl – who'd clearly suffered at the hands of Team Flash's evil twins – had seen past the resemblance and tried to get her father to calm down.

Barry reached out to Jesse. "No one here is evil."

To Cisco's amusement, Thawne let out a tiny cough.

What Jesse said next was like a knife to the heart, however.

She looked at Barry and there were tears in her eyes. "You died saving my life. You and your wife and my dad found me and we'd gotten back to S.T.A.R. Labs. But Zoom found us there and he grabbed your wife and – and – ripped out her throat. You tried to save her but Zoom punched his hand through your chest. Dad grabbed me and we ran for the breach. It was our only hope of escape but we both thought we were going to die because no matter what we'd tried before, we'd never been able to get through. And then the breach stabilized and we were able to come here. I saw you and that's how I knew we were safe. Because Barry Allen wouldn't be evil. Couldn't be evil." She ended her horrible story with a sob.

Barry did what Cisco was not sure he, himself, should do. He wrapped his arms around the poor girl and told her it would be all right.

:::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

You really never know how the day is going to end when you wake up, do you? Eobard sat next to the unconscious man in the bed and wondered at this minor miracle.

Harrison Wells. A man he'd never thought he'd have the chance to see alive ever again.

Of course, this wasn't his Harrison. He'd buried that man in an unmarked grave beside a quiet county road just outside of Starling City, a few dozen yards from where Tess Morgan, Harrison's wife, had died.

This Harrison Wells was much older; he looked battle-worn and at the end of his rope, which didn't surprise Eobard, given what the girl had said she and her father had been through. And that was perhaps the biggest difference between his Harrison and the one in front of him. His Harrison had had no children, and on several occasions, had professed a profound disinterest in them, although Eobard could always hear the lie in those words. It was only that Tess was dead, and Harrison wasn't going to ever have children without her.

Eobard wondered what had happened to this man's Tess. If he'd loved her as much as his Harrison had loved his Tess Morgan. Then Eobard swallowed hard as memories not his own surfaced and tears threatened. This wasn't the time to reminisce.

Eobard was grateful that the team had taken the girl away for food and comfort and reassurance. Barry hadn't said anything to him about the news that the girl – Jesse – had brought. His lover was staying on task, staying focused, and Eobard took a great deal of pleasure in that, even though he'd mocked Barry last night about this very thing.

There were still way too many details to work through, and the appearance of Wells, father and
daughter, was an added complication.

And to think that once upon a time, he’d thought the biggest problem he ever faced was returning to the future. Eobard had to laugh.

"What's so damn funny?" Harrison Wells opened his eyes and growled at him.

"Welcome back, Doctor Wells. We have a lot to discuss." Eobard schooled his face into the well-practiced lines of his own version of the man and took pleasure in paraphrasing his original words to Barry Allen. Such small amusements provided a surprisingly large amount of private gratification.

Wells sat up and in the process, discovered that he'd been cuffed to the bed rail. "What the hell?"

"It's for your own protection."

To Eobard's surprise, Wells reached for the back of his collar with his free hand and pulled out a pair of lock picks. This was something *his* Harrison would never have thought of. But then, his Harrison had been a gentle soul and likely would never have survived even a fraction of what this man had lived through. Wells sat up and pulled his cuffed hand as close to his body as the shackle allowed.

"Those won't work."

Wells glared at him and then looked at the cuff, thoroughly annoyed. "These aren't police issue."

"That's because I'm not the police." Eobard approached the bed. "I'll uncuff you if you promise not to try to leave."

"Where's my daughter?"

"She's probably sleeping right now. She was hungry and tired and more than a little traumatized. My team is good with taking care of the wounded and needy. Sometimes too good at that."

"Your team? You mean Reverb and Killer Frost?"

"No, I mean Cisco Ramon and Doctor Caitlin Snow and Barry Allen. Three of the kindest and most decent people you'll ever have the good fortune to know. And I do suppose that Joe West, and Iris and Edward Thawne are part of the team, too. But they're not here right now."

Wells was distracted by something quite interesting. "Thawne?"

"Yes, Thawne. A rather distinguished name for a rather distinguished family. Why do you ask?"

"I … knew a Thawne, once."

*Oh, this was getting very interesting.* "You did?"

"But his name wasn't Edward. It was Eobard."

"What?" Shocked, Eobard sat back down.

"Eobard. That was the given name of the Thawne I knew. He was called Eobard. It's a strange name, but it suited him." Wells scrubbed at his face. "Not that it matters. He's dead. Zoom killed him. The monster's first act of destruction was to punch his fist through my – my partner's chest."

Of all the things Eobard had thought he'd have to deal with, discovering that *he* had a doppelganger in the twenty-first century was the last on the last. And that his doppelganger was connected to
another Harrison Wells. Eobard could barely wrap his brain around this.

Then Wells asked the question that Eobard was dreading. "Is there an Eobard Thawne on this Earth?"

Still caught off guard by this turn of events, Eobard didn't have an answer prepared. He wasn't ready to tell this Wells the truth.

From Eobard's silence, Wells made an assumption. An incorrect one. "He's dead, too, isn't he?"

Eobard shook his head. He couldn't lie – not about this. Even if Cisco hadn't spilled the beans about his identity to Wells' daughter, pretending to be Harrison Wells again was not something he was prepared to do.

"No?" There was so much hope in Wells' voice that Eobard didn't have to guess to hard at the relationship between his doppelganger and the man before him.

And so, he let the truth slip free, like a dog of war. "I am Eobard Thawne."

It was interesting to see Wells process that information. Fear, anger, wonder, then – nothing. Instead of asking how Eobard had transformed his appearance, Wells struggled. "Let me out of here, I need to see my daughter." He pulled on the cuff. "I need to see Jesse, now."

"No. You're staying put. We have much to talk about." Eobard didn't unlock the cuff, instead he picked up one of the remotes and activated a monitor. "Your daughter is fine." He found Jesse Wells with Cisco, Caitlin and Barry. And the beta team, too – Iris and Edward and Joe West had returned. The seven of them were lounging around the workroom. Jesse Wells looked a lot cleaner. Her burnt and torn clothing exchanged for S.T.A.R. Labs sweats, there were bags from Big Belly Burger on almost every visible surface, and she was laughing at something Cisco just said. Eobard turned up the sound.

"So, let me get this straight – you named the breach in the basement 'Blue Bell'?" Jesse was saying.

Barry replied, giving Cisco's shoulder an affectionate squeeze, "Cisco names almost everything here – the equipment, the metas, the missions."

Snow noted, "Except for Rainbow Raider – I named him." And everyone threw napkins at her.

Eobard turned off the monitor. "Your daughter is fine."

Wells made a face. "As fine as anyone could be who had just spent the last four months as Zoom's captive."

"At least she's not dead."

"What do you mean by that?" Wells pulled at the manacle. "And would you take this off?"

"I still don't have your promise to behave."

Wells grimaced and then, with obvious reluctance, nodded. "I'll behave."

"Very well. And remember, I'm a speedster. You won't get far or have the chance to do much damage."

Wells nodded again, but to Eobard's surprise, he muttered, "Filthy speedster." So, apparently his doppelganger wasn't one.
Eobard pressed his right thumb against the box set in the center of the cuff and it unlocked.

Wells rubbed his right wrist in his left hand. "Hmm – keyed to your fingerprint. I should have realized – I could have been out of these very easily. Assuming that you really are my genetic doppelganger and just didn't undergo some clever plastic surgery."

"No, I'm your genetic double." Eobard wasn't going to go into any details about differences between his Harrison and this man. "But unless you were prepared to rip off your thumb, you wouldn't have been able to unlock it. Your right hand was cuffed and this – " He held up the shackle, "was keyed to my right thumb."

Wells let out a startled laugh. "Now I am beginning to believe that you just might be Eobard Thawne. He always thought a dozen moves ahead."

"A chess player?"

"Grandmaster."

"Is that how you met?" Eobard couldn't stifle his curiosity.

"Not at all. I don't play. Don't have the patience for games. Jesse does, though. She's brilliant and was the only one who could give Eobard a run for his money." Wells wiped his face. "Just one of the many losses my daughter's suffered for my arrogance."

"The particle accelerator explosion." Eobard needed to get down to business. "You are responsible for the meta-humans on your Earth." From the data that the traveler had provided all of those months ago, it was obvious that the Harrison Wells from that timeline had denied the connection, all the while trying to profit from the meta-human threat.

"How do you know so much about what happened?"

"There was a similar accident here, with similar results."

"Before or after you stole my counterpart's DNA?"

_Ah, and so it begins._ "I will gift you with a certain amount of the truth, Harrison Wells, if just because you'll hear it from the team. I engineered the accelerator accident for the sole purpose of creating the Flash. But unlike your accelerator explosion, I knew what I was doing and minimized the effects of the dark matter fallout." He didn't bother to mention that seventeen people had died that night. "I didn't vent the dark matter underground and let it concentrate, like you did."

Wells ignored that dig. "I notice, though, that you haven't answered my question about my doppelganger."

Eobard smiled and it wasn't a nice expression. "I don't owe you any other explanation."

Wells tossed out, "I could always ask Barry Allen about you. I somehow have the feeling that it wouldn't be difficult to get him to switch his allegiance. You're a copy. I'm the real thing."

Wells was baiting him and even though it was an obvious ploy, it worked. Eobard felt the ever-dormant rage that followed on any threat to Barry quickly rise in him and he didn't even try to control it. And perhaps it was time to show this bastard who he was dealing with. He leaned over the man who so resembled a long-dead friend and ground out, "You stay away from Barry Allen. He's mine." He voice was deep from the speed vibrations and in Wells' glasses, he could see the reflection of eyes gone red.
Wells scrambled back as much as he could – which wasn't far. His mouth opened, but words didn't form through the terror that Eobard was causing.

"Yes, I am the filthy speedster you called me before, and I could kill you in an instant."

Wells found his voice. "But you won't."

"You threaten to take what is mine, and I just might." Eobard dialed it back, letting the red in his eyes fade out, but he didn't pull away from his doppelganger. "We have an understanding?"

The man actually laughed. "We do, Thawne. You are not me, and very clearly you are not my Eobard."

"Exactly." Eobard stepped back. "We have a lot to talk about, and most of this will make you very uncomfortable."

"Even more than I am now? Do you have any idea how strange it is to be talking to my mirror image who is really my murdered lover's doppelganger?"

"It's going to get even stranger."

"What is?" That came from Barry, who entered the med bay carrying two Big Belly Burger bags. He handed one to Wells. "Jesse said you like a double-double with bacon and cheese and extra pickle."

Barry gave the second bag to Eobard, who opened it up and breathed deeply of that delicious perfume. Maybe it was his display of dominance, but Eobard was suddenly hungry. He pulled out the burger and meticulously unwrapped the top half. He met Wells' eyes over the burger and took a neat bite.

"What's going to get stranger?" Barry stood at Eobard's back and put a hand on his shoulder.

Eobard finished the burger, then tilted his head so it rested on Barry's hand. "I was just about to tell Wells about …" He didn't see any need to continue, Barry was certainly smart enough to figure out that he was going to tell Wells about the timeline resets.

"Ah. Yeah." Barry turned his hand so it cupped Eobard's cheek. Eobard rubbed against it like a cat. But his eyes were still on Wells' face, watching the man's reaction as Barry made their relationship obvious. Wells broke their eye-contact and concentrated on his burger.

Barry traced the smile lines on his face before bending down and whispering, "Give the poor guy some slack, okay? No need for bloodshed."

Startled by that, Eobard looked up at Barry.

Barry kept his mouth at Eobard's ear. "The cameras work both ways. It's a good thing that Caitlin had taken Jesse to one of the bunk rooms on nine before I checked on you. I don't think she was up to seeing you go all Reverse-Flash on her dad."

Eobard licked his lips, unaccountably turned on by Barry's slyness. Then Barry stroked a hand down his chest before very slowly and very deliberately biting his earlobe, while staring at a very appalled Harrison Wells. It was all Eobard could do not to pick him up and race out of the room.

Barry stood up, smiled, and straightened his – suit? Eobard hadn't realized that Barry had been wearing it.

"I will leave you two to discuss what you have to discuss. But remember, we are on a timeline."
Those breaches have to get shut and soon." Barry gave another pointed stare at Wells, kissed the top of Eobard's head like he was a well-behaved child and sauntered out of the med bay.

Eobard watched Barry leave, that ass swinging back and forth. As mesmerizing as a pendulum.

"You speedsters, you're as crazy as fuck."

Eobard looked back at Wells and nodded. "I've been accused of madness before. And lately, I've had reason to doubt Barry's sanity. But you have nothing to worry about, as long as you remember that Barry Allen is mine."

"And I should point out that he's – ah – just as possessive of you."

A trickle of heat uncurled in Eobard's belly. "Yes, Barry is. Do you know that he punched the avatar of the Speed Force in the face when it was kissing me?"

Wells blinked. "That barely makes sense."

Eobard silently agreed. It was wholly ridiculous if one didn't know the rest of the story. He waved a hand. "And for our purposes, not relevant. Finish your burger and I'll fill you in on the salient points."

Wells gave him a dirty look but took a bite.

Eobard started at the beginning. While Cisco had provided a wealth of information during the months that they'd communicated across time, most of that had been about Zoom. When they’d been constructing the Iron Throne, Cisco and Barry and Caitlin had taken turns filling him in on all of the meta-human activity that had led up to Zoom's attack. "Several months ago, while I was… away, Central City was subject to attacks by some unusually powerful meta-humans." Eobard named a few of them, but didn't get a reaction from Wells until the last. "Including one called 'Doctor Light'."

Wells reacted to that name with a flinch.

"Ah, so you know her."

"Yes. She wasn't particularly vicious when she started out, but she hooked up with Zoom and quickly became a killer. My Central City became a tiny bit safer when she disappeared. I guess she landed here."

Eobard nodded. "She promptly tried to kill her non-meta doppelganger and take her place. It didn't work, for a variety of reasons. But shortly after that, a human – not a meta – came through the same breach that you and your daughter did. A scientist, apparently, and from what I was told, he was very badly injured when he arrived. He gave the team a data drive with the history of Zoom on your Earth and expired from his injuries."

"Not possible."

"What do you mean?"

"No one could get to the breach at S.T.A.R. Labs on my Earth. It's in a secured sub-basement that houses the data redundancies for high security projects at S.T.A.R. Labs. Accessible only by retinal scan and full handprint."

"I was told that the man was a research chemist, perhaps he was one of your employees?"
Wells was emphatic in his denial. "Even if he was the head of a department, he couldn't get into that facility. There were never more than two people who had access and one of them is dead."

Eobard took a guess. "You and your Eobard?"

"Right." The grief in Wells eyes was profound and familiar. It made Eobard ache.

"Could Zoom get in there? Phase through the walls?"

Wells considered the question. "Possibly. You think Zoom sent that guy here? Why?"

Eobard shrugged, "The first salvo in a campaign of terror, I think. Not my way of doing things, but it was effective." He geared up to tell Wells about the timeline resets and his own death, but Wells had his own questions and Eobard was reluctant to deliver the news.

"Do you know the man's name? I know most of the scientific community in Central City."

"Barry mentioned it just the other day." Eobard snapped his fingers as tried to remember. "Garrick, I think. John, no Jay Garrick."

Wells looked shocked. "No – no, that can't be. You have to be mistaken."

"Why?"

"Do you know if they buried this man? Or if there are any photos? I need to see the body."

"I don't have a clue, but I can ask."

"Do it."

Normally, Eobard wouldn't react well to having an order barked at him, but the urgency in Wells' voice was disturbing. He called down to the workroom. Cisco picked up.

"What's going on?"

"Your helpful chemist – Garrick – what did you do with the body?"

"It's in cold storage, in the morgue. Why?"

"Not sure yet." Eobard looked at Wells, who'd finally hopped off the gurney and started pacing. "You and Barry and Caitlin, meet me down there. I have a feeling we've got a problem on our hands."

Wells stopped pacing. "I don't want Jesse to be part of this."

Eobard understood. "Cisco, I know you said the girl was sleeping. Can you have Caitlin stay with her, make sure she doesn't go wandering?"

There was a moment's pause and Eobard could hear a muffled conversation. "Iris will keep watch, okay?"

"Fine. See you there in a few."

Eobard took Wells down to the morgue, and was faintly amused at the expression on the man's face as they walked through the deserted corridors.
"So, what happened here?"

"Everyone left after the particle accelerator accident."

"They didn't stick by you?"

Eobard let out a tiny laugh. "Those who I wanted to leave, left. Those who I needed to stay, stayed."

"Someday, I'd like the whole story."

"If we all live through this, you might just be sorry you asked for that." Eobard had no intention of telling Harrison Wells anything more than he had to. Although he suspected that Cisco might have already given the details to the daughter and probably wouldn't hesitate to offer them up to her father if the request was made.

Barry, Caitlin and Cisco, plus Joe and Edward, were waiting at the door to the morgue facility. Which really wasn't a morgue, per se, just the section of S.T.A.R. Labs with cryogenic facilities. Cisco had adapted them to long-term body storage after the first meta-humans had died under their watch.

And then the day – already one of the more amusing in his life – got just a little better when Wells and Edward laid eyes on each other.

His ancestor commented first. "Holy shit, you really do look just like him. I hope you're not as big of a prick as he is, though."

Wells looked like he'd been slapped. Eobard took great amusement in making the introduction. "Harrison Wells of Earth-whatever, meet Detective Edward Thawne. My ancestor. We've had some issues …"

Edward chuckled and added, "You kidnapped me."

"And clearly, we still are working through them. But Detective Thawne is a good man and a welcome ally." Eobard stuck his hands in his pockets and rocked back on his heels.

Wells, for his part, stared at Edward and nodded very slightly. "You do look like a Thawne. A real Thawne."

Had Eobard not found his own progenitors and his sibling so wanting, he might have taken insult at that. Besides, he suspected that Wells' Eobard was nothing like him. Maybe in exchange for the information Wells wanted about this S.T.A.R. Labs, he could get the story of how his doppelganger had ended up in their twenty-first century, without being a speedster. But that was for another, less fraught, time.

Eobard unlocked the morgue door and ushered the team in. Cisco led everyone to the actual cold storage and pulled open the cabinet marked "Jay Garrick – E-2".

Eobard blinked. That was a face he'd seen in his nightmares for a year. That was the face of the unmasked Zoom in the headlines from the timeline that he'd prevented. The headline that announced the death of the Flash in 2017.

But Eobard didn't say anything. He didn't have to.

Harrison Wells looked at the body and promptly and very thoroughly lost it. "That bastard, that devious, evil, murdering bastard."
"What's going on?"

Wells wiped his mouth. "If I'm right, this is a lot worse than I expected." The man paced.

"I doubt that." Eobard raised an eyebrow at Wells' burgeoning hysteria.

"Really?"

"Yes, really, because things really are a hell of a lot worse than you expected." Eobard twisted Wells' words back at him. "But you tell me what you think's going on." He looked over the room and found Barry leaning against one of the lab tables, his expression blank.

"This man – " Wells gestured to the corpse, "the man who called himself Jay Garrick, who conveniently handed over the data on Zoom and died? He was Zoom."

Cisco pushed his way forward. "No – not possible. He died right in front of us. Weeks before Zoom attacked Barry."

Eobard shook his head and gently said, "Cisco, remember – you've seen a speedster in two places at once."

Cisco snarked back, "Thank you for reminding me of my own murder. And somehow, I don't think speed mirages last this long."

Eobard conceded the point with a nod.

Thankfully, Wells ignored that by-play. "This man is Zoom. I saw his face when he pretended to be the Flash on my Earth, and then when kidnapped my daughter. He wasn't wearing the mask. He wanted me to know who he was. And he knew that even if I told the authorities, they wouldn't believe me. I'd publicly denied S.T.A.R. Labs involvement in creation of the meta-humans for a long time. And Jay Garrick – The Flash – had a grand time revealing that and destroying my credibility."

Barry interrupted, "Wait – you had a Flash on your world?"

"Yes, yes – that's what I've been telling you. Jay Garrick is the name that Zoom used when he pretended to be The Flash on my Earth. He created a very convincing backstory about being a chemist and working to clean up heavy water. And that he's been working late on the night the particle accelerator exploded, which turned him into a speedster. As a 'hero', Garrick was an ineffectual jackass. But when Zoom took my daughter, I found out why he was so inept at catching all of the meta-humans causing havoc in my Central City. Because he was controlling them."

"What a mind fuck," Cisco, ever irreverent, commented.

Joe, however, needed clarification. "So – the man who called himself Jay Garrick is Zoom? Is it possible he kidnapped his doppelganger from here and used him?"

Wells grimaced. "It's more complicated than that. Zoom really isn't Jay Garrick. That's an alias used Zoom used to fool people – to give them false hope that rescue was at hand. So yes, Crisco – a total mind fuck. Zoom's really a psychopathic serial killer named Hunter Zolomon. He was convicted of murdering twenty-three people, and those were only the bodies that were found. We – I – believe he was hit with the dark matter during a court-ordered electro-shock treatment and that transformed him into a speedster. The public was never informed that Zolomon escaped, and it took some digging, but I found out that he'd disappeared from the secure psychiatric facility on the night that the particle accelerator exploded, and that three attendants were reported missing – four months later. I suspect that Zolomon murdered them, but that that was part of the cover-up."
Barry asked, "And no one recognized Garrick as this Zolomon guy?"

"No. When Zolomon was hard at work as a serial killer, he had some … hygiene issues. Long dirty hair and a beard. Garrick, as the Flash, was clean cut in the typical superhero way."

"You don't seem to particularly care for heroes, do you?" Barry asked with studied indifference.

"No, I don't. You're usually a worthless, ineffective pack of fame-seekers and glory hounds. In it for the adulation."

Eobard looked at Barry and they shared a private smile. On this Earth, in this Central City, nothing was further from the truth.

"But to get back to the problem at hand – Zoom's cloning himself." Wells waved his hand at the corpse. "There could be more than one of him out there."

While there was precedent for that, Eobard was almost positive that this version of Jay Garrick – or Hunter Zolomon – wasn't a clone. He wanted proof, though. "Caitlin – can you take a tissue sample and run an exposure test for dark matter?"

Caitlin nodded. While everyone watched silently, she found a pair of examination gloves and a tissue sample kit. Then she took a small slice of skin before returning the body to its cold storage cabinet.

Joe asked, "What's that going to prove?"

Eobard herded everyone out of the morgue and back towards the Cortex, before explaining. "It will prove that the body in the freezer is not a clone, but was from a time before the particle accelerator exploded. That it's a time remnant that Zoom killed."

Everyone except Barry looked extremely confused, and honestly tired of having to explain everything, Eobard gestured for Barry to explain.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Barry and Eobard educate Harry on Zoom's real intentions. Harry is NOT a happy man.

"Time remnant?" Barry wasn't one-hundred percent certain he knew what Eobard was talking about.

"You can figure it out – just start from the beginning and work through it. From what we were told." Eobard's tone was gentle and encouraging, the voice of a mentor and friend.

Barry still wasn't sure what a time remnant was, but buoyed by Eobard's faith in his intelligence, he started to explain. "Zoom is not just a speedster – not even just an evil speedster. He's trying to destroy the fabric of the universe."

Dr. Wells raised an eyebrow and said, with a hefty dose of contempt, "That is quite a statement, Doctor Allen. Excuse me, is it Doctor or Mr. Allen."

"Doctor?"

"My apologies. Your doppelganger worked for me at S.T.A.R. Labs. He had a PhD in forensic chemistry."

Barry nodded. Jesse Wells had mentioned that his counterpart on Earth-2 had worked with her dad, and she'd known him for years. He just didn't like anyone with that face except Eobard calling him Mr. Allen. "No Ph.d, and please, just call me Barry."

"As you wish, Barry, but I still don't understand how you can say with such certainty that Zoom is trying to rip apart the universe. I'm not even sure I understand how that's possible."

"How disappointing. For a scientist, you are very close-minded," Eobard commented, arms crossed over his chest. "I would think after years of association with my counterpart, you'd accept the impossible with your morning coffee."

Wells growled.

Barry sighed and stepped between the pair. "Look – we have it from a very reliable source."

"Really? And I suppose you won't be able to tell me." Skepticism dripped from every word Wells spoke.

Barry was getting fed up with this Dr. Wells and his obnoxious, close-minded attitude. "The Speed Force told us. And I doubt you believe me, but it's true. One of the reasons why Zoom is so powerful is that he is destroying linear time in your universe. He brings your world to the edge of destruction and then resets the clock. We suspect that he takes time back to before the particle accelerator accident."

With that, suddenly everything clicked into place. Barry turned to look at Eobard, who gave him an encouraging smile. "Time remnants are versions of ourselves from other timelines. Zoom grabbed a version of himself when he reset the timeline."
Eobard clapped lightly. "Exactly, Mr. Allen. I knew you'd make the connection."

Barry grinned and basked in Eobard's approval. And then he remembered his other selves, the ones that had been at the scene of his mother's murder.

Dr. Wells distracted him from that thought. "So, are you saying is that the body in the morgue isn't a clone, but an earlier version of Zolomon? One he brought through into a new timeline?"

Eobard notes, "Yes, and that's why Caitlin needs to test for the presence of dark matter. If your Eobard is correct, then the tissue sample will be negative for dark matter, because they hadn't been naturally present before the particle accelerator exploded and released those molecules into the atmosphere – the time of highest dosage. This version might have absorbed some dark matter if it had lived for a while afterwards, but if you compare it to, say, your levels of residual radiation, or mine, you'll find the amounts negligible."

Caitlin came back into the Cortex and everyone looked at her for the news. "It's just as Professor Thawne suspected. There is almost no presence of any dark matter in the tissue sample. I used Barry's stored samples as a baseline, but if you want, Doctor Wells, I could take a sample from you, seeing as this… person… came from your Earth."

To Barry's surprise, Dr. Wells shoved his hands in his pockets. "No, that's not necessary. I can accept your findings. But I still don't know if I can accept that Zoom's resetting the timeline." He paused and shook his head. "Or perhaps I don't want to admit to something so horrifying." Dr. Wells went into one of the side labs and started examining something he found there. Barry understood that he'd just been handed a terrible burden and needed time to process it.

Cisco nudged at him and whispered, "You know, there is a way to prove to Wells that everything we've just told him is true."

Barry grimaced. "Do you think it's a good idea? To let him see that?"

"I don't know. Maybe not. The guy seems on the edge."

"Maybe you could vibe him?" Barry suggested.

"That would only prove to me that he's been through multiple timelines."

Eobard joined them, putting his hand on Barry's shoulder. "I think he needs to see it, as horrifying as it is."

Barry wasn't so sure of that. "Watching your child die and then seeing your own horrific murder could have lasting and terrible repercussions." Barry couldn't help but remember semi-witnessing his mother's death. "And the guy seems close to snapping, you know what I mean?" Barry snuck a look at Doctor Wells. Both Joe and Eddie were keeping an eye on him, too. Or more accurately, standing guard and not being at all subtle about it.

Eobard seemed to consider what Barry had said. "Then offer him the choice. Tell him what you have and let him decide."

Barry wondered if he were making a terrible mistake as he nodded to Joe and Eddie and joined Dr. Wells in the side lab. He sat down on one of the tall stools and watched as Harrison Wells continued to examine the contents of one of the workbenches – the discarded remains of a failed power module for a breach bomb.

Finally, the man sat down and stared at him. Barry stared back.
To his surprise, Dr. Wells broke first. "It's really very unnerving."

Barry let a small and hopefully compassionate smile curve his lips. "I would guess. Finding your dead lover's doppelganger inhabiting what looks like your body."

Dr. Wells waved a hand, dismissing that. "Yes, but honestly, my Eobard would have found it quite amusing."

Barry nodded, and he wasn't surprised.

Dr. Wells clarified. "I mean, it's unnerving talking to you. I watched you die about -- " He checked his watch. "Five hours ago. You and your wife were killed trying to save my life. My daughter's life." Dr. Wells snorted. "An unlikely pair of heroes. Or perhaps, I should say, you were an unlikely hero. Your wife was never afraid of anything."

Barry didn't want to hear about his doppelganger being married to Iris. "No, not my wife. Iris West of this Earth is married and very much in love with Eddie Thawne."

Wells conceded the point, "Okay, okay – but you have to understand that it's hard for me to make that distinction. You – your double – was the head of my forensic chemistry department for the last five years, and when I say you were – he was – the stereotypical nerd, it's meant with affection. My Barry Allen was a valued part of the S.T.A.R. Labs team and I knew you – him – and Detective West very well on a personal as well as a professional level." Wells shook his head, apparently unable to separate the dead Barry from the living one in front of him. "You were a smart guy, passionate about your work, but you weren't hero material. Not in the least."

Barry understood what Wells was saying, but he had to enforce the distinction - that he and his doppelganger were different people. "Not until my counterpart helped you rescue your daughter."

Wells continued, apparently not hearing what Barry was saying. "You – "

Barry interrupted again. "My counterpart – "

"Right. Your counterpart. He wasn't a metahuman, just an ordinary and very smart guy who managed to find the courage to do something extraordinary. He discovered where Zoom was hiding Jesse and helped me rescue her. And got himself killed because of that. Another death on my head. And now you tell me that Zoom might have been setting all of this up, that my world has been dying over and over again? That everyone and everything I care about has already been destroyed more than once because of my hubris?" Wells scrubbed at his face.

Barry made a decision and hoped it was the right one. "You need to know, Zoom didn't spare you."

"What do you mean?"

"He killed you and your daughter, at least once. Probably more than once."

"How could you know this? Even if I accept that Zoom's resetting the timeline, how could you know?"

"When Jay Garrick – " Barry corrected himself, "when this Hunter Zolomon's time remnant came through the portal, he didn't just tell us about Zoom, he had a data drive with him. It had records of metahuman activity on your world." Barry paused and swallowed. "And also videos of Zoom as he killed people – one of his minions recorded his 'work.' There's video of your death."

Wells blinked. "My death?"
"Yes. Zoom murdered you on camera."

Wells buried his face in his hands.

Barry buried the compassion he felt for the man. This was the tipping point, and he couldn't afford to let it pass. "After he killed Jesse."

Wells looked up, his face a mask of grief. "I want to see it. I need to see it."

Barry didn't argue. He just got up, went back into the Cortex and pulled up the video he'd watched too many times.

The images were crystal clear, the camera tightly focused as Zoom cornered Wells and his daughter in their version of the Time Vault, using brute strength to rip open the hidden doors. It was over in a matter of seconds as Zoom tore open Jesse's throat and in the same motion, punched his fist through Wells' chest, pulling out his heart. The bodies hit the floor and the camera focused on the faces of the dead, Zoom's laughter and the cackles of the camera-wielding meta-human a terrifying soundtrack.

"Daddy?"

Barry hit the pause button and spun around. Jesse Wells was standing there, Iris right behind, shaking her head.

The girl ran to her father. "What was that?"

Wells looked like he was about to growl at Iris, but instead focused on his child. "It was something that happened once, but won't ever happen again, I promise."

No one in the Cortex said anything as father comforted daughter. Barry glanced over at Eobard, whose expression was uncharacteristically grim. Barry wanted to wrap his arms around the man he loved and make similar promises. But this was not the time. They needed to show strength, not emotion.

"What do you need from us?" Wells' voice was harsh.

"Nothing," Eobard answered for the team. "You were an unexpected – and not necessarily welcome – complication. Our plan doesn't change with your presence here."

Wells was nonplussed at that answer, but doesn't debate it. "What is your plan?"

Eobard looked at Barry, and it was clear he was wondering how much – if any – of their plan they should share. Barry couldn't think of any reason why they should hold back. Wells had as much of a stake in this as anyone, maybe more than all of them.

"We – Eobard and I – will be closing the breaches tonight with these."

Barry picked up one of the completed bombs and handed it to Wells, who examined it with a scientist's curiosity.

"How does this work?"

Eobard took the bomb back and set it on the table. "CFL quark matter. The principle is similar to the energy output of the Speed Cannon – what we used to stabilize Blue Bell. But the orientation of the strange matter is opposite – "

"So the insulation properties are inverted, and when deployed it disrupts the energy of the breach instead of stabilizing it." Wells completed the thought.
Eobard nodded regally.

"But closing all of the breaches means you're dooming my world."

Barry corrected him, "No, not all of the breaches. Just the breaches outside of S.T.A.R. Labs. Once those are closed, we'll leave Blue Bell opened – an invitation to Zoom to come and play."

"That's an asinine plan. Zoom will kill Barry and then kill everyone else. He'll do to this world what he did to mine. You can't stop him."

"Zoom will be facing me – not Barry. And trust me, I'm not a pushover." Eobard rocked back on his heels and grinned.

Barry glared at the man, but forbore saying that he wasn't a pushover either. After all, Zoom had all but killed him in their last engagement. Although Barry was immeasurably faster now, a gift from both Eobard and the Speed Force, Barry knew he lacked guile and the killer instinct, something that Eobard possessed in spades.

Wells wasn't convinced. "And you'll still lose in a face-to-face battle. He's too fast, too strong."

"He's a drug addict with chemically enhanced speed. Despite the paradox energy, he's not invulnerable." Eobard casually dropped that information.

Barry added, "He has weaknesses."

"What?" Wells stared at them both. "A drug addict?"

Eobard explains, "Zoom - Zolomon - whatever his name is, is a speed drug addict. He uses a form of amino-bonded chloral hydrate, and the results are rather devastating. While it gives him almost unparalleled speed, Zoom is in a constant state of cellular degeneration. The extended drug use has created massive addiction psychoses. And given what you've just told us about Zolomon – that he was a psychopathic killer before becoming a speedster – the addiction psychoses will only have exacerbated his madness."

"How did you figure this out? We've never been able to get any physical data on Zoom. He moves too fast, never leaves a trace."

Eobard went over to Cisco and squeezed his shoulder. "This guy. Got Zoom with a speed-dampener. It didn't work, but Zoom made a mistake. He pulled the dart out of his body and left it behind."

Wells completed the thought, "And voila, you had a DNA sample." He looked at Cisco with a little less hostility. "So, how does knowing this help?"

Eobard answered, "Zoom's connection to the speed force is relatively weak. He gets his speed from drugs and his power from the paradox energy. He attacked Barry and stole a portion of his speed. It's what's keeping him alive, it's what gives him the strength and power to keep resetting the timeline on your Earth. He's probably close to needing another topping off."

Wells shook his head. "I'm still not following your plan. So far, all you've told me is that Zoom is vulnerable, but now how you intend to exploit that."

Barry knew that the next part of the plan sounded the most fantastical. "Speedsters who travel through time have to obey certain rules." He looked at Eobard, who nodded for him to continue. "Traveling through time with the intention of changing linear time, damaging the timeline, has repercussions. Time itself has ways of protecting the timeline."
That earned him a skeptical look from Wells. "Time itself? First you tell me you've talked with the speed force…"

Barry corrected him. "It's the Speed Force – capital S, capital F."

"Whatever. But Time?" Wells waved off the distinction. "You can't be serious."

"Trust us, we've gotten this from the source." Eobard took over, and Barry was grateful. "We need to do two things: get the attention of the entities that protect the timeline – they're called Time Wraiths – and weaken Zoom so that the Time Wraiths can do their job and finish him off. Every time Zoom resets the timeline and weakens the fabric of linear time, he gains more power over it. Right now, he's too powerful for the Time Wraiths to take down on their own."

"And how do you plan to 'weaken' Zoom?"

Barry wondered about that, too. Eobard had been rather sketchy on this part. His plan had consisted of playing tag with the monster until Barry brought the Time Wraiths down on him. A plan that had seemed full of holes and potential disaster.

But Eobard had something up his sleeve. "We're going to suck the natural speed force out of Zoom. He doesn't have much, but what he has is the underpinning for what the speed drugs work on."

Barry wanted to smack his head. "Of course, the Speed Leech. You're going to try to attach the Leech to him."

Eobard grinned like a kid who'd just gotten his first perfect test score. "That's the plan, Mr. Allen. As Zoom chases me, it'll remove the speed force from his cells and the drug will wear out very quickly after that. Then the Time Wraiths can swoop in and suck the rest of his life force out of him."

"And that will be the end of that."

Eobard dusted off gesture with his hands. Wells still looked skeptical, but also impressed. "And I take it that it's the Flash's job to go fetch the Time Wraiths."

Barry nodded. "I'll need to travel back in time with the intention of changing the past and then let the Time Wraiths chase me back here, where they hopefully will find Zoom a more attractive target."

Jesse spoke up for the first time since they'd started to lay out the plan. "That sounds dangerous. It all sounds very dangerous."

"It is."

Barry didn't see any reason to pretend otherwise. "But it's the only way to stop Zoom. Stop him from hurting your world, my world, the whole multiverse. I know it's scary to think that we're actually bringing Zoom here, but we'll keep you safe."

"How?"

Before Barry could answer, and he didn't even know what that answer would be, Eobard stepped in. "You'll stay in the Time Vault here. You and your father, Joe, and Cisco, and Iris – and of course my very precious ancestor – will be safe in there."

Wells, unfortunately, remembered the video. "Zoom killed Jesse and I in my Time Vault."

"Mine is speedster-proof."

Barry gave Eobard a double-take. "It is?"
Eobard explained, "The walls of that entire corridor are set with subatomic vibrators that will make phasing through it impossible – similar to what Cisco and I created to block meta-human powers in the Pipeline cells. And there are superconductive electromagnetic locks on the door that will engage. Not even Zoom will be strong enough to rip through them."

Eobard turned to Barry and added, before Barry could ask, "You wouldn't have gotten past them a year ago if I'd been using them. But the power drain would have sent up a big flag and I figured security through obscurity was the better choice. I just didn't expect you and Cisco to get hold of the plans for the building."

Barry just laughed. "It's ancient history."

Wells was, of course, annoyed at the by-play between Barry and Eobard. "So, what happens while you two are playing superhero? We just wait for the all-clear?"

"Dad, stop being such a dick, okay? It's not like you and your pulse rifle can do anything against Zoom. They aren't 'playing' anything." Jesse's defense was fierce and a touch surprising, given how she'd suffered at the hands of a speedster.

Wells sighed and dialed back the hostility. "My daughter is right. This isn't a game. Whatever help I can give, I will."
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

It's the next to last battle, and Barry and Eobard go out to fight as allies. It's a heady feeling and Barry's certain he can take on the world and win. Eobard - ironically - urges some restraint. At least until Barry takes a bad hit and then all bets are off.

They waited a full day before going out and shutting the breaches.

Eobard packed the last of the bombs and slung the pack over his shoulders, disliking the awkward weight against his back. He let Barry make some adjustments to it.

"Not too heavy?" Barry asked.

Eobard rolled his shoulders. "No, but it's going to be a bit clumsy when we're running."

Barry nodded. "I know, but it can't be helped."

Eobard hated that expression, and yet he agreed with it. "Are you okay?" He turned Barry around and checked the positioning of his pack, and took a moment to appreciate Barry's ass, framed by the lines of his suit.

"Yeah. You have easy access to it?" The plan was that Barry pulled bombs from Eobard's pack, and Eobard pulled bombs from Barry's pack. They would work together as a team.

Eobard nodded. "I do." He took a deep breath. "You know what this is?"

"Of course I do – it's the first time we're running together outside of S.T.A.R. Labs. Or at least the first time we're running as allies." Barry smiled at him and then touched his cheek. "Think you can keep up with me, Reverse?"

Eobard threw his head back and laughed, delighted. "Oh, Flash, don't you know – I always win?"

"Hmm, maybe. Except when we both win." Barry leaned forward and kissed him.

Eobard pulled Barry close, their legs tangling. He didn't care that there were more than a half-dozen pair of eyes on them. Right now, the only person that mattered was Barry Allen. And truthfully, the only person that ever mattered was Barry Allen. Joe West, Cisco and Caitlin, Iris and Edward, the Wellses – father and daughter – could go to hell for all he cared. Barry was his. He groped Barry's ass and pulled him close. "Yes, this most certainly is winning, Mr. Allen."

"Mmm." Barry hummed against his lips. "Let's save that, okay? We've got work to do."

Eobard licked Barry's lips, savoring the sweetness he found there. "You've become quite the taskmaster, Mr. Allen."

"I had an excellent mentor." Barry rested his forehead against Eobard's and Eobard let their breathing fall into sync.
"You ready?"

"As ready as I'll ever be."

Eobard pressed two small kisses against Barry's eyelids, a benediction, a blessing, and let go of him. They both looked around the Cortex and nodded at everyone as they pulled on their cowls. The whole team, plus the two wanderers, nodded back. There was no need for words.

He and Barry nyoomed out of the building, lightning literally at their heels.

Cisco and Caitlin were on the comms. Joe and Eddie were monitoring the breaches that they hadn't yet closed, just to make certain that Zoom wasn't sending his minions through in a last-ditch effort. Iris was keeping an eye on Blue Bell. That portal, with the Speed Cannon off, was still untransversible, but on the off chance that Zoom could use it in its current state, it needed to be watched.

Eobard and Barry pulled up to the first breach – the one furthest from S.T.A.R. Labs – and Eobard took one of the bombs from Barry's pack, activated it, and tossed it at the all-but-invisible breach. There was a quick flare of blue as the bomb detonated, disrupting the breach energy.

Cisco confirmed that the bomb did its job. "One down, forty-nine left. The next breach closest to you is about one-point-six miles away, on the corner of the on-ramp to Highway 12 and Snyder Avenue."

Barry took off and Eobard was at his heels. A few seconds later, they were at the address Cisco gave and this time, Barry took a bomb from Eobard's pack and did the honors.

The circled closer and closer to S.T.A.R. Labs, but as they got deeper into the city, more of the breaches were inside buildings. The one in the corridor just outside of Tina McGee's office was tricky to get to. Harrison's old friend and Eobard's one-time rival had heavy security on that floor, and the ones above and below. Security that wasn't quite so easy to defeat.

Three floors from the target, Eobard told Barry to stop. "We're not going to be able to get around the alarms without wasting a lot of time. Tina's done an excellent job of speedster-proofing her facilities. We can get in, deploy and get out, but we're going to trigger all kinds of alerts and cameras. I don't think we'll get picked up on the video footage, but it's a risk."

Barry shrugged. "Let's stick with the plan – get in and get out and move on to the next breach. Hopefully, by the time Doctor McGee realizes what's happens and files a police report, Zoom will be dead and gone and Joe will do his best to cover everything up."

"Your pragmatism is rather... arousing, Mr. Allen." Eobard dragged Barry close for a quick kiss. "Yes, let us stick with the plan."

"Let me take the lead on this one – if there's any video footage, I'd rather not have to explain the Man in Yellow to Doctor McGee. She's a good person and I don't like lying to her face."

Eobard had to agree; Harrison would have taken him to task for the crimes he'd perpetrated against Mercury Labs. "Okay, then go – close the breach and come back to me."

Barry took one of the bombs from their dwindling supply and whooshed up the stairs. Eobard could actually feel Barry as he vibrated through the fire doors. A few heartbeats later, he felt Barry as he reappeared in the stairwell. "Okay, all done." He touched the comm link in his ear. "Cisco, can you confirm that the Mercury Labs breach is closed?"
Eobard heard, "Yeah, but we have incoming. There's signs that there's some serious meta-human shit going down at the breach nearest to the CCPD. Can't tell if it's a breacher or just a new player looking to make your work a little more difficult tonight."

"Shit. "Can you get a camera on it?" Eobard asked.

"Is my name Cisco Ramon? And holy fuck, that's Dante!"

"Your brother? The meta's attacking him?"

"No, Dante's the meta!" Cisco's voice went up three octaves.

Barry cut in. "Cisco – take a breath. Are you sure?"

Wells took over the comms. "That's definitely not your Cisco's brother. That's a meta from my world called Rupture. He's very powerful – as dangerous as Reverb - the Cisco Ramon on my world - was, but in a different way. He tends to prefer head-on engagement and creating random destruction and chaos – general panic in the streets."

Barry was about to take off and Eobard grabbed his arm. "We stay on mission. You can't go after him."

Barry looked like he was about to argue, but nodded tersely. "Cisco, Wells? Can you keep track of this guy? Where he is and what he's doing. We're going to keep closing breaches but if we can intersect with him, we'll take him down, then."

Cisco responded, "Of course we can. And Joe's coordinating with Captain Singh and the CCPD. They're going to try to put a Boot on him."

Wells interrupted. "I don't recommend police engage with him directly. He's murdered his own share of police on my Earth. He needs to be disarmed first." Wells went on to describe the scythe-like energy weapon Rupture carried.

Eobard let go of Barry and tapped his own comm link. "We have just thirteen more breaches to close. Cisco, can you re-plot our course to intercept this asshole?" He heard Cisco tapping on his keyboard, the sound adding to his rising impatience. "Come on, Cisco – work faster."

Cisco snarked back, "Some of us aren't speedsters, Thawne. But if you reroute to Pequot and Main to take out the breach on the northwest corner, near the Big Belly Burger, you should intercept this son of a bitch playing Grim Reaper fireball with a street full of cars."

"Okay, got it." Barry was about to take off again, but Eobard clamped a hand around his wrist.

"Barry, remember – we have to stay together. We can't let any Earth-2 meta know there are now two speedsters at work. We reveal that and we lose a major advantage."

He could feel Barry quivering with the need to run and be a hero. But Eobard didn't let go. "I know that you need to go save this city. That you need to prove to yourself that you can be the man you were before Zoom attacked, but you have to listen to me. You have to stay with me and not engage until we are both ready."

Barry took a deep breath. "I know, I know. And – thanks." Barry put a hand over his and squeezed it lightly.

"For what?" Eobard was puzzled by Barry's gratitude.
"For understanding. This isn't just the first time we're running together. This is the first time the Flash has been out since Zoom almost killed me. I didn't realize how much I still needed to prove to myself until just now."

Barry's words struck at Eobard's emotional core and he was momentarily overwhelmed *again* by the trust and faith his man had in him. But as always, their timing was terrible. Eobard let go of Barry's arm and nodded, simply saying, "Okay, then let's go. We have breaches to close and a meta to take care of."

A few seconds later, they were at their destination and Barry closed the breach while Eobard watched as a meta-human carrying an energy scythe wreaked havoc.

Barry rejoined him. "So – how do we do this? You distract him while I get that scythe? According to Wells, that's what gives him his power."

Eobard shook his head. "No, you distract him – he's looking for the Flash. Get him into that alley and I'll take him from behind."

Barry looked like he was about to argue, but three quick explosions seemed to change his mind. "All right. Don't get yourself killed, Reverse." He pulled off the almost-empty pack and set it on the ground.

Eobard grinned. "Same goes for you, Flash."

Barry took off and in typical Barry fashion, made himself an all-too-enticing target for this crazy meta.

"You want to play, Rupture?" he called. "Then how about playing with me?"

Eobard let out a little sigh. Barry needed to learn a few lessons about impulse control. He watched as Barry dodged the energy blasts from Rupture's scythe, then winced as Barry got blown a few feet in the air from a blast wave and landed hard on the pavement. Barry got up and in typical Barry-fashion, taunted Rupture, "Is that the best you've got?" The words had just left his mouth when another energy bolt blasted from the scythe.

Barry seemed to have the measure of Rupture and the speed at which the scythe could fire. He began moving towards the alley where they were going to trap him, and Rupture followed. Eobard took a position on one of the fire escapes and waited while Barry lured the meta towards his defeat.

Except that Barry somehow miscalculated and Rupture sent a blast of energy right at Barry. Watching through the time dilation, it hit Barry square in the chest and all Eobard could see was his lover falling to the ground, unmoving. Rupture had raised his scythe for another shot – a killing blow.

There was no question in his mind that this meta should pay for hurting Barry. Eobard dropped to the ground behind Rupture, grabbed his head and twisted, breaking his neck in one clean motion. The scythe rattled when it hit the pavement, a second before Rupture's body did.

"Eobard – what did you do?" Barry was getting up.

"Are you all right?" Eobard stepped over the body and started checking Barry for any serious injuries.

"I'm fine." Barry was staring at him, lightning in his eyes. "You just killed him."
"He hurt you, he almost killed you." The rage Eobard had felt at the sight of Barry, lying unmoving on the ground, was still thick in his blood. "He would have killed you if I didn't stop him." A part of Eobard realized that Barry was furious at him, but he didn't care. Nothing mattered but Barry's safety.

"Eobard – you just killed him." The lightning died in Barry's eyes.

"He would have killed you." Eobard was getting aggravated at having to repeat the obvious. The white and gold lightning bolt emblem on Barry's chest was a mass of melted plastic and fried circuitry. It had apparently absorbed the energy from Rupture's scythe and saved Barry's life. "This wouldn't have taken a second hit." He tapped the emblem and it fell to the ground in pieces. "You could have died." Eobard cupped his hand around Barry's cheek, but Barry jerked away.

"That doesn't give you the right to kill."

Eobard swallowed his annoyance. "I'm not you, Flash. I'm your Reverse and you should do well to remember that."

Barry nodded, but didn't say another word as they both sped out of the alleyway, retrieving the packs with the last of the bombs.

