To Hell and Back

by Nyame

Summary

To Hell and Back

by Nyame

Summary
Oliver Queen was the sixteen-year-old scion of the wealthy Queen family before a boat trip
gone awry landed him on the island hell of Lian Yu.

Three years prior, Barry Allen, all eleven years of age, woke up to a whirlwind of gold and
scarlet and watched as a man in a yellow suit ruined his life. Three years after, he washes up
on the shores of purgatory.

Kara Zor-El, age twelve, had neither luxury. She was shoved into a space ship, baby cousin
in hand, and tossed into the ebony abyss as her planet exploded around her, landing in a
world so similar and yet so very different from her own.

(Or: The AU where Oliver, Barry, and Kara survive Lian Yu together for years, raising a
baby Kal-El, and are eventually rescued – by the League of Assassins)

Notes

This work has a TV Tropes page. See it here.

This work has a Tumblr. Submit any questions and fan art here.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter Summary

Everyone meets in hell.

It's not as bad as they thought it would be.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

PART I

Oliver is the first to arrive in hell.

Oliver Queen is the first-born son of Robert and Moira Queen, and the godson of Malcolm and Rebecca Merlyn. He grew up as the best friend of Tommy Merlyn, of Laurel Lance and Sara Lance. He was the most prominent figure in his sister Thea Queen’s earliest memories.

Oliver Queen was born into money, and his parents didn’t have the heart to take the silver spoon out of his mouth. Combined with his natural rambunctiousness and recklessness, Oliver was a terror throughout the years. But he was a charming terror, and beneath the veneer, he was a good and kind person at heart. He was loved dearly by those who knew him, regardless of how much they wished he would mature a little bit faster.

One day, Oliver managed to finagle himself a trip to China on his family’s yacht. Robert Queen had loaned it to an old friend for a business venture, but was unable to attend the voyage himself due to impending business back home. Oliver, on vacation from school at the time, convinced his parents to still let him go.

They would regret their permissiveness for years to come.

Oliver Queen sailed with the Queen’s Gambit to China, not knowing he would not be returning home.

(not for a very long time, at least)

Barry is the next to enter purgatory.

Barry Allen was the son of a doctor and a college professor, a brilliant child whose future was filled with so much potential. He grew up in a well-to-do middle-class family, in a well-to-do neighborhood, and was best friends with the daughter of a detective, Iris West. Despite his genius, Barry Allen was as painfully normal as could be.

Then his mother was murdered, and they jail his father for the crime.

Barry Allen was taken in by the lead detective of the case, Joe West, but other than Iris, he didn’t like this new turn of events – at all. He constantly claims that his father is innocent, but is constantly refuted, called crazy by everyone around him: his peers, his teachers, and even Joe himself. After one
too many arguments, Barry lands himself a spot in the student exchange program, and goes off to study abroad. The night before his departure, he admits to Iris that he can’t stand to be in Central City anymore, around Joe, after being constantly denied his father’s innocence.

Barry leaves for China. He never comes back.

(Iris never forgives Joe)

Kara is last, and she doesn’t come alone.

Kara Zor-El was genetically engineered to be the perfect blend of her parents, Zor-El and Alura In-Ze. Like her mother, she was predisposed towards law, and had just begun her training when her young cousin Kal-El was born to her Uncle Jor-El and Aunt Lara Van-El.

That was the beginning of the end.

Kara learned her world was dying, and that, through the efforts of her parents, only she and Kal-El would survive. Then she was forced into a ship alongside her cousin and a limited amount of baby supplies, and shot out into the sky as Krypton burst into debris and flames around her.

She cried and cried, but forced herself to remain strong for the baby in her arms.

They only had each other from now on.

(but only for so long)

Oliver floats adrift at sea for days before he finally catches sight of land.

Not long afterwards, a man called Yao-Fei shoots an arrow into his shoulder.

Oliver passes out.

Oliver has just killed a bird, and is now cleaning the meat for a meal. It is his first kill.

The words pass through his mind. *You want survive this place, bird not last thing you kill.* They were ominous, and Oliver nearly gagged at the thought of killing another like he had with this bird.

But before he could muse over becoming a killer, Yao-Fei returns, with a water-logged boy on his back.

They prep the test, and Oliver watches, out of sight, as the boy begs and pleads until, like him, he snaps the bird’s neck.

“Queen? As in the Queen family of Starling City?”

“Yup,” Oliver confirmed, popping the ‘p’ with his lips. Now that Barry has learned the same lesson, Yao-Fei has permitted them to meet and converse while he went out and hunted. “And you?”

“Barry. Barry Allen. I’m from Central City.” Oliver raised one of his eyebrows.

“What are you doing so far away from home?”
Barry gave a weak smile. “I was on a student exchange program. Was supposed to study in China for a semester. My plane landed in Taiwan and my flight was cancelled, so I decided a boat trip was a better way to get there – until it capsized.” he laughed mirthlessly.

Oliver gave a sardonic grin of his own, and opened his mouth to speak.  

He doesn’t get the chance.

Oliver is so very tempted to say yes. To out Yao-Fei. He knows Barry is struggling with the same dilemma, and they both know what will happen if they deny it.

But Yao-Fei saved their lives, and Oliver has too much good in him to give him up.

Barry looks at him, and they are in voiceless agreement.

“No.”

Their screams etch the silent day.

They are rescued, and stuck in a cave. Oliver is tempted again, and this time it is by the release of death. What purpose is there to his life, after all? He is a spoiled brat, a blight on society, a product of a broken system that tramples on the unfortunate and underprivileged. But Barry – Barry still has something to live for, and through that, Oliver remembers that he still has something to live for too.

Barry and Oliver have endured torture together, and that forges a bond that can never quite be broken. Oliver entertains the idea of death just for a moment, before dismissing it. Barry still needs him, and Oliver can’t very well abandon him. Barry has a life to live, after all, and Oliver is going to make sure he has the chance.

The impact is heard throughout the island, a shockwave spanning out for miles. Edward Fyers immediately sends out a scouting team.

Oliver and Barry get there first.

Barry is frozen on the spot. Beside him, Oliver is not much better, pointing and shaking.

A spaceship. An honest-to-god spaceship.

They stare, and continue to stare, until the cockpit snaps open, and a blonde-haired girl spills out, with a baby in her arms. She stumbles a bit, before gaining purchase with the ground, and looks up at them.

“Who are you?” she asks in a language that neither they, nor anyone else native to this planet, knows.

It takes some creative hand gestures and body language, but Barry and Oliver finally learn the girl’s name: Kara. The baby, clearly a relative of hers, is called “Kal-El”, or Kal for short. By the time they finally get around to that point, Fyers’ men appear, and are about to shoot. Kara makes a grab for the baby supplies and succeeds. Barry takes Kara’s hand, Oliver takes the baby, careful to support his head, and they run as far away from the landing site as they can.
They meet Slade next.

Slade is terrifying, but Oliver is the oldest, the strongest, so he does the talking and willingly takes the brunt of his rage.

When he suggests they kill the baby (using very overt hand motions to make it clear to Kara what he’s suggesting), Kara screams and clutches little Kal-El protectively to her chest. Barry glares at him and goes to comfort her, visibly shielding both with his body.

Oliver punches him in the face. It is a weak punch, and hardly phases the older man, but when Slade makes eye contact again, Oliver remains stalwart and regretless.

Slade smiles, impressed.

They spent the next few weeks training. All three rotate between training with Slade, hunting for food and water, caring for Kal-El and planning for the raid on Fyers’ camp. When it is Kara and one of the boys, they also make time to teach Kara English and other hand gestures for easier forms of communication. When it is Kara’s turn for training, Oliver and Barry go about fixing some of the machinery, including a radio. That’s how they learn of the plane and the “monster”.

Their journey into enemy territory is quite the disastrous adventure. Kara hides Kal-El into a makeshift cradle, having fed him full and content, and waited for him to fall asleep before going with others on to their little jaunt.

Barry and Oliver are quickly separated from Kara and Slade, and both kill a mercenary each for their uniform. For a moment, they are left in shock of their first kills, but the thought of Yao-Fei breaks Oliver out of his reverie, and he breaks Barry out of his.

What follows is a terrible attempt to infiltrate Fyers’ camp, where they both get caught and are about to be killed by Billy Wintergreen before Slade and Kara intervene. Kara kills one of the mercenaries with a stolen handgun, before grabbing Barry and Oliver and herding them far away to the side and out of sight. They watch the two former friends fight, and all three flinched when Slade shoved his sword into Billy’s eye.

After Yao-Fei’s betrayal, Shado joins them.

“They’re only kids.” She muses sympathetically.

It is night, and everyone is prepping for the night. Off to the side of their makeshift home, Kara is softly singing to a yawning Kal-El, lulling him to sleep. Barry is taking inventory of their remaining supplies, while Oliver is clearing out another space for Shado to sleep in.

Beside her, Slade watches solemnly, perhaps even fondly, and shakes his head.

“They stopped being kids the moment they stepped foot on this island.” he claims.

Watching Kara set the baby down into his makeshift cradle, Shado can’t find it in herself to disagree.

After Yao-Fei’s death, they escape their bonds and spring into action. Shado, Oliver, and Barry are all grieving inside, but they don’t let it stop them from taking out every mercenary in their path. Barry goes with Slade and Kara to hold the line while Oliver and Shado chase after the missile launcher.
They take out the guards, Shado reprograms the launcher, and Oliver sets off the trigger.

The camp bursts into the flames.

Amongst all the wreckage, Oliver calls out for his companions.

“BARRY! KARA! SLADE! SHADO!” He continues to idly walk around, and notices one of the containers. He opens it to reveal a bow and a quiver of arrows. Oliver grasped the weapon, weighing it before notching an arrow into the bowstring.

“Figures…you couldn’t save the day…without making a huge mess…” A raspy voice rang out.

Oliver turned around to see a clearly banged up Slade walking towards him, being supported by an equally exhausted Barry and Kara. Despite their poor condition, he could see the slightest smiles on his two younger companions, while the oldest member of their group was outright laughing. Unfortunately, Oliver could not share in their mirth.

“Where’s Shado?” he asks. Immediately, their joy was replaced by horror.

“I thought she was with you!” Barry demanded, Kara rapidly shaking her head in agreement.

“Actually, she’s with me!”

Edward Fyers appeared, clearly worse for wear, and in his hold, with a gun to her head, was Shado. Slade stumbled out of Barry and Kara’s grasp. “Let her go, Fyers! It’s over!” he yelled.

Oliver, angry, lifted the bow and aimed the arrow right at Fyers’ heart. “Let her go.” the archer commanded.

Fyers chuckled. “Amazing. A two-year operation undone because two teenagers washed ashore while a girl fell from the sky. And now here you all are: killers.” The mercenary ranted bitterly. Shado continued to struggle, but he paid her no heed. “You wanted nothing more than to leave this island and now you can. I can call in a rescue ship – you can go home!”

Edward Fyers gave one final gasp, and finished his monologue with a low voice. “Tell me, Mr. Queen – are you prepared to give up your freedom for her? For them?”

Oliver paused. Months ago, before he was stranded on this island, his answer would’ve been different. For all his faults, nothing in the world mattered more to Oliver Queen than his family, and he would’ve given anything to see them again. That hadn’t changed.

What changed, was that he had family here too.

Oliver paused, but just for a moment. The next, Edward Fyers collapsed dead, an arrow to his heart. Shado escaped his hold, and gasped in a deep breath, smiling gratefully.

Slade smirked.

Barry and Kara ignored their exhaustion and threw themselves at Oliver, causing all three to fall to the ground, and hugged him close.

Chapter End Notes
In this AU, National City doesn’t exist. As much as I like Supergirl’s cast, outside of Martian Manhunter and certain villains, they don’t have a place in this story. J’onn will make an appearance, but it will be much later on.

As a result, I made all three members of the Arrowverse Trinity closer in age. Oliver is the oldest at sixteen, while Barry is fourteen and Kara is twelve. Of course, by the time they return to Star(ling) and Central City, they’ll be ten years older. Kal-El is around a year old. Quick warning, though – I know nothing of childcare or medicine in general, so that will be glossed over.

Kara and Kal-El’s powers won’t develop right off the bat. Obviously, if they did, I wouldn’t have a story. Instead, they’ll develop gradually over the next two years, and she won’t have full access to them until they are rescued by the League.

**Shipping:**

Just for the record, they all see each other as family, so no, none of the three main characters will be paired with each other.

*Oliver:* NO OLICITY. Sorry to any Olicity, but after the 2017 crossover I can barely stand to acknowledge Felicity’s existence. Felicity wasn’t even going to appear in this story anyway, and that hasn’t changed. Neither is John Diggle, so no #OTA or whatever people call it these days. No Oliver/Sara either, because I feel it wouldn’t work out for where this story is going, especially since Sara wasn’t on the yacht and thus is not going to be the (White) Canary. I typically prefer Lauriver or Olyssa stories, so I may go one of those routes, but it’s possible that Oliver won’t get paired with anyone at all.

*Barry:* WestAllen is the likely endgame, though it won’t happen until at least midway through the story. Iris will date Eddie first, as in canon, though the relationship will be a little awkward as Iris has more-or-less disowned Joe. As for Barry, thanks to the island and then the League, he won’t be completely and utterly in love with Iris off the bat, nor will he be so dependent on her. He had five other living emotional crutches on Lian Yu, after all, and three of those crutches are still in his life by the time we get to the main story. Instead, they will gradually fall in love and come to the realization that these feelings stem from way back.

*Kara:* It’s very possible that Kara, like Oliver, won’t be paired with anyone at all. Since I’ve removed most of her supporting cast from the table, Kara’s romantic prospects have drastically gone down in number. If she develops romantic potential with another character, I might change my mind, but until then Kara will remain single.
Prologue: PART II

Chapter Summary

The Amazo arrives, and everything falls apart. Just not the way you think.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

PART II

Six months pass by.

Immediately after Fyers’ death, the group of castaways and survivors raided the mercenary camp, killing any stragglers and searching for supplies. While not a lot had survived the blast, there were some tents, tarps, and weaponry that could prove to be useful should any other untoward people ended up at the island. The real jackpot was the cache of food and clean water found at the edge of the settlement – with a baby and five mouths to feed, the supplement would be beneficiary if bad weather prevented hunting and gathering.

Kara was immediately sent off with Barry and Slade, so the former could treat the latter and she could tend to Kal-El. Shado and Oliver continued to peruse the camp for other materials before calling it a day and returning to their shelter. The next day, they along with Kara visited the latter’s space pod, relieved to find it unguarded and untampered with. Together, they moved the pod farther inward the island, and then disguised it with foliage and dirt to ensure no one would find it. Kara had no wish to rifle with the contents of the pod just yet, wanting to wait until they were rescued, for fear of losing anything important there.

After that, life went on. With no discernible way off Lian Yu, the days were spent routinely, with training and hunting and gathering. Kal-El soon began with his first steps and his first words. Kara continued to learn English from everyone, and eventually learned to speak it passably, if brokenly. Her grammar still needed a lot of work, and her limited vocabulary was constantly expanding. Barry had apprenticed himself under Shado, learning more techniques from her and the medicinal properties of several plants around the island, essentially becoming the group’s second medic.

Oliver, meanwhile, had devoted himself to Slade’s tutelage. Along with practicing archery with Shado, he had learned how to wield blades and exercised his mind with several strategic games that his mentors had cooked up. As the oldest of the younger generation and already an older brother when he had arrived on Lian Yu, Oliver’s protective instinct had awoken and remained on overdrive. It went unsaid that when neither Slade or Shado were present, he was in charge. With the constant and unknown dangers surrounding the island, it was no secret that those two, as the oldest and most skilled, would be the first targets for any unwanted guests. It was a testament to how much the children had changed that they accepted that reality with grim acceptance.

But despite those dour thoughts, those days went peaceably by. Evenings were spent recounting tales about their old lives. Oliver wistfully lingered on the memories of his many misadventures with Tommy, Laurel, and Sara, and the short time spent with his little sister, Thea. Barry explained the death of his parents, and had refused to tell tales until one story from Oliver prompted him to talk
about one incident with his parents during his childhood. Soon after, he regaled everyone with anecdotes of his brief time with the West family, particularly his best friend Iris. Shado had her own stories regarding her and her father, while Slade narrated about his son Joe’s more embarrassing moments. However, the most fascinating chronicles came from Kara’s mouth, where she explained things about Krypton: its culture, religion, legends, etc. More than one person would interrupt her for their own commentary, or to relate something about Krypton to life on Earth.

Many years from now, the remaining survivors would look back at these nights with deep fondness. Gradually, the six misfits, strangers from all walks of life, bonded and grew closer until one could look at them and see what Oliver saw when he shot an arrow through Edward Fyers’ heart: a family. Not of blood, but of choice, of hardship – one far more valuable, one that could never break.

But like all things, this calm was not meant to last, no matter how badly they wished it had.

Footsteps.

Kara’s ear twitched, and she turned her head. “I hear things.”

Barry, sitting beside her, looked up, peering at the forest facing the dimming sun. They were doing some last-minute gathering before the day ended, and Barry had asked Kara to come with him. The poor girl had been fretting over Kal-El all day, who had taken a minor tumble down a small slope. Aside from a few bruises, which he and Shado assured Kara would heal in no time, he was completely unharmed. Unfortunately, that didn’t stop his cousin from nearly losing it and babying him almost all day. Barry had to all but drag her away from Kal, assuring her that Shado would take care of him and that she needed to relax.

Barry narrowed his eyes as a few dark silhouettes appeared from behind the tree line.

So much for relaxation.

The fight had not been going well. While Barry and Kara had months of training and knew how to work together, they were still facing a group of fully-grown men, and there was only so much teamwork could make up for the lack of strength and reach. They had managed to take out three of the intruders, but the remaining five were about to pose a serious problem.

“BARRY! KARA!” two familiar voices called out: Slade and Oliver.

Kara smiled, and was about to call back, but the distraction cost her – one of the men grabbed her from behind and restrained her with his large, meaty arms. Barry noticed her predicament and ran to aid her, but was blocked by another, rather sizable man. Kara struggled in her captor’s hold, writhing as his arms tightened, until she screamed and, completely on instinct, hitched up her back, lifting the man up and throwing him over her body to one of the trees. His body had been thrown with such force that it broke through the tree trunk, ripping it in half. He continued to skid across the ground before his back hit another tree, and remained there motionless, either unconscious or dead.

The remaining men, who were about to gang up on Barry, had stopped their pursuit, shell-shocked. Barry used the distraction to take two of them out, grabbing the knife he had used to cut herbs to stab them each in the neck. The last two were quickly killed by the newly arrived Slade and Oliver. Kara stood some ways away, stunned as she looked down and stared at her hands.

“What was that?” Oliver asked once they got back to the shelter. Kara had remained silent as they returned to their island home, contemplating the incident in her mind. Shado had met up with them
outside the plane wreckage, and was given a quick rundown over what happened, including what Kara did.

Now, they were all standing in a circle. Kal-El had long since been coaxed into bed, and Slade, the unofficial leader, had called a conference to discuss the recent incident. Everyone was now looking at Kara, who was staring back at them, rubbing her arms in worry.

Barry, resident genius, took point. “Kara and Kal are aliens. They grew up under a sun that emitted red solar radiation. They must process yellow solar radiation differently, which causes some… interesting… side effects as a result.” he hypothesized, using the knowledge he gained from Kara’s stories about Krypton to pull together a feasible theory.

“So basically, because Kara is descended from a species that lived under a red sun, when they’re exposed to a yellow sun, she’s developing superpowers.” Oliver summed up in layman’s terms, with a clearly hysterical and dubious tone. Around him, Kara, Shado, and Slade were also listening with rapt attention, disbelief in their eyes.

“Pretty much.” Barry shrugged.

Slade sighed. “Well, I’m not as shocked as I should be.” At the incredulous looks, he became defensive. “I’m still a little shocked, alright! But still – Kara’s an alien. She and Kal,” he jabbed his thumb towards the slumbering toddler in the corner, “literally crash-landed here on the island in a spaceship, and were discovered,” he pointed at Oliver, then Barry, “by two teenage castaways. Let’s face it, nothing about our situation is normal. Why should this be any different?” At that, everyone had a thoughtful look on their faces, and slowly nodded their heads.

Shado then frowned. “If that’s the case, then why did it take so long for her powers to show up? And if Kara has them, shouldn’t Kal have them as well?” Kara flinched at the reminder, and looked at her cousin with dawning horror. Oliver placed his hand on her shoulder in a comforting gesture, and she leaned into him, appreciative of his consideration.

Barry turned his head, and observed the youngest of their number with a critical eye. “It could be for a variety of reasons: age, size, weight, gender, etc. The amount of time of exposure to a red sun might have something to do with it as well. Kal probably won’t develop his powers until he’s older, though it will likely be at a younger age than Kara is now, since he’s had less exposure to a red sun and more to a yellow sun. Location is also a factor; God knows this place gets more than its fair share of rain.” Everyone grimaced at the reminder.

Slade coughed into his hand, and everyone turned towards him. “Well, there’s nothing we can do about it. Training is suspended for the coming days anyway.” At everyone’s questioning looks, he narrowed his eyes. “We’ve got company.” he reminded them.

At that, the mood immediately shifted. Everyone became far more serious, guarded, clearly remembering the last time they had “company”.

“Now,” Slade mused, “the question is: why are they here?”

The Hozen. The Mirakuru.

**BOOM!**

_Slade._
“We need to go.” Shado proclaimed grimly. Barry, Kara, Kal, and Oliver, all surrounding an unconscious Slade, half his face burnt, looked up.


“Be enough?” Kara asked, hopefully. One of her hands was clutching Slade’s own in clear distress.

Barry, being the only other medic in the group and thus fully aware of the severity of the situation, closed his eyes. Then he opened them again with grim determination. “It’ll have to be,” he said.

Oliver climbed down into the sub first, and helped Barry and Shado carry Slade down the ladder. The man was fading. They had little time left. All three set Slade down to the side, Oliver staying behind to keep him company.

Kara entered next, a silent Kal-El in a makeshift sling with her. Rapidly, the three tore each and every cabinet open, Barry grabbing any leftover medical supplies, until they found it: a box covered in Japanese kanji.

Shado immediately passed it to Kara, who, using her newfound strength, ripped the lock off the container to reveal several vials of a green substance. Barry grabbed one, and using a syringe he had found, filled it with the Mirakuru. He handed it to Oliver. Normally he and Shado would suggest a sedative, but there was no sedative to be found, and things were dire enough as it was.

Oliver looked hesitantly at it, then at Slade. The older man stared back through his remaining eye, tiredly.

“It could kill you.” Oliver stated quietly.

Slade chuckled. “I’ll be dead either way.” The others crowded around them. Kal-El, with his tiny hands, reached out for him.

“Papa.” he said.

Slade gazed at him fondly, at everyone with a softness that was rarely seen anywhere, let alone on Slade Wilson’s face. “No tears, alright? No matter what happens.” he commanded firmly. They all nodded, reluctantly.

“Do it.”

Oliver paused, before jamming the syringe into Slade’s neck, pushing the chemical into his bloodstream.

Silence.

Then screams and tears of blood.

“Please!” Shado begged. Beside her, Kara stood, Kal-El buried into her chest, shaking and crying, shouting in Kryptonese for Ivo to stop. Kal-El, sensing his cousin’s distress, began crying as well.

“CHOOSE!” Ivo demanded, waving his gun back and forth. Before him were a subdued Oliver and Barry, both with their hands tied behind their back. Both were silent. Barry with his eyes closed, mouth in a thin line while Oliver stared hard at the ground, gritting his teeth. They were trying to remain strong, trying not to make a stressful situation any worse. Surrounding them were Ivo’s men,
all with guns trained on them.

“I can’t, I can’t!” Shado screeched back at him, and the sheer desperation in her voice could be heard. Tears began leaking from her eyes. Kara continued to sob.

Oliver, evidently having had enough, stood.

“Me. Take me.” he said, pressing his chest against the barrel of Ivo’s gun. Barry’s eyes snapped open, and he looked up at the scene, before standing himself.

“No. Choose me. Kill me!” He insisted. Ivo turned towards him, and his gun moved, but Oliver moved with him.

“No!”

“Damn it, Oliver!” Barry yelled at him.

“I’m not going to let you die Barry! I’m the oldest! It’s my responsibility to protect YOU!” Oliver shouted back.

“You have a family to get back to! A sister, friends, parents! I have none of that!”

“You do! What about your dad, huh, are you just going to let him rot in prison? What about Iris?” Oliver countered. “You still have so much to live for, so much to offer. You’re going to change the world! Me, I’m just some useless rich kid! I’m not going to let you die here, not if I can do anything about it!” Kara’s sobbing stopped, and she sniffed as she watched her two closest friends argued over which of them were going to die. Shado clenched her fists.

Slade, having watched the proceedings from the sidelines behind a tree, roared, catching everyone’s attention.

Chaos ensued.

“SHADO!”

Barry slowly, methodically, cut open Shado’s shirt, revealing the bullet wound in her chest. He looked back at his makeshift family, and shook his head sadly, his eyes like glass panes. Kara ran forward first, and knelt beside the dying woman, opposite of Barry, Kal-El in her arms. Her tears returned, bloated beads of water streaming down her face. Kal-El, sensing something was wrong, reached out towards Shado, calling out, “Mama.” Shado, with what little strength she had, slowly reached back, and lightly grasped Kal’s hand for the last time.

Oliver was next, collapsing next to Kara, on his knees. A single tear slid defiantly down his face. Shado smiled at him sadly, and let go of Kal-El’s fingers, placing her hand comfortingly on one of his knees.

Slade was last. He stared disbelievingly at his partner, before his legs gave out and he collapsed next to Barry. He reached out, stroking Shado’s face gingerly.

Shado looked at all of them. “I love you. All of you. As my siblings.” her eyes shifted between the three teenagers. “As my child.” she looked at Kal-El.

Finally, her gaze landed at Slade. “As more.” Slade returned her gaze, before leaning down. Their
lips met for an all too brief moment.

When the kiss ended, Shado spoke. “Promise me something, Slade.” she begged. “Promise me that you’ll protect them, our family, alright? Promise you get them back home…no matter what it takes.”

Slade, heartbroken and stalwart, nodded at his love. “I will. I promise.”

“Good…” She said softly, and slowly began to close her eyes. “I’m…glad…I got…the…chance…” she exhaled, and expired.

The dam broke. Any composure everyone had shattered all at once. Kara broke down, clutching a confused and distressed Kal to her chest as she wept. Oliver pulled them into his arms and rested his chin on the top of her head, his own tears falling unabashedly down his cheeks. Barry curled into a ball, crying, constantly pleading “I’m sorry” to anyone that could hear.

Slade pulled the body of his lost love into his arms, and howled to the ebony sky.

They bury her next to her father.

“We’re getting off this island.” Slade announced.

One by one, the rest of his companions, his children, looked at Shado’s grave, and their faces hardened.

And it was going so well at first.

Ivo was dead. That was the only good news.

The ship was in disarray, to say the least. There is fighting everywhere. Barry and Oliver tried to defend Kara and Kal wherever they can, but are soon overwhelmed by the sheer number of fighters. Slade is tearing things apart up in the brig.

Kara punches away any man that gets near her and Kal, but a lucky shot manages to catch her. She is separated from her cousin, who falls to the ground. He shies away from prying hands.

His cousin watches it all, and panics, a mental scream.

Blue rays of light burst from her eyes.

The rope is breaking, thread, by thread.

Barry holds onto it as hard as he can, reaching up to the grab the upper half, but they know he can only support much weight.

Slade, at the bottom of the makeshift ladder, looks down, then up. Oliver, reading his mind shakes his head.

“No.” he says.

“Kid, it’s the only way.”

“NO!” he shouts louder, catching Barry and Kara’s attention. The water continues to rush beneath
them, gushing at a breakneck pace.

“Your three have made me proud. So very, very proud.” Slade inhales, and closes his eyes. “I wished I could’ve seen you all grow up, introduced you to my son.”

“SLADE!” Oliver yells, pleadingly.

“I’ll be sure to say hello to Shado for all of you.”

He lets go.

“SLADE!”

They all scream.

Oliver wakes up. Beside him Kara is tending to Kal-El, staring fearfully at the people surrounding them. Barry remains unconscious, but breathing. He lays next to Oliver, peaceful.

The unknowns are darkly clothed, faces concealed. They each have a sword at their sides, bows on their backs.

Standing in front of him is a girl, around their age. She is middle eastern appearance, hair dark, eyes slim. She is beautiful.

“Who are you?” Oliver asks.

She smirks.

“I am Nyssa al Ghul. Heir to the Demon.”

Chapter End Notes

No Evil! Slade, and before you ask, yes, he isn’t dead. Slade will come in a later arc in the story, I promise.

At this point in time, Kara has her strength, heat vision, and limited access to her super senses. She can also float off the ground for an extended period, though she doesn’t dare try flight yet. No super speed, hence why she didn't interfere when Barry and Oliver were captured.
Prologue: PART III

Chapter Summary

Life in the League of Assassins.

(Or: How Oliver, Barry, and Kara became uber-badasses).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

PART III

Nanda Parbat is cold.

Cold and empty. All the people here are silent, unfeeling. Only Nyssa shows any form of emotion, and her range is limited to icy arrogance, pride in her station, but not too much. Too much would be unbecoming of the Heir to the Demon.

They all hate this unfamiliar place. Lian Yu may have been hell, but it was still recognizable, a reluctant home. But beggars cannot be choosers, and they have been saved by the League of Assassins, and it will be the Demon’s Head that will decide their fate.

They are allowed two days before their audience. They eat. They rest. They clean.

They mourn.

“Mine fault.” Kara mutters despondently, her head buried into Oliver’s chest. Kal-El is fast asleep in Barry’s arms, who is currently leaning against Oliver’s side. They are all huddled together next to the burning fire in their collective room, the full weight of their loss finally dawning on them.

“No.” Oliver disagreed firmly. “You had no idea that would happen Kara. None of us did. And regardless, had it not been for you, we’d all be dead.”

“But…Slade…”

“Slade would be here,” Barry did not deny, “but only him. The rest of us would be dead.” he reaffirmed to her. Kara did not look convinced, but argued no further.

A knock on the door, and then –

“It is time.”

He is powerful.

His blade flashed in arcs, weaving through each blow. His body twisted and turned, no wasted movement, each step with a purpose. One by one, each assailant fell against his might; all, collectively or individually, unable to measure up to his strength.
The makeshift family watched this display with rapture, captivated by the pure skill exhibited by the greatest assassin in the world: The Demon’s Head.

Ra’s al Ghul.

His piercing gaze swept over them, taking in their ragged appearances and haggard faces. Barry stood at one side, anxious and nervous. Kara stood at the other, keeping little Kal-El close to her chest. Oliver stood at the center, scared but determined.

“And what do you have to offer me? Why should I allow you into the service of the Demon’s Head?”

Oliver, the leader in the wake of Slade’s death, looked towards Kara. She nodded back, realizing the severity of the situation, and stepped forward. Then, with a deep breath, she jumped.

Gravity eluded her.

Gasps were heard. Even Nyssa, standing by her father, could not help but stare. Only Ra’s looked composed, observing Kara’s floating with a critical eye. Then, he turned towards Oliver, silently demanding an explanation.

“She and Kal-El,” he gestured to the toddler in Kara’s arms, “are aliens. Barry and I found them after their ship crash-landed on the island you discovered us on.”

“I see.” Ra’s gave a small downward tilt of acknowledgement. “And what of your male companion?”

“He’s a genius,” Oliver automatically responded, reflexively grabbing Barry’s arm. “Brilliant. He excels in every form of academics, particularly science. He is also a skilled medic. I’m sure you can find use for him.”

Murmurs broke out at that from the attending assassins. Medics were rare within the League, as only fitting in an organization where taking life was the primary method of operation. Preserving it, however? Those who had the will and skill to preserve life generally did not seek to enter a service where they would have to take it.

Ra’s made a soft hum of approval, and then narrowed his eyes at Oliver. “And you?”

Oliver took a deep sigh, and met the eyes of the Demon’s Head. “Nothing but my loyalty. If that is enough for you, I will dedicate my life to your service, and to the League. If not, then I will allow you to kill me, here and now. My only wish is that my family live.”

Ra’s observed him the longest. For a moment, they all could have sworn that the corners of his lips had twitched. It was gone, however, like the wind.

The Demon’s Head gave a short nod.

“And live they shall. And so, shall you.”

They train.

Kal-El is given to the priestess, and reared on a rotational schedule. He is frequently visited by his adoptive family whenever they can find the time. He is by far the easiest off.
Kara is studied, poked and prodded, by League-affiliated scientists. They take Barry’s hypothesis about the source of her powers and test it – and find it to be true. They used this newfound knowledge to develop a bracelet that emitted red solar radiation, which she must wear during normal training hours. She was only allowed to take it off during her extracurricular training.

Extracurricular training was a League mandate by the current Ra’s al Ghul during the early twentieth century in response to the rapid changes the outside world was going through. Each recruit was required to develop their skills in a field outside of standard hand-to-hand combat and weaponry to better aid the League in their holy mission. Kara’s extracurricular training was the development of her powers. Along with learning to control her flight, strength, and heat vision, she used her time to discover any new powers she had. So far, she had learned she was invulnerable to bullets and most other metal projectiles, had super breath that could freeze objects, and had super senses, allowing her to hear things from long distances. Kara felt that she was only scratching the surface of what she was capable of.

Besides training her powers, Kara focused on her skills as a combatant, that way she would not be reliant on them should they ever be deactivated, and/or she was forced to face a combatant of equal strength (no matter how unlikely it was). The League did not take things for granted, after all. She was apprenticed under Nyssa, one of the few other females in the League, and taught to use her body’s natural flexibility and smaller form to her advantage. During this time, Kara found that she had an aptitude for swords, and kept one at her side constantly.

Barry’s focus was more of an academic nature. He was put under the tutelage of several of the League’s most prominent scholars and scientists, soaking up information like a sponge. Everyday his mind was swirling with some new material to study or another problem that needed to be solved. He was also called often to deal with some injury that someone had received, either during training or a mission, leaving his days full. Barry was well-acquainted with the other recruits as a result, and oftentimes found himself the go-between for recruits and full members of the League. When people needed a favor or someone to talk to, they went to him.

While not quite as talented in physical combat skills as his male companion, he also excelled in his physical training, with his speed increasing exponentially, until there was no one faster at drawing a weapon and striking a person down than him. His preferred weapons were small daggers and knives, and he had no less than five on his body at any given time.

However, despite the massive workloads Barry and Kara had to endure, it was Oliver who by far and away trained the hardest. He was the most expendable and he knew it. To compensate, he completely dedicated himself to training his body to its absolute peak, spending hours after official training sessions were over perfecting katas and other techniques. His devotion was only matched by his sheer talent; no one, not even Nyssa or the deliberately forgotten Talia, could compare to his combat intuition. Even Ra’s was left impressed by his abilities, and more than once he would stop by one of Oliver’s solitary training sessions to observe him. His skill with a bow and a quiver of arrows was unparalleled, so it was only fitting that Oliver became attached to his League one in quick fashion.

As for his extracurricular training, Oliver tried many things before it was found that he had a gift for languages. Once this was discovered, Oliver was soon tutored by many members of the League, each a different ethnicity, for their respective language. All League recruits were required to know English and Arabic, but Oliver had to learn not only the latter, but also Mandarin, Japanese, Russian, Spanish – basically every known language in the world, along with their dialects. It was a daunting task, but Oliver tackled it with enthusiasm, happy to know that his value had increased, making it unlikely that he would be killed when graduation came should his skill not be satisfactory enough for admission into the League, and thus leave Barry, Kara, and Kal-El behind.
This continued for two years, until The Day came.

They kneel.

He speaks.

“You have all proven yourselves worthy of the title assassin, of undertaking our holy mission. Your former lives are now forfeit, and you will be renamed, in service to the Demon’s Head. You may choose your own name, or I shall name you.”

“You move, and they do not see you. Your existence is non-existence. For this, you are a “Phantom”. I name you…Saraab.”

The former Kara Zor-El bowed her head in submission.

“Your movements are quick and barely unseen. Your strikes, abrupt but effective. For this, you are “The Lightning”. I name you…Al Sa’iqa.”

Barry Allen was dead, and Al Sa’iqa nodded his thanks.

“Your mastery of the bow is unparalleled, far greater than even the League has ever seen in its long existence. For this, you are “The Arrow”. I name you…Al Sah-him.”

Oliver Queen fades into nothingness, as Al Sah-him kneeled before the Demon’s Head, and silently pledged his service.

Mission after mission, the years passed by.

While their primary training was technically done, Al Sah-him, Al Sa’iqa, and Saraab all continued to hone their skills in addition to performing missions for the League. In between their tasks, they were given supplementary training in many different fields, including art and dance (to Saraab’s enjoyment), literature, computer programming, sports, acting – anything that could help an assassin blend in with modern society. Theatricality is deception after all, and not all theatricality had to be blatantly obvious (though that too had its own benefits). Languages also became a focus: Saraab finally became fluent in English and had also learned Arabic and Mandarin, and was working on French. Al Sa’iqa had mastered all of those and was now working on Russian, while Al Sah-him had learned so many languages that he immediately adopted the native language of every person he talked to on instinct.

A year after they were officially inducted into the League, Kal-El turned five and was finally old enough to start his own training. He was tested to see if he had any of his powers yet – the only ones that revealed themselves were super strength and (much to his adoptive family’s relief) invulnerability. His training was balanced by his education, where he learned reading, writing, basic math, and basic science.

Other than this, the only noticeable major development in their lives was their closeness with the Heir to the Demon, Nyssa. Being Saraab’s primary trainer prior to her induction, and one of the few females within the League, the two naturally gravitated towards each other. Through that, Nyssa became familiar with Kal-El, and she was his most frequent visitor after his three primary caretakers. She also formed a bond with Al Sa’iqa, due to the latter constantly patching her up after the rare
Oddly enough, though, the person Nyssa found herself closest to was Al Sah-him. It was unconventional, at first, how their acquaintance formed – Nyssa found most of her sparring partners inadequate, and sought out Al Sah-him instead. He proved to be a worthy opponent, one constantly improving at a pace that surpassed even her own. She found herself continuously seeking him out to test herself against his prodigious skill. This mutual respect soon laid the foundation for friendship: Nyssa felt comfortable enough to banter, then converse with him. It was Al Sah-him she confessed her innermost thoughts to, and Al Sah-him, having matured from the spoiled child he once was, was an able and understanding listener.

There were rumors about their closeness, of course. Al Sah-him was a handsome man, after all, and Nyssa al Ghul was a beautiful woman. It was also well-known that Al Sah-him was heavily favored by Ra’s – he had personal training sessions with the man often, the amount only second to what Nyssa received. Some speculated that Al Sah-him was angling himself to take the Demon Ring for himself, and legitimize his rule by marrying the Daughter of the Demon.

The rumors were dashed after one foolish interloper, in the heat of the moment, accused Al Sah-him of such trickery and treachery. Al Sah-him cut the man down immediately, and loudly proclaimed his loyalty to the current Demon’s Head and his daughter. After that, such thoughts and speculation were kept to the darkest corners of Nanda Parbat. No one wished to anger the greatest warrior in the League after Ra’s himself.

These days continued routinely, until, seven years after they were rescued from Lian Yu, the impossible happened.

Al Sa’iqa spent his nights watching the stars, observing them for any peculiarities. After meeting Saraab, Astronomy hardly seemed like the least interesting subject in the world – on the contrary, it was relaxing, observing the ebony sky, writing down notes and wondering about what other worlds were out there.

But tonight, something felt…off.

Before he could figure out what was garnering this feeling for him, a flash of yellowish-white appeared above. Al Sa’iqa saw it, but before he could move, darkness greeted him.

He woke up in the League infirmary, surrounded by Al Sah-him, Saraab, and Kal-El. Off to the side, he could see an attendant scurrying out the door, and a minute later, returning with Nyssa al Ghul herself.

No point in beating around the bush. “How long was I out?”

“Three weeks.” Al Sah-him replied emotionlessly. But Al Sa’iqa had known him long enough to hear the relief in his voice.

Saraab spoke next. “You were struck by lightning, Al Sa’iqa.” She told him gently.

Al Sa’iqa’s brow furrowed. “I was? Then I should be dead.” He claimed.

Saraab spoke next. “You were struck by lightning, Al Sa’iqa.” She told him gently.

Al Sa’iqa’s brow furrowed. “I was? Then I should be dead.” He claimed.

“When we found you, we thought you were,” Nyssa said. “We would have mistakenly entombed you, had Saraab not heard your heartbeat, which was going so fast that only she could feel and hear it. After that, I ordered the League’s best to figure out what was wrong with you. You would’ve been out longer, had someone,” at this, she leveled a knowing stare at Kal-El, whose cheeks tinted
pink, “not…acquired…water from the Lazarus Pit.”

“The Lazarus Pit?” Al Sa’iqa demanded. He, more than anyone, knew of the effects of the Pit. He was one of the many put aside to study its waters. While no one could determine what was it about the Pit that allowed it to heal people from such severe wounds, they were able to determine potential side effects, including rage, bloodlust, etc. Al Sa’iqa, as one of the League’s top medics, made it well-known his belief that the Pit’s usage be limited for only the direst of circumstances.

“Not too much,” Kal-El assured him hurriedly, his boyish voice echoing within the silent chamber. “Just a little bit.”

“Regardless,” Nyssa intoned. “You have awoken. We will have to inform my father of this development. Are you suffering any other ailments?” Nyssa framed it as curiosity, but it was obvious she was worried. She knew better than to show it, however, even among the few she could call friends. The attendant was still in the room, after all, and it was often those who faded into the background that stirred up the worst gossip.

“None. Which is worrying.” Al Sa’iqa responded, observing his arms and chest. At everyone’s questioning looks, he continued his explanation. “I have been unconscious, in a coma, for three weeks. My body should be weaker than it is right now, my muscles haven’t atrophied at all – I feel well enough to resume my duties right now if our Master so desired. Either the water from the Pit worked a little too well, or something else is at play, judging by the fact that only Saraab could hear my heartbeat. I…” but any words he had left disappeared. The world slowed, ever so briefly. His arm, which he had lifted for everyone to see, had begun to vibrate.

It was only because of their familiarity with Saraab and Kal-El that no one panicked outright.


Al Sa’iqa’s name was no longer metaphor.

Once they determined what powers he had, Al Sa’iqa, with Ra’s blessing, immediately commissioned a frictionless fabric to be used in creation of a new uniform. He spent the next two months familiarizing himself with his powers, determining how fast he could run.

He was faster than Saraab, much to everyone’s disbelief. He could run on water, up the side of buildings. He could even generate electricity, by running around in a circle fast enough to generate a current and throwing it at a target. He truly was “The Lightning”. Combined with his not inconsiderate skill in combat and free-running, he was a force to be reckoned with, almost on par with Saraab.

But as wonderful as it was, Al Sa’iqa could feel something else nagging at him from the back of his mind. Something oddly familiar. It was only when another member of the League commented on how he left in a flash of yellow did it finally dawn on him.

It was night. The survivors of Lian Yu were away from Nanda Parbat, from its prying eyes and ears. Kal-El was with them, asleep in a sleeping bag. The others were all sitting around a campfire, speaking in whispers as to not wake him.

“My mother.” Al Sa’iqa said. Al Sah-him and Saraab needed no explanation.
“She was killed by a man in a yellow suit, who appeared in a storm of yellow and red. You don’t think…?” Saraab trailed off.

“There can be no other explanation.” Al Sa’iqa stated firmly. Al Sah-him adopted a thinking pose.

“If that is true,” He posited, “Then how did he get similar powers to you fifteen years ago? You only received them now, and if intelligence is correct, it was because of the Particle Accelerator Explosion three months ago.”

His logic was sound, but even he sounded doubtful. All their instincts were on edge – everything was connected somehow. They could not figure out why.

“I do not know.” Al Sa’iqa replied, closing his eyes and squeezing his fists. “But it is the biggest lead I have. I cannot ignore it.” he sighed deeply. “My heart is divided. I can no longer remain with the League.”

Such blasphemous thoughts would have received scorn had his companions been anyone else. But these were two people who went through hell with him, who had slept, ate, and trained with him. Had bled with him. Had cried with him.

These were two people that would die for him. And two people he would happily die for. If anyone could understand, it would be them.

“You are not the only one.”

Heads snapped up. Both Al Sa’iqa and Saraab stared incredulously at Al Sah-him.

“There are rumblings, in Starling City. Rumblings that I cannot ignore. I must return.” he spoke tiredly. “My blood…I cannot abandon them to whatever will happen there.”

Al Sa’iqa nodded understandingly. It was blood, after all, that called him back to Central City.

Saraab looked at them both contemplatively. Then, coming to a decision, she said, “Then I shall leave with you. I and Kal-El.”

They both looked to her.

“Our loyalty is to you. You took us in and asked for nothing in return. You protected us, comforted us, cared for us. You are our family. If you both wish to leave, then I will leave with you. And besides,” she looked towards the sleeping child. “the League…is no place for a child. This is not the life my blood wished for Kal-El…or for me. They would wish for us to live, to truly live, and we cannot do this as members of the League.”

“Then we are in agreement?” Al Sah-him asked. His companions nodded. “Very well. When we return to Nanda Parbat, we will request an audience with the Demon’s Head, and ask for release from our vows.”

“And if he disagrees?” Al Sa’iqa inquired.

“Then let us hope we do not have to kill too many in our escape.”

“I knew this day would come.”

It was only from years of ingrained training that all three did not jump up in surprise, each kneeling on one knee, heads bowed, in front of their master. Ra’s was not facing them. He was considering
his reflection in the Lazarus Pit, as if the bubbling waters held all the secrets of the world. Perhaps they did.

“From the very beginning, I knew that you three would not remain with the League for life. Whether it be your loyalty to each other, or for the lingering affection you had for your blood, something would call for you to leave. I could see it in your eyes.” The Demon’s Head explained. “But I still accepted you into our sacred order, because I knew that you would prove yourselves to be useful, valuable, during your time here. I knew that you would dedicate yourselves to our mission.”

“Normally I would deny your request. But you three – you all could have this left this place any time you wanted, and none of the League, not even myself, would have been able to stop you. The fact that you came here first speaks of your character, of your honor.” he continued.

Then, with a flourish, he turned and surveyed all three kneeling assassins, and nodded his head.

“I will release you from your vows, and acknowledge you as our eternal allies,” he intoned, “on two conditions. First condition: You continue to uphold the League’s values after your departure. You continue our holy mission, of cleansing this world of evil, through whatever means you deem necessary.”

“As you wish.” All three replied, heads still bowed.

“Second condition: You complete one last task for me.” At that, they raised their eyes, and met the gaze of their master.

“You must destroy the League’s greatest enemy. You must destroy…H.I.V.E.”

Chapter End Notes

The timeline has been shifted so what would be Season 1 of The Flash and Season 1 of Supergirl will occur at approximately the same time as Season 1 of Arrow. I cut down Barry’s coma to three weeks so that way he could have a better handle of his powers and for plot purposes. It’s necessary for their return to modern civilization.

Maseo never joins the League (you’ll learn why, later), and Kara takes his name as a result.
Prologue: PART IV

Chapter Summary

One last jaunt to Lian Yu, and then a look at how everyone else has been living for the last ten years.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

PART IV

It was sudden.

There were shipments to be made to the base in Coast City. Hub City, corrupt as Starling, paid no heed of a large army of men, masked in black and dressed in military gear, standing in their harbor and loading a ship filled with what was clearly illegal contraband. Just another routine night.

Then it happened.

The ship was sunk, broken in half and then carried off to be drowned deep in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The men had their necks snapped without warning, dead before they hit the ground. Their bodies were piled in a raft, and carried off to the Pacific, where they were burned into the ashes of nonexistence.

It was the first. It would not be the last.

One by one, each base fell. H.I.V.E. caught on quickly, of course, but nothing could prepare them for what was coming their way.

Then The Board was targeted. It started off innocuously. Milo Armitage was found dead of a presumed heart attack. The autopsy revealed nothing – not even the poison that killed him. Phaedra Nixon was next, after her personal driver lost control of the car she was in and accidentally drove them both off a cliff. Soon, they all began dropping like flies. The authorities, seeing no connection between the deaths of so many prominent businessmen and women, chalked it up to coincidental accidents. H.I.V.E., however, knew better, and sequestered their leader away into a hidden bunker in the Alps.

It wouldn’t help them. Within two months, the bunker was the only place left untouched.

Had Damien Darhk lived, he would’ve sorely wished it remained that way.

_BANG!_

Damien grimaced, and turned to face the doorway. A man stood there, a bow and arrow trained on him.

He fired.
The warlock raised a brow and smirked. He lifted his hand, and the arrow stopped in mid-flight. He could just feel the archer’s befuddlement.

“Surprised? I –” but before he could get the quip out, a flash of yellow appeared in his line of sight.

The next second, he struggled to breath as blood bubbled in his mouth. He looked downwards, and saw in horror that a knife was firmly embedded in his throat.

His eyes rolled backwards as darkness greeted him, and Damien Darhk knew no more.

Ruve Darhk scrambled about the office, trying to stuff as many essential documents as she could in her bag. As soon as Damien returned, they needed to run. They had the foresight to send Nora ahead of them, in hiding, and as a result she was spared from the wrath of whoever had been targeting H.I.V.E.

Ruve was ripped from her thoughts when one of the walls of her office exploded into debris. She was thrown back from the force, and looked up. Before she could catch sight of her attacker, a hand was wrapped around her neck.

Snap!

“It is done.” Al Sah-him stated, kneeling before his soon-to-be former master. Al Sa’iqa and Saraab were each on one side of him, mirroring him.

“The girl?” Ra’s inquired.

“Gone. Lost in the foster system. We destroyed her inheritance and killed Darhk’s lawyer and all his affiliates for good measure.” Al Sah-him replied.

“Good.”

Then, to everyone’s disbelief, the Demon’s Head smirked.

“I believe it is time to prepare for your return home, yes?”

Al Sa’iqa handed Saraab a stack of papers. She looked at him.

“Your human identities.” he clarified. She nodded, and set off towards Kal-El’s room. He was packing away his books, to be read and studied during their return to Lian Yu. Saraab set the papers down on the desk in the corner, picking up the one on the top, a brief on their backstories, and read.

She was Kara Linda Danvers. Born September 7, 1989, as the only child of Jeremiah and Eliza Danvers, humanitarians. Kal-El was Clark Calvin “Kal” Kent, her baby cousin, born June 18, 2001. His parents, Jonathan and Martha Kent, died in a fire not long after his death, burning all paper records of both his and his cousin’s existences. He was adopted by Jeremiah and Eliza Danvers, the latter of whom was his maternal aunt, and subsequently taken with them, alongside their daughter, on a missionary trip to the Philippines. Their boat capsized in a storm, and the Danvers drowned, but not before setting up their children in a life raft to safety, where they washed up on Lian Yu not long after Barry and Oliver did.

It was simple, but when it came to things like this, the best lies were simple. It would hold up under cursory scrutiny, but if anyone did any digging, they would find that the Danvers, nor the Kents, did
not exist, and that the money Kara and Kal were about to inherit came from practically nowhere. Thankfully, it didn’t have to be ironclad. Who would pay attention to them, when Oliver Queen and Barry Allen were coming back from the dead?

Satisfied, Saraab turned, and looked at Kal-El. Having finished packing, he was watching her curiously, hands idly fiddling with a knife. Silently, she handed the paper to him.

He read it, and with a quick nod, handed it back to her. “This is our story?” he asked.

She nodded back.

“So…this is it.” Nyssa asked, taking note of the surrounding forest. Before her, Al Sah-him and Saraab were overlooking their old plane shelter, cleaning it up for reuse. Kal-El was unpacking his bag beside them, taking out clothing and food. A whoosh! later, and Al Sa’iqa returned.

“Yes.” He turned to his other companions. “The perimeter is secure. I detected no one else on the island. We’re safe, for now.”

Al Sah-him grunted. “Then it’s time.” As one, they all turned towards Nyssa.

She stepped forward, and took a deep breath. “Saraab. Al Sa’iqa. Al Sah-him. In the name of Ra’s al Ghul, I release you from your vows.”

For the first time, in a long time, Kara Zor-El smiled. “Thank you for everything, Nyssa.” she said, and hugged her friend. Nyssa was startled first, unused to such affection, before tentatively returning the embrace.

Slowly, Kara released her. Barry Allen was next, and pulled Nyssa in for a hug of his own. “You ever end up in Central City, look me up, alright? I’ll take you to all the best places.” he joked when they parted.

Nyssa smiled. “I will hold you to that.”

Finally, Oliver Queen. The years had worn away at him, and at times he could be colder than even Nyssa herself. But here, he let his emotions show, and a genuine, if sad smile graced his face. He took her hands. “The same goes for me and Starling. You ever drop by, just tell me.”

Nyssa looked at him for a long moment. Then, instead of a hug, she kissed him on the cheek. The smile disappeared from his face, and Oliver let go of her hands, stunned. Nyssa payed that no heed, and this time, she initiated the embrace. “I think it is you I will miss the most.” She said. Oliver unfroze, and smiled fondly as he wrapped his arms around her.

When they let go, a blur crashed into her leg. Nyssa stumbled, just a bit.

“What about me!?” a high-pitched voice asked.

Nyssa laughed. “And you as well, Kal-El. And you as well.” she kneeled down and ruffled his hair. Her farewells bid, Nyssa departed. The family all watched silently as she disappeared from view.

“So, what now?”

It had been five days since their return to the island. A week spent preparing their shelter, refamiliarizing themselves with the terrain, and teaching Kal-El about edible food, water sources,
how to locate landmines – everything he would need to know to survive for the next six months.

It was already decided how they would spend the next six months. Just like they had when they first arrived on Lian Yu, everything would be on a rotational schedule, this time, with Kal-El as the focal point. He would spend each day a certain number of hours with each of his three caretakers. He would hunt and gather with Kara, continue his informal education with Barry, and train with Oliver. Every five days, they would relax for two days as leisure time. Whenever he was with one, the other two would either spend their time training themselves, or exploring the island.

Today was the first day of leisure, and Kal-El was bored.

Oliver, Kara, and Barry looked at each other, before turning back to him.

“We visit someone.”

The graves were still there, untouched.

The sight of Shado’s name left a pang of sadness in all their hearts. The pain of her loss was a dull ache, one they easily ignored in the League, because they had no choice. But now, with their old names, they could feel it pulsing beneath the skin.

“Do you think she would be proud of me?” Kal-El asked morosely as he and Kara fixed some flowers onto the grave. Beside them, Barry and Oliver did the same with Yao-Fei, paying their respects to their old mentor.

“She loved you, Kal-El. The fact that you’re here, all grown up, would’ve made her the happiest person on Earth.” Kara answered softly, smiling at him.

“Listen to your sister, Kal. She’s always right.” Barry stated, standing up and stretching his legs.

Oliver remained silent. He stared at Yao-Fei’s grave, then at Shado’s. Then, he reached into his bag, and took out something very familiar to Barry and Kara. It was a mask: half of it black, half of it orange.

Slade’s mask.

Barry blinked. “Where did you…” he trailed off, astonished. Kara also stood, looking woefully at the garment. Even years after the Amazo, some part of her still blamed herself for Slade’s death.

“It was sitting on the bottom of his old chest.” Oliver replied, forlornly. “He must’ve left it behind, when we went to take the ship.”

Kal-El looked at the mask curiously, and took it from Oliver’s hands. His hands wandered over the fabric, taking note of its feel. He looked back at them. “Papa?” he asked. They nodded despondently.

Back in Nanda Parbat, in the dead of night, Kal-El would often wake up, nightmares about his mama and papa, of Shado and Slade. Whenever they had the chance, his adoptive family would take him away from the home of the League of Assassins, and tell him stories about them. Of Shado’s beauty and kindness, her caring nature. Of Slade’s gruff but considerate actions. Of their strength. Of how they gave up their lives, so their makeshift family could live. Saraab would use her prodigious art skills to recreate their faces from memory, and etch them onto paper to give to Kal-El, who would spend hours committing every line to his mind, before he had to burn their visages away. Though his recollection of them was sparse, he nonetheless held them both close to his heart.
Kal-El stared at the mask again. Then, quietly, he handed it back to Oliver. He looked around until he found what he was searching for: a large stick. Quickly, he jogged to it, grabbing it from the ground. He presented it to his two eldest brothers.

It took a moment, but soon everyone realized what he was suggesting. Oliver took the stick from Kal and went to the spot beside Shado’s grave. He planted the stick into the soft ground, and placed the mask on top of it. Barry had taken the time to get some thin rope from their shelter, and used it to tie out around the bottom of Slade’s mask, keeping it in place. Kara went looking for more flowers, and returned a moment afterwards, placing them in front of the newly made memorial.

Silently, they each bowed their head in respect for their lost friend.

“Here it is.” Kara pointed at the mass of greenery. Beneath it, one could see the tell-tale signs of metal.

“This is our spaceship?” Kal-El asked dubiously.

Kara hummed her confirmation, and then got to work removing the foliage. Kal-El joined her, and soon all of it was gone. The ship was in good condition all things considered. Even ten years of being at the mercy of mother nature itself had done little to dull its sheen. Using her fist, Kara shattered open the cockpit. Neither her nor Kal-El payed any attention to the mess of glass.

Kara looked over the ship, noticing a small compartment had been jostled open by the force of her blow. Reaching in with one hand, she pulled it open, and saw it.

An activation key, bearing the crest of the House of El.

She grabbed it, and showed it to her little brother. He took it from her around, feeling the ridges.

“Do you know what it’s for?”

Kara narrowed her eyes at it. “I have a feeling. But we can’t deal with it until we get off this island.” Kal-El returned it to her, and she placed it inside her pack, before they set off again.

Months went by.

A fishing trawler appeared. They ran, and Oliver fired his bow. The mass of wood burst into flames.

The bell rang.

Thea Dearden Queen waved her friends goodbye.

“Miss Queen.” The family driver intoned behind her. She nodded at him, and entered the car.

Life was stifling for Thea Queen. She was rarely ever let outside of the house to hang out with her friends. Instead, she was required to return home everyday and study, finishing her homework. Afterwards, she was allowed a few hours of leisure, either exercising, watching TV, or reading, before she had dinner with her parents. Then it was straight to bed.

She understood why, of course. Her parents had been like that ever since the death of her older
brother. They had been far more permissive with him than they had with her, and it had led to his death, when the *Queen's Gambit* sunk off the coast of China ten years ago. Thea knew her parents blamed themselves for his death, and sought not to repeat the same mistakes with her. She sympathized, of course, but it didn’t stop her from resenting them.

The only person she didn’t resent was Ollie. Even now, ten years after his death, Thea held what sparse memories she had of him close to her heart. Ollie, despite his wild nature, had been a caring and loving brother, one who had always taken time out of his day to be with his baby sister. Thea kept a picture of them on her desk, one taken at her last birthday right before he got on that stupid boat, and made sure to speak a few words to it every night, hoping that wherever he was, he was watching over her.

Thea was shaken from her thoughts when the car made an abrupt stop. She turned and looked out the window, and saw the large ornate doors of the Queen Family mansion.

She was home.

Robert Queen looked up.

“Your wife is here, Mr. Queen.” his secretary told him.

“Send her in.” The man nodded and walked away. Robert had refused to hire anymore female secretaries, that way he wouldn’t be tempted to cheat.

This turn in his behavior had come because of his strengthened relationship with Moira. Robert had always loved his wife, but that had never stopped his wandering eye. Moira loved him enough to turn a blind eye to save face for their marriage, and that had always caused him enough guilt to tell her the truth.

The change came with the death of their son and oldest child, Oliver. Robert’s best friend (if only for appearances – in private, Robert made it clear that their relationship was unsalvageable) Malcolm Merlyn was the one responsible. Robert had disagreed with his plans for the Undertaking and planned to touch base with contacts in China in preparation for stopping it. Unfortunately, some emergency had prevented him from getting on the boat with his son.

Oliver’s death had been a wakeup call for both. Malcolm had seemed genuinely regretful about the death of his godson, but that didn’t stop him from threatening Robert and Moira with a similar fate for Thea. The Queens had tried to defy him one more time by confessing things to Robert’s other best friend, Walter Steele, only for him to die in a surprise shoot out at a restaurant alongside Queen Consolidated’s Head of Security at the time, Josiah Hudson. After that, they kept their mouths shut and played along for the sake of their only remaining child.

Robert had sympathized with Malcolm at one point. The death of Rebecca, another dear friend, had been a blow to both the Queen and Merlyn families. But the death of his son and Walter had destroyed any empathy he once had for the other billionaire. Now, the only sympathy he had was for Rebecca, for having her memory tarnished by her husband’s destructive actions, and for Tommy, for having such a monster for a father and never knowing it.

Dinah Laurel Lance (known as “Laurel”, to differentiate herself from her mother) opened the door to her apartment. It had been a long day at CNRI, and Laurel just wanted to relax for the next few hours. She dropped her bag onto the couch and then herself onto the soft cushions, leaning back into the plush. Darkness greeted her.
When Laurel awoke from her nap, it was already five p.m. She had slept on her couch for two hours. She stretched arms, hearing the telltale creak of bones snapping back into the place, and idly rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, before getting up. It was time to change out of her work clothes and make dinner.

An hour and a half later, she was back on her couch, using her remote to shift through the channels on her TV. Laurel lived a lonely life – besides the occasional night out with Joanna and the girls, and a visit to Ted Grant’s gym every two days, she was almost entirely devoted to her job at CNRI.

Of course, Laurel hadn’t intended for her life to turn out this way. On the contrary, she had expected herself to be married or in a long-term relationship by this point. Unfortunately, life never really turns out the way you expected it to.

If Laurel had to pinpoint the exact moment when her life had changed, it had to be when her childhood friend Oliver Queen had died. She had met Ollie and his best friend Tommy Merlyn at Balliol Prep – the three had clicked instantly, and that served as a foundation for what would’ve been a life-long friendship. Over the years, the boys would get into all sorts of trouble, and Laurel was always the one having to bail them out, or, if she felt like it, join in on the fun, along with her little sister, Sara.

But as the years went on, Laurel’s feelings for Oliver had begun to deepen into something more. She tried to ignore it at first, but the more time she spent with him, the stronger it got. Laurel had planned to confess to him right after he returned from his trip on the *Gambit*.

But he never came back.

The news of the *Gambit*’s sinking, and thus Oliver’s probable death, had destroyed everyone in their circle of friends. The one who took it the hardest was undoubtedly Tommy. He spent years of hard partying and drinking, trying to move past the death of his best friend, and only stopped when his father forcibly cut him off. Afterwards, he got his act together and began working at his family’s company, Merlyn Global, as an executive. Sara had also taken Ollie’s death badly, and nearly joined Tommy in his hijinks before their father had put his foot down. She cleaned herself up, and was now a traveling humanitarian.

Laurel herself was heartbroken over Oliver’s death. In her darkest moments, she sometimes wondered if she had confessed to Oliver earlier, he would’ve never gotten on that boat. Of course, she knew better now – what happened to Oliver was no one’s fault but Mother Nature herself. The loss of her would-be first love kept her out of the dating scene for a while, as she dedicated herself to her studies in law. After Oliver’s passing faded into an aching scar rather than a large, gaping wound on her heart, she had tried to move on herself, dating a few nice guys. But try as she might, the relationships never lasted. After her last relationship with a nice young man named Dick Grayson fell to pieces in a matter of months, she had decided to give up on romance for the time being and focus on her career.

Laurel may have led a lonely life, but it did not make it any less fulfilling or meaningful. She still had friends and family. She still had a job she loved, and cause worth fighting for. Anyone that would call that a bad life clearly had no idea what they were talking about.

As always, the 1st Precinct of the CCPD was bustling. Cops, Detectives, S.W.A.T. Teams, and CSIs were all running around, working new cases, opening and closing old ones, discussing patrol routes,
listing down arrests. Crime never stopped, after all.

Detective Joe West was going over some documents about his latest case, while sipping a cup of black coffee.

“Detective West.”

Joe turned his attentions away from the documents immediately at the sound of that familiar voice. Iris.

“Officer West.” he mirrored back.

She placed a stack of papers on his desk. “For the recent string of bank robberies.” she clarified immediately.

Joe sighed. “Thank you, Officer West.” She gave a short nod and walked away. Joe looked ready to say more, to try and stop her, but thought better of it and shook his head.

Officer Iris West walked out of the main station and into the lobby, continuing to peruse through the documents currently in her arms.

“Hey there Iris!” A smarmy voice rang out.

Detective Ralph Dibny slid his way to her and slung his arm around her. Iris, calmly, gently grabbed his forearm and removed it from her shoulders.

“Detective Dibny.” She greeted him stoically.

“Now, let’s not be so formal. I remember telling you to call me Ralph, didn’t I?”

“Yes.” Iris replied dully, already predicting where this was going.

Ralph grinned. “Good. Now, I was wondering…are you free tonight?”

“Detective Dibny, while I’m flattered, I would like to remind you that I am currently in a relationship and thus unavailable.”

He scoffed. “Why you would want to go out with that bore when I –“ he jabbed his thumb to his chest and gave Iris a roguish smile, “am here is beyond me. So why don’t you ditch that loser and – “

“Loser, am I?”

Ralph’s smile strained, and he turned around. “Thawne.”

Detective Eddie Thawne gave him an unimpressed look. “Dibny. Chatting up my girlfriend, are we?”

“Iris and I were just talking, you know. Catching up, like what friends do.”

“Right. Anyway, if I remember correctly, Singh was calling for you to come to his office. Something about the Dolly case.”

“The Dolly case!” the other detective’s face lit up, clearly glad for an out. “Right. I’ll get there right now.” He said and scrambled back to the main station.
“Be sure you do!” Eddie called out to him, before looking at Iris. “You alright?” he spoke in a normal, softer voice.

Iris smiled at him, genuinely this time. “I could’ve taken care of that myself.”

“I know.” he replied cheekily. Iris gave a small laugh, and lightly slapped him on the chest.

The door chimed open, and the smell of coffee wafted into the cool October breeze. Just another day at CC Jitters.

“So, how was work?” Iris West asked her boyfriend, Eddie Thawne. The day had ended and they both felt like a pick-me up was in order, so it was straight to their favorite coffee shop. They had managed to snag a table in the corner of the shop’s second floor, and were now taking the time to have a mini-date.

“Those bank robberies are still leaving us in a tizzy. Nobody has yet to catch the guy’s face, and the aftermath always looks like a tornado or storm ripped through it. It’s baffling, to be honest.” Eddie bemoaned.

Iris took a sip of her latte. “Well, you’ll catch him soon enough. You always do.”

“Ah, babe, your faith in me warms my heart.”

“Are you sure that isn’t the coffee?”

Eddie smirked. “Trust me. It’s not the coffee.”

Iris grinned back. “Oh, really?” The looked into each other eyes, and began to lean in, before a tell-tale ring! killed the tension.

Eddie made a small groan. “Must be Joe again.” At that, Iris’ expression tightened, and her smile no longer reached her eyes. Eddie, ever the observant boyfriend, noticed, and put the call on hold.

“Hey, I can take this call outside if you want.” he told her, tone considerably softer.

Iris waved him off. “No, no. I’m overdue for a refill,” she gestured to what was clearly still a full cup of coffee, “and I’ve been meaning to try their new selection of brownies, anyway. You talk to Detective West, see what he wants.” She got up from her seat and stalked her way down the stairs, back to the service counter below. Eddie watched her go with a sad expression on his face.

It was an open secret in the precinct that things were strained in the West family. Not everyone knew why, though – only the older members, those that had been around at least a decade or so. Of course, both Joe and Iris were professional enough not to let it get in the way of work, but that didn’t stop Captain Singh from making it an unofficial rule to minimize interactions between father and daughter as much as possible.

It was only by virtue of his relationship with Iris that Eddie knew the full story. Of course, it was also his relationship with Iris that made things so tense during the first couple of months of his partnership with Joe. Joe’s first partner, Fred Chyre, had died the night of the Particle Accelerator Explosion at the hands of one of the Mardon brothers, Clyde, and Eddie had been assigned to Joe in his place a few months afterwards. Around that time is when Eddie had started dating Iris.

Iris was one of the few female employees at the CCPD 1st Precinct, and the only one still unattached at the time. She was a well-regarded officer: focused, professional, smart, etc. All attractive qualities, which only added to her beauty. Every red-blooded and single young man at the CCPD had a crush
on the gorgeous Iris West, but were careful not to outwardly show it around her father, Detective Joe West, who, despite their estrangement, was extremely protective of his daughter.

Eddie was no different, and thanked his lucky stars when they were assigned to work a case together. During that time, however, he found that they clicked on a more emotional level, enough that when the case was closed, Eddie had gathered up the courage to ask her out on a date. To his relief, she accepted, and their relationship had only grown since then. They had decided to keep things quiet at first, to avoid office gossip and Joe’s wrath, but three months in Iris had decided she didn’t want to hide anymore. She hadn’t given a damn what her father thought about her for years, and she surely wasn’t going to start now.

Her boyfriend, however, had been more reluctant, and was then that he finally got the low-down. Growing up, Iris had a best friend who had lived down the street, Barry Allen. Barry was the son of a doctor and a college professor. Things had been normal for ten years, just two childhood friends growing up together, until one night, when Barry’s mother had been murdered. His father was charged and convicted of the crime. However, despite the overwhelming evidence, Barry ascertained to everyone that could hear that his father was innocent, and that “The Man in the Yellow Suit” had killed his mother that night. For this, he had been scorned and mocked by his peers.

Soon after his father was jailed, Barry was taken in by Joe and Iris as a foster member of their family. But despite now living with his closest friend, Barry was still obsessed with proving his father’s innocence, something that caused him and Joe to constantly clash. One night, three years after Nora Allen’s death, they had a huge fight over it, ending with Joe, with an errant slip of the tongue, calling Barry “crazy”. He had immediately regretted it, tried to apologize, but for Barry, that was the last straw.

Being a genius, Barry was a top student, and had gotten an offer to join an international exchange student program, to China. He was initially going to reject the offer, but after Joe’s moment of weakness, decided to accept it. Barry had confided to Iris the night before his departure that he couldn’t stand to be in Central City any longer, with all the spiteful comments and Joe’s continuous belittlement, but promised her he would return, for her and for his father.

He didn’t.

Barry’s connecting flight in Taiwan had been canceled, so he had elected to travel to China by boat instead. Unfortunately, the boat capsized, and all the occupants drowned. Barry’s body was never recovered, only his luggage.

Iris, devastated by his death, blamed Joe in a fit of anger, and refused to talk straight to him for months. For his part, Joe did not try to defend himself, guilt eating away at him. It was his words that landed Barry on that boat, that killed Barry, and he figured his daughter’s anger was his way of atonement. But while the Wests took Barry’s death hard, it was Henry Allen that took it the hardest. He was found trying to strangle himself with his bedsheets, and afterwards had been put on suicide watch for close to two years.

That, more than anything else, had convinced Iris that Barry was right, that his father was innocent. In her grief, she still knew that Barry wouldn't want his father to commit suicide, to die before he could get out of prison. She started to touch base with Henry every week, trying to give him a reason to live. At first their visits were awkward, and they only really got going when they got to talking about Barry, trying to make peace with his passing. But as the months wore on, Henry gradually started to inquire about her, and asking her about her week, the going-ons in her life. Iris had been hesitant at first, but Henry’s earnestness and persistence made it easier.

Joe hadn’t liked the fact that Iris was visiting Henry like Barry once had, but knew better than to try
and stop her. Two years after Barry’s death, however, Joe figured it was time to mend their relationship, and had begun to reach out towards her again. Iris had been angered initially, but Henry cooled her down, and pushed her to give her father a chance. Barry wouldn’t have wanted you two to be fighting over him, he said, and Iris knew he was right.

It was not meant to be.

In her senior year of high school, Iris had been assigned a heritage project for one of her elective classes. She had done some research in her family tree – and learned that her mother, who she had been told was dead, was alive. Iris didn’t want to jump the gun on this, and so, before telling Joe, had made an impromptu trip to Keystone City to meet Francine West.

Wally West opened the door.

That was the last straw. Iris stayed with Joe long enough to graduate from high school, before finally letting him have it over all the lies he told her over the years. She moved out and moved in with her mother and brother, attending Keystone University, majoring in Criminal Justice, and visiting Iron Heights once a month to see Henry. She made no contact with her father during that time. After she graduated from college, she applied for the Police Academy, and graduated top of her class, transferring to the CCPD 1st Precinct.

Joe had a heart attack when he first saw her come through the door, in uniform, with a badge in hand. He went to talk to her, only to be coldly greeted as “Detective West”, informed that she was the newly transferred “Officer West”, and then forced to watch as she walked away. Things had been icy between them ever since.

Eddie didn’t try to make his opinion known about what he felt about all this, only agreeing to make their relationship public. Certainly, he understood Iris’ anger, and had he been in her shoes, probably would’ve reacted the same way. No, what had startled Eddie was the way Iris had talked about Barry. Her voice had been laced with the kind of fondness that people usually reserved only for one person, and she didn’t even talk about Eddie the same way she did about Barry. Notably, not once had Iris ever referred to Barry in familial terms – she always called him her best friend. But every time those thoughts entered his mind, he dismissed them; he had no reason to feel so insecure.

Barry Allen was dead, had been for ten years, and he wasn’t coming back. Right now, it was him and Iris, and that wasn’t going to change anytime soon. And besides, even if Iris had feelings for Barry once, it had been ten long years. Any feelings she had then could not compare to what she had now with him.

So, Eddie and Iris had outed their relationship to the rest of the precinct, and everyone watched the fireworks. They all shamelessly listened through the door as Iris and Joe went at it for the first time in years, arguing and bickering and yelling, until Singh intervened and told everyone to get back to work. Eddie had to endure some of the silent treatment from Joe for a while, but gradually things turned back to normal. Joe and Iris remained at odds, however, and it often left Eddie in an awkward position.

Eddie liked Iris. Really liked Iris. He might even love her. But he was also Joe’s partner, and more than once, he wished they could just patch things up.
The phone rang.

“Hello?”

Chapter End Notes

Iris is a police officer because of her estrangement with Joe. Since Iris no longer listens to Joe, she follows her own heart, and accomplishes her original dream of becoming a cop. It’s also why she outed her relationship with Eddie much sooner than in canon – she doesn’t care about what Joe thinks.

As for that bit at the end, Barry and Iris do have feelings for each other, but only Barry is aware of them, and even then, he doesn’t know how far they extend these days. Iris is no longer his only rock, after all. So, it’s not quite love yet, but it’s close.

Nyssa is still a lesbian, I can assure you. Her connection with Oliver is purely emotional at this point, and not quite romantic; not yet, should I decide to go the Olyssa route and not the Lauriver route (though I am leaning towards the latter at this point). As for pairing her with Kara, no – Nyssa sees Kara as a surrogate little sister more than anything else.

Tommy got his act together sooner because Oliver was gone much earlier and for much longer. As a result, he has his father’s approval, but still thirsts for his praise. That will be important later on.

Robert is alive, and Walter is dead. And since Robert never got on that boat, there’s no reason for anyone to believe that Oliver knows something about the Undertaking, putting him even further above suspicion.

So, this is it for the prologue. Next is Arc I: Settling Down, and this one will be considerably longer to put out. I’m still in the middle of planning it, to be honest, and it’s not going to have a lot of superheroics, not yet.
Chapter Summary

Oliver and Barry are alive.

Everyone's happy, for different reasons.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 1: Welcome Home

“Hello?”

“Dad.” A masculine voice responded.

Robert Queen blinked. “I’m sorry sir, but I believe you’ve called the wrong number.”

“Dad. It’s me. It’s Oliver.” Robert’s jaw dropped, but then he closed his mouth and his face reddened in anger.

He spat out the next words bitterly. “My son is dead. He has been for ten years. Now, I don’t know what kind of joke you’re trying to play but – “

“At Thea’s third birthday party, she stubbed her big toe on one of her toys and immediately started crying. Tommy and I stripped two of the Teletubby mascots you brought in, dressed ourselves in the costumes, and started doing some silly little dances together to cheer her up. She stopped crying and started laughing, and later that night you said, ‘Good work, son, but I think you just opened me up to a lawsuit.’”

Robert’s jaw dropped for the second time in three minutes, but his astonished look disappeared as tears began to well up in his eyes.

“…Oliver?”

“Hey, Dad. It’s me. I’m not entirely sure where I am, but…I’m on a boat. And I’m coming home.”

“Moira!”

Robert Queen practically ran into the conference room, shouting his wife’s name and ignoring the multitude of executives and shareholders in the meeting with her.

“Robert?” Moira Queen asked her husband, setting down the pointer onto the large, oval table and going to speak to her husband, noticing the tears on his face. “Robert, what’s wrong?”

He started babbling as he all but shoved his phone into her hands. The only words she could make out were “It’s him, it’s really him!” Briefly ignoring her husband for the moment, Moira looked at the phone, noticing that a call was still running. Figuring that this was what her husband was talking about, she placed the phone next to her ear, and began to speak.
“I’m sorry, but my husband is completely incomprehensible right now. Could you explain to me what’s going on?”

“Mom.” Moira blinked.

“Pardon me. What did you just say?”

“Mom. It’s me.” Moira’s eyes widened.

*It's him, It's really him!*

“Oliver?” she asked, hope lacing her voice.

______________________________

“Hello?”

“Hello. I would like to speak to a Joseph West?”

Joe frowned. “That would be me. To whom am I speaking to?”

“My name is Mike Bennett. I am a member of the United States Embassy in China. It says here that you are listed as the primary emergency contact of Bartholomew Henry Allen.”

Joe closed his eyes. Barry’s death was an aching wound that he never quite healed from. But, at least he could finally bring him home, even if it was only in a casket. And Iris…well, that bridge was already burnt.

“I am. I assume you finally found his body?”

“…Not exactly.”

______________________________

“Captain, I can assure you that I am fully capable of putting any personal feelings I have for Detective Dibny aside and preventing them from affecting my work on this case.”

“I know, Officer West. It’s not you I’m –“

**SLAM!**

Joe West slammed the door open, and took a moment to catch his breath. David and Iris watched him in shock, before the former started yelling.

“Joe! What the hell? Can’t you see I’m in the middle of a meeting here?” Joe ignored his complaints, and looked to Iris, and began walking towards her.

Iris scowled at him. “Detective West, as you can tell, Captain Singh and I are in the middle of a meeting. Whatever you have to say to me, it can wait –“

“Barry is alive.”

Iris blinked. “…Could you repeat that? I must’ve misheard you.” she asked.

Joe grabbed his daughter by the shoulders, and with happy tears in his eyes, exclaimed, “Barry. Is. *Alive.*”
Henry Allen walked into Iron Heights’ visitation center, and frowned when he saw Iris sitting at the window, a week after her last visit. Iris’ visits were monthly, usually, and Henry wasn’t expecting to see her for another three weeks.

When he got closer, he was shocked to see her eyes red. Tear tracks were still her on her cheeks. Henry would’ve immediately asked her what’s wrong, had it not been for the huge, beaming smile on her lips. Iris’ smiles were rare, these days. Ever since Barry’s death, it was as if a dark cloud constantly hung over her. Things had gotten better after she had gotten together with Eddie (and Henry’s heart had a brief pang of sadness over that, knowing that it would’ve probably been Barry in Eddie’s place in another life), but even then, they were usually more reserved than this.

Henry sat down, and picked up the connector.

“‘Iris.’

“Henry. It’s Barry.” Henry’s eyebrows rose at that.

“Barry?”

Iris nodded her head vigorously, smile still plastered on her face. “Dad got the call today.” And it was a testament to how elated Iris was that she didn’t even realize she called Joe ‘Dad’. “Barry’s alive, Henry.”

Henry’s heart stopped.

*Barry’s alive, Henry.*

“…What?” He asked, failing to keep the yearning out of his voice.

Iris placed her hand against the glass pane, and Henry unconsciously mirrored her, placing his palm against hers.

“They found him on an island in the North China Sea. Barry’s alive, Henry. He’s coming home.”

Henry couldn’t help it. He dropped the connector and began to sob with joy.

Malcolm Merlyn nodded his head, muttering a “Thank you.” and ended the call. Then, he turned his chair around to stair out the view of the city behind him, lacing his fingers together and adopted a thinking pose.

Oliver was alive.

Malcolm felt relief. One of his greatest regrets, after Rebecca’s death, was Oliver. Malcolm had no intention of killing the oldest Queen scion that day, only Robert. He could still remember how his heart stopped when he saw Robert and Moira at a party later that night, and inquiring why they were there. Robert had told him that he had to miss out on the trip to China due to business, but Oliver had gone on ahead, wanting an adventure. After that, guilt crept up on him.

Oliver was an innocent, an unfortunate casualty of his father’s foolishness. Malcolm had prayed for Oliver after the party was over, for his soul, for his safe passage into the afterlife, and hoped that wherever he was, he would understand what Malcolm was trying to do. At least, Oliver’s death was not in vain – though it broke his heart to do so, he had threatened a similar fate with Thea, and with that, secured the loyalty of the Queens permanently. The Undertaking would continue.
But now, Oliver was coming home.

For some reason, Malcolm felt unease at that, and he didn’t know why. There was no reason to believe Oliver was a threat. Prior to that fateful boating trip, Oliver Queen had been a wild child, someone who got into more trouble than it was worth. He was charming, though, and kind at heart. He had a good head on his shoulders, even though he didn’t use it as often as he should have. Malcolm had loved his godson, almost as much as he loved Tommy, and his death had scarred not only him, but his son as well.

After the death of his best friend, Tommy fell apart. He fell into the wrong crowd, and it seemed every week Malcolm had to bail him out. He was expelled from nearly ever college his father forced him to attend. Eventually, after finding narcotics in one of his bedroom drawers, Malcolm put his foot down and cut Tommy off. Thankfully, that seemed enough of a wake-up call. After a few months of bummimg off friends, Tommy swallowed his pride and asked his father for a job, and began to clean himself up.

Malcolm knew Tommy would be overjoyed to have his best friend back, and he knew he should feel the same. No one who knew anything about the Undertaking was on the Gambit, after all, and there was no reason to believe that Oliver would figure out that the boat’s sinking was anything more than a natural disaster, a freak accident, a quirk of fate.

Oliver Queen’s return should’ve been a blessing.

But for whatever reason, Malcolm could only see it as an omen.

“Harrison Wells” smiled at the screen, showing an elated Joe West proclaiming to his daughter that his foster son was alive.

“So, you’ve finally entered the game, Barry.”

When he had killed Nora Allen thirteen years ago, Eobard Thawne had never expected his actions would have such far-reaching consequences. He knew that there were going to be big changes, of course. But not as big as Barry Allen completely disappearing off the map for ten years.

Eobard Thawne had remembered the near heart attack he had when he had learned Barry was missing, presumed dead, after the boat he was sailing on capsized during a massive storm. He had thought that cancelling his connecting flight to China would’ve been enough to convince him to turn back to Central City, but apparently not. It had taken every bit of his self-control not to speed his way to the West house and kill Joe West where he stood.

Instead, Eobard had gotten his emotions under control, and checked the Central City Citizen article that Gideon had stored. Barry still became the Flash, it seemed, and he still disappeared on April 25, 2024. The byline still read ‘Iris West-Allen’. That was the only thing calmed him down. It seemed Barry would return, and he would still be the Flash. He would marry Iris. The future was still intact.

But as the years went on and no news of Barry came, Eobard had started to get worried. He checked the article again, and saw that while Barry was still the Flash and had disappeared, the byline had changed. No ‘Iris West-Allen’ was present. Instead, it now read ‘Julie Greer’.

During the interim between then and the last time he checked the Citizen, Eobard had neglected to keep vigilance over the Wests. After Joe’s actions, it was hard for Eobard to look at him without wanting to kill him then and there for jeopardizing his return to the future. Now, Eobard regretted being so lax.
It seemed Iris West had disowned her father and now resided in Keystone City with her mother Francine, and her brother Wally, aka the future Kid Flash. She was attending Keystone University, majoring in Criminal Justice with plans to join the police force. According to Gideon, she still became ‘Iris West-Allen’, so there was that at least.

No matter. When Barry returned, and he would, the timeline would be corrected once Eobard convinced him to go save his mother.

When it was time to turn on the Particle Accelerator, he briefly panicked. By that point, Barry had still not returned to Central City. But the Citizen was still an article on the Flash, and Eobard knew that time didn’t lie. Wherever he was, Barry gained his powers, and he would come home soon enough. And sure enough, one year after the Particle Accelerator exploded, a call from the U.S. Embassy in China confirmed it.

Barry Allen was coming home.

Briefly, Eobard Thawne wondered what took him so long, but then decided that didn’t matter either.

Barry Allen was coming home, and soon, so was Eobard Thawne.

They had gotten a private plane back to the U.S. One of the benefits of being a billionaire’s son.

“So, we all remember the plan, correct?” Oliver asked, idly sipping a glass of water.

Barry rolled his eyes. “We meet up with our families at Starling General. I will stay with you and your family for a week before going back to Central City with Joe and Iris. Kara and Kal will stay with your family until they find a place of their own. Kal will attend Balliol Prep. We establish ourselves with our families for the next month or so and then we meet up again, so we can start investigating. Is that enough for you, mom?” He rolled out in a dull tone, handing shifting through a large bag of chips.

Oliver slapped him upside the head. “No need to be sassy about it.” He chided him as Barry rubbed the sore spot on his cranium.

Kara smirked from where she was sitting with Kal. They had managed to grab a pack of cards from the Embassy and were now playing an old Kryptonian card game on the table between them. “Play nice, you two.” she jokingly scolded them both.

Kal-El nodded in agreement. “Yeah! Stop being such a worry wart, Ollie, this isn’t our first rodeo, you know!” he said as he slapped down a card, causing Kara to curse when she saw what it was.

Oliver sighed. “I know, I know. It’s just…It’ll be hard, seeing them again.” he responded, giving a look to Barry, whose own expression turned morose.

“Yeah. I imagine a lot of them have moved on.” Barry commiserated, thinking of Iris.

Kara nodded understandingly. “Well, at least you two have family to help you acclimate. Me and Kal are basically starting brand new lives.” She shuddered.

Oliver gave a small laugh. “Well, I’ll still be around if you need help, and I’m sure my parents would be willing to pull some strings if I asked.” then, he continued in a comforting tone. “Don’t worry, Kara. We won’t leave you out to drown in the deep end, I promise.” Barry nodded his head in agreement.
Silence fell when a buzz was heard, indicating the PA had been turned on.

“Mr. Queen. Mr. Allen. Mr. Kent. Miss Danvers. Please fasten your seatbelts. We are now preparing for landing. And…welcome home.”

Chapter End Notes

Everyone’s home now! Yay!

Eobard doesn’t know much about the League. He’s heard whispers, of course, but even in his time, the League keeps themselves to ground. As for why Gideon didn’t inform him what happened to Barry, well…you’ll see. Not for a long time, but you’ll see.
In which everyone meets everyone.

(It's not all smooth sailing, unfortunately)

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 2: Reacquaintance

The day after they got the call, Iris and Joe hopped onto the first train to Starling City, with enough luggage for a week.

Apparently, Barry had been found on the same island as Oliver Queen, whose own rescue had broken news on every local channel on the coast. They had survived there together for ten years, and understandably had gotten extremely close. At Oliver’s insistence, Barry was being treated at Starling General alongside him by the same doctor. They had refused to separate.

Joe and Iris, far too thankful to have Barry back, had agreed to go to Starling in lieu of having Barry transfer to a hospital in Central City. Instead, they had packed their bags and booked a room at an affordable hotel, after Singh had granted them leave to tend to Barry. Once they got to Starling, they checked in and dropped their bags off, before calling a taxi to take them to Starling General. They were both shaking when got there, knowing they were about to see Barry Allen, for the first time in ten years.

When they arrived, the receptionist gestured to an elevator and told them, “Eleventh Floor. It’s a private suite.”

Iris and Joe blinked, before nodding their thanks. Soon, they were on the eleventh floor, and were greeted to the sight of a middle-aged white couple, conversing with a doctor of Asian descent. The three noticed them and beckoned father and daughter over.

A gray-haired man held out his hand. “You must Joe and Iris West. Barry’s foster family.”

Joe took it and gave a firm shake. “We are. And you must be the Queens.”

The woman beside him spoke. “I am Moira, and this is my husband Robert. We’re Oliver’s parents. And this,” she placed her hand on the doctor’s shoulder, “is our family’s personal physician, Dr. Lamb. He treated both Barry and Oliver.” Joe and Iris gave their greetings, and then everyone looked expectantly at the doctor.

He sighed. “I’ll be blunt – both Oliver and Barry did not come home unscathed. Oliver has a significant percentage of scar tissue on his body, and several fractures and breakages that never healed correctly. Barry is the same: scar tissue, fractures, and breakages. Both are mildly malnourished, though a regular diet will change that soon enough.” Dr. Lamb surveyed both the Wests and the Queens with a sympathetic gaze. “I caution all of you: the loved ones you lost, might
not be the ones they found.” He warned.

It was decided that they would all enter the suite one by one, as to not overwhelm the two former castaways. Moira was the first to go in.

She opened the door and hesitantly walked in. On the bed, there was an unfamiliar, dark-haired young man, who briefly looked up at her, watching her curiously. This must be Barry.

And at the window –

Moira Queen lost her son when he was sixteen years old. The man standing at the window could not be him. He was taller, more muscular. His facial features were more defined. A stronger jaw. A little bit more facial hair. His hair was much shorter. His skin darker. And his eyes…it felt like his eyes were staring into her soul. They were so much older.

Then he smiles at her, popping dimples, and then he says, “Mom.” and Moira knew.

Moira Queen felt tears well up in her eyes once again as she embraced her long-lost son. “My beautiful boy.”

Iris opened the door next, and with her first step, she saw him.

When Iris West was fourteen years old, she lost her best friend, her closest confidant, and one of the two most important people in her life. And now…

Barry was…different, which was only to be expected. He was taller now – much taller than her, maybe even taller than Joe. His limbs were longer. His hair was shorn, no longer lightly slicked back. His face had lost a lot of the baby fat, though he still looked very young. His body had filled out, and while he wasn’t too muscular, it was clear he was no longer the gangly teenage boy who used to babble to her about the impossible. Under different circumstances, Iris would’ve called him handsome, and maybe try to hook him up with one of her friends.

But all she could think was: Barry.

His expression was wearier, far more guarded than it used to be. But he was smiling at her, his familiar grin stretching across his face, and Iris felt her heart skip a beat.

Barry stood, and went to her, until they were face-to-face. He spread his arms out, and said, with a hint of softness, “I promised you, didn’t I?” he joked.

Iris felt her eyes turn to glass again, and she gave a choked laugh as she wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her face into his chest. “Took you long enough, Barry.”

An overjoyed Robert and Joe soon followed. Once all the greetings were exchanged, Barry and Oliver looked towards a connecting door in the suite, which began to open.

A young woman, about as old as Barry, appeared through the doorway, wearing a simple t-shirt and a pair of jogging pants. She had long, blonde hair and bright blue eyes, a slim figure, and a modest bust. Peeking out behind her legs was a young boy, no older than twelve, with black hair and similar eyes.

Everyone blinked.
Moira was the one to bite. “And you are?”

The girl smiled softly at her. “I’m Kara Danvers. This is my cousin, Clark Kent. We were stranded on the island alongside Oliver and Barry.”

At Oliver’s request, everyone had been invited to stay at the mansion. For Barry and the Wests, it was only for the week, until the returned to Central City. For Kara and Clark…undetermined, much to the Queens’ befuddlement. The Wests took a taxi back to their hotel to pick up their luggage and cancel their reservation. Barry, however, had gone on ahead with Oliver, Kara, Clark, and the Queens to the latter’s mansion.

When they arrived, the driver started to unload the luggage while another servant went to help him. Robert knocked once, and the large ornate doors open to reveal the foyer. Oliver studied his old home, taking note of any changes, and catching sight of the pictures on the table in the front. Barry, Kara, and Clark did the same for a moment, before watching him. Suddenly, Oliver looked up, and saw a familiar face standing towards the back near the staircase.

He smiled as he made way towards the figure. “It’s good to see you, Raisa.”

The Russian maid beamed at him. “Mr. Oliver. Welcome home.”

A door slammed open, and Oliver looked up at the staircase. He strode to the bottom, and felt his breath catch. He had expected to see a seven year old, and saw a teenager instead.

It had been ten years. He had lost so much time with her.

Thea Queen bounded down the stars, and threw herself around his waist. Oliver reached down, and hugged her close.

“I knew it! I knew you were alive!”

Oliver smiled. “You were with me the whole time.”

After a long embrace, Oliver had introduced Thea to his companions, and had suggested she take Clark on an adventure around the mansion. Thea, despite wanting to spend more time with her brother, had noticed the shy boy’s demeanor, and agreed. Barry and Kara had already dropped what little personal items they had in their own rooms, and now all three were standing in Oliver’s old room.

“She wasn’t lying. This place hasn’t changed a bit.” Oliver remarked, taking note of the small bit of dust layering his old mirror.

Kara hummed in agreement. Barry gazed around the room, and smirked. “Well, at least you don’t have to worry about having to get a new bed.” he drily remarked, gesturing to the large, California King-sized divan.

They both laughed at that.

The door opened.

“Mr. West. Miss West. Welcome. Your rooms are already prepared.” Robert nodded to them, and then to Raisa. “She will take you to them.”
Joe bobbed his head, and he and Iris followed Raisa up the stairs. Robert watched them for a moment, and turned back to the doors, and froze.

“Hello, Robert. Sorry for dropping by so unexpectedly. When Tommy and I heard the news, we cancelled all our appointments and drove here as fast as we could.” Malcolm Merlyn smiled at him, his son waving at his godfather beside him.

Robert shook his head robotically. “No…no trouble at all, Malcolm. I assume you and Tommy will be staying for dinner?”

Malcolm smirked and smoothly replied. “Of course.”

Oliver greeted the Merlys enthusiastically, seemingly oblivious to the tension between his godfather and his parents, and happily introduced Tommy to his new companions. Soon, it was dinner time, and everyone was seated. At one end of the table was Oliver, with Tommy, Joe, Barry, and Iris on one side, and Thea, Kal, Kara, and Malcolm on the other. His father sat at the other end, and his mother was to the side, next to Iris.

Dinner had started out quietly at first, though Tommy, still a troublemaker at heart, tried rouse up some conversation by talking (read: flirting) with Kara.

“So, you were stuck on an island for ten years with this bozo.” The Merlyn scion jabbed his thumb towards his newly-returned best friend. “I imagine you had to keep him from doing a lot of stupid things.” Tommy chuckled.

The Kryptonian smiled tightly at him. “Oliver and Barry saved mine and Kal’s life. We owe everything to them.” She hedged tensely.

After that, tension settled on the room, as everyone stopped eating. Barry and the Wests kept quiet, shifting uncomfortably. Oliver looked down towards his food. Robert and Moira stared at Kara, while Malcolm glared at his son. And Thea –

“Kal?” she asked skeptically.

“It’s my nickname!” The aforementioned child piped up. “My full name is Clark Calvin Kent!” he spoke, and shied away when everyone’s attention turned towards him.

Iris, relieved as the tension dissolved, grinned at him. “I like it.” Kal blushed.

Just then, Raisa tripped over a floorboard and nearly spilled a fruit bowl. Oliver quickly caught her and it, almost instinctively. Malcolm’s eyes sharpened at that.

Quick reflexes.

“My apologies, Mr. Oliver.” the maid bowed.

“Think nothing of it, Raisa.” Oliver waved her off.

Dinner continued with idle chatter, until dessert arrived, and Robert asked the magical question.

“So, what do you four plan to do now that you’re back?”

At that, the four survivors froze. Barry was the first to recover. “Well, once I’m revived, I’m planning on going back to Central City with Joe and Iris. I’ll study for my GED, and after that, I’m thinking of going to the local college.” he explained.
Kara followed him up. “Kal and I are staying here in Starling City. There’s nothing for us left in Kansas. If it’s alright with you, Mr. and Mrs. Queen, would like to stay here until we can find a place of our own. It shouldn’t take too long – our parents left us a hefty inheritance.” She turned towards the Queens apologetically, who waved her off, stating it was no problem at all and that they could stay if they need to. Anything for a friend of Oliver’s, especially one who stuck by him for the ten years he was gone. “I’ll probably study for my GED as well, and then get a job.”

“As for me,” Oliver said, after taking a big gulp of water. “I will also be aiming for my GED, though after that, I don’t know. I want to reconnect with everybody first before making any big plans.”

Malcolm made eye contact at him, and ignored the way his stomach curled. “Not planning to be a layabout, are you, Oliver?”

“No, no Uncle Malcolm. It’s just…” Oliver hesitated for a moment, and then continued, “I lost ten years of my life with all of you. I don’t want to miss anymore.”

The week passed. They all came back from the dead.

And Barry was heading home.

“Don’t be a stranger, alright?” Oliver told him after their embrace ended. Beside him were Kara and Kal, who had already said their own goodbyes.

Barry smiled. “Never.”

On the train ride back to Central City, Barry and Iris had managed to snag a compartment of their own. Joe was in another, fast asleep. Iris was reading a book on one side. Barry had been reading one himself, for a bit, but had now set it down, looking at his best friend thoughtfully.

“So, did something happen between you two?”

Iris looked up from the pages, and sighed. She closed the book and set it down in her lap. “You noticed, huh?”

“I’m not blind, Iris.” Barry replied lazily. “What happened? Is it because of me?” he stated the last part sadly.

Iris almost shook her head, but thought better of it. “It started because of you,” she admitted, “but if it had just been you, we would’ve eventually moved past it.” She took another deep breath, and continued her story.

“There’s no easy way to tell you this, but you need to know. Barry, when your dad found out about what happened to you, he tried to commit suicide.” Barry’s expression became pained at that. “He was stopped before he could succeed,” she reassured him, “but he was placed on suicide watch for a while. As for me, I was on the outs with Joe. I blamed him – it was because of him that you tried to run to China. Your dad’s suicide attempt is what convinced me that you were right about him, that he was innocent and…Barry, I knew you wouldn’t be happy if he died before he could get out. So, I started visiting him, trying to give him a reason to live again. We bonded.”
“Two years after you...disappeared, Joe decided enough was enough and tried to bridge the gap between us. I didn’t want to, but Henry convinced me to. He said that you wouldn’t want us to be fighting over you.”

“And he was right.” Barry interjected.

“He was.” Iris confirmed. “So, we tried. And we might’ve succeeded, had it not been for a project at school.”

Barry’s eyebrows raised quizzically at that. “A school project.”

“A school project. Barry...my mom is alive.” Barry’s eyes widened. “And when I went to see her...my little brother opened the door.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.” Iris laughed bitterly. “After that, I stayed long enough to graduate, and moved out to Keystone. Majored in Criminal Justice, and then entered the Police Academy.”

“You’re a cop?” Barry asked in wonder.

“Yup,” Iris responded, popping the ‘p’ and flipping open her wallet to show her badge. “Top of my class. Got transferred to the same precinct as Joe soon afterwards.”

Barry frowned. “Then why haven’t you transferred out?”

Iris blinked. “What?”

“Iris, if things are really that bad between you and him, why haven’t you transferred to another precinct? I’m sure whoever’s in charge would understand what’s going on between you two and push in the paperwork, if only to cut down the tension in the station.”

“Central City is my home, Barry. And...” Iris looked away. “I guess I wanted to prove myself to him. Prove that he isn’t allowed to control my life.”

Barry was the one to sigh this time. “Iris, you don’t need to prove anything to anyone but yourself.” Iris opened her mouth to speak, but Barry stopped her. “Now, I’m not going to try and convince you to make up with Joe. Whatever is going on there is between you two, and if you want to stay mad at him, that’s your choice. I just hope this doesn’t change anything between us, because I’m going to stay at his place for a while. Not for long – just until I can get back on my feet.”

Iris shook her head. “I understand, Barry, and I don’t mind. It’ll just be a little weird, being in that house again after so long.”

Barry looked at her, really looked at her, and nodded his head. “I know how you feel.” Iris sat up a bit at that. He would know, wouldn’t he? After all, it had been even longer for him.

“So, anything else I need to know?”

Iris smiled, genuinely this time. “Well, I have a boyfriend. His name’s Eddie, and he works at the same precinct as us. He’s Joe’s partner.” At Barry’s pointed look, she playfully swatted at him. “I’m not dating him to get back at Joe, Barry. I really like this guy. I think he might be the one.” She exhaled blissfully at that.

