**Summary**

The Legends have officially broken time, which offers some rather unique opportunities. But a common thug wouldn’t have the knowledge to take advantage of it. Now... a time-traveling bounty hunter who worked for the Time Masters on the other hand, might have a few ideas. And after his encounter with a colder and harsher version of Snart from earlier in time, Mick
is willing to risk anything short of another betrayal to get the right version back.

And yeah, he might have to rescue Barry Allen in the process.

Notes

Yeah, this is probably a bad idea. And yeah, this will almost certainly be completely out of
date and wrong by the time the third season of "Legends of Tomorrow" or the fourth season
of "The Flash" start back up. The chances of them using anything that I've come up with is
almost zero. So canon will make this an AU almost instantly.

But I don't care. This idea is too good to pass up. And yes, I'll admit it. I miss having Snart
around and I don't want to leave Barry in the Speed Force (though we know the latter isn't
permanent). And just because the writers of the show forgot/ignore Mick's time as Chronos
doesn't mean that I have to do so. I've decided to take the scenarios established by the season
finales for the third season of "The Flash" and the second season of "Legends of Tomorrow,"
add some comic book science, and see what I can come up with.

I do not own DC comics, the CW, "Legends of Tomorrow," "The Flash," any of the
characters, or the concept of time travel or the Speed Force. If I did, then Leonard Snart
would have already popped back up from his sacrifice and would have spent the entire
season making snarky comments at Nate.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

*Los Angeles: April 4th, 2017*

Mick sat in the galley with a sandwich while scribbling on a napkin a series of equations that would make Professor Stein gawk.

After their attempt to visit Aruba in 2017 ended with the Waverider crashing in a weird amalgamation of various eras, it seemed pretty obvious that the team had now officially broken time. Not long after, the jump-ship returned with a very frustrated Rip Hunter who'd also ended up being dumped there. Time travel was officially off the table until someone figured out how to compensate for temporal damage. From there, all the nerds and geeks started theorizing with the history experts on how they were supposed to fix things when their attempts to time travel just dumped them in futuristic dino city. No one even batted an eye when the resident criminal remarked loudly that he was hungry and wandered off. It wasn't like the thug with a fondness for fire could possibly contribute to the conversation.

He took another bite of the sandwich as he worked, trying to ignore how recalling the weird math involved left Mick feeling cold and uneasy. He hated thinking about his excessive knowledge of time, timeships, the various oddities and quirks that messing with the time stream could produce, future technology, and tracking down targets across history. Sometimes a useful fact would bubble to the surface, but he mostly kept everything squashed down where he didn't have to remember that entire span of time. Mick would rather remain the straightforward, impulsive, crude, and violent guy that his criminal life shaped him to be than what those people made him.

He hated remembering that dark time after Snart left him in that forest and the Time Masters found him, breaking him down until they could rebuild Mick into their weapon. He hated anything to do with being Chronos.

But it was still there. It was still a part of him. The team didn't erase it from his skull. Snart and the others just managed to pull him back to who he used to be and he shoved the rest down, ignoring it and pretending that it wasn't there.

But he did have all that knowledge the Time Masters drilled into his head, trying to ensure he could hunt down even the most difficult targets in the most extreme circumstances. After all, how could they expect him to hunt down time pirates and the occasional rogue Time Master if they knew more than him? He had the knowledge they gave him to be their bounty hunter. And now that time had shattered, something only theoretical before and yet something they'd prepared for, Mick found himself drawing upon that knowledge.

This was a unique situation. And it offered unique opportunities.

Mick had rolled around the possibility in his head a few times in the months since Vandal Savage died permanently. He really wanted it. He wanted it almost as much as Sara wanted to save her sister. He'd even questioned Gideon, trying to find a speck of hope. But it was impossible. Even if he involved Ray and Stein, Mick knew it wouldn't work. So he fell back on more familiar and comforting pastimes like drinking, fighting, and burning lots of flammables. He just gave up.

But with time shattered, the circumstances had changed. And what was once impossible... was now
merely improbable.

Besides, recent events had managed to rip open old wounds again. And he'd softened enough from his time with the team that it seemed to hurt more.

He looked over the calculations again. Thinking about it still made him uneasy, reminding him of how it felt to be Chronos and he did not want to spend too much time in that mindset. But the equations should be enough to get him where he needed to go. Adjusting the time ship's settings to take the damage to the timestream into account, using the moment they encountered their alternate future selves as the starting point for the math, Mick should be able to time travel correctly.

He'd worked out a method to travel through the shattered timestream. And he knew exactly where to find a speedster and a geek with the power to open portals, both of which possessed a heroic streak to match Haircut's. If there would ever be a chance of making this work, it would be before the team fixed the current crisis and stabilized time once again.

Mick dropped his head and ran a hand along his scalp tiredly. Devising plans was never his strong suit. But he could do it a little. He'd watched Snart do it enough times over their long partnership and Chronos certainly could figure out how to capture or kill his targets, no matter the challenges. He just preferred letting someone else do it while he just fried or punched whoever got in their way. Between the headache from the math and the uneasy memories of his Chronos' days this all stirred up, part of him wanted to drop the idea and burn the napkin.

Burning something would be so satisfying right now. The flickering flame, the bright colors, and the pleasant warmth would be so beautiful and would quiet some of the turbulence in his head for a while. If he couldn't enjoy a vacation in Aruba, shouldn't he at least get a small fire?

But Mick couldn't ignore this chance. It wasn't as if he really had that much to lose and they didn't leave one of their own behind if there was even a slim chance. And not trying this would haunt him for the rest of his life.

Besides, he needed to do something right. The current mess was his fault. Or at least a version of him. The details were a little sketchy, but the treatment from his future self told him a lot. Apparently that Mick betrayed the team and sided with a harsher version of Snart and the Legion of Doom (still a stupid name). Reality was rewritten and time broke because of a future version of himself. A version that Mick was only a few hours from becoming before things changed.

He messed up. A lot. He might do a lot of good and he might have saved them at various times, but he'd also done a lot of stupid things that was bound to stay in the back of their minds. He didn't always think things through and sometimes it came back to bite him. There were plenty of reasons why so many of his teammates distrusted, disrespected, and disliked him far too often. He hated how much truth that past version of Snart spouted before the fight. Sometimes, but not always, they saw him as a dangerous animal on a leash they needed to watch closely rather than a part of the team. But he knew why they would.

Mick knew he'd betrayed them to the time pirates. And he'd come close to doing so again, his loyalty to any version of his partner coming into conflict with his loyalty to the team. He didn't want to do something that stupid again. He didn't want to give them any more reason to hate him.

Yeah, he'd gone soft. Or rather, people change. And yes, it clearly bothered him enough for his brain to conjure hallucinations. But it didn't bother him enough to try going back to the way he used to be. Not anymore. Not when one version of himself died trying to ensure he not make the same mistake.

Mick looked back at his scribblings one last time. He knew the equation and he knew where to plug
in the numbers. He didn't understand the science or why the equation produced the corrected settings. The Time Masters just gave him the relevant information. They wouldn't want their bounty hunter to fail to deal with his target due to a little thing like time breaking apart, after all. And he somehow managed to make it work despite the lack of formal education.

He was going to do this. He was actually going to do this. It was crazy.

Good thing Mick was crazy.

"Gideon," he said. "Is everyone still busy talking about how to fix this mess?"

"Ms. Jiwe and Dr. Heywood have moved towards the library to do research and Mr. Jackson is doing repairs from the crash. Everyone else is where you left them, Mr. Rory," reported Gideon.

Taking a final bite of his sandwich, Mick said, "You know what I'm going to do, don't you?"

"Based on some of our past conversations, the current condition of the timestream, and what is written on that napkin," said Gideon with something resembling concern in her tone, "I have a fairly reasonable prediction. Are you certain you want to attempt this?"

"Got to try," he said with a shrug. "He'd do the same for me. In fact, he did. It could have been me blown up by that thing. So I'm going." Standing up from the table, he asked, "Keep an eye on these idiots while I'm gone. And don't tell them I'm leaving."

There was a moment of silence before Gideon said, "If Captain Hunter or Captain Lance ask directly, I will have to inform them. But I can remain quiet on the topic for a little longer."

"Thanks," Mick said, stuffing the napkin in his pocket.

"Good luck, Mr. Rory."

With that brief exchange, Mick headed out. His first stop was to grab his Heat Gun. Even if he didn't plan to do any fighting in the near future, he had no intentions of going unarmed. Especially since his plans rarely go smoothly. Once his weapon was in his holster and he took a final look around his chaotically-messy quarters, Mick slipped back into the hall.

Right outside the jump-ship, just as he opened the door, an unexpected voice said, "Mick? What are you doing?"

He closed his eyes briefly before turning to face her. Standing at the end of the hall was their newest teammate, the former JSA member from the 1940s with the magic necklace. Mick could admit that Amaya was an attractive woman, but he was perfectly fine with her being a friend and ally. And she clearly had a thing for Nate and vice versa. Animal magnetism or something. He rather liked spending time with her and she seemed to think there was more to him than violence and flames, which was a miracle since they started out with a knife to his throat. But Mick really didn't want to talk to her right now.

She was there, though. So he might as well face things head on.

"Do you trust me?" he asked.

"What?" asked Amaya, blinking in surprise at his question.

"We both know what almost happened. What I did or almost did. What the other me did. Handing over the Spear to Snart from 2014. I didn't do it this time, but I apparently did the first time around.
And you ended up dead," he described. "The team didn't say a word after it was all over, but we know I would have. So tell me. Do you trust me?"

Amaya didn't immediately answer. She simply stared at him with a thoughtful expression, crossing her arms. Mick hoped she would hurry up. He didn't know how long the others would be distracted.

"He was your partner for years," said Amaya slowly. "Even if I didn't see it, there must have been something in him that made your partnership worth it. That would make him part of this team eventually."

"He was at his coldest and most ruthless point when Thawne and the others recruited him. Working with people he didn't trust for too long. Finding out he was destined to die in a few years probably didn't help either."

"And the team doesn't always act as if they respect or like you, though we both know they do care," she continued. "They... underestimate you sometimes. I understand the temptation you must have faced. I'm not happy that you almost turned against us, but you didn't. None of us are perfect. I've had to face my own flaws since joining. So yes, I still trust you."

Mick didn't give himself a chance to reconsider. He pulled out the napkin and memorized the relevant numbers. Then he handed it over to Amaya.

"Then I need you do something for me. Wait ten minutes and then give that to the Professor. It should help. I just need a bit of a head start."

"You're leaving?" asked Amaya, her tone a mixture of confusion and concern.

He produced a sound that was not quite a chuckled and not quite a grunt of acknowledgment. Having someone worry about him like that was still a novel concept. While he and Snart had been partners for decades and watching each other's backs during that time, it wasn't the same as this. Snart used to express his concern when plans went wrong by chewing him out for not listening to what he was supposed to do, which eventually led to their partnership straining. After one particularly bad job that with him hurt from one of his fires, they ended up splitting off until they teamed back up in Central City a few months later. Just because they were partners for so long didn't mean that the partnership wasn't volatile on occasion. Especially when they were both at their worst.

Having teammates who worried about him without framing it as concern over the possibility of failure was something that didn't happen much until after Rip recruited them. It was yet another change that came from hanging out with these hero types. Associating with heroes just seemed to cause change all around.

It changed Snart. And it had changed Mick.

"I've got to, Amaya. I have to fix this."

"And you can't tell me any more than that?"

"I can tell you that it's important. I can tell you that if it works, the team will get back something we miss. And if it doesn't work," he said, pausing briefly as he looked back at the jump-ship, "the only thing lost won't really matter."

He still recognized some doubt in her eyes as she looked between the napkin and him. But for reasons he still didn't completely understand, Amaya liked and trusted him enough by now to accept his vague explanation.
"Then I won't stop you. I don't know how far you can go with the timestream broken like this, but I
won't stop you," she said.

A quick nod of thanks and he started to climb into the jump-ship. Then a thought occurred and Mick
paused.

"And Amaya? Keep an eye on Haircut while I'm gone," said Mick. "Otherwise he'll probably get
himself eaten by a dinosaur or something. And make sure Axel gets fed."

She smiled at his words in a knowing fashion. And with a short nod of agreement to his request,
Amaya turned and vanished down the hall. Mick took that as his cue to get in and start adjusting the
jump-ship's navigational settings. He needed to leave before the entire team started questioning him.

"So having us meet our alternate future selves, attempting to time travel with our alternate future
selves, Mr. Thawne bringing in dozens of his past versions simultaneously, and reality being
rewritten all at the same point put too much strain on the timeline," summarized Stein. "And from
that specific point, time began to crack."

"But it took a little while to completely fracture," Ray continued. "That's why we could return the
surviving members of the Legion of Doom to their rightful times before everything went wrong."

Pacing around the captain's quarters, Sara said, "Great. So we know what happened and how. Now,
how do we fix it and how do we get out of the weird futuristic dinosaur city?" She glanced over at
the previous captain of the Waverider and asked, "Did the Time Masters ever have a contingency
plan for this sort of thing?"

"Actually, yes," he said. "If the timestream broke, all the Time Masters are supposed to return to the
Vanishing Point until our greatest minds can study the phenomenon and devise a solution. And since
the Vanishing Point is outside of time, we would actually be able to reach it without getting knocked
into a mishmash of history like this place." Running a hand through his hair, Rip said, "But since we
put an end to the organization, that's not really an option anymore."

"Perhaps we can find a workaround," suggested Stein, adjusting his glasses. "If we could
compensate for the fractures to the timestream, we might be able to navigate through time again."

That sounded promising. If they could get the Waverider back into the Temporal Zone without it
spitting them back out, they would stand a better chance of fixing things than if they were stuck. If
they solved at least that one problem, maybe they could start working on the bigger issue.

"Can you figure it out, Stein?"

Straightening, the man said, "Of course. It just might take me a day or two to figure it out. There are
a lot of variables to take into account and predicting the patterns of how time shattered is not
something I have attempted before, but I am quite confident that I should be able to work it out fairly
quickly."

Sara nodded, sharing his confidence. There were certainly benefits to having several geniuses on
board. She, and probably Rip, would be the first to admit that the team wasn't exactly the easiest to
lead. They were a chaotic mess of personalities, quirks, and skills that sometimes made her feel like
she was back babysitting again. But they were all very good at what they do when given the chance.
So if Professor Stein claimed he should be able to get them time-traveling again, then she believed
him. And she also believed that they would find a way to fix time itself.

"I think this might help with that," said Amaya, striding into the room with a confused Nate trailing
behind her.

Sara didn't know what to expect as the woman handed over a paper napkin to Stein. But from how his eyebrows shot up, it was clearly not what he expected either. His mouth worked silently a few times as he read over whatever was scribbled on it.

"Astonishing," he said in awe. "This... This equation is exactly what we need in order to compensate for the damage to time. It's even been solved for the specific instant in history that it started from. Did... did you find this in the library somewhere? Or did Gideon have this in her data banks? How did you find this?"

"Actually, Mick gave this to me. I think he solved it," said Amaya.

That produced a reaction from everyone in the room. Various looks of shock and disbelief overtook their faces as they stared at her. Stein looked like his entire world had flipped upside down. And possibly like his brain was faltering at the very idea.

"Mick? Mick Rory? He did this?" he stammered. "That's... That's not... How?"

"How would Rory know enough to figure this out first?" asked Nate. "I mean, he's not exactly an expert on temporal matters."

"Mr. Rory might not be," Rip said slowly. "But Chronos certainly would know about it."

That darkened the mood in the room. None of them really wanted to remember that part of their history as a team. In fact, they tended to forget about it the majority of the time. Mick made it so easy, never mentioning or even hinting at his time as a Chronos if he could help it and acting like the dumb brute around them.

"I'm not exactly sure who Chronos is," said Nate. "Anyone?"

"Oh, right," Ray said. "We never really told you and Amaya about this part. Before he really became a team player, Rory kind of... tried to betray us to time pirates so he and Snart could go home. So Snart decided to strand Rory somewhere out of the way until the mission was over. I guess he planned to pick him up five minutes after leaving, that way he wouldn't cause any more trouble or hurt anyone. But the Time Masters got a hold of him first. They brainwashed Rory into working for them, turning him into one of their best bounty hunters and sending him after targets all throughout time. Including after us."

Understanding spreading across his face, Nate said, "And they called him 'Chronos,' right? And if he went after people across history, he would have picked up a lot of things."

"Like apparently revolutionary techniques for correcting for temporal damage while time traveling," Stein said in a strained voice, clearly not handling it well.

"So what happened?" asked Amaya.

"We managed to capture Chronos and figure out who he was," Ray said. "It wasn't exactly easy, but Snart managed to eventually reach his old partner. Rory rejoined us and we headed to the Old West to lie low for a while. That's when we met Jonah Hex and I became sheriff."

"Hey," called Jax as he jogged into the office. "What's going on, Grey? I can't concentrate with how much you're freaking out."

"I'm not freaking out, Jefferson. I am merely... disconcerted," he said. "The notion that Mr. Rory
would solve this problem before I could even make a proper attempt is highly unexpected. It just took me a moment to adjust."

Jax crossed his arms and smirked at his partner. Having a psychic connection meant trying to downplay his reaction was doomed to failure.

"Okay," said Sara, trying to wrestle things back on topic. "Gideon, tell Rory to meet us on the bridge. If he knows about how to navigate through a shattered timestream, then he can join us and help fix this mess."

"I'm afraid that is quite impossible, Captain Lance," reported the A.I. calmly. "Mr. Rory took the jump-ship and departed approximately fifteen minutes ago."

That announcement sparked off a series of shouts and questions from the team. For a few moments, it was pure chaos and individual words were impossible to decipher. Sara managed to notice that Amaya was silent and didn't even look surprised. But most of Sara's focus needed to remain on the fact that their arsonist wasn't on board.

It would be different if he'd said something before leaving. If he's said he was going to see if there was something worth stealing in one of the buildings or to see if he could fight a dinosaur, that would have made sense. And if he wanted to go back to their own time, which he could apparently accomplish since he knew how to deal with a broken timestream, Sara would understand. After all, Rip tried to retire from the team and move on. He just couldn't go very far before he got tossed back by time breaking. And there were days she was surprised the arsonist stayed with them after Savage was dead, the Time Masters killed, and Snart gone.

But by now she knew he at least cared enough about the team he would at least say goodbye if he ever decided to leave them. If he wanted to go back to the criminal life or something, there would have been something. Mick didn't tell them. He just went to grab something to eat and then vanished.

Something was up. Sara could feel it.

"He left? Why didn't you say anything, Gideon?" Rip asked.

"Mr. Rory requested I not tell anyone and no one asked about his location before now."

Looking a little forlorn, Ray asked, "But why would he leave? Is he worried we're mad at him about what the other Rory did? Because we're not, right?"

"He can't travel that far, even if he has the cheat codes for a broken timeline," said Sara. "He has maybe one good trip through time in the jump-ship, even with Jax's upgrades. We'll just catch up with him and see what's going on. Gideon, any idea where he's heading?"

"I've tracked the jump-ship to Nanda Parbat on November 20th, 1960," the A.I. reported.

Sara frowned at the time and location. That was only months after her second stint in the League of Assassins. Or her first since time travel complicated things. While Mick heading to 2017 Central City or even Aruba made sense, she couldn't figure out why he would leave without warning to visit Nanda Parbat of all places. What could he want there?

"Uh, out of curiosity, did anyone ever do something about Chronos' timeship?" asked Jax slowly. "The one he left camouflaged and parked right outside Nanda Parbat in 1960?"

All the original members of the team exchanged uneasy and sheepish looks. With everything that happened that day, they didn't know what to do with the thing. They just left it there, intending to let
the Time Masters deal with it after Savage was gone. Because Rip still believed they would eventually see reason. But that was before the team realized just how thoroughly corrupt the upper members of the organization were and the destruction of the Oculus. And afterwards, they were too busy protecting history on their own for several months. One hidden and abandoned timeship managed to slip their minds.

But clearly not Mick's. And if he reached his old timeship, he could go throughout history however much he wanted and they may never find him. Not unless they could figure out his ultimate goal.

Remembering how unsurprised she was at learning of his departure, Sara asked, "Amaya, do you have any idea what he's after?"

"Mick said he's trying to get back something," said the woman, glancing down momentarily with a thoughtful expression. "Something the team misses. Something important."

"Well, that's vague and not very helpful," Ray remarked. "That could be almost anything."

"I believe Mr. Rory intends to retrieve Mr. Snart," said Gideon.

Chapter End Notes

Just in case you're wondering, the next chapter should have appearances by some of the characters from "The Flash." Not to mention technobabble, comic book science. While I'll certainly draw upon some real science later on, there is only so much I can do when it comes to time travel and the Speed Force.

Besides, in "The Flash" episode "Family of Rogues," Leonard Snart used his Cold Gun to freeze the security laser beams to access a vault. I repeat, Snart FROZE LIGHT. If they are bending science enough to do that on the show, I think my eventual technobabble should be fine.
The Variables Have Changed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nanda Parbat: November 20th, 1960

The Shadowslicer, his old timeship, was exactly where he left it months ago. Clearly the neighboring assassins never did find the invisible craft tucked out of the way. Mick hesitated briefly when confronted with pieces of previously-frozen and shattered bits of flesh that had been left on the floor for months. He'd been informed of how his partner escaped the cuffs. That didn't prepare him to face the direct evidence of that action, the chunks decomposing the entire time. Cleaning it up was even less pleasant. But he took care of it as quickly as possible while trying not to imagine what it would have been like to witness Snart's escape.

If he could have done it, Mick would have arrived just a day or so after the timeship was abandoned. It would have been easier. But even with the adjustments to compensate, time was still broken and the journey was rough enough to rattle his teeth as he tried to fly the jump-ship towards his destination. Aiming for a more precise day would be too much to hope for. Even landing within a few months of his target date was an accomplishment. Hopefully the Shadowslicer would be more stable and the next part of his journey would be more accurate than what he could achieve with the jump-ship.

The Shadowslicer wasn't exactly like the Waverider. They were built with very different purposes in mind for the respective captains. Where the Waverider had several rooms to house a decent sized crew and make them feel comfortable, the Shadowslicer had several secure cells for imprisoning captives for when the Time Masters wanted a target alive and more extensive weapons for when they didn't. The medbay was in a different location and only had a single chair. There was no fabrication room because there was no need for stealth. The layout of the timeship was completely different and the very atmosphere was darker and more intimidating.

And yet every inch of the place was intimately familiar to him. Mick didn't want to think about how long he spent in the Vanishing Point, being remade into their ideal tool. And he didn't want to think about how long he spent as Chronos, journeying all throughout time and hunting for countless targets. His team wasn't his first assignment. Not even close. He'd spent a long time on this ship. Mick just preferred to ignore the familiarity and shove it down with the rest of his memories as Chronos as much as possible.

And yet every aspect of his current plan depended on his knowledge from his time as Chronos. How's that for ironic?

Striding towards the bridge, Mick yelled, "Hey, Gabriel. Wake up. We've got places to go."

Lights flickered on as the ship's A.I. came back online, a greenish hue painting the walls. Gabriel didn't seem to have quite as much personality as Gideon and he certainly didn't chat with the A.I. much during his time as a bounty hunter. But Mick knew Gabriel should have kept everything in a useable state.

"What is our destination, Chronos?" asked the chipper masculine voice, not even bothering to ask where he'd gone for several months.

Mick flinched at the name. He should have expected it. He should have expected Gabriel to call him
by that name. It wouldn't have bothered him if he'd been prepared. He should have known it would come up. It was what he went by during his entire bounty hunting career. That didn't mean he enjoyed the reminder.

"Don't call me that," Mick snapped as he started recalibrating the computer. "Forget about that name."

"What would you prefer then?"

"My name's Mick Rory. Not Chronos," he said sharply.

Gabriel replied, "By order of the High Council, I am not able to refer to you by that name."

"They're dead. And those that didn't die are still gone. Their orders don't matter anymore."

"I still cannot use that name for you, Sir."

Rolling his eyes as he finished the alterations, Mick said, "Then call me 'Heat Wave.' That's what the nerd in Central City came up with. He loved coming up with those nicknames."

Like Captain Cold. Snart loved it. The name really helped solidify his role as the Flash's opponent and equal. It helped make him more than a common criminal in the eyes of those who lived in that city.

"That name is acceptable," said Gabriel. "Very well, Heat Wave. What is our destination?"

Taking a seat, Mick said, "Back home. We're heading towards Central City, 2017. Aim for April, but we'll be lucky if we get there before Halloween."

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Los Angeles: April 4th, 2017

Sara could swear she felt her heart stop as Gideon's words sank in. It couldn't be true. It didn't make sense. What was Mick thinking? It was impossible. They knew that. He was gone. Leonard Snart was dead. She knew he was dead and not even time travel could bring him back.

Silence swallowed them all up. No one moved or spoke for a moment. Even a member of the League of Assassins would have trouble sneaking anywhere in the absolute dead silence.

"But didn't we just drop Snart off in 2014?" asked Nate. "Why would Rory go back and grab him?"

"Mr. Rory is not retrieving Mr. Snart from that point in time," Gideon clarified. "He intends to retrieve Mr. Snart from when he destroyed the Oculus."

Stepping forward, Rip said, "That is impossible. Even Mr. Rory should realize that."

"He seemed confident in his decision and the plan seems sound, if hazardous," Gideon said. "We discussed it thoroughly in the months after the death of Vandal Savage."

"And you never mentioned any of this to the rest of us?" asked Sara.

"I didn't mention you researching Damien Darhk in order to kill him before he could murder your sister either," Gideon replied.

Sara ducked her head briefly, accepting the calm admonishment from the A.I. without complaint. Gideon certainly had a point. It wasn't exactly her finest hour.
"But it is impossible," repeated Rip, each word slow and tense.

"Why? It isn't like time can break any more than it already has," Nate said, gesturing towards the front of the timeship and the herds of prehistoric beasts wandering around outside.

Burying his face in his hands briefly, Rip said, "But the Oculus was in the Vanishing Point. And the Vanishing Point exists outside of time. You don't age there, meaning you could spend lifetimes there without dying. There is no past and no future. Not really. There is only the present there. Even with a timeship, Rory won't be able to go back to that event. If he goes to the Vanishing Point, he'll only find the partially-destroyed ruins."

"Ruins caused by the destruction of the Oculus," reminded Gideon. "Destruction caused by a massive temporal computer powered by a scaled-down supernova that channels time unlike anything else. The readings recorded from the explosion indicates there were two waves of energy that occurred during the event within nanoseconds of each other. The initial demonstrated a unique signature before being overwhelmed by the second. That was the focus of my discussions with Mr. Rory."

"Really?" Stein asked, adjusting his glasses. "Could I see these readings?"

"Later, Grey," said Jax. "You can work on theories after we find Rory."

Ray crossed his arms and asked, "What exactly about that signature interested Mick so much? Because this is starting to remind me of when everyone thought an explosion killed me, but I was only shrunk."

"While the secondary wave of energy was more standard for an explosion and would have been the result of the scaled-down supernova serving as a power source, the initial blast within the chamber was composed mostly of a form of temporal energy," Gideon reported. "Theoretically, the disrupted temporal anomaly produced by the initial blast would result in everything existing within that area and in that instant being captured and frozen permanently. It would create a limited, disconnected, and isolated moment existing parallel to the rest of reality. Like a photograph of that event. Intact, but inaccessible."

"Astonishing," said Stein. "What you're describing is intriguing, as if a moment of time was sliced out of the timeline and set aside. Everything in that room would have been preserved precisely as it was, but only in that instant. No time would pass."

Staring at the older scientist, Ray said, "And since he would need to be right on top of the explosion, that would include Snart, wouldn't it? That's what you meant, Gideon. That's what Rory is doing, trying to get Snart out of that disrupted temporal anomaly. Because if time is frozen there, then it wouldn't have killed him. Snart is alive. Just... paused."

He's alive. Leonard Snart is alive. He was actually alive. The thought kept echoing around Sara's head.

She'd grieved for him and Laurel. She lost them both so close together and it hurt so much. With Laurel, she never had the chance to say goodbye. And with Leonard, they'd been on the verge of seeing what they might be together. And while she'd tried desperately to find a way to use time travel to save at least one important person in her life, she known there would be no changing what happened to him. There was no monster she could kill to undo everything and there was no body she could drag to the Lazarus Pit, even if she wanted to make him go through something like that and risk him returning with no soul or with an unstoppable bloodlust.
There had been nothing she could do.

But he wasn't dead. He was alive. They left him trapped. They left him behind. But he was still alive. And that meant there was hope.

"That's why he was so convinced at first," muttered Stein, stepping back until he could rest against the desk for support. "That's why he thought those hallucinations could have been real."

"What do you mean, Professor?" Amaya asked, turning towards him.

"Mr. Rory told me not to tell anyone. Rather firmly, I might add. But apparently he started hallucinating Snart around the time we visited Chicago. While eventually we determined that it was likely a manifestation of his survivor's guilt combined with his confliction about what the outcome of being part of the team might ultimately be for him, Mr. Rory initially had a different theory. Gideon and I managed to locate a chip in his head, the handiwork of the Time Masters. And Mr. Rory suggested that perhaps Mr. Snart had been knocked out of normal time by the explosion and the chip was somehow allowing him to perceive Mr. Snart." Gesturing sharply, he said, "That's why he came up with that idea. Because Snart is outside of normal time. And he knew that. Astonishing."

"Even if Mr. Snart somehow survived, he is as good as dead," Rip said tiredly, his shoulders slumping and his posture weary. "What you're describing may be possible, Gideon, but we can't do anything about it. We can't reach that frozen moment in the Vanishing Point. It is in the past of a place that cannot have a past. There is no way to get him back." He dragged a hand through his hair. "At least he wouldn't be aware of his state. Everything would have stopped completely. He wouldn't be suffering."

"The inability for anyone to access the disrupted temporal anomaly is why Mr. Rory eventually dropped the idea and accepted the loss of his partner as permanent," stated Gideon. "Even with all the variables and available resources carefully considered, we could not devise a solution."

Crossing his arms briefly and his brow furrowing, Jax asked, "So if the two of you decided it was impossible, why did Rory take off?"

"The variables have changed," said Gideon.

Pacing right behind Amaya as he dragged his hands down his face, Nate said, "We broke time. We broke time and somehow Rory thinks he can get Snart out again."

"Assuming that the damage was enough to affect the Vanishing Point," Rip said slowly, "he would still need a way to access the disrupted time anomaly. That single instant, created in the Vanishing Point of all places, would require a way to reach through both time and reality at the same time. How does Rory intend to do that?"

"Well, as a former criminal in Central City, Mr. Rory would be intimately familiar with a few heroes with those skill sets," said Stein uneasily. "Such as the Flash and his ability to use his speed to travel through time. And Cisco Ramon, or rather Vibe, and his ability to open breaches to other Earths and so on."

Everyone was silent for a moment, save for Rip muttering something under his breath about speedsters. Then Sara turned towards Jax.

"How fast can you get the Waverider moving again?"

"With some help, we should be able to take off in a couple hours," he said.
While the ride was still nowhere close to being smooth, the Shadowslicer's journey through time was less bumpy than his attempt with the jump-ship. The fact he arrived in June meant his alternations and a little more practice with the shattered timeline was enough to improve his piloting. But it still reminded of the time he got drunk and tried to fly the Waverider, something that Stein would probably complain about until the day he died. But he did make it fairly close to the time period he wanted.

Mick cloaked the timeship as soon as he arrived in the air space over the familiar city. They'd had an alien invasion just a few months ago, after all. He didn't want to start a panic that could end with someone trying to shoot him out of the sky. And after a quick circling of Central City, he found room to land in the parking lot right outside of STAR Labs.

One of the advantages of no one really wanting to work somewhere that once blew up and gave a bunch of people powers: there was always plenty of parking spaces available.

Breaking into STAR Labs was laughably easy. Mick could hardly call it a security system. Snart would be insulted if someone asked him to deal with it. Whenever this was over, Flash and his friends needed to really deal with the issue. Practically anyone could just stroll in off the street.

Heading inside, Mick noticed something big and destructive must have happened recently. Which honestly shouldn't surprise him at all. Scaffolding and buckets of plaster were next to the walls and there were clear signs of repair work. While not seriously burned, Mick still recognized the aftermath of an explosion when he saw it. What had these guys been up to since the alien invasion?

It also seemed to be empty of all human life, which wasn't really that helpful. He started poking around the place, looking for hints on where everyone might be and for things worth stealing. The computers and equipment were only partially replaced. Some of the rooms clearly hadn't been touched since the explosion, cleanup focusing on the more important parts of the building. And there was not a single soul in sight.

One of the rooms turned out to be some sort of lab, with all the materials and tools that implies. Mick wasn't anything close to a scientist, but there was one piece of equipment that he recognized. And no matter how important his current course of action might be, it drew him in. If the phrase wasn't too strong of a pun, Mick would say the object attracted him like a moth to the flame.

He didn't even realize he'd moved until he'd already lit the Bunsen burner. Every fire was unique and awe-inspiring in their own way. The tiny flame burned steadily, the gas fire not flickering like a wood one would and the intense blue fire more powerful than the one from his lighter. The blue, warm, and calm flame felt soothing to watch. Hypnotic might be a more accurate word. The fire was absolutely beautiful as it glowed steadily. He couldn't even think of looking away.

A yelp and a crash pulled him from his reflections. Mick blinked and tried to figure out how long he'd been there. He'd gotten better at not being distracted by fire during most fights, but there were no guarantees the rest of the time. And when given the chance, he could easily lose track of time until something yanked him out again or the fire extinguished. Which could take hours.

Still mildly annoyed at the interruption, Mick turned towards the source of the noise. Right at the doorway, a stack of paper and books piled around her feet, was a strange woman with wavy blonde hair. The only thing she'd managed not to drop in shock and surprise at his presence was her cellphone. She was tall, pretty, and definitely not the usual woman scientist who spent time with the Flash. He never kidnapped and nearly blew up this one.
"What... what are you doing here? Who are you?" she stammered nervously.

"You must be new around here," said Mick. "I like the other one better. Where's the rest of the nerds? I need to talk to them."

She took a step back as he reluctantly turned off the Bunsen burner and moved towards her. The woman looked like she was on the verge of running for her life. Compared to the types of women he'd been spending time with in recent months, it was a very different reaction. Mick held up his hands and backed away from the skittish figure. Scaring her to death wouldn't help anything.

"I'm not here for you," said Mick. "I'm looking for the Flash. Red around or did he move out of this disaster zone?"

She didn't look even slightly reassured. Then he noticed she was staring at his Heat Gun strapped in his holster. That probably explained some of her reluctance to trust him. Then he also noticed there was a flashing symbol on the screen of her cellphone. She'd pressed it without him noticing.

"Calling for help?" asked Mick, nodding his head at the cellphone. "Cops?"

"Better," she said.

The rush of wind and crackle of lightning announced the arrival of a speedster a split second before Mick actually saw him. But it wasn't the familiar red blur that normally raced through the streets of Central City. When the figure stopped, there was no hiding the truth. Unless the last few months managed to change his hair, skin, and costume color, he wasn't the Flash. Not the one he was looking for, at least.

But it only took him a few moments to recognize the young man behind the mask. He'd seen him around during the entire alien invasion situation. And from his dropped jaw, he recognized the arsonist as well.

"The costume is new. Yellow is an interesting choice," said Mick. "Got a name to go with it?"

"Mick Rory?" he asked, sounding a little stunned. Then, shaking off the surprise, he said, "Yeah, I'm Kid Flash. What are you doing here? Where's everyone else?"