As they ran to the next breach, Eobard started to get the feeling that he'd just royally fucked up. Of course you did. Barry Allen values life, even the lives of people trying to kill him. Even yours.

Cisco directed them to the dozen other breaches and Eobard and Barry closed each one with workman-like efficiency and almost no interaction. The final breach they had to close was almost on S.T.A.R. Labs' doorstep – just across the river, at the northwest corner of the Van Geld Opera House. Eobard took the last bomb from Barry's pack and was about to loft it at the breach when a blinding flash of light and an incredible wave of heat disabled him, knocking him to the ground.

"Eobard!" Barry was pulling him to safety.

"What was that?" Eobard blinked – his vision was compromised. He could see the outline of Barry's face, but none of the details.

"Doctor Light. She's back."

There was a crackle in his earpiece – the blast seemed to have taken his comms out. With Barry's chest piece destroyed, that meant that neither of them had any communication with S.T.A.R. Labs.

There was another bright flash of light and Eobard instinctively turned his face away.

"Don't move – don't go anywhere." Barry left him leaning against the granite wall. It was late – probably closer to dawn than midnight – and the area was deserted. The opera house's lights had long gone dark and there was minimal light from the street lamps. The near-darkness actually made it easier to see, except when Dr. Light starting flinging star fire at Barry.

Barry wasn't taunting Dr. Light. He was too busy trying to close the last breach without getting blinded or killed.

Eobard scrubbed at his face and tried to will his powers of regeneration to work faster. There was a brief flash of blue as the bomb detonated in the breach, and Eobard whispered "Bravo, Barry". Barry's success only seemed to antagonize the meta and she stepped up her attacks. Eobard could see well enough to make out the silhouettes of a half a dozen speed mirages Barry generated for Dr. Light to target. An impressive feat, but not as impressive as Barry's bursts of speed. Eobard's eyes
weren’t healed enough for him to see perfect detail through the time dilation, but he could see Barry – the real Barry – as he sped towards Dr. Light as she was about to fling star fire at him.

Eobard hoped that Barry wasn't going to do something foolish, like try and talk to the woman, to get her to see the error of her ways. But that didn't appear to be the plan. Eobard could see a blaze of golden lightning rushing towards Dr. Light, and that blaze didn't stop but resolved itself into the Flash as Barry punched Dr. Light, and the woman crumpled to the ground.

Eobard got up and made his way over to Barry, who was kneeling over the fallen woman. His vision was still compromised and Barry's face was a blur, but when he looked at the meta-human on the ground, Eobard could see that something was wrong. Dr. Light was… broken.

"I killed her," Barry whispered. "I punched her at speed and I broke her neck."

Eobard cursed under his breath. He could hear Barry start to spiral down a very dark path.

"You had to stop her," he said.

"I know. She was going to blast you, kill you. I couldn't …" Barry paused. "I couldn't let her hurt you again."

Eobard reached out for Barry, and this time his touch wasn't rejected. He tried to soothe Barry, murmuring, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." The apology was for everything that had gone wrong tonight. The blood on his hands and the blood on Barry's.

Barry leaned against him for a few seconds.

The interlude was both too long and too short. Barry said, "We need to go, we need to get back."

Eobard let go, but his fingers trailed down Barry's arms. Their hands clasped and Barry pulled Eobard to his feet. "Can you run?"

Eobard blinked, hoping his eyes would clear, and started heading towards the bridge, hating the feeling of helplessness. And worse, hating the feeling that he'd let Barry down. "I think it would be better if I walked."

But Barry disagreed. "No, it probably isn't." Without even asking, Barry scooped him up and carried him as he ran back to S.T.A.R. Labs.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Barry and Eobard and Team Flash, augmented by their Earth-2 guests, prepare for the final showdown with Zoom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Barry watched as Caitlin examined Eobard's eyes. She let out little hmms every few moments.

Eobard asked when she'd finished, "The prognosis, Doctor Snow?"

"Your retinas are damaged, but you're healing rapidly. As fast as Barry would. A few hours and your sight will be back to normal." She placed a pair of dark glasses over Eobard's eyes. "You'll heal faster with these on."

Eobard nodded and relaxed against the gurney. "Barry?" He held out a hand and Barry didn't hesitate to take it, rubbing his thumb over Eobard's knuckles. Eobard squeezed his hand and asked, "Are you okay?"

Barry shrugged, "I'll be fine."

"That's not what I asked."

"I know." Barry let go. "You need to rest and heal and I need to get with Joe and give my report about the two meta-humans who died tonight. The ones we killed."

"Barry – " Eobard reached out for him again, but this time, Barry stepped back.

"It'll be okay. Just rest." Barry stood in the doorway, as indecisive as Janus, Eobard's words echoing in his brain.

"I'm not you, Flash. I'm your Reverse and you should do well to remember that."

As much as Barry needed to leave, he wanted to stay. He wanted Eobard's reassurance that everything would be all right, that Barry wasn't a murderer, that death didn't always have to be a part of their endgame. And of course Eobard would give him that absolution, because in Eobard's eyes, Barry had done nothing wrong.

"Barry?" Eobard turned to face him, his face half-concealed by the dark glasses. "You don't have to stand over me; I'll be fine in a few hours. You heard what Caitlin said. Go make your reports."

Barry hesitated a few moments longer; went back to Eobard's side and kissed him. He whispered, "I love you."

He felt Eobard's smile under his lips. "I love you, too, Flash. Now, go."

Barry took the escape that Eobard offered and went to find Joe and Eddie. Neither man was interested in taking his report, telling him that they had all the details they needed from the audio.
When Barry reminded them that the audio had been out on both his comm and Eobard's, Joe and Eddie told him, rather pointedly, to shut up and let them do their jobs.

He was close to the edge. So much had nearly gone wrong tonight. Barry wanted to escape for a little while, to concentrate on the victory, not obsess over what had happened, what might have happened.

There was a subdued hush in the Cortex. Jesse Wells and her father were working on something in one of the side labs. Caitlin was talking to Iris, who was still monitoring Blue Bell. Cisco, though, was sitting at his console, looking a little… pale.

And then it hit Barry. Eobard had just killed Cisco's brother's doppelganger, while Cisco was listening. That had to hurt.

Barry dropped into the chair next to Cisco and nudged him with his leg. "You okay?"

Cisco gave him a startled look. "Yeah, fine. Why?"

"Thought you might be upset about what happened out there."

Cisco looked puzzled.

"Rupture? Your bro's doppelganger? Eobard killed him."

"Oh, yeah. No – not really upset. Not at all. Guy was not my brother. Although he did make Dante look like a paragon of kindness. He tried to kill you, dude. He would have killed you – you know that."

Barry nodded. "But –"

"But nothing. Thawne did what he had to do. You did what you had to do."

"You saw it? The fight with Doctor Light?"

"Yeah – there are lots of cameras around the opera house. She didn't take out all of them."

"Ah." Cisco's understanding made him feel a little better. "Then what were you brooding about?"

Cisco tilted his head towards the side lab and the Wellses. "It must be so weird for them. Particularly Jesse. A guy with my face tortured her for months, and yet she's not holed up somewhere, screaming 'keep away from me'. When you and Thawne were out doing your thing, she brought me coffee and asked me what it's like being a meta-human here. She said that she'd like to stay, since meta-humans can be heroes on this Earth. Apparently her dad has made a fortune on technology that outs meta-humans. The watch he wears has a meta-human sensor in it."

Barry looked at Wells and his stomach turned. He'd created the metas and then created tools to hunt them down. The irony was sickening.

"Jesse told me that she and her dad fought about that. That she thinks it's wrong to expose metas if they aren't doing any harm."

Barry blinked in shock and whispered, "Do you think she's…"

Cisco nodded. "Yeah. And she asked if Caitlin could run a few tests on her, when her dad's otherwise occupied."
Barry sucked in a breath. The Earth-2 version of Harrison Wells clearly didn't have much use for meta-humans, to put it mildly. Barry wondered how he'd react on learning that his daughter was a meta. But something just occurred to him, "Wait – you just said that he wears a watch that senses meta-humans – so how can he not know about his daughter?"

Cisco shrugged. "Jesse said it doesn't go off around her, but that it's also set to silent mode. She said she looked at the programming on it and there's some weird stuff in there. Things that aren't in the published company specs. Maybe it's rigged – maybe it's programmed not to go off on a Wells."

"You think Harrison Wells is a meta-human, too?"

"Didn't you see how he refused to let Caitlin take a tissue sample? He doesn't let anyone get close. When I tried to touch him, he all but leaped across the room. At first I thought that it was because he killed my super-evil twin, but now …"

"He's afraid you'll vibe him." Barry sighed. Just one more thing to worry about. He got up and squeezed Cisco's shoulder. "I need to think, okay. You know where to find me."

"Usual spot, in front of the entrance to the Pipeline?"

"Yeah." Barry had to smile. Cisco knew him far too well.

Barry didn't know why he always gravitated to this part of S.T.A.R. Labs. There was a magnificent view from the roof, there were plenty of other and far more pleasing spaces where a person could be alone, but the entry to the Pipeline had somehow become the place to think. Both Cisco and Caitlin came here to brood, too. Barry sat down on the ramp, tired and heartsick, and tried to find a little peace of mind.

He was angry. Not at Eobard, whose actions were as predictable as the rising sun. Any life-threatening danger to the Flash, and the Reverse's instinct to protect with extreme prejudice kicked in. No, Barry was furious at his own behavior – at the self-knowledge that he was just as obsessed about Eobard's safety as Eobard was about his. That he'd unthinkingly reacted with the same level of deadly force when Eobard was the one in danger.

He was angry at Joe and Eddie, too. They were giving him – the Flash – a pass.

Okay, maybe not a get-out-of-jail free card, but something close. Barry knew the law. He knew that deadly force was justified when faced with an imminent and immediate threat to one's own life or the life of another. What Eobard had done to Rupture was no more a crime than what Barry had done to Dr. Light, and yet he still felt sick. They'd both used their meta-human advantages to defend each other's lives.

He tried to tell himself that what happened tonight would be no different than if Joe had shot Rupture or Doctor Light. Hell, hadn't Joe shot and killed Clyde Mardon way back at the start of all of this madness?

Of course, other meta-humans had died at Barry's hands before, but this felt like the leading edge of a very slippery slope. It was far too easy to justify using his powers in such a deadly fashion.

On another day and another time, he might have run out to Starling and had a heart-to-heart talk with Oliver. Except that Oliver had his own problems and how the hell was he going to explain his relationship with Eobard?

Maybe later, maybe after they'd defeated Zoom. Maybe after he got Eobard to tell him the truth about the night his mother was killed, for once and for all.
Barry lost track of time as thoughts kept looping through his brain. He was jerked back to the here and now when unfamiliar footsteps rattled the floor grates. Barry turned around. To his surprise, Harrison Wells was heading his way. Barry was wary and didn't say a word as the man sat down next to him. Instead he stared at the entryway to the Pipeline. But as much as he tried to ignore it, Barry could feel the weight of Wells' regard.

"I owe you an apology," Wells said.

That got Barry's attention. "For what?"

"For what I said about heroes."

"Ah." Barry turned back to his contemplation of the Pipeline entrance. "Not much of a hero, really."

"Don't know about that. Your foster father was quite forthcoming about you. So was everyone else. I've gotten quite an earful about Barry Allen – the Flash. You are the man who saved Central City."

Barry pulled a gesture out of Eobard's playbook and gave Wells a dismissive wave. "I don't need validation from you."

Wells didn't take the hint and depart. His reply was equally laconic. "No, I don't suppose you do. But you do have my admiration."

"And don't think you'll be able to make a play for my allegiance, either."

"Huh?"

Barry's lips curled into a bitter smile. "Heard you and Eobard talking after you regained consciousness. You were trying to get him to tell you about what happened here and he was playing coy. Which he does as easily as breathing, by the way. When he wouldn't answer you, you thought you'd get the story out of me. Eobard didn't particularly care for that."

Wells let out a snort of laughter. "Ah, right, he went a little nuts. Joe West calls him the Reverse-Flash, and you two seem to have some kind of history."

"Yeah, and it's really not your concern. I came in with the Big Belly Burger to make sure you didn't do something stupid. You may be a real Harrison Wells, but I'm not particularly interested in you."

"No. Your, ah, interest elsewhere was very clearly demonstrated. And your Eobard was quite clear on the matter, too. But honestly, I'm not particularly interested in you, either."

"Then why are you here?"

"I should clarify – I am interested in you. To the extent that you can defeat Zoom. I know my world is… gone. Destroyed. Other than my daughter, I have nothing left."

Barry wondered how true this was. It was possible that Zoom had reset the timeline after Wells and Jesse had made it through the portal. But Barry wasn't going to say anything about that now. Nor was he going to say anything about the suspicions that Cisco had aired. It wasn't his place to out either Wells as a meta-human. Instead he says, "What do you want from me?"

"I want you to defeat Zoom – by any means possible."

"That's always been the plan, Wells."

Wells didn't get up and leave. Instead, he dropped a tiny bombshell. "And I want a safe place for
Jesse after that happens. She's going to need the support of people who understand what she's going to go through."

"Ah.

"I've known for a while that Jesse was affected by accelerator explosion." Wells spoke slowly and carefully.

"Your watch reveal that to you? Cisco told me about it. Apparently you've made a fortune on outing meta-humans. I wonder if this is why they're so violent on your Earth. Even the ones who want to live peaceful and normal lives can't."

"You have a point, but no, actually. Even before I invented it, I knew. It was why I invented it." Wells pulled off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "I had Jesse's DNA tested a few days after the meta-humans started showing up. She was at S.T.A.R. Labs that night."

But what about you? Barry didn't ask that question.

"S.T.A.R. Labs owns the patents to all of the meta-human sensing technology on my Earth. As soon as I found out that Jesse's DNA was altered by the dark matter, I had all of the programming for every type of scanner configured to ignore her patterns. Same with the watches. She'll never show up as anything but human."

"You've been gaslighting her." Barry wondered if Wells knew the expression.

And he did. "That's a little extreme, I think."

"No, it's not – you're manipulating her perceptions of reality. You're pretending that she's not meta-human and creating a supporting backstory for that lie."

"It's for her own good."

Barry disagreed. He remembered just what his lies had done to Iris. "And yours. It wouldn't do for someone so anti-meta-human to have one's beloved child accidentally outed as one, too."

"That's not true – I'm not against all metas. Just the ones who kill and maim and destroy. You haven't seen the people you love get ripped apart before your eyes. You've been lucky here. Maybe because you've been such a visible symbol of a good meta-human. Or maybe because your metas here are not so destructive and evil."

Barry sighed. This wasn't an argument he want to have right now. With Dr. Light's death on his hands, he didn't feel particularly 'good'. "So why come to me?"

"Her powers are dormant, but they're strengthening. It won't be long before they fully manifest. Jesse needs to be with people who can help her through that."

That was something Barry could understand. "Cisco's powers were dormant for over a year after the explosion. They were triggered by a terrible trauma." Of course, he wasn't specifying just what that trauma was.

Wells nodded. "And I was terrified that they'd fully develop while Zoom was holding her. That he'd be able to twist her into his creature."

"I guess you got lucky." Barry understood Wells' concern, but he just wanted the man to go away.
"Jesse got lucky. She has no idea what's happening inside of her. It would have been terrifying to develop meta-human powers while under the control of the most evil meta-human of all."

"You need to talk to your daughter, Wells. Not to me. When this is over and if we survive, you can make your decisions then. If you have no home to go back to, you can stay here." The words left Barry's mouth before he even considered them.

"Thank you – but no thanks. There are just some things that I don't think I'll be able to endure on a day-to-day basis."

That got Barry's attention. "What things?"

Another set of footsteps rattled the decking – the wheel-chair friendly ramp that had been installed when Eobard had started the last stage of his masquerade. These steps were lighter, quicker, and much more welcome that Wells' had been. Barry turned around and found Eobard coming down the ramp, dressed much like Wells, in head-to-toe black, except that Eobard's clothes were clean, pressed and much softer. He was also shod in his Vans, not a pair of combat boots.

It was, honestly, a little disconcerting to see the two of them standing side-by-side. In the dim light, the differences weren't so obvious, at least until Eobard smiled.

"Harrison will have some trouble enduring me."

Barry had to chuckle. "Yeah, that could be difficult." He reached up and grabbed Eobard's hand. Eobard squeezed it and despite Wells' presence, the moment felt… private.

"It looks like my presence here is superfluous."

"It is," Barry and Eobard both answered at once. To Barry's surprise, Wells laughed.

And left.

As Wells' boot steps faded into the distance, Eobard sat down next to him and Barry rested his head on Eobard's shoulder. "I'm sorry."

Eobard snaked an arm around Barry and threaded his fingers through his hair. "For what?"

"For being such an ass about Rupture. For letting you get hurt."

"You didn't let me get hurt, Barry. And for the record, I'm sorry, too. I need to remember how much you value life. When I see you threatened, my first instinct is to eliminate that threat. Killing Rupture was the most expedient choice, but perhaps not the best one."

"I didn’t even stop to think when I punched Doctor Light. She was aiming at you, you would have died." Barry tried to hold back a shuddering sob.

Eobard all but pulled Barry into his lap and Barry just clung to him. "I'm rather hard to kill, Flash. And when you have my back, I'm pretty much guaranteed to triumph."

Barry let out a watery laugh. "Same here."

Barry suddenly remembered that Eobard had been injured. He lifted his head and looked into Eobard's eyes. They were bright, sparkling blue. "Your eyes are all better?"

"Caitlin grumbled a bit when I told her I wasn't wearing those glasses, but she said everything's fine."
Barry let out a tiny sigh and relaxed again. He wished they could stay like this forever.

"Have you made up your mind?" Eobard's question broke the peace.

"About what?"

"What moment in history that you're going back to change. What you are going to do to get the Time Wraiths' attention."

"I have a few ideas."

"Feel like sharing?"

"Truthfully, no. I don't think I should discuss this with you. If the whole point of this is to go back with the intention of changing time and not changing it, talking about it will make it difficult to keep that intention... valid."

"Smart, Barry. I've taught you well."

Barry smiled against Eobard's shoulder. "That, you have."

"One recommendation, though."

"Oh?"

Eobard didn't speak right away, and then he seemed to choose his words with great care. "It might seem a natural choice, but don't go back to try and stop your mother's... death, again."

That hadn't even been a consideration. "No, there are already too many Barry Allens in that house."

As they sat there, as Barry took comfort from the warmth of Eobard's arms, from the steady heartbeat under his ear, and most of all, from the knowledge that his love was returned.

Cisco's voice, crackling over the intercom, shattered his contentment. "Barry, Thawne, we have a problem. Blue Bell's getting upset. Nervous."

"Nervous?"

"Yeah, she's belching energy at much higher frequencies than normal. Wells is measuring the vibrational signature of the energy she's spitting out. He thinks something – or someone – from his dimension is trying to break through, without the benefit of the Speed Canon."

Barry looked at Eobard and they both said, "Zoom."

They both stood up and ran back to the Cortex. It was time for the race of their lives.

.........................................................

Suited up, Eobard couldn't deny the excitement he felt, the anticipation of finally going up against a powerful enemy. This was a chance to use his speed, his strength, and his wits against the ultimate threat. And to get some vengeance – for what had happened to Barry in this timeline, and for Barry's death in the timeline that no longer existed.

He was waiting for Barry to finish saying what he needed to say to his family and to his surprise, Wells came over and behaved like a civilized scientist.
"I took a look at your Speed Leech. It's an interesting piece of technology, but you know it's not perfect for this application."

Eobard's hackles go up at the criticism. But he was a scientist, too, and needed to keep an open mind. "What are the problems?"

"It's too dependent on proximity. You'll need to carry the storage device as you run."

That was something Eobard had already planned on. "It's not that big, it will fit neatly in a waist pack."

"And you also have a power consumption problem. I know this was not meant for mobile application – you ran on a treadmill and the Leech collected your speed force. But on the run, this setup is not efficient."

"I don't think there's much time to fix that. It will work well enough. Draining Zoom isn't the end-game, it's weakening him so the Time Wraiths can finish him off."

Wells, though, disagreed. "Use this." He pressed a disk – about half the size of one of this era's standard optical discs – into Eobard's hand. "I've miniaturized the components and was able to fix the power supply problems. This will suck out Zoom's speed and store it, no need for a remote containment unit."

Eobard looked at the disk. It was black, heavier than it should be, about a quarter-inch thick and roughly the same diameter as his emblem. "Quantum helical storage structure?"

Wells nodded.

"How do you know this will work? I can't take the risk with something untried."

Wells pulled off his glasses and looked at him with grave eyes. "It's been tested."

Eobard blinked. "Who did you test it on?" His first thought was Barry, but no – that wouldn't have been possible. Barry had been with him all night. And when they had run and closed the breaches, Barry had been faster than he'd ever been. No sign of slowing down.

Wells put his glasses back on and looked at the floor.

Eobard felt like he'd been punched. "You?"

The other man nodded carefully.

Eobard let out a shocked breath. "You're an asshole, you know that?"

"Yes, I do. And I'm a coward. And a liar. And a cheat. I'm not like you or Barry. I have no control over my speed. I can sprint for a few minutes at a time, but then everything fails and I'm crippled for hours with exhaustion."

Eobard was going to have to have a serious talk with Wells when he got back. He won't be able to hide his nature forever.

Wells added, his voice fierce, "If we survive, I'll be using that to pull the rest of the speed force out of my cells for good."

Eobard wasn't going to let that happen, not if what he suspected was really the case. But this wasn't the time for that discussion. He looked at the disc again – there were no magnets or adhesives. "How
"Does this stay attached to Zoom?"

"Using Zoom's own kinetic energy – it's keyed to the vibrational signature of my Earth."

Eobard was familiar with the use of kinetic energy attraction. Wade Eiling had used a needle bomb on Barry based on a similar principle. "Keying it to your Earth's vibrations is smart – it won't stick to anyone else. To me."

"Get close enough to slap it on his back and it will suck him dry. The drain might be slower than your original Leech, but it will hold, theoretically, sixty terajoules of energy. The equivalent of a nuclear bomb explosion."

Eobard looked at the disk and for a brief moment, wondered if there would be a way to retrieve it from Zoom without being too obvious.

"I know what you're thinking. Don't. Don't do it."

Eobard looked at Wells, and knew exactly what the man was saying.

"Promise me that you won't keep it. Zoom is tainted – you know that."

Yes, he did. He knew exactly how tainted Zoom's power was. But there was something of Barry mixed in there. It was poisoned, debased, but maybe there would be a way to extract it and make it clean again ...

"Promise me – on the love you have for your Barry Allen – that you won't keep Zoom's speed."

Wells certainly knew what buttons to push. Reluctantly, Eobard nodded and said, "I promise."

Barry joined them and draped an arm over Eobard's shoulder. Barry's need to touch him, to stay in close physical proximity, had grown even stronger over the few days, since their adventure in the Speed Force. Eobard loved it, and reached up to take Barry's hand.

Barry asked him, "You promise what?"

"To avoid doing something stupid." Eobard corrected himself, "Doing anything stupid."

Barry let out a snort of laughter. "Come on, what about this venture is anything but stupid? I'm going time traveling for the purpose of attracting deadly time guardians. You're going to play tag with a world-destroying speed monster. Everyone we love is at risk if we fail. This is kind of the height of stupidity."

Eobard found Barry's humor infectious, and the anticipation he'd felt before had returned ten-fold.

"We should get this party started. Cisco says that Blue Bell's stress levels are rising, and if Zoom tears through without the Speed Canon, the breach could have a stroke which might escalate into a world-sucking singularity."

Wells rolled his eyes at the anthropomorphism.

Eobard just grinned. "Then let's get everyone into the Time Vault."

Wells looked like he wanted to argue about that, but ended up trooping down into the not-so-secret chamber with the rest of Team Flash. Cisco had found some crates from a nearby storage closet to serve as make-shift benches. Eobard had figured the team would want to watch the proceedings, and had already set the facility cameras to follow him and display everything on the holographic monitor.
built into the wall.

Barry, of course, had to talk with his friends and family again. Everyone, even Wells, got a hug from Barry. But to Eobard's surprise, he got hugs, too. Joe and Edward just gave him manly handshakes. But Caitlin and Iris, and even Jesse Wells – a stranger – wrapped their arms around him and told him to come back safe and whole.

And then there was Cisco. Eobard remembered the moment he'd first seen Cisco after his return to this century. Cisco had been so emotionally overcome, he'd cried while Eobard had held him.

That emotional softness hadn't lasted long. Whether it was the memories of the murder in the alternate timeline or the residual anger over the lies he'd perpetuated, Cisco Ramon had been – in their subsequent interactions – a creature of snark and steel. He'd never let an opportunity pass to needle Eobard about something.

And Eobard liked it. He'd always admired Cisco, his intelligence, his creativity, his loyalty. But at some point in the past few weeks, Cisco had grown a spine of steel and refused to back down from anything. Eobard had many big reasons to survive the coming battle, and the biggest one was standing next to him, tall and lean and gorgeous in his red suit, but surviving and having the chance to help Cisco grow into his powers, into his fierce intelligence, his genius – that was something else he was looking forward to.

Right now, though, he needed to bid Cisco farewell. Eobard held out his hand and Cisco smiled as he took it, his grin a little twisted. "Come back, you still need to show me how to get the suit into that damn ring."

Eobard laughed and pulled Cisco into an embrace. He felt Cisco stiffen for a brief second - as if he'd gone to far, or perhaps Cisco vibed something. But Cisco just hugged him and let go.

Eobard looked at the assembled team of friends and allies, and said, "It's time."

Barry nodded at everyone and they both stepped out into the corridor. The Time Vault door shut with a quiet susurration and Eobard put his hand on the wall next to it. He pressed hard and a rarely used panel popped out. Unlike the security panel that protected Gideon at the house, this didn't require a DNA sample – just a retinal scan. That complete, Eobard set the magnetic locks, which activated with a profound thunk. The floor hummed as electricity fed the circuits.

"What happens if you're not around to deactivate them?" Barry was right to be concerned.

"Come here." Eobard gestured for Barry to put his face to the scanner and Eobard set it to read and store the retinal image. "You'll be able to deactivate the locks now."

"And if neither of us..." Barry didn't finish the sentence.

Eobard made some adjustments to the programming. "They will turn off in forty-eight hours. The locks will disengage and the door will open." He both appreciated and hated Barry's pragmatism.

"Okay."

They didn't linger. His heart in his throat, the former excitement over facing Zoom replaced by worry for Barry's safety, Eobard followed Barry to the accelerator tunnel entrance. They stopped and Barry turned to him.

"Don't do anything seriously stupid, Eo."
This was only the second time Barry had ever used the abbreviated form of his name. The first time had been too fraught, but now, Eobard decided he liked it.

"Same holds for you, Mr. Allen." Eobard knew how much Barry liked it when he took that stern, formal tone.

Barry smiled, but there were too many shadows in his eyes. Eobard still wondered about the when Barry was heading back to.

"Are you wearing it?" Barry put his hand over Eobard's heart. "Do you still…?"

Eobard cupped Barry's cheeks. "Of course, I don't go anywhere without it. How could I go into battle unprotected?" Eobard felt a light blush steal over his cheeks. For a man of science, he was far too romantic about this.

"Good." Barry took a deep breath. "I want something from you. My own talisman."

"Oh?" Eobard was pleased, but it felt a little late in the game. "What can I give you? You already have my heart." Eobard felt that blush deepen. Now he was becoming a sap.

But Barry didn't notice. "And you have mine. But I'm thinking you'll need that organ for the foreseeable future and I'd like something to take with me." Barry took Eobard's left hand and tugged off his gauntlet. "I want this."

"Then I'm taking this for myself." Eobard pulled on Barry's left glove. And as soon as the material cleared Barry's wrist, Eobard pressed his lips to Barry's skin, just at the pulse point. With each beat of Barry's heart, Eobard felt a tiny spark against his lips.

Barry did the same, but before lips even made contact with skin, a spark jumped between them. When Barry's eyes met Eobard's, they were filled with red and gold lightning.

Eobard reluctantly let go of Barry's hand and pulled on the red glove while Barry did the same with his yellow one.

Eobard licked his lips, still tasting the electricity, then let out a sigh. "It's time, Flash. It's time for you to go."

"I know." Barry pulled on his cowl, but before he turned away, he made a request, eyes still blazing. "Say it."

Eobard smiled and murmured, "Run, Barry. Run."

At that, the Flash – the man he'd worshiped for decades, through the centuries, the man he'd helped create and almost destroyed, the man who held his heart – disappeared in a blaze of golden lightning. Off, once again, to save the world.

It was time for Eobard Thawne, the Reverse-Flash, to do the same.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

The battle with Zoom - at long last!

"Run, Barry. Run."

Those three words were echoing in Barry's brain, in his soul, as he took off, racing around and
around the accelerator tunnel. Barry didn't keep track of the laps he made, focusing instead on the
moment in time he needed to change.

Soon enough, a bright blue ball had formed – his passage to the past. And unlike the other day, when
he’d run with Eobard, Barry didn't avoid the portal. He leaped into it.

The last trip he’d deliberately made through time had prepared him for this journey. All sorts of
images – alternate realities and futures yet unrealized – lined the path to the past. Barry ignored them,
visualizing instead a cool night in the not-so-distant past. A night when he hadn't even been in
Central City, but with his new friends in Starling.

As he ran, Barry thought about what he was about to do and the changes that would ripple out from
that, like a stone tossed in a still pond. His very existence would become a paradox, if he succeeded.

Barry didn't allow any thoughts of failure to cross his mind, any consideration that he might not go
through with his plan. He needed to believe in the truth of his actions. He continued to move back
through time, hoping that his quarry would start their pursuit.

And there it was…

No, not one Time Wraith, but a pair of them. They looked just as Eobard had described, like
something out of Harry Potter. They were following him – not yet close enough to stop him, but they
were reaching out to grab him.

Barry put on a final burst of speed, thought of the date and the location, and emerged through the
other side of the time portal.

Barry landed without his accustomed grace, feet first into an icy puddle of slush and dead leaves. But
he was right where he wanted to be – and hopefully, right when, too. Barry pulled his phone out
from the small waist pouch he insisted Cisco make for him. It took a few precious seconds for it to
connect and give Barry the date and time. 11:47 PM, December 10, 2013.

The morning before the particle accelerator went online and changed his life forever.

Barry put the phone away and looked around, pleased with himself and how accurate he’d been. A
few dozen yards ahead was the house that he'd eventually inherit. The house that was currently
occupied by the man the world knew as Harrison Wells.

The man he’d traveled through time to kill.

Barry went around to the back, where the master suite was located. The room was glass on two
sides, facing a dark and dense forest with no neighbors for at least a mile.

The hair rose on the back of his neck. He could sense, somehow, that the Time Wraiths would be here soon. But Barry had plenty of time to do what he needed. He phased right through the glass, right into Eobard's bedroom.

Half-expecting Eobard to sense the presence of another speedster, Barry kept perfectly still. But Eobard, defined in the moonlight, slept on, undisturbed. Barry reached into the pack at the small of his back and pulled out a small, lethally sharp gravity knife and flicked the blade out.

The Time Wraiths were getting closer – Barry could feel them – and he needed to do what he’d come here to do. He took three human-quick steps towards the bed, leaned over the sleeping man, brought the knife to bear…

And sliced off a lock of hair.

Barry caught the strands before they hit the pillow and tucked them, along with the now-closed knife, back into the pack.

He needed to leave, but he had one more thing to do. Barry pressed a soft, quick kiss on Eobard's lips and murmured, "Never forget that I will love you forever."

Eobard's breathing remained deep and even as he slept on, unaware of Barry's presence.

Barry left Eobard and phased back through the glass wall. Although the night was cold and still, the nearby bushes were moving. It could have been the local wildlife. It was more likely the Time Wraiths.

He didn't wait to find out.

It was time to go home, to go back to the future – the one he needed to save. He thought of Eobard, in his suit, but with one red glove and one yellow and black. He thought of Eobard, beautiful and sweaty, eyes glowing an unearthly blue, as they made love in the hushed privacy of their forest home. He thought of Eobard, a man of such dichotomy – a scientist driven by a quest for discovery and a warrior driven by power and obsession, but most importantly, a man far too vulnerable to human emotions. Barry ran and heard his lover's voice urging him along –

_Run, Barry. Run_

Barry felt the Time Wraiths at his heels and he sped forward, reaching out to a time and a place where his heart lived. To his home.

_To Eobard._

Eobard didn't linger after Barry disappeared into the accelerator tunnel. He didn't allow himself to speculate on where and when Barry was heading, or even if he would be fast enough to outwit a Time Wraith.

He trusted Barry to make the right decision and he knew, without question, that Barry was fast enough to outrun any danger. Any danger but Zoom.

From his ring, which he'd kept hidden in his right glove – and wouldn't that have been an awkward moment, if Barry had wanted _that_ as his talisman – Eobard produced the tachyon generator and
clipped it on. He'd left the ring behind when he'd travelled back to his own future. Now he wished that he'd had the chance to show it to Wells, who clearly had a genius for miniaturization, one that might even be better than his own.

Another, albeit minor, reason to survive the coming battle.

Eobard ran down to the breach room and considered his strategy. Zoom was – by all accounts and all warnings – almost too powerful. But that was in his own dimension. As a tourist here, on this Earth, some of his speedster powers, like phasing through solid matter, might – just might – be limited. Which begged the question: did Eobard want to close the chamber doors behind himself and possibly contain the fight to this room, or did he want to take the fight to the streets?

Zoom might be fast and powerful, but the Reverse-Flash rarely relied just on speed and physical strength. He fought with guile and cunning, setting traps and leading his enemies into them.

Eobard left the door open, better to take the fight away from S.T.A.R. Labs and everyone he cared about.

He could see Blue Bell's distress. Her – its – edges were like storm clouds, roiling much like the one that the avatar had shown him, lightning bolt-like energy spikes shooting out. Eobard was able to discern a rhythm to the spikes and wondered if he could use that. If he could time the activation of the Speed Canon to catch Zoom unawares.

At the console he waited for one, two, three pulses and flipped the switch. As it had in the test run, Blue Bell organized into a tight blue ball and a few seconds later, the black-clad speedster he’d been waiting for jumped out of it.

Eobard shut the power off and Blue Bell dispersed.

Zoom – as Eobard had hoped – appeared to be slightly disoriented, looking around the breach room as if he were surprised to be here. And then Zoom saw him.

Eobard felt an atavistic response to the dark gaze but he took his time, sauntering down from the console. He stood in front of Zoom and waited.

"You are not the Flash."

"That's a voice for nightmares," Eobard noted with a casualness he really wasn't feeling. He figured there had to be something in the mask enhancing those grating tones.

"Where is the Flash?"

Eobard held up his left hand, the one with Barry's glove, and said, "He's dead. I killed him." *Forgive me, Barry.*

"You took my quarry! You had no right. All speedsters are mine."

"Now, that's greedy. The Flash wasn't yours, and neither am I."

"You are a speedster, too?"

Eobard cocked his head, genuinely surprised that Zoom had to ask that question. Not only was Eobard wearing a suit with a lightning bolt emblem but speed called to speed, and in such close proximity, Zoom should have sensed the speed force in his veins. But maybe Zoom's corruption of the Speed Force impaired that ability. "Allow me to introduce myself, I am – " Eobard paused for
effect and then, with his hand over his heart, took a small bow. "The Reverse-Flash."

Zoom growled, "Flash or Reverse-Flash, it doesn't matter. I will feast on your speed."

Eobard started to vibrate and let his eyes go red. "You can try, abomination, but you won't succeed." He palmed the Speed Leech and rushed at Zoom, feinting left and going right. He got a couple of punches in, none particularly hard. They were more to distract Zoom from his real intention – getting the Leech attached.

Zoom was fast – likely faster than Eobard – but he was also a clumsy fighter, relying on his mass and his speed rather than on any sort of finesse, and swung wildly at Eobard.

Eobard easily dodged the punches and finally slapped the disk onto Zoom's back. Thankfully, it stayed put. Now it was time to go for a little run.

"Catch me if you can." Eobard sped out of the room and out of S.T.A.R. Labs. He needed to take this battle far away from here, far away from the city – but not so far that Barry wouldn't be able to find them and bring a Time Wraith or two to the party.

Zoom chased Eobard through the city; dogging his heels, but never really slowing down. Eobard started to worry that Wells' "improvements" to the Leech really didn't work. Then he remembered that much of Zoom's speed was artificial – enhanced by speed drugs and his manipulation of linear time. That power wouldn't be affected by the Leech, but Zoom's native speed force, corrupted as it was and augmented by what he'd stolen from other speedsters, should be draining out of him. Once that happened – he'd be vulnerable.

They ended up at an abandoned cement factory, north and west of S.T.A.R. Labs. Eobard skidded to a stop and realized that, finally, Zoom was slowing down – he was at least two seconds behind. An eternity, in speedster games. Now, it was just a matter of playing tag until Barry showed up with a guest or two.

"You are, perhaps, a worthy adversary, Reverse-Flash. But I am the fastest man alive and no one can stand against me." The monster let his blue lightning flash – perhaps in an attempt to intimidate Eobard.

"Possibly, but I doubt it. What happens when your speed drug runs out?"

Zoom cocked his head, clearly taken aback.

"The amino-bonded chloral hydrate – it gives you a boost but it's still a finite resource. Do you have to stop and shoot up like the addict you are?"

"How do you know about that?"

"You're not the first speedster who thought about giving himself an artificial – shall we say – leg up. But you are the only one who was stupid enough to actually do it." Eobard kept taunting Zoom, buying time for Barry's return.

"Not so stupid, Reverse-Flash – I am faster and more powerful than you could ever dream of."

"Your power is destruction – not creation. It's easier to take something apart than to actually build it."

"You killed the Flash. We are not that different."

"Ahh – but what you don't know is that I created the Flash. The Flash of this Earth. I made him."
"And you killed him."

"That is true. And it was my privilege and pleasure." Eobard felt like a cross between an etiquette teacher and a comic book villain. "What have you made, Zoom? Or should I say, Hunter Zolomon?"

"You know who I am?"

"Oh, I know many, many things. I know that you sent your time remnant through the breach in an attempt to terrify the people here."

Zoom laughed, the sound even more unpleasant than his voice. "I'll tell you a secret – I wasted more time remnants than I could count before I finally got one through the portal alive. But my plan worked. I had the Flash cowering at my feet. I broke him. You merely killed something I damaged beyond repair."

Rage burned through Eobard at the memory of Barry's death in the alternate timeline, of what Zoom had done to him in the months before Eobard returned. But rage would not win the day. Cunning, guile and patience would.

"The Flash was healed when I killed him – you barely injured him."

"I all but destroyed the Flash. I stole his speed. I left him barely alive."

Self-control slipping, Eobard glanced down at the red glove and prayed that Barry was on his way back. "You're nothing more than a mass murderer. Your insanity is commonplace, just magnified by the dark matter and the drugs you take."

"But I am smart enough, fast enough to bring the universe to the edge of destruction."

"Why?" Eobard didn't have to pretend curiosity.

"So I will always be the fastest man alive."

"Such a banal reason. You want a gold medal to go with that?" Eobard kept taunting Zoom, buying time. While the leech was slowly sucking away Zoom's speed, the monster was still a formidable enemy.

The talisman – that piece of Barry that Eobard kept next to his heart – glowed with warmth, and something snapped back into place. Barry was home.

"You aren't faster than I am, Zoom. Not anymore." Eobard took off in a blaze of red lightning. He felt Zoom at his heels, the creature's blue lightning stinking of hell. They circled around the cement factory, and suddenly it was like Eobard was racing a toddler. Zoom faltered on the third lap, the power from the drugs spent, and his speed force sucked into the Leech.

Zoom was on his hands and knees, heaving with exertion. Eobard approached with caution – playing injured was a trick he would use. But Zoom seemed truly disabled, screaming, "What have you done?"

"Nothing that you didn't deserve." Eobard stood over the fallen monster. He could kill Zoom now – a quick hand through the chest – except that if Barry had managed to bring the Time Wraiths, without Zoom to punish, they'd continue their relentless pursuit of the speedster who they were chasing in the first place.

A blaze of gold lightning resolved into Barry Allen as he skidded to a stop next to him. Eobard was about to ask if he was successful in bringing a Time Wraith when the clouds parted and two ghostly, corpse-like figures descended, heading directly for them.
Eobard grabbed Barry and pulled him back, but the retreat was unnecessary. As soon as the wraith spotted Zoom, prone on the ground, they pounced and did just what Eobard hoped – what the Speed Force wanted them to do. They sucked the life out of Zoom.

But to Eobard's shock, they didn't kill him.

No, they transformed him into something else. Something that looked like a Time Wraith – but yet wasn't. Something that seemed horrifically familiar, but Eobard couldn't quite place it. And it all happened in a matter of seconds. For some reason – perhaps it was the presences of the Time Wraiths themselves – Eobard couldn't see through the time dilation.

The Time Wraiths dragged Zoom – or whatever Zoom was now – into the sky. The clouds opened and swallowed all three creatures. A cool breeze picked up, sweeping the sky clean.

Shaking with unexpected emotion, Eobard turned to Barry and pulled him into his arms. "It's done."

Barry melted against him, resting his head on Eobard's shoulder. "Yes it is. We saved the world, Eobard Thawne."

Eobard stroked Barry's back. "Yes, Mr. Allen, that we did."

Barry pulled back Eobard's cowl and threaded his fingers through his hair. Eobard purred like a cat, and then he tasted joy as Barry kissed him.

Barry whispered against his ear, "So, how does it feel to be a hero?"

Eobard closed his eyes, expecting to savor the irony, but instead, all he could see was the transfigured Zoom as he was being dragged away. Eobard shook himself and tilted his head back so he could look at Barry. He pushed back Barry's cowl and stared into those incredible eyes. "It feels pretty damn good."

Barry smiled and Eobard felt like he'd do anything to keep that expression on his face. "Then let's go home and share the news."

Before they sped off, Eobard scanned the ground. There, glinting in the moonlight, was the Speed Leech. It had fallen from Zoom as the Time Wraiths took him away. Eobard picked it up – surprised at how much heavier it was.

"What is that?" Barry, of course, had noticed.

Eobard had a choice to make, prevaricate and deflect or… to tell Barry the damned truth. "Remember when Wells told me not to be stupid?"

Barry nodded.

"He was talking about this." Eobard held up the Leech. "This holds Zoom's speed – or the speed that connected him to the Speed Force. Much of it was what he stole from you, and possibly – likely – some of it is from other speedsters he'd encountered."

"What do you want to do with it?" Barry's voice was soft, but there was no uncertainty there.

"What would you do with it?"

Barry held out his hand and Eobard, with a surprising lack of reluctance, dropped the disk into it. Barry took note of the weight. "I think we should give this back to the Speed Force. Let them
cleanse it, separate out what was corrupted. Maybe they'll endow it on another speedster, someone who has the strength to carry such a legacy. We don't need this, do we?"

Almost overwhelmed, Eobard whispered, "No, we don't."

Barry cupped his hands – one in his one red glove, the other with Eobard's black glove – around the disk and Eobard cupped his own hands around Barry's. He knew just what needed to be done.

They both vibrated and electricity crackled around them – braided bolts of red and gold lightning, the ozone a sweet perfume – and the disk began to disintegrate. Eobard could sense the speed force it contained begin to disperse. Some of it was familiar – Barry's speed – but most if it was alien, not of this dimension and possibly not from a human source. Zoom's speed, such as it was, was dark and small and vile.

Regardless of the origin, the speed contained in the Leech shot up into the sky, arcing over them for a brief moment before disappearing.

Eobard, who seemed to have developed a fanciful imagination, thought he heard Harrison's, his voice, whisper "thank you" as the last of the speed vanished into the ether.

Tears were streaming down Barry's face, and Eobard felt a similar wetness on his own.

"Let's go home, Flash."

:::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

There were too many people in the Time Vault, and Cisco was beginning to feel claustrophobic, with Joe and Iris and Eddie and Caitlin, plus the Wellses, crowding into the small space. It didn't help that that oversized grumpy cat, Harry Wells, was taking up twice the oxygen of a normal human being.

It was strange, but Cisco really couldn't think of this guy as "Harrison" Wells. While the man Cisco first knew as Harrison Wells had turned out to be an imposter, the time that Cisco had spent with him had made an indelible impression, and the Earth-2 version of Wells had none of the Earth-1 version's charm or polish. And even though Cisco knew that his Harrison Wells was really Eobard Thawne, and that the true Earth-1 Wells was long dead, his lizard brain couldn't equate the two. Calling the bad-tempered, pulse-rifle-toting, dimension-hopping, meta-human hating scientist "Harry" – even if just in the privacy of Cisco's own mind – was his way of dealing with the dichotomy.

Said grumpy scientist paced the small space and muttered, "So – we just wait until someone comes and gives us the all clear?"

"Dad, chill." Jesse tried to soothe her father. "You're not helping."

"I just – " Harry paced and kept getting close to Cisco, then turned on his heel and walked three paces in the other direction. "Can't relax."

Jesse dragged Harry over to one of the storage cartons and forcibly sat him down. "You're going to have to."

Eddie and Iris were sitting on a storage box, Caitlin on another, and Joe was leaning against the crazy-ass braille wall, glaring at Harry. "You need to calm down, Wells."

"I can't – I can't sit here and just let – "
"Other people be heroes?" Cisco finished the man's thought. "It's rough, but you know what – you don't have a choice." At that, he gave Joe a gentle shove and activated the holographic monitor hidden in the wall. "We can observe, at least what's going on in the building."

Iris and Eddie and Jesse and Harry abandoned their seats to watch.

The display showed Barry and Thawne at the entrance to the accelerator tunnel and they were talking too quietly for the audio feed to pick up, but it was very clear what they were doing.

Cisco – and everyone else in the Time Vault – had watched Barry pull Thawne's glove off and Thawne take Barry's. They watched what happened next, Barry kissing Thawne's wrist and Thawne kissing Barry's, and Cisco felt his face flame in second-hand embarrassment at watching something so personal, so private.

But then he heard Jesse Wells sigh and he glanced at her. She looked like she was on the verge of tears as she rested her head against her father's shoulder. Harry, too, looked devastated, like he was grieving. When Jesse let out a tiny sob, Harry gathered her into his arms and whispered something.

Cisco looked away. What was going on between the Wellses, father and daughter, was as private as what he'd just seen.

By the time he turned back to the monitor, Barry had disappeared and the cameras were following Thawne as he headed towards the Breach Room.

Cisco couldn't help himself. He just had to say, "And now for the main event."

Caitlin shushed him, but there really was no need. Cisco's mouth was bone dry as he watched Zoom come through the breach, as he listened to Thawne taunt the nightmare in black. There was some action – too quick for his eyes to pick up – and then Thawne took off, Zoom at his heels.

They left the building and Cisco let out a stream of vile curses as the monitor displayed the empty breach room. He pulled out a tablet and tried to connect into the network of cameras through the city, but Thawne and Zoom were traveling too fast for the cameras to register.

Joe was looking over his shoulder. "You can't find them?"

"No, damnit. Wait – wait. What am I thinking?? Ramon, you're an idiot – I've got Thawne right here – " Cisco switched to a mapping app, the same one that he used to track Barry. "I'm linked into his comms. They aren't turned on, but they're still tracking."

Cisco pinpointed Thawne in an industrial area north and west of S.T.A.R. Labs, just at the very outskirts of the city and the edge of the network of cameras that he can link into. "Looks like they're at the old Crawford Cement plant." He threw the data stream from the tablet onto the monitor.

Everyone watched as Thawne lead Zoom on a merry chase around the plant, and Cisco couldn't hold back a cheer when Zoom stumbled.

"Looks like the Speed Leech worked - even with your modifications." Without even thinking, Cisco clapped Harry on the arm. To his surprise, the man didn't flinch or jump back.

"Yes, it did. It most certainly did." Harry let out a small, almost hysterical laugh.

Of course, they couldn't hear what Thawne was saying to Zoom, but they could see Barry's arrival and then a few seconds later, a pair of Dementors poured holy hell down on Zoom and took him
Cisco blinked. "It's over." He looked at the time – less than one single hour had passed since they'd locked themselves into the Time Vault. "It's all over. I can't believe it."

Then Joe called his attention back to the screen, "Wait – what's happening?" Barry and Thawne were holding something and they were vibrating.

Harry seemed to know what was going on, when he spat out, "Those idiots. They've got the Leech. They're doing something with Zoom's speed."

The screen suddenly filled with static and then cleared, showing just a patch of empty ground where the two speedsters had been just moments before.

"No, no – they aren't gone. They can't be gone. I'm not going through this again." Cisco squeezed his eyes shut and tried to vibe them, to find a way into whatever dimension had grabbed his best friend and his time traveling bête noire.

Harry banged on the door, apparently trying to release the lock. Jesse pushed her father out of the way and attacked the power mechanism. Neither worked and Cisco told them to just stop and let him concentrate. But a loud thunk interfered with his attempts to vibe and the Time Vault door slid open with an overly dramatic whoosh.