Barry smiled back at her, though there was a hint of sadness to it, not that Iris seemed to notice. “I’m
happy for you. And I can’t wait to meet him.”

Chapter End Notes

The feels. Part I will be more feels, until we get to the action towards the end.

As for the Barry/Iris thing - Barry was not in a coma for nine months and then found out the love of his life had started a relationship with another man in this story. He was gone for ten years, one on an island, the rest with the League. Not only did he expect Iris to move on with her life, he wanted her to. The last thing that he would want is to be the one holding her back from being happy.
Arc I (PART I), Chapter 3: Old Faces

Chapter Summary

It's time to reconnect.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 3: Old Faces

Laurel Lance flipped through the number of letters and documents in her hands. She was prepping for a class action suit against Starling City scumbag #247, Adam Hunt, and she needed her case to be ironclad. Hunt had filed for a change of venue and had gotten it – in front of Judge Grell, whose reelection campaign he had financed.

She was about to call out to her friend and coworker Joanna to help her when she caught sight of a familiar face, and stopped in her tracks. It took all her self-control not to cry – she imagined he had already seen enough tears.

“Hey.” she smiled.

“Hey.” Oliver smiled back.

The Palm was a high-end restaurant for Starling City’s elite. Billionaires, millionaires, lawyers, judges – the very top (or bottom, some of the nastier whispers said) of society dined and mingled there, sometimes for pleasure, usually for business.

Today however, The Palm was playing host to a pair of old friends who wanted to catch up after being (involuntarily) separated for ten years.

“Lawyer, huh?”

Laurel took a big gulp of her wine and hummed. “For the City’s Necessary Resource Initiative, or CNRI, as we’re usually called. We’re a law firm that provides its services to the city’s underprivileged, those that typically can’t afford a decent lawyer.”

Oliver smirked as he took another bite of his steak. “Laurel Lance. Always trying to save the world.”

Laurel shrugged. “Hey, if I don’t, who will?” she didn’t notice Oliver slightly stiffen at that. “And besides, I’m not the only Lance sister trying to save the world.”

Oliver looked surprised. “Sara?” he asked dubiously.

Laurel smiled fondly at him. “Our little Sare-Bear grew up, Ollie. She’s a traveling humanitarian these days. Goes around third world countries and gives them whatever aid she can.”

“Wow.” Oliver leaned back in his chair. “Your parents must be proud of you both.” he commented.

“Very.” the lawyer muttered softly. “Though I imagine seeing Tommy as a responsible adult is what
surprised you the most.” she jabbed back, though the grin on her face betrayed her mirth.

The billionaire shuddered. “You have no idea. He has job now. A job!” he complained. Laurel giggled.

Once lunch was done, Laurel was about to hop into her car. She had a case put together, after all. But before she left, she gave her friend a large hug.

“It’s good to see you, Ollie.” she said once they separated. “Next time, we’ll visit the precinct. I’m sure dad will be happy to see you.”

Oliver chuckled. “Your dad will slap me on the back, shake my hand, and then warn me to stay out of trouble.” Oliver gave a wistful sigh. “It’ll be good to see him too.”

“Hey.” he looked at her. “Whenever you want to go out again, just give me a call, alright? It’s been far too long, Ollie, and the last thing I want is to spend another ten years without speaking to you again.” Then, to Oliver’s astonishment, she kissed him on the cheek, before getting back into her car. Oliver lightly rubbed the spot where her lips met, and waved goodbye as she drove away.

It hadn’t changed a bit.

Barry remembered the first time he had to come to live in this house. The next day, he had tried to run away.

He had resented this place at first, before he realized that his situation wasn’t going to change anytime soon, if at all. After that, the West house had become a reluctant home, not all that different from Lian Yu – just with less near-death experiences. The only bright spot had been Iris, and how he got to spend almost every moment, every single day, with her.

Now, Barry’s thoughts about this place had shifted. After being forced to live on a death trap of an island for a year and then having to live in *Nanda Parbat*, with its lack of luxuries and single-minded devotion to training, training, and more training, Barry was far more appreciative of the West house, with all its basic amenities and quirks. He felt almost relieved to see that things hadn’t changed all that much, even though they were unrecognizable in a way.

“Not all that different from the last time I was here.” Iris muttered beside him. Barry nodded.

Joe popped out of the staircase. “Come on you two! Let’s drop off Barry’s stuff and then we can go out to eat and shop for some of Barry's new clothes.”

Barry found his room virtually untouched as well. His anime posters were still on the wall. Old notebooks were scattered about. Some of his old tools. Pencils. Pens. Trading Cards. He might’ve even seen a toy or two. Never before had Barry felt so out of place, not even in the League.

This was a child’s room. And Barry hadn’t been a child in a long, long time.

But before he could lament how much he had changed, something else found his attention. A familiar picture on the nightstand. Silently, fully aware that Iris and Joe were watching him from the door sill, he walked towards it, and picked it up. He idly caressed the still image of his mother and father, and himself, all of ten years old.
Sharply, he turned his head towards his foster family.

“Before we go out…could we go somewhere else first?”

Henry Allen ambled into the visitation center. He had been getting a lot of visits this month. He made his way to his usual spot, but before he could sit down, he froze.

There was a man sitting there.

He was a young man. Handsome. He had dark hair, and while his face was “babyish”, it was sharp and angled. And his eyes…those were Nora’s eyes.

Quietly, slowly, he sat down, never taking his gaze off the young man who sat in Iris’ usual spot. He picked up the connector.

“…Barry?”

“Hey, Dad.”

Henry couldn’t help it. For the second time in a month, he cried tears of joy.

“You weren’t alone?”

“No, Dad. I wasn’t even the first person to wash up on the island. That was Oliver. Then it was me, and then it was Kara and Kal. We were all young, and we all knew that if we tried to go at it alone, we would die. So, we stuck by each other, for ten years, waiting for the day we could finally go home.”

Henry beamed. “I’m glad.” Barry looked at him. “I’m glad that even while you were still in that hell…you managed to find friends. That you had that one bit of happiness.”

Barry grinned at him. “I am too. I’ll be sure to introduce you to them when you got out of here.”

Henry’s expression changed, becoming somber. “Barry…”

Barry held up his hand, stopping him. Then he pushed his hand forward, allowing his palm to rest against the cool, clear crystal. Henry, confused, mirrored him, and like he had with Iris weeks before, placed his hand against his son’s, wishing, not for the first time, that the barrier was no longer present.

“Don’t ask me to give it up, Dad.” Barry seethed. “Don’t. One of the only things that kept me going those ten years, was the fact that I needed to get you out of the place, because I knew no one else would try. I know what you’re going to say – that I’ve already lost ten years of my life. And I have. And that’s why I can’t give this up. It’s my life, Dad, and this is my choice. And I won’t stop until I can find a way to get you out.”

Hearing the conviction in his son’s voice, Henry finally conceded. “Very well. Just promise me something, Barry.” Barry looked hard at him, and slowly nodded his assent.

“Promise me you won’t stop living. Promise you won’t let this consume your life. You’ve lost ten years, Barry: ten years of doing all the things you wanted to do, all the people who could’ve been a part of your life. I don’t want you to lose anymore.”

The former castaway sighed. “I won’t, Dad. I won’t.”
Since this was a special occasion, the guards allowed Henry to hug Barry goodbye. For the first time in a long time, Henry and Barry Allen embraced.

Moira Queen listened to the hustle and bustle of the city as her pen scratched onto the paper. Right now, she would love nothing more to be with her son and the rest of their family, but work was work and if Moira ignored it would just pile up.

“Mrs. Queen? Your 2:00 appointment is here.”

“Send them in.” She called out to her secretary. Also male – last thing she needed was for Robert to be tempted again.

“Mrs. Queen.” Moira looked up. Kara.

Kara Danvers had become a fixture at the Queen Mansion for the last week, and was poised to do so for the foreseeable future; both her and her baby cousin/adoptive brother, Clark, or “Kal” as he liked to be called. Moira didn’t know what to think about the younger woman. On one hand, she had been Oliver’s companion for the last ten years, and clearly had no intentions of pursuing their relationship any further than surrogate brother/sister. She was also very mature for her age, almost as composed and controlled as the Queen matriarch herself. Moira imagined that had to do with being forced to raise a baby while stranded on an island for the last ten years, and had to admire the former castaway for her strength of character. It also helped that Kara was barely twenty-two years old, almost jailbait age, and certainly not a tempting target for Robert these days. After Isabel Rochev, Robert knew better than to try for the impressionable young ones.

On the other hand, Kara, and by extension, Clark, were strange. Kara certainly blended well in normal society, but more than once Moira caught her staring at something mundane, almost as if it were foreign to her. Normally she would chalk that up to the island, but that didn’t feel right. It wasn’t just unfamiliarity – it was almost as if Kara genuinely had no idea what it was. And when she was staring at something like signs or nail cutters like that, well, forgive Moira for being a little suspicious.

But she was Oliver’s friend, her and Clark, so Moira gave her the benefit of the doubt. Moira had faith in her son, knowing in her heart that ten years hadn’t changed who he was at his core, and that was a good person. He wouldn’t bring anyone untoward into their home.

“Kara. I assume this isn’t something that can be discussed back at the mansion.”

Kara nodded. “Yes. I’m planning to enroll Clark into Balliol Prep.”

Moira leaned back in her chair at that. Yes, that would be something that couldn’t be discussed at the mansion. Balliol Prep was hard to get into for anyone who wasn’t the one percent of the one percent like the Queens and Merlyns were. The only reason the Lances had managed to enroll their children there despite being a middle-class family was because Dinah Lance was one of the professors at Balliol’s college. Laurel and Sara managed to get scholarships, though both Dinah and Quentin had to work extra hours to pay for extra fees.

Kara had inherited a large amount of money, enough for her and Clark to live comfortably off of for the rest of their lives. She would easily be able to afford the tuition. But if it were just tuition that was needed to get into Balliol, she wouldn’t be here. No, for Clark to attend Balliol, his family needed to
prove that they were suitably connected enough to provide for the academy.

Balliol was a top institution for many reasons, but the first and foremost was its network of alumni and their associated families. Alumni that were found in every top college in the country, and had gone on to do great things in their life. Graduating from Balliol Prep almost guaranteed success – look no further than the Lance sisters. One was a successful lawyer for CNRI (and Moira had no doubt that if Laurel ever joined the DA’s office, which was likely to happen within the next five years, she’d eventually become the DA herself), and the other was a high-in-demand humanitarian, at twenty-six and twenty-four respectively. Nothing to scoff at.

It would make sense Kara would want to enroll Clark there, and it would make sense she would try to take advantage of what connections she now had to get him there. After ten years of being stranded on an island in the middle of nowhere, she would want her baby cousin to have the best in life, no matter what it took.

Moira was appreciative of such efforts, because, in a way, she had done the exact same thing. Moira Queen had been born Moira Dearden, and had clawed her way out of the Glades to get to where she was. It was long, hard slog, one she wouldn’t wish on anyone, and the day she found out she could send her children to Balliol Prep just by her last name alone had been one of the happiest of her life.

So yes, she would help Kara get Clark into Balliol Prep. It would take a couple of phone calls and a few donations, but Clark would be attending by the start of next week if she had her way.

But before that, she had a few questions for Kara. Ones that had been nagging her ever since her firstborn had come home.

“I’ll help you, but on one condition.” Kara adopted a questioning look. “Please sit, Kara.”

Kara sat down, watching the older woman curiously.

Moira decided there was no point beating around the bush any longer. “What is your relationship with my son?”

Kara blinked. “Mrs. Queen, let me assure you that I have no romantic inclinations towards your son.” she shuddered. “Actually, the thought of that repulses me. It would be like dating my brother, or Kal.”

Moira gave a light laugh and shook her head, “As relieving as that is, that’s not what I meant.” Her tone lowered. “At dinner that night, you said Oliver saved your life.”

Kara stiffened at that. Moira, realizing she was being a tad insensitive, sat up and immediately started to back track. “Now, Kara, I realize things on the island must’ve been hard for all of you, so if you want me to stop –“

The Kryptonian shook her head and gathered up her courage. “No.” she stated firmly. “I’ll tell you.” She took a deep breath.

“When Kal and I first arrived on Lian Yu, I had no idea where we were. I was alone and frightened, and realized that the baby in my arms was my responsibility. My parents weren’t coming back, and neither were Kal’s. I was twelve years old and completely on my own. I almost wanted to give up then and there, and the only thing keeping me from doing so was Kal.”

“Then Oliver and Barry appeared. They had gotten out of a bad situation a few days ago and were worse for wear. But that didn’t stop them from trying to help me. They got me to calm down, and then, when things got…dicey, they got me and Kal out of danger. That was just the first of many
times they saved my life.” Kara’s eyes got a little misty, something that Moira didn’t miss.

“Your son was our leader. Not because he was the oldest, or the biggest. No, it was because, in a way, he was the strongest. Whenever one of us was on the verge of giving up, he picked us up and he forced us to go forward. He never faltered, not even once. He told us that it was his job to protect us, and he would never forgive himself if something happened to us under his watch. If he couldn’t get us home.”

Kara exhaled, and she began to choke a little, but pushed it down. “I wasn’t lying...when I said we owed everything to your son – and to Barry – Mrs. Queen. Barry was the one who took care of us. Who patched up our wounds, and cheered us up. Oliver, however? He was our rock. We leaned on him whenever things got rough. If it hadn’t been for him...if it hadn’t been for him, Kal and I wouldn’t be here today.”

For a moment, Moira could say nothing. She stared at Kara, shocked at what she’d heard.

When she saw her son for the first time in ten years, she had a hard time reconciling him with the boy who had left on the Queen’s Gambit a decade ago. Oliver had become a man, that much was obvious. But she had never imagined something like this.

Oliver had not just become a man. He had become a man. The type of man that would go on to do great things with his life. The man she, and Robert, and Laurel, and everyone else in their circle knew he could be.

The Queen matriarch sighed, and leaned back into her chair. Then, almost conversationally, she said, “I was planning on asking Oliver to take on a leadership position in the company.”

Kara rubbed the tears out of her eyes. “He’ll do it, to make you happy, and do it well. But...”

“But he wouldn’t be happy himself.” Moira finished for her. She would deny it, but it was true. Oliver wasn’t ready for something like that yet, and the last thing she wanted to do was alienate her son when she had just gotten him back.

“If I could be frank with you, Mrs. Queen?” At Moira’s assent, Kara continued. “Oliver lost ten years of his life. When he came back home, he saw that his seven-year old baby sister was almost an adult, that his irresponsible best friend was now an executive at his father’s company, and that his other closest friend had already moved on with her adult life, with a job and everything. He doesn’t want to miss out on anymore. Before he can take on any major responsibility, he needs to figure out where he fits in everyone’s lives first, and how they all fit into his.”

Moira nodded. “Thank you for the advice Kara. You’ve given me much to think about. And don’t worry about Balliol – just send in Clark’s application. He’ll start next week. I’ll make sure of it.”

Kara smiled beatifically, and moved to stand up. “Thank you, Mrs. Queen.” She turned around and made her way to the door.

Only to stop, when Moira called out to her one more time. “And Kara?”

Kara looked back.

“Please, call me Moira from now on.”

On Saturday, just a few days after her meeting with Kara, Moira called a family meeting in the living room. Kara and Kal were taking a day just for themselves, so only the Queens were present at Queen
Mansion.

Oliver was the last to arrive, and with that, Moira knew it was time to start.

“I’ve taken the liberty of clearing all our schedules for today.” She announced, much to everyone’s shock.

“But Moira, there’s a luncheon –“

“Robert, I’ve already sent a letter with an apology and a gift. And besides, you’re Robert Queen. They’d be fools to snub you.”

“Well,” Thea flounced back into the “It’s Saturday, so that doesn’t change much for me.”

Oliver shrugged. “Or me. I was just planning on taking the day to relax for a bit.”

“Good, good. Now, we’re going to spend today as a family. Our family has been whole for the first time in a decade, and it’s about time we enjoyed it.” Moira looked at her son. “And Oliver, since it’s your return that made this possible, you get to choose where we go out.”

Olive looked like a deer in the headlights, until a thoughtful look appeared on his face.

“You know, Big Belly Burger isn’t what one would call a respectable establishment for the Queens to be seen in.” Thea teased her older brother. Oliver smirked.

“No, but it is perfect for a family outing, and that’s what this is, isn’t it?”

Robert popped a fry into a mouth. “Where’d you find out about this place, Oliver?”

“Laurel. Fast food is a staple for middle class families such as hers, and she was horrified when she realized Tommy and I had never had Big Belly Burger.” Oliver admitted as he took a bite of his burger.

Moira went to use her utensils, but at the sight of her family’s disbelieving looks, thought better of it. She placed the burger into her hands and took a huge bite, giving off an almost orgasmic moan as the meat overloaded her taste buds. “Thank you, Laurel. Remind me to get her something nice for Christmas this year, dear.”

“But of course.”

As the outing wound down, Robert and Thea went to throw their trash away in the waste, allowing Moira a moment alone with her son.

“You know, I was planning on asking you to take a position in the company.” she abruptly stated.

Oliver looked at her, and his expression strained slightly as he tried to smile. “Mom…”

“But someone convinced me that wasn’t the way to go.” Oliver blinked.

Moira continued speaking, gently. “Oliver, you’ve lost ten years of your life, and I understand that you want to figure out who you are first before you tackle something like that. So, the offer will remain open, but only when you think you’re read for that next step. The company isn’t going anywhere, and I’m not going to push you to do something that makes you unhappy, son.”
The Queen scion gave an authentic smile this time. “Thanks, Mom.”

Chapter End Notes

More feels. More hugs. More crying. I’m sorry if that annoys anyone, but that’s what happens when two loved ones come back from the dead after ten years.

As for the Kara/Moira scene – well, a big part of Supergirl was the theme of mother figures. There was Eliza, Alura, Astra, Cat Grant, and I figured Moira would be someone Kara would look up to and bond with easily, especially after the island.
Chapter Summary

Now, for some new faces.

(with many less feels)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 4: Hello, Hello

Chrysanthemum Balliol Preparatory Academy for the Gifted was named after Chrysanthemum Balliol, one of the first settlers of what would become Starling City. Originally starting out as a small school house, as the town began to grow more and more, people started sending their children to Balliol, who was said to have superb teaching skills and believed heavily in the right to an education. Many of her students would go on to be the founders of families that now occupied Starling’s elite. Those same students, grateful for her tutelage, would send in their own donations and their own children to the school, and from there Balliol Prep was born.

Admission had once been open to all of Starling’s population until the start of the twentieth century, when James Balliol, Chrysanthemum’s great-great-grandson took over the institution. James, wishing to increase the prestige of his family’s famous school, had made it so only the best, brightest, and (usually) most well-connected could attend. Many had decried James’ actions, calling it spitting on his ancestor’s grave, but he paid them no heed. As far as he was concerned, Balliol’s success trumped any ideology that Chrysanthemum once espoused.

Fast forward a hundred years later, and Balliol was one of the most prestigious schools in the country. A Balliol degree was a skeleton key that opened doors to places people didn’t even know existed. Everyone coveted one, and thus admission was very competitive. One didn’t just enroll into Balliol. They had to apply. Their application then had to be processed by a board of the school’s most tenured and respected teachers and many of their most reputable alumni. If the application passed muster, a letter would be sent to the applicant’s guardians confirming their acceptance and informing them of the applicant’s first day of school. Accompanying the acceptance letter was a start package, detailing the many extracurricular activities and field trips for that student for their year.

For people like the Merlys and the Queens, that was no issue. Legacy alone was enough to push them in, being descendants of Balliol’s first students. For those like the Chens and the Bowens, who weren’t quite on their level, it took pulling some strings. For those like the Lances, it was virtually unthinkable, even if they had the money to afford it – they weren’t connected. It was only by a stroke of luck that their daughters were admitted.

Kara and Kal were in a similar boat. They had money, but no connections. But by a quirk of fate, they had ended up stranded on the same island as Oliver Queen, and that had opened the door for them.

“We’re here!” Thea announced, looking out the window. Clark climbed up the seat next to her, and
saw a large, opulent building with an open, green lawn, filled with shrubbery, statues, and benches. All around, he could see students of all ages milling about, laughing, conversing, running around, and entering the school itself.

The driver went to open the door. Thea quickly got out and helped Clark get to his feet. Kara followed him and looked around, astonished at the mass of humanity surrounding her.

“Miss Queen!”

A middle-aged woman, blonde with streaks of white, standing in the middle of the sidewalk leading to the school’s ornate entrance, was the one that shouted. She quickly made her way to the trio, nodding her head at the driver before turning her attentions to Thea.

“Miss Queen, I was told our new student would be coming with you today.”

“Dean Balliol.” Thea greeted, and then gestured towards Kara and Kal. “This is Kara Danvers. The new student is her cousin and adoptive little brother, Clark Kent.”

Dean Balliol smiled at them. “Miss Danvers, Mr. Kent. I am Dean Poppy Balliol, and I welcome you both to Chrysanthemum Balliol Preparatory Academy for the Gifted.”

After Thea bid them adieu to hang out with her friends, reminding Clark to meet up with her when school ended, Dean Balliol had elected to take the duo on a tour of the school, before classes start. She had shown Clark the gym, the playground, the library, the cafeteria, the music room, art room, etc., and was now finishing up with his classroom.

“…And this is your room for this year. Your teacher is Miss Lavinia.” Dean Balliol gestured to the door, where many students Clark’s age were socializing. Clark peeked his head in, only to shy away when a dark-haired girl managed to spot him and waved. He turned back to Kara.

“Well, here we are.” Kara got on one knee and gave her little brother a hug, before letting go, placing her hands on his shoulders. “Now, you be strong for me. Be good for Miss Lavinia and Dean Balliol, and make lots of friends. I’ll be here to pick you and Thea up when class over.” Clark nodded as Kara got up, and waved his cousin goodbye.

“Now, everyone, we have a new student today. Clark, why don’t you be a dear and introduce yourself?” Miss Lavinia, a slim, dark-skinned woman with red hair asked her newest charge. Clark gulped and nodded.

He took a deep breath.

“My name is Clark Calvin Kent, but you can call me Kal. My cousin and I just moved to Starling City. Please take care of me.” He finished quietly, bowing his head. The rest of the class stared at him.

Miss Lavinia, not phased, smiled. “Thank you, Dear. Now let’s find you a seat.” She scanned the classroom, and noticed an empty spot next to the same dark-haired girl that had waved to Clark earlier. “Ah, there’s spot next to Ruby. Ruby, please raise your hand.”

Ruby raised her hand. Clark walked to the desk next to her, seating his bag next to one of the legs and sitting down. He tried to hide, burying his face into his arms, only to turn his attentions to Ruby when she started poking his arm.
“Yes?”
“You like to be called Kal?”

Clark frowned. “Yeah, so?”

Ruby shook her head. “Nothing. I think it’s cool that you go by your middle name.”

The Kryptonian blinked. “You really think so?” he asked hopefully.

“I do. Here, let me introduce myself.” she held out her hand. “My name is Ruby. Ruby Arias.”

---

Eddie Thawne frowned as he turned to watch the entrance to the main station for the umpteenth time.

Today was supposed to be the day Iris returned from leave, and she still hadn’t shown up. It was starting to worry him.

Eddie remembered when Iris dragged him aside after Joe’s unexpected outburst in Singh’s office, the sheer elation on her face as she tearfully told him that Barry Allen, her childhood best friend, was alive. Eddie had been happy for her, truly, but had grown slightly resentful when Iris could not stop talking about Barry. She had even gotten the rest of the day off to tell Barry’s incarcerated father the news, and two weeks of leave to pick Barry up and help him settle back in. Apparently, Iris’ long lost friend and Joe’s foster son had been found on the same island as the previously-thought-dead Oliver Queen, and the two had bonded, so Barry was treated at Starling General and was visiting the court there to get legally revived.

He felt neglected. Iris had only texted him a few times during that week, too caught up with Barry to really check in with him. Eddie knew he shouldn’t feel that way – after all, Iris had just gotten her closest friend back. Of course, she would be all about him. Eddie had no right to interfere.

Eddie was human, however, and that didn’t stop him from missing his girlfriend.

A familiar giggle broke his thoughts, and he grinned as he raised his head.

His voice was immediately caught in his throat.

Iris was animatedly conversing with a very handsome young man with dark hair. Eddie had seen enough pictures to recognize Barry somewhat, but those pictures were ten years old. They depicted a gangly kid, clearly unsure of his place in the world – all in all, no one who posed a legitimate threat to their relationship.

The man talking with Iris was nothing like that geeky little kid. Barry Allen stood with confidence, steel in his back. He was very handsome – the type Hollywood would call geek even though they obviously weren’t, the type that real people would say hell-ooo to.

Eddie knew he was steaming. And he wasn’t the only one. All around, every unattached, young, male cop was watching the scene with jealousy. Ralph Dibny in particular was clearly unhappy, judging by the clench in his jaw.

Iris was known around the station as an Ice Queen. She was professional to a fault, and very rarely did she allow her emotions to show while on the clock. That, however, didn’t stop every single guy
working in the station from hitting on her. Hell, Ralph had been trying to get into her pants ever since she first started working here. Only Eddie had ever managed to crack a smile out of her while she was on the job, and even then, her affections for him were usually very reserved.

But apparently, none of her professionalism applied to Barry Allen.

Eddie marched his way to his girlfriend. Iris, catching sight of him, broke off her conversation with Barry and beamed at him. Eddie’s fury quelled a bit at that, but that didn’t stop him from taking Iris into his arms and pulling her into a searing kiss. From the corner of his eye, he watched Barry, expecting to see an envious expression. Instead, all he got was a raised eyebrow.

The detective released the kiss, pulling his girlfriend in close. “Iris. Introduce me.” he asked her suavely, never breaking eye contact.

Iris giggled again. “Barry, this is my boyfriend, Detective Eddie Thawne. Eddie, this is my childhood best friend, Barry Allen.” Barry held out his hand. Eddie grabbed it, gripping it until his knuckles were white as he gave it a firm shake. Oddly, Barry seemed to have not noticed, smiling genially at him as if this was a normal handshake.

“Iris told me a lot about you.” he said, seemingly oblivious to the mounting tension.

“Likewise.” Eddie gritted out as he released Barry’s hand.

They continued to make small talk for a bit. In Eddie’s peripheral vision, he could see Dibny glaring at them as he stapled some papers together. He was torn between sympathy and smug satisfaction.

Then, it happened.

One of the older officers was bringing in a perp into the main station. The guy seemed docile at first, until he unexpectedly slammed his arrester into one of the desks, having managed to unlock his handcuffs somehow. He grabbed the gun holstered into the officer’s side, and then abruptly grabbed Barry, holding him against him as he pressed the barrel of the firearm into his head.

“Anyone move, and I’ll blow this guy’s brains out!” the perp shouted. Everyone froze.

Iris, who had been reaching for her own gun, held her arms out and tried to keep the panic out of her voice. “Now, let’s not be too hasty here –“

“Shut up!” the man shouted, pressing the gun harder into Barry’s temple. Barry grunted, but there was no fear in his expression. He seemed oddly composed despite literally being on death’s door. “I am walking out of here, and none of you are going to stop me. Otherwise, pretty boy over here is getting a bullet in his head, and that’s the last thing any of you want, ain’t that right?” he gave a crazed laugh. Eddie scowled. While he didn’t like Barry, Iris would feel terrible if something happened to him so soon after he came back.

Iris’ worry started to show. That’s when Barry decided it was time to act.

He slammed his elbow into his captor’s chest. Hard.

As the guy reached for his abused torso, Barry grabbed his arm, twisting until he let go of the gun. He kicked the firearm far away, sliding it into the main lobby, before flipping the man over, landing him on his back with an audible crack! and leaving him loopy on the floor.

Everyone stared at the scene, before Barry cleared his throat, signaling them to move.
Officers swarmed their newest arrest, cuffing him tight and marching him to the station’s holding cells. Iris all but ran to Barry, hugging him close. Barry returned the embrace. Around them, the same officers that were watching him jealously were now staring at him cautiously, with a hint of respect and a bit of fear.

When she released him, she asked the question that was on everyone’s mind. “Where’d you learn to do that?”

Barry rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. “The island. You sort of…pick these kinds of things up.”

Eddie, who was listening in on their conversation from off to the side, frowned.

You don’t just “pick up” a move like that. You have to be taught it.

He narrowed his eyes at Barry. Suddenly, this guy seemed like he was a lot more than just a potential threat to his and Iris’ relationship.

What happened on that island?

Elsewhere, in Starling City’s own 1st Precinct, a far more cordial meeting was happening.

“Oliver!” Detective Quentin Lance exclaimed, going to shake the hand of his daughters’ childhood friend. “It’s good to see you.” Beside him, his oldest daughter Laurel Lance was grinning at the scene, before going to converse with her father’s partner, Detective Lucas Hilton. She and Oliver were about to have lunch with Tommy, and had decided to take the time to visit her father on the way here.

Oliver smiled. “It’s good to see you too, Detective Lance. How have things been?”

Quentin tched, waving his hand in a dismissive manner. “Same old, same old. Crime never changes, Oliver, it just evolves.” Then he smirked, “Now, I hope you don’t plan on getting into any trouble yourself any time soon.”

The former castaway laughed. “Nah. I think the island was enough. If I do, though, be assured that it will be for a good cause.”

Quentin nodded. “Well, come by Casa de Lance sometime. Dinah will be happy to see you, and you can have dinner with us, Laurel, and Sara whenever she’s in town. It’ll just be like old times.”

Oliver chuckled. “I hold you to that.” He stopped, however, when he caught sight of something on the evidence board. A sketch.

“Who’s that?” he asked.

“A vigilante.” Quentin replied. “He targets Starling City’s ‘elite’. he uttered the last word sarcastically.

“Elite?”

“Millionaire bottom feeders. The type that prey on the less fortunate. Nothing like your parents or
Tommy's dad.” Oliver went in to take a closer look as Quentin continued to speak.

“He appeared three months ago. People have started calling him ‘The Hood’.”

Chapter End Notes

Dun, dun, duuuuuun. Cliffhanger, anybody?

And as for Eddie, think of it this way. In the show, Barry knew Iris for years and had yet to make a move, so Eddie only registered him as somewhat of a threat because of how close they were. Obviously, he knew on some level that even if Barry had feelings for Iris, he wouldn’t try to make them known, and even if he did, it would be too late. Here, however, Barry was only around for childhood, and went missing for ten years. His supposed “death” had a huge effect on Iris’ personality. So Eddie is registering him much higher on the threat scale, especially since Barry is a lot more confident here. Confidence does a lot when it comes to the attractiveness of a person.

And yes, that’s who you think it is that just befriended Clark. Her mother will appear in PART II of this arc, in the next batch.
Chapter 5: And May the Odds be Ever in Your Favor

Kara waited anxiously by the car, praying to Rao that Kal-El’s day had gone well and that he had managed to at least make one friend. She loved her baby cousin more than life itself, but she wasn’t blind to the adverse effects their unconventional life had on his development. Kal had grown up in Nanda Parbat, where emotional control was beaten into him at a very young age. He was openly affectionate in private, with those close to him, such as his adoptive siblings and Nyssa, but around others he was quiet and submissive, fading into the background as much as a child could in an organization of assassins. This translated to his behavior out of Nanda Parbat – Kal was remarkably shy around strangers, and it took him a while to warm up to them. Thankfully, he had bonded with the Queens and the Wests in a relatively quick fashion, though he was still skittish around the Merlins.

“Kara!” The Kryptonian was broken out of her thoughts by the sound of the little sister of one of her two closest friends and “brothers”.

“Thea! How’s your day been?”

The Queen scion waved her flippantly. “Same old, same old. Is Kal with you? I waited by the entrance for ten minutes, but he never showed.”

Kara shook her head. “No. I told him I would pick him up with you. Maybe he’s lost?”

Thea groaned. “I hope not. It’ll take forever to find him in this crowd.” She gestured to the swathes of humanity currently emptying from Balliol Prep.

Suddenly, Kara’s super hearing picked up familiar laughter, and she turned towards the entrance.

Kal was trotting down the sidewalk with a dark-haired girl, commiserating over a magazine and giggling over a picture. She smiled at the sight, the stone in her heart crumbling away, and lightly elbowed Thea. The teenager, who had been watching another part of the crowd in hopes of Kal turning up, turned towards her, and at a gesture of Kara’s head, saw the scene as well. She smirked.

“Only been one day and he’s already got a girl on his arm. Impressive.” She commented jokingly.

Kara grinned. “Well, I wouldn’t say that. I’m glad he’s made a friend though.” The former castaway cupped one of her hands around the side of her mouth. “KAL!”

Kal looked up, and noticing Kara, waved. He grabbed the girl’s hand and quickly ran to his cousin, evading many of his fellow students with deft skill.
“Kara! Kara! I made a friend!”

“I can see that!” she laughed. “Introduce me, Kal.”

Kal smiled brightly. “Kara, this is Ruby Arias, my classmate in Miss Lavinia’s class.” he said, gesturing to the dark-haired girl. “Ruby, this is my cousin and adoptive sister, Kara Danvers.”

Ruby held out her hand. “Nice to meet you, Kara! Your brother is really cool!” she chirped. Kal blushed.

Kara bent over and took the hand, giving it a firm but gentle shake. “It’s nice to meet you too, Ruby. And yeah, he is pretty cool, isn’t he?” she said, internally giggling as she watched her brother pinken even more.

“Hey!” Thea interjected. “I think you’re forgetting someone!” she accused and glared, but there was no heat to it.

“Oh! Yeah.” He turned to Ruby. “And this is the little sister of my big brother Oliver, Thea!”

“It’s a pleasure, Ruby.” Thea spoke, smiling as they shook hands.

Ruby smiled, then frowned questioningly. “Then wouldn’t that make her your sister too?” she asked her new friend, and he reddened once more.

“I…well…I mean we’re not legally related or anything…”

“I don’t mind, Kal. And I don’t think Ollie or Mom and Dad would mind either.” Thea chuckled. Kal buried his face into his hands.

“Ruby!” A tall woman with dark hair, clearly Ruby’s mother, jogged up to the group. She stopped in front of her charge and looked down admonishingly at her. “Ruby, I’ve been looking everywhere for you!”

Ruby shrunk back a bit. “Sorry, Mom. My new friend was just introducing me to his family.” she apologized.

The woman blinked, only now noticing everyone else surrounding her daughter. “Oh, well if that’s the case, introduce me to your friend.”

Ruby beamed. “Mom, this is my new friend Kal, short for Clark Calvin Kent! He just joined my class today. And this is his adoptive sister Kara and his friend Thea!” She pointed to each one of the group as she named them.

“It’s rude to point, Ruby.” Ruby’s mother lightly scolded, then turned her attentions to Kara. “I apologize if she caused you any trouble.”

Kara waved her off. “None. Your daughter is a sweetheart. Now, I believe we didn’t catch your name.” The Kryptonian teased.

The woman smiled. “I’m Samantha Arias. But you can just call me Sam.”

“Never thought I’d ever have to enter one of these again.” Tommy commented as they passed by the register. All around them were bookcases filled the brim with every kind of book a person could possibly imagine. Everywhere Tommy could see were people either reading books, carrying books, stacking books, or buying books.
Oliver chuckled. “Yeah, well, Kara and I need study materials for the GED Exams. Since she needed to go pick up Kal from his first day at Balliol, I offered to buy what we need on my own. We compiled a list a couple of days ago.” He lifted the sheet of paper in his hand, where lines and lines of squiggles were scratched onto.

Tommy groaned when he saw how long it was. “Really wished Laurel stayed now. Her help would’ve been much appreciated.”

“Now Tommy, you know her work at CNRI is important to her.” Oliver chided him. “And unlike you, she isn’t directly related to her boss. She just can’t cancel everything and go off whenever she wants.”

Tommy winced. “I know, I know. It’s just…I wasn’t the studious type in high school or college, and last I checked, neither were you when we were growing up. We don’t even know where to begin with all this.” He held his arms out to the mass of ink and paper surrounding them.

Actually, Oliver did. This place had nothing on the League archives, and his extracurricular and supplementary training had all but demanded he learned how to navigate that place quick or let getting lost in there cut into training time. But Oliver had technically been stranded on an island for ten years, so he played along with Tommy’s statement. “Which is why we ask an employee to help us and tip them well when we’re done.” he rebutted calmly.

It had taken hours, but finally, they had all the books they needed, bought and stuffed into many, many paper bags, which were now being loaded into Tommy’s car. After that was done, the two billionaires got into the car and drove back to the Queen Mansion.

“Can I talk to you about something?” Tommy said suddenly at one point during the trip.

“Anything.”

Tommy breathed. “I…need your advice.” he admitted.

Oliver blinked. “Advice?” he asked carefully.

“Yeah. Dating advice.”

“Tommy, the closest thing I had to a girlfriend before the Gambit was Ellie Josen in fourth grade and that one month I spent dating McKenna Hall in high school. And after it, well, dating was and still is the last thing on my mind.” Oliver pointed out.

Tommy exhaled again. “Yeah, I understand that Ollie, but it’s either you or one of our parents and I’d rather not get into that anytime soon. They’ll start needling me about her and everything.” The Merlyn complained.

The Queen winced in sympathy. Yeah. That would be bad. “Point. Tell me what’s wrong.”

“…I have feelings. For Laurel.”

Oliver frowned. “So why haven’t you made a move yet? Last I checked, she was completely and totally available.”

“I have, though! I’ve been trying to show her that I’m interested, but she’s either oblivious or doesn’t want to bite.”
The Queen sighed. “Tommy, I know it’s the twenty-first century, but there’s nothing wrong with going the traditional route and just asking her out. The worse she could do is say no.”

“I just don’t want to make things awkward between us.” Tommy confessed. “Laurel and I.” he further clarified.

“Tommy.” At the seriousness of his best friend’s tone, Tommy turned his head. Thankfully, they were already on the path to the mansion, which he knew by heart, so there was no harm in taking his eyes off the road for a few seconds.

Oliver was staring intently at him. “The three of us grew up together. Been best friends for practically all our lives. One little rejection or a failed date or two won’t change that. Any awkwardness between you two will pass eventually. So, and I say this as not only your friend, but Laurel’s as well: take a chance. You’ve got nothing to lose.” he leaned back. “The last thing you want is to have any regrets in your life. Trust me, I should know.” he stared out the window, lost in thought. Tommy wisely said nothing.

Barry entered the main station with a flourish, making a small twirl when he made it to Joe’s desk. “I come bearing gifts.” he stated flamboyantly, dropping a bag onto the wood and setting down a cup of coffee afterwards.

Joe smiled. “You are a lifesaver. I was starving.” He tore at the bag, emblazoned with Big Belly Burger’s famous logo, with wild abandon.

“I figured. Where’s Iris? She and I were going to watch that new zombie movie this afternoon at the theater.” Barry asked, twisting around to look for his best friend.

“Mm.” Joe gulped down a bite of his burger. “She’s upstairs, getting something processed with the CSIs. She’ll be down in a bit.”

“Alright.” A hand clapped onto his shoulder. Barry turned. “Eddie! Hey! Iris and I were going out to watch a zombie slasher at the movies later today. Want to come with?”

Eddie smiled. It looked more like a grimace. “No thanks. Horror really isn’t my thing.” His expression changed, becoming much more somber. “Hey, can we talk?”

“Sure.”

A moment passed, and Barry didn’t move. “In private.” the detective emphasized.

“Oh, well, okay.” Bidding farewell to his foster father, Barry followed Eddie out of the main station and into the lobby. Eddie took Barry upstairs, and found an unused room. He opened the door and all but shoved Barry into it, quietly closing the entrance to not alert anyone to their presence. The Thawne then turned around and stared hard at his girlfriend’s best friend.

Barry frowned, befuddled. “Now Eddie, you and I haven’t known each other that long, so color me confused. What would you need to talk about with me, and why did it have to be in private?”

No point avoiding it any longer. “What are your intentions towards my girlfriend?”

Barry blinked. “Iris?” At Eddie’s nod, Barry shrugged. “She’s my best friend. Nothing more,
“Really? Forgive me if I don’t believe you.” Eddie growled. “The two of you have been spending a lot of time together lately. She’s been with you more often than she has with me, and don’t think I haven’t noticed.”

“Well, when you’ve been stuck on a deserted island for ten years, you tend to want to make up whatever time you’ve lost with those you care about.” Barry pointed out, starting to get a little bit irritated. He had enough self-control not to let it show, though.

“Yeah. Ten years on a deserted island. I wonder about that.”

“You’ve got something to say?”

Eddie smirked. “That other day at the station, with that move you did. You don’t just “pick up” a move like that – you have to be taught it.” his eyes narrowed. “So, I’m beginning to wonder if that island was really as deserted as you claimed it was. Or if you were really there for all those years.”

Barry’s face betrayed nothing. Instead, he smiled. For a moment, Eddie could’ve sworn shark teeth were sticking out of his mouth. “Believe what you want, Eddie.” then, his expression melted, becoming more solemn. “Just be careful. You start asking the wrong people the wrong questions, and they won’t be as kind as I am.” he warned.

“Is that a threat?” Eddied demanded.

Barry shook his head. “Nah. A warning. Iris really likes you Eddie. You make her happy, so I owe to her to make sure you don’t get over your head.” his face darkened. “The last thing you and I want is to get into trouble that we both can’t get out of.” he stated ominously.

The door opened. Barry and Eddie exited the room silently, and waiting for them in the hallway was Iris. She was conversing with someone, probably one of the CSIs, and saw them. She broke off the conversation and headed their way.

Eddie internally panicked. Barry, however, was as calm as a clam.

“Hey guys, what are you doing here?” Iris questioned when she arrived.

“Eddie was just showing me around the Precinct. Figured it would be useful if I ever had to find you or Joe in a hurry.” Barry lied smoothly. Barry had actually memorized the Precinct’s blueprints a few days after his return to Central City, but no one but Oliver and Kara knew that.

Eddie, grateful for Barry’s believable excuse, nodded his head vigorously in agreement. “Yeah. Since he’s your best friend and all, he’ll be here a lot, so I thought it was important he knew where he could find you in a pinch.”

Iris beamed at him. “Ah, how sweet of you.” She gave him a kiss for his “consideration”, and then turned to Barry.

“So. Zombie movie?”

“Yes.” Barry pumped his fist. “I’m so excited! First zombie movie in ten years, and boy have I missed them.” he babbled excitedly.

“You’re such a dork.” Iris stated fondly, playfully giving him a punch in the arm.
“Four.”

“Four what?”

“The movie. It was totally a four.” Barry claimed.

Iris laughed. “There’s an actual scale for this?”

“Of course there is.” Barry insisted, causing her to laugh harder.

Once her laughter subsided, she looked at him. Her smile faltered a bit. “So, what are you going to do now?” she asked.

Barry shrugged. “Study for the GED Exams, I guess. The material is easy, oddly enough.” he noticed.

Iris smirked. “I doubt Oliver and Kara would agree with you, Mr. Genius.”

Barry shrugged. “I wouldn’t be too sure about that. Those two are smarter than they look.” Plus, they had advanced supplementary training with the League. All this studying was really just a formality. Theatricality is deception, after all.

“Really? From you, that’s quite the compliment.” Iris was impressed. Barry, like most geniuses, had different standards for what they considered “smart”.

“Really. If they hadn’t been, we wouldn’t made it through those ten years.” Iris frowned at that. Barry took notice, but didn’t comment – now wasn’t the time for that. “I’ll grab my books and everything and head to Jitters for the next couple of hours. I’ll see you later, okay?” Iris nodded, and they hugged their goodbyes.

“You didn’t have to drop me off, you know. You were already home.”

Oliver shrugged. “I hadn’t seen your house in a while. Plus, Mom wants to talk to me about having lunch with the Bowens later this week, so I’ve been avoiding her all day.” he shuddered. “The last thing I want to talk about with her is Carter Bowen.”

Tommy blanched. “Yeah, I get what you mean. He’s gotten worse over the years.” he informed his best friend sympathetically.

Oliver paled. “He couldn’t have.” he asked anxiously.

“Captain of the Debate Team. Perfect SAT Scores. Won the National Chess Championships. Accepted into both Harvard and Princeton. Neurosurgeon and best-selling author. All by the age of twenty-six.” Tommy listed off in a robotic manner. Oliver whitened with each achievement before groaning out loud in disbelief.

“I should’ve stayed on the island.” Tommy burst out laughing as the Queen buried his face into his hands.

They finally made it to the door, but before one of them could open it, the door handle turned on its own. Malcolm Merlyn’s head popped out.
“Tommy, welcome home. And Oliver! It’s good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you too Uncle Malcolm,” Oliver greeted his godfather brightly, shaking his hand.

Malcolm chuckled. “I hope you two haven’t gotten into too much trouble. I remember how you two were together back when you were kids.”

The Queen scion gave a laugh of his own. “Nothing to worry about, Uncle Malcolm. Unless almost getting buried alive by piles of books counts as trouble these days.”

“Oh?” Malcolm raised an eyebrow. “You two went to the library?”

“A bookstore.” Tommy clarified. “This bozo needed to grab study material for the GED Exams for Kara and himself. I just got dragged along for the ride.”

Malcolm smiled. “Well, I’m glad you’re taking this seriously Oliver. You still don’t know what you’re going to do after you pass?” he asked, curiously.

Oliver shifted his shoulders. “Mom suggested I take a position in the company.” he admitted. “But I’m not sure if I’m ready for that level of commitment yet. I was actually thinking of possibly starting a business. Or doing some volunteer work around the city.”

Malcolm nodded thoughtfully. “Well, at least you have some idea of what you want to do. Now, it’s getting close to dinner time, and I imagine your family is starting to wonder where you are.” Oliver check his phone and realized it was right. “Don’t be a stranger, Oliver. We can have lunch together sometime later this week. Just the two of us.” Tommy frowned, unbeknownst to his father and best friend, but didn’t say anything.

Oliver grinned. “I’d like that, Uncle Malcolm.” he replied warmly.

Barry frowned. He was at Jitters, overlooking the study book he had gotten for the GED. *You have got be kidding me.* Barry knew he was smart and knew the test would be easy. The League had given him an Ivy League education in…well, just about everything. But he didn’t think it would be *this* easy. He probably could’ve passed this test *before* the island.

Someone cleared their throat. Barry lifted his head. A man in a wheelchair.


“Yes. And you are…?” Of course, Barry knew who this man was, but again, ten years on a deserted island.

The man blinked, clearly not used to not being recognized, before realization dawned him. “Dr. Harrison Wells. Of S.T.A.R. Labs. Forgive me for not introducing myself first. Most people already know who I am.” *if only to scorn me* went unsaid, but the sentiment was still there.

“Ah. Then forgive me for asking this: how do you know my name?” Barry’s return from dead had not been advertised on every news outlet in the country, after all. He wasn’t rich and famous like Oliver was.

Harrison Wells smirked, clearly expecting the question. “I like to keep track of promising young
talent. You were on my radar even as a child, Mr. Allen. It truly was a tragedy, not just for your family, what happened to you.”

Barry nodded slowly. “And now? As you can see, I’m not exactly an appealing prospect. I’m currently studying for my GED.” He gestured to the books and writing utensils on the table in front of him.

Wells shook his head. “On the contrary, Mr. Allen, you are a very appealing prospect, as you put it. I have a feeling you’ll go on to do great things with your life, and I would like to help you reach your potential.”

Barry leaned back into his chair. “I’m listening.”

Wells smiled.

“Tell me, Barry, how would you like a job?”

In an abandoned airfield in the outskirts of Coast City, a man wearing a dark uniform entered one of the hangars. He looked around, inspecting the debris within the hangar, making sure no one else was present. Then, he crouched down. Beneath him was a door hatch. He opened it, and dropped down to the bunker below.

“You’re late.”

“My apologies, General.” Non crossed his arm and placed a fist to his chest, a sign of respect to his superior and wife.

“Did the mission go according to plan?” Astra demanded, ignoring his courtesy.

Non nodded. “Yes. Indigo is preparing as we speak. Myriad will be ready for launch within the year.”

Astra returned the nod. “Good.” She turned away, returning to her work.

Non frowned. “Astra?”

“Go, Non. Rest. You must be tired.” He wasn’t, but he knew better than to disobey a direct order. Non nodded once more and walked away.

Later that night, Astra In-Ze paused her work. Silently, she reached into a compartment in her desk, and took out a single item: a spy beacon. Astra had given a similar spy beacon to her niece, Kara, when she was a child, to call for her whenever she was in need. The General’s eyes closed as memories invaded her mind, and she held the spy beacon to her chin, allowing it to touch the bottom of her lip.

Kara. This was all for Kara.

There was no one that Astra had loved more than her niece, not even her twin sister, Alura – and especially not after Alura used Kara to capture her and sentenced her to Fort Rozz. When Astra had learned Krypton was dying, her first thought had been of Kara, and how she would die before she
truly got to live. And with that, she knew what she had to do.

Astra had committed crimes of the highest order, and she would’ve felt regret. But her world was dying, and her niece would die with it if she did not act. Myriad was the only way.

Alas, it was not meant to be. She was captured, her love turned against her, and imprisoned within the Phantom Zone, unable to intervene as her planet exploded into nothingness. Thankfully, Fort Rozz had managed to attach itself to a passing ship, and they escaped that hell, only to crash-land on this backwater planet, which was poised to make the same mistakes that Krypton did. The mistakes that destroyed her home.

She had allowed herself to mourn, but only for a moment. Grieving would not bring Kara back. If Astra truly wished to honor her niece, she needed to do for Earth what she could not do for Krypton – save it.

Astra set the spy beacon down, back into the compartment, and closed it. She took a deep breath.

There was work to be done.

Chapter End Notes

And so, Astra finally appears. We’re finally getting into the action everybody.

I’ve finished planning Arc I, so the chapters should be done by the end of next week. I will also begin planning for Arc II. Thankfully, Christmas break is coming up, so I’ll have a lot of time to work on this story.

Just a teaser, I already have a general outline for Arcs II, III, and IV and a partial one for Arc V. Arc V will be the “half-way” point of the story, though it will be slightly delayed as I need to finish Supergirl Season 3 first before it can be fully written. I will most likely insert a short filler arc between IV and V, and I already have an idea for what it will be.
Chapter Summary

...and all the men and women, merely players.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 6: All the World’s a Stage

Adam Hunt sat in his office, deep in thought. Outside the door, Constantine Drakon and a veritable army of bodyguards were guarding him. They were waiting.

A few days ago, Hunt had been ragging on one of his cronies in a parking garage. CNRI, more specifically attorney Laurel Lance, had taken up a class action lawsuit against him and was putting together a solid case. Hunt had demanded them to remind Grell who funded his reelection campaign, and that they’d better “take care” of Miss Lance.

And then he appeared.

Hunt had heard about the Hood. Everyone had. A crusading vigilante, a modern-day Robin Hood, who targeted the rich and aided the poor. Of course, not all the rich – just those whose means of making money were…a little illegal. And potentially harmful to several of the less fortunate.

The Hood had shot an arrow through the window of his car, and demanded he return all the money he had ‘stolen’. Otherwise, there would be another arrow heading his way, and it would go straight through his chest.

Hunt hadn’t listened, of course – instead he called the police and demanded they do something about this. It was obvious they were tempted to just let the Hood finish the job, but as karmic and justified the vigilante’s actions were, he was still breaking the law and killing people. They posted a force around the perimeter of Hunt Multinational and waited. Hunt had taken his own measures as well, calling in Drakon and his personal army of thugs to keep watch over his office. There was no way in hell some wacko with a bow and some arrows was getting through them.

SMASH!

Hunt stood, thoughts lost.

Constantine Drakon laid on his office floor, an arrow in his heart, bleeding from the mouth. From the corner of his eye, he could see all his men. Dead.

“Adam Hunt.” Hunt turned. The Hood. He wore a leather suit, mainly black with highlights of dark green, including a forest green hood. The lower half of his face was hidden beneath a black cloth wrapped around his head. The only thing that Hunt could see was his eyes, hard and cold as ice.

The Hood took aim. Hunt was frozen in fear.

“You have failed this city.”
He fired.

“Stop!”

Detectives Joe West and Eddie Thawne, with the help of CCPD’s CSIs, had managed to track down the location of the serial bank robber who left miniature natural disasters in his wake: Clyde Mardon, whose identity was confirmed after a sketch artist had managed to get an accurate description from a collection of witnesses during his latest heist. Joe was still in disbelief that one of the Mardon brothers had managed to survive the plane crash from the night of the Particle Accelerator Explosion.

They had ended up confronting Mardon at the same farmhouse where he and his brother had supposedly died, the site of the death of Joe’s first partner, Fred Chyre. The detectives had faced off against Mardon, only to be forced to hide among various farm equipment after Mardon had shown off his strange ability to control the wedding. An ill-timed comment from Joe about Mardon’s god complex had now led to their current predicament: a rapidly forming tornado, that would not only kill them but also potentially do great damage to Central City.

Joe and Eddie watched in horror as the tornado continued to ravage the building around them, growing more and more in size. Soon, the farmhouse was nothing more than debris. How were they supposed to stop this? How was anyone supposed to stop this?

Whoosh!

For a moment, they both caught a brief glimpse of him – a tall, slim man wearing a full body suit, black and red. Every part of his body was covered, from the top of his head to his legs. The lower half of his face was covered with a black fabric, hiding his mouth. On his chest was a red chest piece, etched with a yellow lightning bolt.

He ran. And he ran fast.

Lightning chased after him as he ran around the tornado, a scarlet blur.

He’s real?

There had been rumors about a scarlet blur for months. The CCPD had been getting an influx of surrenders and arrests from all levels of crime, from the lowliest mugger to the head of the Santini Crime Family, all of them babbling about a man in vermillion and ebony who moved so fast the eyes could only perceive colors, not distinct shape. They had initially dismissed it as a vigilante, like Starling City’s Hood, that had access to some sort of drug that caused hallucinations – naming him the Streak as an inside joke. But now…

The Streak chased the wind, and the tornado dissipated into nothing.

Clyde Mardon stood in the center, and staring in shock and disbelief as an urban legend undid his greatest feat.

Then, before Joe and Eddie could move, he collapsed, his throat cut.
Flames licked over the building. All around, fire fighters ran about with water and foam, trying to contain the inferno. Others were running into the building itself, trying to evacuate those few unfortunate souls stuck in the blaze. Skylights were shot into the sky, trying to catch sight of anyone that had managed to make it to the untouched windows.

*BOOM!*

Everyone jumped. A bomb?

No, the skylight saw, and they all gawked.

A girl was floating in the sky.

There had been whispers about such a girl for many moons. She appeared in the midst of disasters, like a guardian angel clothed in sapphire light. Now, everyone knew she was real.

The Girl in Blue was clothed in a tight, full length body suit of dark midnight cobalt, her lower half covered with a crimson skirt, flattering her shapely figure and moderately sized chest. A large, scarlet ‘S’ was emblazoned on the front, in the shape of a diamond shield. Flaring out behind her was an azure cloak, acting almost like a cape. Her face was hidden beneath the hood of the cloak, and her mouth and the front of her nose covered by an ebony veil. If one looked closely, they could a few stray locks of blonde hair sticking out, falling on her shoulders.

They all froze as they took in her appearance, and were broken out of their stupor when she unexpectedly dived, bursting into the fiery building. A few seconds later, everyone that had once been inside the construction was now standing on the road, in front of one of the fire trucks. Afterwards, the building collapsed.

Her black silhouette pierced the full moon, and then disappeared.

“What! It’s forty million dollars! Figure out what happened!” Adam Hunt screeched into his phone.

Inside his office, Detectives Quentin Lance and Lucas Hilton ignored the interruption and continued to survey the carnage.

“Always leaves a pile of bodies in his wake.” Quentin shook his head. “People would be a lot more receptive to what he was doing if he stopped dropping thugs to make it happen.”

“Well, at least we won’t be ambushed by the media over this.” Hilton stated, looking at the bright side.

Quentin gave a nod of agreement, “I still can’t believe she was real after all. Though, I imagine constantly calling her ‘The Girl in Blue’ will get tiring after a while.”

Hilton hummed in agreement.

“It was the Streak?” Iris asked her boyfriend.

It was the morning after the confrontation with Mardon. All around them, CCPD officials swarmed the premises, taking note of the damage and interviewing potential witnesses. Mardon’s body had
already been zipped up in a body bag. Joe himself was currently giving a verbal report to Captain Singh.

“It couldn’t have been anyone else.” Eddie confirmed. Then he sighed. “What Mardon did…and what the Streak did…I still can’t believe it, Iris. It looked like something out of a comic book.”

Iris frowned. “So, their rambling about the blur…”

“They weren’t hallucinations. The Streak really can move that fast.” Eddie’s narrowed. “But that doesn’t matter. I’ll catch him anyway.”

“Harrison Wells” frowned at Gideon’s projection of the news. Clyde Mardon was dead. The tornado, long gone.

Barry. It could’ve only been Barry.

But, according to his surveillance, during the hours of Mardon’s confrontation with the detectives and subsequent death, Barry had been in his room, studying for the GED Exams. Then he had gone to sleep, snoring so loudly that he could’ve woken the dead up.

Yet…it had to have been Barry.

So how?

*How did you do it, Barry?*

Malcolm fingered one of his custom-made arrows as he watched the local news channel on his laptop.

“We can neither confirm nor deny the presence of the vigilante at this time. Hunt Multinational is still under investigation. No more questions, please.”

The Hood. Malcolm fingered his copy of The List. He had initially thought the Hood had been crossing off names from there, but no – the Hood had also gone after a gang of bank robbers a few weeks prior, and a jewel thief before that. It was just coincidence that some of his targets were also on The List.

Yet, for some reason, that proved to be little comfort for Malcolm.

“It was amazing! She appeared out of nowhere and descended from the sky like an angel from above. A living, breathing miracle!”

“I think my heart stopped when I saw her, defying gravity like that.”

“There was an ‘S’ on her chest for some reason. Granted, it was hardly the most interesting thing about her…”
Astra, situated within a random bar, watched the television with rapture, and then she saw it. The emblem.

The sigil of the House of El.

There had been only one female born of the blood of El on Krypton before its destruction.

*Kara*…?

The old Queen steel mill had been abandoned ever since Robert Queen had shut it down five years ago, unable to deal with the guilt of his sin from when it first opened. Since then, no one had step foot on the forsaken property.

Until now, at least.

“Well done.” Oliver praised, still dressed in his Hood gear.

Beside him, Barry, similarly clothed in his own vigilante suit, nodded. “Agreed. You’ve taken the suspicion off us permanently.”

Kara smirked. “Not that there were any grounds for a case considering that ‘we’ all appeared months before we got off the island, but…” her grin widened. “It’s always good to reinforce our cover whenever possible.”

In front of them, ‘Oliver’, ‘Barry’, and ‘Kara’ nodded, showing the slightest hints of mirth. “The abilities of the Human Target are truly advantageous. I’m glad you finally managed to complete the technology, Al Sa’iqa.” ‘Barry’ complimented his mirror image.

“Indeed.” ‘Kara’ agreed as ‘Oliver’ nodded his assent.

Barry shrugged and gave a smug smile. “I aim to please.”

The real Oliver stepped forward. “Now, I believe it’s time for you to go. Your services are no longer required here, and you are most likely needed for other missions.” then, in a slightly softer tone, “Give our regards to Nyssa and the Demon’s Head, if you would?”

The three look-a-likes nodded, and then melted into the shadows. Kara looked towards her leader and ‘brother’. “What now?”

Oliver looked at her, then at Barry, and then at their newly constructed lair, situated beneath his family’s abandoned steel factory. He smirked.

“We begin.”

Chapter End Notes

You were all probably hoping for some big reveal or something, but in truth it was just a plot concocted by our trinity to throw off suspicion. On the bright side, they’ve finally
revealed themselves to the public (well, Barry is a kinda/sorta situation). The reason why I made this happen is because I hate rehashes, and I didn’t want to rehash the entire plot of “Damaged” from Season 1. To be honest, this entire fic exists because there is a startling lack of decent original work in these fandoms. A lot of it is just rehashes with some minor adjustments. As for who was doing the vigilante work during those months before they came home, it was the lookalikes, using smoke and mirrors, aided by the abilities of Christopher Chance. How Chance got into contact with the League – well, you’ll see.

For Kara’s cloak, think like Raven from the Teen Titans. Barry’s suit is a darker red with a lot of patches of black, and obviously his mouth is covered. Oliver is in the same situation.
Arc I (PART II), Chapter 7: Birth of a Legend

Chapter Summary

The trio of vigilantes continue to establish their presence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 7: Birth of a Legend

The doorbell rang.

Laurel turned the knob.

Oliver lifted a bag. “Mint chocolate chip?”

Laurel smiled. “I’ll go get the bowls.”

“So, Kara seems nice.”

“Laurel, Kara and I met when she was twelve and I was sixteen. On an island in the middle of the sea. With a baby in her arms. Never.”

The attorney gave a teasing grin. “Never, huh?”

“The thought of ever doing…that with Kara makes me want to gag.” Oliver admitted, causing his friend to start snickering.

After her chuckles subsided, Laurel carried on with the conversation. “So, I take it that this ‘Barry’ that was with you on the island is a no go too? For either of you?”

Oliver’s mouth pressed into a thin line, the slightest bit of melancholy in his expression. “Barry’s heart has only ever belonged to one person, and even after ten long years, that didn’t change. So, no – it’s a no go for all of us.”

Laurel’s own face softened. “I didn’t know.”

Her friend shook his head. “I wouldn’t have expected you to. Barry gave up on her a long time ago. Now all he wants is for her to be happy.” Silence descended on them for a moment at that somber thought.

“So, what are you doing here?” Laurel asked once the moment passed.

Oliver grimaced. “Carter Bowen.”

“Ah.” That would make sense. Laurel could sympathize.

“He started rambling about how there’s a bidding war over my life’s story, and then went on about something having to do with protein synthesis and a wizard called ‘Dr. Oz’, ” Laurel started
snickering again, “I swear, if I had to listen to another word out of his mouth, I’d probably stab myself with a rusty knife.” The Queen lamented.

The eldest Lance sister laughed once more. “How did you escape, then? I imagine Moira wouldn’t be too happy with you ditching.” she teased.

“He started hitting on Kara. Mom tried to set them up on a date, and while she was distracted with that I made up some BS excuse and snuck out the backdoor. Raisa handed me my favorite on the way out, and I knew if I went to Tommy’s Uncle Malcolm would probably rat me out.”

Laurel grinned. “Just like old times, then?”

“Just like old times.” Oliver confirmed cheekily.

“Though I imagine Kara won’t be too happy with you when you get home.”

Oliver shrugged. “She managed to escape not long after I did – I saw her leave the mansion from the car window. No, if anyone is going to be mad at us, it’s Thea for abandoning her to Mom and the Bowens.”

“Despicable you, leaving your baby sister behind like that.”

“She’ll get over it.” Oliver dismissed flippantly. “So, what’s with the police car outside?”

Laurel sighed. “You saw that?”

“Yup. Who are you going after to make your dad all overprotective?”

“Martin Somers. Alleged connections to the Triad.” Laurel revealed. “He had the father of my client killed.”

Oliver nodded. “Another heavy-hitter.” he noted.

Laurel opened her mouth to speak once again, only to stop when Oliver’s expression changed into something more serious. He held up his hand, and listened closely.

Thump!

“Did you hear that?” He got up, taking Laurel by hand to make her stand.

She looked at him quizzically. “Hear what?”

“There’s someone in your fire escape –“

The front door broke in two with a large SMASH! A large man, clearly of Asian descent, broke through the remaining wood, carrying a large gun. Oliver and Laurel fled the living room immediately once they caught sight of him, ducking to avoid the spray of bullets. They tried for the bedroom, only for the window to shatter open, the glass flying all over the divan as another man, bearing an Uzi, landed on top of the mattress. The duo turned back, only to find themselves surrounded.

At the head of the trio was a beautiful Asian woman, wearing a black leather suit. Her striking white hair fell down her back and shoulders like a white curtain. In her hands were two knives, able and ready.

Oliver pushed Laurel behind him immediately, towards the mountain of candles that decorated the
apartment’s wall as a makeshift fire place.

“Who are you?” he growled. He could feel Laurel shaking.

The woman smirked. “A friend.”

The men took aim. Laurel closed her eyes. Oliver clasped her hand, just a bit tighter.

**WHOOSH!**

But the pain never came. A blast of wind flared over her face, her hair flying with the breeze. Laurel’s eyes snapped open, and everyone froze.

The Girl in Blue. In her living room.

A second later, both men were sent flying, crashing into opposite walls of the apartment, destroying what little intact furniture Laurel had left. Their guns were in the hands of the mysterious figure, who proceeded to bend them in half, before tossing them away.

The woman with white hair, knowing she was outgunned, ran.

Chien na Wei cursed as she escaped the vicinity of Laurel Lance’s apartment. What was supposed to be a quick and easy hit had become a nightmare once the Girl in Blue appeared. Now she had two underlings that needed to be removed from the board before they squealed to the police.

She wouldn’t have been surprised if it had been the Hood that showed up – this sort of thing was right up his alley. But the Girl in Blue? Who could fly and walk through flames with nary a mark? Why would she feel the need to protect some attorney? Didn’t she have another burning building or maybe a crashing plane to save?

The Triad assassin was ripped out of her thoughts when an unexpected force hit the back of her head. She immediately blacked out.

“Laurel!” Quentin yelled as he ran through the crime scene that was once his eldest child’s apartment.

“Daddy!” Laurel exclaimed tearfully as she left Oliver’s embrace, running into her father’s arms. Quentin held her tight, running his hand through her voluminous, brunette hair, reminding himself that she was alive, that she was here.

After making sure his daughter was alright, Quentin looked up and spotted Oliver. He let go of his daughter, and made his way to the man, who, along with Tommy, he considered the closest he had to a son, and clasped a comforting hand onto his shoulder. “Oliver. You okay?”


The detective only shook his head. Both Oliver and Laurel’s faces briefly fell, and the latter went back to Oliver’s side, grasping his arm and burying her head into his shoulder. Quentin looked at both them.

“How’d you manage to take these two out?” he asked, pointing to the two Triad members that were currently being expected by the EMTs and restrained by the surrounding officers.
“We didn’t. It was the Girl in Blue.” Oliver answered, Laurel still too upset to speak.


Oliver nodded. “Laurel and I were having a conversation while eating some ice cream when I heard one of them in the fire escape. I tried to get us out through the front door, but they broke it down. The bedroom window was also a no go. They managed to corner us…and then she appeared. She knocked two of our attackers back, through opposite walls, then grabbed their guns, and…well…” Oliver gestured to one of the aforementioned firearms, which was lying on the floor, bent in half.

Quentin gaped. “She did that!?” he pointed at the malformed piece of metal. Oliver nodded. Laurel unburied her face and nodded as well.

The cop opened his mouth to ask another question, only to be interrupted by another Whoosh! Everyone froze once more at the sight of the Girl in Blue in the middle of the room.

The urban legend dumped a body onto the floor. Quentin immediately recognized it as the unconscious form of the Triad’s top assassin, Chien na Wei, whose hands and feet were bound by thick rope. The Girl in Blue looked at him and nodded, before disappearing in a sapphire blur.

Barry burped. Loudly.

“Finally.” Joe sighed in a relief. On the table was a miniature mountain of pizza boxes.

Barry shrugged sheepishly. “I really missed the taste of pizza?”

CCPD’s most senior detective chuckled. “I imagine so. Though, I figured after the island, you wouldn’t have much of an appetite.”

Barry shrugged once more. “Food is food, and I missed food.” Plus, Nanda Parbat didn’t really have rich food. Barry’s own diet after the brief coma was comprised of calorie bars of his own design. Now, he could diversify a bit.

Joe nodded absentmindedly. “So, anything interesting happen lately in your studious misadventures?” He referring to the fact that Barry had chosen to study in various areas around the city, such as the park, restaurants, small confectionary shops (mainly ice cream) and memorably, a roller skating rink.

“Harrison Wells offered me a job.” The genius replied conversationally, pouring himself another drink.

When Joe refused to answer, Barry looked up. His foster father was staring at him intently, frowning.

“I hope you didn’t accept.”

“Only on a trial basis for now.”


The detective sighed. “I don’t like him, Bar.”
“Because of the Particle Accelerator?”

“No. Though I’ll admit that didn’t help.” Joe narrowed his eyes. “I had the honor of meeting Dr. Wells at a police function a couple of years ago. He was polite. Cordial. But there was something about him that just sent all my senses on red alert. My instincts were telling me not to trust him, and my instincts are usually never wrong.”

Barry listened thoughtfully. “I’ll take that under consideration. And besides, the job is most likely short-term – after I pass my GED, I’ll have nothing to do for the upcoming months. College admission deadlines have already passed for next semester,” he pointed out.

Joe exhaled. “Just be careful, Barry. The last thing I want…” is to lose you again, went unsaid.

His foster son’s eyes lid. “I don’t blame you, you know.”

Joe blinked. “…What?”

Barry shook his head. “For the island. I never once blamed you, Joe. It was my choice to go to China.”

“Because of what I said!” Joe interjected, angrily – not at Barry, but at himself.

“It wasn’t just because of you, Joe.” Barry confessed, stalling his anger and leaving the older man befuddled. “Though, I won’t lie, what you said didn’t help, even though I knew you didn’t mean it. It was everything.”

“This city was where my mother was murdered, where everyone knew me as the son of the victim and her alleged killer. Where everyone but you and Iris and Dad scorned me for believing otherwise. Though you didn’t agree with what I believed, you cared for me – you loved me. I didn’t want to leave you or Iris or Dad behind, but…it was all just too much. What you said just told me what I already knew: I needed to go.”

“Still…”

“Joe.” Joe’s eyes snapped up, meeting Barry’s sympathetic gaze. “Stop. You didn’t put a gun to my head and told me to fly to China. You didn’t initiate that storm. What happened to me was Not. Your. Fault.” The former castaway enunciated.

Joe felt tears well up in his eyes, and he dropped his head into his hands. Barry got up from his seat at the table, and embraced him.

Judge Theresa Howard cowered as Kyle Nimbus stalked her into the elevator. She had just been at the mall, picking up her daughter’s prom dress, when a man she thought dead appeared in front of her as green mist.

Kyle Nimbus smiled, ready to sublimate once more, only to stop when he felt a small breeze behind his back. Theresa was broken out of her own terrified stupor when she saw who it was. There had been rumors, but this was confirmation.

The Streak.

Nimbus turned, and got a vibrating hand through his chest.
“SCPD! Put your hands up!” Detective McKenna Hall shouted as she and the rest of her task force barged into the abandoned water treatment center, the alleged hideout of the sole seller of the street drug Vertigo – The Count. They had gotten an anonymous tip about the location of the Count a day ago and had immediately prepped a team to capture him.

That, however, would be unnecessary.

McKenna lowered her gun at the sight that greeted her. She could her team do the same from behind her.

Bodies were strewn everywhere. Only the slightest breaths and the occasional groan indicated that these people were still alive. And in each person, on some part of their body, was an arrow.

The Hood.

A yell was heard, and immediately the task force went back into formation. McKenna raised her gun once again, and moved forward. They moved past the carnage, and found the source of the loud noise.

The Count was on his knees, holding his hands up in deference to the arrow being pointed at his face. The Hood stood in front of him, weapon ready, and they could tell that whatever the Count was jawing, it would not save his life.

“STOP!” McKenna screamed, interrupting the confrontation. Both the Hood and the Count looked at her and the bevy of armed officers behind her. “Put the weapon down, and put your hands up!”

The Hood stared at her for a long moment. Then, he unexpectedly aimed upwards, and fired. The building’s alarm system, left unused and abandoned and still working, fired up, letting out a piercing and screeching sound as the arrow broke through the glass and penetrated the activator. Everyone but the Hood winced at the sound, and with the officers thoroughly distracted, the vigilante took his chance.

When McKenna Hall turned back, the Hood was gone, and the Count dead, an arrow through the heart.

“…another sighting of the Girl in Blue. CNRI attorney Laurel Lance’s home was attacked last night…”

“…he just appeared out of nowhere. I swore I was going to die in that elevator and then…”

“…an alarm was triggered at Starling’s abandoned water treatment facility. SCPD refused to comment…”

“Ma’am.”

“Has she woken up?”

“About to. She’s already been restrained and prepped for questioning.”
Chien na Wei awoke, groggy and bleary-eyed. Only to freeze as her vision gained clarity.

“Hello again.” Amanda Waller smiled, shark teeth and all.

Chapter End Notes

Yes. The Bitch is here, and she’ll be around for a while, unfortunately. As for Martin Somers, well, he’s screwed. They were able to get information out of the thugs and Somers confessed to everything.

Nimbus is dead. Caught off guard before he could go all misty. Speedsters are broken, people. This is a Barry that was trained by the League and has no issues with killing and taking whatever advantage he can get in a fight. His mind is wired to think of the best possible solution to a problem with information available (and with being a speedster, that means Barry is a very dangerous person). That’s partially why most of the metahuman confrontations are going to go his way in the first go.

I took out the Count because no one in this story is going to have a drug problem. Thea lost her brother at a much younger age, and it was only him – not mention Oliver “died” before his partying lifestyle got really bad. She’s far more adjusted at this age, if a little sheltered due to her parents’ over-protectiveness. Tommy’s been clean for years, and Laurel isn’t going to be drowning in grief anytime soon.
Arc I (PART II), Chapter 8: Revenge (Is Just a Blame Game)

Chapter Summary

Revenge is such messy business.

That's why it's best nipped in the bud.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 8: Revenge (Is Just a Blame Game)

Vroom!

Oliver Queen waved at his mother in greeting from his motorcycle. Moira, across the street, waved back, and continued conversing with the man in front of her, clearly trying to shoo him away.

VROOM!

Oliver turned, and saw another motorcycle drive up the street. The rider, dressed head-to-toe in black, pulled out a gun. Oliver watched in shock as a spray of bullets were fired, hitting the man his mother was talking to, his dead body falling across her. The other motorcyclist drove away as Oliver ran across the street towards Moira.

“Mom!” Thea entered the hospital room. Her mother, laying in a hospital bed, took her into her arms as her daughter all but threw herself at her. Following Thea were Kara and Clark, who made their own greetings and comfort to the Queen matriarch. Off to the side, both Oliver and Robert were conversing Quentin Lance, the former explaining to the latter what had happened.

“Guards needed to be posted immediately, Dad, Quentin. The shooter could come back at any time.” Oliver stressed.

Quentin shook his head. “That won’t be necessary, Oliver. Your mother most likely wasn’t the target.”

Oliver blinked. “She wasn’t?” Beside him, his father, however nodded his head. Quentin gave him a look, and Robert cleared his throat.

“Thea? Why don’t you take Kal and go down to the cafeteria? Get your mother something to eat.”

Thea look mutinous, but at the stern look in her father’s eyes, relented. “Sure thing, Dad.” She took Clark by the hand and out the door. Clark looked at everyone curiously before following her.

Robert closed the door shut, and looked towards Quentin. Quentin gave a short nod and replied to Oliver’s question. “She most likely wasn’t. The man your mother was talking to, the one that was killed, was Paul Copani.”

“Paul Copani?” Kara asked, confused.
Robert answered. “He’s a close associate of Frank Bertinelli.”

Kara still looked perplexed, but Oliver, drawing up some vague memories, pressed his lips together as realization dawned on him. “Frank Bertinelli…as in the boss of the Bertinelli crime family?” He demanded. Robert and Quentin nodded.

The Kryptonian turned her head sharply towards Moira. “Why were you meeting with this guy?”

Moira sighed. “He wanted the contract to build Queen Consolidated’s new Applied Sciences building. I said no, obviously, but he kept on hounding me about it before he was killed.”

“So Copani was the target?” Oliver asked, getting the conversation back on track.

“Most likely.” Quentin confirmed, then sighed. “You didn’t hear this from me, but Copani wasn’t the first member of Bertinelli’s crew that’s been hit. Someone has been targeting them all, one by one, for the last couple of weeks.”

“But,” he continued, “That’s our problem, not yours. So, you,” he pointed at Moira, “just get some rest. I’ll inform you if circumstances have changed, but for now, we have no reason to believe you’ll be in any further danger.” Bidding everyone farewell, he opened the door and left.

Robert exhaled. “I’ll clear my schedule for the next two days, keep you company. Just to be safe.” he told his wife.

“Robert…” Moira protested half-heartedly. Neither of them noticed Oliver and Kara exchanging glances.

Barry gave a low whistle. “You know, for an abandoned lab station, this place isn’t half-bad.”

From beside him, Harrison Wells smirked. “Why thank you, Mr. Allen. Though I think we hardly count as ‘abandoned’, seeing as you and I, along with two others, work here still.”

Barry shrugged.

The former castaway had arrived at S.T.A.R. Labs an hour or so ago for his first day at his new job, whatever that would be. Dr. Wells had then taken him on a tour of the facility. Barry had already memorized the official blueprints of this place, right after Dr. Wells had spoken to him about his offer, but they were only blueprints. Seeing everything with his own eyes was an entirely different thing.

A crash was heard. Barry and Dr. Wells entered the Cortex to see young man of Hispanic descent and a Caucasian woman with chestnut brown hair bickering with one another. Beside them was a fallen mannequin with a red suit on it. Dr. Wells cleared his throat, breaking up the argument. They turned to look at him.

“Dr. Wells!” They both exclaimed. Wells nodded at them both.

“Barry, these are my two remaining employees. Cisco Ramon, one of the most brilliant mechanical engineers in the world, and Dr. Caitlin Snow, an equally brilliant bio-engineer.” The scientist gestured to both as he stated their names. “Cisco, Caitlin, this is Barry Allen. He will be aiding us in our…new work.”
They both blinked. Caitlin frowned. “Dr. Wells…”

The scientist held up his hand, stopping her. “Never fear, Caitlin. I can assure you that Mr. Allen is fully qualified.”

“How so?” Cisco questioned.

Dr. Wells was about to answer, only to be cut off by a loud ringing noise. Barry frowned, taking out his phone and accepting the call, putting the communication device next to his ear. “Hello?”

His expression changed. “What?”

“Joe, Eddie.” Barry called out to the detectives as he entered the Precinct’s lobby. Both men looked up and waved him over. “What happened?”

“Tony Woodward.” Iris answered from behind him. Barry turned to look at her. “Showed up and confronted me at Jitters during my lunch break. Crushed my phone with his bare hand, too.”


Iris hummed. “The one and only. We put out an APB for him after we caught him driving off in a stolen Humvee after robbing several ATMs.” Barry blinked, and smirked.

“Well, at least he’s graduated from stealing candy from babies.” her best friend joked drily.

Iris smiled slightly at that. From behind Barry, Eddie frowned, and decided to interject. He stepped forward, looking directly at his girlfriend. “I’m putting a detail on you.”

“Eddie…” Iris frowned.

“No arguments, Iris. This guy’s like the Girl in Blue and the Streak, and he’s fixated on you. Rather be safe than sorry.” Eddie shut her down immediately. Iris took in a deep breath and nodded her assent.

Barry looked at Joe. “He’s like the Girl in Blue and the Streak?”

“And Mardon. Eddie tried to shoot Woodward and bullets just glanced off him. And before you ask – no body armor. They bounced off his face, believe it or not.” Joe replied.

Barry hummed. “Well, I’m free for the rest of the day, so I guess I can keep Iris company.”

Eddie scowled. “That won’t be necessary, Barry.” he stated, barely managing to keep his jealousy in check.

“Maybe not,” Iris shifted her shoulders and smiled fondly at her closest friend, “But I don’t mind. I was planning to drop by Keystone to visit Mom and Wally, and they haven’t met Barry yet. And since Tony dropped out of high school before word spread about my move, he wouldn’t think to look me for there. It’s a win-win.” Eddie’s scowl darkened, but before he could protest anymore, Barry’s phone rang once more. He picked it up, puzzled when he saw the caller ID.

“Hello?”
“Barry got us a name: Helena Bertinelli.” Oliver announced, dropping file down onto a table in the middle of the Foundry. Kara opened it to reveal some documents, along with a picture of an attractive woman with long, dark hair.

“Any relation to the boss?” she asked as she began to peruse through the information.

“His daughter.” Oliver confirmed as he picked up some of the documents himself. “Fiancé Michael Stanton died in a shootout about a year or so ago. Alleged killer was said to be working alone, tried and convicted and went to Iron Heights. Clean cut case. Or so it would seem.”

Kara clicked her tongue. “Let me guess – Daddy had the fiancé killed, then payed off the police to cover it up so his baby girl would never find out. Except she did, and now she’s out for blood.” she illustrated the most likely scenario like she was conversing about the weather.

“Got it in one.” Oliver’s face turned solemn. “Revenge, huh.”

“Revenge.” Kara sighed.

The League had a complex view on revenge. There were instances where revenge was justice, they could not deny. However, emotion drove revenge. It was dangerous, volatile, which is why the League did not advocate it. Honor was one thing, equivalent exchange, a life for a life. But when it came to vengeance, none of those things were applicable, usually – a person who desired revenge was one who usually desired suffering, and unnecessary suffering was not the way of the League.

Of the castaways, only one of them could ever be tempted by revenge, and that was Barry. But Barry had people to pull him back, to remind him to live his life. To say nothing of the fact that revenge wouldn’t get his father out of prison, only justice, and that's what Barry wanted more than anything else.

“So, what do we do?” Kara asked Oliver after a moment of reflection. Oliver’s eyes sharpened. In the file, there was a document detailing a locker in the Glades registered to Helena.

“We pay Miss Bertinelli a visit.”

Helena Bertinelli was wiping some residue off her gun, all while studying the board in front of her. On it were pictures of members of her father’s inner circle. Among them, recently crossed out, was one of Paul Copani.

Suddenly, the lights flickered. Helena immediately grabbed her gun, arming herself. Only to freeze when she saw who it was that invaded her sanctuary.

The Hood, and the Girl in Blue.

Helena froze, but just for a moment. She fired, only to gape as the Girl in Blue jumped in front of the Hood, blocking the bullets and allowing them to bounce off her in different directions. She never noticed the Hood sneak off until he was right behind her. Helena looked back, but before she could attack, she found her arm held behind her back in an iron grip by the vigilante.

“Helena Bertinelli.” he rumbled. “Your vendetta against your father is reckless and foolish. It is dragging innocents into the fray.” Helena face slightly fell at that, before hardening.

“I don’t care. My father had Michael killed.” she spat.
The Girl in Blue was the one who spoke up this time, her voice smooth and soft with a hint of steel. “Well, we do. Stop your vendetta. If you still seek the downfall of your father, then we shall handle that. Otherwise, you will be going to jail with him.”

“No!” Helena exclaimed angrily. “It has to be me! I need to kill him – jail is too good for him!”

The Hood tilted his head. “Why? Why does it need to be you?”

Helena’s face crumbled. “It was my fault Michael died. I...I was talking to the FBI. Planning to take down my father – he was...is a monster. I gave the laptop that had all the information I was planning to hand over to them to Michael, for safe-keeping.” She gave a choked sob. “My father must’ve found out, however, and thought it was Michael talking, and had him killed.”

Both vigilantes stared at her, sharing a silent conversation. Then, they nodded as one. Helena, after her tears subsided, watched the exchange curiously.

The Hood let go of her arm, which she then began to massage. He took out a piece of paper from a hidden pocket in his suit, and handed it to her. On it was an address.

“What’s this?”

The Girl in Blue spoke up once more. “Tomorrow at 10:00 p.m., a plane will be waiting for you there. It will take you directly to the base of the mountains of Tibet. Once there, pluck a blue flower and climb until you reach the midpoint. There is an entrance hidden behind a slab of rock with the symbol of a demon’s head.”

The Hood continued with the explanation. “Follow the path and it will take you somewhere that can help you hone your skills and harness and control your anger, your rage and hate. Hand the flower to one of the guards, and they will take you to their Master. Tell him your story, and if he deems you worthy, he will train you until you become one of the most dangerous people in the world.”

Helena stared at them both, calculating. “…and if I’m not found worthy?”

“You die.” The Hood refused to sugarcoat it. It would not do any good.

Helena frowned. “…and if I stay?” she hedged.

“You go to jail for the rest of your life, and your father will walk free.”


She could feel them smirking. “Daddy goes to the slammer. Don’t worry.” The Girl in Blue waved her off.

The lights flickered once more. Helena looked around, and found she was alone. In her hand was another piece of paper.

*When you get there, tell them that Al Sah-him and Saraab sent you. That should get your foot into the door.*

Chapter End Notes
And now Helena joins the League of Assassins. She will return, I can assure you. Next time, a Barry-centric chapter!
Arc I (PART II), Chapter 9: Sixteen Candles

Chapter Summary

Growing up is hell. Barry's was just the literal kind.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 9: Sixteen Candles

Francine West opened the door, and smiled.

“Mom.” Iris beamed at her. Beside Iris, a man who was clearly not Eddie looked curiously at her. This must be Barry.

“Iris. Welcome home.” she greeted her daughter.

“Iris!” Wally West happily exclaimed from the dining table at the sight of his older sister. He got up and grabbed her into a large hug, which she elatedly returned. After the hug ended, Wally caught sight of Barry, and glowered.

“Who’s your shadow?” he asked her. Barry raised an eyebrow at the odd label, but didn’t comment.

Iris beamed once again. “Wally, this is my best friend, Barry Allen. Barry, this is my little brother, Wally.” she gestured to each man. Barry held out his hand, which Wally seized. Tightly.

“The one who came from the dead, huh.” Wally eyed him suspiciously.

Internally, Barry snorted. The over-protective brother type. He was definitely Joe’s son. “Yup,” he stated, popping the ‘p’ with his lips. “And you must be Iris’ baby brother.”

“Not a baby.” Wally muttered.


Wally looked at him contemplatively. “What do you mean that?” he asked.

“Oh, she didn’t tell you?” Barry answered casually. “When we were seven she saw this cute little baby in a stroller. Pinchable cheeks, big, wide doe eyes, an adorable giggle – the whole enchilada. He was so lovable that she just couldn’t stop playing with him. So, she wrote a note telling his parents that she was borrowing him for the next couple of days, tied it to the stroller, and walked off with him. Of course, the parents panicked, Joe got an earful, and Iris started bawling like a baby herself when she got no dessert for dinner that night. So, it’s only fitting she tried it again the next day. And the day after that. And the day after –” Iris, thoroughly embarrassed, slapped her hand over Barry’s mouth as Wally doubled over, laughing.

“Barry!” she squawked.

“What?” Barry asked her, seemingly genuinely perplexed, though she could see the mirth in his eyes.
“He’s your little brother, Iris. He needs blackmail material. I’m just doing my sacred duty as a fellow bro and giving it to him.”

Iris hmphed, giving him a small push. “Jerk.” she stated, with no heat to it.

“But you love me anyway.” Barry teased back. Iris pouted, then smiled at him.

Once his laughter subsided, Wally looked at Barry with a far friendlier expression. “You’re not bad, Barry, not bad at all. So, what are you two doing here?” he asked, looking towards his sister.

Iris grimaced.

“And this…” Iris opened her arms outwards, giving a small spin. “…is my room.”

“I can tell.” Barry hummed, looking at the familiar posters of Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, Angel, and N*Sync. “It’s not all that different from your room back home. Your tastes are just a little more… mature.”

“But of course.” Iris stated pompously.

“That was not a compliment.” Barry elaborated. Iris scoffed and playfully punched him in the arm. “And now you’re abusing me. Your violent tendencies are starting to scare me, Iris. Are you sure you don’t need some anger management classes? I think one of my old shrinks might know someone.” He asked with a completely straight face, only to burst out laughing when she scowled at him.

“Ha Ha, Bare. One more word out of your mouth and I won’t take you to see the new Iron Man movie in May.” Iris threatened.

Barry gasped. “How could you, Iris? I already missed the Avengers – you’re going to make me miss Iron Man too?” he whined pitifully at her.

Iris sniffed imperiously. “Then stop picking on me.” She demanded, though the small grin she cracked betrayed her real feelings.

“Fine, fine.” Barry conceded. His eyes turned to slits when he noticed something in the corner of the room. “Why do you have a punching bag?”

“Boxing classes were a part of the curriculum at the Police Academy.” His best friend answered smoothly, obviously dodging a straight answer. It might have worked, except Barry was explicitly a trained liar.

Barry smiled blandly at her. “Except you told me you moved out of your Mom’s house when you finished college.” Iris stiffened at the reminder. “So, tell me Iris – why do you have a punching bag in your room? If I remember correctly, you stopped your boxing lessons when we were thirteen.”

Iris shifted her shoulder, and avoided Barry’s eyes. “I had a lot of issues to work out during college.” she mumbled.

Barry opened his mouth to ask for clarification on these ‘issues’, only to stop when Iris and he heard a loud scream from upstairs. They exchanged glances, and immediately ran back up to the living room.
Well, Tony was taller. And bigger. And more muscular.

Still a moron, though.

“Iris.” Tony moved forward in what he assumed was a suave manner. Wally could be seen protecting his mother in the living room. Both him and Francine were clearly urging for Iris and Barry to run. “You weren’t your dad’s house. How come?”

“He and I aren’t on the best of terms these days. Now, why are you here, Tony? You know that no matter what happens, it won’t end well for you.” Iris retorted, reaching for her gun, which was holstered to her side. Barry, behind her, quietly moved to the side, clearly ready to get away should the confrontation get out of hand.

Tony ignored her, looking at Barry quizzically. “And who’s this guy, huh? This the boyfriend you were talking about? He doesn’t look like much.” Tony continued to eye Barry up and down. Something about this guy was familiar…

“Wow, Tony. Glad to know how unremarkable I am, considering your favorite pastime for three years was ridiculing me over my incarcerated father.” Barry drawled sarcastically, though there was a hard glint in his eye.

Tony blinked, and looked a little harder at Barry. Then he blanched. “Allen!? Last I heard, you drowned in the Atlantic Ocean or something.”

“Yeah, well, I was actually stranded on an island in the middle of the North China Sea, which is in the Pacific Ocean, thank you very much.” Barry sassed back.

The metal-man blinked once more, not expecting such back-talk from who was once his favorite bullying victim. Then he laughed. Loudly. “Oh, this is rich! It’s like everything is falling into my lap these days. Not only do I have these sweet new powers, but now I got the girl and my old punching bag back!” his laughter subsided, and he gave them both vicious grin. “The two of you are coming with me.”

“Or what?” Iris asked, her gun now out. She fired once, twice, only to lower her firearm when she saw the bullets spark right off her aggressor’s chest. Tony smirked at her dumbfounded look.

“Or,” he jabbed his thumb to Wally and Francine. “These two get their heads caved in. And neither of you want that, do you?” Barry and Iris exchanged glances. Barry slowly nodded his head, and Iris sighed.

“Fine.” she spat. “Just leave my family alone.”

The doors burst open with a loud SLAM! Barry and Iris stumbled in, ripping their arms out of Tony’s grip. They looked around at the building. For Iris, it was still so very recognizable – she spent four years of her life here, after all. For Barry, however, it was more like a distant memory. He never once expected he would ever have to return here, and some part of him, once upon a time, had wished that wasn’t the case.

“Our old high school?” Iris asked, honestly perplexed.

Tony flexed his muscles and nodded. “Yeah. The best years of my life were spent here.”

“And then you graduated, right? Oh, wait you didn’t.” Barry interjected. “Trying for that GED, then? Hey, maybe we can study together! I’m going for mine too. Of course, the only reason I didn’t
graduate was because I was stuck on a deserted island for ten years, not because I couldn’t tell where the right end of my pencil was.”

Tony glared at him, growling. “I see that living on that patch of rock has made you mouthier these days, Allen.”

Barry scoffed. “Well, what do you expect, Tony? You just make it so easy. High school dropout, now petty thug, gets a shiny new toy and decides he wants to relive his glory days, going as far as to kidnap both the girl he liked and the kid he used to stuff into lockers and use them as hostages when the police start bearing down on him. Honestly, it’s effing hilarious. Would make a great comedy – maybe we can call up Adam Sandler and he can take a go at it! How about that, Tony? That’s one way to get your name –“

CLANG! The locker in front of Barry caved in, leaving a huge dent in place. Barry shut up immediately at the sight, and Iris gave him a pointed look for provoking their captor.

“Allen. Shut. Up.” When Barry wisely remained silent, Tony leered at him victoriously. “Good. Now, as for why you’re both here. You,” he pointed at Iris, “are going to being writing about me, on your old blog.”

The former castaway forgot his vow of his silence momentarily in favor of giving his best friend a questioning look. “Blog?” he mouthed at her. She didn’t respond, blatantly avoiding eye contact with him. Iris didn’t have a blog back then – he would know. They shared everything together. Iris had never shown interest in any writing beyond school essays when they were kids…Barry’s eyes widened.

Iris didn’t have a blog then…but he did, for his forays into the impossible. He looked once more at his best friend, his eyes demanding an answer, but she refused to look back.

“I shut that blog down years ago. I’m not opening it back up again – especially not for a criminal.” Iris instead said, staring determinedly at Tony. He leered at her once more, blatantly checking her out.

“And there she is: the Ice Bitch. I’ve got to say, Iris, that look has only gotten hotter over the years.” Tony commented.

“Ice Bitch?” Barry couldn’t help but ask.

Tony glared at him once more, then smirked. “Oh yeah. It was the school’s nickname for Iris here after everyone thought you bit the bullet, Allen. Never smiled, never hung out with the other girls, always shut the boys down when they tried to ask her out – the Ice Bitch. Of course, she was also the most gorgeous girl here, which meant every other girl hated her while every boy – including moi – wanted to get in her pants. If anything, it only made her more popular.”

The assassin gazed incredulously at his best friend once more. Iris continued to avoid his eyes, instead glaring at Tony. “I’m not opening it back up again, Tony. There’s no point anyway; you’ll be going to jail soon.” she refuted his demand.

Tony’s malicious smile returned. “I figured you would say something like that. Here’s the thing Iris: either you agree to start writing about me, or…” with a sudden movement, he grabbed Barry by the front of his shirt. Barry involuntarily stepped forward, trying to rip away from his former bully’s grip. “…this guy returns to his former job as my punching bag.” he threatened, lifting a fist near Barry’s head for further emphasis.
Iris whipped out her gun once more, pointing it straight at Tony’s head. “Let. Him. Go.” she grounded out, absolutely furious.

“Say the magic words.” he sing-songed, giving Barry a shake for good measure. Barry continued to visibly struggle, trying to tear Tony’s hand away.

“TONY!” Iris yelled at him, refusing to stand down. “LET HIM GO, NOW!” She would not, could not, lose Barry again. She didn’t think she would be able to handle it.

Tony smirked and opened his mouth to taunt her once more –

WHOOSH!

“Mind if I cut in?”

Everyone stared.

The Girl in Blue.

Tony let go of Barry immediately. Barry scrambled back, grabbing purchase with one of the lockers. He hid his smile, wiping his mouth with his forearm. Iris lowered her gun slowly, genuinely stunned.

“Tony Woodward…” the marvel sang. “A little birdie told me that you’ve been a very bad boy.”

She put her hands on her hips, jutting her chin forward. He blanched, before standing straight, clenching his fists.

“I’m not scared of you!” Tony shouted at her, obviously scared but trying to save face.

The Girl in Blue tilted her head. “You don’t sound like it. Or look like it, either.”

Tony screamed, changing into his steel form and charging at her. She yawned, and once he was close enough, gave him an idle backhand. The criminal was sent flying, bursting through several walls before landing right outside the building. His powers deactivated as he succumbed to the pain.

Iris gaped. Barry went to stand behind her, schooling his expression into something that vaguely resembled surprise. Internally, however, he was just amused, noting how playful his friend was being. *Guess Kara felt like showing off for once. Must be because of what city she’s in.* After all, in Starling, she showed far more restraint. Then again, most of the criminals in Starling were baseline human, not metas like himself and Tony.

The Girl in Blue sighed as she looked at the wreckage. “I thought he would last longer.” she complained. Then she shrugged, “Ta-ta, everyone. I’ll be taking him for now.” Waving at Iris and Barry, she disappeared in a blur. Barry and Iris jogged towards where Tony’s body was supposed to be, and stared. He was gone.

“Well, that was something.” Barry understated. Iris, exhausted, only holstered her gun and groaned.

“The Girl in Blue?” Eddie asked.

Iris hummed. “Yup.” Beside her, Barry was nodding along. All around them were police cars and various other officials, inspecting the damage done to the school.

Joe looked dubious. “Doesn’t she usually hang around Starling, though?”

Barry shrugged. “Maybe she’s looking to branch out?” he suggested.
“The Streak, the Girl in Blue – something tells me it won’t be long until either the former shows up in Starling or the Hood shows up here.” Iris mused.

Eddie glanced at her. “What makes you say that?”

Iris shifted her shoulders. “I don’t know. Something, however, is telling me that they’re all connected. How is the real question.” she answered. No one noticed Barry smiling at that.

SPLASH!

Tony woke up, coughing and choking, his face wet. He sat up, and froze.

The Girl in Blue.

“Where’d you take me?” he demanded. She tilted her head.

“Somewhere.” She stated unhelpfully. “You can leave whenever you want, though.”

Tony narrowed his eyes. “What’s the catch?” Tony might not have been the sharpest tool in the shed, but even he could tell there was something fishy about this entire situation.

The Girl in Blue didn’t answer. Instead, she took out a syringe, and in one smooth motion, stabbed it into the metahuman’s arm. Tony winced.

“What did you do to me!?” he yelled once the pain subsided.

She tilted her head to the other side. “Just a little something to nullify your powers for the next twenty-four hours. And as for the catch – well, all you have to do is beat this guy in a fight.” She pointed. Tony turned his head, and froze once more.

The Streak.

“Don’t worry,” she continued to speak as Tony eyed the other urban legend, “It’ll be a fair fight. He’ll refrain from using his powers as well.”

Tony clicked his tongue. “Fine. Just don’t complain to me when your friend is squealing in pain on the floor.” He got up, and charged.

The Streak dodged his assault, ducking underneath Tony’s first punch, and the punch after that. He continued to evade every blow Tony threw with ease, moving like the wind.

“Stay still, you freak!”

And then he pounced!

The Streak ducked under another punch, and then slammed his own fist into Tony’s abdomen. And then another. And another and another and another until Tony doubled over, trying to soothe his abused midsection. His opponent took advantage of that moment of weakness, grabbing Tony’s head and kneeling him in the face. Hard.

Tony stood, woozy and hurt, blood bleeding from the nose. The Streak grabbed him by the shirt, winding up his right hand, and socked him right in the face, knocking him out. He let go, allowing Tony to fall back into blissful unconsciousness.

The Girl in Blue walked forward, staring at the body and shaking her head. Then she looked up at
“Feel better?”

The Streak’s eyes narrowed. “Not as much as I thought I would be.”

WHOOSH!

Cisco and Caitlin halted their actions, staring in horror at the Streak, who was now carrying a large man on his shoulders. He dropped the man to the floor, and then looked directly at Dr. Wells.

The scientist gave a short nod. “Mr. Allen.” he greeted, shocking both of his employees once more.

Barry took off his face mask and removed the head of his suit, revealing his mouth and hair.

He grinned.

“Who sent you here?” Ra’s al Ghul inquired his newest recruit.

Helena Bertinelli bowed her head. “Al Sah-him and Saraab.” Gasps were heard.

From beside her father, Nyssa al Ghul smirked.

Chapter End Notes

I honestly wasn’t planning on using Tony, but then I realized the fact that he went to school with Iris when Barry was gone would make a good introduction for Iris’ past and for moving forward Iris and Barry’s relationship. Iris took Barry’s death hard, harder than Laurel did with Oliver, because she lacked a decent support system. Laurel still had her family, Tommy, and the Queens. Iris only really had Henry, since she cut out her father because she blamed him for Barry’s death. So, becoming an ice queen isn’t too far of a stretch, when you’ve lost your closest friend so tragically.

As for the title of the chapter - it’s a reference to a song. Can anyone guess which? I’ll give you a hint - those words were never an actually line in the lyrics.
Arc I (PART II), Chapter 10: Those We Leave Behind

Chapter Summary

...are the ones that have the hardest time letting go.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 10: Those We Leave Behind

RIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIING!

“You’re not coming with us today?”

Thea shook her head. “Mom and Dad are finally loosening up and are allowing me to go out with my friends for once. It’s Friday afternoon, after all.”

Kara sighed. “Well, alright then. You’ll call if you need the car, right?”

Thea smiled. “But of course.”

“Thea!”

The Queen turned her head and waved to her friend. “In a minute!” she turned back to Kara and Kal. “I’ll see you two later, alright?” Ruffling Kal’s hair one last time, she bid them farewell and jogged to her friend.