"Wait, I know that name," said the woman. "Mick Rory? Isn't that Heat Wave?" She took yet another step back while he enjoyed the smugness of knowing he'd left an impression on people even after his time away. "Why do super villains keep coming after me?"

Leaning against the counter, Mick said, "If you keep hanging around with people like this, you'll run into plenty more. And I might be a criminal, but I've been working with the heroes lately." Shifting slightly, he said, "And I never caught your name before you called for help."

Shrugging slightly, the Kid Flash said, "I guess it doesn't matter if he knows. He's met most of us before. This is Tracy Brand. And I'm Wally West."

With a brief grunt of amusement, he said, "I think your old man arrested me once. Good times."

Mick smiled slightly at the memory of the arrest and escape, but Wally's smile was stronger and bright when he heard the comment. It made it obvious how strained and tired the young man looked before. It was as if he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. The hero types always take on way too much responsibility.

Once again, Mick asked, "So either of you want to tell me where Red is? I need to talk to him and
the nerd who invented the Heat and Cold Guns."

The two of them exchanged looks, some emotion midway between guilt and grief overtaking their faces. Mick instantly straightened up. Something was wrong. Something was wrong and neither wanted to tell him. And whatever was wrong had to do with the Flash and why he wasn't the one investigating the break-in at STAR Labs. He should have been here and wasn't. The entire plan was derailing before he could properly begin.

Make a plan. Execute the plan. Expect the plan to go off the rails. Throw away the plan. He'd seen his partner in action enough times that he knew how to adapt. He could still salvage this.

"Someone start talking," he said with a growl. "What happened and where's Barry Allen?"

The fallout from their final confrontation with Savitar a month ago was something all of them were still struggling with. They'd stopped the crazed speedster and saved Iris from her foreseen death. But they also lost H.R. instead, Caitlin left them, STAR Labs was partially destroyed by an explosion, and Barry was trapped in the Speed Force prison.

Cisco honestly wasn't sure what they would do long term. Wally was protecting the city as Kid Flash and everyone else was trying to gradually repair the damage to the building. But he didn't have a clue how to help Barry or how to convince Caitlin to come home. His friends were gone and he didn't know how to fix it. It honestly felt like they were stuck in a holding pattern.

But no matter how messed up everything seemed, some things remained the same. And one was that they all came running when one of their team called. Cisco literally jogged down the halls of STAR Labs until he reached the control room where Wally said to meet him. And whatever he expected to find there, that wasn't what he stumbled into.

Wally, Iris, and Joe were already standing around in a little group on one side of the room closest to where Barry's suit was displayed, still waiting for his return. Tracy was in the corner farthest from the main door, looking uncomfortable. Harry stayed close to her with an almost protective posture. And slouching in a chair with his feet propped on the closest computer and eating a cup of cherry Jello, was Mick Rory.

"Why is Heat Wave eating my Jello?" asked Cisco.

"Because you didn't have beer or anything to make a sandwich," he said, taking another bite.

"No, I mean, weren't you busy time-traveling with Stein and the others?" asked Cisco. "What are you doing back?"

He shrugged and said, "I'll tell you when the Flash is here. I'm not explaining twice."

Glancing briefly at Tracy, Harry, and the West family, Cisco said, "Uh, I really don't know how to explain this, but you might be waiting a while. He's..."

"Gone," finished Mick casually. "Junior over there already explained. He gestured at Wally, who didn't seem particularly pleased with the nickname. "Some crazy, alternate, evil, future version of the Flash was locked up in a prison in the Speed Force that a good future version of the Flash made specifically for him. Then this Savitar person did some time-traveling to try and kill the girl in a stable time loop." He gestured at Iris this time. "He didn't kill her, which erased him from existing. But apparently evil future Flash only happened if she died. But without someone in the Speed Force prison that good future Flash made specifically for Savitar, the Speed Force started falling apart. And the Speed Force showed up, looking like Barry's dead mother, and said the prison needs a prisoner
or it would break the whole world. Or something like that. So present Flash went in there to keep it stable because stupid sacrifices are what heroes do."

Mick took another bite while everyone stared. Cisco didn't remember the arsonist being this quick on the uptake.

"Time travel is kind of our thing," said Mick as an answer to the unspoken question. "And the Time Masters knew a lot about speedsters and the Speed Force thing. They really hated speedsters. I mean, really hated them. Especially the High Council. Time-traveling in a completely different way than anyone else and messing with all their neat little plans for the timeline? You should have heard them complaining. Probably would have sent bounty hunters after Barry and the rest if it wouldn't make things worse. Not to mention it's hard catching a speedster." The man smirked slightly. "So yeah, I heard them complain a lot about speedsters. How else do you think I knew Barry's name? Snart certainly never told."

Cisco considered asking what Mick had to do with these Time Master people. He didn't though. He had a feeling it would be a long story and they already had a lot on their plate.

"So you can see why waiting for Barry won't work," said Cisco.

"Can you get in there?" Mick asked, finishing off the snack.

Cisco blinked in surprise at the question. A quick glance showed the rest of the group had no clue what he was asking about either. Iris, who had grown mildly upset about being reminded of her fiancé's fate and looked away during the story, now seemed curious about where the conversation was going.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"The nerd. Vibe. Whatever. Can he get into the Speed Force place?"

Watching the arsonist with suspicion, Harry said, "He can. But Barry can't leave. That's the problem. He's trapped in the prison built into the Speed Force."

"Good thing I have experience handling a prison break," said Mick, dropping his feet from the computer and standing up. "If you can get me to Barry, I'll get him out."

Hope instantly bloomed in the faces of the entire West family. Joe's enthusiasm did seem to be tempered by the knowledge of who was offering the chance to bring his adopted son home. Iris, however, seemed to hold onto even the smallest possibility desperately. She needed that hope too much to care who provided it.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," said Cisco slowly, "but wasn't it your partner who made the plans? How do you expect us to believe that you've solve the problem in ten minutes like that?"

"Look, I don't see any of you coming up with any ideas. Do you want to help get your friend back or not?" Mick asked. "Because if you want something bad enough, you can't back down because your only option seems stupid. Or dangerous. I know how to get Red. And I'm stubborn enough to get what I want. Are you?"

Before anyone could respond, Julian finally arrived. He walked into the room, but froze when he caught sight of their guest. Even if he specialized in metas and he didn't arrive until after the height of Heat Wave's criminal career, Julian clearly recognized him. And he apparently didn't get the memo about Mick's change in career. The expression on Julian's face was priceless.
Casually glancing at the new arrival, Mick asked, "Who's the ferret-faced guy?"

The Speed Force was right when she said it wouldn't be a punishment this time. Where Savitar, Wally, and Jay remained trapped in the worst moment of their lives on repeat, Barry found himself in a recreation of his favorite memory with his parents. He knew it wasn't real. He knew that the little diner, the French fries, the ice cream, and his mother and father weren't real. And when they went out to watch the local fireworks show, the beautiful colors and explosions overhead weren't real either. He knew it was a fantasy.

But it didn't bother him. He didn't care it wasn't real. He felt calm and completely at peace. He accepted the fantasy.

After worrying for so long and struggling so hard, he could finally rest.

Barry wasn't sure how long he sat there, watching the colors explode overhead with his parents on either side of him and feeling like a child on the verge of nodding off to sleep. He just knew that his peace was only disturbed when a swirling blue cyclone formed in front of him, filled with red and yellow lightning that crackled and flashed. He knew what it meant and that knowledge pulled him out of his tranquil and almost trance-like state.

"We have company, Barry Allen," said his mother.

No, not his mother. The Speed Force. The face belonged to his mother, but he knew who was truly speaking.

The Speed Force seemed to like him as much as such an inhuman force of the universe was capable of. He, she, they, it, or whatever the Speed Force might be, Barry knew that it seemed to favor him. It also seemed as if it wanted to teach him and played therapist whenever Barry faced his most conflicting moments. But the problem was that the Speed Force wasn't human and its views and methods weren't always conventional or normal. What it considered reasonable and helpful could be anything ranging from confusing to unnerving to completely terrifying.

"We should speak to them about their current course of action," continued the Speed Force.

Barry already had his suspicions about who it was and why they were there. Only a handful of people could access the Speed Force in even a limited capacity. And a speedster would be in the illusionary reality rather than the more literal swirling vortex of movement and power. That's what happened when Jay came after him when Barry tried to rescue Wally. He knew it was probably Cisco vibing his way there, which meant he must be trying to get Barry out.

Did his friends figure out a different solution to the issue of the Speed Force prison? Because he would not let Jay or Wally take his place. They all knew he wouldn't let that happen. He wouldn't sacrifice their freedom for his own. If Cisco did come for him, Barry knew there had to be a plan in place.

Being a fundamental force of the universe, the Speed Force would already know who it was and why they were there. It seemed aware of everything, even when time was repeatedly changed. But if the Speed Force wanted to pretend it was a normal person ready to greet arriving company, Barry knew better than to argue. He just quietly followed the figure of his mother into the lightning-filled vortex.

As he predicted, Cisco stood in the eye of the storm. Decked out in his goggles and gloves, he'd come ready for a fight if necessary. His posture practically screamed that he refused to go home.
empty handed. He'd come for his friend and nothing would stop him. Considering that Cisco was only starting to join the front lines on occasion, it was mildly impressive.

What Barry didn't expect was his companion. Cisco holding onto his coat to keep him in the Speed Force, Mick Rory stared at the speedster and the personification of speed. The arsonist didn't look particularly impressed by what he saw.

"Hey, Red. Nice suit," he said. "Bit more formal than usual."

Glancing down briefly at the clothes he wore for H.R.'s funeral, Barry asked, "What's going on?"

"So the good-looking lady is the Speed Force wearing his dead mom's face, right?" asked Mick, ignoring the question as he glanced towards his companion.

"Right," Cisco said uneasily. "The source of all speedster's powers. All in one human-shaped package."

"Huh," grunted Mick in dull surprise.

Then Heat Wave swiftly drew his weapon and fired at the human avatar for the Speed Force, engulfing it in flames.

Chapter End Notes

So while I made up the name for Chronos' ship, I took inspiration for the name Gabriel for the A.I. from SeaSpectre160 and their awesome stories. And considering how much the High Council wanted to control and shape time to fit their wishes, I can't imagine that the Time Masters were huge fans of speedsters. How the Flash time travels is something that they can't control and it seems to operate with somewhat different rules than the form of time travel they accomplish using timeships traveling through the Temporal Zone.
"It actually is quite fascinating to contemplate," remarked Martin. "Simply working out the science responsible for this disrupted temporal anomaly could lead to countless discoveries. Gideon must let me look over the recorded readings when this is over. I can only theorize so much without them."

"Once we track Mick down and see if we can get Snart back, I'm sure she'll share," Ray said, his arm half-buried in the inner workings of the timeship.

Everyone was pitching in on the repair work to try and speed things along. But only Martin, Ray, Jax, and Rip possessed either the relevant knowledge or skills to work on the more complex repairs to the timeship. For the others, it was outside their fields of expertise. So while Rip coordinated the work for Sara, Amaya, and Nate, the other three were in the engine room focusing on the more delicate and precise repairs. With their efforts spread out like that, they hoped to get the Waverider mobile as soon as possible.

One of the side effect of having two geniuses working in close proximity after a stunning revelation, however, was that it inspired them to talk. While Ray mostly discussed how the destruction of the Oculus could produce two distinct forms of energy in the blast based on his observations of it prior to the event, Martin himself theorized on the disrupted temporal anomaly itself. Even before the particle accelerator explosion, he had a fascination with time travel and his enthusiasm only grew once he gained proof it was real. Jax listened distractedly to the conversation as he worked, bemusement coming over their psychic connection quite clearly.

They'd learned how to block the connection partially over time. It took concentration, but they could keep their partner from experiencing their emotions or suffering their injuries to a limited degree. It helped when Martin wanted to keep Jax from being harmed when something like having his past self shot in 1987 happened. But it was too hard to maintain most of the time. So Jax didn't bother hiding his reactions to Martin and Ray "geeking out."

"But can you imagine what it would be like if you could observe time completely halted like that?" asked Martin. "There would be nothing to hear in such a place. Light would be unable to travel, so you wouldn't be able to see. Nothing would move. Why, even the very atoms would cease..."

He trailed off, his mind both grinding to a halt and racing after that thought. When they realized that Rory intended to pull Snart from the strange timeless place, the team decided to follow in case they could help (and so they could express their frustration with him running off without a word). They hadn't considered the hazards that such a venture would offer. Not completely, anyway.

If time was halted to a single instant, there would be absolutely no movement. Not even from subatomic particles. There would be zero entropy, something theorized about and never observed.

The Second and Third Laws of Thermodynamics flashed through his mind. He couldn't ignore the implications. And Rory intended to get Snart out of a place like that? Did he know? Did he understand what he was walking into?

They wouldn't be getting a team member back. They would be losing one.
"Grey?" asked Jax uneasily, his partner's dawning horror feeding into the young man's emotional state. "What is it?"

"I'm afraid that Mr. Rory's intended plan might be more dangerous for him that what we initially imagined," he said. "We must finish repairs immediately and reach him before he gets himself trapped or killed."

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He thought the yelps of surprise and fear from Cisco and Barry was unwarranted, but Mick had to admit they probably didn't expect him to try burning the woman. He certainly didn't tell the nerd ahead of time and he'd moved very quickly with his attack. The flames engulfed the figure completely, his Heat Gun at one of the higher settings. If it was human, she would be very dead.

"Ready to go, Red?" he asked.

"Are you insane?" asked Cisco, his free hand pressed to the side of his face. "We're so dead."

"Very few come here who are not speedsters." A new figure formed where the woman had vanished. "You are not one of ours."

Mick glared at the Speed Force's new face. A bald man in gray robes that still guest starred in some of his nightmares. The last time he saw Declan, he crushed the Time Master's skull with his boot. Changing into the person who performed the induction process, the one who tried so hard to burn and pry away his entire identity to transform Mick into Chronos, didn't improve the arsonist's mood.

"I belong to nobody," he growled before turning his weapon on the figure once more.

He let it burn a little longer this time. Call it petty, but it felt good to kill that man for a second time.

"Stop it," shouted Cisco. "We're still partially in STAR Labs. You're going to burn the place down."

"And you can't kill the Speed Force like that. It's all of this," Barry said, gesturing at the swirling storm of bright lightning. "The person is just a way for it to talk to us."

"Don't care," said Mick. "Ready to leave or not?"

"I can't," Barry said. "Someone has to stay in the prison and I won't make anyone else do it."

"You are not one of ours," the Speed Force repeated as a third figure formed. "And you are not one of Barry Allen's, like Cisco Ramon is. But we know who you are, Mick Rory. We know what you intend."

This time, Mick dropped his weapon to his side. He knew it wasn't real. He knew the figure was the Speed Force. But Mick couldn't bring himself to burn this one.

A scrawny fourteen-year-old with a bloody lip, torn-up knuckles, and a cut on his arm from a shiv redirected at the last moment, Mick was staring at an image of Leonard Snart from the first time they met. He remembered how Leonard seemed determined to take whatever the older boys could dish out, something Mick learned later could be contributed to a lifetime with Lewis Snart as a father. He likely would have died without a cry for help because there had never been anyone there for him. He never had anyone to watch his back. And even though Mick didn't know a single thing about the smaller teenager at the time, something compelled him to insert himself between the older teens and Leonard. Something made Mick want to save him.
He gained something that day. He gained a partner. He gained Leonard and even Lisa to an extent. Even when he lost everything else he had to fire and his panic, he managed to keep at least something important.

But then he lost even that much because of the Oculus.

"You don't know anything," Mick growled at the thing wearing the face of a teenage Leonard.

"We know. We know more than you can comprehend. We know that Cisco Ramon's brother would have been lost even without the creation of Flashpoint." The nerd seemed to shrink beside him, though Mick didn't know if it was due to the words or because he was being addressed by the Speed Force. "We know you lost your first family to a fire you did not warn them of, Mick Rory. Your second family was taken from you when the Oculus was destroyed and you could not face his sister any longer out of guilt. And you have repeatedly betrayed your newest family in pursuit of what you desire. The latest of which led to time itself shattering."

"The fire was an accident and I was a dumb kid," he snapped back.

It took him years to stop blaming himself and he still did sometimes, but it wasn't his fault that he'd panicked back then. He'd even flat out told his teenage self that it wasn't his fault. He'd always been attracted to fire and sometimes it went out of his control. Like that night when he was a teenager. Or when he nearly burned himself to death, ending with him escaping an ambulance covered in severe burns and Leonard abandoning him for months because he couldn't handle Mick's self-destructive tendencies anymore. Mick knew he had issues. But those issues weren't something he ended up with on purpose.

The fire was an accident that night. Panicking and running out of that house was just survival instincts kicking in. It wasn't his fault.

"As for the rest of it," he continued, "I'm fixing it. That's why I'm doing this. And who do you think you are, acting so smart and looking like that?"

He didn't argue against the teenage-looking figure using the word "family" to describe them. It would take too long to convince the Speed Force that Snart was his partner and the others were his team. And that was completely different. Family was trying to crush the flame out of him. Family was blaming him for an obsession he could not control. Family was anger, guilt, and regrets. Family was ash and fading smoke.

He didn't argue the word though. He just wanted to get the Flash and leave. The longer he looked at the Speed Force wearing the mask of his partner as a teenager, the more it unnerved him. There was something fundamentally wrong with it. It wasn't just that the Speed Force couldn't perfectly mimic someone that Mick had known most of his life. The eyes, the expression, the way it moved, and every bit of body language felt empty and false. He was looking at something pretending to be human, but was utterly alien and unnatural behind the disguise.

"We are the Speed Force. We have existed since the first subatomic particle sprang forth from the Big Bang to form reality as you know it. And we shall remain until the last proton loses all energy and stops vibrating, plunging the universe into heat death. From the spin of galaxies to the movement of atoms, we are there," said the Speed Force. "And yet you intend to go where we cannot reach. It is intriguing to find someone with such a goal and the willpower not to be swayed. We know that you understand the cost you may pay for that choice and that you enter with full knowledge of what you are doing."

"But the Flash doesn't know, does he?" he said, refusing to acknowledge or consider what it was
saying about his plan. "He doesn't know he could've gone home at any time."

"Wait, what are you talking about?" asked Barry.

Mick glanced at the speedster and said, "Maybe you needed to stay a little while, but that Kid Flash person said it was a month ago. You should have been able to leave a while back."

"We explained, Heat Wave," reminded Cisco. "No prisoner in the Speed Force prison means disaster."

"There's no prison anymore."

The nerd and the speedster stared at him as if Mick was crazy. The Speed Force didn't react to his words. The familiar figure simply stood serenely within the unnatural storm.

"Wait, back up," Barry said. "What do you mean?"

"Good future you made the Speed Force prison to hold the evil future you," said Mick.

"Time remnant. Savitar was a time remnant," Cisco added helpfully.

"Anyway, he only existed if your girlfriend died."

"Fiancée," Barry corrected, furrowing his brow in thought.

"Well, she looked alive to me. Which means Savitar never existed, wiping him from the timeline. And no Savitar means the good future Flash never needed to make a prison in the first place," said Mick. "Paradox. Once time caught up, the Speed Force prison would have vanished. It may have taken some time to happen, but it should be gone by now."

Gaping like a fish, Cisco said, "I've watched 'Back to the Future' a million times and I still didn't make the connection. When Marty kept his parents from getting together, he nearly wiped himself from existence and the picture was going blank. And it was going blank because without Marty and his siblings, there would be no reason to have a picture. No Savitar, no prison."

"Is he right?" asked Barry. "I could have gone home to my friends? To my family? To Iris?"

Even as a teenager, Leonard wasn't always the easiest person for most people to read. He preferred to maintain control and that included over his emotions. But the Speed Force managed to take it to a whole new level. Mick couldn't tell if it felt any shame over Barry's confrontation or any annoyance over being exposed. It had the ultimate poker face, only revealing what it chose.

"We know what your future holds, Barry Allen. We know that you must return. You are the Flash and you are not one to stop," said the Speed Force. "Your presence was required here initially and we chose not to tell you when it was no longer necessary. We knew you would return to the rest of reality in time. We merely let you rest while you had the chance."

"But he could have rested at home," Cisco said. "He didn't have to stay here. He could have been with us. Do you know what we've been going through since he left?"

"Don't bother, Cisco. I don't think it actually understands. Not really," said Barry. "I don't think it can. The important thing is I can leave now."

Barry stepped across the swirling vortex, taking Cisco's offered hand. Mick watched the human-shaped Speed Force closely just in case there would be a last attempt to keep the Flash.
"You may return to protect the city and the people that are so important to you. You will return in time. All speedsters eventually return to us in the end," the Speed Force said. "But until then, do what you have always done. Run, Barry, run." Then, looking so much like his partner and yet completely alien, the Speed Force turned slightly and added, "Stay warm, Mick."

He didn't respond to the offered advice, even if he knew exactly what it was talking about. Mick just stared firmly until Cisco pulled them out of the blue swirling chaos.

Barry almost stumbled when the room reappeared around them. Mick remembered them calling it the breach room earlier, though the scorch marks on the opposite wall were new. Apparently he caused some damage while frying the Speed Force. At least no one was dumb or unlucky enough to stand in the line of fire. Not even the ferret-faced CSI, Julian or whatever his name was.

"Barry!"

Moving with enough speed to make Mick wonder if she was yet another speedster, the young woman launched herself at the Flash. He wrapped his arms around her, spinning briefly while holding Iris tight. The pair laughed brightly even as Mick caught sight of tears on their cheeks.

Emotional romantic reunions weren't really his thing. But that didn't mean he didn't understand the reactions. Getting someone back that you thought was lost forever? It was her fiancé rather than a partner, but it was what Mick was trying to achieve.

"I thought I'd never see you again," she whispered.

Kissing her forehead gently as he moved to cup her face, Barry said, "I know. I didn't want to leave you. I'm sorry, Iris."

"I've missed you so much."

The private moment between the two grew to include Joe and Wally hugging their returned speedster. Mick edged back as they spoke rapidly and reassured one another that it was real. A loving family with none of the sharp edges and broken bits that comprised his from childhood or that of the Snarts. This moment wasn't meant for him, a sentiment clearly shared by Cisco, Julian, Tracy, and the guy named Harry since they also kept their distance during the reunion. He could give them time together before he explained what he needed.

Would it be like that if... when he got Snart back? Lisa would call him a jerk and yell at him for disappearing, but there would be no bite to her words. And maybe him and the blonde assassin would finally get their act together. Mick wasn't completely oblivious and he knew Snart better than anyone else except maybe Lisa. Maybe Sara or Snart would actually do something with their second chance. And Ray would definitely try to start a group hug when he saw Snart, the right one, alive and safe. The hug probably wouldn't happen, but Ray would try.

Mick remained in the background while the reunion unfolded. He almost thought they'd forgotten he was even there until the detective broke off. The man approached Mick with purpose in his stride. Joe West met his gaze with a hint of the same suspicion all cops had directed towards him since he became a teenager and lost what little sympathy that a child's cuteness had afforded him. But then he extended a hand towards the arsonist.

"Thank you," Joe said with real honesty, "for bring my son back to us."

While uncomfortable with being thanked like he was some kind of hero, the fact it was a cop who once arrested him made it at least a little amusing. He gave a grunt of acknowledgement and took the
"I expect a piece of cake from the wedding reception," said Mick, shaking the hand. "A big one."

"Heat Wave actually did it," Cisco said, pulling off the goggles and running his hand through his hair. He sounded rather giddy, like Ray sometimes did when coming down from the excitement of a particularly intense mission. "It actually worked. He made the Speed Force let Barry go. After trying to burn it repeatedly. How? Time-traveling has turned him into as much of a criminal genius as Captain Cold."

"Not quite," said Mick. "I told you. Time travel is kind of our thing. Paradoxes and changing timelines. I just get them now." Deciding he'd waited long enough, he stepped forward again. "Now, you have your favorite speedster in red back. Think I can borrow a couple of you for a favor?"

"What do you need?" Barry asked without hesitation, pulling away from his fiancée enough to face the man. "And where's the rest of the team?"

"He wouldn't tell any of us much until you got here," said Wally. "He said he didn't want to repeat himself."

Shifting slightly, he said, "Do you hero types feel like another rescue? Because I have one in mind that'll need a speedster and Vibe. Interested?"

"Are Stein and the others in trouble? Is that why you're here alone?" asked Cisco, eyes widening and worry bleeding into his voice.

"They're fine. Left them in Los Angeles," Mick said quickly. "It isn't them that needs rescuing."

"Then who?" asked Cisco.

"Leonard Snart."

There was no hesitation or doubt in Barry's voice. He knew. He'd heard enough and knew his former criminal rogues. He recognized the loyalty between the partners. He knew without any doubts who Mick wanted to save.

There was a reason why Snart always respected the Flash.

"Wasn't he your partner in crime?" asked Julian slowly. "The infamous 'Captain Cold,' to use the ridiculous nickname?"

Pointing a finger sharply at the other man, Cisco stated in a serious tone, "Don't go dissing my naming skills. You won't win that fight."

"But Barry told us that Snart died on one of your missions," Wally said quietly. Pity and sympathy came from the young man in waves. "Isn't it too late to save him?"

Trying to shrug off the looks now being directed towards him, Mick growled, "First, he's only as good as dead. Not actually dead. And second, I have a timeship. It's never too late."

"Changing the past is dangerous," said Barry.

"Try telling that to someone who doesn't spend all his time fixing messes like that, Red. And I'm not changing anything. Snart is stuck. I'm just pulling him out."

Staring at him firmly, Barry said, "Maybe we should start at the beginning. Why aren't the rest of the
"Well, we accidentally broke time recently," he said with a shrug. "They need to fix that, so I left our nerds to work on that emergency while I came to recruit you and your nerd with the powers. They figured I could handle this on my own. That way we can get both jobs done."

The lie slipped out so easily and completely natural. Let them assume it was a team decision. Let them believe his choice to work alone was so the others could focus on the shattered timestream. It was easier than admitting the truth.

If they didn't know what he was up to until it was over, it would be easier on the team. And for himself. If his plan didn't work, dashing their hopes would be too cruel. And if they knew what he was planning, they would either try to stop him for his own good or try to help. Mick wasn't so selfish as to make them pay the price instead. Not anymore. Not after what he'd already done to them or almost done. If there was going to be a cost for pulling Snart back, Mick would pay it and no one else.

They were partners. And it should have been Mick there when the Oculus exploded. It wouldn't have ended up this way if Snart didn't sucker-punch him. And the Snart who sacrificed himself like that probably wouldn't have touched the Spear of Destiny. He wouldn't have betrayed the team even in an alternate future timeline.

"And what do you mean Snart is stuck? Stuck where?" asked Barry.

"Really? You're not going to ask about the 'time breaking' thing?" Cisco asked.

Taking a moment to look over his audience, Mick said, "That's a bit of a long story. Any of you ever hear about a place called the Vanishing Point?"

While Barry wasn't so naïve as to think Mick told them everything, he told them enough to send the more scientifically-minded members of the team into a mild freakout. Between the concept of a location outside of time, an invention to more thoroughly view and manipulate the timestream, and the accidental creation of a captured moment that was unreachable by normal means, Harry and Cisco were delighted. He wouldn't be surprised if the pair invented the technology for timeships within a few weeks working off that information.

Mick also laid out his plan, which he assured them that a futuristic A.I. had already confirmed them to be theoretically-sound. They would head to the Vanishing Point, where Barry would run fast enough to attempt traveling back in time while Cisco would try to vibe and create a breach. Normally, the Vanishing Point wouldn't allow it to work because there was no past in that place. But apparently with time shattered, combining their two powers together should allow them to create a portal into that frozen instant. And while Barry and Cisco kept it open, Mick would go through and grab Snart.

It was a solid plan. Everything seemed simple and straightforward. There were no obvious threats. No villains or criminals involved except for Snart and Mick.

Of course, they didn't have the best track record when it came to plans. That little fact hung over their heads ominously. But they were all purposefully ignoring it.

"Are you sure they'll be safe?" asked Joe once again, staring down the arsonist as they walked towards the entrance of the building.

Barry didn't blame Joe for worrying. He'd been gone for a month without any sign that Barry would
ever return. It couldn't be easy for him to let his adopted son go again so soon.

Iris certainly wasn't happy about him leaving already either. But between the fact that Mick did just help pull him out of the Speed Force and that Leonard's shift towards more heroic actions might be due to Barry's influence on the older man, he couldn't turn his back on this. He had to help.

So he pressed a few more kisses to her lips, something he'd missed even in the tranquil serenity of the Speed Force, and he promised Iris that he would return soon. He reassured her that nothing would separate them permanently. He loved her too much to ever lose her. He would always find his way back home to her. But no matter how much he loved her, he couldn't stop being the Flash. And if he wasn't the man who would always do everything in his power to help, would he be the man she loved?

"Flash and Vibe will be fine. Those two won't be near anything dangerous," said Mick. "There's no one left in the Vanishing Point to hurt them. The biggest threat to them is being late coming back. Navigating the timestream while it's broken is tricky. Might be off by a month or so. But they'll be back in one piece."

"I'm holding you to your word," Joe said firmly.

Chuckling slightly, he said, "A cop trusting my word. What's the world coming to?"

As they stepped out of STAR Labs, Mick did something and a timeship appeared out of thin air. Even with his limited exposure, Barry could tell it wasn't the Waverider. This was different. More... menacing.

"Dude, did you steal another timeship?" asked Cisco, staring up at the technological marvel.

"Didn't have to. The Time Masters handed it over to me," Mick said shortly. "Let's get moving."

Carrying his gloves and goggles in a backpack, Cisco practically sprinted up the ramp. There was no way he would pass up the chance to poke around another timeship. The only question was whether or not he would try to take apart the engine.

Wrapping her arms around him in a brief hug, Iris said, "I just got you back, Barry."

"You're not losing me. I promise."

"Finish up your goodbyes and hurry up," called Mick as he headed towards the timeship.

Barry reluctantly pulled away from the woman he loved. But as he turned to follow the pair, a thought occurred to him. Tapping into his speed, he raced back into the labs to change into his suit. Then he raced towards his and Iris' apartment. Briefly taking note of any changes since he disappeared, Barry grabbed a few items from the kitchen and placed them in a cardboard box. And when it turned out they were missing a key ingredient, he raced towards the grocery store to grab it and left money on the cash register on his way out.

Returning to the STAR Labs parking lot, Barry paused long enough to give Joe a quick nod before finally heading into the timeship. Leaving the box in what appeared to be a cargo bay, he tried to find his way through the slightly-dimmed hallways. He felt the floor shudder underfoot slightly as Mick apparently ran out of patience and took off. Only then did he find the bridge of the timeship.

And someone unexpected waiting there.

"Iris, what are you doing here?" he asked, shoving the mask part of his suit back.
"What do you think? I'm coming with you."

"But-"

"We spent months thinking I was going to die," she interrupted. "And then you were trapped in the Speed Force and we had no clue if any of us would ever see you again. Now you're on a spaceship, headed somewhere that time doesn't exist."

"Timeship," corrected Cisco.

"Do you really think, after all that, I'm going to stay behind?" she continued. "I am not going to let you vanish somewhere beyond our reach. Not again. For better or for worse, we're supposed to be equal partners in this relationship and support each other. Sometimes you'll save me from dangerous criminals and sometimes I'll shoot a speedster in the back to protect you. Wherever you go, I go too. Because I love you, Barry Allen. And even if you tell me that I won't lose you again, I'm going to do everything in my power to make certain of that."

He struggled for a moment to find something he could say in response to that. But he couldn't think of anything. There was nothing he could say to Iris that wouldn't somehow treat her as weak or lesser than him. And even without powers, that wasn't who she was.

"Joe is not going to be happy with either of us," Barry said finally.

"Wally promised to watch over him," said Iris with a triumphant smile. "He also distracted Dad so I could sneak onboard."

"Hey, Lovebirds," Mick called. "You and Vibe might want to hang onto something. The Time Masters were idiots, so the Shadowslicer doesn't have chairs." Steering the timeship high above the city, he said, "Gabriel."

A cheerful voice from the ceiling replied, "Yes, Heat Wave?"

"Set a course for the Vanishing Point."

Chapter End Notes

Timelines for the ages of people in this show can be such a headache sometimes. According to the show, Leonard Snart was born 1972 since that's when they grabbed the baby version of him in the first season (which also happens to line up with the actor's age). He first met Mick in juvie when Snart was fourteen, which would be 1986 or 1987 depending on the time of year. And Mick burned down his family's home in 1990 since that's when the team grabbed the teenage version from. I can almost make it work if we place Leonard Snart as having a birthday late in the year (and we pretend the kid version of Leonard we see in the third episode is actually younger than he looks in 1975).

If Leonard has a birthday in the latter half of the year, that could place him in juvie in early 1987 at age fourteen. If we have Mick as the same age (even if there are two years difference in age between the two actors), that would place Mick at seventeen when his family dies. We'll just have to assume that Mick was already having issues with the law even prior to the deaths of his family.
As a side note, Lisa couldn't be born any sooner than 1981 since she didn't exist prior to 1975 and her father went to jail for five years (and then her mother would have to be pregnant for nine months). The actress was born August 8, 1986. Either way, there is a significant age difference between the two siblings.
Third Law of Thermodynamics

Chapter Notes

I have noticed that no one has commented or questioned what our dear Professor Stein has realized about Mick's plan that is so concerning. No has anyone wondered about the mysterious comment about Mick intended to go somewhere beyond the Speed Force's reach when it states that pretty much all movement, both on a macro scale and a micro scale, is connected to it.

The answer to both can be summarized in a single word: thermodynamics.

That's right. After my liberal use of comic book science, it is time to bring in some real-world science. Albeit with some twisting in order to work with the comic book science already established.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Los Angeles: April 4th, 2017

When he recruited the assortment of people for his unauthorized mission to kill Vandal Savage and try to save his family, Rip had no idea what he was getting into. It wasn't just the discovery of the Time Masters' agenda and corruption that dominated the High Council and the existence of the Oculus. It was everything to do with leading a team.

He'd never truly led a team before. The Time Masters tended to work alone or with other Time Masters for short spells of time. Rip spent most of his captaincy with only Gideon and the occasional local people like Jonah Hex. He didn't have the experience at juggling all the strong personalities and issues of the people he selected. Starting the entire mission off with a lie and initially treating them as skillsets rather than people probably didn't help him establish much authority with the group either.

And honestly, there were days where it felt like he was herding a bunch of children. Highly-armed and super-powered children with impulse-control issues and not much sense of self-preservation. Rip actually felt relieved that Sara took on the role of captain in his absence and was content to let her remain in command of the team. She seemed to have a talent for it and the team worked better under her guidance. Rip was happier without the responsibility.

That didn't mean that the feeling of being surrounded by impulsive children ever went away. And it didn't change his frustration when one of them ran off and did something crazy.

He initially had no real interest one way or another when it came to recruiting Mick Rory. At least, not at first. While Rip knew he would bring some useful firepower to a fight, he mostly saw Rory as a general thug and a requirement for Snart's recruitment. But he had moved past that initial impression. While Rory would always be the most troublesome and least moral member, he was still part of the team. And that meant that when Rory decided to vanish on an insane scheme with long odds, they would charge after him and try to knock some sense into him.