The two missing speedsters were standing there, grinning like a pair of goddamned idiots.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

It's hard to believe that the fight with Zoom is over. But it is, and that means that Barry and Eo will finally have a chance to relax, to find their level and start their lives together.

It also means they have to deal with their guests - the Wells, father and daughter.

Eobard was, in a word, exhausted. All he wanted to do was get Barry home, into bed, and sleep for a week. He didn't want to think about anything – not murderous speedsters, not trans-dimensional doppelgangers, not even Team Flash. He just wanted to hold Barry in his arms and savor something he hadn't experienced in half a lifetime. Peace.

But that didn't seem on the agenda right at this moment. Cisco was peppering him for details of the fight. Caitlin had insisted on a complete examination and treating the bruises that Zoom had managed to inflict. Bruises that would heal in a matter of minutes, not even hours. Barry was talking with Joe and Iris about something. And the Wellses just sat there, looking stunned with relief.

Eobard, back in soft clothes (and honestly, he was feeling like he never wanted to put that suit on again), went over to the visitors. He wasn't sure he liked this Harrison Wells, but it was possible that he'd be here, underfoot, for a while. And then there was his rather intriguing status as a speedster.

Eobard wondered if Wells was really as "crippled" as he said he was, or if he just lacked the proper understanding of the basics, like nutrition. And given that this Wells – or at least this version of Harrison Wells in a timeline reset by Zoom – had been living the a war zone since his own particle accelerator explosion, he had probably never had the chance to really comprehend the needs of a speedster.

Under her father's watchful eye, Jesse was taking apart the chest piece that Rupture had fried – not that there was anything salvageable from it.

"Miss Wells?"

The girl looked up and Eobard's breath caught. One of Harrison's memories surfaced – Tess, the moment Harrison first laid eyes on her. It took all of Eobard's self-control not to break down.

"Yes, Professor Thawne?"

"May I have a private word with your father?" Eobard had summoned all of his almost childhood training – manners and etiquette – to help keep a firm grip on his emotions.

Jesse gave him a small and unsure smile, but nodded. "Okay."

"Come with me," Eobard said to Wells. Wells glared at him, but Eobard wasn't bothered the overt hostility.

It was interesting to stage a staring contest with his genetic doppelganger and it seemed, for a few
moments, that Wells wasn't going to back down, but he did, turning to his daughter. "If I don't come back, remember me fondly."

The girl, to her credit, laughed, and said to Eobard, "He's a big ball of mush. And be careful, he bruises easily."

Wells then turned his glare on his child, who didn't appear to be the least bit cowed. That glare turned into a fond smile when she made a little shooing gesture with her hands.

Eobard left the Cortex, nodding to Barry, and headed towards his office with Wells trailing him. Eobard closed the door and made certain the sound maskers were engaged. Barry had access to the audio feed, but while Eobard had no issue with Barry listening, he didn't want anyone else monitoring the conversation.

Wells declined Eobard's offer to take a seat and stood there, hands in his pockets. He looked like a man standing too close to the edge of a cliff and wondering just how hard the landing would be. "I guess you want to talk about my speed."

Eobard nodded. "Precisely." He pushed Wells into one of the chairs and took a seat next to him.

"There's nothing to talk about. I'm flawed and nothing's going to fix that. And it's a good thing – if I had any real power, Zoom would have killed me right after he murdered my – " Wells paused and swallowed, "my Eobard."

Eobard hadn't thought of that. "You have a point, but I'm still not convinced that your so-called flaw is really what you think it is." He pulled up Barry's early training records and pointed out the abrupt drop in blood sugar. "From what you told me, I'm thinking this is your culprit."

Wells looked at the data, but didn't say anything, so Eobard continued. "You were fifty when you were hit with the dark matter, that's going to have a difference on your body's ability to develop its speed. You also didn't spend nine months in a coma, while your body adjusted to the speed force in your DNA."

Wells was startled by that, and asked, "Did you, when you got your speed?"

"No, Barry did. When I became a speedster, for the first few months, my abilities were as erratic as yours, until the speed force in my body stabilized. And then I needed to figure out my caloric requirements. On a quiet day, without any significant use of my powers, I need about ten thousand calories. A day like today, I'll need two or three times that."

Wells looked appalled. "You have to be kidding."

Eobard just laughed.

"So, you're saying that I might be like you? Like the Flash?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying." Something occurred to Eobard. "When you were hit with the dark matter, were you exposed to any chemicals?"

Wells remained quiet for a while, then ground out, "I was up to my ankles in coolant, trying to get the damn thing shut down. I was also in a Faraday cage, but there was a partial failure. I shouldn't have survived."

Eobard laughed. "You unwittingly created the perfect environment for the introduction of the speed force into your body. You are, my friend, a member of the family."
Wells scrubbed his face. "I don't want this, whatever it is. My world – what's left of it – is going to need scientists, not speedsters."

"One does not preclude the other." Eobard leaned back in his chair. "I would know that."

"I'm surprised you have room in your bed for Barry Allen. I'd think that your ego would take up all of the available space."

The same atavistic response that Eobard had had on the night that the Wellses had arrived, when Wells had suggested that he could claim Barry's loyalty, flooded through Eobard like a rip current. His vision turned bright, bleeding red and he sprung up, pushing Wells back into the chair, a hand on his throat. "You shut up about Barry Allen – you never say his name with anything less than perfect respect – do you understand me?"

Through the madness, he saw Wells nod.

Eobard let go and sat back down, cleared his throat and smiled. "Good. I wouldn't want to have to give that lesson for a third time."

Wells actually laughed, a bitter and almost self-loathing sound. "At first, I thought it was the speed that made you insane. But it's not. It's love. You love Barry more than your own life. That's a form of madness in and of itself."

Eobard shrugged, uncomfortable with the acuity of Wells' observations. "Yes, it is."

Wells continued, "And it's a madness I understand. When I lost my wife, I almost snapped. It was only Jesse and how young she was, how she needed me, that saved my sanity. But when Zoom killed Eobard – my Eobard – I focused everything I had on getting revenge. Yet everything I did was wrong. It nearly cost me my daughter's life. And I am going to have to live with the knowledge that my own hubris killed my partner, deprived my daughter of the only emotionally stable adult in her life. That thousands have died, friends and colleagues, innocents, people dedicated to protecting my city, because of me. I thought I was smarter than everyone and it's cost me everything." Wells scrubbed his face. "Having this … gift, this speed, is a burden I don't want."

When Eobard had brought Harrison Wells into his office, he’d expected it would be difficult to convince the man to accept the fact that he was a meta-human. Now he was having a hard time convincing himself not to help Wells extract the speed force from his body.

"I'm sorry." That was all he could say.

"I talked to Barry – before you two went into battle. I asked him for a favor. And would like to ask the same of you."

"What?" Eobard couldn’t imagine what Wells wanted from them.

"Jesse. She's a meta-human, too. Her powers are dormant, but I think that they will start to manifest soon. My Earth is in shambles and meta-humans – even the ones that weren't under Zoom's control – will not be welcome. Jesse will need a safe place, a place where she can grow into her powers, where she can live without fear. I'm hoping that Detective West will give her shelter until I can figure out how to support her here."

Eobard was grateful that Wells didn't ask him to look out for his daughter, though he was – he had to admit – a little stung, too. Not that he was at all equipped to watch over a teenage girl. Joe West had already done that, with great success. "We'll look after her for you – but you are welcome to stay here, too."
Wells shook his head. "No – frankly, living in close proximity to you won't work in the long run. I think you've already demonstrated that. Several times."

Eobard could concede the point, but the idea of letting a Harrison Wells – even this weaponized version of the gentle man he once knew – go back to a world with death and disaster waited was as uncomfortable as letting Barry run towards danger. There was nothing he could do to stop it, but he didn't like it.

And he could delay the inevitable. "Stay for a little while. I'm sure that Joe will be happy to put you up for as long as you want." In truth, he had no clue if Joe West would or would not give house space to Eobard's genetic doppelganger, but Eobard had a feeling that Joe wouldn't turn anyone away.

Wells looked at Eobard, and his lips twitched in a slight smile. "Thank you. Maybe for a few nights."

"Your daughter needs you." Eobard felt that he was the last person who was qualified to give parenting advice, but it seemed obvious. "She's been through a lot. And if, as you say, she's got burgeoning meta-human powers, she's going to need to know that you're not abandoning her because of them. That you don't love her any less because she's different." Eobard all but snapped his mouth shut. He was revealing far too much to a virtual stranger.

"You're right. Jesse needs to know that." Wells shook his head. "Although she might hate me for hiding the truth from her."

"She seems like a smart girl. Have you considered that she already suspects what she is?"

Wells looked like he'd been slapped.

"No, clearly you haven't. But that's neither here nor there." Eobard got up. "You have several choices to make and you need to choose wisely. If you truly wish to remove your speed, we'll do it properly. If you want to go back to your world, we'll take you there. But neither of those decisions should be made now." Eobard listened to himself and heard the echo of a long-dead friend, someone much kinder, much wiser, in those words.

Wells nodded. "I'll ask Detective West for some accommodations – for a few nights. I'm so tired, I can't even think."

Eobard tried to imagine what it was like, living in Zoom's war zone for over two years. Yes, he'd lived with the terrible knowledge of Barry's fate for almost a year – but he'd had peace and solitude for that year. He couldn't fathom what Wells had gone through, knowing his daughter was held captive by that monster.

But that was over. Wells and his child would have a place here, and Eobard would do his best to see that they found a modicum of happiness. Just so long as Harrison Wells stayed away from Barry. His Barry.

Everything else was negotiable.

:::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

Eobard, never someone who slept easily or deeply, felt Barry shift and drape himself over his torso. Barry wasn't the most comfortable of blankets, but Eobard wouldn't exchange his lover for all the silk and velvet in the universe. Or the multiverse, for that matter.

Despite the earliness of the hour – by Eobard's internal clock, it was still a few hours before dawn –
he was fully awake. But there was no need to get up, get going, get to S.T.A.R. Labs and do anything. For the first time in this new eternity, Eobard truly felt like he could catch his breath and simply relax.

There was nothing out there stalking them – no insane speed monster trying to destroy the multiverse, no terrible future to prevent, nor any engagement with destiny. The past, and all the damage he'd caused, was fixed. Barry Allen was the Flash in all of his glorious perfection – a man of kindness and generosity, with a grace of spirit that Eobard had never imagined possible, even in his most desperate dreams.

Eobard tried to banish those ghosts and he reminded himself that this was real and true. Barry might not know all of Eobard's terrible secrets, but he knew one, one that had shamed him for a lifetime. It seemed all too unreal that Barry had not only accepted Eobard's deviance, but shared it. Which reinforced Barry's own assertion that he – Eobard – wasn't deviant, merely different. And it was a difference to be celebrated. Worshipped, perhaps.

Eobard must have made a noise, because Barry shifted and opened his eyes, meeting Eobard's gaze. Eobard reached out and traced Barry's lips, ghosting his fingers over the warm skin. Barry kissed his fingertips and Eobard shivered; from just that simple, almost innocent caress, his whole body tensed in desire.

"Good morning, Mr. Allen." Eobard's voice didn't sound like his own.

Barry blinked and then smiled like a slow rising dawn, before replying, his voice barely a whisper. "Good morning, Professor Thawne."

"So formal?"

"I think you like it." Barry was still whispering.

"I do, but I don't know why." That was the truth.

"I do."

"You do?"

Barry nodded slowly, rubbing his face against Eobard's chest. "You like teaching me, you like giving me knowledge, making me better. When I call you 'Professor Thawne' – even here, in bed – I'm acknowledging that."

"Those are very profound thoughts for the pre-dawn hours." Profound and absolutely true.

"Mmm. Perhaps." Barry closed his eyes and Eobard wondered if he'd fallen back to sleep. But he hadn't. "And the flip side to that? I like being your student, I like learning from you, I like how I become better because you've shared something with me, taught me something new. I like – love – how you teach me."

Eobard didn't know how Barry just kept shattering and rebuilding his world. He'd started calling Barry 'Mr. Allen' as a way to ensure some emotional and psychological distance between them, but for his part, it had never worked. Even under the guise of Harrison Wells, when he'd first taught Barry what it meant to be a speedster, he'd been drawn deep into Barry's emotional orbit.

Barry let out a tiny sigh.

"What's the matter?"
Barry echoed his own thoughts. "I can't believe it's over. Zoom is gone, the breaches are closed, we survived."

"We didn't just survive. We triumphed, Barry."

"Thanks to you, Eobard. This never would have happened without you." Barry pressed a small kiss above his heart. "You came back and without hesitating, you gave me your speed."

Eobard started to say something, but Barry looked up and Eobard couldn't speak for the lightning in Barry's eyes – not just gold, but flashes of Eobard's own brilliant red. "Whatever you've done in the past, whatever sins you think you've committed against me, they are gone. They don't matter anymore. This is the balance, Eobard, please accept it and let us move forward. Can we?"

To Eobard, the voice may have been Barry's, but he wondered if the speaker was the Speed Force. He didn't know if he could accept this absolution, but in this moment, he had to. "Yes."

Barry smiled and the otherworldliness disappeared from his eyes. "Good." He rolled off of Eobard and sat up. "What shall we do today? No villains to slay, no universes to save." Barry gave Eobard an impish grin. "I might get bored, and do something stupid. You need to keep me busy."

Eobard tilted his head back against the pillows. "Hmmm, what can we do to keep you from falling into fatal ennui."

Barry's smile went from impish to downright devious. "Well, I can seem to remember wanting to give you a blow job, but you held me off, you said it was a pleasure we should wait on, until we have all the time in the world."

"That's right, I did." Eobard felt mildly hoisted on his own petard. "And you are about to tell me that we now have all the time in the world."

"In fact, we do." Barry's expression turned serious. "Unless this is something you don't want. I never, ever want to do something you don't want or don't like or would make you feel bad. Or uncomfortable."

Eobard didn't know how he could go from chagrin to near-tears in a single sentence. Actually he did: Barry was how. "I'll make the same promise to you. We have a eternity to explore what we like and where our hard limits, and I'll never be afraid to tell you what I like and what I don't want. And right now, I would really like for you to put your mouth on me. Would you like to do that, Mr. Allen?"

Barry licked his lips, that wicked look returned to his eyes. "I certainly would, Professor."

Eobard's cock twitched with interest – at both Barry's expression and his words – and when Barry gaze drifted down Eobard's torso to his hips, still covered by the bed sheet, it twitched again. Eobard leaned back against the pillows and lifted his chin, and feeling both ridiculous and extremely aroused, he said, "Go ahead."

..............................................................................................

Barry felt the lightning of desire burn under his skin. Eobard was like a pasha, leaning back against the mass of pillows, his arms tucked behind his head, and Barry swore that he knew exactly what he looked like.

"I want to touch you, I want to know you." Barry ran a finger from Eobard’s jaw to his neck and came to rest at the base of his throat, where he felt Eobard’s pulse jump. The throbbing under his finger was as arousing as a kiss – not that he needed an aphrodisiac – and Barry lingered there,
petting and stroking and finally pressing his lips against the pulse point. "May I touch you?"

"You may do whatever you want."

Barry reached out and traced Eobard's neck, his fingertips gently vibrating. Eobard shivered at that initial contact and Barry withdrew his hand, clenching his fist. "Sorry – I can't seem to control it."

"Then don't." Perhaps remembering how Barry had responded a few nights ago, Eobard put a note of command in those two simple words.

Barry couldn't help himself. He had to tell Eobard, "You are so beautiful, you know that?"

Eobard seemed to scoff at the compliment, and Barry remembered what Eobard had told him, about his parents and the genetic engineering, so he filed that reaction away, marking it as a sensitive subject. "You are so strong, so perfect. Here – " Barry stroked the length of his collarbone. "And here – " He cupped Eobard's shoulder. "And here." Barry leaned over and pressed a soft kiss at the base of his throat.

"Are you seducing me, Mr. Allen?"

"I'm trying to, Professor Thawne."

"You need to know, you seduced me a long time ago. You woke up and looked at me like I held the secrets of the universe."

Barry felt the same. "You seduced me, too. You drew me in, you made me want things I never thought I'd want." But he didn't want to be distracted and drawn into a discussion about the past. He wanted Eobard – his body, his skin, his cock, and continued exploring and praising his lover's body. "This is perfect, too – " Eobard's breastbone. "And this." His left pectoral. And then his right. Barry kissed and stroked and drove Eobard into a quiet frenzy.

Eobard said, "For someone who's never done this before, you are wonderfully wonderful at this."

Barry laughed, not the least bit offended. "I've done research, you know. I am a scientist."

"And now is your chance to experiment." Eobard reached up and grabbed the headboard, much as he'd had Barry do last night.

Barry's mouth didn't stay on Eobard's skin, but his fingers did. Just his fingertips, seeking out the sensitive places, the base of Eobard's throat, the length of his collarbone, the fold of skin where chest meets shoulder meets armpit, and Barry didn't hesitate to follow that line. He traced the path of the hair that curled in dampness and Barry could smell Eobard's natural musk – clean and healthy – and he couldn't resist the impulse to bury his face in Eobard's armpit and breathe deeply.

Their bodies were intertwined, Barry had a leg between Eobard's, and he was riding Eobard's thigh. At this moment, right now, he was not the Flash, but a man seducing and seduced. It was a slow ride, a gentle trot, and the pressure of Eobard's rock-hard thigh against his groin was a bearable, pleasurable pain – it keeps him from going over the edge too quickly.

Barry savored the feel of Eobard's skin – like velvet over steel – a smooth chest with just a few fine curls around his nipples. He was still just using his fingertips, but Eobard was getting impatient. Barry ignored his breathy whine and continued to explore Eobard like a blind man. He finally let himself touch Eobard's nipples – they were tight, hard like pebbles, and Barry kept his eyes on Eobard's face as he pinched them.
"Do you like that?" Eobard didn't answer and Barry pinched them again. Eobard hissed in pleasure and Barry repeats the question. "Do you like that?"

Eobard finally answered, "Yes, don’t stop."

Barry smiled. He had to. "Why are you so stubborn?"

Eobard shook his head and just closed his eyes. Barry was stunned by the beauty of the image – Eobard laying there, acquiescent, willing – not submissive – just dormant. Like a resting tiger waiting for his prey in the shadowed forest. Barry knew that this wouldn't last much longer, so he took full advantage of the moment.

He climbed over Eobard, arms braced on either side of Eobard's head, surrounding him like a cage. He pressed a soft kiss against his lips, and to Barry's delight, Eobard remained passive. So Barry deepened it, biting softly at Eobard's lower lip. Just as Eobard began to respond with a low growl, Barry let go and kissed his chin, licking at the morning scruff, delighting in the roughness of it against his tongue. When Eobard lifted his head, Barry couldn't help but feel like he was a big cat and Eobard was his prey – a delightful reversal of their usual roles. Barry bit down gently; hard enough to mark, hard enough to leave a bruise that will likely fade before they both climax. He was rewarded when Eobard's hips surged up.

Barry's tongue lingered at the base of Eobard's throat, then moved down, licking at Eobard's swollen nipples before working his way down to his abdomen. He gripped Eobard's ribs firmly, holding him in place while he teased at his navel, licking just the rim with his tongue.

Eobard moaned and Barry looked up. Eobard was panting slightly.

"I'm going to do that to your ass one day." Barry didn't know where the words came from – maybe a porno he'd once watched, hoping to find some clues to his own sexuality.

The sound that came out of Eobard’s mouth was something between a moan and a small scream. Barry smiled and went back to work on Eobard’s navel, fucking it with his tongue, torturing it. Barry felt as if some sex god had inhabiting his body, that there was no such thing as inexperience, that he was living all of the fantasies he’d had in that long and lonely year they’d been apart and making them reality.

Barry sensed that Eobard was about to go over the edge – or maybe it was the way the damp spot on sheet was so rapidly growing. Barry tried to pull the sheet away, but Eobard held onto it. Barry wondered if for some reason, Eobard was shy, but then their eyes locked.

This wasn't shyness, not at all.

Eobard wanted something from him, and Barry understood exactly what it was. He wanted Barry to ask permission.

And so he did. "May I see you? Please?"

Eobard nodded, the gesture so perfectly regal, so perfectly Eobard, that when Eobard let go, Barry waited a heartbeat before slowly pulled the sheet away.

Eobard was fiercely aroused. Hard and red and wet and perfect and Barry licked his lips before bending over to complete this journey of discovery.

Barry breathed over Eobard’s cock, and the warm stream of breath aroused Eobard even further. His balls began to draw up tight and drop of pre-come pearled through his slit. Barry licked a single strip
along the length of Eobard's cock with the flat of his tongue, from base to tip, and then back down.

Eobard moaned as Barry licked his balls, takes one, then the other into his mouth, laving it with his tongue before letting them slide out with a wet pop. Eobard was so wound up that Barry knew it wasn't going to take much to bring his lover off. Barry licked him again, teasing along the big vein, under the hood, dipping into Eobard’s leaking slit before engulfing the head with his mouth.

He held Eobard down at his hips, refusing to let him surge up into Barry’s mouth. There was an art to this and though a part of Barry knew he should have been clumsy and awkward, gagging as Eobard's cock filled his mouth, he seemed to be possessed by some preternatural instinct – perhaps this was another gift from the Speed Force. He knew he had to keep his throat relaxed, and his mouth filled with saliva as he swallowed as much of Eobard as he could. Barry kept up a consistent pressure, breathing through his nose as he bobbed his head up and down. He reveled in this giving, enjoying the very real heat and mass of Eobard, his taste, his texture – the very essence of him.

When Eobard’s hands grasped Barry head, his nail scraping against his scalp, Barry almost lost it. He’d never realized that his scalp could be an erogenous zone – but it was, and it almost triggered Barry's own orgasm. It almost brought the lightning – something that Barry knew would end this far too quickly. He didn’t quite block out the sensation of Eobard’s fingers in his hair, but he forced himself to concentrate on the feel of Eobard's cock in his mouth. He slid up, just barely keeping the head in his mouth, and then down again – almost all the way. Barry could feel the pulse beating in the big veins against his lips, and he swallowed the pre-come that was continuously leaking. He went up and down one more time before he let go of Eobard’s hips, cupping his hands around Eobard's cock.

Barry was not quite sure what he did to trigger Eobard’s orgasm, but Eobard was coming, filling Barry's mouth with sweet-bitter-sour semen. The taste was quintessentially Eobard and Barry swallowed until he couldn't anymore; finally letting Eobard’s cock slid all of the way out of his mouth.

When Barry looked up, Eobard's expression stunned him. Eobard was dazed, wrecked, there were tears streaming out of his closed eyes, and his chest was rapidly rising and falling. Barry couldn't tell if Eobard was just panting or if he was sobbing.

Barry swallowed again, licked his lips, and climbed back up Eobard’s body, until they were face to face. He brushed his hand against Eobard’s damp cheek, gently against his forehead, tangling his fingers in Eobard's sweat-soaked hair.

Eobard was crying.

"What’s the matter?" Barry was devastated. Had he done something wrong, something that Eobard hadn't wanted?

Eobard opened his eyes and looked at Barry – the vivid blue almost completely taken over by his blown pupils. "You are … you are just …"

Whatever Eobard was going to say was lost when he rolled over Barry and kissed him as if the world was about to end. Or maybe as if the world had ended and was just reborn.
Chapter Summary

Time moves forward (and also backwards, but that's not part of this chapter) and Eo and Barry are finding some well-deserved happiness. They are fighting metas and being heroes and Eo is more at ease with himself than he's been in his entire life.

The Wellses are guests of Joe West, and Eo's resigned to the constant and irritating presence of his doppelganger; he's just wishes the made would make a decision about embracing the speedster in himself.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the brief delay!

It had been about a month since their victory over Zoom and Eobard was mostly at peace. The team seemed to fully accept him. Edward finally stopped looking at him with a mix of horror and curiosity. And best of all, he had Barry at his side, day and night.

There were still meta-humans to fight and Eobard found he enjoyed being out on the streets with Barry, with Caitlin and Cisco and yes, occasionally, with Harrison Wells providing support over the comms. Before every mission, Barry made Eobard promise not to use lethal force unless absolutely necessary, and almost more importantly, to let Barry drop the criminal off at the secure meta-human lock-up facility at the CCPD or Iron Heights.

To Barry's delight and the team's gentle teasing, Eobard actually saved the first headline (courtesy of Iris West-Thawne) that hinted at the presence of a second hero speedster in Central City.

He couldn't help but remember those early, heady days when he was masquerading as Harrison Wells. How Barry would speed back into the Cortex, triumphant after a battle, looking to him for validation. And how nicely the tables have turned, because Eobard was the one who now looked to Barry for approval.

And that was, quite strangely, something rather perfect. He'd spend a lifetime worshiping the Flash, and then a part of it bitterly angry at his own limitations and setting himself up – so foolishly – as the Reverse. But now, now everything that he'd dreamed of as a child, everything he'd planned for and imagined, everything he ever wanted – to be at the Flash's side, as a friend and an equal – was his.

Except it wasn't. There were still too many secrets Eobard could never share. The knowledge that Barry's very existence as the Flash was born of a moment of anger and stupidity.

But when Barry smiled at him with so much approval, Eobard could manage to forget the path that led him here.

And then there was Harrison Wells, who – as Eobard had predicted – had found a home for himself
and his daughter with Joe West. They hadn't had any further discussion about Wells' desire to permanently extract Eobard’s speed, and given how intrigued Wells was by Barry's speed, by his own speed, it was possible that Wells was changing his mind.

Eobard had discussed this with Barry, who had the oddly effective suggestion of treating Wells like a feral cat. Laying out the treats and letting Wells come to them. In this case, running in the accelerator tunnel and inviting Wells to watch.

It seemed to be working. Although Wells had declined Barry's invitation to take a run on the treadmill during an afternoon when Iris had taken Jesse shopping for some much-needed essentials, he’d had a rather in-depth discussion of a speedster's nutritional needs with Caitlin.

Eobard could tell, however, that Wells was still suffering from the two-year battle with Zoom, and still looked like a man who wasn't sure where he belonged anymore. Eobard understood that feeling more than he'd ever want to admit.

He had found Wells at the breach room door a few times, staring at the amorphous Blue Bell, and hadn't said anything. But Eobard felt a terrible kinship with the man. Like he'd once been, Harrison Wells was an exile, longing to go home. Unlike Eobard, he had a way back, except that the home he longed for no longer existed, destroyed by a monster. As a precaution, however, Eobard had Barry add an extra layer of security on the breach room doors, preventing Wells from gaining access without at least two other members of the S.T.A.R. Labs team present.

Jesse Wells, Eobard had to admit, was a delight. She still sparked moments of intense emotion in Eobard, calling on his Harrison's memories of Tess, but those moments were outweighed by her casual demonstrations of brilliance. And she was the only person since Hartley Rathaway who could give him a run for his money at the chess board. Jesse hadn't manifested any meta-human powers yet, and it seemed that Wells still hadn't had that important conversation with her. But Cisco had told Eobard that, at Jesse's request, Caitlin had been regularly testing her blood and there was a growing presence of meta-human markers in her mitochondrial DNA.

So, Jesse Wells knew what she was – or would become – despite her father's insistence in keeping her in ignorance.

Interesting, but in the long run, not Eobard’s problem. He'd do his best by the girl when her powers emerged, but he was not going to interfere in that father-daughter relationship.

Right now, Jesse Wells was out with Eddie and Iris and Joe and Cisco. A few hours ago, Caitlin had left for a few days of well-earned conjugal rest. Ronnie had flown in for a brief visit for the first time in three months, and when Caitlin had started to explain Eobard's presence in the here and now, Ronnie had given him such a hostile look that Eobard hadn't been sure if he was about to get punched in the face. But instead, Ronnie had turned and walked away, gathering up Caitlin and escorting her out of S.T.A.R. Labs. At the moment, they were probably burning up the sheets in Caitlin's apartment. Eobard wished them joy of it.

Martin Stein, on the other hand, had greeted him with a surprising amount of pleasure. He’d been bursting with questions about time travel, at least until Wells had walked in and the old man went into paroxysms of joy at the living proof of his theories on the multiverse.

Eobard had just smirked and left Wells to Stein's relentless questioning. Wells had looked like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming car, but to his credit, he was answering all of Stein's questions with grace and patience. And Stein, for his part, seemed more than willing to give Wells all the information he desired about the Firestorm matrix.
"You are looking rather pleased with yourself." Barry joined him, handing him a mug filled with perfectly brewed coffee. Eobard took a grateful sip.

"I am."

"You like being a hero instead of a villain." That wasn't a question.

Eobard sighed, unwilling to admit just how much he did like it. "Let's just say that I didn't start out with villainy in my heart, and leave it at that." He knew that the time was coming when Barry would start pressing for all of the answers he didn't want to give.

Barry sipped his own coffee. "I didn't imagine you had when you made yourself into a speedster. Which is why I do have to wonder at what the future me did to you, what crimes he committed against you, that made you become the Reverse-Flash."

"What are you talking about?"

"Last year, before you went home, remember our conversation?"

Of course Eobard did. He considered his words carefully before speaking. "Can you forget about that?"

"I can and it doesn’t matter to me anymore." Barry leaned back. "You wanted me to hate you, and I understand why – you were trying to push me away. But what I don't understand is why you're still doing that."

Eobard felt his blood run cold. "What are you talking about? I love you, Barry. I've given you everything, and would do so a million times over. There is nothing I wouldn't give you." *Except the truth of that night.*

Barry rested his head on Eobard's shoulder, a gesture of affection in seeming opposition to his words. "I know you do. I know you love me. But what I mean is that you still hold yourself apart. You're still searching for a wedge to drive between us."

Eobard wanted to snap back at Barry, "*No, you are the one pushing that wedge*," but he didn't. He knew what Barry was getting at, he remembered the avatar's counsel, but fifteen years of secrets, fifteen years of guilt and shame and regret stilled his tongue, shut down his brain. "Let it go, Barry."

Barry reached for Eobard's hand and threaded their fingers together. "Okay."

Eobard knew this was only a temporary cease-fire. Barry would continue to look for answers and press the issue. That was his nature, written as deeply into his soul as his generosity and his heroism. One day, soon enough, Barry would insist on the truth and Eobard would have to tell him. At that moment, all of the love now shining out of him would turn to disgust and hate.

Eobard basked in Barry's warmth – both physical and emotional – and watched Stein and Wells go at each other with the enthusiasm that only two scientists on the same wavelength could share. Wells was losing that grim, shell-shocked look, and his occasional shout of laughter brought an odd, corresponding warmth to Eobard's heart. It wasn't his Harrison's laugh, but it was close.

Barry discreetly let go of Eobard’s hand when Stein got up and came over to them. Stein says, "Do you mind if I take Harrison home with me, to Clarissa? The poor man looks like he could use a home cooked meal."

Eobard felt Barry struggling not to laugh. A couple of days ago, Barry had mentioned to Eobard that
Wells had come close to eating Joe out of house and home. Eobard himself was rather amused by Stein's request and wondered just what "a home cooked meal" actually meant in this context. "Harrison Wells is a grown man and free to come and go as he pleases. When you are done with him, you can return him – in one piece, please – to Joe West's house. Dr. Wells and his daughter are staying there for the moment."

Stein nodded and toddled back to Wells, who looked over at Barry and Eobard and gave them a somewhat bemused smile. Martin Stein was still a force of nature.

Eobard watched Stein bully and chivvy Wells into his coat and out of the Cortex, and he vaguely wondered what Stein would say when Wells inevitably told him about his Earth-2 counterpart.

Barry looked thoughtful as he watched the pair depart.

"What's on your mind?" Eobard hoped Barry wasn't going to return to the subject they'd just abandoned.

"Wells."

Eobard raised an eyebrow at that. Not that he was jealous or anything. "Oh?"

"Has he said anything more to you about removing his speed?"

Eobard had told Barry about the discussion he'd had with Wells on the heels of Zoom's defeat. "No."

"I'm pretty sure he's been running."

"Which would explain his rather prodigal appetite."

Barry nodded. "But even if he embraces the speedster in him, I think he wants to go back to his Earth."

"For what?"

"To make things right. We don't talk too much, but I think I unnerve him, even more than you do. The Barry Allen he knew was rather different from me."

"I can understand his discomposure. I find Wells a little unnerving, too."

"He's very different from the Harrison Wells you knew."

Eobard stared at Barry, shocked. "How do you know that?"

"I finally figured out the puzzle of the avatar."

Eobard swallowed hard. Why was every conversation he was having with Barry leading to subjects he didn't want to discuss? But he wasn't going to be a coward. "And what puzzle is that?"

"The avatar was build from your memories – of my mother, of Tess Morgan, of Harrison Wells."

"I didn't know either your mother or Tess Morgan."

"But you do have memories of them. Of my mother, when she was terrified. Of Tess, as Harrison Wells knew her. The avatar's personality was strongest when they were in Harrison's form. Sharper, clearer, more human. Which tells me that you actually knew Harrison Wells. And knew him very well."
Barry stared at him. Eobard wanted to look away, he wanted to *run* away. Instead, he took refuge in detachment, in the cool, mentoring tones he'd used for so long. "There are things, Mr. Allen, that you should just leave alone."

Barry just smiled. "Another Pandora's box, Eobard?"

"Yes. Precisely."

Barry let out a tiny sigh, and to Eobard's relief, let it go, returning the the earlier subject of their conversation. "Wells wants to go home."

"But he doesn't have a home to go back to. His Earth was all but destroyed by Zoom."

"I know – but he feels responsible for what happened."

Eobard had little sympathy for this Harrison Wells. "He is responsible for what happened."

"So – are you saying we should just let him go back? To a world that's been ruined? That might be overrun by criminal metahumans?"

"The bigger question is, do we have the right to stop him?"

Barry, softhearted and wonderful Barry, wasn't willing to let anyone go to their doom. "How about if I go and check it out? Make sure it's safe before letting Wells return."

Barry seemed far too casual about dimension hopping, and Eobard felt the every protective instinct rising to the fore. "That's not a terrible idea, but why you?"

"Because I don't think I could keep Wells from going with you, or going after you once he discovered where you went."

"You don't think you could stop a middle-aged man who barely understands or can control his powers? What type of superhero are you, Barry?"

"One with a very soft heart, Eobard. You always chide me for trying to talk the bad guys down. How do you think I'm going to handle one of the good guys who is trying to go home and save his world?"

"Are you accusing me of having a hard heart?" Eobard found himself smiling.

"Not hard, but just better armored." Barry placed his hand on Eobard's chest, over that organ.

Eobard relished the feel of Barry's hand against him, against the talisman that he always wore. He smiled at Barry and nodded, conceding the point. "If you do go, it's just a reconnaissance mission. No getting involved. You go, you look around, and you come home."

"That's my intention. Go, look around, come home." Barry parroted Eobard's words, but Eobard knew that keeping Barry on task in such a novel environment was likely impossible.

"When do you want to go?" Eobard wondered if Barry was going to say "Right now."

But he didn't. "Tomorrow. I don't think it's right to go and not tell Wells what we're doing. There are things I'll need to know, anyway. Like where our breach leads to on his Earth, what to look for, what to look out for. I know he's got his own S.T.A.R. Labs, but how much does it resemble ours?"

Eobard agreed. "You'll need a complete debrief before you go. You need to find out what were the
conditions before Wells left, what was the likelihood that there were any survivors. I'm wondering if you shouldn't take some hazmat gear with you, in case there was no one left to do any clean up."

Barry turned green. "I hadn't thought of that."

"I can do this, you don't have to go." Eobard wasn't particularly anxious to wade through death and disaster, but if he could spare Barry that, he would.

"No. You need to keep Wells in check. I'll take precautions."

Eobard still wasn't happy about letting Barry go alone, but then, he'd never been happy about sending Barry out into danger, and he'd done so without voicing any qualm stronger than cautioning restraint. To change now, to try and hold Barry back, to chain him down because he – Eobard – was obsessively worried about him, was wrong and unfair on so many levels. "Very well. We'll debrief Wells tomorrow and you'll go and come back. No exploring, no shenanigans."

Barry chuckled. "Shenanigans. When have I ever indulged in shenanigans?"

Eobard made a point of checking the time. "We have all evening, Mr. Allen. If I start enumerating now, we might be done some time tomorrow morning."

He was rewarded with a bark of laughter and a kiss. "Trust you to deflate all my pretensions."

Eobard curled his fingers around Barry's neck and held him close. Not quite believing he was doing this, he licked his lips and murmured, "I trust I'm not deflating everything."

Barry kissed him again and rocked their lower bodies together, and Barry's growing arousal was a spark to his own desire. "What do you think?"

ATAR

As Barry expected, Wells insisted on traveling with him. And for every argument Barry made in favor of Wells staying behind, Wells had one that was equally reasonable about going with him.

Barry shot Eobard a dirty look, one that clearly said You're supposed to be helping, here, and Eobard just smirked. And then excused himself. A few moments later, he came back with Jesse.

Who was, perhaps, the most effective weapon in their arsenal. "Dad, you're not going back with Barry."

"Sweetheart, please."

Jesse just stood there, arms folded across her chest. "What if something happens? You'd leave me all alone? I just spent four months as Zoom's hostage. I can't lose you."

Barry hoped he was subtle when he covered his mouth to hide his smile. Jesse was playing the daughter card with great skill.

She went over to her father and hugged him. "I really need you, dad."

Wells' shoulders slump and he puts his hands behind his head – a surrender gesture that Barry's seen on Eo. Barry let out a tiny sigh of relief. All it took was a little familial blackmail and the battle was won. "Okay, now that that's settled, I'm going to need some particulars. Where does the breach lead to? To the same sub-basement?"

Wells scrubbed his face. "No. There are some differences between our S.T.A.R. Labs. The other end
of the breach is in a sub-basement in a different quadrant. It's in a special room that houses the data redundancies for high security projects at S.T.A.R. Labs. I am the only person who has access to it. There's three-factor security on the entry – a passkey, a retinal scan, and a full handprint. To get out of the room, you'll need this." Wells pulled his wallet out and took out what looked like a security badge. "This is my passkey; it will get you through the building. My office is at the top floor of the north tower and there's a private elevator that will take you there."

Barry took the card – it was blank, no S.T.A.R. Labs logo, no photograph or name printed on it. Just a few letters and numbers on the edge – 1-1A-1-1A-2B-1B-2B-3. The sequence looked vaguely familiar, but Barry didn't have the time to tease out the memory.

"Anything else I should know or be aware of?"

Wells shrugged, a sad gesture. "No. Zoom and his minions killed everyone. Probably destroyed everything, too. But, if you can – try to bring the data core back. You might find it useful." Wells then went on to explain how to remove the drives in a concealed redundancy unit. "Once you remove the drives, enter the code on the back of the card, followed by the confirmation code Zero-Zero-Zero. Do it right before you are heading back because the self-destruct is an electro-magnetic pulse that will fry the remaining systems thirty seconds later."

Barry looked at the code again and shook his head, finally recognizing the sequence. He showed the card numbers to Cisco, who couldn't be bothered to stifle his own amusement. Cisco then handed the card to Eobard, who chuckled, too.

Wells got annoyed. "What's so damn funny?"

Barry explained, "Your auto-destruct sequence is the same as one in a very well-loved television series."

Wells gave them a surprised look, "You have Star Trek here, too?"

Cisco draped an arm over Wells' shoulders, and to Barry's delight, the man didn't flinch away. "Of course – and we are going to have so much fun marathoning it."

Wells let out a tiny, put-upon sigh and shook his head. "You are determined to befriend me, aren't you, Ramon?"

Cisco hugged Wells and then let go of him. "Or drive you nuts. As your genetic doppelganger here can testify, I'm pretty good at both."

Eobard just laughed in agreement.

Barry refocused back on the mission. "Okay, is there anything else?"

"There is one thing. It's a favor, more than anything." Wells sighed. "If you can get into my office, and it hasn't been destroyed, could you bring back the two photos on my desk? One is of me and Jesse's mother on our wedding day, and the other is of me and Jesse and my Eobard. If I'm going to be here for a while, I'll need something to remind me that I did something right in my life."

Jesse sniffled, "Oh, dad. You shouldn't feel like that. You've done marvelous things."

Wells hugged his daughter. "Yes, I made you, my Jesse Quick. You will always be my greatest achievement."

Barry knew what Wells meant, and while he hadn't had his world destroyed, he knew just how
hard it was to cope with loss. Breaking the stress of the moment, Barry got up and said, "Okay, then I guess this is it. Unless there's something else I need to know?"

Wells should his head.

Barry sped into his suit.

"Shall we go down to the breach room?" He made a gesture for everyone to leave the Cortex. When Wells passed him, Barry noticed that the man was sporting a deep blush.

Eobard noticed his noticing and whispered in his ear, "You forgot he's a speedster, too, and can see through the time dilation. You also let your shorts drop and gave the man a rather unexpected show when you bent over and pulled them up."

Barry groaned in embarrassment.

"I, however, thoroughly enjoyed the view." Eobard smirked and then hip-checked him.

When they arrived in the breach room, Cisco, unaware of what had happened, handed Barry a backpack. "Thawne and I went over what you might need to carry through the breach. I've got a hazmat suit in there, a rebreather, and a miniaturized high-speed camera unit that will clip onto your shoulder. Also, I know you rely on your speed to get things done, but in this case, both Thawne and I actually agree on something – you should have a sidearm with you."

"No, Cisco. Absolutely not." Barry looked through the pack and pulled out the weapon. It was one of Eobard's, and it was beautiful, shiny, and deadly. "I don't use guns, period." He unloaded the pistol in a flash, handing the bullets to Cisco and the firearm to Eobard.

"That might be, but you're also a pretty damn good shot," Cisco tried to argue. A few months after Eobard had left, Joe had taken both Barry and Cisco out to a shooting range. Barry thought it pointless, but Joe had insisted. Cisco had a blast, Barry was merely bored.

While he'd never absorbed the boxing lessons Joe had tried to teach him as a kid, Joe hadn't let up on getting both Barry and Iris trained in the proper use and handling of firearms. Not that Joe had wanted either of his kids to carry, but he thought it important that they both know how to respect weaponry. While Barry appreciated the training and quite ironically, had a natural eye, he hated guns.

"And I'm also faster than a bullet. I can defend myself against anything armed or unarmed. And if there are still hostile meta-humans roaming around, then I'll come back home. This is a recon mission only. Zoom was the only speedster on Earth-2. If the plan is to avoid engagement with anyone, then I'll be faster than anything that can hurt me."

Cisco didn't look happy. Nor did Eobard. But both men knew better than to argue with him about this.

There were a few other items in the pack the team had deemed necessary – a flashlight, a first aid kit and some street clothes. Barry zipped it closed and slung it over his shoulders. Before he could pull up his cowl, Eobard pulled him into a corner, and not just to kiss him farewell.

"Remember – no engagement. No unnecessary risks."

Barry dropped a brief kiss on Eobard's lips. "I promise. Remember, I made that promise to you weeks ago – and I didn't rescind it."
Something in Eobard's face crumbled – at the reminder that Eobard had retracted his own similar promise.

"It's okay," Barry said. "We did what we needed to do, and everything worked out perfectly, didn't it?"

Eobard’s lips crooked up in a half-smile, something just a bit short of true happiness. "Yes, Mr. Allen, it most certainly did."

Barry rested his hands on Eobard's hips and pulled him just close enough. "How about this for a promise? I love you, Eobard Thawne. And I will do nothing to jeopardize that and the future we've worked so hard to build."

That earned Barry Eobard's full smile, and blue eyes glowing with happiness. "Yes, Mr. Allen, that is a promise I most certainly expect you to keep." Eobard stroked Barry's cheek. "And it is one I will give to you, one I will never break."

Barry let out a long, slow sigh and basked, just for a moment, in perfect happiness. He turned his face into Eobard's hand and kissed his palm. "I have to go."

"Yes, you do."

"And I will be back."

"You most certainly will." Eobard looked like he was lit from within.

It felt like he was tearing away a part of his soul, but Barry finally stepped away. Cisco and Wells were staring at the console, but Jesse was looking at them with soft, approving eyes.

Eobard joined Cisco and Wells and with little ceremony, flipped on the switch that powered the Speed Cannon.

Barry gave what now felt like his customary nod to the team, took a deep breath, and ran through the bright blue ball.

The experience wasn't that dissimilar from time travel – but instead of images from timelines that never happened, he was seeing images of worlds he didn't know, other meta-humans passing by too quickly for Barry to tell if they were villains or heroes. There was one image, though, that almost made him stop cold.

One of the Flash and the Reverse-Flash fighting to the death, the remnants of Eobard's Time Sphere shattered around them.

Barry forced himself to keep going. That wasn't him, it wasn't Eobard, and therefore, it didn't matter.

And then just like that, he emerged on the other side of the breach, into a dark room filled with computer banks, behind a massive steel and glass portal.

Just as Wells had described.

Before Barry used the passkey Wells had given him to open the door, he took a look around. No dead bodies on the floor, or any evidence that there had been. The air was fresh and well-circulating, the heat from the banks of working computers just this side of too warm.

There was no sign of any damage, no indication that Zoom had been here. Barry suddenly realized
that the timeline might have been reset, that it wasn't late 2016 but 2014, right before the particle accelerator was launched. Could Wells have gotten that lucky?

Barry looked up and noticed the blinking green lights of an activated security camera.

*Shit.*

Hanging around wasn't a good idea, and Barry swiped the card across the security pad. The doors opened with a barely audible whoosh and Barry looked for elevator that had Wells told him about – the one that would take him to Wells' office. The passkey opened that door, too, and Barry ducked inside. He didn't send the car up, not just yet. He wanted to see if his presence triggered an alarm, but after two long, nerve-wracking minutes, no one appeared. Barry let the doors close and once again used the passkey to activate the controls. There were no other buttons to press – it went directly to the top floor. He tucked the passkey into his left glove.

The ride was fast enough to make Barry's stomach drop and make him regret not taking the stairs. Or even not running up the side of the building.

The doors opened and as soon as Barry stepped out of the elevator car, the lights came on, displaying a vast and very elegantly appointed office, one certainly befitting a CEO and a scientist. As with the data room, there were no signs of any battle here. All was quiet and peaceful and…

Dusty.

There was a light coating of dust over everything – the computer monitors, the desk, the workbenches. Even the air was stale, as if the office had been abandoned and unoccupied for a long time.

Taking off his backpack and setting next to the elevator, Barry explored the suite and was amused at what he found – not one but two full length portraits of Harry Wells. Without the wear and tear of his pitched battles with Zoom, he looked a little too much like Eobard from his days masquerading as Earth-1’s Harrison Wells; all designer suits and smooth elegance. Which reminded Barry. He needed to get those photos that Wells had asked him to bring back.

There, on the desk, were two framed pictures. One was of a young Harry Wells with a woman who was clearly Tess Morgan. The other was of a much older Harry, with Jesse in a cap and gown. On the other side of Jesse was a tall, blond man, who was looking at Jesse with love and pride and affection. Jesse, for her part, had her arms around both men – they were clearly a family.

Harrison, Jesse, and *their* Eobard.

Barry picked that photograph up and gazed at it in wonder. So this was what Eobard had looked like before he'd taken Harrison Wells' DNA. He could see a slight resemblance to Eddie – mostly the coloring, the hair, maybe something around the chin. From the crinkles around the eyes and the lines on the side of his mouth, he looked like he smiled a lot.

A handsome man.

Frankly, Barry preferred his Eobard, dark and dangerous.

He was so involved in studying the picture that he didn't notice when one of the subjects of that photograph entered the room.

.........................................................
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Earth-2 Eobard Thawne has been grieving for nearly two years. His partner, Harrison Wells and Harrison's daughter, Jesse, who he loves as his own, disappeared a few nights before the particle accelerator was to go on-line for the first time. How to you recover when the two people you love the most have disappeared without a trace?

Chapter Notes

More than a little bit of E-2 Harry and E-2 Eo's backstory, with a very special guest star, EoBlond himself!

S.T.A.R. Labs – Earth-2

Eobard Thawne tried to pay attention to the department head giving her quarterly action report, but it was impossible. The woman, a brilliant bio-geneticist, had the unfortunate habit of speaking in a hushed monotone. It was both hard to hear and difficult to follow.

He hated these meetings, when all of the department heads gathered and did their own little song and dance, touting their achievements, begging for more staff, bigger research budgets, more time.

It was all part of running a business. Except that this wasn't his business. S.T.A.R. Labs wasn't his, it never would be, and more importantly, it never should be. He was only a figurehead, unexpectedly dropped into the role of Acting CEO and Chief Scientist because the real head of S.T.A.R. Labs, Harrison Wells, had been missing for almost two years. Seven hundred twenty-three days, to be precise, and every single one of those days – and their component hours and minutes and seconds – felt like knives flaying his skin.

It wasn't just Harrison who was gone, but Jesse, too – the daughter of his heart, if not his body. They'd both vanished into thin air, leaving Eobard behind, lost for answers.

The night they'd disappeared, nothing had been taken, nothing had been disturbed. There had been no signs of violence. Harrison's car had still been in the garage; so had Jesse's bike. The limo driver hadn't gotten a call to take them anywhere, and there were no records of either of the Wellses on any flights, or trains, or buses leaving Central City.