The Kryptonians watched her disappear into the crowd, and then turned to each other. “Ruby’s going to the arcade today. Can we come with?” Kal asked his guardian.

Kara sighed once more, then smiled. “Let’s go ask Sam.”

“Mom! Kal and I are going to play skeeball!”

“Go on ahead, honey! The food will still be here!” Sam called out to her daughter, watching as she dragged her friend over to the machines. “Always needs to be active, that one.” she deadpanned to Kara, causing her to chuckle.

Kara grinned. “I know the feeling. Kal always had a hard time staying still,” when he had the choice of actually moving, “I remember always having to try to find something for him to do.”

Sam give a short laugh of her own, then looked at her speculatively. “Kara, I know we’ve just met and all, but I noticed you don’t have a job. Even for Balliol Prep that’s…”

“…rare?” Kara finished for her. Sam shrugged. “You’re right. Truth is, I don’t even have a high school diploma. I’m currently studying for my GED.”

“Really?” Sam asked, genuinely astonished.
“Really. Not by choice, obviously – I never even got the chance to attend high school.” Kara admitted.

Sam blinked. “Why?” she asked, letting her curiosity get the better of her.

Her companion smiled weakly. “Kal and I spent the last ten years stranded on an island in the middle of the North China Sea.” she bluntly stated, knowing that there was no point in hiding it any longer.

Sam stared.

“It was the same island Oliver Queen washed up on.” Kara continued. “It’s how we know Thea, and how Kal got into Balliol – Moira Queen helped us get our foot into the door.”

“…Wow…I’m sorry for prying into something so personal like that.” Sam apologized.

Kara waved her off. “It’s alright. You couldn’t have known. As you can tell, we don’t like to advertise the fact – the last thing us and the Queens wanted was for someone to start rumors about Kal being Oliver and I’s son or something, disregarding the fact that we met when he was sixteen and I was twelve.”

“I can imagine.” Sam giggled as the awkward atmosphere dissipated.

“So, what about you? How’d you end up in Starling?”

“Oh, nothing special. I started my own company down in Coast City. As we got more and more successful, I moved headquarters to Starling City when Ruby was eight and we’ve been here ever since.”

“And Ruby’s dad?”

“No longer in the picture.” Sam’s expression tensed. Just a bit.

Kara slowly nodded. “I see.”

“We should do this again sometime.” Sam suggested when it was time to leave.

“Definitely.” Kara agreed.

Oliver went to press the doorbell on Laurel’s door, only to stop when it unexpectedly opened on its own. On the other side was Tommy, who had a dejected look on his face.

“Tommy?” he asked. Tommy looked up, and his expression changed to one of surprise.

“Ollie? What are you doing here?” he asked.

Oliver shrugged, and lifted a bag of snacks. “Movie night. Laurel said she would watch the last Harry Potter movie with me. I already saw the other seven with Thea, Kara, and Kal.” he explained.

Tommy plastered what was clearly a fake grin on his face. “Oh, okay. Well, don’t let me keep you.” Then, without saying anymore, he stalked past Oliver, heading straight for the elevator. The Queen lowered the bag of snacks and watched him leave, concerned, before turning back to his other friend’s apartment.

He walked in, slowly, and popped his head into the living room. Laurel was sitting on her couch,
eyes closed, looking deep in thought. Oliver watched her for a moment. “Laurel?”

Her eyes immediately snapped open, and her head turned, her eyes spotting him. “Ollie! What are you doing here?”

“Movie night?” he stated, lifting the bag up once more.

“Oh! Right, that’s tonight.”

Oliver looked at her with concern this time. “We can do this another time if you want, Laurel.”

“No, no.” She shook her head and smiled. It had a hint of melancholy to it. “I’ll go get the movie prepped. You deal with the food.”

“Wow.” Oliver said, once the credits started rolling. He couldn’t keep his eyes off the TV the entire time.

Laurel hummed and nodded her head. “Quite the emotional coaster.”

“There were times where I wanted to cry.” Oliver admitted, and considering he was trained by the League of Assassins, that was saying something. “The thing with Snape, Harry meeting his parents, Lupin and Sirius in the forest, the ending…”

“I’m glad to see you’re as sensitive as always, Ollie.” Laurel teased him.

Oliver blushed. “It was a really good movie, alright!” he defended himself.

“Sure…” Laurel drawled mockingly. Oliver did not pout, but he did duck his head into his hands, causing his fellow movie-watcher to chuckle.

A little bit later, as they were cleaning up the depleted snacks, Oliver decided now was the time to act. Casually, he asked, “So, what happened between you and Tommy?”

Laurel jumped. “What makes you think something happened between us?” she shifted awkwardly.

Oliver gave her a deadpan look. “Laurel, I saw him storm out of here earlier. What happened?”

Laurel sighed, and flopped back onto the couch. Oliver sat with her, watching her curiously.

“Tommy asked me out on a date.” she confessed.

“And I take it you said no.” Oliver noted, already connecting the dots.

The lawyer raised an eyebrow. “You don’t sound surprised.”

“He told me he had feelings for you the other day. I was the one who pushed him to ask you out.” Oliver admitted. “Told him that he didn’t want to have any regrets, and that the worse that could happen is that you’d say no or you two would endure a failed date or two.”

“Yeah, well…” Laurel trailed off, biting her lip.

“Look, I’m not judging. I just want to know why you didn’t say yes.”

Laurel shrugged, and looked at him with a tired expression. “As ironic and cliché as it is, I told him I didn’t want to ruin our friendship.”
At Oliver’s urging look, she continued. “Ollie, I have dated a lot of great guys over the years. But no matter how hard I tried, the relationships never lasted. It usually wasn’t because I didn’t like the guy, so much as the fact that I couldn’t put my heart into the relationship. I didn’t want to give Tommy the same false hope.”

“Why couldn’t you put your heart into those relationships?” Oliver asked curiously.

Laurel bit her bottom lip a bit more before elaborating. “There was this one guy…that I could never quite get over,” she spoke carefully, not wanting Oliver to know who she was talking about, “We weren’t together. But I had feelings for him, and before I could tell him, he left. I guess I’ve never really managed to get over him.”

Oliver gave her a comforting look. “Laurel, by the sounds of it, this guy isn’t coming back. And if he isn’t, you shouldn’t let your romantic life revolve around him. I’m not saying you should change your mind about Tommy – that’s your choice – but…you deserve to be happy, Laurel.”

Ring! The Queen looked away for a moment, taking out his phone and reading the text on the screen. “That was Mom. She wants to talk about dinner with the Chens tomorrow.” he turned back to Laurel, giving her a friendly hug. “I’ll talk to you later, alright?” he got up and made his way to the door.

She watched him leave, a sad and longing look on her face.

*But that’s just the thing, Ollie. He did come back.*

---

Iris West walked out of CCPD’s 1st Precinct. Her shift was over. Normally, she’d be leaving with Eddie, but he had stayed behind to work more on a particularly hard case.

She stopped when she saw him. Someone she desperately did not want to see.

Barry Allen took a step forward.

“Can we talk?”

“You’ve been avoiding me.” Barry accused her. They were at their favorite hotspot, Jitters.

Iris took a sip of her hot cocoa, and nodded. “I have.” She didn’t deny.

“Iris–“

She cut him off. “I know what you want to talk about. The Blog.”

Barry exhaled. “Iris…”

“He it hard,” she admitted. “Those first couple of months. After we learned what happened to you. After we realized you were never coming back. I was…I was just so angry, Barry. At Joe, at the shrinks, at the teachers, at the kids at school – everyone. I was angry at the world. Talking with Henry helped, but…after you were gone, I just shut everyone out.”

“That first year without you was the worst. I wasn’t coping well. So, I started hoarding everything about you – every memory, all your things, even your essays at school. I couldn’t let you go. And
then I remembered your blog. I would read it every single time I was down, just to remind myself of you. And then I…heard about something.”

“Heard about what?” Barry questioned, already suspecting what it was.

“Something impossible. I don’t even remember what it was. But it made me think of you, so I went chasing after it, obsessing over it. Then I figured out the password to your blog, and, well…”

“…you wrote about it.” Barry finished for her. “And you signed your name to it.”

“Yes.” Iris confirmed. “People made fun of me at school for it, but I didn’t care. You were closer to me than you had been since you left Central City and got on that stupid boat. I channeled my “inner Barry” for another two years before Henry finally talked sense into me. He told me that it wasn’t healthy, that you would want me to live my own life, not clinging to your ghost. He was right, though it took a bad scrape with one of those ‘impossible’ things to make me realize it.”

“What kind of ‘bad scrape’ are we talking about?” Barry asked, dreading the answer.

“I nearly got arrested.” Iris confessed in shame, causing Barry to put a hand to his face. “After that, well, I realized I was going too far, and if I went any farther, I wouldn’t be able to pull back. So, I shut down the blog. Focused on school instead. It was for the best.”

After Iris finished her story, silence descended on them both, stretching for many moments.

“I’m sorry.” Barry finally said, a guilty look on his face.

“For what?” Iris asked tiredly. “You didn’t do anything.”

“I left.” her best friend stated pointedly, as if that explained everything.

And it did, except Iris disagreed, shaking her head. “I understood why you left, Barry. I didn’t blame you, not once, for doing so. In this entire situation, you were the only one I was never mad at.”

“But…”

“Barry.” He looked at her, and she reached forward, taking his hand in hers. “It may have been your choice to leave, but it wasn’t your choice not to come back.” They looked into each other’s eyes, holding their gazes for a moment too long. Barry then diverted his eyes downwards, noting their joined hands.

He looked at her once more. “Come with me.”

“Remember this place?” He spread his arm outwards towards the row of aisles. Central City Bowling Alley.

Iris nodded, glee on her face. “We’d come here as kids all the time. It’s been so long…”

“Hey.” she looked at him, and found that they were holding hands once again. And oddly enough, she didn’t want to let go. “I can’t change the past, Iris. I can’t get us back all the years we’ve lost.”

Iris looked down, only for Barry to tilt her chin upwards, so they were face-to-face. “But I’m here now. And I promise, I’m not ever leaving you again.” They exchanged smiles, and Iris felt her heart stop beating, just an instant.

“Now, come on! I’m going to kick your ass, West!”
“In your dreams, Allen!”

“Do you have it?” Astra demanded as Braniac 8, or Indigo as she liked to be called these days, materialized from the nearest computer.

“You doubt me?” Indigo mocked her rival, handing over a file.

“Doubt? No. Trust?” Astra sneered, and then opened the file, clicking on the touchpad. It was a picture of a boy. “This is the wrong one!”

Indigo shook her head. “No. This is the file of her charge.”

“Charge?”

“Your dear niece is the guardian of a boy. Officially, he is her maternal cousin and adoptive brother. But I think you might recognize who he really is, General.”

_Cousin?_ Astra looked down, and read the name on the file: Clark Calvin Kent. _Calvin…_ Cal…

…Kal-El.

“Jor-El’s son!” The Kryptonian gasped in shock.

“Yes.” Indigo snarled. The Braniac Clan never did have the best relationship with Jor-El.

Astra payed her no attention. Jor-El’s son. She should’ve known.

Jor-El, and his brother, Zor-El, were the two most brilliant men on Krypton. They knew about their home planet’s imminent destruction, and they had worked tirelessly to find a way to stop it. But if there had been no way to stop it in time, it wasn’t hard to believe that they had preparations in place, to save their children. Kara had been charged with taking care of Kal-El, no doubt, and they had landed here, on Earth, together.

Astra had always had a tense relationship with Kara’s paternal family. She found them overly idealistic, pretentious. But Alura had loved Zor-El, and Kara had loved them all, so she endured. At least that love had not been for not – Kara survived because of them, and she would give them a token thanks, a brief prayer, for that.

“And Kara’s file?”

“Here.” Indigo handed another pad over, and Astra took it greedily, hurriedly opening it.

The picture was the first thing to catch her attention. Astra allowed her fingers to caress the visage of her niece, all grown up. Kara had matured into a beautiful young woman. Her long blonde hair and the color of her eyes may have belonged to her father, but the shape of her face, the curl of her lips – they were all Alura, and by extension, Astra. _Oh, how much time we’ve lost, little one._

It took all of Astra’s strength to remove her eyes from the image of her most precious one. She instead turned her attentions to the information. Her human name was Kara Linda Danvers. Born in Kansas City, on September 7, 1989, as the only child of Jeremiah and Eliza Danvers. Parents died in a shipwreck off the coast of China when she was twelve, she and cousin Clark Calvin Kent were presumed dead alongside them. Ten years later, they were rescued from an island in the North China
Sea, along with an Oliver Jonas Queen and a Bartholomew Henry Allen. Now resides in Starling City, alongside her cousin, who is attending a prestigious private school.

Astra frowned. *Why would she spend ten years on an island? Surely her powers would’ve awoken by that point and she and Kal-El and whoever else was with them could’ve escaped.* The thought nagged at her, but she dismissed it – she would learn the reason eventually, when she and Kara met again. Instead, Astra looked at Indigo, and gave her a short nod.

“Well done."

Indigo waved her off, “Think nothing of it, General.” she smiled slyly.

---

**Chapter End Notes**

The cliffhanger will be dealt with in the next chapter, which will also be the last chapter in this arc. After that, I will take about a week of hiatus, for Finals and so I can fully plan out Arc II.

As for the actual events in this chapter: ship tease, anyone? Except for Kara, of course. I was tempted to pair off Kara and Sam briefly, but then I realized that pairing wouldn’t work out for obvious reasons, if you’ve watched the most recent season of *Supergirl*.

And I love writing Astra! I still think it’s a shame that she wasn’t the final villain for Season One and Non and Indigo were. No worries, though! Not in this fic! She will be the final villain for Kara in her storyline in Arc II. Harrison Wells / Eobard Thawne will be the same for Barry, as will Malcolm Merlyn for Oliver. And trust me – I’ve got a lot more twists to go through.
Arc I (PART II), Chapter 11: Misstep in the Right Direction

Chapter Summary

The stage has been set. Let the games begin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 11: Misstep in the Right Direction

“You're the Streak.” Caitlin Snow whispered.

Barry shrugged, and his grin widened. “Guilty as charged.”

Cisco Ramon discreetly took out his phone, only to jump back when it flew out of his hand, and landed on the floor, pierced by a knife.

Barry, arm still stretched out, wagged his finger. “Sorry, but I can’t have you outing my secret.”

“So, are you going to kill us? Like you did him?” Caitlin shrieked, pointing at the unconscious and bloody Tony.

Barry gave the piece of meat on the floor a small kick. “He’s not dead.” Caitlin blinked.

Cisco, having regained his courage, asked the question. “Why not? Didn’t you kill the other two metas?”

The Streak smirked. “Oh? You guys call them that too? Anyway, yes, I did. The difference is, one of them was unstable, had just developed a god complex, and had created a tornado that was about to destroy the city. The other was a former hitman of the Darbynian Crime Family whose powers were explicitly lethal – to say nothing of the fact that he was already on death row and was supposed to have been executed the night of the Particle Accelerator Explosion.”

He jabbed his thumb at Tony. “This guy? He’s an asshole, a convict whose crimes date all the way back to juvie, and he made my life and the life of my best friend hell when we were kids. But he’s not a murderer, just a thug, so I don’t see the need to kill him for such petty crimes.” Barry shifted his shoulders. “Of course, I just can’t let him walk away, either, so this is where you come in.” He looked at Caitlin, Cisco, and Dr. Wells.

“Why us?” Cisco demanded.

Barry smiled smugly. “I know you’ve been developing anti-meta technology. I could keep him in my own personal prison, but we’re still in the process of building it and if I keep knocking him out eventually I will end up killing him, if only unintentionally. So, you guys are my best bet.”

“And what makes you think we already have a prison ready?” Dr. Wells asked, speaking for the first time since he outed Barry’s identity.

Barry gazed at him intently, the smile never leaving his face. “Because you hired me.”
Dr. Wells returned his gaze with a stare of his own. "Caitlin. Cisco. Show Mr. Allen the Pipeline so he can deposit Mr. Woodward here. After that, go home and speak of this to no one. Something tells me that if you try, you'll only live to regret it. Mr. Allen, meet back here when you're done."

"You knew...that I knew."

Barry scoffed. "Of course. I'm not stupid, you know. You're a master of spinning lies, Harrison Wells, that much I can tell, but the thing is – so am I. Why else would you give a kid who never graduated from high school a job when you used to work with the most brilliant minds on the planet? Considering your tarnished reputation, if you had truly wanted to help me with a future career in scientific research, you would've stayed away as far as possible. To say nothing of the fact that you didn't even give me specifics for the job you wanted me to do. There was only one explanation." Barry then narrowed his eyes. "The only missing piece of the puzzle is how exactly you knew."

This time, it was Harrison’s turn to smile. "I have my ways."

"I'm sure you do." Barry deadpanned. "Look, I don't trust you."

Wells tilted his head.

"I don't trust you, but for now, I need you. I'll give you the benefit of doubt. But don't think for one moment that I don't have my eyes on you."

Wells nodded. "Very well then. Then I assume you have already put together the job I intended for you?"

Barry showed his teeth. "You want me to capture metas. Hold them here so you can figure out a standard blueprint for a prison to hold all of them."

"Yes." Wells confirmed.

"Fine. But only until the city can build its own prison. We're already breaking enough laws as it is."

"Don’t you mean you, Mr. Allen? After all, I’m not the one killing people." Wells challenged.

Barry tsked. “Harrison, Harrison, Harrison. Here’s something you should know – I know a fellow killer when I see one. And I'm not talking about casualties from a failed experiment. I'm talking about actual, intentional robbing of another's life. What do you think I see, when I see you?"

He’s different.

Eobard Thawne watched the feed, feeling concern rip through him.

When he had refused to rescue Barry from whatever place he disappeared to all those years ago, he had given a thousand justifications as to why. Damage to the timeline. Insufficient information. Maintaining his secret identity.

But none of them were true. The truth was, Eobard Thawne had wanted Barry Allen to suffer.

Now, he was regretting his pettiness. This Barry was different, so very different from the one he once knew. This one was a stone-cold killer, a master liar, and skilled in ways that the other Barry wouldn’t have once considered. He was an unknown variable, one that Eobard could not hope to
bring to heel. He was manipulative, smart.

He was dangerous.

And against all rhyme and reason, Eobard loved it.

There was an extreme likelihood that he would be losing this game. That he would never see home again. But here and now, facing a Barry Allen that could no doubt go toe-to-toe with him, on every battlefield, thrilled him beyond belief. Had things gone to plan, had Barry Allen never gotten on that damn plane, things would’ve just been too easy. Eobard would’ve known all the right buttons to push, all the right words to say, and eventually Barry would’ve played into his hand with nary a protest. This Barry, however, wouldn’t do that at all – he’d fight him every step of the way. He was a worthy nemesis, very close to the level of Eobard’s original Flash.

The only thing he wished to know was how Barry came to be like this. It hadn’t taken long to figure out who else had been with Barry on that island – Oliver Queen, and by the looks of it, Kara Danvers and Clark Kent, according to Gideon and the reports of the Girl in Blue.

Oliver Queen’s years on the island were a mystery even in his time. Not his identity nor his exploits as the Green Arrow, though, after a psychotic hacker had deluded herself into believing the Green Arrow was her soulmate and started stalking him, releasing all the information right before she was jailed after he rejected her. But the hell Oliver Queen had gone through on the island of Lian Yu was knowledge lost to time and something told Eobard Thawne it was integral to how this Barry had become so…dark. To say nothing of the fact that Oliver landed on the island seven years earlier than he did in the original timeline and stayed there for much longer.

Kara Danvers was another surprise. Eobard knew for a fact that what happened with her was not his doing. Kara Danvers, or Kara Zor-El, was not supposed to arrive on Earth for another five years, and not debut as Supergirl until ten years after that. Clark Kent was at the correct age, though he was supposed to be raised by the Kents, who oddly enough were dead in this timeline in a fire twelve years ago.

And that wasn’t the only discrepancy in the timeline. Bruce Wayne’s parents were never killed. Diana of Themyscira never left her home to the world of man. Those three were the backbone of the future Justice League, the “Holy Trinity”, as they were once called. Now, it seemed, a new Trinity was replacing them, one much more…driven in their pursuit of justice.

There was another player at work, he realized.

But no matter, he thought, whoever it is will be stopped, the moment Barry goes back to save his mother.

“Stay away from my son.” Robert Queen snarled as he stormed into Malcolm Merlyn’s home office.

“Why hello Robert, it’s good to see you. It’s good to see you too, Malcolm, how’s your day been?” Malcolm Merlyn muttered sarcastically, cool as a cucumber in the face of his former best friend’s rage.

Robert ignored him, glaring. “I saw you two yesterday, at The Palm. What’s your game, Malcolm?”

“What, can’t a godfather spend time with his godson?” Malcolm smirked.
“You lost any right to that name when you had your godson killed.”

Malcolm conceded defeat, holding up his hands. “You’re right, Robert. You’re right. When the Undertaking is over, if it makes you feel better, I’ll start distancing myself from Oliver.”

“What about now?” Robert demanded.

“I’ll continue socializing with him, if only to remind you and Moira of what is at stake should you defy me.” Malcolm smoothly replied, dead serious.

Robert gritted his teeth, then crumbled. He collapsed into the chair in front of Malcolm’s desk, tears leaking out of his eyes. Malcolm’s face softened a bit – despite their relationship being tattered beyond repair, he still had a soft spot for the Queens, who had been his closest friends and confidants at one point.

“Robert.”

“Please, Malcolm. He’s my son. I already lost him once. I can’t…I can’t…”

“And you won’t.” Malcolm cooed. “Oliver will live, as long as you keep with the plan. And once the Glades are nothing more than rubble on the ground, we can put this all behind us. Alright?”

Robert stared at him. He wanted to shout, to scream, to hit Malcolm with everything he had. But it would do nothing to help. He deflated. “Alright.”

“General.” Astra jumped, slightly startled. She turned.

Non.

“Lieutenant.” she returned his nod.

“What are you doing?”

“Surveillance.”

 “…it’s her, isn’t it?”

“What of it, Non!” Astra slammed her fist down, glaring at her husband. Non returned her glower defiantly.

“She is weak, Astra. Hardly a threat. Either as an ally or as an enemy.” He retorted calmly.

Astra scoffed. “Regardless, she is the only fully grown Kryptonian on the planet that defies us, even if she is unaware of it currently. We must remain vigilant over her.”

Non shook his head. “You still care for her. Do not let your feelings get in the way of your duty, Astra.”

“Never.” Astra ground out. “Now leave, Non. Consider this a direct order from your superior officer.”

“Very well, General.” He bowed his head and left, his steps echoing through the corridor.
Astra sighed and turned her head back to the screen. On it, Kara was currently conversing was a middle-aged woman, laughing at something she said.

The Kryptonian General knew she was obsessing over this. She couldn’t help it – Kara had been the most important person in her life, and even after all this time that hadn’t changed. Everything she had ever done, since the day Kara was born, had been driven by the love she had for her niece. That hadn’t changed even when she thought Kara to be dead.

It was tempting, just to reveal herself, reveal everything to Kara, to try and convince her to turn to her side. But Kara had been living with humans for the last ten years, and before that was raised with the ideals of the House of El. She had filled her head with foolish notions of heroism, judging by her actions as this “Girl in Blue”. She would never approve of Myriad.

No, Astra’s best bet was to wait until after Myriad was activated. Once Kara saw the benefits, it was only a matter of time before she turned to their side. If not, well, Kal-El would certainly make a good bargaining chip, as would some of the humans Kara seemed to be especially fond of.

Astra would’ve felt regret, causing her niece so much pain. But Kara would not willingly turn to their side without some incentive, and once she did, Astra was sure she’d see things her way.

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

“Block all exit routes! Turn off the main power! Put this place under complete and total lockdown! Do not let this son of a bitch out of this building!” Amanda Waller commanded, an ugly look on her face.

“Ma’am, Ma’am!”

“What!”

“I’m sorry, Ma’am, but judging by our scanners…he’s gone.”

Waller clenched her fist, and then grabbed hold of the nearest chair and threw it at the wall.

He ran. For seconds, minutes, hours, days – he didn’t know how long.

It was only when his legs could no longer handle the strain did he stop, collapsing onto a nearby bench. On it, an old newspaper laid there. At the sight of the front page, he grabbed it, staring long and hard at the headline.

‘OLIVER QUEEN IS ALIVE!’

He smiled.

*I’m glad you made it out, kid. I just hope the others managed to make it out with you.*
And with that, I end Arc I. Arc II will be fully planned out once finals are over, and chapters should be released by next Sunday.

As for the “psychotic hacker” bit, yes, that was Felicity Smoak, and that will be the only reference to her in the entire story. If you’re wondering what happened to her, she went to jail with Cooper Seldon for that virus she made. Won’t be released for at least another ten to twenty years. John Diggle and Lyla Michaels never divorced, and are currently living in another city with their son and daughter. Lyla never joined A.R.G.U.S. as a result.

And then there are the bits about the timeline. This was deliberate. It was to set up another arc in the story, one after Arc V. This where I deal with all the bits about the timeline.

See ya next time!
Chapter 12: Big Old Fancy Fortress

“That was way easier than I thought it was going to be.” Barry admitted to Iris as they exited the building.

Iris grinned. “Glad to see your mind is still as sharp as ever.” the grin then faded slightly. “Do you really need to go?” she asked.

Barry smiled comfortingly at her. “It’s been a while since I saw them, Iris, and it’ll be a good way to wind down from all the studying and testing.”

“But still…”

“Iris. It’ll only be a few days.” Barry bared his teeth. “I’ll be back before you know it.”

“You’ve got all your phones?”

“Yes.”

“You’re all packed?”

“Yes.”

“You –“

“Mom. It’s going to be fine.” Oliver stressed to the fretting Moira.

Moira sighed. “I’m sorry, Oliver. I just don’t want you – or Kara and Clark – to leave my sight. Not after what happened the last time I did.”

Oliver looked comfortingly at her. “No boats, this time, Mom. Planes are much safer. We’ll be fine Mom. It’s not going to be a long trip.”

“Can you at least tell me where you’re going? You’re all being surprisingly mum about this.”

Oliver shrugged. “Up north. Kal wants to see the snow.”
“This is it?”

“This is it.” Kara confirmed. They all stared at the large tundra of sprawling ice. Kara took out the key, bearing the sigil of her and Kal-El’s family, and held it outwards.

Her companions watched, raptured, as the tundra suddenly spiked outwards, all at once, constructing a large, uneven structure that dwarfed them all. After the edifice completed its rise, they moved forward. There was a doorway, and on it a small opening, in the shape of the key. Kara inserted it, watching as the entrance opened, collapsing into nonexistence.

The survivors of Lian Yu walked in, taking in the palatial interior carved out of translucent, solid water. A buzzing called out to them, and they looked forward.

An imp of machinery, a golden automaton floated, blinking and gazing at them. They gazed back, surprised to something so advanced already here. All except Kara, who looked at it with nostalgia. She knew exactly what it was.

“Greetings. I am Kelex. Designated as the primary assistant to the House of El.” it synthesized.

Kara broke out of her reverie, and spoke. “Greetings, Kelex. I am primary user Kara Zor-El. This,” she put her hand on Kal’s shoulder. “is my cousin.” She looked pointedly at him.

Kal got the message. “I am primary user Kal-El.”

“Greetings, Lady Kara Zor-El, Lord Kal-El. I have been waiting for you. My prime directive is to serve the House of El and preserve the memory of the planet Krypton. I will obey every order you ask of me that is within my authorization.” The machine repeated.

Kara nodded. “Thank you, Kelex. Then, as my first order, please designate two secondary users to the Fortress.”

“Very well. Announce your names, please.”

“Oliver Queen.”

“Barry Allen.”

Ping. “Welcome, Oliver Queen, Barry Allen. As secondary users, I will obey every order you give me if it does not conflict with my prime directive. All your orders are secondary and can be overridden by primary users Lady Kara and Lord Kal-El.” The machine announced.

Everyone looked at one another. “So, you guys have your own big fancy fortress now, huh?” Barry commented.

“We’ll need to connect it to the Foundry.” Oliver stated, ignoring Barry’s comment.

“And what of S.T.A.R. Labs?” Kara asked.

Barry shook his head. “Not until everyone that works there has been vetted. It will continue to be a satellite base, and possible back-up base should the Foundry be compromised.” he insisted, turning serious.

“Uh, guys?” A timid voice called out.
The three vigilantes turned their heads, looking at their young ward, and froze. Kal-El was standing in front of a stationary hologram of a man with dark hair, wearing a robe. His features were eerily familiar, though Barry and Oliver could not place why.

Kal-El scuttled up to his cousin. “Who’s that?” he asked her.

Kara payed him no attention, her eyes fixated on the buzzing, see-through image.

“Hello, Kara.” He said, and while his voice and face could not emote, one could feel the fondness seeping through him.

“Uncle…Jor-El?” She gasped, stunned.

At that, the entire world stopped. The three males looked at the features of the hologram once more, and it was then that Barry and Oliver could see it. This man…looked just liked Kal-El. With that, it dawned on them who exactly this man was. They each made a small noise of surprise.

Kal-El ignored them, gawking at the visage of a man he’d never thought he’d meet.

“Dad?” he breathed out.

“You’re angry today.” Ted Grant commented. Beside him, one of his regulars, Laurel Lance, all but ripped the boxing gloves off her hands.

“I’ve got a lot on my mind.” She ground out.

Ted sighed. “Talk to me.”

Laurel, realizing how abrasive she was being, turned to look at her mentor apologetically. “Ted…”

“C’mon, Laurel. We’re friends, right?”

Laurel nodded. She had first met Ted after he saved her from some punks trying to mug her during her first week at CNRI. The attorney had sought him out to thank him, and took note of the gym.

After another guy tried to get the drop on her, she had gone to him, asking for training beyond the basic self-defense her father had made her go through.

Fast forward a few years, and while Laurel had technically completed her training, she still found herself as a regular at Ted’s gym, training hard and frequently sparring with him. They had forged a solid friendship, and Ted was often her go-to for any information her father needed from the Glades.

“Yeah.” Laurel agreed, then threw her head back, stretching her arms. Her hair, arranged into a long, single braid, bounced slightly behind her. “It’s a lot of things, really.”

“A girl like you, always trying to help people – I’m not surprised.” Ted smiled at her.

Laurel smiled back. “Yeah, well...For one thing, Cyrus Vanch got out.”

“Crap.” Ted muttered, and Laurel identified with him. Vanch was a well-known name in the Glades and Starling City’s criminal element in general. While quite not on the level of the Bertinellis (at least before Frank Bertinelli got busted thanks to the Hood) and the Triad, he was a power-player whose crimes were just as bad if not worse. When Laurel helped put him away, the entire neighborhood
breathed a little easier.

“I know, right? Worse part is, the DA won’t do anything about it, and won’t take any calls
demanding her to do something about it.” Laurel snorted. “And to think she’s considered less corrupt
than the last one.”

“He’ll be back in Iron Heights soon enough, Laurel. Guy like him doesn’t know how to stop.”

he’s not the only man that’s stressing me out.”


The lawyer chuckled. “I doubt you want to listen to my boy problems.”

The boxer shrugged. “You’d be surprised how many guys come in here to vent about their issues
with the fairer sex. It’d be nice to hear thing from the other side of the equation.”

“If you insist,” she teased, and then became morose once more. “I told you a couple of weeks ago
about my friend that came back, right?”

“The one on the news? Oliver Queen?” she nodded. “Yeah, I remember. Is he causing you issues?”

“Not intentionally.” Laurel admitted. “Ollie and I grew up together, alongside Tommy Merlyn and
my little sister, Sara. The three of us were in the same year at Balliol Prep. It was odd, being so close
to two people whose parents made more money in a month than mine did on a yearly basis, but for
whatever reason, that never was a real issue between us. They never treated Sara and I any different
from anyone else in the class. We eventually became best friends, and the three of us were thicker
than thieves. I was always the one to bust Ollie and Tommy out of the trouble they always seemed to
get into – when I wasn’t joining in on the fun.” she added on, sheepishly rubbing the back of her
head. Ted gestured her to continue.

Laurel inhaled deeply, and spoke further. “Life was good. But as we got older, I started developing
feelings for Ollie. At the time, he had just noticed girls and wasn’t looking for a serious relationship. I
didn’t want to ruin our close friendship, so I didn’t tell him. But they got stronger, so I resolved
myself to tell him after he got back from his trip on that stupid boat.”

“And then the boat sunk.” Ted concluded for her.

“And then the boat sunk.” Laurel confirmed. “For ten years, we all thought he was dead. I took it
badly, I won’t lie – for years, I wondered if I told him my feelings, he would’ve never gotten on that
ship. I know better now, but…” she exhaled. “Tommy, of course, took it the hardest, next to Oliver’s
own family. He drifted away from me for a while, fell in with bad crowd for a couple years, until his
dad finally decided enough was enough and cut him off to force him to take control of his life. After
a few months, he did, and we reconnected. He was my closest male friend for years. Until…well,
until Ollie came back.”

“I’m guessing this is the part where things get complicated.”

“You’d be right. I tried moving on from Ollie after his death, but all my relationships never stuck.
And then he came back, and we started spending time together – as friends, and…I realized I still
had feelings for him. I couldn’t tell him, because after ten years on an island, romance is the last thing
on his mind these days. He simply isn’t ready for a relationship right now. And Tommy…”

Ted looked at her sympathetically. “Tommy has feelings for you.”
The attorney nodded. “He tried asking me out a little while ago. I told him no, that I didn’t want to ruin our friendship.”

“So: you have feelings for this one guy, who’s not looking for any relationship right now, while his best friend, who also happens to be your best friend as well, has feelings for you, and you don’t want to date him because you don’t think you can commit to a relationship with him.” Ted summed up.

Laurel groaned. When he put it like that, it sounded like one of those soapy Lifetime movies. “Pretty much. I care for Tommy a great deal, but I honestly can’t see him as anything more than a brother these days. And with Ollie back in the picture, it just wouldn’t be fair to him to try for a relationship when I’m pining for our other best friend.”

Ted gave a low whistle. “Wow. That’s a lot more complicated than the ‘My girl is pissed at me and I don’t know why!’ I usually hear around here.” He gave Laurel a small pat on the back. “My suggestion? Give it time. Your friend just came back from the dead, Laurel. Of course, you would be emotional over that. If those feelings are still around in six months or so, then I say give it chance.”

Laurel nodded. That seemed reasonable. In six months she would know whether her feelings were genuine or just sprung from her joy at having one of her closest friends back. And if they were real, then six months should be enough time for Oliver to acclimate enough to try for a relationship.

“Yeah. You’re right, Ted. A little time is all I need.” Laurel smiled. “I doubt Ollie will be leaving Starling City anytime soon. At least not permanently.”

Iris moaned. Eddie laughed.

They were at a nice Italian restaurant in the heart of Central City. With Barry coming back and the incidents with the Streak and Tony Woodward, they hadn’t had a date in a while. So, Eddie had surprised his girlfriend with a bouquet of flowers and a trip to the best lasagna in town.

“God, this is so good.” she waxed on, taking another bite of tomato and cheesy goodness.

Eddie chuckled once more. “I’m glad you like it. Dibny is the one who gave me the recommendation.”

Iris blinked, momentarily forgetting the food. “Dibny?”

The detective shrugged. “He was surprisingly well-versed in food culture, at least for Central. I for one think it’s because of the number of failed dates he’s been on.”

“Sounds like Dibny. Can’t go a week without some woman slapping him right across the face and leaving the precinct in a huff.” Iris commented, attention back on the food.

“Indeed.” Eddie agreed, amused. The amusement soon disappeared from his face and he looked Iris at once more. “Hey, where were you last Friday? You didn’t pick up your phone when I called you.”

The cop stopped inhaling her food, and looked up briefly. “Barry and I needed to talk. There were some things said during that thing with Tony…that we needed to clear the air about.”

“Oh.” Eddie set down his fork, and tried to keep his emotions in check. They’re just friends. He
reminded himself. “You guys alright?”

Iris patted his arm. “Better than ever. Afterwards we went bowling, like we used to when we were kids.”

Eddie’s heart beat erratically. *They’re friends. Nothing more.* “That’s…great. I imagine you guys had a lot of fun.”

“*Lots.*” Iris emphasized, oblivious to the tension in her boyfriend’s form. “What about you? How’s the case going?”

Eddie internally made a sigh of relief, glad for the change in subject. “Well, we’re reanalyzing all the reports made about the Streak.”

Iris quirked an eyebrow. “The Streak?”

“At this point, with the Girl in Blue and Tony Woodward and Clyde Mardon – there are things this world can’t explain, Iris. And the Streak, he’s at the center of it, I just know it.” Eddie excitedly extrapolated to her. Iris nodded along, though there was this uncomfortable feeling settling in her gut. Surely, getting the Streak off the streets would be a boon to the CCPD. No matter how well-intentioned the vigilante was, it didn’t change the fact he was killing people and keeping morale down. On the other hand, the people he killed were people with powers like him, people that the CCPD were ill-equipped to deal with – people that had no issue taking advantage of that shortcoming.

Iris was a cop, and she knew that the law dictated she helped bring this guy down, but she wasn’t blind to the greying morality of the situation. She knew better than to voice her concerns to Eddie, though, seeing how animatedly he was acting at the thought of catching the vigilante.

“Just wait, Iris. We’ll catch this guy eventually, no matter how fast he is.” Eddie had a glint in his eye. “Speed isn’t everything, after all.”

“Hello, Kal-El. I know I’m not really here, but…I’m happy to see you, regardless.” the hologram of Jor-El greeted his son with as much emotion as he could.

Kal-El had been raised to control his emotions, to never show weakness. But even that training failed in the face of his biological father. Kara had told him stories about his blood parents, about their many achievements, of their love for him; the only child on Krypton to have been born naturally, rather than through genetic engineering. While his memories of them were even sparser than of those he had of Shado and Slade, that didn’t stop him from holding them just as close to his heart.

Tears glistened on the corner of his eyes as he stepped closer to Jor-El. “I’m happy to see you too.” He sniffed slightly, and wiped the liquid away. “Why are you here?” he asked.

“Kelex is limited by the internal safeguards regarding what information he can give you from Krypton’s database. I, however, have full access to the database, as a construct of a member of Krypton’s Science Council.” Jor-El answered.

Oliver crossed his arms. “So, you’re here to bypass the safeguards for any confidential information we might need.” he surmised.
“Yes.”

Barry, catching on to Oliver’s train of thought, looked critically at the hologram. “Why? Shouldn’t Kara and Kal-El be the only alien presence on Earth?”

When Jor-El hesitated to answer, Kara looked at him sharply. “Uncle?” she prodded.

If Jor-El could sigh, he would have. “There has been evidence of prior alien contact with this planet. And, even if there weren’t, the presence of Kryptonian technology would inevitably spread throughout the universe. I am sorry, my dear niece, my beloved son. I wished that you two would be able to live peaceful lives, be able to pass on what is left of our planet’s culture to the people of Earth, but I knew, logically, that wouldn’t be the case.”

Kara stepped back, as if a blow had hit her. Kal-El clenched his fists. Barry and Oliver exchanged looks.

“Then we must be ready.” The archer declared. “We need to connect the Fortress to the Foundry immediately. Barry, how soon can you vet your new coworkers?” he asked his surrogate brother.

Barry shook his head. “Not soon enough.” At everyone’s questioning looks, he held up his hands. “I doubt Caitlin and Cisco will be an issue. Dr. Harrison Wells, however…” Barry’s eyes narrowed. “There’s something off about him. Something I don’t like. And since he owns S.T.A.R. Labs, that’s not a good thing.”

“Fine.” Oliver relented. “We’ll put off S.T.A.R. Labs for now. The League will also have to be informed – they can put out feelers for any possible troublemakers that have already found their way here.”

Kara blew away a strand of hair. “We’re never going to have normal lives, are we?”

“Any chance any of us had at a normal life died when we landed on that island.” Barry groused. Everyone else couldn’t help but agree.

Ted set down another box and stretched his arms. He had just closed his gym for the night and kicked out any stragglers.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a familiar dark material sticking out from another box. Hesitantly, he grabbed it.

His old mask.

Ted stared at it for a moment, allowing the memories to wash over him, before burying it back into the excess of cardboard.

There was no point in living in the past.

“Here.” Maseo Yamashiro handed the paper file, watching as his companion perused over it
greedily. “I’m sorry it’s not much – even with my clearance, information about them is scarce. They practically fell off the map after Lian Yu.”

The man waved him off. “Don’t worry about, Maseo. This…this is more than enough. Knowing that they’re alive is more than I could’ve hoped for.”

Chapter End Notes

I think you all know who the escapee is, but I’ll keep you in the dark a little longer.

I’m still planning out the ending of this arc, though I’ve already got a fair few chapters planned. I figured I might as well start writing those and let it sit for a while. It will come to me eventually. The issue isn’t so much the actual ending itself so much outlining it in a way that will allow it to build to Arcs IV and V.

And if you want something a little more philosophical / emotional, I’ve uploaded a new story called God and the Devil. It’s a soulmate story, with the main pairing being Barry Allen/Earth-2 Hunter Zolomon. Strange, I know, but the pairing is secondary really. It’s more like an exploration what it really means to be soulmates with a person. Hence, the ending is rather bittersweet, with emphasis on the bitter part.
Arc II, Chapter 13: Adventures in House Hunting

Chapter Summary

Kara and Laurel bond. As do others.

(WARNING: This chapter contains disparaging comments about Twilight. If you are a fan, read at your own peril.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 13: Adventures in House Hunting

“Thanks for doing this with me.” Kara smiled gratefully at Laurel. “Moira had a meeting she couldn’t get out of and with Thea and Kal at school – it’s hard enough doing this on my own.”

Laurel waved her off. “Think nothing of it. I know how frustrating the housing market in Starling can be, even if you have enough money to skimp out on offers in the Glades. I had similar issues when I went apartment hunting during my college years.” The two women continued to converse until the housing agent, a middle-aged woman wearing business casual attire, appeared, carrying with her a ring of golden and silver keys.

“Miss Danvers.” she held out her hand, which Kara took. She then held out her hand to Laurel. “And you must be Miss Lance. Miss Danvers told me you would be coming here today in place of the Queens.”

Laurel grasped the offered courtesy firmly, nodding. “Yes. Moira had business to take care of and Thea is attending school today.”

The housing agent nodded. “Very well then. You may call me Miss Mericle.” she turned back to Kara. “Now, Miss Danvers, I know you have not enjoyed the last few homes we have visited over the last few weeks, but I can assure you that today, you’ll find something that you will like. Here, for example.” She gestured to the door, then fished through the ring of keys until she found the correct one. She inserted the key, and with a click! the door opened.

When Kara and Laurel first entered the condo, they first thing they noticed was the wide, open space of the living room. “That’s a lot of space.” the lawyer commented.

The Kryptonian hummed in agreement. “Good. Kal-El needs a place where he can move a lot.” She peered into the kitchen, taking note of the appliances and utilities. “Are these solid brands?”

Laurel walked into the kitchen herself, surveying the logos. “Pretty solid. Granted, I don’t cook often, but a quick google search should –“ she stopped speaking as a very familiar smell wafted into the room.

Kara, also noticing the scent, wrinkled her nose. “What smell is that?”

“You don’t want to know.” Laurel grimaced. “Miss Mericle! We’re ready for the next place!” She called out as she started shoving Kara back towards the door.
“Laurel?” Kara asked, perplexed.

“One of the downsides of working in the Glades is that you’re familiar with smells you really don’t want to be familiar with.”

From the corner of her eye, the former castaway saw a shifty-looking man leave from the condo next door, coughing and sputtering. “I see.”

“I see you still haven’t finished your food, Oliver.” Malcolm Merlyn remarked to his godson, observing the large slab of meat still present on Oliver’s plate. The Queen scion, in the middle of cutting another piece of steak, paused momentarily.

“After the island, you tend to savor things like food a little bit more.” Oliver admitted.

Malcolm gave a short nod. “I would imagine so. Living years without them makes a person more appreciative of the finer things in life.”

Oliver grinned. “You sound like you’re talking from experience, Uncle Malcolm.”

Malcolm smiled coolly. “Maybe I am. And perhaps, one day, I’ll tell you all about it, godson.”

“I look forward to it.” Oliver replied, sounding genuine.

Just then, Tommy appeared from his short trip to the bathroom, plopping back down into his seat. “I’m back! Did I miss anything?”

His father schooled his expression into something more benign. “Nothing you need to worry about, Tommy.” he turned back to the other member of their dining party. “So, Oliver, now that the GED exams are over and done with, do you have an idea on what you plan to do with your free time?”

“We don’t know if I passed yet, Uncle Malcolm.” Oliver responded humbly.

Malcolm shook his head flippantly. “Nonsense! Of course, you did. You’re a smart young man, Oliver, and you and Kara and I have no doubt Barry as well all studied hard over the last month and a half. Those exams must have been a piece of cake for you three.”

They were, but Oliver refused to admit that. He was playing a role, and that meant not letting anyone outside of his inner circle how smart he really was. Instead, he gave a small chuckle. “I wouldn’t go that far, but I will admit that they were easier than I thought they were going to be. And as for plans – well, I’m debating starting a business.”

“A business?” Malcolm leaned forward, as did Tommy, who was watching the exchange uncomfortably. “What kind of business?”

“Kara and I were thinking of partnering up and starting an affordable shopping center in the Glades. The old family steel mill is still there, abandoned, and well…”

Malcolm smiled, careful to hide the strain. “Ambitious. And thoughtful as well. I’m glad to see you taking such initiative like this.” he praised his godson.

Unbeknownst to both Oliver and Malcolm, Tommy was observing and listening, frowning heavily when he heard his father compliment his best friend.

Dad had never said anything like that to me before. He thought, green-eyed.
Laurel and Kara stood in the middle of the entranceway, staring.

“Are those raccoons?”

Barry smirked. Caitlin and Cisco glared back.

“What? No hello?”

Caitlin huffed. “I don’t greet murderers.”

Barry shrugged. “I am what I am. And considering that I work here now, you’d better get used to working with a murderer.” *Granted, you already have, even if you haven’t realized it yet.*

Cisco walked up to him, shaking slightly but trying not to show it. Barry noticed his slight trembling, but didn’t comment, admiring his courage. “Look, Edward Cullen, I don’t care if you’re a blood sucker – you try anything with me or her, and super speed or not, I will lay your ass out.” he threatened.

Barry ignored the threat, and looked confusedly at his aggressor. “Who’s Edward Cullen?” he asked.

Silence.

Both Cisco and Caitlin blinked, forgetting the tension in the room. “You don’t know who Edward Cullen is?”

“Nope.” Barry shook his head.

“The dude from *Twilight*?” Cisco hedged.

Now it was Barry’s turn to blink. “What’s *Twilight*?”

“You don’t know what *Twilight* is?” Caitlin questioned, both aghast and slightly jealous he had no such knowledge.

“You guys do know I spent the last ten years stranded on an island, away from modern civilization, right?” Barry interrogated back. When he got no response, he clicked his tongue against his teeth. “Your boss didn’t bother to tell you why exactly I didn’t have so much as a high school diploma?”

“You’re telling me you’ve missed out on ten years of pop culture?” Cisco demanded, sounding legitimately horrified.

Barry, slightly befuddled, slowly nodded.

Cisco threw his hands into the air. “Alright. This is greatest travesty I have ever seen in my life. We must remedy this *immediately*. Caitlin.” he snapped his head towards his best friend, who jumped slightly. “Prep the monitor. I’ve got a cache of DVDs and my laptop of bootlegged movies stored in my lab.” With that, he turned away, heading out of the Cortex.

Barry watched him leave, before turning back to the other occupant of the room. “What just happened?” he asked, puzzled.

Caitlin shrugged, before moving towards the monitor.
“Are you sure we won’t be having any issues with this one?” Laurel pleaded Miss Mericle.

The woman nodded, completely immune to the disgruntled mood of her client and her client’s friend. “Positive. This condo has been left virtually untouched for the last six months. There should be no issues.”

Slightly apprehensive, Kara turned the door knob. Laurel and she were relieved to see that there were no raccoons and the smell of the condo was stale but not unpleasantly so. The two women looked around.

“Lots of space like the first one.” Kara noted first.

“State of the art appliances.” Laurel continued.

“Hardwood floors.”

“White, solid walls, so you can decorate however you want.”

“Beautiful view of the city.” Kara pointed to the large, sliding doors, windows that led out to the balcony.

Laurel began to smile. “So far, so good. Let’s look at the –“

_SLAM!_

“WHO DARES TO INVADE MY HOLY KINGDOM! THE GREAT LOMBARGO DEMANDS IT!”

Both women sighed. “MISS MERICLE!”

“We really must do this again sometime.” Malcolm commented as the three men exited the restaurant.

“Agreed. In fact, we can do it next week, with a whole bunch of other people.” Oliver responded as they made their way towards the Merlys’ car, where their personal driver was waiting.

Tommy looked at him, following his train of thought. “Thanksgiving?”

“Yes. Barry and his family are coming, along with the Lances.” Tommy perked up at that. “Didn’t you two already get your invites from Mom and Dad?” Oliver inquired.

“Just yesterday.” Tommy confirmed.

“Robert must’ve forgotten to tell me the last time we talked.” Malcolm lied smoothly. In reality, he hadn’t been personally invited to the Queens for any family occasions in several years – he was just expected to show up to keep appearances.

Oliver smiled. “Well, here’s the invitation from me. We’re celebrating Thanksgiving next week, with a traditional dinner and afterwards, some karaoke. I, as a representative of the Queen family, would be delighted if you could join us.”
“Happily.” Malcolm smiled back, a calculating glint in his eye.

“So, he’s a vampire.” Barry established.

“Yup.”

“Who sparkles.”

“Yup.”

“…What kind of vampire sparkles!?” Barry challenged incredulously.

Cisco threw his hands into the air once more. “Thank you. I wonder that myself, almost as much as I wonder how in the hell this became a popular film series.”

Barry looked at him disbelievingly. “Why do you even have this film on your hard drive, then? From the sound of it, it looks like you hate it.”

The mechanical engineer held his hands in front of him in defense. “Hey, I pride myself on being culturally relevant, and it was either watch the movie, or read the book. And from what I hear, the latter is much worse.”

“This crap is based on a book?” The speedster queried, shocked.

“Yes.” Caitlin interjected, sounding pained. “And let me tell you that it is the most pathetic excuse of literature I have ever read in my entire life. I knew I should’ve never taken that bet.”

Cisco patted her arm sympathetically.

Dr. Harrison Wells watched the feed from within the Time Vault, amused. They seem to be bonding nicely. He looked at another monitor, which showed a sparkling Edward and Bella.

I can see why France banned that movie seventy years from now. He shuddered. And why the books were burned en masse here in the States.

Some stories were not meant to be passed down through the centuries. Twilight was one of them.

“Last one?” Kara asked her housing agent tiredly.

Miss Mericle, as unruffled as she was this morning, nodded. “Last one.”

Kara, deciding enough was enough and cheated, looking at the condo with her x-ray vision. No lifeforms, at least.

Laurel was the one who took the plunge this time, carefully opening the door.

Sunlight blasted both women.
It was clean, thankfully. The air was crisp, with no disagreeable scents pervading their senses. It was just as spacious as the other condos, with a large living room, connected to two other rooms and a balcony that held a gorgeous view of the heart of Starling City. Kara and Laurel walked in, encouraged by their first impressions. One room, the masters, was also very open, and even connected to a personal bathroom. The other room was relatively sizable as well, and right across from another bathroom.

“This place is nice. *Really* nice.” Kara commented when she and Laurel met back up in the living room.

Laurel lightly slapped the side of her thigh. “And not too far from Balliol Prep either.”

“And from Starling City’s premier shopping center.” Miss Mericle interposed as she walked forward, looking expectantly at Kara.

The Kryptonian gazed at her, pleased.

“What’s the asking price?”

Chapter End Notes

And now, Kara and Kal have a home.

For the record, I don’t have anything personal against Twilight, it’s just low-hanging fruit, aka easy to mock. I did watch the first movie (a long time ago) and it was decent for what it was. I tried reading the book, but I couldn’t make it pass a hundred pages. Not because of the allegedly bad plot mind you – Stephanie Meyer’s writing just bored me a lot. I can see why ATOS had it on a fourth-grade level.

This is mostly a filler chapter, as you can see. Next chapter is Thanksgiving, where everyone meets everyone (again), along with the entry of a particular character I think you all will be happy to see.
Chapter Summary

And everyone meets everyone (again).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 14: Turkey Day

“And here we are.” Barry announced as the car finished its journey, parking right in front of the mansion’s front door. “Is it me or does this place look grander than it did last time?”

“It’s just you.” Iris informed him cheekily as they exited the car. Eddie, meanwhile, was staring at the ostentatious structure and sprawling greenery with a slightly gob smacked expression on his face.

“And I thought my family was well off.” he muttered as he went to help Joe and one of the butlers in unloading the car.

The door chimed open, and more help emptied the mansion to overtake the detectives’ self-imposed duties. After them was Moira Queen herself, playing the part of gracious host.

“Barry, Iris, Joe! It’s good to see all of you.” she welcomed them in, giving each a small hug. When she made it to Eddie, though, she paused. “And you might be?” the Queen matriarch asked politely.

“Moira, this is my boyfriend, Eddie Thawne.” Iris interjected, grasping her significant other’s hand.

Moira quirked an eyebrow but smiled nonetheless, holding out her hand, which Eddie took, shaking it courteously. “Well, then, pardon my manners. I am Moira Queen.”

“I know.” Eddie stated automatically, only to immediately backtrack. “I mean, I’ve heard of you before, seen the occasional picture —“

The female billionaire gave a mirthful chuckle, cutting him off. “I understand. Think nothing of it. Your name though…you wouldn’t happen to be related to Hugo Thawne, would you?”

The detective’s smile strained slightly. “Yes. He’s my father.” Iris gave him a slightly worried look – having been Eddie’s girlfriend, she knew of the difficulties he had with his blood family. Moira, adept from years of playing hostess as a society wife, read the mood and didn’t push the subject any further, instead giving a short nod.

She led the couple away from the door, back to the rest of the party. “Well, your rooms are the same last time. Eddie will be staying with you, Iris?” she looked to her prior conversation partners, who affirmed her assumption. “Very well then. I assume you all remember the way. If not, Raisa can show you again.” Moira addressed them all.

Barry held up his hands. “We remember the way, Moira. You needn’t bother Raisa – I assume she’s busy. From what I heard, we are having quite the party tonight.”
Moira smiled fondly at him. “Yes. On top of the four of you, we’re also being joined by the Merlyns, and the Lances. I believe you’ll like them, Joe, Iris – Quentin Lance is a senior detective for the SCPD, and his eldest daughter Laurel is a lawyer for the City’s Necessary Resource Initiative.”

Joe gave a low whistle. “Quentin Lance? Yeah, I’ve heard of him. He’s got quite the reputation.” Mainly for being one of the few cops in the SCPD that wasn’t on some criminal’s payroll – him and his partner, Lucas Hilton.

“The Laurel Lance is joining us for dinner tonight?” Barry asked, being far more interested in the latter’s name.

Iris gave him a confused look. “I didn’t know you followed Starling City’s news so closely, Barry.” she mentioned to her best friend.

Barry shook his head. “I don’t. However, Oliver talked about Laurel all the time on the island, almost as much as he did his family and Tommy. He would often call his common sense his ‘inner Laurel’. He was really fond of her.” Moira had a pleased smile at that – if what Barry said was true, well, she had always had a soft spot for Laurel. Oliver always seemed to be on his best behavior when he was around her. If their friendship were to become something more…well, she wouldn’t complain.

“I am. Much fonder of her than I am you, you little rascal.” A voice said behind him, and soon afterwards Barry found himself a victim of a noogie, squealing in amusement. Oliver, the perpetrator, had a wide, playful grin on his face as his rubbed his knuckles on Barry’s head.

Eventually, however, the Central City native broke the hold and gave his friend a good-humored shove. “Jerk.”

“But you missed me anyway.” Oliver teasingly replied as he went in for a hug.

Barry reciprocated. “Against my better judgement.” He responded as they separated.

“Now boys, play nice.” Kara scolded them both as she and Kal made their way down the stairs.

“Kara, you know that will never happen.” Barry told her as they went in for their own embrace.

Kara sighed. “Won’t stop me from trying.” She was smiling despite that, holding Barry close, far longer than Oliver did. Eddie took notice, as did Iris. Iris was slightly annoyed, though she didn’t know why, while Eddie felt hope blossom in his chest.

“Barry!” Kal yelped after the two separated and his fellow castaway snatched him up, deceptively strong as he gave his youngest companion a strong squeeze.

“And I see you haven’t grown a bit!” Barry joked.

“Hmph! That’s no fair! We just saw each other last week!” Kal jabbed back.

“So?” The speedster vaunted as he released the younger Kryptonian. Kal pouted.

Barry laughed, then remembering his family, turned to them sheepishly. Still in sync after all these years, the three castaways also clammed up, noticing that they were being a little too exclusive in their greetings. Moira had a look of slight disapproval on her face, but she was also clearly amused. Joe wore a similar expression, while Iris was considerably placid, almost annoyed. Eddie was neutral, if a little…delighted.
“Joe, Iris, you remember Oliver, Kara and Kal.” he gestured to his friends awkwardly. Each of them gave small waves.

“Yes, we remember them Barry.” Joe chuckled. “It’s good to see all of you.” He went forward, shaking Oliver and Kara’s hands, and ruffling Kal’s hair, making the middle schooler smile. Iris followed his lead, though her handshake with Kara was slightly tighter, and rather than ruffling Kal’s hair, she gave him a big hug.

Eddie cleared his throat. Barry turned to him, and smiled awkwardly to him. “Eddie, these are my fellow former castaways: Oliver Queen, Kara Danvers, and her baby cousin Clark Kent, though he prefers to be called Kal. Guys, this is Detective Eddie Thawne, Iris’ boyfriend.” he gestured to the other man.

“Pleasure.” Eddie stated happily as he exchanged greetings with the trio. He greeted Kara last, smilingly happily at her. “Barry didn’t mention he had a girl here.”

Silence.

Then Oliver and Kal, self-consciousness long gone, both burst into hysterical laughter. Kara, however, let go of Eddie’s hand with an “Ew, gross.” while Barry stumbled back into one of the tables in foyer, grabbing the edge and looking like he was about to retch. Eddie, Iris and Joe watched the entire scene, perplexed, while Moira hid her growing smile behind her hand.

“I’m sorry?” Eddie asked, slightly offended.

Kara waved him off. “Not your fault. It’s just the thought of dating Barry…” she made a disgusted noise, visibly shivering. The two laughing males, who felt their mirth began to subside, were set off once more.

Barry, having finally gotten control of his equilibrium again, walked up to the group again, pounding his chest slightly. “Yeah, thanks for that visual Eddie.”

The detective felt his hopes plummet. “So, you two aren’t…”

“No. The thought of dating Barry – or Oliver for that matter – makes me want to lobotomize myself with a rusty spoon.” Kara settled the matter instantly. Oliver sobered up at that, and he too shuddered. Kal tried to get his laughter under control, though there were still tears in his eyes.

“Yeah. These two are like my siblings. Never happening – ever.” Barry added in for good measure.

Eddie’s expression clouded slightly. Iris, however, felt relieved, as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

After settling in their rooms, the Wests and co. went back down to the foyer, where the Queens were meeting the Merlys. Barry quickly introduced Eddie to Robert, Thea, Malcolm, and Tommy, and soon afterwards everyone was resuming small talk, waiting for the last of the guests to arrive.

The door chimed. Robert went to open it, smiling as he saw who it was. “Quentin.”

“Robert!” The Starling City detective gave his friend a one-armed hug. “Thank you for the invitation. It’s nice for us to meet up under better circumstances.”

“Indeed.” His smile widened when he saw Quentin’s company. “Dinah! Laurel! And…is that who I think it is?”
“Indeed, it is.” a smooth voice replied. Oliver’s ears perked up at the voice, and he turned his head, teeth in a crescent.

Robert removed himself from the doorway, and there she was.

“Sara!” he barreled over, grabbing the woman he thought of as a second sister and pressing her chest-to-chest.

“Ollie!” Sara laughed, returning the embrace. They separated momentarily, and looked each other over, and then laughed again.

“It’s good to see you, Sare-Bear.” The Queen said, holding his childhood friend’s hands.

Sara smiled. “It’s good to see you too Ollie. I’m sorry I didn’t show up earlier – I was jumping for joy when Laurel sent the news, and I was planning to visit, but then there was this issue with the well in the town I was in…” she trailed off.

Oliver shook his head, looking at her understandingly. “I get it, Sara. I wasn’t expecting you to put your life on hold for me. Especially with what you do.” he smirked. “Humanitarian…what is with you Lances and public service?”

Laurel stepped up, putting a hand on Sara’s shoulder and giving Oliver a kiss on a cheek. From his vantage point, Tommy frowned. “What can I say? It runs in the family.” she interjected. “Now, Ollie, I believe some introductions are in order?”

“Oh, right!” He dragged the Lance sisters over to his cohorts, beckoning Thea and Tommy as well.

After introductions were over, dinner was served. Raisa and the rest of the cooks had prepared a three-course meal for the mass of humanity that now occupied the Queens’ dining room, slaving over a stove all day. Her hard work was worth it, however, as the food was soundly devoured as soon as it was set on the table. Barry, Kara, and Kal were the main offenders, piling nourishment on their plate constantly.

In between bites, others had started conversing as well. Dinah and Moira were in deep discussion about a cultural exchange that the Queens were planning for a charity gala in the spring. Quentin and Joe had hit it off immediately, and were swapping stories about cases they had taken on over the years, with Robert and Malcolm listening and offering their own input. Iris, Sara, and Laurel bonded over being the daughters of cops and lamenting the many overprotective measures their fathers had employed while growing up. Thea was telling her brother about a field trip she had gone on when she was a child, while they weren’t watching the gluttonous trio in disgusted awe and, in Oliver’s case, resignation.

That left two members of the party out of the festivities: Tommy Merlyn and Eddie Thawne.

Tommy could’ve easily included himself in any of the conversations. Unfortunately, he was sulking over the fact that Laurel wasn’t paying him any attention. They had greeted each other, less awkwardly than the last time they had seen each other, but she hadn’t paid him any attention afterwards, too taken with her sister and the host of new people that Oliver introduced her to.

Eddie was a bit more understandable. He was the only here who could be called a veritable outsider. Besides Iris, Joe, and to a lesser extent, Barry, he was meeting all these people for the very first time, and they all seemed more interested in each other than they were in him. Not helping his mood was the disastrous encounter with Kara from earlier.
So, rather inevitably, the two found each other.

“You don’t look like you’re having fun.” Eddie looked up, picking out the voice from the din of cluttering utensils and moving mouths, and from across him was Tommy, watching the detective pick at his food with a somber air.

“Neither do you.” Eddie retorted calmly.

Tommy shrugged and looked aside, scowling when he saw Oliver pop up next to Laurel’s part of the table, making a grab for the bowl of mashed potatoes. She smacked his hand, causing him to retreat immediately and gaze at her, wounded.

“Ollie!” she chided him.

“I haven’t had any yet!”

The lawyer looked at him incredulously. “Don’t you have your own bowl?”

The billionaire simply jabbed his thumb to the other end of the table, where a clearly empty bowl of mashed potatoes was laying. Off to the side, Kal licked the remaining bits of the bland substance off his lips, smacking them loudly.

Laurel shook her head and exhaled. “Fine.” she stated exasperatedly. “Get your plate, though – this is still our bowl.”

“You’re an angel, Laurel.” Oliver praised her, unaware of the rose blooming on her cheeks. Sara, however, gave a knowing smirk, patting her older sister’s thigh.

Tommy’s scowl deepened, a dour look on his face. Eddie glanced at him sympathetically.

“I now see why.” he commented.

Tommy shrugged, only for both their attentions to be drawn back to the girls, where Barry had followed Oliver to grab his own portion of mashed potatoes, which Iris was now astutely defending.

“No.”

“Iris…”

“No, Barry. I’ve seen your appetite – you’ll keep coming back and coming back until there’s nothing left.”

“I won’t.” Barry responded unconvincingly, shifty-eyed.

Oliver deadpanned. “Barry, this is your fifth serving of potatoes.” he pointed out.

“Okay, so maybe I’ve increased my starch intake a bit.”

Iris snorted. “More like your everything intake.” She gestured to the end of the table, where every plate of food had been cleared out and licked clean.

“Hey! That was not just me – Kara and Kal ate a lot too.” Barry tried to defend himself.

Iris sighed, then stood and grabbed the ladle herself, piling the beige sustenance onto his plate. “Only this, alright? You’ve have to leave room for dessert.” she ordered him.
“Oh, something tells me he’ll have plenty enough room for that.” Oliver answered shrewdly. Barry’s eating habits were clearly no strangers to him.

Iris gave him a commiserating glance, then frowned slightly when she saw something on Barry’s face. Almost absentmindedly, she wiped off the bit of gravy on the corner of his mouth. “And clean your face regularly. We’re guests in someone’s house, Bar.”

“Yes, mom.” Barry remarked dully, and then gave a slight giggle when she slapped him – hard – on the arm.

Now Eddie was the one glowering. Tommy looked at him with complete understanding on his face.

“You too, huh?”

Eddie clicked his tongue against his teeth. “Worse – she’s my girlfriend, remember?” Tommy winced.

Yeah, that was worse.

“…it’s the dancing queen!” Moira and Dinah finished the song with a gusto, to the applause of everyone around them. The song went into decrescendo as the two set down the mics onto the coffee table.

“Who’s next?” Dinah asked, projecting her voice to the large party of people.

Kal, a mischievous look on his face, piped in his recommendation. “Barry and Kara!” he called back, then tittered as both his surrogate siblings went for him.

“Kal, you brat!” Kara squeaked as Barry growled and started chasing the only child in the room around the other partygoers, much to their amusement.

Oliver, however, ever the enabler, smirked and slyly shouted, “I second the motion!”

“Oliver!” Both victims squawked.

The eldest ‘sibling’ shrugged. “Hey, I’m not the one who spent Kal’s formative years singing baby songs every night.” What he failed to mention was that they were Kryptonian baby songs, though in this case, he figured it hardly mattered.

“Really?” Iris wiggled her eyebrows at her best friend. “I didn’t know you could be so maternal, Barry.” The cop sniggered as she watched her best friend rub the back of his head nervously.

Moira quirked an eyebrow. “Kara?” she stated in an expectant and amused tone.

“C’mon guys, sing!” Thea laughed. Soon afterwards, everyone began chanting “Sing!” in unison.

Barry and Kara looked at each other and sighed, trudging forward and grabbing the mics. The former took the remote and started sifting through the many songs.

“Ooh! High School Musical!” Laurel pointed at one song, titled “You Are the Music in Me”.

Sara looked at her disbelievingly. “You’ve seen High School Musical?”

Laurel flushed. “It was a phase, alright!”
“At twenty?” The lawyer flushed harder.

Oliver turned to Tommy, perplexed. “What’s High School Musical?”

Tommy grimaced.

Barry and Kara glanced at each other once more and shrugged, selecting the song, and reading its brief bio. “It says this song is from High School Musical 2.” Kara commented for the benefit of the crowd.

“There were two?” Sara demanded.

“Three, actually. The released the last one in theaters back in 2008.” Laurel corrected her, reddening again at her little sister’s pointed look.

Barry pressed start, then quickly set down the remote as the opening chords began to play.

“Na na na na / na na na na, yeah / You are the music in me.” Kara started off, trying to get a feel for the rhythm. “You know the words “once upon a time” / make you listen? There’s a reason / When you dream there’s a chance you’ll find / a little laughter / Or happy ever after…”

After the last verse, Barry joined in, his voice playing off Kara’s perfectly. “Your harmony to the melody / It’s echoing inside my head / A single voice (single voice) …”

“Above the noise…” Kara sang, quieting the room.

“And like a common thread…” They both hummed together.

“Hmm, you’re pulling me.” Barry finished off the stanza, and the tune began in earnest.

“When I hear my favorite song / I know that we belong,” Kara belted out, as Laurel began to clap to the beat. Her actions were contagious, and soon everyone was doing it, with a swing for flair.

“Oh, you are the music in me / Yeah, it’s living in all of us,” Barry continued, turning to Kara as they began to sway together, the lyrics in the corner of their eyes.

“And it’s brought us here because…”

“Because you are the music in me!”

The song continued with fervor, and soon everyone was joining in, caroling along. Oliver, in a moment spontaneity, stood and grabbed Laurel by the hand, and soon they were dancing and laughing too, punctuating each swing they made together with a clap of the hands. Tommy briefly stopped at the sight of this, but with a jab from the unaware Thea’s elbow, rejoined the rest of the group, though with noticeably less enthusiasm.

Towards the end of the song, Barry, caught up in the mood, followed Oliver’s lead and grabbed Iris by the hand, dragging her upwards so they can dance. Iris, also blinded by the atmosphere, joined him with little resistance and little regard to Eddie, who visibly started frowning, but quickly schooled his expression so no one would notice.

“When I hear my favorite song / I know that we belong,” Barry’s voice resonated throughout the entire room, occasionally punctuated by Kara’s own singing. “Oh, you are the music in me / Yeah, it’s living in all of us / And it’s brought us here because…”
“Because you are the music in me!” Everyone sang this time, finishing off the song together with the final chorus of “Na na na na…”

When everything was said and done, vigorous cheering broke out as Barry and Kara both took a bow.

“Well, at least you two have a future in show business if your current plans don’t work out.” Quentin clapped the shoulders of the two super-powered individuals. After Barry and Kara’s performance, it was universally decided that no one could follow them and after that the gathering began to wind down. Now, it was time for the Lances and the Merlyns to leave, and everyone was about to bid their goodbyes.

“Agreed, Quentin. You two are quite talented.” Malcolm complimented the duo, while Tommy was signaling their driver to prep the car.

“Aw, stop it. You’re making us blush.” Barry quipped as he and Kara all but glowed under the praise.

Oliver, standing beside them, chuckled. “Humility is not your strong suit, Bar.” Barry slapped him on the arm and pouted, causing the rest of their little group to laugh.

As the laughter subsided, Kara looked around, and cleared her throat. “Well, now that the party is over, I have one last announcement to make.” The moment she got everyone’s attention, she inhaled slightly. “I’ve finally found my own place!”

Cheers broke out, and Moira went up to the woman who had fast become like a second daughter to her, gathering her up in the arms. “That’s wonderful, Kara. When will you be moving in?”

“At the start of Balliol Prep’s Christmas Break.” Kara answered. Her face softened, and she looked at both Robert and Moira now. “Thank you for your hospitality, Moira, Robert.”

Robert waved her off. “Think nothing of it, Kara. Just know that you and Kal are welcome here any time. You’re practically family now anyway.”

“And know that all of you are welcome in my home at any time. I’m giving both Oliver and Barry spare keys, so they can drop in whenever they want – which they will, I can assure you.” Kara deadpanned, pointedly looking at both men, who began to whistle innocently.

“And I will be helping you move in. I know for a fact that Ollie has a poor sense of decoration.” Thea added her two cents.

“I’ll be dropping in as well, for the same reason.” Laurel volunteered. “And so, will Tommy.”

The Merlyn turned away from the door and blinked. “Why me?” he asked dumbly.

“Because we need more than two guys to help arrange the furniture.”

“You’re joining in too?” Iris turned to her best friend, Eddie standing sullenly behind her.

Barry shrugged. “But of course. Whenever I’m Starling, chances are I’ll be crashing at her place almost as much as I will be at Oliver’s. The design has to be palatable to me as well.” And Barry would be in Starling far, far more often than one would assume.
Later that night, after the Lances and the Merlyns had departed, everyone had decided it was time for bed. One by one, the lights went out, until only Kara was awake, rifling through her things.

Then, her ear twitched.

*Whoosh!*

Fire licked around the road, the truck broken and impacted. The Girl in Blue appeared instantly, observing the wreckage silently.

“It’s about time you got here, Kryptonian.”

She turned. A man was there. She would’ve almost mistaken him for human, if it not for the large ridge on his head and the glowing axe.

*He called me Kryptonian.*

He charged, and swung. The Girl in Blue paid it in no mind, clasping his arm and redirecting the axe downward, while at the same time kicking upwards, the bottom of her boot meeting his chin. Then, in one smooth motion, she disarmed him, removing the axe from his hand and slamming the sharp edge right into his chest, the pointed tip of the blade piercing his heart.

He died instantly.

The Girl in Blue stared at the body for a moment, and then disappeared. The corpse and the axe vanished with her.

---

“Report.”

“General.” The Commander saluted to his superior, crossing his fist against his chest. “Vartox is missing.”

Astra turned, dubious. “What? I sent him to face the daughter of Alura,” and oh, how it burned to be unable to call Kara by her name, “Did he run?”

“No, General.” The Commander shook his head. “When we made it to their coordinates, there had been signs of battle, including some blood, but no one was present. Neither the daughter of Alura, nor Vartox.”

Astra frowned visibly, and her gut twisted. Something was wrong with this scenario. She had sent Vartox for specific reasons – while strong, a determined and smart Kryptonian would be able to easily defeat him. Kara fit that criteria, Astra knew it in her bones, but since she was not a killer, being raised with the ideals of the House of El, the fight would be considerably harder for her. Vartox would put up enough of a struggle to help Astra gauge the relative strength of her niece. And as a Valeronian, he would kill himself upon defeat, rather than be imprisoned by the enemy, preventing Kara from learning anything. It was a win-win scenario.

Except she miscalculated somewhere down the line, because it seemed Kara had taken care of Vartox with ease and departed with his body before they had gotten the chance to observe her strength. Either she was stronger than they had first assumed (which Astra doubted logically, though
there was a small tug in her chest) or someone else had intervened and aided Kara in the battle. Astra ruminated over this, and the feeling in her abdomen grew stronger. She didn’t know what it was, but something told Astra that she wouldn’t like it when she finally found out.

“Very well. Dismissed.”

The Commander blinked, clearly expecting a reprimand. He was tempted to implore his superior for more, but thought better of it and departed from her presence.

Astra turned as he walked away, using her enhanced senses to assure her of her solitude, before looking at the computer.

She pressed a button, and the machine came to life, projecting the local news, which now showed the Girl in Blue saving a crashing plane. Astra watched the feed, ignorant of the chatting news anchor, entirely focused on the sapphire figure.

*What did you do, Kara?*

**Chapter End Notes**

WOO! Finally finished this chapter. Much longer than usual, plus my break made me a little lethargic.

As for the song, I was drawing a blank, so I decided more mid-2000s teenage culture was the way to go and went for *High School Musical*. I saw all three, but to be honest I only really liked the first two. I’m probably not going to watch the fourth.

I spent my Christmas with my mom, and we watched *The Last Jedi* together. I spent most of the movie expecting Rey and Kylo Ren to eventually kiss, and was oddly disappointed that they didn’t. Other than them and Luke Skywalker, however, it was sort of boring. It wasn’t a bad movie by any means, the plot was just…lackluster, I guess.

And as for the plot – yes, we’re finally getting into the action everybody! This chapter is when the arc starts in earnest, and it will build to the three climatic confrontations: Kara/Astra, Barry/Eobard (Harrison), and Oliver/Malcolm.
Chapter 15: Alien Impel Down

“Identify him. Species, a name if you can, any information that can be useful.” Kara demanded the translucent image of her uncle.

She, Oliver, and Barry were currently in the Foundry, looking over the corpse of the alien had attacked Kara on Thanksgiving. A hologram of her uncle, which had been installed into the Foundry’s computer systems thanks to the connection between it and the Fortress, had been projected to help aid the vigilantes.

Jor-El, unemotive as always, abided her command. “Vartox. A Valeronian convict of Fort Rozz.”

Everyone froze.

“FORT ROZZ!” Kara screeched, and Oliver and Barry were suddenly thankful that their lair had been soundproofed.

Caitlin crossed her arms, a defiant look on her face. “I still don’t trust him, Cisco.”

“And I understand that. I don’t trust him either. But I think we should give him a chance.” Cisco responded, tinkering with another one of his many contraptions. They were currently in the mechanical engineer’s lab, conversing over the newest addition to S.T.A.R. Labs: The Streak himself, Barry Allen.

“He’s killing people Cisco.”

“People who are also killing people, and unlike his victims, they’re mainly innocent. Besides, he doesn’t kill everybody he goes up against – just the ones who are too dangerous to be left on their own.” Cisco argued back.

Caitlin sighed. “You feel bad for him, don’t you?”

Cisco shrugged. “Don’t you?” He asked her, and Caitlin’s failure to answer told him all he needed to know. “Look, Caitlin, I’m not condoning what the guy is doing, but at least we know he’s doing it for the right reasons. If it hadn’t been for him, Central City would’ve been destroyed ages ago by all the metas that are running amok these days. And the whole ‘stranded on an island for ten years’ thing – it’s obvious he’s not alright up there in the head.”
“So, you’re saying we should just give him a pass for all that.” Caitlin asked him dubiously.

“No, but I think we should at least try to understand why he’s so hardcore. Caitlin, think of it this way: if we get him to value our input more, we might be able to convince him to tone his methods down a notch.” Cisco rebutted back. “Like it or not, the city needs him. The police, even with the anti-meta technology we’re developing, can’t handle the number of superpowered criminals popping up. No number of bullets would’ve been able to stop that tornado Mardon was forming, not even killing him while he was forming it would’ve done the trick. Central City needs somebody with similar abilities to keep the peace, and right now he’s our best bet.”

“Fine.” Caitlin sighed once more. Then a contemplative look appeared on her face. “What do you think happened on that island that caused him to become this way? Being stranded on an island and being isolated for so long is traumatizing in its own way, but not to the point that it would convince a person to become a vigilante.”

Cisco looked at her at that, curiosity also piqued. Then he shrugged. “Maybe he’ll tell us one day.”

“So…”

“Yeah…”

Joe and Iris West stared at each other from across the table, each holding on to a cup of coffee. They were at Jitters, enjoying their lunch break together. The previous tension between them was still there, though it had been gradually diminishing since Barry’s return and was considerably less hostile than it was before.

The former cleared his throat. “I heard you’re working on a case together with Dibny.”

Iris slowly nodded. “I am. There’s an illegal arms-dealing ring we’re trying to break up. Rumor has it they’ve been stealing advanced technology from several firms such as Mercury Labs and Stagg Industries and selling them on the black market.”


“Yeah.” Iris clicked her tongue. “I think he’s planning on promoting me.”

“That’s…good.” And Joe meant it. While he was still nervous about his daughter being in the line of fire, he couldn’t help but be proud of her accomplishments.

“It is.” Iris gave a small, clumsy smile, which Joe shakily returned. Then, in unison, they each made for their cups, taking large sips to ease the awkward atmosphere.

Iris set her cup down, and looked back up again. “So, how about you? Any major cases you’re taking the lead on?”

“David has us chasing after the Streak right now. Eddie’s delighted.” Joe replied drily.

Iris had an understanding look on her face. “He’s running you ragged on that too?”

“Can’t go a day without him shouting about some breakthrough he’s made about the Streak. What his powers are, his possible identities, possible hideouts – it’s driving me nuts.” Joe complained.

“I know what you mean. Half the time I think he’s more into the Streak than he is me.” Iris admitted, stirring her coffee a bit.
Joe snorted. “You’re not that far off, honey. He’s just lobbied to have an entire room entirely dedicated to the case about the Streak, even as going as far to appropriate a board from the CSIs. I’ll probably have to talk to him soon, before that vigilante becomes his white whale.”

“And the last thing we all want is for him to become Captain Ahab.” Iris tacked on. The she blinked. “…I’ve never read Moby Dick. How do I know that?”

“Barry.” Joe deadpanned. Iris shook her head fondly.

“Hey, Dad.” Tommy leaned onto the frame of the doorway, watching his father tap away on his desktop.

Malcolm looked up, and gave a small smile. Even after all these years, seeing Tommy working with him at Merlyn Global elated him.

“Tommy.” he greeted his son. “Why are you here?”

“Well, I’ve got the reports you told your secretary to get.” Tommy stated, standing straight and walking forward, handing the documents over. “And, I’ve got some great news: Rochev agreed.”

“Isabel Rochev?” Malcolm quirked an eyebrow. “You got her to agree to invest in the company?”

“Yes.” Tommy responded with relish. “It took a lot schmoozing, but she surrendered in the end.” He looked expectantly at his father.

“That’s good Tommy. The company will surely prosper with her on board.” Malcolm complimented his son, before going back to his work. Tommy’s face faulted at the minimal praise, and he turned away, trying to hide the dejected look on his face.

Laurel Lance rifled through her bag, searching for her set of car keys. It was late afternoon in the Glades and she did not want to stick around for too long while all on her lonesome. That was just asking for trouble.

Click.

She turned. The barrel of a gun was in her face. A dirty man in a ragged hoodie and jeans was pointing at her, slightly shaking. “Give me all your money.” he rasped out.

Laurel, not wanting any trouble, gave up on the search for her car keys and went for her wallet instead, trying not to show her fear. Normally she would’ve tried to take this guy down, but the presence of a gun changed the game dramatically. She was still a bit shaken up about the incident with the Triad a couple of weeks ago.

“Hurry up!” she winced at the shout. Then, she saw a shadow from the corner of her eye, and froze.

WHACK!

The man fell, unconscious, the gun leaving his grip with little fanfare. For a moment, Laurel was worried it would go off on its own, and breathed a sigh of relief when it didn’t. She then looked at her savior, and smiled.
“Thanks.”

Ted Grant smiled back. “Any time.”

“So, what were you doing all the way here at CNRI?” Laurel asked as the police cuffed the attempted mugger and dragged him to their cruiser.

Ted shifted his shoulders. “Looking for you. You left your bag at my gym the other day.”

Laurel blinked, then sighed. “Well, at least it served a purpose. I’ll grab it tomorrow at my next session.”

Ted gave a short nod. “Got it.” He turned to walk away.

“And Ted?” He looked back. Laurel rubbed her arm. “You have anything more you can teach me?”

Ted opened his mouth and was about to tell her know, but then thought better of it. There were a few moves he picked up from his vigilante days that Laurel might find useful. Some that would give her more confidence in disarming some punk with a gun.

“Sure. I’ll show you tomorrow.”

Laurel gave him grateful smile.

Caitlin turned the key, waiting for the tell-tale click, and then she felt it.

The parking garage. It was getting warmer.

She turned, and a homeless man stood in front of her, fire licking every part of his body. And his face…

“…Ronnie?”

“That cannot be possible. Fort Rozz is impregnable.” Kara ranted loudly. Oliver and Barry exchanged looks.

Oliver cleared his throat, getting her attention. She looked at them both, breathing heavily. “Kara, what exactly is Fort Rozz? You’ve mentioned it once or twice, but…”

Kara sighed, flopping down into the chair in front of the computer. “Fort Rozz was Krypton’s super-max prison. It was located in the Phantom Zone, a nigh inescapable region of space where time is meaningless. A sentence to Fort Rozz was regarded as Krypton’s highest punishment, as absolutely no one can be released from there once imprisoned.”

She looked at Vartox’s body. “If he truly is a convicted prisoner of Fort Rozz, he shouldn’t be here. Nobody leaves Fort Rozz, the structure is completely anchored to the Phantom Zone and isolated from any possible transport from the prison.”
All throughout Kara’s explanation, Barry was analyzing the information. He tapped a finger onto his chin, and then narrowed his eyes at the floating image of Jor-El. If his theory was right…

“Jor-El, you implanted the seedlings for the Fortress on Earth right before Kara and Kal escaped from Krypton’s destruction, correct?” He asked the hologram, ignoring both Oliver and Kara’s inquisitive looks.

“Yes.”

“Barry…” Oliver quietly demanded. Barry continued to ignore him, entirely focused on Jor-El.

“Approximately how many Earth years ago was that?” Kara’s eyes widened as it dawned on her what Barry’s train of thought was. Oliver, however, still looked slightly confused, though even he was beginning to connect the dots.

“By my calculations, the Fortress was implanted thirty-four Earth years ago.”

A person could’ve heard a pin drop. Oliver unfolded his arms, as he looked incredulously at the hologram. “That’s not possible. Kara and Kal only arrived here ten years ago. Unless…” he looked at his female companion, who shook her head.

“The journey should’ve only taken a week at most, with the hyperdrive installed in our ship.” she explained.

Barry sighed. “Your ship must’ve gotten knocked off course during the blast and landed in the Phantom Zone.”

“We must’ve slept there for decades.” Kara buried her face into her hands.

Oliver groaned. “And when your ship escaped, it must’ve somehow brought Fort Rozz down here with you. For the last ten years, this planet has been playing host to a prison full of alien convicts, with all of us none the wiser.”

“Crap.” Barry summed it up for all of them. Oliver and Kara could only shake their heads in agreement.

“He was here. I know it.”

A short nod. “Search the perimeter! I want this place combed clean! We need to find that son of a bitch as soon as we can!”

He grabbed his knees, taking in deep breaths. *I need to get to Starling soon. I can’t last much longer.*

Chapter End Notes

I am not happy with this chapter. It just refused to come out. But it’s done now, and soon the escapee’s identity will be revealed to all (though I guess most of you already
know who he is). It’s also shorter than usual, to compensate for the longer chapter I updated earlier.
Arc II, Chapter 16: Beebo Day

Chapter Summary

It's the happiest time of the year.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 16: Beebo Day

Kal tore off the wrapping of his very first Christmas day present and blinked. “What's this?” He lifted the specimen up, admiring its soft blue fur, goggle eyes, and surprisingly firm midsection.

“A Beebo doll!” Ruby unhelpfully informed him, removing the wrapping from her own gift, her face brightening when she saw it was a pack of art supplies that she wanted.

“Beebo doll?”

Ruby excitedly nodded, grin still on her face. “Yeah! My mom got me one as a kid, and it helped keep my company whenever I felt lonely. Now, whenever you feel lonely, you’ll always have some company.”

Kal blinked and looked at the stuffed toy with a little more regard. Hesitantly, he squeezed it, jumping when it responded with a “Beebo hungry!” in a clearly animatronic voice. Ruby giggled.

“Be careful: he’s very huggable!”

Barry opened the door, and smirked. “So, you two decided to come after all.”

Cisco lifted his hands. “Hey, it was either this or visit my family for Christmas, and trust me, I do not want to spend what's supposed to be the happiest time of the year watching my parents slobber over my jerk brother.”

“And I just didn’t want to spend Christmas alone.” Caitlin followed, though with little of the hostility that usually colored it. On the contrary, she was pale, smiling shakily.

Barry quirked an eyebrow. “Alright then. Let me welcome you into Casa de West.” He pulled them forward and towards the living room, where Iris and Eddie were arguing half-heartedly.

“Iris –“

“Eddie, it’s Christmas. I think the Streak can wait a day or two.” Iris calmly rebutted.

Barry clicked his teeth. “Listen to her Eddie. She’s always right.” Eddie glared at him, only to sigh and finally concede.
Iris blinked, taking in the two new guests. “You invited people, Bar?”

“Yup. Iris, Eddie, this is Cisco Ramon and Caitlin Snow, my two coworkers at S.T.A.R. Labs. Cisco, Caitlin, my best friend Iris West, and her boyfriend Eddie Thawne.” Barry introduced the two pairs to each other as everyone exchanged handshakes.

At that point, Joe exited from the kitchen, setting down the eggnog. He looked up, beaming at the sight of Barry’s ‘friends.’ “You two must be Caitlin and Cisco!” The two scientists looked at him nodded. “Wonderful. I’m Joe West, Iris’ father and Barry’s foster father.”

As the scientists went to greet him, Iris took Barry and Eddie to the aside. At her guarded look, the two leaned in, careful to keep out of Joe’s sight.

“Don’t tell Dad, but I invited a couple more people to the party.” She whispered conspiratorially.

Barry and Eddie exchanged looks, and then Barry blinked, looking hard at his best friend. “Iris, did you invite them?”

Iris shrugged. “I figured it was about time they meet.” she murmured back.

“Combining a house-warming party and a Christmas party into one – that’s certainly a new one for me.” Tommy mused, looking around the mish-mash of decorations and moving boxes.

Sara hummed, pouring herself another cup of eggnog. “Well, we’re not all old money, high-society billionaire types who need to have a party for every single occasion, Tommy.” she snarked back.

Tommy scratched the back of his ear. “I know, I know, Sara. I’m not completely removed from the workings of the average lifestyle of the middle-class American, contrary to popular belief.”

“But you’re still removed.” Sara pointed out.

Tommy opened his mouth to argue his case, only to stop when he noticed something by the entrance of the kitchen.

“Oh.” Oliver’s head was tilted upwards, and he was openly staring.

Mistletoe.

“Yeah.” Laurel’s head was in a similar position. She rubbed her arm as she and Oliver made eye contact once more. “So…”

Oliver cut her off, lightly grabbing her chin and giving her a chaste kiss on the cheek. Laurel blushed hard, smiling widely when they separated. The Queen rubbed the back of his head, returning the smile with one of his own, though far more clumsily.

Tommy grit his teeth and looked away. Sara noticed, but made the smart decision not to comment – there were some things that were better left alone.
The doorbell chimed. Joe West turned towards it, confused.

“Did anyone invite anybody else?” He called out to his guests, specifically towards Barry, Iris, and Eddie.

“Just me!” his daughter called back. Joe frowned, and turned the door knob, pulling forward.

He froze, shocked.

“Hello again, Joe.” Francine smiled at her ex-husband.

“Francine.” Joe said, in complete disbelief. Then, shaking his stupor, he gave his ex-wife a nervous smile and went in for a short hug.

When they released their embrace, he looked at her with a more inquisitive expression. “What are you doing here?”

Francine smile had a hint of sadness to it now. “Iris invited us.”

“Us?” Joe asked, even more perplexed.

Francine didn’t respond, instead simply moving aside, revealing a young man behind her. Joe’s expression turned into one of even greater shock, and he had to grab the door sill to steady himself.

“I’m Wally West.” The young man stuck his hand out.

“You’ve got quite the reputation, Miss Arias.” Moira complimented the younger woman. She, Sam, and Kara were all sitting together, huddled against the fireplace.

Sam flushed. “I hope it’s nothing bad.” she responded shyly.

Moira shook her head. “Farthest thing from it. I’ve only heard good things about you from others, including my husband and Tommy’s father.”

“Robert Queen and Malcolm Merlyn themselves?” Sam asked in awe.

“Yes.” Moira took a sip of her eggnog. "When Robert heard you and Kara were acquainted with another, he all but begged her to invite you to our Thanksgiving gathering. Unfortunately, you and your daughter were out of town at the time.”

The other woman rubbed the back of her head sheepishly. “It's kind of mine and Ruby’s thing to spend every Thanksgiving out of town. We either visit the Macy’s Parade up in New York or spend a couple of days at an amusement park together.”

“I understand completely. Thanksgiving is time for family after all. I still wished you could’ve joined us, if only to hear Kara’s beautiful singing voice.”

Kara, who had been listening to the conversation silently, sputtered. “Moira…!”

The Queen matriarch gave her a dismissive gesture. “Pish-posh, Kara. Humility is fine, but you should take at least some pride in your abilities. I, for one, think your voice is wonderful – I insist you perform a song or two at one of our larger gatherings. Perhaps our charity gala this April?”
The Kryptonian floundered, her arms waving vigorously in front of her. “My singing experience is only limited to baby songs and karaoke, Moira! I’m sure you can find better entertainment than me with the money at your disposal.” she insisted. She was lying, of course – she had vocal training from her time in the League. That being said, she was in no way keen on performing in front such large crowd, especially when it would be mostly filled with complete strangers.

The two women continued to playfully argue over the merits of exploiting Kara’s singing abilities, completely unaware of the blinking dot on the wall outside of Kara’s apartment.

From across the street, in a small café, Astra listened to the conversation from her headset, frowning at the borderline maternal tone that this ‘Moira’ addressed her niece with. Though she didn’t want to admit it, she was jealous – it seemed in that a fleeting time, this human had already developed a matronly bond with Kara that was not that different from one she had shared with her.

Her envious thoughts were purged, however, at the sound of Kara’s voice. Seeing her picture, watching her on the news – none of it compared to hearing the dulcet tones of her niece, positive proof that Kara was truly here on this planet, alive. Her voice had deepened, of course, and hearing it in one of this planet’s foreign languages was somewhat startling. Astra, of course, had mastered English in preparation for Myriad, as had Non and Indigo, but it still sounded exotic to her ears at times. Hearing it in Kara’s cadence, her tilted ‘l’s and cheery tone, was just as unfamiliar as it was nostalgic.

It was only a reminder of all the years they had lost together. Kara should’ve been with her, raised by her, taught by her, standing side-by-side with her, her remaining blood family, rather than consorting with a foreign species. If only Astra had known, that it was her and Kal-El’s ship that had dragged Fort Rozz out of the Phantom Zone; she and Kara could’ve been preparing for Myriad right now. Instead Astra had to lower herself to spying on her own family, while Kara remained completely unaware of her continued survival. It was a dream almost as much as it was nightmare.

Silently, she turned the headset off, deactivating the bug. She was tempted to retrieve it, but thought better of it – Kara had no reason to believe she would be spied on, and Astra knew it wouldn’t be long until she would return in hopes of catching another glimpse of her niece. With the gathering going on upstairs, it would just be asking for trouble.

Still, her mind dwelled upon the incident with Vartox a couple of weeks ago. They had yet to locate his body, nor had they determined what exactly happened during the Valeronian’s confrontation with the Girl in Blue. Even now, Astra was befuddled over what exactly Kara did, and perhaps her occasional surveillance on her niece would shed some light on the truth.

Her mind set, Astra departed from the café, dropping a small tip into the glass jar on the counter along the way.

“You’re an engineering major?”

Wally hummed. “What can I say? Cars are my one true love.”

From their vantage point by the table, Barry and Iris smiled at the scene. “It’s going well.” Barry stated happily, idly taking a bite out of a gingerbread cookie.

“I know. I’ll see if I can drag Wally to dinner here another time.” Iris commented back, grin wide,
Barry turned to her, taking another bite out of his cookie. “So, does this mean you’re ready to bury the hatchet?”

“I guess so.” Iris shrugged. “I thought on what you said, and we’ve been hanging out more in the last couple of months than we have in the last six years because of you and, well…I’m just tired of being angry. It’s time we moved past all that.”

The speedster nodded. “Eddie will be pleased.”

Iris snorted. “A month or two ago, maybe. These days he’s too concentrated on the Streak to pay anymore attention to the state of my relationship with Dad.”

Barry furrowed his eyebrows. “I knew you told me it was bad, but I didn’t realize it was *that* bad. How much effort did it take you to get him out of the station?”

“Way more than it should have, I can tell you that.” Iris said, leveling a small glare at her boyfriend’s back. Eddie was currently conversing with an amused Francine and an uncomfortable-looking Cisco about the vigilante, slightly intoxicated by Grandma Edna’s famous eggnog.

Amused, Barry was about to respond, only to catch sight of the ashen Caitlin, who was nursing her own drink on the stairs, deep in thought and clearly distressed. “A moment.” Not waiting to see if Iris heard him or not, he quietly made his way to the bio-engineer, careful to not catch anyone’s attention.

“Hey.” Caitlin looked up, haggard. “You okay?” Barry asked with concern. While they didn’t have the best relationship, they were still coworkers. Barry had noticed that Caitlin had seemed more withdrawn lately, but he hadn’t put much mind to it. He did question Cisco about it, and heard from him that this would be the first Christmas since her fiancé Ronnie’s death. Figuring that was the issue, and that Caitlin wouldn’t like to be reminded of it, he invited her to the party in hopes of cheering her up.

Something told Barry, however, that wasn’t the real source of Caitlin’s current state. At least, not entirely.

“It’s nothing.” Caitlin tried to shoo him away. Barry wouldn’t take that for an answer, however, and took her by the hand, forcing her gaze towards him.

“Caitlin. It’s Christmas. Whatever it is, just let it go. Just for tonight.” He insisted gently.

Caitlin hesitated. Then, seeing the genuine expression on Barry’s face, slowly nodded, and allowed him to guide her back to the festivities.

“I don’t know why, but I feel that this doll is way more important than it actually is.” Kal commented to his cousin, staring hard at his newly acquired Beebo doll.

“It’s your Christmas gift, Kal. Of course it’s important.” Kara told him, absentmindedly placing the rest of the leftovers in their new fridge. The party long over, everyone had departed back to their own homes, and Kara was cleaning up the remaining food and waste.
Kal shook his head. “Not for sentimental reasons. For some reason, I think this doll is pivotal to some world-shaking event. Something that could change reality as we know it.”

Kara stared at him for a moment. “…Kal, who gave you the eggnog?”

“Tommy, and no, Kara, my mental faculties are fully functioning. Earth alcohol can’t affect us Kryptonians anyway, you know that.”

“Fully-grown Kryptonians are immune to Earth alcohol.” Kara corrected him. “We have no clue how it would affect the body of a developing Kryptonian child.”


“Whatever you say, Kal. Whatever you say.”

Kal opened his mouth to argue back, only to be cut off by the loud chime of the doorbell. Kara peeked her head outside of the kitchen as he went to open the door. “Who’d be visiting us at this time of night?”

Kal shrugged, and distractedly opened the knob. He lazily turned his head to see who it was, and froze.

“KARA!”

Kara, having turned her attention to putting away the dining ware, exited the kitchen with a bowl in her hands. “What is it, Kal –” she stopped immediately, inadvertently stiffening. Her arms fell to her sides, and the bowl dropped to the floor, shattering upon contact with hardwood.

“Night, Bar.”

“Night, Joe.” Barry bid his foster father goodnight, watching as the light turned off from his bedroom. He frowned when he heard the tell-tale sound of his phone. Picking it up, he saw a text there.

MY PLACE NOW BRING OLIVER WITH YOU

Quirking an eyebrow at the inarticulate sentence, he shrugged. A flash of lightning later, he was gone.

“Wonder why she wants us here.” Oliver mused as Barry inserted his spare key and turned the front doo open. “I just left this place a few hours ago.”

Barry shrugged. “Whatever it is, she was pretty urgent about it. I –“ His voice caught in his throat, his body completely immobilized. He had been the first to cross the threshold of the condo, and thus the first to see what was inside.

Oliver, confused over Barry’s reaction, frowned and pushed his way in, causing the younger man to stumble to the side a bit. He looked up, and stopped dead.
“Slade?”

Chapter End Notes

Yes, it was Slade all along, though I imagine all of you already knew that. Quick warning, the next chapter might take a little longer than usual. It’s going to cover what Slade has been doing for the last eight and a half years, and how exactly he ended up in Amanda Waller’s grip.

As for the title, I am indeed a follower of our one true god, Beebo. PRAISE BEEBO!
Chapter Summary

The reunion of a lifetime, and the tale of Slade's own ten years in hell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 17: The Terminator

“Slade? Slade…”

He turned his head. Shado.

“You promised to protect them Slade. You promised.”

“What did you promise her?”

He wearily watched them from his remaining eye. “To protect you. All of you. To make sure you all made it home…no matter what the cost.”

Gasps.

“I DID! I DID!”

“Get the chains! Restrain him!”

CRASH!

“HOLD HIM DOWN!”

“WE CAN’T! HE’S TOO STRONG!”

Click!

“That should do the trick.”

Shado…

And darkness.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” Kara sobbed into his chest. Slade comfortingly rubbed her back.

“It wasn’t your fault. It was never your fault.” He murmured. At first, it seemed like she hadn’t heard him, but soon her tears subsided, and she slowly removed herself from his embrace.

Not long afterwards, she was replaced by Barry, who hugged him as close as physically possible. Slade patted him softly on the back. After Barry was Oliver, who was remarkably more measured in
his affections, but no less sincere.

“We missed you.” He spoke, voice barely above a whisper.

“I missed you too. I missed you all so very, very much.”

He couldn’t break the shackles.

Then they appeared, and in their hands, empty syringes. The pricks were annoying at worst, as was the frequency. And it continued like this for months, weeks, days, hours, minutes.

And then, one day, they arrived with one full of a glowing white liquid.

They injected it in him, and nothing could stop the screams.

It was silent as a grave.

Kal-El and Slade stared at each other.

Then, tentatively, Kal-El reached forward, grasping both of Slade’s hands. That seemed to be all the permission Slade needed, as he pulled, and suddenly the child was in his arms, head leaned against the bigger male’s torso.

“I know you barely remember me.” Slade breathed into his ear. “I know I was in your life for but a fraction. But I want you to know, Kal-El, that seeing you here and now, healthy and grown-up, fills me with more joy than anything else.”