Life would be so much easier if people wouldn't go off on their own to engage in impulsive rescue missions without letting those in charge know or do anything. But Rip knew if he complained to Gideon, she would point out the hypocrisy.
With Amaya and Nate keeping the wildlife at bay, he and Sara finished the repairs to the outside of the Waverider. The dinosaurs weren't the only misplaced creatures prowling around. But those Amaya couldn't commune with fast enough, Nate knocked them back with a steel fist. The work went faster and smoother than expected. And that meant they would be able to locate and chew out their missing member all the sooner.

As they headed back into the Waverider, Stein came hurrying out with the others trailing behind him. The man's expression made Rip hesitate briefly and Sara tense. Something was wrong.

"Ms. Lance, the situation is far more serious than what we initially believed," said Stein frantically. "Mr. Rory is in grave danger if he follows his current plan."

Pausing briefly before narrowing her eyes, Sara said, "We're heading to the bridge. Explain as we walk."

"If Mr. Snart is truly trapped somewhere that exists only as a single instant, that would imply that everything has stopped," said Stein, falling in line beside her. "Even the very molecules. There would be no entropy. Theoretically, at least. And if that is the case, then-"

"Absolute zero," Ray said, his eyes widening as they moved through the hall. "Third Law of Thermodynamics. The entropy of a system approaches a constant value as the temperature approaches absolute zero."

Rip bit back a sharp curse. Outside of the Cold Gun on the highest setting, it was extremely difficult even in the future to achieve that temperature. And it never lasted long before the surroundings warmed it at least a fraction above that temperature, allowing ice from the moisture in the air to form. Humans weren't built to survive temperatures even close to that.

The only benefit to the entire captured moment existing at absolute zero was that Snart's body wouldn't have a chance to react to the cold. No moving molecules meant the damage would be paused before it happened. While all timeships were equipped with a decent medbay, captains were taught some basic first aid and medical knowledge in case they were caught away from any help. Rip knew what extreme cold could do to the human body and it wasn't pretty.

"Precisely," said Stein. "And the Second Law of Thermodynamics essentially states that any energy, any heat, that enters such a system would move from high concentration to low. Or to put simply, anything with heat is going to try to warm up the cold. And the meager body heat of a man of even Mr. Rory's size would barely make a dent. He'll be reduced to absolute zero almost instantly and he'll be in the exact same predicament as Mr. Snart. Trapped and frozen in time."

"He can't have known," Amaya said quietly. "Mick can't have known what will happen if he tries."

"Actually, Mr. Rory is quite aware of the issue," said Gideon. Her tone held a hint of what might be reluctance and guilt. "As I stated earlier, we spoke quite thoroughly about his possible retrieval of Mr. Snart. I informed him about the difficulties that the absolute zero temperature would theoretically pose to his plan." Hesitating a moment, she added, "I was quite detailed in my description of what would happen. He needed to have a very clear idea of what risks he faces. Both the risks to his success and the risks to his life."

"A plan that won't work," Rip said. "He'll be trapped immediately."

"Okay, new rule," said Sara sharply. "Gideon, if anyone of this team starts researching or working on a secret plan that could threaten either their life or time itself, tell someone else on the team so we can talk them out of it or at least help keep it from being a disaster." Realizing the possible hypocrisy
due to her previous vendetta against Damien Darhk, she added, "And that includes the captain."

"Mr. Rory's plan has taken the absolute zero temperature into account," said Gideon. The hesitation was more noticeable now. "We devised a method to deal with the issue until he at least reaches Mr. Snart."

Nate said, "Well, that's good, I suppose. How?"

"Just as Mr. Snart's Cold Gun is capable of producing temperatures of absolute zero on the highest setting, Mr. Rory's Heat Gun can reach the Planck temperature or the absolute limits of heat," said Gideon. "Neither man normally used the full power of the weapons regularly, both for energy concerns and to minimize casualties after Mr. Snart's agreement with the Flash, but the capabilities are well-established. Mr. Rory's Heat Gun producing flames at the Planck temperature will counteract the absolute zero surroundings. To an extent."

"The Cold Gun and Heat Gun may have canceled each other out, but those produce limited streams," Stein said as the arrived at the bridge. "It won't be enough to warm the entire area. The Second Law of Thermodynamics will still ensure the energy will move from high temperature to low. The most it might accomplish is that it'll be enough energy for molecules to move and the human body to react to the extreme low temperatures."

"And how exactly does Mick plan to use his Heat Gun to avoid freezing anyway?" asked Ray as they all strapped in.

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**Vanishing Point**

Though the trip was certainly still rougher than normal due to the broken timestream, Mick had enough experience and enough resistance to the effects of time travel by now to remain standing. The rest of the passengers weren't so lucky. Other than Cisco's brief trip during the alien invasion nonsense, the three of them were still new to this method of time travel. And with that came all the side effects. It knocked the trio to the floor with various levels of nausea, vertigo, and so on.

But still no bleeding eyeballs. Mick was beginning to think that symptom was a myth.

"I can't feel my face. Is that normal?" asked Barry, poking at his cheeks. "This is so weird."

"Why is everything purple?" Iris added, blinking rapidly.

"It'll pass," mumbled Cisco, burying his head between his knees while looking rather green. "Messed with me and Felicity too."

"It gets easier the more you time travel like this," Mick said.

Climbing unsteadily to his feet, Barry said, "My way doesn't make me want to throw up."

"And you want to drag all of us somewhere outside of time like the Vanishing Point?" Mick asked, watching the trio shaking off the worst of the effects. "Because I really can't imagine being yanked through the timestream at super speed being any more comfortable." As soon as he guided the Shadowslicer to the farthest edge of the place, he added, "You can head out as soon as we land if you want. Get a good look at the place. Just don't wander off too far until I get everything sorted here."

He didn't have to offer twice. Cisco broke into a bright grin and raced out, excited to see whatever the Vanishing Point had to offer. Shaking his head briefly, Barry took Iris' hand and followed him as
the Shadowslicer touched down. Mick gave them a few moments before glancing towards the ceiling.

"Gabriel?"

"Yes, Heat Wave?"

"If I don't manage to give the order later, you better make sure those three are returned as close to their own time period as you can manage. Don't leave them trapped here."

"Do you not intend to return to the timeship?"

Hesitating a moment, Mick said, "Just covering all possibilities."

"Of course, Heat Wave."

With that piece of preparation handled, Mick left the bridge and started heading out. He knew this could end badly. The details of extreme temperatures in places with no time passage and that stuff didn't fall under the category of topics that Time Masters thought he needed to know. And while he knew plenty about fire and how it worked in a variety of situations (mostly by experience), he would be dealing with the opposite of fire. Gideon helped explained the parts Mick couldn't figure out on his own.

He knew that wherever Snart was, it would be as cold as the full power of the man's weapon. Deadly cold.

He always hated the cold. Almost as much as he loved fire. And the bitter temperatures now made his burn scars ache sharply. And this would be far worse and more intense. People weren't meant to survive being that cold.

But Mick had a plan. A crazy and stupid plan, but a plan that might at least keep him from getting stuck like Snart. He was so lucky Gideon took the time to help work this out and explain what he needed to know. And he was too stubborn not to use the plan.

He paused briefly to grab a long coil of rope, woven from some advanced material that left it lighter and stronger than anything from his native century. And it was resistant to fire, another important feature. Mick slung the coil over his shoulder. The extra person on the rescue mission might actually be useful.

Mick also vaguely wondered if he left a spare set of that stupid armor on board and whether it would make any difference. Would it buy him any extra time? Would any form of insulation really make any difference where he was heading?

He ultimately rejected the idea though. He didn't want to go searching the timeship on the off chance the stupid armor from his time as Chronos might buy him an extra second or two. He would stick with his normal coat and gloves. He might even toss on a pair of goggles from the days when he was still getting used to the light from his Heat Gun, just to cover his options.

When he stepped off the Shadowslicer, Mick found the trio staring at the Vanishing Point. Cisco kept looking up and around at the structures floating and orbiting overhead. Flash and his girl were more focused on their immediate surroundings, examining the destruction. The Legion of Doom might have straightened a few things out, but it didn't hide the fact the explosion did a number on the whole place.

"Done sight-seeing yet?" he called to them. "We've got a job to do."
"Right," said Cisco, clapping his hands together. "Lead the way."

The place was once again abandoned and empty, the Time Masters and Legion of Doom both long gone. Silence hung over the building as they headed in. Dark and vaguely dusty, it reminded Mick of a crypt. Lifeless and crawling with disturbed memories. A proper fire burning the whole place down could only improve things. His whole body practically itched with the desire to take a lighter or his Heat Gun to the damaged building. It might calm him down and ease the impulse to lash out at the shadows.

And when he reached their destination, the unease only grew worse. As did his agitation. Mick couldn't tear his eyes away from the pile of rubble in the center. The old layout of the chamber remained burned into his mind. He remembered a deep circular pit with a green glow coming from below. He remembered a square platform in the center over it with only two thin walkways across gap. And he remembered a machine with a circular opening exposing a cylinder chamber filled with mechanical workings, including the switch that needed to be held down to ensure an explosion.

The destruction of the Oculus was meant to take Ray. The nerd would have died and the man barely blinked at the idea of sacrificing himself. Ray might be an idiot, but he wasn't a coward. Partially out of revenge against the Time Masters and slightly because Mick didn't want the nerdy hero to die, he knocked Ray out and took his place holding the switch down. Keeping his teammate alive, destroying the source of the Time Masters' real power, and burning destiny to the ground at the same time sounded like a reasonable way to die.

But then Snart had the same idea. He knocked Mick out and stayed behind instead. He chose to sacrifice himself like one of those heroes.

Even if he was unconscious and didn't actually witness it, Mick could still see his partner standing in front of the machine and holding down the switch that would seal his fate.

It shouldn't have been Snart. It shouldn't have been anyone else. If anyone deserved to go down while wiping out the Time Masters' organization, it was him.

"Mick," said Iris, startling him back to reality. Something in her tone indicated that they'd been trying to get his attention for a while. "You okay?"

"Yeah," he said, coughing quietly. "This is it. Right where that junk is." He gestured at the rubble where the machinery above the pit once existed. "Don't know how much you can aim where those portals form, but it'll be a lot easier if you can get it close."

Looking around the chamber thoughtfully, Barry said, "There's not a lot of room to build up some speed. I might have to clear a path."

"Go for it," Mick said.

A blur of motion and lightning flashed as the speedster went into action. Following him with the naked eye wasn't going to happen. But Mick watched the flickering afterimage and the vanishing debris as best he could. In almost no time, the Flash managed to clear the edges of the room, essentially creating an improvised track for him to run on. He left the destroyed remnants of the Oculus untouched. Barry looked rather pleased with himself as he eventually skidded to a halt.

"I should be able to work with that," said Barry.

"Great. Now, I don't know how much you know about my powers," Cisco said slowly, pulling his goggles and gloves back out of his backpack, "but it can really help if I have something to vibe. I
I'm trying to open up a way to this weird little pocket of reality created when their time crystal ball exploded. I need a little help aiming. I don't suppose you've got anything of his, do you? Or anything else that might have been yanked in there?"

If he brought the Waverider, there would be plenty to choose from. Snart's belongings and at least half of their stolen historical loot was still in his old room, untouched for months. No one had the heart to pack it away. Nate took Carter's old room and Amaya took Kendra's and there were still a few unused rooms that Rip never bothered with in the first place, so no one ever needed to disturb his belongings. They couldn't bring themselves to throw them out and the only ones who might have a claim on Snart's stuff were Mick and Lisa.

But the Shadowslicer didn't carry much connected to the man. Even less after Mick cleaned out the formerly-frozen chunks of hand. That didn't mean, however, they were out of luck.

Mick dug into his coat pocket and pulled out the silver ring that Snart left him. A souvenir of their first real job together and a reminder that even the best plans could go wrong.

"This belonged to Snart. He had it for years. Will it work?"

"Um... Wow," Cisco said awkwardly. "I mean, I know you two were 'partners,' but I didn't know you meant..."

Rolling his eyes in annoyance, Mick said, "Not like that, idiot. Besides, he had his eye on Blondie. Not that he would admit it. He was too cold for that," he said, letting some sarcasm color his last sentence.

"Blondie? You mean White Canary?" Cisco asked, eyes widening. "That's both scary and awesome. Does Lisa know?"

"Is now really the time for this?" asked Barry.

Holding his hands up in surrender, Cisco said, "Right. Sorry. On a mission. We'll worry about future killer thief babies later."

"Anything I can do to help?" asked Iris, clearly trying to steer things back on track.

Unwinding the rope, Mick tossed one end to the young woman. He quickly tied the opposite end around his waist with a sturdy knot.

"Tie that to the broken junk to anchor it," he said, gesturing towards some metal structure next to her. "You get to play safety line and make sure there's a way back."

"Smart," said Iris as she obeyed, sounding mildly surprised. "Didn't you used to be too hot-headed for this stuff. You seem calmer than when you were robbing Central City."

He didn't really respond to that. He really didn't have the time or desire to explain that lifetimes in the Vanishing Point being remade into someone else cooled him down a bit. Not completely, but enough.

"You watch the rope," Mick said. "If it stops going forward or even starts coming back, start pulling. I know you don't have super-strength, but do your best. Really don't want to stay in there any longer than necessary."

She was a tiny, thin, fragile-looking thing. She wasn't like Amaya or Sara, armed with magic or assassin training. Mick could see she didn't have the upper body strength to do what he was asking.
He wasn't exactly light and adding Snart would give her more weight to pull. But the other two would be busy keeping the portal open, so she was the only option.

Besides, based on how the young woman drew herself up and her expression hardened, Iris seemed determined to meet the challenge anyway.

He wasn't sure if she reminded him more of Lisa or the Flash with that look.

"Ready?" asked Barry.

Mick gave a nod and said, "Start running, Red."

Nate knew that everyone was hoping that the Waverider would reach the Vanishing Point first. It would be easier that way. They could stop him and talk some sense into Rory. They could figure out a better plan.

But as Sara brought the Waverider around, they all saw the second timeship waiting. Nate could also see the ramp down. Rory was already inside the structure.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Jax.

"We could still have time," Ray said, though he didn't sound completely convinced.

Nate looked at the woman beside him. Worry dominated her face. Worry for their missing teammate. He knew Amaya had developed an unexpected friendship with the former criminal. Which was surprising since Nate once kept her from slitting Rory's throat with a knife.

He knew what she wanted to do. And he knew what she needed to do.

As soon as the Waverider touched down, Nate said, "Run, Amaya."

She didn't even hesitate, bolting to her feet as her hand touched her totem around her neck. A brief aura of a feline made of light and magic flared around her. Then she raced off the bridge faster than any non-speedster human could achieve, the power of a cheetah helping her.

Mick watched as the Flash raced around the perimeter of the room and, now wearing his gloves and goggles again with the addition of an earpiece to communicate with Barry's suit, Cisco directed his powers at an angle in front of the arsonist. He didn't know what he expected the forming portal to look like, but the gray-blue thing that occasionally pulsed the same shade of green as the Temporal Zone seemed vaguely promising.

Doubt and something resembling fear tried wriggling at the back of his mind as he now faced the ultimate moment. Playing the hero would always lead to death eventually. Mick knew that for a fact. Being the hero meant dying and leaving your partner behind, lost and adrift with nothing left except a team that deserved better. And even if Snart could be a hero in the end, Mick knew he wasn't one. So he would probably die and fail.

Mick shoved all that down. Too late to back down now. He was getting Snart out of there.

It should have been him, not Snart. The team would have been better off. Snart wouldn't have betrayed them or almost betrayed them. And Snart had Sara and Lisa. Snart deserved to live. They needed him.
If things went wrong, the team wouldn't lose anything they would miss. Jax and the professor could handle any fire that they might need. Nate could provide any muscle and Sara could take care of any required punches. And Snart was the best criminal that they could possibly need. They would be fine.

He dug into his other coat pocket and pulled on his old goggles. It wasn't much protection, but he didn't think anything would help much anyway. He still pulled his coat a little tighter just in case.

"I think this is as stable as it's going to get," said Cisco, his voice slightly strained. "If you're going to go, now's the time."

Nodding once, Mick stepped forward. His hand wrapped tightly around the grip of his Heat Gun at his side. He was going to get his partner back. He was going to do one thing right.

He ruined so many things. He left his family to burn. He lost control on a job, nearly burning himself alive and driving his partner away for a while. He sided with pirates over the team for a ride home, betraying his team for the first time and forcing Snart to choose. He hunted them as Chronos and killed Kendra's past life son. He failed to destroy the Oculus, letting his partner steal that sacrifice instead. And he failed to learn from his past mistakes, almost betraying them again.

Mick didn't regret many choices in his life. Especially those that involved breaking the law. But he did regret those few decisions. This wouldn't fix any of them. But it was a choice that Mick would never regret and he knew without a doubt it was the right one.

His hand tightened enough on his Heat Gun that his fingers ached within their gloves. It was crazy. The entire plan sounded like the stupid hero morality thing.

"Hold on to that rope, Iris," he called over his shoulder. "I'm counting on you."

"Go get your partner," said Iris over the sound of a racing speedster.

Pulling his weapon from his holster, he powered up the Heat Gun to its highest setting. Mick hugged it to his chest as he stepped right up to the portal. His breathing was ragged and shook for some reason. Mick ignored it.

He tried to remember every detail of how the room used to look. He didn't want to step off the walkway and fall into that deep pit. At least the portal formed close to where the machine used to be. Only a handful of steps.

He could handle a few steps. If he could survive the induction process twice while holding onto even part of his identity, then he could do this.

Disobeying the most primary rule of weapon safety, Mick turned the barrel towards his chest with his finger on the trigger.

"Mick, stop!" Amaya's voice shouted from somewhere behind.

But he was already stepping through the portal, pulling the trigger to fire.

Chapter End Notes

And yet another chapter ends with Mick firing his Heat Gun. But this time, he is trying
to use it to be able to not get stuck in a location that is at absolute zero.

Unfortunately, having at least enough heat to keep his molecules moving also means that his body will have enough energy to react to the extreme cold. Snart, currently existing in that captured instant and at absolute zero, at least has the benefit that his body can't react to what is happening. Which means Snart can't die in that state until he warms up at least slightly and he can't suffer frostbite or hypothermia because there isn't even enough energy for water molecules in him to freeze.

Yeah, if I'm going to bring back a character that the show is treating as dead and gone, then it isn't going to exactly be easy. And sometimes that means there's going to be a cost. Whether or not the cost is the life of another person is yet to be seen.
**Absolute Zero**

Chapter Notes

My few loyal fans have some deep concerns for our arsonist. Good. You should be concerned. The guy is facing absolute zero temperatures. The outcome of that won't be very nice.

Frostbite is when exposure to cold temperatures causes freezing to the skin or other tissues. It most commonly affects the hands, feet, and face. The longer areas are exposed to cold, typically the worse the frostbite. Frostbite is classified by degrees of severity, with first degree being superficial damage to surface skin and fourth degree involving bone, muscle and tendon. This causes irreversible damage and often requires amputation. Cold temperatures cause blood vessels to narrow, slowing the flow of warm blood from the core of the body to the extremities. With prolonged exposure to cold, ice crystals form in tissues. These ice crystals, in turn, damage cells and blood vessels. And rewarming afterwards can do further damage to the body.

Since it is safe to say that first degree frostbite will be the least of their problems, let's worry about the more serious versions. In second degree frostbite, the skin develops clear blisters early on, and the skin's surface hardens. In the weeks after injury, this hardened, blistered skin dries, blackens, and peels (but the that's not an issue here since that takes time). At this stage, lasting cold sensitivity and numbness can develop. In third degree frostbite, the layers of tissue below the skin freeze. Symptoms include blood blisters and "blue-grey discoloration of the skin." And in fourth degree frostbite, structures below the skins are involved like muscles, tendon, and bone. Early symptoms include a colorless appearance of the skin, a hard texture, and painless rewarming. Later signs include lovely things like your skin looking black and mummified and body parts randomly amputating themselves months later.

As for hypothermia, that's pretty much what happens any time the human body drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit or 45 degrees Celsius. In moderate hypothermia, low body temperature results in violent shivering, obvious muscle coordination problems, slow and labored movements, a stumbling pace, and mild confusion even as the person may appear alert. Surface blood vessels contract further as the body focuses its remaining resources on keeping the vital organs warm. And the patient will seem pale with possibly blue lips, ears, fingers, and toes. As for severe hypothermia, the biological processes falter and heart rate, respiratory rate, and blood pressure all decrease. Difficulty speaking, sluggish thinking, and amnesia start to appear; inability to use hands and stumbling are also usually present. Cellular metabolic processes shut down. Below 86 degrees Fahrenheit (30 degrees Celsius), the exposed skin becomes blue and puffy, muscle coordination very poor, and walking almost impossible, and the person exhibits incoherent or irrational behavior or even stupor. Pulse and respiration rates decrease significantly, but fast heart rates can also occur.

So yeah, the cold isn't very pretty to the human body. You have been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Even with the speed her totem granted her and the sounds of wind and lightning from a speedster to guide her, Amaya knew in her heart it was too late. But she tried. She raced into the room to see a red blur wrapped in yellow lightning circling the circumference of the chamber like an uncrossable barrier, forcing her sprint to a halt. And in the center was a long-haired man in goggles extending both arms out and a young woman holding a rope, both of which she recognized from the whole alien invasion incident. She also saw a strange warping and pulsing portal with Mick in front of it, his back to her.

"Mick, stop!" she shouted desperately.

Her words weren't fast enough. While the others twisted around at the sound of her cry, Amaya saw him slip through without even looking back. Mick was gone.

Too slow. Too late. Once again, she arrived to witness the aftermath and unable to stop it. Amaya felt transported back to that moment where she found Rex dying on the floor, helpless to save him. She loved Rex and lost him, too slow to do anything when a speedster came into their headquarters to murder him. And now she'd lost a good friend, again too late to do any good. The thought made her chest ache.

Then she saw the rope in Iris's hand. It was still running between her fingers slowly, trailing through the portal after him. Mick had the other end. He was still moving. And that meant he was somehow alive.

Knowing the speedster, the Flash, would have the reflexes to avoid her, Amaya marched straight forward. And even if he ran close enough for the wind to whip around her in a concerning fashion, he turned out to be no barrier to her after all. Cisco kept the power blasting from his hands to the portal and Iris kept a steady eye on the rope, both clearly trying to fulfill their duties. She headed toward the two without hesitation.

"Why did you let him go?" Amaya asked, desperation, frustration, and worry all woven together. "How could you?"

"He has a plan," said Cisco, his tone wavering between a question and a statement. "That apparently involves pointing the Heat Gun at himself?"

"A plan that is going to get him killed," she responded.

Glancing between Amaya and the portal, Iris asked, "What?"

Amaya heard more racing footsteps over the sounds of a speedster. A quick look back showed that the rest of the team had arrived. Stein appeared slightly winded, but it was them.

"Absolute zero," said the professor as he tried to catch his breath. "It is absolute zero through that portal. Mr. Rory will either become trapped there like Mr. Snart or he'll freeze to death."

"It'll make a dip in the Arctic Ocean seem like a hot tub," Ray added.

Even through his goggles, Amaya could tell Cisco's eyes widened at the man's words. But he kept his powers directed at the portal.

"You hear that, Barry?" he asked, his head tilted the way she'd learned meant someone was speaking through a communicator. "Heat Wave is trying to turn himself in a popsicle. I did not sign up for that."
"Barry and Cisco can't stop or the portal will close," said Iris. "And Mick isn't dead or else the line would have stopped. He said to pull him out if it stopped or it starts growing looser because he's coming back."

Her eyes locked on the slowly-moving rope in the other woman's hands, Sara said, "Too bad. He's coming out now. We'll figure out a less stupidly suicidal way to get Leonard out afterwards."

Amaya and the others were quick to follow their captain's lead, moving towards Iris. But while still several feet away, she saw the rope go limp and still. He'd stopped. Either Mick found what he was looking for...

...or something was wrong.

Mick was familiar with pain. When he lost control of that fire and nearly burned himself alive (and could have killed Snart too since they were both inside at the time), he escaped the ambulance and dealt with the injuries on his own. He wrapped up the burns and self-medicated with whatever he could get a hold of, dealing with the agony until they healed. And then the induction process introduced him to a new level of pain. But the same stubborn and unbreakable willpower that let him mind control an army in Camelot ensured that Mick would always keep going regardless of the pain.

Besides, Snart froze off his own hand once and still managed to run into Nanda Parbat in time to interrupt a fight. If he could manage that much, Mick could handle this.

He was ready for pain when he turned his Heat Gun on himself and stepped through. Mick expected to feel the familiar burn of fire and bite of ice. He thought he was ready.

His imagination failed to prepare him.

Mick didn't feel the flames of his Heat Gun focused on his chest, trying to keep his core body temperature preserved just as Gideon warned him to. What he felt was the stabbing and slicing pain of cold over every inch of flesh, his clothes absolutely useless to stop it. It hit so suddenly and intense that Mick instinctively gasped in shock.

He instantly regretted it, staggering forward a step to keep from collapsing on the ground. His throat felt shredded by the air. His chest filled with knives and then seemed to tighten. Even as his body tried to inhale again out of pain and desperation from the assault, Mick managed to fight the urge and clenched his mouth shut. He thought he could taste blood at the back of his throat, but his tongue already felt stiff and mostly numb.

Breathing air at absolute zero. Bad idea.

He took another step forward, eyes clenched shut. He didn't know if he could open them anyway. Just as his clothes didn't protect his body at all from the extreme temperatures, the goggles didn't prevent his eyes from the initial sensation of needles trying to force their way out or the way his skull felt like it was trying to contract around his brain.

Just a few more steps. He just needed to keep moving. If he stopped, he would fail and die. One shuffling step after another, even if he couldn't feel his legs responding.

Honestly, after the first second or two of impossible agony everywhere, a lot of the pain was gone. His limbs had gone completely numb, leaving it a mystery if he was still pulling the trigger of his Heat Gun and trying to add at least a little heat to his body. His arm may have dropped to his side. Or fallen off his body completely. He wouldn't be able to tell the difference at that point. He couldn't feel his face or any of his skin. His chest ached deep inside and his heart couldn't seem to decide.
whether to race or slow, stumbling unevenly instead.

This was bad. Mick couldn't figure out why though. His thoughts were sluggish and slow. Everything felt numb and heavy.

He wanted to stop. Why was he doing this? He wanted to sleep. He couldn't tell if he was moving or holding his Heat Gun anymore. He could barely feel anything. But even as his mind struggled to remember his purpose, Mick kept trying out of sheer thick-headed stubbornness.

Barely conscious, Mick only noticed he'd still been moving when he bumped into something. He couldn't truly feel it, but the impact shook him just enough to catch his fading attention.

While it might be a Time Master who got too close before the explosion, Mick knew. Something deep down and primal reacted in recognition to someone vitally familiar. Something that spoke of trust, security, and a feeling that for years he'd only subconsciously admit as friendship.

Leonard.

He tried to wrap his left arm around the shape, like a desperate bearhug. His barely-responding instincts told him that he needed to grab on. To grab on and never let go. He didn't even know or care what would happen to the Heat Gun caught between them. Assuming he hadn't dropped it from his numb grip already.

Was it working? Was he even moving? He couldn't tell. He was exhausted. He couldn't feel his body. Mick couldn't even feel his heart beating. Everything felt so disconnected.

He felt numb and so far away from everything. From everyone.

It was so lonely. And he was so, so tired.

His willpower finally faltered. And then it gave out, his weak grip on awareness failing completely.

Rip would have cursed the entire twenty-first century for producing so many people lacking survival instincts or common sense if he could spare the moment. Instead, they were desperately grabbing at the safety line. The young woman was already pulling as hard as she could, her muscles straining the moment the rope stopped moving. She didn't initially make much progress, but a whole team of heroes adding their strength quickly shifted the balance. Rip wasn't certain how much he contributed compared to some of the others. But hand over hand, they pulled the rope slowly through the portal.

There was no way to tell how much progress they were making until it happened. A large shape fell out of the portal. Or rather one figure holding onto another.

Rip felt a moment of panic about what would happen as they fell, worries about what a rough impact would do shrieking in his head, but then a red blur intervened as the portal snapped shut. Super speed allowing him to react in time, the Flash managed to catch and lower both to the ground gently within the blink of an eye. The Heat Gun clattered past almost as an afterthought.

While he expected the figure with the rope around his waist, the other one was someone that they'd never expected to see again. At least not without it being a past version. Goggles around his neck, left arm outstretched and stiff, and his more casual black jacket and navy sweater already starting to frost over after escaping the extreme cold, it was clearly Leonard Snart.

Both he and Rory were right in front of them. But too pale, too stiff, and too still.
Rip ignored the expressions of worry and horror on the others' faces, trying to weigh the hazards of speed over the hazards of waiting. Sara might be captain now, but he knew the capabilities of the Waverider's medbay better than anyone other than Gideon herself. There were limits and it couldn't produce miracles, but the medbay was well suited for the dangers of a Time Master. And even if he never met the Flash previously, he knew plenty about the famous speedster and knew he would listen.

"Get them both to the Waverider's medbay," Rip ordered sharply. "Now, Mr. Allen."

If the young man hesitated, it was too quick to notice. In a blur of wind and lightning, the Flash and Snart vanished. Sara, taking the initiative, chose to use the chance to cut the rope from Rory. She was also wise enough to not touch him or the stiffening rope with her bare hand directly. The delay that was likely due to the Flash attempting to locate both the ship and the correct room onboard proved to be just enough for her self-appointed task. The moment she pulled the knife away, Rory vanished in the same blur of speed.

What Rip didn't expect was a force to grab hold of him and to yank him along, rushing wind and streaks of color engulfing his senses. Then as suddenly as it hit, everything stopped. Blinking against his briefly blurred vision and disorientation, Rip realized he was in the medbay.

"How can we help them?" Barry asked in a rush.

Rip glanced quickly at the two criminals, trying to take stock of the situation. Snart was positioned in the chair closest to the door and Rory was in the other, the chairs reclined back until they were nearly lying flat. While Snart's left arm remained in the same position he used to hold down the switch, Rory's right hand was close to his chest while the left curved in front of him, clearly from when he grabbed his partner. Trying to lower any of the limbs to a more natural position would not end well. Frost and ice were forming as the air condensed on their clothes and skin.

Far more concerning was the appearance of their skin. And even though logic would suggest otherwise, Rory's symptoms were more extreme. While Snart was in that place longer, he was only now reacting to the temperature. His skin was shifting to a blue-gray tone while blood blisters formed before Rip's eyes, starting at the extremities and working inward. And Rory's skin looked nearly bloodless and unnerving like that of a corpse.

Rip took all of this in almost an instant. Drawing on what he remembered of the Time Masters' mandatory first aid courses, he knew the usual wrist cuff for the medical infusion device would not suffice. Even as a blue light started to dance across the pair as Gideon attempted to slow down the damage, they were far too cold. And relying solely on external heating would only make things worse, warming the extremities and skin while leaving the body core too cold to support them. The fastest and most effective way to warm them up would be to combine with Gideon's current actions with extracorporeal rewarming methods. That would involve removing the blood from their bodies, warming it, oxygenating it, and then returning it to the body, essentially taking the role of the heart and lungs in order to introduce heat to the center of mass. And taking a detour through the wrist would increase the risk of sending them into some form of shock.

They needed to focus on warming the major organs and stabilizing them. The cold would slow everything down, buying them time. But it didn't erase the urgency.

"Both Mr. Rory and Mr. Snart are suffering from severe cases of hypothermia," reported Gideon. "And while Mr. Allen's speed may have warmed them slightly through friction, especially the slightly longer journey with Mr. Snart as he located the medbay, their core body temperatures are still dangerously low."
Even before having the patients properly hooked up for full treatment and monitoring, Gideon could handle some of the more general issues. Just as she was slowing down the accumulating damage to their flesh with her systems, she could give the most basic diagnosis. Not that it took a high-tech A.I. to realize the pair were hypothermic.

Rip pulled out gloves buried at the very bottom of his coat pocket, nearly forgotten after so long. Causing himself harm from contact with the cold patients wouldn't help anyone. Then he started digging into one of the supply drawers for scissors.

"Down the hall is the fabrication room, Mr. Allen."

Rip spoke to the speedster distractedly as he started cutting down the middle of Snart's navy sweater and exposing his chest. He then twisted around to repeat the process to Rory's unfortunate shirt, causing Rip to catch a glimpse of the rather graphic burn scars that frostbite was now competing with. Of course, frostbite normally took a little more time to become so visible and extreme. But then the two men had been exposed to temperatures far beyond what could be found anywhere on Earth.

"If you head there, Gideon should be able to provide thermal space blankets and maybe some alternate clothes."

The man pulled out one of the alternate medical infusion device models that were stored out of the way. Two thin clear tubes rather than one and round dome around the size of his fist that was designed to bond onto the chest rather than attach around a wrist, it was not exactly convenient when only a sedative, antibiotics, or similar medications were required. But for something more involved and elaborate, such as the removal, warming, oxygenating, and recirculation of blood, it was ideal. Even as he instructed the Flash on what to retrieve, Rip carefully positioned on the medical infusion device on Snart's chest before moving to do the same with another on Rory's.

"I assume you'll be able to find everything on your own, Mr. Allen. And I also assume that I don't have to tell a speedster to hurry."

A short nod and the Flash vanished. Rip turned his attention briefly towards the readings that Gideon was now displaying, though part of his focus remained on trying to remove the cold clothes from the pair without causing them further harm. Rip noticed their skin felt hard and rough as he cut coats, sweaters, and shirts from the men. And the temperatures for the men did not inspire confidence, the displayed numbers far too low. Their heart and respiratory rates were nonexistent. Gideon had essentially taken over those processes through the medical infusion devices along with warming them, the thin tubes now red as the blood moved slowly.

"In addition to hypothermia, Mr. Snart is displaying third degree frostbite on his limbs and second degree frostbite across his face and body," reported Gideon. "Mr. Rory possesses third and fourth degree frostbite. Both men's limbs and large portions of their skin and muscle are too damaged to recover and will need to be replaced."

"Then they should be very thankful for your cellular regeneration capabilities, shouldn't they?" he said, gently pulling off the gloves from Snart while taking his time not to shatter another of his hands anyway.

"Furthermore, Mr. Rory has managed to collect more specific injuries from freezing. Hairline fractures in the legs due to fourth degree frostbite damaging the bones and causing breakage from the weight of his supporting his body."

"As you said, his legs were already in need of removal due to just the frostbite itself. He probably didn't even feel the breaks."
"Damage from ice crystals that formed in his eyes, throat, lungs, and vascular system are also worth noting," continued Gideon.

Rip grimaced as he carefully tugged the goggles off Rory's face. Even with his eyes pressed closed, he could make out reddish ice that lined the edge of his eyelids.

"Mr. Snart avoided the additional damage by his body not being able to react to the extreme cold very long before he was brought to medbay. I should be able to prevent further damage from the low temperatures, though rewarming shock could be a danger later on. I shall monitor closely for any sudden drop in blood pressure combined with low cardiac output once they resume breathing on their own and their heart is capable of beating again."

Rip tossed what remained of the sweaters, shirts, and coats in the floor in the corner. There wasn't any way to remove them without cutting them apart. And considering how he could feel the chill even through his gloves and there was visible ice and frost coating the fabric, leaving them on the two men was not an option. The clothes were a lost cause. But if either of them complained, they could always get replacements created in the fabrication room.

Assuming that either of them ever woke up.

Rip said quietly, "I suppose I should ask the question then. Are they alive?"