The police had brought in bloodhounds to search the woods that surrounded their house. Eobard had offered a seven figure reward – first for their safe return and then simply for information. He'd suffered through endless interrogations; after all, he'd been the last person to see Harrison. The day before Harrison and Jesse went missing, he and Harrison had fought, loudly and publicly. So naturally, he'd been considered a suspect in the disappearance. The prime suspect.

And of course, the attention on him was difficult and disconcerting. But his identification, his whole fabricated history, had withstood police and media scrutiny.
Two months after Harrison and Jesse vanished and without any evidence to implicate Eobard, the police had dropped him as a suspect. His alibi had been airtight. He'd been working with the particle accelerator team for twenty hours straight. Without any other leads or evidence of foul play; the police simply dumped the file in the cold-case drawer and moved on.

Eobard hadn't considered the matter closed or cold. He'd had a dozen private investigators on retainer, looking for his family in cities around the world.

But in the desperately lonely privacy of the night, in a house missing its heart, Eobard had had to admit that his lover and the child they'd raised together were gone. And they'd never be back.

Days like today, stuffed with administrivia, with meetings and budgets and all the things that Harrison had normally handled to keep this enterprise running, were almost intolerable. When Eobard could escape into his science, he could forget about the loss, he could escape the grief, if just for a little while. At least until he'd turn to tell Harrison or Jesse something, to show them the latest advancement he'd made, and they wouldn't be there.

Then the grief would come flooding back and he'd barely be able to keep from screaming his loss to the universe.

"Professor Thawne?"

The head of the bio-genetics division – and Eobard couldn't remember her name – was asking for his attention.

"Yes?"

"Do you have any questions on what I've presented?"

Eobard looked at his tablet, with the copy of her project forecasts, budget requirements and schedules. He let out a tiny sigh. "I'll review the numbers and let you know."

She wasn't the last of the department heads to give their review – there were at least three more to go – but Eobard needed a breather. Before he could say anything, his phone buzzed. Not for an incoming call, but with an alert he'd set up two years ago.

Hands sweaty and suddenly breathless, Eobard dismissed the waiting scientists before looking at his phone.

**H. Wells passkey used on egress pad in data core room.**

Eobard called up the security cameras for the data core room. Someone was in there, but the cameras were out of focus. He headed to the elevator, but before he got there, his phone chimed with another alert:

**H. Wells passkey used on data core room private elevator.**

And then, **H. Wells passkey used to access penthouse, North Tower.**

Eobard sprinted through the halls and cursed the toroid shape of the building – there simply no shortcut from the south side.

Thankfully, he could use his own passkey to override the other elevator calls and didn't have to wait more than a minute for the car. It was a long minute, one filled with too much hope and terror.
Was Harrison home? Was Jesse with him?

Or had someone gotten his passkey? That thought made Eobard pause, and he didn't head directly to Harrison's office, but to his own, right across the hall. Eobard went to a small safe he'd built into the wall, accessible only by handprint, and took out a gun – a hand cannon as Jesse would have called it – along with a full clip.

Hopefully, Harrison would look at him and laugh at the precaution.

And if it wasn't Harrison, Eobard would start with the intruder's thumbs and proceed from there, until he got the answers he needed.

The door to Harrison's office was closed, but Eobard could see the light bleed through the bottom of the door frame. The door was still closed, since Harrison – or the intruder – had come up from the data core room in the elevator that opened directly into Harrison's office.

Eobard opened the door, trying to stay as stealthy as possible. He didn't find Harrison, but a man clad in head-to-toe red leather. It should have been a ridiculous outfit, something fit only for an Old Town sex club, but the man wearing it carried himself like a hero. His behavior was strange, though. He didn't seem interested in the art that decorated the walls or the technology that crowded the shelves. Instead, he was holding a photograph – the one of Eobard and Jesse and Harrison on Jesse's graduation day, a scant six months before the disappearance – and studying it.

Eobard aimed at the intruder's torso and announced his presence. "Put the picture down and put your hands behind your head."

The man in red turned to him, and even though he was wearing a mask, Eobard could see the surprise in his eyes.

"Eobard Thawne?"

"You know who I am – good. Now, do what I asked – put down the photograph and put your hands on your head." Eobard kept the gun steady, a difficult feat given all of the desperate emotions he was feeling.

The man blurted out, "You're not dead!"

"Why? Am I supposed to be?" Eobard took a step closer.

"Actually, yes. I was told you'd been killed."

"Who told you that?"

The man in red didn't answer right away. And instead of giving him any sort of answer, he asked, "Would you mind putting that gun down?"

"Put the picture down." Eobard was incensed that this costumed stranger was holding something so precious.

That done, the intruder actually raised his hands. "For what it's worth, I'm very glad to see that you're alive. Could you tell me what year this is, the date?"

"What? Why?" Of all the things to ask.

"Please?"
Despite the ridiculous nature of the question, Eobard couldn't see any reason not to answer it – not if it would buy him some answers. "It's December 4, 2016."

"Really?"

"Yes, really – and why wouldn't it be?" Eobard was getting a very strange feeling about the visitor. Something about him seemed just a little off. Well, more than a little, considering the costume.

"I'm just surprised. I would have thought – " The man cut himself off.

"Thought what?" Eobard's arms were beginning to ache.

The stranger sighed. "That it would have been early December, 2014."

"Why? Why would you say that?"

"Look – I'm unarmed and I'm not a threat. Can you put down the gun?"

Eobard lowered the weapon but kept his finger on the trigger. "I'll ask you again – why do you think it is two years in the past?" Then something occurred to him. "Are you a time-traveler?" That might just explain the strange outfit.

"I am, but not one like you."

Eobard froze. "How do you know that?"

"I know a lot of things about you. I know that you were a professor of chrono-dynamics at Central City University in 2175 – or thereabouts – and you've been living in this century for the last sixteen years. I know that you used a Time Sphere – based on a design from Rip Hunter – to travel back to the twenty-first century."

Eobard was speechless. He had left no clues when he'd departed the twenty-second century, knowing that it was going to be a one-way trip. There were only two people who knew where – and when – he came from. And both of them were missing. He started to pant – could it be? "Harrison – Harrison told you, right?"

The man nodded. "It's a long and strange story. Can we sit and talk like civilized men?"

Eobard went over to one of the work tables and sat down. He put the gun on top of a dusty magazine and waited for the stranger to sit down. "Would you mind taking your mask off? It's really rather disconcerting."

"Not just yet, okay?"

Eobard nodded, he could be patient. "Okay – now, tell me what's going on."

"First of all, Harry – Harrison and Jesse are fine."

Eobard nearly collapsed in relief. "Where have they been? It's been almost two years since they went missing. I'd hoped, I'd hoped and I tried not to lose hope, but it's been two years since they disappeared and when – " Eobard looked at the intruder, all antagonism gone. "When I was alerted that Harrison's passkey was used, I thought that he was home, after so long." Eobard could hear the tears in his voice, the near hysteria, but he didn't care.

"They've been missing here for two years?"
"Yes – they disappeared on December 7th, 2014."

"That's four days before S.T.A.R. Labs launched the particle accelerator."

"We cancelled it." Eobard corrected himself, "No, I cancelled it. There was too much risk, and with Harrison and Jesse missing – I couldn't go forward."

"What happened?"

"Other than Harrison and Jesse going missing?" Eobard spat out those works, angry at the stranger's casualness.

"Yes."

"We were five days from launching the particle accelerator, when I found a potential flaw in the design. The remediation would have taken over a year. Harrison and I disagreed about it – he thought that the chances of the problem impacting operation were infinitesimal and wanted to go forward. I urged restraint, argued for caution. Harrison wanted to go ahead with the launch; he didn't think there was any chance that the accelerator could fail. We argued about it. Harrison went home with Jesse, I stayed here and tried to figure out a way to fix the problem. When I got home, they were gone." Even after all this time, the pain was unbearable.

But the stranger couldn't see that. He said far too casually, "That explains it."

Eobard snapped, "Explains what?"

"Why this place isn't a war zone."

"What do you mean?" Eobard wished the man would take off his mask, or at least give him a name.

"You'll probably think I'm crazy. Or maybe not, given who you really are."

"What I do know is that I'll find it a lot easier to believe you if you weren't dressed up like some comic book superhero or a refugee from a bondage club."

That earned Eobard a laugh. "Okay – okay." The man pulled over his mask and cowl and stared at him through a very familiar set of eyes.

"What type of sick joke is this, Doctor Allen? Of all people, I wouldn't think you'd do this."

Barry Allen shook his head. "I'm not Doctor Barry Allen, just plain Mister Allen. I don't work here, at S.T.A.R. Labs, as the head of the Forensic Chemistry unit. And that's easy enough to prove." He tilted his head towards the telephone. "Why don't you call him? Track him down."

Eobard could track anyone by their badge, but Allen could have left his badge in his office before starting this stunt. Instead, Eobard picked up the handset and dialed Allen's extension. He expected that it would ring through to voice mail, but the video display changed from the S.T.A.R. Labs logo into Barry Allen's face, complete with wire-framed glasses, puppy-dog eyes and a plaid bow tie. Allen's voice held its customary, slightly squeaky and over-excited tone. "Doctor Wells! Oh – it's only you, Professor Thawne. Is everything all right?"

Eobard looked at the man in front of him, and then back to the video display. "Everything is fine, Doctor Allen. I was just checking on something here and thought you could help, but I was mistaken."
"Are you sure, sir? I could come up?"

"No, Doctor Allen, everything's fine. I'll catch up with you later." Eobard disconnected the call and let out a deep sigh. "Okay, so you are not the Barry Allen who works here. And since Doctor Allen doesn't have an identical twin brother, I'm going to make a leap of faith – you are not from this universe."

The man, and now at least Eobard could think of him with a name – Barry Allen – smiled. "You're familiar with the theory of the multi-verse, yes?"

"Yes." Eobard nodded. "And I guess it's no longer a theory, now."

"No, it's not."

"So – are you telling me that Harrison and Jesse are on your Earth?"

"Yes. He gave me the passkey." Allen pulled off his gloves and the card landed on the workbench. Eobard picked up the card and examined it; his hands were shaking. "Harrison's really alive? Jesse, too?"

"They are. They are safe and well on my Earth."

Eobard licked his lips and the questions poured out of him like bullets. "Why have they stayed away? Are they not able to come home? Why did they send you? And I guess, most importantly – how did they get to your Earth? Were they kidnapped?"

"This is where things get strange."

"I'm a time-traveling professor of chrono-dynamics, you've just proved the existence of the multi-verse, how much stranger are things going to get?"

"Very." Allen scratched the back of his head, a bemused expression on his face. "Our worlds aren't much different. But what differences there are, are important."

"I expect they would be." Eobard kept a tight rein on his patience. He had a feeling that this Barry Allen could do a lot of damage with very little effort.

"The biggest difference is that the timeline in your universe has been reset multiple times. Harrison Wells and his daughter came through a dimensional breach into my S.T.A.R. Labs about a month ago. They were running from a monster called Zoom. The same monster that had murdered you a little less than two years ago – from their point of view."

Four simple sentences – but a veritable tsunami of information. Eobard focused on the only thing that he could. "They think I'm dead?"

Allen took his hand and squeezed it gently. "Yes, I'm sorry. And I know that they will be as overjoyed to see you alive and well as you will be to see them."

Eobard had to let that go for the moment. "Tell me about this Zoom character. What is he?"

"Zoom was a powerful meta-human. It's what we call people who were altered when they were exposed to the dark matter released by the S.T.A.R. Labs particle accelerator when it went on-line, and then went critical. On this Earth, the dark matter was vented downward, and seeped into the city through the sewers. Where the conditions and the genetics were right, there were mutations, giving
people powers. Zoom – who was the serial killer, Hunter Zolomon – was one of them. He became a speedster and was able to use his speed – among other things – to manipulate the timeline.

Eobard didn't say anything, he just gestured for Allen to continue.

"Initially, we didn't know what Zoom was doing to the timeline. He just seemed obsessed with speed and with being the fastest man alive. He'd been sending other meta-humans to my Earth, through the breaches –"

Eobard cut Allen off. "What breaches?"

"Ah, well – this is where it gets tricky."

"And a dark-matter powered super-villain who resets the timeline isn't?"

Allen laughed. "I suppose so. Okay – so there was a cosmic event on my Earth – a singularity. We managed to close it, but it left breaches between our two universes. Pathways, wormholes if you will. Zoom was using them to send evil meta-humans through and try to create havoc on my world, while he was doing his best to destroy yours."

"And you said this monster killed me?"

"Yes – you were killed in the timeline Harry and Jesse came from. The timeline before this timeline."

"Why me?" Eobard asked the question and then was immediately able to answer it. "Because my field is chrono-dynamics. If, as you say, this Zoom was resetting the timeline, he might have feared I could have figured that out, and figured out how to stop him."

"Could you? Do you have that ability?"

Eobard nodded slowly. "I'd been working on a tachyon trace sensor, to search for anomalies in linear time."

"That's it. You might have used it in one of the early timelines and Zoom realized you were a threat. He reset the timeline and killed you right after he got his powers. Right after the particle accelerator exploded. And every time after."

"How many times do you think he reset it?"

Allen shrugged. "We think a few hundred times – he was trying to destroy the fabric of this universe. And he was getting close to succeeding."

Eobard thought through everything that Allen had just told him. "There's a paradox there."

Allen agreed, "Yes, there is."

"The last time this Zoom reset the timeline, he reset it to a timeline when the particle accelerator didn't go live, to when he wasn't created. He took himself out of existence."

"You would think so, but Zoom had been feeding off of paradox energy. And the biggest paradox of all is that he kept resetting the timeline to a moment before he becomes a metahuman. Zoom should not have existed in those timeline, but he did. That was what made him so dangerous."

Eobard noticed something. "You're using the past tense. You're saying that Zoom was defeated?"

"Yes, about a month ago on my Earth – a couple of days after Harry and Jesse arrived." Allen smiled
and Eobard thought he looked impossibly young. Younger than the Barry Allen who'd joined S.T.A.R. Labs as an eighteen year old with a shiny new Ph.D. and an embarrassing puppy-dog crush on Harrison.

"I have the feeling you're only telling me half the story."

"There's more – a lot more. Would you like to come with me and hear the whole thing? Hear how your Harrison played a part in Zoom's defeat?"

"Is that possible?" Eobard felt his breath catch, at the thought of seeing Harrison again, and Jesse.

"There's a breach in your data core room – it goes both ways. I'm surprised it hasn't affected the data storage units."

"Actually, now that you mention it, we've had some problems there and I've supervised the replacement of a couple of power units. They burned out for what we thought was no apparent reason, but when we started monitoring the room, we recorded ambient power spikes. I'm guessing that was this breach."

Allen nodded. "Quite likely. Blue Bell – that's what we call the breach on my end – is very unstable. Although it was the largest of the breaches, it would keep collapsing on itself. Right before we closed the other breaches, my team was able to stabilize it with CFL quark matter."

Eobard could see how that might work.

Allen continued, "When we turned the Speed Cannon on to test it, Harrison and Jesse came through. That was something of a shock. They'd been trying to escape Zoom."

"But they are all right now."

"Yes, they are."

Again, Eobard had the feeling that there was a lot that this Barry Allen wasn't telling him. He didn't press – when he saw Harrison again, he'd get all of the answers he needed.

Allen added, "Just so you know, you won't be able to traverse the breach without me."

"Why not?"

"You need to be a speedster to travel through the breach. Or be with a speedster." Allen stared at him as he revealed the last piece of the puzzle.

"You're a meta-human – like Zoom?" Eobard shouldn't have been surprised.

"Yes, I'm a meta-human, and no, not like Zoom, not at all." Allen seemed offended by the comparison.

"And just how did you become a meta-human speedster?" Eobard was pretty sure he knew the answer to that.

"My S.T.A.R. Labs had a particle accelerator accident, too."

Eobard could hear the slight pause on the word "accident" but he let it go for now.

"I was struck by lightning and when I woke up from a nine-month coma, I discovered I could – well – run very fast." Allen was being deliberately charming about that. Eobard found it annoying.
"How fast?"

"My baseline speed is Mach-4 now. I've clocked in at Mach-7."

Eobard wasn't sure if he believed Allen, but he'd been fed so many other unbelievable things in the last half-hour that he couldn't come up with any reason to reject that assertion.

Instead, he asked, "Why didn't Harrison and Jesse come with you?"

"Because this was supposed to be a recon mission. When they'd escaped, Zoom and his meta-human minions were destroying S.T.A.R. Labs. I expected to find corpses everywhere. If you want confirmation – you can check my backpack – " Allen gestured to the pack on the floor next to the elevator. "I brought a HazMat suit and rebreather."

Eobard remembered Allen's initial surprise, his comment about the place not looking like a war zone. "No, I believe you. You came up here first, though. Why?"

"Harry wanted the pictures from his desk; the one of him and Tess and the one of you and Jesse and him. Harry said he wanted something to remind him that he'd done something right, once."

Eobard scrubbed his eyes. "He's done a lot right. He built this place."

"And he thinks he destroyed it. He said that he watched Zoom kill you."

The thought made him sick. "Tell me, Allen – what is worse? Seeing your lover die before your eyes, or having your family disappear without reason? And how the hell do you recover from that?"

"You go forward, Professor Thawne. You and Harry and Jesse will be a family again. Things definitely won't be the same, but you will have each other. That's more than most people get." Something in Allen's eyes shifted and grew dark. Eobard wondered just what tragedy he'd reminded Allen of.

"If you have powers like Zoom, you could reset the timeline."

Allen shook his head. "I could, but I won't. Speedsters who mess with linear time do so at their peril. And I wouldn't change the past, no matter how painful it was. That would be the height of selfishness. Change one thing and there's no way to predict what else gets altered. You should know that, Professor Thawne."

"I do." Eobard felt slightly ashamed, but as he considered the weight of Allen's words, he had to wonder if he had his own doppelganger running around in the twenty-first century.

But like the Barry Allen working in a lab a few floors down, this version seemed to have a terminally sunny disposition. He smiled and asked, "So, do you want to take a little trip? Go see Harry and Jesse?"

"Harry? You must really have a death wish if you call him that." Eobard felt comfortable enough with this strange young man to tell him that.

Allen retrieved Harrison's passkey and laughed. "He's a grumpy sort, but he grows on you. 'Harry' suits him."

Eobard asked, "What do I need to do?"

Allen pulled up his cowl, put his mask in place, and said, "Other than telling people you've been called away for a day or two, nothing."
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

The traveler returns, and brings an unexpected guest with him, Eobard Thawne from Earth-2, and Harry and Jesse Wells couldn't be happier. Eobard Thawne of Earth-1 has mixed feelings about his doppelganger.

Earth-1 S.T.A.R. Labs – Breach Room

Eobard would have paced, but the damn breach room was too crowded. Not only were the Wellses taking up too much space for his mental comfort, Joe West had turned up about two minutes after Barry left. Eobard thought that the man must have a special sense to know when his foster-son was doing something foolhardy.

And of course, Joe had brought Iris and Edward. Cisco had spilled the beans to Caitlin, who cut her conjugal reunion short to stand by in case Barry needed medical attention. That meant Ronnie was at her side, and where Ronnie Raymond went, Martin Stein wasn't far behind.

At least Stein had left his wife at home.

Eobard stared at the glowing blue ball and asked, "How long, Cisco?"

Cisco pulled the ever-present lollipop out of his mouth and snarked, "Ten minutes since you last asked, Thawne."

Barry had been gone for fifty-four minutes.

Eobard had been careful not to put Barry on a clock. He'd known that doing so would give Barry incentive to take too many risks, so he gave him no orders to come back in a set amount of time. Just to come back soon.

And "soon" was a relative term.

Right now, it felt as long as the Jurassic period.

Another six minutes and Eobard was going to get into his suit and go through that damn breach. In fact, he wasn't going to wait the six minutes. He nyoomed into his suit before anyone realized what he was doing. Anyone but Wells, who stood up, gripped his pulse rifle a little higher and headed over to Blue Bell.

Eobard shook his head. "You're still not going back, Wells. Not yet."

"You can't stop me."

"Don't count on that." Eobard disarmed Wells between heartbeats and handed the pulse rifle to a very startled Martin Stein. "You take another step towards the breach, I'll put you back in those cuffs."

And Jesse added her voice. "Dad, you promised me."
All it took were those four simple words, and Wells sat back down.

Eobard looked over Cisco's shoulder and checked the timer. Now, finally – Barry had been gone for one full hour. "All right, that's it. I'm bringing Barry back."

"Do you want this?" Cisco held out the gun Barry had refused to take with him.

"Or this?" Martin Stein actually offered him Wells' pulse rifle. Wells snatched the weapon out of Stein's hands, looked at it and then offered it to Eobard, who shook his head.

"No, and no. But thank you."

"Are you sure you want to go alone?" That was from Ronnie, who'd taken out the quantum splicer and was about to put it on.

"Oh, yes – we should go with you," Martin Stein chimed in. "I would love to have the chance to experience the multiverse firsthand – after all, proving its existence has been my life's work."

"This is not a chance for you to play tourist, you know. I'm going to get Barry and bring him home, even if I have to drag him back by his – " Eobard was about to say "short and curlies" but quickly reconsidered. " – ankles."

Stein and Ronnie started to argue with him, which meant that Wells needed to add another two cents. And then Joe West, of all people, volunteered to come along. Eobard didn't know why he was even entertaining any sort of discussion. He was going, going alone and bringing Barry back. He pushed everyone aside and was poised to run into Blue Bell, when his missing speedster came through the breach.

And he wasn't alone.

Eobard stared at the man Barry brought back through the portal, at a face he hadn't seen in a very long time.

"Look who I found!" Barry, that little shit, sounded so proud of himself. Eobard swallowed and found his voice. "Zoom had reset the timeline?"

"Yup." Barry walked over to him and draped his arms over Eobard's shoulders, looking far too smug. "That's exactly what happened."

Whatever Eobard was about to say – and he would never be sure about what that was – was forgotten as Wells, father and daughter, pushed them aside to get to the doppelganger.

Watching the reunion, Eobard thought that if he ever believed he had a hard, cold, heart, he would have to admit he was wrong about that.

Wells and Jesse stared at the doppelganger, wonder and fear and disbelief in their eyes. This other Eobard – the one they had thought was dead – was weeping.

Damn, but he was an ugly crier. And so was Wells.

"You were gone – you disappeared," this other Thawne cried.

"We saw you die. Zoom killed you right in front of us," Harry sobbed.

The two idiots stared at each other without moving, but Jesse wasn't one to stand on ceremony. She
flung herself into the doppelganger's arms with a sob. "Uncle Eo."

That triggered Wells, and the three travelers turned into a messy pile of emotions. Sobbing and laughing incoherently.

Eobard reached for Barry's hand, otherwise he'd start crying, too, and that would be unbearable. "I was getting worried. You were gone too long."

"Just an hour."

"It felt like a year." Eobard watched the reunion and realized he knew exactly how Wells and his daughter felt, grieving for their murdered family member – just like he'd grieved over Barry when he'd found out that Zoom had killed him – and then seeing him alive, again. "What happened?"

Barry just stuck to the most salient points. "Like you said, Zoom reset the timeline before coming here. But since Wells and Jesse were here, the reset changed everything. They went missing, the particle accelerator never went online, and if Zoom had hung around, he might have paradoxed himself out of existence. He didn't have the chance to commit murder and mayhem. This one found me in Wells' office when I went to retrieve the photos Harry had asked for."

Cisco joined them. "So, that's what you looked like." He looked over at Edward. "I can see a resemblance."

Eobard said, a little weakly, "It's faint."

And of course, Edward came over, with Joe and Iris. "Should I introduce myself?"

Joe chuckled. The bastard was definitely enjoying Eobard's discomfort.

Of course, Eobard had no answer. He hadn't given any thought about how to introduce himself to his cognitive doppelganger, let alone introduce his ancestor. He tore his eyes away from the three travelers and turned to Barry. "What have you told him?"

"About you? Nothing."

Eobard realized that he still had his cowl and mask on, and if he didn't take them off, he just might be able to escape without any need for prevarication. It was one thing to deflect the inevitable questions from strangers, but he wasn't sure how well he could hold off his own doppelganger if he confronted him. At least right now, before he was prepared.

And then there was Team Flash – augmented by people who wouldn't mind making his life a little difficult – who might take just way too much pleasure in telling this Eobard Thawne exactly who the Man in Yellow was.

Almost overcome with emotion, Eobard tried to take refuge in cool logic. Except cool logic was hard when the man who wore the face he was born with was doing a spectacular job of kissing the man who wore face he bore now.

And of course, at this most inconvenient moment, memories – real, not inherited ones – came crashing back. Memories of his Harrison. He let go of Barry's hand and left the breach room, muttering, "I can't stay and watch this."

Eobard wasn't sure where he was going, but he was going. Except that Barry was there, at his side. Eobard had to ask, "So – what do you think of the original version?"
"Of you?"

Eobard nodded, hating his own insecurities. His family, after all, had spent a fortune to ensure that smooth blondness.

"It's a shell."

"You don't find him attractive?"

Barry cocked his head, "Why would I?"

"That's the result of some very expensive genetic engineering. Remember, my family wanted the perfect child."

Eobard didn't want to name the expression that crossed Barry's face. "I prefer this package – " Barry stroked Eobard's chest, " – with this mind." Then Barry pressed his palm against Eobard's head. "You are not interchangeable, Eobard Thawne of Earth-1, with anyone else. Don't ever think you are."

Eobard let out a tiny sigh of relief. He had no reason to believe that Barry would prefer him pretty and blond – although his doppelganger seemed to be developing a tiny middle-aged paunch and his hair was receding...

"Do you want to go home?" Barry asked.

"What? You don't want to stay and watch the happy reunion?" Eobard took refuge in snark.

Barry shrugged. "I've already gotten a full dose of his grief."

"His?"

"Your doppelganger – I can't call him Eobard. But plain Thawne seems disrespectful – he's done nothing to earn that. And I'm not calling him Eo. Or Professor Thawne – those are your names. Anyway, he'd been mourning for Harry and Jesse for two years. It's really rather awful."

Eobard nodded – once again at a loss for words.

Barry said, "Let's go home, okay? Let's just take care of each other tonight." Eobard wondered if Barry was making some kind of sexual double entendre, but apparently he wasn't: "I'll make dinner; we'll sit in front of the fire and cuddle. Shut out the world."

"Cuddle?"

"You know, when we just hold onto each other? Nothing more. Or we can do more, if you want." Barry bit his lip and Eobard almost melted from the uncertainty in Barry's eyes. "But I just want to fall asleep next to you, holding you. I don't want to think about speed monsters, timelines, or trans-dimensional doppelgangers, okay?"

"That sounds – " Eobard licked his lips, "very enticing, Mr. Allen. Shall we?"

Barry grinned and took off. Eobard chased after him and as they ran, side-by-side, all Eobard could think about was getting home, getting Barry out of that suit, and, as Barry said, shutting out the world.

Just for a little while.
Eobard woke before Barry, and to his surprise, he didn't experience that momentary confusion he usually had when he was caught between his juvenile dreams of sleeping next to the Flash and the reality of his adult self, waking up with Barry Allen in his arms.

Maybe reality was finally settling in.

Eobard eased himself out from under the covers, enjoying the sight of Barry wrapped in three comforters. Barry – half-asleep, half-awake – reached out for him, but Eobard quickly tucked a pillow in Barry's arms. Barry snuggled against it, sighed and fell back into a deep sleep.

He watched Barry, committing the moment to memory, a buttress against future loss. Just as the reality of this life was imprinting itself of his soul, every day, the feeling that this happiness was transient grew stronger. That the reckoning he'd once promised Barry in a moment of madness was coming soon.

Uneasy with his thoughts and needing to outrun the impending doom, Eobard headed back to S.T.A.R. Labs. There were always projects to work on – improvements to the technologies they used to fight meta-humans, improvements to Barry's suit, and yes, improvements to his suit, too.

Eobard wanted to take a look at the suit that Cisco had created for him. Once, he'd have claimed that his own suit was the pinnacle of speedster technology, but in truth, it wasn't – not anymore. It might not be the "yellow horror" that Cisco called it, but it wasn't perfect. Back at the start, before his adoration of the Flash had soured into disappointment, he'd thought to mimic the Flash's own skin-tight suit. But he'd soon realized that it was impractical for any kind of battle.

A student of history as well as science, Eobard had referenced Medieval armor in its construction. Nearly every aspect of the jacket had some analog to what he'd seen and studied in museums – from the heavy cowl that was based on chain mail coifs of the early Middle Ages, to Renaissance jousting armor with the pauldrons that covered his shoulders, the gorget that protected his neck, and the vambraces that shielded his forearms. It was a suit designed for combat – hand-to-hand, bloody combat.

It had protected him well, but it had its limitations, and fighting side-by-side with the Flash, with Barry, made those all too apparent.

Maybe it was time for an upgrade.

He'd changed into civilian clothes, his customary black sweater and pants, and had taken out the suit he'd left behind in the Time Vault. It was on a stand next to the suit that Cisco had made for him before he'd gotten his speed back. Eobard had to admit that his suit really was something of a horror, particularly the yellow cowl and mask. In the artificial light, the rubbery material took on a flesh-like quality. If he were going to become the superhero he'd dreamed of, maybe that would need to change. Cisco's version was as aesthetically pleasing as the suit he'd made for Barry, but Eobard wasn't quite ready to give up the armor.

He pulled out a tablet and started sketching, and became so lost in the work he didn't realize he had company.

"They tell me you're not my Harrison's doppelganger. That you took his DNA and his name and masqueraded as 'Harrison Wells' for fifteen years."

Eobard closed the tablet and carefully, slowly put it down before turning to look at the man who
shared his name. "Professor Eobard Thawne."

"Is that an introduction or a question?"

"It could be both." Eobard tucked his hands behind his head and leaned back in the chair. "And neither. You know who I am. I clearly know who you are, so let's call it a statement of fact. We are both 'Professor Eobard Thawne'."

His doppelganger walked around the two suits, clearly curious. "You are a speedster, too. Like Barry Allen. A meta-human, as he called himself."

Eobard nodded. "Yes." He wondered just how much the team had shared.

"Did it happen when the particle accelerator here went critical?"

"You know about that?"

"Your Barry Allen told me – he said that there was an accident that released dark matter, which caused widespread mutations. That it had happened on both of our Earths – but that the timeline on mine had been reset before the particle accelerator went on-line."

"Yes, many times."

His doppelganger sat down and scrubbed his face. "You'd think I'd be predisposed to accept the possibility of this."

"You are, after all, a time-traveler."

"And a recognized leader in the field of chrono-dynamics."

"But when it's personal, when you learn that you are at the core of a paradox, it becomes incomprehensible."

His doppelganger nodded. "I still can't believe that I died in an alternate timeline. I mean, I believe it because your Barry Allen told me, because Harrison and Jesse told me, but from an intellectual point of view, it's hard to accept."

Eobard was feeling a little mean. He wasn't inclined to like this cognitive doppelganger. "Did Harry tell you what we showed him? How we proved the timeline reset to him?"

"No, he didn't. Are you saying you have objective proof of the reset?"

Eobard grinned. "We most certainly do. I hope you have a strong stomach." He went behind the console and called up the video – the one he'd spent six months grieving over, the one that Barry had shown to a disbelieving Harrison Wells shortly after his arrival.

Eobard didn't watch the video – he'd see it too many times for it to have any impact. Instead, he watched his doppelganger's face, taking a little too much delight in the dawning horror.

Zoom was just about to kill Jesse when Eobard was pushed out of the way and the video stopped.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, Thawne? Are you really this much of an asshole?" It was Cisco, and he was in a state of high dudgeon.

His doppelganger shook his head. "No – it's all right. I needed to see this."
Cisco glared at Eobard, but his gaze softened when he looked over at the other him. "No, not this. It's the stuff of nightmares. You don't need to see a monster murder your family."

"Maybe I do. After all, they saw this monster murder me."

Eobard had to give the man credit when he tapped the keyboard to resume the playback, and watched as Zoom murdered Jesse and then Harrison. Eobard himself felt a little queasy, watching it now and knowing how events had unfolded.

His doppelganger closed the video program and let out a deep breath. "I guess I have to believe."

Eobard didn't say anything. Neither did Cisco.

"This thing – this monster in black – he's the speed creature that our particle accelerator created?"

Eobard answered, "That's Zoom – and yes – he was the result of the accelerator accident on your world."

"Barry gave me the broad picture. Harrison refused to go into detail – he didn't want me to have any further knowledge of what happened. As if that would protect me."

Eobard knew there were other reasons why Harry Wells didn't want to give out specifics. They'd lead to too many questions. But he was going to have to – if just to protect his child.

"I feel like I know just enough to be dangerous."

Eobard looked over at Cisco. "How much did you share with him after I left?"

Cisco shrugged. "Not a thing. Harry and Jesse were kind of anxious to get out of here last night. So, unless they spilled the beans, Eoblondie doesn't know anything except what Barry told him."

Eobard swallowed a snort at the nickname Cisco had just created. *Eoblondie.*

However, his doppelganger took offense and loomed over Cisco. "Do not call me that."

Cisco rolled back. "I can't call both of you 'Thawne'. And he was here first, so he gets dibs on the name." Cisco gave Eobard a considering look. "Unless I call you 'Professor Speed'."

"I could always shred your heart again." Eobard raised a threatening eyebrow, but didn't lift a hand.

Cisco sniped back, "You are going to pay for that one day, you know."

"I do." Eobard shrugged. Any other reaction would be pointless. "Call him Doctor Thawne, since he does have a Ph.D., and call me Eobard. Or simply Thawne. We'll figure it out from the context."

Eobard locked eyes with his cognitive doppelganger. "That work for you, Doctor?"

Said doctor nodded. "Now, will someone please tell me more about Zoom?"

Eobard let Cisco tell the tale, since he'd been there at the monster's first appearance. And naturally, Cisco had to loop back into parts that Eobard would have preferred he'd have avoided – such as Eobard's initial masquerade as Harrison Wells, the engineered "accident" at his S.T.A.R. Labs, Eobard's trip home. Of course, Cisco did mention Eobard's own return – complete with giving Barry his speed and his sojourn in the Speed Force to recover it. While Cisco retold that last set of events in fairly heroic terms, he also relished telling the parts where Eobard hadn't exactly conformed to a strict moral code.
His doppelganger looked at him, appalled. "You're a monster."

Eobard flicked that indictment away with a wave of his hand. "I don't have to justify myself to you."

He stood up and was about to exit the Cortex when Barry came in, trailed by Harry and Jesse Wells.

Barry looked from him to Cisco to Eobard Version One and asked, "Everything okay?"

"This one doesn't like me. My feelings are hurt." Eobard pretended to pout. Barry's face got stormy and Eobard shook his head. "But it's okay. I don't like him, either."

Through the time dilation, Eobard watched Barry relax. He hadn't realized just how easily his casual comment had gotten Barry wound up and ready to do battle on his behalf. The sensation was heady and could be addictive if he wasn't careful.

He looked back at the three visitors – that reunited family – and smiled. Despite his distaste for his cognitive doppelganger and his troubled affection for his physical doppelganger, he could share in their joy. He knew just how they felt.

"Doctor Thawne, want to see the last battle? See these two heroes take down Zoom?" Cisco looked over at Eobard and Barry with pride, perhaps in apology for all of the damning information he'd shared.

Eobard was startled. "You have footage of what happened at the cement factory?"

"Yeah, of course I do – we watched the whole thing go down. That's why we were so freaked when you came back – the cameras when black after you two did your mojo with the Speed Leech. You know we're jacked into all of the video cameras in the city. And when Zoom first started sending breachers through, Barry – being the owner of S.T.A.R. Labs and a responsible sort of superhero – thought it worth the effort to upgrade the system to hi-def. We – and by 'we', meaning I – wrote a kick-ass algorithm to upscale the data output with minimal degradation, so that even the low-def cameras provide better-than-the-average-bear images."

Eobard Version One said, "I didn't think that was possible."

Cisco chuckled, "Yeah, most people who aren't Cisco Ramon wouldn't think it was possible either."

Eobard said, without even thinking, "One of the best decisions of my life was hiring you."

And of course, Cisco wasn't going to let an opportunity pass to needle him. "Well, we both know you really didn't hire me for my engineering genius, don't we?"

To Eobard's surprise, Barry said, "Give it a rest, Cisco – okay? This isn't the time or place."

Cisco made a face but didn't comment back. Instead, he went to the console and called up the video. "I have the whole thing recorded – at least the parts where we could get cameras on you."

As Eobard watched, Barry leaned next to him. Barry wasn't overtly touching him, but it felt to Eobard as if Barry had his arm over his shoulder, around his waist, surrounding him, grounding him, keeping him focused on what mattered, that Barry Allen loved him.

The video opened with a surprising dramatic shot of Eobard and Barry at the entrance to the accelerator tunnel, and Barry touching Eobard's heart. There was no audio, but Eobard found himself on the edge of tears as he watched the scene – the exchange of gloves and kisses on wrists, the sparks that flared between them. He watched himself watch Barry start his run, and wondered for the first time, what was the when Barry heading to.
The cameras follow him to the Breach Room, and the ones in there were equipped for audio. Eobard didn't remember hearing Zoom's assault on Blue Bell at the time, but each time the blue mass pulsed, there was a deep, discordant noise – like the shifting of girders under a bridge. But Eobard did have to chuckle when Zoom all but landed on his face after coming through the breach.

"You really do love to take risks, don't you?" Barry whispered in his ear. "Taunting Zoom like that?"

Eobard sniffed. "It seemed appropriate at the time. Needed to distract him."

And then the battle. Although it had been fought at speed, Cisco had done an excellent job with the hi-def cameras and had slowed down the playback. Eobard watched and absently pulled apart his own actions – he seemed to have a left-side weakness, dropping his guard. Something to work on.

There was literally a break in the action as he got Zoom to chase him out of S.T.A.R. Labs.

When the video picked up again, they were at the cement factory, but the images were too dark to make out anything but the flashes of red and blue lightning.

Cisco paused the playback. "Hold on, I can fix this. Just – just, hold on." Cisco fiddled with some controls on his console and the results were astonishing. Instead of a dark, murky scene, it looked like Eobard and Zoom were about to do battle at high noon.

Barry said, "Let it run, Cisco."

The scene was much as Eobard remembered, getting Zoom to chase him until the Speed Leech did its job. When Zoom faltered and collapsed, the Wellses cheered. Which struck Eobard as funny, since they'd already seen this play out in real time.

Yet, when Barry arrived on the scene, Eobard let out his own little Yes!.

The Barry sitting next to him chuckled and leaned his head against Eobard's shoulder. "We're almost done. Time for the Time Wraiths."

Since the cameras were focused on the ground action, they didn't pick up the two Wraiths flying down from the clouds, but they did capture what happened next. In vivid clarity, the Wraiths sucked the power out of Zoom. Since he had no speed force left, the Time Wraiths took all of the paradox energy Zoom had generated from resetting the timeline.

When Eobard had watched this happen in real time, it had been too dark to see what the Time Wraiths had done to Zoom. He could only have seen bits and pieces as the Wraiths had distorted the time dilation. But now it was all too clear.

"Cisco, pause the playback."

Cisco did as Eobard asked, but the Wraiths were already taking Zoom away. "Can you go back frame by frame?"

"Sure." Cisco kept hitting a key as the video slowly stepped back, frame by frame.

"Stop," Eobard commanded. He walked up to the screen and stared at the image. He knew this creature. He knew what the Time Wraiths had created. Looking at the shrunken, skeletal face with its rotting mask, Eobard knew just what disaster he'd precipitated and the generations of pain it was going to cause.

"What's the matter?" Barry had joined him and then looked at the monitor. "Huh – that is one
seriously ugly corpse."

Eobard wanted to snap, *It's not a corpse,* but he bit back the words. And summoned all of the emotional discipline he'd learned during his years of pretense as Harrison Wells. This was not the time to fall apart. That would come later, in the privacy of the Time Vault after Gideon confirmed his observations. "Nothing. Just reveling in the destruction of our enemy."

Stepping back from the monitor, Eobard went over to the console, blanked the screen and turned to the visitors. "And that's what we do with rogue speedsters." Eobard even managed to summon a smile. Harrison looked ill, Jesse, triumphant, and his cognitive doppelganger, intrigued.

That wouldn't do. Not at all.

......................................................................

Barry could feel something was wrong. It practically hummed from Eobard, like a discordant buzz; it raised the hairs on the back of Barry's neck, made him ill at ease, unhappy. He wanted to scoop Eobard up and take him someplace where they wouldn't be disturbed, where Barry could do everything in his power to get Eo to tell him what was bothering him. What he'd seen in that video, in the demise of Zoom, that had him so freaked out.

But Barry couldn't. They were dealing with the impact of the bombshell Harry Wells had dropped when Eo had not so subtly told the visitors it was time for them to go home.

Following a lengthy discussion about how Central City dealt with the meta-humans, Eobard had asked, his tone polite and disinterested, "So – any questions before we take you back?"

Eo's doppelganger, who Cisco was now calling Doctor Thawne, looked like he had a dozen questions he wanted to ask. But before he'd gotten the chance to say anything, Harry Wells announced, "I'm not going."

Dr. Thawne was shocked. "Harrison, you can't be serious. Why wouldn't you want to come home?"

Barry knew the reason. So did Cisco. He looked over to Eobard, who had taken himself to the far side of the Cortex and was standing against the wall, arms crossed. But it wasn't hard to read his thoughts either.

Harry didn't answer; he just stated at his hands and let the silence stretch out. At least until Jesse decided that this game had gone on long enough. "Dad doesn't want to go home because he's a meta-human, too. He's a speedster – just like these guys."

Harry looked at his daughter, horrified at the disclosure. "Jesse –"

"Dad, just stop lying. I've suspected for years. This last month, since we came here, after these guys took care of Zoom, I've been watching you. You're eating like a pig and disappearing for hours. You come back and there's something different. But it's something I recognize. You're running in the accelerator tunnel. Like Barry and this Eobard do. I can feel the speed force in you."

That last claim startled Barry. *Speed called to speed.* "Jesse?"

She held up her hand and it vibrated. "Me, too. I'm a speedster, too."

Harry erupted out of his chair. "No – no. Jesse –"

"Dad, it's time to stop protecting me. I finally figured out what you did with the meta-human sensors.
You've programmed them to disregard your pattern and mine. Once I figured out my pattern, it wasn't hard to find yours in the coding."

Harry clenched his fists. "You don't want this, Jesse. Trust me. You don't have to be a speedster."

"I think I'm old enough to make my own decisions. You can use the Leech on yourself if you want, but I'm not giving up so quickly."

Harry's voice was filled with too much anguish. "Jesse – "

Barry listened to the argument between father and daughter but he was more interested in Eo's reactions. Eobard looked unhappy at this development; the micro-expressions that crossed his face were far too readable to Barry – and possibly to the Wellses, father and daughter, if they'd been paying attention – to discount.

The bickering between the Wellses wasn't Barry's problem – at least, not at the moment – but Eobard's distress was. Without bothering to make any excuses, Barry tugged Eobard into the hallway, far enough away that they wouldn't be overheard. "What's going on?"

Eobard shook off both Barry's hand and the question. "Nothing."

Barry was nothing if not persistent, especially with the people he loved. "Don't deflect. I can see you're upset." Playing it subtle, he ignored what was bothering Eobard about Zoom's demise. "You're upset that both of the Wellses are speedsters?"

Eobard nodded. "I've been ambivalent about Harrison's ability to deal with his powers and I haven't pressed the issue. And now Jesse – how is she going to cope?"

"She's young, yes, but she's not a child, not with everything she's been through. She's very strong."

Eobard rubbed the back of his neck. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

Barry wracked his brain, but he couldn't think of what Eobard was asking.

Eobard supplied the answer. "They're immortal, Barry."

Barry couldn't believe he'd forgotten that – of all things. "I'm actually less concerned about Jesse than Harry. He's not exactly… stable."

Eobard agreed with that assessment. "No, he's not. And couple immortality on top of that…"

Barry tried not to see only shadows. "On one hand – it's hard to see him turning evil, like Zoom."

Eobard snarked, "As opposed to the Reverse-Flash?"

Barry snapped back, "That wasn't where I was going, Eobard. And don't you dare go there, either. But what I was about to say is that he could do an awful lot of damage as an emotionally compromised speedster, even having the example of the evil he's seen. And Jesse – she's his child. I don't think she'll be able to keep him in check if something goes wrong."

"We could convince him to give up his speed," Eobard speculated.

Barry was puzzled by this suggestion. "After all this time spent subtly pushing him to accept it?"

"At the time, we had been thinking that Harry would be staying here, as uncomfortable as that might be. Or that he was going back to a world that needed a speedster. And Harry wanted Jesse to stay
behind, to let her grow into her powers here. But now, the game's completely changed. If he goes back, Harrison would be a meta-human in a world without metas – except for his daughter." Eobard understood the ramifications of that. "And now, he doesn't want to go home."

"He needs to. You didn't see your doppelganger grieving. It was horrible." Barry shook his head at the memory.

Eobard looked at him, one eyebrow raised. "I'm familiar with that emotion."

Barry swallowed hard. He'd forgotten about what Eobard had gone through when he'd gone back to the future.

"Guys?" Cisco had come looking for them. "What's going on?"

Barry sighed, "Nothing – just trying to solve the problem that's the Wellses."

Cisco laughed. "Okay, Sister Margaretta. But if you come back in, you might find that your problems have solved themselves."

"Oh?"

Cisco didn't stand on ceremony and went back into the Cortex, Barry and Eobard at his heels.

Barry was pleased to see all three of the Earth-2 visitors smiling, and Harry and the other Eobard were actually holding hands, with Jesse standing behind them, looking like she'd just won the lottery.

"Well?"

Jesse announced, "We're going back. All of us."

That was – and was not – surprising news. But Jesse wasn't finished. "We have to, for a while at least. Dad and I have to show our faces, we have to do a lot of damage control. And dad and Uncle Eo need to be together and figure themselves out. But when the dust settles, I want to come back here. I want to learn from the people who can teach me what it means to be a speedster. I don't know if I want to be a hero like you guys, but I do want to understand these powers."

Barry was mostly relieved. "You are welcome to come back and stay as long as you need."

Jesse came over and hugged him. "Thank you, Barry."

When Jesse let go, Barry looked at Harry. "What about you?"

"I haven't made up my mind about my powers, my speed. But I do have to go home. I have to clean up the mess my disappearance left behind. I have a life there, a life I loved. I want it back." Harry turned and looked at his Eobard, his smile tentative but far more relaxed than Barry ever seen.

Dr. Thawne spoke for the first time. "There's a favor I'd like to ask of the two of you."

Barry glanced over at Eobard, who shrugged. "Okay, we'll help you if we can."

"We need you to destroy our particle accelerator. Make it unrepairable without destroying the building. I have the feeling that if we ever took the damn thing on line, no matter how much we tried to fix the problems, it would still go critical."

Eobard commented, his tone as dry as the high desert, "For a scientist, that seems to be a highly concentrated dose of magical thinking."
Dr. Thawne chuckled with dark humor, "Yes, it is. But given what I've learned over the last forty-eight hours, what I've lived through over the past two years, I'd rather be called a superstitious idiot than lose everything I just regained."
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

You might think that with Zoom dead, all would be right in the world, that Eobard and Barry are destined for a long and happy life together. Think again.

Cisco turned off the power to the Speed Canon just as Barry and his Thawne popped back through Blue Bell. "How was the trip?"

Barry grinned as he pulled back his cowl. "Very interesting – I got to meet my doppelganger. What an utter nerd. He puts the both of us to shame."

Cisco laughed and asked, "Any signs of my double?"

"Nope, but both Harry and Doctor Thawne are going to look for him. They're hoping that he's as much a genius as you are."

"No one is as much a genius as I am." Cisco sniffed, pretending to be offended, but he was secretly pleased by the praise. "Are they going to look for Caitlin's counterpart, too?"

"That, they didn't say. Speaking of which, any word from Caitlin?"

"Yeah, she'll be back tomorrow. Ronnie and Doctor Stein have to get going."

The three of them headed back to the Cortex, where both Barry and Eobard flashed back into their civilian clothes. Without a word, Eobard left. Barry looked like he was about to follow, but just collapsed into a chair. "It feels strange, you know?"

Puzzled Cisco looked at him. "What do you mean? Isn't strange our normal state?"

"Zoom's dead, Harry and Jesse are back home, no extra Eobards hanging around, no metas causing problems. I don't know about you, but I feel kind of superfluous."

"You can't mean that!" Cisco was offended by the very notion.

"Yeah, yeah – I know that we're in a lull. A week, or maybe an hour from now, some meta will pop up and cause havoc. Or the Rogues will come back. It'll be go-go-go and I'll wonder why I ever thought this way, but right now, at this moment, everything is too quiet."