Kal felt water well up in his eyes, and he fisted the fabric of Slade’s shirt. “Papa…”

“What did you do to me?”

Shado. Shado was gone.

But the strength still remained.

“Made you better. Stronger.” He turned.

And she appeared.

“Where have you been all these years?” Oliver asked, once the atmosphere had become significantly less…emotional.

Slade grimaced. “I assume I washed back up on the island, and was taken while I was unconscious.”

Barry blinked, and frowned. “Taken? Taken by who?”

Slade looked them all in the eye, and even with their training, they were shaken by his haunted gaze.

“The Devil herself.”

"Hello, Mr. Wilson." she smiled, and Slade felt his stomach crawl. Whoever this woman was, something told him she was someone not to be trifled with.
“Who are you?” he demanded, careful to mask his apprehension. “What do you want with me?”

For a moment, he could’ve sworn her teeth sharpened.

“My name is Amanda Waller.” she answered him. “And you? You are everything.”

"She doesn’t like me.” Slade murmured to Maseo. Tatsu glared at him briefly, before turning her attentions back to Akio.

“I cannot say I blame her.” Maseo responded, his eyes focused on washing the dishes. “You are rough around the edges, my friend.”

Slade watched him briefly, before opening his mouth. “Maseo. What did Waller do to me?”

The A.R.G.U.S. agent froze briefly, then turned the faucet off, allowing the stream of water to gradually disappear into a momentary drip. “She perfected the Mirakuru in your body.”

Slade blinked. “…what?”

Maseo sighed. “When we drew out the samples of your blood, our original goal was to replicate the serum and inject them into our own agents. But it was soon discovered that the serum was ‘imperfect,’ so to speak – in exchange for the strength and regenerative abilities, our initial test subjects would suffer hallucinations, inducing rage and eventually resulting in psychotic breaks, and that was just those who survived the initial injection. After having to put down three test subjects and losing scores of others, Waller made a new mandate. Our scientists were to derive an entirely new serum from your blood, one that would minimize the side effects while still maintaining the benefits.”

“It wasn’t possible, was it?” Slade correctly guessed during Maseo’s brief pause.

Maseo shook his head. “No. The best they could come up with was something to remove the detrimental side effects of the Mirakuru from someone who already had the serum in their veins. Considering how only one in twenty survived receiving it, the project was discontinued. Waller was initially planning on killing you once the serum was perfected, but in light of all this, she decided she would cure you of your own symptoms and make use of you instead.”

“And thus, here I am.” Slade finished the story bitterly for him. “Leashed like a dog, or my son gets a bullet in his skull.”

“I am sorry, Slade. I truly am.” Maseo spoke sincerely, understanding his situation perfectly.

After all, they were both in the same boat.

“What’s your interest in the Queens?”

Slade sighed. “Their son was one of the castaways I took under my protection on the island. I owe it to Oliver to at least check on them.”

Maseo furrowed his eyebrows. “Is that why you killed the drug dealer of that Merlyn kid?”

The former ASIS operative nodded. “He was Oliver’s best friend growing up.” He exhaled. “I don’t think Oliver would be happy to see his closest friend like this.”

“WAS IT YOU?” He roared.
Amanda Waller, hurt but still standing, scowled and shook her head. “Shrieve.”

“Shrieve?”

She nodded. “He’s planning on unleashing the Alpha-Omega virus on Hong Kong. He sees them as a threat to American dominance of the global economic market.”

“And so, he’s willing to kill millions of people to prevent that from happening.” Slade concluded, anger taking a new direction. He was broken from his thoughts, however, when Amanda handed him something — a syringe, containing a familiar green liquid.

“Just in case.” Amanda said. “Now go! And I promise, we will meet each other again.”

“We need to go to Shrieve now. He has to have a cure.”

“Maseo —“

“I know it’s a long shot but he’s my son Slade and I can’t —“

“MASEO!”

Maseo and Tatsu both looked at him, Tatsu sorrowfully holding the fading Akio close to her chest. Briefly, Slade was reminded of a memory, of two boys and a girl and a baby, all huddled together, as if that would be enough to protect each other from all the evils of the world. The recollection only steeled his resolve.

“There’s another way.” He opened the front of his coat and took out the syringe, lifting it up for the couple to see.

Maseo, realizing what it was, shook his head rapidly. “No.”

“It’s the only way, Maseo.” Slade stated resolutely, if sadly.

“It will kill him.” Maseo protested, tears starting to well up in his eyes.

“He’s dead either way.”

Maseo buried his face into his hands, more conflicted than he had been in any other moment in his life.

“Do it.”

Both men looked at the sole female member of their trio. Tatsu was gazing up at both of them, also tearful, but no less determined.

“Tatsu.” Maseo begged.

“We cannot lose our son, Maseo. We can’t.” Tatsu beseeched back.

Maseo took in a deep breath and nodded, finally conceding.

Slade kneeled down, gently taking Akio by the hand, rolling up his shirt to reveal the bare flesh beneath.

The child’s eyes slightly opened. “Slade…?”
“I’m sorry, Akio. This is going to hurt.”

And, just like Oliver had done to him so long ago, he jabbed the syringe right into Akio’s chest.

Silence descended.

And then Akio screamed, as blood riveted down his face.

“Well, Mr. Yamashiro, it looks like your service won’t be terminated after all.” Amanda smirked.

Maseo, standing in front of his wife and son, bunched together, merely narrowed his eyes. “Just give my son the cure, and I will continue to work for A.R.G.U.S. as long as you deem me useful.”

“Very well then. It just so happens that there’s a particular organization that’s cottoning up to be a thorn in my side. I’ll need you to infiltrate them.”

“Wait.” Slade called out. “Send me.” Everyone looked at him, and Maseo, both downtrodden and slightly grateful, went to protest. Slade cut him off before he could.

“It’s because of me that Akio has the Mirakuru in him now, Maseo. It’s only fair I pay for the cure as well.” He turned to Amanda. “What organization, and where?”

“I think you might’ve heard of it – they’re called Shadowspire. And as for where…” Amanda smiled mirthlessly. “It’s somewhere very familiar to you.”

“I have a Japanese super-soldier serum running in my veins, and even that can’t compare to what I’m seeing right now.” Slade idly commented to the panicking Taiana, as Baron Reiter’s eyes glowed.

“Take us to Russia.” Slade demanded his handler, as Taiana clustered closer to him. “She’s got business there, and that means so do I.”

Amanda shrugged. “Dare I ask what sort of business?”

“The sort of business that you will disavow me for if it all goes south.”

“Ah. The usual kind.”

“You were on the Amazo.” Slade stated, staring hard at the Bratva Captain.

“Yes, yes. The ship you and those three children tore in half.” Anatoly Knyazev said, swirling his glass and watching the liquid in it spin.

He smiled. “And that means, I owe you a debt. Welcome to the Bratva, Slade Wilson.”

“TAIANA!”

Taiana smiled sadly at him. “Thank you for everything, Slade.” She plugged the dagger right into Konstantine Kovar’s heart, before collapsing from bullet wound in her chest.
“Joe?”

“Hello, father.”

“No! No. Don’t. Please.” Slade begged. A needle stuck out of his leg, filled with a venom that attacked the Mirakuru, as seen by his bleeding eye socket. While it wouldn’t kill him, it would immobilize him, long enough for Amanda Waller to shoot his son in the head.

“Then you come back. And you work for me.” She challenged him, her voice holding an almost sadistic tint to it.

“Oh, did your eldest not tell you? Congratulations, Slade.” Amanda said sarcastically. “It’s a boy. Grant’s his name, right, Joe?” Joe growled, and got another kick for his troubles, this time in the face.

“And now I’ve got an exploding chip on the back of my head.” Slade sighed. “What a life we live, huh, Maseo?”

Maseo clicked his teeth. “I’d prefer that to having my family being held hostage.”

“Well, I’ve got both, so I’m really not in a position to judge.” Slade sighed once more. “She’s gathering a group of others, just like me. All with chips in their skulls too. She’s calling us ‘Task Force X’.”


“Got it in one.”

“Hey, hey. What are you doing?” The sniper backed away, only to let out a roar of pain as his wrist was broken.

Slade smiled hollowly. “Welcome to the team, Lawton.”

“Well, well, well. Chien na Wei. It’s been a while.” Slade spoke calmly, though one could hear the underlying tone of distaste in his voice.

“Slade Wilson.” China White tsked. “I was hoping to God I’d never have to see you again.”

Slade shrugged. “Tough luck. Though, I’m surprised she put you on the team, considering that ten years ago she tried to blow up a plane just to kill you.”

China White smirked. “What can I say? Very few are as good as I am.” she then frowned. “Look, I don’t like you. I will never like you. So, don’t talk to me, or chip or not, I’ll shove one of my knives in your remaining eye.” With a flip of her snow hair, she walked away.

Slade watched her leave, smirking. “Real charmer, that one.” Then, mindful of the security
cameras, he fingered the long, thin piece of metal hidden in his sleeve.

Don’t worry about that, dear. You won’t be seeing me for much longer.

“It’s gone?”

“Yes.”

Slade rubbed the back of his neck, feeling free for the time in years. “Thank you, Maseo. For telling me about Joe and Grant’s escape. For this…for everything.”

“Think nothing of it, my friend. You saved the life of my son. For that, you shall always have my eternal gratitude.”

Slade looked at him with concern. “Are you sure Waller won’t punish you?”

Maseo waved him off. “She let me in too deep. My security clearance is too high – getting rid of me or my family will only cause her problems.” He returned the look of concern. “What of you? Where will you go?”

Slade closed his eyes, and let the memories overflow him.

“Searching. I made a promise. It’s time to see if I fulfilled it.”

“And I ended up back here. With all of you again.” Slade finished his tale, his audience raptured.

Oliver frowned. “Slade…”

“You all thought I was dead, Oliver. I don’t blame you for not trying to find me. My only regret is that I didn’t try to find you all sooner.”

He leaned forward. “Now tell me: where have you all been for the last eight and a half years?”

The four exchanged looks. They turned to Slade, somber.

Slade sighed. “I’m not going to like the answer, am I?”

They all shook their heads.

Chapter End Notes

This was shorter than I thought it was going to be. I’m still happy with this chapter, I just expected it to have more words to it. Eh, just means it gets an early release.

Anyway, yeah – Slade went through Oliver’s journey in canon (with several modifications), except he didn’t go home right afterwards. Waller saw him as too valuable, and press-ganged him into Task Force X. Akio having the Mirakuru in him won’t be coming into play for a long, long time, though it will be important eventually. Joe and Grant – I’m thinking of putting them in either Arc III or Arc IV.

Slade will be sticking around for the rest of the arc, and will play a part in all three of the
climatic confrontations, along with having his own this arc. As you can most likely guess, his villain with will be the Bitch herself, Amanda Waller.
Arc II, Chapter 18: The Wall

Chapter Summary

The Devil has a name, and it's Amanda Waller.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 18: The Wall

“Do you really have to leave?” Kara asked, watching her surrogate father pack a bag of supplies.

“Yes. Waller has agents everywhere – eventually, one of them is going to catch sight of me here, if they haven’t already.” Slade replied, zipping the duffel bag up. “It’s too dangerous for me to stay.”

“Slade, we’re not helpless kids anymore. Anything she can throw at us, we can handle ourselves.” Barry said, trying to convince the older man to remain here, with them. They had just gotten him back, only to lose him again.

Slade sighed. “I know that. And let me tell you, this is the last thing I want to do. But it’s too risky. You don’t know her like I do – you only know of her by reputation. She will do anything to have me back under her control, including targeting you.”

Oliver snorted. “I’d like to see her try.” he muttered darkly.

“Oh, I have no doubt you four can take of yourselves, especially if you were trained by the League,” and Slade winced at that. Learning where exactly his four charges had gone after his supposed death was not a happy memory, by a long shot. “But it still risks blowing your covers, which you can’t afford to have. You,” he pointed at Barry, “haven’t found your mother’s killer yet. And you,” he moved his finger to Oliver, “still haven’t discovered just what is about to go down in this city. Right now, with Waller after me, I’ll only hinder you.”

The four exchanged looks, and Oliver sighed. “Fine. We’ll let you go. Just let us escort you out of the city first.” Slade made to protest, but Oliver shook his head. “Don’t worry. You said it yourself, Slade; we can take care of ourselves. And besides – I don’t think any of us are ready to let you go just yet.”

“I’m not going to be able to convince you otherwise, am I.” It was more of a statement than a question.

“Nope.” Kal chirped. “We’re all as stubborn as you.” His three elder siblings nodded their agreement.

Slade barked out a genuine laugh at that.

“Here we are.” Slade looked out at the dirt road, at the very edges of the outskirts of Starling City. Beside him was a motorbike, with enough fuel to make it to his destination of Opal City. His four charges had followed him, riding in a pickup truck with tinted windows to hide their faces.
“So, this is goodbye?” Barry asked, saddened.

Slade nodded. “For now. At least until I can find a way to get Waller off my tail.”

“We could kill her.” Oliver suggested darkly, already running plans through his head. Barry and Kal-El sighed in exasperation as they waited for the fireworks to start. It was a retread of the argument they had back in the Foundry. Kara paid neither of them mind, having caught something with her supervision.

“And have the entire U.S. government on your asses? I think not.” Slade said harshly, shutting down that train of thought immediately. “I know it’s not ideal and I know my chances aren’t great, but I rather have that than you even more danger than you already are.”

“We’re not amateurs Slade! We know how to cover our tracks!”

“It’s still too risky!”

“If we didn’t take the risks that we did on Lian Yu, we would be dead. Everything has a risk to it Slade. And I for one think this risk is worth it.” Oliver passionately argued.

“Well, I don’t, and I for one would rather slit my own throat rather than –“

“Guys!” Kara shouted, grabbing everyone’s attention. She pointed.

A line of five armored cars were speeding down the dirt road, stopping right in front of them. The doors opened, and out poured dozens of what were presumably A.R.G.U.S. agents, dressed in S.W.A.T. gear and armed with guns, which they aimed at all five former castaways. Barry and Oliver were about to move to take them out, but Kara stopped them, her eyes narrowed.

In the last car, one final door opened, and a slim, African-American woman in blue business wear stepped out. The stone-cold expression on her face, the way that every man and woman moved in deference to her, made it obvious who she was.

Amanda ‘The Wall’ Waller.

Amanda Blake grew up in the Cabrini-Greene projects of Chicago. Rife with crime and poverty, she persevered, and it was there she would meet the man she would eventually marry: Joseph Waller. Their lives together were a financial struggle, dependent on the social programs and handouts from the state and federal governments. Even then, they didn’t mind, happily in love and determined to raise their soon-to-be born son smart and strong, so he could finally escape the projects.

Alas, it was not meant to be – the serial rapist known as “Candyman” attacked Amanda, and while she managed to evade sexual assault, the trauma of the event caused her to miscarry. Her attacker, a prominent businessman, managed to buy his way out of a conviction, enraging Joseph. He would go on to kill the man who destroyed his and his wife’s family and future, and in the process, lose his own life as well.

Devastated, Amanda Waller became a shell of a woman. But her insatiable need for success still remained, and so she moved forward, escaping the projects and earning a degree in political science. She would then become the campaign manager of a local politician, helping him get elected to Washington D.C. – first the Capitol Building, and then, the White House itself. The politician would take her with him as a Congressional aide, and that is where she truly began.

The traumatic circumstances that set Amanda down this path had left her cold, ruthless, stubborn,
aggressive, and completely and utterly disposed towards taking down threats to the United States by any means necessary. After one too many missions, both on- and off-the-books, failing due to emotional trappings such as compassion and mercy, Amanda took things into her own hands, and using her political pull, was put in charge of a new agency – Advanced Research Group United Support, or A.R.G.U.S.

Ostensibly a research and special ops division, A.R.G.U.S. was created with one purpose: to protect the United States from terrorist threats, both domestic and international, by any means necessary. Amanda, as director of A.R.G.U.S., used whatever it took to eradicate her enemies, with little to no regard for human life, both on her side and theirs. Her cold-hearted approach would earn her a nickname ‘The Wall,’ and with a fearsome reputation to match. A reputation that would find itself in the deepest, darkest, and seediest corners of the world, including Nanda Parbat itself.

“Mr. Wilson.” she smiled, cold as ice.

“Amanda.” Slade controlled his fury, mindful of all the guns pointing at him and his companions. Technically, the only one at risk was Oliver, but better safe than sorry.

“I see you’ve brought friends.” she observed the four, her teeth glinting. “Miss Danvers. Mr. Allen. Mr. Queen. And I believe that is Mr. Kent behind the car, correct?”

Kara, Barry, and Oliver remained steadfastly silent, simply glaring at the woman who had made their surrogate father’s life hell for the last eight years.

“Not talking? Or would you like me to address you by your other names?”

“Saraab.” Kara clenched her fists.

“Al Sa’iqa.” Barry grit his teeth.

“Al Sah-him.” Oliver closed his eyes and pursed his lips together into a thin line.

“You want to know, don’t you? How I know about you – who you are, what you are.” Her smirk tightened as she continued. “Or is this enough to convince you?”

She rifled into her jacket, and took it out – a knife, attached with a blade made of a glowing, green substance.

The aggression in everyone’s stances, sans Slade’s, melted away instantly. Kara dropped down to the ground, her eyes wide and focused entirely on the knife. Barry and Oliver’s eyes were also wide, and they allowed their self-control to slip, making small noises of disbelief. Kal was shaking, staring at the weapon in fear.

Slade saw all this and relaxed his own stance, watching their reactions in confusion. “Oliver?”

“It’s Kryptonite.” Oliver answered, already knowing what Slade was about to ask. “It’s one of the only substances, if not the only substance, that can harm Kara and Kal-El.” Slade cursed, and he glared at Amanda even harder than before.


Amanda calmly rolled her shoulders, tilting her head, allowing the knife to rest on her chin. “It’s my job to know.”
“What do you want, Waller?” Kara asked, tone lightly trembling. She and Kal-El did not have fond memories of the last time they had encountered kryptonite.

“A lot of things. And what you want, is for daddy over there to go free, right?”

Amanda smiled once again, and now there was no doubt in anyone’s heart – she had the devil’s grin.

“To talk.”

_____________________________

Click!

Beside Amanda, a picture appeared on the large screen, of a structure that was clearly alien in origin. It wasn’t hard for everyone to connect the dots. Oliver, Slade, Barry, Kara, and Kal were all seated in a crescent, grimacing at the image.

“Fort Rozz.” Kara murmured.

“It crash-landed here about ten years ago, in Nevada. We cordoned off the area immediately and went to investigate, but the first team we sent in was killed. We sent in another team, with significantly more firepower, and they were all killed as well.”

“Which is when you sent in an army.” Oliver said grimly.

“They killed a number of us before stealing some of our vehicles, or, in the case of others, flying off, scattering to the four winds. We have had sightings of one or two suspected prisoners, but we have yet to capture any of them. We do know, however, that some of them – who had the same powers as you, Miss Danvers – were capable of being harmed by this.” With that, the A.R.G.U.S. director placed the Kryptonite knife on the center of the table. Kara looked away slightly, while Kal grasped her sleeve tightly.

“It was Krypton’s super-max prison. It only figures there would be some Kryptonian prisoners.” Barry said resignedly.

Oliver sighed. “You want us to capture the prisoners, don’t you?”

“Yes. Work with us on that front, and Mr. Wilson here will go free. And considering how you were already planning on going after these prisoners, I’d call that quite the bargain deal.” Amanda suggested slyly.

Oliver rested his chin on his hand. “And what’s to stop us from just killing you instead, for all you’ve done to him?”

Amanda smirked. “Besides the U.S. government? I have resources that not even the League has. Such as access to an entire supply of this.” she placed the tip of her finger on the knife.

Everyone remained stonily silent at that. It was League mandate to destroy any Kryptonite found. But if there were truly some rogue Kryptonians mulling about – well, that mandate would have to be abolished soon. Until then, however…

“How much do you know?” Oliver demanded quietly.

“About you?” Amanda’s smirk widened. “Quite a bit. Of course, I first heard of you from a mercenary who had been under my employ at the time: Edward Fyers. Imagine my surprise when I found out that a two-year operation had been taken down by a rogue ASIS operative, a med student,
and three children. But even then, you weren’t ordinary children, were you?” No one rose to the bait, continuing to glare at her instead.

“I was planning on grabbing all of you, not just Slade here, after the Amazo sunk. But you weren’t found – the League got to you first. At first, I assumed you were dead, until years later, when the rumors started.”

“Saraab. The girl whose powers were out of this world. You were a phantom killer – the authorities could never connect any assassinations to you, because they were impossible for a single human to commit. You melted the insides of people with your heat vision, caved in the heads of others with a single blow. You froze them alive and shattered their bodies into fragments of ice. You found so many different ways to kill people with your powers, I couldn’t help but be impressed when I finally connected the dots.” Kara perked up slightly, though her face remained unemotive.

“Al Sa’iqa. The most brilliant mind to have ever entered the service of the Demon’s Head. Your kills were quick, instantaneous, and at many times, ingenious – but that’s not where your true value lied. No, you proved your value with the countless contributions you made to the scientific field, biological and technological, medicine and weaponry. It was you who spearheaded the League into the twenty-first century.” Barry palmed the bottom of his face, glaring.

“And finally, Al Sah-him. The man who speaks a hundred languages. You were supposed to be the dead weight. The one who was only supposed to be another body that would die in service to the Demon’s Head. But you proved your value, training constantly, and with that, your true talent shined. On top of your impressive linguistic skills, you were also a combat prodigy only seen once in a lifetime, the greatest warrior the League has ever produced to have never worn the Demon’s Ring. It’s even been rumored you are a greater warrior than the current Ra’s al Ghul himself.” Unlike the other two, Oliver had no reaction to Amanda’s description of him, his face like marble.

“Together, with Nyssa al Ghul, the Heir to the Demon, you were his horsemen – the Four Horsemen. You were extensions of his will, his sword and, the rare times he needed it, his shield. He devoted months of his personal time and poured countless amounts of resources into your training, and I dare say, he was rewarded handsomely.”

“Take pride, Slade – your three eldest children are, without a doubt, the three most dangerous people in the world.”

A person could hear a pin drop.

No one needed to look at Slade to see how he was feeling right now. The guilt eating away at him, knowing that he left them to that terrible fate. They all wanted to comfort him, to tell him that it wasn’t his fault. But they were in the lion’s den, and that meant showing no weakness.

“You know too much.” Oliver spoke, face still uncut stone.

Amanda’s devil smile deepened. “I know just enough. I also know that, with my knowledge, every single one of your instincts are demanding that you kill me, here and now. But you won’t.”

“And what makes you say that?” Barry asked, one of his hands already reaching for one of his hidden knives.

“Because if I die, Slade Wilson goes to the very top of the wanted list, and his face will be plastered on every news channel on the planet. Any hope of a life with all of you, with his sons, goes down the drain. And that’s just about last thing you all want, right?”
The silence returned. Barry’s hand stopped reaching for the knife, and receded back to his lap. Kara sighed.

“We’ll take the deal. As for the Kryptonite – if it is alright with you, we would like to have it forged into a number of weapons for us. If we really are dealing with a group of rogue Kryptonians, we need every advantage we can get.”

“All of you?” Amanda asked pointedly, no doubt wondering if Kara could handle have something so potentially lethal close to her.

“My suit was specifically designed by Barry to negate the effects of Kryptonite near me. I can handle it.” Kara answered, tugging at her shirt. In reality, Barry had modified all of her clothes to protect her from Kryptonite, as long as she didn’t directly touch it – Kara, however, knew better to reveal such information to a potential enemy.

“Very well. I’m glad we all managed to reach an understanding.” This time, even Kal-El couldn’t resist glaring at her. “Agent Yamashiro is waiting outside the door. He will escort all of you back to Starling City proper. And one last thing.” Amanda grabbed another item from inside her jacket: a flash drive. She placed it on the table, next to the knife.

“This is all the information we managed to download from the servers of Fort Rozz. It isn’t much, but I’m sure you can find a use for it. Take the knife as well – I’ll have another one forged for myself soon enough.”

“Thank you, Director Waller. If any of us ever see you again, it will be far, far too soon.” Barry made the group’s parting words as they all got up to leave.

“Likewise, Mr. Allen.”

“She really is the devil incarnate.” Oliver muttered to Slade as they followed Maseo to a darkly-colored SUV.

Slade clicked his teeth. “When someone finally sends her to hell, Satan himself will have to vacate the throne.”

Chapter End Notes

Woo! That’s done! Happy New Year everyone! This was a fun chapter to write. We get more Waller, The Bitch herself, and we get a little more elaboration on what our little trinity did as members of the League. And trust me, it was not pretty. The trio really are that dangerous, which is why I’m not worried about sending them against the Season 1 villains and calling it “too soon”. While they are major villains, they are also major “starter” villains. Every other major villain after they is going to be infinitely more dangerous than them.

As for the Kryptonite thing – the trinity had to transverse all over the world for their missions. They were going to run into Kryptonite eventually. Unfortunately, it wasn’t Kara who was first to encounter it, but Kal, which is why he has such a tough time looking at the knife.
Arc II, Chapter 19: Baby, I Hate Your Guts

Chapter Summary

In which our trinity becomes aware of their enemies, and their enemies learn more about our trio.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 19: Baby, I Hate Your Guts

She wasn’t lying about this, at least.

Kara was currently in the Foundry, overlooking the information on the flash drive Waller had handed to them before they departed from A.R.G.U.S.’s Starling City base. It had been two days since that confrontation, and while Oliver, Barry, Kal and herself were all happy to have Slade back with them permanently, the elation they would’ve felt was dimmed by the overarching threat of the missing Fort Rozz prisoners.

What information A.R.G.U.S. had managed to glean from Fort Rozz itself was minimal, and overall useless since they dealt with actual structure itself – a structure that was abandoned by its former inhabitants and guarded zealously by the U.S. Federal Government. Amanda, had, however, managed to acquire a partial list of the prisoners that were still alive and imprisoned on Fort Rozz when it crash-landed on Earth – information that not even Jor-El had. Jor-El had access to the entire database of prisoners, but obviously some had died during their incarceration, information he did not have since communication between Krypton and Fort Rozz was so minimal, thanks to the workings of the Phantom Zone. At least with Waller’s list, incomplete as it was, they wouldn’t be searching for someone who was no longer among the living.

Kara was broken from her thoughts when a distress beacon activated on another monitor. There was an attack in progress at Kord Industries. Barry was back in Central, and Oliver was helping Slade settle in her new condo, and then was planning on going hunting later. She had promised to take care of any major crimes or emergencies for him in return.

Well, that’s my cue.

“Here you go. Driver’s license, state ID, U.S. passport – everything you need to pass off as a legal U.S. citizen for the time being.” Oliver handed over the manila folder. “Oh, and a credit card. Don’t worry about paying the bills – I’ll handle that.”

“Oliver…” Slade half-heartedly admonished.

“You’re family Slade, and I’m filthy rich. Let me do at least this much for you.” Oliver cut him off, clearly not taking no for an answer.

Slade chuckled. “I see you still got that bleeding heart of yours.”

“Pumping blood right in my chest.” Oliver smiled back. “Now, it’s time for me to go. Kara’s taking
care of any major emergencies, so I can go hunting.”

“Hunting?” Slade raised an eyebrow.

“Starling is corrupt as they come, Slade. Convincing the elite to give back what they stole is the least I can do. And occasionally, there are some criminals that continue to slip away and need to be put down. The one I’m dealing with tonight is that particular type.”

“Oh? And who might that be?”

Oliver shrugged. “Cyrus Vanch. Laurel’s been pissed lately about how he managed to get off on a technicality. I figure I might as well do her favor and take care of him permanently.”

Barry whistled as the elevator descended downwards. He knew it was late for him to come here but Caitlin had called him in, asking for a favor. He entered the Cortex, and paused. The bio-engineer was sitting in a chair, reading something intently on the computer.

“Caitlin.”

She jumped. “Barry! You scared me.”

“What are you reading there?” he ignored her slight reprimand, moving forward to look at the screen. F.I.R.E.S.T.O.R.M. That sounds ominous, and certainly not something a bio-engineer like Caitlin would be working on.

Caitlin sighed. “Barry…I need your help.”

The Girl in Blue flew to Kord Industries at breakneck speed, but gradually slowed down as she got closer to the main building, careful not to alert any of the intruders with her presence. She descended to the roof, landing softly on the concrete so not even a crack would appear. A scan of her supervision indicated that none of the thieves were outside the building, on the lookout, so that was something at least, as strange as it was.

Either these guys are confident that no one can stop them, or they’re amateurs of the highest order. Perhaps even both.

She located a heating vent on the roof, and removed the cover. Carefully, she entered it, stealthily moving in the vents to where she could hear movement with her superhearing. It wasn’t long until she made it to the main laboratories, where a woman was there, clearly not there for good intentions judging by how she was pulling out every drawer with unrestrained savagery.

“Where is it!” she growled in frustration.

“Why don’t you tell me what it is, and I can help you look for it?”

The woman turned, and saw the last person she wanted to see. The Girl in Blue.

She scowled. “The other Kryptonian.”
The Girl in Blue, having barely registered her words, acted on instinct and moved to the side, dodging a breath of what was clearly poisonous gas. She turned her head sharply towards the woman. *She’s an escapee of Fort Rozz. No chances, then.*

She moved, vaunting her body into a spin and performing a leg sweep, knocking the woman down to the ground. Before the Fort Rozz escapee could get up, the Girl in Blue slammed her foot down on her ankle, shattering it. She screamed in pain, but got not quarter; a moment later, her upper body collapsed to the ground, her neck snapped in two.

The Girl in Blue left the body where it was and started searching the building. She could hear the sounds of the dead woman’s cohorts, all searching the many laboratories for something. *They have to be other escapees. They’re working together.*

The Hood, the Streak, A.R.G.U.S., and herself had all assumed that the escapees had spread themselves throughout the world, just searching for a place to hide and/or find their way back to the stars. But if they were all working together…

She entered each room where she could see and hear movement. Different aliens, all with powers, were there, rifling through the compartments for something. They all attacked her on sight, and she summarily killed them all in return. The Girl in Blue was thankful that Waller had the foresight to forward her number to their phones (which were heavily encrypted, of course) – she couldn’t imagine how the police would deal with the sight of such strange corpses. She would have to call A.R.G.U.S. over to take care of the bodies once she was done.

There was no more movement in the upper floors, as far as she could tell. All that was left was the main lobby. She flew down the stairs, and gently pushed the door open, wincing at the creaking sound. Immediately, the other thieves – two in total – appeared. The Girl in Blue blinked. Her memories of Krypton grew more distant by the day, but if she remembered correctly, they were wearing the uniform of Kryptonian soldiers. Which meant…

She ducked, dodging two beams of heat vision. The Girl in Blue flew fast, stealth no longer a priority, and grabbed one of the Kryptonians by the waist and driving his back down into the concrete, hard, forcing him to turn off his heat vision. She moved to the side as the other Kryptonian tried to hit her with his heat vision, only to strike his cohort instead. She smirked beneath her veil as the man in the crater winced and groaned in pain.

The standing Kryptonian ran forward with his super speed, trying to take her head off with a series of well-practiced blows. The Girl in Blue blocked them easily, then retaliated with a hard uppercut of her own. He involuntarily flew upwards, and she exceeded his ascent, clapping her hands together and throwing the two-handed fist downwards with all her strength, striking the top of his head and burying deep in the concrete beneath. Before he could get up, she was upon him, and with a flick of her wrist, the Kryptonite knife appeared in her hand, before she lodged it into his throat.

*Preparation. Perhaps the most important lesson the League imparted to me.* She thought victoriously. *Now, for the other one.* She yanked out the knife in one smooth move.

But before she could deal with the other one, even more Kryptonians appeared. She blinked as she watched four other Kryptonian soldiers, including one with a scarlet-lined uniform, entered her sight, surrounding her. They were about to move, only to stop as they truly took in the scene, staring disbelievingly at her and the bloody knife in her grasp. The Girl in Blue took advantage of that, once more using her super speed to knock them all down to the ground. One managed to recover in time and engaged her in hand-to-hand combat.

He was more skilled than the Kryptonian she had just killed, but he was still nowhere near her level.
She blocked every blow with her forearms, and then kicked him right in the chest. He skidded backwards, and suffered another kick for his trouble, this time to the chin. Quickly lowering her leg, with a final spin and twist, she stabbed Kryptonite knife right into his heart. He gurgled, before going limp.

Her head snapped backwards when she heard a series of small booms. The Kryptonians had departed, taking with them their unconscious comrade and leaving the deceased for her to deal with.

The Girl in Blue surveyed the scene, and sighed. Reaching behind her, in one of her suit’s many hidden compartments, she found it: her phone. *Time to call Waller.*

---

The Hood stood on the ledge of one of many of Starling City’s high-rise buildings, watching the speeding cars below.

The hit on Cyrus Vanch had gone well – an arrow was in his heart, and many of his goons were heading to the ICU. He had left the girlfriend alone, simply knocking her out, so she wouldn’t interfere. He had no doubt she would attach herself to another of Starling City’s criminal element soon enough, so he had attached a bug to her phone just in case.

He hoped Laurel could relax a bit more now that Vanch was dead. Now that was over with, he had some time to spare, so he was planning to deal with any street crime that he happened across. Of course, that no longer seemed possible. He turned around, having long since noticed the presence behind him.

A member of the League.

Slightly confused, the Hood spoke, careful to keep his voice disguised. *“What does the Demon’s Head need of me?”* he asked in Arabic. When his fellow assassin failed to respond, he narrowed his eyes.

And then, the League member fled.

Warning bells rang in the Hood’s head as he pursued what was now clearly either a rogue member of the League or someone trying to frame them and turn him against them. Clearly, whoever this assassin was, had not realized that he was also an ally of the League and a former member himself. A miscalculation on his part, undoubtedly.

They jumped, rooftop to rooftop, continuing their chase until it finally seemed they could run no longer. The rogue member stopped his escape, turning back, and grabbed the bow on his back along with an arrow in his quiver, and fired. The Hood, having just landed on the same roof with a roll, stood. With ease, he plucked the arrow from its flight and span, notching it in his own bow and firing. The rogue member, stunned at how his attack was countered, barely managed to catch the arrow and prevent it from piercing an eye. Eying each other wearily, they charged.

This man was certainly League-trained, this much the Hood could tell. He was very well-trained, in fact. Easily on par with the top-tier members of the League, perhaps even on the same level as Nyssa and his other two companions. Unfortunately for him, however, the Hood had long since surpassed that level.

He beat back the rogue member, blocking his blows and, when an opening presented itself, grabbing his arm and twisting it to the side, before driving his elbow downwards in a harsh arc onto the captured limb. The rogue member grabbed his arm and stumbled to the side, wincing at the pain. The Hood showed no mercy, grabbing the man by the collar and, with another spin, tossing him off the
When the Hood look downwards to the alley below, there was no body on the concrete. The rogue member was gone, almost as if he were never there.

*Definitely League-trained.* The Hood concluded grimly.

“Caitlin…how did you even hear about this project? I’ve read through it, and this is the kind of stuff that is both revolutionary and at the risk of being weaponized by a rogue general like in the movies.” Barry commented as he continued perusing through the files. Caitlin, standing in front of Barry on the other side of the monitors, clicked her teeth.

“Cisco helped me.” she admitted. “Barry, a couple of weeks ago, I ran into the Burning Man.”

Barry quirked an eyebrow. “The Burning Man?”

“The Burning Man.” Caitlin confirmed. “I saw his face and…he’s Ronnie.”

“Ronnie? As in your fiancé Ronnie, who died when the Particle Accelerator exploded? What does he have to do with F.I.R.E.S.T.O.R.M.? Unless…” Barry looked down back at the screen, frowning contemplatively.

“I did some research and came up with this. I meet with one of the authors of the paper, a student named Jason Rusch, and he told me about how the government confiscated it after they were denied further funding and were threatened to be shut down by the university. The other author, Professor Martin Stein, was planning on attending the Particle Accelerator activation to acquire backing from S.T.A.R. Labs from an old friend of his, who was also attending, but that same night, he disappeared.” she explained, rubber her arm. “And when I met Ronnie again, it seemed like he recognized me, but at the same time, he didn’t. I can’t help but feel that this is all connected, but…”

Barry narrowed his eyes, his mind working on overdrive. “This project’s main focus is on transmutation. Unzipping particles on a sub-atomic level and making new elements from it. If Stein was planning on acquiring further backing for his research, he would need to prove the validity of it, the idea that it was worth pursuing this avenue of study. So, he would bring part of the physical project with him, most likely. And if that’s the case, when the Particle Accelerator activated, and say, this physical object was to somehow escape its case…”

Caitlin listened to him in disbelief, in awe of how easily he connected the dots. From what she had managed to collect from Dr. Wells, and Barry himself, she knew he was a genius in his own right, one that would’ve had his own bright future had he not been stranded on an island. But she had no idea that he was this intuitive. Her mind, however, cut off that line of thought as Barry closed in on his final conclusion, already making her own connections.

“You think Stein and Ronnie merged into one person?” she asked dubiously, though her heart started to race. Though she didn’t voice it out loud, she had also been starting to draw on this conclusion, but even after encountering metas, she still had a hard time believing it. But if Barry was also theorizing this…

“It’s the only explanation. Ronnie’s body was supposedly incinerated by the explosion, but Stein was nowhere near the direct blast, so his body should have never disappeared. Then, Ronnie shows up on video as the Burning Man.” Barry explained automatically, continuing to scroll through the
project, completely ignoring Caitlin’s expression of disbelief. “Ronnie trusts you and S.T.A.R. Labs. If it had just been fear of his own new powers, he would’ve come here eventually because he knew you would help him anyway you could to control them. But he didn’t, and remained on his own for over a year, and when he did finally appear to you, you said it seemed like he recognized you, but at the same time didn’t. If he merged with Stein, then their minds would be fighting each other, each trying to take over Ronnie’s body and move forward with their own agenda. Stein’s mind, being older and more experienced, would inevitably win the struggle, but Ronnie’s presence would still be there, trying to influence him. Hence, Stein would be drawn to you, Ronnie’s lover and fiancée, but would only recognize you on an instinctual level because it wasn’t him that knew you but Ronnie.” He spoke his steady stream of reasoning and finished with that conclusion, never noticing Caitlin’s expression turn to one of awe.

When Caitlin did not respond, Barry looked up, blinking. “What?”

“You’re brilliant.” she bluntly stated, before tears started gathering in her eyes. “Then Ronnie…”

“Ronnie’s alive.” Barry nodded, and with a show of compassion, took Caitlin’s hand. “And I’m going to bring him back to you.” Caitlin looked at him, and smiled watery.

The moment was broken, however, when a beeping sounded. The document on F.I.R.E.S.T.O.R.M. disappeared, and was replaced by a distress beacon from Mercury Labs. A break-in.

“I’ve got to deal with this. We’ll talk more about this later, alright.” Barry told her, and, without waiting for a response, disappeared in a flash of yellow lightning, grabbing one of his suits, which rest on a model in the Cortex, along the way.

The Streak sped his way throughout Mercury Labs’ main building, stopping when he caught sight of the thief. His breath caught in his throat.

The Man in the Yellow Suit.

He was vibrating, blurring his visage, but there was no doubt in the Streak’s mind who he was. The man stared at him with scarlet-eyes, and with a trail of similarly colored lightning, disappeared. The Streak gave chase.

They ran throughout the city, dodging cars and pedestrians, leaving large gusts of wind in their wakes. Much to the Streak’s distaste, the Man in the Yellow Suit was faster than him – not to the point that he couldn’t see him, but enough to keep ahead in their little race.

Eventually, they found themselves in an empty football stadium. The Streak said nothing, staring hard at the monster who ruined his life thirteen years ago.

The Man in the Yellow Suit stared back, continued to vibrate, before he moved. The Streak jumped to the side, skidding slightly as the Man in the Yellow Suit sped around, no doubt trying to entice him into a running fight. The Streak refused to take the bait, knowing he wouldn’t stand a chance with the difference in speed. Instead, he allowed his perception to slow – while the Man in the Yellow Suit was fast enough that he couldn’t catch up to him, he wasn’t fast enough for the Streak not to predict his attacks. Every time the Man in the Yellow Suit tried to ram himself into him, the Streak moved away, using his own speed to make distance. It was a close thing, but the Streak moved just fast enough to dodge, within fingertips away, causing his opponent to stumble slightly from his momentum, each time.

Eventually, realizing that the Streak wasn’t going to play his game, the Man in the Yellow Suit
stopped moving. They had another stare-off, before charging right at each other and engaging. Again, the Streak allowed his perception to slow. The Man in the Yellow Suit’s blows were fast and furious, and it took him total concentration just to predict their general direction and block them, leaving him unable to retaliate with a blow of his own. This exchanged continued for quite some time, until the Man in the Yellow Suit unexpectedly stumbled to the side, his red lightning dancing around him.

“Not now.” he muttered, grasping his head. The Streak, uncaring of his predicament, took advantage, using his powers to land a barrage of punches to the torso of his enemy, finishing it with a right cross. The Man in the Yellow Suit, realizing he had underestimated his opponent, fled. The Streak was tempted to give chase, but the lack of feeling in his arms dissuaded him, as had the bruises from where his rival had managed to land a few hits.

He rubbed his arms, and winced at the pain. It seemed he too had underestimate his opponent to some degree, or at least his own pain threshold. He breathed in. *Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional.* He reminded himself, before fleeing the scene.

*Another day, then. Dad and I have waited this long. We can wait a little longer.*

Chapter End Notes

Yes! Done! We’re getting to the really good parts, everyone.

Yeah, Kara is a beast. Of the Fort Rozz escapees, only Non, Indigo, and Astra really stand a chance against her in skill, and even then, I’d give her the edge in each fight. Oliver is far more skilled than Malcolm at this point, which is why the tension from that storyline isn’t going to come from the fight but from the Undertaking itself, and its background. Barry is the only one who had issues, but the way I developed his character, I made it so had somewhat of a chance against Wellsobard. Barry doesn’t fight like a traditional speedster, which will be explained in the following chapter.
Arc II, Chapter 20: Do You Know Your Enemy?

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of last night's events.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 20: Do You Know Your Enemy?

“Get him to the med-bay, now!”

Astra marched forward, Non and Indigo on her heels. The Commander saluted her shakily, clearly still distressed from whatever had managed to eliminate the majority of his team.

“What happened?” she demanded. “Where is the rest of the team?”

“Dead, General.”

“Dead?” she asked quietly, displeased. “This was supposed to be a simple retrieval mission! How could the humans eliminate eight members of your team, including two Kryptonians! Our bodies are invulnerable to any weapon they could use against us.”

The Commander shook his head, eyes wide. “It wasn’t the humans, General. It was the daughter of Alura.”

It was almost as if time froze. The bustling array of twenty or so aliens, all former prisoners of Fort Rozz, had gathered in the command center to see what the commotion was about. Silence descended upon all of them once the Commander made his claim. Astra, in shock, took a small step backwards. Her failure to speak for several moments caused Non to take the lead, after breaking his own stupor.

“You are telling me that the daughter of Alura, Krypton’s top judge, and a scion of the House of El, killed eight members of your team, two of whom were her fellow Kryptonians?” Non asked dubiously, stepping forward.

The Commander nodded. “Yes. I wouldn’t have believed myself if I hadn’t seen it with my own two eyes. Myself and three of the Kryptonians in our group were staking out another building on the compound. One of them saw something suspicious in the main building, so we went to investigate. We searched the upper floors and found each of the non-Kryptonian members of the team dead, either from by having their necks broken or their insides melted. That’s when he heard fighting in the main lobby. We flew down there, and there she was – she had knocked out one of the men and left him lying in a crater on the floor. The other…she buried a knife in his throat, and was in the process of removing it when we arrived.”

“What of the other Kryptonian she killed?”

He gulped. “When we saw what she did, we took a moment too long to react. She took advantage of that and attacked, using her superspeed to knock us all down. The other Kryptonian managed to recover before me and engaged her one-on-one. He fought well, but…”
“But…” Non urged him to continue.

“But she was far more skilled at hand-to-hand combat than he was. It was like she was dancing around him, Lieutenant – she’s clearly been trained, and extremely well at that. After a few moments, she killed him, stabbing the knife right into his chest. After that, we grabbed our unconscious comrade and fled. Even with the number’s advantage, my instincts were screaming at me, telling me that if we stayed, we would all die.”

Indigo leaned onto a railing by the entrance, a hand on her hip. “What of the knife? Even with her strength, she shouldn’t have been able to pierce the skin another Kryptonian, even if she put all her weight behind it.”

“I managed to catch a glimpse of it when she removed it from the first Kryptonian she killed. While it was covered in blood at the time, there was a faint glowing outline to it, and it seemed the blade was colored green. It was most likely some sort of special material they found that could affect Kryptonians. Why it did not harm her, I do not know.”

The room quieted once again. Astra had listened to every word the Commander said, but they did not compute in her mind. Her Kara, a killer? It shouldn’t have been possible. But the Commander had no reason to lie about this – on the contrary, he should be praised for choosing to flee. With it, he managed to relay valuable information to them about who was now assuredly the biggest threat to their plan. But still…

Astra took a deep breath, knowing everyone’s eyes were on her. “Thank you, Commander. That was…enlightening.” She stood straight, regaining her authoritative air.

“Indigo. How soon can Myriad be activated?”

The Coluan bit the edge of her nails, serious for once. “With this setback? Not for several Earth months.”

Astra nodded. “Very well then.” She turned, analyzing the faces of each of her men, before addressing them all. “It is clear our plans cannot proceed until the daughter of Alura either dies or joins our cause. Indigo will continue her work on Myriad, but until she can complete it, we have a new objective: Kara Zor-El. We must determine her exact threat level – her training, what weapons she has access to, what allies she has, and how much she knows about us and our plans. Until we have a full understanding of her abilities, none of you are allowed to engage her on your missions. If she appears, scrub the mission and flee immediately. These are your standing orders.”

Each of the aliens either saluted her or nodded their assent, cowed by either Astra’s own strength or Kara’s alleged prowess. Astra allowed the crowd to disperse, and when it was just her, Non, and Indigo, she let her façade fall, collapsing into one of the chairs, emotionally spent.

“Wife.” Astra looked up, and saw Non with genuine concern on her face. “Are you alright?”

Astra, too tired to lie, shook her head. “No, Non. I’m not.”

What did this planet do to you, Kara?

Malcolm Merlyn clenched his fist, his head against the wall.
Stupid, stupid! How could I have grossly miscalculated like that?

Of course, he knew why, but it was a bitter pill to swallow.

His pride was why.

When it became clear that the Hood was not following the List but was instead just aiming for nearly every unsavory individual in the city, Malcolm knew he should have just left him alone. As far as he could tell, the Hood had not a single inkling of the Undertaking, and it was best to keep it that way. Provoking him would just be giving him the key to doors he didn’t want opened.

But if there was anything else Malcolm had gained besides clarity during his brief stay in Nanda Parbat, it was a warrior’s pride. The sight of another archer, one clearly trained (by special forces, he initially assumed), beckoned to him like a siren’s song. Malcolm hadn’t had a decent fight in several years, and while training maintained his skills, he yearned for another dance partner, a rival to conquer. He thought the Hood would be interesting enough prey to assume that role for him.

He attired himself in his League armor, because the League’s secrecy was so strongly held that even the most well-connected people heard only whispers of them. A vigilante would know nothing of the true meaning of this uniform. Or so he thought.

Malcolm berated himself for making such hasty assumptions.

The moment the Hood opened his mouth and Arabic spilled from his lips, Malcolm knew he screwed up. The Hood had been aware of the League, and judging by his words, was still closely affiliated with them. Most likely he, like Malcolm, was a former member who had managed to get Ra’s al Ghul to release him from his vows. Unlike Malcolm, however, it seemed he was still in frequent communication with them. His departure must have been recent, within the last two years or so.

So, when he saw him in his League attire, the Hood assumed he was a current member of the League, a messenger for Ra’s al Ghul, and assumed Malcolm would have at least passing familiarity with him. When Malcolm failed to deliver on all those fronts and fled, the Hood obviously gave chase for answers. And now…now…

The Hood would send a message, certainly. And while the Demon’s Head would not divulge his true identity, he would certainly mention his League name. After that, it was just a matter of time before the Hood found out who he was in his search, and chances are, he would find out other things that Malcolm didn’t want a lot of people knowing – such as the Undertaking.

This was bad. This was very, very bad. The Hood was dangerous even by his standards. He was League-trained, that much he was able to glean from their brief scuffle, and a combatant that was on Malcolm’s level easily. Maybe even beyond that, maybe even on the same level as the Demon’s Head himself. That technique, where he so easily reversed his arrow into a shot of his own, without pause or hesitation, not even as he notched the damn thing and fired – that was a move that went beyond catching arrows with just one hand. That was proficiency in the bow that not even most talented archers could hope to achieve. If he fought the Hood, not only was Malcolm was sure he would lose, he was sure he would die in the process. And if he found out about the Undertaking, the League would surely back him, and even if he managed to kill the Hood then, Ra’s al Ghul would hunt him down to the ends of the Earth.

He needed to eliminate this threat immediately.

Thankfully, the project at Unidac Industries was right on schedule. That, at least, was going well. That meant Malcolm, and the rest of Tempest, could focus their energies on finding the Hood. If they
Malcolm nodded. Yes. That could work. Time to make a few calls.

---

_He doesn’t fight like a traditional speedster._

Eobard Thawne stared at the Reverse-Flash suit, rubbing his sides. While the bruises had mostly healed, the skin was still tender. It was just another reminder of how dangerous this Barry was.

He had expected to deal with a novice speedster, one who only had the slightest understanding of the power that was at his fingertips. But Barry didn’t fight like that at all. He didn’t rely on his speed, just used it as another tool at his disposal, another weapon, something to augment the existing skills he had. It was mind-boggling at first, but in hindsight, he should’ve expected that in the first place.

When he found out that Barry had been stranded on the same island as Oliver Queen, he knew that he would be getting some combat training from someone and somewhere. Eobard had barely paid any attention to that at first, figuring that all it would really mean is that he would have looser morals and would be able to throw better punches and kicks. He figured the real threat in Barry was his inability to be manipulated. Now, he had wished that he had thought things through more. Perhaps his eagerness to both play with this Barry Allen and return home had blinded him to the true strength of his enemy.

Barry Allen had been with Oliver Queen, wherever they and Kara Danvers and Clark Kent were, for the last ten years. That meant he would’ve been taught and trained like Oliver Queen, enough to give the man to give a decent fight in hand-to-hand combat – no small feat. Thus, Barry already had ingrained training from prior the lightning, a fighting style who did not have his immense speed as the core. And he would’ve been fighting with it long enough to be smart enough not to discard it in favor of his new powers, but rather use those powers to enhance it to unbelievable heights.

So, when Eobard had tried to trick him into making their fight about speed, Barry didn’t take the bait. With his prior training, he would know that you don’t allow your opponent the direction the fight, you don’t play to _their_ strengths, you play to your own. Instead, what he did was try to frustrate Eobard, force him to fight head-on, where Barry had the advantage in skill and at least stood a chance of hitting him.

Under certain circumstances, even with Barry’s unconventional style, Eobard still would’ve won their clash. The speed difference was just a bit too much for Barry to handle with his current level. But with Eobard’s speed constantly shorting out from the destabilized timeline and overuse, he collapsed at the wrong time in the wrong place with the wrong opponent. This Barry was not merciful, not honorable – he took every opening he got, and would’ve beaten him to a pulp had he not fled.

It was humiliating to know that even the past, even with a year at most with his powers, the Flash was still able to one-up him like this. Eobard was tempted, just ever so slightly, to confront Barry now for a rematch. But that would serve no purpose other than to prop up his wounded ego and make Barry suspicious.

At least the initial goal of the confrontation had been achieved. With this, Barry would no doubt try
to train his powers and get faster, so that way he would be able to completely overwhelm his childhood nightmare when they inevitably faced-off again. When he was just fast enough to travel back in time, well, Eobard would know, and that was when the true endgame would start.

“...is if he wanted to kill me. And when he found out that I knew what the armor meant, he fled, because if he knew would attract the attention of the League if I died with an arrow in my heart or a sword wound in my chest.” Oliver narrowed his eyes. “We need to send a message to Nanda Parbat. Now.”

“Already on it.” Barry announced, typing away at the computer. “Oh, and I met my mother’s murderer last night.”

Kara blinked. “Huh. How did that go?”

“Draw, technically. He fled, but he still got some good shots in, as did I. Also, I think his speed is limited, so that’s something, at least. I’ll still have to get faster, though.” Barry spoke nonchalantly, masking the angry, yet eager tone in his voice. Patience was a virtue, certainly, but knowing his mother’s murderer was still out there invoked emotions he hadn’t felt in a long time.

Kal looked up at him from where was doing his homework. “He’s faster than you?”

“Just enough to make a difference, so I don’t need to be as fast as him – just faster.”

“And on that note, I am the bearer of more interesting-to-bad news.” Kara rubbed the back of her head. “The Fort Rozz escapees are working together.”

Barry stopped typing and turned with everyone else to look at her. “What.”

“Yup. They’re working together. They all tried to rob Kord Industries last night. I had to kill about eight of them, including two Kryptonians, but the last four managed to flee.”

“The bodies?” Oliver was the one to ask this.

“A.R.G.U.S. They also hushed up the actual attempted robbery itself, so don’t expect to see it on the news anytime soon.”

“Wait, so if they’re working together, why? What goal could they possibly have?”

“Survival?” Kal-El suggested, though it sounded weak to even his ears.
“Unlikely.” Slade shook his head. “They’re all dangerous enough to survive on a planet like this on their own. Kara herself says we’re as backwater as they come, at least on the galactic stage.”

“We are. Survival here is not an issue, especially since metahumans haven’t been on the rise until recently, thanks to the Particle Accelerator Explosion, and even then, it’s been mostly contained to the West Coast. No, there’s something bigger at play. Something much bigger; else, why bother robbing Kord Industries? If it were survival, going after a technology giant instead of a convenience store or something with sustenance would be a poor choice.” Kara pointed out.

Oliver sat down in another chair, fingertips pressed together. “We’ll have to capture one of them. Not only to find out their plans, but also to figure out the location of their base.”

“You’re positive they have a base?” Slade quirked an eyebrow.

“They’re working together, and have been stuck on a foreign planet for the last ten years. Prior to that, they were imprisoned in an area of space where time stood still. They would want stability, familiarity, and while everything on this planet is foreign at first, stay in one place long enough and it becomes familiar with time. Plus, with so many prisoners, it would be a hassle to try and inform everyone where their base of operations moved, so having one area to base themselves in would be the most convenient tactical move.” Oliver explained.

“So. We’re searching Starling City, a city filled with over half a million people in it, for a completely unknown League member. At the same time, Barry’s mom’s murderer has resurfaced, and he clearly has plans of his own. And finally, we got to snuff out a base filled to brim with alien convicts, a significant amount of whom are probably Kryptonian, and all of whom are most likely planning something big, that is most likely not beneficial to the world at large.” Kal-El summed up for all of them, setting down his pencil.

“Yes.” Oliver deadpanned, only to his expression to change to one of confusion when the computer’s distress beacon set off.

“Waller wants us three in Detroit, soon as we can.” Barry announced loudly, gesturing to himself, Oliver, and Kara, as he read the message on the screen. “Says she wants us to confront a new metahuman that’s surfaced there. Maybe press-gang them into Task Force X if they’re criminals.”

“And why would we do that?” Kara glared at the screen. Damn that woman for being able to hack their systems so easily.

“She says if we don’t, Slade goes on the run tomorrow.”

Oliver sighed. “I’ll go prep the jet.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is something completely different, in which our little trio meets someone new. If you have any familiarity with the Arrowverse and Detroit, you’ll know who.
Chapter Summary

Exactly what it says on the tin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 21: And Now, For Something Completely Different

Ah, Detroit. Once a bustling, prosperous city, the largest on the border between the U.S. and Canada and the largest in the state of Michigan, the years had not been kind. The Metro Detroit area served as headquarters for the three largest automobile companies in the U.S., but the loss of jobs in the automobile industry thanks to rapid industrialization severely harmed the city’s economy. This was reflected in the streets and rising crime rate – while not quite on the level of say, Starling City, Detroit had its own share of problems.

Which is where Mari McCabe came in.

Mari McCabe was the adoptive daughter of Chuck and Patty McCabe – something that became rather obvious as she grew older, as Mari was dark-skinned, and her adoptive parents were white. This caused her to be a target of bullying growing up, and resulted in her developing identity issues. To comfort her, when she was ten, her adoptive parents gave her a necklace, which was found with her when she was a baby. It was the only clue she had to her origins.

As she entered adulthood, Mari fell in love with fashion and became an aspiring fashion designer. But due to her identity issues, her designs lacked distinction, an individual flair that screamed “her.” Realizing this, she would spend the next four years searching for clues regarding her parents, and would only return home to Detroit after those years proved to be fruitless.

And that is when Mari McCabe’s story would truly begin.

“Hello, boys.”

The thugs looked up. There African-American woman with long, dark hair perched on top of one of the steel beams above, clad in a light-brown leather suit with dark gloves. Around her neck was a necklace, animal teeth in crescent, and above her heart, a stone in the shape of a fox’s head. She placed her hand on the head, and they watched, shocked, as the phantom of a gazelle enveloped her for a brief moment.

She pounced.

It was over in seconds.

Mari surveyed the carnage with a smile, the moans and groans music to her ears.

“Mari McCabe?”
She blinked, and turned around. Her jaw dropped.

The Girl in Blue.

“We need to talk.”

“Ms. McCabe. A pleasure.” Amanda Waller’s smile sent shivers down her spine. Mari, trying not to show how disconcerted she was, crossed her arms. They were currently in a military base of some sort, on the outskirts of Detroit.

“I’m only here because you sent her after me.” She jabbed her thumb to the Girl in Blue, who was leaning next to the door. “Who are you? And what do you want? And how did you know about me?”

“My name is Amanda Waller. I am the director of Advance Research Group United Support, or A.R.G.U.S. for short. And what I want…well, we’ll get back to that. And as for you – care for a little history lesson, Ms. McCabe?” Mari narrowed her eyes.

Amanda took out a remote, and tapped a button. The screen behind her came to life, and showed a monochrome picture of a group of strangely dressed people. Their costumes were not all that different from Mari’s and the Girl in Blue’s. On the bottom was writing: ‘JSA, 1943’.

“And what does this have to do with me?” Mari demanded, though something began to curl in her gut. One of the two women in the picture felt oddly familiar to her.

Amanda held up a finger, stopping her. “First, introductions. You,” she pointed to the Girl in Blue, “get the other two.” The Girl in Blue stared at her for a long moment, before going to the door on the side. She made three short knocks. Soon afterwards, it opened. Mari blinked as the Streak and the Hood made their way in.

“Didn’t see that coming,” she muttered. “Though, now that I can see you all up close, I can see the similarities in your gear. They yours?” she turned to Amanda, directing the question at her.

“Affiliates.”

“Not by choice.” The Hood growled. The guttural sound startled Mari slightly, though she tried not to show it.

Amanda ignored his interjection, and continued to smile. “Reveal yourselves.” And now, there was no question – they were all glaring at her in earnest. “You know what’s at stake. And besides, I revealed Ms. McCabe’s identity to you. It’s only fair you reveal yours.”

It seemed they would remain defiant, but then their stances relaxed, ever so slightly. The Girl in Blue was first – she took off her hood, letting loose a head of long, blonde hair, and then removed her veil, revealing a face that was much young than Mari expected. She held out her hand to Mari, and smiled lightly. “Kara Danvers.” Mari took it and shook it gingerly, knowing that despite appearances, this girl was probably even more dangerous than she was. Mari, after all, was not fire-proof or bullet-proof, nor was she strong enough to lift a crashing plane.

The next was the Streak. He took off the top of his disguise to reveal a boyishly-handsome man with dark hair who was not that much older than Kara. He flashed her a charming smile and repeated his companion’s actions. “Barry Allen.”

The Hood was stubborn, but one look from his two teammates and he relented, revealing a face that
Mari was already familiar with. “Oliver Queen.” This time, Mari was the one who had to hold out her hand. Oliver stared at it for a moment, then sighed and reciprocated the greeting.

“Wonderful. Now that you all know each other, we can cut to the chase. This, Ms. McCabe, is the Justice Society of America. I guess you could call them the world’s first superheroes. They are, or were, in any case, the greatest secret force this country has ever known. They were formed to combat the Nazis during World War II, and continued to operate well into the 50s before disbanding.”

Mari quirked an eyebrow. “And what does this have to do with me?”

Amanda smirked, and pressed another button. It was a close up of one of the women in the picture, digitally colorized. Mari blinked, her heart stopping. “That’s…”

“…the Anansi Totem.” Amanda nodded. “The same one that is around your neck. The woman wearing it was Amaya Jiwe, codenamed ‘Vixen.’ She was one of the first members of the JSA to depart from the group, after the death of their first leader, Rex Tyler, codenamed ‘Hourman.’ It was never put into official documentation why, but the journals of Courtney Whitmore, codenamed ‘Stargirl,’ the other female member of the JSA, revealed the truth: Jiwe and Tyler were lovers, and when Jiwe left, she was pregnant with Tyler’s child. Jiwe returned to her home village in Zambesi, where she would give birth to a daughter. She would continue protecting the village into her old age, and on her death bed, she would pass on the totem to her daughter, to bond with her eldest grandchild.”

“Then…she…” Mari blinked once more, but this time it was prevent tears from gathering in her eyes. While the feeling wasn’t as strong as when she found out the truth of her origins from her older sister, it was still hard to hear.

“She was your grandmother, Ms. McCabe. And I need you to carry on her legacy.” Amanda smirked. “All of you.” she looked around, surveying the faces of the vigilantes in the room.

“You want to restart the JSA.” Barry stated, already knowing where this was going.

“Of a sort, Mr. Allen.”

Oliver stepped forward, “I mean no disrespect,” to the JSA went unsaid, “but don’t you already have a task force for this sort of thing? Your Suicide Squad?”

Amanda shook her head. “I see Mr. Wilson has been telling stories. While Task Force X is fearsome, their talents lie in matters of a more…delicate nature. What I want is something more public. A symbol to the world, a deterrent against those that would stand against American, and, in certain cases, the planet’s, interest.” She looked at all of them once more. “While your identities may remain a secret, you all have already publicly revealed yourselves, stopping crime, no matter how small, and dealing with large disasters. Despite some of your less…reputable deeds, public opinion is gradually turning to your side. You are all ideal for this endeavor. Others will join you, I have no doubt, but until then, you four will be the beginning.”

“You’re not giving us a choice, are you.” Kara tiredly asked, already knowing the answer.

“No.”

The four vigilantes exchanged glances. The trio already knew their answers, and Mari was the only outlier. They looked to her, and she bit the bottom of her lip, before nodding.

“We’re in.” Oliver spoke for all of them, glaring darkly at the director of A.R.G.U.S.
“Good. Don’t worry, this will not be a full-time gig – you’ll only be called in for major emergencies, the first of which you will reveal yourselves, and your association with each other, to the world. But a base will be built for you nonetheless, and you will be required to be in contact at least once a month. For you three, I imagine that will not be a problem, but for you, Ms. McCabe…”

“I’ll make it work.”

“Very well then. Then this meeting is over. I’ll contact you all on a later date for more information. Consider yourselves dismissed.”

“One of the mystical totems of Zambesi, forged by the trickster god Anansi himself. Well, I’ll be.” Oliver commented, expecting the necklace around Mari’s neck. While the meeting was over, the trio of vigilantes had remained behind, wanting to get to know their new teammate.

“You’ve heard of it? But weren’t you stranded on an island for the last ten years?” Mari questioned him, leaning against a wall.

Barry rubbed the back of his head. “We were all on that island, actually. That’s how us three know each other. And as for how we know about your totem…let’s just say we didn’t spend all ten years on that island.”

“I see.” Mari sighed. “Still, after everything that happened with Kuasa, I thought that would be end of all the surprises in my life. But this, learning my grandmother was a superhero, and meeting you three…”

Kara shrugged. “Just another day for us. This doesn’t even crack the top ten.”

“Really?”

“We were trained by a secret society of assassins that guard a pit of water that can revive the dead.” Oliver deadpanned.

“I got my powers by getting hit with a lightning bolt charged with dark matter.” Barry raised his hand nonchalantly.

“And I’m an alien.” Kara shrugged once more.

Mari blinked, and began to laugh nervously, slightly overwhelmed. “Well, that puts things into perspective.”

“Yeah…” Barry elongated the word. “We haven’t scratched the surface, really, and something tells me that things are only going to get crazier.”

“I’m not sure how much more of this I can stand.”

“Don’t worry.” Oliver patted her gently on the shoulder. “You’ll get used to it. We did.”

“Here’s our number.” Kara handed her a piece of paper. “Don’t be afraid to call for help.”

Mari smiled. “I won’t.”

Chapter End Notes
Short, I know, but this is more of an interlude, sowing the seeds for the beginning of the Justice League. Mari isn’t going to appear often, but she will play a major part in the world-ending catastrophes. You know, like alien invasions and stuff.

Next time, we see what everyone else is doing.
Arc II, Chapter 22: Meanwhile, Back on the Ranch

Chapter Summary

What everyone else was doing when our trio spent their day and night at Detroit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 22: Meanwhile, Back on the Ranch

Laurel fingered through another pack of documents. A couple had just contacted CNRI, asking for help. They had been recently swindled out of their money by Edward Rasmus, and wish to take a class action lawsuit against him in retaliation.

“…And in another news, the Hood has struck again once more, this time against alleged crime lord Cyrus Vanch. Vanch had just been recently released from Iron Heights…”

She blinked, and turned to the TV, watching disbelievingly at the screen, where a sketch of the Hood and a picture of Vanch were being projected together, side-by-side.

“Dad, where are you going? It’s our day off.” Tommy complained, watching his father pack his suitcase.

“Something just came up; I have to go now.” Malcolm lied absentmindedly, clasping the case closed.

Tommy frowned. “Is it something important? Do you need me to come in too?”

“No, no. Nothing like that. You take the day, have some fun.” Malcolm dismissed him, before exiting the house.

Slade set the box down and stood, stretching his arms, feelings his joints pop into place. “And that’s the last of it.”

Kal-El, barely winded, placed down in his box (which was significantly larger than Slade’s) and looked at him confusedly. “Don’t you have the Mirakuru in you? Why are you getting tired?”

Slade patted him on the head fondly. “Even I have my limits. And now that all the boxes are in, we can get around to arranging everything.” He looked around the mass of waste. “Why haven’t you and Kara used your superspeed to get rid of all this trash already anyway?”

“Kara considers it cheating. She wanted us to fully enjoy the experience of decorating our own home, and that meant no powers and with friends other than Olive and Barry.” Kal answered. “Plus, it would look suspicious to all our non-vigilante friends.”

Slade barked out a laugh. “I see that the League has made you lot paranoid. Can’t say I disapprove, as inconvenient as it is.”
Kal shrugged, and smiled. “Neither can I. Kara always said that preparation was the most important lesson the League imparted to her.”

“I’m not surprised. Your sister was a little reckless and overly emotional when she was younger. Especially when it came to you.”

The younger male perked up. “Really?”

“Really. Even then, you were her entire world, Kal-El. Whenever you got so much as a stubbed toe, she’d fret over you for the entire day. We’d often have to find excuses to get her away from you, even if it was just for a little while.” Slade commented wistfully. “Looking at you two now, that hasn’t changed at all, really, though I guess time and the League has made her accept the fact that she can’t always be there to hold your hand and protect you.”

“Doesn’t stop her from trying.” Kal-El grumbled. Make no mistake, he loved his cousin, but she could be overbearing at times.

Slade smiled. “I’d be worried if she did.” He ruffled the hair of his youngest charge once more. “Now, come on. The apartment isn’t going to clean itself.”

Ted opened the door and blinked. “Laurel? What are you doing here? It’s not one of your usual days.”

Laurel rubbed the back of her head sheepishly. “Yeah, but I needed someone to talk about this, and with Ollie out of town…”

Ted sighed, but smiled nonetheless. “Come on in.”

Laurel entered the gym, blinking when she noticed it was emptier than usual. “Slow day?”

“The slowest.” Ted walked forward, and leaned against the ring apron, crossing his arms. “Now what’s bugging you?”

The lawyer sighed. “Cyrus Vanch got busted today.”

Ted blinked. “And you’re not jumping for joy because…”

“He got busted permanently.”

“Ah. The Hood.”

“Yeah. That’s what got me so conflicted. That case with Vanch – it took forever to build. Not just because it had to be ironclad, but because he just committed so many crimes, enough to get him life. Me and the team, we worked on that case for months. And when he got off, on a technicality no less…it just grated on me so badly, Ted. I was pissed. And with the DA refusing to reopen the case, and nobody willing to go up to bat against him anymore, knowing that he was just going to continue his crimes unimpeded…It was just so infuriating.”

Ted nodded along understandingly. “And then suddenly, Vanch is no longer a problem, and this time for good.”

Laurel went to stand next to him, pulling herself up to sit on the edge of the ring. “I always held the law as sacred. I thought if I just fought hard enough within the boundaries of the system, things would work out in the end. But repeatedly, the system has failed me and countless others, and all
these murderers and thieves get off with a slap on the wrist at worst. And now the Hood comes in, and he breaks laws left and right and, yet, he still gets results. Within a single night, with just a bow and an arrow, he took care of Vanch, something that months of our own hard work failed to achieve in the end.”

“So, you approve of him putting arrows into people?” Ted asked carefully.

“No! At least, I don’t approve of him killing people. But I can’t lie and say it’s not a relief that Vanch is off the streets for good now. And killing people isn’t all the Hood does – he scares the criminal elite into giving back to the city they stole from, like a modern-day Robin Hood. And even though Robin Hood was a criminal, no one could deny that his actions were noble at heart, even if they were illegal.” Laurel palmed her forward, sighing. “It’s just so confusing, Ted. The Hood is not the only one doing things like this. The Streak, back in Central City, has been making waves too, and the Girl in Blue, she saved my life a month ago. Crime has been going down in both cities ever since they made their appearances. As much as I would like to side with the police and the media over condemning their methods, they’re still getting results, which is more than can be said for Starling City before them. I just don’t know what to believe in anymore, Ted.”

Ted looked at her contemplatively, before placing a hand on her shoulder comfortingly. “You’re at a crossroads, Laurel. The answer to a question like this, you’re not going to find an answer to. The only answer you’ll find is one you make for yourself. What you believe in, what you think is the right way to do things – those are all things you have to decide on your own.”

Laurel sighed. “Any suggestions?”

“The same advice I gave you for your boy problem – give it time. You can’t decide whether or not to completely change your fundamental beliefs in a single day, Laurel. Just wait until you can get some distance personally from the Hood’s actions, and judge them from all angles. Then you can decide whether you approve or not, and go from there.”

The attorney leaned against the ropes, and gave a small smile to Ted. “How did you get so wise, Ted?”

The man shrugged. “Growing up in the Glades, trying to stay on the right side of the tracks – it gives you some perspective. And a little experience on both sides of them didn’t hurt either, even though I wished I stayed on the right side at the time.”

“I never knew.” She noted, looking at him sympathetically.

“I didn’t tell you.” he pointed out. “And besides, it’s in the past. I made my peace with it a long time ago. Now, I just try to make sure the kids here don’t make the same mistakes I did.”

Laurel grinned. “You’re a good guy, Ted.”

“This was rather spontaneous, Malcolm.” Robert commented from his seat at the table, Moira right beside him. “I thought we weren’t supposed to have our monthly meeting for at least another week.” All around the rectangular table, the various members of Tempest nodded.

“I know, Robert, but circumstances have changed. We have a problem.” Malcolm announced, and while everyone was visibly displeased, the Queens could feel hope fluttering in their chests.

“Are there issues with the development of the device?” Frank Chen spoke up from his spot.

Malcolm shook his head. “No, that’s still right on schedule. It will be ready by May, just as planned.”
And just like that, Robert and Moira’s hearts plummeted.

“We have a potential leak.” He announced, and immediately everyone stood at attention.

“What do you mean by a ‘potential’ leak, Malcolm?” Moira asked, almost worriedly.

“The Hood.”

“How does some Robin Hood-wannabe know about the Undertaking?”

Malcolm pushed down the growing feeling of irritation, and sighed. “He doesn’t yet. But he’s on the path to figuring it out soon, unless we do something about it. We need to find out the Hood’s true identity immediately and take care of him as quickly and discretely as possible before he uncovers our little plot and exposes us all.”

Robert quirked an eyebrow. “How did the Hood get a heads-up on all this, Malcolm? We’ve all kept our mouths shut and I know you squash out leaks before they happen. The Hood should be as in the dark as the rest of the city.”

Malcolm frowned, and chose his next words carefully. “The Hood has…connections to certain people. Connections I didn’t realize he had until now. And they’ll give him enough information for him to start digging, and knowing who he knows, I realize that he’ll learn the truth eventually unless we stop him now. Permanently.”

“Connections to what kind of people?” Moira followed up her husband’s question, looking curiously at Malcolm.

“People that no one here, not even I, want to anger, Moira. Trust me. It’s best that you leave it at that.” Malcolm suggested, by Moira had been a part of Tempest long enough to know it was an order.

“What of your associate?” Frank proposed, drawing everyone’s attention. They had all met Malcolm’s “associate,” and they tended not to want a repeat performance. “Can’t he take care of the Hood?”

“Unfortunately, Frank, I already tried that. While my associate is good, the Hood is even better. He barely escaped with his life when they fought.” At that, any immediate protests stilted at the mouth. If the Hood truly was more dangerous than Malcolm’s personal assassin…

“As of right now, you are to divert all your resources, any contacts you have, into finding out the Hood’s identity. It is our top priority, and only when he’s dead in the ground can we all relax and proceed with the plan unhindered.” At the assortment of nods, Malcolm smiled, for the first time since the meeting started. “Good.”

“These are some well-drawn pictures.” Slade commented, overlooking the stack of Kal-El’s art assignments.

Kal blushed. “Kara gave me some pointers.” he responded shyly.

Slade chuckled. “Your sister always did love art. She’d draw you all sorts of pictures when telling you stories about Krypton. Granted, the ground made for a poor canvas unless it had been raining recently, but she didn’t let that stop her.” Then his ear twitched, and he frowned.
“Slade?” Kal asked cautiously, his previous bashfulness gone.

Slade put a finger to his lips, a quieting gesture, and then calmly and quietly walked to one of the walls. He put his ear against it, hearing slight static. Noticing the open balcony, he walked outside, and looked at the building’s side. With his acute eyesight, he noticed it immediately, and calmly reach forward, careful not to break the small piece of machinery.

He walked back into the apartment, frowning at the palm of his hand.

“Slade?” Kal-El asked once again, walking up to him.

Silently, Slade held out his hand. Kal’s stomach dropped.

Kal had been raised in the League of Assassins. He knew a listening bug when he saw one.

Laurel knocked on the door leading to Ted’s office, peaking her head inside before walking in.

“Ted? I’m sorry about coming back so soon, but I think I left my wallet here and –“

Laurel froze, staring at the suit and mask hanging on one of the walls.

“I see you found my old suit.” A voice commented behind her.

She turned around, staring at Ted like she had never seen him before. “Ted…what is this?”

Ted sighed. “Sit down, Laurel. I’ve got quite the story to tell you. I think I owe you that much, at least.”

“Eddie! Where have you been? Singh told me that you were ‘on assignment’ the last couple of days and you haven’t been answering any of my calls.” Iris said to her boyfriend, slightly upset.

Eddie didn’t say anything, instead taking her by the waist and pulling her into a deep kiss. Iris melted into it for a brief moment, before pushing him away abruptly.

“Eddie? Not that I’m disappointed, but, there’s the matter of you being missing lately?”

Eddie up held his hands, still very pleased. “Now Iris, I know you’re mad, but I swear I have a good excuse. You know that case I’ve been working on, right? Well, I’ve just got back from S.T.A.R. Labs and they’re shipping in their new anti-meta technology within the next two weeks for the CCPD to use.”

“Anti-meta technology?”

“It’s short for anti-metahuman. Metahumans are what they call people who have powers, like the Streak and Woodward.”

Iris blinked, then smiled hesitantly. “That’s great, Eddie! That’ll make catching those guys much easier to do.”

“I know, right? But that’s not the best part.” Eddie said euphorically, before dragging her into the main station by the hand.
“What’s the best part?” Iris asked, though she had a feeling she already knew.

“This.” Eddie smirked at her, before yelling out to the crowd of working officers. “HEY, EVERYONE! I JUST GOT APPROVAL FROM THE CAPTAIN ABOUT FORMING AN ANTI-STREAK TASK FORCE!”

Cheers broke out at that, before a swarm of blue converged on Eddie, who was too drunk on all the praise to notice Iris slipping out of the crowd and making her way to Joe, who was one of the few policemen present not congratulating her boyfriend and/or begging to join the task force.

The two Wests looked at each other. “You in this too?” Iris asked, almost defeated.

“Just to make sure he doesn’t get himself killed.” Joe admitted to his daughter, knowing exactly how she was feeling.

When Harrison Wells entered the Cortex, it was to the sight of Caitlin Snow and Cisco Ramon muttering to each other conspiratorially. They immediately clammed up when they saw him, causing him to furrow his eyebrows.

“You two are looking mighty suspicious today,” He commented, already knowing what they were whispering about. He kept cameras in the Cortex, after all.

Cisco rubbed his arm. Caitlin was the one to bite the bullet. “Dr. Wells…we have proof that Ronnie’s alive.”

Harrison Wells said nothing, leaning back into his wheel chair and pressing his fingertips together contemplatively.

So, it’s finally time to deal with Firestorm.

Chapter End Notes

And our trinity comes back to us in the next chapter to deal with all this.
Chapter Summary

Barry and Caitlin have a heart-to-heart as they wait for Ronnie to appear. Elsewhere, Oliver and Kara ruminate over the rogue League member as the prep for a major event.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 23: Disco Inferno

“It’s lined with lead.” Barry announced, looking the bug over with a magnifying glass. “That’s why neither you nor Kal-El were able to detect it during your annual scans.”

“How about sound? Why was Slade able to hear it and not us?” Kara asked, leaning over his shoulder.

“My guess? Luck. The bug’s been designed to be almost entirely silent. The only time it makes noise is when it’s being activated, a static that’s so quiet that you would only hear it, and only if you were specifically searching for it. Slade, however, being paranoid, would keep his ears alert at all times, and since they weren’t expecting someone other than you two to be able to hear it…” Barry shrugged.

Oliver frowned. “Can you back trace the signal?”

Barry shook his head. “It’s not a strong transmitter. Only supposed to go as far as across the street. My guess is that a Kryptonian with supervision was spying on Kara and using this to listen in to the apartment. With Slade finding the bug, when it fails to transmit, they’ll know they’ve been had and stop their surveillance of the apartment.”

“Another dead end, then.” Oliver sighed.

Kara sympathized with him. “The only thing we know from all this is that they know who Kal-El and I really are. We need to be more careful.”

“If we be anymore careful, we’re only going to inconvenience ourselves, Kara.” Oliver pointed out.

“I’m not saying we should be throwing our families and friends into bunkers and throwing away the key. I’m saying we need to be more vigilant. This?” She picked up the bug, holding it up for both of her older brothers to see. “This shouldn’t have eluded me. We need to be more vigilant. Keep ourselves more aware of our surroundings. All three of us our stuck in our own conspiracies, and getting lax will get us all killed.”

“Kara, that is not your fault. We are as vigilant as we’ve ever been. We aren’t gods. No matter how skilled, how powerful we all are, we aren’t perfect. We’re just going to have to accept the fact that some things like this are going to fall through the cracks.” Oliver calmly rebutted. Kara crossed her arms, defiant.

Beep!
“Pizza?” Barry noted the many boxes from his place in the back of the van, idly clicking on some of the surveillance gear. He nonchalantly opened one and removed a slice, shoving it into his mouth with little abandon.

“Cheap, filling, and Ronnie’s favorite.” Caitlin, sitting across from him, took a slice of her own and began to nibble on it. They were staking out the Steins’ house, waiting for Ronnie to appear. In another car a little ways off was Cisco and Dr. Wells doing their own surveillance.

Barry smirked. “Peace offering?”

“If he torches you, yes. Otherwise, I imagine he hasn’t had a decent meal in a while. Last I saw him, he looked rather…ragged.”

“Let me guess – he looks like a hobo.”

Caitlin grimaced. “Not an inaccurate comparison. He’s going to need a lot of work when we get back to the lab.”

Barry nodded along, taking another bite of his pizza. “And you and Dr. Wells have got a cocktail of meds prepped and ready to deal with the warring minds?”

“Yes. I just hope they’ll work.”

“We’re flying blind here, Caitlin. They’re going to have to.” Barry pointed out.

Caitlin sighed. “Barry, if Ronnie can’t be cured…are you…”

“…going to kill him?” Barry finished for her, causing the bio-engineer to flinch. “Of course not, Caitlin. If he’s hurt anyone, it’s obviously wasn’t by choice.”

“And how are you sure of that?” Caitlin couldn’t help but ask, slightly accusatory.

“Because of you.” He replied calmly, stopping her anger cold. “You told me how he ‘died’ the first time Caitlin, and I trust you enough to know you wouldn’t lie about something like that.” Caitlin continued to glare, causing Barry to groan and return her gaze.

Barry stared hard at her. “Caitlin, I know you don’t like me. I know you don’t like my methods. But make one thing perfectly clear – I’m not going to harm someone who’s only looking for help. Not intentionally, in any case.”

Caitlin shrank back at that. Of course, she should’ve known that. Ever since Barry entered the service of S.T.A.R. Labs, he had been taking care of metas left and right. That being said, he was only brutal with those who were looking to profit off their powers with crime and cause harm to innocent people. Roy Bivolo, or Rainbow Raider as she had called him, nearly had his eyes gouged out after one of his heists left several dozen people in the hospital. While they were still left intact in
the end to the point he could somewhat see, he knew better than to try to use them in such a fashion again, especially against the Streak, and was left to rot in the Pipeline.

By contrast, Barry was far kinder to Danton Black, though only after learning his story. He had offered to help Black expose Stagg, reasoning that being exposed would be a far worse fate than just killing him, but Black had been too far gone after the death of his wife, and if he couldn’t have the head of Stagg, he’d rather die. Which he did do, by his own hand. The same had happened with Farooq Gibran, but Farooq was too focused on revenge on Harrison Wells and Barry had been forced to kill him in defense of Cisco and Caitlin.

To Bette San Souci, he was comparatively angelic. It was clear that Barry wanted her to make something of her life – if not as a hero, then as something else. But Plastique had unfortunately been recaptured by the government, and, judging by the later explosion off in the outskirts of Central City not long afterwards, killed by them as well. It was this particular incident that had convinced Caitlin that she could ask Barry for his help regarding Ronnie. Surely, Barry would understand.

And he did. And Caitlin doubted him regardless.

“I’m sorry.”

Barry sighed. “It’s alright. I understand where you’re coming from. I can be a little…rough.”

“How is that by the way?” she asked suddenly, curiosity getting the better of her.

“I imagine you and Cisco already have an idea as to why.” Barry leaned back, grabbing another slice of pizza.

“You weren’t alone on the island, that much we guessed.” she admitted. “But even then, you’ve shown knowledge and understanding that you couldn’t have learned there, being that isolated from society. The only explanation would be if you weren’t always on the island.”

“And I wasn’t.”

Caitlin blinked. “Pardon?”

“Your assumption is correct. I wasn’t always on the island.” Barry took a gulp of water from the bottle beside him. “In fact, I spent most of the last ten years off of it.”

“Why didn’t you go back home, then? Where did you go?”

“If I answered that honestly, I would have to kill you.”

Noting his serious tone, Caitlin swallowed audibly. “You’re not joking, are you?”

Barry shook his head. “I’m not. If I told you, I would kill you, if only to spare you from a far worse fate.” He exhaled. “Where I went, Caitlin, let’s just say it was a place that wasn’t very kind. It was also somewhere that is far older than you and me and will endure long after you and I pass from this world. Their ideals, morals, sense of justice, are all…unconventional, to say the least. So, listen to me when I tell you, you are better off not knowing that part of my past.”

Caitlin slowly nodded, and slumped against the wall of the van. “Is that why you didn’t return home?”

“Partly. If I made any contact with Iris or Joe or even my dad, they would’ve killed not only me, but also them. It was only recently that I was able to return with no consequences. I suspect that had it
not been for certain… *circumstances*, I would’ve had to wait for far longer to leave.”

“What kind of circumstances?”

Wordlessly, Barry lifted his arm, which began to vibrate. Caitlin, getting the message, nodded, and went for another slice of pizza.

“*The Magician* – you know, even with knowing that we have access to a magical hot tub that can revive the dead, I’m almost positive this name is metaphorical.” Kara commented. She and Oliver were currently driving to a clothing store for a fitting, and Kara was looking through the digital file the League had sent on her iPad (a Christmas gift from Moira)

Oliver snorted. “Of course it is. Everything in the League is metaphorical on some level. I imagine someone who earned the name of ‘The Magician’ is someone good at tricks, simple deception, which fits the profile of our rogue. He tried to trick me using the attire of the League, figuring the next time a member showed up in town I’d kill them and get myself killed in the process when they found out. It’s brilliant when you think about it. Too bad it backfired on him.”

“And in the worst way possible, too. Now we know he’s here and know that he doesn’t want you sniffing around something.” Kara noted, continuing to scroll down the file.

“Anything notable about the profile they sent?” Oliver asked.

“He was initiated about nineteen years ago, but only trained and served for about two years. According to the file, this was because in his life prior to the League, he had already mastered most of the supplementary training and had his extracurricular training waved. In exchange, he acted as Ra’s horseman for those two years, before finally being released on the grounds that upheld the League’s ideals and principles.” Kara said, finally closing the file and deleting it (there was a backup on the Foundry’s computer). “While helpful, we still have no idea where to start. We don’t know where he came from, when he moved to the city, his motives…”

Oliver frowned. While Kara was correct, there was something in the file that had caught his attention. The timeframe in which Al Sa-Her had entered the League and left, it sounded very familiar…

He was broken from his thoughts when he saw the store, and made a right turn, parking the car on the side of the street. “We’re here.”

Kara looked out the window and clicked her teeth nervously. “Honestly, your mom loves to spoil me. Getting me a brand new outfit, all for this one event.”

“You’re family, Kara. Dad said so himself. Plus, I think she’s still planning on setting you up with Carter Bowen.” Oliver smiled cheekily.

Kara blanched. “That tool?”

Kara and Carter’s initial meeting had not gone well, to say the least. While Carter and Janice Bowen were amiable enough to the returning Oliver, the moment they saw Kara and her familiarity with the Queens, it was as if a fire lit under Carter’s ass, and not the good kind. He had immediately started posturing, boasting about his many achievements, and failing to flirt with her. While Moira and Janice seemed rather oblivious to his showboating and tried pushing Kara to talk to him, Kara was
not, nor was Oliver and Thea. She had tried to be polite, but knew even her threshold was failing, especially after Oliver found an opening to ditch and head to Laurel’s. Eventually, however, she had enough, made a blatant excuse, a fake smile to Carter, and a walk-run to the car.

“I though she loved me!” Kara cried out. “Why him?”

“Well, on paper, he’s a great catch.” Oliver pointed out as they got out of the car.

“Yeah, if I were some money-grubbing gold digger. The guy’s an ass. And according to you and Laurel and Tommy, he’s always been like that.” she grumbled.

Oliver shrugged. “He’s going to be there either way, Kara. Might as well accept it and prepare yourself.”

“Why did Malcolm invite the Bowens to the ceremony anyway? And better yet, why would they accept? Last I checked, they aren’t as close to the Merlyns as they are to your family.” Kara asked, crossing her arms.

“Being named Humanitarian of the Year by the city is a huge honor, and that makes it a status marker. Uncle Malcolm just doesn’t want to snub anyone.” Oliver explained as they arrived at the store.

“That was way easier than it should’ve been.” Barry announced as the loaded the unconscious Ronnie into the car.

And it was. The moment Ronnie arrived on the scene, Barry changed into his suit and jumped him, knocking him down. The fire throwing metahuman had recovered quickly, however, and started throwing fireballs and flying upwards to get a better vantage point, at which point Barry decided enough was enough and threw lightning at him, unceremoniously ending the fight.

“Well, that’s only to be expected when you THROW LIGHTNING AT HIM!” Caitlin screeched after shutting the door.

Barry waved her off. “Don’t worry, I knew he could take it.”

“Still!”

“Would you rather he set fire to Clarissa’s rosebushes? Or Lily’s car? Or maybe allow the entire house to catch fire?” Barry pointed out the very nice house across the street.

Caitlin groaned.

“I am impressed, Barry. I didn’t know you had such an ability.” Harrison Wells stated genially, a calculating look in his eye.

Barry shrugged. “I worked it out in the first couple of months I had my powers. It’s not like I had much to do.” He turned his eyes back to the window, where Caitlin was testing Ronnie on the other side, and then looked down at the readings. “He’s going to go nuclear, isn’t he?”

Harrison sighed and nodded.
“I suggest a Quantum Splicer!” Barry shouted over all the bickering.

Harrison blinked at him. “How do you know what a Quantum Splicer is?”

Barry just smiled blandly at him.

Jor-El was quite the conversationalist for a glorified database.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry everyone, I need to take a short break. Get the creative juices flowing. On the bright side, Arc II’s planning is finally done, so I now I can completely focus on writing the chapters. After this arc is over, though, I will take a short sabbatical of two weeks or so, both to plan Arc III and start the general for another story. This trend will continue until I finish Arc V (the half-way point), where I take a sabbatical of three to six months from this story, so I can write something else. Oh, I made a small continuity correction in Chapter 19 involving the fate of Cyrus Vanch. He’s dead.
Guillermo Barrera exited the helicopter.

The next moment, he fell back into the doorway, an arrow in his throat.

“There’s a job about to go down.” Oliver mused as he handed the phone over to Kara.

“Well, we’ll know who the target is within twenty-fours at least.” Kara noted as she started connecting wires into the phone, and then into the computer.

Oliver leaned against another table, watching as the machine came to life and then displayed another name: Gideon. “Are you sure we shouldn’t call in Barry for this?”

“Barry’s busy. Gideon should be enough, anyway – you know as well as I do that Barry’s been working on her for years, and now that he has access to Kryptonian technology…” Kara shrugged. “Hacking a phone, no matter how advanced the security, will be relatively easy.”

“Alright.” Oliver stood up and started divesting himself of his weapons. “I better get ready for Tommy’s birthday party. Are you sure you don’t want to come? I can assure you that Carter Bowen is most certainly not invited.”

Kara waved him off. “This is more important. Besides, the kind of party Tommy is having isn’t my kind of scene.”

“Did you send over a gift at least?”

“It’s sitting over there.” She pointed out at the neatly wrapped box. “Addressed to him by both myself and Kal. Give it to him when you get there, alright?”

“Got it. And as for my gift…” he opened up a cupboard off at the side, pulling out a bottle of wine. “Châteauneuf-du-Pape, aged about ten years. Laurel-recommended. Hope he likes it.”

Kara smiled. “It’s the first birthday gift he’s had from his best friend in a decade, Oliver. He’ll love it.”

Oliver arrived at Merlyn Mansion, the bottle stored in a bag and Kara’s gift sitting on the side. A chauffeur was there, opening the door as he gathered up the gifts. He handed them off to another chauffeur and tipped both handsomely, before walking up the steps. All around he could see people
dancing and drinking, with security dotted within the crowds to make sure things didn’t get too rowdy. While Tommy had cleaned himself up and had become a respectable member of society, that didn’t mean he didn’t know how to loosen up and have a little fun every once in a while.

“Hey buddy!” Tommy welcomed him enthusiastically in the foyer, the party raging around him. “Glad you could make it! Where’s Kara?”

Oliver chuckled and gave him a one-armed hug. “Like I was going to miss this, especially after ten years in the backlog. And as for Kara, something came up – she did, however, ask me to bring her gift to you.”

“Oliver?” A vaguely familiar voice called out. Tommy turned around, allowing Oliver to catch sight of the speaker. McKenna Hall.

“McKenna! Hey.” Oliver greeted her, pulling her into a brief hug. “How’s it been?”

McKenna smiled. “Pretty good. I’m a detective now, for the SCPD. How about you? How’s your return to civilization been?”


“That’s great news man. This mean you’re going to start the groundwork on that business of yours with Kara?” Tommy interjected.

“We’re applying for the permits and everything. After that, we’ll be speaking to some of the local businesses down in the Glades, asking them to relocate, offering money…It’s going to take a while, but the work will all be worth it.”

“Tommy! Ollie!” Laurel called out as she entered the fray. Tommy was the first to get to her, pulling into a strong hug.

“Happy Birthday, Tommy.” Laurel congratulated him after they separated. “I’ve already handed off your gift.”

“Thank you, Laurel.” He stated sincerely, holding her hands and smiling at her in a way that made her slightly uncomfortable. Laurel returned his expression, though a little nervously and shakily.

Oliver put a hand on Tommy’s shoulder, finally causing him to let go of her hands. As he went to greet Laurel himself, Tommy frowned slightly.

Oliver bobbed his head to the beat, half-listening to the conversation that McKenna and Laurel were having about a recent case on the news. McKenna had been the lead detective for it, and Laurel was impressed with her work, particularly the amount of evidence found. Enough for the prosecutor to throw the book at the accused with little fanfare. Tommy was beside him, nursing a drink.

“This is a good song.” Oliver remarked, causing everyone’s attention to turn to him. “When did it come out?”

“About five or so years ago.” Laurel noted after listening to a few lyrics herself. When the song ended, a new one started up, significantly more upbeat than the previous one. “Ooh! I love this song!”

She started to sway her hips and shoulders, before laughing and dragging Oliver over to the dance
floor. Oliver, caught up in the mood, didn’t resist, laughing himself. McKenna watched the scene with a fond smile on her face. But when she went to comment about the adorable scene to Tommy, she stopped dead, noticing the envious look in his eyes.

“Hey, where’s McKenna?” Oliver asked when he and Laurel finally left the dance floor.

Tommy shrugged. “Went to get a refill.” he stated blandly.

“Speaking of drinks, I need food. Where’s the buffet, Merlyn?” Laurel asked, rubbing her stomach hungrily. Tommy jabbed his thumb behind him, towards the hall leading to another room. Laurel, familiar with the layout of Merlyn Mansion, nodded her thanks and skedaddled towards the direction of the main dining room. Oliver, starving himself, went to follow her, only to stop when Tommy grabbed his elbow rather forcefully.

“What the hell, man?” Tommy whispered angrily.

“You’re the one who pushed me to go after Laurel, so why the hell are you putting the moves on her?”

Tommy snorted. “The way you act around each other, the amount of time you two spend together – there’s something going on between you and Laurel, isn’t there?”

“No, no! Tommy, we’re just friends.” Oliver insisted, trying to calm his best friend down.

“But you want to be more, don’t you?” Tommy accused him.

Oliver hesitated slightly, before his mouth set into a firm line. “Tommy. There’s nothing between Laurel and I. We’re just friends, alright?”

Tommy remained stubbornly silent, slightly glaring at his oldest friend. Oliver sighed.

“C’mon, man. It’s your birthday. Let’s just…let’s just enjoy it, alright?” Oliver gave Tommy a pleading look. Tommy remained defiant for a long moment, before all the tension melted away from him and he gave a deep sigh. Oliver, taking what he could get, grabbed Tommy by the hand and gestured back to the dining room, ignoring the conflicting thoughts raging in the back of his mind.

After the party was over, Oliver bid Tommy, Laurel, and McKenna farewell and waited for his car to arrive, deep in thought.

Do I have feelings for Laurel?

He’d be lying if he said he didn’t notice how attractive Laurel was. Even before the Gambit, he wasn’t blind to that. But actual feelings?

He wasn’t nearly as experienced in those matters. His parents didn’t have the best relationship prior to the Gambit – Oliver had walked in on enough of his father’s dalliances over the years to notice. His month-long relationship with McKenna was purely physical, a fling more than anything else, and the most they did was make out. The closest he’d seen to a functioning romantic relationship in the last ten years was Slade and Shado’s. And while Oliver had no doubt that his adoptive parental
figures had loved each other, their relationship was hardly a conventional courtship. At least part of it was being stranded on an island and basically raising four kids together, with nary a hope of ever leaving. In that sort of stressful situation, it would’ve been more surprising if they hadn’t latched on to one another.

The only other experience he had with the matters of genuine romance had been Barry’s affection for Iris, that had stemmed from a time long before Lian Yu – perhaps from the first moment he had laid eyes on his childhood best friend. And even that was complicated in its own ways, as Barry wasn’t entirely sure if his feelings for her were still romantic, especially after years of separation and how much they had both changed over that time span as a result. And even if they were, Barry had long since resolved himself not to pursue her for his own reasons.

He had no frame of reference, no clear idea of knowing if he had feelings for Laurel, but something in his gut told him that it was the truth. Because he would by lying if he said he didn’t notice how attractive she was. He’d be lying if he said being with her didn’t make him happy, didn’t make a warm feeling bloom in his chest. Those were all sensations that most cultures, popular or otherwise, had claimed to describe romantic attraction. The only other time he had ever felt like this was with Nyssa – and considering the rumors that had surrounded their relationship, well…

*Ring!*

Oliver accepted the call, placing the phone against his ear.

“How do you feel about Chinese tomorrow?”

The waiter placed an enormous fried fish on the center of the table. Oliver looked at it with both horror and resignation, while Kara gazed at it with glee, rubbing her hands eagerly and licking her chops in a very blatant fashion.

“The most authentic Szechwan in town, they said.” Oliver groaned as Kara dove right in.

“So, what’s on your mind?” Kara asked, well-versed in Oliver’s moods. She was wiping her cloth napkin across her face, removing the remain bits of fish and sauce from her lips.

Oliver sighed deeply, setting down his silverware. “Tommy accused me of having feelings for Laurel.”

“Oh.”

The archer frowned. “You don’t sound surprised.”

Kara shrugged. “Oliver, of the three of us I am by far the least experienced in the workings of romance. But the way you two look at each other sometimes…well, it wouldn’t be surprising if something was going on. At least to me.”

Oliver winced. Kara was correct on that front – by her own admission, she had never been physically or emotionally attracted to anyone in a romantic fashion. Part of this was due to circumstance: Kara was a late bloomer and barely started puberty when her entire world was destroyed, and she was stranded on an island with her baby cousin. The trauma of that situation didn’t allow for romance. And even after she moved past that, all of her energies were entirely focused on protecting her new family and raising Kal-El, because Lian Yu and Nanda Parbat wouldn’t accept anything more than that. So, when finally placed in an environment where a romantic liaison was possible, Kara didn’t try to pursue that avenue, simply because she had been
living without it for years and didn’t see the appeal or the need for it. She was perfectly content with her current relationship status.

Oliver would’ve been in the same boat as her, but unlike Kara, he didn’t have the benefit of adopting an entirely new life to live as he see fit. He was the firstborn of the Queen Family, a member of Starling City’s elite. Whether he liked or not, there were expectations that came with that, expectations that he would have to live up to keep his blood family happy and satisfied. His parents were accommodating now, allowing him to live at his own pace, because they had already lost ten years with him and the last thing they wanted to do was push him away. But Oliver knew that there was only so much time he had before they started inquiring about his life again, if only out of concern.

And truth be told, there was a time when Oliver had envisioned that sort of life, with a wife and kids and everything. Not anytime soon, obviously, as he was on the starting stages of becoming a wild playboy like his father and Uncle Malcolm during their college years, but eventually, after he had his fun. Of course, the island changed all that. But now that survival and the League were no longer on the forefront of his mind, he could dwell upon those old hopes and dreams and no longer dismiss them as infeasible. Now, he could think of them and see potential, even though he couldn’t quite focus on achieving them yet.

But fulfilling them with Laurel? The idea had never crossed his mind, not until Tommy opened his mouth. And now that he thought about it, the idea wasn’t unappealing. It wasn’t unappealing at all. It almost felt…right.

“So, do you?” Kara voice pierced his thoughts, and Oliver looked at her.

“So I what?”

Kara raised an eyebrow. “Have feelings for Laurel?”

Oliver leaned back into his chair and rubbed his temples. “I don’t know? Maybe? All I know is that she makes me warm and happy, Kara, like I am with you, Barry, Kal, Slade, and my blood family. Except…differently.”