"I am uncertain, Captain," said Gideon after a brief hesitation. "Low temperatures drastically reduce and slow down all biological process, making it difficult to detect any signs of life. Their heart and respiratory rates can be restored once their core body temperatures raise to a more acceptable level. As for whether or not they have survived enough to be restored, that will depend on whether brain activity can be detected as they begin to warm. Until then, it would be best to operate under the assumption that Mr. Snart and Mr. Rory can recover."

"So all we can do treat them and hope they're alive as they thaw out."

The medbay might seem miraculous to the rest of the team, but the technology had limits. It wasn't even the best available in his time. The hospitals were better stocked and run by doctors trained in the latest techniques. At least before Savage and his forces tore their way through the world and then the man died multiple times that bordered on paradoxical as it strained the timeline. Timeships were equipped for emergency treatment because time traveling would be dangerous for injured patients. It was safer to offer what help they could in the field with the sturdy, dependable, and versatile equipment that could be operated by an A.I. and the occasional assistance from any available pair of hands. It was good, but not perfect.

There was still plenty of uncertainty.

A rush of wind and the Flash practically materialized beside Rip. In his arms were a pair of silver thermal space blankets and thick gray clothes, held together with snaps and easy to put on unconscious figures. The thermal space blankets were made of heat-reflective thin plastic sheeting and were thus not the most comfortable things. And the clothes were thickly woven. But both the blankets and clothes were perfect for retaining body heat. Gideon outdid herself fabricating these.

The sounds of frantic running came down the hall, announcing quite clearly the rest of the team's return. Knowing that he was about to be crowded and questioned by far too many people in one room, Rip grabbed the offered blankets and clothes.

"Try to keep them out of here, Mr. Allen," Rip said quickly. Then, remembering that he had two patients and remembering who took care of Sara during that very unpleasant situation during the
Revolutionary War that he disliked thinking about, Rip added, "And please ask Professor Stein if he could assist. I only have two hands."

Looking back at the two still figures briefly with clear concern, the Flash nodded and said, "Of course."

"And be careful of Ms. Lance. She is not going to be happy about staying out and she always has knives," he said in a rush of words. "Always."

With that piece of advice, the Flash vanished back into the hall. Voices started up almost instantly. And it didn't take long for them to grow more forceful.

While Rip did feel a little sympathy for the speedster that he knew had or would mess with time plenty, Rip also felt brief relief that he wasn't the one having to field all questions and concerns.

"Gideon, prioritize the most immediate concerns," Rip said as he pulled out the cellular regenerator. "What should we start with?"

"The ice shards that formed in Mr. Rory's pulmonary circulatory system have punctured his lungs and will cause a traumatic pneumothorax once he resumes respiration," recited Gideon.

Air escaping his lungs and collecting in the space between them and the chest wall would indeed be a reason for concern as Rory warmed up. Not only would it be difficult for him to get enough oxygen to support his body, but it could also cause his lungs to completely collapse and for him to die.

Rip remembered experiencing a pneumothorax himself years ago, a cracked rib from a mission that turned into a full-on break by the time he made it back to the Waverider and tore a small hole into his lungs right as he made it to medbay. But even with that unpleasant turn of events, the mission still went more smoothly than most of his more recent ones.

But he couldn't spare the time to reminisce. He and Gideon still had to deal with the fallout of their insane arsonist going off on his own without warning.

"Then we better fix his lungs while he isn't using them."

As Rip positioned the device over Rory's chest, Stein slipped into the medbay. The old man looked a little pale as he glanced at the two figures. He wasn't a medical doctor and didn't seem very comfortable with the role, even if Gideon handled the majority of it. They were only there for the occasional task that required physical hands. But even with his obvious discomfort, Stein seemed determined to do what he could.

"How may I assist, Captain Hunter?"

Chapter End Notes

In severe cases resuscitation begins with simultaneous removal from the cold environment and management of the airway, breathing, and circulation. Rapid rewarming is then commenced. Moving the person as little and as gently as possible is recommended as aggressive handling may increase risks of a dysrhythmia. Extracorporeal rewarming is the fastest method for those with severe hypothermia,
which essentially means taking the blood out of the body, warming it up (and oxygenating it since you're handling the heart and lungs' jobs at the moment), and pumping it back into the body to warm up the core of the body. There are risks to trying to rewarm someone. Rewarming shock (or rewarming collapse) is a sudden drop in blood pressure in combination with a low cardiac output which may occur during active treatment of a severely hypothermic person. The only good news about this is that even if the person looks dead when you find them, there's still hope. Extreme hypothermia can suppress heart and brain function, so you won't know for sure until they're warmed up.

Anyway, there's some of the research I found for this (though no one has ever tossed someone into absolute zero before). But even if you find this interesting, don't take medical advice from a fanfiction. Especially when part of the treatment involves future technology that we don't have yet.
Being an educated and intelligent man, Stein was very familiar with the sensation of those around him expecting him to know everything. And while he wasn't an expert in all fields, he generally could handle most queries directed towards him. There were advantages to being a brilliant and respected scientist with decades of experience. Stein had gathered a vast amount of knowledge in his lifetime.

But there was one particular branch of science that everyone kept pushing Stein into that the man wished they would stop. For all his brilliance, he was not and held no interest in becoming a medical doctor.

If Stein wanted to poke and prod at someone's internal organs, he would have attended a prestigious medical school rather than studying physics. He did not have the temperament or interest to pursue that path. And yet, against all odds, he kept finding himself trapped in that role.

When Rory came to him with stories of hallucinations, Stein tried to offer what advice he could even with no psychiatric or psychological training. And when a brain scan showed the presence of an implanted chip, Stein felt as if he had no choice other than to aid Gideon in performing brain surgery to remove it. Especially since Rory seemed distressed enough by its presence that Stein wouldn't be surprised if he tried carving it out of his head with a spoon. And when Sara was shot in 1776, after the Waverider was knocked offline by an EMP, there was no technology to care for her and Stein was forced to act as a doctor to save her life. These situations kept happening and Stein was slowly resigning himself to his fate, no matter how uncomfortable it made him.

And yet again, he was recruited for a medical role. Literally recruited this time. Barry met the returning group just in time to say that Rip requested they stay out of medbay for the moment, but that he also wanted Stein's assistance with the patients. What else could he do other than accept? At least Gideon was online this time.

When Stein entered medbay, Rid directed him to a pair of gloves (normal gloves rather than rubber ones) and asked him to start trying to get the fabricated clothes on the pair. The gray fabric almost reminded him of flannel and the snaps would make it simpler, but Stein knew that maneuvering the almost-pajama-like clothes around stiff unconscious men wouldn't be easy. Their arms were locked in awkward positions and he still needed to get their footwear wrestled off. But Stein could see the importance of his task and how the new clothes would help warm them. And since Rip was already focusing on Rory, he decided to start with Snart.

As Stein tried to determine what would be the least damaging way to remove Snart's footwear, Rip seemed to be aiming the cellular regenerator at the arsonist's chest. Stein could see images of blood vessels and lungs on the display. Certain points would flash briefly, indicating tissue damage in need of repair. Of course, with all the visible injuries from frostbite, it only made sense that there would be internal issues as well. But Rip seemed to be dealing with it already with Gideon. He had complete confidence that the A.I and the former captain would be able to handle the medical treatment.

Then the screen started flashing red and clear, though not especially loud, alarm rang out in the room. Rip cursed quietly before yanking the cellular regenerator away from Rory's body.

Confusion and panic gripping him, Stein asked, "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Stupid," he said, shaking his head. "I was stupid. The cellular regeneration process will recreate tissue, but it automatically does it at normal body temperature. Which would instantly be damaged
again because his body is still too cold. We can't start repairing the injuries from the frostbite until they warm up enough. Otherwise it's just a waste of time and won't do them any good."

"It would be advisable to repair the damage gradually as well," suggested Gideon. "Once their body temperatures are high enough to allow proper cellular regeneration, they will be vulnerable to sudden changes. That includes movement, abrupt temperature changes, or excessive stress from the regeneration process. If Mr. Snart or Mr. Rory fall into shock in the process of repairing the injuries, it could be difficult to stabilize them."

"How difficult?" Stein asked.

"Fatally so, Professor."

How could the A.I. sound so cheerful saying things like that?

"Fine," Rip said. "We'll work on getting them warmed and stable for now. And see if we can actually detect any brainwaves."

During less serious moments where Stein might be annoyed by the man, he might have made a sarcastic remark about Rory and brainwaves. But with Rory sprawled there, all his scars and frostbite damage on display, the very idea made Stein feel guilty.

"Just make sure to keep track of their core body temperatures, Gideon," he continued. "We'll need to use the cellular regenerator once instantaneous frostbite is no longer a threat. There's a lot of work to do on both of them."

Stein managed to cut the laces on Snart's footwear and pulled at the tongue just enough to slip it off his foot. And once he also cut off the sock, Stein flinched at the exposed damage. Being trapped and confined in a bitterly-cold shoe did nothing to help his foot with the frostbite, turning it swollen and discolored as a result.

At least they had access to future tech to treat the damage before it reached the stage of turning black and falling off. Even without a medical degree, Stein knew about that unpleasant possibility. There were some documentaries that he should have avoided watching.

"We have to take our time," Rip muttered, shaking his head wearily. "People aren't supposed to surviving being so cold. We have to be careful. If they're actually alive, we don't want to risk killing either of them by rewarming or fixing the damage too quickly."

Stein knew he was right. It would be too easy for them to die. He didn't know of anyone who ever survived temperatures even close to what those two experienced. Though certain metas might have a chance. And all of that was assuming that Snart and Rory were even still alive. There were certainly no external signs.

But perhaps, with proper care, futuristic tech, and a little faith, their team would be whole again.

He could tell that Amaya wasn't in the right mindset to stay in the same room with a crowd. Not after he saw her expression when they pulled Rory out. He didn't want to use the obvious metaphor, but he had the feeling it would make her feel like a caged animal. So once it became clear that the medbay was currently barred to all visitors, Nate managed to lead her to his room and let her deal with her emotional turmoil in private. Which mostly consisted of the two of them sitting on the edge of his bed, his arm around her shoulder as she stared blankly at her hands in her lap.

Another man might be jealous, but Nate knew better than to be that stupid and insecure. Not only did
it make sense for teammates to worry about each other since being part of a team involved caring about one another, but she was also Rory's friend.

The arsonist wasn't exactly the easiest person to bond with. He was gruff, blunt, and somehow had a knack for saying exactly what no one wanted to hear. Not to mention his unhealthy relationship with fire. Rory wasn't close to many people, even if he was part of the team. But Amaya was his friend. She cared about Rory. Not the same as she seemed to care about Nate, but that didn't mean it wasn't important. Nate wasn't so petty that he would begrudge the two of them that friendship. And because the two of them were friends against all odds, Rory's current state was clearly affecting her.

She didn't burst into tears or crumble. Amaya wasn't like that. It wasn't in the nature of the powerful and strong woman he loved. She'd been in war. She'd seen plenty of pain, suffering, and injuries to those she'd cared for. She's lost people before. But she wasn't made of stone either. Nate could see she was hurting. He could see it in her body language and in her eyes. She was in pain and he couldn't make it stop. All he could do was try to help as much as he could and to be there for her.

For someone who could turn into metal, Nate felt pretty useless and powerless at the moment.

"I shouldn't have let him go," she said quietly, breaking the silence. "I could have stopped him. This is all my fault."

Brushing her hair back, Nate said, "It's not your fault. Rory probably would have just tried again later. I don't know if you've noticed, but he tends to do whatever he wants. Like when he made friends with the guy he was supposed to fight. Remember? You would think getting him to start a bar fight would be easy, but no. Too bad I missed that part. I would have loved to see how that happened."

The memory of the Old West managed to spark a weak smile from Amaya. Nate considered that progress. Maybe he could pull her thoughts away from her friend's current condition. Having her focus on a different topic might help. But it couldn't be too different or she might not go for the bait. Well, there was at least one topic that they could try.

"So what do you think Snart will be like?" asked Nate, still brushing her hair back with his hand. "We're the only ones who never knew him."

"Except for the version who joined Thawne," she said.

"From the past," said Nate with a nod.

That was the thing. The version of Snart that they'd faced briefly was only two years away from the one in medbay. Two years wasn't a long period of time to truly change in. Nate remembered Ray rambling about how the Legion of Doom version of Snart killed the other version of Rory, the scientist clearly upset over the incident. How much of that man remained?

Did they need to worry about him waking up? The others seemed to trust and miss him, but Nate couldn't completely banish his concerns. Until he could properly judge the man in the present, he knew that past experience would continue to color his views.

"I don't know what he'll be like," Amaya said thoughtfully. "He is just as much a criminal as Mick. And he's supposed to be an expert thief. He seemed fairly cold and efficient when we met him, but we know that he sacrificed himself rather than let someone else do it." She raised her head and turned towards Nate. "And we know that the team respected and trusted Snart enough to grieve his loss and to welcome his return. I may not know what Snart will be like when he wakes up, but I
have learned enough to give him a chance."

Smiling at her, preferring Amaya reflective rather than worrying, Nate said, "I suppose that's fair."

Having been banished from medbay, they'd mostly wandered back up to the bridge. Nate and Amaya had vanished somewhere and Sara eventually went to do her "throw knives at improvised targets in the cargo bay" thing that she did when thinking or stressed. No one opted to try disturbing her or following. Everyone else claimed a chair, a wall to lean against, or even a spot of the floor. Even Barry, Cisco, and Iris only briefly vanished to the galley, super speed apparently requiring a lot of calories, before reappearing to join them in the tense waiting game.

Conversation was stilted and hesitant. The atmosphere seemed to weigh down on all of them. It was clear where everyone's thoughts were. Jax certainly knew what obviously occupied Stein's mind.

Once it would have been strange to even consider the idea of sharing a psychic bond with someone, let alone occasionally share a body. Now Jax could barely remember what it felt like to be alone in his own head. Just like flying and creating flames as Firestorm, feeling Stein at the back of his head seemed natural. And if Jax should ever lose that connection, he imagined it would feel like a large open wound in his mind that would never heal. It was the sensation that he would pick up from Stein occasionally when he thought about Ronnie, the loss and guilt almost painful when it caught the man off guard.

Jax could feel their bond prickling at the back of his mind as the young man sat against the wall. Stein's brief moment of panic, the undercurrent of worry and concern, and the general discomfort practically radiated through their psychic connection, the man not even trying to block off his emotions. He was too distracted to attempt the necessary concentration. It frayed at Jax's nerves, making it harder to keep track of where his own worry ended and where Stein's began. But Jax did his best to keep his partner from feeling his current emotional state. Otherwise they'd create a feedback loop as his anxiety fed off Stein's and his in turn fed off Jax's, continuously strengthening until they both ended up as nervous wrecks.

He should be working on repairs. They managed to get the Waverider moving, but there were things he could still fix. It might take his mind off the situation. But he knew the repair work would require a large amount of concentration and Jax needed that concentration to keep his emotions from distracting Stein. That left him curled up in the bridge with his tense friends and his thoughts.

A few hours ago, Jax had been trying to ignore some mild anger at Mick. Even if he didn't do it this time, at least one version of Mick betrayed the team. Again. And Jax couldn't stand the idea of turning against people who trusted him and vice versa. There was just something utterly wrong about that. The arsonist did it once and they forgave him, deciding that his experiences at the hands of the Time Masters was punishment enough for his actions with the pirates. But then it nearly happened a second time and only a visit from their alternate versions kept him from following that path. Jax felt guilty for even partially blaming Mick for something that he didn't actually do, but he couldn't change how he felt.

But now Jax got it. He understood why. Mick wasn't trying to betray his team. He was trying not to betray a version of his partner. He and Snart had known each other for decades. They had more history together than anyone else on board. And if Jax understood anything, he understood the importance of a partner. If Jax ever had to choose between Stein and the rest of the team, he wasn't completely certain what he'd do.

No, he knew who he would choose. He'd feel guilty about it, but Jax knew who he would choose. He would do anything to protect Grey because that's what partners do.
And Mick, when confronted with a version of his partner that he couldn't keep and who barely resembled the man who sacrificed himself to destroy the Oculus, chose to do whatever it took to save his friend. Jax could understand the impulse. He just wanted his partner back.

Jax ran a hand across the top of his head. The idea of getting their lost teammate should have been a happy occasion. But they were all waiting anxiously for the news of whether they regained a teammate or merely lost another one. He saw how Snart and Mick looked when they pulled the pair back. They looked practically dead. Only the fact that Rip and Stein hadn't come out with bad news reassured the team that they were alive.

For once, no news truly was good news.

"I still can't believe this happened," said Cisco, half draped in one of the chairs. He'd picked up the Heat Gun in the aftermath and was still holding onto it, the weapon casually resting on his lap since no one else had any better ideas what to do with it for now. "Nothing makes sense anymore. Heat Wave managed to figure all of this stuff out, he figured out how to pull a prison break from the Speed Force of all things, and he didn't know what would happen to him? That's crazy."

"Nah, man," Jax said quietly. "He knew. He just didn't care."

"I guess he figured getting Snart back was worth it," said Barry, leaning against the wall with his mask down to expose his face. Iris sat next to him, her back against the same wall and her legs pulled close. "Guess Cold wasn't the only one with the potential to be the good guy."

"They'd both shoot at you if you told them that," Iris said as she glanced up at him.

Occupying the chair next to Cisco sprawled form, Ray said, "It should have been me."

"What do you mean?" asked Cisco.

"It should have been me trapped in that place."

"Don't blame yourself for other people's choices," said Barry. "It's hard. Believe me. But it isn't your fault that Rory tried to take your place. And it isn't his fault that Snart did the exact same thing. Good or bad, they are responsible for their own decisions. You can only help as much as you can."

Running a hand through his hair tiredly, he said, "And both of them are here. They made it back. They're too stubborn to die."

Jax couldn't help the wry chuckle that slipped out at that. And judging by the weak smiles that blossomed on the others' faces, it was a shared reaction. From the moment that he met the two criminals, Jax could tell they were survivors. No matter where or when they ended up, Snart and Mick could handle it. And usually rob everyone blind along the way. Even when Snart sacrificed himself, it didn't seem completely real for the longest time. If anyone was going to survive the mission in the end, Jax always figured it would be those two.

He felt something shift, the emotions coming through the psychic bond changing slightly. The worry, concern, and discomfort were still there. Jax could feel it prickling at the back of his head. But the anxiety had eased off a bit. Stein was doing better than before. And there was hesitant relief, which coaxed the same emotion from Jax.

While he might not know what was happening, Jax could tell it was promising.
The knife buried deeply into her makeshift target, her arm moving smoothly through the practiced throws. Any form of combat training always seemed to help her. Throwing her knives at targets while adding in some basic strikes and blocks at imaginary foes was just easier and safer than some of her other options.

When she wanted to think, letting muscle memory guide her actions would let Sara's mind deal with difficult issues undisturbed. Her body would go through the motions and keep her active while she thought over her problems.

But if she didn't want to let her thoughts haunt her, Sara would put her entire focus into the familiar attacks. Each strike, slash, and stab was performed to absolute perfection. She concentrated on every muscle movement to ensure nothing was sloppy or weak. Sara poured all her energy into her body with such intensity that her mind wouldn't be able to wander.

She had fallen back on the strategy numerous times over the last few years. Both to think and avoid thinking. She used to spar with Nyssa like this when one of them needed either a distraction or a chance to focus. Neither of them really found the quiet and stillness of meditation to be quite as effective as something far more active. She could always find relief with these methods.

But today, Sara threw herself into her knife throws and yet her mind refused to settle.

Mick risked everything today. Or rather, he risked himself and no one else. Not even Cisco and Barry were placed in any form of danger. He drew upon what his time as Chronos taught him, recruited heroes from their present, and nearly killed himself to pull off a miracle. Underestimating Mick was certainly a mistake the entire team had made at different points in the past, but she certainly wouldn't repeat it in the future.

But while concern for the arsonist kept nipping at the edges of her mind, Sara's thoughts kept tumbling towards the thief.

Sara accepted Leonard's choice to sacrifice himself. Not that she could have done anything to stop him. The only way to prevent it would be to knock Leonard out, but then there would have been no one to drag both him and Mick out afterwards. It could have been all three of them dying or just him. Leaving Leonard behind to destroy the Oculus was the only option. She knew that and accepted his decision. All she could do was steal a single kiss before leaving.

Another knife flashed through the air and buried itself into the target.

That was the tragedy of it. After countless card games, friendly conversations, and fights ranging from fun ones in bars to intense ones against heavy forces, there was no denying that she and Leonard hit it off. They got along great and always had a good time together. And between his clever mind, his wry and sarcastic sense of humor, and his flexible morality, there was plenty going for him. Not to mention the same thrill of trouble that drew her towards Ollie back when he was dating Laurel and then to the beautiful and deadly Nyssa. What could she say? She was attracted to relationships with just a hint of danger and excitement. But ironically on a timeship, they ran out of time to see if anything could develop between them.

She left him behind. Any future that might have been disappeared. She accepted it. Unlike with Laurel, Sara at least got to tell him goodbye. She had at least a little closure.

But now Leonard was lying in medbay, trapped between life and death from hypothermia. And if he lived, if he woke up, there would be another chance to see what could happen. There would be a chance to see what the future might hold.
For him. For her. For him and her.

Another knife flew from her hand, but landed slightly to the left of her goal. She growled quietly at her suffering aim. The League of Assassins would mock her for that throw. Sara blinked a few times to clear her vision and ease the burning in her eyes.

She didn't know what would happen when he and Mick woke up. And she refused to consider that they wouldn't. She really didn't want to think at all. There was nothing she could do for the pair. She needed to do something productive. She needed to do something useful. She couldn't sit still, powerless and waiting. So Sara just doubled her efforts to concentrate only on her practiced throws and strikes.

Focus only on perfecting her form. Every movement must be smooth and lethal. She threw herself completely into the motions. There could be no mistakes. Sara finally managed to push her thoughts away and quieted her mind.

She wasn't certain how long she spent in the cargo bay, attacking and hurtling the blades. Sara didn't even pause. She just did her best to wear herself out until she would be too exhausted to think. And considering her training, that could take a while.

"Captain Lance?" Gideon said abruptly pulling her out of her practice.

Breathing a little harder as she pushed a stray hair from her face, she asked, "Yes? What is it?"

"Captain Hunter and Professor Stein wish to speak to everyone," Gideon stated. "Would you like to join the others on the bridge?"

The prospect of news made it impossible to maintain her tranquil and blank mindset. Her thoughts returned to the two teammates in medbay. If Rip and Stein wanted to talk, then either things had gone wrong or they discovered some form of hope for the pair. It meant something good or something quite ill for one or both patients.

The League of Assassins covered all forms of death, from the most direct and brutal methods of murder to the subtler ways of arranging "accidental" demises. Drownings, falls from great heights, bites and stings from venomous creatures, and even hypothermia could easily be used to kill without any evidence of outside influence. Sara knew how ruthless and unforgiving the cold could be and how fragile human life truly was. She knew the dangers.

So would Rip and Stein say that the two patients would recover or would they say that Mick and Leonard were beyond saving?

Sara struck down that darker fear and squared her shoulders. They would be fine. Mick and Leonard would be all right and would recover. And any doubts would be brutally crushed. She wouldn't let herself consider anything else.

"Captain Lance?" prompted Gideon.

Sara brushed her palm against her face briefly, ignoring the wet sensation. She was still the captain. She needed to head back to the rest of the team. She needed to take care of the situation. She needed to be there when they delivered the news. The good news. She needed to be there for the team when they heard the good news.

It would be fine. There was hope. They would be fine.

She wouldn't lose anyone.
"Captain Lance?"

"I'm fine, Gideon," she said. "I'm on my way."
You Have A Second Chance

Chapter Notes

Needless to say, the new seasons of "The Flash" and "Legends of Tomorrow" contradict my plotline completely. But since they didn't elect to give us Snart back, I think we'll have to go with this outcome instead. I like the idea of reuniting the team, not splitting it up further for six months (even if Mick did finally make it to Aruba).

She sometimes felt like an outsider when it came to the hero community. Not always, but sometimes. Iris was the last to learn Barry's secret even though they grew up together. She didn't have superpowers or combat training beyond what her father taught her to deal with bullies and pushy dates. And she wasn't a scientific genius. She contributed to the team, but she wasn't like the others.

That left her feeling a little like she didn't belong on the Waverider. Iris knew them from the whole alien invasion affair and the afterparty, but she wasn't close enough to really know any of them properly. Not like Barry and even Cisco did. She recognized names and faces with the exception of the man in the brown coat who might be the previously-missing Captain Rip Hunter. But she couldn't remember really having a conversation with any of them before. And now wasn't exactly ideal for small talk.

Ironically enough, before today, she'd had more contact with Snart than the others. They at least exchanged a few snarky comments when he broke into the house.

So Iris sat on the floor next to Barry, her fingers intertwined with his as if he might still vanish once more. The tension in the room was palpable. And there was not a thing she could say to improve things. But she did notice when the young man, Jax, visibly relaxed.

"Gideon told us to head this way," said Nate as he and Amaya unexpectedly entered the bridge. "Have you heard anything yet?"

"No, but Grey isn't as stressed now," Jax said. "I guess we'll hear some news soon. Especially if Gideon is gathering us together."

Iris took that as a signal to stand up. The others were quick to follow her example, climbing to their feet. No one said another word until Stein and Rip arrived a few minutes later.

"Is everyone present?" asked Rip.

"We are now," Sara said, coming up behind them and entering the bridge. "How are they?"

"Do you want the good news or bad news first?" asked Stein.

Both men looked tired and strained as they prepared to deliver their update. Of course, everyone looked tired. Stress could be exhausting.

"Both Mr. Rory and Mr. Snart are in serious condition," Rip said slowly. "They were exposed to temperatures that no human was meant to survive. Even Gideon can't fix it instantly."

"Hypothermia, frostbite, and all the damage that goes with it," said Stein. "Mr. Snart was colder on
arrival, but Mr. Rory ended up with worse frostbite before Gideon could stop the progression. They aren't doing well."

"But they are both alive," Rip said. "Once their body temperatures began rising, Gideon managed to detect weak brainwaves. First for Mr. Snart and then Mr. Rory. Everything else can be stabilized and repaired later as long as the brain activity is preserved."

"So they're going to be all right," said Sara.

"They'll need some time. Gideon can't repair the damage until they are closer to normal temperature," Stein said. "But yes, it would seem that the two of them managed to survive being exposed to absolute zero."

Immediately the atmosphere on the Waverider brightened. Iris could see their shoulders relax and hope eased back into their expressions. Sara closed her eyes momentarily and breathed out, unable to hide her relief. Ray's grin beamed. Amaya's smile wasn't as intense, but equally happy by the comforting news. Even Barry looked a little lighter.

"So what do we do next?" asked Cisco.

Shrugging tiredly, Rip said, "At the moment, all we can do is wait. When they are warmed up enough, they'll need some work from the cellular regenerator. Mr. Rory more so than his partner, if only somewhat. Other than that, all we can do is wait until they can wake up." He looked towards Barry. "I'm afraid we have an issue about getting the three of you home. Traveling through time is rough on the human body, especially when injured or ill. Traveling through time while the timestream is broken is even worse. We cannot risk it right now. The Waverider can't go anywhere or it'll kill them."

"There's the other timeship," suggested Nate. "The one that Rory brought them in."

"We're not leaving yet," Barry said. "I can't go back until they're awake. Until we're certain they're all right."

"They are your teammates, but they were Heat Wave and Captain Cold first," said Cisco. "We've known them longer. They fought the Flash several times and kidnapped me long before you guys brought them onboard. Turns out we're a little invested in the well-being of our former villains."

"Then we'll open up and setup a few of our extra rooms," said Sara finally. "You can stay here however long necessary." Glancing around the room, she said, "And while we are all worried, we're not all going to crowd into medbay the whole time. We'd go crazy while keeping an eye on them. Only one or two at a time. We can watch them in shifts."

With that, she apparently volunteered for the first shift because she abruptly left the bridge. Iris couldn't blame her. Especially based on what Mick said before. Iris would be the first person there if it was Barry in medbay instead.

"I suppose... I could use the time to study the equation that Mr. Rory left us," Stein said awkwardly. "Perhaps I could refine it further. Maybe even make it more accurate. Or at least learn something useful from it."

"And I can finish the rest of the repairs," said Jax.

"I thought we fixed it," said Nate.

"The Waverider can fly and travel through time. That doesn't mean everything is fixed. The last
couple of days have been rough on the timeship."

"Do you need any help?" asked Iris, not wanting to feel useless. "I don't know anything about timeships, but... I can try."

Jax smiled and shook his head.

"Nah, I've got it. The distraction will do me some good."

"And just in case anyone gets any ideas," added Rip, "no studying the time drive. You lot already cause enough chaos to the timestream without inventing the technology to time travel early."

Holding his arms out to his sides, Cisco said, "Okay, first? Evil Harrison Wells or Thawne or whatever already had me help with a time travel orb thing. So I have at least some idea. And second, if you plan to keep me from all the cool tech, what do you expect me to do while we hang around here?"

"Well, maybe you could help fix this."

They turned back toward the doorway to see Ray returning with something in his arms. Iris didn't even remember him stepping out. But she did notice the expression of absolute horror on Cisco's face. He was staring at Ray like the man was carrying the murdered body of Cisco's first-born child.

"What... what did you do?" Cisco asked, voice strained as his hands reached out desperately. "What did you do to my Cold Gun?"

Cringing in embarrassment, Ray said, "I had to use it to defuse an explosion in Washington D.C. and that fried all the inner components. After that, it felt wrong trying to experiment with repairs."

"And what do you mean 'your' Cold Gun? Didn't it belong to Snart?" asked Nate.

Holding the damaged weapon to his chest protectively, Cisco said, "And Barry wears the suit. That doesn't mean it isn't mine. If I created it, then it's still mine."

"Rule one for any true inventor," Ray confirmed with a solemn nod. "But I've got to know. Do you think you can fix it? I really don't want to explain to Snart that I fried the Cold Gun, even for a good cause."

Iris didn't blame the man. She couldn't imagine that conversation going well at all.

"If your fabrication room can replicate the replacement parts necessary, I should be able to fix this," said Cisco, looking over the weapon. "It'll make a nice 'welcome back' present for Captain Cold when he wakes up."

When Amaya walked into medbay carrying a bowl of vegetable soup, she knew convincing their captain to take a proper break from her vigil was a lost cause. For all her talk about taking shifts, it turned out to be more accurate to say that occasionally someone else stayed with Sara. She'd barely left the room since everything started.

"I thought you might be hungry," said Amaya gently.

Sara looked up at her with a hint of relief. She'd dragged one of the sturdy silver containers from the cargo bay in to serve as an impromptu bench. For a while, she'd had her knives out on the extra space to sharpen them, but she'd put them away hours ago. The container was shoved into the perfect
position to let her sit next to Snart's still figure and yet remain out of the way it someone needed to access him or the equipment. Amaya also noticed she was close enough to reach out and touch him, though she currently refrained from doing so.

"Thank you," Sara said, accepting the offered bowl. "I didn't realize it was getting so late."

"Time does strange things when you are consumed with worry and your own thoughts," said Amaya. "May I join you?"

Sara scooched over a little so that Amaya could sit down next to her on the container. The two women stayed there in silence for several minutes, the only noise being the machinery in the room and the clink of the spoon.

Both men looked at least a little better than before, wrapped in gray fabric and silvery blankets with blue lights dancing over them. Their limbs were no longer frozen in awkward positions and instead rested in more natural ones. And the frost and condensation was gone.

But their skin tones didn't look healthy, too pale and gray. The cellular regenerator was currently directed towards Snart, though it clearly spent time being used on both. And while Amaya was not an expert on the equipment or what it all meant, she'd learned enough since she left her native time period to decipher the displays. Everything was still too low.

The temperatures were too cold. Snart's heart was beating slowly and his breathing was even more spaced out. Mick, on the other hand, seemed to be dependent on Gideon for both. While Snart now had the normal cuff on him, Mick was still connected to the one that vanished under his blanket to his chest. Even with the confirmation that he was alive, Mick looked so much like a corpse that it made Amaya's heart clench.

"I've been helping Gideon with the cellular regenerator," Sara said gradually. "She's been working on them gradually. The worst of the frostbite, or at least the most dangerous, has been addressed. Fixing the limbs wasn't exactly pleasant to watch, but that's finished. Mick still has a lot of damage left, so Gideon is keeping his temperature lower to give us more time to work on it. His lungs are healed though. Len is almost finished. A few more minutes with the cellular regenerator and then it'll just be a matter of waiting for him to warm up slowly enough not to put him into shock."

Amaya carefully listened to her summary and tried to use the information to reassure herself. Mick was on the mend. Both of them were.

"You and Gideon have been talking quite a lot," said Amaya quietly.

"Not much else to do in here while waiting," she admitted, taking another bite of the vegetable soup. "And knowing seems to help."

Not wanting to overstep and yet feeling confident of the truth, Amaya asked, "You care for him. Leonard Snart."

Sara stiffened, but didn't immediately answer. She just kept staring forward. She kept staring at the unconscious thief.

"He was a friend," she said eventually. "A good friend and a better man than he would ever admit. Of course I care for him."

"That's not what I mean."

The Justice Society didn't encourage fraternization within the ranks, regardless of how she and Rex
ended up. But she knew the Legends weren't as strict. And Amaya could recognize the facts. The evidenced was etched into the blonde woman's face. She couldn't hide her emotions.

"You love him," said Amaya, deciding to risk a little more.

"I never got the chance to love Len. Not really," she admitted softly. "The Oculus happened before we took the chance."

"And Thawne took Rex before we could retire and be together. Just because we never acted on our feelings before that happened doesn't mean those feelings didn't exist," said Amaya gently.

Sara turned toward her, pity in her eyes. Even after so much time on the Waverider, the loss still hurt. Amaya could tell that Rex's death would always hurt at least a little. Losing the man that she loved and watching their planned future together slip away broke her heart. But she was healing. Amaya could move on from that loss and be happy.

"There is nothing as tragic as thinking about what might have been," said Amaya. "It has taught me not to let those precious opportunities pass me by. We have to be brave and take risks for what we want." Moving cautiously, she gently reached out and squeezed Sara's shoulder comfortably. "You have a second chance. And you are no coward."

Sara looked down briefly at the hand on her shoulder. Then she turned back towards the silent thief. The two women returned to their earlier silence as they watched over their teammates.

Death was colder than he expected.

That was his first hazy and disjointed thought as his mind dragged itself slowly out of the murky depths. Not that he normally minded the cold. He preferred it to being too hot. But this time, the cold was too much even for him. He felt himself shaking even as his body seemed too tired to do so. It almost reminded him of when he and Sara nearly froze to death when the Waverider was damaged.

But that was in the past. They survived that. So what happened?


That was why he was dead.

Almost without meaning to, Leonard's eyes cracked open. The light was dimmed enough not to cause him any pain. He could, however, recognize the ceiling of medbay.

Whatever death should be, Leonard didn't think it was supposed to include the Waverider. Not unless it involved listening to Ray cheerfully lecture on the development of his suit for all eternity. He wasn't deluded enough to think that whatever awaited him would be pleasant. More likely he'd end up trapped with his father for all time, unable to escape or avoid his wrath. The medbay seemed a bit underwhelming in comparison.

Blinking and groggy, Leonard began to notice a few more hints of his surroundings. There was a weird shiny blanket wrapped around his shivering body. It wasn't made of fabric, but something else. Plastic, maybe? His mind couldn't seem to focus enough to identify it properly. And even if he couldn't see them, the clothes felt strange and unfamiliar. His sluggish thoughts couldn't concentrate much more than that.