Cisco let out a small laugh. "Yeah – I know just what you mean. It's been months since we've had a chance to kick back and just relax." Cisco remembered all of the nights spent watching his friend struggle to stay alive, all the hours communicating with Thawne, trying to figure out a way to save Barry's life. "It seems like it was so long ago, but it's was barely more than a month since Thawne's been back. I'd say it feels like he's never been gone, but – " Cisco paused with deliberate delicacy.

And Barry picked up the thought easily enough. "But everything is different. He's not the same man who lied to us, who manipulated our lives. Remember when you ambushed me at the cemetery? When you told me what you'd been vibing?"
Cisco nodded. "And that feels like it happened in another lifetime." Cisco searched back through his memories. "It was so weird, telling you what I'd seen."

"And everything came to pass. Eobard's back, we're building a life together. I just wish …" Barry made a face.

"What?" Cisco wondered what was wrong in Barry's version of paradise.

"That I could get him to tell me what happened the night my mother was killed. He's pretty much admitted that he didn't kill her."

"Yeah, he just says he's 'responsible' for your mother's death. Which is bad enough, but it's not the same as actually committing the act." Cisco was kind of surprised at his own lack of tact, but Barry seemed so open about the who thing.

"Can I tell you something?" Barry's tone turned grave.

"Of course. We're best friends. You can tell me anything."

Barry nodded and said, "Even if he did kill my mother, I couldn't hate him. I'd forgiven him almost as soon as he'd admitted it. What I'd had a hard time with was forgiving myself for not hating him. For allowing myself to love Eobard, despite what he'd done.

"The year after he'd left, it was worse than anything I'd ever experienced. It was like I lost the best part of me."

Cisco reached out and took Barry's hand, squeezing it. "I knew you were losing yourself. That's why I finally told you what I'd been seeing. It hurts when you're so unhappy."

"Have I ever told you that you're the best best friend I've ever had?"

Cisco let go of Barry's hand and laughed. "I do strive for excellence in all things."

The conversation lapsed, but Cisco didn't feel the need to fill the dead air. Barry did, though. "Want to catch a movie tonight?"

"Really? Figured you and Thawne would be burning up another set of sheets tonight. How do you manage not to set your bed on fire?" Oh, it was so worth seeing Barry turn as red as his suit.

But Barry recovered and deflected easily. "I'll always have time for you. We're bros, right?"

Secretly pleased at Barry's loyalty, Cisco offered, "You could bring him along, you know. Professor Speed said he actually does like the movies."

"Professor Speed?" Barry looked as appalled as Thawne had when Cisco had used that name this morning.

"Yeah – I needed a way to keep all the Eobards straight. But then your Eobard just suggested I call Eoblondie 'Doctor Thawne' and it sort of stuck."

Barry turned bright red again – not from embarrassment, but from an effort to stop laughing. "Eoblondie? Seriously, dude. Forgetting about your vibing, your nicknaming powers have leveled up."

Cisco nodded his head in a regal gesture of appreciation of Barry's appreciation. "So, the three of us,
the movies?"

Barry shrugged. "How about just the two of us? Remember, Eobard's got that whole posthumous murder confession hanging over his head. And I don't think there's a person in Central City who wouldn't recognize him. Besides, let's just hang out together. Just because Eobard and I are together, doesn't mean I can't spend time with you, my best, best friend."

Cisco felt a tiny knot of dread unwind and dissolve inside him, something he'd never wanted to acknowledge – the fear that Barry would leave him behind. "Cool, any idea what you want to see?"

"Isn't there a new Star Trek movie coming out?"

"I think it's already come and gone." Cisco pulled out his phone and checked. "But we're in luck – the multiplex at the mall has one showing at nine, tonight. So, dinner and a movie?"

"Sounds good." Barry got up. "I'm going to check on Eobard, okay? Let him know I won't be home until later. See you in about an hour?"

Cisco shook his head and wondered if Barry would remember to come up for air if he needed an hour to say goodnight and see you later to his boyfriend. "Sure thing."

Barry left the Cortex and Cisco headed down to his workroom. He had a half-dozen projects that had gone fallow since Zoom had appeared and he wanted to get back to them. Now was not the time to get deeply involved in anything, not with dinner and a movie in an hour. But there was one project he could finally finish – one that would take up the allotted hour. Dismantling the suit that had been so badly damaged when Barry had fought Zoom. He'd dumped it back in a box when Thawne had returned and hadn't looked at it since. The shell was a lost cause, but there were miles of sensors that could be recycled, and the first rule of mechanical engineering was "never waste good tech".

Cisco emptied the carton onto his worktable and as soon as he touched it, Cisco was swept into a vibe.

Not one of Zoom and Barry's pain, of a battle that had nearly cost Barry his life. No, nothing so simple. This vibe was far more terrifying.

Cisco was vibing nothingness. No light. No darkness. Just a whole lot of nullity.

..................................................

Eobard didn't waste any time when they'd returned from Earth-2. He left Barry and Cisco in the Cortex without any explanations. He needed to get to the Time Vault and Gideon. Hopefully Barry's interdiction about future news wouldn't interfere with his research. And to keep Barry himself from interfering, Eobard turned on the electro-magnetic locks and the subatomic disrupters after he entered the Time Vault, blocking out Barry's override.

He pressed his hand onto the podium, and Gideon appeared. "Good evening, Professor Thawne."

"Hello, Gideon," Eobard replied with the familiar response. But he found himself unable to issue a command.

Gideon offered a suggestion. "It has been five hundred sixty four days since you've made a journal entry. Do you wish to create one now?"

"No, thank you." No, Eobard had no need for journal entries anymore. He swallowed against the rising nausea, and forced himself to ask, "Do you have access to any information about the Black
"Flash?"

"I do, Professor Thawne. However, as all of this information is derived from future news events, my programming prohibits me from providing it to you."

Eobard paced. "My journals – you still can give me access to my future journals, correct?"

"Yes, Professor Thawne. That data is not interdicted and it is kept separate from the timeline."

Eobard dragged a hand through his hair. He wished this Gideon module was more intuitive. "Please display all entries that mention the Black Flash."

There weren't that many. A total of four out of all the thousands of entries he'd made over the decades. And Eobard's memory was excellent. He knew what each of those entries contained without even looking.

One was an ancient photograph, something he'd taken from the Flash Museum. It was his memory of this image that was setting him on this course.

"Gideon, please pull up the image of Zoom when he was taken by the Time Wraiths and display side-by-side with the photograph of the Black Flash."

Gideon completed his request, and Eobard sucked in an anguished breath. He paced the length of the Time Vault, needing some outlet for the mad energy that was filling him. He could run, lose himself for a while in the speed force, but he couldn't outrun this conclusion – that he'd inadvertently created the Black Flash. That the Time Wraiths that he'd encouraged Barry to summon had turned Zoom into the Speedster God of Death.

When Eobard had had Zoom on his knees, emptied of his speed, Eobard should have finished him. He should have plunged his hand through the monster's chest and shredded his heart. He shouldn't have waited, even if it had meant he'd have been damaged by the paradox energy Zoom had been creating and consuming.

"Analysis, Gideon." Eobard was startled at how shaky his voice was.

"The semi-humanoid creatures in the two images are virtually identical, Professor Thawne."

Eobard scrubbed his face, feeling as helpless as he had when he'd learned of Barry's death. He quickly read through the entries he'd made about the Black Flash.

The first entry, the one that accompanied the photograph, was made when Eobard was fourteen. It was mostly notes and suppositions: According to my research, the Black Flash is the avatar of Death for all biological life (anything that requires linear time) that is connected with the Speed Force – i.e. Speedsters. I have been unable to discover the origin of this myth, but per texts from Speedsters who are not the Flash, the Black Flash is believed to be the embodiment of Speedster Death as conventional Death does not have enough power to affect those who were blessed by the Speed Force.

Ergo, Speedsters are immortal (question)

The second entry, nearly eight years later, was a little more coherent: My continuing research into the Flash and his origins has uncovered a small cache of data relating to the Black Flash. The Black Flash is the Speedster God of Death, and can manipulate linear time through extreme speed. Supraluminal speed, to be precise – speeds at which time itself becomes unstable. My theories of chronodynamics require an acceptance of the belief in multiple, yet divergent timelines for every event –
quantum time – since the Black Flash, through its ability to move at unknown multiples of superluminal speed, can transverse the timelines at will and even exist in many timelines at once.

It is not understood if the Black Flash is a neutral or malevolent force. Does it act upon speedsters or does it appear only when speedsters are at the brink of death?

The next entry, made a few months after Eobard had transformed himself into a speedster, was one that Eobard wished he'd never made, wished that he could erase: *I have met the Flash. My fondest wish is for him to be taken by the Black Flash.*

The last entry that referenced the Black Flash was made a week after the death of Nora Allen: *"All of my plans, all of my dreams, my hopes and desires, everything I have worked for, has come to ruin. In my quest to control the destiny of the Flash, I have brought only disaster. The Black Flash has all but destroyed my connection to the Speed Force. The fate of the Flash – his very existence – is now in jeopardy. I cannot repair the timeline, but I believe I have found a way to accelerate events and ensure the creation of the Flash. Harrison Wells, whose theories on the manipulation of linear time formed the foundation of the entire field of chrono-dynamics, lives in this century. He is poised on the edge of greatness – but according to Gideon's databases, he never achieves that promise. I must do everything possible to ensure Harrison Wells' success."*

Reading his own words, Eobard felt all of the despair and grief that his younger self had poured into that entry. His actions in March, 2000, his hubris, his anger, his selfish and immature needs, had precipitated everything that had gone wrong in Barry Allen's life.

Maybe if he didn't love Barry Allen – the man, not the superhero – so damn much, he wouldn't feel such corrosive shame. Just this morning, his doppelganger – the *real* Eobard Thawne – called him a monster. He was right.

Barry wished he could say that he'd enjoyed his evening with Cisco. After all, the movie was pretty awesome – it was Star Trek after all – but Cisco wasn't all there. It was like the guy who he'd left alone in the Cortex for all of an hour wasn't the guy who'd met him in the S.T.A.R. Labs parking garage with the keys to a van. It was like his Cisco had been replaced by a clone, or worse.

This Cisco was not just quiet, he was practically mute. He didn't pick up any of Barry's jokes during dinner, nor did he provide anything remotely resembling his usual running commentary during the movie. And it wasn't like he was being quiet for the sake of the other patrons – this was the last weekend the movie was playing and they were one of only a dozen other souls in the movie theater.

In an attempt to pretend everything was normal, Barry playfully bumped Cisco as they walked back to the van. "What's the matter, dude?"

"Matter?" Cisco was still distant.

"Yeah, matter. You're way too quiet. We've just seen an awesome movie and you barely made a comment during it. You'd normally be tearing it apart right now, flinging the best bits at me. Did you hate it that much?"

"No, of course not. It was pretty epic."

"Then what's going on?"

Cisco shoved his hands in his pockets and shrugged. "Nothing, just got a lot on my mind."
Barry couldn't imagine what that could be. "Did you get a call from someone while I was looking for Eobard? You were fine when I left."

"It's nothing, Bar. Just let it go, okay?" Cisco's tone was colder that the early December air.

They stopped in front of the S.T.A.R. Labs van. "You're my best, best friend, Cisco. I thought we'd just established that. If something's bothering you, I want to help. I'm here for you."

Cisco chuckled, but Barry couldn't hear any humor in it. "I know, and I appreciate it. But this is something I've just got to handle on my own right now. If something changes and I need help, you will be the very first person I ask, okay?"

That felt like a slap in the face, but the only thing Barry could say was, "Okay."

Cisco got into the van and Barry waited and watched as he pulled away, disappearing down the parking structure's spiral exit ramp before Barry took off in the other direction, towards home.

Except that Barry didn't know if home was going to be particularly welcoming, not after he'd discovered that Eobard had locked him out the Time Vault, overriding Barry's own override on the locks and the subatomic dampeners. Frustrated and upset, Barry had just ended up leaving a post-it on his own suit and hoped that Eobard noticed it when he went back to the Cortex.

Barry didn't understand why Eobard had shut him out, and given Cisco's own enigmatic behavior, Barry didn't bring it up with his friend.

But he wasn't going to be so shy with Eobard, and prepared himself for a confrontation.

Except that the house was dark and cold, not even the front light on to welcome him home, and Barry wondered if Eobard was actually there. He checked the security log, and yes, Eobard had come home about two hours ago. Barry walked towards the bedroom with a creeping sense of dread.

For some reason, it felt like his life was about to collapse.

Eobard was awake – there was a thin blade of light visible at the base of the master bedroom door – and Barry breathed a tiny sigh of relief. He didn't even understand why he'd been so agitated. Maybe Cisco's weird behavior had infected him.

He opened the door and Eobard looked up from his tablet. "Did you and Cisco have a good evening?"

"I guess you found my note."

Eobard just nodded absently and returned his attention to his tablet.

All of the anxiety that Barry had felt before inexplicably returned and multiplied. There was something wrong with Eobard's tone, it was too neutral, too polite, too disinterested. All thoughts of confronting Eobard evaporated like steam. And so Barry pretended everything was normal. "It was okay. We enjoyed the movie."

"What did you see?"

Again, Barry had the sense that Eobard could care less. "The new Star Trek." Barry bit his lip, wondering if he'd erred in not inviting Eobard. "Did you want to come with us?"

"No, not at all. You and Cisco haven't had much of a chance to – well, bond – since you woke up from that coma."
Everything Eobard said was true, but his tone was so off, so distant, so uncaring. There was none of the heat, the fire, the *life* that always infused everything that Eobard said. Feeling lost in a forest of shadows and thorns, Barry plunged forward. "How was your evening?"

"It was fine."

Barry waited in vain for Eobard to elaborate. When he didn't, Barry asked, "What did you do? You sort of disappeared when we got back." He didn't ask why Eobard locked him out of the Time Vault yet. He didn't want to know the truth and he didn't need to hear a lie.

"I had some research I needed to finish."

Eobard's tone was so flat that Barry couldn't bring himself to draw out this conversation any further.

"Ah, okay. I'm going to take a shower. Will be out in a couple of minutes."

As he turned to head into the bathroom, Eobard called his name. "Barry?"

"Yes?"

Eobard let out a tiny sigh. "It might be best if you slept in the other suite tonight. I'm feeling… restless and there's no need for you to suffer because of that."

"I don't mind. I'd still sleep better next to you, even if you toss and turn." Barry hoped he sounded as disinterested and casual as Eobard.

"Actually, Barry. I'd prefer to sleep alone."

Barry sucked in a breath. It felt like he'd just been sliced open with a very sharp blade, the kind that cuts and the pain doesn't hit until there's blood everywhere. He managed to say, "Just for tonight, right?"

Eobard looked at him and Barry just realized that for the duration of this conversation, Eobard *hadn't* been looking at him. He'd been looking at his tablet or at some point over Barry's shoulder.

"No, I think it would be best to go back to the way things were. I don't sleep well to begin with – I never have. I wake up at the least little thing. And frankly, you're a bit… much to share a bed with night after night."

Barry just stared at Eobard, not believing what he was hearing. One of the pillars of their relationship was the absence of outright lies between them. Eobard might let Barry draw certain conclusions that weren't necessarily correct, but since his return to this time, he had never deliberately lied to Barry.

Until now.

Barry wished he had the courage to call Eobard on that lie, to tell Eobard that he'd witnessed firsthand just how soundly he slept.

And Eobard blithely continued to destroy Barry. "There's not much difference between the two bedrooms – and with the Gideon module in the closet here, it would just be best if you moved back into the other suite."

As if from a great distance, Barry heard himself saying, "Perhaps it would be best if I moved out altogether."

Eobard shrugged. "If that's what you'd prefer, I have no objections."
Barry remembered what it felt like when Zoom stuck his claws into him and sucked out his speed. He remembered the soul-cracking fear and agony. That was nothing compared to this.

Barry didn't bother with the front door. He phased through the glass wall and out into the night.

He didn't run to Joe's. He didn't run to Iris and Eddie's. And Cisco had made it pretty clear he had his own problems. Even if he knew where Henry was, there was no way he'd go to him. For a few brief seconds, Barry entertained the thought of going back to Earth-2 and hiding out there. Except that no one there could give him any solace.

Hollowed out and heartsick, Barry ran with no destination in mind, Eobard's inexplicable behavior and his own heartbreak chasing him like a winter-starved wolf.

He ran for what felt like hours, and somewhere in the Badlands, among the rubble of frost-slicked shale, Barry collapsed.

I'm doing this for Barry's own good.

Eobard kept telling himself that, repeating the words over and over again like a mantra, hoping that the repetition would lead to belief, to acceptance.

But the only thing it led to was shame and grief.

Barry had never been good at masking his emotions and tonight, when Eobard had requested that they sleep apart, his anguish had been clear. And it was even worse when he pretended not to care if Barry moved out. Eobard didn't need his speedster's ability to see through the time dilation to read Barry's hurt and pain.

It took every ounce of control not to race after Barry, to run to him and tell him he didn't mean it, that there was nothing he wanted more than to sleep next to his beautiful speedster for the rest of his life. He wanted to go to Barry, to heal the pain he'd just deliberately caused.

But he couldn't.

It wasn't that he didn't know how to give comfort. True, for most of his life, Eobard had never been good at dealing with other people's emotions. After all, he was a Thawne and such basic courtesies were beneath him. He'd been taught that compassion was a weakness. But he'd learned to give comfort, to understand tenderness, to realize that compassion was one of the greatest gifts humanity had. Harrison Wells taught him that. His Harrison, not the emotionally scarred genius he'd taken home this morning. His Harrison had also taught him the necessity of sacrifice, especially for the ones who loved and depended on him.

Separating himself from Barry was a necessary sacrifice.

If nothing else, Barry deserved a happy life. A long and fruitful life, whether as a speedster or as a mortal. He didn't deserve to have the speedster's doom dogging his existence.

Eobard turned off the light and stared up at the night sky. The clouds were thick and the temperature was dropping; there might even be snow tonight. The bedroom was cold and despite his speedster's metabolism, Eobard was chilled.

He couldn't help but think that if Barry were here, he'd never be cold. If Barry were here, next to him, he'd be able to sleep.
At that moment, the only things that Eobard was certain of was that he'd never be warm, that he'd never sleep easily, again.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

So much pain - for everyone involved. But perhaps there's a light at the end of the tunnel?

Chapter Notes

My apologies for missing the Sunday post - was out of town for the day and got back exhausted.

Warning for this chapter - There's a vibe of a child murder that doesn't happen. If you don't want to read, skip the first set of italicized text in the beginning of the chapter.

Cisco emptied the last of the rum into his glass and knocked it back like it was water. He'd run out of cola about a third of the way through the bottle of Bacardi and there was nothing more depressing than drinking a party drink like a piña colada when there was no one to party with. So, he drank it straight and tried not to gag at the burn in his throat.

Cisco Ramon was not normally a guy who drowned his sorrows in excessive drink, but his behavior tonight was just about beyond the pale and he needed something to help him forget not only the shame of treating Barry like shit, that he was the worst best friend in existence, but that he'd just vibed Barry's complete non-existence. That where Barry Allen once was, there was nothing. No future, no past, no present.

Of course, it didn't make sense. So many of his vibes didn't, They were usually rich in obscure metaphors, like the vision of the falling blackbirds that had presaged the death of Laurel Lance. But the one constant with his ridiculous powers was that vibes relating to Barry were never abstract or metaphorical, never cloaked in fantastical imagery. They were literal, as concrete as the structure of S.T.A.R. Labs itself. That's what made them so dangerous.

So, to vibe nothingness, especially after the villain had been vanquished, killed and taken off to some unknown dimension, made no sense.

The more Cisco thought about it, the more it seemed to mean that Barry Allen was going to be wiped from existence. And how could he just come out and say that?

Cisco comforted himself with the thought that this vibe might just be a false alarm, a freak vision that meant nothing. Maybe it was all because he was vibing on that horrible, battle-torn suit and he'd been over-reacting. In the morning, he'd try to vibe the suit that Barry had been wearing since he woke up. And just for good measure, Cisco would go to the Time Vault and do a little vibe on Thawne's suit, too. Although that idea creeped him out more than it normally did. Thawne was here, in this time, and he was wearing the Yellow Horror on a regular basis.

But it really was the only way to check the accuracy of what he'd seen. ‘The Flash and his Reverse’
was more than just a catchy phrase. They were truly halves of one very powerful whole and one couldn't exist without the other.

Filled with a bit more purpose, Cisco drank as much water as the rum he'd just consumed – a probably futile effort to stave off tomorrow's inevitable hangover – and planned on vibing Thawne's suit as soon as he got to S.T.A.R. Labs.

The water and the Tylenol Cisco took before finally going to bed helped prevent the worst of the hangover headache – in exchange for probably significant liver damage – but they didn't do anything to get him out of bed before noon. Not that it really mattered, it was Saturday, and when Cisco checked his phone, there was only one text, from Caitlin, letting him know that she wouldn't be in until early noon. She and Ronnie were having brunch with the Steins, and Ronnie and Martin Stein would take off from there.

There was nothing from Barry, not surprising given how much Cisco had behaved like an asshole to his best, best friend last night. And there was no reason why Thawne would be texting him. Thawne wasn't his boss and they didn't have the sort of relationship that included random texting. Although Cisco could probably just vibe him, if he really wanted to.

No, absolutely not. It was one thing to have that weird psychic connection with Thawne when Barry's life had hung in the balance; it was another when the dude was just a text message away.

Before heading into S.T.A.R. Labs, Cisco stopped at Jitters and picked up two Flashes – one for Caitlin and one, as a peace offering, for Barry, plus a Double-Flash for himself. He was definitely not supplying caffeine to his once-upon-a-different-timeline murderer.

The Cortex was quiet when he arrived, no sign of either Barry or Thawne; although Caitlin was back at her post, and accepted the gift of coffee with heartfelt thanks.

Cisco teased, "You're looking all rosy-cheeked and chipper, Mrs. Doctor Snow-Raymond." He loved mangling Caitlin's name in celebration of her marital status.

Caitlin blushed. "We had a very good time."

"I'm sure you did." Cisco took a sip of the coffee he'd gotten for Barry. Since Barry wasn't around, he was going to drink it before it got cold and gross.

"You, on the other hand, look like you spent the night having a ten-round prize fight with your pillows – and the pillows won."

"Actually, I slept okay – it was just …" Cisco sighed. How could he tell Caitlin what he'd vibed, when he couldn't bring himself to tell Barry? And speaking of Barry... "Have you seen or heard from Barry today?"

Caitlin shook her head. "Nope, and haven't seen Professor Thawne either. Perhaps the two of them are …" She bite her lip and whispered, "sleeping in."

Cisco chuckled at Caitlin's almost Victorian-level of embarrassment.

Even though he was getting antsy about what was living in his head right now and to stop himself from telling Caitlin and freaking her out – perhaps unnecessarily – Cisco redirected his own thoughts and said, "You know, it's kind of quiet without the visitors. I think I miss them. I'm glad that Jesse will be back. Just think – we'll get to train another speedster."

When Caitlin had called yesterday, while Barry and Thawne were taking the visitors home, Cisco
had told her what the Wellses had planned. She'd approved and was still wholeheartedly enthusiastic, saying, "I can't wait to get started. We have all of Barry's data, even Professor Thawne's. It will be pretty amazing to see how Jesse stacks up against them."

If Cisco hadn't just vibed the end of Barry's existence, he'd be just as excited, too. He let out a tiny sigh. "When Barry comes in, could you tell him to come see me in my workroom? There's something I want to show him."

"Sure." Caitlin smiled and went back to running tests.

Before heading down to the workroom, Cisco had something he needed to do first. Vibe the Yellow Horror. He made a detour to the Time Vault and prayed that Thawne hadn't reset the access controls.

And he hadn't. Nor had he added any security measure to the panel that hid his suit. One of his suits. Although he'd seen Thawne wearing the ring on occasion, Cisco wasn't sure if Thawne was alternating between suits, the way Barry did, or if he preferred the one in the ring. And then Cisco wondered if it was going to make a difference when he tried to vibe on the suit.

The only way to find out was to do it. Cisco reached out to touch the Reverse-Flash's emblem, like he had so many time in the past, but just before he made contact, someone grabbed his shoulder and spun him around.

It was Thawne looming over him, demanding, "What are you doing in here? What are you doing with my suit?"

The adrenaline rush immediately plunged Cisco deep into a vibe…

"Who are you?"

Cisco was in a dark room. It felt like a bedroom and he watched as a small child – a boy, about six or seven years old – sat up and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. The child was blond, and although it was hard to tell, seemed a little scrawny for his age.

"Who I am doesn't matter."

Cisco then realized that the boy wasn't talking to him, but to a looming shadow. And then the shadow turned on the light, and to Cisco's shock, became the Reverse-Flash.

"You're not the Flash. The Flash's suit is red and gold. You're his reverse!" The little boy didn't sound at all frightened. Just curious and excited. "You fight the Flash."

"Sometimes, and sometimes I work with him." The Reverse-Flash sat down next to the boy.

"What's he like?"

"He is… incredible. More than the history books describe, more than you could ever imagine. He is kind and generous, he cares about people. He is the finest of all of the heroes. There is no one, past, present, or future, who is his equal. He is worthy of your respect."

"Really?"

"Yes, really." The Reverse-Flash told the little boy stories about Barry, about his early heroics, creating a figure of purest nobility. Cisco – in the vibe – bit his lip to hold back a laugh because he knew the truth of those tales. Of Barry tripping over his own feet, of Barry making stupid mistakes and errors in judgment. Of Barry's frustrations and fears. But those weren't part of the Reverse-
Flash's stories, and maybe a little boy who worshipped the Flash didn't need to know them, either.

Cisco didn't understand this vibe – it was like nothing he'd ever experienced before. He'd never been in a vibe watching two people just talk.

The little boy let out a happy sigh. "I wish I could meet him now. When I'm old enough, I will travel through time and meet him." There was so much determination there.

The Reverse-Flash shook head. "No, you will not do that. That will end in disaster."

"Why?" The little boy's eyes widened in fear.

"Because, young Eobard, you will bring only ruin and despair to the Flash that you love. That we love more than anything. And we must be stopped because it is the right thing to do. Here, now. Do you understand?"

The child version of Eobard nodded. "I would never want to hurt the Flash."

Cisco watched as the Reverse-Flash pulled out a pressure syringe. Horror was thick and choking as the Reverse-Flash pressed it against the boy's – Eobard Thawne's – throat and depressed the trigger. "You have to understand. The only way to save the Flash from a life of grief is for us to die."

The Reverse-Flash gently held the boy as he gasped for air. He pressed a kiss on the child's forehead and eased him back onto his pillow, watching as he took his last breath and died.

There was just enough light for Cisco to see the trail of tears stream down Eobard's face, from under his mask. The tears shimmered and then Eobard himself began to dissolve.

Into nothingness.

"Cisco! Cisco!"

Someone was shaking him and Cisco opened his eyes. It was Thawne and he recoiled in horror. "Let go of me!" Cisco pulled himself loose and huddled in the corner.

"What did you see?"

Thawne was coming at him and Cisco instinctively covered his heart, a thoroughly futile gesture. "Let me go. Do you think that Barry won't figure out that you killed me? Again?"

Thawne stood there, shaking his head. "I'm not going to kill you."

"You could have fooled me." Actually, all Thawne had done was tug on his shoulder and shake him. He hadn't threatened him at all. But Cisco was still too worked up from his vibe to make that distinction.

"What did you see, Cisco?" Thawne stepped back, hands raised and behind his neck.

There was no way Cisco was going to tell Thawne he'd just seen him murdering his younger self. It didn't make sense. "Nothing about you. Or Barry."

"Do you know when you lie, Cisco, you suck in your cheeks?"

He hadn't. "I'm still not telling you. And if you kill me, you wouldn't find out anyway."

"I'm not going to kill you. I told you that. I told you how much I regretted doing that."
Cisco nodded. "Okay, okay – I believe you. Now, let me go?"

To Cisco's utter disbelief, Thawne was trying to bargain with him. "I will if you tell me what you were doing in here."

"And if I don't?" Cisco had nothing to bargain with, but he wasn't going to give in.

Thawne laughed, and it was an ugly sound. "I'll let you go, anyway." He stepped back and the hidden door slid open. "You're free to leave."

Cisco didn't think twice and scurried past Thawne. He was about to make a beeline for his workroom, but changed direction and went back to the Cortex. If Thawne changed his mind about killing him, he'd have to do it in front of witnesses.

Halfway back to the Cortex, Cisco put everything together. The vibe from last night, the one he'd just had.

It now made horrible, perfect sense.

How did everything fall apart so quickly?

Barry found it hard to move, his limbs uncooperative after spending a night on a pile of rocks. The cold didn't help either – he'd woken up to find himself coated with a crust of icy snow. If he were human, it was possible he'd be dead or dying from hypothermia right now, but he'd been colder – much colder – and survived.

A good run took care of the stiffness and muscle aches, but his hands and face were still hurting when he got to S.T.A.R. Labs. Caitlin, the only member of Team Flash that was in the Cortex when he arrived, took one look at him and demanded to know why he had incipient frostbite. "What did you do, sleep outside last night?"

She was being facetious, of course. But she also knew Barry too well and when he didn't answer, when his eyes focused on anything but her face, Caitlin whispered, "Barry? What really happened to you?"

He shrugged. "I went for a run last night. Got kind of lost and just fell asleep outside. Couldn't find shelter."

Barry could see Caitlin digest that information and the implications. She asked a very practical question, "You didn't have your phone?"

Barry debated which lie – couldn't get a signal or battery died – would work better. He settled on the latter. "It's no big deal, Cait. It won't happen again."

"No big deal? You've got frostbite on your hands and face. If it wasn't for your cellular regeneration, you might be facing some serious injuries. Maybe even amputation."

"Are you over-exaggerating? It wasn't that cold last night."

"It was twenty-two degrees – and I mean Fahrenheit, not Celsius – at City Hall Park this morning. Outside the city, it was ten degrees colder. So, no – I'm not exaggerating."

Barry thought the tone in Caitlin's voice was even colder than that, but then she did tend to get that
icy chill in her voice when people she cared for did very stupid things.

She dabbed something on his nose and chin and cheeks. It felt warm and greasy. She put the same stuff – a rather nauseating greenish-yellow ointment – on his hands. "You're going to blister in a few minutes and ooze for an hour or two. It'll probably take until tonight before your skin is completely healed."

"That long?"

"Yeah, Barry, that long. You're a speedster, your body needs heat to function, almost more an a normal human. Remember how long it took you to recover from the first time you were hit with the Cold Gun?" Now Caitlin sounded thoroughly annoyed.

Barry looked at himself in the mirror above the med-bay's sink and wrinkled his nose. "Do you have anything less… revolting? I look like I have gangrene or something."

"You could have gangrene – that's what happens with third-degree frostbite. And trust me, you don't look like you have gangrene – your skin would have turned black from the lack of blood flow and oxygen. You just look like you have some putrid sores. And it's only the salve, so be grateful."

Barry swallowed, finally recognizing just how serious this was. "Okay, okay – I get it. I did something stupid and now I'm paying for it." And wasn't that an accurate summary of his life?

"What happened, Barry? Why didn't you go home?" Caitlin rested a hand on his knee, her anger replaced with concern for a friend.

"I told you, I got lost."

"Really? Where were you running to that you couldn't find a street sign? There are highways everywhere. What happened?"

Barry shook his head. "I'm not sure I can talk about it, okay?" Truthfully, he wasn't even certain what happened. "I made a big mistake."

Caitlin held his gaze for a long minute. "All right. When you want to talk, I'm here. And if you want me to read Eobard Thawne the riot act, I will."

Barry didn't understand how Caitlin made the connection. "What has Eobard to do with this?"

"Barry, I'm not stupid. You don't have a habit of running out into the wilderness in the middle of the night unless you're upset about something. And since Professor Thawne hadn't raised an alarm or come looking for you, he doesn't know you weren't home last night. Given his highly focused attention on your well-being, and your own well-expressed preference for his company, I can't help but conclude that you two had a falling out."

"Cait, thank you for caring so much, but just leave it alone, okay?"

Barry could see Caitlin fighting the urge to interfere, but finally, she acquiesced. "All right." She cleaned up the examination area and stripped off her nitrile gloves. "Cisco's in. He also had a crappy night."

Barry held back a scathing comment. "Oh?"

"Yeah – he looked a little hung over. But anyway – he's down in his workroom and asked me to ask you to go see him there; he said he's got something he needs to show you."
Barry hoped that maybe Cisco would have an apology and an explanation for him, too. He could use both.

But before he could even leave the med bay, Cisco came running in, slamming the door behind him. He grabbed a towel, jumped up on a chair and tried to cover the surveillance camera that everyone had agreed to keep on line. It had been most useful when Barry had been in that coma. "Damn it, I'm always too short. Barry – help?"

With little effort, Barry did as asked. "What's the matter? Why do you need to cover the camera? Who would be watching us?"

Cisco ignored the question and asked one of his own, "What's the matter with your face, dude? It looks like you sneezed all over yourself."

"It's not important," Barry said.

And Caitlin chimed in at the same time. "Barry slept outside last night and got frostbite."

Thankfully, Cisco just said, "Whatever." And then he dropped his own bombshell. "I think I've vibed the end of everything."

"What?"

Cisco wrapped his arms around his own torso, as if he were trying to hold himself together. "Okay, okay. Last night, you thought I was behaving weird, right?"

"You were. You were like a Stepford wife – you know what I mean. You could barely string two words together."

"I know – and I'm sorry. But I couldn't tell you what I'd vibed. I wasn't even sure what it meant."

"And now you are?"

Cisco nodded. "I had another vibe and everything suddenly made sense. But it's all so hard to explain."

Caitlin steered Cisco into a chair. "Start at the beginning, okay?"

Cisco took a deep breath. "Last night, before we went out, when you went to look for Thawne, I went down to my workroom. There were a couple of projects I'd let languish and now that our lives are back to normal – or so I thought – I figured I'd use the hour and finish off one of simpler ones."

"And that's what set off your vibe?"

Cisco nodded. "I kept the suit you wore when Zoom attacked you. It never felt right to get rid of it – but when you were in the coma, every time I touched it, I got sucked into your… terror."

Barry reached out and took Cisco's hand. "I'm sorry."

"For what? You did nothing wrong. I kept thinking that I needed to repair it. That if I put everything back together, you'd wake up and you'd be whole and healed. Magical thinking at its best."

Barry felt like he wanted to cry.

Cisco went on, "And in a way, that's kind of what happened."
"What do you mean?"

"I was touching the suit when Thawne made contact with me from the future. Which really makes sense now – he was using a piece of lining from one of your suits, I was touching one of your suits and we were closing a circuit."

Barry thought it still seemed like magic, but he wasn't going to argue.

"Anyway, after a while, I found that one of your old emblems was a better nexus and I'd packed the suit away. But last night, I thought I'd take it apart and recycle the sensor material. Except as soon as I touched it, I got sucked into another vibe."

"Me fighting Zoom again?"

"No – that would have been kind of okay? Like it was psychic residue, you know what I mean?"

Barry wasn't quite sure, but he didn't think that was relevant.

"Nothing."

"Huh?"

"I vibed nothing. Nothingness. Just a vast, empty space. You didn't exist. Not as Barry Allen, not as the Flash. I didn't exist. Caitlin didn't. Thawne didn't. There was nothing and no one. It was like the universe had been wiped clean."

Barry felt nauseous. "Now I get why you were acting so strange last night."

"I was having a freak-out. And I'm really sorry about that. I should have told you."

Barry was quick to reassure Cisco, "It's okay." Cisco is his friend and he's allowed to be freaked out.

"Anyway. Remember what I told you – how I would vibe you and then get a cross reference from the Reverse-Flash's suit?"

"Cisco?" Caitlin, who didn't know about this, was confused.

Cisco spared Barry the embarrassment of explanation. "After Thawne when back to his future, I would sometimes pick up vibes from Barry’s suit. About Barry and Thawne. And then I'd go into the Time Vault and vibe on the Yellow Horror to get confirmation. So this morning, before I went to my workroom, I detoured to the Time Vault."

"You wanted confirmation?"

Cisco nodded. "Yeah, and boy – did I get it. But not from the Yellow Horror." Cisco shuddered.

"What happened?"

"Thawne came up behind me, just as I was about to touch the Reverse-Flash emblem. He scared the crap out of me."

"So you vibed Eobard?"

"No, not quite. You know that I can go spontaneously into a vibe when I get fear-triggered?"

Barry did. It had happened more often before Zoom's attack than now. "So, what did you see?"
Cisco wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, like he was about to be sick. He looked over Caitlin's shoulder and out into the Cortex. "I saw…" Cisco trailed off. He repeated, "I saw – I saw Eobard Thawne as a child. And the Reverse-Flash was there. And he…" Cisco's mouth opened and closed like a fish gasping for air.

"Cisco? Are you okay?"

"No, and I don't think I'll ever be okay again. But you need to know this, Barry. You need to know."

"What do I need to know?" Barry was at the edge of his patience, but he forced himself to wait for Cisco to find the words.

Cisco took a deep breath and finished. "The Reverse-Flash killed him – himself. The child. He told him – and he used his name – that he had to do it, he had to prevent all the pain and despair that he – Eobard – would cause to the Flash. The little boy died and the Reverse-Flash just disintegrated into a million tiny particles and ceased to exist."

Cisco was crying and Barry realized he was, too. Caitlin sniffled, her own face was wet with tears.

Cisco let out a shuddering breath. "And coming back here, I realized that if Thawne does go through with that, everything will end. He won't be preventing all the bad things that happened because the Reverse-Flash was responsible for your mother's death. He'll be precipitating the end of the universe."

Barry wanted to run and find Eobard and tell him that he couldn't go and unmake himself. That he didn't have the right to do that. Not when Barry loved him, despite everything.

But the part of Barry that had been an eager student of the man who'd once called himself Harrison Wells restrained those passions. He left the med bay and went over to the control console and first locked down access to the accelerator tunnel. If Eobard was going to travel back in time, the tunnel was the easiest way to generate a time rift. Barry wasn't going to allow that.

Then he locked down every exit point at S.T.A.R. Labs. He wasn't allowing Eobard to go anywhere. Of course, nothing was foolproof and Eobard could certainly phase through the walls, but why make it easy for him to escape?

Barry then turned to Cisco. "Where did Eobard go?"

"I left him in the Time Vault."

The last thing Barry did was set the security cameras to track Eobard through the facility. They'd lock in on him as soon as he'd emerge from the Time Vault.

Cisco bit his lip. "I don't know if it matters, but I was kind of horrible to Thawne. He scared me and after I vibed, I kind of acted like he was going to shove his hand through my heart again."

Barry wasn't really surprised by that. Cisco never let an opportunity pass to needle Eobard about the murder in that alternate timeline. And Eobard never stopped expressing regret for what hadn't actually happened and took Cisco's snark with grace. Barry had actually thought it was therapeutic for both men. But now, he wasn't so sure.

"Did you really think Eobard was going to kill you?"

Cisco shook his head. "No – I didn't. I know it wasn't rational. I want to apologize for that. Provided that he doesn't cause the end of the universe. Then I'll have an ever bigger beef with him."
Barry understood what Cisco meant. "We need to stop him from doing this."

"How? The nanites again? I think we've got a one of Oliver's special arrows left." Caitlin made the suggestion.

Barry shook his head, appalled at the thought. "No. I don't want to hurt him."

Cisco asked, "Then using the Speed Leech on him is out of the question, I guess?"

Barry exploded in outrage. "Of course it is! How could you even think that I'd use that abomination on Eobard?"

"It's just one of the available options. If you take his speed, he can't travel back – forward – in time and kill his baby self. That's all I'm saying."

Barry forced himself to calm down. Losing his temper wasn't going to help matters. He scrubbed at his face, forgetting about the healing frostbite and the ointment. "Oh, yuck. I think I got this in my eyes."

Caitlin came to the rescue, first washing the salve out of his eyes, then cleaning off the dead skin from the burst blisters, and putting on a new coating of that horrible ointment. "Another hour and you'll be fine. Just keep your hands away from your face."

Barry paced. He needed to keep moving. It helped him concentrate. If the situation weren't so dire, he'd go for a long run to clear his head. But leaving S.T.A.R. Labs, or even going for a spin in the accelerator tunnel, would be the height of self-indulgence. No, he needed to figure this out, right here and right now.

Eobard's strange behavior hadn't started last night, in their bedroom. He'd behaved oddly before taking the Wellses and the other Eobard back to Earth-2. It had started when…

"Cisco – the video feed of Zoom and Eobard. Eobard had you play back the last few frames. He saw something there. Can you pull it up?"

Barry hadn't finished speaking before Cisco had that video on the central monitor. He was at the same point that Eobard had stopped the video yesterday morning. The moment when the Time Wraiths had descended on Zoom and sucked the life out of him.

Just like yesterday, Cisco advanced frame by frame through the last few seconds of Zoom's life and he stopped at the same place Eobard had. Zoom's face had transformed into a desiccated corpse-like mask, something that looked very much like the Time Wraiths themselves.

"Are you seeing what I'm seeing?" Barry pointed to the screen and looked at his friends.

"Did Zoom just become a Time Wraith?" Caitlin walked up to the monitor and stared at the grotesque face.

Barry nodded. "Now that I really look at it, I can't not see that."

Cisco stared at the screen, too. "So, the insane speed monster is now some kind of trans-dimensional time cop that goes after time-traveling speedsters? And this is what set Thawne off?"

"I think so, but unless I can convince Eobard to tell me, we'll never know." Barry sent the screen to the printer. He had some vague idea about confronting Eobard with that image.
"Can't you just ask him?" Caitlin's question was simple, but too fraught with meaning.

"I could, but I'd doubt he'd tell me. There are things that we just can't talk about. No, there are things Eobard refuses to talk about, and I've got the feeling this is going to be one of them." Barry paced. "This must be why Eobard pulled back last night."

"Last night? What happened last night? Wait, wait – is that why you slept outside? You and Thawne argued?" Of course, Cisco didn't know anything about that; he hadn't been around when Barry arrived.

Barry was about to scrub at his face again and Caitlin was close enough to pull his hands away. "We didn't really argue. It was more like everything just disintegrated." He let sharp sigh. "I'm going to spare you the details, okay?"

Cisco said, with no small amount of sympathy, "In other words, please don't ask for specifics."

Barry gave his friend a grateful smile. "I think that if Eobard believes that this Zoom-Time Wraith is going to hurt me, and he's also feeling guilty for what happened to my mother, then maybe he thinks that preventing himself from growing up will solve everything."

Caitlin noted, "Well, even when Professor Thawne was pretending to be Doctor Wells, he was very protective of you."

Barry was slightly warmed at the reminder. Only slightly. "There's protectiveness and then there's treating me like an idiot who can't make a decision for myself. And you know what, if I don't have all of the information, I'll never make a good decision." He glared at his friends, letting his anger at Eobard bleed over.

"Barry, we're with you. But it's not like you're going to be able to torture the information out of Thawne." Cisco was surprisingly pragmatic.

Barry sighed again. "I don't suppose you could vibe him – like you did when I was in the coma?"

"Nope – it didn't work like that. I wasn't really vibing him. It was more of a psychic connection with the occasional emotional overload. I wasn't seeing inside his head. And I don't think I'm strong enough to actually get the specific information out of the suit. As if he'd let me back into the Time Vault."

"Well, unless he's set the locks from inside I could always override a lockout, but I guess that vibing isn't really a sure thing."

"Nope." Cisco paced with him. "Pity truth serum is really a scientific myth. And that it wouldn't work on a meta-human with a rapid metabolism."

Barry stopped in his tracks and stared at Cisco, who stared back at him. They both said, at the same time, "Scopolamine" and turned to Caitlin.

She put up her hands, as if to ward off an attack. "No, Barry. That's a really bad idea. Don't you remember what she did to you? You locked yourself in a pipeline cell and babbled and cried about how much you missed Eobard, how much you loved him, and how much you hated yourself for that. For three whole days, Barry. It was heartbreaking."

He'd actually forgotten about that attack. The meta was one of the first that Zoom had sent through the breaches and she spat something that was the meta-human equivalent of truth serum – hence the name that Cisco bestowed on her. She was currently residing, de-powered, in a cell in the meta-
human wing in Iron Heights.

Unlike Caitlin, Cisco was fully on board with this. "It doesn't have to be synthesized at full strength. Just enough to lower Thawne's inhibitions. Get him to talk to Barry, to answer his questions."

Caitlin looked at him, appalled. "You plan on just shooting Professor Thawne with that stuff and then interrogating him? No warning? Don't you know what that can do to a relationship? Forcing Professor Thawne to tell you his deepest secrets?"

Put so baldly, it seemed like a horrible idea. "I don't know. I want answers but I don't want to destroy him. And if I don't understand why he plans to end his existence, I don't think I'll be able to stop him. He thinks he's doing it for me, for my best interests. But he's not. I don't care what happened. I don't care about this Zoom-Time Wraith. I care about Eobard and the future we're supposed to have together."

Caitlin nodded. "Okay, I still think this an absolutely terrible idea for both of you. I want you to go in with your comms on. If something horrible happens with this serum, I need to be able to help him."

Barry could accept that, with a slight modification. "I'll go in with the comms, and I'll turn them on if there's a problem. Otherwise, it's just going to be me and Eobard. And the truth."

Caitlin agreed to Barry's proposal. "All right."

"How long will it take to synthesize the serum?"

"About an hour. I have Professor Thawne's blood work from when we gave him his speed back, and I have the compounds from Scopolamine's saliva already broken down. I just need to balance the formulation for the dosage."

"Thanks, Cait – I know you have reservations about this."

"I do. But let me get to work, because the more I think about this, the less willing I am to actually go through with it."

Caitlin went into the lab adjacent to the med bay and started working. Cisco stood there, hands in his pockets, looking more than a little miserable. "Are we cool, Bar?"

Barry smiled and shook his head. "Of course." He held out his arms and Cisco hugged him. Barry held on tight. Cisco had stood by his side through everything, good and bad, and Barry didn't know what he'd do without him. "Thank you."

Cisco looked at him, puzzled. "For what?"

"For being my best, best friend."

"Always and forever. You know that the universe wants us to be bros."

Barry felt some of the pain inside him ease.

Cisco then teased, "But you've just gotten that ointment on my shirt and for that, I'm going to have to kill you."

Barry felt even better when they both laughed. Everything had – at least for the moment – returned to normal between them.

Barry kept an eye on the monitors, but there was no sign that Eobard had left the Time Vault. The
security sensors hadn't reported any movement anywhere in the facility. But while they had been upgraded to detect Zoom, Eobard was, in a word, wily, and might very well find a way to defeat the sensors.

He paced and checked the monitors and paced again, stopping to look at the condition of the blisters on his face. The first time Barry had looked, they'd burst and leaked and his stomach had churned at the mess he'd seen. Which was funny, because he'd been hurt a hell of a lot worse and had taken it in stride, like that time when his right tibia had poked through his skin. But skin things did always give him the heaves.

The second time he checked, the raw skin had healed over and Barry risked interrupting Caitlin to ask if it was okay to wipe away the ointment. She paused and carefully removed the salve and debrided the dead tissue, and applied a very thin coating of another type of ointment.

By the time Caitlin had finished with the serum and loaded it into a pressure syringe, the frostbitten areas on Barry's nose and cheeks had mostly healed. The skin was bright red and very tender, as if he'd gotten a bad sunburn. That, too, would fade within the hour.

"Are you sure you want to do this, Barry?" Caitlin wasn't quite ready to turn the pressure syringe over to him. "It seems like such a violation of the trust between you."

"And I know what you mean and I don't know if I'll actually use it, Cait. But I think the only way I'm going to stop Eobard from doing this terrible thing, from destroying everything we've built, from destroying himself, is to get him to tell me what happened that night. We can't move forward with that secret between us. I know he thinks he's doing this because he loves me and wants to fix what happened, but I love him and I'm not willing to give that up for a life that I didn't live. I'll always regret my mother's death, the years that my dad spent in prison, but just because Eobard and I have the ability to time travel, that doesn't give us the right to reset the timeline and fix our mistakes. We don't get do-overs."

Caitlin smiled, really smiled. "That's what I think I needed to hear. You're not doing this to prevent the end of the universe. You're trying to save the man you love." She handed him the pressure syringe. "Don't forget the comms, Barry."

He lifted up his shirt and showed her that he had a unit clipped to his belt. "I'll contact you if anything goes wrong."

She hugged him, and Barry then turned to Cisco. "Are you okay with this, too?"

Cisco let out a deep breath. "I don't know if I have the right to be not okay with it. You're trying to save the universe – again."

"Yeah, but this time, it's personal."

..........................................................
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Barry finally confronts Eobard about everything - why Eobard had kicked him out of their home, why Eobard is hiding from him, and most importantly, what really happened on the night Nora Allen died.

Eobard worked and refused to let himself become distracted by speculating on Cisco's vision, because Cisco had definitely vibed something that terrified him.

And yet, for all his resolve, Eobard couldn't keep himself from wondering if Cisco had somehow seen his plan. The one he'd come up with in the cold dark hours of the night when it had seemed like there was no way to move forward. Except by going back.