“Different how?”

Oliver shrugged. “Like Nyssa. She makes me feel the same way Nyssa did.”

Kara nodded sagely. “And we all know what they said about you and Nyssa.” Oliver opened his mouth to argue, only stand down when he realized she was right. He himself had acknowledged during his own self-reflection, and he admitted that the thought of being with Nyssa romantically wasn’t unappealing either. But Nyssa was with the League, belonged there, and Oliver didn’t – his heart would always be with Starling City. A relationship wasn’t plausible, not right now, and possibly not ever. A relationship with Laurel was, except there was still another factor to consider: Tommy. And the last thing Oliver wanted to do was hurt his best friend by entering a relationship with the woman he had strong feelings for, feelings that went unreturned.

Seeing the conflict on his face, Kara got up and placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. Oliver looked up at her. “Don’t try to force it, Oliver. You’ll figure out in your own time.” Knowing that she was right, Oliver leaned his head back once more and nodded.

About a moment later, a heavy-set man with a tattoo on his face passed by their table. They both smirked.
“Tomorrow, huh?”

“The Awards ceremony, schmoozing around with a bunch of one-percenters, including Carter Bowen, and then having to foil an assassination. Busy day.”

Oliver snorted. “Che. This is nothing and you know it. Remember Prague?”

“I’d rather not, thank you very much.” Kara deadpanned.

“Oh, what chaos that was! Too bad Barry had to burn the costume.” Oliver laughed merrily at the memory.

“Ha. Ha. I’m glad someone can find joy out of that…” Kara trailed off, picking up the phone and staring at it in shock.

“Kara?” Oliver asked, previous mirth gone. Kara said nothing, and instead showed him the screen. Oliver went white as a sheet.

*Malcolm Merlyn.*

Chapter End Notes

Oliver-centric chapter here. Next one, we deal with both Firestorm and the Awards Ceremony. Quick warning – it’ll be a little long, judging by my notes.
Chapter 25: …And Meddling Vigilantes!

“Now, fair warning: you might blow up.” The Streak stated, placing the splicer in Ronstein’s hand.

Ronstein blinked. “Are you sure we should be doing this?” he asked cautiously as he placed the splicer on his chest.

“Either way, you’re going to blow. And if you’re going to blow, we might as well see if we can separate you two first so that way you don’t blow again.”

Ronstein frowned. “You are oddly calm about this.”

The Streak shrugged. “This isn’t my first rodeo, so to speak. Anything that happens, I can handle. Trust me.”

“And her?” Ronstein shifted his eyes to Caitlin, who was waiting a little way’s off to the side, watching them anxiously.

“She’ll be fine too. Now, if you would?”

Ronstein sighed, and caught fire.

BOOM!

“Moira.” Kara greeted the older woman, giving her a short hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Moira smiled. “Kara. I assume Kal is at your house with Thea?”

“And with Ruby.” Sam walked up to them, clad in a stunning midnight blue evening gown. “Hello again, Moira.”

“Sam! I see you were invited too.”

Sam blushed. “They sent me an invitation, and I saw no reason to refuse. And when Kara told me she was invited as well, we decided to save money on a babysitter. I hope that’s no imposition to your daughter, Moira.”

Moira shook her head. “None at all. I’m sure Thea is thrilled – Kal and Ruby can wear each other
out faster and she might be able to get some peace and quiet tonight.”

Kara frowned. “Speaking of your family, where’s Robert and Oliver?”

Moira craned her neck. Kara and Sam turned around to see Oliver and Robert conversing with Tommy and –

“Is that Carter Bowen I see?” Kara asked faintly.

“Yes.” Moira would’ve squealed had she not been so prim and proper. “He’s been asking about you lately, Kara.”

“Oh.” Kara did not seem pleased. While Moira was oblivious to it, Sam was not, and she had to stifle a small giggle behind her hand.

Just at the moment, it seemed Carter had caught sight of her. Cutting his conversation with the men, he strode towards the trio of women, eyes completely zeroed in on Kara.

“Moira.” He grabbed the Queen Matriarch’s hand and gave it a kiss. Then he looked at Kara, and gave what he assumed to be a suave smile. “Kara.” Kara – reluctantly – held out her hand, and gave a kiss to it, rather than the handshake she would’ve preferred.

“Carter. How…nice. To see you again.” Obviously, she wanted to replace the word ‘nice’ with something else, but she was currently in polite company. Not that anyone except Sam noticed.

“It’s good to see you too. Who’s your friend?”

Sam held out her hand. “Samantha Arias.”

Carter shook it. “Carter Bowen.”

“Kara!” Oliver arrived, preventing anymore conversation, much to Kara’s relief. “It’s good to see you!”

“Oliver, you remember Sam, right?” Kara smiled tightly, trying to get everyone’s attention off her.

“Ah, yes! From the Christmas party?” Sam nodded politely as she and Oliver exchanged greetings. “It’s good to see you. Dad’s been wanting to meet you for a while.”

“Robert Queen himself?” Sam still couldn’t believe it.

Oliver gave a short nod. “Yes. Unfortunately, he’s with Tommy and Uncle Malcolm right now, helping the latter with any last-minute nerves.”

Sam frowned lightly. “Oh. That’s too bad. I guess I’ll see him at the afterparty?”

“I’ll introduce you to him myself.” Moira put a comforting hand on her arm.

Carter, noticing that everyone was done talking, decided now was the time to make his mood. “So, Kara, I was wondering –“

“I think the speech is starting.” Kara cut him off, looking to the podium where the announcer was currently walking up the steps. Carter scowled, and turned to watch with her, as did everyone else.
“Identification.” The soldier demanded.

Barry held up his S.T.A.R. Labs employee ID card, and then his state ID in conjunction. The soldier scrutinized him for a moment before deciding they were legitimate and letting him on his way. Barry walked into the cortex, where he saw Dr. Wells conversing with someone he instantly recognized as General Wade Eiling.

“Dr. Wells.” He interrupted the two men’s conversation, diverting their attention to him.

“This one of your lab monkeys, Harrison? I know a few stayed, but I don’t think I’ve heard of this one before.” Eiling eyed him up and down, distinctly unimpressed.

“He’s a new hire.” Dr. Wells explained, face devoid of emotion.

Eiling snorted. “Now that’s even stranger.”

“You aren’t here to ‘catch up,’ Wade. What you’re here for, is not here. So, my suggestion? Leave.” Harrison looked oddly imposing for a man that would be permanently bound to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

“This isn’t over.”

“As far as I’m concerned, it is.”

Once Eiling and his cronies had finally vacated the building, only then did Barry speak.

“Charming guy. I’m surprised you haven’t done away with him yet.” He commented, hands in his pockets.

Harrison frowned at him. “If I could, I would. Unfortunately, the disappearance of a U.S. General would be hard to cover up.”

“And now you’re not even denying it! I’m glad we can be so open with each other Harrison.”

Harrison smirked. “Indeed. Where are Ronnie and Stein?”

“Holed up at Stein’s place with the Quantum Splicer. I told them I would take care of Eiling, and I will.” He opened the inside of his jacket and took out a GPS, where a blinking red dot was moving towards the outskirts of Central City.

“I didn’t even notice you place the tracker on him.” Harrison noted, genuinely impressed.

Barry shrugged. “I’m gifted like that. Didn’t even need my speed to do it. Of course, now that we know where he is…” he smirked.

“Is it me, or did that speech sound slightly ominous?” Kara whispered to Oliver as they applauded with the rest of the audience.

Oliver shifted his shoulders. “Uncle Malcolm always did have a flair for the dramatic.” he whispered back.
Just then, the fire alarm sounded off. Oliver and Kara nodded to each other and were prepared to move.

Unfortunately, an oblivious Carter Bowen interceded. “Kara, let me escort you out.”

“Carter –“ Kara looked at Oliver pleadingly, who shrugged.

“I insist.” He grabbed her firmly by the elbow as they exited the building. Oliver watched them disbelievingly.

“Come along, Oliver.” Robert Queen appeared from behind him and gestured to follow Kara and Carter. Oliver, knowing he couldn’t say no without arousing suspicion, didn’t fight it.

They exited the building with little fanfare. Up ahead, he could see Kara and Carter following Moira and Sam, who were being escorted outside by the Merlys. Internally, Oliver frowned. This isn’t going to plan.

And then –

Oliver could hear it, faintly, the tell-tale whizz of a passing bullet. Kara was already moving, but with so many witnesses, she could only do so much. Someone else, however, had noticed Malcolm Merlyn’s predicament, and pushed.

“TOMMY!”

It was night.

He wasn’t the Streak tonight. Tonight, he was Al Sa’iqa, because this – all this required a finesse, a delicacy that was uncharacteristic of the Streak. Silence, stealth, all tricks of the trade that the Streak rarely, if ever, employed.

It was child’s play, breaking in. Perhaps Eiling had grown arrogant, sloppy in his single-minded pursuit of American dominance. Or perhaps Al Sa’iqa was just that good.

He looked and looked and – there.

He inserted the drive into the terminal, and let Gideon work her magic.

“How is he?” Malcolm asked quietly, the Queens crowded around him and Dr. Lamb. Kara was off to the side, watching worriedly.

“Stable. The bullet is gone, and the blood transfusion from Oliver helped. However, we’d like to keep him under observation for the time being.”

Malcolm nodded slowly. “If that’s what you think is best.”

“Can we see him?” Oliver was the one to ask, clearly distressed by his best friend’s condition.
Dr. Lamb sighed. “Two at a time only. He’s still unconscious, and needs as much rest as possible.”

“This was not supposed to happen.” Malcolm snarled, pacing around the empty hospital room with his hands behind his back. “The Hood didn’t show, and because of his negligence, Tommy was almost killed!”

Robert and Moira, both standing, exchanged looks.

When Malcolm had devised this plan, they had been doubtful from the start. The goal had been to pique the Hood’s interest with the sudden appearance of so many high-end assassins, and then draw him to the ceremony. When he arrived, a bevy of mercenaries, both surrounding the shooter and within the building itself were to converge on him and kill him, or, failing that, capture him. Malcolm was to further the charade by fleeing to his panic room above, giving the Hood a reason to remain in the building.

Of course, the plan was shot to hell when Tommy questioned why his father wasn’t leaving the building with everyone else. With there being no imminent danger at the time, Malcolm couldn’t just tell his son the truth. Thankfully, he had been prepared for this possibility, and had Kevlar beneath his shirt so the assassin, the only one not aware of the plan and specifically instructed to shoot the chest only, would not be able to kill him. And then Tommy interfered again.

The assassin hired, who had taken inspiration from a fellow hitman by the codename of ‘Deadshot,’ had coated the bullet in a poison. Thankfully, it was a knockoff, but Tommy was still in the red until Oliver had convinced one of the EMTs to perform a blood transfusion with him as the donor, allowing them to dilute poison enough so Tommy could survive the bullet’s removal.

The plan was terrible, unquestionably. But Robert and Moira and the rest of Tempest had not protested it, simply because they had no better options of drawing the Hood out. The vigilante was a ghost, harder to catch than the wind. There were no clues to his identity, no trail of breadcrumbs to follow, and anyone that they sent after him would be killed or worse. Malcolm had been growing increasingly desperate with each dead end, and had created this plan in return, seemingly hinging its success on the Hood taking care of a hitman who was doing similar assignments for Warren Patel. But it seemed either the Hood was already suspecting something was amiss with Malcolm, or hadn’t been able to figure out who the target was, because he never appeared.

And here they were.

“Malcolm. Robert. Moira.” Dr. Lamb opened the door, catching everyone’s attention. “I have something to tell you.”

“Ollie. Kara.” Laurel muttered quietly, mindful of the sleeping Tommy. Oliver and Kara, who were crowded around the Merlyn, turned and beckoned her over.

Oliver wrapped his arms around her as they looked down sadly at Tommy. “He’s going to be fine. Though he’ll have to take it easy for a while.”

“Oh, thank God.” Laurel felt relieved. “What about you two?”

“I’m a little dizzy.” Oliver admitted. “Tommy needed a blood transfusion, so I volunteered. But other than that, we’re fine.”

Kara stood up, taking out her phone. “I better go. Someone needs to call Thea, inform her that we’re fine and that so is Tommy.”
Oliver nodded, Laurel still buried deep in his arms. “Tell her we’ll pick her up when visiting hours are over.”

“Alright.” Kara bid farewell to them both, and quietly closed the door, a small smile on her face.

“Thank you, Barry.” Caitlin smiled gratefully, if a little sadly, as they watched Ronstein fly away.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t bring him back to you.” Barry apologized, sincerely.

Caitlin shook her head. “You did bring him back to me. It wasn’t your fault he couldn’t stay. But, knowing that he’s still out there – that’s enough for me.”

“And you got rid of Eiling.” Cisco piped up, genuinely pleased. He was referring to a recent news broadcast, where Eiling had been carted off to military prison in chains for an impending trial regarding his inhumane experiments. “How’d you manage that?”

Barry smirked. “Trade secret.”

“Wade.”

“Amanda. I thought we agreed not to interfere in each other’s operations?” Eiling growled out, his arms restrained behind the chair as various A.R.G.U.S. agents dismantled his base piece by piece.

Amanda smiled darkly. “We did, didn’t we? Except, Wade, you reneged on our agreement.”

“And how exactly did I do that?”

At that, Amanda snapped her fingers. A figure entered the room. A very familiar figure.

Eiling felt his blood go ice cold.

“Hello, General.” Bette Sans Souci grinned unkindly.

“I killed you.”

Bette gave a one-armed shrug. “You thought you did.”

He gritted his teeth and turned his attentions back to Amanda. “How is this reneging on our deal? She was never one of yours!”

Amanda shook her head. “No, she wasn’t. But her fiancé was.”

Eiling stopped at that, looking at her in disbelief.

Amanda leaned down, the smile still there. “You remember Nathaniel Adam, right, Wade? He was the first meta you captured, the first you experimented on. Now, I admit I am the farthest thing away from a saint, but I’d like to think I always repay my debts. And I owed Captain Adam quite the debt. When he disappeared, it was rather…upsetting. And when his fiancée disappeared – well, I couldn’t just ignore that either, right?”

“How did you find out?” Eiling asked, voice resigned.
“She smirked. “Trade secret.”

“You don’t look surprised, Robert.” Malcolm noted, trying to keep his temper in check.

Robert, comforting a distraught Moira, payed him no mind. “I always knew. But from the very moment I saw him in your arms, Moira, I loved you both. And that will never change.”

Malcolm snorted. “Very kind of you, Robert. But as sweet as this all is,” he growled out, punching the wall loudly, causing the Queens to flinch, “it doesn’t change the fact that you DIDN’T TELL ME!”

They both glared at Malcolm, stubbornly, defiantly silent.

“You were never going to tell me, were you?” Malcolm stated angrily.

“You were never going to tell me that Oliver was my son.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait, everyone, but I got sick. Right now, I have a runny nose, and that is not fun.

As for recent revelations – in this continuity, it is Oliver, not Thea, that is Malcolm’s child with Moira. Thea is the daughter of Robert and Moira here. While this will impact Oliver on a significant level (eventually), this was mainly done for the character development of Malcolm and Tommy. While many of you have probably guessed Tommy’s fate in this story, I will still keep it a wrap for now.

As for Bette Sans Souci, you can probably guess, but she will be joining the Suicide Squad as one of the few “willing” members, so to speak. Barry helped fake her death to hide her from Eiling after some instruction from Amanda, and the two waited until he could steal information and hand over evidence of what he did to Nathaniel Adam, so Amanda could call off their agreement and jail him for his crimes.
Chapter Summary

The Prodigal Son returns, which is the only thing that is really relevant to the title of this chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 26: Bible Parable Parodies

Barry whistled merrily, a bag of popcorn in his hands as he watched the fireworks.

“Why are you eating popcorn?” Caitlin asked as Cisco continued to argue with the imprisoned Hartley Rathaway.

Barry shrugged. “Don’t you eat popcorn when watching good entertainment?” he asked back. He then gestured to the bickering duo. “You didn’t tell me those two had so much sexual tension between them.”

Cisco and Hartley, having evidently heard his statement, paused in their bickering to glare at him. Caitlin inched away from Barry as much as she could without being conspicuous about it, while Harrison hid his smile behind his hand.

“Cisco and me? Never.” Hartley seethed.

Cisco nodded. “Yeah, man. Even if I were gay, I wouldn’t be gay for him.” He jabbed his thumb towards Hartley.

Harrison couldn’t help himself. He let out a tiny laugh, which he disguised as a cough. No one was fooled, however, and Cisco and Hartley immediately turned their ire towards him. Harrison, however, being who he is, was completely unintimidated. “Congratulations, Barry. You’ve managed to do the impossible once again, and got these two get agree for the first time ever. Something I sorely wished I’d known how to do when we were building the Particle Accelerator.”

Hartley snorted, catching everyone’s attention. “As if you cared whether or not the Accelerator was built correctly, Harrison.”

Caitlin blinked, then narrowed her eyes. “What does he mean by that, Dr. Wells?”

Barry took another bite of his popcorn. “Oh, that’s easy. Dr. Wells knew there was a possibility that the Particle Accelerator would explode.”

Silence.

“…What?” Barry asked confusedly when he noticed everyone staring at him.

“And how did you figure that out… Barry, was it?” Hartley demanded, slightly angered that someone managed to spill Harrison’s secret before he could.
Barry shrugged once more. “I got bored one day so I started looking through the data logs. Plus, it’s not much of a leap to guess.”

Hartley hummed. “Like it’s not much of a leap to guess that you’re the Streak.”

Caitlin and Cisco, who had been glaring at Harrison after Barry’s revelation, immediately stopped and stared at Hartley in horror, while Harrison turned his head sharply towards him and pursed his lips. Barry, however, was oddly calm that someone had managed to figure out his secret identity.

“*Quite the arrogant one, aren’t you?*” the self-proclaimed Pied Piper mocked in French.

“*Not as arrogant as you, Rathaway.*” Barry insulted back, also in French. Everyone blinked, not expecting Barry to understand that. “*Oh, surprised? You’re not the only one here who’s multilingual, you know.*” he finished off in Mandarin, shocking everyone even more.

“Show-off.” Hartley muttered as he backed down. Cisco, having heard him, rolled his eyes at the hypocrisy.

“Oh, that’s not showing off. Me showing off is me demanding you take out your little hearing aids because they can double as sonic devices that can blow that glass door wide open.” Barry stated cheerily, grabbing a handful of popcorn and shoving it into his mouth.

Hartley’s jaw dropped. The S.T.A.R. Labs trio, their conflict temporarily forgotten, turned back to the Rathaway and glowered expectantly at him. Realizing that his plan had already been foiled before it began, Hartley held up his hands in a defensive gesture.

“Wait a moment, everyone. Before you do anything, wouldn’t you like to know where Ronnie is?” he pleaded desperately. They were, to his surprise, completely unmoved.

“Ronnie is currently with Professor Martin Stein and a colleague of his learning how to control the F.I.R.E.S.T.O.R.M. matrix.” Barry informed him, reaching into his bag of popcorn once more, only to blink when he realized all of it was gone. Noting how the other three were closing in on the cell, and therefore, the nervous Hartley, Barry shrugged absentmindedly and left, ignoring the Pied Piper’s groans of pain.

“Eddie…”

Eddie, of course, was referring to the incident at Rathaway Industries earlier that day, where a metahuman had started attacking the building with what the CSIs claimed were ‘sonic blasts.’ The evidence at the crime scene matched the damage done to Harrison Wells’ house the previous night, where the shattered glass lacked an impact point. Before the police, specifically the Anti-Metahuman Task Force (or the Anti-Streak Task Force, as Eddie preferred to call it), could get into position and capture them using their new upgrades, the Streak had appeared and easily apprehended the metahuman, before running off to God knows where. When they finally arrived at the scene and were informed what they missed, it took all of Eddie’s self-control not to throw a fit.

“Clearly, we need to work on our reaction time. I’ll need to stage some drills, perhaps ask everyone to stay back tonight. We also need to determine the Streak’s base of operations – he has to be putting all those metas *somewhere*…” the detective continued to ramble to himself, ignorant of Iris’ growing irritation.

“Eddie…”
“Perhaps an abandoned warehouse…no, someone would’ve caught on to that eventually…”

“Eddie…”

“Maybe it’s outside of city limits! No, that doesn’t make sense…as fast as the Streak is, even he would find that inconvenient…”

“Eddie!” Iris whisper-shouted, slapping her hand down firmly on the desk for good measure. Eddie finally snapped out of his borderline trance, staring confusingly at his girlfriend.

“Yes, Iris?”

Iris sighed. “Eddie, I can’t do this anymore.”

“What do you mean?” Eddie sat up straighter, all thoughts of the vigilante having abruptly left his mind.

“Eddie, we haven’t gone on a date in weeks. And our last date was dominated by you ranting about the Streak, how you’re going to catch the Streak, etc. In fact, ever since the Streak proved he existed, we’ve been spending less and less time together in general. If you’re always going to put the Streak first, then I don’t think I can continue this relationship.” Iris explained, genuinely unhappy.

Eddie stared disbelievingly at her. He would’ve brought up how much time she spent with Barry, except that had gradually diminished within a month, and only accelerated when he had gotten his job at S.T.A.R. Labs. They generally only had their not-dates twice a week at most these days. Looking back, Iris had actually spent more time trying to get Eddie to do something fun than hanging out with Barry, for the last two months.

“Iris…”

Iris stood up, and collected her things, waste included. “I’m sorry, Eddie.”

“Why didn’t you two tell me!” Malcolm demanded, glaring heatedly at both Robert and Moira, who, for once, refused to back down and glared back. “If I had known he was my son –“

“It would have changed nothing. You care more about yourself and your plans than you do your own children, Malcolm, your abandonment of Tommy proved that.” Robert coldly stated, cutting him off. “You would’ve held his death over us, held Thea against us, just like you have for the last ten years – the only difference is that you might’ve held a twinge of regret over it.”

Malcolm gritted his teeth. “Robert, I always regretted Oliver’s death. It broke my heart when I found out he was on the boat and not you, and using him against you and Moira was never my intention.”

“No, you were going to kill Robert and then hold both Oliver and Thea against me, and call it a ‘necessary evil,’ like you did when you threatened us with Thea after Oliver’s death. Forgive us if we don’t believe the complete bullshit you’re spewing out of your mouth, Malcolm.” Moira retorted, her anger superseding the manners ingrained into her being since she first married Robert.

Malcolm glowered at them. “Regardless, you should’ve told me – and, you should’ve told Oliver. And now that I know, I demand that he know as well.”
The Queens exchanged looks and nods, before calmly stating “No.” in unison.

“Excuse me?” Malcolm nearly shouted, not used to having his authority subverted like that.

Robert, refusing to be cowed, glared back. “You heard us: no. We will not tell Oliver, and you will not tell Oliver. Nobody will be telling Oliver the truth – ever.”

“And why is that?”

“Because if you tell Oliver, we will go up to the entire world and reveal your plans. And before you think you can kill or kidnap us, just so you can have Oliver to yourself, let it be known that we have set up a dead switch, and if we aren’t there to restart it every day, it will release everything we know about the Undertaking to every news station in the country.” Moira bluffed. In reality, there was no such dead switch, but with the Hood’s interference and Malcolm’s shaken state as a result of that, she was confident he wouldn’t see through her lie. Even if he suspected as such, he wouldn’t dare risk it.

Malcolm scowled deeply. “You’re going through an awful lot of trouble to keep a father from his son.”

“He isn’t your son, Malcolm. You lost your right to consider him as such when you sabotaged the Gambit.” Robert finished definitively. Taking his wife’s hand, they left Malcolm’s office, heads held high. Malcolm watched them go, then collapsed back into his chair and sighed.

From her corner in the restaurant called ‘The Palm,’ according to her file of Starling City, Astra watched Kara intently. She had disguised herself heavily, tying her hair back and wearing a headscarf and a large pair of sunglasses to hide her face, especially the distinctive streak of white hair that would surely clue Kara in her identity. All lead-lined, of course, just in case Kara was a little liberal with her powers in public.

Her niece was sitting far from her, but not far enough that Astra couldn’t catch sight of her – or hear in on her conversation. She was conversing with another woman at the table, named ‘Sam.’ Most likely, Samantha Arias from the Christmas party. According to previous observations of Kara and Kal-El, she was the mother of Kal-El’s best friend, a Ruby Arias, and a fast friend of Kara as a result.

They were speaking about a “birthday party” for Ruby. She surmised it was a celebration about the anniversary of Ruby’s birth – a common fad here on this planet. Astra internally snorted. Such frivolous events were never undertaken on Krypton. Besides being a general waste of resources, birth was hardly something that needed to be celebrated more than once, especially when no work was undertaken by the parents themselves. The dates themselves were hardly distinctive for one child, anyway – the advent of genetic engineering meant that the children of Krypton were born in specifically chosen dates in staggered intervals.

But, regardless of that, Astra took heart in hearing her niece’s laughter, hearing her talk about such pointless festivities. It was reminder of what she was fighting for, about the person she knew Kara was at her core. She knew the Commander hadn’t lied to her. She knew that Kara had taken life of several of her soldiers. Astra just couldn’t see it though. This was Kara, a daughter of the House of El, Alura’s daughter. Astra knew her niece, and knew in her heart that nothing could make her a killer. Astra knew it was irrational to think such thoughts, but Kara, Kara…

…was staring right at her.
“Finished with invitations already?”

Sam grinned. “We worked on them all weekend. And,” she rummaged through her bag, taking out an envelope and handing it to Kara, “Ruby insisted that you and Kal-El get the first one.”

Kara smiled widely. “We’re honored. Don’t be surprised if it ends up framed or scrapbooked.”

“No judgement. It’s his first ever birthday party, and his first ever birthday invitation. Now, I just need to complete the rest of the party preparations by next Saturday.” Sam’s grin gradually faded with each word.

“Work.” Kara guessed immediately, taking a sip of her iced tea.

“Work.” Sam sighed, breaking off a piece of one of the breadsticks and dipping it into the olive oil.

Kara leaned back into her chair. “I could help you.” she suggested.

Sam blinked and then shook her head rapidly. “You don’t have to do that.”

Kara waved her off. “I have no job, remember?” She reminded Sam. “The mall is slow-going right now, and I have a lot of free time on my hands. You wouldn’t be imposing at all.”

“Kara…”

“Look, if it makes you feel better, you can owe me one. Just let me help you, Sam.”

Sam exhaled. “You’re not going to stop asking until I say yes, aren’t you?”

“Nope.” Kara smirked.

“Fine.” Sam finally relented, before placing her hand over her friend’s. “You’re the best, Kara.”

Kara flushed slightly. “I aim to please.” She was about to say more, before her sharp eyes caught something. A woman, covered from head-to-toe so one couldn’t spot a single distinguishing feature about her appearance, was staring right at her. Kara stared back at the obvious spy, and something in her gut told her that she knew this woman from somewhere.

“Kara?”

Kara broke out of her staring contest with the woman and looked back at the concerned Sam. “Sorry, sorry. I just…I just thought I saw someone familiar for a second.”

Sam searched her face before accepting the excuse. “Alright then. So, about the party…”

Kara listened to her friend intently, and when she got the chance, she turned back to look at the mysterious woman, but she was gone.

Chapter End Notes

I’m almost back to full health everybody! Hopefully that means more frequent updates again.

As for HVFF – no comment, which is what Stephen Amell should have said than so
blatantly lying to everybody. Olicity was only endgame from Season 3 onwards, not from the beginning. Felicity wasn’t even originally supposed to be a part of the cast – she was a special guest character that got popular enough with both the fans and the actual cast to be promoted to series regular. The Oliciters will ignore this, obviously, but us fans who bothered to do the research know the truth. I know they want to wade through this anti-Olicity wave of publicity, but lying about it isn’t the way to do it. You’re only going to lose viewers that way. They’ve already lost me, that’s for sure – I’m not even going to DVR Arrow anymore, let alone watch it live.

Anyway, now that my mini-rant is done with (and you’re free to disagree if you want, just know that if you flame me, your comment/review will be deleted/reported with no regret or hesitation), next chapter is a very important chapter. We’re back to the action everybody, and a lot of revelations abound. Oh, and somebody is going to die. I won’t say who, though.

As for Eddie and Iris, they haven’t permanently broken up yet. That won’t happen for a long time, that much I can tell you. Never fret, though, WestAllen fans that are reading this – it will happen eventually.
It's Ruby's birthday.

Chapter 27: B-Day

Oliver opened the door, and blinked.

“Oliver. Hello.” Malcolm greeted him, careful to hide the nervousness and anxiousness he was feeling right now.

“Hi, Uncle Malcolm. If you’re looking for mom and dad, they’re out of town today. They were invited to this function down in Hub City.” Oliver told him, leaning against the doorsill.

Malcolm cleared his throat, gathering his courage. “Actually, Oliver, I was looking for you. I was wondering if you and I could go out to lunch together. Just the two of us. Tommy is still recovering at home and he’s getting quite sick of me fretting over him, so…”

Oliver looked at his godfather in confusion, before shrugging. “I would love to, Uncle Malcolm, but I already have business today. I’m going to Kal’s best friend’s birthday party.”

“Kal’s…best friend?” Malcolm asked carefully.

“Ruby Arias. The daughter of Samantha Arias. You’ve heard of her, right?”

“I have.” Miss Arias had been considered a potential affiliate for Tempest at one point – the legitimate affiliates. However, her lack of ties to Starling City and overall neutrality in regard to the Glades had caused them to put off making an offer to her. It was still somewhat of a priority, though, and Malcolm had remembered tasking Robert and Moira with cornering her and ingratiating themselves to her, so she would be more willing to aid them when the reconstruction phase of the Undertaking began.

“Yeah. I need to meet up with them at the trampoline park in about an hour – Sam was extremely busy this week, so Kara took care of about half of the preparations. She and Kal are already there.”

Malcolm felt himself sweat slightly, and then blurted out, “Then…then, why don’t I come with you!” It took all of his self-control not to palm himself on the face for that. Not suspicious at all, Malcolm. He thought to himself sarcastically.

Oliver blinked. “Uncle Malcolm, are you alright?”

“I’m fine, Oliver.” Malcolm deflected quickly. “It’s just…it’s been a while, you know. You and Tommy and Thea, you’ve all grown up so fast and I feel…like I missed out on so much of your earlier years. You especially.”
Oliver stared at him. Then he sighed, figuring it wasn’t worth it to call his godfather out on such a blatant lie – Malcolm wasn’t the most forthcoming of people, even though he was warmer to Oliver than he was to most others. “Alright. Let me call over the car.”

“Hey. You two still pissed at Dr. Wells?” Barry leaned next to the entrance of the Cortex.

Cisco and Caitlin, the former furiously clicking through something on the computer, jumped at the sound of his voice. “Could you please stop doing that, Barry?” Caitlin pleaded exasperatedly.

“No.” Barry denied them cheekily, before going up to join her in watching Cisco work. “What’re you doing, Cisco?”

Cisco clicked his teeth. “To answer both your questions – yes, we’re still mad at Dr. Wells. And as for what I’m doing, I’m re-running an old test I made after the Particle Accelerator exploded. It’s a 3D model of the entire facility I made so I could pinpoint where the Accelerator went wrong.”

“And let me guess – it never occurred to you that problem could’ve been from an area of the building outside of the Pipeline.” Barry concluded smugly.

Cisco turned to look at him, distinctly unimpressed. “Has anyone told you how annoying it is when you do that?”

“Yes.” Barry shrugged. “Usually I just ignore them.”

Caitlin snorted. “That explains a lot.” she muttered under her breath. Cisco sighed, and went back to the computer, only to pause when he noticed something on the screen.

Barry leaned in, and blinked. “Huh. That’s not on any of the blueprints I memorized.”

“Why is he here?” Kara whispered to Oliver, both watching as Malcolm stared at the mass of children running around and jumping about, distinctly out of place.

Oliver winced. “He insisted on coming.”

“Strange.” Kara frowned. “Is he alright?”

“Hopefully. He was kind of desperate in wanting to spend time with me today, for whatever reason.”

Kara nodded slowly. “Moira told me he’s been smothering Tommy a lot, ever since he got home from the hospital.”

“Well, according to him, Tommy kicked him out of the house today because of that. Maybe he’s a little stir-crazy?” Oliver suggested, though that didn’t sound right to his ears. Kara gave him an uncomfortable look. Clearly, she felt it was off as well.

“Kara! The pizza guy is here!” Sam called out.

“Coming!” Kara called back.
“Need any help?” Oliver asked, smirking. Kara swatted him on the arm before making her way towards Sam. Oliver watched them go for a moment, before returning to observe his godfather. One of the younger kids had lost a coin on the ground and couldn’t find it. Noting that he was about to cry, Malcolm, in a rare fit of empathy, beckoned the child over. Then, in a familiar movement, he seemingly plucked the coin right out of the child’s ear, putting him in awe with a simple sleight of the hand.

Oliver felt his heart stop.

The trick was familiar to Oliver, very familiar. Before Aunt Rebecca died, before Uncle Malcolm grew cold, he used to be the life of the party, a beloved figure for the children of Starling City’s elite. And at every birthday party, to cheer a child up, he would do that same old coin trick. Oliver remembered, hazily, that the adults would often jokingly call him an ‘illusionist’ because of that.

Nineteen years ago, Al Sa-Her joined the League of Assassins. He was only a part of the League for two years hence, and then was released from his vows, whereupon he cut off all contact with them. Coincidentally, nineteen years ago, Rebecca Merlyn was murdered by a mugger in the Glades, devastating her husband and causing him to abandon his son for two years to travel the world.

The thing is, Oliver didn’t believe in coincidences. Not since he joined the League.

The Hood narrowed his eyes.

Al Sa-Her…the Magician…is Malcolm Merlyn.

Barry placed his palm on the wall, Caitlin and Cisco behind him. The wall opened in strips, each disappearing to reveal a dark room. The speedster entered first, knowing that at the first sign of danger, he could speed them all out of there in a moment’s notice.

With each step, the room gradually illuminated, revealing the contents of the room. The walls were pure white, and dotted with odd, spherical protrusions. Off to the side, Barry could see a stand next to the wall, with a futuristic looking activation pad. He looked, and continued to look until –

He froze.

Right across from the doorway, was a model.

And on it, was a yellow suit.

“I still don’t like this, Non.”

“Then why did you agree to it, Astra?”

Astra sighed. “Because you are stubborn, and you would just find a way to go behind my back and do it anyways.”

Non grunted in agreement, as he transfixed the miniature cameras onto his chest. “You’re sure this will work, Indigo?”
“Tested it myself the other way. Even in as far Starling City, we’ll be able to receive a feed.” The Coluan rested her chin on one of her hands. “Watching the humans in that cesspit called Gotham makes me glad you situated our base here, Astra. They are no threat to us certainly, but that place proved that they can certainly be an annoyance.”

Astra ignored her, keeping her attention on her husband. “Remember your orders: do not kill her. Only fight her long enough so we can determine her threat level and, if possible, subdue her and take her here for questioning and containment.”

“Wife, are you sure that is wise? She may not be as courteous.”

“You are her family, Non. Perhaps not by blood, but still. She will not kill you.”

“And what if you’re wrong?” Non demanded. “You know the dangers of assumptions, Astra. Your assumptions of her got eight of our men killed.”

“Our assumptions, Non. Or have you forgotten how adamant you were in convincing me that she was weak and not a threat?” Astra retorted coldly.

“Semantics.” Non waved her off. “Regardless – what if she is willing to kill me?”

Astra sighed. “Then you have full permission to use whatever force it takes to survive. No more than that, however.”

“This was a wonderful party, Kara. Thank you.” Sam told her sincerely, watching as all the party-goers, one-by-one, departed. It was night, and closing time was almost upon them.

“Anytime Sam, anytime. I’m just glad everyone could enjoy it.” Kara grinned, and gestured with her head towards one of the tables, where Ruby and Kal were playing with the former’s newly opened presents.

“Indeed.” Malcolm Merlyn sauntered up to both women, Oliver at his heels. The latter was chomping away at a piece of pizza. He seemed relax, but only Kara recognized how sharpened his stance really was. She looked pointedly at him, and he imperceptibly shook his head.

“Quite the party, Kara, Miss Arias. Not my typical outing – not since Thea discovered boys, at least – but enjoyable none the less.” He complimented them both.

Sam flushed, flattered to receive such praise from one of her business idols. “Coming from you, Mr. Merlyn, that’s quite the compliment.”

“A well-deserved one in my opinion, Miss Arias. And might I say, it was a pleasure to finally meet you. We should do another outing together some time. Talk business. I hear you have quite the vision for A-Corp.” The two businesspeople shook hands as Oliver and Kara watched. They continued the small talk for quite some time, until Kara got a text on her phone. It was from an unfortunately familiar number, and all it had was an address, which Kara recognized as one of the many abandoned plants on the outskirts of Starling City, specifically on the outer, deserted rim of the Glades.

“Kara, what is it?” Broken out of her thoughts by a concerned Oliver, and noting that she was being watched as well by a similarly concerned Sam and Malcolm, Kara laughed sheepishly, fooling
everybody but Oliver.

“Sorry. It seems I forgot I had a major errand to do today. No worries, though, I’ll just do it now and be done with it. Though, just in case things run a little late, could you take Kal with you to the mansion, Oliver?” Kara looked at him, sparkling, and Oliver understood instantly.

“Of course, Kara. Thea will be overjoyed to see him.” Oliver replied smoothly. Kara nodded gratefully, and after bidding farewell to Sam, Malcolm, and the kids, she departed in haste, finding a secluded corner to change and flying off to the Foundry to pick up one last thing…

The Girl in Blue dropped down to the cemented ground, taking note of the industrialized surroundings. Everything around her was well-rusted, and there was fauna bursting everywhere. Clearly, this place had been abandoned for a very long time.

“Hello, Daughter of Alura.” The Girl in Blue span around, and her hidden jaw dropped slightly.

Non smirked. “Surprised to see me?”

“You were on Fort Rozz?” The Girl in Blue said in disbelief.

“Indeed, I was. You can thank your mother for that, dear niece.” Non tilted his head to the side.

“And do us both a favor and take off that ridiculous disguise of yours? How you can breathe in that thing is beyond me.”

The Girl in Blue stared at him for a long moment, before slowly letting down her hood, revealing her long, blonde hair, which was tied up in an ornate bun, sans one lock, which framed the right side of her face. She pulled down the veil that covered the lower half of her face, and Kara Zor-El gazed at her maternal uncle in apprehension.

“Kara Zor-El – even more beautiful than your mother and your aunt when they were your age, I dare say.” Non couldn’t help but admire his niece’s loveliness. Truly, had Krypton survived, she would’ve been its crowning jewel, both in appearance and status. Every eligible suitor in the galaxy would’ve sought her hand.

Kara perked up at the mention of her aunt, and she narrowed her eyes at Non. “She’s alive, isn’t she? She’s the one behind all this.” And suddenly she remembered the woman from the other day, the one who was staring right at her, so obviously spying on her. Was Astra watching her even then?

“Child, who better than Krypton’s top general to take control of all those ruffians that were imprisoned within Fort Rozz? Who better than Krypton’s greatest warrior, its greatest tactical mind?” Non waxed on about his wife – while he had never been completely faithful to her, his admiration for her had never dimmed.

Kara clicked her tongue against her teeth. “I thought that was General Dru-Zod.”

Non scowled. “Zod was an overzealous self-absorbed maverick – he had no care for our planet, for our people. He just wanted to rule before it was all gone. Your aunt, however, is none of those things. She is the beacon for what remains of our people, a visionary that will lead those of us that remain to a golden age.”

“And since Krypton is dead, I assume this ‘golden age,’ as you call it, will be here, on Earth?” Kara asked, her face betraying no more emotion.

Non shrugged one of his shoulders. “But of course. Though, we will need to deal with the humans.
Their actions are killing this planet, not unlike Krypton’s last days. We will provide the guiding hand soon enough, and that is why I am here.”

Kara crossed her arms. “You want me to join you.”

“You and Kal-El both, Kara. As the last children of the planet Krypton, this world is yours as much as it is ours.”

Kara stared at him once more, scrutinizing Non with a critical eye.

And then she burst out laughing.

Non frowned as he watched his niece bend over and grab her midsection, slapping her thighs as mirth chorused through her. After a minute or so of this, Kara finally calmed down, wiping tears out of her eyes.

“You almost had me there for a moment. If I hadn’t been dealing with others of your ilk for the last ten years, I might’ve been fooled.” Kara gasp in a deep breath, genuinely amused.

“…You were never fooled, were you?” Non narrowed his eyes, voice dropping a pitch and tone unemotive and cold.

Kara shook her head, and gave a smug, borderline seductive smile. “You hated my family, Non. You hated me. The last thing you would do is hand over power over this world to me, especially when you know I sympathize with the humans, judging by how your little band of thugs have been following me and Kal-El around for the last few months.” She feigned checking her nails. “Quite honestly, I’m surprised you even bothered with silly little ruse at all. Knowing you, I would’ve figured you would’ve tried to burn my eyes out with your heat vision the first chance you got.”

“That can be arranged, niece.” Non stated, moving into a battle ready position.

Kara set her hand down, and took in her uncle, eyes visibly moving up and down. Ever so slowly, she undid the clasp on her cloak, allowing the fabric to pool into a mass of blue behind her.

A second later, her fist meant Non’s, a loud BOOM! echoing throughout their surroundings as a shockwave ripped through the air. The ground beneath them shattered, the sheer force cracking it into a circular pattern. They stayed in that stalemate for but a moment, until Kara twisted her body, kicking Non right in the chest.

Non skidded back, reaching down to the ground slow his slide to a stop. Before he could stop and attack back, Kara was already there, dropping down to take out his legs with a sweep of her own. Non managed to catch himself however, and was able to roll away, dodging Kara’s follow up punch. He tried to retaliate with a kick of his own, using one of his hands to vault himself upwards, but Kara easily caught his foot and, with a half-spin, throw him into one of the surrounding buildings.

The lieutenant hit three walls before he was able to use his momentum to fly upwards, preventing him from destroying anymore of the battlefield. He took a quick breather, looking around for Kara, only to see she had disappeared. Non grimaced, knowing she was most likely biding her time to strike. I underestimated her. I knew she was skilled, that much I could tell from the Commander’s report, but I never thought to think she would be this skilled. The humans were fragile, certainly, but they had a certain creativity to them that Krypton had lost long before their destruction. This creativity translated to their fighting styles, and wherever Kara landed, she must have had the knowledge passed on to her.
Someone cleared their throat behind him, and Non spun around, sputtering to see that his opponent had snuck up behind him without him even realizing it. Kara wiggled her fingers at him in a bastardized wave, before bursting into him once again, knocking him down back to the ground. Non got back up, in more pain than he had been in years, and just barely managed to block Kara’s punch. He threw one of his own, only for her to catch it, pulling him forward so she could knee him in the chin. She let go and Non stumbled back, slightly dizzy.

Kara drop-kicked him in the chest, forcing him back even more. Non shook his head, trying to get it screwed back on, and got back-slapped for his troubles. He stumbled to the side, and tried to punch her again with a right cross this time, only for Kara to loop her arm around his mid-strike and flip him over, landing him face-down on the ground. Before Non could pick himself up again, Kara had already grabbed his right leg, and began bouncing him up and down the ground everywhere, before throwing him off to the side, thoroughly bored.

It was a testament to both Kryptonian physiology and Non’s own natural durability that he was still able to move after that beating, getting up with only some scrapes and bruises, a stream of blood sliding down the side of his face. He was breathing deeply, however, and that was not a good sign.

Kara put her hands on her hips. “Either your skills have really degraded over the years, dear uncle, or I’m just that good.”

Non grit his teeth. “Arrogant child! Don’t you dare look down on me! I admit, you are strong, skilled, but do not think for one moment that will be enough to defeat your aunt, let alone me!”

“Why, is it because you’ve set up cameras all around this facility, all so you could broadcast our fight to her?”

Non paled.

Kara chuckled darkly. “You honestly think I wouldn’t check this place over first? The electrical discharge made it light up like a Christmas tree.” She shook her head mockingly. “Dear uncle, there is still so much you don’t know about me – so much you will never know about me. You and her.” She reached behind her, and only then did Non notice the handle sticking out slightly behind her shoulder. Kara firmly grasped it, and unsheathed the glowing, green blade, pulsing outwards. He felt himself collapse as the radiation flooded him, his body weakening with each step his niece took towards him.

“Goodbye, Non. And Astra, if you are watching, know that this will be the fate of you and anyone else who dare threatens this planet.” Kara held the blade up, and with a well-practiced motion, slashed it across his chest. Blood splattered everywhere, on the ground, on Kara’s face and costume. As Non bled out, he saw his life flashing before his eyes. He closed them as Kara dropped down, and gave him one final stab to the heart.

Indigo screamed as her once-lover took his final breath. All around her, the former prisoners of Fort Rozz were frozen, in shock and fear, as Kara removed the blade from the cooling corpse, swinging it slightly to flick away the blood accumulated on it.

Astra all but slammed her fist onto the computer’s activation key, watching the feed sputter out into nothing. It took all of her strength not to burst into tears then and there.
Yeah, Non is dead. The fight would’ve lasted much longer (and just as one-sided) if Kara hadn’t broken out the Kryptonite blade, which basically crippled him and ended it then and there. And now, Astra has to deal with the fact that her niece is this dangerous killer, doesn’t approve of her plan, and just murdered her husband.

Malcolm and Harrison are now in Oliver and Barry’s sights, and we’re reaching a climax everybody! And to think this arc still has like thirteen to fourteen chapters left!
Chapter Summary

An interlude of reflection.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 28: Villain Entrance, Stage Right

“Dude…” Cisco muttered in awe, staring at the yellow suit. Caitlin was similarly entranced. Barry took a deep breath, trying to calm his nerves. It wouldn’t do to get angry right now. He instead turned his head back to the stand on the other side of the room, and made his way to it. He placed his hand on it, turning it on and causing to project a newspaper article.

Barry blinked.

‘FLASH MISSING: VANISHES IN CRISIS’

“Guys…” Barry called out, genuinely unnerved for the first time in a very long time. Cisco and Caitlin turned away from the suit and looked at the projection, their jaws dropping.

“The date…” Caitlin breathed out, and Barry stared. ‘April 25, 2024’ blared out to him. Cisco read out the blurb beneath, but Barry paid him no mind, his heart racing. The pieces were falling into place, one by one. Eager, he lost control for a brief moment, and pushed the activator on the stand again.

The newspaper vanished. And in its place, was a face, featureless. “Good evening, Barry Allen.” It spoken in a feminine voice.

Barry blinked. “You know who I am?”

“Indeed. Dr. Barry Allen, codenamed ‘The Flash,’ owner and head scientist of S.T.A.R. Labs and founding member of the Justice League.” Barry’s eyes widened. Justice League was one of the test names for Waller’s division of public superheroes. So, then… “Former member of the League of –“

“Who are you?” Caitlin blurted out, cutting it off.

“I am Gideon, an interactive artificial conscious.”

Cisco made a small noise of surprise. “A.I.”

“My A.I.” Barry noted, beginning to smile.

The scientists blinked, and stared at the vigilante in disbelief. “What?” they asked in unison.

“When I left the island the first time and went to…where I went, I started the development of a personal A.I. It took years, but it was finally functional for field work about one year before I returned to Central City. And when it was finished, I named it Gideon.” Barry grinned. “There’s no
doubt in my mind now – this, all this, is from the future.”

“You’re here – great. I think I’ve figured out who Al Sa-Her is. As much as it pains me to say it, the most likely candidate is Malcolm. We need to set up surveillance equipment in his office, just for confirmation, but my gut is telling me that it’s him and you know as well as I that my gut is never wrong.” Oliver stated, typing on the computer. When he failed to get a response, he frowned, and turned around. He froze.

Kara was standing in the middle of the Foundry, the front of her suit, her face, and bits of her hair covered in blood. In her arms was an unfamiliar man – clearly dead. But none of that was what caught Oliver’s interest.

The only thing Oliver could see…were the tears streaming down her face.

Barry sped into the Foundry, a wide grin plastered on his face.

A grin that immediately faded once he took in the scene in front of him.

In one chair, next to what was clearly a corpse, Kara was curled up into a ball, shaking. She wasn’t crying – but she was close. Beside her, in another chair, was Oliver, who was silently rubbing soothing circles on her back, trying to comfort her. They made no indication that they had noticed Barry enter. They didn’t need to.

Barry grabbed his own chair, and sat it next to hers. He took a long look at the man on the table, before sighing and flopping down onto his seat. He wrapped his arm around Kara, careful to avoid Oliver’s moving limb.

After an hour of silence, Kara finally calmed down, sniffing slightly as she just stared at the corpse of what was once her uncle. Barry, gathering his courage, spoke.

“What happened?” he asked carefully, wishing not to upset her again.

“I murdered my uncle.” Kara stated blandly, continuing to stare at the cold body.

“…did you love him?” Oliver questioned, watching Kara intently.

Kara snorted, causing Oliver and Barry to flinch. “Hell no. He was always cold to me as a child. He hated me. He hated my family – my mother, my father, Kal-El and his parents; he only ever tolerated us for my Aunt Astra’s sake,” she paused, and bit her lip, “but…he was still kin.”

The men in the room stayed silent, not knowing what to say. The only one who could even remotely relate to this situation was Oliver, thanks to the recent revelation of his godfather’s former occupation as a member of the League of Assassins, and even then, Oliver still cared for his Uncle Malcolm enough that the idea of killing him was unthinkable. Especially since he had no clue what Malcolm’s plans were regarding the Hood.

“When did it get so easy, Barry, Oliver?” Kara sighed, wrapping her hands around her knees and rest her head on them.
Barry leaned against his chair. “What do you mean?”

“I didn’t spare a second thought about killing him. When he revealed his plans for world domination – as cliché as it is – I knew I was going to shove my sword right through his heart. And when I finally got around to it…I didn’t feel a damn thing. Only the satisfaction of knowing he wasn’t going to harm either of you, or Slade, or Kal, or anyone else I cared about.” Kara’s lip trembled. “When did it get so easy? Easy enough that I can kill someone I once called kin, no matter how loosely, without an ounce of regret?” She buried her head into her knees. Oliver and Barry exchanged looks. Barry leaned over and took over the job of physically comforting Kara, while Oliver stood, and paced around a bit, before speaking.

“Do you remember what Shado told us, all those years ago? When I brutalized that man from Ivo’s ship?” Kara and Barry both looked at him, Kara’s eyes a little red, and nodded in unison.

“That’s the point, isn’t it? Everyone has a darkness to them; every light casts a shadow. What matters is how you deal with it.” Oliver continued, looking straight at Kara. “Kara, it may seem like it’s easy, but it’s not – the fact that you’re crying your eyes out right now proves that. You said it yourself: he had designs on this world, and he would’ve killed all of us to make it happen. Even Kal-El. You did what you had to do.”

Kara shook her head. “Every time someone says that, I can’t help but feel that it sounds more and more like an excuse.”

“Perhaps, but it’s the truth.” Oliver said firmly. “We did what we did during those ten years, became what we are, to survive. And we’ll always have this darkness to us as a result. And it may seem like it’s not worth it at times, but it is. If we hadn’t done what we did, Barry and I wouldn’t have been able to reunite with our families and friends, and use our skills to protect them. And Kal-El…Kal-El wouldn’t be here, living the life you always wanted for him.”

He walked back to Kara, and leaned down, putting his hand on her shoulder. “I know this isn’t ideal, Kara. It never will be. But this is how our lives have turned out, and we’re just going to have to learn to live with it.”

The silence returned, as Oliver’s prophetic words echoed throughout all their minds, the painful truth. Kara sighed, and stretched her legs. “You think we’ll ever be able to stop?”

“When we’re old and gray. Or when we die. Whichever comes first.” Barry responded, letting his head hang on the edge of the back of the chair. Kara let out a small noise of amusement.

Oliver clicked his teeth. “You two will still be kicking fifty years from now. Me? I’ll be lucky if I only end up in a wheelchair.”

Barry sat up abruptly, startling both his companions, who looked at him in confusion. “Actually, now that you mention it…”

“It’s a match: this is the body of the real Harrison Wells.” Barry announced, staring at the decayed mass.

Oliver rubbed his forehead. “Okay, so your boss is from the future.”

“Yup.”

“And you found this out by locating a secret room at S.T.A.R. Labs that contained both the Yellow Suit, a projection of a newspaper with a future date, and an advanced form of Gideon, who mentioned one of the potential names for Waller’s new personal super-squad that we got press-
ganged into.”

“Yup.”

“And, it now turns out you boss is not Harrison Wells but some guy from the future who murdered the real one and his wife and then created Particle Accelerator and specifically blew it up so you could get your powers. And murdered your mom because he couldn’t kill you when you were a kid.”

“Yup.”

“Why is this not surprising as it should be?” Oliver looked up and asked the sky, clearly exasperated at how insane his life had gotten over the last ten years.

Barry shrugged. “Aliens, Mirakuru, Lazarus Pits, magic, me – pick one and there you go.”

“I hate you so much, Barry.”

“I know.” Barry replied cheekily, patting Oliver on the shoulder. Oliver sighed. Kara smiled at the sight, but her face became serious again.

“And we also got my aunt deal with. Woohoo.” She said sarcastically.

“And my godfather. Wonderful, just wonderful.” Oliver groaned.

Barry rubbed his hands gleefully. “Planning time everyone!”

Chapter End Notes

Short, I know, but I’ve been a little tired lately, and this chapter did not want to come out. Next chapter should be better – we focus on everyone else and see what Slade has been up to for the last few chapters.

Also, I saw Black Lightning last night – and it was awesome. I’m really looking forward to this, and I hope it gets a second season. I also saw Supergirl, and that was great too. Kara and Brainy had a lot of chemistry together – more than she ever did with James and Mon-El in my opinion. If they become a couple, I don’t think I will mind at all. I haven’t been feeling Flash lately, so I didn’t watch last night’s episode, but I think I’ll watch next week’s. I’m not even going to bother with Arrow, and Legends isn’t coming back yet, which saddens me, because it’s my favorite show.
Arc II, Chapter 29: Day in the Limelight

Chapter Summary

Any of you read *Ashes of the Past*? Yeah, well, this is like those "Ashes Nowhere to be Seen" chapters.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#).

Chapter 29: Day in the Limelight

Iris West sighed as she walked down the hallway to the apartment. It had been a long day at work. She and Detective Dibny were still following up leads on that illegal, secretive arms-dealing ring. It was slow going work, but they finally had a name for the possible mastermind: Amunet Black. Unfortunately, whoever she was, she wasn’t in the system. A ghost, one who had covered their tracks very well.

“Iris.” A familiar voice said, breaking her out of her thoughts. Iris looked up.

Eddie.

Iris had been consciously avoiding Eddie ever since their kinda-sorta breakup the other day, mainly by focusing on her own case. She could see now why relationships between coworkers weren’t encouraged – if they didn’t work out, an awkward environment would follow. It was oddly ironic, in a way, how her familial relationship with her father was improving, only for her romantic relationship with his partner to deteriorate thank to his obsession with the Streak.

“Eddie. What are you doing here?” She asked, perplexed and slightly apprehensive.

Eddie inhaled deeply. “I want to talk.”

“Hey, Ted.” Laurel peeked her head in the office, smiling.

“You know, you’ve been hanging out here a lot more often than you used to.” Ted commented, looking up from the paper he was reading.

Laurel shrugged. “Joanna has been asking for more work and we’ve just got a new member of the firm: Anastasia. With her around, it’s easier for me to get more time off.”

Ted snorted. “I can’t believe you of all people are asking for more time off. If I remember correctly, your friend complained about how much of a workaholic you were one of the few times you dragged her here.”

“Yeah, well…” Laurel bit her lip, smiling awkwardly.
“Laurel…” Ted stated carefully, recognizing the look on her face.

“I want you to train me.”

Ted raised an eyebrow. “I already do.”

Laurel shook her head and took in a deep breath. “I need you to train me…as a vigilante.”

“Hey, Dad.” Tommy sat up, wincing slightly. While the pain had dialed down a lot over the last two weeks, he was still far from full health.

“Tommy.” Malcolm smiled brightly, setting down his son’s lunch on the side table. “How was your day?”

“Great. Netflix has been a godsend. How about you? Where’d you go?”

Malcolm’s smile brightened even more. “I spent the day with Oliver. He introduced me to someone I have been wanting to meet for a very long time.”

“Oh.” Tommy’s grin dimmed noticeably, though Malcolm didn’t seem to notice. Like always.

“Who?”

“Samantha Arias.”

“You met Sam?” Tommy blinked, surprised.

Malcolm’s smile faded a little. “Yes. You already knew her?”

“She was at Kara’s housewarming party. They celebrated Christmas with us.”

“Ah. Well, you should have told me, Tommy. Miss Arias has been on my radar for a while.” Malcolm stated absentmindedly. Tommy visibly deflated, as his father continued to ramble on.

“Whatthellwhatthellwhat. The. HELL!” Cisco paced around, absolutely distressed. Sitting some ways away was Caitlin, who was staring at a picture of her and Ronnie.

“He knew. He knew.” She whispered to herself, growing angrier by the minute.

Cisco took in a deep breath, and tried to calm down. “Okay. So, our boss is from the future. He murdered Barry’s mom. Then he created the Particle Accelerator and purposely blew it up, so Barry could become a superhero. Oh, and he might not be the real Harrison Wells. And…and…”

“He’s been using us.” Caitlin finished for him, truly angry for the first time in a long time. She put the picture down and got her bag, fishing out her phone.

“Caitlin…” Cisco asked cautiously.

“I’m calling Ronnie. He and Stein need to be here now.” She spoke furiously, punching the numbers onto the touchscreen.
“So…how have you been?” Eddie stated lightly, a slight grin on his face.

Iris stared hard at him, pointedly taking a sip of her hot chocolate. Eddie’s grin faded as the moment stretched on. “Iris?”

“You and I both know you’re not here for small talk, Eddie. Cut to the chase.” Iris said tiredly, setting down her mug.

Eddie sighed. “I want to get back together.”

“Eddie…!”

“Iris, I love you.”

Iris closed her mouth, then her eyes, and leaned back into the couch, knowing she was going to be emotionally spent when this conversation was over. She exhaled.

“I’m sorry, Eddie, but I don’t believe you. You haven’t been paying a lot attention to me for the last two months. It’s why we broke up, remember?”

“Iris, just because I wasn’t paying attention to you didn’t mean I didn’t care. I did care. I still do. It’s just…the Streak was a priority I couldn’t ignore.”

Iris clicked her teeth. “Eddie, the Streak is a lot more than a priority to you. He’s all there’s been to your life lately. You haven’t just been neglecting me, you’ve been neglecting everything. You haven’t gone out with the guys and you and my dad won’t take a case that doesn’t involve the Streak in some way – I should know, he told me. The fact of the matter is, as long as the Streak is here, there’s no room in your life for me.”

Eddie set down his mug, and looked at her determinedly. “Then I’ll make room.”

“Eddie…”

“I love you, Iris. Do you love me?”

She paused.

Did she love Eddie?

She cared for him, certainly. Eddie was the first major relationship, the first serious boyfriend, she had ever had. Eddie had opened her up, the first person to really do so since Henry and her mom and brother, ever since Barry supposedly died at sea. So yes, Iris cared for him deeply. He brought out a warmth in her, a warmth she had only felt a few times, though with who she could not quite remember. And if this warmth was so rare, then…yes, perhaps she did love Eddie.

Iris nodded slowly. “I do, Eddie.”

Eddie smiled thankfully, and then buried his hand into his pocket, taking out a small box. He opened it, revealing a key.

“I was planning on asking you to move in with me at Christmas, but I couldn’t get around to it. And that was my fault, I admit. But I love you, Iris, and I can’t think of a future without you. So, please – will you give me another chance?”

Iris took the key into her hand, and found it heavier than she thought it would be as it rested on her palm. She sighed.
“Give me some time to think about it.”

Amanda Waller leaned back into her chair, smirking.

Slade Wilson stood across from her, visibly frowning, before setting down the flash drive on her desk.

“All the information I could find after scraping over every inch of Fort Rozz, including a possible location of the escapees.”

Amanda raised an eyebrow. “Oh? That’s interesting. Though it may be outdated soon.”

Slade tilted his head. “How come?”

“Your surrogate daughter just murdered the husband of the likely leader, in front of the cameras from which they were watching the fight.”

Slade hummed, betraying nothing.

“Oh, and apparently he was her uncle.”

He looked at her, shocked, and her smile dimmed, ever so slightly. “I have had cells especially commissioned to hold Kryptonian prisoners, and they’re finally finished. Please inform your little trio of them. Capture or death is still their prerogative.”

Slade narrowed his eye. “Fine. And our deal?”

Amanda’s smile widened slightly. “Ah, yes. Your two wayward children. When all the prisoners of Fort Rozz are accounted for, I’ll give you all the information we have on their current whereabouts. Don’t worry – as far we know, they’re alive.”

“And that’s the only reason you’re still alive.” Slade finished for her, glaring.

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that, Slade.” Amanda angled her face ever so slightly, grinning.

“Slade!”

Slade turned around, and smiled. “Maseo.”

“Slade.” Maseo walked up to him and clasped his hand. “How are things?”

The Australian shrugged. “We’re making decent progress, but we’ve still got a lot of heads to chop off. How about you? How’s the Suicide Squad?”

Maseo groaned. “I know this is in poor taste, but I miss having you on the squad. It’s nice having someone I can trust out there. Someone that won’t give me lip with every order.”

“Chien na Wei?” Slade guessed.

“God, why did she have to remember me?” Maseo moaned.

“Well, your wife kicks major ass, Maseo. I doubt Chien na Wei would ever forgot an opponent like
her. Or the husband she kidnapped her for.” Slade mused.

Maseo shook his head. “I dread the day she shakes her leash loose.”

“You and Tatsu can take care of yourselves, Maseo.” Slade pointed out, then smirked. “And if she goes after Akio, she’ll be in for a nasty surprise. How is he, by the way?”

“He’ll be a freshman at Tōdai next term. Top percentile of the class, no strings needed to be pulled. I’m so proud.” Maseo smiled.

Slade nodded. “I’m glad. After everything your family has been through, your son deserves nothing but the brightest future possible.”

“A future that was only possible because of you, Slade.” Maseo reminded him, gratitude permeating from him. “You saved my family. When you get the word, let me help you save yours.” With that final word, he walked away.

Slade watched him go, and sighed.

*Something tells me that wherever I need to go, I can’t let you follow, Maseo.*

Chapter End Notes

Short again, I know. In fact I already had this chapter mostly done but I got sucked into watching *NCIS* episodes on Netflix. Even without Tony and Ziva the show is still one of the best on TV, at least in my opinion.

We’ll be getting back into long chapters again, but the update schedule might slow down. The semester starts again soon, and I will be busy with college work.
Chapter 30: Grodd, the Monkey God

Barry hummed merrily himself as the elevator descended towards the main lobby. He was meeting with Caitlin and Cisco, about to set up a trap they had devised in the sanctity of Cisco’s apartment in order to get Wells to incriminate himself as the Man in the Yellow Suit – or the “Reverse-Flash,” according to the article they had found in the secret room.

When the elevator stopped, he exited and trotted down the hallway, only to stop when he heard a scream. Speeding the rest of the way, he blinked. The Cortex, normally meticulously arranged due to the neuroses of the three genius scientists, was completely trashed. Papers and items were strewn everywhere, smashed and shattered, knocked down, thrown about, etc. In front of the mess were Caitlin and Cisco, staring at the sight in horror and each close to a breakdown.

“What happened?” Caitlin shrieked.

Cisco said nothing, only staring mournfully at the destroyed computers.

Barry paid neither of them mind, instead looking at the walls, many of which were cracked, pieces broken off. Where the walls were metal or reinforced as such, there were imprints of fists, impacts of extreme force. He narrowed his eyes – whoever this had super-strength, which suggested a metahuman, but the size of the imprints…and the cracks, they all made larger openings…

His eyes widened. “Guys, where’s Wells?”

The scientists broke out of their horrified reverie to look at him in shock. Barry didn’t wait, grabbing them both and running towards the secret room. They blinked when they saw the door wide open, entering quickly to see the suit long gone. Turning to Gideon’s stand, Caitlin and Cisco gasped in disbelief at the panel of projected feeds of their apartments and other places they regularly frequented. Barry only sighed.

“Figures.”

“You knew he was watching us?”

“I suspected. And I only thought he was watching me and my family. I had no reason to believe he’d be watching you as well – and Eddie, apparently…” Barry looked at one particular screen, where an exhausted Eddie was passed out on his bed. “I’m just glad…” that he didn’t bug the Foundry. Or Oliver’s and Kara’s places.

“Glad for what?” Cisco prodded him.
Barry turned his head and smiled sharply at him. Cisco clamped up immediately.

Caitlin looked at him suspiciously. “What made you suspect him?”

Barry snorted. “Caitlin, I suspected him from the very moment he approached me at Jitters that day. It’s why I never did or stored anything important at home. Or here for that matter.”

“Wait, so you have another superhero cave?” Cisco cut in, looking vaguely offended.

“Of course I do, Cisco. You should know me by now. I’m paranoid as hell and I just told you I suspected Wells straight from the beginning. It only figures I’d have another hideout besides here.” Barry said logically, still observing all the screens. He frowned at one particular feed, which showed Iris doing some paperwork at the precinct.

“Okay, that is not cool man. You’re holding out on us!”

“I was and before you try to guilt trip me, know that I’m not going to fall for it. It was a necessary precaution and I don’t regret it in the least.”

“Guys…”

“You immoral, inconsiderate bastard! Do we mean nothing to you?”

“Guys…”

“If you two meant nothing to me, I wouldn’t have told you I was the Streak. I haven’t even told Joe and Iris that.”

“Guys…”

“Please, you only told us that because you knew he already knew and…”

“GUYS!”

Barry and Cisco broke off their argument to look at the fuming Caitlin. “What?” They asked in unison. She jabbed her thumb towards the entrance to the room, where a loud crash could be heard. Both of them blinked. Barry’s face turned serious, and he gestured to Caitlin and Cisco to keep quiet, walking silently and slowly towards the door. He peeked his head outwards, and looked around slowly. Left, right, up…

He blinked.

The gorilla roared.

As the animal dropped to the ground, Barry stumbled backwards, catching himself before he made a very unflattering fall on his ass. The animal roared once more, and everyone in the room flinched. Barry sped to the other side of the room, dodging the large, hairy arm reaching through opening trying to grab him. He looked at Caitlin and Cisco, who were shaking slightly in fear.

“You two wouldn’t happen to know who the giant gorilla is?” Barry asked, slightly wincing at the loud noises the beast was making as it started pounding on the walls. Whatever this room was made of, it had reinforced the walls enough to handle the amount of force in the blows, but he didn’t want to test how long they could last against a meta-enhanced animal.

“Grodd.” Caitlin whispered, lip trembling.
Barry blinked. “What’s a Grodd?”

“Grod is a gorilla that was used for experiments for General Wade Eiling. He was a test subject in the development of telepathy and other mental abilities for American soldiers. After seeing the inhumane treatment Eiling was putting him through, Wells shut the project down, and put Grodd under our care.” Cisco answered him, backing away from the walls as the pounding got louder.

“After the Particle Accelerator Explosion, I went down to check on him, only to find his cage destroyed and him long gone.” Caitlin finished, hand on her forehead. “Do you think…”

*Father. Enemy.* Everyone froze as an unfamiliar voice invaded their minds, words stilted but no less hostile. *Flash.*

“He wants me.” Barry noted, face taking on a determined expression.

Caitlin shook her head vigorously. “Barry, even with your powers, Grodd’s strength…”

“Don’t worry.” Barry took a small, circular device out of his pocket, and pressed the button on it. “I don’t plan on going solo.”

Kara frowned at the computer, where a distress signal, illustrated by Barry’s name, was flashing on the screen.

She turned to Oliver, who was also looking at the screen in concern. “You want to come?”

Oliver shook his head. “No. If Barry needs help, then it’s likely something out of my weight class. Besides, I have a lunch date with Al Sa-Her today.”

The Kryptonian clicked her teeth as she walked towards the model that had her suit on display. “Can you handle him on your own?”

He snorted. “Kara, please – that’s an insult if I’ve heard one.”

“Remember, Oliver. Pride goeth before the fall.” She warned him.

“And if I were proud, I would take your words to heart. But I’m not proud, Kara. Just self-assured. You of all people should know that.” Oliver reminded her back as he took off.

---

*And there goes the van.* Barry noted as he jumped to the side, watching as Grodd’s fist smashed into the metal surface, imprinting ridges into the S.T.A.R. Labs logo. *Well, it’s not coming out of my pocket at least.*

After they had confirmed Grodd’s identity, Caitlin had taken the initiative and tried to calm Grodd down at first. It seemed to have been working, but unfortunately Grodd’s loyalty to his ‘father’ – Wells, of course – was stronger than his soft spot for Caitlin. And by virtue of *that* was his apparent hatred of ‘the Flash’ aka Barry. Grodd had gone after him, and Barry had drawn him out to the parking garage before any more damage could be done to the rest of the building.
The battle so far had mostly consisted of him running around, dodging Grodd whenever he got too near, careful to avoid anything integral to the structure. He would’ve tried attacking, but Grodd’s skin was too thick for his knives to pierce without a strong, hard thrust – and with the gorilla as powerful and mobile as he was, that was not a currently achievable feat. Nor was the lightning throw for similar reasons. A frustrating game of cat and mouse, and while Barry had less trouble scurrying away here than he did with Wells, he certainly wasn’t going to able to do damage any time soon. Hopefully, however, he wouldn’t have to. If the beacon worked…

Whoosh.

Barry smirked.

Finally.

Changing tactics, Barry sped right towards Grodd, momentarily confusing the beast. Grodd shook it off, however, and roared to the heavens. He too charged, towards Barry, fists cocked and ready to give double clubbing blows. He jumped upwards, arms slung back, ready to pound his opponent into the pavement.

Barry gave him no quarter, however. Just as Grodd was on him, he dropped down into a baseball slide, skidding beneath the beast. Grodd turned his head to watch him and twisted his body so he could continue his pursuit, only for his face to meet a brutal punch to the cheek. The force of the blow crashed him into one of the walls of the garage, and he laid there, keening in pain. Barry watched him, smirking, and turned his head to exchange looks with the Girl in Blue.

The fight had continued much in the same vein. Whereas a continued battle with Barry was a stalemate that would’ve only been settled with attrition, a battle with Barry and the Girl in Blue was one that would and did end decidedly not in Grodd’s favor.

While Grodd laid on the garage floor, almost comatose, the duo exchanged one last look, nodding in unison. Barry reached down and removed the knives beneath the heels of his shoe, as the Girl in Blue reached behind her back to remove the sword hidden beneath her cloak. The hilt in her hand, the blade beside her leg, they moved towards the beast, all intent on slaying him.

“WAIT!”

They stopped, turning to the garage’s connecting door, where a breathless Caitlin and Cisco were standing. Both had been sequestered away into an untouched room at the Labs by Barry, told to stay there until he personally came to get them out. Obviously, they had not listened to his orders.

“Please. Don’t.” Caitlin begged, staring pleadingly at Barry.

Rather than make some dark, sarcastic remark, he only stared stonily back at her. The lack of emotion on his face was startling – it was only then that Caitlin realized that the man she was looking at was not the Barry Allen she had come to know, but rather the Streak. The violent vigilante that had been terrorizing Central City’s criminal element for the last several months. The killer that had terrified both her and Cisco when he dropped the limp, unconscious body of Tony Woodward on the Cortex’s floor long ago.

But the Streak had still spared Tony Woodward all the same. And she knew she could convince him to do the same for Grodd.

“He’s a victim too, Barry. Please.”
Barry looked at her contemplatively, still stony-eyed. He then looked once more at the Girl in Blue, silently communicating with her. Then, with a sigh, he re-sheathed the knives into his footwear, as the Girl in Blue did the same with her sword. The female vigilante moved forwards, picking up the gorilla and carrying him in the air, one of her arms supporting him.

Cisco frowned. “Where are you taking him? There’s no way the Pipeline can hold him.”

“Then maybe it’s a good thing he’s not going to the Pipeline.” Barry responded as the Girl in Blue took off.

Cisco and Caitlin watched in awe, finally realizing that this really was the famous urban legend that had been seen all about Starling City. “And how do you know her?” Cisco continued, pointing at the departing women.

Barry smirked. “I’ll tell you when she gets back.”

“So, what did you want to talk to me about, Uncle Malcolm?” Oliver asked curiously as the waiter took off to place their orders with the kitchen.

*I want to tell you you’re my son, for one.* Malcolm thought to himself as he opened his mouth to speak. “It’s about your business, Oliver.”

Oliver quirked an eyebrow. “What about it?”

“The location, mainly. I suggest you consider building it somewhere else – somewhere other than the Glades.”

“Uncle Malcolm, one of the reasons Kara and I are building this place is to the benefit as much of the underprivileged of Starling City as possible. And you know as well as I do that most of those people reside within the Glades.”

Malcolm sighed. “I understand that, Oliver, and while I sympathize with your reasoning, the Glades are not safe. You open yourself to the risk of robbery and assault if you build your business there. If the people there are truly willing and determined to take advantage of what you’re offering, then they’ll be willing to venture out of the Glades for it.”

Oliver shook his head. “Uncle Malcolm, you of all people should know that one of the reasons why the Glades are in the current state that they’re in is because the city isn’t as accessible to the residents there as it is to other neighborhoods. It’s why Aunt Rebecca built her clinic within the Glades, remember?” Malcolm winced at the reminder. “That’s another issue I plan to pursue. If you look at Starling City’s history, the decline of that neighborhood, and by extension other parts of the city, directly correlates with the closing of the city’s subway system. Without a decent transit system, the situation won’t change. But in order to do that, I need to gain the trust of the people there, and by extension, some influence in City Hall. And there’s no better way than to have my business within the Glades, and to make sure it succeeds.”

“I still don’t like the idea of your business there, Oliver. I love you like a son, and the last thing I want is for someone to take advantage of your generosity to harm you. You and Kara.” Malcolm confessed. *Like Rebecca.* He added silently.

Oliver’s face softened. “I know, Uncle Malcolm. But you shouldn’t worry. I’ll have a lot of
extremely well-paid security safeguarding the place. Kara and I will be fine.”

As he watched Malcolm’s car drive away, Oliver watched, hand in the air as it departed from view. Once it was a safe distance away, his face hardened.

*Whatever Al Sa-Her’s plans are...they have to do with the Glades.*

Chapter End Notes

I LIVE! Sorry for the late update, but college is getting in the way and I had this sitting on my hard drive for the last two weeks half-finished. But I will finish this fic, and I will never abandon it. Arc II should be done by the end of February if I work hard enough on it.

I’ve also been distracted by other things. The Royal Rumble for one, and if you’re a wrestling fan like me I highly recommend you watch both this year’s Royal Rumble PPV and NXT TakeOver: Philadelphia. Both were wonderful shows, and the former had the first ever women’s Royal Rumble. And for the record, everyone, it was great! Not as good as the men’s Rumble this year, but still pretty good. It felt like a love letter to the last two decades of women’s wrestling in WWE, and while not all of it was good, it still felt nice to see.

As for this chapter – yes Grodd, and we’ll be seeing more of him in other arcs. Next chapter we get more action and Oliver continues his surveillance on Malcolm.
Chapter 31: Goodbye, Loose Ends

“Okay, when the military men in armored cars come, don’t panic.” Barry loudly announced to the frazzled Caitlin and Cisco, who were trying to get the Cortex back into some semblance of order.

Caitlin gave a defeated sigh. “What did you do?”

“Called in someone to transfer all the metahumans in the Pipeline to another prison. Don’t worry – they’re fully capable of restraining these guys.” Barry grinned and gave two thumbs-ups.

Cisco looked at him dully. “And why do the metas need to be transferred?”

“Because Wells knows we know that he’s evil and this place is a ticking timebomb with them here.” Barry pointed out. “We’re lucky Grodd didn’t knock something out that could have released them.”

Caitlin groaned. Barry was right (as he usually was, unfortunately). She, however, did not want to deal with the government after Grodd, especially since her previous experiences weren’t…ideal. By the pained look on his face, Cisco clearly felt the same way.

Barry frowned at their reactions. “You both look like someone just told you that your dog just died.” He observed.

“Barry, it’s been a long day. Please…just, please.” Caitlin pleaded with him, kneading the bridge of her nose in frustration.

“Yeah, man. How you can still be so perky after all this is beyond me.” Cisco complained.

Barry shrugged. “Well, considering that, with Wells out of the picture, I don’t have to hide anymore secrets from you guys, I think that’s a cause for celebration.”

Both scientists paused in their work to stare at Barry quizzically. “You’re serious?” Cisco asked suspiciously.

“As a heart attack. Granted, there are still some things that have to be kept from you – because you’re honestly better off not knowing – but the real important ones I can trust you with. Like this one.”

Right on cue, the Girl in Blue appeared in the doorway of the Cortex, hand perched on one of her hips. Caitlin and Cisco flinched backwards at her sudden arrival, while Barry just smirked.

“You’re late.”
“And you know damn well why, Care-Bear.” The vigilante snorted.

“Are you and him always going to keep calling me that?” Barry complained, though the smile on his face suggested otherwise.

The Girl in Blue patted him on the chest. “Considering how you mother hen us every time one of us gets a boo-boo, yes.”

“Barry mother hens people?” Cisco blurted out suddenly, surprised.

He was even more surprised when the Girl in Blue responded by pulling down her hood. She was a young woman, even younger than they were, with blonde hair and bright, blue eyes. The perfect picture of an All-American girl.

The girl smirked. “Yes, though we’ve gotten used to it by now.” She held out her hand. “Kara Zor-El. Or, as I’m known on your planet, Kara Danvers. Something tells me we’ll be working together from now on.”

---

“Are you sure you can’t go anywhere else?” Astra demanded. In front of her was a large screen showing Indigo’s face.

Indigo smirked. “Worried, Astra? That’s not like you.”

“There have been several super-powered individuals sighted there, including their own vigilante. You are the only one who can complete Myriad in the allotted timetable.” The general responded tersely, glowering slightly.

“I can handle that overgrown roadrunner easily.” The Coluan waved her superior off.

“It’s not just him I’m worried about, Indigo. She has been sighted there.”

Indigo scowled. Ever since Non died, there was a growing tension at headquarters. The sight of the Daughter of Alura destroying one of their best two combatants was sobering enough; but seeing a member of the House of El killing someone, a family member no less, had stricken everyone. Several of their underling were now sufficiently terrified of Kara Zor-El, and dissension was showing in the ranks. While Indigo herself had not taken it well either, it was nothing compared to how Astra had.

The Kryptonian, after handing off temporary command to the Commander, had shut herself away in her personal quarters for several days. She didn’t even come out for meals, which were instead delivered to her via a slot in her door. When she came out, her entire demeanor had changed. Previously, Astra had been cool, professional, but nonetheless confident and merciful when the situation allowed it. Now she was as frozen as a block of ice, refusing to speak unless it was to give orders, her face betraying nothing besides the occasional sense of irritation. She also refused to address the Daughter of Alura as anything other than an enemy and had rescinded all previous orders to take her in alive if possible, much to everyone’s relief. It was obvious at this point that no one under their command was capable of taking in that girl alive, or even taking in that girl period. At least this way they had a fighting chance of surviving should they encounter her.

“Don’t worry, Astra.” Indigo finally stated after a moment of silence. “Even if she is there, there’s no way she can stop me from escaping into a computer if things get too rough. I’ll be fine.”
“Good. Do not underestimate her, Indigo. We can no longer afford mistakes.”

Malcolm Merlyn, previously absorbed in his work, paused. Sensing something, he turned around and looked out the window. The sun was out, the sky clear of any crowds. Down below, he could see people milling around, going about their days. Just another day in Starling City.

He narrowed his eyes, but realized that whatever it was, it was gone. Sighing, he turned back to his work.

Right outside his window, on the corner right behind his office, was an arrow deeply embedded into the stone. Attached to the shaft was a device with a blinking, green light.

“Break-in at Mercury Labs.” Cisco announced. Barry, Caitlin, and Kara all turned to look at him, Kara setting down the large piece of rubble she was carrying gently. The two vigilantes exchanged looks.

“You up for it?” Kara asked, eying the bag of chips in her brother’s hands.

“Of course. That gorilla wasn’t nearly as fun as he should’ve been.” Barry said, setting down the chips. A quick run later, he returned dressed in his suit. Kara smirked, and then lifted up her hood and her veil, concealing her identity once more. They both set off in a blur.

Watching the humans flee as the men under her command ran rampant throughout the building, Indigo smiled. She looked around at the various tables, inspecting the tools and technology on them. Lifting one particular contraption up, her smile widened.

“You know, for a backwater planet, your technology is rather advanced.” She commented to the cowering scientist in the corner of the room. Then, she crushed the device, turning it into a pile of metallic scraps. “Still very primitive compared to the rest of the universe, though.”

“Leader.” She turned. The Commander. “The targets are secure. We are ready for transport.”

“Very well then. Let us depart before Speedy Gonzales gets here.” Indigo sighed, staring mournfully at the poor human, who continued to whimper.

The Commander blinked. “Speedy Gonzales?”

Indigo waved him off. “A cultural reference from this planet.” She turned to walk away with her lieutenant for this mission, only stop cold when a knife buried into her back. The Coluan hissed, yanking the blade out as her digital body reformed.

The Commander looked to see who attacked his companion and froze. The Streak was standing in front of the poor scientist, and beside him…

“The Daughter of Alura.” He whispered in horrified awe.
Both the Streak and the Girl in Blue paused momentarily when they saw the large group of aliens guarding a small pile of stolen technology in the lobby of Mercury Labs. Realizing this wasn’t going to be as easy as they thought, they exchanged another meaningful look and silently adjusted their plans.

The Streak entered first, using his superior speed and his knives to make a few quick kills. The Kryptonians were able to perceive his presence and – just barely – dodge the fatal blows or tank them with their invulnerability, but the rest of the team was not so lucky. Bodies littered the ground, blood leaking from stab wounds, all perfectly aimed at vital areas. Instant death.

The Girl in Blue was the next to make her appearance. At the sight of her, several froze. Two, however, still stewing over the death of their Lieutenant, roared and blindly charged at her. She welcomed their attack, countering their sloppy blows with ease, before kicking out their knees. She grabbed one by the shirt and pulling forward, bent him backward into a choke hold. Then, in a move right out of the Hood’s playbook, she twisted, snapping his neck. The other combatant tried to strike her from behind, but the Girl in Blue foresaw that, grabbing his forearm before his blow could connect. With a quick strike, she crushed his throat, and his body fell limp.

The other soldiers broke out of their fear-induced trance, and tried to mount their own assault, only to find their legs restrained by rope. Off to the side, the Streak spooled the remaining cord with his hands and tilted his head as the Girl in Blue unsheathed her sword.

Once everyone was dead, the Girl in Blue looked up. The Streak followed her line of sight, and as one, they sped their way to the top.

“You are…Braniac 8.” The Girl in Blue noted, eyeing the Coluan warily. Behind her, the scientist, realizing this was his chance, fled with a scream, leaving the super-powered individuals alone for their confrontation.

“You’ve heard of me? I’m flattered. Though I prefer Indigo these days.” Indigo smirked sharply, hiding her slight apprehension.

The Streak clicked his teeth. “Hard not to. When we realized that Fort Rozz was on this planet, we immediately tried to identify which of the possible escapees could cause the most damage. Yours was at the top of the list.”

“That being said, you’re not one that strikes me to take orders. Or play well with others in general.” The Girl in Blue continued, surveying the surrounding room.

Indigo shrugged. “What can I say? Your aunt, as much as I despise her, is quite the visionary. She made me an offer I couldn’t refuse.”

“Well, maybe you should’ve, because you’re going to die for it. Like, right now.” The vigilante pointed out, fingering the handle of the sword on her back.

“Oh yeah?” Indigo’s smirked widened into a full-out, bloodthirsty grin. “And pray tell, how will you achieve that? If you know of me then you know of my species. I cannot be killed by conventional means, and there is an escape route ready for me no matter where I go.”

The assassins stared at her.

At that exact moment, the power went out. Indigo froze, her mouth agape.
The Commander, having broken out of his stupor some time prior, used the conversation as a distraction for a sneak attack. Unfortunately for him, neither of his opponents were fooled. The Girl in Blue grabbed his neck, and with a squeeze, snapped it in two.

Indigo broke out of her own stupor immediately after that and tried to search for a working computer, a phone, anything, only to freeze when the Streak appeared behind her. Knowing running was futile, she stopped lifted her hands in surrender, only to smirk when she noticed a phone laying about at another table. Dissolving herself into digital code, Indigo reveled in her victory.

Or at least she did, until the virus activated.

The Streak and the Girl in Blue watched her go and smiled when her screams pierced the silent room. Indigo immediately left the device, her body frizzling from the damage she’d sustained. Now knowing in certainty that she’d lost, and unwilling to let her death be in vain, she charged at the Kryptonian who had killed her once-lover, trying to slash at her face with her long claws. The Girl in Blue leaned her head backwards, dodging the blow, and countered with a right cross, followed by a left one.

The Coluan recovered quickly and had seemed to regain some measure of composure. She and the Girl in Blue circled each other, before Indigo followed with a kick to the shin. Her opponent’s knee buckled slightly and retaliated with an uppercut that Indigo soundly dodged with a matrix-like move, stretching back, allowing her body to form a bridge. She kicked upwards, only for her foot to be caught. The Girl in Blue span her around and threw her to the side, watching as she collided with several tables and bookcases.

Off to the side, the Streak continued to watch as the women did battle. He looked outside one of the windows in the room, noting how some police vehicles and news vans were starting to gather in front of the entrance. Knowing that they could no longer afford to play around, he sped up to Indigo and tripped her.

Indigo stumbled back, but quickly regained her footing. She continued to slash away at the object of her hatred, her anger blinding her to the futility of her actions. The Girl in Blue grabbed the Coluan’s wrists, and with a sharp pull, ripped her arms off. Indigo collapsed to her knees as her enemy threw the separated limbs to the side. Almost lazily, she unsheathed her sword, letting the kryptonite blade’s verdant glow illuminate the room.

“Tell me, Indigo. Can even your body reform after being cut in two?”

Indigo said nothing, gritting her teeth, waiting for the inevitable.

“Oh?” The Girl in Blue tilted her head. “Good.”

She lifted her sword high into the air.

The Streak sighed as he eyed the carnage. Picking up the phone that Indigo attempted to escape into, he dialed a number that he – unfortunately – knew by heart.

“Hey, Amanda? You know that prisoner transport I called you about…”
“WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU LOT HAVEN’T FOUND OUT WHO HE IS YET!” Malcolm screeched into his former friend’s face.

“Malcolm, enough. We still have time. The Undertaking still isn’t for another few months.” Robert calmly reminded him.

Malcolm growled. “Perhaps, but that is still enough time for the Hood to go snooping around and figure out what we’re doing. That cannot happen, Robert.”

“Then why don’t you give up the plan, then! If the consequences are really dire, if you really fear whatever organization is behind the Hood, then why bother continuing!” Robert snapped, temper frayed.

“WE’VE COME TOO FAR TO TURN BACK NOW! THIS CITY NEEDS THIS! YOU KNOW THIS!” Malcolm shouted back.

“No. You need this. This has never been about the city, it’s always been about you. It’s why you sabotaged the Gambit, why you threatened Thea, why you threw away our friendship. Because in the end, Malcolm, you only really care about yourself. You and your damn revenge.”

Malcolm glowered. “Are you threatening me, Robert? You know the consequences for going against me.”

Robert scowled. “And you know the consequences if I die.” Robert reminded him, referring to Moira’s bluff. “But if you must know, Malcolm, I’m not. I’m just saying what you aren’t willing to admit.”

Back in the Foundry, Oliver Queen leaned back into his chair, a shocked and glazed over look on his face.

Uncle Malcolm…sabotaged the Gambit?

Chapter End Notes

I’M ALIVE! AGAIN! Sorry everyone for the delay, but life, you know. Plus, I haven’t really been keeping with the Arrowverse shows lately. They haven’t interested me in the while, though writing this fic is still enjoyable to me. Thankfully, I’m on break, so expect a slew of updates. I guarantee, for real this time, that this arc will be done at the end of the month. After that, Arc III won’t start for another few months (I need to fully outline it, after all), and I’ll continue writing through the summer, hopefully.

As for this – we’re in endgame mode, as I’ve said before. Next chapter one of our storylines will tie up, and after that another, culminating in Chapter 41 (going by MY count, not the site count), which will be the last chapter of the arc. Be ready for a roller coaster, everybody.
Arc II, Chapter 32: The Truth

Chapter Summary

No more hiding; Kara and Astra's fated confrontation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 32: The Truth

“I want to shove an arrow down his throat.”

“When you cannot do. Not yet.”

Oliver groaned, lifting his hand to his head. “Don’t remind me. Stupid revenge bylines.”

“They’re there for a reason, Ollie. And like it or not, we are still beholden to the League’s laws, as is he – we all swore to abide by their principles in exchange for our release. If we try anything too rash, he will turn the situation to his advantage.” Barry pointed out idly as he continued to type on the computer. Wells had been MIA ever since the Grodd incident a few days ago. It was starting to worry him. I knew I should’ve planted that bug on his wheelchair. Then again, if he really is from the future, maybe it’s a good thing I didn’t…

“We already know he’s up to something!” Oliver argued back feebly.

“And that alone will not satisfy Ra’s.” Barry shot back lazily. “We must prove, beyond any doubt, that he has gone against the League’s code. Only then can we act.”

The archer moaned. “Barry…he sabotaged the Gambit…”

“I know.”

“…he’s blackmailing my parents…”

“I know.”

“…he’s threatening my sister…”

“I know, Oliver, I know!” Barry snapped. “Do you think I like this anymore than you do? I want to put the bastard in the ground too! If only for your sake. But, and I can’t believe I am saying this to you of all people, we have to be patient. We need to think about the big picture. In any case, whatever plot he’s concocted won’t reach its conclusion until May. We have time.”

“…he took ten years of my life, Barry.” Oliver whispered. “I won’t lie and say there wasn’t any good that came out of it. I met you, Kara, Kal, Slade, Shado, Nyssa – people who are family to me as much as my own blood is. But I still lost so much. All of Thea’s milestones, the chance to graduate high school with Tommy and Laurel, college, all the people I could’ve met, could’ve shared my life with, and for what? For what?” Oliver grit his teeth, willing himself not to cry, and failing.
Barry sighed, pausing in his work. He got up from his chair and brought his older brother into a hug. “I know, Oliver, I know. Kara and I – what happened to us was just a quirk of fate, circumstances beyond our control. And we all thought it was the same for you, except now you have someone to blame. I can’t even begin to imagine how you’re feeling right now, but I know that you won’t be able to move past this until you finally learn why it happened in the first place.”

Oliver sighed as his tears subsided. “You’re right, Barry, you’re right. I’ll continue surveillance and wait.”

“Good.” Barry smiled as they separated.

Later that night, Barry watched the trees pass by outside the window of his train compartment. Suddenly, his cellphone rang; frowning, he took it out of his pocket, noting the caller ID, which said ‘Unknown.’ He sighed, and accepted the call, lifting the device to his ear.

“Was wondering when you were going to make a move.” He idly commented, continuing to watch the trees.

“I just needed a little more time to observe my opposition. I’m sure you of all people can understand.” A smooth voice replied. Harrison Wells.

Barry smirked. “Knowledge is power, they say. It makes me wonder – how much do you know, Harrison? Is it alright if I call you Harrison, by the way? I know it’s not your real name, but…”

A small laugh echoed from the other side of the line. “Harrison is fine, Barry. As for what I know – well, I know you’re departing from the old Queen Steel Mill in the Glades. How is Mr. Queen, by the way? I assume you lot have just found out Malcolm Merlyn sabotaged the boat. I wonder if you’re aware about the details for his little Undertaking for Starling City yet?”

“It’s all just ancient history to you, isn’t it?”

“But of course, Barry. How else was I supposed to play you all like a fiddle? Or at least I was supposed to, except you were less fiddle and more fiddler.” Another laugh. “Of course, even I couldn’t have foreseen the complication with the island and all. It’s all a part of being human, I guess.”

“The island – yeah, that would screw up a fair few plans, wouldn’t it?” Barry sighed. “I wasn’t supposed to be on that island, was I?”

“No.” Harrison confirmed. “Nor was Miss Danvers or Mr. Kent. In fact, your companion’s little war with Astra wasn’t supposed to happen for at least another decade and a half. And as for Mr. Kent, he was actually supposed to land on this planet before her.”

“And I assumed you had nothing to do with that?”

“No, no. Even I had gone that far back, there was no way I could’ve gotten to Krypton in time to meddle with that particular event with such primitive technology at my disposal.” Barry could just hear him shake his head. “My meddling was limited to the last fourteen years. But I think you already know that, don’t you?”

“I want to kill you.” Barry stated cheerfully, placing his chin into his hand, a smile on his face.

“And I wanted to kill you.” Harrison responded back, just as jovial. “Alas, I can’t. I still need you.”
“To go faster, right?”

“Sharp as ever. And you need me to confess to get your father out of prison. It seems we’re at a stalemate, Barry. Of course, I could go for a hostage or two…”

Barry clicked his teeth. “Unnecessary and you know it, Harrison. I already have all the motivation I need, and something tells me I’m already close to the speed you need me to be.”

“Oh, and what makes you think that?”

“Well, the lack of metahuman attacks for the last couple of weeks. Aside from that overgrown gorilla of yours, nobody has been making trouble lately. I assume you have something to do with that.”

“Indeed, I did.” Harrison admitted. “They’re distractions at this point.”

“Figures you’d say that.” Barry sighed. “What are you after, Harrison Wells? What do you need me for?”

A long moment of silence, and then, “Everything, Barry. Get faster, catch me, and maybe I’ll tell you the details.” With that, a click! sounded, and the call ended.

Barry exhaled once more, leaning back into his seat.

Faster, huh?

One aspect of Starling City that made it so appealing to the criminal element was its vibrant nightlife. Even after the sun went down, the streets were still filled to brim with people, bustling about from one club to another, giggling, drinking, retching – everything that had to do with hedonistic revelry. Restaurants stayed open late at night, catering to the partygoers before they made their journey into the bowels of gaiety. It was both a sickening and intoxicating sight.

Thus, Starling City’s metropolitan area was still very much active when a woman descended from the sky.

To be more specific, she slammed into the ground like a ballistic missile, her feet cracking the concrete below, right in front of a large, ornate fountain. People shouted and shrieked, shielding themselves from dust and debris, and looked. Over the last few months, the people of Starling had been gradually desensitized to the sight of flying women, but very rarely did the object of their numbed reactions ever bother to mingle with mortals. So, it was only fitting that the woman that appeared be nothing like the Girl in Blue.

For one, her looks were not concealed. The citizens immediately identified her as a fairly attractive, middle-aged woman with long, dark hair, with a single streak of white. She wore a form-fitting black body-suit, which, while not skin-tight, was still rather flattering to her well-cared physique. If she hadn’t just destroyed a substantial portion of one of the city’s communal fountains, a few of the men present might have even considered making a move.

However, nobody made a peep. As pleasant as she looked at first glance, the deadly expression on her face and the sheer killing intent radiating off her had sufficiently silenced them all.

And then she lifted the fountain, ripping it and many of the pipes beneath it off the ground, holding it above like a scepter of an angry, self-righteous queen, about to pass judgement upon a lowly peasant that had the misfortune of displeasing her.
It was only when she began swinging it, did the screaming begin.

Kara looked up from the sink, a dish bubbling in her hands. Across from her, Kal looked up, and followed her line of sight to the television. They both stared at it for a long moment, taking note of the ‘BREAKING NEWS’ banner and the sight of what was clearly a metahuman or alien of some sort wreaking havoc downtown.

The next, the balcony door was open, and Kara was long gone, a gust of wind in her wake.

Kal sighed, setting aside his homework, and made his way into the kitchen.

Astra In-Ze was angry.

No, angry didn’t quite cover it. Nor did furious. Absolutely livid was the most accurate term she could think of, and even then, she felt it paled in comparison to how she really felt.

Indigo was dead. Any hopes of getting Myriad to work within this decade, if that, died with her. And that was time they simply did not have, not when Kara and whatever allies she had were closing in on them. The men knew it as well, and already she could hear it, feel it: the whispers of mutiny, of dissent. Everything Astra had worked for since landing on this miserable mudball of a planet was burning up in smoke, and she was powerless to stop it.

And it was all because of these humans! To think she had dedicated all these years to trying to save these ungrateful wretches from themselves. These pests were lucky to have had her land here, a savior that would help unite them in rescuing this planet from a doom similar to the one that had taken her own home. But no, they didn’t care about that, they were too self-absorbed, too arrogant accept help from an outsider. Even worse, they had poisoned her beloved niece into doing the dirty work for them. It was inconceivable at first, but now, Astra saw the truth, and it was one she could never, ever forgive.

The humans would pay with their lives. She wouldn’t stop until they were all dead, until they all joined her people into whatever hell such unenlightened fools went to when their hearts no longer beat. And then, perhaps when they were all gone, Kara would finally see through their deception and aid her. They could leave this place, explore the stars above, live life quietly, freely, something they would have never gotten chance on Krypton or here.

Filled with resolve, Astra swung the fountain once again, watching it fly and land on the other side of the street, while the humans scurried around as they tried to escape her rampage. Frowning at how so very few had been caught in her attack, she picked up one of their vehicles – a large, silver car – and kicked it into one of the tall buildings dotting the side.

Before it could impact, however, it was stopped, and gently set down to the side. Astra, not surprised, scowled even deeper when the Girl in Blue revealed herself. Those few pedestrians still in the vicinity gave out a strangled cheer: their heroine had arrived.

Astra reached out for another car, but in a blink of an eye, the Girl in Blue was in front of her. Startled, she was unable to react as the vigilante punched her upwards. As Astra ascended, her new opponent burst in the sky after her.

The Girl in Blue continued to punch Astra away, until the other Kryptonian finally countered,
looping her elbow around her niece’s forearm and landing a jab with her other hand. Augmented with her super strength, the vigilante’s head snapped back, her body held in place by her aunt’s hold. Her rival sufficiently stunned, Astra grabbed the fabric of her suit, pulling it forward and spinning one, two, three, four times before releasing the Girl in Blue into another part of the sky.

The vigilante shook her head, collecting herself just in time to block Astra’s ballistic punch by crossing her forearms together. She followed up with a perpendicular kick to the chin, allowing the force of her blow to tumble her until she was eye-level with her aunt’s midsection. Straightening her legs together, she used her feet to “push” against an invisible wall of air, using the extra power from the movement to aid in her downward acceleration as she collided with Astra. Wrapping her arms around the general’s abdomen, she flew to where she could see the abandoned outskirts of Starling below.

Once there, both women crashed onto the ground ungracefully, leaving large cracks in their wake. Both now dazed, they used this moment to separate, trying to recover. For several minutes, only breathing could be heard as they stared at each other.

Astra was the first to speak. “Reveal yourself, Kara. There is no one watching, there is nothing left to hide, and I think I speak for us both when I say I’m done with playing these games.”

The Girl in Blue watched her carefully, before slowly letting her hood down to reveal her long blonde hair, and bright, blue eyes. Calmly, she pulled down her veil to reveal her nose and mouth. Astra watched her, outwardly stoic, inwardly hungry. She had been content with photos and videos and long-distance glimpses – but that could not compare to seeing Kara up close and personal, the clarity of her soft skin, the curve of her cheekbones, the slightness of her lips.

“…You’ve become so beautiful, Kara.” Astra stated softly, taking in her niece’s features. “It is a pity I wasn’t there to watch you grow up.”

“From what I understand, no matter what happened, you were never going to get the chance.” Kara lazily retorted, though the hard glint in her eye showed she had not forgotten the current situation.

“Myriad would’ve made it possible.” Astra responded, her voice filled with spite. “If your mother hadn’t imprisoned Non and myself in that hellhole, you and Kal-El would be on Krypton right now, old as I am and with children of your own!”

“No, we wouldn’t have.” Kara stated confidently. Astra looked at her confusedly, before her eyes widened in realization.

“You know.”

Kara snorted. “Of course I do. After Non showed up, it wasn’t long before I realized you were involved, as you know. And of course, like the dutiful niece that I am, I searched the archives for the reasoning behind your imprisonment. Myriad stuck out like a sore thumb.” Kara spat on the ground in disgust. “You are fool, aunt.”