One particularly violent shiver shifted his head to the right slightly. Then he stiffened as much as the involuntary shaking would allow. The effort felt exhausting, but Leonard managed to turn his head
the rest of the way and properly see what he'd glimpsed.

Perched on a storage container, her legs drawn up and her head resting on her knees, was Sara. Asleep, but definitely with him. Her blonde hair and her knees hid most of face. He wished he could brush it back and see her better. But he didn't have the strength to try and he didn't want to risk a knife to the throat if he woke her. Assassin training made her twitchy if surprised.

Well, if she was here with him, then he wasn't dead. He was actually alive and on the Waverider. Against all odds, Leonard did the crazy hero thing and didn't die.

After this was over and they finished dealing with Savage, no one better tell Barry. Leonard didn't want to face his cheerful smile, boundless optimism, and the proud "I told you so" from the Flash.

Another particularly strong shiver ran up his spine. He couldn't stop shaking. Why was he so cold? What happened? How did he get back on the Waverider? Why didn't he die when the Oculus exploded?

And there was something else. Large sections of his body felt uncomfortable and tingling, a bit like when his foot fell asleep. Similar, but not quite. But he remembered the sensation from when he regrew his lost hand. Strong futuristic painkillers combined with newly-regrown nerves since they apparently tended to be overly sensitive for a while. He didn't know how much ended up being healed, but it seemed more extensive than just his hand this time. Last time it took almost a full day for it to completely fade away. Hopefully that meant he hadn't been out of it very long.

While he didn't particularly feel comfortable staying in medbay any longer than necessary, Leonard barely had the strength to move his head. Getting up wasn't really an option. But it was safe here. He... trusted these people. All of them. So if the shivering would allow him, maybe he should try getting some more rest.

"Welcome back, Mr. Snart."

The voice was pitched low, probably to avoid waking the assassin. But Leonard recognized it even before he shifted his gaze slightly to the doorway. Rip Hunter stood there, his expression somewhere between his perpetual annoyance at things not going as expected and relief. A little more surprising was the lack of his normal brown coat. Instead, he wore a thick navy bathrobe and slippers while his hair looked more ruffled than normal.

If Leonard had to take a guess, Rip ordered Gideon to inform him if he woke up. And that clearly led to her dragging the man out of bed in his pajamas.

"I should have known you'd wake up in the middle of the night," Rip continued quietly, stepping into the room properly. "Anything else would be too simple. You probably have some questions. You've missed quite a bit."

Opening his mouth to ask how much he could have possibly missed, he could only produce a dry rasp. He stopped the attempt before he could devolve into coughing, something he suspected would make him miserable. Rip gave him a sympathetic nod.

"I'd go get you some water to drink, but you'd probably fall back asleep before I returned," he said. He glanced at the display somewhere behind Leonard's head. "Your body temperature is still on the low side and you're going to be tired for a while."

He could have figured that much out from the shivering and the overall grogginess. Couldn't the man actually say something useful? Or get him the water anyway? This was probably Rip's method of
"Well, there's no easy way to explain this," Rip said. "For the past ten months, we thought you were dead."

Leonard couldn't completely hide his shock. Ten months? He couldn't seem to wrap his mind around it. But exhaustion and painkillers might have something to do with it. His thoughts weren't the most coherent and focused overall.

"You succeeded in destroying the Oculus. There's not much left of the Time Masters. Certainly not as an organization," he continued. "We killed Savage and rescued our remaining teammates. Ms. Saunders and Mr. Hall have since returned to their own time to live without the threat of Savage murdering them. The others elected to remain on board and help protect time. We also gained two more recruits in recent months. I'm sure you'll meet them soon enough."

He paused briefly, making Leonard narrow his eyes. Rip was hiding something. Again. Leonard wasn't exactly surprised. The man was practically allergic to telling the full truth. But Leonard didn't have the energy to tease out the answers just yet.

"We've had some difficulties lately," Rip admitted. "Which, with this team, is not that great of a surprise. There was a group of individuals who tried to remake all of reality in their best interest. The short version is that we stopped them, but shattered the timestream in the process. But there was an unexpected side effect to that disaster that provided the opportunity to recover you."

Yep. He was definitely hiding a lot of details. But Rip at least gave him the general outline of events. He could drag out the rest of the story later, whenever Leonard actually had the energy to put the effort into it. He barely had the energy to resist the pull of unconsciousness. For now, it was enough to know Savage was dead, the Time Masters were gone, and the team was fine. Sara was clearly all right, after all. She would probably wake up stiff from her awkward position, but she was alive and unharmed even through the ten months that he missed.

As Rip looked at the display again, Leonard took another brief glance at the sleeping woman beside him. Even with her hair blocking her face from view, he could tell that her slumber was uneasy. He could only guess how long she sat there watching over him before succumbing to sleep. But even as he tried to imagine what his supposed death must have done to her, Leonard wasn't so distracted that he didn't notice Rip looking past him to the other side of the room with the same concerned expression.

He didn't have the strength to sit up, but he could at least try turning his head. He'd already managed it once. And between the shivering, the exhaustion, and the painkillers adding an extra layer of murkiness to his coordination, the fact he accomplished it at all was a miracle. But he put in the effort. And when his head turned, he realized that Rip had been hiding something major.

For a moment, Leonard's tired and admittedly drug-addled brain wondered if he'd hit Mick too hard at the Vanishing Point. Then he remembered that it was ten months ago that he punched Mick. Something else must be the reason for his partner lying in the neighboring chair, looking a lot like a baked potato wrapped in aluminum foil.

Leonard's fuzzy mind tried to race, though it ended up more of a clumsy stumble. What happened to him? Why didn't Rip say anything? How badly hurt was Mick? This was more than just unconsciousness. He was paler than he should be. And he was too still, too much like that night where he dragged his limp partner out of the burning building until sirens and his refusal to watch the self-destructive behavior any longer drove Leonard off. He could practically smell the blackened flesh again.
And was Mick breathing? He couldn't tell. He couldn't see his chest moving, but twin tubes vanished under the silver blanket. What was wrong with him?

He chose to stay behind to destroy the Oculus so no one else would die. Not Ray like he was destined to. Not Sara like she would have undoubtedly tried. And definitely not Mick, his hand already on the switch before Leonard took his place. His partner was supposed to be fine. This wasn't right.

"Easy, Mr. Snart," said Rip quietly. "Calm down."

Leonard knew that, even in his groggy state, he didn't react too much even while his thoughts stumbled out of control. He'd spent his entire life concealing and controlling his feelings. It ensured he could make decisions with a cool head and that he didn't expose vulnerabilities to those who would take advantage. And if even his own father would use any weakness against him, the rest of the world certainly would. He always kept a firm rein on his emotions. But it was hard to hide his reaction when Gideon was displaying his heart rate.

"I promise Mr. Rory is alive and recovering," continued Rip. "He's just taking a little longer than you are. Gideon is letting the cold work for us to give him time to gradually adjust. He ended up with worse frostbite and we need to avoid causing shock. But he's already improving."

"He has improved enough that it might be advisable to switch to the more standard cuff version of the medical infusion device, Captain Hunter," Gideon stated, the volume of her voice turned down low to match the rest of the conversation.

Leonard tried to stay awake as Rip moved around to the other side of the room. But he'd hit the end of his stamina. His eyes slid shut before he even noticed. Apparently shivering wouldn't be enough to keep him conscious and worrying over his partner burned up the last of his energy. Resistance was futile.

Maybe when he woke up again, he'd actually be recovered enough to ask a few questions.
For Me And You

For a brief moment, as Iris slowly awoke in warmth and comfort, she thought it was another dream. But as she blinked lazily, it began to sink in that the arm around her and the chest against her back were real. Barry was actually back. She had him back again.

Moving slowly, Iris twisted around so she could face him in the dim light. The sight of him quietly snoring into his pillow with his hair a complete mess pulled a smile out of her. Not to mention the his-and-hers matching Flash pajamas, the inevitable result of letting Cisco play with future technology capable of fabricating anything, somehow made the entire situation more adorable. She wanted nothing more than to stay with him and never let him go. This moment was absolutely perfect.

Then Barry snorted in his sleep and startled a giggle out of Iris. That resulted in him moaning tiredly and reaching up to rub his face. As he reluctantly opened his eyes, Iris leaned in to kiss him.

"Morning, Barry. Sleep well?"

"Morning, Barry. Sleep well?"

"Better than I have in a long time," he said. "What time is it?"

"Technically, the Vanishing Point is outside of time and thus normal chronological timekeeping would be meaningless," said Gideon, the abrupt remark from the A.I. making them jump. "However, for practical purposes on board and to ensure healthy circadian rhythms for the crew, we have adopted a traditional twenty-four-hour cycle that we attempt to match to our destinations during time jumps. By that reckoning, it is approximately eight thirty-four."

"Thanks," muttered Iris, pushing herself up.

Maybe the others were used to the idea of having absolutely no privacy onboard, but she certainly wasn't. Gideon seemed nice and helpful, but she was part of the reason Iris and Barry didn't do anything more than cuddle in their sleep on their first night back together. She was always in the room with them, listening and watching.

The room was nice enough though. A bit empty and practical, but still nice. The bed was relatively comfortable, though a little small for two people. One wall had a screen that currently looked like a window, providing a view of a beach at dawn. That's where the light in the room was coming from. It almost made her feel like they were at a nice hotel, albeit not a super expensive one.

Barry reached for a navy shirt and jeans, more products from the Fabrication Room so he didn't have to wear the Flash suit their entire stay. Iris did the same, collecting her clothes to change into. Since they were both up anyway, they might as well get dressed and grab some breakfast.

Once, Sara would have been groggy and painfully stiff as she returned to awareness. The last couple of days had been long and intense, filled with war, death, mystical objects, the destruction of time itself, the return of someone they'd lost, and hours of volatile thoughts. It was hard to keep track with everything that happened, but it must have been almost two days since their last proper sleep. Even for someone who spent time in the ruthless training of the League of Assassins, succumbing to exhaustion was inevitable eventually.

But another advantage of her League training was that not only could she operate with very little
sleep if necessary, but she could also sleep in almost any situation. Sleeping while sitting up might leave her neck, shoulders, and back somewhat stiff, but it was nothing that would slow her down. The pain of tightening muscles wasn't even worth noticing. A quick stretch would work out the kinks.

It was also warmer in the medbay than the rest of the timeship. Uncomfortably warm actually, with Gideon focusing most of the heat onto patients while the rest of the room received merely what radiated from those two points. But Nanda Parbat didn't exactly have air conditioning either.

Neither her position nor the heat were enough to keep her awake. It was always important to grab rest when she was able since you can never tell when another chance might be. Assassins were practical like that. So Sara managed to drift off in the awkward position regardless of the temperature or lack of comfort.

And assassins weren't allowed the luxury of grogginess. Ra's Al-Ghul would not tolerate such weakness and vulnerability. She learned to be a morning person. Whether she liked it or not.

Thus, Sara returned to consciousness instantly. She snapped her eyes open and lifted her head, rolling her neck to deal with the stiffening muscles. She let her legs stretch back out while she pushed her hair out of her face.

A brief look to her right demonstrated that someone left a pitcher of water and a couple of cups next to her. Fairly recently too, judging by the ice. It could have been from anyone, but she suspected Ray brought it in. It was the sort of nice gesture that he'd come up with.

Pouring herself a drink, the sharp iciness of the water helped shove the rest of the remnants of sleep from her mind. It wasn't quite as effective as caffeine, but it was better than nothing.

"...Share?"

Sara stiffened at the sound of the croaking, dry, and tired voice. She could barely understand the rough sound at first. It shouldn't be familiar. She shouldn't recognize the voice in that condition. But she knew. Even before she turned, she knew.

Raising his head slightly and staring at her with a groggy expression, Leonard Snart was awake and talking. Sara's breath briefly caught in her throat.

Then his request properly registered in her brain. She quickly poured another cup of water. Leonard's hand managed to slip out from under the silvery blanket, reaching for the drink with sluggish movements. She knew he would want to do this himself, but Sara kept one hand close to his shaky grip on the cup as she raised his chair into a sitting position.

After he managed a few slow sips, Leonard let her take back the water and said, "Thanks."

She could already tell a difference in his voice. He sounded closer to what she remembered.

"No problem," said Sara.

Blinking a few times as he seemed to grow more aware, he mumbled, "Guess you're a pretty good thief yourself."

For a moment, his words simply confused her. Then she remembered. She remembered their conversation in her room, when they danced around the topic that they should have confronted. She remembered her remark about him stealing a kiss. And she remembered that she was the one who ultimately initiated their first kiss.
She was *not* going to blush. She was not a teenage girl with her first crush. She was not going to blush about that kiss or being reminded about it like that.

"Turns out some of my assassin skills can be used for stealing," she said finally. While her weak teasing tugged a slight smirk from him, Sara grew graver. She said, "Listen, I don't know how to tell you this, but..."

"Ten months," interrupted Leonard, closing his eyes tiredly. "Rip told me last night. Or whenever it was. Apparently I vanished for a while and you guys killed Savage. Then you broke time." He opened his eyes again. "Should have known you'd get in trouble without me around."

"Guess it's a good thing you're back then."

It was so easy. She fell back into the old rhythm without thinking about it. The smart comments and dancing around topics came back as naturally as breathing. It was like no time had passed at all.

But she couldn't pretend everything was the same, that nothing had changed. She wasn't the same person who left him in the Oculus any more than she was the girl who first set foot on the *Gambit*. He remembered her before Laurel's death and before the responsibility of being captain.

"I know a lot has happened that I missed," said Leonard slowly, almost as if he was reading her mind. "Rip was stingy with the details, but ten months is a long time for people like us. And back there, when neither of us expected to see each other again... We can just call it the heat of the moment. It doesn't have to mean anything. No strings. No obligations, Sara."

He was giving her a way out. She could recognize the offer for what it was. They could pretend the kiss never happened and put all those complications aside for now. It would be the easiest way to handle everything.

Sara considered it. Then she considered Amaya's advice.

"You're right. A lot's happened and I've changed," she said. "And maybe you won't like the changes that much."

"I doubt you could change that much, Assassin."

Standing up and stepping closer to the chair, Sara continued, "But I'm no coward. And I doubt that Cold would let fear make his decisions either."

Sara knew there was a risk. There always was. But sometimes people had to try anyway or watch their chances of happiness slip away. She didn't want to mourn for what could have been. Never again.

Before she could second-guess herself or change her mind, Sara leaned in. Leonard still felt a little cooler than he should and he didn't immediately react, her kiss too sudden and unexpected. But she could tell the moment that shock wore off because he began kissing back.

Once she got started, part of her wanted to keep going. It was like the small act cracked the dam that she didn't even remember building, letting everything trapped within start flooding out. There was a desperation in the contact. Not the same as their first kiss, where they knew it was also the end. This was different, but no less intense. This was desperation born from the fear and determination to never again experience that loss. She wanted this. And judging by his enthusiastic responses to her deepening kiss, Leonard desired this just as much.

But part of her needed to be the responsible one. They couldn't just make out in medbay, hoping
none of their teammates wandered in. Furthermore, no matter how much he wanted to do this, she could tell that Leonard hadn't quite recovered enough to keep going. And so after a few moments, Sara reluctantly pulled back and broke it off.

Breathing a little harder than before even while his remaining grogginess had vanished, he said, "I don't really have a plan for this."

"I'm sure you'll come up with something eventually," she said. "Neither of us know what will happen next. For me. For you. For me and you. But I'd like to find out together. If that's what you want."

 Trying to catch his breath, Leonard couldn't quite believe how the events of the last few minutes were going.

Ten months was a long time. He knew that. Ten months where Sara thought he was dead... She was bound to move on. Even if she cared about him enough to watch over him in medbay, she must have moved on to an extent. Whatever that might have existed between them would have fizzled out. He understood and accepted the inevitable outcome. He couldn't expect the events at the Oculus to really matter after so long, even if it was only a day ago for him.

Leonard accepted the obvious fact and let Sara know there were no hard feelings, refusing to let any part of himself wish otherwise. Cold logic and reason locked down the more rebellious emotions. The kiss and everything connected to it should no longer hold any weight or sway over either of them. She owed him nothing.

And that's why he didn't expect Sara to lean in for a kiss, one not given as a final farewell, one that was both exhausting for someone still recovering and yet extremely invigorating. Maybe it was because of the chill that he could still feel all the way down to his bones, but the warmth from her lips seemed to pour into him and Leonard desperately wanted to continue long after she ended it.

"I don't really have a plan for this," he admitted.

"I'm sure you'll come up with something eventually," said Sara. "Neither of us know what will happen next. For me. For you. For me and you. But I'd like to find out together. If that's what you want."

She thought that she needed to ask if this was what he wanted?

He almost wanted to laugh at the question. He could admit to not being the most skilled when it came to dealing with his and others' emotions, but this didn't take any thought.

Finding someone that he might be more than casually interested in was rare. The person would need to be skilled and strong enough to hold their own, both physically and mentally. They would need to be quick and clever enough to keep up with him. And they would need to be a little flexible morally, but not a complete psychopath. Perhaps even a paler shade of gray now than what he might have accepted in the past.

But most importantly, if he was going to actually care about someone, he would need to trust the person. That was the only way he was going to put up with them for any reasonable span of time.

Finding that exact combination of traits in a person was nearly impossible. Especially with how rare he trusted anyone beyond his sister and his partner. Of course, that was before things started changing...
And Sara... She somehow possessed all the traits that he found attractive in a person. She knew exactly who and what he was, without distaste or judgement for his less savory features and history since she wasn't an innocent either. And most surprisingly, she seemed to care enough about him to want this. To want him...

Leonard still wanted to see what they might become. Even if it meant moving forward without a plan or an idea of how to proceed. An unnerving prospect for someone who valued control so much, but part of him knew she was worth it.

"I think I'd like that," he said finally.

Her entire body language relaxed at his words, as if there could be any doubt about what he would choose. Or perhaps there was. He did keep his feelings close and ten months might have left her less certain.

"Good," Sara said, smiling a little as she sat back down. "Good." Rubbing her arms briefly, she said, "I can't tell you how happy we are to have you back."

Smirking a little, he said, "I'm pretty sure that kiss made it clear how much you missed me, Assassin. Though maybe you could fill me on what I've missed out on." Growing a bit more sober, Leonard gestured weakly to the neighboring chair. "Like what happened to Mick? Rip mentioned frostbite."

He turned towards the other chair. His partner was still there, silent and motionless. This time Leonard could think clearly enough to look at the display and see the reassuring evidence that Mick was alive. Not in the best health, but alive. And maybe his complexion was a little less gray than the night before. Or maybe that was just the result of better lighting.

"He's going to be all right," assured Sara. "Though he's in a lot of trouble when he wakes up." Leonard turned back to face her as Sara continued, "Rory and you are both too cold for the same reason. When the Oculus exploded, it apparently trapped you in a moment frozen in time. And the 'frozen' part was pretty literal. Rory figured it out with Gideon. And when we accidentally broke time, he realized there was a chance to get you out. So he snuck off with the jump-ship, grabbed Barry and Cisco, and used their powers to get you back. And nearly froze to death in the process. So no more secret plans and definitely no more nearly-suicidal solo rescue attempts for anyone."

Leonard stared at her silently for a moment, trying to wrap his mind around what she just told him. It wasn't that he didn't believe her. Even after their partnership strained and nearly broke, even after Chronos, Leonard and Mick watched each other's backs. He switched places with Mick to keep him alive, to hold the trigger down instead. It wasn't hard to imagine Mick risking the same.

Leonard was still going to tell him exactly how stupid his actions were.

Then, further realization from her words sinking in, Leonard said, "Wait, Barry knows about all this?"

"He's onboard the Waverider right now," she confirmed. "He knows what happened. He knows what you did that day."

Closing his eyes and groaning quietly, he said, "Fantastic. Why not? Should have known this would come back to bite me. Dying would be better than listening to the Flash being proud of me."

"Every hero has their burden to bear," Sara said, the teasing smile clear in her voice.

"Not a hero," said Leonard dryly as he opened his eyes again. "And what else did I miss? How did you manage to break time?"
She turned away briefly, staring at the far wall with a dark expression. Leonard raised his head a little. He waited patiently for her to continue, but it was clear this was one of the things that Rip tried to hide. And Sara didn't want to tell him any more than Rip did the night before.

"There was a group," she said slowly. "The Legion of Doom." Sara rolled her eyes at the name. "That's what Nate called them."

"Nate?"

"Dr. Nathaniel Heywood. One of our newer teammates. He's a historian and has the power to turn his body to metal."

"Handy trick."

"Anyway, the group went through time hunting for a powerful artifact," she continued. "Eobard Thawne seemed to be the one in charge. He was a speedster from the future at risk of being erased from existence. You probably remember him as the Reverse Flash. There was also Malcolm Merlyn, another former member of the League of Assassins, the man who arranged my previous death, and overall someone with a very complicated relationship with the Green Arrow and his team. And... there was Damien Darhk."

There was something in her tone, something in how she said that third name. It left him on edge. He recognized the way she spoke about the man. It was the same way that he sounded whenever he discussed his father.

Whoever Damien Darhk might be, Sara absolutely hated the man. More than she did the person who caused her to literally die. And the hatred was very, very personal.

"What did he do to you, Sara?" asked Leonard quietly.

"The version we faced? Nothing worse than the others," she said, closing her eyes. "The Darhk in 2016? He killed Laurel."

Leonard pushed himself up a little more and leaned towards her, acting on impulse. He could understand her pain and hatred far too easily. Her sister was stolen from her. Losing Lisa would utterly destroy him. He'd do anything to keep her safe and the idea of failing her like that...

There was a reason Lewis Snart ended up with an icicle in his cold heart.

"Is he dead?" asked Leonard finally.

"In our time, yes. I also tried to kill him in the past before he murdered Laurel. I thought the risk of paradoxes would be worth it. I almost lost myself hunting for revenge," she said, her voice flat. "I almost lost myself trying to prevent Laurel's death. But some things can't and shouldn't be changed. I can't use time travel to remake the world like that, not even for my sister. It wasn't easy, but I've made my peace with what happened."

She opened her eyes when he reached over and placed his hand on hers. He wasn't good at this type of thing, but he couldn't ignore it. He wasn't certain if she gained any comfort from the contact, but she smiled slightly in thanks.

Shaking her head briefly, Sara continued, "Anyway, they were after the Spear of Destiny. Which apparently is magic and can rewrite reality. We managed to steal the pieces from them and we were trying to find a way to destroy it. And that's where things get complicated."
She ran a hand through her hair, tousling it in a rather distracting and appealing way. Sara looked almost as tired as felt at that moment though.

"Thawne's group decided they needed a new edge to get the Spear back from us. Something we wouldn't expect. They recruited another member." She hesitated before turning back towards him.
"They chose you, Leonard. They found you in 2014 in Central City, not long after your first major encounter with the Flash. Maybe a few hours after you derailed the train."

His immediate reaction as to deny that such a thing ever happened. Surely he would remember? Wouldn't he remember being recruited by a time-traveling speedster and a pair of psychopaths? But that wasn't necessarily proof it didn't happen. And if someone made a good enough offer, Leonard knew he would have accepted. He'd always been one to seize a golden opportunity.

But, at that point in the past, what would he have done for the chance to rewrite reality? What would he have done to the team if they got in his way? He derailed a train just to steal a jewel and best the Flash. He might have done worse if the prize was greater or the threat from failure was higher.

"That's where things grow even more complicated," Sara continued. "Apparently the first time around, they won. They got the Spear because if there is one person that Rory would do anything for and would side with even against us, it would be you. And we weren't exactly making it a hard choice at the time. He handed it over and they remade the world, erasing everyone's memories of the original version. But Rory ended up trying to fix things and reminding the team of the truth, which led to everyone traveling back in time again to prevent it. So we ended up with two versions of the team, us and the ones from that future in an alternate reality. They're gone now, but traveling to a time where we'd already traveled to is part of what broke time."

She was hiding something. Just like Rip. Leonard could sense it in her voice and her body language. Even as his mind turned over the information that she was sharing, he tried to puzzle out what she might be holding back. The way that she was avoiding his eyes gave him an idea though.

"What happened, Sara?" asked Leonard firmly. "What did I do that I can't remember?"

She looked at him, glanced across the medbay at Mick's unconscious figure briefly, and then turned back towards Leonard. Something about it sent a shiver down his spine that had nothing to do with the cold. After what she'd already told him, what would make her hesitate now?

"The other versions of us? The ones from a future that no longer exists and never happened? Most of them died in the fight. They would have been erased anyway, but it was still pretty bad seeing everyone die," she said slowly. "Thawne killed Ray by ripping his heart out with his speed. Merlyn killed Jax with an arrow straight into his chest."

It didn't take a genius to figure it out from there. Leonard could see exactly what she was leading up to. A couple years ago, he wouldn't have known any of the team. He wouldn't care about them even remotely. And he wouldn't have hesitated to kill someone if it proved to be the best and most effective solution.

Or, an uncomfortable thought emerging as he remembered how she'd looked at Mick a few moments ago, he wouldn't have hesitated to kill someone that he thought had betrayed him.

"No," said Leonard quietly. "I didn't."

"I'm sorry. That version of Rory? The one who came back to keep his past self from handing over the Spear of Destiny? He was killed by the Cold Gun."
"You mean by me. He was killed by me."

He let his head fall back, closing his eyes tight and clenching his teeth. He killed Mick. Another version of his partner, but still him. They'd threatened each other with weapons and fought each other until they were bloody at different points in their partnership, but they'd never wanted to seriously harm the other. Even as Chronos, Mick couldn't bring himself to kill his partner. And yet a couple years ago, Leonard murdered one of the only two people that he trusted.

And if it had been the other Mick who died, the one in the neighboring chair who nearly killed himself trying to save Leonard, then his partner would be truly dead and gone. Wiping out the earlier version would take out both of them. It didn't matter that it ended up being the Mick who would have been erased or whatever. Leonard still killed him.

Mick died and Leonard couldn't kill the man responsible without wiping himself from existence. Maybe he could figure out a way to go back and punch his younger self at least. Or have someone do it if the paradoxes would cause too many problems.

No, this wasn't doing him any good. Leonard stubbornly bundled up the tangled emotions and locked them down. Cold logic took control of his thoughts. Mick was alive. He was in the neighboring chair, not dead with an icicle in his heart like Lewis Snart (may he rot in his grave). Everyone that mattered was alive and whole.

No, that wasn't true either. Sara's sister mattered. He never met her, but Sara loved Laurel. And that mattered.

It was a lot to take in and process. From the moment of that kiss, he'd been off-balanced and overwhelmed with everything that happened during his absence. And his surroundings weren't helping him get a strong handle on it. Something about medbay put him slightly on edge, like he half-expected his father to walk in with fake worry for his "clumsy" son to make sure that he remembered to keep his mouth shut. Leonard needed somewhere he could focus and deal with all of this. Somewhere he wouldn't feel trapped and where he could relax, but was still close to his partner.

As he tried to sit up and started pulling at the cuff on his wrist, Sara said, "Hold on. What are you doing?"

He didn't immediately answer, too distracted when the blanket slipped off and revealed what he was wearing. The thick gray material, held together by snaps, was certainly nothing he'd ever worn before. It looked like rather boring versions of the pajamas they made for toddlers. The outfit seemed a little surreal. Even prison jumpsuits would be more normal.

"Who dressed me like this?" he muttered.

"Leonard, what are you doing?"

"First, I'm seeing if there's some actual clothes for me to wear or if they were thrown out in the last few months," he said, swinging his legs around. "Second, I'm more hungry than tired right now. So I'm heading for the galley. Care to join me?"

"I don't know if that's a good idea yet," said Sara, reaching over to keep the cuff in place. "Gideon?"

"Mr. Snart currently has been restored to a core body temperature of 35 degrees Celsius or 95 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the threshold where a patient can be considered no longer hypothermic," the A.I. reported. "While it would be important to dress warmly and go slowly until his strength recovers, there should be minimal risk if Mr. Snart leaves the medbay as long as he..."
remains onboard and closely observed by those around him. His body is currently focusing on restoring his temperature, so Mr. Snart will likely be lethargic and have low endurance until then. But if there are any changes in his condition or symptoms, please bring him back immediately, Captain Lance."

Not quite a clean bill of health for release, but it at least seemed close enough to count as parole.

With one smooth motion, Leonard shoved himself out of the chair. And instantly grabbed the armrest to keep from falling. His legs didn't immediately respond properly, the muscles acting more like jelly. Surprise and instinct almost caused him to jerk away from the hand that grabbed his arm to hold him up, but he remembered who it was in time. It was just Sara. Sacrificing dignity for practicality, he let Sara help support his weight until his legs stopped shaking enough to start working properly.

Once his muscles seemed to be reacting correctly again, Leonard got his feet under him again and stood up properly. But he could definitely see what Gideon was talking about now. Standing up was already exhausting. Hopefully some food would help with his lack of energy. He did notice, however, that Sara didn't immediately let go once he could support his weight again.

"You good?" she asked.

"Yeah. I just stood up too fast," said Leonard. "I'm fine. I can handle this."

Hesitating a moment, Sara leaned towards him. This time, the kiss was calmer and slower. Reassuring and warm without the previous desperation, but still intense in a different way. A short and gentle kiss before pulling back to smile at him.

"I know you can handle it," she said. "But just in case you haven't noticed, you aren't alone, Thief. None of us have to handle things on our own. You have a whole team to watch your back and we'll always help you if you let us."

"I know," said Leonard quietly. Then, frowning briefly, he asked, "Wait, did Gideon call you 'Captain Lance'?"

Chuckling slightly, Sara said, "Right. I guess I should have mentioned that."
Welcome Back

Chapter Notes

So just in case you didn't figure it out in the last chapter, I definitely liked Leonard Snart and Sara Lance's interactions in the show. They had a great dynamic and fit together so nicely.

I also like Mick Rory and Amaya Jiwe's interactions in the show. I think that they would have been an interesting couple if the writers went that way. But I'm equally happy with just their friendship. And since Amaya and Nate kind of officially became a couple right at the end of Season 2, I can't just break them up a day or two later to slap her together with Mick.

But I don't write a lot of romance and couples stuff in my stories. That's not my forte. I still like how that last chapter turned out though (even if no one commented on it...). I liked Leonard and Sara's reunion and conversation. Hopefully you'll like this next chapter too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was exhausted. Stein knew he should have been sleeping. Or rather, he should have slept the night before. Instead, he'd been up all night alternating between studying the formula that Mick provided and researching human biology and anatomy since everyone seemed determined to treat him like a medical doctor. But he didn't stay up out of a workaholic mindset. He didn't want to pull an all-nighter like in his twenties.

Stein tried sleeping initially. They'd been running around constantly for two days previously. He'd wanted to sleep. He tried his best to get some rest.

But the moment he was no longer distracted, it hit him hard. Every time he closed his eyes, Stein saw that scene once more: Jax with an arrow buried in his chest. Intellectually, he knew it wasn't his partner. Not exactly. It had been the version from an alternate future, one that would have been erased anyway. Stein knew that. But it didn't change the horror and guilt that came from watching the young man die protecting him.

Stein managed to block the psychic connection enough that Jax wouldn't pick up his stress during the night, but he couldn't keep the mental image from haunting him. Between that alternate version of Jax and Ronnie, how many times would he lose his partner? An old man should not continue to outlive those with so much life still ahead of them. He eventually surrendered the idea of sleep and worked the rest of the night so he wouldn't have to remember.

But now he was paying for it. Stein shuffled tiredly down the hall, a tablet tucked under his arm. While he might fear the creatures, he knew that he must strongly resemble a zombie that morning. Maybe next time he tried to sleep, he would be tired enough to manage it.

Originally, he intended to stagger his way to the galley and try to find some coffee, tea, or pure caffeine to drown himself in. Anything to help with how sluggish his brain felt. But when he was partway there, Stein remembered that Sara spent the night in medbay. He redirected his path to stop by and check on her. Maybe he could see if she would want some breakfast.
That was his plan, at least. But when he reached medbay, Stein found that not everything was as he expected. Their captain had vacated her crate. And one of the chairs was now empty, the previous patient gone. Stein stared for a moment before it truly sank in.

"Gideon?"

"Yes, Professor Stein?" she answered cheerfully.

"Is… is Mr. Snart awake?"

"Yes, Professor Stein. He and Captain Lance left medbay approximately six minutes ago. You barely missed encountering them on the way here," Gideon stated. "They intend to locate Mr. Snart different clothes before heading towards the galley."

He smiled at her words. They needed all the good news possible. Even with their destruction of the Spear of Destiny and the defeat of the Legion of Doom, there had been some rather difficult events lately. The graphic deaths of their counterparts (though Stein didn't know for certain what happened with his own that was only "as good as dead"). Time shattering. The near death of two teammates from severe hypothermia. The recovery of one of them made him feel a bit lighter.

Stein briefly considered trying to track down the pair, taking the opportunity to welcome back their teammate. Even if he wasn't the closest to Snart, he felt relieved that the man had regained consciousness and had been brought back to them at all.

But the professor quietly settled himself in the spare chair instead, turning so he could look at the display for Rory. He wasn't certain if Gideon displayed both temperatures as a standard feature or if she did it due to having Americans on board since they still clung to measuring with Fahrenheit. Either way, the remaining patient had climbed to a temperature of twenty-two degrees Celsius or approximately seventy-two degrees Fahrenheit. And his heart rate was around thirty beats per minute when it should have been closer to a resting rate of sixty. But he seemed to be breathing on his own and he had a heartbeat even at the still-very-low temperature. Granted, it wasn't completely steady, but Stein's reading the night before did suggest that certain types of arrhythmias were to be expected during the rewarming process and would disappear on their own.

Even if Sara and Snart only left a few moments before, it didn't feel right to leave their remaining patient alone. And he certainly didn't have any more pressing matters at the moment. Stein didn't mind sitting around for a little while with the unconscious Rory. He could do some work in the meantime.

Stein barely activated the tablet before his heavy eyelids slipped down. He didn't even notice it happening. Exhaustion finally won out over troubling memories. While certainly not sleeping easy, the old man managed to drift off.

"I still can't believe that Mick Rory now has a statue of himself," said Barry, shaking his head. "How does something like that even happen?"

"Definitely not what we expected when we met George Washington either," Ray said, twisting the glass of orange juice in his hands.

The galley currently contained only a handful of people. Ray had already been there when Barry and Iris joined him, the scientist working on his bowl of cereal already. By the time they figured out how to produce twin servings of pancakes, Cisco stumbled in moaning for a coffee from Jitters. Jax eventually joined them, yawning and hungry for some bacon and eggs. It wasn't the most organized
breakfast, but everyone seemed grateful. And they took the opportunity to fill each other in about the recent events each team had faced.

It really wasn't that long ago that they were fighting aliens together, but a lot could apparently happen in that time. Savitar, HR's death and Caitlin leaving, and being trapped in the Speed Force. The Spear of Destiny, multiple versions of themselves, and breaking the timestream. Their lives were never boring.

"If this timeship can produce any kind of food, why doesn't the coffee taste the same as back home?" grumbled Cisco groggily.

"The replicated food just doesn't taste as good as the real stuff," Ray said. "It ends up being nutritious, but not as tasty somehow. That's why all the junk food is the real deal. We tend to stock up whenever we visit one of the more modern time periods."

Smiling briefly, Jax added, "Rip hid a supply of cereal from various time periods on the Waverider. The good boxes vanished quickly after a couple criminals came onboard."

"If you call what he did 'hiding'," said a familiar voice rather dryly.