In the cold light of day, Eobard knew that it was impossible to correct the errors he'd made. Eliminating himself – *killing himself* – wasn't going to make Barry Allen's life perfect. It wouldn't restore the timeline Eobard had altered, either. He'd learned the hard way that resetting the timeline was impossible.

And Gideon confirmed it. Eobard had spent hours digging into the AI's core programming and found a way to bypass the instruction Barry had implanted. The work-around would only last for a few hours, until this Gideon module synced up with the one back home. It wasn't a perfect solution, either. Gideon wasn't actually allowing him to see future news events, just using them to extrapolate data and provide the answers he needed. Answers that confirmed that his interference in the timeline in 2000 had caused ripples that spread across history. The Barry Allen that he'd met and despised so long ago would likely never have become the Flash, if just because Eobard hadn't been on the road the night that Harrison Wells and Tess Morgan were driving home from a day at the beach.

According to Gideon, Eobard's trip back in time had caused so much damage that the Flash was never created in 2020 and no matter what he did – even if he'd eliminated himself as a child – he could never be able to fix that damage.

Nor could he kept going back and resetting the timeline to stop himself from killing Nora Allen. He would become like Zoom, or worse. Reliving that moment of grief, seeing his happiness destroyed over and over again, would drive him insane.

Gideon claimed his attention. "*Professor Thawne, the last data sets have been calculated and there is one further ramification you will need to consider if you persist in this course of action.*"

"Which is, Gideon?"

"*While your interference in the timeline in this universe will not affect the actions in any other universe, if you prevent the creation of the Flash in 2014, the particle accelerator on the world you refer to as 'Earth-2' will go online, will explode, and will create the meta-human called Zoom. While you will have prevented his transformation into the Black Flash, Zoom will ultimately destroy the multiverse through repeated resets of the timeline. The cascading damage to the Earth-2 universe will affect this universe and Barry Allen will cease to exist in January, 2021.*"
"So, by saving Barry from the grief of losing his family, I end up destroying the universe. Good to know." Eobard let out a small, almost hysterical laugh. "So, where do I go from here?"

"I am sorry, Professor Thawne. I do not have sufficient data to extrapolate a recommended course of action for you."

"Nothing to worry about, Gideon. The question is not for you, but for me to answer."

"Professor, I have received core instructions from the prime Gideon core and my recent programming modification is being rewritten. I will need to shut down for maintenance."

"Understood, and thank you, Gideon."

Of course, Gideon didn't answer.

Eobard paced the length of the Time Vault. Without Gideon to interface with, Eobard was left with his own desperate thoughts. For the first time in his life, he had no clear path forward. When he was a child, every action he'd taken was to travel in time to meet the Flash. When that had turned out to be a disaster, he'd concentrated on becoming the Flash's reverse, to be better than the Flash by being worse. And when that had proved to have no satisfying outcome, he'd traveled back to the dawn of the twenty-first century, to remake history and manipulate the timeline.

That disaster had precipitated everything – every other goal. Meeting Harrison Wells, ensuring that S.T.A.R. Labs was founded, building the particle accelerator and finally, going back home – back to the future.

And that was yet another disaster. In that timeline, Barry wouldn't live to 2024. He wouldn't make that great leap forward in time. They would never meet in the twenty-second century because Barry Allen – the Flash – had been killed by Zoom.

So, returning to 2016 had become another concrete goal. Not just to go back and prevent the divergent timeline, but to heal Barry and help him defeat Zoom.

Which in turn had created an even greater monster – the Black Flash.

And there was nothing Eobard Thawne could do to prevent that.

Eobard remembered what he'd told Barry shortly after he'd gotten his speed back – the night they'd properly made love for the first time. "Because of everything I've done, because of all the lies I've told, all of the damage I've caused… You have no reason to trust me, to love me, and I can't understand why you do. But you really do love me. You seem to see past everything and you seem to want me."

A part of Eobard, the rational scientist, said he needed to trust in Barry's love, in his ability to see him – Eobard Thawne – as a man worthy of love and respect. That Barry would understand what happened, would accept the truth for what it was, would see past the folly and the hubris and accept him, now, as an equal.

But there were louder voices: the nighttime sobs of the hurting child devalued and misunderstood by his parents, the two people who should have had the most faith in him; the bitter young adult confused by desires he perceived as abnormal and dirty and wrong; the speedster who set himself in opposition to his hero because that hero wasn't the kind of man the child and the young adult had imagined. These voices shouted at him that Barry Allen would turn his back on him, would look at him in horror and disgust if he knew Eobard's greatest crime.
There were two paths before him – stay and muddle through, or leave and never know what really might have been.

The idea of staying was so seductive. After all, there was nothing he could do about the Black Flash. There was no hint of any connection between the Flash and the avatar of speedster death. The Flash's mysterious disappearance in 2024 had nothing to do with the Black Flash. Everything he’d read about that event – not just the article in the Central City Picture-News, but in dozens of other newspapers and eyewitness accounts – supported his belief that Barry had created a time portal. That he’d traveled in time. Eobard had believed, from the moment he’d first learned of the Flash's disappearance in 2024, that the Flash had leapt forward in time, to 2187. He’d had no scientific proof of that, just a bone-deep belief that they would be together in the future. Eobard now knew that this was merely a delusion, a story the still-yearning child in him had created to make everything better, to justify every horrible thing he’d ever done.

Which brought him face first into a wall that stretched to infinity, the wall he'd never be able to get past. The trap he'd tried to avoid but had ended up walking right into.

The truth.

The other alternative, to leave without a word, was the coward's way out. He could go anywhere, any when, live for the rest of eternity without Barry. And if eternity was too much, he could do what he’d done just a few weeks ago – extract his speed and simply live out the span of years allotted to a healthy human. He’d be alone, but it wouldn’t be for an eternity. That seemed the best course of action. It wasn’t as drastic as killing his child self and it wouldn't have any repercussions to the timeline. He'd just go away, fade away, like a memory.

The idea made him sick.

What kind of monster are you? You're more revolted by the idea of disappearing into the woodwork, hurting no one, than you were about killing yourself as a child. You're not a hero; you're barely even a villain. You're a graceless, spineless coward who doesn't deserve happiness. Let alone the respect and love of the Flash. Of Barry Allen.

That was the hurt child, the embittered teenager, the wronged speedster talking, and their voices were far louder than the scientist, the rational adult, the man who knew he was flawed but had worked so hard to change, to become someone better.

As loud as those voices were, they couldn't drown out the Speed Force's words, spoken what felt like a lifetime ago. "You don't see yourself worthy of Barry's love. Of our love. But you are. And your own doubts and hesitancies, your questions and your insecurities, make you all the more precious to us."

Exhausted and heartsick, conflicted and seeing no viable endgame, Eobard kept pacing the length of the Time Vault. It was both a cocoon and a prison. He couldn't leave, but he didn't want to stay. He wanted to find Barry, apologize for his cruel words last night and find a way to move forward. To buy some time – to figure out a new plan, the next moves in this chess game between love and truth.

Steeling himself for the coming confrontation with Barry, he disengaged the locks and the disrupter and opened the Time Vault door, only to find Barry waiting on the other side. Caught by surprise, he let Barry push him, at super speed, back against the wall and he watched, through the time dilation, as Barry reset the security measures, coding them to his palm print.

Eobard could have stopped Barry at any point, but found he lacked the will to do anything.
Barry turned back to Eobard and they stared at each other for a few long moments as Eobard drank in the sight of the man he loved more than his own life. And then he noticed the bright red splotches on Barry's face.

"What happened to you?" Eobard reached out to touch Barry's face, but of course, Barry flinched away.

"It's nothing."

"It's something. You look like you got burned. Were you attacked?" A hundred horrible scenarios rushed through Eobard's mind. There were still too many rogue metas out there, and Barry was always throwing himself into fights he couldn't win, while Eobard was locked in here, indulging in an epic fit of self-hatred.

"I wasn't attacked."

"Then what happened?"

"Do you really care?" Barry's voice had no intonation.

"Of course I do."

"You didn't seem to care if I moved out of our house last night. You made your feelings – or lack thereof – very clear to me."

Eobard shut his eyes against the memory of the pain he'd caused. "I'm sorry. I don't know what I was thinking."

"Really, Eobard? You always know what you're thinking, what you're doing. You're the master chess player; the one who had every move planned fifteen years ahead. You knew exactly what you were doing." Barry wasn't shouting but he was standing in front of him, fists clenched and radiating the same type of hurt and anger Eobard had seen when Barry had confronted him in the Pipeline so long ago. The first time Barry had asked for the truth. The first time Eobard had lied to Barry about something that meant so much to both of them.

Eobard shook his head. "Trust me, Barry – I didn't. I made a mistake, and I'm sorry."

Barry stared at him, his gaze unwavering and Eobard couldn't help but think that this was the full measure of Barry Allen – the hero who never backed down. And then it hit him, something that had been teasing at the edge of his consciousness for far too long. The Flash was irrelevant to him now. If Barry never suited up again, if he somehow lost his speed, if he just sat down and said "I'm done", Eobard wouldn't care.

But he couldn't tell Barry that – not with everything that had defined them. They were still – and always would be – the Flash and his Reverse.

Eobard forced himself to concentrate on the here and now, and this time, when he reached out to touch the red splotches on Barry's face with gentle fingers, Barry didn't flinch. "Please, tell me what happened."

"I slept outside last night and it was cold. I had some frostbite – but it's all healed, now."

"You didn't go to Joe's?"

Barry just shook his head and shrugged. Eobard understood everything that Barry didn't say.
"Why not go to Cisco?"

"That wasn't possible, either."

"Or come here? Why not stay here for the night?"

"I didn't want to."

Eobard whispered, "So you just slept outside instead of coming home." He touched Barry's face again. "Why would you, when I made it so clear you had no place there. I drove you out of your own home. I think, of all the monstrous things I've done, that might just be the worst."

Barry gently pulled Eobard's hand away. "Will you tell me what's going on with you? Please?"

Eobard knew that Barry would ask this question. He opened his mouth, but he couldn't say the words. All he managed was "I'm sorry."

"That isn't going to work, Eobard."

"No, of course not." Eobard sighed and tried to tell himself to be relieved. This was his way out. "Come home tonight. I'll stay here. You don't have to leave your own home."

"That's not what I mean." Barry looked at him as if he was a particularly difficult set of equations. And maybe he was.

Eobard knew where this conversation was heading. Straight off a cliff.

Barry paced the length of the Time Vault before saying anything. "You won't tell me what happened on the night my mother was killed. You won't discuss what happened to the real Harrison Wells. But the thing is – what I can't get out of my head is, what hurts the most – is why you lied to me last night."

"I lied?" Eobard probably should have said, "which lie?", because he'd told so many lies in the brief conversation with Barry last night that he didn't know which one Barry was focusing on.

"Yes, you lied to me." Barry was about to scrub at his face but stopped. Instead, he pulled at his shirt – the same one he'd been wearing yesterday. "You told me you 'don't sleep well', that you 'wake up at the least little thing'."

"I do. That was the truth. I lied to you when I said you disturb my sleep. The only time I sleep well is when you're next to me." Eobard let out a deep breath, hoping that Barry would understand everything he was saying.

Barry didn't. "You're still lying."

"I'm not. Unless I'm in bed with you, I can't fall asleep and I wake up at the slightest noise. I've been that way since I was a child."

"That's not true. I know that there was a night that you slept so well you didn't sense a speedster hovering over you with a knife in his hand."

Eobard didn't understand Barry's anger over something so small, so unimportant. "What are you talking about?"

"You couldn't have forgotten the night we fought Zoom? When I time-traveled to get the attention of the Time Wraiths?"
"No, of course not. But what does that have to do with why you think I lied about my sleep patterns?"

"I needed to travel to a point in time with the intention of changing the timeline. It had to be something important, something big and disastrous if it was changed, right?" Barry didn't wait for Eobard to say anything. "So I picked a date that changed the course of history."

"Which date?" Eobard already knew that Barry hadn't gone back to the night of his mother's death – he was there and he knew just how many Barry Allens had been in that room.

"December 10, 2013. The night before you launched the particle accelerator. The night that changed our lives forever."

Eobard nodded in approval. "That was a good night to pick." And then he remembered what Barry had just said. "Wait – you came to the house and were planning to kill me? You tried to kill me?" Approval changed to shocked pride and then confusion.

Barry's expression was unreadable. "That was my overt intention – the thought I kept in my head when I was traveling through time. It was what I needed to get the Time Wraiths' attention. I was never going through with it."

Eobard laughed, delighted. "You are something wonderful, Barry Allen. I don't think I could have picked a better point in time than that. That's probably why you ended up with two Time Wraiths on your tail. Killing me and preventing the particle accelerator explosion would have shattered the timeline."

"You don't get it, do you?" Barry practically shouted those words at Eobard.

Eobard had no idea why Barry was still so angry about this particular point. "No – I guess I don't."

"I phased through your bedroom wall, I stood over you with a knife in my hand. I actually cut off a lock of your hair."

Eobard reflexively reached up and touched his head. Thinking back, he vaguely remembered something odd about his hair the morning of the accelerator launch, there had been so many other things on his mind that he'd just shrugged it off.

"I kissed you, too, and told you how much I loved you. You didn't even stir. You didn't even sense me. I touched you. You didn't wake. And you have the utter gall to tell me you wake up at the least little thing? That you always have?" In his anger Barry had Eobard pressed against the wall.

Eobard let out a sigh, finally making the connection. "This is what upset you?"

"It may seem silly to you, but with all of the secrets you're keeping from me, it's the one thing I can call you on."

Eobard was relieved. At least this was something he could explain. "I didn't lie. That night, I took something that would help me sleep. I was exhausted and I needed some – ah – chemical assistance."

"Sleeping pills don't work on speedsters."

"Ordinary ones don't. I'd created a cocktail of different drugs to help me fall asleep, and the main ingredient was ketamine. It only worked on me because my speed was mostly gone. It wouldn't
work on you at all, or on me, as I am now. That's how I slept that night – I was drugged to the gills. That's why I didn't sense your presence in my bedroom. Although, it would have been an interesting wrinkle in the timeline if I had."

"I wouldn't have moved out of the shadows if you'd woken up." Barry stepped back and scrubbed his face. "I guess I got angry for nothing."

"Not for nothing. I was cruel to you."

"You were trying to drive me away."

Eobard could hear the "why" hanging in the air.

But instead of asking, Barry pulled a piece of paper out of his back pocket and handed it to Eobard. "Tell me what this is."

Eobard unfolded it, looked at it, and folded it up again, handing it back to Barry without saying a word.

"Zoom became a Time Wraith. That's what set you off? You don't think I didn't notice how strangely you reacted when we watched the final battle? How you had Cisco go through the scene frame by frame? I knew you saw something that upset you but I didn't press because we had to deal with the Wellses, with the other Eobard."

Eobard thought, for a heartbeat, about letting Barry believe that Zoom had been transformed into a Time Wraith. They were dangerous creatures, after all – the bane of all speedsters. He turned to the wall and stared at the meaningless braille pattern, trying to find some way to answer without having his world end.

"Eobard?" Barry hugged him from behind. "Whatever it is, we'll get through it. Together."

He stood there, stiff and unresponsive. "I can't, Barry. Please – don't do this."

Barry just held him close. Eobard couldn't let himself relax; he couldn't let himself fall into the trap of believing this was going to end well.

Barry rested his head on Eobard's shoulder and whispered, "I won't let you do it. I'll follow you into nothingness if you do."

"What?" Eobard turned around and looked at Barry in confusion. "Let me do what?"

"Travel back to your future. Reset the timeline by killing yourself when you were a child."

"How did you …" Eobard didn't have to finish that thought. "Cisco – that's what he vibed this morning."

"I won't let you do that to me, to everyone."

Eobard felt the urge to argue the point. That it was his life to do with as he wished, that Barry couldn't stop him, that everyone would be better off. Except none of that was true. And he wasn't going to do it, anyway. "Barry…"

"I love you, Eobard Thawne. I can tell you that every minute of every hour of every day. You've named yourself the Reverse-Flash. You were trying to be ironic, but it's the truth. You might be my reverse, but you complete me. You make me whole. And even if you take yourself out of my life
before you even enter it, I'm going to spend my own life feeling like something is missing, that
there's a part of me that was stolen before I had the chance to claim it. I don't know how I can make
you understand that there is nothing more important to me than you."

Barry held him close and kissed him. It was like no other kiss they'd ever shared – Barry's lips were
desperate, his hands were desperate. It wasn't a kiss of desire, but need and pain and fear. Eobard
breathed deep and instead of Barry's usually clean, healthy scent, Barry smelled sour and medicinal.

*I did this to him.*

Barry buried his face in Eobard's neck and whispered against his skin, "I won't let you go, Eobard.
They promised me that you would be there when I woke, and you were. They promised me that
you'd tell me what I needed to know, if I asked the right questions at the right time."

This time, Eobard didn't have to wonder who the "they" were. Barry was talking about the Speed
Force.

Eobard could feel Barry trembling against him and Eobard desperately needed to soothe Barry, to
ease his lover's distress. "I won't do it. I promise you. I thought it would fix your life, but I know it
won't."

"I don't want my life fixed."

Eobard couldn't believe that. "You wouldn't want your childhood back? Your mother alive, your
father free of a life spent in prison?"

"We're not gods, Eo. We can't just go back and erase our mistakes. And you don't have the right to
sacrifice your life for mine."

Eobard wasn't so certain that the tradeoff was fair.

Barry pulled back and stared at him. "So, I'm asking you now. What happened the night my mother
was killed, and what does what happened to Zoom have to do with her death?"

Eobard pulled free and wondered if he could make it out the door.

"Eo, please. Tell me." Barry reached for Eobard's hand. "No matter how bad you think it is, I
promise you that I'll listen. I won't hate you."

"You will, Barry." Eobard was certain of that.

But Barry wasn't giving up. "I loved you when I thought you killed my mother. I hated myself more
than I ever hated you. But you didn't kill her."

"I'm still responsible for her death, for every terrible thing that happened to your family."

"I know, and I forgave you for that. *Please*, Eo, please tell me what happened."

Barry kept using that shortened version of his name and it was like a hammer against the wall of his
resolve.

"I can't tell you. I just can't." Too many years of conditioning, too many years of denying the truth,
even to himself, block the words.

Barry stepped back and once again, gave Eobard that terrible measured stare. He pulled something
out of his jacket and held it in the palm of his hand. A pressure syringe.
"What is that?"

"About six months after you'd left me, Central City got a visit from its first Earth-2 meta-human. Cisco called her 'Scopolamine' – can you figure out why?"

Eobard didn't have to tax his imagination. "Because she made people tell the truth? And that's what's in the syringe? But truth sera are a medical myth. All they do is lower a subject's inhibitions. That won't work on me."

Barry grimaced. "It will. It worked on me – at least the full-strength version did. I spent three days in a cell in the Pipeline telling everyone how much I loved you. How much I hated myself for loving you."

"Ah." Eobard looked at the syringe in Barry's hand like it was a poisonous snake.

And of course, Barry surprised him – the way he always did. "But I'm not going to use it on you. I can't."

"Why?"

"It would be wrong. You'd tell me what I needed to know, but you'd never trust me again. Over time, you'd come to truly hate me. If I used this on you, I'd break us. And there is no knowledge worth that price. I'll never give up on you. Please don't give up on me."

"Give up on you? Barry – you are the reason I exist, I breathe."

"Then trust me with the truth." Barry put the syringe in his pocket and shrugged in defeat. "This was a bad idea."

"Maybe it isn't."

"What? Why would you say that?"

"Do you remember what I said to you when you were worried about what would happen when we gave me back my speed? A desperate disease calls for a dangerous remedy."

"Eobard, no – " Barry backed away.

"Maybe you should give me that truth serum. Maybe I need it. I've conditioned myself for almost seventeen years to avoid the truth, I don't think it's possible for me to tell you without it."

Barry pulled the syringe out of his pocket. "You want to use this on yourself?"

Eobard let out a shuddering sigh. "Yes. No. I don't know."

Barry shook his head. "I don't want you to use this. I want you to tell me the truth without any form of coercion. I want you to tell me what happened because you trust me. You trust that even if I can't accept what happened, you know that I'll try to work through it. I won't go off the rails and do something stupid."

"It's not that I don't trust you, Barry. It's just …" Eobard couldn't finish the sentence, because he knew he'd just lied – a little. He trusted Barry not to go off the rails, but he didn't trust that Barry could forgive him. He didn't trust himself not to react badly when he realized he'd just lost everything.

"I'm going to make the decision easy for you." Barry reached for something under his shirt – a
comms unit that had been clipped to his belt. "Caitlin is on call – just in case you'd had a bad reaction to the drug. I'm going to call her down and give her this. Then we're going to stay in here until you talk to me and tell me what the hell is going on."

Eobard was oddly aroused at how Barry was taking charge, making the decision for the both of them. He nodded and focused his attention on Barry's expression as he talked to Caitlin. Through the time dilation, he could see the emotions that Barry was feeling – primarily relief, but also joy and trepidation, too. At that moment, Eobard thought that the only thing he could do to honor that was give Barry the truth, no matter what it cost.

A few moments later, someone actually knocked on the Time Vault wall. Eobard retreated to the far corner as Barry opened it. Caitlin ducked her head in. "Just checking on you, Professor Thawne. You're okay?"

Eobard managed a smile. "I'm fine, Doctor Snow."

Barry handed her both the syringe and the comms unit. "We're going to be in here for a long time, Cait. You and Cisco should go home."

"We'll consider it."

Barry thanked Caitlin, shut the door and set the locks, which engaged with a satisfying thunk, and turned back to Eobard. "We could have done this at home, but I think you'll be better able to open up to me here."

Eobard agreed, but wondered why Barry thought that. "Oh?"

"I think this is your safe place. It's where you come to when you have to fix things. When you have problems to work out. It's not particularly good for the creature comforts, but you've got your suit, you've got Gideon, what more do you need?"

A little stunned by Barry's acuity, Eobard made a small joke. "Are you calling this my man cave?"

Barry smiled a little and shrugged. "Well, you could use a couch and maybe a mini-fridge, but yeah – it could be."

"So, what now?"

Barry pulled the picture of the Black Flash out of his pocket and gave it back to Eobard. "How about we start with something simple, like this?"

Eobard looked at the folded up picture and sighed. There was nothing simple about that.
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

The truth comes out, all the lies have been proven. It's time for Eobard to come clean and give Barry what he needs. The story of what really happened on the night Nora Allen was killed.

When Barry gave the truth serum back to Caitlin, it felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He'd been so angry, so worried when he’d asked her to formulate the truth serum. It had seemed like the only way he was going to get Eobard to tell him the truth was to use extreme measures – the "dangerous remedy" that Eobard just referred to.

And yet, in the hour it had taken for Caitlin to prepare the truth serum, he'd already begun to waver from that purpose. He'd told his friends that he’d needed to do this because he and Eobard couldn't move forward with these secrets between them, but once Caitlin had handed him the syringe, Barry had realized that betraying the trust between them would be worse than living with Eobard's secrets.

On the way down to the Time Vault, Barry had told himself that he'd use the drug only if Eobard were about to end his existence – commit suicide by time travel – if it were the only way to save the universe.

But after talking with Eobard, once again seeing the hints of his sorrow and pain, Barry knew that he couldn't do it. Not even if it meant the end of everything.

Barry didn't have much hope that Eobard would tell him everything – the important parts – but he'd hoped that maybe he could get Eobard to open up about what had set him down this disastrous path. So Barry gave him back the picture of Time Wraith-Zoom. "How about we start with something simple, like this?"

Eobard took the picture but didn't look at it. "You think this is simple?"

"It's not?"

Eobard finally unfolded the page and held it up. "Tell me what you see."

"It looks like the Time Wraiths turned Zoom into one of them." Barry thought about that for a moment. "Does that mean that Time Wraiths are actually former speedsters?"

"You're only half correct. Most Time Wraiths were once speedsters. There are some that aren't, but the ones that go after speedsters generally are."

"Then what am I missing?"

"The Time Wraiths didn't make Zoom into one of them. Not really."

Eobard's voice was quiet and steady, but Barry could hear the grief there. "What did he become?"

Eobard refolded the paper and handed it back to Barry, then started to circle the Time Vault, dragging his hand against the wall.
"Eobard?"

Eobard looked at him in despair. "I helped turn Zoom into an even worse monster than he already was."

Barry didn't think that was possible. "What could be worse than Zoom?"

"The Black Flash. The Speedster God of Death."

Barry first reaction was to laugh. "You have to be kidding, right? The speedster god of death?"

"Trust me, Barry, I am not kidding."

"How could you know this?" Barry planted himself in front of Eobard. "What makes you think that there is actually such a thing as a speedster god of death?"

"You aren't just going to take me at my word, are you?"

Barry reined in his frustration. "You can't drop a bomb like that and not explain how you know that."

"You know I did a lot of research about the Flash."

"When you were younger, before you got your speed."

"Yes." Eobard went over to Gideon and summoned the A.I. "Good evening, Professor Thawne, Director Allen."

Barry felt himself flushing at that unaccustomed – and as yet, unearned – title.

Eobard issued a command. "Gideon, please display the image of the Black Flash from my journal entry."

The image was almost identical to the one on the printout.

Barry stared at the image on the holographic display. "Where did you get this? Or should I ask, when did you get this?"

"I found it in an archive, in 2162. It was part of a cache of information about other speedsters. Speedsters who'd been killed by the Black Flash. I don't know who took that photo, but it was entered into the archives in 2078."

Barry could tell that Eobard was deflecting. "What aren't you telling me?"

And of course, Eobard didn't answer. Barry rubbed the back of his neck and laughed.

Eobard was annoyed, of course. "What's so amusing?"

"You – you know what you remind me of? Who you remind me of?"

"I can't even begin to imagine."

"The Speed Force. They would do this to me, too. Dribbling out bits of information and making me work hard to put all the pieces together. And they'd never actually confirm whether or not I was right. It was – to say the least – very annoying."
Eobard smiled. "I guess there are worse things than being compared to the Speed Force."

It was Barry's turn to pace and they were like two lions circling a carcass.

It was unnerving, but to Barry's surprise, Eobard finally caved. "Ask your question."

Barry remembered what the Speed Force had told him, to ask the right question at the right time, and then he realized he had one shot – Eobard was going to do his best to deflect, to let Barry assume, to avoid answering. So he asked the one question that required a very specific answer, the one Eobard couldn't avoid or dodge or dissemble. Barry asked, "What did the Black Flash do to you?"

Eobard's lips curled up in a sardonic smile, one Barry's had last seen when he'd confronted Eobard in the Pipeline cell so long ago. "Every time I think I have the measure of your greatness, Barry, you leap far past that mark."

"I'm not great, Eobard."

"You are, Barry Allen. You very much are, to me."

Barry felt a hot blush stain his cheeks, but he refused to be diverted. "Will you answer the question?"

Eobard paced the room again. "I suppose I must."

Barry waited and watched Eobard as he continued to pace, his steps measured. Then Eobard stopped and leaned his back against the wall and stared up at the lights. "What did the Black Flash do to me? That's your question?"

"Yeah."

"Hmm."

Barry took a deep breath and ordered himself to be patient.

"Are you sure you want to hear the answer?"

"Yes, I am." Barry looked over at Eobard, who was still looking up. He'd tucked his hands behind his head and Barry wondered, not for the first time, if this was a deliberate gesture of surrender.

Eobard spoke quietly, but the words dropped like bombs. "The Black Flash ripped out my speed."

Barry blinked and tried to process that information. Eobard tilted his head and glanced at him sideways, a small, sad smile on his lips.

"You told me you lost your speed the night my mother was killed. Was that a lie?" Barry heard the words coming out of his mouth, but he'd made no conscious effort to form that question.

"No, it wasn't. I didn't lie to you. I did lose my connection to the speed force that night."

The ramifications of this were almost incomprehensible. Barry closed his eyes and tried to remember what his eleven year old self had seen that night. Lightning – red and yellow – whirling around the room. There had been darkness too, more darkness than there should have been. "The Black Flash was there. The night my mother was killed."

"Yes."

Barry took a deep breath and asked the most important question of all. "Why?"
Eobard couldn't answer Barry's question, not without his whole world crashing in on him. But Barry wasn't going to let it go. Of course not.

"Eobard, why was the Black Flash there?"

"Before I answer that, can I ask you for something?" Eobard turned to face Barry and touched Barry's face, absently noting that the last of the redness had disappeared. Barry's skin was healed. There was a certain irony in that.

Barry smiled, tentatively. "Yes, of course."

"Please kiss me. Just one last time – let me have that memory before everything you call love turns to hate." Eobard knew he was begging. He hated begging, but this was the final turning point, this was the very last moment for him and Barry.

"I think you're underestimating my feelings for you." Barry leaned forward and whispered those words against Eobard's lips. "I think you can't believe that you are worthy of love, but you're wrong." Barry pressed gentle kisses along Eobard's jaw.

Eobard shuddered and closed his eyes. "I took your life from you, Barry. My selfish, juvenile obsession stole your childhood. I – "

Barry didn't let him finish. He kissed him – this time with heartbreaking tenderness. Eobard let himself fall into that kiss; he let himself believe, for the space of a dozen heartbeats, that Barry wouldn't turn on him once he learned the truth.

Eobard sighed into the kiss, and when Barry cupped his hands around his head, holding him like he was something dear and precious and worthy, Eobard let out a tiny sob.

"Shh, what's the matter?"

Eobard whispered, "The Black Flash was there because of me. He was after me." He waited for Barry to pull away, to push him away, to get up and walk out.

Barry didn't, though. "Tell me the whole story." Barry's fingers were gentle against Eobard's cheek, stroking softly, encouraging him in the most basic sense of the word.

But Eobard couldn't tell the story, not with Barry so close. He pulled back, striving for physical, if not emotional distance.

"I told you that I didn't have a particularly good relationship with my parents."

Barry nodded. "You said your parents were narrow-minded and judgmental."

"Yes, they were assholes."

Barry chuckled.

"I wasn't the perfect child they wanted. I was far too interested in things they deemed 'inappropriate'."

"Like time travel?"

Eobard took a deep breath and committed himself to this course of action. "My interest in time travel
was an off-shoot of another obsession."

"Oh?" Barry looked at him with his head tilted and Eobard was reminded of a mostly trained and very affectionate Golden Retriever puppy. He didn't think Barry would be particularly pleased by the comparison.

"When I was… five, I had my first history lesson. It was stupid and silly, a child's fairytale about some collection of costumed heroes who saved the world. I thought it was ridiculous. Until I read about the Flash. The hero from my own Central City."

Eobard watched Barry's face, but he wasn't able to read anything from his expression. "I was obsessed with the Flash."

"With me."

"No, not with Barry Allen. With the Flash. The Flash was simply the Flash. No one officially knew who he was. Who the person underneath the mask really was."

"Ah." Barry nodded. "I remember what you told me when I confronted you in the Pipeline. That you'd learned my secret, my name. That that's when you decided to go back in time and kill me as a child."

The memory of that conversation still had the power to make Eobard ill. "So many lies."

"Then tell me the truth." The request was so simple.

"Do you remember what I told you about my childhood?"

Barry nodded, his eyes grave. "It wasn't idyllic. Far from it."

"So much of what happened was rooted in my childhood. When I was a very young boy, I'd learned about some of the great heroes of the twenty-first century. Your friend, the Arrow, and his compatriots. But there are others, ones you probably won't want me to tell you about."

"No, I don't. I'm curious but I don't think this is the type of information I should have."

"You're probably right. And to be honest, most of those so-called heroes had seemed ridiculous, little more than fairytales, fantasies to appeal to the common masses. But there was one hero I truly believed in." Eobard paused and leaned over Barry. "Can you guess which hero captured my five-year-old heart?"

Barry licked his lips. "The Flash?"

"Of course. The Flash was the hero who protected my city. A hero who – had I been born a century and a half earlier – I might have met. Except that his name, the identity of the man behind the mask, wasn't truly known and I became obsessed with finding out who the Flash really was."

For some reason, Barry felt like he’d known all of this.

"Are you disgusted?" Eobard asked.

"No, why would I be?"

There was another telling pause before Eobard continued. "When I was twelve, intellectually an adult, but still emotionally and physically a child, I'd formulated my master plan. I was going to travel back in time. I would meet the Flash. We'd would be boon companions like David and Jonathan,
Achilles and Patroclus, Alexander and Hephaestion." Eobard laughed. "I thought we'd be equals. I was so deluded."

"No, you weren't. Never. You were young, you were supposed to dream big." Barry touched Eobard's face, trying to erase the lines of pain and self-loathing carved in it.

"As childish an idea as it was, I'd refused to be diverted. Even when I'd made the mistake of telling my parents, and they'd scoffed at me, told me that I was a fool. Their ridicule only made me more determined. When I look back through, as an adult, I can understand my parents' concern. After all, traveling through time to meet a man whose name was lost to history did seem quixotic. Perhaps if they had just let me dream, if they hadn't set themselves in opposition, hadn't made my desires seem foolish and stupid, I might have forgotten it. But their vehement opposition only strengthened my determination."

"I might have been the same. After all, I always believed in the impossible." Barry hoped that this would give some comfort to Eobard. But it didn't.

He paced, his body stiff with suppressed tension. "At fourteen, I had my first advanced degree in a respectable subject – the practical application of strange matter. I was too young for a university appointment, so I turned my attention to history and spent all of my time researching the Flash, digging for hints of who the hero really had been, when he'd really lived, how he became a speedster and a hero.

"My parents considered my interest in the Flash an unseemly weakness, especially for a Thawne, for the heir to one of the world's great fortunes. They tried to cut off my access to research facilities, but while they were smart, I was smarter. Their disdain and outright hostility towards me after I'd told them my plans meant I needed to play a deep and hidden game, filled with feints and subterfuge."

Barry burst out, horrified and so bitterly angry on Eobard's behalf. "I wish I could run forward in time and beat some sense into your family. You were a child, you should have been able to trust your parents, you had every right to expect their love and approval."

Eobard shook his head. "Not every parent is Nora and Henry Allen, or Joe West. I did what I had to do so my research could continue without interruption. If I lied to them, it was for the greater good."

"I was obsessed with the Flash. Everything I did, from the first time I learned about the Flash, was to achieve one very specific goal. I wanted to meet him, although he'd been gone – possibly dead – for over a century. He'd disappeared in 2054."

"2054? I thought that – "

"The CCPN headline that you saw – the one that Gideon can no longer display – was from 2024, thirty years earlier. Change one thing and it cascades through history."

Barry nodded, accepting the revision to his own future with grace. "So, that's why you studied chrono-dynamics? That's why you turned yourself into a speedster? Just to meet me?"

Eobard corrected Barry again. "No, to meet the Flash. At the beginning, I knew nothing about Barry Allen. I wouldn't have particularly cared about Barry Allen. My obsession was about the Flash. For a very long time, who you were under the mask was almost irrelevant."

"Ah." Barry leaned back against that wall.

"I know – that's some obsession, right?"
Barry's lips curled into a smile. "Yes, but it's also a testament to your intelligence and dedication. Kids have fixations on things, it's normal. Sometimes they grow out of them. Sometimes they become inventors and scientists and artists and writers because of those obsessions." Barry leaned his head on Eobard's shoulder. "And guess what? Sometimes they become time-traveling speedsters."

Eobard was curious, "What was your childhood obsession?"

"Eobard, you really have to ask me that?" Barry's surprise was the first strong emotion he'd revealed since this conversation started. "You watched me grow up. Science fairs and soccer games, remember?"

Eobard froze and then turned hot in embarrassment. Of course he knew just what childhood obsessions had driven Barry Allen all through his boyhood. The Man in Yellow. Freeing his father. "And I am an idiot, aren't I?"

"Sometimes." Barry chuckled, but there was nothing mean in his laugher. "Our lives have always run on parallel courses."

"Yes, they have."

"So, I guess you finally met the Flash. I gather that he was a huge disappointment."

"That is a very simple way of looking at it."

"But nothing – at least between the Flash and his Reverse – is ever very simple."

Eobard had to agree. "No greater truth was ever spoken."

Barry took Eobard's hand. "Will you tell me what happened when you met the Flash?"

"You really want to know?" What a stupid question that was, of course Barry wanted to know.

"It's not like it's going to affect the timeline. That future will never happen now."

"No – I made sure of that." Eobard scrubbed his face and thought that this was all going far too well. But then, he hadn't told Barry much of anything. Just the embarrassing parts. "I was twenty-five when I turned myself into a speedster. The first time."

"Is that another parallel? Or was the timing of the particle accelerator launch deliberate?"

"No, I didn't do that deliberately. I didn't time it so we were the same age when we became speedsters."

"Hmm. Okay – what happened? Was the Flash an asshole? Is that why you became the Reverse-Flash?"

Eobard felt the heat of embarrassment burn his face. He nodded.

"I was a jerk to you?" Barry got on his knees to face him. "I was horrible to you?"

"It's ridiculous, isn't it? All of this because of some unpleasant words."

Barry didn't laugh, he didn't storm off. He didn't deride Eobard, not the way he deserved. Instead, he asked with far too much empathy, "There's more to it. Tell me."

Eobard sighed. "You weren't really horrible. You were just uninterested in anything but being the
heroic Fastest Man Alive. I was young and immature and I approached you like an equal. I thought – " Eobard shook his head and forced himself to continue. "I thought that you'd see me. See my value. My worth. See something more than a pretty face."

Eobard's voice cracked on the last, appalled at how much of himself he was revealing. "I was twenty-seven when I met the Flash. I'd just gotten a handle on my powers and all of the things I could do. I was so proud of myself. I traveled back in time – little steps. A few days at first, then a week. A couple of months. Nothing that seemed to be a big deal. The first time I traveled back for a significant time period was when I met the Flash for the first time. I – I told the Flash that I was a speedster, too. That I was as fast as you were. That we could be partners."

"And how did I respond?" Barry's tone was quiet, he sounded almost ashamed, afraid.

"You patted me on the shoulder and told me that that was nice. And that maybe we could race someday, when you had the time – as if time were a joke. And then you said that while I had good sidekick potential, you didn't do sidekicks, and walked away."

"Sidekick? I said you could be a sidekick?" Barry's voice rose in outrage. "You just said I wasn't horrible to you? I was worse than horrible – I was cruel and hateful! You are not a sidekick!"

Eobard felt just a little vindicated by Barry's outrage at his future, alternate self. "You – and by 'you' I mean a Barry Allen in a different timeline – were much older. In the original timeline, Barry Allen didn't become the Flash until he was almost thirty. By the time we'd met, the Flash had already been a speedster for more than a decade. You wouldn't recognize either the Barry Allen or the Flash that I'd met."

"I'm that different?" Barry wasn't so willing as Eobard to make that distinction.

"Very. That Barry Allen, that Flash, was harder, more cynical, closed off. Jaded. I'd later learned that he'd been married and divorced. He was a very unhappy man."

"Because his marriage to Iris failed?"

"Yes. He'd never told her that he was the Flash, although she'd known his secret for a long time. She ended up resenting him and his alter-ego, and eventually it destroyed their marriage."

"I sound like a real prize. A prize asshole."

"Barry – that wasn't you." Eobard couldn't stress that distinction enough. "That Barry Allen was not the kind and bright hero of my dreams. It wasn't that he was flawed and all too human – because you are, too – but that he was hollow, petty. Too worn down by disappointment, deception and lies." The description suddenly sounded far too much like himself – like the Eobard Thawne who'd pursued a disastrously selfish plan without thought of the cost.

"So this future me shattered your expectations and broke your heart. Broke Iris' too."

Eobard tried to absolve Barry. "This is a future that will never happen."

Barry was quiet for a moment. Then he shook his head in disbelief. "Sidekick. I can't believe I looked at you and thought you were sidekick material? How stupid could I be?" Barry turned at looked at him, a curious expression on his face. "It that what you were trying to do?"

"What?" Eobard was confused.

"Was that your revenge?"
"Revenge? What are you talking about?"

"Did you go back in time to turn me into your sidekick? Were you going to kidnap me?"


"That would have been the most perfect and humiliating revenge. Turn the callous hero into the whiny and incompetent sidekick. The one you'd have to keep rescuing from his own stupidity." Barry chuckled. "And yet, quite ironically, you do that all the time, anyway."

"That wasn't what I'd planned," Eobard admitted. Although it would have been the perfect form of vengeance…

"Then what did you intend to do?"

Eobard took a deep a breath and committed himself to the truth. "It's strange that we were talking about childhood obsessions. Because that's what I was trying to do. I went back in time and showed up at your house because I thought that if I could stimulate your interest in the impossible, I could create a future where you would become the Flash at a much younger age. Then you wouldn't be so hard and cynical, so closed off. Then we could have a future where we could be equals."

Eobard leaned his head against his knees and waited for Barry to condemn him. But he said nothing. Finally Eobard looked up at Barry and said, "Well?"

Barry shook his head. "This is what you didn't want me to know?"

Eobard nodded. "I traveled to 2000 to change your whole future, to change the course of history. To make the Flash into an entirely different person. Aren't you appalled?"

"Ah." Barry was thoughtful. "You weren't trying to traumatize me."

"No – I wanted you to believe in the impossible. To instill a lasting sense of wonder in you. You'd see the man in the lightning and spend your life looking for him."

"That's why you stopped moving for a few seconds – so I'd see you, the man in the lightning. The man in yellow."

"Yes. I'd originally planned to go up to your bedroom and appear there, but you came downstairs."

Eobard didn't have long to wait for Barry to draw the natural conclusion.

"That is why the Black Flash was there."

Eobard nodded, slowing. This was the last piece of the puzzle. "Yes, to punish me for that intention. I'd eluded Time Wraiths when I'd time traveled before. But I'd never time traveled with the intention of committing such a cardinal sin against linear time. To engender a paradox."

Barry nodded. "The Black Flash – he killed my mother." There was a tremble in Barry’s voice.

Eobard thought his lover was remarkably calm about learning the truth. He let out the breath he was holding. "When I realized that the Black Flash was in your living room, I grabbed the knife. It was madness, to think that I could defend myself against the Black Flash with a simple kitchen knife. I thought I could protect you – you're eleven year old self. But all I did was bring destruction."

"When you took your future self out of the room, the Black Flash grabbed the knife and stabbed Nora. Then he shoved his hand into my chest and ripped out my speed, crippling me."
Eobard wiped his cheeks, wiped away the tears of memory. "I managed to find a place to hide, to try to gather some energy to go find you. To bring you home, to keep you safe. A neighbor must have called the police and before I could recover and go find you, police cars showed up and I had to stay hidden, like a coward. Until Joe West took your father out in handcuffs, I didn't even know he was there. I didn't realize that he'd been knocked unconscious. Then you came back and insisted that the Man in Yellow killed your mother."

"Everything makes sense, now," Barry said, his voice almost a whisper. "I remember the red and the yellow lightning, I remember the shadows. But why would the Black Flash kill my mother?"

"Until I figured out that Zoom had become the Black Flash, I didn't know why. Other than ‘because he could’." Eobard shook his head. "And I'm still not sure. I think it was revenge for what we did to Zoom – for bring the Time Wraiths, for transforming him into the Black Flash. For denying him victory. Otherwise it doesn't make sense. The Black Flash should have killed me. He should have taken all of my speed, he should have turned me into a Time Wraith. Instead, he crippled me. Left me half-alive and stranded, condemned to live with my failures. As revenge."

"But you weren't a failure. You created the Flash years before he was supposed be created."

"Yes, but – " Eobard couldn't complete the thought, as the memories of all the ways he'd manipulated the timeline flooded through him. He'd been the monster that Barry had once called him, playing god because he knew the future.

And of course, Barry wasn't letting this go. "But what, Eobard?"

"But it wasn't supposed to happen like this. I wasn't supposed to become someone else. We were supposed to meet as equals."

"So instead you became Pygmalion and fell in love with your best creation."

Eobard wanted to laugh at Barry's over-the-top comparison, but he couldn't. It was too apt. "Aren't you repulsed?"

Barry smiled and shrugged. "No, should I be?"

Before Eobard could say anything, Barry continued.

"You've hated yourself for seventeen years for something you didn't do." Barry leaned over and kissed him. It was a gentle kiss, meant to heal almost two decades of self-inflicted pain.

"Barry – " Eobard murmured. "Why don't you hate me?"

"Because I have no reason to."

"I beg to differ. I destroyed your life. Not once but twice."

"Twice?"

"I stole your childhood and then I tried to make you into something you weren't supposed to be."

Barry rested his forehead against Eobard's. "I am the person I am supposed to be. I am Barry Allen, I am your beloved, and I am the Flash. In descending order of importance."

Eobard swallowed. "I don't know what to say to that." He'd been expecting the opposite of that declaration – Barry's complete and utter repudiation of their relationship. He'd never even allowed
himself to hope for even a lingering friendship.

"Then say nothing." Barry pulled him close, into an awkward embrace. Eobard buried his face against Barry's neck, letting the heat from Barry's body wrap around him like the most luxurious blanket.

"I don't deserve this. I don't deserve your acceptance."

"You do. You need to let go of your fear. You need to trust me."

"I do trust you."

"And most importantly, you need to trust yourself."

At that, Eobard froze.

Barry sensed his distress. "You did nothing wrong, Eo. What happened that night was supposed to happen. What happened afterwards needed to happen. You have to realize that. You have to accept it and move forward."

Eobard did, but it wasn't something he could take solace in. And of course, Barry had to shatter him, again.

"The Speed Force told me that." Barry said, his lips curving into a smile of surpassing sweetness. "I'd already accepted that my mother's death was necessary, and that going back in time to prevent it would have been an act of criminal selfishness, but they told me that if I didn't become the Flash in 2014, Zoom would have destroyed the universe." Barry put a little distance between them, but took his hands. "I know it's a lot to take in, but the fate of the universe depended on my mother dying that night. On you losing your speed and needing to create the Flash when you did."

Eobard didn't know what to do. Part of him was howling with bitter, derisive laughter – he'd spent seventeen years hating himself for nothing. Yet another part of him wanted to relax, to sink into the new reality where Barry Allen knew what had happened. Knew and accepted the truth.

And more importantly, still loved him. The Speed Force had told him this. He hadn't believed them.

Eobard took a deep breath, held on to Barry's hands, and silenced the mocking laughter for a while.

"I love you, Barry. But I didn't set out to love you. When I was a dreaming child, I'd hoped that we could be friends. When I worked to make those dreams become reality, I imagined us as equals, partners. When I hated you for your failure to see my worth, I was still reaching for the dream. If we couldn't be friends or partners, we'd be rivals. Even when I interfered with the timeline and brought disaster into your life, I never saw beyond my dreams of the Flash.

"But from the moment you woke up from that coma – the first one – and looked at me with so much hope, so much confusion, so much trust, I was finally able to separate you – Barry Allen – from the Flash. And I realized that you, and not the Flash, were my destiny." With those words, Eobard felt lighter than air, the weight of his secrets had finally been lifted and the doom he'd been prepared for had been fully averted. "Am I making any sense?"

Barry smiled, hope and joy shining out of his eyes. "You are making perfect sense. I love you, Eobard Thawne. You are my equal and my partner. Wherever you go and whenever you are, I will be there. You are my lightning bolt, my anchor; you will always bring me home. I exist because of you."
Eobard gave into the irony of his own existence, he accepted himself – perhaps for the first time in his very complicated life. "And yet, I am who I am – Eobard Thawne, speedster, time traveler, the Reverse-Flash – because of you, Barry Allen. We exist only because of each other – we are the definition of paradox. How is that possible?"

"Does it matter?"

Eobard shook his head. "I guess not."

At some point, Eobard had sat on the floor and pulled Barry down next to him. They'd managed to find a comfortable position; Barry curled against Eobard, his head cushioned against Eobard's chest, their fingers entwined. Eobard relaxed and let his mind drift – to a future with Barry Allen, and then to the past. And he realized that there was one more part of the story, a vital piece of the past that Barry deserved to know, in all its murky and complicated detail.

"I need to tell you about Harrison Wells..."
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Barry and Eobard travel back in time, but only through the power of Eobard's words. This is the beginning of the Flash, or it could very well be his end.

Chapter Notes

I don't know if anyone is reading this, but this is my favorite part of the story, something I'd conceived up at the very beginning. There's just three more chapters to go and I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I've enjoyed writing them.

March, 2000

His body tormented by the agony of his maiming by the Black Flash, Eobard had hidden himself for hours, trying not to be sick as the blue and red lights flashed and reflected in the puddled water. He saw Henry Allen, dazed and grieving, brought out of the house in handcuffs. He listened to the man's protests of innocence as he was pushed into a police cruiser and taken away.

He watched and listened as young Barry Allen was taken over to a waiting ambulance. Barry was crying about the man in yellow, the man in the lightning. Then Joe West came over and argued with the woman. He wanted to take Barry home with him; she was adamant about taking Barry to the hospital to make sure he was uninjured. West lost the argument and Barry was whisked away.