Astra grit her teeth, growling. “And how exactly am I a fool, niece?”

The vigilant went in resignation, moving to stand. “If you can’t figure that out on your own, then truly, there was no hope for you at all.” With that, she removed her cloak, letting it pool to the ground, before gently setting her sheathed sword down next to it.

Astra stood, her face set into a mask of determination and anger. Kara adjusted her gloves and matched her glare with one of her own. They deliberately began to circle one another, the tension
mounting, until finally, Astra charged. Kara met her halfway, their hands clasping together above their heads in a test strength. They pushed and pushed at each other, their pearly whites snarling, until Kara finally got the upper hand, allowing one of her feet to cross forward and loop behind one of Astra’s legs. The older woman fell backwards, landing harshly on the ground. Kara followed up by moving another one of her feet forward, in the space between Astra’s head and shoulder, and then drop downwards, trying to move her opponent into an armbar.

Astra, feeling the painful onset of the hold, countered, managing to get up in time and lift Kara’s body from ground, and smashing her down to the ground, forcing her to break it. The general tried to stomp down onto her midsection, but the vigilante rolled backwards, landing on her feet. Astra was not perturbed, and quickly tried to slug her enemy with a left hook. Kara shifted her head to the side to dodge and immediately retaliated with a left uppercut, which was quickly evaded.

The two women, fists held high, began to circle each other once again, measuring one another. This was a fight to the finish, and they both knew it. No one could afford to make a mistake.

This time, Kara was the first one to make a move. She faked a left cross, and landed an overhead punch, momentarily breaking Astra’s guard. She followed up with a strong kick to the abdomen, creating some more space between them. Then, knowing there was no reward without risk, charged, aiming a powerful haymaker at Astra’s face. Astra, seeing the blow coming, banked to the other side and countered with a beautiful right uppercut. Blood and spittle flew from Kara’s mouth as the blow connected. Knowing that this was a prime opportunity, Astra continued with another cross and another, and another, watching gleefully as her niece stumbled back with each hit. Confidence, power and satisfaction began to build as her assault continued.

“Fight me, Kara Zor-El!” she shouted as her niece swayed, slightly punch drunk. Astra showed her no mercy and punched her once more, her fist impacting the younger woman’s cheek with vigor. “Show me the warrior that killed my husband, one of Krypton’s greatest soldiers! That killed Braniac 8, the most dangerous criminal to have ever been imprisoned in Fort Rozz!” A final straight sent Kara’s head back, her body flying backwards. She landed on her back, starfished like a defeated prizefighter.

Kara breathed in deeply, clearing her mind. Astra watched her, smirking, as her enemy gradually sat up, her face shadowed by her hair. Had she broken her already? Perhaps her niece’s string of victories had swelled her head?

Then, ever so slowly, Kara lifted her head, revealing her bruised cheeks and busted lips. A small trickle of blood was tracking down her face from the corner of her mouth. Her eyes, however, were expressionless. Lightly trembling, Kara thumbed the blood, slowly rubbing at the texture. Then she looked at Astra.

The general saw only a flash of it, the wild look in her niece’s eyes and the bloodthirstily elated grin, burn Kara sped forward, landing her own, more powerful uppercut. Astra saw stars as she fell back, trying to retain her footing, but as she herself had proven mere moments before, there was no room for mercy in this battle. Kara gave her no quarter, burying her fist deep into Astra’s solar plexus. Astra gagged trying to breathe as she staggered back, but Kara was not letting up, intending to repay Astra for the beating earlier. First a right cross, then a left uppercut, followed by a right hook – combinations rained upon Astra’s face and body, the pain almost unbearable. One of her eyes swollen, cheeks bruised, and nose bloodied, Astra could barely stand as her aggressor measured her for a finishing punch. A powerful left hook slammed into Astra’s cheek, her body almost twirling with the force of the blow. Astra landed on her knees, one of her forearms against the concrete, desperately trying to get up.
“Rise, Astra In-Ze!” Kara demanded, breathing heavily with a pleased look on her face as she watched her aunt struggle. “You asked for this battle, and you will see it to the end! I will not accept surrender, only victory or defeat! SHOW ME YOUR PRIDE GENERAL!” She roared, fire throbbing through her veins.

Astra’s eyes snapped open, and she got up, roaring back. Forget Krypton, Earth, Myriad, Non, Indigo, Kal-El. Forget Jor, Zor, Lara and even Alura. Forget it all. None of that mattered anymore. Here and now, this was about pride. This was about who was the better woman, and Astra would be damned to lose to a mere girl, decades her junior.

With that, the two women charged at each other, augmenting themselves with their super speed. Right before they were about to collide, Kara dropped down, sliding in between Astra’s legs. Anchoring herself with her hand, she swung backwards, sweeping the feet of her aunt right from under her. Flipping up, she stomped downwards. Astra caught her foot before it could connect with her heavily abused midsection, wincing at the force, before wrapping her legs around Kara’s own, using one to force Kara down back to her back. Flipping her niece over, Astra cinched in a half crab, grimly reveling as her niece yelped in pain.

Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional. Kara repeated that mantra in her mind, biting her lip (which she knew she was going to regret later). She placed her palms flat on the ground and pushed. Her upper body was now in the air, but she could feel Astra trying to lean back. Knowing she had little time, she used whatever leverage she had to augment her leg strength. Kara’s chest meeting the concrete, Astra was lifted high in the air, and Kara used her leg to kick and kick until the hold broke. Relief filled her body as the pain was gone, though her leg was still a tad numb. Kara shook it a little, letting the blood rush back in, but had little reprieve as Astra was right back on the attack. Kara rolled to the side as Astra attempted a stomp of her own. Kara got to one knee, breathing even more heavily as she used another forearm to block Astra’s downward punch, then grabbed the fist, refusing to let go. Astra struggled a bit, before punching down with her other hand. Kara, however, caught that one as well, and Astra found herself restrained, struggling even harder. The vigilante payed her no heed, and vaulted her legs forward, landing a double kick to Astra’s chin. Astra stumbled back as Kara landed in a handstand, jumping back to her feet. With a quick burst of speed, she grabbed Astra from behind, wrapping her hands around her aunt’s waist. Heaving forward, she bridged her body as Astra landed backward on her head, neck and shoulders: a German suplex.

After a moment, Kara let go, lifting herself up from the bridge as Astra fell to her side, tired and spent. Kara watched her, then using her foot, rolled her onto her back. Her enemy’s eyes were glazed over, her breathing deep and laborious, her body slightly trembling. She was done.

Kara observed the wreckage beneath her disdainfully, before leisurely walking back to her cloak and sword. Picking up the latter, she unsheathed it, smiling down at the familiar, green glow. Walking back to Astra, noting that her aunt had managed to sit up, but clearly in no condition to fight, Kara’s smile widened. Astra watched her approach warily, defiantly, eying the Kryptonite blade as if it were the devil itself.

“I commend you, Aunt. No one has managed to match me like that…ever, to be quite honest.” Kara gave small laugh. “At least, not with my powers.”

“Now, normally,” she continued, swinging blade so its tip pointed downward, “I would ram this right through your heart and be done with it. Unfortunately, I had a crisis of faith a couple of weeks ago after I killed your husband, so guess what? You get to live.”

Astra blinked silently in disbelief.
“You’ll just have to be unconscious for a little while.” Kara’s smile glinted with a razor edge.

Astra blinked once again. Then the pommel of the handle met her temple, and she knew no more.

“Nighty night, Aunt Astra.”

Chapter End Notes

WOO! I finished this chapter! This is perhaps the chapter I looked forward to the most in this arc. The final battle between Kara and Astra, because we didn’t get one in the show.

If Astra is acting OOC to you, that’s because she’s supposed to be. Remember, she’s been put in the absolute ringer for the last few weeks, and her entire world has been pretty much shattered by her beloved niece. She’s not in the right frame of mind.

As for the fight, you’ll notice that Kara and Astra didn’t use their powers a lot. There’s a reason for that – as Astra put it, this is a fight about pride. Using their powers would have added nothing to their fight because of that, as it wasn’t just about power, but also skill and willpower. Who could take more, who could dish out more, who was simply better. Powers would’ve just made it into a contest of who could hit harder.

Next chapter, we tie up Kara and Astra’s storyline and start moving into the endgames for the boys. Plus, a surprise.
Arc II, Chapter 33: Pretty Bird

Chapter Summary

A new vigilante is added to the mix. Plus, some family drama.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 33: Pretty Bird

John Lansen lived a simple life.

Get up, go to work, mug a few women for their things on the way home, sleep. A simple life, common in the Glades. People did what they had to survive, you know? People here knew what each other did, and they didn’t begrudge them for it, because in the Glades, it was all about survival. You make the most of what you had, and Lansen didn’t have much. A high school diploma from the worst district in the city didn’t get you anywhere, not unless you were valedictorian, captain of the debate team, drum major, and a whole slew of other titles to go with it. It’s what he told himself every day, as a reminder that this was the only way to get by.

As of right now, however, Lansen was starting to rethink his position.

“Who are you?” He wheezed out, clutching his bruised stomach, as he looked up at his attacker.

It was a woman, that much he could tell, but her visage was concealed by the shadows of the night. The only feature he could make out was her platinum blonde hair, reflecting the moonlight.

She tilted her head.

“I guess you can call me…Black Canary.”

‘Black Canary,’ they called her, whispering it from corner to corner, in fear and awe.

The common folk of the Glades had little to say about Starling City’s other two vigilantes. The Girl in Blue typically made her appearances at mass disasters and an occasional high-level crime; she had very little to do with the Glades otherwise. The Hood, however, was partly revered, partly hated. For those poor downtrodden souls who had their livelihoods abused by the criminal element that dominated Starling City’s wealthy elite, he was a savior, a hero, a beacon. For others, however, particularly career criminals who had long since resigned themselves to their places in life, he was a self-righteous do-gooder that was putting them out of decent work.

Clearly, Black Canary, whoever she was, intended to model her own vigilante career after the latter, though on a smaller scale. While the Hood dealt with the big wigs who made good people resort to criminality, Black Canary dealt with the criminals themselves. She attacked those who did petty crimes: thieves, muggers, rapists, etc. Outlaws that slip through the cracks, thanks to SCPD’s negligence.

In a way, that made her reputation even more extreme than the Hood. “Hero” was the first though in
people’s minds when they heard the name Black Canary. For criminals, however, she was even worse than the Hood. The Hood may have been downsizing the amount of work they could do, but Black Canary usually rendered them unable to do the work at all. Granted, she was more merciful than the Hood – after all, she didn’t leave behind corpses for body bags – but to what extent was debatable.

Regardless, it was clear Black Canary, like the Girl in Blue and the Hood, was here to stay. And with that, Starling City had one more protector to add to the list.

Ted Grant flipped the light on, smirking. Across from him, the (in)famous Black Canary removed her mask.

“Had a good hunt?” He asked, already knowing the answer.

Laurel Lance smiled. “As always. Now, if you need me, I need to wash this dye out of my hair.”

Barry sighed as he opened the door to the West House and blinked. Sitting on the couch, looking through some old photo albums, was Iris.

“Iris!” He called out, pleased. “What are you doing here?”

Iris had become more of a fixture at the West House after Barry had returned and she and Joe patched things up. Joe had even confessed to Barry at one point that Iris had been around more in the last couple of months than she had since she’d graduated high school. While the Allen was sad that things between the West had tattered so badly during his disappearance, he was happy to know that they were on the fast track to reconciliation. Things would never quite be the same, obviously, but it was something, at the very least.

Iris smiled back, though not as heartily. “Barry. How was Starling?”

Barry frowned at the obvious evasion, before smiling again. “Great. Oliver and I spent a lot of quality time together. Unfortunately, Kara and Kal couldn’t join in – something came up.” That something being Astra, whose appearance had him badgering Oliver for an update. Accordingly, Kara had captured her (unsurprisingly – their Kara was nigh unbeatable, even for a fellow Kryptonian) and interned her at A.R.G.U.S.’s Starling City base. A.R.G.U.S. already had cells especially commissioned for Fort Rozz’s lost children in each of their bases, and even more were being built after it was determined that the escapees were holed up somewhere in Coast City. A date was already being set for the final strike to wipe them all out.

“A pity. You didn’t get caught up in that mess from the other night, right?” Iris asked worriedly.

“Nah. I was long gone by the time that happened.” Barry’s smile dimmed. “What’s wrong, Iris?”

Iris laughed unconvincingly, rubbing the back of her head sheepishly. “Whatever do you mean, Bare?”

“Iris, I’m your best friend. I know when you’re evading.” Barry sighed. “What’s wrong?”

Iris’s face fell, and she exhaled deeply. “Eddie asked me to move in with him.”
The speedster raised an eyebrow. “Didn’t you two break up?” He remembered when Iris came to the West Home with the news. Even though she was the one who made the move, it didn’t make her any less heartbroken, and Barry spent the night comforting her, baking brownies and binging on bad sci-fi movies.

“We did. He wants to get back together.” Iris moaned. “What am I supposed to do, Barry?”

“You know you’re asking a guy who literally has a non-existent love life, right? My experience with romance is limited to bad romcoms and soaps on TV.” Barry pointed out, moving to sit down next to his best friend. And my crush on you, is the one thing he didn’t say, purposefully. Iris didn’t need to know, and hopefully, she’d never find out.

“I know, but Barry, I don’t have a lot of close friends. I’d rather not bring this to Mom and Dad or Wally – they’d be too biased to make an accurate judgement on what I should do.”

Barry was tempted to say that he was biased too but thought better of it. While yes, he did get jealous of Eddie and Iris occasionally, it was easy to squash out – he knew that it was very likely Iris would be spoken for when he returned, and he had long since made peace with that. Besides, he was too busy for a relationship right now. “If you say so. Now, tell me: do you love him?”

Iris paused slightly, then gave a sharp nod.

“Do you think you’re ready for that next step?”

The cop stopped a little longer at this one, but nodded again, albeit slower.

“Do you think you can spend the rest of your life with him?”

“Isn’t that the point of moving in with him? To figure that out?”

“Yes, but it doesn’t hurt to see if you feel that way now.” Barry noted. “…Do you think he might be the one?”

Iris sighed, flopping onto their back. “I just don’t know, Barry.”

“Well, I can’t tell you what to do, just that you do what you feel is best.” Barry threw his arms into the air, then flopped back himself.

“But I don’t know what feels best, Barry! I love Eddie, I know that much, but he can just be so frustrating at times! His obsession with the Streak is only getting worse with each passing day they fail to catch him.” Iris groaned. “When he came to me with this, he promised me he wouldn’t let the Streak dominate his life anymore, but I just don’t know if I can trust him.”

“And yet, you’re still considering his offer.” Barry observed.

“He’s my first serious boyfriend, Barry. He made me happier than I had been a long time. I don’t want to let him go, but…”

“Iris.” Said woman looked up, biting her lip. “If there is anything I do know about committed relationships, particularly romantic relationships, it’s that they aren’t obligations. They have obligations, certainly, but entering one should be your choice and your choice alone. Now, if you want to get back with Eddie because you think you should be with him, I will take that key and smelt it for one of my experiments at S.T.A.R. Labs. But if you want to get back with him because you love him, and you want to be with him, then I say go for it.”
Iris gazed at Barry thoughtfully, then gratefully. “Thank you, Barry.”

The speedster smirked. “Anytime. Now that you’re finally done with your angsting, I think a night out on the town would be good for us both. I found a new Mexican restaurant we could try.”

“Lead the way.” Iris gestured to the door. Barry laughed and got up, jogging to the car in the driveway. Iris followed him at a more sedate pace, her previous troubles forgotten, at least for now.

Kara frowned as the guard looked her over. “You know, I’m the one who brought her here.”

Amanda, who was standing off to the side getting her own check over, smiled. “Just a precaution, Miss Danvers. You of all people should know that it never hurts to be too careful, especially in today’s world.”

Kara sighed. She certainly did understand that. “Why is it that she wants to talk to me? I thought we said everything we needed to say to each other that night.”

“Apparently, she wants some clarifications, and refuses to speak or eat otherwise. Now normally, I would just let her do what she wants and die on her own, but something tells me that having a second combat-capable Kryptonian will be handy one day.”

Kara clicked her teeth. “Covering all your bases, Amanda?”

“Your dear cousin won’t be fully grown for quite a long time, my dear, and even then, I doubt you’d ever release him into my service, at least willingly. As I said, it never hurts to be prepared.” The A.R.G.U.S. Director placed her hand on the scanner, then leaned forward so her retina could be analyzed as well. The computer confirmed her identity, and the door locks snapped open, sliding away.

Kara moved to enter, only to pause when she realized Amanda wasn’t following her. She looked back.

“Your Aunt will not be…appreciative of my presence.” Amanda explained. “I’ll review the footage later, don’t worry.”

Kara scoffed. “I wasn’t worried.” She muttered as she entered the prison.

Astra’s cell was located at the end of the hallway, in its own room. When Kara made her entrance, she found it to be much more spacious than she thought it would be. Soft, green light emitted from the walls. In the center was a glass structure, furnished with a single bed and a small table. And sitting on the bed was –

“Astra.”

The Kryptonian General stared at her niece with a blank look. Kara stared back, taking note of her aunt’s visible injuries, covered up in gauze and bandages. Normally, they would’ve healed by now (like Kara’s), but the presence of the Kryptonite emitters suppressed the accelerated healing factor that a yellow sun blessed Kryptonians with. Astra would just have to heal at a human’s pace.

“Kara. I didn’t think you would come.”
“Believe me, I didn’t want to, but as I said before, I’ve been in a merciful mood lately. I figured it wouldn’t hurt to hear you out.” The vigilante shrugged.

Astra narrowed her eyes. “You didn’t give me that courtesy the other night.”

“You were trying to kill people.”

Astra was tempted to remark on the hypocrisy of that statement, or perhaps share with her niece what exactly she thought of the species Kara had been trying to protect but thought better of it. “The other night, you called me a fool, for believing that Myriad could have saved this planet. Saved Krypton. Why?”

Kara searched her aunt’s face for any deception and found none. She sighed. “Your plan would’ve robbed free will from this planet, making its objective pointless.”

Astra jumped to her feet, fists clenched. “No, it wouldn’t have! While I understand why you thought of and labored under this misconception, that was not my goal, Kara!”

“But it’s what you would’ve gotten in the end.” Kara stated firmly. “Don’t be so ignorant, Astra. Tell me, how did you manage to cow all those escapees into following you?”

Astra froze, no words coming to her mouth.

“Those that are imprisoned on Fort Rozz are considered to be the worst of the worst, and their crimes are never light. In order for you, the sister of the judge that imprisoned so many of them, to have somehow enticed them into your service – it isn’t hard to figure out. You promised them power, didn’t you? You promised them the chance to rule this planet. Do you think they would be content letting Myriad run like that? Just letting it divert its near limitless power into only convincing a few billion souls to stop abusing this planet’s resources? No, they would have never been content with that, and you know it.”

Knowing her niece was speaking the truth, Astra shifted her eyes downward.

“The same thing would have happened on Krypton. Perhaps even sooner, with no yellow sun to bestow the populace powers. Someone would get it into their head to use the program for more than just saving the planet and kill you to take control of it. Myriad’s potential for abuse is too great, Astra, and quite honestly, I would’ve rather had our planet die then condemn future generations to such a fate.”

Astra had nothing to say to that, and Kara, content that she had said her piece, turned to leave.

“What happened to you, Kara?”

Kara stopped walking, her back still facing her aunt.

Astra fell her eyes starting to brim with tears, but here and now, she didn’t care. “Everything I did, I did for that little girl on Krypton. So vibrant, so full of life, so innocent. Who gazed upon me with love and adoration, who spent hours and hours telling me about how she was going to care for her baby cousin, teach him all the best hiding places, how to walk, run, draw – everything she could think of. That little girl who still had her whole life ahead of her and was going to have it cut short by circumstances out of her control.”

Kara continued to be still, refusing to show even the slightest reaction.

“And for years, I thought that was the case, and then I saw you, and I hoped, ever so fleetingly, that
we could regain what we’d lost. I would’ve given you the world, Kara. And as I see you now, and I wonder if it would’ve been better if you had died with the rest of our people.”

Kara clenched her fist, gritting her teeth. Astra failed to notice, so absorbed in her grief. She went to the glass that separated her from her once-dear one, placing her hand against the cool pane.

“What did this planet do to you, Kara?”

“THIS PLANET DID NOTHING TO ME!” Kara whirled around and screamed, stomping to the glass cell. “YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?! I WENT TO HELL! AND EVERYTHING I DID THERE, I DID SO I COULD SURVIVE! SO KAL-EL COULD SURVIVE!”

Astra, stunned, could do nothing but watch as her niece raged.

“That innocent little girl you mourn for? She did die on Krypton. I won’t deny that I’ve done things I’m not proud of. That there’s probably some place in hell reserved especially for me. But I don’t regret any of it, because I did what I had to do. Nothing more, nothing less.” Kara seethed out, slamming her fists against the glass.

“So, it was necessary to kill my men? To kill Non, your uncle? You are a kin-slayer, Kara!” Astra shouted back, breaking out her stupor.

“Yes, to stop you from subjugating this planet. Those men were criminals that had committed high-order crimes anyway – I read their files as I was crossing them off the list. And Non? Non was never kin, Astra, you and I both know that. Even as a child, I could sense the darkness in him. He hated me, hated my family, and he would’ve threatened everyone I cared about had he lived. I don’t regret his death in the least.”

“Yet you still condemn me for killing these humans?” Astra demanded.

Kara let out a hollow laugh. “Of course I do. As I told you, I’ve done things that I’m not proud of. But if there is any comfort to be found in them, it is that I never deliberately tried to kill innocents. That every kill I’ve made was either in defense of myself and Kal-El and the makeshift family we’ve made for ourselves, or to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Not for revenge or wanton destruction, like you did that night.”

“They are not innocent.” Astra hissed angrily.

“They are.” Kara shot back. “I can see it in your eyes. You blame them, don’t you? You blame all of them for how I turned out. I won’t deny that humans have done me wrong, Astra, but it was humans who saved me, cared for me, loved me. Me and Kal-El.”

Astra pursed her lips as Kara narrowed her eyes.

“Humans didn’t make me this way, Astra. Life made me this way. Whether you accept me as I am or not is irrelevant – it’s just something you’re going to have to live with.”

“And sparing me? What of that? I was a threat to this new family of yours as well. You should’ve killed me that night.”

“Because, while Non may have not been kin, you are.” The vigilante announced, thoroughly shocking her relative. “Make no mistake, I was tempted. But I guess some part of me is still sentimental enough to spare an enemy that once meant so much to me. That some part of me…still loves you.” Kara stated quietly, though Astra still heard, shocking her even more. Kara payed her no
heed and continued. “But I won’t let that blind me from your crimes, from what you were trying to do.”

With that, Kara turned and walked away.

“Better get comfortable, dear aunt. You won’t be leaving here for a very, very long time.”

Black Canary stealthily jumped from rooftop to rooftop, keeping track of the fleeing perp in front of her. Just another night of vigilantism.

At least until an arrow pierced her quarry’s shoulder, leaving him writhing on the ground in pain.

Black Canary stopped her pursuit, slightly stunned, and watched as the Hood appeared from behind an installation on another rooftop on a taller building across from her position. He shot another arrow, this time a zipline, and used his bow as a makeshift pulley, using gravity to slide his way down to her. Upon arrival, he idly kicked the head of the thug, knocking him out, and looked at Black Canary expectantly.

“...So, I guess you’re here to tell me to stop infringing on your territory?” Black Canary asked drily, her nonchalant look hiding her nervousness. Black Canary was skilled, but the Hood was on a completely different level.

“Depends. What are your intentions for doing this?”

Black Canary sighed. “I want to help the people here. I know I can’t do as much as you can as I currently am, no matter how badly I want to – but at the very least, I want to make it so the people here can sleep a little easier.” She tilted her head, smiling lightly. “The Girl in Blue can’t be everywhere, you know.”

The Hood said nothing, but she could see his eyes narrowing slightly. “And what makes think you need to be outside the law to do that?”

“You did.” She admitted, surprising him. “I don’t condone the lengths you’re willing to go, that much I admit, but I understand the necessity of going outside the law to clean this city up. For a long time, I held the law sacred, but the more I try to use it to help these people, the more it becomes obvious how ineffective it is against those who don’t hold it as sacred as I did.”

The Hood stared at her for a long time, searching her face, before giving a short, approving nod.

“Very well, then.” He turned to leave.

Black Canary blinked. “You aren’t going to stop me?”

“As long as you don’t punch out of your weight class, I see no reason to stop you.” The Hood called back, turning slightly. “And besides, I think nothing short of jail would be able to stop you, and something tells me that’s the last place you belong...pretty bird.” With that, he jumped down. Black Canary ran to his previous spot, looking down, and found no sign of him.

Despite the anxiety coursing through her, she could stop the smile spreading across her face.

Chapter End Notes
If you haven’t figured it out, the ‘surprise’ was Laurel’s debut as Black Canary in this story. As for identities: Oliver does not know Laurel is Black Canary. He could’ve easily found out, obviously, but he had a gut feeling it was better to let this one go for now.

Kara and Astra’s storyline is tied up…for now. We will revisit their relationship in a later arc, that much I will say.

Next chapter, we start the climax of Barry’s storyline, and boy, it is a doozy. The arc will finish with the climax of Oliver’s storyline, which won’t be for quite a few chapters.
Chapter Summary

Barry's located 'Harrison Wells'. Unfortunately, things don't quite to plan this time (but it all works out in the end).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 34: The Place Where You and I Collide

Eddie Thawne slapped the door on his cruiser closed, frowning. On the other side of the car, his partner his Joe West mirrored his actions, moving forward to observe the scene before them: An armored car was resting on the side of the road, badly damaged but still intact. Beside it was a gaggle of thieves, tied up together and struggling through their bonds futilely.

“The Streak.” Eddie growled. Other police cars were beginning to arrive, fellow cops getting out of their cars to section off the crime scene. Joe ignored his partner and trudged towards the thieves, handcuffs twirling on one of his fingers.

The senior detective shook his head as he moved to cuff one of them. “Sorry boys, but I guess it’s just not your day.”

From beneath his mask, Leonard Snart nearly snarled at that.

“Nothing?” Cisco called out as Barry sped into the Cortex.

“Nothing.” Barry confirmed, sighing. “Wherever he is, it’s not within the city limits. Search for any anomalies within a fifty-mile radius of Central City – he may not be here, but he wouldn’t dare go too far out.”

“What makes you say that?” Caitlin asked, looking up from her own computer.

“Whatever he’s after, he needs me for it. Everything he’s ever done, since the Particle Accelerator and even before that, has had something to do with me.” Barry explained as he removed he gloves. “He’ll push me, attack me, but he won’t risk me, that much I’m certain about. And not risking me means not risking being too far away from me if I get way over my head.”

“Well, if you do, we’ll be there to bail you out.” A voice called out.

Ronnie Raymond and Martin Stein entered the Cortex, wide smiles on their faces. Caitlin’s face immediately brightened, and she went to greet her fiancé, sharing a chaste kiss with him. Cisco and Barry went to the professor and clasped hands with him and did the same with Ronnie after he and Caitlin separated.

Barry smirked. “I’m glad you could make it.”

Ronnie grinned. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Then, his expression suddenly dimmed. “Granted,
I never expected it would be for something like this.” Caitlin grabbed his arm in a comforting manner, looking at him understandingly, as did Cisco.

Professor Stein gave a solemn nod. “Indeed. It was quite a shock when Dr. Snow told us everything. To think, one of the most brilliant minds in the world had been impersonated by a time traveler all these years – it would be astonishing, had he not turned out to be such a despicable individual.”

“Yeah, well, it’s just one of those curveballs that life throws at you.” Barry shrugged, then clapped his hands. “In any case, we’re all here, so let’s get started.”

Caitlin blinked, letting go of Ronnie’s arm. “Um, Barry? I thought we were going to wait for the Girl in Blue as well?”

“Wait, you know the Girl in Blue?” Ronnie asked, shocked.

Barry ignored him and gave one of those smiles. “Don’t worry, Caitlin, she’s already here. As is another friend of mine.”

“Yeah, Caitlin, didn’t you notice me?” The Girl in Blue asked from beside the bioengineer, hand on her hip. Everyone in the room besides Barry jumped at the sound of her voice, Ronnie and Stein’s jaws dropping at the sight of the mysterious woman that had been making headlines for the last couple of months.

“Ah, new friends.” The vigilante removed her hood and veil, revealing her face. She held out her hand to Ronnie. “Kara Danvers.” Ronnie dumbly shook it, as did Stein, both still quite stunned.

“Don’t taunt them, Kara.” A much-beleaguered voice stated from the other side of the room. The Central City natives (sans Barry) whirled around, and this time everyone was shocked at who they saw.

The Hood.

He was leaning back against one of the tables, his arms crossed. His piercing gaze was making them all uncomfortable – at least until Barry audibly cleared his throat and gave him a pointed look. The Hood responded with a flat one, which caused Barry to gesture wildly, clearly trying to convey that the former should reveal his identity as well. The archer shook his head, refusing, which caused the speedster to stomp his feet.

Everyone else watched this exchange in disbelief, except for Kara, who palmed her face and gave an exasperated sigh.

Eventually, after a minute or two more of silent arguing, the Hood finally relented, sighing. He moved away from the table, uncrossing his arms and removing his signature disguise, along with the cloth that hid his mouth. Caitlin, Cisco, Ronnie, and Stein all blinked at the familiar face that greeted them.

“Oliver Queen.” Oliver announced, giving a short nod to the group. “I believe you have all heard of me.”

“More than that.” Cisco noted, then frowned. He looked at Barry. “You were on the same island as Oliver Queen?”

“And me!” Kara interjected.

Cisco ignored her. “And you didn’t bother to tell us?” He asked, almost woundedly.
Barry shrugged. “I’m telling you now, aren’t I?”

“Anything yet, Cisco?”

“Still searching.”

“So, you’re from another planet? Astonishing! Please, tell me, what advances have you made in the field of nuclear fission?”

“Sorry, Professor, but there’s a reason why I’m here and not there. And that question is more Barry’s expertise. He’s already familiar with most of Krypton’s tech, and he’s had long talks with the A.I. that came with me.”

“What is he after?”

Oliver’s question immediately stopped all conversation cold. He was staring at a whiteboard, which held a string theory construct, all centered on Harrison Wells – or, to be more accurate, the person impersonating him. He turned back and looked at Barry in particular. “Killing your mother, creating S.T.A.R. Labs, deliberately sabotaging the Particle Accelerator, recruiting you – why go through all that trouble?”

“Well, he’s a time traveler, isn’t he? Why hasn’t he gone back yet?” Kara asked, noting that particular discrepancy. Barry narrowed his eyes, mind already running.

“Perhaps he still has something to do here? Something to keep his future intact?” Ronnie suggested.

Stein shook his head. “If it was something as simple as maintaining a time loop, he would’ve never broken his cover, and instead let history run its course. Any further action he took beyond his initial ones puts that future in jeopardy. No, he’s making deliberate changes to the timeline – but why?”

“Well, he’s a time traveler, isn’t he? Why hasn’t he gone back yet?” Kara asked, noting that particular discrepancy. Barry narrowed his eyes, mind already running.

“Perhaps he still has something to do here? Something to keep his future intact?” Ronnie suggested.

Stein shook his head. “If it was something as simple as maintaining a time loop, he would’ve never broken his cover, and instead let history run its course. Any further action he took beyond his initial ones puts that future in jeopardy. No, he’s making deliberate changes to the timeline – but why?”

“Wells is a speedster, isn’t he?” Barry suddenly asked, a theory forming in his mind. “Professor, is it possible to use my super speed to time travel?”

Stein blinked, “Theoretically, yes.” He moved to the whiteboard, flipping it over to reveal the blank white space on the other side, and picked up a marker, making a diagram depicting a road with different ramps. “I’ve dabbled a bit on this subject and theorized that space-time is a free-flowing “highway” that intersects with the physical world. We live in the moments between the on- and off-“ramps,” so to speak. To time travel is to simply find some way to bypass the barrier and get on that highway. Your speed could – theoretically, again – build up enough kinetic energy to blow a hole in the space-time continuum in order to do that.”

Oliver frowned. “Well, if that’s true, why hasn’t Wells done that yet? He’s even faster than Barry, and we have proof that he’s actually done it before.”

“It’s because he can’t.” Barry answered, crossing his arms. “When I fought him for the first time, I wasn’t able to get a decent hit in until his speed “shorted out,” for lack of a better term, which made me theorize that his speed is limited. Assuming that’s true, it doesn’t matter how fast he is – he won’t have enough time to build up the necessary kinetic energy to go back to the future. It’s likely that any attempt he makes to do so anyway will only cause him to deplete his speed faster.”

Caitlin’s eyes widened. “That’s why he needs you. He needs you to go back to the future.”

Barry gave a sharp nod. “Yes. That was his plan all along – everything he’s done ever since my mother’s death was for purpose of getting him back home. The question is…how was he going to
convince me to do it? He has to have known that the moment I found out, there’s no way I would help him get back, no matter what he offered me. Even disregarding personal reasons, I’d rather have my enemies here, imprisoned or dead, rather than in the future where they’re out of my sight and planning God knows what.”

Cisco snapped his fingers, startling everyone except the two assassins. “Found him. There have been reports about flashing red lights in the new metahuman wing that’s being constructed at Iron Heights.”

“Iron Heights…of course! Dad!” Barry groaned.

“He’s planning on using your dad as a hostage to convince you to play along.” Ronnie concluded grimly.

“No.” Barry shook his head. “He expected us to find him.”

“What? What makes you think that?”

Oliver scowled. “This close to achieving his goal, there is no way he would make a mistake like this, exposing his location so easily. He wants us to find him, and most likely, capture him. He still doesn’t know if Barry is fast enough to time travel. Hell, we don’t know that yet. Stationing himself at Iron Heights has a double purpose – not only to show us that he has a ready hostage at hand, but also to motivate Barry to get faster for…” He trailed off, eyes widening in realization.

“…the main reason why Barry is after him is to clear his father’s name. Get him out of Iron Heights, so they can be together again.” Kara’s stated numbly, also coming to the realization as Oliver.

“He wants to remind me of all the time I’ve lost with my dad.” Barry closed his eyes and sighed. “He wants to remind of me that, so I can come to the conclusion that there is a way to regain all that. If I became fast enough to time travel, I can go back in time and stop him from murdering my mother, saving both her and my father.”

Silence descended upon the room as everyone processed that statement. The sheer amount of psychological manipulation from something as simple as hiding out at a prison – truly, whoever the man impersonating Harrison Wells, was bestowed with great genius, but also great cruelty. Cisco, Caitlin, and Ronnie, all of whom had worked with this man, had, in a way, loved this man, were absolutely shaken. They had never truly known him at all, had they?

“So, what’s the plan? Clearly, having him so close to Mr. Allen is something we cannot risk any longer. On the other hand, if we make any overt moves, Wells will take him and hide himself away once more.” Stein said, adopting a thinking pose.

Barry, Kara, and Oliver all exchanged looks.

Later that night, the man known as Harrison Wells lounged in the front seat of one of the many construction cars that dotted around the half-built metahuman wing of Iron Heights. He was currently wearing his super-suit, wondering if he should make another run around for those guards to see. He had no doubt Barry would find him eventually, but a little more assurance (such as getting on the local news) wouldn’t hurt.

“Hey.”

Harrison smiled, and put his feet down. “You’re finally here.” He looked below, and there he was. The Streak. “Took you long enough.”
“Needed to figure out a plan.” The Streak shrugged.

“To make sure I don’t take your father as a hostage, right? Don’t worry, I won’t.”

“Now, why would I believe you?”

“True. Now, are we going to get started? Or does Mr. Queen need more time?” Harrison asked slyly as he jumped down from his position to the ground below, where he and the Streak faced off.

“Oh, you needn’t worry about him.”

Harrison turned, and there she was, floating above. The Girl in Blue.

“Worry about yourself.”

And with that, the chase was on.

“This is unexpected.” Henry commented as he was led – in cuffs – to the armored car.

“It’s just for the next couple of days, prisoner. You’ll be back in your cell soon enough.” The guard commented. As soon as Henry was situated in the back of the vehicle, he closed the door shut, tightening its lock. Then, he walked to the other side of the car, careful to keep out of earshot, and took out a mobile phone, dialing a number and waiting for the telltale ring.

“Target is secure, ma’am.”

“Good. Take him to the designated drop-off point and wait there for further instructions.” Knowing she need not say anything more, Amanda Waller ended the call.

The Streak and the Man in the Yellow Suit raced through the streets, yellow and red lightning crackling around them. Lagging slightly behind was the Girl in Blue, but only so. Keeping an eye on the two speedsters, and noting that they were just far enough, she suddenly banked down another street, perpendicular to the one they were running on. Making a quick few turns, and glad she had familiarized herself with the streets in Central City (secretly, of course). Her gamble proved to be fortuitous, and she flew right in front of the Man in the Yellow Suit, forcing him to turn down another street. The Streak and the Girl in Blue continued this trend, and try as he might, the Man in the Yellow Suit was forced to follow their pace – the downsides of not having an ally to deal with the Kryptonian. With this, they were able to divert his route towards a specific building S.T.A.R. Labs.

Focused as he was on keeping his mother’s murderer on their intended path, the Streak never allowed his senses to be closed off. Thus, he was able to hear the tell-tale whizz of a dart being shot at once. Using his speed to slow his perception, he caught the incoming dart, which had been aimed at his neck, and then another, and another, and another – soon he could see several darts, all coming from different directions, and all aimed at him. As fast as the Streak was now, that many projectiles were too much, even for him. He caught and dodged as many as he could, but two had managed to land, both piercing his back. He quickly removed them, but, by then, it was already too late.

Immediately, he could feel a slight wooziness overcoming him, a sapping of his strength. He tried to access his speed, but other than a few sparks of that familiar lightning, the power was gone, almost as if it were blocked off. *Speed dampener*, he realized.
“Got you.”

The Streak looked up, and there he was: Detective Eddie Thawne, his own Inspector Javert, dressed in S.W.A.T. gear and armed with some of the anti-meta technology that had been donated to the CCPD by S.T.A.R. Labs. The Streak looked around. Surrounding him were several other officers of the Anti-Streak Task Force, each similar dressed and armed liked Eddie. Up in front of him, he could see a prisoner van and several cruisers parked across the street, creating a blockade.

“Put your hands in the air.” Eddie ordered, his gun aimed right in the Streak’s face. The Streak looked up at him for a moment, then, ever so slowly, raised his hands in the air.

The detective moved to cuff him, and that as when the Streak decided to act. Just as Eddie grabbed his forearm, the Streak flipped him over, turning around and using him as a shield. Immediately, the guns, which had tensed at the action, stiffened at the sight of one of their own being used like this. The Streak, knowing he need not saying anything, slowly backed away, towards the blockade, keeping Eddie in front of him as a deterrent to the cops. When he determined he was close enough, he kicked Eddie forward, and jumped behind one of the cars. Knowing he only had a few moments before Eddie managed to get far away enough to avoid friendly fire, the Streak peaked out over the hood of one car and, with one of his throwing knives in his hand, aimed for a thigh of one of the cops. The blade, far more pointed and sharper than what even S.W.A.T. gear was made to hold up against, pierced through cloth, causing the man to drop his gun and collapse in pain.

His teammates were immediately distracted by their partner’s pain, and thus were woefully unprepared for the other knives the Streak threw, each hitting a non-vital area – enough to cause pain, to stun, to even knock unconscious, but not enough to kill. Before they could even catch on to what he was doing, they were all writhing on the ground in pain. The Streak, knowing there was still one more person to deal with, turned around, and found Eddie Thawne once again aiming a gun at him.

“You are not getting out of here.” The older man growled determinedly. The Streak held his hands up once again, trying to convey a non-threatening air, but Eddie didn’t become a detective by falling for the same tricks twice. He immediately shot at his prey, desperate to disable him – temporarily or permanently, whichever.

The Streak, however, despite his speed being dampened, still had reflexes that put professional athletes to shame, and dropped to the ground, evading the bullets. He rolled towards Eddie and swung his legs, knocking the other man off his feet and forcing him to drop his gun. The Streak got up immediately and made a move to run away, speed or no, but the Thawne grabbed his leg, trying to trip him. The speedster caught himself before he could fall, and kicked the other man away, backing away.

Realizing that he couldn’t get away as long as Eddie was conscious, the Streak allowed the other man to get up. They glared at each other for but a moment, and then Eddie stepped forward, swinging a hard fist at the object of his obsession. The Streak dodged it easily, along with the punch after that and the punch after that. Every shot Eddie made failed to connect, with the Streak easily dancing around him. It made the detective angry that his rival could still be so quick without his speed. Eventual, having exhausted himself, Eddie leaned forward, hands on his knees, panting. The Streak, seeing his enemy weakened, kneed Eddie in the chin, forcing him to stand straight, and follow with a blow to the midsection, then two quick crisscrossing punches to the face, soundly knocking the other man down and out.

Just before Eddie lost consciousness, he saw a flash of blue and a familiar ‘S’ above him, and then, darkness.
At soon as he arrived at S.T.A.R. Labs, the Man in the Yellow Suit took a page out of his arch-enemy’s book and shot an impending Firestorm with a bolt of lightning, knocking him out briefly. Unfortunately for him, that was all the Hood needed. The next moment, he was shot full of a speed dampener. The Man in the Yellow Suit stumbled a bit, try to acclimate to the sudden loss of his speed, and barely dodged another arrow aimed his way.

The Hood kept his distance, making shot after shot, all while running around, circling the speedster. While he would love nothing more than to engage in close combat with the man, the speed dampener would only last so long, and the Hood knew better than to be in the line of fire when that happened. Thus, this was the best – keep the Man in the Yellow Suit occupied and distracted as long as possible, until the Streak and the Girl in Blue returned.

Unfortunately, the Man in the Yellow Suit saw through his plan, and was trying to close in on the Hood, to take down at least one of the vigilantes and make enough distance to escape when his speed returned. Effectively stuck in a battle of attrition, the two men continued their stalemate until one of them saw an opening or made a mistake. Inevitable, the Man in the Yellow Suit saw his opening first, catching one of the Hood’s arrows moving forward to engage in close combat with the man.

The Hood immediately blocked his first blow with his bow, and retaliated with one of his own, kicking the inside of the other man’s leg. The Man in the Yellow Suit stumbled back once again, but regained his footing leaning back to dodge the Hood’s follow-up elbow, grabbing it. The two continued to trade blows, catching, dodging, blocking, no one managing to land one good hit. Nonetheless, it was clear who had the advantage. The Man in the Yellow Suit was good, but the Streak and the Girl in Blue were better, and the Hood even better than them. He landed more offensive blows, pushing the older man back, and then he saw it – an opening. Before he could capitalize however, a fist, trailed red lightning, grabbed his neck. The Hood grabbed hold of the arm immediately, trying to pry it off, but even his strength was not enough.

“This history books say you lived to be eighty-six years old, Mr. Queen. I guess the history books are–”

BAM!

The Reverse-Flash jumped back, dusting off the light vestiges off his suit.

“Forgot about me?” Asked the flying Firestorm, his hands blazing. The Man in the Yellow Suit growled, but before he could act, a sharp blow hit the back of his head, and he knew no more.

Barry gazed silently at Cisco and Caitlin, who stared back at him, biting their lips and sweating slightly. In his hand was a very familiar dart.

“Speed dampener, huh?”

Both scientists grinned sheepishly. Barry continued to glare at them.

Until he burst into laughter.

Cisco blinked. “You’re not mad?” he asked carefully.

“Nah.” Barry smiled. “I’m actually impressed you managed to keep that from me. You aren’t the types to hide secrets like that.”

Caitlin smiled in relief. “Thank you –”
“Though I do expect you two to tell me about all the anti-speedster measures for the CCPD now.” Barry continued genially.

Caitlin and Cisco froze and then immediately started spilling out confirmations. Barry smirked.

Still got it.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter continues the climax of Barry’s storyline, and the two chapters after that will be the denouement, before we move to Oliver’s storyline and the end of the arc.

Yeah, Eddie got his ass kicked. He’s not going to be happy when wakes up, and, well. I’m saying this because I have plans for Eddie, which is why he’s getting focus, and he’ll have even more in the next arc, particularly on his relationship with Iris, which will be integral to his development as a character.

And Snart! Snart will appear in the next arc as well in a major capacity. While I won’t make him as unbeatable as the show made Snart Season One, he will definitely be one of Barry’s more difficult foes.
Eddie awoke to find himself in a hospital bed, his vision blurred and his head aching slightly. Sitting next to his bed were Joe and Iris, who were watching him worriedly.

“Hey…” He greeted them tiredly, voice slightly raspy.

Iris smiled at him. “Hey. How are you feeling? From what the doctor told us, you took some pretty hard hits.”

“Nothing I can’t handle…The Streak…?” He looked at Joe, who shook his head.

“By the time we got there he was long gone.” His partner explained.

“Damn…”

Iris gave him a soft pat on the leg. “Look at the bright side. At least we know the dampener works. And we also got a more accurate assessment of his abilities.”

“Whoever he is…he’s been trained extremely well…even without his powers, he completely outclassed me…” Eddie murmured. “When we go after him again…we’re going to need a lot more firepower…”

_Especially if I really did see what I think I saw._
“Yes.” The newly christened Eobard leaned forward, resting his forearm against the glass wall separated them. “I’ve always thought of him as the most boring of my ancestors, and only planned to keep an eye on him to ensure my own existence. So far, he hasn’t proven me wrong.” Eobard lamented.

Barry’s frown deepened. “Why did you try to kill me? Why did you kill my mother?”

“Because I hate you.” Eobard answered frankly. “Not the current you – you, years and years from now. I went back in time to make sure you never became the Flash and haunted me. Future you followed me back, though, and saved you,” Barry’s eyes narrowed at that. “So, I had to settle for the next best thing and hope that it would work. And it did. Except…without you, I had no reason to gain my powers in the first place. I was stuck in this barbaric time with no way back – except you. I tried to destroy you and lost everything. And the only way to reclaim all that I’d lost, was to recreate you, the Flash, my greatest enemy.” Eobard gave a humorless laugh at the irony. He remembered his reaction when he first made that realization, the anger, the sheer hatred that coursed through him. No matter wherever he went, the Flash would always be a part of his life, and that only made him loathe the man all the much more.

“The Flash?” Kara piped up, curiously.

“Yes. His superhero name, one that has endured for countless centuries. Granted, he wasn’t the only one. Imagine my surprise when I saw you return home with Supergirl and the Green Arrow in tow.” Eobard shook his head in amusement. “Quite the shocker.”

“Supergirl?” Oliver blinked.

“Green Arrow?” Barry guffawed, momentarily forgetting the seriousness of the situation.

“What kinds of names are those?” Kara demanded incredulously.

Eobard shrugged. “While history is a little unclear on how Mr. Queen got his name – though, it likely evolved from his choice of weaponry and attire – your name was actually derived from your cousin’s, who had been a long-established hero by the time of your debut. They called him Superman, the greatest superhero in the world.”

Kara raised an eyebrow. “Kal-El?”

“Better known by his human identity, Clark Kent.” Eobard confirmed. “Together, with Batman, aka Bruce Wayne, and Wonder Woman, aka Princess Diana of Themyscira, they were the three pillars of the Justice League, the greatest superhero team of all time. Of course, it seems my meddling has drastically altered history. Diana has yet to leave her island, and Bruce Wayne will never become Batman now that his parents have survived to see him off into adulthood.” He smiled slyly. “In fact, it seems their places in history have been taken by you three.”

“Any other changes you think we should be aware about?” Oliver asked drily.

“Well, there’s the article of course. I imagine you memorized it already, Barry?”

“Duh.”

“Do you recall the byline?”

Barry narrowed his eyes again. “Julie Greer. What about her?”

Eobard smirked once again. “She wasn’t the original author. The original author’s name was Iris
“West-Allen.”

Everyone else immediately stiffened at that. “Don’t worry, it seems the only reason that change happened was because Iris West changed professions. Last I checked, she still survived to see you disappear, and her last name was still ‘West-Allen’.” Eobard further explained, and while it was a relief to know that nothing bad had happened to Iris, Barry was still focused on the name. West-Allen… He didn’t know how to feel about that. All his efforts to keep away from Iris romantically had evidently failed, that much was certain. Perhaps this was the trigger, for this timeline? No, acting this foreknowledge felt like acting on an obligation, and as he told Iris before, relationships weren’t obligations.

“Anything else?” Oliver growled out, breaking Barry out of his thoughts.

Eobard shook his head, his demented smile clear on his face. “No. So let’s cut to the chase, shall we?”

“You want to go back home.” Barry claimed.

“Yes. And you can do that for me. But you won’t, because you hate me.”

“And yet, you have an offer for me. My mother.”

Eobard nodded, smirk widening. “So, what do you say, Barry? It’s not just your mother I’m offering. You go back, you can undo everything – all the suffering you went through, becoming this killer, your father’s incarceration – everything. And all you have to do…is get me home. Quite the deal, don’t you think?”

Barry looked intently at him, taking everything in, perhaps weighing all the pros and the cons.

And then, he gave that cheekily sharp smile that so many had come to loathe.

“No.” He answered cheerfully.

“…What.” Eobard blinked, his growing triumph having stopped cold.

“No. I won’t help you get back home.” Barry enunciated slowly, as if talking to a mentally disabled child.

“Do you have any idea what you’re giving up?” Eobard whispered, his satisfaction gone and replaced with mounting rage. He was glaring hard at Barry, as if he would love nothing more than to strangle the younger (older?) man.

Barry shook his head, that fucking smile still wide on his face. “Oh, I know perfectly well what I’m giving up. And I’m giving up the chance to regain the life that should’ve been mine. But honestly, I don’t mind.”

Eobard looked ready to spit fire. Barry didn’t care.

“Do you remember what I told you, Eobard,” Barry spoke the name spat the name out like it was poison, but he was still smiling, “when I first revealed myself to you? How I knew a fellow killer when I saw one? Well, if there’s anything I’ve learned over the years since I’ve made my first kill, it’s that death is a part of life.”

“Right this second, there is someone, somewhere out there, that is dying. Be it from old age, disease, accident, or violence, someone out there is dying. And there’s nothing I can do to change that,
because we all die in the end. The same applies if I go back and change the past. She’ll still die – eventually, perhaps a little more peacefully – but she’ll still die, and there is nothing I can do to change that. All you’re offering me is a little more time with her.”

Barry placed his palms against the glass, leaning forward. “I won’t deny that a part of me wants that. That wants to change a lot of things. But it means giving up all I have right now, and truth be told…” he turned his head back, to see Oliver and Kara smiling approvingly at him. He smiled back, genuinely, fondly, and then turned back to Eobard with a determined look on his face. “Truth be told, despite everything that happened over those ten years, I’m fine with the way things turned out. So, you can take your offer and shove it where the sun doesn’t shine, because I’m not doing it.”

Eobard scowled heavily, gritting his teeth. “Then don’t expect me to help your father get out of jail, because I’m not saying a damn thing.”

Barry smirked and backed away. “Then don’t expect to get anything to eat for the next couple of days. After that, I’ll get out the toys and we’ll talk again.”

“You’re going to torture me?” The time traveler accused him.

“It’s cute how you assume I’m above torture, Eo.” Barry turned and walked away, joining Oliver and Kara. He placed his palm on the scanner and watched as Eobard’s pod was taken away.

“Okay, now that he’s dealt with, all we have left is Malcolm.” Kara said as they made their way back to the Cortex.

“How has surveillance been going?” Barry asked Oliver, who seemed to be glaring into space.

“Not well. I’ve bugged all the obvious places, but he’s being tight-lipped about whatever his plans are. No doubt he recognizes the danger I pose and is taking all the necessary precautions.”

“And your parents.” When Oliver said nothing, Barry sighed. “Oliver…”

“I know. But…”

Kara put her hand on her hip. “Oliver, I don’t want to do it either. But like it or not, they are a part of this, even if unwillingly. If they knew, I don’t think they would really mind.”

“Only if they knew what we were capable of, which we all agreed we would never reveal to them.” Oliver retorted shrewdly. “Otherwise, they would try to dissuade us any way we can, and if I learned anything about my parents from my parents, they are willing to go extreme lengths to protect Thea and myself from whatever danger we’re in.”

Ring!

The discussion broke as Oliver’s phone began to ring. Sighing, hoping it wasn’t a member of his family, he picked it up.

“Hello?”

“KID! YOU THREE NEED TO GET OUT OF THERE NOW!”

Oliver’s eyes widened. “Slade? Slade, what’s going on?”

“NO TIME TO EXPLAIN! JUST GET OUT–” The call immediately shorted out.
The trio stared at each other, only to stumble slightly as a loud **BOOM!** rocked the building. Once they regained their footing, Barry immediately grabbed Oliver and Kara by their waists and sped them into the Cortex.

There, Cisco was already typing onto the computer, trying to bring up the security feed, everyone else leaning over his shoulders. The screen buzzed and revealed a very startling sight: a mixture of the metahumans they had captured and some strange-looking individuals (who the trio immediately identified as the Fort Rozz escapees that were thought to be holed up in Coast City) causing chaos in the lobby. Off to the side, they could see a blasted opening where S.T.A.R. Labs’ front door used to be.

“Are those the metahumans we caught? How did they get out of whatever place you sent them to?” Caitlin demanded from Barry, her anxiety hiking up.

“That’s what I’d like to know.” Barry seethed.

Kara wrung her hands. “I’d like to know how those Fort Rozz escapees found out where we were.”

“None of that matters right now!” Oliver cut through, already moving to put his hood back on. “We can deal with all that later. First we need to make sure they don’t destroy the building.”

Ronnie and Stein exchanged looks and nodded, slapping their hands together and immediately combining into Firestorm. The three assassins put their disguises back on, becoming their vigilante alter-egos.

“If anyone gets in, you run, and you hide. Got it?” The Streak told Caitlin and Cisco, who nodded nervously. Satisfied, he grabbed the Hood, and all four went off to the Lobby to deal with the current threat.

When they arrived, the lobby was already in shambles. Debris were everywhere, metahumans and aliens alike running amok. Firestorm noticed a familiar face among them, Hartley Rathaway, and immediately blasted him, knocking him unconscious. That caught the attention of everyone else, and the brawl was on. The Kryptonians tried to bum rush the Girl in Blue, looking to avenge the losses of their leaders, while the metahumans aimed for the Streak, who began to run around trying to avoid their blows and take them down.

The Hood, knowing he was outclassed, kept his distance, aiming his arrows wherever he could see a shot. Firestorm kept to a similar strategy, flying about and throwing frequent fireballs whenever it seemed one metahuman or alien was starting to get some progress on taking down one of his two super-powered comrades.

Despite this teamwork, however, things were at a stalemate. Astra had recruited quite the amount of muscle from Fort Rozz for her cause, and the numbers game was on the enemy’s side. It looked as if it would never seem to end. Soon, someone was going to have to do something big to break it.

Caitlin and Cisco watched this all from their places at the Cortex’s computers, silently cheering their friends on. And then…

`Beep!`

The feed cut out, and the computer showed a message: ‘OPENING CELL.’
“What the hell?” Cisco said, already typing, trying to combat whoever managed to hack his systems. His efforts were fruitless, and soon another message appeared. ‘SYSTEM INITIATED.’

“They’ve started up the Particle Accelerator! I can’t shut it down!” He told Caitlin, who frantically tried to access the com system to tell the combatants in the lobby. However, before she could, someone hit her on the back of the head, and she blacked out. Cisco turned to see their assailant, catching sight of the man who had betrayed them all, before he too fell into the realm of sleep.

The Streak zipped around, dodging attacks and offering both lethal and non-lethal blows with his knives in return, but even with him, they were barely making a dent. Too many powers, too much thick skin, all able to resist him. The lack of progress was starting to frustrate him.

Then, his eyes saw red lightning zipping through the mass of bodies, its path leading directly to him. The Reverse-Flash, his outline blurring as always, charged straight at him, and the Streak could barely react before he was taken away from the battlefield. The Hood, the Girl in Blue, and Firestorm all saw it, but they could do nothing to help as the enemy’s numbers began to overwhelm them. Without the Streak, their opponents had gotten the advantage, and they intended to press it much as they could.

Then all action stopped as another explosion rocked the building. Bodies flew inward as another hole was blown into the other side of the lobby. Before anyone could act, one of the Fort Rozz escapees collapsed dead, a bullet in his head. Everyone stared at him, then at his killer: a man dressed in heavy tactical assault gear, wearing an orange and black mask. Beside him were an Asian man dressed in similar gear, as well as an Asian woman with white hair. In front of them, holding her hand outward with one of her gloves off, was a Caucasian woman with light brown hair.

While Firestorm observed these people warily, the Hood and the Girl in Blue immediately felt relief. The cavalry had arrived.

The Streak rolled to his feet as he was dropped unceremoniously on the ground. He blinked as he looked around: The Particle Accelerator.

“You are going to bring me back home, whether you like it or not.” The Reverse-Flash rumbled in front of him.

The Streak glared back. “You’re better off killing me, because I’m not doing it.” He stated firmly, preparing himself. He reached back and grabbed another one of his knives from one of the hidden compartments in his suit.

“Very well then.” The Reverse-Flash crouched slightly, readying himself. “That can be arranged.”

With that, the two speedsters charged at each other. The Streak knew that his previous strategy could not work in an enclosed space like this, so he had tried to modify it by getting in close and using his speed to keep out of range whenever he could and block the rest. Unfortunately, it wasn’t working as well – without the advantage of distance, the Reverse-Flash had him boxed in from the get-go, slowly wearing down his defenses.

“I’m not going to kill you immediately, of course.” WHAM! The Streak flinched at the hard blow that met his forearm. “I’ll just beat you down and restrain you.” He flinched again when another fist managed to break through, hitting his midsection. “Then I’ll bring each and every one of them in front of you, expose you, if they don’t know, and then kill them, and make you watch.” The Streak
collapsed to his knees, only to be kicked in the face. Already somewhat exhausted from fighting the mass of people out in the lobby, he breathed in deeply, trying to catch his breath, only to start choking as the Reverse-Flash and started to squeeze.

Unfortunately for him, however, he gave the Streak the opening he needed, and was forced to let go as a knife slashed at his side, leaving a deep cut. The Reverse-Flash gave a roar of pain, as the Streak once more fell to his side, massage his abused throat.

“Barry!” The Streak looked to the mouth of the Particle Accelerator’s entrance, where the recently-awakened Cisco and Caitlin were standing rubbing their heads. “The Accelerator has been activated, you need to get out there now!”

The Streak moved to get up, but found himself kicked to the side again.

The Reverse-Flash, despite the immense amount of pain he was in, smiled hungrily. “How about I start with them?”

He sped forward. The scientists shrieked, and in a wave of panic, Cisco got in front of Caitlin and held out his hands. A blast of blue energy came out, hitting the Reverse-Flash right in the chest. The Streak watched in shock as the other speedster flew towards him, landing ungracefully right in front of him. Immediately, everyone fell silent, staring at Cisco (or in Cisco’s case, staring at his hands) in shock. Only the whirr of the Particle Accelerator could be heard.

“What…what was that?” Caitlin asked in astonishment.

“I…don’t know.” Cisco whispered.

“Vibe.” The Reverse-Flash gritted out, grasping his chest in slight pain. The Streak said nothing, just watching his friend for but a moment. Then he took advantage in his opponent’s momentarily lapse in concentration. Tumbling forward, he pulled the other speedster forward, and twisting him until he was fully restrained in an arm-bar. The man yelped in pain, trying to break the hold, but it was already too late. The Streak pulled, adding just enough force until…snap!

“BASTARD!” The Reverse-Flash screamed, his blurring long gone and his writhed around on the ground, holding onto his arm in agony.

The Streak got up and moved to take the Reverse-Flash back until he saw it: the particle. However, before it could reach him, it hit something, tearing open some sort of portal in front of him. Whatever it was, there was a gravitational pull to it, trying to drag him into it. The Streak, immediately held onto the ledge of the bridge, clasping it as tight as he could. Caitlin and Cisco did the same, holding onto the edges of the entrance.

“FLASH!”

The Reverse-Flash, however, could not, with one working arm. He tried to hold onto the ledge as he felt himself flying towards the mysterious portal, but his hold broke easily. He went into the portal, and with that, it closed.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that’s done! Next two chapters are the denouement, then we finally start with the
climax of Oliver’s storyline and the end of the arc.

As for Thawne, we’ll see him again. Though it won’t be until the second half of the story, so not for a long, long time.
Chapter Summary

All's well that ends well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 36: Something of a Happy Ending

Watching the rest of Task Force X helping other A.R.G.U.S. agents take the remaining fugitives into custody, Oliver, Barry, and Kara gave Amanda and Slade flat looks.

“How did they escape?” Barry asked quietly, deathly serious for once.

“We don’t know.” Slade responded tiredly. “Somebody hacked the prison’s systems and released them. Why they came back here is still unclear, however – we’re starting interrogations when we get back.”

“And as for the Fort Rozz escapees, according to our team in Coast City, someone transmitted a feed of Miss Danvers flying here. I assume they came here for revenge as well, but…” Amanda bit her lip, thinking silently. She needn’t say anything, they could all tell that didn’t sound right. Metas and aliens working together? When they didn’t even know their respective vigilantes were in cahoots until recently? The entire situation was off, and experience had taught them all not to take anything at face value.

“And Astra?” Kara asked, her hands opening and closing.

Amanda perked up, but only just. “Still in captivity. We were actually in the process of transferring her to another cell – this one using red sunlight lamps instead of Kryptonite emitters to suppress her abilities – when the breakout happened. As bad as all those metahumans being released are, Astra on the loose would’ve been even worse, so we completed the transfer and then went after the metas. Unfortunately, by the time we were done they were already on the way here.”

Barry rubbed his chin in a thoughtful manner. “This is all too coincidental. The metas, the aliens, Thawne, the Particle Accelerator, that damn portal – someone orchestrated all of this to happen.”

“But who?” Oliver postulated, dread creeping on him. “It couldn’t have been Thawne – he had no access to technology in his cell, and even if he did, he still needed you to get him back home. He was obviously expecting you to accept his deal. There’s no way he would’ve arranged this beforehand, it risks setting his timetable back by several months, it risks you, and he was already prepared for the endgame, whether you accepted or not.”

“There’s another player in this game.” Barry sighed. “It’s not just my timeline that was screwed up, remember? Kara’s timeline was screwed up too, and her divergence point was long before mine. There’s another person involved in all this, messing with us, playing us. Someone who wanted Thawne out of the picture but didn’t want me to win.”

“Are we even sure he’s dead, though? That portal could’ve led anywhere.” Slade pointed out.
“It is possible he survived.” Barry conceded. “Wherever he is, though, something tells me it’s somewhere we can’t follow. And whoever this other player is, they were banking on that.”

Kara groaned. “This is just one big mess. Why can’t things ever be simple?”

“That’s life for you.” Barry stated bitterly, startling everyone. With dawning realization on their faces, Oliver, Kara, and Slade all made to comfort him.

But Barry wouldn’t have it. “Don’t.” He pleaded, sighing. “I’ll figure it out eventually.”

Cisco pushed his hand outwards once more, trying to reach deep within himself, and then –

The mannequin fell backwards, singed from the mysterious blue energy that emitted from his hand.

“Yes!” The mechanical engineer pumped his fist, elated.

Off to the side, Ronnie, Caitlin, and Stein watched in slight awe.

“Well, I’ll be.” Ronnie muttered to his fiancée, who gave a small chuckle of her own.

“I wonder what else I can do?” Cisco asked them, holding up his hands in glee.

“Well, with Thawne I guess we’ve got a lot of time to figure that out, don’t we?” Caitlin smiled at her best friend.

“You think I can become a superhero?” Cisco suggested to her, causing her smile to falter.

Caitlin shook her head. “Cisco, I don’t think that’s a great idea.” she told him gently. “You could get hurt.”

“Well, Barry goes out there all the time and he does just fine.” Cisco argued back.

“Barry’s trained, Cisco.”

Cisco shrugged. “So? Why can’t I be trained too?”

“Don’t bother trying to reason with him, Caitlin.” Barry told the bioengineer as he entered the Cortex. “He’ll just go behind your back anyway. And with that being said,” he clasped a firm hand on Cisco’s shoulder, “I’ll train him.”

“You will?” Both scientists chorused, one in relief and one in dread.

“I will. It won’t be easy, though.” He warned his friend.

“Something tells me it’ll be worth it!” Cisco grinned.

“Trust me, by the time I’m done, you’re not going to feel like that at all.” Barry noted, smiling, slightly sadistically. “It’s not just your powers, after all, that will be going through the ringer.”

Everyone paused at that, and then Cisco suddenly paled.

“Can I retract my previous statements?” He squeaked.

“No.” Barry notified cheerfully as Caitlin smiled smugly.
“Francisco Ramon, Ronald Raymond, and Martin Stein.” Amanda muttered under her breath on her way back to the base. Her smile was knife sharp.

Better keep an eye on them. Something tells me they’ll be good additions to the team one day.

The moment he got home, Barry found himself with an armful of Iris. He blinked, his mind briefly going back to Eobard’s words, before he mentally shook them away. He could ruminate on that later.

“Hey. What’s wrong?” He asked, feeling his best friend’s trembling.

“We heard about the attack on S.T.A.R. Labs.” Barry looked up to see Joe standing up from where he was sitting on the couch. “Singh was about to send in a team to investigate until the army – again – appeared and told them it was no longer under our jurisdiction.” Joe looked pointedly at his foster son. “What happened there, Barry? You’ve been incommunicado for hours, and we’ve been worrying ourselves sick.”

Iris let go of her best friend to also look at him sternly, though the undercurrent of worry in her eyes diminished the effect. Barry sighed.

“I’m sorry. What happened at the lab, I can’t say. It’s been classified, and I’ve been given a gag order. What I can say, however, is that Dr. Wells is dead.”

“…What?” Joe gasped. “And you’re absolutely positive you can’t say anything else?”

“Not a peep. I want to, trust me, there’s something you really need to know, but I can’t.” Barry exhaled in frustration.

Iris pursed her lips. “Let’s forget about all that for now, there’s nothing we can do about it. How about you? You didn’t get hurt, did you?”

“I’m here, aren’t I?” Barry stated drily, only to wince slightly when Iris glared at him.

“Don’t sass me, mister.”

“Fine, fine. Don’t worry – I stayed out of the line of fire. Nothing more than a few scratches.”

“Good. And now, you can join us when we visit Eddie in the hospital later today.”

Barry blinked, mask already settling in. “Eddie? What happened to him?”

“The Streak.” Iris confessed, Barry let his eyes widen, imitating shock. “Eddie managed to get the drop on him the other night along with the rest of the task force. They even managed to dampen his speed. Unfortunately, it seems the Streak is far more dangerous than first assumed – he took out most of the team and then knocked out Eddie himself after a brief fight. He got knocked pretty hard, and they’re keeping him in the hospital for observation, just to make sure it isn’t anything major.”

Barry crossed his arms, frowning. “This city has gotten a lot more dangerous lately.”

Joe mirrored his actions, eyes narrowing. “Agreed. And something in my gut is telling me that isn’t going to change anytime soon.”

A few days later, Barry was arriving at S.T.A.R. Labs, looking to continue the cleanup effort, when he saw man standing in front of the building, observing the damage. Upon noticing Barry, he smiled.
“Barry Allen?” He held out his hand, which Barry took warily.

“Yes. And you might be?”

“I’m Greg Turk. An attorney at Weathersbee and Stone. I’m also the manager of Harrison Wells’ estate in lieu of his death.”

“Uh huh.” Barry pulled a small face. “I’m assume you’re here to survey the damage?”

Turk shook his head. “Not exactly. Can I come inside? We need to talk.”

Barry continued to watch him suspiciously as they headed inside the building.

Joe West blinked as he noticed his foster son enter the precinct, face pale. In his hands was a flash drive, gripped so tightly that his knuckles were almost white.

“Barry?”

The speedster placed the drive on his desk, his arm almost trembling. “You need to watch that.”

Joe raised an eyebrow. “Okay. When I get home tonight—”

“No.” Barry stated firmly. “You need to watch that today.”

“Barry. What’s wrong?” Joe asked, concern welling up in him.

“Nothing’s wrong, Joe.” Barry shook his head, and Joe blinked as he began to smile. “On the contrary, for once, everything’s going to be just fine.”

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter, I know. I was tempted to merge this with the next one – which is also supposed to be rather short – but honestly, I didn’t want to. Next chapter, we tie up Barry’s storyline, and move on to Oliver’s.
Welcome home, Henry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 37: Fathers

Henry Allen looked up at the shining sun, a small backpack slung on his back. For the first time in a long time, he wasn’t dressed in a prisoner’s garb, but rather some jeans, a button-up plaid shirt, and a beige jacket. He smiled, greeting all the guards, who all smiled back, genuinely.

Today, Henry was going home.

He watched as the metal gates slid open. Across from him, through the fence, he could see Iris and Barry, attached at the hip as always, arms hooked together. Their grins were wide, and he could see tears welling up in their eyes.

Nothing needed to be said. As the barrier finally opened all the way, Henry found himself wrapped in a strong hug from his son, the one person who had never given up on him, not even for a moment. After Barry (finally) let go, he found himself in another hug, this time from Iris, the woman he had come to see as a daughter.

Henry felt emotion overcoming him. It was real. It was all real.

He was free.

They arrived at the West House, which Henry could already see was decorated quite modestly for a ‘Welcome Home’ party. Barry opened the door, letting all three of them inside, and Henry was introduced to a small group of people that he had only heard of in passing during Barry and Iris’ biweekly visits. Caitlin Snow and Cisco Ramon, Barry’s coworkers; Ronnie Raymond and Martin Stein, the former being Caitlin’s fiancé, both good friends of his son’s; Francine and Wally West, Iris’ mother and brother, respectively; and Eddie Thawne, Iris’ (ex-)boyfriend, who he had seen once before when Iris had brought him to Iron Heights to introduce them. Off towards the back, Henry could even see Joe, who was watching the proceedings awkwardly behind a wall in the dining room. He knew there was a lot to be said there, but the former doctor was content to let things be and wait until they had a moment alone together to talk.

Last but least, however, were the people Henry had been looking forward to meeting the most.

“Dad, Oliver Queen,” Henry shook hands with a tall, muscled young man, who was apparently one of the scions of Starling’s wealthiest families, “Kara Danvers,” hugged a young woman with blonde hair and bright, blue eyes, and “Clark Kent. Or Kal, as we like to call him.” A young boy with an air of good-natured mischievousness smiled up at him, and Henry gladly smiled back.

“The three of you came out here to meet little old me?”
Oliver shrugged. “Once we heard, we couldn’t say no. We all knew how long Barry has been waiting for this day.” Towards the back, Joe winced. He ignored the concerned looks all who noticed gave him, especially those of Barry and Iris.


Kara waved him off. “It was nothing,” she insisted, “we owe him as much as he owes us. God knows we wouldn’t have survived out there without him to patch us up.”

“Oh?” Henry quirked an eyebrow, while Barry’s face beheld an uncharacteristic flush.

“What can we say? He inherited your talent in medicine.” Oliver smiled softly. “You should be proud.”

“I already am.” Henry looked to his son, who was on the verge of tears once again. “Far more than any words can say.”

The party had been underway for hours when Henry and Joe finally confronted each other. They had gone outside to the porch, where the sky was donning hues of orange as the sun began to set. Joe had gone out a little before, sitting on the steps and sipping a beer, trying to escape the festive atmosphere inside. Henry had noticed him go, and after twenty more minutes or so of conversation, had excused himself, claiming he needed some air. He joined Joe on the staircase, a beer in his hand, and the two sat together for a few minutes, before someone finally said something.

“…I’m sorry.” Joe said, sadly. For what, he need not have to say.

Henry quirked the corners of his lips. “I won’t deny that sounds a little satisfying, but truth be told, Joe, I forgave you a long time ago. You were just doing your job, and the evidence you had led you to that conclusion.”

“The wrong conclusion.” Joe stated bitterly.

Henry did not deny that, only sighing. “Don’t blame yourself, Joe. Blame him.” He finished angrily, the thought of Harrison Wells causing him to seethe. “He played all of us, and then he had the gall to try and involve himself in Barry’s life again for more of his games. I hope whatever hell he’s in, he’s rotting for what he did.”

Joe narrowed his eye. “Amen to that.” The two raised their beers, toasting, before taking long, hard drinks. After they were done, Joe exhaled tiredly. “But still…I’m sorry. For Barry.” For not taking care of him as well as I should have.

“Don’t be.” Henry looked down. “I’m just glad someone cared enough to try and raise him right. What happened to him, what landed him on that island – that wasn’t your fault. No matter what you or anyone else says. No one could’ve foreseen that happening, and in the end, he still made it out okay. Better than I could’ve hoped for, in fact.” Thoughts of the Starling City residents currently in the West House, mingling with the other guests, brought smiles to both their faces. Yes, Barry had turned out fine despite the circumstances, and that’s all could they ask for.

“Listen to him to, Joe. He’s talking sense.” Both men turned around to see Barry, leaning against the edge of the front doorway, smirking.

“Shouldn’t you be in there partying?” Joe looked sternly at him, but the fondness in his eyes betrayed his true feelings.
Barry shifted his shoulders. “Needed a little break, thought I’d come out here to see how you two were doing.” He walked to the handrail, folding his arms and allowing them to rest there. “You know, he named me the inheritor of his estate.”

“He did?” Henry blinked as Joe frowned heavily.

Barry nodded. “Everything’s now mine. All his properties, including his house and S.T.A.R. Labs, his belongings, his money – it’s all mine.” He smirked bitterly. “I’d like to say it was out of remorse, but truth be told, it was probably just to spite me one last time.”

“Bastard.” Joe uttered furiously.

“Indeed.” Barry tilted his head. “Don’t worry, though, I think I’ve found a use for it all.”

The two older men looked up at him quizzically, and Barry grinned.

“I think it’s about time S.T.A.R. Labs make a comeback, don’t you think?”

As the party began to wind down, people began to leave. Iris was at the door, Barry beside her, saying their farewells to Eddie.

“You’ll be fine on your own?” Iris asked worriedly.

Eddie smiled genially. “I’ll be fine, Iris. I’m returning to work tomorrow, remember?”

“Yeah, yeah. I just can’t help but worry, you know?”

“I know.” Eddie sighed, and his face took on a look. “We still need to talk, right?”

“Right.” Iris smiled slightly, though her body tensed. Eddie and Barry then followed up with their own farewells, and while polite, were hardly warm.

Henry, who had accidentally, inadvertently eavesdropped as he was helping clean the house, frowned as he watched the scene. More specifically, he frowned at the way Eddie looked at Iris… and at how unconsciously close Iris and Barry were. He was tempted to intervene but thought better of it; it would all work out on its own, it always did.

He just hoped that, regardless of whoever Iris chose, no one would get too hurt.

“So, you’re going?” Barry asked sadly, gazing at his father with unabashed longing.

“I want to stay, Barry, but, after fourteen years in prison, I need to find myself.” Henry stated firmly. “And the memories here…” He closed his eyes and thought of Nora, of how he was forced to watch the light fade from her eyes, powerless. That vision had haunted him for the first few years of his imprisonment, peaking during Barry’s disappearance, and being back in Central City had brought it all back to the forefront.

Barry nodded unhappily. “I understand.” And he did, truly. Those first few days back on Lian Yu had been a trial for his surrogate family, returning to the epicenter of all their suffering. They had endured as they had been trained to, because they had to, but that hadn’t made it any easier. “But, before you go…”

“There’s someone I need you to meet.” Barry pressed his ID against the scanner next to the back entrance, watching the door slide open. He beckoned his father inside, and they made their way to the elevator that led to the Cortex.

“It wasn’t just Oliver, Kara, and Kal that were on the island with me.” Barry explained as the elevator car descended. “There were two others – adults. A woman and a man. The woman was named Shado. She was a med student who landed on the island while searching for her father. She was like an older sister or even a second mother to us.” They exited the elevator, walking down the hallway. Henry didn’t miss how his son spoke of this woman in past tense, nor the combined tone of fondness and sadness that overlaid his voice. It saddened him to know that Barry had suffered such a loss so soon after Nora’s death and his incarceration. Truly, life had not been very kind to them.

Knowing only asking what happened to her would bring his son pain, Henry changed the subject.

“And the man?”

Barry grinned.

They finally made it to the Cortex, and upon entry, Henry blinked. Standing with Oliver, Kara, and Kal was a very muscular man wearing a blank wife beater, a beige coat, and cargo pants. He had tanned skin and graying black hair – Australian it looked like – with what visible skin he had showing faint scarring. But by far his most striking trait was the eyepatch on his face, over his right eye. Henry would’ve tensed at such an imposing figure immediately, had it not been for the kind look on his face.

“Dad, meet Slade Wilson.” Barry introduced the man to him happily. Henry held out his hand slowly, and Slade, undeterred, grabbed it firmly.

“It’s an honor to meet you.” He rumbled warmly.

Malcolm Merlyn glowered slightly. The lack of progress on the Hood’s identity was starting to wear down at him, and he knew it was only a matter of time before him, and therefore, the League, was onto him. He picked up his phone, dialing a familiar number.

“Dr. Markov, how soon can you push up your timetable?”

Outside the building, a single arrow flashed silently.

Chapter End Notes

And with that, we move on to Oliver. Now for the upcoming chapters, they might be delayed until next weekend because I really need to get a move on homework now. Finish a book, write a paper or two – that kind of thing. Don’t worry, though – Arc II will be finished this month, I guarantee it.
Chapter Summary

Malcolm Merlyn is the last of the first. Everyone else figures out how to deal with him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 38: Opportunities

“An earthquake machine.” Oliver slid his finger over the tablet, eyes narrowed. “That does not bode well.”

“What could he possibly want with that?” Kara grumbled, sliding over her own tablet. “An invention like that would only lead to destruction.”

Barry frowned. “Maybe that’s his goal? He did start talking to Robert about how the city ‘needed’ this, and terminology like that is usually used for something unpleasant that needs to be done. Like pulling out a tooth…” He idly commented.

Oliver shook his head. “No maybe – it is his goal. He was Ra’s’ horseman at one point, remember?”

“The privilege of which would allow him access to League secrets.” Kara’s eyes widened. “The ritual of the Demon’s Head, known only to those who wear the Demon’s Ring, their prospective successors, and their horsemen.”

Barry sighed. “He wants to destroy Starling City.”

“Not Starling City. The Glades.” Oliver corrected him. “That’s why he tried to dissuade me from building our business here. He didn’t want us to be stuck in the crossfire.”

“Why the Glades, though?” Barry quirked an eyebrow. “They might be the worst-off part of this city, but all of Starling is infested with corruption on some level. No offense.” He added as an afterthought.

“None taken. It’s true. And as for your question, the answer to that is easy.” Oliver stared outwards, lost in memories. “Aunt Rebecca, Tommy’s mother and Merlyn’s wife, ran a clinic here in the Glades, and it was here that she was killed; a mugger attacked her midday, shooting her in the abdomen. By the time help came, it was already too late – they found her dead, having bled out on the pavement. Merlyn was never the same, and there is no doubt in my mind that it was this event that eventually led to him joining the League.”

“So, revenge?” Kara confirmed, mind reeling.

Oliver nodded. “He’s probably deluded himself into believing its for a higher, greater purpose, but truthfully, it can’t be anything else but revenge.”

Kara pulled a face. “But how are we going to prove it to the League? All we have are recordings confirming his interest in the Markov device. While our logic is sound, they’re going to want
definitive proof.”

The men in the room exchanged looks.

Robert and Moira Queen, having finished a strenuous board meeting together, hailed over their personal car for a much-needed break. They planned to dine at their favorite restaurant in downtown Starling for lunch, relaxing and enjoying this brief reprieve from the cutthroat world of business.

Robert opened the door for his wife, allowing her to step inside first, before following in himself. The windows of the vehicle were tinted so they could hide from the paparazzi and other less-than-desirable figures. Oddly, though, the window to the driver’s side of the vehicle was closed off. Figuring their personal driver wanted them to keep their privacy, they didn’t think much of it. As the car pulled back into the street, the Queens settled into a comfortable silence for the following few minutes.

Unfortunately, however, something was nagging at Moira’s mind, and she couldn’t hold it back any longer.

“He’s getting more unhinged, Robert.” Moira stated softly, almost like a whisper.

“I know. It’s starting to scare me.” Robert replied, just as solemn. “But there’s nothing we can do about it. The Hood’s a ghost, and no one we can hire has a chance of tracking him and figuring out who he is, let alone killing him. And the rest of Tempest is as lost as we are.”

“And the same time, however, the Hood hasn’t been sniffing around any of us, so that’s something at least. Maybe he hasn’t figured it out yet?”

Robert leaned backwards. “I doubt it, Moira. Whoever’s backing the Hood, whoever it is that Malcolm fears so much – something tells me they already know, at the very least, who’s involved. Why they haven’t made any moves yet…it suggests they might have something big planned.”

“Well, whatever it is, we’ll handle it. We’ll make it through.” Moira said with conviction. “We have to, for Oliver and Thea’s sakes.”

“Agreed.” Robert grasped his wife’s hands. He then frowned, as if realizing something. “Shouldn’t we be at the restaurant by now?”

Moira blinked, realizing that he was right. She sat up and rapped her fist lightly on the driver’s window. When it failed to slide down, she rapped again, this time much harder. At the driver’s failure to respond once more, she shared a look with her husband.

The couple immediately started budging the car doors, trying to get them open, but they were locked tight. They tried to slide open the car windows as well, but for some reason the button wasn’t working. Moira looked outside the window, her eyes widening when she saw the sign that clearly said, ‘YOU ARE NOW LEAVING STARLING CITY.’

“Robert…” she whispered in horror.

The car ride continued for another half hour, in which the Queens finally ceased their attempts to escape, realizing it was futile. When the car finally stopped, the thrum of the engine finally going silent, they immediately felt their anxiety levels hike up, and held each other’s hands even tighter than before.
The door finally opened, and Robert was the first one to step out, warily checking out for any threats. A mass of military men surrounded them, guns at the ready. Robert felt himself sweat, only avoiding the voiding of his bowels due to the simple fact that none of the weapons were aimed at him. He silently beckoned his wife to exit, and together they stood, completely on their lonesome in unknown territory.

Through the pervasive stillness, only steps could be heard. The duo turned to watch a slim, African American woman in a blue business suit approach them. She would’ve been attractive, especially to Robert, had it not been that cold, ruthless look in her eye that reminded them so eerily of Malcolm.

“Robert and Moira Queen.” Her devil’s smile pierced their defenses, fear coursing through them. “My name is Amanda Waller. We have much to talk about.”

Amanda clicked a button on the screen, revealing live feeds of Thea, who was currently at Balliol Prep for school, and Oliver, who was at lunch talking with a potential investor for his business. The Queens stiffened at the sight of their children.

“I have snipers trained on them right now.” Amanda told them, idly checking her nails. “You don’t tell me everything you know, they die.”

Robert and Moira gave slow, understanding nods.

“Good. Glad we’ve reached an understanding. Now – tell me, how did you get involved with Malcolm Merlyn’s little plan to destroy the Glades?”

Moira swallowed the small lump in her throat. “Our children.”

Amanda narrowed her eyes. “That much I can surmise. Elaborate.”

“It was my fault.” Robert confessed, closing his eyes guiltily. “When I first opened my steel mill in the Glades, a city councilman tried to extort me, telling me that’s how things worked there. We got into an argument, and I – got a little too handsy and pushed a little too hard. He fell into a cement mixer, and, well.” The businessman sighed. “Malcolm was still my best friend at the time, and he helped me cover it up.”

“And so, you joined in on this plan, this… ‘Tempest,’ out of guilt for what you did?”

Robert shook his head. “Tempest, yes, I joined because of that. But the plan…I never approved of it. And when I told Moira, she convinced me that I needed to act against him.” Moira felt tears well up in her eyes, knowing what that action would cost them. “I had planned to go to China, touch base with contacts there, mount up resources to combat Malcolm, but before I could go, some business came up at Queen Consolidated. I was about to cancel the trip…”

“…except your son saw an opportunity to have the entire boat to himself with no parental supervision.” Amanda finished for him, already knowing how this story ended.

“After the sinking of the Queen’s Gambit and Oliver’s disappearance, Malcolm revealed to us the truth about what happened, and threatened a similar fate for Thea if we did not comply with his plans.” Moira concluded the tale, fisting her hands in her lap. “We’ve been under his heel ever since.”

Amanda nodded slightly, her face showing no emotion. And then, she smirked, causing the hair of the other two people in the room to stand on end.
“How would you like to get out of it?”

“…What?”

“You don’t want the plan to go through, truly? You want to protect your children, protect your family, protect yourselves, right?” Amanda’s teeth were pearl white and razor sharp. “Then let’s make a deal.”

“The recordings have been sent to the League.” Barry announced from behind his laptop, closing it. “We’ll probably get confirmation for to pursue Al Sa-Her’s termination within the next few days.”

Kara, sitting across from him, nodded. Oliver, completing the triangle, said nothing, eyes still trained on the screen showing his parents ironing out their deal with Amanda. Both the Kryptonian and the speedster noticed this and sighed in unison.

“You’re still not blaming yourself, are you?” Kara demanded.

“If I hadn’t gotten on that boat, they wouldn’t have been in that position.” Oliver stated quietly.

Barry leaned back into his chair, frowning. “Then he would’ve done something else to secure your parents’ support, Ollie. What happened to you was just convenient to him.”

“I know, I know.” Oliver exhaled as his parents were finally escorted outside of the conference room. Amanda waited until they were long gone, before leaving the room from a different exit.

A minute later, she appeared in their own room, her smirk still wide.

“Contact Miss McCabe. I think I’ve just devise the perfect opportunity for your team’s debut.”

May

Quentin Lance frowned as he and his partner Lucas Hilton entered the estates of one of Starling’s most prominent business family’s. For whatever reason, they had been called here to watch the upcoming, impromptu press conference that had been called. Looking around, he could see cameramen and news anchors alike, clustering around a safe distance from where a podium had been set up. A hush suddenly fell over the crowd as footsteps were heard, and distantly he could hear people starting to run their cameras.

“Everyone, welcome. My name is Frank Chen…and I have failed this city.”

Chapter End Notes

Three more chapters and then this arc is done. I was struggling to figure out a way to make sure the Queens got off without exposing their involvement in the entire crisis when I was planning this out back in the winter. Then I realized that Chen was still around, and that he hadn’t gotten his comeuppance for what he did to the Queens, so, I found a use for him here. Next, chapter, we get everyone’s reactions to the press conference, and how exactly Frank got into this situation.
Frank Chen dropped his briefcase down onto his home office’s desk chair. He put his hands on his hips and stretched backwards, feeling slight relief throb through him as his bones snapped back into the place. A daily ritual after a long day at the office, and the days had only gotten even longer as the Undertaking approached. Already, he had made several calls, trying to plant the seeds and get all the pieces into place for his part in the reconstruction efforts after the deed was done. So absorbed was he in those thoughts, that he never noticed he was not alone.

A small dart pierced his arm. Frank stumbled slightly, noticing the projectile just before he started to sway. His vision started to darken. As he fell to the floor, he briefly caught sight of forest green boots before unconsciousness took him.

Frank awoke to find himself bound to a chair in what looked to be a conference room. He struggled a bit, only to cease his efforts when Robert and Moira entered his vision, both visibly scowling. What were they doing here?

“Robert, Moira…what’s going on?” He asked, fear creeping up in him.

Robert’s hard expression refused to falter. “You’ll understand in a moment, Frank. Just answer me one question: was it you who told Malcolm?”

Frank froze at that, and Robert looked away, knowing the truth.

“It was you.” The Queen patriarch confirmed. “…Did you know about the bomb?”

Frank froze at that, and Robert looked away, knowing the truth.

“It was you.” The Queen patriarch confirmed. “…Did you know about the bomb?”

The Chinese man closed his eyes in shame. “…I’m the one who planted it.” he stated quietly.

The Queens felt anger flare in them. Moira, finally having had enough, marched over to their now former friend and gave him a hard slap to the cheek. Frank’s head flew to the side, his face slightly pink from the force.

“My son lost ten years of his life because of you.” Moira whispered furiously. “He never got to graduate from high school because of you. He never got to go to college with his friends because of you. He never got to see his sister grow up – all because…of…you.” She felt her nails dig into the palms of her hands, but she didn’t care; the pain couldn’t compare to what her son had went through because of this man. “I will never forgive you for any of this, Frank. Ever.” With that, she walked back to her husband, having said all she needed to say.

“I hope you’re proud of yourself.” Robert threw his two cents in after his wife was done. “And know
that what you’re about to get, is more than you deserve.”

Frank finally looked up, his shame replaced with confusion. Robert and Moira moved themselves to the side of the room and allowed another to enter – a woman.

“Hello, Mr. Chen.” Amanda Waller sat down, allowing her legs to cross. “I have a proposition for you. And before you ask – no, you’re not allowed to refuse.”

“I have been complicit in an Undertaking of the worst sort,” Frank continued, ignoring the flashing lights in his face, “with only one, terrible purpose: to destroy the Glades and kill everyone in it.”

Gasps of horror could be heard from those present. Quentin and Lucas exchanged disbelieving looks, faces pale.

“And you all need to know, that the architect of this atrocity…is Malcolm Merlyn.”

Back in the Queen Mansion, Robert and Moira watched the conference in the living room television, a myriad of feelings pulsing in them. Amanda had already assured them that any evidence of their participation in the Undertaking had been altered or removed, and the rest of Tempest was getting visits from one of her ‘enforcers’ to keep their mouths shut about the Queens. When Malcolm was apprehended, any claims he’d make against them would fall on deaf ears – if push came to shove, they’d reveal how he’d sabotaged the Gambit, and that would turn public opinion in their favor.

As Frank revealed the many people Malcolm had murdered in pursuit of his insane mission, among them including Walter Steele and Josiah Hudson, they felt a massive weight falling off their shoulders. It was satisfying to know that their friends’ deaths would not go unavenged.

“Mom? Dad?” Thea burst into the room, a confused and hurt look on her face. She looked at the TV and pursed her lips. Her parents, feeling her distress, took her into their arms. Internally, however, they felt lighter than they had in a decade. The nightmare was almost over.

All across Starling City, people were watching the conference with wide, disbelieving eyes. To think that someone had plotted such a thing beneath their notices for so long – it was a horrifying thought. And for that someone to be Malcolm Merlyn, a man near idolized by every aspiring entrepreneur in the city, a man who, just a scant few months ago, had been named Starling’s ‘Humanitarian of the Year’…

Samantha Arias crossed her arms, trembling. The press conference on her TV screen had just ended, Frank Chen being led out of his in handcuffs by the police. Malcolm Merlyn… to think she had looked up to that man. That she had allowed him to appear at Ruby’s birthday party. And Kara – did Kara…no. God, Kara had just gotten back from ten years on that island, her and Oliver, to find out that someone they had thought of so highly was such a monster…

Sam picked up her phone, immediately speed dialing Balliol – she needed her daughter in her arms now.

“Dad!” Tommy screamed, rushing past several soon-to-be former employees. “DAD!”

Was it true? Was it true?
Tommy wanted to believe otherwise, but deep down he knew it was very much reality. His father had never been the same after his mother’s death, a walking shell that was there but not very much there. And then, he left, and came back colder than the Artic Sea. Tommy knew his father had changed, perhaps forever.

But this much?

He slammed the door open, marching into the room hurriedly. His father was looking out the window, observing the city below.

“Is it true?” Tommy demanded. When Malcolm failed to answer, Tommy choked back something resembling a sob. Suddenly, as if having an epiphany, he stepped forward. “This is about mom. You blame them, don’t you?”

Malcolm turned around slowly. Tommy watched him as went to his desk and slid open a drawer, taking out an old flip phone. Silently, he flipped it open and clicked a few buttons, then set it down on his desk.

His son was about to ask him what he was doing, until it started.

“Malcolm, I’m in trouble.” His mother’s familiar voice reverberated throughout the room, the chaos throughout the building and the city below, now mere background noise. “I told-I told him to take everything. My money…my ring.”

Tommy felt his heart clench. “Turn it off.” He pleaded his father, but Malcolm refused to budge.

“They shot me. I screamed for help, but no one would come.”

“No one came. She bled out on the pavement while people passed by, did nothing.” Malcolm spoke shakily – angrily. “Your mother built her clinic in the Glades because she wanted to save this city. It can’t be saved.” He declared, righteously. “Because the people there don’t want it to be saved.”

“So you’ll kill them all—”

“THEY DESERVE TO DIE, ALL OF THEM!” The father shouted to the son, furious, determined, certain. “THE WAY SHE DID!”

Tommy shook his head. “This isn’t what she would’ve wanted. If it had been you—”

“Your mother’s dead. The dead can’t ‘want’ anything.” Malcolm responded, panting. “There’s no point in hypotheticals, Tommy. Not here, not now.”

“Dad…” Tommy closed his eyes, pained.

Malcolm’s face softened. He moved from behind his desk, clasping his hand on his son’s shoulder in comfort. “I knew you wouldn’t approve. It’s why I didn’t tell you. I didn’t want to put that burden on your shoulders.”

“But you’re not going to stop, are you?” Tommy noted. “Not even for me.”

“No.” Malcolm shook his head sadly. The moment continued, until–

“MALCOLM MERLYN!” A S.W.A.T. team member cried out. He and his team invaded the room, surrounding the newly-revealed terrorist. “PUT YOUR HANDS UP!”

Tommy immediately complied, not wanting to provoke a potential shootout. Malcolm followed his
lead, slowly walking towards the man who had shouted – and then made a sharp turn, knocking the gun down and grabbing him in a chokehold, quickly snapping his neck. Bedlam erupted, Malcolm immediately jumping towards the side where his hidden vault was, ducking under the flying bullets. Tommy followed the suit, hiding beneath his father’s desk.

Careful not to get shot, Malcolm punched in the vault’s code as fast as he could, allowing revealing the room hidden within his walls. He crawled in, quickly grabbing his scimitar and a shield, allowing it to hang off his arm. Fully armed, he charged back in the fray, blocking gunshot after gunshot as he cut down his assailants. Tommy peaked from under his hiding spot, watching in horror as his father killed. Once the last officer was down, the younger man slowly stood up.

“…Dad?”

Malcolm turned suddenly, sword high. Noticing it was Tommy, he relaxed himself, letting his weapon fall to his side. “This isn’t how I wanted to tell you. Truth be told you, I never wanted to tell you about this.” He gestured to himself, the blood on his suit. Tommy was at a loss for words.

Until he fell back, having been shot in the abdomen.

Malcolm turned around instantly, and immediately cut the shooter down, a man who had been a part of his company’s security until today. Dropping his protection, he rushed to his son’s side. Tommy was bleeding profusely, and while he was trying his best to stem the blood with his hands, the fading look in his eyes made it clear he didn’t have much time left.

“Dad…”

“You’re going to be okay Tommy, you’re going to be okay.” Malcolm ripped off his jacket, placing it on the wound. It was quickly becoming soggy and red, however, and he knew something had to be done before his son joined his wife. And then, his thoughts turned to one, surefire way to prevent that.

*Should I use it? The side effects, though – but he’s not dead yet! It should be fine.* Replaying the last line in his head continuously, he got up and quickly ran into the vault. Going to a safe located towards the back of the room, he punched another number, the door clicking open. Gingerly, he took out the safe’s contents.

In his hand was a vial, with a bubbling, glowing green liquid.

Pandemonium had blanketed over the Glades. Everywhere one could see, there was fire and death, people running, screaming, telling others to flee. Cars swerved on the road, others taking the opportunity to loot the abandoned homes, heedless of their safety, confident they could escape before Armageddon came.

Inside CNRI, lawyers were scurrying about, trying to save as many documents as they could before the building was destroyed. Cars had been prepared in time, ready to take the papers to a safe location.

Laurel Lance was one of those lawyers, shoving file after file into a box. There was no time for organization – who knew when the earthquake would hit? Beside her was Joanna de la Vega and Anastasia, a new hire who probably now regretting her change in workplace, operating diligently. They took every filled box and hurried them to the cars.

A phone rang. It was the fifth time tonight. Knowing who it was, Laurel slid her finger across the screen, accepting the call, and balanced it on her shoulder, against her ear. “Dad.”
“Laurel, please tell me you’re not there.”

“I’m not.”

Over the line, Quentin sighed. “Sweetie, I know you’re lying. Look, things are crazy over here too – we’re trying to organize an evacuation effort but people, obviously, aren’t cooperating. Pike’s given me the okay to go, so I will drive over there and get you right now. Be ready.” With that, the call ended.

Laurel quickly set the phone down, sparing a single thought to her father before she continued her work.

Outside CNRI, people were still panicking. Somehow, someone had managed to hijack a bus, crashing it into another car. Apparently, the mass hysteria was driving people insane, convinced that there was no hope of escape.

A young man collapsed onto the street, having twisted his leg. He tried to get up, only to freeze – one of the wooden poles that connected the powerlines had been severely damaged, its structural integrity compromised. He watched in stunned horror as it began to sway, before it started falling down...towards him.

He closed his eyes, accepting his apparent to death, before he felt himself being picked up and a rush of wind. As he was set down, he opened his eyes to look at his savior.

The Streak.

Gaping, he stared as the vigilante gave him a short nod before speeding away.

Roy Harper watched him go, before closing his mouth and collapsing to his back in relief.

Elsewhere, people watched in amazement as a woman in an orange and brown spandex suit lifted up a bus, allowing the trapped people within to escape. If they watched closely, they could see a faint, glowing blue outline of a gorilla surrounding her.

Slowly, realization dawn on the people of the Glades, hope blossoming within them. Against all odds, help had arrived.

Chapter End Notes

Things are crazy. Next, the climax chapter, followed by the denouement, which ends Arc II.
Chapter Summary

The world will never be the same.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 40: The Sigil of Justice

The Hood entered the penthouse of Merlyn Global silently, observing the leftover carnage. Bullet holes riddled the furniture, bodies strewn everywhere. He circled around, making sure to take everything in. Noticing Tommy’s still body and the faint stench of blood on him, the Hood kneeled down, taking the pulse of his friend. Feeling warmth and the beat of his heart, he felt relief within him – Tommy was still alive.

He stood up once more, noticing the slight protrusion of the wall to the side. Soft light pierced through the razor thin opening. Keeping his steps silent, he walked to the secret door, leaning against it. He heard nothing.

Then, with a flourish, he slid it open, using the opportunity to spin and fire.

Malcolm Merlyn fired back, knocking down the arrow with his own. They exchanged a few more shots, until the older man fled to the roof. The Hood followed, using the door to block another shot. Merlyn used the distraction to place his own mask on. With that, the transformation was complete.


“Have I?” Al Sa-Her shot back, careful to keep the desperation out of his voice. “I assume you have a partner searching for the Markov device right now.”

“Both devices, actually.” The Hood corrected, pleased at how his enemy’s eyes widened. “You’ve lost, Al Sa-Her. The Undertaking will fail, and the League knows of what you’ve tried to do – the entire world does. Even if you manage to kill me here, they will all hunt you down. It’s over.”

Perhaps.” Al Sa-Her snarled, readying his bow. “But if I can have your head, that alone will be enough. Tell me, who are you?”

The Hood paused. Should he? It was eerily tempting, revealing the poetic justice of the entire situation. Revealing to his godfather that he has no one to blame but himself for the ruination of his life and the failure of his plans. But no – as satisfying as that would be, allowing an enemy as cunning as Al Sa-Her his identity, no matter how short they had to live, would only end badly. Besides, if Tommy’s disapproval was not enough to sway him from continuing his plans, he highly doubted that his would do any better.

“It doesn’t matter who I am.” The vigilante said after a long moment of muteness. “Just know that I am one of the many you have wronged.”

Al Sa-Her snorted bitterly. “You won’t even give me that much, will you? Expected of someone
trained by the League. Very well then.” He reached backed into his quiver and notched his bow with an arrow. “Come.”

Knowing words were useless now, the Hood mirrored him, and they fired in unison. Barrages of arrows countered and countered one another, until both quivers were empty. The battle quickly turned to hand-to-hand as the distance between them grew shorter; the Hood flipped Al Sa-Her over, trying to twist the limb into an arm bar. Al Sa-Her quickly locked his hands together, then bridged his body upwards, forcing the Hood to let go. They stood once more and began to strike at one another.