Everyone spun towards the doorway. Standing there next to a grinning Sara was Leonard Snart, awake and smirking slightly at their surprised expressions. Barry could tell the man was wearing multiple layers of clothing, warmth clearly more important than style at the moment. The loose black sweater and sweatpants certainly didn't scream master criminal. But between that and the colorful quilt that Sara carried in her arms, Snart would certainly stay cozy.

And Barry couldn't even describe how good it was to see the man up and about again.

"Snart!" Ray called, sounding absolutely delighted as he shoved himself to his feet. "I can't believe you're all right."

The casually-dressed criminal didn't even have a chance to react or respond before Ray wrapped him in a swift hug. Barry could see Snart stiffen from across the room. But he didn't immediately shove the scientist away, so that was better than what Barry expected.

"Yes," said Snart through gritted teeth. "I'm not dead. That doesn't mean you need to cling to me."

"Oh. Right." Ray let go and took a step back, allowing some of Snart's discomfort to fade even as he shivered slightly. Looking him over briefly, Ray asked, "Feeling cold."

Walking over and collapsing into the closest chair tiredly, he said, "Honestly, yes."

"Gideon said he still needs to warm up a bit more, but at least she let him out of medbay," Sara added. She settled the quilt around his shoulders. "So sweaters and blankets. Doctor's orders."

Barry thought he saw Snart's eyes soften slightly as she tucked the blanket around him. It was subtle and easy to miss, but it seemed that Rory was right. There was something going on with those two.

"Though I want to know where my parka is," said Snart. "I can't find it."

Cisco raised his hand timidly before dashing out the door without a word. The thief just raised an eyebrow as he watched the frantic escape.

"Do I want to know why the nerd with a crush on my sister stole my parka?" asked Snart slowly.
"Actually, he's been dating a meta from another Earth named Gypsy," Iris said. "As for the parka, no clue. He spent most of yesterday in the fabrication room."

Turning towards her, he said, "Didn't expect to see you here, Ms. West. Working on your next article?"

"I wasn't going to let my fiancé vanish after Rory just yanked him out of the Speed Force yesterday."

"Every part of that sentence raises questions," said Snart, rubbing his temple tiredly. "Catching up will definitely take a while. A lot can apparently happen in less than a year." Turning towards Barry, he continued, "And I know you're waiting to say it. Go ahead, Flash."

"You mean how I told you that you could be a better person, you tried to deny it, and then you did that?" Barry asked innocently. "I won't say a word."

"But it is great to have you back," said Ray. "Really. It just wasn't the same without you."

"Yeah, man. Welcome back," Jax said, messing with the food replicator. "We couldn't believe it when Rory ran off and Gideon told us what he was doing." He shook his head. "Honestly, it doesn't feel quite real. But I'm not going to complain." Jax gestured towards what he was working on. "Want some toast or something, Snart? I'm getting a grapefruit for Grey."

And that question reminded Barry of what he'd brought on the trip with him. Tapping into his speed, he vanished from the galley to retrieve the small box. When he returned, everyone stared at him in curiosity.

"When Rory told us he wanted to bring you back, I thought it might be nice to have a small welcome back gift," Barry said with a shrug. "It isn't much, but I thought you'd appreciate it."

Raising an eyebrow, Snart reached for the box and peered inside. The surprised chuckle from the thief reassured Barry that his idea was appreciated. As the others stared questioningly at both of them, Snart started pulling out the contents.

A light-blue mug covered in snowflakes, part of a set from last Christmas. A container of hot chocolate mix, a pretty decent brand that most people liked around the holidays. And from a quick trip to the store before leaving, a bag of mini marshmallows.

"Feeling sentimental?" asked Snart.

"At least you didn't need to break into our home this time," Iris said, slightly smiling at the reminder.

"Did you at least invest in better locks after that?"

"Like that would actually keep you out," said Barry.

Footsteps caught their attention as two more people entered the galley. Amaya and Nate froze as they caught sight of the blanket-enshrouded thief. The mood in the room instantly shifted. They didn't know Snart like the others did. From what Barry knew, they'd only met the version from the Legion of Doom. The version that Barry first fought when he was still learning to be the Flash. He wasn't sure how they would respond.

"Dr. Nate Heywood, I presume?" said Snart. "Sara mentioned you. But I don't think I caught the lady's name."

Nate looked a little uneasy, like he was uncertain how to react. Amaya only hesitated a moment
before calmly approaching. She extended a hand towards him.

"I am Amaya Jiwe, formerly member of the Justice Society of America. And you are the Leonard Snart from 2016," she said. "We have heard about you from the rest of the team. A thief and criminal for most of your life, I believe."

"And is that a problem, Ms. Jiwe?" asked Snart, eyeing her and not yet accepting the offered handshake.

She smiled and said, "I've learned not to judge so quickly or harshly anymore. And feel free to call me 'Amaya' if you prefer. You're Mick's friend and everyone here trusts you."

"Not to mention the cozy sweater and blanket combo makes it harder to take you as a threat right now," added Nate, visibly relaxing.

"I'll work on that," said Snart dryly, but he finally returned the handshake.

As Jax slid a plate of toast with raspberry jam in front of the thief, the newcomers started their own breakfast. Snart started eating with the same enthusiasm that Barry did after a particularly intense day of running. Both running and recovering from hypothermia probably took similar levels of energy. The man still looked a bit weary, so hopefully the extra sugar in the jam would help.

"Here you go," shouted Cisco as he ran back in, the parka in his arms. Practically shoving it at Snart, he said, "Sorry about that."

Weighing it with a frown, Snart asked, "What did you do to it? It's a little heavier than before."

"Well, after I repaired the damage to my Cold Gun—"

"What happened to my Cold Gun?"

"—I was on a bit of a roll. And I remembered that you and Rory were running around with no powers or protective gear. So since the ship can fabricate almost any material, which is amazing, and I know quite a few useful synthesized materials, I figured I might as well fix that problem while I'm here," continued Cisco quickly. "I found your old room, grabbed the parka I remember you wearing all the time, pulled out the stitching, added another layer in the lining, and put it back together again. It isn't much, but the material in the lining should resist someone stabbing you with a knife and stop lower-caliber bullets, though that could still leave a bruise from impact. Admittedly not my best work, but I was going for subtle. I figured you wouldn't go for something like what the Flash wears."

"You would guess right," Snart said, studying his parka with new appreciation.

"And since Heat Wave's coat was cut apart when the two of you ended up as popsicles, I fabricated a new one based on the design of the old one. I just added the same lining and made it fire resistant as an added bonus. Just in case. But hopefully it'll help keep the two of you alive with all the time travel and stuff," said Cisco.

"Assuming that Mr. Snart intends to continue time-traveling now that Vandal Savage is dead," Rip said, striding into the room. "And it is good to see you up and feeling better."

Rolling his eyes, Snart said, "If you're worried about how I feel, then next time actually get me a drink of water rather than wait for me to fall asleep again. And I have to stay. Look at what happens when I leave you alone for a few months."

"Hey, we're doing fine," said Nate.
His tone completely deadpan, Snart said, "You broke time."

"In our defense, Thawne bringing an army of himself as backup at the end didn't help either," Ray said.

"Which is why the Speed Force apparently sent a time wraith version of Hunter Zolomon after him," said Barry, remembering the description of events.

"And we know you're staying because Sara's the captain now," Ray continued.

That casual comment made both the thief and assassin stiffen. And maybe it was Barry's eyes playing tricks on him, but he could swear that Snart looked slightly redder than before.

"If you mean I'm staying because there's finally a competent person in charge, then yes," said Snart, his attempt to sound casual just a little too strained.

Rip didn't seem to notice the slight tension. And he didn't even look surprised at the insult though. He just rolled his eyes slightly.

"Then you are staying?" Amaya asked, clearly trying to redirect the conversation towards a safer path. "I'm sure everyone is happy to hear that."

Smiling briefly, Barry said, "He'll at least keep you on your toes around here. Snart always kept me busy when I dealt with him."

"Someone's got to keep you at the top of your game, Flash. Wouldn't want you getting slow and lazy," said Snart. "Who knows what quality of criminals you've been stuck with while I was gone."

"No one like you. There's only one Captain Cold," Cisco said. Pausing briefly, he added, "Though I guess there's probably other Leonard Snarts on the other Earths."

"Well, I better take Grey some breakfast," said Jax as he picked up a plate with a grapefruit. "He tried to hide it, but he didn't sleep well last night."

"If you're heading out," Snart said, almost sounding hesitant, "think you can swing by and check on Mick on your way?"

Nodding with a very knowing grin, Jax said, "No problem, man. I'll grab a book and hang out with the big guy for a while."

He slipped out of the galley, forcing Rip to move out of the doorway. The room felt a bit crowded with everyone in there working on their breakfasts. But the atmosphere felt cheerful enough that Barry doubted anyone minded.

A copy of "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" tucked under one arm and carrying a plate, Jax headed into medbay. Gideon helped him track Stein down. He wasn't surprised that the older man dozed off in there. Jax had been dealing with a general sense of fatigue all morning.

And now that he was unconscious and unable to block off their psychic link, Jax could guess why his partner was so tired. Faint flickers of guilt and grief prickled at the back of his mind. Stein was in the middle of a nightmare, one he'd been avoiding all night.

Jax carefully sat the book and grapefruit on the crate. Part of him wanted to let Stein try and sleep a little more. He needed the rest. They all needed sleep after the last couple days. But the faint feelings
coming over their connection had been growing worse since at least Rip's arrival in the galley, part of the reason Jax left not long after. The nightmare was growing more intense and that wouldn't help Stein get the proper rest that he needed.

Shaking his shoulder, he called, "Grey? Come on, man. Wake up. Grey!"

Stein startled sharply, nearly dislodging his glasses from his face. His eyes, wide and confused, darted wildly around the surroundings. He glanced at the doorway, at the still figure in the neighboring chair, and finally focused on Jax's face. Stein visibly relaxed as he recognized his partner in front of him.

"Jefferson," he said quietly, the only sound in the room other than the shallow breathing of the patient and the soft beeping from the display of Rory's condition.

"Yeah, Grey," said Jax comfortingly. "It's me. I'm fine. Everyone is fine. That's what you're worried about, right?"

"I… I don't know wh—"

"Don't even try that, Grey," interrupted Jax. "I know you better than that. I know what it feels like when you have nightmares and it doesn't take much to guess what caused it."

At least he had the decency to look ashamed of his attempt to deny it. Stein sat up the rest of the way in the chair and straightened his glasses. Jax sat down on the edge of the crate, studying his partner carefully.

"I'm not dead," continued Jax. "You should be able to feel enough through the psychic link to know that. I'm not dead. And I'm not dying. And what happened to the other me wasn't your fault."

"Unfortunately, my subconscious disagrees," he muttered dryly.

Jax could understand that. Seeing his own face die wasn't exactly easy for him either. But stabbing Merlyn in the leg in retaliation immediately afterwards did make him feel a bit better.

"I get it. But there's a big difference between me and him," said Jax. "Two, actually. One, he knew that he was existing on borrowed time. He already knew he was dead, one way or another. And two, he didn't have his partner to watch his back. I'm not going to end up like that."

"He died saving me, Jefferson. Do you know how that makes me feel?"

"Exactly how I felt when you sent me back to 2016 in the jump-ship to save my life and condemning yourself to death. If I didn't find my way back, you would have died saving me, Grey."

And he knew Stein would do it again if necessary. Without any hesitation. The old man might be arrogant and have issues with overprotectiveness at times, but Jax knew that Stein would always make that choice. His life for that of his partner.

"I'm not going to end up like Ronnie. Or that other me," continued Jax. "And if I do die in the distant future, it won't be your fault. Because no matter what your ego might say otherwise, you're not responsible for everything that happens." Giving his partner an encouraging smile, Jax said, "So how about instead of worrying and stressing out, you have some breakfast and you head to your room for some proper sleep in your own bed. Maybe even get some warm milk or something from the galley."

"And Mr. Rory?" Stein asked.
Jax was about to reassure him that he planned to keep an eye on their unconscious arsonist, but stopped as he actually turned his attention back to Mick. He wasn't quite certain what it was, but something wasn't right. His shallow breathing sounded both faster and weaker than when Jax came in. The display showed a lot more red and the beeping seemed a bit unsteady. And the blue light that previous danced across all the man's body now focused on his chest.

"Hey, Gideon?" asked Jax uneasily.

"I am aware," she responded, sounding surprisingly worried for an artificial intelligence. "I am attempting to stabilize him before—"

An alarm cut off her words as the display flashed red.

Chapter End Notes

What? You thought it would be just fluff and sweetness from here on out? You thought that everything would be fine? You thought I was a kind and benevolent writer? You thought there would be no consequences?

No. There are consequences for bringing back Snart. There are consequences for suffering exposure to such harsh temperatures. The lowest human body temperature ever recorded that the person survived was 56.7 degrees Fahrenheit (or 13.7 degrees Celsius). And that didn't involve being exposed to absolute zero.

There are consequences for what happened. And I am a cruel and vicious writer.
Seeing the worried shrieks and flailing of my readers when I threw a curve ball into what they think is happening is rather satisfying. Especially since they have every reason to be worried.

Hypothermia is not something that can be easily shrugged off, especially the more severe stages. Benign arrhythmias, such as sinus bradycardia, slow AF, other atrial arrhythmias and transient ventricular arrhythmias are common physiological responses in hypothermia and require no specific treatment other than rewarming. Most cardiac arrhythmias associated with hypothermia will resolve spontaneously with rewarming. However, profound depression of myocardial function, with bradycardia, hypotension and life-threatening arrhythmias, V-Fib (especially at 22 degrees Celsius) and asystole (especially at 18 degrees Celsius), can develop with severe hypothermia.

Ventricular fibrillation, or V-Fib, is when the heart quivers instead of pumping due to disorganized electrical activity in the ventricles. The ventricular muscle twitches randomly rather than contracting in a coordinated fashion (from the apex of the heart to the outflow of the ventricles), and so the ventricles fail to pump blood around the body. Because of this, it is classified as a cardiac arrest rhythm and patients in V-fib should be treated with cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and prompt defibrillation.

Left untreated, ventricular fibrillation is rapidly fatal as the vital organs of the body, including the heart, are starved of oxygen, and as a result, patients in this rhythm will not be conscious or responsive to stimuli. Ventricular fibrillation can also quickly progress to asystole, a cardiac flatline and the state of total cessation of electrical activity from the heart. That would be clinical death, with no pulse and even the chaotic electrical activity stopping as the person goes from a "shockable" rhythm to a "non-shockable" one. This is followed by death in the absence of treatment.

Rates of survival among those who are out of hospital when ventricular fibrillation is detected is about 17 percent and is about 46 percent if it happens within a hospital. For an asystolic patient… the numbers are worse.

In cardiac arrest, it should be further noted that the severely hypothermic patient will be resistant to both drug and electrical therapies. If there is no initial response to these then further attempts are unlikely to succeed until rewarming has occurred to at least 32 degrees Celsius. The only good news is that there are well-documented cases of complete recovery from very prolonged hypothermic cardiac arrest, and prolonged resuscitative attempts are warranted in the hypothermic patient.

In summary: hypothermia is bad, Mick is in trouble, and while the cold might buy him more time, it also makes it harder to help him. And I am an evil writer. So death is a distinct possibility.
method to alert them to time aberrations. The one that startled him into nearly spilling his porridge was different than the others. But if there was one thing that a former hemophiliac would recognize, it was a medical alarm.

"Gideon?" asked Ray, climbing to his feet.

"Even with precautions, Mr. Rory is experiencing rewarming shock," she reported, the normally-calm A.I. speaking quickly. "The excessive stress on his body has resulted in disrupted electrical impulses in his heart, causing ventricular fibrillation."

Rip had already run out the door at the sound of the alarm, before Ray started questioning her, but everyone else was surging to their feet. Barry vanished in a flash of speed that crackled with power. And Nate saw Snart, the man that he'd only known as the cold and ruthless member of the Legion of Doom, looked almost desperate as he tried to stand.

Mick almost yelped in surprise as his back slammed against the wall, the twelve-year-old dropping the box of matches in his hands. His father glared down at him as he kept the boy pinned in place. Mick already knew what the man would say. This wasn't exactly a new conversation.

"So we have to stop keeping matches in this household because of you and you decide to steal them?" he yelled. "What is wrong with you, boy?"

"I can't help it," said Mick dully.

"Yes, you can. You just need to grow up. Grow up and take responsibility for what you're doing. This can't go on," he yelled. "I can't believe I ended up with a selfish and stupid son like you. How many times do we have to keep doing this?"

"It's not my fault," said Mick, not knowing what else to say by now. "I've tried. I can't stop."

He'd never been able to explain it properly. He couldn't make anyone understand. He couldn't escape how fire called him.

Life was so much like fire. Both could grow. Both needed to feed and needed air to breathe in order to survive. Both could seem bright, lively, and beautiful. And both could fade and die in time.

He could no more escape fire's hold on him than he could escape life itself.

His father slammed him against the wall again. Mick didn't even flinch this time.

"Michael Calhoun Rory, I swear I'm going to drive this disobedient streak out of you, one way or another."

Mick wanted to say something, to yell back in defiance. But whatever fire that normally burned inside the boy seemed to be far weaker and dimmer than normal. He just accepted the normal shouts without a word.

"What's wrong with you, boy? Giving up? Are you as stupid as you are crazy?" He slammed Mick again, the man's expression twisted in frustration. "Come on then. Fight back."

Rip cursed under his breath as he ran down the halls of the Waverider. They were too complacent. The recoveries of their criminal teammates had been going smoothly and they let their guards down. But just because Snart survived his time in absolute zero with nothing so serious that medbay
couldn't fix it didn't mean that Rory would be just as impossibly lucky.

When he reached medbay (a rush of wind alerting him to the fact that the Flash had also arrived), Rip found Jax and Stein already trying to help the patient. Undoubtedly following Gideon's steady directions, one of them managed to locate the facemask to provide oxygen. It fit more snuggly than those of their native times and would force Rory to breathe without the need for non-trained people to attempt intubation. And even more importantly, Jax apparently learned enough about CPR at some point that he'd started chest compressions.

That was important. He'd heard Gideon's diagnosis even as he'd raced from the galley. He vaguely remembered what ventricular fibrillation meant from those distant first aid courses. Rory's heart was weakly spasming rather than beating anymore. And until it was restored, his blood would not pump through his body without outside influence.

They assumed he would be all right. Rory managed to recover enough earlier that Gideon didn't need to continue the more intense rewarming treatments. Rory had even started breathing on his own at a lower temperature than expected. Rip assumed that since Snart managed to wake up, Rory would certainly follow a similar path. They had assumed that the worst had passed.

"Gideon," Rip prompted.

"Mr. Rory's heart rhythm needs to be reestablished before it progresses from ventricular fibrillation to asystole," said the A.I. quickly. "However, hypothermia reduces the effectiveness of both electrical and chemical treatments."

"Work on raising his temperature as fast as possible then," he said, pulling out the defibrillator from where they were stored. "Causing further medical shock is the least of our problems."

He felt like he'd forgotten something, but Mick knew he couldn't have missed much. The flames might be dying down, but the house was still burning. He felt numb even as his eyes couldn't look away from the fire.

Mick always felt a kinship with fire. They were the same in the end. But Mick wasn't the good and beautiful parts of the light and heat. He was only the worst elements of flames.

He burned everything around him. He was chaos. He was pain. He was destruction.

He was death.

Mick destroyed his family and home. He'd done this. He created this destructive force and ran, leaving it to burn. He took everything in his life and turned it into ash and smoke. In the end, all he would be left with would be fire.

He didn't deserve anything else.

"Mick?"

He turned slightly, spotting one of the cops approaching him finally. Mick recognized the man. He'd dealt with the teenager a few times, mostly shoplifting and a few more public fights. Mick couldn't remember the cop's name. The man clearly remembered him though.

"Do you know what happened?" he continued, keeping his voice steady and calm.

Mick nodded slowly. He felt so disconnected and numb, but he knew what happened. It was a distant
knowledge, like it happened to someone else. But he knew. There was no reason to deny what he did. There was no denying what kind of monster he was.

"I started the fire. I killed them."

The cop looked paler at the blunt admission. Mick turned back towards the dying fire. He watched the fading orange light, his eyes burning from the smoke. So much destruction and death caused by something so beautiful.

"Okay," said the cop. "Okay. You're going to need to come with us, Mick. Please make this easy on us. Just give up."

Barry had run into the medbay, barely behind Rip even with his head start. He arrived in time to see Rip giving orders to the A.I. while digging out something silver and black with the expression of a man on a mission.

There was nothing that the Flash could do to help Rory, but Barry took some first aid classes before he started working at crime scenes. It wasn't much, but you never knew what could happen in the field. And whenever Jax grew tired, Barry knew enough to take over. CPR could be exhausting to perform.

Rip took the twin objects that Barry now recognized as wireless defibrillator paddles and, telling Jax to move, yanked the blanket out of the way and sent a jolt into the limp figure.

Then Barry heard the others hurrying down the hall.

Mick shouted wildly as his new favorite weapon sent flames into the night. Snart was right. This was better than just stealing. Fire and frost, side-by-side as they turned Central City into their personal playground.

He would be the force of destruction and chaos that fire had revealed Mick to be. They would burn the cops and scorch the buildings. They would rob and steal anything that caught his attention. They would plunge the city into chaos and crime. It would be glorious.

There was only one obstacle. The speedy young man in the red suit, the one that Snart challenge to this showdown. The Flash.

Mick and his partner would just have to kill him.

One cop with a shield tried to play hero and help the Flash, blocking flames and cold from finishing the job. The young cop ended up shoved back out of the line of fire before Mick could scorch him for the interference.

"I know you can do better than this," the Flash shouted, breaking his earlier silence abruptly. "Fight back."

"Go," snapped Leonard, forcing his tired body to obey. "Get in there. I'll catch up."

Sara hesitated, reaching towards him in case he needed help. He shrugged it off, gesturing for her to hurry. He needed her there. Mick needed help and Leonard would only slow everyone down.

It wasn't logical, but he felt like Mick would have a better chance if Sara was there. As if she could
somehow watch his back and protect him from whatever was happening. Leonard certainly wasn't in any condition to provide backup this time, no matter how ridiculous the idea.

Maybe she believed that he could manage on his own or maybe she just realized it was important for some stupid, illogical reason. Either way, Sara gave a short nod and vanished out the same doorway as everyone else.

Leonard tried to run after her. Desperation and a heavy sense of dread wrapped around him, whispering things he stubbornly ignored. The knowledge that his partner was in danger spurred him on. And by some miracle, he did run across the galley.

But no further. Exhaustion sapped what little strength that worry managed to provide. Leonard nearly collapsed as his body tried to surrender, forcing him to grab the wall to stay upright.

Panting and limbs shaking, he refused to give up. It wasn't that far. He ran into an assassins’ stronghold after amputating a limb on his own and this was a far shorter distance. He could do this.

His partner needed him.

A hand abruptly grabbed his arm and slung it over his shoulders. Leonard nearly took a swing at them, however weakly, before he realized it was Heywood. The new historian apparently stayed behind to help.

"I've got you," he said. "Just hang onto me."

Every instinct screamed to be on guard, to get some distance from this stranger and be wary of the possible threat far too close to him. He was vulnerable and didn't know this person enough to trust them. But his need to get to Mick now won out.

Leonard dug his fingers into the shoulder of the other man's shirt and let him support the thief's weight.

Like always, Snart had a plan.

Specifically, this plan would end up with the Santini crime family losing both a lot of power and money. And if his partner was right, they'd even replace their lost Heat and Cold Guns along the way.

That part would fall on Lisa's shoulders, but Mick knew she could do it. He'd spent a lot of time helping Snart with his little sister over the years and he'd watched her grow up to be a smart and tough young woman who could take care of herself. Mick and Snart had the more dangerous job.

Snart's plan involved them sending a pretty strong message to the Santini family. But the first part required their muscle to capture the pair. So Mick figured being held at gunpoint meant the plan was going well.

"Don't even think about it," sneered the closest goon with a gun. "Just give up."

Jax hated health class in high school. It wasn't even that complicated of a class. Mostly, it was an easy "A" that filled in a gap in his schedule. But they'd all had to practice on the ugly dummy with the permanent marker mustache, the worn-out demonstration tool that should have been replaced years ago. Mrs. Cuevas insisted that they at least leave her class with a few useful skills. That included both the Heimlich maneuver and CPR.
As he threw all his weight and strength into each compression while mentally counting the steady beat she taught him, Jax silently promised his old teacher a fruit basket or something for Christmas.

CPR wasn't like on television. It was harder and exhausting. Keeping his arms stiff and putting enough force behind each compression was tough. And when Jax thought he felt something crack and give way under the pressure, he nearly stopped. But Mrs. Cuevas' sharp voice cut through his mind with nearly the same clarity that Stein's did when merged: a cracked ribcage was easier to survive than no heartbeat.

"Step back again, Mr. Jackson," Rip ordered, the black-and-silver defibrillator paddles in his hands.

He flung himself back briefly as the former-captain once more sent electricity jolting through Mick's body. Again, it wasn't like television. It was less dramatic. Rather than the full-body spasm, he barely twitched.

But more importantly, the display didn't change and Rip's strained expression remained the same as he pulled back. It didn't work.

"I've got it," said Barry, slipping in front of Jax to take over and give his shaking arms a break.

He knew the aching muscles belonged to him, but Jax couldn't tell if the barely-restrained panic and worry came from himself, Stein, or both. His partner, after finding the facemask, couldn't do much more to help. Nor could the crowd of people gathering near the doorway with horrified and concerned expressions.

A rebellious thought, one Jax couldn't completely bury, suggested there wasn't much any of them could do to help because nothing would be enough to stop what was happening.

After a week trapped on the Waverider without the opportunity to burn anything to the point he was practically twitching, after being forcibly dragged from the criminal-controlled version of Star City, and after watching his partner gradually transform into someone he didn't recognize much anymore, Mick's temper was already burning beneath the surface. Getting locked in a small room with the kid, the frustrated captain, and some woman didn't help. Tensions were high all around. What came next was inevitable.

Mick and Rip were snarling at each other, practically at each other throats even as Jax tried to play peacekeeper. It wasn't going to work. Rip was too stressed and upset. And even if Mick couldn't set a physical fire, he could feel the flames burning inside and he couldn't resist. He let it rage as the argument burned brighter.

Rip should have known what to expect. He brought Mick onboard for his kinship with fire. He chose Mick because he saw his potential just like everyone else on the team had the potential to achieve his mission. Even with the lies, that part was a fact. Rip wanted a deadly criminal arsonist and that's what he got.

"No," snapped Rip, "I recruited you because you and your partner are a package deal."

That stopped him cold, the fire dying down to embers.

"What?" he asked numbly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rory, but a serial arsonist was never part of my plans to stop Savage," continued Rip harshly. "Much less one with the I.Q. of meat."
It shouldn't hurt. It shouldn't surprise him. And yet even after years of hearing similar statements, it still cut deep. People always wanted Snart because he was brilliant and could plan even the most impossible crime if given the chance. Unless they needed a fire, Mick was always an afterthought. The dumb muscle.

They didn't want him around. They never wanted him in the first place. He and Snart should have never listened to the Englishman. The two of them should have stayed in 2016.

"Nothing to say? Not even a word?" asked Rip. "Don't stop now. Fight back."

"Come on," muttered Rip as he pulled the defibrillator paddles away, eyes locked on the display. "Come on."

The more times that they used a defibrillator on him, the lower the chances of success. And while Gideon was raising Rory's core body temperature faster than before, they hadn't managed to shock him out of V-Fib. The only thing keeping their arsonist alive was the CPR.

Switching him back to the setup where Gideon managed all of the patient's vital processes like when they first brought Rory in with hypothermia wouldn't work. His condition had devolved too far. It would probably kill the man if they tried.

All they could do was what they were already doing for him. Gideon was warming him, forcing him to breathe, and dosing him with epinephrine through the cuff on his wrist to hopefully force the return of spontaneous circulation. Ray was slipping over, apparently ready to switch places with Barry and take over CPR.

Then the fragile balance shifted. Rory's heart fell out of the ventricular fibrillation, which was what they wanted. But it wasn't in response to the defibrillator. Rip hadn't used them again yet. Rory's condition was instead devolving further.

"Mr. Rory is now asystolic," Gideon reported clinically. "His heart has completely ceased all detectable function."

The pain finally faded from his mind, leaving him limp in his chair and dragging in a shaking breath. He couldn't tell how long he'd been there, trapped and at the non-existent mercy of the Time Masters. He thought being stranded in that forest, starving and losing his grip on sanity, was as bad as it could get. He thought that Snart turning on him, abandoning him in that forsaken place, and a slow death from hunger and exposure was the worst fate possible. But that was before Time Master Declan found him.

"What is your name," asked Declan.

He knew what he was supposed to say. They'd ripped his mind apart countless times and put him back together again. They'd nearly broken him repeatedly only to repair him once more. That team left him behind to suffer and the Time Masters took advantage. They were remaking him into something else.

He knew what Declan expected him to say. The word was on his lips, unbidden and automatic. A name that they'd chosen for their creation. He knew it was the only way to make it stop. All he needed to do was submit to what his body and mind wanted to become. It was all imprinted and burned into place, scorching away who he used to be.

But there was too much stubbornness and hatred in him to surrender just yet. He hadn't been erased
completely. Not yet. The fire in him was smoldering, but not yet gone.

"You're dead," Mick managed to choke out, his threat not quite believable.

Frowning in mild disappointment at the answer, Declan said, "You are making the induction process far more painful than it needs to be. And for what? How much of your old identity even remains after so long?" He shook his head and Mick knew that the indescribable pain was about to return. "There is no escape from this. It was your fate to come here. We ensured that this would happen before you were even born. You cannot win." There was a sharp gesture, indicating for them to continue the process. "Just give up.

Amaya didn't know what exactly was being accomplished by how he others were pressing on Mick's chest, Iris' quick mention of CPR not really clarifying anything, but she could tell it was meant to help. But since she didn't know how to help, she found herself watching anxiously at the doorway with Sara, Iris, and Cisco.

He wasn't getting any better though. She could see that much. It was etched in the faces of everyone in medbay. Whatever they were doing wasn't helping enough. Mick was getting worse.

"Amaya," called Nate, causing her to look down the hall.

He was hurrying towards medbay as quickly as Snart could manage, Nate supporting the man's weight. Snart clearly didn't have much energy to spare, exhaustion weighing him down and leaving him pale. Even the short distance from the galley left him panting. He was barely out of medbay himself, after all. But his expression was stubborn and even if he tried to keep his face mostly blank, he couldn't completely hide the worry. Nothing was going to stop him.

Sara moved in front of the two men suddenly, blocking their path. Nate blinked in surprise, but Snart kept trying to reach his goal.

"Leonard, don't," she said gently.

"What's happening to him?" asked Snart, still breathing hard.

"Please," Sara pleaded, reaching for his shoulder, "you don't want to see this."

Refusing to be deterred and obviously deciding to get answers elsewhere, he said, "Gideon, tell me. What's happening?"

Eyes widening, Sara glanced up and started, "Gideon, don't—"

"Mr. Rory is in full cardiac arrest," reported the A.I. before she could be stopped. "He can be considered clinically dead, though his low body temperature and the continued use of cardiopulmonary resuscitation has prevented complete biological death thus far."

For a moment, Snart looked like the news would make him collapse. But then he tore away from all of them, staggering the last few steps to reach the doorway. He grabbed the doorframe for support, keeping upright if only barely. But Snart's eyes were locked on the still and silent figure.

He'd known Lisa for most of her life. Leonard introduced him to her little sister not long after they left juvie. Mick helped his partner watch over her, sometimes even picking her up from school when Leonard couldn't get there in time or needed to keep a low profile. Anything to keep her away from Lewis Snart as much as possible. Mick wasn't her family; his family was ash and smoke by his own
actions. But Mick kept an eye on her when he could and cared about the young woman that he watched grow up.

For decades, all he had was her and Leonard.

But having this conversation with Lisa was something he'd never wanted to do. He never expected to track her down at a safehouse like this, alone and feeling like someone ripped out something deep inside. But someone had to tell Lisa. So Mick told her.

Not everything and not in detail. He couldn't scrounge up the willpower to talk much. But he told her the only thing that mattered.

Mick told her that Leonard was dead. That he was left behind and died alone.

She didn't break into tears or collapse in response to her clear pain. Lisa wasn't like that. She took that pain and turned cold and sharp.

"How could you?" she hissed, her eyes bright and wet. "You were partners. You were supposed to watch his back. You should have protected him." She closed her eyes, taking a breath that shook in heartache and fury. "But now Lenny's gone. He's gone."

He dropped his gaze to the ground, unable to look at her any longer. There was nothing he could say. Mick completely agreed with every word. It was everything he'd already told himself since he woke up on the Waverider and realized what happened. And those thoughts hadn't stopped since Rip dumped them off the timeship back in 2016.

She could blame him all she wanted. He should have found a way to keep Leonard from switching places like that. He was supposed to protect his partner, to keep him from getting killed. It should have been Mick.

Leonard was dead, it was Mick's fault, and he couldn't even kill the Time Masters for creating the Oculus because they were blown up too.

"He's gone and it's your fault. I hate you," she snarled, lashing out in pain and sorrow. "You couldn't even watch his back. You let him die."

She threw a punch to his stomach, strong and sharp enough that Mick staggered back from the unexpected pain. They taught her to fight long ago. She knew how to hit.

But Mick's temper didn't even flicker. Any fire left in him was nothing more than tiny embers. He deserved this. He deserved the young woman's hatred and fury. She was right. Everything she accused him of was right.

"Get out," Lisa snapped. "Get out of here. I never want to see you again."

"Lisa…"

"Go!" She shoved him back and slammed the door in his face. Her voice shaking slightly as it came through the door, she said, "Why couldn't you save him? Do something? Fight back? That's what you're supposed to do. Fight back."

Ray could feel his arms shaking from the effort by the time that Rip took his place. They couldn't stop. It was vital to always continue CPR until either the patient recovered or trained medical personnel arrived. And since no help would be coming, they would have to keep going. Mick's life
depended on it.

But hope was fading. Ray could feel the very atmosphere around them darkening. He could see the tension in their bodies and the strain in their faces.

Everyone either stood near the walls or in the doorway, watching for any sign or hint that the CPR and the drugs from Gideon were making any difference. They all looked for anything that might suggest that Mick still had a chance.

Ray had hope. He refused to believe it was too late. If Snart could come back when everyone believed him to be dead, then Mick wasn't beyond reach. They could still save him.

He had to believe that. Ray refused to lose a friend like this.

Mick tried to focus on what was real. The smells of sickness, blood, and smoke were real. The crying and shouts of pain from within the hospital tent, the background conversations, and the distant explosions were real. The uncomfortable fabric from his uniform rubbing against the covered burn scars was real.

The cold and sharp version of his lost partner, one who reminded Mick so much of Lewis Snart (though he would never say it aloud), was probably not real.

No matter what his senses told him, Leonard was gone. And he was never coming back. So he certainly wasn't outside a hospital tent in World War I. Mick needed to focus on reality.

They had a mission. They needed to destroy the Spear of Destiny. That was the job.

"Mick, Mick, Mick," scolded Snart. "When have we ever destroyed anything we've ever stolen, let alone the most valuable score of the century? What have they done to you?"

They done it once. Destroyed what they'd stolen. That ugly painting from the rich couple. That was when he first received the Heat Gun.

Rip contacted Mick through the comms. A welcome distraction from how he was trying to avoid looking at Snart. The man was gone. This wasn't real.