Almost an hour later, the police brought out Nora Allen's body and then the last of the police vehicles disappeared into the rainy night.

Finally alone and safe – no more police, no sign of the Black Flash or any Time Wraiths – Eobard summoned Gideon, and forced the words out. "Show me the Flash, show me the future."

Eobard knew that he'd damaged the timeline, that the information he expected so see about the Flash in the mid-twenty-first century would be very different. But he didn't expect Gideon to tell him, "Professor Thawne, there is no information in my databanks about the Flash."

Eobard caught his breath; this was a different and more terrifying kind of pain. Sick to his soul, Eobard asked, "What about Barry Allen?"

That at least provided some measure of comfort. Gideon promptly displayed a long list of academic and career achievements for Barry Allen. Joe West, the police officer who'd been at the Allen house tonight, the father of Barry's best friend, had taken the boy in as a foster child. Barry had, despite the trauma of Nora's death, flourished. As in the original timeline – the one Eobard knew – Barry had married Iris West, then they'd divorced six years later. He'd become a chemist and had risen quickly through the academic ranks before going to work at Mercury Labs. Eobard was relieved; the timeline might yet be manipulated to a successful outcome, Barry could eventually become the Flash. He had the intellect, the scientific background. But that relief didn't last, not when Gideon read the last entry
that Barry Allen was killed in 2024, when conducting an experiment with the Mercury Labs particle accelerator.

Almost crippled by grief and the pain of his stolen speed, Eobard slowly made his way out of the neighborhood, avoiding the street lights as much as possible, clinging to the darkness as his legs kept giving out. Dressed as he was, he'd become an immediate suspect in Nora Allen's murder, if just because Barry had seen a man in yellow in his living room.

It was close to dawn by the time Eobard found a small strip mall with a clothing store. He took only what he required – a coat, a decent suit, a shirt and a pair of shoes. Just what he needed to blend in.

Money, thankfully, wasn't going to be a problem. This era had those so-convenient and very primitive cash dispensing machines. It didn't take much effort to get several to spit out significant amounts of currency. Eobard needed to get out of Central City and lay low. He needed to find a way to get his speed back and fix the disaster he created.

The train system in Central City was surprisingly clean and efficient, and best of all, anonymous. He paid cash for a ticket to Starling City. Eobard believed that the only hope for restoring some order to the timeline was to find Dr. Harrison Wells, the scientist whose theories formed the basis of Eobard's own field – chrono-dynamics. Wells was, according to Gideon's databases, on the cusp of great discoveries and about to leave his position at Starling City University.

He and his wife were also about to disappear, which would become one of the great mysteries of the scientific community.

It would be up to Eobard to stop whatever happened to Harrison Wells, to keep him alive. And then to convince him that they should partner in the creation of a particle accelerator.

Eobard was not planning on telling Wells that the accelerator was going to have to fail.

April, 2000

Eobard was fighting against a rapidly ticking clock and it was an uncomfortable feeling.

After he'd arrived in Starling and helped himself to more cash and a primitive computer, it took just a few days to get the documentation he needed to establish a completely legal identity here in the twenty-first century.

Having intimate knowledge of his family history had greatly helped – there was a conveniently deceased Albert E. Thawne, the youngest child of a politically connected branch of the family in Keystone City. He would have been roughly the same age as Eobard was right now, had he not died when he was four days old. Eobard didn't bother "requesting" the documentation through official channels. He just hacked into the systems and got what he needed – a certified copy of a birth certificate.

With that in hand, and an exquisitely constructed photo identification card from a Thawne Corporation subsidiary that wouldn't exist for another twenty years, he requested – and received – the all-important social security card for Albert E. Thawne. Which opened all kinds of doors.

But none of that would matter if he couldn't locate Harrison Wells.

The biggest stumbling block to that – ironically – was his own body. It had taken a month for him to regain some of his health. He could only now walk a decent distance without collapsing. And that
time was precious. According to Gideon, Wells and his wife would disappear forever within a month.

Eobard had been able to track down Wells and Morgan to the Starling City University, but there the trail grew cold. Wells and his wife had already resigned their university positions. They'd moved out of their apartment and had told friends they were taking a vacation before starting work at their own startup in Opal City. Except that Wells and Morgan never make it to Opal City. They simply vanish one night, leaving behind a mystery and a rich scientific legacy.

That mystery would be solved fifteen years later, when a hiker would discovered a car with two bodies in it at the base of a steep embankment, covered by fifteen years of forest undergrowth. The desiccated corpses were identified through dental records as the missing scientists, Harrison Wells and Tess Morgan.

By the time Eobard's identity was in place and he'd recovered a certain level of mobility, he had only three days left to find Wells and do whatever was necessary to keep him alive.

He worked backwards from where the car was found, and two days later, Eobard discovered that Wells and his wife were staying at a small, anonymous hotel about ten miles from the shore. Eobard had tracked them down and watched the couple enjoy a picnic on a cold, empty, windswept beach. The breeze carried snippets of their conversation to Eobard, and it was obvious that these were two people deeply in love.

Eobard wondered just what that felt like, to let someone be that close, to be able to share your hopes and dreams without fear of ridicule. To let someone touch you intimately, to accept those touches without fear or shame or disgust. It was all academic to him – that was not a life he'd expected or ever wanted to have.

It was nearly dark when the Wellses packed up and left the beach. Eobard instinctively kept his face averted as they walked past, but when they got into their car to drive off, Eobard cursed himself for the missed opportunity. Had he spoken to them, delayed their presence on the road by even five minutes, he might have changed history.

Instead, he tailed them, headlights off, as they drove along a deserted country road. Eobard knew they were approaching the point where the accident happened, where the car went off the road and rolled down a steep embankment and disappearing into the forest. Eobard accelerated and tried to overtake Wells’ car, to keep him from driving off the road. As he passed, Eobard looked over and saw Harrison Wells, his head thrown back, eyes rolled up, his body shaking from a seizure. Morgan was trying to steer the car from the passenger side, but she couldn't keep it under control.

Eobard sped up and was able to use his vehicle to keep the other car from going off the road, but he couldn't stop the tragedy completely.

History changed before Eobard's eyes. While he'd lost his connection to the speed force, he could still perceive events through the time dilation. The Wellses' car flipped over and Eobard saw Tess Morgan's head snap back and forth. As the car stilled, it became clear that her neck was broken. That she was dead.

Eobard pulled to a stop, desperately intent on rescuing at least Harrison Wells. He reached through the broken window and felt for a pulse. It was weak and thready, but Harrison Wells was still alive. Fighting his own weakness, Eobard managed to pull Wells free of the wreck and lay him out on the pavement. Wells was still convulsing with that seizure and there was nothing Eobard could do to help him keep him from any further injury. He stripped off his coat and folded it up into a pillow, to protect Wells' all-too-precious brain.
The seizure finally ended and Wells remained unconscious – a blessing for him. Eobard searched the wrecked car and found a cell phone. He knew enough about this century to know how to call for help, and Eobard sat on the cold road next to Harrison Wells, his fingers on Harrison's wrist, counting out his pulse as he waited for that help to arrive. As long as this man was still alive, Eobard would have a way home.

It took close to forty minutes for police and medical services to get to the scene, enough time for Eobard to come up with a plausible story, one that was as close to the truth as possible. Eobard explained he'd seen a car driving erratically and then flip over. That he'd pulled the driver from the car and that the passenger was dead. Thankfully, he didn't have any damage to the vehicle he'd "borrowed" and the police had no reason to question him any further.

He left the scene, but didn't go far, and a few minutes later, Eobard followed the ambulance to a local hospital. To his relief, it wasn't some small institution with minimal facilities, but a large medical center attached to a university.

Getting information about Wells’ condition was going to be tricky. Eobard could hack his way into the hospital computers, but that would take too much precious time. The easiest – and quickest – path to knowledge was to ask Gideon. Sitting in the parking lot, Eobard listened with great relief as the A.I. told him that Harrison Wells would survive the accident. Gideon didn't have any information about his immediate status, but it did advise that Wells lived for almost another five years before dying from brain cancer. Not only did he leave behind the great scientific legacy that Eobard already knew of, but Harrison Wells also lived long enough to see the construction of S.T.A.R. Labs in Central City and approve the plans for the particle accelerator.

This was a future that Eobard could work with.

If there was anything that symbolized the primitiveness of this backwards century, it was the medical system, and it both horrified and disgusted Eobard.

No one seemed to care that the man in the hospital bed was one of the foremost scientific minds of the age, that the work he'd do would herald in advancements in physics, in power, in medicine – in the understanding of the very nature of the universe. No, to the people in charge of caring for Harrison Wells, he was an unconscious body, piece of meat which barely deserved the minimal attention he received.

With no one else to protect Harrison Wells' rights as a patient deserving the highest level of care, Eobard stepped forward and declared himself as Wells' nearest living relative – a cousin on his mother's side. The hospital officials only seemed to care that the bills would be paid and never checked up on Eobard's claim of familial ties.

That claim came with more responsibilities than Eobard had realized. Wells' wife, Tess Morgan, who'd died in that crash, needed to be interred with some level of grace and dignity. Eobard paid for a simple casket and a plot in a non-denominational cemetery. When Wells regained consciousness – hopefully soon – Eobard would gather the necessary details for the headstone.

While Eobard knew that Wells eventually died from brain cancer, that diagnosis – as of today – hadn't been finally determined. Right now, Harrison Wells was kept on high doses of an anti-seizure medication, which left him in a near-comatose state for most of the day.

Midway through the second day, after finalizing arrangements for Tess Morgan's funeral, Eobard returned to Wells' hospital room, a private suite in the neuro ward. He was delighted to see Harrison
sitting up and looking surprisingly alert. Gaunt and ill, but alert.

"Who are you?" Wells' voice was low and raspy and slurred.

"Your cousin, Albert Thawne, from Keystone. I'm not surprised that you don't remember me."

Wells stared at him with unnervingly blue eyes. "I don't have any cousins in Keystone. I don't have any cousins, period. Who are you, really?"

Eobard stuck his hands in his pockets and said, "A friend."

"That's better." Wells licked his lips. "Where's my wife?"

And now for the hard part. "She died in the car crash. I'm sorry."

Wells closed his eyes as the tears rolled down his face. "Yes, that's what they told me, I didn't believe them."

"They just told you?" Eobard was angry – how dare the hospital inform this poor man of such a tragedy without his family in the room.

"No – before, they told me before – when I got here. I begged them to take me to Tess, to save Tess first."

"She died when the car flipped over. Her neck was broken."

"How do you know that?"

Eobard licked his lips and decided truth was the best way forward. "I saw the accident, and pulled you out of the car."

"So, you're just some passing good Samaritan? Why didn't you save my wife?" Wells was weak as a newborn kitten and as fierce as a jungle cat.

Eobard rephrased the information he'd already provided. "She was already dead. There was nothing I could do for her."

All of the life seemed to go out of Harrison Wells; he slumped down and became small and almost insignificant.

Eobard didn't know what to do, what to say, but the words "I'm sorry" just slipped out.

"She was my life. My reason for living. You should have let me die, too."

Eobard wanted to tell the man that he couldn't just follow his wife into the grave. He was an all-too-important part of Eobard's own future. But all Eobard said was, "She wouldn't want that."

"What do you know? You're a damn stranger."

"I know that your wife was Doctor Tess Morgan. She was one of the premier physicists in America and her work on quantum mechanics was revising the core principles of the field. She was a scientist and while I have no evidence to contradict your love for her, or her love for you, I don't think that she would have found that your death would serve any practical means. You are, after all, Harrison Wells, and your own work in chrono-dynamics and quantum manipulation is equally groundbreaking. You are set to revolutionize our understanding of the nature of the universe."
"How the hell do you know this?" Wells looked frightened.

Eobard tucked his hands behind his neck and sighed. "I'd been looking for you. I'd followed you to the beach the afternoon before your accident. I was going to approach you about a scientific partnership, but you and Doctor Morgan looked like you wouldn't have appreciated my interruption. I regret that – if we'd spoken, you might have not been driving when you had your seizure."

"So this is why you're pretending to be my cousin? Guilt? Ambition?"

"No." _Far from it. _"Someone needs to look out for you. You don't seem to have any real family."

Wells turned his head away. "No, I don't. My parents are dead, and so are Tess'. Neither of us have any siblings." Wells sighed. "We just had ourselves. And now I have no one."

Eobard felt surprising jolt of pity for Harrison Wells. While he despised his own family, Eobard had to figure that they'd never leave him in such a vulnerable position, if just because it would be a blot on the illustrious Thawne name. "You have me."

Wells looked at him. "Why?"

"Why not?" Eobard shrugged.

Wells shook his head, "I'm not up to fighting you. But you don't have to do this. It's not your fault."

Whatever Eobard was about to say was lost when the medical team came in. Eobard had been told this morning that they would reduce Wells' anti-seizure meds. He needed to be awake and alert for the medical consultation.

To Eobard's pleasure, Wells asked if "his cousin, Albert" could stay.

One of the white coated doctors introduced herself as a member of the neurology team and Eobard listened as she explained that Wells' seizure was caused by a tumor on the cerebellum. Another doctor – a neurosurgeon – explained that the tumor was large, but based on the scans, very operable.

"Is it malignant?"

"We can't fully determine that without a tissue sample."

"Come on, doctor – you can tell by the shape and location of the tumor. I'm not an idiot. The tissue sample will only confirm what you already know." Harrison was antagonistic, despite his weakness.

A third doctor stepped forward, this one from the oncology unit. "You are correct, Doctor Wells. The profile of this tumor is consistent with a malignancy. However, as my colleagues have said, the position is optimal for surgical intervention. We don't anticipate a significant loss of cognitive function after the surgery. You are a lucky man."

"And you're an asshole. My wife just died in an accident I caused. I don't consider myself lucky at all. I don't even know if I want to have the surgery."

The oncologist started to apologize, to protest that the surgery was necessary, but was cut off when Wells' head rolled back and he fell into another seizure.

Eobard was pushed out of the room as the medical team worked to stabilize Wells and began to re-administer the anti-seizure medications.

A little while late, the medical team exited, but the neurologist stopped to talk to Eobard. "We didn't
get a chance to convey just how critical the situation is. The tumor is aggressive and the continuing seizures are going to take a toll on your cousin."

Eobard had the benefit of foreknowledge, but he also knew that the least little thing could change the course of that future. "What do you need from me?"

"We'll need to finish getting his informed consent – unless you have a medical proxy for your cousin?"

Eobard didn't think that he could manufacture something like that in the next few hours. "No, I don't."

"Then we'll have to stop the medication again and talk with him in a couple of hours. Ideally, he should be in surgery tomorrow morning."

"I'll sit with him. If he wakes up, I'll talk to him. I'll convince him that the surgery is essential."

The doctor nodded. "I know he blames himself for his wife's death, but he really is lucky. Although the tumor is aggressive, it's extremely operable. Waiting any length of time, though, will radically decrease his chances for a full recovery."

Eobard understood the urgency better than the doctor. "I will guarantee that Harrison Wells will consent to the surgery."

"That's good, but unfortunately, your guarantee won't sit too well with the ethics board." The doctor clearly knew where Eobard was heading and she didn't like it.

As Eobard made some non-committal noises about talking with Harrison, the doctor's pager beeped, calling her to another consultation. Eobard went back into Harrison's room and sat down to watch the sleeping man. It was strange, but he felt an odd kinship with Wells. They were both cut loose and set adrift in a hostile, unfamiliar world.

From sheer exhaustion, Eobard dozed off but he didn't sleep deeply. The hospital smelled alien and unpleasant, the constant noise was torture. But he wasn't going to leave Harrison alone any longer than he had to. It was bad enough that the nursing staff insisted that he leave at the end of visiting hours.

"You're still here."

Eobard jerked awake. "Yes, I am."

"Why?"

"Because you need me." Eobard couldn't think of a better answer.

"I want to die. Please, just go away." Wells' voice was slurred, but there was no mistaking his will.

"I'm not going to let that happen."

"You don't have the right to stop me."

Eobard knew that, but he had to convince Wells that his life still mattered. "I guess your genius means nothing to you. It seems that you don't care that you will be robbing the world of unparalleled scientific advancements."

"I'm nothing without Tess."
Eobard was lost in the face of so much grief – he didn't know how to comfort Harrison. And yet, in a way, he understood just what Harrison was going through. A few scant weeks ago, Eobard had willfully, stupidly, destroyed history, and in the process, prevented the creation of the very person he'd spent a lifetime longing for. There was no one here who could understand that, who'd be able to comprehend even a fraction of the pain he was experiencing.

Except maybe Harrison Wells.

"Tell me about her, about Tess."

"Why?"

"Because I want to know more about her. I've read her papers on quantum mechanics, but I know nothing about her as a person." That wasn't a lie. Tess Morgan's work in the field was groundbreaking – required reading for every physics student, even in the twenty-second century. But little was known about her outside of her publications. Eobard thought it might be a way to help Wells through his grief.

Harrison stared at Eobard, his eyes surprisingly sharp and focused despite the medications. But that sharpness was in contrast to the trembling of the man's lips, the lines of grief bracketing his mouth.

Eobard held Harrison's gaze, and asked with sincerity. "Please tell me about her."

The floodgates of memory opened and Harrison rambled. There was no coherence to his narrative except for the iron-strong threads of love and desire and admiration. Threads that bound two souls together.

"I can't go on without her."

"You have to." Eobard searched for a way inside Wells' armor.

"Why? Why should I?" He didn't give Eobard a chance to answer. "And if you tell me it's because of my great genius, I'll have you removed; I'll tell them that you're no relation, that you have no legitimate reason for being here. And then where will you be?"

Eobard had to admire Harrison Wells. As sick, as desolate as he was, he could move the pieces on the board like a Grandmaster. But Eobard had his pis aller, his move of last resort. "What happens to Tess when you die?"

"What do you mean? She's dead."

"No, she isn't. Not really."

Wells looked at him, hope and skepticism warring with each other.

"Tess still lives in your memory. If she had no other family, there is no one else alive who truly knew her. When you die, she'll cease to exist except as a name atop a handful of articles. What kind of legacy is that?" Eobard had always wondered about the fragility of memory. At this moment, he was the only person who would ever know about the Flash, about Barry Allen, about a hero who never was. If he died, so did Barry Allen, and Barry deserved better than that. So did Tess Morgan.

"Damn you."

"She can live through you, Harrison Wells. You can preserve her memory, her legacy as a member of the human race. If you die now, she will, too."
Wells let out a small, gasping sob and his body started to shake from another seizure. Eobard went to get a nurse, but Wells reached for him. "Okay, okay – I'll do it. Not for you and for whatever reason you have for keeping me alive, but for Tess and the future we'd dreamed of."

May, 2000

Eobard was slightly shocked at how easy it was to build up a small fortune. In the second month he spent in the twenty-first century, waiting for Harrison to recover from brain surgery, Eobard simply invested wisely.

Of course, having Gideon's vast database helped.

He was careful. He knew that the governments watched for unusual patterns and high turnovers in stock trading, and of course, he could radically alter the timeline if his investments caused a company to change track. It was a tricky gambit, but Eobard Thawne wasn't a Grandmaster for nothing. By the time Harrison was ready to leave the hospital, Eobard had several million dollars scattered over a dozen different accounts. Taxes would be paid – there was no need to be stupid about that – but his name was nowhere to be found. Even Harrison's hospital bill was handled through a shell company.

"Albert E. Thawne" had a driver's license, a social security card, and a brokerage account. He paid cash whenever possible. Eobard Thawne, naturally, didn't legally exist.

"Where am I going to live?" Harrison had asked that question, his tone plaintive, before they'd taken him down for surgery.

Eobard had smiled and said, "Don't worry about it. I'll take care of everything."

Still mostly sedated by the anti-seizure meds, Harrison had just nodded. "Okay."

A few days after arriving in Starling City, Eobard had rented a small efficiency apartment. It was frankly revolting and certainly not a place to bring anyone needing to recover from a life-threatening illness; its only virtue was that it was cheap and anonymous. Eobard wasn't planning on staying here permanently, and buying residential property would unnecessarily complicate matters, but he could and did rent a private house, one close to the hospital. The landlord was willing to forego a long-term lease and a background check when Eobard paid him twice the market rate, in cash. All that mattered was that Harrison had a place to live comfortably until he was well enough to relocate to Central City with Eobard.

They were going there because Eobard's future – and wasn't that a laugh – was back in Central City. He'd been keeping tabs on Barry Allen, but the distance was troubling. He only had access to information that made its way into the city's computerized systems.

Right now, young Barry was living in a group home with six other boys while Joe West's application as a foster-parent made its way through the system. Eobard did what little he could to speed it along, but admittedly, he didn't truly understand the bureaucracy involved. He needed to be back in Central City. He needed to do everything to ensure that Barry Allen – this Barry from this timeline – flourished.

But for the moment, Eobard had to content himself with long-distance monitoring and constant checking with Gideon. Harrison – and ultimately, the particle accelerator – had to be his first priority. Harrison had been in residential rehabilitation for the first three weeks after surgery, but today, he was coming home. Home, for the present value of that word, was a two-bedroom ranch that Eobard
paid a small fortune to fit out with wheelchair ramps and grips and bars. If Harrison's recovery continued at its present pace, they'd be here for two more months.

Eobard hadn't hid his intention about moving to Central, and Harrison, who had been apathetic about where he lived, fell in with his plans at first. But the past few days, Harrison had become surprisingly stubborn about leaving.

"I don't want to leave here, Albert."

"Starling is a city on the verge of collapse. The university is running out of funding, which was why you and Tess were leaving. Crime is skyrocketing. Half of the city's industry has fled. In a decade, there will be nothing left worth saving. This is not the place to build your legacy. To build Tess' legacy."

Harrison hadn't replied right away. He stared off into the distance and blinked.

Eobard sighed. "She's not here, Harrison – it's just a grave. She lives in your memories. Staying in this place just because she's buried here does nothing for her. Or you."

Harrison adjusted the knit watch cap that covered his still mostly-bald head. "Someday, I'd going to be strong enough to punch you in the face every time you use my love for Tess against me."

"I'm only looking out for you."

"No, you're manipulating me. You're very good at that."

It was Eobard's turn to keep quiet. He was manipulating Harrison, but that didn't mean his motives were completely selfish. Mostly, but not completely.

Harrison finally asked, "Why Central City? It's in the middle of nowhere."

"Not really. It's a young city, full of industry and very favorable to the high-tech sector. There's Rathaway Industries, Stagg Industries, Mercury Labs – "

Harrison interrupted him. "I know Christina McGee. She runs Mercury. We – Tina, Tess, and I – were very close when we were at MIT."

"So – that's reason enough to move to Central City. You have a connection there." Eobard hadn't forgotten about that particular establishment, and was already doing everything possible to prevent a different fate for this timeline's Barry Allen. According to Gideon's initial report after Eobard had destroyed the old timeline and created this new one, Barry was supposed to be killed when the Mercury Labs particle accelerator exploded in 2024. Eobard had already taken steps to ensure that Mercury Labs would never build its own accelerator – steering important resources away from Mercury, like the particle physicists that Tina McGee was hoping to hire, to make certain that Mercury Labs focused on smaller, less ground-breaking projects.

And per Gideon, it was working. The last time Eobard had checked – just that morning – Barry Allen would leave Mercury Labs in 2024 to return to academia. Not the perfect place for Barry to become the Flash, but Eobard still had plenty of time for more course correction. To nudge Barry into the right place at the right time.

Two months later, right on schedule, Eobard Thawne and Harrison Wells relocated to Central City, and Eobard's watch over Barry Allen's life began in earnest.
June, 2000

"What have you got there?" Harrison looked over Eobard’s shoulder at the piece of paper Eobard held. "More building plans?"

"I found a piece of property in the hills north and west of the city. We're going to buy it."

"I thought we were bidding on that vacant waterfront lot."

"We are – that bid’s already in." Eobard knew that the offer they had made – well, *Harrison* had made – would be accepted and the future would be built as Harrison had dreamed it would be, as Gideon had documented. The waterfront site was perfect for what would become S.T.A.R. Labs. Although it was close to the river, the elevation was high enough to mitigate chances of flooding. The ground conditions were optimal for both the accelerator ring and the towers that were part of Harrison's original design.

"So, what's this?" Harrison asked.

"A house."

"What's wrong with this place?" Harrison sat down and pulled the plans away from Eobard.

Eobard looked around and grimaced. "Do you need me to enumerate everything?" The house was small and cramped; the wiring had been state of the art in 1937. There was no bathroom on the main floor – which meant that Harrison needed to climb too many stairs too many times a day. The kitchen looked like something out of a horror story. Of course, Eobard didn't imagine that he'd be able to have all of the modern conveniences of a twenty-second century home, but living here was taking its toll on him. The only virtue this house had was its proximity to Barry Allen.

Harrison looked at the plans. "This seems … ambitious."

"It isn't – not really." Eobard knew he was stretching the truth. It wasn't ambitious for the architecture and building techniques in his day, but it was by today's standards. "The site has already been prepped for construction – the original owner walked away from the project just after the foundation was dug and the utility connections brought in. So – the hard work has been done."

"Hmm." Harrison wasn't convinced.

"It will be a better place for you. Clean, quiet, private – everything on one floor."

"All the accommodations needed for a dying man."

"Harrison." Eobard shook his head. He didn't want to have this conversation.

"We both know I've got an expiration date tattooed on my head. Inside my head. I only have a twenty-three percent five-year survival rate. It doesn't take a crystal ball to know what will happen to me."

"The odds aren't great but they aren't impossible." Eobard knew better than anyone alive today just how flexible time and the future could be. "You know that."

"No, actually, I don't. I know the theory but this is my life. A life you've been fucking with for reasons you won't tell me. You show up like some benevolent fairy godmother just at the right
moment in time. You're doing everything possible to not only keep me alive, but to keep me moving forward. Why is S.T.A.R. Labs so damn important to you? Why not build this yourself? Why am I your front man?"

Eobard didn't answer. He didn't need to. Harrison knew that "Albert Thawne" was an enigma – a scientist who was the equal of Harrison Wells – but one who had no credentials, no publications, and no degree. The papers that gave Albert E. Thawne life couldn't be stretched to invent the deep academic background that the head of the nascent S.T.A.R. Labs needed.

"Al, come on. Tell me."

"Don't call me that. My name is Albert." And so the deflections began again.

"Take the diminutive as a sign of affection."

Eobard glared at Harrison. "I could call you Harry."

Harrison shrugged. "I don't care. I've been called worse."

"Somehow, I doubt that. You're too nice."

"Ask some of my students. I had a reputation."

"For being everyone's favorite professor. You were Science Educator of the Year at Starling University three years in a row. I've seen the certificates." Along with all of the Wellses' clothing and household goods, they'd been in the car that night. Eobard had taken the certificates out of the broken frames and put them with Harrison's more personal things, preserving yet more memories of a life that wasn't lost.

"Asshole."

Eobard laughed. He enjoyed this banter and he had to believe that it helped Harrison. He repossessed the architectural plans and showed Harrison the house he was having built.

"You'll have your own suite, of course. It will have a fireplace and a skylight with an unobstructed view of the Milky Way. The property is far enough out of the city and the suburbs that it's not affected by light pollution."

That seemed to intrigue Harrison. "Can I have an observatory?"

"Certainly." Eobard made a few notes on the plans. "Anything else?"

"What about when I get really sick again? Will I be able to stay there or will I need to come back here and die in a hospital?"

Eobard hated these conversations. Harrison was far too focused on his impending death. "There's a small suite for live-in medical staff, when and if necessary."

That seemed to satisfy Harrison. "Okay. If you want to spend the money, why should I stop you?" He pushed himself upright with deliberate care. "I'm hungry."

Eobard rolled up the plans and slipped them back into their case. "Good. Shall I make you something?" Not his favorite thing to do, but they both needed to eat.

"You're a terrible cook."
That was true. "Which is shorthand for saying you'd like a Big Belly Burger."

"With curly fries and a chocolate shake."

Eobard knew that Harrison would manage about half a burger, just a few of the fries, and almost none of the shake. But that didn't really matter. Harrison was hungry and that was something to be celebrated.

"You want to come with me?"

"Nah. I'll take a quick nap. Not really up to going out again."

Eobard made sure that Harrison was settled and comfortable on the couch. It had been three months since the surgery, but the daily radiation treatments were draining and Harrison needed frequent rest.

Eobard took the opportunity to drive through the pleasant suburban neighborhood and circle around to PS 23, the local elementary school. It was a little after mid-day and there were hundreds of children running around, screaming with the sheer exuberance of youth let loose in the springtime. Somewhere in that mass of small bodies was Barry Allen.

The boy had finally been permanently placed with Joe West. The social worker's notes indicated that Barry was adjusting as well as could be expected, but he did have the disturbing habit of running away to the Iron Heights prison to see his father every few weeks. That was far too dangerous for a young child. Barry could be hurt or killed at any point along that journey, which needed three separate bus rides just to get within a mile of the front gate.

Yes, Gideon was still tracking Barry's future and it had remained unchanged: an advanced degree in chemistry, a dozen years working up the ranks at Mercury Labs, and then a return to academia, but not in Central City. Eobard was still thinking about the best place for Barry Allen, the right configuration of circumstances that would enable Eobard to turn him into the Flash. That would give Eobard a way back and a chance to meet his destiny.

Again.

April, 2001

Eobard watched Harrison as he gave a speech to the press and a crowd of scientists, members of the city government and interested bystanders. Harrison was smiling with practiced charm, working the otherwise jaded and bored reporters with a deft hand. A year since the surgery and six months since the last of the radiation treatments, an apparently healthy Harrison Wells presented a quite handsome figure in the sharply cut suit that Eobard had insisted he wear. The open collar and the soft-soled shoes were a nice touch of informality that softened an otherwise intimidating persona.

This was the ground breaking ceremony for S.T.A.R. Labs, a project of unparalleled ambition in Central City. There was already some controversy about the planned particle accelerator, but that was limited to a few nut cases holding up hand-letter signs, proclaiming that it would bring about the end of the world.

Of course, Eobard knew that the protesters were, in a way, correct. But that wasn't going to stop the future – his future – from happening.

"The work S.T.A.R. Labs will do here will about usher in a future of unimagined opportunity. It will change our understanding of the very laws of physics and bring about unparalleled advancements in
power and medicine. With S.T.A.R. Labs, Central City will become the epicenter for positive change, not only for the country but for the world."

Harrison took the ceremonial shovel with the bright red ribbon tied around the handle, stuck it into the ground, and lifted out a clod of dirt to the sound of cheers.

Eobard clapped and smiled and felt so much pride. For most of the year, he'd bullied and pushed Harrison back to health, refusing to let Harrison succumb to grief and apathy. At the same time, Eobard had been the one to file the papers for permits, draw up business plans, and spend millions of dollars just getting the site ready for today.

But somewhere along the line, Harrison had started taking an active interest in what Eobard was doing. Not just the creation of S.T.A.R. Labs, but the science – particularly the plans for the particle accelerator.

Eobard hadn't been so sure if that was such a good idea, but then, the flaw he was planning wouldn't show up in any of the plans that Harrison – or anyone – would see.

In the end, it did turn out to be a good idea, if just because Harrison Wells was a genius and the work that Eobard was already familiar with was only the tip of the iceberg. His contributions were invaluable and would push the date of the accelerator launch forward by at least three years.

But the clock was ticking. Gideon reported no change in Harrison Wells' lifespan. Harrison's death would cause all kinds of problems for Eobard. Without the charismatic head of S.T.A.R. Labs to push things forward, the particle accelerator project would stall a few months after Wells' passing. S.T.A.R. Labs wouldn't fail, per se; it would just never achieve the potential that Eobard needed.

During every quiet moment, when his thoughts weren't consumed with plans for the future, with protecting Harrison, protecting Barry Allen, Eobard wished for his speed back. He wasn't in constant pain anymore, and there was a tiny remnant of his connection to the speed force within him - he could still perceive action through the time dilation. But that was it, nothing more. His speed was gone. The Reverse-Flash was no more.

He would give anything for the chance to undo what he did. Except that that wasn't really the nature of linear time. He'd fucked up so badly that the ripples spread out in all directions. There was no way he could go back to March 2000 and prevent his visit to the Allen house without further breaking the timeline. The only thing he could do was move forward, course correct in small ways over the years; manipulate the timeline in real time.

No outcome was assured, but as long as Harrison Wells was alive, as long as Barry Allen was alive, there was a chance that the future could be fixed.

Eobard leaned against the car and watched Harrison glad-hand the politicians and the bankers, two very important groups. There were also a few uniformed members of the military, including one two-star general, Wade Eiling. Eobard had researched the man and didn't like him. He'd represent a singular threat to the Flash, if the Flash were ever created. On the theory that one should keep one’s enemies closer, Eobard planned to cultivate Eiling. Cultivate, nurture, and then eliminate when necessary.

Harrison broke free of the crowd and made his way over to Eobard. Despite his smiles, Eobard could tell that Harrison was exhausted. He played chauffeur and opened the door for Harrison.

As Eobard drove away, Harrison commented, "That went well, didn't it?"
"You were perfect. Just the right combination of arrogance and accessibility. You charmed them and intrigued them at the same time."

"I was pretending to be you."

Eobard felt himself flush at what was supposed to be a compliment. "Whatever you were doing worked."

"Hmm. It also exhausted me. Mind if I close my eyes for the rest of the trip?"

"Not at all."

Eobard turned on the stereo and the soft strains of a Mozart concerto filled the car. Harrison dozed until they pulled up in front of the house. The structure was complete, except for some small details, like the landscaping and the observatory that Harrison had asked for. The interior was still a work in progress, but it was livable. The massive fireplace in the great room was waiting for some parts, the kitchen wasn't quite done – not that either he or Harrison did much cooking. But the bedrooms were finished, as was the library that served as their joint office. Eobard would, given time, build in an extensive data system to house Gideon. The A.I. was going to need some space and power to grow.

And he wanted to tinker with the programming. There were times when Gideon's original purpose – as part of a mental health practice specializing in sexual dysfunction – created some interesting dynamics. He'd tried to rewrite that part of the programming, but hadn't had much success. Eobard was thinking that he could clone the A.I. without the psychological services component. But that would require time and technology not easily accessible in the early twenty-first century.

Eobard helped Harrison into the house and then to the bedroom outfitted with everything a man with precarious health might require. Harrison looked gray from exhaustion and Eobard asked, "Can I help?"

"I think you'll have to, if you don't mind playing valet."

Eobard didn't. Helping like this made him feel a little more tied to his humanity. Eobard had spent too much of his life apart from the world – his family hadn't cared for him, his colleagues had viewed him with suspicion, he'd had no real friends. And of course, the one man he'd idolized no longer existed.

Harrison, though, made Eobard think that simple human connections really did matter. That helping a tired man take off his shoes had as much value as writing a groundbreaking paper on strange matter.

He not only helped Harrison out of his shoes, but out of his suit and shirt, too, and then into some soft lounging clothes.

"Do you want to sleep, or are you up for a meal?"

"Maybe later?"

Eobard nodded and helped Harrison under the covers. "Rest, okay?"

As Eobard turned to leave, Harrison grabbed his wrist, his grip surprisingly strong. "Someday, I'm going to figure you out, Albert Thawne. No one is this much of a saint."

"Trust me, Harrison. I'm not a saint."

"But you are my friend." That wasn't a question.
Eobard nodded. "As you are mine."

Harrison let go and rolled over. Eobard watched as his friend relaxed into sleep.

August, 2001

"Why are you so certain that geothermal power going to be worth the expense? From the looks of these plans, it'll add at least three million dollars to the cost of construction." Harrison's question was reasonable.

"Running a facility this size using the local power grid will be a nightmare. With geothermal, we will provide our own power and can sell the excess capacity back to the city, take the tax benefits for using green energy, and cut our usage costs by seventy-five percent within three years. The costs for putting in generators running on geothermal energy will be recouped in five years, maximum."

"Pity I won't live long enough to see that." Harrison leaned back and gave Eobard a sad smile.

"Harrison – "

"What? It's the truth. We both know I'm not going to live for much longer."

"We don't know anything of the kind."

"Your friend 'Gideon' knows, though. She seems to know the future quite intimately."

Eobard took a measured breath and rested his palms on the desk. "Gideon?"

"Stop pretending, Professor Thawne. And stop insulting my intelligence." Harrison was angry, despite the evenness of his voice.

Eobard sorted through the responses he could make and decided on the truth. "How do you know about Gideon?"

"A few nights ago, I was restless and was wandering through the house. The door here was open and I heard you talking. I was frankly surprised to hear a woman's voice responding and when I peeking inside, I was even more surprised to see that it wasn't a real woman, but a computer generated – what would you call it – hologram? You were asking about the events in 2006 – five years from now. What happened after my death. You were particularly interested in the success of the particle accelerator project."

Eobard covered his mouth, shaken by Harrison's discovery.

"I'm going to ask you again and I will need a real answer. Who are you, really?"

Eobard was shaking, the wounds from his maiming ached as if they'd just been inflicted.

"Damn it, Albert – just tell me!" Harrison wasn't shouting at him, but Eobard flinched just the same.

Eobard said quietly, "My name isn't Albert. It's Eobard."

"That's a ridiculous name." Harrison wasn't at all shocked by the deception.

"Fuck off." Eobard got up and paced. His whole body hurt but he couldn’t afford to show any weakness.
"Sorry. But it's still 'Thawne' I'm guessing. Since that thing – Gideon – called you 'Professor Thawne'."

Eobard nodded.

"I tried to find out who you are. But there's no Professor Albert Thawne listed in any academic registries. The only Thawne of note I could find is a family in Keystone. A state senator who fathered two children. One boy is named Edward, and interestingly enough, the other one was called Albert, but he died when he was four days old. There's no one in any field of academics bearing the name Thawne."

Eobard didn't bother to deflect, it would be pointless. "There wouldn't be."

"And why is that?"

Eobard paced and felt like a trapped animal. Harrison could destroy everything. All his plans, his dreams, could die right here.

"I'm waiting, Eobard."

"You wouldn't believe me."

"Oh, I think you underestimate my ability to accept the impossible."

Eobard leaned against one of the bookcases that lined the wall, arms crossed over his chest. "The truth would strain even your credulity."

"I doubt it." Harrison smiled, a gentle and understanding expression. "Why not just admit that you're from the future?"

Eobard blinked.

"Oh, come on. You don't think I couldn't figure it out? I'm not stupid. You're brilliant – your scientific theories are almost beyond my comprehension, and that's not something I'd lightly admit to. And besides, you've got a talking palm-sized computer that projects a highly responsive holographic image – something I've never seen outside of a movie. A computer that seems to know the future."

"Gideon isn't a computer. Not precisely." Eobard knew he was being pedantic.

"Oh? You have an uplink to the future?" Harrison was awed.

"Not quite. Gideon is an artificial intelligence." Eobard shook his head and decided to put everything on the table. "It isn't just semi-sentient, its data core exists within and outside of time. Changes to the timeline impact the data that Gideon has access to, but don't change the A.I. itself."

"I'm not sure I understand."

"I think I can explain. Let me give you an example." Eobard didn't have to think too hard for one. "When I was a student – "

"In the future."

"Yes, the future. When I was a student, Harrison Wells was considered a visionary, a scientist of unparalleled genius whose works formed the core principles of my field. According to one version of history – the version of history I'd been taught, a version that's now erased – you were also part of a terrible tragedy. What I'd learned was that Harrison Wells and his wife, Tess Morgan, had simply
disappeared, vanished into thin air without any explanation. Fifteen years later, your car was found buried in the forest undergrowth. You and Tess had died that night."

Harrison looked shattered, but Eobard continued. "After I saved you, the timeline changed and Gideon was able to tell me that you lived long enough to build S.T.A.R. Labs and that you died five years later. I keep checking on how history tells your story, in the hope that my continued intervention in your life keeps prolonging it. You heard me checking with Gideon."

Harrison's face turned bright red in anger. "Why didn't you stop us? We walked right by you – you could have stopped us. You could have saved Tess."

Eobard sighed. They'd had this conversation before. "I didn't know you were going to die that night. No one knew the exact date of your disappearance. It wasn't until I saw your car weaving erratically on the road that I realized what was about to happen. I tried to overtake you and stop you from driving off the road. Your car flipped over and there was nothing I could do for Tess. I couldn't save her. But I could save you."

"And all of this?" Harrison waved his hand around. "Is this some kind of guilt trip?"

"Not at all." Eobard was glad that Harrison hadn't accused him of engineering Tess' death.

"Then why? Why look for me? Why save my life? Why the hell am I so important to you?"

Since Harrison had accepted one improbability without question, Eobard offered another. "You're my way home, Harrison Wells. I need you."

"That doesn't answer the question. Why do you need me?"

Harrison was not going to give up and he wasn't going to settle for a half-truth. Eobard admitted, "Because I fucked up. I no longer have the ability to travel through time, to get home."

Harrison nodded and gave him a speculative look. "So that's why you need the particle accelerator. Hell – you're trying to do just what those stupid protesters are complaining about. You're trying to create a rift in space/time." Harrison didn't seem upset about that, just thoughtful.

For the first time in their relationship, Eobard directly lied to his friend. "Yes. That is the plan." And yet, it wasn't precisely a lie. It would be the Flash who created the rift in time, but he’d do so using the accelerator energy.

"Will people get hurt? Die?"

"No one will die if we're careful." He hoped that was true, but there were so many risks in what he was planning. There weren't enough pieces in place to shape the future, yet.

Harrison pulled off his glasses and stared at Eobard, his gaze soul-piercing. "I knew you were using me. But why me? You could have approached any physicist. Any one of my peers would have been thrilled to be your front man for such a massive undertaking. You clearly don't need my science, just my reputation. Hell, you could have built it yourself. Who would have cared?"

Harrison was right. Eobard really didn't need Harrison Wells. "I told you I messed up. It's more than that. I broke something."

"Something?" Harrison raised an eyebrow at that.

Eobard committed his queen to the play. "I broke time. The timeline, the sequence of events that was
supposed to happen but now will never happen, because of my interference. Saving you was the one way to repair the damage."

"An act of contrition?"

Eobard didn't particularly care for the religious connotation of that term, but he understood what Harrison was saying. "If you like. You and Tess dreamed of creating S.T.A.R. Labs. That's what you told me. You planned it – that day on the beach when I went to find you. It was as if my needs and your dreams fit together like pieces of a puzzle."

"So, our friendship really doesn't exist, does it? Is it just a sugar coated frosting over expediency?"

Eobard collapsed into the chair he'd vacated, as exhausted and pain-filled as the night Nora Allen died. "It started out that way. I'm not particularly good with people. I've never had a friend. No one who I've really cared about. Not until now. I don't think I could have done this without you. I would have given up and just … I don't know… "

Eobard couldn't look at Harrison, and he spoke to the ceiling, which wouldn't judge him. "I have issues. A bad temper. Poor impulse control. It's hard to rein those things in when there's no one who'll look at you and think that you're actually better than you really are. I'm not a hero but I always wanted to be one." Eobard couldn't believe he was telling Harrison these things. "You are my friend. The only friend I've ever had. It's pathetic, I know. I didn't want this. I didn't want to care about you. After all, to me – to the man I used to be – you've been dead for over a century. You weren't supposed to matter."

Harrison asked in a soft, unsure voice, "But I do?"

"You do. You and Tess." Eobard rested his head against the back of the chair and stared at the ceiling, hating the tears that were beginning to fall. "I've never had what you had, I convinced myself that I never wanted it. But every time you talk about her, I feel like – I don't know – like it could have been something I might have had, too."

Harrison reached out and took his hand. "I didn't want to like you, either. You're an ass. You're arrogant and imperious and you don't care who gets in your way. You bullied your way into my life, you bullied me into living. You made me so angry sometimes that I wanted to punch you, but then I'd remember how you took care of me. You couldn't have enjoyed it." Harrison shook his head at the memory. "I couldn't understand why you cared so much, and after a while, I stopped wondering. You were simply there, you let me talk about Tess, about our dream. You embraced that dream as if it was your own, and I didn't want to believe it was for selfish reasons."

"And now that you know just how selfish my reasons are?"

Harrison sighed. "I find I just don't care. I've always been a big-picture type of person. I believe in the importance of S.T.A.R. Labs, what it will mean for the future. That you need S.T.A.R. Labs to get back to the future is something of a delicious irony."

"So," Eobard licked his lips, "where do we go from here?"

Harrison squeezed his hand. "We go forward. I have a lab to build. You have a particle accelerator to plan. The future is going to be here faster than you think." Then Harrison ducked his head. "And I'll be too dead to see it."
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

And so Barry learns the true fate of Earth-1 Harrison Wells and his relationship with the time-traveling Eobard Thawne.

August, 2002

S.T.A.R. Labs was up and running. The towers weren't complete, but the ring was done and forty percent of the labs were operational. Eobard felt just a trifle guilty about that. At some point, this was going to all close down.

Just this past week, Harrison had completed the first wave of hiring – scientists and support personnel – mostly on Eobard's recommendations. However, they didn't always see eye to eye on the human capital – particularly the ones that Harrison was looking to bring on board several years down the line. For instance, Eobard didn't particularly care for the very young physicist who Harrison wanted to lead the accelerator project.

Perhaps because Hartley Rathaway reminded Eobard too much of himself. Too smart, too difficult, too different. Way too full of his own genius. And it didn't help that the young man had something of a boy-crush on Harrison, it was all too obvious from the meet-and-greet that Harrison had conducted at Hudson University a few weeks ago.

But Harrison insisted that Hartley would be the perfect addition to the team in three to five years. Eobard, of course, checked with Gideon, and yes, the young man did join the S.T.A.R. Labs team before abruptly leaving five years later. Eobard briefly wondered what would happen, but right now, he didn't care enough to speculate.

At the moment, Eobard was multitasking. Working on the power consumption issues for the accelerator and monitoring Barry Allen's progress through junior high school. The boy was academically advanced, but socially inept. One good friend, his foster-sister. He was also the frequent target of bullies, often because of Henry Allen's imprisonment. Refusing to feel guilty about that, Eobard had thought long and hard about making the young brutes disappear. He would have, except that children were a valued commodity and the mysterious disappearance of even one of them could result in yet another change in the timeline. So Eobard contented himself with the future knowledge that most of those young men would end up in low wage jobs or in jail.

Eobard had also found the perfect future landing place for Barry Allen, a career that would keep him in Central City and make him a convenient target for a not-so-random bolt of lightning. Barry Allen was going to become a CSI. Eobard had already planted the seeds. A visit from one of Joe West's colleagues on Career Day, a science fair challenge sponsored by S.T.A.R. Labs, a rigged contest that gave Barry a subscription to a forensic science magazine and another magazine that explored the unknown, the unknowable, and the downright weird. All small, incremental steps that would lead up to a career in curiosity. Of course, a full scholarship to the right university would help, too.

Gideon was already providing positive reports on the effects of Eobard's course correction. It seemed that Barry Allen would join the CCPD as a forensic assistant in 2012, right after finishing his master's degree in chemistry.
Unfortunately, Eobard had no solution for the slow decay of the S.T.A.R. Labs accelerator project. As time ticked forward, Gideon's database was becoming populated with more information about Harrison's eventual passing in late 2005. The additional data was appearing because Harrison had become the very public face of S.T.A.R. Labs, and was considered eminently newsworthy. A month didn't go by without his appearance on the local news programs and print interviews. He'd even been approached by television producers about a series to popularize the hard sciences, something akin to Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*. Harrison had thought the idea was amusing, turned it down with exquisite politeness, and suggested that they contact Neil DeGrasse Tyson instead.

And yet, nothing that either Eobard or Harrison did seem to be able to reverse the entropy of S.T.A.R. Labs after Harrison's death. Backers pulled out, the city rescinded its approvals for the accelerator, scientists deserted the project. Which was probably why the future Dr. Hartley Rathaway didn't stick around.

Such speculation really didn't help. Over their after-dinner scotch, they discussed the problem yet again.

"You've miscalculated, Eo."

Eobard sighed. He hated this diminutive as much as he'd hated being called "Al", but he didn't bother to correct Harrison, who'd only call him "Eo" with greater frequency, if just to annoy him.

"How did I miscalculate?"

"You've kept yourself in the background. If you'd been the face of S.T.A.R. Labs, my death wouldn't matter."

Eobard couldn't disagree with that statement, but the very idea of it was wrong. "S.T.A.R. Labs is yours. Not mine."

"Hmm, but your money paid for it."

"Your name's on the title to the property, on all the paperwork."

"It'll be yours soon enough. And won't that be a mess, with the inheritance taxes."

Eobard gazed into his glass. He hated that Harrison was so casually accepting of his eventual demise. Harrison said jokingly, "Pity that you can't just become me. Maybe a good plastic surgeon – like something out of that Nick Cage movie. We're the same height, we have the same color eyes."

Eobard froze.

Harrison noticed his reaction. "What? Don't tell me this is something you'd want to do. Go under the knife and completely change your appearance?"

Eobard shook his head very slowly. "What you are suggesting wouldn't require surgery. I could become you."

"Wait, what are you saying? You can change into me?"