Al Sa-Her’s anger clouded both his vision and his thoughts, and his blows were powerful but sloppy. The Hood dodged them with ease, shifting side-to-side, allowing them to just barely miss, before grabbing another arm. Just like in their previous fight, he straightened the appendage and brought his elbow in a downward arc. Before he could connect, however, Al Sa-Her pulled back, causing the Hood to spin outward in a grim mockery of a dance. It seemed his anger hadn’t dulled his instincts.

A brief stare-off ensued, before they went charging at each other again. The Hood landed a powerful straight kick to Al Sa-Her’s midsection, folding him over, then followed with kicks to the knees, forcing the older man backwards. He then followed up with a spinning flip, landing a powerful strike to the head with his feet. The other assassin fell to the ground, landing on his hands and knees. The Hood reach downwards to pick him up by the scruff of his neck, but the Magician was too quick, and punched the younger man right in the chin with an uppercut.

The Hood staggered back slightly, caught off guard, and Al Sa-Her saw his chance. He picked up one of the arrows laying about the roof, and attacked, aiming the makeshift assault weapon right at the Hood’s face. The Hood sensed him, however, and quickly blocked with both his forearms, struggling to keep the arrow away from his eyes. Another kick to the midsection loosened Al Sa-Her’s hold, and the Hood took advantage, bringing both pairs of limbs down and disarming his opponent of his weapon. Then, with a flourish, he released one of the fletchettes hidden beneath his sleeves, aiming them straight at specific points of Al Sa-Her’s body. They pierced through the armor, and the Magician collapsed, his limbs now useless.

The Hood watched him struggle for a brief moment before taking out a beacon and clicking on it. A few moments later, the Streak appeared in a flash of yellow lightning. Al Sa-Her stopped his writhing to stare at the metahuman at disbelief, only now beginning to realize how truly out of his depth he was, before a gush of wind surrounded him and he found himself back in his business suit, his face exposed. He was now once again Malcolm Merlyn. The Hood and the Streak exchanged looks before nodding, and a moment later, all three of them were gone.

Near CNRI, people began to scream as the ground began to shake. Laurel and Quentin, outside the building to help load the cars, hugged each other tight in anticipation for the pain, and likely death.

However, death did not come. Instead, it seemed the shaking was emanating from a specific spot in the street. People watched in awe as part of the street burst outwards, debris flying everywhere. The Lances opened their eyes and gazed in amazement; the Girl in Blue was floating above them, and in each of her hands were two identical machines.

The mysterious woman in the black and brown spandex suit appeared atop of one the trucks sitting at the side of the road, the glowing blue outline of a falcon surrounding her. People were torn between staring at her and staring at the Girl in Blue, until a streak of lightning changed their minds. They took a moment to marvel at the Streak and the Hood…until they noticed him.

“MONSTER!”
“BASTARD!”

“What did any of us ever do to you?”

The residents of the Glades hurled obscenities at the man that caused them so much misery: Malcolm Merlyn. Merlyn, for his part, had enough composure not to return the favor and run his voice hoarse. Instead, he just settled for glaring at them all. The vigilantes allowed the civilians this chance to unleash all their anger on a deserving target, only allowing their attention to divert when the Markov devices started beeping. The Girl in Blue flew high into the sky above, almost above the clouds, before she threw her cargo upwards. The two collided, creating a massive shockwave, sparking white.

As she descended downwards, near the street, the men, women, and children watched the lightshow in disbelief, effectively silenced. The Hood kept an eye on the Girl in Blue, then turned to see news vans driving into the vicinity – Amanda’s doing, no doubt. Reporters poured out of the vehicles, followed by their camera men. The people, still stunned, did nothing to dissuade them, barely reacting to their presences. The Hood allowed them to set up shop, and once most of them were done, once again pressed one of the buttons hidden beneath the suit, using it to amplify his voice.

“When I first started this crusade,” he began, knowing he had everyone’s attention, “it was to help the people of this city. Those who were disenfranchised by the more fortunate, abused by those who were supposed to help them, protect them. I knew that my methods would not be condoned by many, that I would be criminalized, rightfully or not. Hero, vigilante – I didn’t care about what people called me, as long as they could continue to live their lives peacefully.”

“When I first heard of your plans, Malcolm Merlyn, I realized that I didn’t need to be any of those things to know that what you were doing was wrong, and that someone needed to stop you. I was willing to do what needed to be done, but I knew I couldn’t do it alone.” At that, the Hood gazed at his compatriots, who all move to stand or float close to him, “Thankfully, I was not the only one who thought the same. I was joined by people who thought the same as me. That, regardless of their extraordinary abilities, wanted to help people any way they could.”

“Vixen.” The Hood gestured to the mysterious woman, who allowed the faint images of several animals to surround her, only to fade away in wisps of mists.

“The Flash.” The former Streak held up his hand, vibrating it and allowing trace amounts of lightning to flicker off him.

“Supergirl.” The Girl in Blue gave a small twirl in the sky, releasing a soft gust of wind.

“…And I, Green Arrow, joined together to stop your Undertaking. And now, with our job complete, I have this to say…”

“MALCOLM MERLYN!” He roared. “YOU HAVE FAILED THIS CITY!”

At that, the surrounding crowd lent their voices, a wild and piercing cheer breaking out. Even Quentin couldn’t help but give a small smirk.

“Your punishment will not be to face death from my hand, or from their hands.” The newly christened Green Arrow continued after the noise died down, indicating his fellow vigilantes. “No, your punishment will be to face the justice of the people you tried to wrong, and to expose your misdeeds to the world. Detective Quentin Lance.” He suddenly barked out, and Quentin blinked at being called out. Nonetheless, he stepped forward, in full view of the cameras. Green Arrow marched up to him, holding Merlyn up front, and gave the other man a short nod.
Quentin returned it and took out the spare cuffs he kept in his pocket, thankful for being prepared. “Malcolm Merlyn, you’re under arrest for suspicion of obstruction of justice, murder, and terrorism. You have the right to remain silent…” In front of the entire world and to the full approval of the residents of the Glades, Quentin restrained and arrested his now former friend. The people watched him march off with his new arrestee, some of the camera operators and reporters following them while others stayed behind to keep filming the vigilantes.

“People of Starling City – no, people of the world! We are the Justice League! Heroes, vigilantes, criminals, call us whatever you wish. Just know that we will always be here to protect you from evil, wherever it may fester! As long as those like Malcolm Merlyn exist, those who seek to commit injustice; we will always be there to correct it!” With that, Green Arrow held one of his hands upwards, allowing Supergirl to pick him up and fly him away. The Flash followed them, picking Vixen up and speeding them away from the applauding crowd.

As she watched the Justice League go, Laurel Lance felt a smile grace her face.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is the last chapter of Arc II, in which we deal with the immediate aftermath. As for this, sorry if the speech sounds a little cheesy. I tried my best to make it sound inspirational, but that’s not really my strong suit. As for the names – despite the trio’s disdain for how silly they are, they do help to soften their public images until they can firmly establish their hero cred. It’s like the Joker – a name like that wouldn’t make people fear it by itself. It was his actions that did that.

You’ll notice that Oliver disregarded telling his identity to Malcolm, and for good reason. Barry and Kara’s respective villains already knew who they were, which is why they didn’t bother trying to hide their identities from them – no point. Not to mention, thanks to how dangerous they both were, and the secretiveness of their own plans/identities, they were going nowhere but A.R.G.U.S. lockup. Malcolm, however, doesn’t know Oliver’s identity and has no reason to believe Oliver is Green Arrow anyway, thanks to Oliver creating the Hood identity months in advance, prior to his arrival, and the lack of Robert’s presence on the boat. Plus, he’s a public figure who will be getting a public trial. No reason to give him somewhere to leverage and out it.

As for Oliver’s assumption that Malcolm wouldn’t stop, even for him – the truth of that is ambiguous. Oliver is, naturally, operating under the belief that he is just Malcolm’s godson, and not his biological son like Tommy. While Malcolm won’t hesitate for Tommy, he will hesitate for Oliver. With Tommy, the most he’s guilty of at this point in time is neglect and emotional abuse, and even then, they’ve made strides in the relationship over the years. With Oliver, however, things are different. Malcolm would still be operating under the emotional shock of learning Oliver is his son. Not to mention, out of his two children, Oliver is the one he has wronged the most, far more so than Tommy. Every misfortune (and there is quite a lot of them) that Oliver has suffered ever since that boat sunk is ultimately Malcolm’s fault, as Oliver wouldn’t have washed up Lian Yu if it weren’t for him. Whether Malcolm would’ve stopped for him, however, I left unclear. You’re welcome to make your own conclusions for that.
Chapter Summary

Picking up the pieces, for a different world.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 41: The Aftermath

While Malcolm Merlyn’s act of terror did not come to fruition thanks to the efforts of the newly-dubbed “Justice League,” that did not mean all was well within the Glades. There was still extensive amounts of casualties and property damage from the bedlam that had overcome the area in the wake of Frank Chen’s announcement. People were cleaning up debris, putting out fires, arranging shelters for those who were temporarily homeless. Businesses were surveying the state of their shops and taking inventory. CNRI, in particular, was recalling the many vehicles they had sent outside the neighborhood, so they could put their central office back in order. Many would despair over having to do such tedious work, but considering the alternative, they were just thankful they were alive to do it.

Laurel was one of them. She was grateful that she could rifle through these documents, arranging them, piling others – it was almost relaxing in a way. Normally, her days were spent pouring over evidence, creating arguments, making connections, but after the would-be Undertaking, it felt wonderful taking the time do some mindless secretarial tasks. Anything to keep her mind off what could have been, and what currently is.

“Laurel.” Laurel perked up, lifting her head to see her father in front of her desk. She smiled, getting up and wrapping him in a big hug. After what happened a couple of days ago, having her father close felt hardly tiring. Laurel knew she wouldn’t be feeling that way in a couple of weeks, but for now, she welcomed his protective instincts.

“Hey Dad. What are you doing here?”

Quentin rubbed the back of his head. “We’re policing the area. Making sure no one’s taking advantage of what happened to make off with some cargo or use the confusion for a hit or two. That kind of stuff.” He smiled mirthfully. “Though, it feels a little unnecessary. Crime has gone down.”

Laurel nodded. Crime had gone down. Ever since the Justice League had revealed themselves to the world, the crime rate in major cities had decreased noticeably, especially in Starling and Central. She imagined that learning that Green Arrow, the Flash, and Supergirl were all close allied with each other had to do with that. Those three together would be terrifying enough, but with an unknown like Vixen added to the mix – well, people didn’t like unknowns. They can’t plan for something they don’t know. And no doubt, others, some with unbelievable powers and the desire to do good, would be joining the team soon as well.

And for those few who had gathered up the courage to keep going with their crimes, Black Canary happily dealt with. Her way of helping those who had deeply inspired her, for doing what she could not have done.
“…How’s Tommy?” Quentin asked quietly.

Laurel sighed. “From what Oliver told me, not…well, I guess you could call it, but he’s coping. I think that’s the most we can ask for right now.”

After Tommy Merlyn had been looked over at the hospital and cleared of all suspicion by the police, he had been allowed to go free. Unfortunately, he had nowhere to go – the Merlyn accounts were frozen, their properties cordoned off for investigation. Laurel would have offered her place, but she figured that after seeing her dad arrest his on national television, that wouldn’t be the best idea. Thankfully, the Queens were willing to do what she could not. Malcolm might have not been what they thought him to be, but Tommy was different – Tommy was practically family.

“…Good. That’s good.” Quentin closed his eyes. “After everything, he needs to be close to the people who care most about him.”

Raisa set down the tray of food and shook her head.

Moira exhaled. “He’s still not eating?” She asked knowingly.

“No, Mrs. Queen. Mr. Thomas…” the maid trailed off, not quite knowing how to put things to words.

“It’s alright, Raisa. Thank you for trying. We’ll just have another group meal tonight.” With that, she dismissed her servant kindly. Once Raisa was gone, Moira leaned back into her seat on the couch and sighed.

Tommy had been completely shut within himself ever since he had gotten to the Queen Mansion. Learning of his father’s actions, that he was the son of a monster, would be shocking and horrifying enough – but from what Robert and Moira understood, that was not all he had learned. The authorities had found Tommy unconscious and covered in his own blood in the midst of the bodies of the S.W.A.T. team sent to take in Malcolm Merlyn. More than likely, he had met his father’s enforcer, and watched him kill those men before being injured and knocked out. That was probably when the Hood – or Green Arrow, as he and the public were calling him now – went to apprehend Malcolm himself, seeing as Tommy had no knowledge of the vigilante’s new name when he finally awoke.

They were giving him space, as was only logical, but it could only last so long. Tommy was hurting, and despite what his father had done, to both the city and to her family, she still saw him as one of her own. She always had, especially after Rebecca’s death. Moira could not bear to watch him suffer like this. He only ventured outside of his room for family meals, and those same meals were the only times he ever ate. Other than that – nothing. It was like Tommy Merlyn was gone, and some sort of automaton had taken his place.

She knew she wasn’t the only worried. Raisa loved Tommy as much as she did, and always entered with a tray of food for meal times, even though she knew it would go untouched. Robert would drop by the door, asking Tommy to join him in watching a game or a show (as going out to town right now was currently very inadvisable), only to reluctantly walk away when he didn’t answer. Oliver had done similar things and gotten similar results, as had Thea. She had no doubt Laurel would be visiting herself if it weren’t CNRI’s current state. Plus, with Quentin being the one to arrest Malcolm…the Queens still held the Lances close, it’s just that with Tommy here, it would be best if they kept away for now. She knew Oliver took time to visit Laurel in the Glades while doing his own volunteer service and update her on Tommy’s condition, so at least they weren’t out of the loop.
The door rang. Moira went to open it, smiling lightly when she saw who it was: Kara and Kal. The two didn’t say anything, just going in to hug her, an embrace she gladly returned.

“How are things?” Kara asked once they let go.

Moira diverted her eyes slightly. “Not... good. But not terribly bad either. We'll make through this.”

“Yeah. That’s good to hear.” Kara inhaled deeply. “…You mind if we stay here for the next couple of days? Balliol canceled school for the rest of the week, and, well…”

“Of course, Kara. You're more than welcome to.”

“I still can’t believe it.” Iris said as she, Barry, and Joe watched the television, which was showing a recap of Frank Chen’s press conference. “I mean…”

“I know, Iris.” Joe stared at the screen, his eyes betraying nothing. “We had dinner with that man. Talked with him, laughed with him. To think he was capable of something like this…”

Barry nodded his head in agreement. “Caitlin and Cisco felt the same when they found out about Wells.” He deliberately avoided mentioning himself.

“How are the Queens taking it? And the others from Thanksgiving?”

Barry rubbed his hands. “They’re in shock, mostly. They don’t know how quite to feel, but I think they’ll be fine. The real concern is Tommy. From what Oliver told me, he hasn’t been doing too well. He’s coping, but…” He shrugged.

“I can’t even imagine how he’s feeling right now.” Iris released a deep breath, contemplative. “If either of you had plotted something like this…” Barry nodded along, keep his feelings buried deep.

All three suddenly jumped when they heard a loud noise. They looked over to see Eddie all but slamming the door to Captain Singh’s office closed, an ugly look on his normal handsome face. He stomped towards his own desk and started opening drawers and taking out files, throwing them into a heap. The three exchanged looks. Joe took the initiative, walking to Eddie slowly, trying not to provoke him.

“…Eddie?” He asked his partner. “What’s going on, man?”

Eddie snarled loudly. “Well, for one, I’m no longer in charge of the Anti-Streak Task Force anymore. I’m now in charge of the Anti-Metahuman Task Force. For another, the Streak, or the Flash – whatever stupid name he’s calling himself these days, is now off-limits. A blanket pardon for saving the Glades in Starling.”

Joe blinked, as did Iris and Barry. “O...kay?”

“NO! Not okay, Joe! He’s still a murderer, and God knows what else. He’s dangerous and letting him run around free is a mistake.”

The senior detective held up his hands in a defensive gesture. “I understand how you feel, Eddie, but it’s out of our hands now. You’re just going to have to live with it.” The other man growled angrily at that.
Iris watched the scene worriedly. No one noticed the way Barry’s eyes narrowed slightly at Eddie.

Amanda Waller smirked as she surveyed the screens. Everywhere around the world, people were talking about the Justice League, speculating over their proclaimed motives, their effect on the crime rate – everything. Things had gone exactly to plan, better than even she had hoped.

As for the two who had made this possible, Frank Chen was currently imprisoned within Iron Heights under maximum security. After his trial and conviction, he would then be “killed” and smuggled out of the country alongside his daughter to make new lives under new identities. More than he deserved, that much Amanda agreed with Robert, but it was his payment for helping them with this and exposing Malcolm Merlyn. As for Merlyn himself, he was currently imprisoned in A.R.G.U.S.’s own supermax prison, awaiting his trial. Amanda knew she would have to visit him to dissuade him from trying to take down the Queen, but she figured she’d allow him to stew a bit before making a play.

Her smirk dimmed slightly when someone joined her side: Slade Wilson. Slade had been invaluable as well – he had visited each of Merlyn’s fellow conspirators, and after determining their motives, had either threatened them to keep their silence and be spared from the witch hunt, and or killed them, staging their deaths as suicide, in order to protect the Queens’ involvement. All to protect the blood family of his eldest “son,” of course. That, and…well, it was time she paid up anyway.

She took out a flash drive from within her jacket, holding it up for him to take. “Everything we have on Joe Wilson, aka Kane Wolfman, and Grant Wilson. Happy hunting, Slade.”

Slade took it, snorting derisively. “Go to hell, Amanda.”

---

**ARC II: FAMILY**

**END**

**NEXT: ARC III: CONFLICT**

Chapter End Notes

Arc II is FINALLY over! One long hard slog for this one.

Arc III is going to be more episodic than Arc II, a little more like Arc I. Its focus is developing other characters, particularly Laurel (both as herself and as Black Canary), Iris, Eddie, Tommy, Sam, and Nyssa. Yes, Nyssa will be returning in Arc III, and we’ll delve a bit into her history before the trio came into her life. Don’t worry, the trio will still have major parts, their storylines just won’t dominate like they did in Arc II. They
will have three major villains in Arc IV, all of whom will either appear or be alluded to in Arc III. Arc V, the final arc before the halfway point, is when most of the plot threads will all tie back together. I’ve been deliberately vague about that arc for various reasons, and I hope you’ll be pleasantly surprised by it.

Arc III won’t start until May, most likely. Not only do I have to outline it, chapter by chapter, but I also have school to deal with. Don’t worry, though – I will never abandon this story.

In other news, *Justice League* is now officially the lowest grossing film in the entire DCEU. Which is…sad, but not entirely unexpected. *Wonder Woman* was wonderful (heh) and *Justice League* wasn’t bad so much as average, but, well, you know how things like this go. And for my fellow *One Piece* fans, there is allegedly no break next week! Cheers!
Chapter 42: The Martian

“The Flash made an appearance in Starling City today, helping Green Arrow round up a gang situated in the Glades that planned on selling stolen military-grade firearms on the streets…”

“…Supergirl spotted in Detroit, fighting alongside Vixen against a man who could manipulate fire with his bare hands…”

“…Sightings of the vigilante Black Lightning, who disappeared several years ago, have been reported in the city of Freeland…”

“…Carol Ferris, CEO of Ferris Aircraft, had a press conference today addressing the disappearance of missing test pilot Hal Jordan…”

Malcolm Merlyn glared angrily at the concrete wall across from him. It had been one month since the Undertaking had been foiled at the hands of Green Arrow and his band of merry men. Since then, he had been arrested and detained, before his custody had been transferred to the United States government – and by extension, the vilest woman in existence.

“Malcolm Merlyn. We finally meet.”

Malcolm looked up from his cot, frowning. After Quentin had handcuffed him, he had been quickly chauffeured in to the SCPD’s 1st Precinct, thrown into one of their holding cells like a common criminal. He had attempted to escape, but found that the security of his cell was, suspiciously, of a far higher standard than one would expect. Deeming it too much of a hassle, he had resolved to wait until his inevitable incarceration at Iron Heights to make his vanishing act, hopefully before the League sent someone in to finish the job that Green Arrow started.

Except he hadn’t been incarcerated at Iron Heights. A few days later, men in military uniforms had appeared, re-cuffing him, gagging him, and obscuring his sight with a black, cloth bag, before marching him out of the precinct to be driven to God knows where. Hours later, the bag had finally been taken off, and Malcolm found himself staring at the insides of his new concrete prison, with state-of-the-art security, supported by technology far beyond his expertise.

He had been on his lonesome since then, left to wallow in his misery on his own, until now. The woman before him was African-American, slim and attractive – had it not been for the dark look in her eyes. Malcolm had seen that look before, on his own face, and that of his former master, the Demon’s Head himself. But on this woman, it was unsettling, and he felt a pit form in the bottom of
his stomach. Whoever she was, he could tell that she was one not to be trifled with.

“And take it you are my new warden?”

The woman smiled. It was not kind. “My name is Amanda Waller, and yes, I guess you could say that. This is a courtesy call more than anything else – one last bit of salt in the wound before the good people of this country decide your fate, whatever it may be.”

Malcolm nodded slowly, eyes narrowed. “Let me guess; you’re here to tell me that it was the Queens who really sold me out, correct?”

“Oh, you are a sharp one. How’d you know?”

“Easy. Frank Chen was too much of a coward to go against me, and always has been. He might have felt a little guilt once in a while but as long as he and his daughter were safe, he easily pushed it aside. The Queens were different – they’ve tried to defy me twice out of some convoluted sense of morality before little Thea became the cost of their disloyalty, and even then, they weren’t as tempered as the others. It figures that the moment someone gave them an out that didn’t end in their deaths or those of their children, they’d take it and never look back.”

Amanda smirked. “Well done, Mr. Merlyn, well done. And if you’ve figured out that much, then you’ve figured out why I’m here.”

“You want me to absolve the Queens of any involvement they’ve had with the Undertaking in my testimony.” The archer concluded, frowning. “And why would I do that?”

Amanda shrugged. “Well, for one, we’ve scrubbed any proof of the Queens’ involvement, so, with your reputation already so far down the drain as it is, your claim will be taken with a grain of salt at best, if that. The last ravings of a mad man, if you will. And even they do take it seriously, we have proof that it was you who sabotaged the Queen’s Gambit – and considering Oliver’s good reputation with the city, including the ever-increasing amount of volunteer work he’s been doing in the Glades; well, whose side do you think public opinion is going to fall on? Especially when they connect the dots and realize how exactly Walter Steele got involved and why he was killed?”

Malcolm grit his teeth. Amanda’s smirk deepened.

“You’ve lost, Mr. Merlyn. Accept that, repent for your sins, and maybe you can find some peace in your life before they stab a needle into your arm. And if you don’t, well, there’s this one.” She lifted her phone, showing a picture of Tommy Merlyn. Malcolm clenched his hands.

“And then, there’s this one.” Her finger slid over the screen, revealing a picture of Oliver Queen. The assassin blanched, white-faced.

“You’re a smart man. You can figure it out from there.” And with that, she walked away.

Malcolm had been prepared for failure, unlikely as it had been until Green Arrow had gotten involved. He would be a fool not to plan such a contingency.

But this? This wasn’t failure – this was so much more worse. He had been played, his plan used to springboard his enemy and his band of super-powered lackeys, and he hadn’t seen it coming. He had been so far out of his depth, and worst of it all, there was nothing he could do about it. The Flash and Supergirl were both far out of his league, as was this ‘Vixen’ that had made her debut alongside them. Even if he had known about them, without any knowledge of their weaknesses, all he could have done was stall them. They were all far beyond his reach.
Green Arrow, however, wasn’t, and Malcolm could be content with that. It started with Green Arrow, and it had been the fellow archer that had been his downfall. If he could have his revenge against him, that would be more than enough.

Malcolm didn’t know how. He didn’t know where or when. But revenge would be his, in the end.

“This it?” The Flash asked, surveying the far-off base from a cliff. Beside him, Green Arrow nodded.

“This is it. Eiling’s last base. According to intel, his most secretive and best-guarded as well; it was buried so far deep within his files that the techs are surprised they managed to find it at all. Whatever’s here, he didn’t want anyone to see.”

Supergirl, standing on the other side of the Flash, crossed her arms. “Apparently, the only other person who had knowledge of this place was an Agent Smith. Amanda was not happy to hear that; something tells me that whatever’s down there, we’re not going to like it.”

The Flash stretched his arms. “Well then, let’s take a looksie. Arrow?”

“Is it me or is this getting too easy?” Supergirl noted as her two compatriots restrained the last of the base’s residents: a couple of scientists, who had been looking over an extremely tall, large cylindrical glass tube, attached to a couple of very ominous machines. Whatever the contents, an alarming amount of smoke inside obscured them.

Green Arrow grunted. “Don’t tempt fate, Supergirl.”

“I’m serious, Arrow. Ever since we took down Merlyn a month ago, it’s been smooth sailing; no major plots, no dangerous fights, nothing. Crime is down, perhaps more than it’s ever been.”

“Visible crime, you mean. Crime doesn’t end, it just evolves.”

Supergirl sighed. “Yeah, I guess you’re right on that account.”

“Uh, guys?”

The two vigilantes looked over to their companion. The Flash had been observing the machines, trying to figure out their functions. It seems whatever he found was…startling, judging by the narrowed look on his face.

The speedster tapped the glass. “Whatever’s in here? It’s alive.”

Green Arrow and Supergirl shared a look. “Should we open it?”

“Well, judging by these readings, it looks like it can survive our atmosphere, so there’s that at least…” Flash placed a finger on his chin. “Supergirl? Are you okay with carrying this thing over to A.R.G.U.S.? I think I can disconnect the machines fast enough to make transport viable.”

The Kryptonian shrugged. “I could, but this is supposed to be a stealth mission and Amanda said she wanted most of the base intact. Want that out? We’re going to have to blow the roof off.”

“Okay then, opening it up it is!” Flash announced brightly, already in the process of pushing the necessary sequence of buttons. Green Arrow sighed, palming his face in a well-practiced fashion.

With one last click!, the glass cover snapped open – and spilled out a large, tall humanoid with green
skin and a pointed head.

It was clearly an alien.

Green Arrow delivered a flat look to Supergirl. “You just had to open your mouth, didn’t you?”

“So, you aren’t going to experiment on it?” Green Arrow asked incredulously.

Amanda smiled viciously. “Oh, apparently we already have, and extensively, and the reports are all in my office. My conversation with Agent Smith was quite enlightening.”

The trio of vigilantes were tempted to ask if this “Agent Smith” was dead but thought better of it.

“And what of the alien currently lacking blonde hair?”

Amanda pursed her lips. “His name is J’onn J’onzz – and he’s a Martian. And he is under your care from now on.” The vigilantes blinked.

“…Can he at least shapeshift?”

“You are never allowed to make an idle comment like that again.” Oliver stated pointedly to Kara. They, along with Barry, were now standing in front J’onn’s bed, waiting for the Martian to wake up.

Kara scoffed. “Then Barry will make one, either for kicks or to just spite you Ollie. You know he will.”

“She’s right. I totally would.” Barry admitted shamelessly. Oliver pinched the bridge of his nose.

Oliver Queen. Kara Zor-El. Barry Allen.

“And of course, he’s a telepath.” Barry shook his head. “You aliens have too many broken powers for your own good.”

Kara ignored him. “J’onn, correct?”

Yes. Thank you for releasing me from my prison. I’ve spent the last decade or so stuck in that construct and it was not…fun. I understand I am to be under your care from now on.

“Yes. Don’t worry, we won’t imprison you or run tests on you like they did.” Kara assured him. “Seeing as you can shapeshift, you can blend in with human society easily. We’ll help you acclimate here for now, and in the meanwhile we can find a way to send you home.”

…I have no home.

Barry frowned. “What do you mean? Mars is right around the bend, isn’t it?”

Mars, yes. But Martians are a different matter.

Oliver stepped forward, eyes narrowed. “…You’re the last one, aren’t you? The last Martian.”

Yes. Mars is a dead planet. There is nothing left for me there.

“Well, that explains why we’ve found no life on the planet closest to sustaining it besides ours.” Barry snarked, the humor falling flat in the face of his obvious distress.
“How?” Oliver demanded, dread pooling in the pit of his stomach. Kara would’ve reprimanded them both for being so insensitive, but J’onn’s confession had too close to him, and something told her that whatever had done in the Martians, it hadn’t been overtaxing their natural resources like Krypton.

They feared us, feared our abilities. So, they came, and slaughtered us all.

“Who? Who came?”

J’onn snapped his eyes open, a striking ruby red. They go by many names, but only one has persisted.

They are called…the Dominators.

Chapter End Notes

I'M ALIVE!

So, I promised this in May, but it didn’t come. I have a lot reasons for that – writer’s block is one, but also disinterest. With the exception of Legends, the Arrowverse did not have a good year. Supergirl, while good, got delayed extensively thanks to Kreisburg, and Arrow and Flash both suffered significant dips in quality. Plus, there is a number of fandoms I’ve gotten into lately – Boku no Hero Academia and Yuri On Ice!!!. Not to mention Infinity War, which we all saw and are aching for the sequel next year.

Now, onto the story. Yes, this is J’onn, and yes, I’ve completely changed his backstory to accommodate the Dominators. For storyline purposes, mainly involving character focus.

As you all have noticed, I have been focusing on specific characters and downgrading the roles of other major characters – most prominently, Thea, Cisco, and Caitlin. And honestly, that is not going to change. One of the reasons why Arrow and Flash have varying quality is because they almost always try to include everyone in the central plot and ignore the fact that they have lives outside of whatever the leads are doing. Too many characters to juggle at once. I’m not going to do that; they’ll get more focus if they’re integral to the main plot but otherwise I’m not going to force them in there when they have no right to be there.

Iris, for one, is not going to be the leader of Team Flash, partly because there really isn’t a Team Flash and partly because I have other plans for her. It’s actually ironic that I’m doing this considering my Iris is probably more qualified for that post than canon!Iris is, but oh well. I actually like canon!Iris fine, and her relationship with Barry is sweet, but pigeonholing her into that role because they weren’t willing to do journalism stories with her was not fun.

As for villains, no DeVoe and no Diaz. I know people liked DeVoe, but I didn’t and I’m not going to delude myself into believing I can write a character that smart and do them justice. As for Diaz – meh, I’ve got plenty enough Arrow villains play around with. Needn’t bother with him.

The next update might not be for a while, but consider this a bone for all your waiting.
Oh, and I have TV Tropes page, which is linked at the end of the fic. Edit it at your peril.
Chapter Summary

Life in Central City is never boring.

Sometimes, people really wished it was.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 43: The Central City Underbelly

“Hey.” Eddie smiled and looked up, seeing Iris’ smiling face.

“Hey. You up for dinner tonight?”

“Always, babe. I’m thinking Japanese – what about you?”

Eddie’s smile widened. “Sounds great. Pick you up after our shift is done?”

Iris walked over to him and kissed him on the cheek. “You know where to find me.”

---

Eddie hummed to himself as he turned off the stovetop, taking the frying pan and sliding out the delectable-looking chicken onto his plate. Off to the side, the rice cooker steamed away silently; it wouldn’t be long until his daily grains were done.

The door rang; frowning, Eddie made a silent apology to his cooling food and walked out into the hallway, opening his front door – and froze.

Iris was standing there, an unreadable look on her face. Eddie felt clammed up all of a sudden, feeling sweat on the palms of his hands.

“Iris.”

“Eddie. Can I come in?”

Eddie blinked, having already beginning to move to the side before she could finish her statement. Iris took that as a yes, and walked in, surveying the décor. She had been to Eddie’s apartment a number times, staying over for most of them, but never long enough to really settle in. Even so, she could not deny her familiarity with place, and knowing that, steeled her resolve.

“Iris…”

“I’ve been thinking a lot over these last few weeks. About what you said. And…” Iris trailed off.

“And?” Eddie prompted, heart racing.

Iris sighed. “You’re the first guy I’ve ever really been with, you know? And what we had together – it was good, Eddie. Really good. And I want that back. A lot. But…”
“But?” Eddie felt himself panicking.

“But I don’t want us to make the same mistakes we did before. I know that our work is important; that, sometimes, our relationship will have to take the backburner. At the same time, however, I don’t want it fall so far to the wayside that it might as well not exist at all.”

“It won’t, Iris.” Eddie moved forward, taking her hands in his. “From here on out, it’s us first. Nothing and no one else will ever come between us again; I promise.”

Iris smiled at him, leaning forward for a chaste kiss on the lips. It began to deepen, and probably would’ve evolved into something more had it not been for the tell-tale beeping of the rice cooker separating them. They reluctantly broke apart, Eddie giving out an awkward laugh while Iris giggled.

“Sorry about that – I was making dinner.”

“It’s alright. I need to go anyway. Barry and I are having a movie marathon at Dad’s, and I promised to pick up some snacks.”

Eddie felt the familiar spark of jealousy at the sound of Barry’s name, but buried it deep. He had just gotten Iris back, and there was no need to jeopardize it all for a man who had yet to make a move even after Eddie screwed things up.

“Okay then. I won’t hold you any longer.” Eddie moved away from the door, giving Iris a clear path. Iris moved to leave, only to stop suddenly. She quickly opened her bag, reaching in for the familiar cool metal of the key Eddie had given her so long ago. She had agonized over this key while thinking over her relationship with Eddie, and, after making her choice, had decided what she wanted to do with it.

“Here.” She handed it over to Eddie, who took it, confused.

“You’re not moving in?”

Iris smiled, a little sadly. “Like it or not, Eddie, we did break up, if only for a little while. I think we should wait a bit more before taking that step.”

Eddie stared at her, then gave a short nod. “If you think that’s best, Iris.”

Iris, glad he hadn’t taken it too badly, kissed him one more time, this time on the cheek, and then left. Eddie watched her go, heart significantly lighter than before.

Eddie smiled at the memory. Things had been great between him and Iris ever since, with Eddie taking extra effort to be a better boyfriend to make up for his abysmal behavior prior. Flowers, chocolates, constant texts and talks (but not overbearingly so) – it was like the beginning of their relationship all over again. He had never been happier.

“…Just in! The Flash arrived at Central City Park after strange packages started dropping from the sky. These packages, wrapped as gifts, were each packed with explosives that detonated upon contact. Thanks to the efforts of the vigilante, there were no casualties, however the park itself has suffered significant property damage as a result…”

The detective felt a twinge of anger at hearing the Flash’s name, but calmed himself, expressing his displeasure through a frown rather than making a mess of his desk and pissing off the captain again. Ever since his debut with the Justice League, the speedster, originally an extremely divisive figure in
Central City, had been gaining more popularity with every ‘heroic’ feat he committed, sometimes with the aid of either Supergirl, Green Arrow, or both. Support for the vigilantes had been higher than it had ever been, and the thought of it disgusted Eddie, knowing that the Flash’s many crimes were lost to public memory, replaced with what were clearly PR-driven acts.

Even so, Eddie knew there was nothing he could do about it right now. Like it or not, public approval was on the Flash’s side, and thus, so was the local government. And, though Eddie found it hard to admit, the city needed the Flash. While the new anti-metahuman technology provided by S.T.A.R. Labs was sufficient in detaining metahuman criminals, subduing them was another matter entirely. Said criminals had proven themselves willing to use lethal force, and while their technology might be able to keep up, Central City’s Finest could not themselves. Their bodies were still baseline human, and nothing (short of another outbreak of dark matter, according to Mr. Ramon) would change that. Unless other metahumans joined the police department, things were in the hands of the Flash until technology advanced far enough for them to catch up.

Eddie didn’t like it at all, but he was powerless to change it, and now that he and Iris were finally back in a good place, he didn’t have that same inclination to try anyway. The Flash had come between him and Iris once before, and Eddie was determined to make sure it didn’t happen again. And besides, the Flash was still a criminal at heart, no matter his intentions. There was no doubt in his mind that he’d slip again one day and turn the people against him in the process. And when that day came, Eddie would be waiting, power-dampening cuffs in hand.

Patience was a virtue, after all, and Eddie was nothing if not virtuous.

Iris felt her good mood gradually evaporate as she watched the scene before her. Her partner for this case had made a not insignificant number of paper airplanes with their collective paperwork and was trying to fly them into a makeshift goal of books on the other side of their work room.

Ralph Dibny may be one of the best detectives the CCPD had ever seen, but God, the man could be such a child at times.

“Detective Dibny.”

“Iris!” Ralph twirled away in his spinning office chair to face her, an innocent grin on his face.

“Ready to get to work, partner?”

Iris wasn’t fooled but knew calling him out on his behavior wasn’t going to change anything. The rest of the precinct had already tried, long before she started working here officially, and it had never taken. She had no reason to believe that her words would succeed where theirs didn’t. “Yes. I’ve gotten the latest reports from UC, and they’ve finally got a name for our mystery mastermind.”

“Oh?” Ralph’s steeled, demeanor finally serious. It was times like these that reminded Iris why Dibny got to keep his job despite his many quirks and bouts of unprofessionalism. After all, childish he may be, Dibny wasn’t an idiot, or he wouldn’t have been able solve the many impossible cases that ensured the security of his job for many years, such as the Gimlin and Roqueward cases.

“Yeah.” Iris set down a file, opening it to reveal a grainy photo of a Caucasian woman with long blond hair. “Amunet Black.”

“Lisa, darling, it’s been far too long.” Amunet got off her makeshift throne to greet the brunette-haired woman, giving her kisses on the cheeks. Lisa returned the gesture, smirking.
“Amunet.” A sly voice called out from behind Lisa. Amunet turned her smile to Leonard Snart, who had his own smirk. She held out her hand for a shake, which Leonard complied, before lifting it up for a kiss to her fingertips.

Amunet giggled, amused. “Oh Lenny, a charmer as always.”

“What can I say?” Leonard shrugged, letting go of her hand. “I’m a real hit with the ladies.”

“I’d imagine so.” Amunet nodded at him, then went back to her throne, leaning back into the soft plush couch, chin in her hand. “So, what brings you here?”

“Can’t this be a social visit, Amunet? Aren’t we all friends here?” Lisa asked, sitting down. One of Amunet’s men had pulled up two armchairs for the siblings to sit in, a luxury both had taken for granted without second thought.

“Cute, Lisa, but you and I both know that’s not how things work in our world.”

Leonard nodded. “Indeed. And you’ve done quite well for yourself in the last year, Amunet, despite how…dangerous our world is.”

Amunet shrugged. “I had a little bit of help.” Silently, she held up her hand. Both Snarts were startled to see bits of metal start to coat it, forming a glove.

“So, the rumors are true.” Lisa spoke, stunned. “You’re one of them.”

“Yes.” Amunet gave a vicious grin. “It’s been quite useful, these abilities – though, you understand why I need to keep them under wraps, yes?”

“Yes.” Leonard nodded, eyes narrowed. “Last thing anyone here needs is his attention.”

“Of course. I swear, that one’s been nothing but trouble since he got here.” Amunet scowled. “Business has expanded, certainly, but not nearly as much as it could’ve if not for his…meddling.”

Lisa shrugged. “People are scared. And can you blame them? The Flash is not pussy-whipped like the cops are, and us regular-types are lucky that he usually leaves us to them while he deals with you super-powered folk. That’s the only saving grace, so of course nobody wants to associate with metahuman criminals and have the Flash on their ass. Especially now that we know that he has Supergirl, Green Arrow, and the Vixen chick up in Detroit for backup.”

“Astute observation, Lisa, one that I agree with wholeheartedly. That, however, doesn’t make it any less annoying.”

“Didn’t say it would.”

“And thus, we reach the purpose of this visit.” Leonard announced, trying to get the conversation back on track. “Amunet, I need a favor.”

“Anything for you, darling.” Amunet crossed her legs. “I owe you quite a few favors after all, though do keep it in reason.”

Leonard took a deep breath. “I need you to get me something to help combat the Flash.”

Silence.

Amunet and Lisa both stared hard at him. Leonard ignored them and continued speaking. “Before you start panicking and shouting at me, let me explain: I am not planning on picking a fight with him.
I’m not suicidal. But recent events have showed me that I need a little insurance just in case my luck runs out. Something to keep him away while I make my escape and go to ground again until he forgets about me.”

“This wouldn’t have anything to do with your recent stint in Iron Heights, would it?” Amunet asked, her usual humor gone. Leonard said nothing, which was all the confirmation she and Lisa needed. She sighed. “Alright, fine. I’ve got something – but Lenny, use it as sparingly as possible. If the Flash discovers this or assumes you’re a metahuman, we could all go down with you.”

“Only as much as necessary.” Leonard promised. “And in return, I’ll score you something big for my next job.”

“Alright then, we have a deal.” Amunet held her hand out once more, which both Snarts shook.

Cisco groaned loudly as his back met the mat once again. Barry leaned over his head, smirking.

“Break?” The speedster asked teasingly.

“Break.” Cisco confirmed, relieved. Barry sat down, a little out of breath but otherwise willing and ready to go. Cisco, tired and covered in bruises, was nowhere near as eager. “Do I really need all this training?”

“Yes.” Barry stated bluntly. “If you really want to go out into the field, then I need to be able to know you can handle yourself without your powers or any gadgets you will undoubtedly bring with you. Smarts and energy blasts can only take you so far, Cisco.”

Cisco groaned once more, clearly displeased.

“Complain anymore and I will bring Caitlin in.”

Cisco moaned at that threat, sitting up to pout at his mentor. Barry patted him on the shoulder in a comforting manner. The engineer swatted his hand away and flopped back onto the mat, trying to enjoy his break as much as he could before his hellish training could continue. After a few more minutes of restful silence, Cisco spoke once more.

“So…when are we going to get around to reopening S.T.A.R. Labs?”

Barry sighed. “Not for another year at least, unfortunately. The front of the building to be fixed, but honestly, that’s small potatoes compared to everything else we need to deal with. We have mountains of red tape to go through to get this place undeclared hazardous – and that will take months to get through, possibly longer if my connections can’t work things out. Then there’s our reputation, which is now back in the gutter thanks to dear old Eobard, which will affect not just contracts, but also recruitment. I’m working on something right now, but we can’t use it until the place is ready to operate. So basically, no work for a while.”

“That sucks.” Cisco sighed. “…Cait and I still have jobs here, right?”

“You two will be two of my head scientists and S.T.A.R. Labs’ public faces.” Barry confirmed. “My lack of college credentials will not me endear me to the scientific community right now, especially after a ten year-disappearance. So, until I can build up my reputation as Barry Allen, I’ll just be the mysterious owner of S.T.A.R. Labs and your anonymous benefactor for now.”

Cisco blinked. “Oh yeah, you’re starting college in the fall, right?”
“Yup. Double major and a few minors mixed in, since I managed to test out of my general courses.” Barry held up a peace sign, grinning widely.

Cisco side-eyed. “You sure you can handle that much work while moonlighting as the Flash?”

Barry shrugged. “What’s the point of having superspeed if you aren’t going to use it to make life a little easier? It’s all for the benefit of humanity in the end, Cisco.”

“Sure, Barry. All for the benefit of humanity.” Cisco deadpanned.

BEEEEEP! BEEEEEP!

Any further conversation was broken when the alarm sounded throughout the Cortex. Cisco and Barry shared a look; a second later, a streak of yellow lightning sped out of the Cortex, towards the basement.

“What’s going on?” Barry demanded Caitlin and Ronnie, who were standing in the middle of the room, gobsmacked. Beside him, Cisco walked, also intrigued. The couple pointed towards the center of the room.

Barry followed their gazes. At a glance, it looked as if nothing was there – but Barry knew better than to just assume. He looked a little closer, squinting, and then he saw it: a furl of air, reality wavering like a curtain. He immediately held out his arms, preventing everyone else from getting closer. And then –

A portal, eerily reminiscent of the one that had ripped away Eobard Thawne from the world, appeared. It was blue, oval-shaped, the edges like rolling waves. Everyone froze, staring. Suddenly, something flew from the portal into the basement, landing on the floor with an audible clang! before rolling to a stop.

The portal sucked into itself, before disappearing entirely, as if it had never been there to begin with.

Barry frowned. He walked over to the object, picking it up.

It was a helmet. Shining silver, circular like those used in the army. It’s only other distinguishable feature where the golden wings that flared out on the sides.

He narrowed his eyes. All of his senses were on edge, his instincts on high alert.

It was just a helmet. But Barry knew, down to his bones, that it was dangerous. It was an omen.

And omens never led to anything good.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter! This was one was a doozy, much longer than I thought it was going to be. We’ll be getting back to Starling City next chapter everyone, don’t worry. And Zoom! I love Zoom – he’s by far my favorite major Flash antagonist, though admittedly I have soft spots for the first three in general. Plus, I think it would be interesting to see the changes in his dynamic with Barry, since this Barry is far more similar Zoom than canon!Barry is.
Eddie and Iris are back together, though they will eventually break up, as I’ve stated before. The how and the why, however, I’m still keeping under wraps. As for Ralph, both he and Amunet were plotted to be in the story before Season 4 went downhill, and I can’t remove them without compromising the plot. Amunet will only have major appearances in this arc, however, that much I can tell you. Ralph will be a supporting character, though I am still debating whether or not he will become Elongated Man. If he does, it will be in the second half of the story (after Arc V).

If you think it’s strange that Leonard Snart isn’t trying to pick a fight with Barry like he usually would, think of it like this: Barry doesn’t usually target bank robbers unless they’re metahumans. He still has enough faith in the CCPD to handle normal situations, seeing as Central, while far from perfect, is not a cesspit of corruption like Starling. He only captured Snart because he was passing by, essentially, otherwise he would’ve let the CCPD handle it. Not to mention, this Barry is perfectly willing to kill, and while, to the public’s knowledge, he’s only killed extremely dangerous metas, Snart obviously wouldn’t want to be the one to change Barry’s mind on that front.

A little elaboration on Central’s criminal underground. This is information that didn’t make it into the main story like I initially intended but needs to be explained all the same. Central is not like Starling. In Central, the wealthy elite are less self-serving, the cops more honest, and the politicians aren’t as interested in lining their pockets. The city’s healthier overall, and the criminals recognize that. As such, they aren’t concerned with steady streams of profit like the criminals in Starling; instead, they’re more interested in big scores: bank heists, priceless jewels, stolen technology, etc., and fading away into the night until their next job. The criminals are also significantly smaller in number and work with each more closely than the factions in Starling, who more-or-less war with each other. Thus, the bigger players aren’t as interested in selling each other out unless they’re that desperate, as they all rely on each other. For example, Amunet: prior to the Particle Accelerator Explosion, she was just a minor fence for stolen technology and other goods, and the Snarts were one of her main clients. After the incident, she used her powers to steal tech for herself, so she could keep most of the profit. She also keeps her status as a meta on the downlow, as a metahuman arms dealer/crime lord would assuredly catch the attention of Barry, and the type that Barry would probably kill.

That’s it for now. All constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be ignored/deleted!

And please, update the TV Tropes Page! The link is in the last note of the story, towards the bottom of the latest chapter (for you AO3 users). Go wild!
Chapter Summary

People thought things would quiet down in Starling now that Malcolm Merlyn was doing time.

They were wrong. Very, very wrong.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 44: The World Keeps Turning

Oliver and Thea watched in concern as the last of the staff placed down Tommy’s bags on the floor of the foyer. Tommy himself was surveying the scene with a critical eye, as if one of the staff would take advantage to slip something unsavory into his bags – never mind that most of them had known him when he was but a babe still in Aunt Rebecca’s womb.

Then again, Oliver couldn’t exactly blame Tommy for his paranoia; the Merlyn name had been tarnished, perhaps irreversibly, but Malcolm’s actions. The few times Tommy had been active in the city, he had taken care to hide his most distinguishing features, and even so, people still recognized him, and many had no issue throwing him dirty looks and/or debris to express their distaste. It was why everyone had respected his wishes to seclude himself to the Queen Mansion. It was simply too dangerous.

But now, Tommy felt he had his time and didn’t want to impose any longer. Merlyn Global had been shut down while the investigation into Malcolm’s activities continued, and the family’s assets frozen in return. However, that part of the investigation was over, and Merlyn Global, net worth having significantly decreased, was now ready to continue day-to-day operations. With Malcolm’s incarceration and impending trial, everything in his name had reverted to Tommy, including the majority share of the company. And in place of his father, Tommy was now CEO and Chairman of Merlyn Global, and had much work to do to save his ailing company.

Even so, both Oliver and Thea wished he would stay with them, and the rest of their family. Tommy would be all on his lonesome in the Merlyn Mansion, his father’s ghost clinging to him and like a parasite, present in all the memories that haunted that place. But Tommy was determined, and stubborn, and it was a losing battle to convince him to do otherwise.

“Again, Tommy – your room is your room, no matter what happens.” Oliver clasped a hand onto his best friend’s shoulder, smiling lightly.

The smile faded as Tommy, irritated, slapped his hand away. “Thank you for the offer, Ollie.” He replied, a little frigidly. “But as I said before: I’ll be fine.”

That was another point of contention. Whenever he wasn’t in a silent, contemplative slump, Tommy was easily irritable and uncharacteristically cold. Just the other day, he had snapped at Raisa, and while he had apologized immediately afterwards, the maid had been walking on eggshells around him ever since. It was worrying, even more so now that Tommy was moving out so soon. While the
Queens were aware the Undertaking would have some effects on his personality, to be acting so profoundly unlike himself was well beyond what they expected. And now that he wasn’t under their supervision…while Tommy may have been an adult capable of making his own choices, he was still family, and they felt responsible for him.

“Alright, then.” Oliver cleared his throat awkwardly. “Laurel told me that she’s off two days from now. If it’s alright with you, the three of us could meet up then for lunch. Go out for a little bit. If that’s fine…?”

At the sound of Laurel’s name, Tommy cracked a small smile. “It’s fine Ollie. I’ll see you then. Speedy.” He nodded at the teenager, who had been watching the proceedings silently. Thea returned the nod with a tentative one of her own.

The last of his luggage loaded up into the car, Tommy slid in, and the siblings watched as he drove away.

“It’s progress.” Thea commented the moment they were alone. “But…” she trailed off, knowing her brother understood.

“I know.” Oliver sighed. “He’s still in there, though. All we can do is keep reaching out, and hope he eventually meets us halfway.”

The Palm was the be-all-to-end-all for Starling City’s elite. If you were someone who couldn’t get invited to The Palm, let alone afford a reservation, then you were someone not worth talking to, as far as Starling’s upper crust was concerned. It was this status marker that, along with the high-quality and absolutely delicious food, that catered to The Palm’s continued existence for the last thirty years.

Perhaps the only downside to The Palm is that they did not discriminate as long as you could line the owner’s pockets. While the likes of the well-reputed Bowens frequented the establishment, so had Frank Bertinelli and his ilk. Even Tommy Merlyn could still, conceivably, book a reservation despite his father’s heinous and outwardly illegal actions a month prior, the younger Merlyn’s own moral alignments irrelevant.

That was a misfortune for the Queens, as that meant they often had to interact with people they very much would rather not concern themselves with (outside duress, such as their forced membership in Tempest). The aforementioned Frank Bertinelli, for one; there was a reason why he was unafraid to send Paul Copani to meet with Moira Queen in his fit of desperation prior to his arrest. Unfortunately, it was impossible to frequent The Palm without meeting Bertinelli at least once, since his father was one of their first patrons. The same applied for many of those who had occupied the pages of The List – in fact, The Palm was integral to the creation of The List in its entirety. Everyone on there had been to, or at least was connected to someone that had made at least one visit to The Palm.

So, it only makes sense that, even after Malcolm Merlyn’s arrest, the Queens’ luck in that regard remained unchanged.

“Ma’am.” The usher opened the door, greeting The Palm’s newest patron. The woman, young with brunette hair and Russian features, would’ve been attractive had it not been for the severe look on her face. She barely graced him with a glance before walking away without a word, absentmindedly palming a tip to his chest with a strong push.

“Isabel Rochev.” She stated to the host. After confirming her name on the list, the host gestured
inside to the waiting area in the lobby.

Just as she was making her way, she stopped, noticing an exiting couple, two familiar faces that she had longed to see ever since the day she left Starling City with termination papers in her hands, thoroughly disgraced.

Isabel smiled. It was not kind.

“Robert. Moira. It’s good to see you again.”

Robert froze when he heard that familiar voice, looking away from his beloved wife to see the one person he never wanted to see ever again, perhaps even more so than Malcolm Merlyn and Amanda Waller. He could feel Moira’s hand clasp his own tightly in a possessive manner, and he didn’t have to look back to see that she was glaring as much as propriety would allow in a public setting like The Palm.

“Isabel.” He greeted his former lover stiltedly. “What brings you back to Starling?”

“A new business venture.” Isabel’s smile widened, and for a moment, he could’ve sworn her teeth were pointed. “A lot has happened in the last month, and, well, I’m here to make sure that my investments stay healthy.”

“You’re here for Merlyn Global.” Moira stated, eyes narrowed.

Isabel shrugged. “Tommy Merlyn and I have been in contact for a while, and I was impressed with his perseverance and business savviness. It would be a shame for his company to fall to pieces just because his father happened to be a mad man, so I figured I’d get involved and help him stabilize things. It’s a win-win for everybody, as good business should be. You two, of all people, should know that.”

“Indeed.” Robert interjected, wanting to get this meeting over with as soon as possible. “Well, it was…interesting, to see you again, Isabel, but Moira and I must be going. Work in the office and all that.”

“Of course, Robert.” Isabel stepped away, clearing their path. “Don’t let little old me hold you up.”

As the Queens, as dignified as they could, rushed away, Isabel watched them go, her smile slowly fading away, replaced by a dark look.

Arms linked together, Kara Danvers and Samantha Arias entered The Palm, giggling at some unheard joke. Less dignified than most of the other patrons present, they turned heads and some disapproving looks, most of which were ignored. They stopped briefly to mention their reservation to the host, then waited in the lobby to be seated.

“So, you’re having Kal’s birthday party at the Queens’?”

Kara laughed awkwardly. “Well, we were having trouble coming up with a venue. His first suggestion was the arcade, but considering the relative social classes of his classmates, I vetoed it. Second choice was the place we chose for Ruby’s party, but, well, he felt like that was too much like copying his best friend. After that we were drawing blanks, and when we mentioned it to Moira during our last visit, she suggested the Mansion. Neither Thea nor Oliver are much for partying these days, so while the pool is clean, it hasn’t been used a lot anyway. And we figured more parents would be inclined to let their kids attend if they knew Robert and Moira were present.”
“And when they learn that you’re familiar enough with the Queens to have Kal’s birthday party in their own home…” Sam felt a smile creep up her face.

“…They’ll invite Kal to their own kids’ parties. And let them attend Kal’s, even if it’s in a “plebian” place like an arcade.” Kara finished for her. “I know they’re not all like that – you’re the prime example. But more than enough of them are, unfortunately.”

Sam waved her off. “I understand perfectly well, Kara. God knows Ruby and I had the same problems when she first enrolled into Balliol. It was only after A-Corp started getting more recognition that was I finally acknowledged as someone other than the “Single Mom Parent”.” She mimicked quotes with her free hand to emphasize her point.

“I wonder what they see me as, if they saw you as that.” Kara mused.

Sam made to make a comment, only to freeze when a patron exited the restaurant to the lobby. A very familiar patron, who soon noticed her own presence, and glared at her. Sam glared back, ignoring Kara’s quizzical look. The patron made their way to them, heedless of any looks they might have been getting.

“Arias.”

“Rochev.”

Kara watched the exchange for a few moments, and when the tension started to become unbearable, stuck out her hand. “Hello there. I’m Sam’s friend, Kara Danvers. And you are?”

‘Rochev’ looked down at the offered hand disdainfully, then turned away with a dismissive sniff, exiting the restaurant with her head held high. Kara blinked as she left.

“Your friend was rude.” Kara commented to Sam as their server went to fulfill their drink order.

“She’s not my friend.” Sam almost growled, mood sour.

“I can see that.” Kara observed. “Who is she?”

Sam sighed. “Isabel Rochev. We were rivals back in business school, competing for a lot of the same opportunities. She never hesitated to make a shot at my single parent status, and in fact used it to snatch away an internship at Queen Consolidated from me – which she somehow squandered away when she was fired a few months later for ‘undisclosed reasons.’ Around the same time, I managed to get my own internship at Wayne Enterprises, and after it was over, used those connections to start A-Corp. While she managed to snap up a VP position at Stellemoore International, she’s never forgiven me for starting and heading my own successful company before she could. A-Corp has had a lot of dealings with Stellemoore over the years, and she’s never hesitated to make her displeasure known during the few face-to-face meetings we’ve had together.”

Kara nodded along the explanation, and after Sam finished and announced they should forget Isabel and enjoy their day out together, smiled agreeably. Internally, however, she felt her insides twist, and resolved to get Oliver and Barry to look into Isabel Rochev as soon as possible.

From the moment she saw that woman, her instincts were on edge. Something was up with her, and something told Kara that, whatever it was, it was something she wouldn’t like.
“You know how it goes, boys.” Daniel Brickwell announced to the two men in front of him. He set the gun down on the table and waited for the carnage to begin.

Danny “Brick” Brickwell was just another two-bit thug in the Glades before he bought his trusty gun, shot a woman, and made something of himself. He rose through the ranks of his gang until he was the one calling the shots, and then subsumed many other smaller, weaker crews under his control. Brickwell would’ve done more, expanded more, but unfortunately, he hit a bit of a snag.

Brickwell didn’t play well with others, and he lacked the deep-rooted and long-standing connections found in crime families like the Bertinellis and the Triad. And with his criminal record and reputation public and well-known, he couldn’t put up a façade sophistication and expand his influence that way. Brick was deceptively smart despite this thuggish demeanor – smart enough to realize that said demeanor was hampering him from becoming a big fish in the crime capital of the west coast, a fact that grated him deeply. The only reason he and his crew hadn’t been scooped up by one of the established factions in the city was because they had ties to the crime lord that ruled over Hub City, a Tobias Church, and even then, an argument could be made that he was just another lackey for Church instead.

He would be lying if he said he wasn’t bitter about it.

However, things were look up for dear old Brick. Green Arrow and Supergirl, thanks to all their do-gooding and Samaritan-behavior, had created a power vacuum in Starling. The Bertinellis were gone, done in by a laptop full of evidence they thought long gone, with the head honcho himself doing time and their little princess missing, presumed dead. The Triad were slowly withdrawing from Starling now that their top enforcer was in the slammer. For whatever reason, the Bratva were being reticent, content with minimal influence in the city. And as for all the other aspiring crime lords, after the Count and Cyrus Vanch, nobody was stepping up to the plate for fear of making themselves another target for the Green Arrow.

Brick wanted out of Church’s thumb. He wanted to shine, the way he wanted to for years, all those opportunities denied to him because nobody ever saw him as anything more than a meathead to point their problems at. And now that he had that chance, he wasn’t going to waste it.

“You got it.” Brick demanded his second-in-command, Xavier Reed.

Xavier smirked, then set down a roll of paper. He slowly unraveled it, revealing it to be a stack of blueprints. Brick grinned.

“Perfect.”

His eyes glinted upwards, towards the title:

CHRYSANTHEMUM BALLIOL PREPARATORY ACADEMY FOR THE GIFTED

Chapter End Notes

Tommy’s getting colder yes, but he’s still Tommy…maybe. And yes, before you ask, his change in personality has to do with that vial of green water. As to where this leads…who knows?
Isabel Rochev, #2 on the bitch-o-meter, second to only Amanda Waller herself, is here. Rochev is an important villain, however, she is not THE villain for Oliver’s arc, that much I will say. Also, she will not be a combat-type villain like Ravager, for obvious reasons. But she’s integral to the plot nonetheless, and it all has to do with Tommy, as you can tell. And it’s obvious that she’s whatever up to, it involves payback against the Queens. I also added in that bit with Sam, which will be important later on as well.

Finally, Danny Brickwell. He’s important to, but again, he isn’t the Big Bad of Oliver’s arc. He is, however, important to someone else’s arc, but who, I won’t say. You can probably guess, but I’ll keep things tight-lipped for now.

Please comment if you can. Criticism is not just welcomed but also encouraged – as long as it is constructive.
And don’t forget to update the TV Tropes Page!
Arc III, Chapter 45: Justice in Motion

Chapter Summary

The Justice League gets their own base.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 45: Justice in Motion

Far off in the outskirts of Central City, the four members of the Justice League were watching as an old hangar of S.T.A.R. Labs was being renovated, repurposed as their new headquarters. The logos on the side were being painted over, replaced with their newly created symbol, which had been anonymously spread to numerous media outlets to use for future broadcasts.

“I don’t like it.” Oliver announced. Kara and Barry made noises of agreement, while Mari arched an eyebrow.

“Really? I think it looks grand.”

“Exactly. It’s too grandiose, and it’s out in the open. It’s basically a beacon for criminals to come and attack us.”

“Tactical as always, Oliver.” Amanda Waller commented, making her presence known. She had been speaking with members of the construction crew, specifying a few more features for the base.

“Indeed, perhaps it is a little bit much, but you are symbols now, a warning to all evil. And you can’t be a warning if you aren’t seen.”

“You have a point, Amanda.” Barry interjected. “But so does Oliver. We’re targets for whatever megalomaniac that has grand designs for a hostile takeover of the planet, and they’ll know to attack here first before everything else. I just don’t feel comfortable with it.”

Amanda waved his worries off, smirking. “Then maybe it’s a good thing this isn’t your permanent base.”

Everyone blinked at that.

“There are plans being drawn up for your real base, but there are issues with authorizing the funding, and the technology is a little more advanced than what we are currently capable of – but considering who’s involved, I’m sure we’ll be able to get it up and running in the next couple of years.” At this, she gave a pointed look to the three ex-assassins, who frowned in understanding. The meaning was clear: ‘You want this fixed? Then do it yourself.’

“Very well then.” Oliver took in a deep breath. “Anything else?”

Amanda smirked.

“Why are there seven chairs?” Kara asked, looking over the wooden arm chair that bore her family’s
crest.

After explaining that this was their ‘temporary’ base, Amanda had directed them to a meeting room within the hall, the only room to have been finished in the last two weeks since the start of the hangar’s renovation. In the center of the room was a large, stainless steel table with the League’s symbol on the surface’s center, surrounded by several chairs in a semi-circle. At the head of the table, in the center of the lineup, was a chair inscribed with an arrowhead, clearly representing Oliver. To its left was the chair that Kara was currently inspecting, while to its right was a chair with Barry’s lightning bolt, and to that chair’s right was another, with the head of the Anansi Totem – Mari.

They were not the only chairs present, however. Three more chairs were placed at the table, each lacking a carving: one to the right of Mari’s chair, and two to the left of Kara’s.

“As you know, our aim for the Justice League is to gather as many public superheroes as possible and place them under one banner as a deterrent to crime.” Amanda explained. “Your debut at the Undertaking has hastened the rise of these heroes throughout the world – but there are not nearly enough to serve as a full organization.”

“To remedy this issue, I’ve decided that you will publicly invite three more heroes to the League, each of whom have done a great, heroic deed in public. Together, you seven will be the ‘founders’ of the organization and serve as an inspiration for the heroes yet to come. This will, hopefully, convince more vigilantes to act in the open, and eventually join the Justice League themselves in return.”

“Quick question!” Mari raised her hand. “What counts as a ‘great, heroic deed’?”

Amanda gave a sly smile. “I trust your judgement. All of you, in fact. I’m sure you all already have some good candidates in mind.” She walked over to the table and placed her palm on it, just beneath the League symbol. The spot she touched instantly lit up, and to the slight astonishment of everyone, the symbol split open, revealing an opening. Out of the opening rose another pedestal, this time containing a line of seven rings, each also bearing the Justice League’s crest.

“These rings serve as both identification and ‘keys’ to the hall. I’ll leave it up to you to figure out how’d you like to conceal them to the public during your daily life. When you choose a candidate, bring them to the hall, and if the rest of the team approves their ‘application’ for membership, give them one of the three remaining rings. Once all three are taken, we will see about making more for future members.”

At her nod, all four vigilantes took a ring for themselves, fitting them on their right hands to see how they fit.

“Is that it?” Oliver asked, already aching to go home. Being in Amanda’s presence for an extended amount of time always made him feel uncomfortable, and he knew the others felt the same.

“For now. Farewell, ladies and gentlemen; I’ll see you all next month.”

Laurel frowned as she looked over her notes for the Rasmus case. The case had been delayed thanks to the chaos left in the wake of the Undertaking, but now that things had begun to settle down, the case had finally been pushed through. She and her clients would be going to court in a month or so. Thanks to moonlighting as Black Canary and beating the crap out of thugs who just loved to talk, Laurel had become intimately aware of the corruption present in Starling – more so than all of her tenure as an attorney at CNRI. She knew of the criminality that went on the city, and that most of it
was centered in the Glades, but it was only now she realized how deep-rooted it was and how far up it went. Names she never knew of passed through the lips of the many lowlifes that had the misfortune to cross her path, but more alarming were those she did know of. Many of them she already knew to be scumbags, such as the very man she was currently building a case against, but others she had been surprised to hear of. It seemed that Malcolm Merlyn wasn’t the only supposed humanitarians putting up a mask.

It was this information that had prompted her to warn her clients of the potential danger attached to this case. Word on the street was that Rasmus liked to hire “fixers” to deal with problems like this, and if they pursued this case, their lives would be unmistakably in danger. When they insisted on it regardless, she had immediately contacted her father, who had issued a detail of men he explicitly trusted to watch the small family for the duration of the trial. Even so, Laurel made plans to watch their home over as the Black Canary instead of going on her usual patrol routes, just in case.

Eddie looked through a stack of casefiles, frowning. With the Anti-Streak Taskforce now the Anti-Metahuman Taskforce, their caseload had increased significantly. The rise of metas had forced them to look at cases from a new perspective. Suddenly the impossible was no longer impossible, and while it meant that no one’s story could be dismissed based on logic (Barry came to mind, and Eddie winced; while he and Barry had issues, he couldn’t help but sympathize with other man for what happened to his family), it meant there were some threads in these cases that would be hard to pursue.

Among the most recent incidents included people physically being in two places at the same time (suggesting a shapeshifter), a woman that could appear in one place and then another the next second (teleporter?) and, perhaps the most distressing of all, odd weather patterns that were extremely similar to those found in locations where Clyde Mardon was present, prior to the man’s death. Considering that Clyde had a brother who allegedly died the same night he did, in the same storm that had given him his powers…Eddie shuddered. That was a terrifying line of thought.

Sighing, he opened a desk drawer. He looked at the mass of paper, each tightly organized in manila folders: his old files on the Streak – or the Flash, as he was now called. He felt a fire light up in his belly.

This city didn’t always need the Flash to solve its problems, and Eddie was going to prove it.

“According to intel, Amunet has purchased a number of abandoned buildings along the south side of town and in Keystone City.” Iris explained to Ralph as they looked over their board of evidence. “They’ve been turned into clubs, where she conducts most of her business. And you won’t believe who was just seen entering one of them.” She posted another photo to the board with a pin.


The Snarts were well-known faces to the CCPD. After their father, Lewis Snart, had been arrested for domestic abuse and overall corruption, the Snart siblings had gone off the grid for a few years. Leonard Snart eventually did turn up – as Central City’s premiere thief, and thus a frequenter of Iron Heights. While his sister was never charged, they had ample reason to believe she was also a part of his criminal activities. Snart had gone off the grid recently after breaking out of Iron Heights, and it seemed they finally found him.

“We have reason to believe that Amunet has contracted him and his sister for a job; according to UC, word going around is that the Snarts are looking for a new crew for their latest heist, and it’s rumored to be a big payday. Coincidentally, a new cache of weapons has just rolled into Central City and are
currently under lock and key at a military base just outside the city.” Iris posted another piece of evidence: a report of the new weapons cache. At the top of the paper was an acronym of the organization that had ordered them in: ‘A.R.G.U.S.’

“Right up Amunet’s alley.” Ralph smirked. “Good work, Iris.” He slapped Iris on the back in congratulations. Iris winced. “Now we just need to see about getting an inside man.”

“Isn’t UC currently tied up in the Sonus case?”

“Point.” Ralph stated, punctuated by him literally pointing at her. “And you can’t do it because you’re a cop’s daughter. And I can’t do it because I’ve been on the news for cases before.”

“So, who are we going to get?” Iris wondered, genuinely distressed. This was her first big case, and she didn’t want something like this to mess it up.

A knock on the door. The two officers shared a look, knowing they had asked the rest of the precinct to leave them undisturbed for the time being.

“It’s open!”

The door swung in, and Barry popped his head into the room. “Hey, Iris! I’ve got you coffee and brownies. Sorry I couldn’t answer your call earlier, I was in the middle of…Why are you looking at me like that?”

“No.” Iris stated sternly, as Ralph began to grin.

Chapter End Notes

A nice, short transition chapter. Now I need to get around to planning out the rest of the arc, like I was supposed to a couple of months ago.

Don’t forget to update the TV Tropes page! There’s also a character page!
Arc III, Chapter 46: Terrible, Terrible Idea

Chapter Summary

People have dumb ideas. Unfortunately, that doesn't stop people from using them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 46: Terrible, Terrible Idea

“This is a terrible, terrible idea.” Barry loudly announced. Iris, Ralph, and Captain Singh, all crowded together with him in Singh’s tiny little office, had different reactions to that, but remained silent as Barry continued to speak. “For one thing, I have no official affiliation with the police. I’m not even a consultant.”

“I agree with Barry.” Iris quickly stated, (futilely) hoping this would be enough to sway the argument in their favor.

It wasn’t.

“You’re perfect for the job, Barry – I can call you Barry, right?” Not waiting for answer, Ralph plowed on through. “You’ve been gone for ten years and have no public profile or online presence. You’re basically a ghost, and ghosts are easy to mold for undercover work.”

“What if someone recognizes me?”

“Dye and contacts.”

“Residence? I’m living with Joe right now.”

“We can get you place, easy. It’ll only be for the duration of the assignment, of course, but you’ll make it work, I’m sure.”

“What if it goes south?” That was the most important question, and even that, Barry knew the answer to.

“Witness protection.” Ralph smoothly replied, and Barry shook his head, frowning.

“My life is here, Detective Dibny. I will not risk that.” He stated firmly.

Ralph sighed in false exasperation. “Barry, this is a chance to take down the premier weapons dealer of Central City’s underground. There’s no way we’re going to find anyone else suitable with the small timeframe right now. You don’t want Iris’ first big case to fall apart because of something like this, right?”

Barry blinked. Normally, this is when he would’ve have laughed at Ralph’s amateur attempts to manipulate him. The man had no subtlety whatsoever. However, he was diligently thinking. Crime in Central City – and most of Starling and Detroit as well – was slowing down thanks to the establishment of the Justice League. He hadn’t had to imprison a meta in the newly opened
metahuman wing in Iron Heights for several weeks. Nowadays, he filled his time with working on his projects and training Cisco, and the entertainment factor the latter provided was wearing itself real thin these days. And worse yet, there was no obvious hope of any of that changing until he went to college in September.

Simply put, Barry was bored.

And a bored Barry is *never* a good thing.

Putting on a mask of tiredness, Barry exhaled. “Only if the assignment starts *after* Kal’s birthday.”

Ralph gave a triumphant grin. Iris adopted a look of defeat and buried her face in her hands in aggravation. Singh said nothing, having remained a spectator in the proceedings, and instead started pulling out the appropriate forms.

“His name is Leonard Snart. The best thief on the west coast. He spends weeks, or even months, casing a gig, and then after he’s done, falls off the radar for months until the next one turns up. And word on the street is that for this job, he’s looking for a hacker. I understand you have familiarity with that.”

Barry gave a small smile. “Some.”

“You’re going to infiltrate Snart’s crew, offering your skills to him, and stay with them until they begin touching base with Amunet Black, our target. Black and Snart are two of the major crime heads in Central City’s underground, and they’ve been closely associated with each other over the years. She’s known to fence some of his wares, usually on the lower end, but some high-end stuff as well.”

“You’ll stick with them until then, then, after wringing as much information as you can from them, you’ll inform us of their location. We’ll go in, arrest everyone – even you, and when we’re done, we’ll send you off in a different car, claiming you’re wanted for some major federal crimes. After that, we wash out the dye, take out the contacts, and you can resume your life as you see fit.” Ralph finished his explanation with a thumbs-up. Both Barry and Iris were distinctly unamused: Barry was still skeptical of the operation (it was a simple plan, but Barry knew it was going to go to shit because life always worked out that way for him) and Iris was just fed up with Ralph.

“Anything else I need to know?”

Ralph and Iris exchanged looks, and Iris took a deep breath. “Just one thing. There are rumors that Amunet might be a metahuman, which would explain how she rose to the top of the underground so suddenly.”

Barry raised an eyebrow in interest at that but betrayed nothing else. “Alright then. I still think this is a terrible idea, but when has that ever stopped anyone before? How am I going to get Snart’s attention?”

“…and that’s it for today. So?” Tommy drummed his fingers unto his desk.

He was in his office at Merlyn Global. His father’s office, located at the top of the building, had been cordoned off for investigation, and even after the police had determined they had gathered all the
evidence they could from it, he hadn’t the heart or will to go anywhere near it for the time being. Instead, he had sent one of the few trusted employees that hadn’t fled from the company after the Undertaking to gather any necessary documents and files (both hard copy and digital) from there and give it to him, and then had sectioned off the entire floor to everyone but him. The memories would be too much for him now and Tommy was too concerned with the company to bother with whatever his father might’ve left behind for him.

“Not bad. Not bad at all. Stocks have dropped significantly, but your public return has seemed to pull them back up. And the statement you made to the press was a good first step to repairing the company’s public image – at the very least, Merlyn Global won’t be another S.T.A.R. Labs.” Isabel gave a reassuring smile to Tommy, and it wasn’t entirely an act; Tommy had done well. It seemed he had his father’s penchant for business, and that made things easy for her, for many reasons.

Tommy blushed at the praise. “Thank you. Anything else?”

Isabel was about to reply negatively, until something caught her eye. “What’s this?” She pointed to an invitation. Contrary to the elegant script and finely-crafted card stock that was used for most upper-class functions that someone of Tommy’s station was usually invited to, this invite used blocky print and bright coloring. It was almost juvenile.

“Oh. That’s an invite to the birthday party of the little brother of a friend of mine.”

“Are you going?”

Tommy shook his head with a laugh. “Oh, no. I was just planning on sending a gift. Kal’s a good kid, but he’s just that – a kid. I doubt he and I have similar tastes in fun.”

Isabel tilted her head. “Kal?”

“Clark Kent, the younger brother of Kara Danvers – though I doubt you’ve heard of her, being new in town and all. His middle name is Calvin, hence the nickname.”

Isabel nodded. In fact, she did know of Kara Danvers, even before the other day at The Palm where she had snubbed the younger woman so blatantly. She had taken great pains to learn of those who were closely related to the Queen family, and the mysterious Miss Danvers was near the top of the list, just below the Merlyns and the Lances in fact. She had immediately caught the eye of Starling’s high society, partially due to the abrupt and unexpected admittance of her younger cousin to Balliol Prep, and partially due to her close association with Samantha Arias, Laurel Lance and, more pointedly, the Queens. It was the latter that had many turning heads; Kara was a virtual unknown, and her association with them had caused the greatest rise in societal status since the Lances.

While the Lances were technically a middle-class family and, logically, should not be considered among the Elite, they unofficially were, if only tangentially. Laurel and Sara Lance were acquaintances and even friends of many of the younger generation, their mother had been a teacher of a few who had elected to attend Balliol’s college in place of the more well-known institutions, be they Ivy League schools to Starling City University. Even Quentin Lance was a well-known face among the upper-crust; his wife and daughters’ connections meant he was often assigned to any high-profile cases that impacted one of the richer families.

However, what really cemented the Lances anomalous place as one of the premier families of Starling City were their close friendships with the Queen and Merlyn families, the two most powerful families in Starling prior to Malcolm Merlyn’s fall from grace. Their alliance thanks to the close friendship between Robert and Malcolm had not only cemented their places at the very top of Starling’s high society but also prevented any divide within that social strata. Oliver and Tommy
grew up together, best friends and brothers in everything but blood, and they had immediately hit it off with Laurel when the three started Balliol Prep together and were occasionally joined by Sara when she started school. They were so close, in fact, that the Lances were said to be among the first to be introduced to Thea Queen when she was born, alongside Tommy Merlyn himself. That, more than anything else, proved their status, and it was then they were counted among their number, no longer snubbed or looked down on.

Kara Danvers, however unintentionally, was repeating the same feat. Samantha Arias had a rough start in Starling due to being low-born and a single parent, but in the years since her arrival, she had proven herself to be a brilliant businesswoman and a desirable ally. Laurel Lance, again, was well-known and a well-beloved citizen of Starling, with connections from every part of society. And, of course, the Queens. Kara was officially Oliver Queen’s business partner for his ongoing pet project in the Glades. The two were seen together frequently, so much so that some had speculated the possibility of a romantic liaison – a thought that was immediately shut down after both expressed blatant and vehement disgust at the thought. She had also been seen in the presence of Thea Queen, particularly when picking up her cousin from school, and Robert and Moira Queen, who spoke of her as if she were another member of the family.

The rise of a new star was striking enough, but what was most interesting about the girl was that she and her cousin literally came out of nowhere. The Lances, at least, had the excuse of their children being lucky enough to get into Balliol thanks to their mother’s place of employment. Kara however, had no point of origin to explain why she had become so close with Starling’s most prominent family in such a brief time. Isabel, of course, had figured out the truth. A private investigator and a little digging revealed that Kara and Clark had gone missing, presumed dead, ten years ago in a shipwreck with Kara’s parents. Clark’s parents had died in a fire not long after his birth. It was obvious what happened – they had washed ashore on the same island as Oliver Queen, stayed there with him, and were rescued alongside him. With no family left to go to, they had settled in Starling and took advantage of their friend’s connections to build a future for themselves.

It was a bitter pill to swallow for Isabel. Kara had managed to accomplish in a year what Isabel had been striving for her whole life, all thanks to being (un)lucky enough to wash up on the same abandoned island as a pampered rich boy. She wasn’t even fishing for a husband, and already, Carter Bowen, the most eligible bachelor on the west coast after Oliver Queen and Tommy Merlyn, was pursuing her. Isabel knew if she showed even the slightest interest in any young man in Starling, the witch called Moira would have her cast out before she could even finish speaking her name. Just another notch against her ill-fated affair with Robert Queen.

So yes, Isabel knew of Kara Danvers, which is why she threw such a withering glance when they finally met at The Palm. The presence of Samantha Arias and the obvious closeness of the two did not help matters – God knows the history between her and dear Sammy was anything but pretty.

However, looking at the invitation, Isabel wondered if she had been too hasty. In order for her to succeed in her goals, particularly her revenge, she needed Tommy’s trust, and there was no better way to gain the trust of a man than gaining the trust of his friends, and it was clear that Tommy Merlyn and Kara Danvers were, indeed, friends. She picked up the invitation and looked at the details, noting triumphantly that it was taking place at the Queen Mansion.

“Tommy, I think you should go.”

Tommy arched an eyebrow. “Isabel –”

Isabel held up a hand. “Hear my out. From what I understand, a lot of Kal’s classmates are attending, right?”
“Right.”

“And Kal attends Balliol Prep, right?”

“Correct.”

“And since this takes place at the Queen Mansion…”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “A lot of their parents will be there.”

Isabel nodded. “Their rich, well-connected parents. Tommy, this is an excellent opportunity. By showing up, not only can you make new connections and strengthen old ones, you can also show others that you are doing well, and that you don’t condone your father’s actions. Once they see that, Merlyn Global will probably see some old investors returning. Not now, obviously, but perhaps when your father’s trial is over…”

Tommy looked conflicted. Clearly, the pros outweighed the cons, and he had been invited, so no one could protest his presence even if they wanted to.

He just wasn’t sure if he was really ready to face the world yet. The Queens and Lances were one thing, Merlyn Global another, but this…

“If you want, I could go with you?”

He sighed in relief. “Sure. Thanks, Isabel.”

“It’s not an issue, Tommy. We’re partners now, remember?”

Internally, Isabel smiled vindictively.

Knock.

A tall, well-muscled African American man opened the door. “Ah, Kara. Come in.”

Kara did just that, looking around the sparsely decorated apartment. Thanks to Amanda’s… connections, they had been able to move J’onn into the apartment right next to hers and Kal’s, already fully-furnished with all the necessities. The only thing the place was lacking was decorations to give it a personal touch. As for J’onn himself, they had shown him the picture of a deceased government agent to take on for daily appearances, and assigned him a false identity, complete with driver’s license and passport – John Jones.

Since then, J’onn had been assigned to her and Oliver’s care as they taught him how to blend in. Surprisingly, J’onn had adapted quite easily, admitting to them in private that he had used his telepathy during his incarceration to learn about human lifestyles, and this wasn’t much different. After determining him to be competent and inconspicuous, the Martian had taken to exploring Starling, eating different foods, collecting knick-knacks and testing the limits of the limitless government-issued credit card that had been handed to him after his release from A.R.G.U.S.

A good life, Kara thought, thoroughly amused.

“Indeed, it is.” J’onn commented, offering her a box of cookies. Kara took it gratefully, opening it with glee and watching J’onn do the same with his own box of cookies. Each grabbed one of the cookies inside their box and bit them in tandem, moaning in almost orgasmic pleasure.

“Thank Rao for alien metabolism.”
Agreed. So, you’re here to invite me to Kal-El’s birthday party?

Kara nodded, taking out another cookie to eat. Yes. And please, call him Kal. That’s what the public knows him as and I don’t want to advertise his Kryptonian name to the masses.

J’onn gave her knowing look. You all are very paranoid.

She shrugged. Experience.

Understandable.

Black Canary woke up.

“Don’t worry. Your mask is still on.” A familiarly low, gravely voice spoke to her. She looked to her left. And there he was. Green Arrow.

Her side is aching, she has blooding caking the bottom of her nose. Arrow is soothing another bruise on her exposed arm. She’s staring into space.

Taylor Moore is an orphan.

“You know, when I was younger – a kid, really – I had two people who I loved very much. They were like parents to me. And…I lost them.”

“I’m sorry.”

His eyes flicked up to meet hers, and he tilted his head. “Don’t be. You didn’t kill them. But I…sometimes I wondered if I did. If I had been faster or stronger or smarter, maybe they wouldn’t have been taken from me.”

“I’m sure you did everything you could.” And she did. Regardless of his methods, Green Arrow was nothing if not dedicated, and she admired him for that.

“And I’m sure you did too.” At her startled look, he elaborated. “You didn’t kill that kid’s parents. You tried to save them, and there’s no one to blame for their deaths except the man that shot them. The thing you need to learn about this job, this life, Canary, is that you can’t save everyone. You can try, and there’s nothing entirely wrong with that, but the reality is, we’re human. We aren’t as strong as we want to be, as we should be, and we make mistakes. And all we can really do is learn from them and do better next time.”

“There won’t been a next time for the Moores.” And if a bit of bitterness seeped into her tone, he ignored it. He knew it wasn’t directed at him, anyway.

Instead, he shook his head. “There won’t be. And that’s something we’re all going to live with. And there will be more like them, in the future – I know it. If you want out, Canary, I won’t blame you.” And then his eyes crinkled knowingly. “But something tells me you don’t.”

She looked at him, and knew he was right. If anything, this – all of this – left her more determined than ever. She resolved to do more training, and perhaps it was to branch away from Ted, to look for other styles besides boxing. Black Canary didn’t know what the future held, how this would all end for her – but she did know that she couldn’t let this go. This city needed help, Supergirl and Green Arrow both need help, and she was here and willing and raring to go.
“Thanks, Arrow.”

“Anytime, pretty bird.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, this is a long chapter.

There’s a discrepancy between what Kara and Sam think high society sees Kara as and how they actually do, as seen with Isabel. The discrepancy is deliberate; Kara doesn’t have an accurate picture of how people see her due to not being particularly sociable (at least by high society standards). Besides a few business lunches/dinners with Oliver and some investors, and the Humanitarian Awards Ceremony that she only went to because it was the Merlyn before she learned Malcolm was evil, Kara doesn’t really go to a lot of high society functions. As for Sam, she’s an upstart like Kara, and her early treatment before establishing her reputation has colored her perception of these kinds of things.

Next chapter: Kal-El’s birthday! Expect lots of fluff.

Comments and reviews are welcome, even if they’re bad ones, and only if they’re constructive. Flames will be deleted/ignored/reported.

And don’t forget the TV Tropes Page! There’s a character page to update too!
Happy birthday, Kal-El.

Chapter 47: For the Boy Who Has Everything

“I still say it looks grander every time we come here.” Barry grumbled as he and Iris got out of the taxi, taking their night bags out with them.

“And I still say it’s just you.” Iris sing-songed back. Before them was the familiar sight of the Queen Mansion, the place where Kal’s long-awaited birthday party was to take place.

They made their way to the entrance, handing off their bags to one of the servants. Another opened the door for them, allowing them inside.

As she entered the ornately decorated mansion, it occurred to Iris how much had changed in the last eight months. Last year in September she was just a beat cop trying to get out of her estranged father’s shadow, trying to move past the tragic death of her best friend. Now, said best friend was back from the dead, and she and her father were finally back in a good place with each other after years of not speaking to one another.

Ever since Barry had been found and returned home, life had picked up at a wild pace. Central City had gotten crazier than ever, with the rise of metas and the debut of the Flash, culminating in the discovery of Nora’s murderer and Henry’s release from prison. Her career was starting to accelerate, and she was on the fast track to becoming a detective, like Eddie and Joe. Most of all, however, was this – the Queens. Never had she expected her and Barry’s reunion to result in a friendly acquaintance with the richest and most socially prolific family on the west coast. It almost felt like a dream.

“Hey Kara.” Barry moved in to hug his surrogate sister. “Where’s Ollie?”

And of course, Barry was the one to remind her that it was not, in fact, a dream.

“He’s at the pool with Kal and Laurel, getting the place ready for the rest of the guests. I’ll have someone take you there,” Kara took her hand and smiled. “Iris.”

“Kara.” Iris nodded back, smiling lightly.

“Aren’t you warm?” Oliver asked as he set down another box of pizza unto one of the side tables.

Laurel, who had elected to wear a violet long-sleeved shirt and jeans, shrugged. “A little, but I’ll last. It’s not like we’re going to be sticking out here for long anyway, right?”

Oliver internally frowned at the obvious deflection but smiled anyway. “Agreed.” He jabbed his
thumb toward the pool. “God knows that thing isn’t used nearly enough as it should be. I don’t even remember the last time I took a dip in there.”

“Well, the kids will like it for certain.” Laurel gestured to Kal and Ruby, who were staring longingly at the water. They had been banned from playing in the pool until at least five other guests arrived.

“Oliver! Laurel! Are you finished setting up the tables?”

“All done Sam!” Oliver called back.

Sam stepped out the house, directing a number of chefs carrying different kid-friendly foodstuffs to the line of tables set up across the Queens’ backyard. She had initially been inside, helping Moira and Robert decorate the backroom where the adult party would be held, and had volunteered to help with the food once the kitchen was finished with it.

“That looks good.”

“It’s not for you, Bare.” Oliver responded automatically, and then blinked.

“Barry! Iris!” Laurel shrieked in happiness.

“Oliver, Laurel. It’s good to see you.” Iris grinned as the two women went into a hug. The two had hit it off at Thanksgiving and had exchanged contact information. Since then, they had shared several conversations over texts and emails and the occasional phone call, forming a strong friendship that was only further supported by the brotherly bond between their two best friends.

“What you think the kids will mind if I sneak a bite?” Barry jokingly asked as he and Oliver clasped hands.

Oliver arched an eyebrow. “A bite to you Barry is a full meal to them. I think they would mind – that spread will barely be able handle Kal. Don’t need to add you to the mix.” He let go and held out his hand to Iris. “Iris.”

“Oliver.” Iris blushed slightly. She couldn’t help it; Oliver was very attractive.

“From what I saw last Thanksgiving, Ollie’s right, Barry.” Laurel giggled as she went and hugged him. “I wonder if we made enough for the ‘other’ party?”

“I warned Mom and Dad as soon as I heard the party was here. We should have enough, and even if we don’t – well, that’s what we have the pizza guy for.” Oliver joked.

Just then, Sam walked over to the group, finally satisfied with the arrangement of the food. “Food’s done and raring to go. I warned Kal and Ruby that if they ate right now they wouldn’t be allowed to go into the water for another half-hour. But considering the ban…” she shrugged, then blinked. “Barry and Iris, I take it?”

“Yup. Don’t wear ‘em out.” Barry smirked as he crossed his arms. “And you must be the famous Samantha Arias. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Good things, I hope.”

“Very.”

Kara smiled as she greeted another guest, directing them to the side where Robert was waiting. On the other side of the door, Moira was doing the same with another invitee. A line of cars, some
vintage, some brand-new, some long and some short, all very, very expensive, spanned the entire driveway of the Queen Mansion. The party had begun.


“Carter. What are you doing here?” She asked, careful to hide the nervousness she felt. Why did she keep running into this man?

Carter Bowen smiled slyly, and it would’ve been charming to anyone but her. “One of my cousins was invited, and when I heard you and Kal were hosting, I just knew I had to come.”

“Oh, really. Well, we can catch up later. I have to greet all the guests and—”

“That’s alright. I can just wait here with—” Before he could finish sentencing her to damnation, a hero arrived.

“Carter, it’s good to see you and all, but I need to hand over my gift.”

Kara let out a breath of relief. “Tommy! I thought you weren’t coming.”

Tommy Merlyn rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. Carter, knowing he was foiled, frowned deeply in Tommy’s direction before going up to Robert for his directions.

“I wasn’t at first, but I thought better of it.” He handed over his gift, before adopting a nervous expression. “Is it okay if I brought a friend?”

“Of course, Tommy. The more the merrier! Who’d you bring?”

Tommy stuck his head out to the side and beckoned someone to come in. Kara felt her nerves freeze when Isabel Rochev entered the scene, but she had too much practice masking her emotions to let it affect her outward composure. Instead, she continued to smile, holding out her hand and greeting the woman as if she had never met her before. Isabel had the tact to do the same, with a smile so insincere that Kara felt her teeth ache from the sugariness of it. From periphery, she noticed that Moira’s friendly demeanor immediately drain away the moment she saw Isabel, and she could hear Robert stumble over his words while directing another guest to the pool. She made an idle note of it as she told Tommy where the adults would be mingling, reminding him to place his gift on the side table.

When the last car in the line arrived, Kara and Moira both sighed in relief.

“Thank God, my feet are aching from standing in these heels for so long.” The usually stately Queen Matriarch complained, causing Kara to giggle.

Just then, the final guest arrived, and Kara’s face brightened when she saw who it was.

“John! You made it!”

John Jones smiled awkwardly – oh, they needed to work on that, thankfully they were at the social event of the week – and handed over his gift to Kara, returning her incoming hug. “Sorry I’m late – I had a tough time finding a cab driver who was willing to drive me here.”

“Don’t worry, the party has just barely started.” Kara reassured him. Moira audibly cleared throat, and Kara was suddenly reminded of her presence. “Moira, this is John Jones – he’s one of my neighbors. Just moved here from out of the country. John, this is Moira Queen, the mother of my
friend Oliver. She and her husband graciously offered their home for Kal’s birthday party.”

“Mrs. Queen.”

“Mr. Jones.” Moira gave a polite smile, and then offered to direct him to where the adults were mingling. Robert had long since departed from his guide duties and joined the rest of the older guests. As they started a conversation over John’s current experiences in Starling, with Kara occasionally chiming in, another conversation went unheard.

She’s Oliver’s mother? I can see the resemblance – in more than just looks.

Yeah. She can be a little uptight at times, but she’s a big softy inside, really.

You like her a lot.

Are you an empath too?

No, but I’m not oblivious either.

A laugh. Yeah, I do. Ever since Kal and I arrived in Starling, Robert and her – and Thea as well – have been nothing but kind to us. When I moved out, they told us we were welcome back anytime and…that we were family, now. It’s almost like…


Yeah. Flashes of not only Zor-El and Alura and Astra, but also Shado and Slade, crossed her mind. J’onn saw them but knew not to comment on them. I guess you do.

The pool party lasted for a couple of more hours. Some of the children, having had their fill of swimming, and showered and dried themselves off and then were sequestered up to one of the entertainment rooms. There, the ever-responsible Thea was keeping watch while the kids had a Marvel movie marathon, starting with Iron Man and ending with The Avengers.

The adults, content that their kids were occupied and sufficiently supervised, had gone on to have their own little soiree in the backroom of the mansion. While far more casual than the Starling Elite’s usual get-togethers, there was still an air of decorum present, a forced space between every exchange. For those who were not used to it, it was visible, and they couldn’t help but comment on it.

“How are you able to deal with all this?” Iris whispered Laurel when they had a moment to themselves.

When the party started, she and Barry had been introduced as friends of Oliver Queen; after that, people had flocked to them, introducing themselves and trying to use polite conversation to discern how two Central City natives with no publicized net worth had gained the favor of Starling’s golden child. Iris was unused to such attention and had floundered a few times, having to be saved by Laurel more than once. Oddly enough, Barry had no such problems, keeping afloat easily and endearing himself to several of the people present; Iris figured that Oliver or even Wells had coached him on things like this during their free time.

“Easy. I grew up with it.” Laurel commented, taking a sip of her lemonade. At Iris’ inquiring look, she elaborated. “I met Ollie and Tommy at school – private school. My mom’s a college professor at Balliol College and she managed to get Sara and I into Balliol Prep. The three of us – we clicked
instantly and have been thick as thieves ever since. And when you’re so close to the sons of the two richest families in Starling, and attend school with the rest of their peers, well…” Laurel shrugged, and Iris instantly understood.

“So, you and your family…”

“…we’ve been a part of all this for two decades.” Laurel admitted. “In the beginning, it was weird. These people – they operate on a different set of rules. There’s an unspoken way of how things go, and we were expected to follow them. But we learned quick, and eventually got used to it. We’ve been a part of this world for so long that sometimes everyone, even us, forget that we aren’t as well-off as the rest. Even Dad has slipped a few times, and there’s been more than one cop in the precinct that was shocked to see him on speaking terms with some of the people here. It’s just how life has worked out for us Lances.”

“But doesn’t it get hard?” Iris pressed on. Laurel knew she was thinking about Barry – after Harrison Wells died and was exposed and his estate was passed down to Barry, she had been one of the lawyers to look over the will for any caveats, as Barry trusted her and really only her not to screw him over. There had been quite a lot of money passed on to Barry, and with his recent decision to reopen S.T.A.R. Labs, Iris must’ve come to the realization that she too would be a part of this world, as Barry’s best friend.

“It does. But honestly, I wouldn’t change it for the world.”

Her eyes landed on Oliver, and she smiled.

“Ollie, Barry I’d like you to meet my new business partner: Isabel Rochev. Isabel, my best friend Oliver Queen, and another friend of mine, Barry Allen.” Tommy gestured to the woman on his arm, who gave them a small smile.

“A pleasure to meet such a beautiful woman.” Oliver held out his hand, which Isabel took with a forced giggle.

“Tommy was right; you’re quite the charmer.”

Oliver smiled. “It’s just how I was raised.”

“Well, I wouldn’t expect anything less from the famous Moira Queen.” From the corner of her eye, she could see the aforementioned women watching their little meeting warily. “I hear you and Kara our planning on starting your own business?”

“Yes – we’ve already started construction. We’re converting my family’s old steel mill into a low-cost outlet mall for the residents of the Glades.”

Isabel nodded in interest. “A worthy endeavor.”

As the conversation continued on, Isabel excused herself, commenting that she needed another drink. On her way to the refreshment table, she caught sight of the Queens, who were conversing with Janice Bowen. For a moment, she watched them, feeling determination well up inside her.

Don’t worry, Robert, Moira. You’ll be getting yours soon.

So focused she was on them, she didn’t notice John Jones off to the side, eyeing her suspiciously.
As the night neared, it was finally time for Kal to blow out the candles on his cake. As people trickled outside for the final major event of the night, Iris took note of the cake placed on the grand table outside, noting the familiar shape.

“I didn’t know Kal was a Supergirl fan.” She whispered to Barry, who was walking next to her.

Barry smiled knowingly. “He’s her biggest fan, actually. He’s just a little…subdued about it.”

After the candles were blown out and everyone had a slice of chocolate ice cream cake, Kal made a big show of opening some presents for the guests. The Queens had carefully selected each present, making sure that the more personal, private ones from friends and family were kept away to be opened when it was only them, while those opened publicly were from some of the more prominent families of Starling City.

Once he was finished and the many guests departed (including, reluctantly, Tommy and John), leaving just the Queens, Kara, Barry, Iris, Sam, Ruby and Laurel, he opened the rest, thanking each giver sincerely and gratefully. After the last gift was opened, everyone decided to call it a night. People were directed to different rooms and bathrooms as the servants cleaned up the last signs of the party before they too departed to their own homes and quarters.

It was late into the night, when most of the home was quiet and asleep, that the trio of former assassins and their charge met in Kara’s room, for one last present. Kara opened a drawer in the nightstand next to her bed, handing it to her young cousin, who observed it with a fond eye. Unlike most of his other gifts, this one was small, about the size of the palm of his hand. Aware of the eyes on him, Kal opened it carefully, untying the knot on the top and lifting the lid. There was a small pouch inside, with a letter attached. He picked up the letter first.

_Dear Kal-El,_

_I’m sorry I wasn’t able to attend your birthday today. I wanted to, but Amanda…well, you know how she can be. And it would be hard to explain why I would be there anyway. If you don’t find those to be good reasons, I understand._

_The gift I’m giving you has a lot of memories connected to it, for all of us – both good and bad. I’m giving it to you as a reminder that, no matter where I am, I am always with you._

_With all my love,_

_Papa_

Setting down letter with care, Kal pulled the draw string on the pouch, and shook less its contents on his hand. Everyone looked down, and gasped.

_The Hozen._

As he settled in for bed, Kal fiddled with the arrowhead in his hand, thinking.

He knew he lived an atypical childhood thus far. If being an alien with superpowers wasn’t enough, he had spent the beginning years of his life in island hell, before moving in with a super-secret league of assassins. He had been all over the world, taught skills that most people, let alone children, wouldn’t even touch. The first twelve years of his life had been an odd combination of chaos and tragedy that he could’ve done without.
In the midst of it all, however, there had been love. Overwhelming, unconditional, endless love. Love he wouldn’t trade for the world.

Sometimes, he wondered what it would’ve been like. If his planet hadn’t exploded. If he had the life he was supposed to have.

But as he looked at the Hozen in his hand and the sleeping Kara next to his bed, he decided it didn’t matter.

He already had everything he could ever need – and everything he could ever want.

Chapter End Notes

Finally done! I’ve finally decided on a schedule for updates. Every week, on Tuesday nights/Wednesday mornings or afternoons – with my current schedule for college, I think I can handle that. As for the quality of the chapter, I’m kinda iffy on it, but I think it came out okay. I am thinking of getting a beta, and if you know anyone with a decent resume (including yourself), please tell me!

In other news: this story now has a Tumblr! The link will be in the endnote and the beginning note for AO3 users. For FFN users, here is the link: thabarrowsverse (dot) tumblr (dot) com. Replace the dots with periods and remove the spaces.

For the Tumblr, I will share when there as an update to the story and some idle thoughts on the Arrowverse (depending on how I think the season for each show is going), and maybe even some sneak peeks. You can also ask questions and send in artwork, which will be reblogged and linked in the story. Some might even appear in the story, with credit to the artist. Meta posts are also welcome.

Well, that’s all for now. Please comment/review your thoughts. Don’t forget to update the TV Tropes page!
Barry looked over the message, satisfied with its brevity, and clicked send. Then, he turned off the phone and hid it within the hollow space beneath the floorboards.

For the last few weeks, he had been living in a new apartment in one of the less… agreeable parts of town, with his hair dyed blonde and his eyes covered with blue contacts. His hair had even been cut crew-style. It was to further support his cover while he tried to get an in with Snart, along with making him familiar and inconspicuous with the locals. The Wests, Eddie, Caitlin, Cisco, Ronnie, and Professor Stein had all been made aware of his assignment, and knew to avoid that neighborhood and anywhere else Snart, and by extension, him, would be frequenting for the next couple of weeks.

He had also informed Oliver and Kara as well. While he had found a nearby place to act as a temporary base for Flash work, with his current assignment, there was an understanding that he wouldn’t be around as often. Kara had agreed to appear in Central more often to keep the metas at bay and to fill in for emergencies. If push came to shove, Ronnie and Stein had also offered to play hero as well, as Cisco was still in the middle of training with his own powers.