"What happened to the man who never took orders from anyone?" asked Snart, edging closer. "I respected the hell out of that guy. Now you're just their trained pet. 'Sit, Mick. Fetch, Mick. Good boy, Mick.' Ruff."

The mocking bark got under Mick's skin almost as much as the accusations. After so many years around each other, Leonard knew how to get a reaction.

No. He had known. But not anymore. Because this wasn't real.

"I'm no one's... pet," Mick growled, nearly snarling at the word.

"Sure, you are." The man's snark was impossible to miss. "They may act all friendly to you, but they'll never trust you. Never. When the chips are down, they'll look at you the same way they always have: as a thug."

Snart was practically in his face by now. It was harder not to look. And it was harder to ignore the words. Every doubt he'd ever had on the team was laid out in a few carefully-chosen words.

They didn't trust him. They didn't respect him. They didn't want him.
He didn't even have to look hard to see the truth. They didn't really try to hide their feelings from him. They probably thought he was too dumb to notice. And with Snart discussing it so bluntly, Mick couldn't ignore it and pretend it didn't matter like normal.

"But you and me? We're partners." Mick couldn't help meeting Snart's eyes briefly that time. "At least, we were. And we could be again."

Snart kept turning his head, scanning the surroundings. He was sizing up threats, planning escape routes, watching for anyone who might interfere, and locating targets. The familiarity of watching his long-gone partner's mind at work hurt so much. Mick wanted him to be real. It tore at old wounds and left them raw once more.

Hissing quickly, Snart said, "Take the Spear of Destiny. Use it for yourself. Use it for us."

"There's no us," he said, glancing briefly at the man. "You're dead."

Mick forced himself to say it. Yes, he and Gideon had figured out that Leonard was actually technically alive. Trapped in a frozen moment, unreachable and unaware. But there was nothing he could do. They couldn't get him back. It was easier to call him dead. There was a finality to it that kept Mick from hoping.

Hope hurt too much.

"I don't have to be, Mick. With the Spear, it would be so easy to bring me back."

Mick closed his eyes, trying to ignore the temptation. Snart was right. An object capable of rewriting reality could do it. He could save his partner from what happened. He could undo it all. But the team kept talking about the dangers, about how anyone who used it would risk losing control. And he already knew what happened when fire ran wild.

He couldn't risk it. And he couldn't betray them.

Mick breathed out as he tried to steady himself. Why was he even thinking about this? Why was he listening?

"You're in my head. You're..." Mick struggled to sort through his turbulent thoughts for the word. "You're an illumination."

"Hallucination?" asked Snart dryly.

"That's it."

Snart turned slightly, as if he intended to walk away. Then he threw a punch, causing the right side of Mick's face to explode in pain.

Real pain. Snart was real.

As Mick straightened back up, Snart asked, "Now did that feel like a hallucination?"

Mick stood there in stunned silence as his partner turned and started walking away.

"Things aren't going to get any better the way you're going now," Snart called over his shoulder. "Just give up."

Just give up.
"Don't give up," whispered Leonard, his voice less steady than he intended.

He couldn't look away. Everything shook with exhaustion, his body had no energy left, and Leonard felt as if he could pass out at any moment, but he couldn't look away. This was wrong.

How long could someone survive without their heart beating, even with CPR? How long until there was no possibility of revival, no matter what futuristic technology was onboard?

He always knew death was a possibility for them. Either on a heist or on a mission, Leonard always figured they'd be killed in a fight of some kind. But he never imagined him or Mick dying in a hospital or medbay. It seemed wrong for his partner to end up like this, his body abruptly surrendering while surrounded by miraculous medical technology that could do nothing to stop it.

Mick was dying. After everything that happened, Mick was dying. And he was dying because Mick tried to save Leonard.

It was bad enough that Leonard killed another version of his partner, even if he didn't remember it. But now he was killing Mick again. And this time it would be permanent.

"Please, Mick," Amaya said quietly, the woman standing right next to Leonard probably being the only reason he heard her. "Don't leave us. Not like this."

He wasn't sure where he was. Mick only knew that he was slumped weakly on his knees, partially buried in ash. As far as he could see, there was nothing else. Thick layers of ash covered the ground, deep enough he'd sank into it enough that it covered his legs and hid his limp hands from sight. Smoke drifted through the air, just as gray as the powdery and cold ash. Soot coated his body, grimy and dark. And everything was dead silent.

Fire might have once existed in this place, but it was gone. Only ash and smoke remained.

Mick didn't even try to move. He felt too tired and weak to bother. He stared down numbly at the gray substance, the man half hidden in the ash. He couldn't quite find the right words to describe how he felt. The strange fading sensation, like he barely existed anymore...

He was like a fragile candle flame guttering in the wind, on the brink of extinguishing completely.

There was no strength or will left to draw on. No coals to rekindle the flames. He was as barren and empty as the landscape around him.

Alone and lost, Mick let his eyes slip close. He couldn't do anything else. There was nothing left in him.

"You can't quit now. What are we supposed to do without you around?"

Surprised, Mick's eyes opened. Stepping out of the smoke towards him on the right was Nate. The historian wore a concerned expression across his face, but didn't seem to care about their surroundings. Nor did he seem to care about the fact that he was walking on top of the ash rather than sinking into it. Nate was only looking at Mick.
"You've got to get up, man. We're not leaving you like this," said Jax, also appearing through the smoke to the left.

"The world would be all the poorer without you in it," Stein said solemnly as he joined his partner. "Let no one ever convince you otherwise."

Stepping into view closer to Nate, Ray said, "You're our friend. We want you to come back, Mick."

"The team needs you, Mr. Rory," said Rip, striding into view next to Stein. "We truly do. And we're sorry that you ever believed differently."

"You shouldn't be here," Sara said as she came through the smoke just a little to the right. They seemed to be gradually forming a half circle around him that was slowly meeting towards the middle. "You don't belong in this place. Not yet. You belong with us. So don't give up. You have to fight back."

"Don't do it, Mick," Leonard whispered in a strained voice.

As if his partner could hear him. As if his words would make a difference.

"Don't you dare."

He blinked a few times, his eyes burning as he stared at his partner.

"Fight back."

Mick heard their words, but he wasn't certain he could do what they asked. He wasn't even sure what they were exactly asking him to do. They looked at him with concern on their faces, but Mick didn't know what to do about it.

Honestly, there wasn't much that he could do. His limbs felt limp, heavy, and useless. He could only slump there, as cold and lifeless as the ash around him.

But his team needed him. They were asking him to do something. Practically begging. They needed him to fight whatever was weighing him down. Mick scrounged deep down, trying to find the strength to do something.

"Please," said Amaya as she stepped through the smoke. She kept walking forward until the woman stood right in front of him. "You can't stay here. Come back to us. Come home."

She reached out a hand towards him. A pleading expression met his eyes, one that made something in his chest twist uncomfortably. He didn't want her to look like that, so upset and worried.

Where was home anymore? A burnt-out husk of the house from his childhood? Any of the safehouses that they'd used over the decades?

Or was it a timeship filled with familiar faces, people that he'd fought beside throughout history?


Pulling his arm out of the dark ash was harder than it should have been. It was a loose powder, long since cooled and settled. It shouldn't weigh him down at all. But his body didn't want to cooperate. Mick struggled to lift his shaking hand, but he slowly managed to move it towards Amaya's offered help. But before he could reach her outstretched hand, his strength slipped away and his arm fell
Mick slumped further. He couldn't do it. He couldn't even reach out and take her hand. What was the point of struggling and trying when he failed something so simple? There was simply nothing left. He couldn't keep going anymore. He was too weak and tired.

"I know you can do better than that, Mick."

Leonard came through the smoke. Not the cold and sharp-edged version he saw in hallucinations and in World War I, the one forged by too much time alone among those he couldn't trust and then given the knowledge of his future fate by the Legion. This was the man he last saw in the Oculus. This was his partner, the one that he missed desperately.

This was his friend.

"We'll help you. That's what a team is for. And that's what a partner is for. But you have to meet us part way," Leonard said as he joined Amaya in front of Mick. The rest of the team drew a little closer, watching the man with clear worry. Leonard reached out to him and said, "I've never known you to give up easily. Fight back. Show us what you're made of."

One more. One more try.

Gritting his teeth, Mick forced his heavy and limp arms up again. He reached for the waiting hands, Leonard and Amaya watching patiently. And by some miracle, even if it took too much effort to achieve and left him shaking, Mick grabbed on.

The warmth from Amaya and Leonard's hands sank into his palms, making Mick realize how truly cold he was. The contact practically burned. But it also made him grin.

Amaya holding his left hand and Leonard grasping his right, they pulled him slowly to his feet and out of the ash. The rest of the team drew near, reaching out to steady him and ready to catch him if he fell back down. Each hand that touched his arm, shoulder, or back burned even as they supported him. With everyone crowded around him, Mick could feel the heat practically wrapping around him.

He welcomed the sensation. The warmth and even the burning from the contact felt right. Perhaps a few smoldering embers still remained. They just needed to be rekindled before they could be completely extinguished.

Life and fire were so much alike. And Mick always had a talent for letting things burn.

Never in her life had Sara been so happy to hear a soft beep.

She almost missed it, the young woman trying to prepare for the fallout. She needed to be ready to catch Leonard since he was clearly on the verge on falling and she desperately wanted to know what she could say if they lost Rory. Because no matter how hard he was trying to hide it, Leonard was not doing all right. She was so distracted on how to manage this piece of the crisis that she didn't immediately realize she heard the soft sound.

But those in the room did. She saw them stiffen, their heads snapping towards the display. And she saw Leonard holding his breath, listening intently even as his arms shook with the effort of holding himself up.

The second beep was easier to notice, everyone dead silent and straining to hear. And then there was
a third. And a fourth. Slow and weak, but relatively steady.

"Mr. Rory's body temperature has apparently risen enough for the epinephrine to be effective," reported Gideon. "He is no longer in cardiac arrest."

Chapter End Notes

A bit of a longer chapter, but I figured you'd murder me if I split this one up. And please, don't take medical advice from fanfiction. I do a lot of research and try to make certain things authentic, but I'm not a doctor. I assume that most of you have enough sense not to use fanfiction as your source of knowledge of medicine, but I figured I'd mention it anyway.

In case you were curious, Mick's sections were mostly a combination of his actual memories (the whole "life flash before your eyes" thing) and stuff his brain created to basically tell him "hey, you're kind of dying right now" and trying to decide if he should resist it or not. So the pieces of dialogue at the end of each memory that don't match the episodes exactly are intentional.
No Reason That He Can't Be Both

Chapter Notes

So we got a few more glimpses of Mick's home life in "Welcome to the Jungle" and guess what? None of it necessarily contradicted what I wrote in the last chapter. Yay! That's always a good thing.

And I will say one thing for the massive crossover special: unlike with the Dominators, this one did not maintain the status quo by the end. There were marriages, death, a loss of any superpowers for a surviving character, and another character joining one of the teams.

Anyway, I absolutely love and appreciate all the comments I received with the last chapter. I am so glad to see that it went over so well with all of you. I can't tell you how much hard work I put into getting everything just right.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Leonard held his breath, listening intently even as his arms shook with the effort of keeping himself up. He thought he heard it. Maybe it was a mistake, but he needed it to be real.

The second beep was easier to notice, everyone in the room dead silent and straining to listen for it. And then there was a third. And a fourth. Slow and weak, but it was real.

"Mr. Rory's body temperature has apparently risen enough for the epinephrine to be effective," reported Gideon. "He is no longer in cardiac arrest."

Relief flood through him even as his strength melted away. Leonard completely collapsed, Sara and Amaya catching him before he hit the ground. Gideon wasn't exaggerating when she said it would take time for his endurance to come back. He was weaker than he ever remembered feeling. And he hated being that obviously vulnerable.

"And back in the chair," muttered Sara as she helped him. "We've got you."

Leonard wasn't exactly happy to end up back where he started that morning, but there wasn't really anything he could do about it. Honestly, retaining consciousness seemed like an achievement.

At least he wasn't alone in his visible reaction to Mick's change in condition. Half the team had slumped against the closest wall. Stein muttered something quiet enough that Leonard couldn't make out the words, but the tone strongly suggested it to be a prayer of thanks. And Rip looked like he seriously needed a drink.

"I did inform you it would take time for your endurance to recover, Mr. Snart," said Gideon.

"Forget about that," Leonard said. "What just happened? Everyone kept saying he'd be fine and the Mick…"

He trailed off, too tired and unwilling to continue that train of thought. But he needed answers. Knowledge was power. And if he couldn't control what was happening, then he should at least know what they were dealing with.
"We thought he was," said Rip, rubbing his forehead. "He seemed to be recovering at a reasonable rate. But then again, the both of you were exposed to temperatures no humans have ever survived before. No one knows exactly what to expect."

"Speaking of which," Barry said before vanishing in a flash of speed. Then he reappeared with the quilt that was left in the galley earlier. "We can't let you backslide too."

Leonard kept quiet as the blanket was passed over to Sara and she tucked it around his shoulders and arms. He was too chilled to complain about the lack of dignity in everyone trying to bundle him up.

"But seriously, what happened?" asked Jax. "Everything went wrong very fast."

"One of the risks for more severe hypothermia is rewarming shock," Gideon said. "It is a sudden drop in blood pressure in combination with low cardiac output. And though beneficial, the cellular regenerator can put stress on the body in the process of repairing damage. That includes in this instance excessive repairs to the lungs, heart, and vascular system specifically. The combination of that stress, the rewarming shock, and the still-present hypothermia put enough strain on his heart to disrupt the rhythm. It set off a cascading failure, causing his condition to rapidly worsen until he achieved complete cardiac arrest."

That made a surprising amount of sense. Snart did remember feeling very tired after his hand was restored, but he figured that was just the adrenaline wearing off and probably delayed shock from the injury. He'd slept heavily that night. In retrospect, it made sense that regrowing limbs took a lot out of a man. Even if it helped in the long run. And he had no idea how much damage they'd fixed on Mick.

Cisco said, "So a whole lot of bad luck hitting him all at once. Any way to prevent Round Two?"

"The necessary, yet sudden spike in Mr. Rory's core body temperature does raise the possibility of further medical shock even if he is still within the range of hypothermia," Gideon stated. "Further complications might be reduced however. I recommend that, since none of his current injuries are immediately life-threatening, the most effective treatment would be to postpone any further cellular regeneration until Mr. Rory's condition improves."

"Broken ribs are easier to survive than no heartbeat," muttered Jax.

"And Captain Rip?" she continued. "I also recommend the use of an external pacemaker."

"Why?" asked Leonard, some of his concern about the situation flaring back up.

Opening a drawer and pulling out a silver disk a little larger than a quarter, Rip said, "Until we're certain that he's recovered sufficiently, this should keep his heart at a steady rhythm and keep it from slipping back into V-Fib like that again. Only a temporary measure, but one that should prevent a repeat performance." Carefully positioning the device on Mick's chest, he added, "I honestly can't take a repeat performance. Not this early in the morning."

"As if the rest of us can handle it," said Stein, slumping against the wall behind him.

Leonard leaned back tiredly in the chair. He could barely keep his eyes open now that he knew Mick would be all right. In fact…

He glanced down, blinking sluggishly as he tugged his arm back out from under the quilt. The cuff was back on his wrist. When did…? Oh. Sara must have slipped it on when she tucked the blanket back around him. And she and Gideon were apparently in a conspiracy together. That would explain how heavy everything felt. He'd be more upset about her stunt if he wasn't so busy being impressed
by the stealthy move.

"Really, Assassin?" he mumbled, managing to raise the offending appendage briefly before dropping his hand back on the armrest. "You and Gideon sedating me?"

"I am only administering a low dose, just enough to calm you," defended Gideon. "It would not be enough to reduce you to unconsciousness if it was not for your current state."

"And it'll give her a chance to double-check on you," Sara said. "Make sure that she didn't miss anything and that all that running around didn't cause any new problems. A little more rest won't hurt you. And one of us will be here when you wake up."

"Cheater," he mumbled.

"Don't complain, Crook. You'd do the exact same thing."

Leonard couldn't exactly argue with Sara on that one. Both because she was right and because exhaustion and the mild sedative finally pulled him back into slumber.

"I'm not exactly sure it's a good thing our assassin captain can stealth sedate us like that," said Jax slowly when it became clear that the thief was out like a light. "But since Snart doesn't look like he's about to collapse anymore, I'm not complaining much."

Not to mention the man looked more relaxed now than before. He actually looked like he was sleeping instead of being half dead, which was how Snart looked when they first dragged him out of the weird portal. Actually sleeping rather than simple unconsciousness was visibly different.

"Mr. Snart will likely awaken in a few hours," reported Gideon. "That should be sufficient time for him to recover from the amount of energy he has recently expended and from the stress from the last few moments. Though I highly recommend that Mr. Snart actually take it easy this time."

Jax couldn't help a minor smirk at Gideon's tone. The A.I. sounded like she wanted to scold the unconscious thief.

"So Rory is stable again and Snart is going to be sleeping a while," Iris said. "Since they both need their rest, we probably shouldn't be crowded in here."

Right. It was pretty much what Sara said the day before. They couldn't just stand over the patients worrying the whole time. That wouldn't help anyone.

"She's right," said Jax. "I was going to keep an eye on things anyway. Go on. I've got this." Sitting down on the crate, Jax picked up both his book and Stein's breakfast. "And I mean you, Grey. Eat your grapefruit and get some sleep."

Rubbing the back of his neck, Stein said, "After that excitement, I am uncertain how easily I'll be able to rest."

Jax knew better. Based off what he felt through their psychic link, he suspected that his partner would be out almost instantly once Stein reached his room. The only question was if there would be any more nightmares.

Well, if there were, Jax could always wake him up.

"If Professor Stein is getting a little shut-eye, maybe Cisco and I can take a look at that equation,"
Ray suggested. "It's better than doing nothing all day."

The rest of them started shuffling towards the door with varying levels of reluctance. Jax settled himself comfortably on the crate with his book. He waited quietly as Amaya, Nate, and Sara finally left last. Then he waited a couple extra minutes.

Quietly, Jax said, "All right, you guys. I don't know what is going on with Rory and Amaya or Nate and Amaya or whatever. But I'm pretty sure something is going on with Snart and Sara. Especially with how those two used to act. Honestly, between all you guys, all the stuff that happened with Kendra, and whatever in the world is the deal with Gideon and Rip, the Waverider is turning into the love boat."

He shook his head slightly. He was getting off topic.

"But whatever. The point is that you two better not die or almost die again. None of us want to deal with that. You're our teammates, so listen to us. Don't put any of us through that again. No self-sacrifices and no making me do CPR again. All right?"

Unsurprisingly, neither of the unconscious men responded to his words. But Jax felt better saying it aloud anyway. So he pried open his book to the beginning and started reading.

His partner was right. Once Stein managed to get a few hours of sleep without being disturbed by nightmares, he felt much better. It didn't completely ease his weariness, but it helped. So he felt a little more lively as he headed to the galley for lunch.

As Stein sat down with a bowl of tomato soup and a plate of grilled cheese sandwiches, Ray and Cisco ran in. The clear excitement on their faces suggested good things. The team needed good news after their rough morning.

"Professor Stein," called Ray. "We think we have something."

"We were going over that equation that Heat Wave gave you, your notes from last night, and Gideon's information on the timestream," Cisco said quickly. "And we figured it out."

"You mean you know how to fix the timeline?" asked Stein.

Ray shook his head and said, "Oh, not that. We're nowhere close to solving that problem."

"Not even close," Cisco added.

"But we were able to work backwards with that equation to figure out what it actually meant. What the different variables represent and how it applies to reality rather than just being some numbers to plug into a timeship's navigation," continued Ray.

Leaning back, Stein asked, "And what has your studies revealed?"

"The equation is a way to map out the fractures to the timeline," he said.

"Which isn't exactly easy to visualize since it works in four dimensions rather than two or three, affecting both time and space, but we aren't the type to back down from challenges," added Cisco. "Doc Brown would be so proud of us."

Ray continued, "We managed to work out that there's a pattern. It spirals out from the initial point at a predictable rate. Specifically, it matches the Golden Ratio. You know, if the Golden Ratio was
four-dimensional rather than two."

"Fascinating," said Stein. "I believe I saw hints of what you're describing, but I just didn't take it far enough."

"Well, to be fair, we had more sleep and Gideon's help when we were working on it," Ray said.

"But here's the important part," said Cisco. "Certain places and times will be hard to travel to or from. Or even impossible. But you can work around it. Arrive earlier or later than you intend to. Or travel to a different geographical location. With this information, you can plan out your time-jumps. Like we know that the closest time to when we left Central City that we can return would be July 7th, 2017. I'm going to send a message to STAR Labs to let them know."

"And hopefully this means our time-jumps won't be as rough if we don't try traveling through one of those fractures," Ray added.

Nodding thoughtfully, Stein added, "And hopefully it will prevent us from being dumped back in that futuristic-dinosaur city amalgamation place."

"Which sounds both amazing and horrifying," said Cisco.

Smiling briefly at the pair and gesturing beside him, Stein said, "Well, after a particularly intense and productive morning, perhaps the two of you would care to join me for lunch?"

"Great," said Cisco with a bright grin. "Quick question. Is the replicated pizza here decent?"

They were doing much better now about actually taking shifts in medbay. Jax watched over the pair for a while before trading off with Nate. And then Iris and Barry took over.

There wasn't much for them to do while the pair sat on the crate, though they both managed to locate a couple books. But Iris didn't mind. She leaned against Barry's shoulder, letting him twist her hair between her fingers in a rather soothing manner. The sensation felt relaxing. And there was something comforting about having him running his fingers through her hair. It reminded her that she had Barry back. Iris suspected it would be a long time before she completely believed it.

She loved him so much and she came close to never seeing him again. Just like how he nearly lost her to Savitar. The world kept trying to tear them apart, but they kept finding their way back.

As Barry leaned over and pressed a kiss to her temple, she heard a tired groan and a familiar drawl complain, "That isn't exactly what I want to see first thing when I wake up."

"Too sweet for your so-called cold heart?" asked Iris as they turned their attention back to the awake patient. "Or are you just particularly grumpy when your girlfriend drugs you?"

And no matter how subtle Snart tried to keep it, the man definitely stiffened at her word choice. Iris almost smiled at the idea of the calm and controlled Captain Cold looking flustered, however subtle it might be. But she had enough experience with the difficulties of the heart that she would limit her teasing.

"Rory mentioned that he believed that you had your eye on Sara," explained Barry.

"Never pictured Mick as a gossip," he muttered, sitting up. "Or a matchmaker."

He glanced over at the other chair. Snart didn't say a word, but his shoulders definitely relaxed a
little. Thankfully, nothing had happened to Rory since the incident that morning. He seemed to be doing fine again.

"And we never pictured him trying to set fire to the Speed Force," said Barry. "But he did. He helped pull me out of there just to get my help rescuing you."

Staring at the speedster a moment, Snart finally said, "How is it that you and your misadventures are more confusing than the entire time travel mess?"

"Next time you're in Central City, I'll give you copies of my recent articles to help catch you up," Iris said dryly. "But I'll let someone else tell you about the alien invasion."

Leaving Snart with an expression that made it clear he was attempting to figure out if she was serious, Iris gave Barry a quick smile and stepped out of the room. She would let the two of them talk while she tracked down the captain.

Iris found Sara in the study, filled with knickknacks that she doubted belonged to the assassin. Sara sat there with a stack of books in front of her as she twisted a knife between her fingers. She didn't look up, but Iris knew that Sara noticed her arrival immediately. Iris didn't spend as much time around assassins as those who lived in Star City, but she knew that journalists didn't have enough stealth to sneak up on someone like Sara.

"Whatever you did to knock him out has worn off," said Iris. "Snart's awake. He's in there with Barry."

"Snart's awake. He's in there with Barry." Smiling slightly at the woman, Iris added, "But I doubt it'll end in a superhero and supervillain fight, so I think we have time."

Returning a wry smile, Sara said, "That's probably a safe bet. Thanks for telling me."

Sara stood up and slipped her blade out of sight. Iris had no clue where it ended up, but she suspected the knife could reappear just as quickly without warning. Maybe Sara could teach her that trick someday. It might be useful to know how to hide a weapon in case of a kidnapping. That type of thing happened far too regularly.

"Let's go check on them then," Sara continued. "Maybe this time Leonard will actually stay out of medbay for more than ten minutes."

Barry waited a moment before giving his former villain a significant look.

"You know, if Rory is right and you haven't talked to Sara about it," he said slowly, "I really think you should."

"I'm sorry, but do you honestly believe that the best person to give someone relationship advice is the guy who took forever to start dating his adopted sister?" asked Snart dryly.

"Okay, first? I loved her even before I moved in with Iris and Joe. And second, she's my fiancée."

"Mazel Tov."

Barry blinked in surprise as he was hit by the feeling of déjà vu. Something was off about this.

"You already told me that. You said it the first time I told you we were engaged. When I found you in Siberia, 1892," said Barry slowly.

Turning in his chair and staring at the speedster as if he was crazy, Snart said, "I've never been to
Siberia, 1892."

"Then how did…," he said before trailing off.

An idea began to tick through Barry's head. If the man hadn't been to that time and place, but Barry definitely found him there, then…

Barry started laughing, shaking his head slightly. He couldn't help it. He couldn't believe it was that simple. Barry ran a hand through his hair. Cisco was going to love this.

"Do you want to share with the rest of the class?" asked Snart, clearly still wondering about the younger man's sanity.

"About a month ago for me, I traveled to Siberia, 1892, to ask for a favor. We have a way to send and receive messages between the Waverider and STAR Labs, so I adjusted it and used that to find you there," Barry said as he gained control of his laughter. "I assumed it was you from before the events of the Oculus."

"But now you're thinking this favor is in your past, but my future," said Snart.

"It's the only thing that makes sense." Snart chuckled dryly and asked, "When did our lives get so crazy that this is what we consider 'making sense'?"

"For me? Either when Thawne ruined my childhood or the particle accelerator explosion," Barry said. "For you? Probably whenever you semi-adopted a criminal arsonist for a brother."

Snart stared at him strangely in response. Barry just shrugged and leaned back.

"Look, families can be complicated and aren't just the people you're related to," he continued. "Joe has been just as much my dad as my father was. And considering how long the two of you have known each other and what I saw him do and risk to save you, I don't know what else to call Rory other than your family."

"Partner," said Snart, but in a quieter voice than expected.

"No reason that he can't be both."

After a brief moment of silence, Snart asked, "Do you practice inspirational speeches or do they come naturally to you optimistic types? You and Raymond both seem to love this stuff."

Chuckling slightly, Barry said, "Must be part of being a hero. You'll probably start it up soon."

"Not a hero," said Snart. Pushing himself slowly to his feet, he managed to stand up while looking far steadier than last time. "So do I have a clean bill of health, Gideon?"

"Not completely, but you have not suffered any further damage from earlier," the A.I. reported. "Do not overexert yourself again, Mr. Snart. Otherwise you might spend the rest of your recovery under sedation."

"And you know I'll help her with that," said Sara as she and Iris re-entered the room.

"You really think you can pull off the same trick twice on me?" Snart asked with a smirk.

Returning her own version of the smirk, Sara said, "I don't know. Do you really want to test that,
Crook?"  

Barry and Iris exchanged glances. Rory definitely wasn't exaggerating. The way they kept look at each other made the flirting impossible to ignore or dismiss. Barry suspected that, before the events with the Oculus, there was probably a betting pool in place about the pair.

"Maybe another day," Snart said. He glanced back at Rory again, silently reassuring himself that the man was still stable. He turned back towards Sara and said, "But as fun as that sounds, let's wait until after I get something to eat. A little toast wasn't enough to do much."

"Then you two head to the galley," said Iris as she sat back down next to Barry. "We're not going anywhere."

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**Hub City: June 25th, 2017**

She slipped into the apartment that served as their safehouse in this city, pulling off the blonde wig and shaking out her hair. She wasn't one who tended to plan out bigger heists. She preferred to be more spur of the moment, taking advantage of situations as she spotted them, but she occasionally chose to work on more grand-scale projects. More secure locations, more heavily-guarded targets, and more suspicious men who took time to fall for the honey-trap routine. And if she wanted to go big, that sometimes meant she had to case the situation a bit first. That also meant that she would have to change her appearance a bit in those scenarios.

Men tended to remember her when they saw her.

Her upcoming heist wasn't particularly smart to attempt, but she was bored. She'd been a good girl lately. No messing with the superheroes in the other cities. No massive crime waves. She hadn't even needed to break out her favorite shiny toy. Honestly, for the past few months, she just couldn't seem to work up the motivation to do anything really…

But she was going to pull off this job. She couldn't let all her talents and skills go to waste. She couldn't just give up. So she pulled herself together and started working on something big, ambitious, and definitely a bit more complicated. It was a good plan. Perhaps not as good as what he would have done, but… he wasn't here. Not anymore…

She forced herself to shake off those thoughts and walked further into the apartment. Part of the reason she chose it was because it was the one that held the fewest memories. None of them used it much. There hadn't been many trinkets and valuables that could remind her of things that were better left alone.

But it had a worn-out couch, a television, and a coffee table currently covered in her attempts at writing out the timing of the various guards, an empty paper bag from last night's dinner, and her personalized weapon. And for the moment, the couch was extremely inviting.

The young woman collapsed on the cushions with a sigh of relief as she kicked off her heels. The added height and the blonde hair would be enough to keep most people from recognizing her later. Especially with the blouse she was wearing, which drew most men's attention to the low neckline and generally convinced their eyes never to wander to her face. The things she did to rob people blind.

As she quietly debated whether or not it would be worth the effort to hunt down some more comfortable clothes, she noticed that there was a missed call on her burner phone on the coffee table. Not her normal burner phone, the one that she used and switched out regularly while running jobs. It
was the second burner phone, the one that three… two people had the number for emergencies. The memory of slipping a piece of paper with it into Cisco's pocket without him noticing before she climbed on her motorcycle and rode off still made her grin. It would have been nice to see his expression when he found it later.

But the fact that she had a missed call was concerning enough for the young woman to sit back up. No one had used the number in months. The last time was when Cisco called to warn her to stay out of Central City and to keep a low profile because Sam Scudder and Rosa Dillion were on a bit of a hunt for vengeance and might decide that she would be a good enough target. Not that she'd been anywhere near Central City at the time, but she appreciated the sentiment.

And when she picked up the cellphone, she realized that it was more than just a missed call. Someone actually left a message. Without hesitation, she picked up the burner phone and played it.

"…Hello. This is Julian Albert, a crime scene investigator for the Central City Police Department. Though that probably makes you less likely to trust me if I understood Cisco correctly on who it is I am speaking to… Honestly, I have no idea why he wants someone to contact you. But Cisco insisted that I pass this on to you rather than give this information to the authorities so they can track you down and arrest you. Regardless, here is the message that he literally sent through time. On July 7th, around noon in the parking lot near STAR Labs, a… timeship will be landing there and Cisco believes that you should be there. The rest of the information was a bit of a jumble though. Something about a Mr. Mick Rory, another criminal who should have been arrested, and some time nonsense resulting in a dead—"

The message cut off abruptly, leaving her staring at the burner phone.

She had to be wrong. The rest of the message must have meant something different than what she was thinking. That man, sounding so detached and disapproving the entire time, couldn't be saying what it sounded like at the end.

Her eyes burned as she blinked rapidly. She had to be wrong.

The last thing that she said to Mick was that she hated him and never wanted to see him again, that she blamed him for what happened to…

She tried to find him a few days later, but he'd disappeared. Just like the first time, when they left with a bunch of heroes to "save time" or whatever it was. She drove him off. He left with those time travelers before she could say it wasn't true and she didn't really mean it.

She figured that there would be a chance later. He always came back, no matter how long they all separated to run separate jobs for a while. Mick would come back and then she would tell him that she didn't mean what she said that day. Because he was all that was left.

But if she understood that partial message correctly…

Lisa shoved the papers off the coffee table. She had almost two weeks before she had to be back in Central City. That gave her time to plan. She had a time and location. She knew the area. She could probably come up with a few ideas, maybe work out some escape routes for after.

Or she could go for a more direct method. Show up and work with whatever she found there, adapting to the situation as necessary. That was more Lisa's style anyway.

Regardless, that "no killing" deal with the Flash was now officially null and void. Those time travelers had taken enough from her already.
…So maybe it wasn't the best idea to have Julian deliver any kind of news to anyone. He isn't exactly renown for his people skills. But the only ones back at STAR Labs currently are Harry, Tracy, Wally, and Joe. With Joe as a cop, Wally as the son of a cop, and Harry being even worse at general people skills than Julian, there really weren't a lot of good options to talk to a criminal who doesn't want to be found. And I have a feeling that Tracy would ramble even worse.
You're Awake

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the slightly longer delay on this update. A combination of getting sick and getting enthralled by the latest Disney/Pixar movie (which you should definitely watch) kept me from making as much progress as I expected for this chapter. But it's here now. So please sit back and enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was late. Almost everyone was asleep by now. Even if they didn't do anything more strenuous than wait and worry all day, the stress could wear away at someone. None of them could stay awake for long.

She did notice, however, that Sara had paused outside the thief's door before retiring to her own. Amaya half-expected their captain to go in, even if only for a moment. But that was probably too large of a step right now.

But while Amaya managed a few hours of sleep, she woke up and felt too restless to drift off again. Her mind practically buzzed inside her skull and ensured that further sleep would remain evasive. So after lying there for a little while, she decided to make the best of it. Amaya silently untangled herself from Nate's warm embrace and pressed a soft kiss on his lips before leaving for another part of the timeship.

Amaya slipped into medbay just as Ray yawned. She couldn't blame the scientist for being on the verge of dozing off. It would have been nice if she could manage the same thing for a little longer.

Startling slightly at her arrival, Ray stood up and asked, "Amaya? What are you doing here?"

"I was unable to sleep," she admitted, rubbing her arms. "I decided it would be better to sit with Mick for a few hours rather than pace the halls."

"Are you sure? It's really late. Or really early. You don't have to. I can stay with him. I'm not that tired," said Ray, fighting back another yawn.

Smiling at him, Amaya said, "I will be fine. And you were one of the first awake yesterday. You should try to sleep."

If he planned to argue any further, another yawn silenced him. Scratching the back of his head, Ray nodded at her and practically dragged his feet out the door.

Amaya didn't immediately take a seat. The woman instead drifted to the far side of the room, taking position at a spot near Mick's shoulder.

They left the transparent mask on his face just like the silver disc on his chest under his gray clothes, making certain that there would not be a repeat of that morning. It would ensure that he would keep breathing and his heart would keep beating, even if his body tried to surrender again. But it made Mick look weak and vulnerable, something that seemed wrong for the tall and broad man that she knew. Having him in the medbay for so long felt wrong.
The fact he was now shivering slightly under his blanket and strange clothes didn't make him seem any less vulnerable. Though it did help overall. Even the small movement from the almost constant shivering did make it clear that he was still alive. It was a little reassuring. Not much, but a little.

The memory of that morning, of him essentially dying for a moment, would take time to forget.

Absently, Amaya tugged at the silvery blanket around him. But between her attempt and his shivering, the covering slipped enough to expose his arm.

Without really thinking about what she was doing, she brushed back the long sleeve of the gray clothes. It exposed thick burn scars that started just above his wrists, scars normally hidden beneath the long sleeves of his coat or whatever shirt he chose that day. She never asked what caused those injuries, but anyone who spent time around him could draw some conclusions. His affinity with fire was the most likely culprit. She couldn't imagine how bad the burns must have been to cause such drastic scars.