Eobard swallowed against the knot in his throat. "The technology for DNA transference exists. Will exist. I'm not unfamiliar with it."

"So, what's the problem?"
Eobard laughed. "It's unethical and illegal. The project was shut down by the Science Police and the research data destroyed."

"I guess I can see where swapping DNA could be a problem."

"You don't swap DNA, Harrison. You take it – it's a one-way street."

"Ah. So you are creating a clone?"

"No, the process kills the donor." Eobard was blunt.

It was Harrison's turn to laugh. "Considering the fact that I'm dying, does that really matter?"

"There has to be another way." Eobard shook his head. "This is a repulsive idea."

"It might be the only way." Harrison was far too pragmatic. "You need the particle accelerator. You need 'Harrison Wells'." Harrison made air-quotes around his name.

Eobard launched himself out of the chair and wished he could just run away from this conversation. But he couldn't run anywhere, could he?

"Ask Gideon about my future now, Eo," Harrison was implacable.

Eobard didn't ask for information on Harrison's death, but about the particle accelerator project. He kept his question very specific.

"Gideon, when does the S.T.A.R. Labs particle accelerator go on line?"

"December 11th, 2013."

Harrison clapped with delight. "Ask her who is running S.T.A.R. Labs at the time."

Eobard had long since stopped correcting Harrison about referring to the A.I. with feminine pronouns. But he did do as Harrison asked.

"Doctor Harrison Wells is the CEO and chief scientist of S.T.A.R. Labs in 2013."

"Mmm, Chief Scientist – I like that. But I wonder, if I add that title to my position – will it be because of this? Will I be creating a causation loop? What a total mind fuck."

Eobard resigned himself to the inevitable. "Time travel is – as you say – a total mind fuck. Which is why I don't recommend it if you don't know what you're doing." Eobard couldn't help but think that even when you know what you're doing, it was still a very risky proposition, to put it mildly.

:::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

Present Day

At some point in the conversation, Eobard had relaxed against Barry, slowly sliding down until he was completely horizontal, his head pillowed in Barry's lap.

Before, when he'd had finally told Barry about the Black Flash, about how and why Nora had died, he'd felt lighter than air, absolved by Barry's acceptance. But now, after telling Barry about Harrison, about what he'd done to try and fix the mistakes he'd made, Eobard felt less sure. As the words spilled forth into an unbelievable story, he started to wonder if this part of his past were not a greater crime.
After all, Barry had once called him a monster for how he’d used his access to the future to manipulate the present.

Barry hadn't pushed him away. He’d listened without interrupting Eobard once. That was worrisome.

Eobard paused in his tale and took a deep breath before asking, "What are you thinking?"

Barry answered without hesitation. "I am beginning to understand."

"Understand what?"

"The avatar – the Harrison Wells in the Speed Force. That Harrison was taken from your memories. He – they – were so gentle, but so implacable."

Eobard remembered the conversation from just the other day, when Barry had put together just who and what the avatars were.

Barry's next comment stole Eobard's breath. "You loved him."

Eobard's first instinct was to deny, to deflect. But he couldn't, not with everything that he'd just revealed. "Yes – as much as I'm capable of love."

"You have to stop putting yourself down. You are absolutely capable of love. It might not be an easy love, it might make you uncomfortable, but you love deeper and more profoundly than anyone I know."

Eobard smiled. "I'm not so sure of that."

"Trust me. You love me, don't you?"

"Yes – of course I do." Eobard would never deny that.

"So why is it so difficult to believe that you could love someone else?"

"I – I don't know."

Barry carded his fingers through Eobard's hair. "Tell me more about Harrison."

Eobard relaxed into Barry's gentle caress. "Harrison was – until you woke up from that coma and looked at me like I had all the answers in the universe – the only person I ever wanted to be a better person for. He knew I was keeping secrets, terrible secrets, but he trusted me, despite those secrets. Not just with his dreams, but with his memories. I might have strong-armed him into living, but even afterwards, when he was recovered, when he had regained his will to live, he would – at the least prompting – tell me about Tess."

"He trusted you with what was most important to him. He wanted her to live in your memories."

"She does." Eobard blinked against the sudden rush of emotion. "Jesse Wells – she is so much like Harrison's memories of Tess. Sometimes I find myself overwhelmed when I look at her, when I hear her talk. It's like I'm looking at Tess Morgan, hearing her voice."

Barry stopped petting Eobard. "What do you mean?"

Eobard shifted, rolling away, onto his side, so he didn't have to look at Barry. "Unforeseen consequences. That's what I mean."
August, 2005

Most of the time, Eobard deliberately avoided S.T.A.R. Labs, content to observe the progress from a distance (and from the many closed-circuit camera he'd had installed). There were just too many intelligent people there, too many eyes, too many chances that he'd do something memorable and somehow alter the timeline.

But today, Eobard needed one of the labs. Not for the equipment – which could always be purchased and set up at the house – but for the clean room environment that could not be so easily replicated. He needed to finish the DNA transfer device.

Gideon had only the most sketchy of notes on the mechanism. The Science Police, in 2182, had done a thorough job of shutting down the project and erasing the entire line of research. But they weren't perfect. There were a few data units that hadn't had their caches wiped, and Gideon – as part of its programming – had harvested that information.

It was up to Eobard to rebuild and perfect it.

A frustrating part of knowing the future was knowing that he'd succeeded, but not knowing how he'd made it happen. Harrison Wells no longer died from brain cancer in late 2005, which meant that Eobard was successful in slipping into Harrison's life. He was at point "A" in the journey and only had a faded and incomplete map on how to get to point "Z".

Time, as always, was not his friend. Harrison was starting to fail.

Three months ago, Eobard had taken Harrison to a clinic in Chicago for a new set of brain scans, and as they had both expected, the results weren't good. The tumor had grown back and was beyond the point where surgical intervention would work – not without leaving Harrison severely impaired.

On the trip home, Harrison had six words on the subject. "No surgery. No chemo. No radiation."

Eobard couldn't bring himself to argue.

This morning, as Eobard was making breakfast, Harrison smiled, but the expression was terribly sad. "It's almost time, Eo."

"Not yet, Harrison."

"But soon enough."

Eobard stifled an argument he knew he'd lose.

To his adoring public, Harrison was still the camera-ready genius, promoting S.T.A.R. Labs and guiding it with a firm hand. There were dozens of ground-breaking projects underway, work that impressed Eobard to no end. But Harrison Wells' public appearances were far less frequent these days, and the time he spent at his beloved S.T.A.R. Labs was minimal, too. In the privacy of their home, Harrison was achingly fragile, barely able to walk. A few months ago, Eobard had given his friend a cane, something polished and elegant that could be written off as an affectation, but these days Harrison didn't have much strength to use it, especially not after a long day of pretending to be healthy.

Eobard didn't say anything. He just sped up the pace of his own work and was breaking his self-imposed rule about going to S.T.A.R. Labs. There were now enough people here now than a random body in a white lab coat shouldn't attract any attention.
Or so Eobard thought. He'd just swiped his keycard over the access point for the clean room when someone challenged him.

"Do you have authorization for this sector?"

The voice was young – almost too young. And the face behind the ridiculous round glasses was equally young. Eobard recognized him as the juvenile genius that Harrison had finally been able to hire – Hartley Rathaway.

Eobard pushed the door open and replied, "Apparently so."

Rathaway was quick and followed Eobard into the clean room – rather, the anteroom to that facility. "I don't know you."

"And do you know everyone here?"

"Most everyone, especially those who have access to this sector. And like I said, I don't know you."

Eobard briefly thought about snapping this young pest's neck. Once, he might have vibrated his hand through the boy's chest and squeezed his heart into a bloody pulp, but he didn't have the power to do that anymore. Besides, Harrison would be most disappointed in him if he killed the boy.

"Whether or not you know me doesn't mean I don't have the right to be here."

Rathaway was determined to be difficult. He reached for the phone on the wall and announced, "I'm calling security."

"Let me make it easier and less humiliating for both of us." Eobard pulled out his cell phone and called Harrison, who'd stayed home today. After a quick greeting and explanation, Eobard passed the phone to Rathaway.

It was interesting to see the boy turned bright red and then sheet-white. Okay, less humiliating for Eobard, but highly humiliating for Hartley Rathaway. The boy nodded and bit his lip. "Yes, yes, sir. Of course, Doctor Wells. I understand."

Rathaway handed the phone back to Eobard, who just disconnected the call without another word. "Now, if you'll excuse me. I have work to do."

Rathaway abruptly nodded and left. Eobard stripped down, went into a second antechamber and got into the required suit and mask. He passed through an air shower and then an air lock before entering the actual clean room environment.

He was in the last stage of construction on the DNA transfer device – the one he'd have to use on Harrison. Over the last few months, he'd tested the prototypes on lab animals, and by the fifth test, the device worked as he'd expected. It took the DNA from one animal and perfused it into the other. Within minutes, the recipient took on the complete appearance of the other – now dead and thoroughly desiccated – lab animal.

He'd shared the results with Harrison – up to a point. Harrison, despite being a scientist, was very squeamish about the use of lab animals. In respect of Harrison's soft-hearted sensibilities, Eobard had offered to forgo the testing, but when he checked with Gideon, the reports were disastrous. The timeline reverted to what it had been before Eobard mentioned DNA transference – because something went wrong. Harrison Wells died and the particle accelerator project was cancelled.

Which meant that Eobard never returned home and the Flash was never born.
So, Eobard had simply kept the results of his progress private. Until today.

With this last unit complete now, all he needed to do was wait for Harrison to tell him he was ready. Based upon the timeline that existed before Eobard agreed to create the DNA transfer device, Harrison Wells would die of brain cancer in early December, 2005, about four months from now.

When he returned home, Eobard found Harrison in the library. Harrison greeted him with a tired smile. "So, it's done?"

Eobard nodded. He didn't want to talk about it.

And neither did Harrison, although he did want to discuss Hartley Rathaway. "What did you think of him?"

"He's a nuisance."

"He's brilliant. You'll need him to get the particle accelerator on line."

"He's too nosy."

"You just don't like being challenged." Harrison was, for some reason, baiting him.

"I don't like snot-nosed brats digging into things they shouldn't be involved in."

"He's kind of cute."

"Huh?" Eobard had no idea why Harrison would say that.

"He's got this whole nerdy-dorky thing going on with the glasses. A sharp dresser, too. He's also a certified chess Grandmaster. Figured you'd appreciate that."

"What are you talking about?"

Harrison took off his glasses. "I hired him for you."

Eobard still had no idea what was going on. "For me?"

"Rathaway's family disowned him."

"And why is that supposed to matter to me?"

"Because he's gay."

Eobard wondered if the tumor was already affecting Harrison's cognitive processes.

"I thought you'd understand, feel some… sympathy for him."

Still puzzled, Eobard asked, "Why would I?"

Harrison gave him a funny look. "In all the years we've know each other, you've only mentioned your family once. You said that you don't get along, that they didn't approve of you."

Eobard made the connection. "Ah, and you thought that they disliked me because I am homosexual?"

"Aren't you?"
Eobard chuckled. "One of the biggest cultural differences between your 'now' and my 'now' is sexuality – there is no stigma attached to sexual preference." *Only to not preferring anyone of any gender.*

Harrison flushed bright red. "My apologies, I thought… wrong."

"Believe me, my differences with my family have nothing to do with who I'd choose to have sexual congress with."

"Sexual congress – you sound like a Victorian pamphleteer, railing against the base desires of the human body. I don't suppose you'll ever tell me why you don't get along with your family."

Eobard scrubbed at his face, thoroughly annoyed with this conversation. "It's not important, Harrison."

Harrison accepted the deflection but turned towards a more painful, more annoying topic. "I don't like the idea of you being alone after I go. You need someone to take care of."

"Did you just call me 'nurturing'?" Eobard was appalled at the idea.

"If the shoe fits…"

"I am not nurturing, not in the slightest."

"No, you aren't. After all, you don't make sure I eat, you don't make sure I sleep, you don't sit up with me for hours on end when I can't sleep and listen to me ramble about my wife. You didn't spend a couple of million dollars building a house that is perfectly suitable for a man who will have accessibility issues. No, you are not nurturing in the slightest."

"I never finished the observatory for you. That was the only rebuttal Eobard could come up with."

"Eo, you don't want to admit it, but you are a caring soul. Yes, you are also a manipulator and conniver and a schemer. You don't hesitate to use people to get what you want. But you can't help but care about them, too."

"Some of them. One of them." Eobard refused to think about the fifteen year old boy who, one day, was supposed to be his destiny.

"So, why not two of them? Hartley Rathaway could use a guiding hand. He needs someone older and wiser, someone who'll let him soar and bring him home again."

"That may be, but it's not going to be me. Ever. I have no interest in being someone's daddy."

Eobard didn't want to tell Harrison that the Rathaway kid of creeped him out.

Harrison gave him a look, one that Eobard had gotten used to over the years. The look that said, *I know you better than you know yourself.*

Except in this instance. Eobard met Harrison's stare and Harrison was the one who broke, with a dry chuckle.

"So, is it done? It's ready?"

"Yes." Eobard didn't need to say anything else.

"And you're sure that this thing won't give you my brain tumor?"
"I am. Your cancer is not a genetic problem; it hasn't affected your DNA." Of course, Eobard didn't mention that many of the animal tests had been needed to ensure that he didn't transfer the cancerous cells.

"Okay." Harrison struggled to his feet and Eobard resisted the urge to help. At least until Harrison almost fell.

He jumped up and caught Harrison, taking him over to the couch.

"What the hell did you just do?" Harrison gaped at him.

"What do you mean?"

"You just flew – I didn't see you move. One second I was falling, the next, I'm here on the couch."

Eobard stepped back, shocked. "I – I…" His voice trailed off.

"Eo?"

Eobard collapsed into the chair next to Harrison, his mind whirling at the implications.

"This is another one of your secrets, isn't it?"

Eobard stared at his hands, they were trembling. He barely heard Harrison's question. Was it possible he was regaining his speed?

"What are you, Eo?"

Eobard panted, "I'm… not sure."

"Well, that's something of an answer." Harrison's sarcasm flowed over Eobard, as unnoticed as a mote of dust.

"I – ah – need to go. I'll be back in a little while."

"I hope so." Harrison sighed and leaned back against the couch, closing his eyes in exhaustion.

Eobard headed outside, but he didn't go far. The back of the house was beautifully landscaped; there was a swimming pool glimmering in the late afternoon sun and a pair of loungers stationed next to a fire pit. Chairs and a table were near an outdoor kitchen that Harrison had enjoyed using up until a few months ago. And a few yards away was a small platform, where Eobard had planned to build Harrison's observatory.

Harrison had always seemed to have some reason for not approving the final plans. Almost four years later, it was clear that the structure would never be built.

None of which mattered right now. Eobard faced out towards the forest, but focused instead on himself, on the small, fragile thing vibrating inside him.

Ten years ago – and more than a century and a half into the future – when he'd first turned himself into a speedster, he would feel that vibration thrumming in every cell, in the very atoms and molecules that made up his body. This was his connection to the speed force. It wasn't just the urge to run; it was the urge to go faster than the speed of thought, to find the perfect awareness of vibrations of the universe.

Eobard had lost that when the Black Flash had mutilated him. When it had executed justice on him
for his transgressions against time. Even as the pain from that mutilation had subsided, Eobard had long since forfeited any hope of regaining his speed. He'd told himself that he was – despite all reason – still alive. For the last four years, he'd focused on that, on fixing the timeline and creating a path home. In his colder moments, he'd told himself not to become distracted by concern for people long dead in his time, but he couldn't quite stop himself from caring, from becoming this strange, nurturing creature.

Maybe he should kill Hartley Rathaway, if just to prove that he could still be a villain.

Harrison's slow shuffle-thump distracted Eobard from his murderous daydreams.

"I thought you were resting," Eobard said over his shoulder.

"Hmm, I couldn't quite relax." Harrison was now standing next to him.

Eobard steeled himself against another gentle and relentless interrogation.

"I have a question for you."

_And here it comes…_

"When you make it back to your own time, will you be able to reverse the DNA transfer? Won't you have problems if you don't look like yourself?"

Eobard chuckled in relief, the answer to that question was almost too easy. "I've already taken care of that. I implanted a capsule with my DNA coding sequence inside a large bone. The capsule will shield that DNA from the changes in the rest of my body. I'll extract it when I get home and reverse the transfer."

"You've thought of everything. Will you have problems with using a prohibited technology when you get home?"

"I might, but my family is not without influence."

"So, money and power still rule the world in your time." Harrison leaned his head against Eobard's shoulder. "Some things never change, do they?"

"No, I guess they don't."

_Late November, 2005_

Eobard wished it were over already.

Not for himself, but for Harrison, who now required the humiliation of around-the-clock care.

Last month, Harrison had to give up the illusion of even imperfect health. He stepped away from the operations of S.T.A.R. Labs and appointed a three-member board of directors, who thought they were reporting to Harrison on a daily basis. In truth, it was Eobard giving all the orders.

The fiction that explained the leave of absence and his eventual return was easily swallowed. Harrison was working on the first draft of a book manuscript, one that would stand with the works of Hawkings and Sagan in the popular imagination. A book that would spark the scientific passions of young men and women around the world.
No one would ever know the truth. The medical personnel that Eobard brought in were from Chicago and New York and Los Angeles and they were never given Harrison's name. When it was almost over, they'd go back home, well compensated for their time and their silence. The man the world knew as Harrison Wells would return to S.T.A.R. Labs, no one the wiser.

And it was going to happen soon.

Harrison's body was dying, but up until the last week, his cognitive abilities hadn't been significantly impaired. The last few days had been telling, as Harrison started losing his grip on the past – on reality. Eobard supposed it was a mercy, to escape into memory. But spending time with the dying man as he rambled about events and people Eobard would never know was heartbreaking. The worst moments were when Harrison looked at him and thought that he was Tess.

It was late afternoon – well past sunset – and for once Eobard wasn't sitting with Harrison. Instead Eobard was watching Barry Allen struggle through yet another holiday season without his parents. Joe West had taken the boy up to Iron Heights and Eobard watched the touching conversation between father and son.

"Hey, slugger. You have plenty of turkey and stuffing? I know that Joe's a mean cook."

"Yeah – his Grandma Esther's recipe." Barry looked glum – more down than usual.

"What's the matter?"

Barry shrugged. "Wish I had Thanksgiving dinner with you."

"No you don't. The food here is terrible." Henry tried to make a joke.

"That's not what I mean, Dad."

"I know, Barry. But there's no point in wishing for things that aren't possible."

"I'm going to get you out of here one day. I'm going to prove that the Man in Yellow killed Mom. That you're innocent. I'm going to prove that the police messed up."

"Barry, listen to me. You need to live your life. I'll always love you, and I'll always be proud of you for believing in me. But you need to forget what you think you saw and move forward."

Barry shook his head, a mulish pout on his face. "No, never. I'm going to study forensic science and I'm going to learn everything I can so I can prove you're innocent. So I can keep other innocent people from going to jail and put the real criminals behind bars."

Eobard allowed himself a small smile. Not that he liked the idea of being blamed for Nora Allen's murder, but he was delighted that Barry was so firmly committed to a path that would turn him into the Flash.

The rest of the father-son conversation was pretty much a repeat of what went on every month. Barry promised to get proof of his father's innocence, Henry promised to stay safe. They both cried a little when the guard came to take Henry back to his cell.

Eobard didn't know why he watched these visits, month in and month out. Harrison, if he knew about them, would tell him that it all fed into Eobard's need to nurture and protect.

Protect, maybe. Nurture, not at all. Eobard Thawne was not the nurturing kind.
Fed up with that line of thought, Eobard cancelled the playback and checked the time. The medical staff – a nurse and two aides – had just changed shift. In a few minutes, someone would come and give Eobard a report.

He didn't have to wait long. The nurse reported that Harrison was conscious. He'd consumed approximately four ounces of a high-protein nutritional paste and six ounces of thickened water.

"What are his pain levels?"

"He says they’re manageable. We administered two drops of Fentanyl sublingually one hour ago and the patch was replaced at the start of this last shift. It should be good for another six hours."

"Thank you." Eobard watched the nurse and the aides leave. They'd be taken to a house Eobard had rented a few miles away. A house completely wired for observation. Not that Eobard was particularly interested in their off-duty activities. He just wanted to make certain that they weren't talking to anyone about Harrison.

Eobard tried to relax. Tried to focus his mind on the half-dozen projects he was working on, all small and diverse pieces of the bigger plan. But he couldn't. Not with Harrison awake.

He went into Harrison's suite and dismissed the nurse and the two aides. Harrison was listening to music, Debussy's *Clair de Lune*, and tears were streaming down his cheeks.

Eobard reached for a tissue and wiped the tears away. "You've said that this was Tess' favorite piece of music."

"It is. She loves this." The words were slurred.

Eobard didn't bother to correct Harrison's tenses. That was an avoidable cruelty.

The piece ended and the room was filled with silence. "I want to sit up." Harrison's voice was stronger, clearer.

Eobard pressed the button on the hospital bed controls to lift the head of the bed, and fixed Harrison's pillows and blankets.

"We need to talk." Harrison reached out for Eobard's hand. "I have very little time left."

"I know." A strange sort of stuffiness filled Eobard's nose, his whole head.

"I love you."

Eobard blinked. He didn't expect to hear that from Harrison and he had nothing to respond with.

"I've been thinking a lot lately, can't do much else. And I feel like I've left something undone."

Eobard was about to soothe him with promises that S.T.A.R. Labs would be the success Harrison and Tess had dreamed of, but Harrison stopped him.

"I was so lost in my own grief that I never really looked at you. I never considered that there might be someone else for me."

"Harrison – "

"I see you, Eobard, and what I see breaks my heart."
"Stop, please – " Eobard forced those words out, but they were a whisper.

"You and I – we could have been something wonderful."

The denial stalled on Eobard's lips.

"And sometimes, when Tess is very close, she tells me that she could have loved you, too."

Stop, please just stop. Everything inside Eobard clenched into a tight ball, like some tiny, pitiful creature hiding from a terrible predator.

Harrison didn't stop. "I know you're different. I know that there are things that make you uncomfortable. We've lived on top of each other for five years and I can see. You shy away from intimacy. You retreat from even the notion of it."

Eobard did what he usually did, and tried to deflect. "I'm from the future, Harrison. I messed with the timeline once – what do you think would happen if I took a lover, had a family?"

"Ah, but one thing doesn't follow the other. And you've been messing with the timeline since the moment we met. I was supposed to die that night and you saved me, remember?"

Eobard wanted to spit out words like "hero-worship" and "savior complex", but he couldn't.

"Besides, that isn't the point. The point is that I love you. I didn't have the courage to tell you before, and now it's too late to do anything about it." Harrison laughed, a bitter and weak sound. "And I feel guilty about telling you. I know nothing about the future. Your future, the time you are trying to get back to. Do you have a family? A partner? A lover? Someone who misses you? Someone you're longing for?"

"There is no one."

"Come here." Harrison let go of his hand and patted the bed. "Come closer. I want to do something."

Curious, Eobard did as Harrison asked. "What? What do you want to do?"

"This." Harrison wrapped a hand around the back of Eobard's neck and with surprising strength, pulled him down. And kissed him.

Harrison tasted sour, of medicine and illness. But Eobard could feel himself responding. Not with the self-disgusting lust he'd felt as a young man dreaming of the Flash, or worse, the false feelings from when he'd taken chemical enhancements to trigger the sexual drive that had otherwise been absent in him. With a slowly rising tide of need, gentle and undemanding as it crested and then died.

Harrison ended the kiss, and then kissed him again, softly on each eyebrow. "I had thought for so long that my biggest regret was not dying with Tess. But now, I realize, it's going to be not living for you."

"Harrison – " Eobard's voice was rough. "I'm so sorry." Harrison kissed him again, and Eobard felt something crack inside himself. "I wish I could have given you wanted."

"What I want is for you to be happy." Harrison let go and collapsed back against the pillows. "I want you to have everything you ever dreamed of. I want you to be able to go back to your own time and live the life you're supposed to have."

Eobard took Harrison's hand and rubbed his thumb across the loose skin, feeling every tiny, delicate
bone. "I will try. And know that even the attempt would be impossible without you."
"Then I can go forward in peace."
Early December, 2005

It was almost over.

Two days ago, Eobard had dismissed the nursing staff, planning to do the DNA transfer at home. Afterwards, he'd intended take Harrison's body back to Starling, to that road from the beach where this had all begun, and bury him there. But Harrison had begged him to take him back there while he was still alive, so he could die where fate had intervened. Eobard hadn’t had the heart to deny him that, but in hindsight, it might have been a mistake.

When they'd left Central City, Harrison had been mostly conscious, rambling about Eobard, about Tess, about space/time theories which made no sense at all. Halfway through the trip, however, Harrison had fallen silent, his breathing labored as he’d strained for every last atom of oxygen.

It was a matter of hours now, if that long.

The near-silence was oppressive, but music was even more unbearable. Instead, Eobard talked. He told Harrison *everything*, all the secrets he’d never shared, all the shattered points of his life. The shame and guilt he felt over the results of his obsessive need to control the future.

Harrison couldn't give him expiation; he couldn't offer a single word to absolve Eobard of his sins.

Eobard ran out of words a few miles before they reached their destination.

"You stopped talking, why?"

"Harrison?"

"Yeah. I'm here for a little bit longer."

Eobard didn't believe in anything except his own intelligence and the speed force, and neither of them would answer the prayer of thanks he’d just offered.

"We're almost there," Eobard whispered, hoping this was true.

"Good."

"Barry Allen. He's the one you're waiting for."

"Yes." There was no point in lying.

"You love him."

"No. He's – " Eobard couldn't say enemy, because that wasn't true. "My nemesis."
"You still love him. Good." Harrison's words were barely audible.

Eobard shook his head, wanting to argue.

It was hard to tell if they were in exactly the right spot, but as he pulled over to the shoulder, Harrison whispered, "Yes, here. This is it. It happened here."

Eobard didn't believe in the least that Harrison was experiencing some mystical connection to the place where Tess died. But there was no point in going any further. Harrison didn't have any more time and was holding on by sheer force of will.

Eobard got out of the car and went around to take Harrison out. The man weighed next to nothing and the heat pouring out of him was terrifying. Eobard carried Harrison over to a deadfall log and sat down with him. He pressed a kiss against Harrison's burning hot forehead and whispered, "Are you ready?"

"It's time."

"Thank you, Harrison. For everything. For being a man of heart and vision. For giving me this chance. " Eobard's hands shook as he attached one of the leads from the DNA transfer unit to Harrison's neck and the other to his own. He pressed the button and he didn't have to wait long for the transfer to start.

There was pain, which he’d expected. What he hadn’t been expecting was the rush of memories that sought purchase in his mind. Harrison's memories and emotions, too many of them. Eobard squeezed his eyes shut, as if that would stop the process, but they kept coming. Tess featured in so many of them, intimate moments that terrified Eobard – not just sex, but the closeness of lives lived in concert.

As the flood stopped, Eobard opened his eyes and found himself holding the desiccated corpse of Harrison Wells. He’d tried to be prepared for this, but it hurt. He was truly alone now, except for the memories.

Despite Eobard’s unfamiliarity with this body, it didn't take much time to dig a grave, to redistribute the undergrowth to hide what he'd done. From the dampness in the air, the clouds rushing in to cover the moon and stars, it was likely to rain tonight, erasing whatever trace evidence Eobard left behind. It seemed fitting.

He didn't linger at the makeshift gravesite. There was nothing here but the husk of a man who still had a lifetime's work to do.

A light patter of raindrops chased him back to the car. Eobard looked into the vanity mirror and tried to map the face he saw to the man he was. It wasn't all that difficult. He liked this face, the strong planes, the slight flaws in skin tone and texture. It was unique, the lines fanning out from the eyes and bracketing the mouth were earned, not created in some lab based on a genetic ideal.

Adapting to this appearance was going to be easy. Dealing with the memories now living in his brain was not. He felt everything and it hurt, grief and anger and fear. The loss of Tess felt like the death of his speed, the erasure of the Flash from history.

But he couldn't let these memories stand in his way. There was too much to do.

Except that Eobard was not as cold-blooded as he should have been. He spent the night at the same anonymous motel that Tess and Harrison had been at right before the accident. And the following morning, before he started the return journey to Central City, he paid a visit to Tess Morgan Wells' grave. He said nothing, but left a single yellow rose as a gesture of respect.
During the long drive back to Central City, Eobard ruthlessly suppressed Harrison's memories. By the time he returned home, the sky had cleared and a brisk wind signaled that winter was imminent, and he felt he had control over his emotions. He was merciless when he went through the house, removing everything that would indicate that someone else lived here. Harrison's hospital bed would be delivered to a local hospice charity. Clothes – Eobard's, not Harrison's – were bagged for anonymous donation. Harrison's books would be dropped off at the university library. In a few weeks, Eobard would call in an interior designer and have Harrison’s suite made over to remove the evidence of a resident with a chronic illness.

And Harrison's personal goods – his precious photo albums filled with the memories that now resided in Eobard’s mind – Eobard burned in the outdoor fire pit. He saved nothing, not a single picture.

The man that had been Harrison Wells was soon nothing more than ashes. The man that was Harrison Wells now was an enigma, a blank slate. A man without a past, because he needed to go back to the future. Eobard watched the last of the flames die into embers and he went inside.

He needed to know if the future was going to happen.

After Harrison had discovered Gideon, Eobard had fitted out part of his own bedroom closet with a data cabinet, to give Gideon the logical expansion space the A.I. needed. Of course, he and Harrison had prepped Gideon for the transition and the A.I. responded as usual when Eobard unlocked it with his new palm print.

"Good evening, Professor Thawne."

"Thank you, Gideon. However, from now on, please refer to me as 'Doctor Wells'."

"As you request, Doctor Wells."

That settled, Eobard took a deep breath and asked, "Show me the future."

A new image was displayed, a headline from April, 2024:

FLASH MISSING
VANISHES IN CRISIS

For the first time since Harrison's death, Eobard smiled.

Present Day

Eobard felt emptied out, hollow. While he'd always prepared for the day when he'd have to tell Barry the truth about the night Nora had died and the inevitable fallout, he'd never imagined telling Barry about Harrison. His Harrison.

Barry was quiet and his hands stilled. Then Eobard grew cold when Barry pulled them away.

Eobard sat up and looked at Barry, who was – to his shock – crying.

"What's the matter?" Eobard couldn't help but feel that he'd somehow disgusted Barry.

Barry wiped away the tears. "Sorry. I'm so sorry for you."
"For me? Why?" Eobard didn't understand Barry's grief.

"You lost someone you loved and you never had the chance to grieve. Not just for Harrison, but for yourself. You never allowed yourself to grieve. You had to be that man and live his life."

Barry reached for him, but Eobard pulled away. He was stunned. Barry was grieving for him.

"You still have his memories?" Barry asked.

Eobard admitted, "Yes. They're still there, in the background. Sometimes they rise to the surface and I can't quite control my feelings."

"That's what you meant when you said you would look at Jesse and feel overwhelmed. The memories and feelings were an unforeseen consequence of the DNA transfer."

"Yes." Eobard stared at his hands. "Most of the time, Harrison's memories are dormant, but then there are times when I can't keep them back. They push their way forward and take over. I feel lost when that happens."

"Or, they are a part of you that existed even before the DNA transfer – from listening to Harrison talk about her. What happened then just completed the circuit. They are as much a part of you as your own memories. They're not taking over, you're just remembering."

Barry made sense, but Eobard didn't want to let himself believe that. "Maybe. Sometimes, before the accelerator explosion, I'd just start crying. I'd hear her voice, I'd hear Harrison's reply, and I'd feel like a thief." Eobard still couldn't look at Barry. "I don't think you'd much like the man I was before Harrison died."


They both knew how silly that question was. Eobard Thawne of this earth had never been a nice man. "That man is as unlike the person I was before Harrison as possible." Eobard shook his head, disgusted by the memory of his former self. "I was cold, selfish, amoral."

Barry, of course, disagreed. "Not so cold that you wouldn't save a man's life."

"For my own selfish ends," Eobard reminded Barry.

"Had you been as amoral as you seem to think you were, you would have stolen Harrison Wells' life as soon as you could. Why didn't you think of the DNA transfer before Harrison joked about you taking his identity? Had you been truly selfish, you would have thought of a way to do that as soon as possible. Why put yourself through years of caring for a sick man, propping him up emotionally, physically, financially? You didn't need Harrison Wells the man, you only needed his face and his reputation."

Eobard wasn't mollified. "You always try to see the best in the villains, don't you? The best in me."

"And you're always so quick to run yourself down, to diminish yourself. You spent five years trying to make Harrison's dream a reality. The next ten years trying to rebuild the timeline."

"I messed up the timeline. I was trapped here. I took care of Harrison because it fit into my plans. I needed to get home."

Like his Harrison, Barry had a counter-argument to everything. "Did providing around-the-clock
nursing care fit in with your plans? What about building a house to accommodate someone who was going to have mobility issues?"

"I needed that for my own masquerade, eventually." Eobard knew that defense was weak. "And besides, I never built the observatory Harrison asked for."

Barry shook his head, clearly frustrated by Eobard's counterclaims. "What about listening to Harrison talk about Tess? Telling you the same stories over and over again. What was the cold, selfish, and amoral reason for doing that? Or what about giving Tess a dignified burial? Going to her grave after Harrison died? What did you get out of that?"

"Barry, stop. Enough."

"No, Eo. You stop. Stop running yourself down. Stop thinking that you are some kind of terrible monster. You're not. You're a man who made a bad decision and then spent a lifetime trying to fix it."

"You forget, I was the Reverse-Flash for a decade. We were mortal enemies. I hated you. We fought and I always tried to kill you."

"Because I disappointed you."

"Not really a good reason for becoming a villain." Eobard wasn't backing down.

Barry wasn't backing down, either. Not his Barry, not the man who looked at him and saw a hero, someone of worth. "Is that timeline still intact? Not from the way I see it. Everything you've done has been to change that fate. You are a hero, Eobard Thawne. Not just because you're a speedster, but because you know what it means to love and hurt and want the people you care about to be happy and safe."

Eobard still had pieces to play, he still had points to score against himself. "I killed Cisco in that alternate timeline."

Barry didn't seem to have a glib answer for that. His reply was measured, "And you'll pay for that – Cisco's never going to let you off the hook for what might have done to him."

"What about Simon Stagg?" Eobard doesn't exactly have mixed feelings about Stagg. But he knew how Barry felt about murder.

"What's the point, Eo? Why keep bringing up every terrible thing you've done?"

Eobard shrugged. He knew why he was doing this. And Barry knew, too.

Barry said, "You're never going to prove to me that you're unworthy. I will never look at you and see you as anything less than the hero you are."

Eobard wants to shake some sense into Barry. "You look at me through rose-colored glasses. You see the man you want me to be."

"I look at you and see the man who risked everything for me. The man who – twice - wouldn't let my death stand in his way. I see a man who isn't perfect, who is flawed and difficult and has done things that are…" Barry paused and licked his lips before continuing, "Pretty selfish and kind of horrible. But I also see a man who did everything he could to make things right. I see a man of almost infinite courage and heartbreaking personal cowardice. I see the man that I trust and I love, and will spend an eternity loving."
"Barry – " Eobard could hardly get those syllables out from the emotions crowding his throat.

"I have a very simple question for you, Eobard Thawne. What do you want?"

The hurt child, the angry man who'd been wronged by his hero, the loner, the freak, and the misunderstood genius were, for the first time, in absolute agreement with the rational scientist, the adult who believed in his own power. Who believed in Barry Allen – not just The Flash, but the man underneath the suit.

Eobard said, “I want you. I want that eternity. I want your love and I want to love you. Is that possible?"

Barry leaned against Eobard, burying his face against Eobard's neck. Eobard felt the heat from Barry's tears and he couldn't hold himself apart any longer. He held onto Barry and let himself believe in the dream of their future.

Barry murmured against his skin. "It's possible, Eobard. You make everything possible."

Cisco was worried. He and Caitlin had been watching the monitor for hours, but nothing. Barry and Thawne were still inside the Time Vault, still thrashing things out. Hopefully with words, not fists.

Every once and a while, Cisco would pick up Barry's old emblem and focus. He'd get feelings, nothing more, which was fine. It meant that Barry – and presumably Thawne – were still alive.

Caitlin asked, "How much longer do you think they'll be at it? It's been close to four hours."

"No clue." Cisco checked the time, it was close to six. "Look, if you want to go – you should. This is a long time to be on emotional high alert. I'm not getting any sense of anything going wrong."

Caitlin gave him an appreciative look. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'll turn the monitors on in my workroom. The place needs some cleaning up."

"Okay. Thanks, Cisco."

"No problem."

Caitlin was out the door like a shot. Cisco pushed the video from the monitor to his tablet, then when he got down to his workroom, he pushed it back to a monitor.

He was mostly exaggerating about needing to clean up, although there were always little things to put away. He putters around, avoiding the great big mess, right in the middle of the workbench. That cursed suit.

Cisco glared at it, and then glanced up at the monitor just at the moment that the Time Vault opened and Thawne and Barry stepped out, both of them looking – well – happy. No sign of any physical damage, no need to call Caitlin. Barry paused, pulled out his phone and typed. Cisco's phone buzzed almost immediately with an incoming text. Thawne looked up at the cameras and winked. Then they both disappeared in a blaze of yellow and red lightning.

Cisco looked at what Barry must have sent him. "Evrythings good Futures gonna be long & hppy".

And at that, Cisco thought – Let's just see. 
He closed his eyes, touched the suit, and was immediately sucked into a vibe.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

All of the lies have been revealed. The life of Eobard Thawne and Barry Allen, together as speedsters, can begin in truth.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Epilogue - April, 2024

"Stop fidgeting." Harrison pushed Eobard's hands away from his bowtie and fixed the offending article of clothing.

Eobard looked in the mirror, glared at the man standing behind him, his genetic doppelganger, and asked, "Why are you my best man?"

"Because you asked me?" Harrison Wells of Earth-2 shot back.

Eobard closed his eyes and tried to find the patience he'd once been so known for. He tried to remember the man who had waited for fifteen years to return to a future that he'd thought he wanted. But that man didn't seem to exist anymore. This Eobard Thawne was now a nervous wreck.

"You have the ring?" he asked.

"Yes, I have the ring."

"Show me."

Harrison rolled his eyes, but he did as Eobard asked, taking a soft velvet bag out of his breast pocket, opening it up and dropping the simple gold band onto his palm. "See, here it is."

Eobard took a deep breath. "Okay, put it away."

"Why are you so nervous?" Of course, Harrison didn't shy away from the difficult questions. He was too much like the man who'd once given Eobard the most precious gift of all – not just his DNA, but his love and his trust.

"Because." Eobard knew he sounded like a child. How could he tell this man - not a stranger anymore, but a valued friend - that today was the culmination of a truly impossible dream?

"That's not an answer."

"Stop talking." Eobard turned on Harrison, his eyes glowing red.

But Harrison didn't flinch. "You don't scare me. That stunt hasn't worked on me for a while."

Harrison smirked and his own eyes lit with gold fire.

Eobard laughed and shook his head. It was either that or start to cry. "Isn't there something I need to sign? Paperwork? Marriage certificate?"
Harrison shrugged. "I have no clue. I'm not from around here, remember?"

"Well, go check." Eobard added, "please", if just because he suspected Barry would be annoyed at his rudeness.

Harrison didn't need to go check. Someone knocked on his door and then came in without waiting for permission. It was Cisco, of course, holding a file. "You'll want to sign this now."

Amused, Eobard shook his head. "Your timing, Cisco, is impeccable." Eobard took the papers and glanced over them. Barry had already signed them, and so had Iris West-Thawne, as his witness and best woman. The changes in the timeline seemed to have rewritten the fate of his ancestor's marriage to Iris West. As for his lack of genetic kinship with Iris, perhaps that too would be rewritten.

Caitlin had signed the marriage certificate as the second witness. It would have been a little strange to have this Harrison Wells sign a legal document, considering that he wasn't even a resident of this dimension.

The only blank space left was for Eobard’s own signature. Eobard took the pen that Cisco offered and paused before signing his name as Eobard Thawne. It's a strange sensation; everything he'd done in the years of his so-called exile had been under his Harrison's name. He'd signed thousands of documents as "Harrison Wells" and never gave it a second thought.

This, though, this mattered. This was the contract for the rest of his life, the documented proof of his right to be happy.

"Thawne?" Cisco interrupted his musings.

Eobard grinned and with deliberate care, signed his name with a flourish. "Here. Now, how much longer do I have to wait?"

Cisco tilted his head and gave Eobard a look. Cisco's eyes went full black for a few heartbeats and Eobard wondered what he was seeing.

It must have been good, because Cisco grinned – a familiar buoyant expression. "How about now?"

Eobard was about to run down to the Cortex, where the ceremony was to take place, where Barry was waiting for him. But Harrison stopped him, using just a little bit of his speed.

"You're forgetting something, besides your dignity." Harrison was holding a clear plastic box. "Hold still." He opened the box and took out the single perfect rosebud - a deep, rich scarlet - and pinned it to Eobard's lapel. It wasn't quite the same shade of Barry's suit, but it was close enough. Barry would wear a similar rose pinned on his suit lapel, only in dark yellow.

"Are we ready now?" Eobard clenched his fists and forced himself not to run. Cisco wasn't a speedster and nothing could happen until the celebrant arrived, which made racing down a trifle pointless. Although Eobard could just carry him. Harrison, though, wouldn't speed and that meant that the ceremony still would have to wait.

"Don't even think about it, okay?" Cisco stepped out of reach. "We're going to walk down to the Cortex like adults and arrive looking like we're going to a wedding."

Eobard grinned and snarked, because this was Cisco and he never would stop relishing the give and take between them. "How long did you work on your hair, Legolas?"

As Cisco's control over his powers had increased, his hair had started shedding color, turning a
strikingly pure white. Cisco had let it grow past his waist, earning the fond reference to the famous elven character. Cisco touched one of the braids at his temple a little self-consciously. "A few hours, but that's got nothing to do with anything."

Eobard nodded, looked over at his doppelganger, who just shook his head. "Then, shall we?"

As the wedding party left Eobard's office, music started to play in the hallway. A simple choral piece of crescendoing *alleluias*. Someone had a sense of humor.

But the music served the purpose that all processional music did. It enforced a steady pace and a building anticipation, although the latter wasn't something Eobard needed. He could feel a glowing warmth from the scrap of fabric that he still wore over his heart, signifying Barry's approach. The final *alleluia* faded away as Eobard approached the Cortex from the right. Flanked by Iris, Barry arrived from the left at the same time. Cisco went in, but Eobard stopped, immobilized by the sight of Barry in formalwear. Long and lean, he was a study in crisp monochrome, the stark black and white broken only by the yellow rose at his lapel. Barry was so beautiful, Eobard had a hard time believing he was real.

Then Barry smiled and the incandescent joy in his eyes broke the illusion of cool perfection.

Eobard held out his arm and Barry placed his hand atop it. Despite the unusual setting, they both seemed to understand the need for, and even relish, the formality of this moment. Another short piece of music played as they circled around the console and the guests organized themselves on either side. Cisco, as officiant, was waiting for them right in front of the recess where both of their suits were on display.

Eobard took his place next to Barry and their attendants took their positions. Joe West stepped forward, as did Eobard’s ancestor. Joe, of course, was "giving" Barry to him, and it somehow seemed fitting that Edward was giving *him* to Barry.

The music faded out and Cisco took a deep breath before beginning.

"Today, we are gathered in a familiar place, a beloved place, and although the story of Eobard Thawne and Barry Allen began long before they first exchanged words, it was here – in the Cortex – where their lives together truly commenced.

"I was there at that moment, and for many of the moments that followed – the good ones, the terrible ones, the terrifying ones – and I can say that if there are two people who truly belong together, it is Eobard Thawne and Barry Allen. And I should clarify that, Eobard and Barry of this Earth."

Laughter, like a gentle breeze, flowed through the Cortex. Harrison, Jesse, and Eobard Wells(?) were not the only Earth-2 guests, either; the West-Allens had accepted also the invitation. Barry had insisted and Eobard had given in, despite his instinctive revulsion at seeing someone who wasn't *his* Barry wearing Barry's face.

Cisco continued. "Barry and Eobard; the Flash and his Reverse. To strangers, this may sound like they are opposites, but as everyone here has learned, they are not opposites – they are the two sides of the same coin, complements. And yet, that metaphor isn't wholly appropriate, because there is tragedy in those words – neither side can ever see each other. Barry and Eobard, though, see each other most clearly. They see each other's flaws and faults, they see the brilliance and drive in the other, they see each other's passion and commitment. They see the truth in each other. They see love and they glory in it."

Eobard swallowed against the emotions that Cisco's words created and saw Barry blink rapidly, but
the tears fell anyway. Eobard reached out and wiped them away.

"We all share in this glory, as friends and family of Barry Allen and Eobard Thawne. Before I speak the words required by law, Eobard and Barry will exchange their own vows."

Eobard reached for Barry's hands and a bright spark crackled between them. Barry gasped and his eyes glowed gold for a brief second. Eobard wondered if his turned red. And then he gathered his thoughts and spoke.

"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. King Solomon wrote those true and beautiful words. He was, among other things, considered a wise man, but I have, on far too many occasions, shown a decided lack of wisdom. But my wisdom was not lacking when I fell in love with you, Barry. You are my heart, my soul, my guiding star. You anchor me and let me fly. Everything I am, the very man that I am, is because of you."

Eobard's voice broke on those last words, but he wasn't finished. "There is another line from the Song of Songs, which is most fitting for us – 'Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a gazelle or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices'. I will always make haste to you, my Barry, my heart, my beloved."

Eobard pulled one of Barry's hands to his lips and kissed it. Again, the spark crackled between them. Barry's vows stared out, appropriately, as a mirror to his own. "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. We have traveled a long path to this moment, to this happiness, to this perfect joy. The road hasn't been easy and the dangers have taken us beyond the boundaries of time and even life. On this road, we have been tested, we have been wounded, we have had our doubts and they have been soul-crippling. This journey has shown us the truths that others may have called lies, and we have also discovered that we are our best selves when we trust each other. Because from that trust, we can love each other fully and without condition.

'Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a gazelle or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices'. I will always make haste to you, my Eobard, my heart, my beloved."

Barry took Eobard's hand and kissed it, and the spark crackled for the third time. The gathered guests might have made a noise but Eobard didn't hear it, lost in Barry's gaze.

Cisco spoke, but his words were not an interruption, but a complement to Eobard's enraptured thoughts, *Barry is mine. I am his. Nothing else matters.*

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today, in the face of this company, to witness the joining in matrimony of Eobard Thawne to Bartholomew Henry Allen and of Bartholomew Henry Allen to Eobard Thawne."

Cisco continued through the familiar ritual and Eobard and Barry and the appropriate members of the wedding party responded as required.

"Do you, Eobard, take Barry to be your lawfully wedded husband, to live together in love and harmony, to give comfort and pleasure, to honor and respect him, for all the days and the nights of your life?"

"I do." *And I shall, for the eternity granted to us.*

"Do you, Barry, take Eobard to be your lawfully wedded husband, to live together in love and harmony, to give comfort and pleasure, to honor and respect him, for all the days and the nights of your life?"
"I do."

It was time for the rings, the simple gold bands they'd selected, talismans to carry them forward into the unending future. Harrison and Iris placed the rings into Cisco's outstretched hand.

"These rings, these perfect circles, are the physical representation of the unity between Barry and Eobard. They are now and forever will be unbroken, eternal and continuous."

Barry took one ring and slipped it on Eobard's finger and Eobard took the other and placed it on Barry's.

"And so, by the power vested in me by the State, I now pronounce you married."

Barry was haloed a haze of gold, the rest of the universe faded away. Eobard wanted to live in this moment forever.

"And oh, please kiss each other already."

_Ah, yes, we can do that._ Eobard reached for his husband and Barry came into his arms, more perfect than ever.

"I love you, my husband," Barry whispered. "Now and always."

"Yes, my love, my husband, now and always." Eobard leaned in and brushed his lips against Barry's.

In the weeks leading up to this moment, they'd joked about the wedding kiss. But there was no room for humor now. This was the moment of a lifetime, the culmination of a timeline ruined and repaired. Barry deepened the kiss and the power that lived in their DNA sang. No mere spark now, the lightning – red and gold – wrapped around them, benign and loving.

As Eobard kissed Barry, as Barry kissed him, Eobard heard voices sigh, yes. It could have been the guests, it could have even been the Speed Force, but for the fleeting moment that Eobard was conscious of anything other than his husband in his arms, he believed it was his Harrison and Tess, giving him their blessing.

FIN

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who has read and commented or kudo'd or who has just followed week in and week out. I appreciate your love and enjoyment of this story.

End Notes
Feel free to follow me at my tumblr Obscene Circus Ponies, and on my old school (and much beloved) Dreamwidth account.

And now that the story is done, I can share the prompt that started this - "Truth Serum". Ha! Bet no one was expecting that.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!