But if he could survive those flames, then he could recover now. He was strong enough to pull through.

She took his hand in hers, her thumb rubbing back and forth over the rough skin. She wished that she'd stopped him from going. She wished that she had said or done something to help Mick rather than let him leave on the jump-ship alone. Maybe he wouldn't be in medbay if she did something back then.

But, ironically for a group of time-travelers, there was no point wishing to change the past. They couldn't undo Mick's choice. They could only deal with the situation in front of them.

He would be all right. Amaya silently reassured herself of that fact as she rubbed her thumb over the scars, his skin still a little cooler than it should be. He was improving. There would not be a repeat of what happened before. He would keep breathing. His heart would keep beating. He wouldn't die like Rex.

She wasn't going to lose a good friend. She wasn't going to lose anyone.

After a moment, Amaya released her hold on his hand. She leaned in close and, after a little hesitation, pressed a short kiss to his brow. From there, she readjusted the blanket back around him. Only after she felt satisfied that Mick was properly situated again did she sit in the empty chair.

His first hazy thought, one that crawled through the thick muck that seemed to have replaced his brain, was that Gideon was using the good drugs on him.

Mick didn't mean the general painkillers, the stuff that Gideon normally used before sedating her patients and getting to work on fixing the damage. These were the drugs that he would have to practically order Gabriel to administer and Gideon essentially refused to use unless someone was literally dying (he'd asked…). He remembered the particular numb and vaguely floating sensation from a few of the rougher bounties, the ones that involved Chronos barely succeeding and then dragging himself back to the Shadowslicer.

But if Gideon was giving him the good stuff, even if the dose wasn't quite as large as he'd sometimes managed to convince to Gabriel to administer, then it meant he wasn't in good shape. And it was serious enough that they hadn't already fixed everything and he still needed those drugs.

So… probably almost died, but didn't. Better than he expected, honestly. His plan didn't get him killed.
But did it work?

Prying open his eyes seemed like a bad idea. He could already tell it would be too bright in the room. The glare through his eyelids told him that much. Not to mention that there were probably better ways to use his limited energy. Like dealing with whatever was on his face.

As his awareness sluggishly returned, Mick became more and more aware of something covering his mouth and nose. It wasn't making it hard to breathe, but just having it in place somehow made him anxious. The sensation felt unpleasantly familiar, dragging up memories of Chronos and the helmet that he wore all the time. He didn't want whatever it was on his face. He wanted it off now.

His arm was partially trapped under something, but it wasn't heavy. A blanket? It entangled his limb a little until his hand pulled free and he started pawing at the thing on his face. His lack of coordination, exhausted weakness, and the general numbness didn't help with the task.

"Easy," soothed a gentle voice, a hand catching his and moving it to the armrest. "Are you awake, Mick?"

The tired grunt of acknowledgment was harder than he expected it to be. But still easier than trying to open his eyes and deal with the lights of medbay.

He heard a sigh of relief as his drug-addled mind belatedly identified the speaker as Amaya. But since the thing was still on his face, covering him like Chronos' stupid helmet, Mick tried to reach for it again. He had to get it off. He wanted the confining thing gone.

"All right," said Amaya, grabbing his hand and settling it back in place. "I get it. I'll take it off. Hold on a moment."

Gently, she pulled the annoyance from his face. Mick breathed deeply in relief at the removal, ignoring how his chest ached slightly even through the painkillers. He immediately felt calmer and certainly a lot more comfortable with the thing gone.

"Better?"

Thankfully, wordless grunts and groans were easier to produce than proper responses. A small sound was enough to answer the question.

"Good. Gideon?"

"I'll inform him at once, Ms. Jiwe," the A.I. responded mysteriously. "I will also lower the lights by forty percent."

Dimmer lights sounded great. Not as great as a drink and a tropical beach, but certainly an improvement.

"You were wrong before, Mick," said Amaya quietly. "What you told me before you left."

Curiosity prompted him to open his eyes at that statement. Mick needed to blink a few times to clear his vision, but he eventually managed to see Amaya staring down at him with wet eyes and an expression between relieved and upset with him. While he wasn't exactly thrilled about the woman having to rapidly blink to keep from making things awkward with tears, there were certainly worse things to wake up to than her.

But he had no clue what she meant.
Maybe his face ended up more expressive than he intended, but Amaya seemed to recognize his confusion. And she took pity on his drug-addled mind enough to continue.

"You said that if your plan didn't work, the only thing we would lose wouldn't be missed. You were wrong. We almost lost you, Mick."

Oh, yeah. That wasn't a conversation he planned to survive to deal with. Uncertain how to respond to that, he turned his eyes away. But it didn't help. It only brought the other medbay chair into view.

The empty chair.

Mick's eyes slipped shut, his stomach feeling like it was plunging. He failed. If he'd brought Leonard back, Mick knew he would probably need medical help and would be in medbay too. But he wasn't here.

So either Leonard didn't survive… or Mick couldn't manage to pull him out. Either way, Mick failed. He only had that one chance to get him back and it clearly didn't work. His partner was truly gone.

He should have known. He should have known this would happen. He wasn't a hero. Rescuing people wasn't a job for a crook. He could only fight, steal, and destroy. There was no way that he would be able to fix anything. There was no way that he would get back what they lost.

Maybe it would have been better not to have hoped for the impossible.

A warm hand briefly touching his arm compelled him to look at Amaya again. Her expression looked mostly the same, but her eyes seemed a bit drier at least.

"The entire team agrees that we don't want this to ever happen again," she continued. "We didn't have to take an actual vote. We all agree. No more secret plans that could kill you. Sara even made it an official rule." Her voice taking a slightly pleading tone, she added, "Please don't make us watch you almost die again. Please don't do that to us."

No matter how tired and sluggish he might be, Mick still felt something twist in him at her words. Even after everything he did or almost did, they still preferred him alive. And if he came so close to dying, it… it must have reminded them of when they lost Snart. And the hero types tended to react badly to anyone non-psychotic dying, but especially people they knew. He… must have worried them.

He didn't intend that.

Mick managed a small twitch of his head that a generous person might call a nod. Amaya visibly relaxed at his agreement. Then her gaze drifted across the room and she smiled.

"Then I shall leave the two of you to talk," she said, straightening up.

He turned his head slightly towards the door, expecting to see their captain there to lecture him. Or maybe Ray. He could easily imagine the scientist waiting eagerly to welcome him back and try to cheer him up. But Mick instead stiffened, his mind briefly going blank.

Leonard Snart stood in the doorway, wearing a familiar parka and behaving as if he'd never left.

Part of Mick warned it was another hallucination, that it wasn't real and it was too good to be true. But Amaya saw him, his partner was real, he was alive, he was back, it worked—

Shock caused Mick to jerk up and breathe in more deeply than before, resulting in a sharp pain in his
chest that managed to cut through the drugs. He flinched at the sensation as it sparked off a coughing fit, forcing him back down. And that hurt worse, rattling his body with each cough as he squeezed his eyes shut against the pain. Even the good painkillers couldn't dull everything and something in him was clearly battered and possibly broken. He cringed and winced between coughs, trying to catch his breath.

"Easy there, Mick. Take it easy," said Leonard, the man having crossed the room during the attack. "Just focus on breathing. Nice and slow."

Years of listening to the man's directions, both on the job and off, ensured that he obeyed the instructions without question or thought. With a little struggle, Mick managed to regain control and the coughing eased. From there, he settled back into shallower and more even breathing that let the drugs dull the pain away once more. Only then did he managed to crack his eyes back open.

Amaya and Leonard were both there, standing next to Mick's chair. It was real; this wasn't a hallucination. Her expression was more open than his partner's, but Mick could recognize after all these years that there was concern on both their faces.

"You all right?" Amaya asked. When Mick gave her a shaky nod, she said, "Good. Are you sure?" Another unsteady nod. "Very well then. Let's try this again."

This time, she managed to get out the door without anything going wrong. But Mick wasn't paying much attention to her exit beyond noticing that she paused briefly at the doorway. He just couldn't look away from his partner.

"Snart…," croaked Mick, his voice rougher, weaker, and quieter than he intended.

"Surprised? You were the one who apparently mounted a rescue for me," he said. "And that was after I knocked you out. Some people just can't take a hint."

Yeah, it was really him. This was actually happening. His plan worked.

Mick would have to repay him for that punch someday though. For the punch, for knocking him out, and for making Mick go through almost a year of knowing it should have been him instead. But any minor revenge would have to wait until he actually had the strength to take a swing at him.

Eh, maybe he would just let it go.

After a few moments of silence, some of Leonard's normal confidence slipped and his posture slumped slightly. That put Mick on edge even through his exhaustion. It was rare to see him so honest and open, even with no one else present. The sight was mildly unnerving.

"You died, Mick," he said quietly. "Not for long, but your heart stopped. You died trying to get me back."

Amaya already told him that, but now his partner was confirming it. Honestly, Mick didn't mind it too much. It had been the only choice that made sense; die or risk dying to get back his partner. His best friend.

As if Leonard wouldn't do the same for him. In fact, he did. That was why they ended up with the whole Oculus mess in the first place.

"Partners…," said Mick, his eyes feeling a bit heavier.

"Doesn't make it any easier. For now on, we go out in a blaze of glory together or not at all."
Mick managed a slight chuckle at that, but quickly stopped as it brought back the dull ache in his chest. Leonard placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Careful with those ribs. I think they're still cracked and bruised," Leonard said.

Which explained the painkillers, but not what caused the cracked ribs in the first place. But he couldn't just ask about it. He could already feel himself starting to drift off again.

Though it was possible Gideon was sedating him.

"Hey, Amaya? Do you—" Ray said as he came through the door before cutting off. His annoyingly-cheerful smile managed to grow even brighter. "Mick! You're awake."

"Nope," mumbled Mick before letting himself doze off again.

"What is with you lately and stealth-sedating people, Gideon?" asked Leonard, sending a look towards the ceiling.

"My apologies, but since Mr. Rory has recovered sufficiently that there should be minimal risk from the cellular regenerator, it would be wise to addressing his remaining injuries before he can exacerbate them further," she said. "Sedating him will make the process proceed more smoothly."

Remembering how tense and strained Mick's face looked during the coughing fit, Leonard reluctantly admitted she was right. It would be better to go ahead and fix his ribs, heart, and anything else that were harmed by their attempts to save his life. And if Mick's recovery followed his partner's even remotely, he would be sleeping a lot anyway. Leonard was just now feeling some of his normal strength returning.

"At least you didn't knock him out immediately," said Leonard.

"No," Ray said, looking mildly disappointed. "Just when I came in."

With her normal calm, Gideon said, "Mr. Snart did request to be informed when Mr. Rory regained consciousness. As did Captain Hunter, though he chose to remain back when I informed him that someone was already heading toward medbay. And it seemed prudent to wait to sedate him until after Mr. Rory had seen Mr. Snart. With evidence that his plan was a success, he should rest easier with less overall stress. That should help with his recovery."

Leonard didn't know how exactly to respond to that, though it did make him remember that Gideon could spy on the dreams of those onboard. It made him wonder what exactly his partner had been dreaming of that caused him stress and for how long it had been happening. And if he had been dreaming during his hypothermia. Or when Mick was dying.

She wouldn't tell him even if Leonard asked though. She wasn't perfect, but she seemed to understand the concept of privacy to an extent. All he could do was hope that Gideon was right and that seeing Leonard back would help whatever might trouble his partner's rest.

Whether or not he would admit to anyone else, Leonard knew he would sleep better after even the brief conversation with Mick. It was reassuring to know he was recovering enough to talk to him.

Who was he kidding? There was no way he would admit it to anyone. Talking like that was against his nature.
"Well, if you think it's safe to use the cellular regenerator again, then perhaps we should get started," said Ray.

He pulled the machine out and directed towards Mick's chest. From there, Gideon took over proceedings. The images on the display suggested she was focusing on his heart first, probably trying to repair the damage caused by electrical shocks. Even if it was meant to save his life, that much power to a vital organ was bound to leave some ill effects.

It was still less unnerving than watching his own hand being recreated in front of him.

"You know, when he feels up to moving around, we should arrange a movie marathon for the whole team," said Ray awkwardly, clearly trying to find a less tense topic than the events of the last few days. "I think we could all use a break to take our minds off everything after what's happened. It would be a good way to celebrate everyone being back."

Leonard was quiet for a moment before giving Ray a wry smile and said, "That depends. Think you can put up with a bunch of ninja films? Because Mick will want to watch those if we're having any kind of marathon."

"I know," he chuckled. "You should have seen him after he met some real ninjas."

"Mick saw ninjas? And I missed that?" Leonard shook his head briefly. "The only thing that could have made him more excited would be a visit to the Great Chicago Fire."

"After we fix time, maybe we could talk to Sara into a quick trip." Ray paused briefly before admitting, "But probably not. He's still kind of in trouble for running off alone."

Chapter End Notes

First, just in case you're getting any ideas, keep in mind that Amaya is from both a different decade and a different culture originally. It is completely possible to platonically kiss someone, especially when it isn't on the lips. It does happen.

…But if you want to slap on your shipping goggles, I'm not going to try arguing with you.
Leonard aimed his Cold Gun down the narrow hallway, no room for even the speedster to dodge. The Flash—no, Barry. Even in the suit, he was Barry. He was trying to talk them down, trying to keep everyone alive. He wasn't stupid. He was young and far too optimistic for his own good, but Barry wasn't stupid. It took Leonard a while to figure Barry out, but he finally did. He would risk his life for anyone not for the thrill, but because something in the hero truly believed that there was something good and worth saving in anyone. That naivety and blind hope was crushed out of Leonard and his sister long ago, but he could respect the speedster for somehow keeping it without getting killed in the process.

Honestly, Leonard didn't want to kill him. Against all odds, he liked having the Flash around. And Barry seemed to include his enemies as people who he wanted to save. Even after they stabbed him the back, he tried to help. No matter what Leonard said or did, Barry kept coming back to save him because Lisa asked. He refused to give up until both Leonard and Lisa were safe. Even if that meant staying in close proximity to a dangerous criminal, one without the respect and restraint not to kill him.

The only reason why Leonard was aiming at the Flash was because of that man. Lewis. The man already tried to shoot Barry once, trying to kill the young man once he served his purpose for no other reason than Lewis didn't need him anymore. Leonard didn't want to see him die again. He hated seeing his father do it the first time, the young man pretending to collapse from a gunshot in a far too convincing manner.

That was why he hesitated even as Lewis ordered him to fire. He didn't want Barry dead. But he couldn't let that piece of scum father kill Lisa either. He couldn't let that man detonate that bomb he buried in her head. Leonard couldn't lose her.

But before he had to decide between killing the speedster and losing his little sister, the Flash said the words that Leonard wanted to hear more than anything else. Lisa was safe. She was safe. Lewis only managed a brief look of horrified realization before his son turned the Cold Gun.

And with a lifetime of pain, fear, fury, and hatred towards the man, Leonard fired straight at his father's shriveled heart.

But it wasn't Lewis.

Leonard dropped his Cold Gun with a clatter, eyes wide as he stared at the thick icicle sprouting from Mick's chest. His partner made a pained choked sound as he collapsed to his knees.

He should catch Mick. He should reach out before he hit the ground. He should help. He wanted to do something. But Leonard couldn't move. He could only stare at the look of confusion and betrayed shock on Mick's face.

Then that expression faded as his eyes seemed to grow blank and empty. Leonard tried to force his body to move, to do anything, but it was like he was paralyzed. Leonard felt like he was suffocating as Mick collapsed lifelessly on the ground.

Dead. His partner was dead.
This was wrong. It wasn't possible. And yet, it was.

Mick was dead. He killed Mick. He killed his partner.

Everything had spiraled out of control. Leonard couldn't seem to breathe, but his heart pounded heavily in his chest. And there was a tight pressure that seemed to squeeze the life out of him. It hurt. And his body still wouldn't obey.

He murdered Mick.

He couldn't tear his eyes away from the still figure. Leonard just kept staring at the lifeless body, the icicle speared straight through his partner's chest. The ice he put there.

Mick, someone who trusted him with his life, was dead.

He did this. He killed Mick.

Barry was right. He murdered the closest person he had to a brother.

Startling slightly, Leonard snapped awake. Breathing hard and trying to shake off the remnants of the dream still clouding his thoughts, he quickly took stock of his surroundings.

Everyone was camped out in the library for the impromptu movie night, Ray's enthusiasm for the idea impossible to quench. They'd gathered a few chairs from around the Waverider while improvising further with pillows, cushions, and blankets. Due to recently vacating medbay, Leonard and Mick claimed two of the comfy chairs while Stein took the third one so he didn't end up completely stiff and half-crippled in the morning. Everyone else ended up sprawled around the room with popcorn and drinks as they watched a mixture of movies randomly selected by suggestions, votes, bargaining, and flat-out threats of violence both for and against certain choices.

But by now, the actual movie watching had more or less stopped. Sleep had claimed them, one by one. The lights were dimmed and the volume turned down enough not to disturb everyone currently engaging in the mass slumber party. And furthermore, the credits were rolling on the most recent film.

Mick snored in his chair, a blue blanket wrapped around him. He was the first person that Leonard spotted as he glanced over everything. With that small reassurance, he took in the rest of the group.

Barry and Iris were practically curled around each other while Cisco hugged a bowl of popcorn to his chest. Heywood leaned against a wall while Amaya slept against his chest. Ray was sprawled across a couple cushions like an oversized ragdoll. Jax ended up cocooned in blankets. He'd somehow shifted his location at some point so that he was sleeping a bit closer to the chair containing the professor than where he started the evening.

Leonard wasn't certain where Rip ended up. He probably had enough sense to crawl off to a real bed. He wasn't exactly big on team bonding exercises or however Ray managed to talk Rip into joining the marathon in the first place.

And leaning against his chair, cards scattered across both of them, was Sara.

No threats. No one hurt. Everyone was safe. Everything was under control.

It was only a dream.

Or possibly buried memories combined with a dream. He might not consciously remember doing it,
but Leonard knew that he did it. Maybe that knowledge was dragging up fragments of memories in the form of dreams.

Or it could be the work of his imagination.

Either way, it didn't matter. Mick was alive and safe. Thinking about what almost happened or what happened to another version of his partner would only drive him mad.

Mick wasn't dead. None of them were dead. And Leonard wouldn't kill him.

He wouldn't kill them.

Cold logic helped push away the last hints of the dream. Everything was fine. And it wasn't like staying awake and dwelling on his dream would do any good. He could already feel the urge to drift back to sleep.

He just needed something to keep his mind from wandering towards less pleasant scenarios.

"Gideon," Leonard said quietly. "Start up 'The Fox and the Hound.'"

The screen flickered as the credits for one film were replaced by the start of the animated Disney movie. Leonard settled back and closed his eyes, hearing the familiar sounds.

Lisa loved the movie when she was younger, though the bear scene bothered her as a little girl. He couldn't count the number of times that she watched it with Leonard in the room. Practically any chance she could take. Whenever Lewis wasn't home or was at least ignoring them, Lisa would want to watch it. Even when Leonard didn't actually watch the screen, he would listen to the film in the background. It was something familiar and comforting. It was one of the few good memories of home.

Leonard didn't actually listen to the film as Gideon played it. He just let the sounds wash over him, the utter familiarity of it calming. Memories of Lisa coloring on the floor while movie played lulled him back to sleep.

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Central City: July 7th, 2017

Judging the passage of time in a place outside of time was difficult, but they stayed parked in the Vanishing Point for almost a week. It was at least long enough that their criminals mostly stopped whatever awkwardness there was between them due to the "mutual near-sacrifices for each other" thing. After Rory regained the ability to stay on his feet for the length of a conversation without grabbing a wall for support, the two of them started stalking the rest of the Waverider. Nate was surprised and mildly amused to learn exactly how many card games that Snart, Rory, and Sara apparently played together.

He was less surprised that the snarky comments onboard had practically doubled.

But about a day later, Gideon stated that the two men were relatively fit for time travel. Or at least, it wouldn't damage their recovery or cause them harm. She simply warned that the side effects might hit them a bit harder this time due to recent events.

They left the other timeship parked in the Vanishing Point. It was safer to leave it somewhere outside of time with no people than it was leaving it outside a secret assassin lair, which was apparently what they did last time. Rory even took the opportunity to order the A.I. to lock out controls for anyone who wasn't a Legend or one of the few heroes that he trusted piloting a timeship (Cisco pleaded for
ten minutes to be added to Rory's list of acceptable people). Other than leaving someone to guard the second timeship, it was the best they could do.

But there were far more people on the Waverider than there were chairs on the bridge. They couldn't strap everyone in properly. But even if it wasn't exactly the safest way to travel through time, it wouldn't necessarily kill anyone if they weren't properly secured. Barry, Iris, and Cisco ended up getting proper seats since they had the least experience and resistance to the effects of time travel. And even if they were mostly recovered, Snart and Rory were also guaranteed seats. Once again, the entire team voted unanimously on it before the criminals were informed. Rip, Ray, and Jax ended up just bracing themselves as much as possible.

The arrival was far smoother with whatever Stein, Cisco, and Ray did with Rory's equation. Apparently picking the right moment to travel to caused less turbulence or whatever. But it still left the new trio fighting off some symptoms and their criminals looking a bit light-headed and pale. They didn't certainly didn't look ready to immediately jump to their feet as they landed the timeship.

Well, Cisco tried. Unfortunately, his symptoms apparently included vertigo and he landed face-first on the floor.

"Why is time travel so painful?" he mumbled, his face still squashed into the ground.

"Try it after spending a few days in medbay," said Snart, eyes squeezed tight as he swayed slightly in his seat. The chair restraint still across his chest at least kept the man in place. "Turns out it's extra fun."

Rory didn't add anything. He simply groaned briefly as he clutched his head, blinking rapidly like he was trying to clear his vision. Or possibly avoid passing out.

"Sorry. It shouldn't last too long," Sara reassured, climbing out of the pilot's seat. Stepping over to their back-from-the-presumed-dead teammate, she said, "Just give it a few minutes."

"Until then, someone should head out and see if the rest of Team Flash has made it here," said Cisco as Barry pried him off the floor. "I told them when to meet us."

"Yeah, Dad probably isn't happy with me right now," Iris said.

Giving her a quick nod, Jax said, "No problem. We can go greet the welcoming party for you."

Of course, not everyone on the bridge immediately charged off like an invading army. Nate ended up heading towards the cargo bay with Jax, Amaya, Ray, and Rip as Gideon lowered the ramp. No one turned out to be waiting outside, but it shouldn't take them too long. And it wasn't the end of the world to wait a minute or two.

Ray made a comment about possibly stopping for Big Belly Burgers since they were in the right time period, which immediately led to him quickly explaining to Amaya about the wonders of fast food in general and their burgers specifically. Even after her time with the team, there were certain aspects of 2017 that she hadn't been exposed to. Their last visit involved fighting aliens, which didn't leave much time for sight-seeing. It might not be the ideal date idea, but Nate silently filed away the idea of taking Amaya to try some Big Belly Burgers later.

The sound of an approaching motorcycle prompted everyone's heads to snap up. A figure in a leather jacket, one that seemed to be an unusual shade of golden brown, raced towards the Waverider. He couldn't recognize the person on the bike due to the helmet, but it had to be someone in the hero business. Who else would drive straight towards the timeship without hesitation? Especially after the
recent alien invasion.

The motorcycle swerved to a stop a short distance away as Nate and the others walked the rest of the way down the ramp. With a swift and smooth motion, the rider dismounted so the motorcycle ended up between the group and the brunette young woman who swept the helmet off her head.

Nate didn't recognize her, though the brief glimpse of sharp coldness in her expression seemed familiar. He didn't have a chance to notice more than that fleeting impression before she pulled out a strange-shaped gun and aimed it straight towards them.

Instinct kicked in. Nate's skin shifted to steel as he shoved the closest teammate, Amaya, behind him and threw his other arm up in an attempt to block the shot from his face.

Instead of the familiar ricochet of a bullet (and how did that become familiar so quickly?), a thick and hardening glob practically swallowed his arm. In the three seconds of her pulling the trigger, gold metallic encased Nate from fingertips to just past his left elbow. And unlike his steel skin, the substance from her gun didn't want to bend and move like flesh.

He couldn't move his fingers. They were trapped in a hard covering of strange metal. And if it had hit his face like she attempted, he would be suffocating.

Shouts of surprise from his teammates were quickly replaced by them preparing to retaliate against the surprise attack. The woman didn't seem to care that they were moving to the offensive, using her bike as cover as she shifted her gun to a new target with deadly intent.

"Lisa!" shouted Cisco, racing feet slamming down the ramp and the young man shoving past Nate desperately. "Wait, stop!"

Chapter End Notes

Look! Another cliffhanger! Sorry for the shorter chapter. But this was still the best way to break things up. And the next chapter is also the final one. So for everyone who has been reading this story, we are near the end. Thanks for supporting me so far and I hope that the ending will be what you're hoping for.
Cisco had managed to regain his footing and started heading towards the exit when he heard it. He would recognize the sound of one of his inventions anywhere. Especially when he kept the wielder of it in his mind so fondly (though even before he met Gypsy, things were the very definition of "complicated" with the criminal… Apparently his type was dangerous and very scary women who specialized in mixed signals).

But it kicked off his panic instinct when he heard the Gold Gun fire and Cisco broke into a run before his brain could fully register what was happening. He would never be mistaken for the fastest man alive, but he raced towards the sounds of fighting with more speed than he realized he was capable of.

He shoved his way through the small group, everything in their postures declaring they were switching to the offensive. But they hesitated slightly as Cisco moved into the line of fire. He barely noticed, spotting a familiar brunette young woman ducking behind her motorcycle. And she looked murderous.

"Lisa!" he shouted, flinging himself down the ramp. "Wait, stop!"

"Get out of the way, Cisco," snarled Lisa. "I will shoot you too."

He believed her. For the first time, he could see the resemblance to her brother. There was the same ruthlessness in her expression as there was in the early days of Captain Cold. But not the emotionlessness. Her face was twisted in fury, but her eyes were red. Cisco tried to shove down his fear and concern.

"Why?" he yelled back, keeping between her and the time-travelers. He met her eyes, trying to force her to look only at him. "Come on, you don't want to hurt me. Let's talk this out."

Cisco hoped she would hesitate at shooting him, that some of her past affection for him would save his life. The others didn't have that protection. He had no idea why Lisa seemed determined to kill someone. He figured that she would be in a good mood. He did ask someone to pass along a message to her. But she looked furious and heart-broken. Cisco just couldn't figure out why.

"Who is she and why is she shooting at us?" asked Jax from somewhere behind him, his voice tense.

That seemed to be the wrong thing to say because her expression darkened further and she fired, a stream of shining metallic substance barely missing Cisco's head. The lack of screams of horror from the heroes was promising; it suggested that no one was hurt. But he couldn't risk checking. He needed to focus on her, to keep things from escalating further. Lisa was not messing around.

"Because you heroes took everything from me," she snapped, cold and sharp. "First Lenny. And then that idiot called and said Mi..."

Her voice cracked briefly before she fell silent, her Gold Gun never wavering. Confusion swirled in his head, preventing him from finding the words to talk her down. Cisco couldn't figure out what she meant, but she was definitely upset enough to try killing them. And he was increasingly aware that he was between Lisa and her targets. Hopefully they would have the sense to dodge after she entombed Cisco in metal.

"No more," she said quietly, shifting her weapon towards someone behind him.
"Look, they're nerds, but try not to kill them. We need them alive."

Lisa froze, nearly dropping her weapon. Cisco turned to spot Rory coming down towards them, moving between his still-tense teammates. He looked mostly relaxed, but there was a hint of unease as he took a position next to Cisco.

"You're... you're..." she said quietly, weapon dangling at her side.

"Yeah, I know you don't want to see me," said Rory slowly, "but—"

Whatever he intended to say was cut off as Lisa flung herself at the arsonist, wrapping her arms around him and making Rory stiffen. Cisco would have laughed at his statue impression if it wasn't for the fact that she was clinging rather desperately to the man.

"I'm sorry, Micky," she said quickly, her face buried into his chest. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean it. I never should have said it. It wasn't your fault."

"Lisa?" asked Rory uneasily.

"I thought you were dead. That idiot called and said you were dead too," she said, fighting to keep her voice steady.

Twin thoughts hit Cisco hard. First, that was not the message that he sent STAR Labs. No wonder she went a bit crazy on them. And second, the "idiot" that called was probably Julian. He was going to smack the man when this was over.

Mick tried to figure out how to react to the young woman who wrapped her arms around him, shaking slightly while trying to hide it. She hadn't called him "Micky" since she hit double digits. And last time he spoke to her, Lisa made it clear that she wanted nothing to do with him and he hadn't been able to consider approaching her since. But she wasn't mad at him anymore and apparently thought he'd died.

Even when she was small, he wasn't the best at this. He'd tried at different points, but it didn't come naturally to him. But he awkwardly wrapped his arms around Lisa, hugging the upset young woman that he'd watched grow up. She relaxed slightly in his grip. That probably meant he was doing something right.

"I'm fine, Lisa. Do you really think anything could take me out?" he said.

"Actually, he did come very close to—" began Ray before someone had the good sense to cover his mouth.

"See?" said Cisco as she reluctantly ended the embrace. "No one needs to kill anyone. Right?"

Nodding slightly as she stepped backwards, no tears on her face and putting on the familiar Snart mask of control, Lisa said, "Right. I shouldn't have attacked like that. Or I should have at least cased things out better first. If I did, I would have figured out that idiot was lying. No hard feelings?"

"My arm is trapped in a glob of gold," reminded Nate, still in his steel form and waving the offending appendage.

"I invented the thing. I can get it off. Eventually," Cisco said. "You'll be fine."

Chuckling a little, Mick said, "Got to admit. Didn't expect you to try killing the whole team to
'avenge me' or something. Not that the team deserved that. They're pretty good at trying to keep people alive. Myself included."

"Makes me wonder what she had planned for the Time Masters," said Leonard dryly as he and Sara reached the ramp. Then, with a half-smile, he said, "Hey there, trainwreck."

That cracked her mask of control, shock and something a little broken overtaking her features. Fragile hope slowly followed as she stepped forward. The team, while still nervous about the woman previously attacking them, had the wisdom to move out of her way. Then anger surged up in her expression. Lisa stomped up and punched her brother in the face, Leonard having the good sense to let her. And to throw an arm up to warn Sara not to help.

"You jerk," she snapped. "I thought you were dead." Lisa spun around and pointed an accusing finger at Mick. "You said he died."

"I thought he was when I told you. Turns out he was only mostly dead," said Mick quietly. "Still took a while to find a way to get back to him."

She accepted his vague explanation with a shaky breath and a nod. Lisa turned back around to trap her brother in a desperate hug that made the one she gave Mick look half-hearted. And she was shaking in a way that suggested she didn't completely prevent tears this time. Leonard wrapped his arms around her, his smile a bit softer.

Quietly, almost too quiet for Mick to hear if he wasn't listening for her voice, Lisa whispered, "You were dead. You left me. You were dead."

"Sorry to put you through that, Lisa," said Leonard, still holding her close. "Forgive me?"

"Only if you and Mick promise to stay alive," she said, her voice cracking in a way that everyone purposefully ignored.

"Deal."

Watching the reunion for a moment longer, Mick finally said with a mildly teasing tone, "You going to introduce her to Blondie or not? I think your sister should meet the resident assassin. We're stuck here for at least a few days before we can time travel again. They can bond over you."

He struggled to hide his grin as the siblings pulled apart, Leonard looking mildly annoyed since he knew that Lisa would get exactly what Mick was hinting at. Lisa was gaining a rather mischievous smirk that mirrored Sara's. Both women would definitely get along well. Especially after Lisa finished teasing her brother for his new relationship.

She was allowed. Family prerogative and everything.

Unsurprisingly, shore leave essentially morphed into a miniature party.

Not a huge party and certainly not as childish as the slumber party and movie marathon they dragged him into on the Waverider, but there was food and drinks at STAR Labs (which really needed some serious security upgrades). Apparently that's what happened with Cisco called ahead and let people know when they were returning. Leonard didn't have much of an interest in the socializing aspect, but Sara was and Mick wasn't going to say "no" to free food and beer, so he ended up watching things from a corner.

Cisco, after reluctantly admitting to Lisa that he was seeing someone, was doing his best to avoid
her. Not because she was mad at him, but because she'd started asking questions about the other woman that gave off the impression she intended to either team up with this Gypsy person the first chance she found or she planned to attack her. According to Cisco, either option was scarier than he wanted to imagine and that it would probably end in him being seriously maimed somehow. Even with powers, he was still the same nerd.

Iris and Barry ended up having to spend about ten minutes of dealing with their cop father, trying to reassure him that they were both safe and that the young woman was sorry for sneaking away in the first place. The man didn't seem too mad. Just worried about them. It was a little unnerving to see a father who clearly loved his grown children and wanted to protect them. And maybe a bit uncomfortable in a way, a flicker of that quiet wanting Leonard buried the same way he did since Lewis made his particular parenting style clear. He was perfectly content to stay on the other side of the room from that family reunion. No reason to tempt the cop into trying to arrest him.

A new face, some British nerd named Julian who apparently worked with Barry in his day job, had been dragged in briefly. He didn't last long, leaving the building for self-preservation almost as soon as he opened his mouth. Cisco had to grab Lisa to keep her from trying to attack the "idiot who made that phone call" even as Cisco yelled at Julian for almost getting someone killed because he couldn't "even pass on a message without ticking someone off."

Most of the nerd squad had ended up clumping together, talking excitedly about various topics. There was some discussion about how to deal with the shattered timeline and put it back together, but they kept shifting around. Leonard could only follow about a fourth of the conversation when he bothered to eavesdrop. At one point, they did discuss whatever process Cisco used to remove the golden metal from Heywood's arm without hurting their steel teammate. Leonard tried to at least remember a little of that. It wouldn't hurt to keep that information in case Lisa ever needed it.

But around the point where Heywood and Ray started seriously discussing the possibility of karaoke, Sara slid up next to Leonard with a small smile.

"Want to get out of here?" she asked quietly.

He raised an eyebrow and asked, "Getting tired of this already? Wait long enough and some of the heroes from Star City might show up."

"It's fun and everything, but I had a better idea," Sara said slowly. Shifting in a way that might be considered nervous from someone else, she said, "I know we aren't going to get a lot of chances if we stay on the Waverider and nothing about us is really that traditional, but I was wondering… Would you like to go on a date with me?"

Even though he was the man who would purposefully provoke and fight a speedster without a trace of hesitation, her question made him stiffen. He turned to look at her more directly.

"Like what? A 'dinner and a movie' type of thing? Me and you waltz into a fancy restaurant together?" asked Leonard slowly.

It wouldn't be his first choice. Not unless he planned to rob half the other patrons of the place. But he didn't want to even try to figure out when the last time he went on anything resembling a date might have been. And it didn't count if he was working on a job or trying to scope out a location for a later job. If this was what Sara wanted, then…

"Actually, I was thinking about something a bit more fun," she said, interrupting his thoughts. "How about we find a bar and probably start a fight? Kind of like when we first met?"
Leonard smiled at her suggestion. That sounded a lot more like them. And definitely more fun.

"Well, if I remember right, we also stole a car on the way back," said Leonard. "And Mick was with us, so I don't think it counted as a date."

"He can come next time. We're going to be here at least a few more days. And I won't rule out the possibility of stealing another car if the guy who owns it is a jerk."

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