Since his free time could no longer be occupied with training and doing new experiments with the rest of the S.T.A.R. Labs crew, he had found a new hobby: establishing his hacker identity. His in with Snart was technology, and that meant he needed street cred. Ralph and Iris had overlooked the list of inactive hackers and, with his input, had determined one he could impersonate: Bolt. Bolt had been one of the best hackers in the world, easily one of the top ten, but had gone off the grid over two years ago after an underground 'hacktivist' organization called Helix had tried to recruit him - forcibly. Helix instead had been hacked in return and subsequently apprehended by the federal authorities after the death of their leader, Cayden James. Even with his enemies locked up, however, Bolt had yet to go back online, and it was believed that the scare with Helix had convinced him to hang it up for good.

Unbeknownst to everyone but the League of Assassins (and A.R.G.U.S., much to his resigned disbelief), however, is that Bolt actually was Barry. It had been a useful handle for him to investigate targets for the League and pick up other nifty pieces of information. After the mess with Helix, however, he had been forced to abandon it (much to everyone's irritation), but not before attaining quite the bevy of information on the other organization. While most of the members had been determined to be no real threats and could be easily handled by the regular authorities, Cayden James, their founder and head, was deemed too dangerous, with Barry himself personally handling his assassination. He had derived some guilty pleasure in informing the man why exactly he was
dying before slitting his throat.

To keep Ralph and Iris off his back, Barry had Cisco make up some cockamamie story about technology that could mimic Bolt online, filled with so much technological jargon that they had simply told him to just get on with it. Thus, Barry was allowed to reactivate his old handles and accounts undetected and unaware to all but those in the know. Since his incarceration under this new identity, he had been making waves on the darkweb, specifically centering his searches of information around Central City, so that way he knew his possible competition for his soon-to-be role as Snart's new techie. Once that was out of the way, he had made some arrangements, making sure that they had happened on a specific day.

That day was today, and Barry was about to enter the lion's den.

Hopefully, this wouldn't have to end with him having to kill somebody. He rather liked not having to hide bodies anymore.

Saints and Sinners was the center of Central City's underground. The place where all its rogues went, either to get their kicks off or to do business - or even both. It functioned as an informal base of operations for Central's most prominent criminals, many of whom were also the establishment's best customers and frequent donors to the owner's little slush fund.

Among these customers was Leonard Snart. A favorite of the boss, he entered with little fanfare, giving a small smirk to the bartender and tipping him when the man passed over his usual drink. Leonard took a long sip, leaning against the edge of the bar top, until he spotted who he was looking for.

A bald, heavy-set man wearing a long, beige trench coat was nursing his own drink in a corner booth. Upon seeing him, Leonard set his glass down, leaving a bit of money for payment, and sauntered towards his quarry, that smirk still on his face, slight and light. He was here on a mission, and he wasn't leaving until he completed his objective.

Leonard slid into the seat opposite the man, and turned up the charm. "Mick."

"Beat it." Mick Rory replied back without so much as a twitch, watching as the alcohol swirled inside his glass.

"Come on now, Mick, is that anyway to treat an old friend?"

"Some 'friend'." Mick scoffed. "Last time we hooked up, you ditched me to the cops."

"Can you blame me? You went wild last time we went out together. Completely out of control. Set yourself on fire and screwed up the entire gig."

"Che." The arsonist took a long swig of his glass. "What do you want, Snart?"

Leonard smiled. "Got a new job lined up. Real penny to make."

"Oh? And why don't you pick up some other suckers to take the fall while you run off with the goods?"

"'Cause this ain't your ordinary job, Rory. We're hitting a place that's really on the high-end, and I need the best if this is going to go anywhere."

Mick snorted, attracting some attention from the other patrons present. "And ya sure ya want a loose
cannon like me on the team then?"

"There's a reason I kept going back to you, Mick. You provide a balance to me. When things inevitably go off the rails, you're the one that keeps the cops on their toes. You're spontaneous - the blunt hammer to my scalpel, and sometimes, a hammer is all you really need to get the job done. Not to mention I need someone I trust on the team, and other than Lisa, you're the only one that really fits the bill."

"High praise from Central's self-proclaimed best thief." Mick sighed. "Who else?"

Leonard smiled. *Got 'im.* "Lisa, of course. Amunet's getting a cut, so she's got some men lined up for us too."

"Amunet?" His companion raised an eyebrow. "You're making a deal with *her*?"

"She did me a favor and I'm repaying her. We've got history together, you know, and she's really moved up the ladder in the last two years. And this deal she's got lined up - it's going to make everyone a lot of money, no matter how small the cut."

"Okay, fine. So you got Lisa for transport, me for muscle, and Amunet's lackeys for extra hands. But you're missing something." Mick took another swig of his drink. "A geek."

Leonard drummed his fingers against the table. Mick wasn't wrong, of course. Despite, or more likely, *because of,* Central being one of the science capitals of the world, a good tech was hard to find underground. Every decent egghead in the city was employed by any one of the scientific and/or industrial giants that made their home here. Even the downfall of S.T.A.R. Labs had done nothing to change that - many of the people employed there had found work elsewhere soon enough, as the Particle Accelerator had been mainly been riding on the reputation of S.T.A.R. Labs in its entirety, which itself was tied mainly to Harrison Wells as far as individuals went. And even then, the failure of the Particle Accelerator had only ravaged those reputations so badly was because of the damage it had done to the city and its inhabitants - otherwise, it would've been written off as another scientific failure (albeit, a colossal one that cost millions in money) and life would've continued on for all those involved.

The only way anyone with a masters or above degree could fail to get a semi-decent job in *this* city is if they were blackballed or they actively tried not to find one. The latter was more likely than the former - more than a fair few corporate scumbags were willing to hire less-than-ethical nerds as long as they got results. Hartley Rathaway, who was his go-to techie until the Particle Accelerator exploded, was one such nerd. He could've easily gotten a job at Mercury Labs after Harrison Wells dropped him like a potato, or really any lab in the world, but he was too intent on revenge after the incident screwed with his hearing, and got busted by the Flash for his troubles.

"I'm looking into someone right now, actually." Leonard eventually admitted. "Brie Larvan."

"Where'd she get dropped from?"

"Mercury. Got sacked from Tina McGee herself. Unfortunately, she isn't what you'd call professional."

"And I am?"

He had to give Mick that one. "True. But something tells me she's a different brand of crazy from you. You? You're just reckless and hotheaded. With her, she's got a real chip on her shoulder, and I don't trust her not to screw us over eventually when this is over. So, I was thinking of importing
someone in instead."

Mick clicked his teeth. "From where? Not a lot of crooks are willing to make the jump to the Flash's city, if you get what I mean."

"Not unless they're desperate." Leonard smirked. "I was thinking either Starling or Gotham. Gotham's getting gentrified and stuff, and with its new, apparent unbribable police force, it won't be long until the rats flee the sinking ship. And with Starling, I'd think anyone with a bent leaning would like to avoid an arrow to the throat. I've already started sniffing a few out, seeing which one would work best with us."

"Green Arrow shows up here too, though. Granted, it's always with the Flash against whatever meta is causing trouble for the week, but if they're planning to get away from him, Central City is hardly the place to go."

Leonard opened his mouth to counter-argue, but a call interrupted him. Holding out a finger to Mick, he took out his burner phone and accepted the call. Lisa was the only one who had the number to this phone, and she knew not to call unless there was an emergency, so there must be something going on with her.

"Yeah, Lis?"

"Hello, Mr. Snart."

Leonard froze at the unfamiliar voice. And then, the anger came. "Who is this? Where's Lisa!"

"Don't worry. Your sister is perfectly fine. If you don't believe me, call her right now."

Narrowing his eyes, Leonard covered the phone and whispered to Mick to call Lisa, knowing that while his partner had been on the outs, they had been. Confused but understanding, Mick complied, and when Lisa's familiar voice could be heard from his companion's phone, Leonard internally let out a breath of relief before once again returning to the call.

"Satisfied?"

"Who are you?"

"Well, if you're that curious... look at the TV."

Frowning, Leonard turned to the television that was mounted above the bar, and stilled. There, in a breaking news alert, Brie Larvan was currently being arrested by the police. The anchorwoman reporting her arrest, Linda Park, listed the charges against the other woman, and Leonard knew that Brie was on a one-way-trip to Iron Heights if even one of those were true. Following that report, another one followed, revealing that a number of other hackers from all around the country had found themselves charged and facing jail time.

The most jarring thing is that they were all someone Leonard had sniffed out for his upcoming job. Both unnerved and impressed, he spoke once more. "You've got my attention. I take it you want the job I'm offering?"

"You guess correctly, Mr. Snart."

"Well, as impressive as that was, I'd like to meet you in person first before we make this a sure thing."
"I figured. If you'd look over Mr. Rory's shoulder?"

Startled, Leonard did just that. Over in the corner, leaning against the old pinball machine, a slim man wearing black jeans, black gloves, and a black jacket with his hood on, held up his hand and wiggled his fingers at him. Leonard smiled.

About ten minutes later, behind the building, Leonard met his new hacker with Mick by his side. Across from him, Hoodie stood, hands in his pockets.

"Got a name?"

Leonard could almost feel the smirk on Hoodie's face. Then, in a smooth motion, the man let his hood down and revealed his face. Young-looking, thin, with blond hair and blue eyes. But there was something to him, a glint in his expression, that made Leonard both drawn and wary. Whoever this young man was, he was clearly not someone not to be trifled with.

"Call me Bolt." The newly christened hacker said, grinning. "And as a show of good faith, I've gotten you a gift." He zipped down his jacket and reached in for a hidden pocket, taking out a sheaf of papers and handing them over to Leonard.

Leonard quirked his eyebrow, before looking them over, and smiled widely.

Bolt had just given him the blueprints to A.R.G.U.S.'s Central City base.

He held out his hand, and Bolt took it firmly.

"Kid, I think this is the start of a beautiful friendship."

'I'm in.'

Iris let out a sigh of relief. "Phase I is complete. He's in Snart's crew."

"Good. Now he just needs to wait for Snart to touch base with Amunet." Ralph said, smiling giddily, before he noticed the pensive look on Iris' face. "What's wrong, Iris?"

"I'm just wondering how Barry managed to get in Snart's crew. It can't have been easy."

Ralph shrugged. "Barry's a smart guy. He probably figured out the way Snart thinks and acted accordingly."

Iris sighed once more. "That's what's worrying me."

In a warehouse on the outskirts of Central City, there stood two men. One of the men bore an uncanny, near-identical likeness to Cisco Ramon - if one disregarded his questionable hairstyle. The other was clad in an all-black suit, not dissimilar to the material of the Flash's own suit. On his chest was an insignia of a single lightning bolt - a mirror image of the one on the Flash's suit. His face and hair was covered with a mask, bearing only his unholy obsidian orbs and a jagged line of stitches where his mouth would be located, and his hands were in clawed gloves.

The Cisco-lookalike held out his arm, his hand in a fist, and watched impassively as a beam of blue energy flowed out from him, eventually creating something resembling a portal. There, The Flash could be seen, running around Central City with a determined look in his eye.
Chapter End Notes

Congratulations, Barry, you've got two supervillains into you!

Woo, I'm back! I'm finally feeling inspired again now that the new seasons are about to start. Don't worry, if you're a fan of my KND fic as well, that will not be abandoned - I've already started writing the next chapter, but that will take a while.

As for this fic, I'm still planning out Arc III - time has been limited lately, the perils of real life and all. Plus, with a beta now, who has their own life as well, updates are going to be sparser than usual. As a result of my beta's schedule, I've decided to shift the update schedule from Wednesday to weekends - better for everyone.

Now, as for pairings, I've written a bit of rant about that on this fic's tumblr. It's up to you if you want to read it, but I will reiterate the gist of it here - I am not changing this fic's pairings for you, or anyone else, just because you don't like Iris or Laurel or think Oliver/Kara better or whatever. Anything along those lines. Those pairings were decided right at the beginning and were interwoven into the plot, to the point that changing them would drastically change the flow of the story, probably even break it. I will not compromise that for anybody.

In other news, I am thinking of planning a contest for fan art. It's in the tentative stages right now, but it will happen eventually. I plan on talking it over with my beta, Kara Smoak, for ideas for prizes before it happens. So, if you're a fan of this story and have a bit of an artistic flair to you, keep an eye out.

Don't forget to check the blog! And update the TV Tropes Page!
"You're not heading to Central tonight?" Green Arrow asked Supergirl curiously as they walked into the Foundry after a late-night patrol. Supergirl shook her head, frowning.

"Barry still needs to be seen around the city, and since he's now in with Snart he can't let him get too suspicious when the Flash isn't seen on the nights he's planning the heist out. After the meeting's done, he's planning on donning the Flash suit and doing some patrolling of his own."

As they walked down the steps, Green Arrow let down his hood, and Oliver sighed. "I still don't like this. Barry should've said no to this, it's all too risky."

"He was getting bored, Oliver." Kara pointed out as she pulled down her own hood. "You know how he gets when he's bored. Need I remind you of the Monkey Incident?"

"I thought we swore to never speak of that again."

"You and Barry swore. I did no such thing."

Oliver groaned. "How we never managed to connect it to him, I'll never know. Even Ra's knew, but since there was no evidence, we couldn't punish him for it."

Kara smirked. "Yeah, but then Ra's took over his personal training sessions for the next month. I think that was punishment enough."

Oliver shrugged. "True." He then blinked at a particular spot of the base. "Slade? What are you doing here? We thought you were over in Calgary looking in on another lead on Joe."

Slade Wilson emerged from the shadows, and blinked with his remaining, intrigued. "How'd you know I was here?"

Both of his present children gave him deadpan looks. "We were trained by the League of Assassins, Slade. They practically invented that trick." Kara answered drily.

Slade let out a breath at the reminder. "But of course." He then turned serious. "I'm here because I finally found out where Joe is - he's in a prison in Kasnia."

Both Oliver and Kara raised eyebrows at that. "Kasnia? Why would he be there? We've been to Kasnia, and we know first-hand that place isn't exactly what you'd call a dream vacation spot."

Slade sighed. "He followed in my footsteps, became an ASIS agent. According to my contact, he
was there conducting an investigation on an ongoing arms deal in the country. Got arrested at some point and imprisoned, and ASIS washed their hands of him rather than risk a potential bargaining chip. I need your help to get him out."

Oliver held up his hands in apology. "I'd love to come, but I can't - I'm too conspicuous with all the charity and PR I've been doing around the city. Heads will roll if someone spots me in Kasnia."

Slade nodded slowly, accepting the answer, and turned to Kara. "And what of you, Kara?"

Kara shrugged. "I'm game. The city can last a few days without me, and Kal could use a vacation outside of Starling."

Slade blinked. "You're seriously considering bringing Kal-El with us, Kara? He's a child!"

"A child who's invulnerable and can take care of himself, Slade. Besides, he wants to see you. You've been spending a lot of time searching for Joe and Grant lately, and couldn't even make it to his birthday party as a result."

Slade cringed at the reminder and sighed. "Fine, fine. But if things go pear-shaped," off to the side, Oliver snorted; the other two blatantly ignored him, "he stays out of the line of fire, alright."

"Of course."

Waiting outside in a private airfield, Oliver handed over the last bag to Slade and clasped his hand on Kara's shoulder. "I'll keep watch over J'onn over the next few days, if you're alright with that."

Kara nodded. "Great - make sure he eats a balanced diet and doesn't binge on oreos for meals."

Oliver raised an eyebrow. "What counts as a balanced meal for a Martian?"

Kara playfully slapped him on the chest. "Figure it out yourself, Ollie."

"So, how are we getting Joe out?" Kal asked once they were in the air and settled in. Slade took out a sheaf of papers from his bag and handed them to Kara. The child leaned over to read it alongside his cousin, frowning.

Kara whistled. "Wow, this is quite the card you've got, there. How badly did Amanda ring you out for this?"

"More than enough. That's why I've been gone so often for the last couple of months." Slade said wearily. He then smiled. "But it will all be worth it in the end. I can't wait to introduce you to Joe - you'll love him."

"We already do, Slade." Kara replied warmly, leaning over to pat her adoptive father on the leg. "You've told us all so much about him, I feel as if we already know him as well as you do."

Suddenly, her face grew pensive. "I do have one concern, though. Amanda."

Hearing that, Slade sat up, his back straightening. "She won't be a problem."

Sighing, Kara leaned back into her seat and placed a hand to her forehead, rubbing circles. "Slade-"

"Amanda knows the dangers of pushing us, Kara. She's a ruthless, cutthroat bitch, but she's not a fool. What she has over us can only last for so long; she wouldn't dare go after Joe if she thinks that it
will finally push us over the edge."

"I'm not talking about what Amanda will do, Slade."

Slade blinked. "What?"

It was Kal, young but insightful, who cleared things up for him. "Joe."

As realization dawned on Slade, Kara elaborated on her cousin’s statement. "Amanda essentially stole you from Joe and forced him and the rest of your family into hiding, Slade. Do you think he's going to be happy to hear that you're still working for her?"

"We're working on a plan to get rid of her." He pointed out. It sounded weak even to his ears.

"And how long will that take? It will be years before we can kill her and sufficiently weather the consequences. You, of all people, should know that - it took you three years to escape her control the first time, and she had you back under her thumb soon enough." Kara shot back. "Do you think Joe will be willing to wait that long, to deal with having her constantly over all our heads, manipulating us like puppets on a string?"

Slade shook his head slowly, now downcast.

Kara sighed. "I'm not saying this to be cruel, Slade. I just need you to see the reality of our situation. The only reason we were willing to put up with Amanda is because she had more dirt on us besides you and, as much as I hate to say it, she's useful for what we do. Our goals align on some level. The same cannot be said for Joe."

Oliver hummed as he waited in his seat. Finally, John Jones arrived, bearing gifts. Oliver licked his lips at the sight of his chili and enchilada - until he caught sight of what John had brought with him.

"Choco-covered triple fudge cake with caramel frosting." The archer groaned. "I get fatter just by looking at it."

"You know of this dish?" John asked, handing over Oliver's food.

"It's a family favorite." Oliver deadpanned. "Both families."

John quirked an eyebrow. "Kara?"

"And Kal. The joys of fast metabolism and a limitless back account." Oliver snarked.

"Dead? What do you mean, he's dead?" Slade hissed, disturbingly quiet.

The Kasnian warden, who was right now severely regretting his choice in profession, answered. "There was a problem… a fight between two of the other prisoners. Your son, he tried to break it up… and was stabbed."

Kara listened to the man explain, using her supersenses to listen to the warden's heartbeat. She frowned. To the untrained mind, it could easily be explained away by Slade's threats getting into the man's head. But to her…

"Where's the body?" Slade demanded. "I want to see my son!"

The warden stuttered, unable to get the words out.
"There is no body." The two men looked towards Kara. "He's lying, Slade."

"So why did you call me here, John?" Oliver asked as he polished off the last of his food. "You said it was important."

John nodded. "At Kal's party last week, I picked up some disturbing surface thoughts from one of your guests."

Oliver frowned. "Which one?"

"Isabel Rochev." John narrowed his eyes when he saw Oliver's frown deepen. "You know her?"

"You didn't dig any deeper?"

"No. I wanted to run it by you or Kara first. I go any deeper, a person risks sensing my presence, especially if I do it more than once. I know neither of you - or Barry - would want me to risk it."

"And you would be correct." Oliver agreed. "...what kind of thoughts did you hear from her?"

"Extremely negative thoughts." John answered. "Thoughts of vengeance, violent and social retribution. And all of it was directed at your parents, Oliver."

Oliver scowled. "Isabel is Tommy's new business partner. She initially invested into Merlyn Global back when Malcolm was in charge, and flew over to help Tommy stabilize the company after the Undertaking. All three of us were suspicious when we heard. I'll message Barry and he'll run a deeper background check on her. I'll also run it by Amanda - I'm sure she's already done her own share of looking."

"And Tommy?"

"What about him?"

"I could take a look-" John started, only for Oliver to immediately cut him off.

"No. There's no evidence to suggest that Tommy is even remotely aware of what Isabel is planning. For now, we leave him alone."

John gave him a look. "Oliver, I know we've only known each other for a short time but I've been around you enough to know you're worried about him. I could easily assuage those fears for you."

"Yes, you could." Oliver conceded. "But Tommy's my best friend. I'm not going to betray his trust like that. I've already done that with my parents - I'm not going to do that to him too."

"So, your contact… where is he?" Kara asked as Slade paced around. They had been waiting in the meeting spot for ten minutes already.

"I don't know. Nylander's never on time." Slade paused. "He's also a bit of a jackass, so watch yourself."

"He's not that bad." An unknown voice countered.

Slade and Kara looked to their right to see a tall, reedy man walk towards them with a swagger in his step. As Slade went to greet his old friend, Kara crossed her arms. Her instincts were screaming at her not to trust this man, and they were rarely wrong.
"Where were you?" Slade asked after he and Nylander ended their embrace.

"I was with a girl." Nylander replied, then looked behind Slade to eye Kara up and down, blatantly checking her out. "And so were you, I see."

Slade frowned, suddenly very teed off at his old associate. "She's my daughter, Nylander."

Nylander looked at him disbelievingly.


Kara smiled beatifically at them both.

Nylander gulped a bit, slightly nervous. "Right. So, Joe. You need his location?"

"Are you sure you don't want me to go with you?" Kara asked as Slade finished putting on the rest of his gear. Off on the other bed, Kal-El was reading one of the books he had brought on the trip - The Hunger Games.

"I'll be fine, Kara." Slade reiterated, unsheathing one of his swords to take a good look at the blade. "Even without the Mirakuru, the Jackals will hardly be an issue. You will be overkill, especially since the last thing we need is people asking why Supergirl is in Kasnia when there isn't a world-ending crisis going on here. Especially when Starling's newest socialite has made an impromptu trip here without telling anyone why."

"I have a bad feeling about this Slade." Kara sighed. "Something about this entire set-up feels off. I don't like it."

"Well, if you're that worried, you can shadow me while I rescue Joe. If things get... spotty, then you can step in."

"Can I come too?" Kal asked, piping up from his book.

His two guardians exchanged a look. "No." They bluntly stated in unison.

The child pouted.

"Alright, we're here." Kara whispered in Slade's ear as they landed several yards away from the Jackals' hideout, an abandoned military warehouse. The two quietly hid themselves behind one of the large, surrounding crates and eyed the entrance, where two men were standing guard in front of the gates.

After about ten minutes of memorizing the guards' scouting route, Slade turned away from the sight. "Once I head in, wait five minutes before following me. Do not break your cover unless you are certain Joe or I are in trouble, alright?"

"Don't worry, Slade. This is hardly the first time I've done something like this." Kara said, loosening her shoulders. "You sound just like Ollie, you know? Always a worrywart."

"Comes with being the eldest. Your brother may recognize you as a warrior, but he'll always see you as his sister first." Slade muttered fondly, turning his gaze back to the gates. "I'm not any different, Kara. The world may only see Supergirl, but as for me, the only person I see is my daughter."

Kara had nothing to say to that. Instead, she silently took Slade's hand and squeezed it firmly.
About two minutes later, the guards turned away from the gates to start the next round. Not waiting any longer, Slade used his Mirakuru-enhanced speed to sprint towards the gate, busting and bending the metal with his super strength. Kara watched him, using her supersenses to keep track of the situation. The screams and shouts of pain were as loud to her ears as they would be if she were there in the thick of the action herself.

After five minutes passed, she quickly followed Slade to the compound, careful to keep her speed within human limits in case someone managed to survive Slade's onslaught and she didn't notice them. She followed the trail of carnage her adoptive father left behind, making sure that each of the enemy combatants were either unconscious or dead. Finally, she made it to the main storage room, hiding among the shadows of the crates. There, she could see Slade holding Nylander at sword point. Surrounding them were several mercenaries, all aiming their guns at Slade.

I knew we couldn't trust him. Kara thought as she focused her superhearing on the confrontation.

"I'm curious, Slade. What was your plan? Kill us all and save your boy? Kind of reductive, no?" Nylander smirked. "Then again, with the Mirakuru in your veins, it certainly had a strong chance of working, yes?"

"Yes. Now if you know what's good for you, let my son go!" Slade shouted, the tip of his blade inching ever so closer to Nylander's throat.

"Ahh, my brother - it's not so simple, unfortunately."

"And why is that?" Slade asked, growling.

"Because we need your boy, Slade." Nylander responded casually. "After all, he's our boss."

The world stopped.

Slade's grip on his sword slackened, the blade lowering unconsciously. From behind Nylander, a young man with black hair and the chiseled features of his father walked forward. Nylander stepped aside to allow him a direct line to their base's assailant.

"Hello, father." Joe Wilson said, a cold undertone that Slade had never heard in his son, now emanating from his boy's voice. "It's been a long time."

From her hidden vantage point, Kara fisted her hands and resisted the urge to sigh.

Why does stuff like this never go smoothly?

Chapter End Notes

Hey, I'm back again! Sorry about the late update - school has been hectic. However, once Christmas Break starts I'll have at least three weeks to do nothing but write, and I finally feel inspired to continue the story again.

As for this chapter, it was started during NaNoWriMo when I hit a rather bad case of writer's block for my chosen story. After watching Flash's 100th Episode, I felt the urge to finish it. And here it is. For next chapter, we'll tie up the Deathstroke two-parter,
including Joe finally meeting one of his father's Lian Yu kids. After that, I have some more planning to do for the arc, but rest assured, what I have planned will keep you all interested. The fun has only just begun.

Please comment/review! Don't forget to update the TV Tropes page! And visit the Tumblr blog if you want to submit fanart!
Arc III, Chapter 50: Sibling Rivalry

Chapter Summary

Siblings don't always get along, unfortunately.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 50: Sibling Rivalry

"Why?"

After the little revelation ten minutes ago, Slade had demanded that he and Joe be left alone to talk in private. Despite having taken out a significant amount of their men and holding his second-in-command hostage, Joe had obliged. It was his father after all.


"Yes - to all of them!" Slade answered, angry and worried. "I left so you could be safe! I gave up my freedom so you could have yours, and this - all of this, is hardly what I expected from you. A mercenary-for-hire, Joe? What were you thinking?"

Joe crossed his arms, untouched. "After that bitch took you away from me, ASIS all but abandoned me. Rather than take it up with the US government over what she did, they instead swept everything under the rug and put a gag order on me. After all the years of service you and I put in, they threw us away, tossed us aside. So, I was thinking I was returning the favor."

"ASIS didn't like that of course, but I managed to hide both mine and Grant's whereabouts from them. Considering you're here, however, I guess it wasn't well enough."

Joe eyed his father up and down. "So, tell me, how'd you get out from under that bitch's thumb?"

Slade gazed at his son unreadably before sighing, his posture slouching. He looked as if he had aged decades with those simple gestures. "I didn't. At least, not completely."

Joe narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean by that?"

"I was a member of Task Force X - her personal black-ops team of criminals, all kept in line with an exploding chip in the back of their head. Defy her and your brains will be splattered on the floor the next second. For four years I was under her employ, until a friend of mine clued me in on an opportunity to escape, and helped get the chip out of me. I left, but only managed as far as Starling before she caught up to me again."

"So, you have the chip back in you again." Joe surmised.

Slade shook his head. "No. When Amanda found me, she found me with a new, far more effective leash."

Joe stared at his father in confusion, before the realization dawned on him. "Those kids you found on
the island."

"Yes."

While Slade had not told his son all the details of what happened on Lian Yu, he had told him enough. Joe was aware of the existences of Oliver, Barry, Kara, and Kal, along with his father's romance with Shado, but he was not clued in on the specifics. Particularly the bit about the latter two being aliens from space; Slade did not believe he could tell his son any of this without being called crazy in return. The Mirakuru had already stretched Joe's suspension of disbelief far enough.

"The only reason I tried to escape is because I heard you and Grant were no longer under her surveillance. Unfortunately, Amanda had already done her research on me, and had located the kids after they were finally rescued from the island. She knew I would go to them first, and banked on that to catch me, and make me aware that she knew who they were and where they lived. It was essentially you and Grant all over again."

Joe frowned, one of his hands fisting together. "If that's the case, then why are you here? I'll just be another hostage against you."

"Because I was worried, Joe." Slade replied wearily. "Amanda may be the devil incarnate, but she isn't completely inured to gratitude. She already has four hostages nearby to keep me in-line - adding you in would be completely pointless to do. So, in return for some more… unsavory jobs, she gave me information on your brother's and yours' possible whereabouts. Considering Grant is living blissfully and happily away from all this, I left him alone. You, however, are another matter."

"So, answer me, son - why the Jackals?"

Joe clicked his teeth. "Originally, I started the Jackals to get enough capital to stage a rescue attempt for you." He admitted. "Storming a secret U.S. government agency to rescue one man isn't cheap, you know."

Slade held out his arms. "That's no longer necessary any more, as you can see."

"Oh, but it is, father." Joe retorted, seething. "That bitch separated our family. She's keeping you as her personal attack dog. We may no longer need to rescue you, but that doesn't mean we're done. Amanda Waller… needs to die."

Kara kept one ear on Slade and Joe's argument as she started snooping around the Jackals' base. Thanks to her powers and training, she had been able to avoid detection this far; however, she knew the longer she kept at it, the more likely it was that someone would find her. She only hoped that Slade managed to get out before she was spotted.

Sneaking into another room, she hid behind some nearby crates when she spotted a couple of the mercenaries overlooking some documents. On the wall behind them, she spotted a map, where there were some specific places marked. Using her supervision, she zeroed onto the map, memorizing it; she'd have to compare it to a more distinct map of Kasnia once she and Slade were out of here.

Listening in on the conversation again, she scowled at the words exchanged.

"Boss, it's time."

"Very well, Nylander."

"Wait, where are you going? Joe!"
"There's no point in you being here anymore, father. I'm not leaving with you."

She could hear Slade scowl. "Fine, then, if that's how you're going to be, then I'll just leave!" She heard a door slammed, and knew it was time for her to go.

"I never should have left him alone." Slade grumbled as he and Kara lounged around in their hotel room. Kal, far past his bedtime, was already asleep in the other bed, his soft snores one of the few comforts of the ever-growing tension in his adoptive father's body.

Kara paid Slade no mind, instead taking out her laptop. She had pulled up an image of Kasnia's map, and was now transcribing the one she had seen in the Jackals' base for comparison.

"I know leaving was the best option at the time, but I should've just escaped the first chance I got instead of waiting for Maseo to give me the okay. Maybe if I had, he would've listened to reason." Slade laughed bitterly. "I really am a shit father. You four end up in the League of Assassins, while my oldest son becomes a crime lord. It really says a lot that the only child of mine to have a normal life was the one who never had a chance to meet me."

"Slade, don't." Kara spoke up, lifting her head. "Don't do that."

"Do what?"

"Blame yourself," Kara responded. "I know for a fact that it doesn't help. Everything you did was to protect Joe, it isn't your fault that he's become what he is. He had a choice, and he made it, and while we both know it was the wrong one, you can't blame him for why he chose it. If there's anyone to blame, it's Amanda for putting us in this situation in the first place."

"Comforting words, Kara." Slade smiled bittersweetly at her. "I just wish I could believe them."

Kara sighed and looked back down at the map she was drawing. Her eyes quickly widened, and she looked back at the map on the laptop for confirmation. Slade, seeing her distress, sat up.

"What's wrong?"

Kara didn't answer, instead quickly going to her bag and taking out a long, sheathed katana, strapping it to her back. She began tying up her hair, making sure it kept out of her eyes.

Now Slade was really beginning to worry. "Kara."

"We need to go now, Slade." Kara finally told him, eyes serious. "Joe is about to do something that we're all going to regret."

"I'll go after Joe!" Slade called up to a flying Kara as he directed his motorcycle towards a different road. "You deal with the mercenaries!"

Kara nodded. Despite the situation, Supergirl still could not be seen in Kasnia without reason - so she was instead dressed in a tight black shirt and pants, made of reflective League armor. It allowed her to blend into the night sky; the only way anyone would be able to see her is if they shined a direct light on her. The lower half of her face was hidden beneath her usual veil, and her hair under the usual hood, keeping any distinguishing physical traits away from curious eyes.

As her adoptive father drove out of sight, Kara descended from the sky, landing on a tall metal ridge, out of sight. She crouched down, using the thermal aspect of her enhanced vision to spot the Jackals.
Quickly, she found a large congregation of heat signatures in one of the buildings nearby. Switching to x-ray, she recognized them as the Jackals. Joe seemed to be directing Nylander to do something, judging by how the man led the rest of the pack outside with the equipment. Once they were gone, she saw Slade make his entrance, and knew it was time for her to act.

She descended from her position, using her super speed to move faster but only so much to keep the sounds of her movement silent. Once Nylander and his group were in the vicinity, she pounced.

Grabbing the first Jackal member, Kara spun him around and punched him right across the face, before kicking him forward to allow his body to take the bullets that were now being shot at her. She dropped to the floor, and, leaping forward towards another group, used her right arm as pivot and swung her legs around, knocking them to the ground.

As they were groaning in pain, Kara jumped it, grabbing the arm of another member and directing his gun to shoot at his companions before directing it upwards to shoot him in the head. She then used his body as another meat shield, as she grabbed the handle of the katana on her back and drew the blade outward.

After that, it was a slaughter. Kara cut down man after man, taking out members of the Jackals as she danced around bullets and blades alike. Eventually, the dance ended, and there was only one man left to deal with: Nylander. Snake that he was, he tried to flee, only to be quickly knocked out before he could react, via Kara driving the butt of the handle of her weapon into his solar plexus and then giving him a hard punch to the face.

She quickly tied the sole living member of the Jackals up as she refocused her enhanced hearing back on Slade. After a bit of sifting, she could hear the tell-tale striking of blades, and flew over to aid her adoptive father in his fight.

"Taking out a power plant? Depriving hundreds of thousands of water, condemning half the country to death? What were you thinking, Joe?" Slade demanded, pointing one of his blades at his now disarmed son. "What makes you think that your revenge is worth the lives of so many innocents!?"

"Oh, like you've done any different! Have you forgotten about Milford Sound?" Joe screamed back.

Slade's sword lowered slightly at that, his grip slacking as he looked at his son in shock. "You saw that?"

"Yes." Joe hissed. "I saw it. Don't you dare say you have the high ground on me! You're as every bit as ruthless as I am!" He lunged, and Slade, being too distracted, was unable to stop his son from knocking the blade out of his grip. Joe grabbed it for himself, and pointed it directly at Slade.

With Mirakuru, Slade could easily disarm him and end this fight already. But his mind, clouded by everything that happened, was blank. He couldn't think straight - all he could think of was how he had turned his son into a monster.

"Mother didn't want Grant in this world, which is why she took him away. Me, however? She didn't bother. She knew that I was too much like you, so she left me on my own."

"Six months after that camping trip, I made my first kill." Joe continued, uncaring of the pain his words were causing his father. "I slit his throat, just like you did. Because you were all I ever wanted to be."

Slade stared at his son, and then shook his head. "I'm not that person, Joe. Maybe I was, once, but not anymore."
Joe curled his lip, snarling. He pulled the sword back, looking to swing. "Then you're not my father anymore. Just in my way!"

The blade descended, and Slade closed his eyes, preparing for the pain. It wouldn't kill him - the Mirakuru would make sure of that - but it would certainly leave a nasty scar that would remind him of this day.

At least, until he heard a loud clang! Slade opened his eyes to see Kara blocking Joe's sword with her own, the metal sliding against each other and giving off a very unpleasant, piercing sound. If the situation hadn't been so dire, he would've winced and bemoaned his Mirakuru-enhanced senses.

Kara kicked Joe right in the chest, causing him to stumble backwards. He righted himself using the railing of the platform they were all on, and glared at the intruder.

"You. You're the girl that Nylander saw with him earlier today, aren't you." Joe growled. "The one Slade called his daughter."

"Yes." Kara affirmed. "Forgive me for hiding my face, but let's just say I'm a very cautious person and leave it at that."

"Kara…" Slade said, at a loss.

"Kara? I see, you were one of the little baubles he collected while he was stuck on that island. A fixture of the fantasy family he made for himself when he couldn't bother look for his real family." Joe scoffed.

The next second, he had to block a strike from a furious Kara. He gritted his teeth as he tried to hold her back. She was unnaturally strong.

"Insult me all you want, but don't you dare insult our father or trivialize what we went through in that hellhole." Kara hissed out.

"No, don't fight!" Slade called out, finally getting a hold of himself. He moved to intervene, but a gunshot stopped him. Joe had taken out one of the guns on his person and aimed it directly at his disowned father.

"Don't interfere." He pushed against Kara, finally breaking the lock. "If your daughter wants to die so badly, let her. She's clearly old enough to make her own choices." And with that, he swung.

Kara countered, and soon the clash of blades began again. Slade watched silently as two of his children did battle. Once again, he felt helpless; for all the power the Mirakuru afforded him, it failed to do anything meaningful when it truly mattered, like now.

Neither of his children payed him in any mind. Instead, they were absorbed in their own battle. Kara dodged a particularly harsh stab and slammed her own blade down, once again locking her and Joe together. They struggled briefly, with Kara tapping into just enough strength to overwhelm Joe and loosen the grip he had on his handle. Acting quickly, she grabbed his wrist and flipped him over, before stepping inside and forcing his arm between her legs. With a twist, she snapped his arm, breaking it. Joe shouted out in pain, grabbing his now useless appendage.

Thankfully for him, a swift kick to the head knocked him into blissful unconsciousness.

"I've called Amanda." Kara announced as Slade loaded the last of the Jackals - Joe himself - into the truck. "She's sending in a plane now to pick us up. All of us."
"Will she be taking custody of the Jackals?" Slade asked tonelessly.

"Nylander and whatever lackeys are left, yes." Kara nodded. She hesitated with the next bit. "Joe is another matter."

Slade snorted. "You'd think she'd want another soldier to do her bidding. Joe would make a very effective one."

Kara crossed her arms and sighed. "Indeed, he would. The problem is that his life's goal - as far we're aware - is to kill her. That makes him a liability."

"We all want to kill her." Slade pointed out. "Everyone in A.R.G.U.S. hates her, and she's their director."

"That may be, but there's a difference: as much as everyone hates her, they all still value their lives over killing her. It's why no one on Task Force X has made an attempt over the years." Kara reasoned. "Joe is a different matter. It's clear he doesn't care if he dies, as long as she dies with him. Why else would he bother doing all of this? With Joe disowning you, Grant is the only possible leverage she would have over him, and she knows that killing Grant would put us all against her. She may have us on a leash, but that leash has a very slippery grip."

"Then where are we going to put him if A.R.G.U.S. won't take him? No normal prison is going to be able to hold him. The only other organization I can think of is the League."

Kara shook her head rapidly. "No way. The League does not take prisoners, only recruits, and there's no way they'll accept Joe as one, even if Oliver, Barry, and myself all vouched for him. Trying to murder half a country just for the sake of money and revenge goes against League principles, and after Al Sa-Her, the League will not take these offenses lightly. They'd sooner kill Joe than recruit him."

Slade sighed. "Then ASIS will have to do. I have contacts and connections, and they'll do their best to keep him under lock and key." He looked at her, a little pleadingly. "Can you and Kal come with?"

Kara smiled comfortingly at him, placing a hand on his arm. "Sure."

As they watched A.R.G.U.S. operatives load the Jackals into the plane, Kal-El grabbed Slade's hand. His adoptive father looked down at him in confusion. "I'm sorry this didn't turn out the way you wanted to, Papa."

Slade smiled tiredly. "It's alright, Kal. Your sister warned me this might happen, and I should've heeded it better."

Kal looked towards the plane, where Joe Wilson was being escorted in by a very large number of guards. "Are you really going to send him to jail?"

"I have to. He's too dangerous to be left on his own." Slade closed his eyes. "I just hope that one day, he'll forgive me for it."

Kara, having heard the entire exchange, simply grabbed Slade's other hand. The three kept close as they entered the plane together. It was time to go home.
New chapter! This finishes the Deathstroke arc for now, though this will not be the last time you’ll see Joe Wilson, that much I can assure you.

In other news, I've finally finished planning out Arc III! If all goes according to plan, the last chapter of Arc III will be Chapter 63, after which we will move into Arc IV. I won't spoil much, but let's just say people will be surprised this arc - on both sides of the fourth wall.

Now, for some more news. After some deliberation with my beta, Kara Smoak, I've decided I'm going to be holding a contest. After finals finish next week, I'm going to be updating this story much more often, so this is the best time to do it.

Now, this is a FANART competition.

The Prompt: Draw your favorite scene of To Hell and Back. Any scene. You can have as many entries as you like.

Dates: From the day this chapter is posted to the day the last chapter of this arc (Chapter 63) is posted, you may submit something.

Submitting: Submit your drawings to the story's official blog on Tumblr (the link can be found in the first chapter beneath the chapter summary on the AO3 version). If that is not feasible, then simply post it to your preferred image-hosting platform and send me the link via messaging on either AO3 or FFN.

Winning: There are three ways to win.

1. Author's choice. Whatever piece I favor the most.
2. Beta's choice. Whatever piece Kara Smoak, my beta, favors the most.
3. Fan's choice. I will put up a poll (either on FFN or Tumblr) and have all the readers vote via that.

Prizes:

1. For the fan that wins #1 (my choice), your piece will be the cover page for FFN, the first chapter of AO3, and the TV Tropes page!
2. For the fan that wins #2 (beta's choice), your piece will be the background image of the Tumblr blog, which is scarily bare.
3. For the fan that wins #3 (fan's choice), your piece will be inserted into the first chapter of Arc IV.

That's it for now. Don't be afraid to ask questions (preferably via review or commenting). If this contest does well (as in, gets a lot of submissions), I will consider doing a second one down the line.

Criticism is welcome! Flames will be ignored! Don't forget to update the TV Tropes
Chapter Summary

It's a game that isn't exclusive to criminals, you know.

Chapter Notes

**The Prompt:** Draw your favorite scene of To Hell and Back. Any scene. You can have as many entries as you like.

**Dates:** From the day this chapter is posted to the day the last chapter of this arc (Chapter 63) is posted, you may submit something.

**Submitting:** Submit your drawings to the story's official blog on Tumblr (the link can be found in the first chapter beneath the chapter summary on the AO3 version). If that is not feasible, then simply post it to your preferred image-hosting platform and send me the link via messaging on either AO3 or FFN.

**Winning:** There are three ways to win.

1. Author's choice. Whatever piece I favor the most.
2. Beta's choice. Whatever piece Kara Smoak, my beta, favors the most.
3. Fan's choice. I will put up a poll (either on FFN or Tumblr) and have all the readers vote via that.

**Prizes:**

1. For the fan that wins #1 (my choice), your piece will be the cover page for FFN, the first chapter of AO3, and the TV Tropes page!
2. For the fan that wins #2 (beta's choice), your piece will be the background image of the Tumblr blog, which is scarily bare.
3. For the fan that wins #3 (fan's choice), your piece will be inserted into the first chapter of Arc IV.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Chapter 51: The Con Game**

Bolt looked around suspiciously, making sure there were no pursuers before climbing the metal fence, vaulting over it and landing on the other side. He quickly walked around, spotting the warehouse with the right number, and sprinted over to it. He took out a phone - burner, of course - and called the number programmed into it.
"I'm here."

The next moment, the front door to the warehouse opened, revealing Leonard Snart, thief extraordinaire, and his current employer. Snart smirked and beckoned Bolt over, allowing him through the door and into their crew's new hideout. It was sparse, being abandoned, all except for one specific corner of the room. In that corner, there were a few bunk beds and a variety of goods, most likely stolen. A few weapons were propped against the wall. However, the most interesting thing to Bolt was the massive technological setup. State-of-the-art hardware, connected to a large plasma screen.

"Amunet hook you up with all this?"

"She has a lot of money riding on this, so she spared no expense with the equipment." Snart chuckled. "All the more reason to succeed, otherwise she might put us in debt to her for all this. I understand you know how to work it?"

"Indeed." Bolt responded. "I'll set up my laptop immediately."

Snart stopped him. "Before you do, you should meet the rest of the crew." Bolt followed him outside, on the other side of the hideout. There, four people were wreaking havoc. He could see Mick Rory burning something up with a gun that spit fire, while Lisa, Snart's younger sister, watched in awe. Beside her was someone who was constantly changing appearances - a shapeshifter, how wonderful. And finally, there was a young, African American woman teleporting to and fro, occasionally stepping into Mick's line of sight and then moving elsewhere. Snart put two fingers into his mouth and blew out a loud, piercing whistle, catching everyone's attention.

They all walked over to the duo, each of them appraising the new arrival, trying to determine what kind of person he was. Bolt was indifferent to the scrutiny - he had gone through worse.

"Everyone, this is Bolt, our hacker and technology expert." Snart gestured to the younger man, who simply held up a hand in greeting.

"Bolt, you remember Mick. He's our muscle." Snart jabbed his thumb towards his partner. "Mr. Rory."

"Geek." Mick announced. "'Bolt' is too cool a name for a nerd like you." Bolt blinked at that, then shrugged. He'd been called worse.

"My sister Lisa, getaway driver and support." Lisa Snart smirked at him, which he returned with a nod.

Snart then pointed to the shapeshifter, who also smirked before turning into a featureless man. Bolt widened his eyes when he saw the other man had none, as if they were never there to begin with - that was new. "Hannibal Bates. A meta with a penchant for disguise, as you can see."

"Pleasure." Bates held out his hand. Bolt shook it in kind, and he could see the slight twinge in Bates' jaw when he saw that Bolt's hands were gloved.

"And finally, Shawna Baez." Shawna crossed her arms. "She's the one that will be doing the actual thieving for obvious reasons."

"'Sup." She said. Bolt simply nodded in kind.

Snart clasped his hands together. "Now that we're all here, we can finally discuss the plan. Everyone,
back inside. We've got a lot to talk about."

Once the plasma screen showed the desktop of his computer, Bolt set about pulling up the files of information on A.R.G.U.S. Everyone watched, somewhat impressed, as he rapidly typed his way through layers and layers of authentication and encryption that he himself had put up to access the hidden sub-directories in his hard drive that held the information he sought.

"Paranoid, much?" Shawna commented.

"Better paranoid than dead." Bolt retorted. Shawna had nothing to say to that.

Finally, he passed through the last encryption, revealing the files. He clicked one, pulling up a picture of an Asian man.

"A.R.G.U.S. stands for Advanced Research Group United Support. They're one of the lesser-known alphabet agencies of the United States of America. Their primary purpose is the combat of terrorist threats, both international and domestic, via the use of, well, advanced research; science and technology that has yet to even be publicized as possible subjects of interest, let alone actively researched." Bolt explained. "The man on the screen here is Maseo Yamashiro; their sub-director and public face."

Bates frowned. "What about the actual boss?"

"Unknown." Bolt said, frustrated. "I searched far and wide, but there's no record of who the real boss is. It's very likely he - or she - has wiped all evidence of their existence from the internet. A near-impossible feat if it were not for A.R.G.U.S.'s resources."

"Yamashiro here is a Japanese national." Snart picked up from where Bolt finished. "It's not known exactly how he became a member of an American agency, but he is, and he's trusted as much as a sub-director of a shady covert agency can be. Other than the director, he is the only person who has direct access to the resources of every A.R.G.U.S. base on the planet."

"That's where you come in." Bolt nodded to Bates. He tapped on his keyboard, bringing up pictures of an attractive Asian woman and a handsome, young teenager that bore resemblance to both her and Maseo. "Yamashiro has a family: a wife named Tatsu and a son named Akio. Akio is currently a freshman at Tōdai- Tokyo University," he amended when he got confused looks, "majoring in biology and chemistry. He's currently looking for possible graduate programs and post-education internships. Since Central City is one of the scientific capitals of the world and Yamashiro has ties to America, they've decided to visit here to see what the city has to offer."

"According to this schedule," Bolt pulled up another file, this time a document containing a list of names, "the Yamashiros will be visiting Mercury Labs in three days and doing a tour of the facility with a bunch of other well-to-do families."

Snart pointed at Bates. "You are going join the tour group and take Yamashiro's appearance. That will allow us access into A.R.G.U.S.'s Central City base."

"Is that it?" Bates smirked.

"No," Snart intoned, deathly serious. "That's the easy part. The hard part is the actual heist itself. Bolt?"

Bolt clicked on his keyboard again. The documents receded, and a new one was pulled up: blueprints. Everyone except Snart and Bolt blinked at the detail of what they were shown; something
so… *informative* could not have been easy to obtain.

"There is a five-hour window on the last day before Yamashiro's departure where he'll be completely unaccounted for, according to the schedule Bolt here lifted from their system. It's likely he'll be with his family. *That's* when we'll strike." Snart nodded to Bates. "You'll disguise yourself as Yamashiro and access the building. There, you'll enter the right hall," Bolt used his mouse pointer to circle the indicated location, "and enter the main terminal."

"There, you'll use this," Snart picked up a small, circular disk, "and insert it. This will allow Bolt to access the terminal and take control of the building for a few minutes."

Bates took the disk, examining it carefully. "Why do we need it?"

Surprisingly, it was Lisa who answered. "Ever since metas became a thing, S.T.A.R. Labs has been developing anti-metahuman technology to combat all the criminals that have been showing up. A.R.G.U.S. purchased these meta-dampeners to weaken if not outright suppress a metahuman's powers. Fortunately for us, thanks to S.T.A.R. Labs being so strapped for cash after the Particle Accelerator exploded, they're few in number and don't have a good range. They're only installed in a couple of high-profile rooms."

"And both our target and the main terminal have them." Snart sighed. He picked up another device. "This one will knockout all the surveillance cameras in a room, replacing it with a five-second loop. Use this before the other one - once you enter the main terminal, your powers will forcibly deactivate and you go back to your original form."

"Bolt will use his access to the main terminal to deactivate all the metahuman dampeners and most of the security measures in the building. This will probably set off alarms, so that's where Mick and I come in. We'll enter from different entrances - the front for Mick and the side for me - and wreak total havoc on the place. While all the guards are occupied dealing with us, it's Shawna's turn."

Snart picked up another item, this time a large bag made of some strange material. Shawna took it from him and frowned as she felt the fabric over. It was surprisingly resistant and lacked stretch.

"Why this bag? There's not a lot you can fit in here."

Instead of answering her question, Snart simply gave Bolt a pointed look. Bolt responded by opening up another image, this time of what seemed to be a small computer chip.

"This," Snart gestured to the image, "is what we're stealing.

With the exception of Lisa and Bolt, everyone gaped at the image. *That* was the score?

"I thought we were stealing guns and stuff." Mick bluntly stated, aghast.

"Allow me, Snart." Bolt cut off his boss before he could respond. Bolt clicked and suddenly another image took up the screen. It was a simulation. Everyone watched silently as a virtual man took one of the chips and attached it to the inside of a car. The man then walked away several yards, before taking out a small remote. He pressed a button, and everyone except Bolt flinched as the car disappeared in a miniature mushroom cloud.

Bolt, uncaring of how unnerved everyone was, spoke candidly. "A.R.G.U.S. has an abundance of these chips, developed and built in-house, and they control the distribution with an iron fist. There is quite a number of people in the black market that have been itching to get on this technology for years, and are willing to pay top dollar for it."
Snart nodded. "He's right. Amunet first heard about them from a mole she has in the local government, who lucked into a demonstration back when he was an aid to that general on the news, Eiling. She talked to some people, and well." Snart shrugged, and smirked. "We pull this off, and we'll be made people. All of us."

Eddie scratched his chin as he walked upstairs to the room Iris and Ralph had appropriated for their secret case. The two had been secluded in their ever since Barry had to go undercover, compiling evidence and making connections as more and more information was fed into their files thanks to their double agent. They had already made contact with A.R.G.U.S.'s director - whoever that was, he or she had not deigned to show their face - and plans had already been made for when they finally snapped the trap on Snart and his crew.

He opened the door to see them both bending over some papers, with Iris taking one document and pinning it to one of the boards on the wall. A wall had that almost completely disappeared under the insane number of documents and photos that had been put up together and connected by string. The two had been busy, that was for certain.

In fact, they were so absorbed in their work that they had yet to notice his arrival. Eddie watched them work for a long moment and then audibly cleared his throat, catching both their attentions. "You called?" He asked, pointedly addressing his girlfriend. He would not talk to Dibny if he could help it.

Instead of responding, Iris instead went over to the table and picked up a small device; it was rectangular and a little bulky. She walked over to the door, silently gesturing to Eddie to move, locking it and then placing the device just above the handle. Once it was in place, she clicked the side, and a loud piercing sound echoed in everyone's ears before abruptly stopping.

"What was that?" Eddie asked, trying to get the ringing sound out.

"Something that will prevent anyone from eavesdropping." Iris explained. "A gift from one of Barry's coworkers at S.T.A.R. Labs."

Eddie blinked. "You two aren't taking any chances, are you?"

"It's a big case, Thawne." Ralph retorted. "Better paranoid than dead. The walls have ears, after all." He smirked.

Eddie frowned at him, then turned his attention back to his girlfriend. Iris sighed. "Barry made contact again. Two of Snart's crew are two of the metas you've been trying to catch."

"Which means you," Ralph pointed at Eddie, "are now officially a part of this case."

"Which ones?" Eddie asked, now very alert.

"A shapeshifter and a teleporter." Iris answered. "They're participating in the heist."

"Which means you," Ralph pointed at Eddie, "are now officially a part of this case."

Eddie scowled at him. "What about Joe? Why isn't he here?" Joe was his partner, and had been working on those two cases with him since the beginning.

Iris and Ralph exchanged uneasy looks. Eddie's eyes widened. "You think he's… compromised?"

"Yes, but not in the way you think." Iris responded. "We think that Detective West, would not be… objective with the handling of this case. With Barry being his foster son and all. We believe he might do something rash, and Barry agreed."
"Wouldn't that logic apply to you as well, though, Iris? No offense, I mean." Eddie quickly tacked on, not wishing to be in the dog house when they were off the clock.

Iris raised an eyebrow but showed no other signs of being offended. It was a valid question. "Yes, but things have gone well so far, so I've been able to stay my hand. I trust Barry. Detective West, meanwhile, has always been a bit… overprotective, and with this case, it's not just Barry at risk - it's myself as well. His judgment would be… skewed by that." It was clear that Iris was struggling to be polite with her father's smothering tendencies. While she had no issue complaining about it back when they were on the outs - when she was reminded of it, otherwise she preferred not to talk about Joe at all - they had been reconciled for months now. She understood her father's actions better once they had gotten to talking and was trying to be charitable to him for that.

"And you think I wouldn't be compromised?" Eddie asked, incredulous.

At that, both Ralph and Iris gave him a deadpan look. Eddie flushed the longer the look lasted. "What?"

"Eddie, I'm sure you'll have no issue with Barry being in danger." Iris had been oblivious to the animosity between her boyfriend and her best friend in the beginning, but as time wore on and the novelty of having Barry back ended, she could see things much more clearly. Thankfully, both had made the effort to at least be polite to each other when in his presence.

Ralph, meanwhile, had never been blind to it. He was an idiot, but he wasn't that kind of idiot.

Eddie sighed. "Yeah, yeah." There was no point in denying it. "Could you start catching me up on the case?"

Maseo watched silently beside his wife Tatsu and teenage son Akio as their guide, the famous Tina McGee herself, continued her speech to the crowd. After two very long hours, the tour had finally ended, and he was ready to crash with his family at the very nice and very expensive hotel.

He suddenly stumbled slightly to the side. Looking down, he saw a small child had bumped into him. A young woman, undoubtedly the boy's mother, had quickly collected him, giving him an apologetic look. He silently waved her off - no harm done.

The door to the van slid open. Leonard Snart smirked as he watched his sister take the hat and sunglasses off her head while the child accompanying her transformed back into Hannibal Bates, who quickly started to stretch.

"I hate transforming into kids." The shapeshifter growled out.

Snart ignored him. "Is it done?" He asked his sister instead.

Lisa simply smirked and looked towards Bates. The man smiled before transforming into another once again - this time, a perfect mockery of Maseo Yamashiro.

"Good." He looked towards the front of the van. "It's time we hit the road, Mick."

The pyromaniac held up a flask of alcohol and drank before turning on the ignition and hitting the gas pedal. They had a heist to prepare for.
Next chapter is the heist, everyone! We'll be wrapping up this storyline in the next couple of chapters, and then move on to the next thing. Make no mistake, though, there's still a lot to go through this arc, and I think you'll enjoy it. Also, here's a little secret: Nyssa will be reappearing soon! And boy, she'll have quite the role.

Don't forget the contest! The details are at the start of the chapter for AO3 version and end of the chapter for the FFN version, and will be posted for every chapter of Arc III from here on out. There's also a link to the Tumblr page both at the start and the end of the story.

All constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be ignored. And remember to update the TV Tropes page!
Chapter Summary

Now for the hard part.

Chapter Notes

**The Prompt**: Draw your favorite scene of To Hell and Back. Any scene. You can have as many entries as you like.

**Dates**: From the day this chapter is posted to the day the last chapter of this arc (Chapter 63) is posted, you may submit something.

**Submission**: Submit your drawings to the story's official blog on Tumblr (the link can be found in the first chapter beneath the chapter summary on the AO3 version). If that is not feasible, then simply post it to your preferred image-hosting platform and send me the link via messaging on either AO3 or FFN.

**Winning**: There are three ways to win.

1. Author's choice. Whatever piece I favor the most.
2. Beta's choice. Whatever piece Kara Smoak, my beta, favors the most.
3. Fan's choice. I will put up a poll (either on FFN or Tumblr) and have all the readers vote via that.

**Prizes**:

1. For the fan that wins #1 (my choice), your piece will be the cover page for FFN, the first chapter of AO3, and the TV Tropes page!
2. For the fan that wins #2 (beta's choice), your piece will be the background image of the Tumblr blog, which is scarily bare.
3. For the fan that wins #3 (fan's choice), your piece will be inserted into the first chapter of Arc IV.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Chapter 52: The Caper**

Bolt whistled when he saw the inside of the van. Snart hadn't been wrong when he said that Amunet had spared no expense for this venture. Even he hadn't known you could install this much-advanced technology in the back of a van.

"I can't even begin to imagine what even a quarter of this stuff is for." Shawna Baez commented
beside him, similarly amazed. The setup looked like something out of a sci-fi movie.

"At least we won't have to worry about me screwing up things on this end." Bolt commented, stepping into the back of the van with Shawna following him. "Come on. I need to check to make sure the frequencies are all on point before it's time."

"Ready to go?" Lisa called out from the front of the car.

Bolt gave a thumbs up while Shawna called out a simple "Hit it, Lisa!" Lisa, satisfied with their answers, obliged. Bates, Snart, and Mick had already long since left; Bates in a black SUV, the car Yamashiro had rented for his trip to Central City, according to the records, and Snart and Mick in their own cars. They would circle around the city for a bit so they wouldn't cast suspicion, while the three of them set up shop in a hidden alcove near the A.R.G.U.S. building. Lisa had been careful to disguise the van as something innocuous - a repairman's van for the local cable and dish services.

Silence settled into the van as Lisa drove them out of the warehouse and into the streets. They, like the others, would circle around for a bit before making it to the A.R.G.U.S. building.

After twenty minutes of mindless driving, Bolt finally decided to break the tension. He had already done two quick checkups on the systems in the van and found them to be working, and was already getting bored of the quietness that had blanketed the vehicle. He looked towards the metahuman beside him. She'd do.

"So," he asked slowly, waiting until he had Shawna's attention. "Why are you doing this?"

Shawna blinked a bit. Evidently, she was surprised he was actually bothering to talk to her. Bolt had taken great pains to stay professional this far, as much as his current persona would allow; after all, he was technically the "new guy" for Central's underworld.

The teleporter continued to stare at him for a bit, before sighing, finally cracking. She was sick of the silence too. "My boyfriend. He's in Iron Heights right now."

Bolt raised an eyebrow. He was perfectly aware that she'd be able to easily break said boyfriend out of Iron Heights with her powers.

Reading his mind, Shawna continued with her explanation. "I haven't broken him out yet because he owes money to one of the smaller mob families here in Central - one that's managed to avoid attention from both the police and the Flash. If I get him out now, then we'll just be trading one prison for another. So, I figured I'd use the money from this job to pay off his debt first, then break him out and use whatever's left to get out of Central City and start a new life together."

"Smart." Bolt noted. "I take these guys don't know about your powers yet? Because if they do, you know they'll never let the two of you leave. You'd be too useful."

Shawna nodded. "What about you? Why are you doing this?"

The hacker smirked. "The thrill."

'Maseo Yamashiro' walked into A.R.G.U.S.' Central City base with an assured step. He nodded to people as he greeted them, holding up a hand or two to others, before arriving at the front desk. A slim woman with dark hair was there, typing away on one of the computers. Most likely a receptionist, he thought.
The woman perked up when she saw him, smiling lightly. He quickly spotted the small name tag pinned on her shirt, hoping he didn't screw this up. "Cynthia."

"Sub-director Yamashiro!" She said happily, if confusedly. "I thought you were going to join your family for today."

"I was, but something came up." 'Maseo' answered. Cynthia obliviously nodded along, then directed him to the retina scanner. Once he was checked in, she waved him away, wishing him a good day.

With that obstacle out of the way, 'Maseo' turned to the right, careful to keep a normal and sedate pace so as to not arouse suspicion. He arrived at the door that supposedly held the main terminal and entered. Right before his powers were dampened, he discreetly placed the surveillance canceler on one of the walls, just as his body forcibly turned him back into Hannibal Bates. He waited a moment just to make sure no alarms were sounded, and once he was sure he was safe, started walking around.

Bolt had shown him a picture of where he would have to insert the disk, and the image had been burnt into his mind. That being said, all the complicated technology around him was making his head spin. It was distracting, all the wires and buttons and blinking lights.

Finally, he found what he was looking for. He took out the disk and carefully inserted it into the indicated slot, then stood back and waited. It was all out of his hands now.

"I'm in." Bolt announced. His fingers flew over the keyboard as he entered in command after command, only pausing a moment or two when something new came up. Lisa and Shawna, whose computer expertise amounted to electronic keypad locks and Google, respectively, simply watched. Their eyes almost hurt at how fast the text was scrolling down the screen.

Bolt clicked his teeth as he pushed himself to move even faster. "A.R.G.U.S. doesn't mess around. This level of encryption, I've only ever seen once before, and it was designed by a guy who many considered to be the best hacker in the world."

"Should we be worried?" Lisa asked dryly, slightly concerned.

"No." Bolt smirked. "I've already cracked it." With the final push of a button, the meta-dampeners were powered down.

Shawna frowned. "I thought you said this level of encryption could only be designed by the best hacker in the world?"

"I said many considered him to be the best in the world." Bolt corrected, grinning widely. "I never said he was the best in the world. Oh, make no mistake, he was good, but plenty were better."

Lisa crossed her arms, amused. "I assume you're one of them?" It was more of a statement than a question.

Bolt shrugged. "Considering I'm the one who exposed him in the end, I guess so." He blinked. "Oh, and one last thing."

He pressed enter on the keyboard, and smiled as all the security protocols in the building shut down.

"That's our cue, Mick." Leonard Snart muttered into his earpiece as he powered up his cold gun. "Let's rock and roll."
The first time in... well, ever, A.R.G.U.S.'s Central City base was in complete chaos.

After all the security systems were shut down, the building found itself attacked on two fronts: the front and the side. A man wielding a **flamethrowing gun** of all things had burst through the glass doors and started laying waste to everything. Over to the side, in the left hall, another man with a gun that spewed some kind of ice cold energy was freezing people left and right. It was a slaughter.

Cynthia, knowing the danger, had rushed to the right hall to warn sub-director Maseo. She ran and ran, but could not find him anywhere. So consumed in her search, she failed to see a young woman suddenly appear into the hall, walking into the direction of a place that very, very few people had the authorization to be in.

Mick Rory laughed loudly as he screamed "BURN!" at everything he could see. So consumed in his pyromania, he failed to see a lone, brave guard rush him from the side and knock him down, loosening his grip on his heat gun and causing it to fall to the ground, giving the building some reprieve.

Just then, the fire alarm sounded, and water sprung from the sprinklers above - apparently, one of the techs inside had finally managed to get the system in something of working order again. Mick growled as his beautiful fire gradually withered away into nothing, and tried to pry the burly guard off him.

"Need a little help, Mick?" A smug voice called out.

Mick looked up to see a smirking Leonard Snart, glasses and all, aiming his cold gun directly at them. Before he could fire, however, he fell to the ground abruptly. As he fell, he revealed that another guard had knocked him out with their club.

"Got the goods." Shawna said as she entered into the van once more, closing the doors behind her. Lisa already had the vehicle started up, and pressed the gas pedal.

"What about Snart and Rory?" Bolt asked.

"Don't worry," Shawna responded as she set the bag of chips down gently next to her. "Bates has got it covered."

"I can't find sub-director Yamashiro anywhere." Cynthia said, almost tearfully, as the remaining guards and personnel congregated into the front lobby. The resulting pandemonium from the attack on the building had destroyed quite a bit, to the point that they were still looking for people and trying to assess the damage.

The two assailants, whoever they were, were tied up next to the front desk, where a lone guard was keeping an eye on them. They would've spared more, but quite honestly, they were spread out right now.

Another guard, the one who had been speaking to Cynthia, frowned. "He must be locked up somewhere." He deduced.

"EVERYONE!" He called out to the remaining people inside the front hall. Everyone turned to look at him. "Find sub-director Yamashiro! We have reason to believe that he's trapped somewhere in the building!"
"Trapped where?"

Silence fell over the crowd, as they turned to see the very man they were planning on searching for, stand before them. Cynthia blinked, noting that he was wearing far different clothes than when he entered the building.

"Sub-director Yamashiro?" She asked, parting her way through the crowd.

"Yes?" Maseo said, confused.

"Did you just arrive?" She asked carefully.

"Yes. I've been out with my family all day. I came back when the alert sounded on my phone." He explained, even more confused.

Everyone stared at him for a long moment, until a sudden moment of clarity hit the head guard. He turned around, sprinting over to where they had tied up the assailants - only to see broken and frayed spools of rope.

"Nice improvisation there, Bates." Snart praised, leaning back into his chair. Behind him, Mick was snacking on a bag of chips, the heist leaving him very hungry.

Beside them, Hannibal Bates, in his true form, grinned. "Well, I couldn't leave you behind, could I? Lisa would kill me, and I don't know enough about Amunet to get the best deal out of her for the goods."

"Smart, too." Snart picked up his phone as it rang, and without having to see who it is, took the call. "Hey, sis. Mission accomplished."

"Okay, the FBI and the ATF have both been informed." Singh said after his last call ended. "They're prepping teams right now, though the number of people who know where they're storming is small. Can't risk any leaks."

"Great." Iris took out a small tablet. "Barry has a tracker on him. When he's near the meeting place, he'll activate it and we'll converge on his position. If all goes well, Amunet Black will be behind bars soon enough."

From beside her, Joe sighed. He had finally been let into the operation after Barry had confirmed the heist had been completed. "Are we sure he hasn't been found out?"

"Positive." Ralph answered for him, smirking. "We've developed a system of codewords and phrases for this. He's safe."

"But how are we going to get him out without tipping off Amunet and Snart that he's on our side?" Eddie asked. It was less for his sake and more for Iris' peace of mind.

Iris and Ralph exchanged looks.

Chapter End Notes
That's a wrap, everyone! Next chapter, we tie up the heist storyline!

Don't forget the contest! It finishes when I post the last chapter of Arc III.

Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be ignored! Please update the TV Tropes page!
Arc III, Chapter 53: The Greatest Trick

Chapter Summary

...is making people believe you don't exist.

Chapter Notes

The Prompt: Draw your favorite scene of To Hell and Back. Any scene. You can have as many entries as you like.

Dates: From the day this chapter is posted to the day the last chapter of this arc (Chapter 63) is posted, you may submit something.

Submission: Submit your drawings to the story's official blog on Tumblr (the link can be found in the first chapter beneath the chapter summary on the AO3 version). If that is not feasible, then simply post it to your preferred image-hosting platform and send me the link via messaging on either AO3 or FFN.

Winning: There are three ways to win.

1. Author's choice. Whatever piece I favor the most.

2. Beta's choice. Whatever piece Kara Smoak, my beta, favors the most.

3. Fan's choice. I will put up a poll (either on FFN or Tumblr) and have all the readers vote via that.

Prizes:

1. For the fan that wins #1 (my choice), your piece will be the cover page for FFN, the first chapter of AO3, and the TV Tropes page!

2. For the fan that wins #2 (beta's choice), your piece will be the background image of the Tumblr blog, which is scarily bare.

3. For the fan that wins #3 (fan's choice), your piece will be inserted into the first chapter of Arc IV.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 53: The Greatest Trick

"Darlings!" Amunet Black, known in the underground as "Blacksmith", gave a joyous cry as the men and women bearing her biggest catch yet made their presence known. An abandoned factory, hidden deep within a derelict section of Central City's harbor, had been selected as the exhibition sight for her many business partners; it was situated near an area that was grossly uninhabited and
near a medium-sized cliff where the tide consistently clashed with the bare stones. *Loudly.*

"I'm so glad you could make it!" She continued, her signature grin stretched wide across her face. "Please, come in! Everyone's been waiting for you."

Cautious but eager, the crew followed her at a quick pace, successfully ignoring the grime and debris that covered the area. Up ahead, they could see the potential buyers; some were grungy, some eccentric, some business-like, all dangerous. Bolt frowned imperceptibly at the sight; they all looked very familiar to him, and not in a good way.

Amunet gathered over to the front of these many groups, near a small, aged car that would be used for the demonstration. Catching everyone's attention, she soon introduced them to this cabal of dangerous underworld kingpins. Typically, this wouldn't be done; having an open identity of criminality was dangerous in this day and age. Restricting to only criminals hardly mitigated the problem. However, Snart's crew was untried and untested before this job and many of them hadn't been big names in the underground before, at least for beyond Central City, sans Bolt. Bates had been a complete newbie, Shawna was the girlfriend of a low-level drug runner, and while the Snarts and Mick were fairly well-known, their notoriety was solely constricted to Central.

However, with the success of this job, that changed. Breaking into one of the high-security bases of an alphabet agency, one not particularly well-known but extremely well-funded nonetheless, was an impressive feat. One deserving of a reputation. Amunet had promised them riches for risking their lives to attain such a bounty, and this was just one facet of her pact. Cold, hard cash could only last so long, but connections? Connections endured.

"Now!" Amunet clapped her hands together as the introductions finished, catching everyone's attention. "Let's begin."

"We got a location!" A tech yelled out. "Central City Harbor, Section 45, District D!"

Iris nodded, and pressed on the gas pedal of her car. The cruiser roared to life, passing through the back streets of South Side like a knife to butter. Beside her, Ralph whistled.

"Man, can you drive West! Where'd you learn this from?"

Iris lips quirked. "Let's just say my brother needed some sense knocked into him, so I beat him at his own game." She then glared at Ralph. "You won't say anything to dad, will you?"

Ralph mimicked a zipper with his mouth. "My lips are sealed."

"Good." Iris nodded. "It won't be long now. Hopefully we'll be able to set up a perimeter before everything goes south."

"Don't worry, Iris; Barry hinted in his last transmission that the place would be at the harbor, so we've already got people there. We'll manage."

"Yeah, but without catching people's attention, Ralph? You just know that Amunet has got cronies sniffing around the docks, watching out for us." she frowned. "And once they tell her about what's coming her way, she'll realize there's been a leak. And that's when Barry will be at risk."

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Amunet sighed as the last of the smoke cleared from the explosion. From behind her, many of her potential customers nodded in agreement, all smiling. These weapons would be boons indeed.
Mick was no different. He was gazing at the leftover, flickering flames as if he were in love. Bates was grinning eagerly, all but salivating at the payday he was about to receive. The Snarts wore small smirks, no doubt thinking the same thoughts. Only Shawna and Bolt were the holdouts; the former was looking at the scene with unease, though she tried desperately to hide it, while Bolt kept his face perfectly blank.

"Now, the bidding?" Shouts of numbers - exorbitant money that many of the crew present had never been even close to having - soon followed that question. Amunet looked up to the ceiling, trying to absorb the moment. She'd be a made woman after this, and while she wouldn't leave the arms trade after this, it would allow her to be pickier with her jobs. Bigger, better, and safer.

She bent her head backward, as if yanked by an invisible force, the curve of her neck visible for all to see -

WEEEEOOO!

And then the sirens blared out.

"How did they find us?" Lisa hissed out, drawing her gun. Everyone else followed her lead, taking out weapons, readying themselves for fighting and fleeing.

"There's only way." Snart murmured, taking out his goggles and firing up his Cold Gun. "We have a leak."

At that statement, everyone turned to each other, eyeing one another warily. There was no honor among thieves, after all, and trust could only be found when there was money to be made.

Amunet sighed audibly. "Everyone, please! Do not worry, I shall take care of this." She looked pointedly at each person present, hoping to convey her seriousness.

After a tense moment, they all followed her command, but there was still suspicion everywhere. Amunet internally rolled her eyes; couldn't they trust her?

"I'd prefer not to use this, to keep it hidden for all our sakes, but this is far more important." She held up her hand to the sky, smiling as the metal around her began to rumble and float.

There was a reason she had chosen this place. On top of location, it was a treasure trove of metals - metals containing the specific alloy needed to use her powers. She had preferred to keep this secret, to keep herself invisible to the scarlet death that roamed the streets for metahuman criminals' day and night. But if there was anything Amunet Black could admit to herself, is that she was greedy. If there was money to flow into her grasp like dripping honey, she'd drink it all up until she drowned into its golden waves.

Amunet directed the metals in front of the group, in front of the entrance where the cops and agents would surely enter. She was smirking as the doors open, as her prey revealed themselves to her. The sharp, pointed ends of her weapons were at the ready. She made a single fist, watched as the metal flew from her side a breakneck pace -

And fall, clanging to the ground.

Everyone froze. Amunet made several gestures with her arms, trying to get the metal to just move, but found her efforts fruitless. They were inert.

"It's been rumored you're a meta, Black, since we first found you out." Ralph Dibny called out, smirking victoriously. "We had no proof, but we figured better safe than sorry, and set up a meta-
dampening field around this place. No meta-human can use their powers here."

Shawna flinched when she heard that. She looked behind the cops and tried to teleport, but her body did nothing. Beside her, she could see Hannibal Bates trying to transform, perhaps into one of the many cops that had tried to apprehend him while he was disguised, and see that he was having the same amount success - none. He remained in his original form, unable to morph even one part of his body.

Amunet screamed, whipping out a sidearm she had hidden beneath her usual attire and began firing. Everyone else did the same, Snart and Mick trying to keep their very destructive weapons from wrecking their allies. The entire place was a circus.

Back ing away from a particularly close shot, Shawna yelped as Bolt pushed her out of the way of another, taking one to the chest. Before she could try to look over her teammate, a whoosh! was heard. The gun she had been using was ripped out of her arms.

She looked up, and it took all of her willpower not to scream.

Iris tried not to look as she saw Barry - Bolt, she reminded herself - fall to the ground. She remembered the plan, she knew he was alright, but it was hard. She never liked seeing him hurt.

Thanks to the meta-dampening field, the tides had turned decidedly in their favor. Oh, there was still Snart and Rory and their guns, but they were limited thanks to their allies. Survival normally would've been at the forefront of their minds, but with the amount of money on the line, they couldn't afford to do that. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, money they'd never come across again. They couldn't afford to kill their potential benefactors in the crossfire.

But we can, Iris thought, grimly pleased. She had killed before, in the line of duty, and she hadn't liked it. The first time, it took her some therapy to recognize the necessity of it. Even after recognizing that, every time after had not been any easier. But here, with these men firing blasts of ice and fire, she may not have a choice.

Suddenly, a buzz rang into her ears. Something subtle, and low, something she couldn't quite recognize. She tried to ignore it, tried to keep her focus as she fired and fired and unloaded and reloaded and fired again. She couldn't afford to be distracted when death was just a whiff away.

At least, until her gun was ripped out of her hands.

Iris stared at her empty palms, and looked up, feeling her insides run cold.

The Flash.

He had dropped the guns into the middle of the factory, the deadland where bullets and metal littered the ground, and was now dodging the streams of heat and cold. She watched, and in the periphery, she could see Eddie glaring and cursing. She had no doubt that if he had his weapon in hand, he'd be trying to attack the Flash right now. Iris was torn by understanding and condemnation, for her boyfriend, for his anger and his foolishness.

She was torn from her thoughts when she saw the Flash suddenly take the streams at the same time, forcing Snart and Rory to slowly direct their guns to follow him until -

BOOM!

The explosion was loud, and rocked her back. She was out for a moment and came to, enough to see
the Flash hold up Amunet Black by scruff of her dress. The woman was struggling, trying to break his iron hold, and utterly failing. Iris could feel the fear radiating off her; she knew her death was near.

*Why hasn't he killed her yet?* she thought to herself. She looked around, and saw that all the other bodies in the factory were just coming to, and realized it instantly.

*It's all theater, a show. He wants everyone to see.* See so they could tell others. Tell others no matter how hard you hide, the Flash could find you and kill you if you used your powers to subvert the law. The Flash hadn't publicly killed anyone in a while, and that encouraged criminals to be bolder again. He needed to remind them of the danger. With someone like Amunet Black, it would be a sickeningly effective message.

Iris felt her insides turn to lead. Effective, perhaps, but wrong. They needed Amunet, she was more valuable alive than dead. The names in her head, there were so many people they could get off the streets, people who killed people they could save. Perhaps the Flash thought he was saving people too, by doing this, and maybe he was, but there had to be a better way.

She thought of the Undertaking. She thought of the videos of the Justice League roaming around the Glades, saving people, inspiring hope in them. She thought of how bright the Flash looked then, not a crimson shadow that blanketed the entire city, but a hero. He was a hero then, why couldn't he be a hero now?

As that thought raced through her mind, her mouth opened.

"Don't!"

She could feel everyone's attention on her now. Even the Flash's. Only Amunet was not paying attention, and that was because she was still fighting for her life and losing.

"Don't." Iris continued, desperate. "I know she's a monster. I know you, and others too, think she deserves to die. And maybe she does."

The Flash narrowed his eyes at her, but did nothing else. Iris took that as he went ahead to continue. He was listening.

"She has names in her head. Names of people who work for her, sell to her. Names of people she sells to. If you kill her, you cut their strings loose. You let them go free."

Iris breathed in, picking herself up from the floor to stand, knowing that everyone's eyes were on her. "I don't know how many you'll save by killing her. But I know you'll save more by keeping her alive."

The Flash stared at her. Iris did not flinch as their gazes met. She kept her head held high, tried to stand her ground. It was all she could do now.

*Whoosh!*

He was gone.

In his place, Amunet Black was cuffed and unconscious.

But as the slight rise and fall of her chest showed, she was alive.

Iris stared at the sight for a moment, and let out a breath of relief.
Bolt sat up and breathed.

"It's done." Joe said beside him, smiling.

"Great!" Bolt groaned, ripping off his shirt to reveal the bulletproof vest underneath. "We're at the safe house?"

"Yes." Joe nodded, gesturing to their surroundings. Blandly colored but comfortable nonetheless. "You stay here for a few days, clean out the dye in your hair, maybe get another haircut. Then you head over to Starling for a bit. We need to keep up the illusion that Bolt is dead for Snart's crew before Barry Allen can come back to Central City."

Bolt sighed. "Wonderful. I guess I'm confined here for a while." He sniffed, and hissed. "And I smell too! Where's the shower?"

"Over there, son." Joe smiled. "I'll just get out of your way." He got up to leave, but stopped for a moment. He looked searchingly at his foster son, before his smile softened, just a bit. "I'm proud of you, Barry."

Bolt smiled. "Thanks, Joe."

"He's gone."

The Flash faded out of the shadows and into the light, gazing at Bolt expectedly. Bolt frowned at him, before sighing and ripping off his face - revealing the Human Target, Christopher Chance.

A whoosh! later, and Chance's clothes had been taken off and replaced with a fresh pair, clean and free of debris, while the Flash, now Barry, bore the dirty ones. Where the Flash suit went, Chance didn't know, and he cared even less to find out.

"Thanks for doing this, Chance." Barry felt the words rolled off his tongue lazily. "No hard feelings about Prague?"

Chance glared at him. "What do you think?"

Barry shrugged. "I figured you'd have moved on by now. It's been years, hasn't it?"

Chance crossed his arms. "What do you want? I'd like to get out of here as soon as possible and forget I ever had to help you. For anything. The things I do for Amanda..." he muttered.

Barry smirked, and sat down onto the couch situated towards the back of the room, crossing his legs. "Information, really. Amanda doesn't trust me, you see."

"I wonder why."

The speedster ignored the sarcasm. "What's going to happen to them?"

Chance blinked, and shrugged. "For everyone except Bates, prison. Amanda sees no value in them."

"Not even Shawna?" Barry raised an eyebrow.

"The girl's not a killer, Allen." Chance replied seriously. "She's not a killer, and she'll break before she bends if we try to make her into one. She's better off in prison - maybe she'll reform and finally do something productive for society."
"And the Snarts and Rory?"

"Rory's dumb muscle for the most part and the Snarts’ skill sets are hardly unique. Besides those guns of theirs, they're mostly run-of-the-mill. And with the guns gone, they have no real value."
Chance shrugged again. "It is what it is."

Barry continued to gaze at him.

"Why are you asking me about all this?" Chance demanded. "We both know how smart you are, you could've easily figured this out for yourself. You don't need me for anything!"

"What about Bates?"

Chance blinked. "What?"


Chance grimaced.

Hannibal Bates tried to scream through his gag when he came to, gasping for air when it was finally removed. He was about to shout at the guards beside him, regardless of the large guns strapped to their sides, when the subtle *click-clack* of heels distracted him.

He looked forward to see a woman walking towards him. A very familiar woman.

"Cynthia?"

'Cyntha' smiled. Bates felt himself shiver.

"Amanda." She stated firmly. "Amanda Waller, Director of A.R.G.U.S.. You know, the agency you tried to rob?"

Bates fell silent. Even without eyes, the fear was clear on his face.

"You know," Amanda continued, her voice velvety. "I have an agent with abilities just like yours. In some aspects, his are superior. In others, yours are."

The tension mounted, and Bates knew, *knew*, he was face-to-face with Satan herself.

"I wonder," she put a finger to her chin, a faux-look of thinking on her face, "just how can we reconcile the two?"

Bates wanted to scream. He didn't.

"Welcome to Task Force X, Mr. Bates."

Chapter End Notes
Finished! That's it for this storyline, though we will revisit the consequences of this in the next arc. We'll be going back to Starling City next chapter. Central City will take center stage again this arc, but after that, it's all Starling.

Don't forget the contest! Remember to update the TV Tropes Page! All constructive criticism is welcome!
Chapter 54: Heir to the Demon

"Again."

Black Canary got up on her elbows, breathing deeply. Then, she swiped once more at Green Arrow - a feint for her actual maneuver, a sweep of the legs. He dodged that too, however. She wasn't deterred, instead pressing on her attack. She used movements old and new, techniques that had been
hard pressed into her for the last few months. Yet, while she was quick and smooth, flowing into each attack, manipulating her momentum, she had yet to land a hit.

Eventually, she was tired, and left into a heap on the floor. Green Arrow held out his hand and helped her up, handing her a bottle of water. She took small sips as they sat against the railings of the roof they had been sparring on, watching as the barest hints of the sun rose above the horizon.

"You're getting better." Green Arrow praised.

Black Canary gave him an incredulous look. "You barely broke a sweat!"

"Canary, I've got over a decade of experience on you. It will be years before you can really challenge me."

She sighed. "Don't remind me."

He put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry about it. You're very talented and hard-working. Perhaps even more so than me when I first started, at least when it comes to hand-to-hand combat. It's just that…"

"… the teaching isn't ideal." Black Canary finished for him. Green Arrow remained silent.

Her statement rang true. Ever since the Mr. Blank episode, he had been aiding her in her training. And while she was advancing at a reasonable pace, there was frustration there; there was no doubt she'd be able to improve at an even faster pace with proper tutelage. Something that, he unfortunately, was unable to provide for her.

There were many reasons for that. They didn't know each other's real identity, for one thing - while trust was becoming more and more of a non-issue, both of them would prefer to limit the number of people who knew their true names until it was necessary. Another problem is that they both had lives to live. Green Arrow had many advantages that allowed him to be as skilled as he was, the primary one being a near unlimited amount of free time before he made his appearance in Starling City, and the secondary one being under the care of some of the best teachers in combat in the world. Black Canary had no such advantages: she was limited to him and whatever training she did on the side, for a set couple of hours a day.

It was only Canary's talent and dedication that overcame these obstacles to bring her as far as she was. Green Arrow privately admitted that if she kept it up, she'd be on par with the lower-level members of the League of Assassins within a month or two. Unfortunately, that is also where he believed she'd begin to plateau.

Not because of any lack of ability, but because there was only so much he could teach her. He may have been the most skilled combatant in the League behind Ra's al Ghul himself, but there was one, hard cold fact that he could not ignore: he was a man. He lacked the intimate knowledge of the female body needed to teach Canary the more advanced techniques. There was a reason why Supergirl was primarily taught by Nyssa during their time in the League, as were many other female recruits once they finished the basic training.

While he could certainly figure out how to apply his more advanced moves to the female form, it would be trial-and-error and take far longer than Canary deserved. Supergirl and even the Flash would be better at teaching her these things, but both couldn't for their own reasons. Supergirl had been spending more time outside of Starling helping with other natural disasters around the world, and the Flash lived in an entirely different city with his own enemies and already had his own student to deal with. He couldn't add another one on top of that.
"… Arrow?"

Green Arrow removed himself from his inner monologue and looked at his companion. She was gazing quizzically at him behind her black domino mask.

"Sorry, I was just thinking."

She smiled at him, a bit tiredly. "Penny for your thoughts?"

He sighed. "I'm thinking that there's only so much I can teach you - and that you deserve more than that."

Black Canary put a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I'll take what you can give me. That's more than enough."

After his sparring session with Black Canary, Green Arrow returned, brooding in his thoughts. He was still trying to figure out how he was going to fix the issue with Black Canary's training; the most logical deduction was to find her another teacher. Unfortunately, the best way to do that was to ask Amanda, and he had no doubt that whoever she'd recommend would be doubling back to her for reports.

His eyes perked up to a darkened corner of his base, and he drew a knife. "Who's there?" As far as he knew, Supergirl was helping with a fire over in New York, and the Flash was still in hiding after his little heist escapade as Bolt. Kal and Slade were out of town for a father-son trip and wouldn't be back until tomorrow afternoon.

"The Heir to the Demon." A familiar voice called out.

Green Arrow did not let down his guard as the familiar visage of Nyssa al Ghul appeared from the shadows. Instead, he threw the knife, watching as she caught it by slapping her hands together on the sharpened blade.

Satisfied, he let down his stance and removed his hood and the cloth that covered the lower half of his face to reveal Oliver Queen. "Nyssa."

Nyssa gave a polite nod and smiled. "Oliver."

The two moved forward and hugged each other deeply. It had been over a year since they'd seen each other last, after all.

Letting her go, Oliver smiled back, before having it fade away when he saw the guilt in her eyes. "You're not here for pleasure, are you?"

"No." Nyssa shook her head. "We've had word from our spies. There's been movement."

"Who?"

The assassin took in a deep breath. "The League of Shadows."

Oliver felt his breath catch into his throat.

"Talia."

When a recruit first entered the League of Assassins, all they heard of Talia al Ghul were rumors.
She was a taboo in Nanda Parbat; a ghost that clung to its ancient halls that had yet to be exorcised. They all heard her name once, and learned to never speak of it again. At least, not in the presence of those who once knew her, which dwindled with every passing year. But the League of Assassins were still a group of people, and no matter how brainwashed and beaten down they were, people talked.

They say she was imprisoned deep within the innermost chambers of their ancient keep, kept alive to torment the wind with her screams. They say she was gallivanting about the world, seducing men and killing them for their riches, so she could die in the lap of luxuries that not even the Demon's Head could hope to touch. They say she was dead, drawn and quartered, and her remains were thrown off the mountains into the endless valley below.

But despite speculating on her fate, few knew her story; only that she was the disgraced daughter, the sister that faltered. A black mark that even the Demon felt ashamed of.

As the closest companions of Nyssa al Ghul, Al Sah-him, Al Sa'iqa, and Saraab were some of those few, the tale spilling from the lips of the sibling who suffered most from Talia's departure. When they heard it, they found themselves at a loss for at its core, it was a story about envy and glory - everything that opposed what the League stood for.

Talia al Ghul was the firstborn daughter of the current Ra's al Ghul, raised from birth to be his foremost assassin. She wanted for nothing, and in exchange, her childhood was steel and blood. Soon, she became skilled, so skilled that Ra's permitted her as one of the few besides himself allowed to dip into the waters of the Lazarus Pit.

But despite her purported usefulness, despite the blood that ran within her veins, Talia had not been named Heir to the Demon, something that grated her as the years wore on and the whispers increased. For all his honor and strength, her father was not the most forward-thinking man, and it wasn't until recent years that he decided it was time to become one with the modern world. It was no secret that Talia's one failing, to him at least, was that she was a woman - a failing so great, that he sought to have another child.

Talia was slighted, of course, until the child her father begotten was another daughter, another disappointment. She reveled in this victory by taking the child under her wing. Despite the threat the child had to her birthright, Talia trained her all the same, and so, did Nyssa's life begin. A bond between sisters, too old and too young and yet so close.

At least, until the whispers began again. For Nyssa was also talented, also skilled - more so than Talia had been at her age. By the time she was a teenager, she had become Talia's equal, and matches between them could go either way. Talia was slighted once again, and against Nyssa's wishes, their relationship shattered.

Around that time, the healing properties of the Lazarus Pit were diminishing, at least for Ra's al Ghul. It wouldn't be long before they failed completely, and his death would become an inevitability. Knowing this, Ra's needed to choose an heir between his daughters, in the event that he'd die before he could set other provisions in place.

It wasn't a matter of skill in the end, but heart. Talia, arrogant and entitled, and so very proud, led a slaughter, the victims, a local warlord and the village he presided over. Guilty and innocent died at the edge of her blades, and when asked to give reason, she said it was taken in the name of all the insults paid to her by the vile man. His blood alone could not satisfy the debt.

That was enough for Ra's to settle the matter. Talia embodied none of the League's principles, the laws they abided by, and if she were to lead, she'd only lead them to ruin. Nyssa would have to do.
His eldest daughter, enraged by his decision, made an attempt on Nyssa's life. When she failed, she fled into the night with a small group of loyalists, never to be seen again. It wasn't long before the whispers started again, of a new League. One that had no honor, only money and vengeance. A League that did not exist in darkness, but was darkness incarnate.

A League… of Shadows.

"Do they know what she's after?" Oliver asked seriously.

Nyssa shook her head. "No. The movements of the Shadows - what little we can glean of them - are erratic. There is no pattern to them. Except…" she bit her lip.

Oliver frowned. "There was an attempt, wasn't there? You're here for protection."

"Yes." Nyssa confirmed. "Thankfully, the attempt failed, though the assassin killed himself before we could question him. If she is still trying to kill me, there can only be one thing she wants."

"The League."

"Correct. My sister has done well in the time since her departure from Nanda Parbat, but a few years are not enough to entrench her organization into the fabric of the world. The Shadows are not the Demon. They do not have the wealth, the history, the influence. They cannot call upon debts and favors that have aged decades and even centuries. Compared to even H.I.V.E., dust as they are, they are nothing."

"For as long as I can remember, my sister has sought our father's approval. But praises of her skill cannot compare to the ultimate sign of acceptance: The League. If she cannot have his approval, then she will have the League, and while father and I do not fear her, we cannot help but be apprehensive of what she might do to achieve that end."

"So, he sent you here." Oliver concluded. "For as long as you live, Talia's hold on the League will never be complete. You were named your father's heir over her. Even though she were to kill him, either by trickery or by sanctioned combat, you still have a claim."

Nyssa nodded once again. "If that comes to pass, I will need your help, Oliver. Yours, Barry's, Kara's, and whoever else you can spare. It is not known whether or not Talia has foreknowledge of your siblings' abilities, but even without them, they are both forces to be reckoned with."

Oliver sighed. "Very well then. If you are staying in Starling, however, then you'll have to stay in the Foundry. You can't be seen in public with Oliver Queen - people will ask questions, and I have no doubt your sister has agents in the city as well."

"That is fine, but…" Nyssa huffed. "I can't stay here all by my lonesome, Oliver. You're going to have to find me something to do, eventually."

Oliver blinked, and an idea popped up in the back of his mind. He'd need another's approval, though.

"Don't worry. I think I've already got something for you."

"Why are you staring at my food?" Laurel asked, idly dipping one of her French fries into her milkshake.

"I'm thanking all that is great and holy that the most disgusting thing about your eating habits is
dipping fried potato into an ice-cold cream drink." Oliver deadpanned, popping one of his own fries into his mouth.

Laurel raised an eyebrow. "They're that bad?" She didn't need to specify who.

"Yes." Oliver hissed. His adoptive siblings' eating habits were a sore point for him. Laurel laughed.

The meal continued on with some small talk, stories and jokes flowing freely between them. At least, until someone brought up their missing third.

"Is Tommy still sequestering himself at Merlyn Global?" Laurel asked, worry tinged her voice. She had barely seen Tommy since the Undertaking. Their last significant interaction had been at Kal's birthday party.

Oliver scoffed. "He practically lives there these days. No matter how many invitations I send, he'd stay there and only there. Granted, we can hardly blame him for not wanting to go out in public right now."

"It's not healthy, though." Laurel bit her lip. "He needs to socialize with other people."

"He does, technically." Oliver pointed out.

"With people that aren't his business partners." Laurel clarified. "Isabel seems nice and all, but Tommy's mind is always going to be on business with her. He needs to relax, or else he's going to run himself down into the ground with all this work. He'll have those expectations over his head-"

Oliver cut her off. "He'll always have those expectations hanging above him, Laurel. He can't escape from that. Even if his father hadn't… tried what he was trying to do, Tommy was always going to have something that he had to live up to. It's just one of those things that come with having the kind of parents we have." Laurel listened intently, lips pressed into a thin line. Her friend didn't sound bitter, but there was a knowing tilt to his tone, a wistfulness that was all too familiar. "You talk as if you know what he's going through."

Oliver stopped, and averted his eyes. "Do you miss it sometimes? The island?"

"Yes." And then he cringed, as if the admission was a confession to some great crime.

Laurel reached over and put a comforting hand on his forearm, an understanding look on her face. "It's alright. There's nothing wrong with that, Oliver."

Oliver clicked his teeth. "Isn't there? I loved my family and my friends, and I missed them, but the island..."

"... the island gave you those brief moments. The moments where you could just be free of all the weight on your shoulders." Laurel quirked her head. "Don't think I don't see it, Oliver."

Oliver paused and looked at her, really looked at her. He then looked at the hand holding his forearm, and reached over to take it into his own. "You do, don't you?" He asked, and there was warmth to his voice. "Yeah." Laurel smiled, and it was bittersweet. "I do."
"Alright, boys." Black Canary called out, holding up one thug by the shirt. "Talk."

"I ain't saying nothing." The thug spat out. It was quite defiant of him, seeing as he probably had a broken rib or two.

"That's a double negative." Canary sweetly informed him before launching her fist deep into his abdomen. The thug wheezed, clutching his midsection as Canary shook him around a bit more. "You were saying?"

"Brick!" The chump shouted, hoping to stave off more punishment. "Brick sent us over here! Said it was an initiation test!"

Canary dropped him, and then crossed her arms. "And who might this Brick be? And an initiation test for what?"

Before he could answer, a shot rang out, and the man fell back, a shot to the heart. Black Canary turned around to see one of the thugs she had taken out had awoken and brought out his gun. She braced herself as he aimed for her, but before he could make a shot, an arrow whizzed through the air, puncturing his hand. He cried out in pain as he dropped the gun. Canary breathed a sigh of relief and walked over to the man, knocking him out with a strong kick to the head.

"Thanks, Arrow." She spoke to the shadows.

Green Arrow appeared from them, and shook his head. "It wasn't me who fired that shot."

Black Canary blinked at that, and watched as another person, a woman dressed in violet garb and a sheer veil covering her hair and the lower half of her face appeared beside him. She had a bow in one of her hands, hanging at her side.

"Black Canary, this is Nyssa al Ghul. She's an old friend of mine and she'll be staying in town for the next couple of months. Unfortunately, she can't be seen in public for various reasons, so I've asked her if she was willing to take over your training instead."

"And I said that only if you were willing." Nyssa added, looking directly at her potential student.

Black Canary glanced back at her, then looked to Green Arrow. "Are we still going to do some training?"

"Yes." Arrow assured her. "But the Justice League is getting busier and I have to travel more, so I can't train with you as much I want to. Nyssa however, is staying in the city and can dedicate herself fully to your training - if that's alright with you?"

"It's fine." Black Canary said, though she struggled to keep the reluctance out of her voice. She didn't know this woman, after all, but she did save her, and if Green Arrow trusted her, then she'd give her the benefit of the doubt.

Nyssa smiled at that, and despite it all, Black Canary smiled back.

Chapter End Notes

Enter Nyssa, everybody! She'll be sticking around for a while, and will have important
roles in this arc and the next two arcs.

Talia will not be appearing in this arc, but she will be one of the main villains for Arc IV, alongside Zoom. The third villain will be revealed very soon.

On the Oliver/Laurel front, they still haven't become a couple. However, their feelings for each other are becoming stronger, and it won't be long until even they can't ignore it anymore. How that will end, with Nyssa in the picture now… well, you'll just have to wait and see.

Don't be afraid to ask questions! Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be ignored! Please update the TV Tropes page!

And don't forget the contest! I may be considering an extension on it!
Black Canary huffed as she punched her assailant in the jaw, and then buffed her nails on her suit. Then, almost offhandedly, she backhanded another one, sending him sprawling onto the rough pavement of the alley. All around her, groaning, near-unconscious bodies were writhing about,
cursing her name. Ignoring them, she eyed the horizon, noting that the faintest vestiges of the sun were starting to rise in the east.

"Well done."

She turned around to see her newest teacher melt away from the shadows, something that she was oddly fond of doing. Nyssa still wore that ensemble of hers, and it was only as they spent more time together that she noticed the similarities between it and what Green Arrow wore. From this, she surmised that they had shared a teacher, or at least training; why else would Arrow trust Nyssa with Black Canary's?

"Thank you." Canary nodded politely. "Anything I need to improve?"

"Try not to be too straightforward with your attacks." Nyssa advised. "For common riff-raff like this, it hardly makes a difference, but with a more skilled opponent, it could get you killed. They will know the tells, so you must limit projecting your blows. You do well with feints, take advantage of that."

Canary nodded along, hanging to her every word. While there was still an air awkwardness between them, Nyssa was a master combatant, almost on par with Green Arrow. She had proven that during their first spar together. She internally winced when she thought about it.

She was also a better teacher than Green Arrow. Not to say the vigilante was a bad teacher, but their situation was hardly ideal for learning. Green Arrow had his own responsibilities and he barely had any free time to dedicate to her. Not to mention, he was a man, and applying the training he had to a woman's form had been difficult. Nyssa had none of these issues.

While Black Canary had not been cleared on the specifics (and been told that it was better if she didn't), Nyssa was not allowed to be seen in public. All that was said on the matter is that it wasn't safe, and while Nyssa could take care of herself, it was saving everyone a headache if she stayed out of sight. This meant Nyssa had all the time in the world to focus on Canary's training. And seeing as she was a woman, one that had professed to have trained several other women beforehand, it was as ideal as it could get.

Except for one thing: her identity. While Canary had already seen what was beneath Nyssa's veil, she had yet to reveal her own identity. While she trusted her teacher, it was secondhand trust sourced from Green Arrow. And she had yet to reveal her identity to him as well.

Despite this barrier, however, the training was going well. Nyssa accompanied her throughout the night as she patrolled through the Glades, taking down criminal after criminal, hiding in the shadows and appearing to praise and criticize her performance. She was strict and blunt, but not too harsh and was willing to give her praise when it was due. Provided Canary wasn't too exhausted at the end of the night, they'd then have a spar to finish off before Canary returned to Ted's gym for her customary four hours of sleep before she started her day. She was proud to note that every time they sparred, she lasted longer than the last time.

Speaking of Ted's gym, she was speaking with her first mentor about getting her own hideout. While Ted stated she was always welcome with him, it was dangerous if someone managed to connect Black Canary to the building, and therefore, him. She had already began exploring the Glades, searching for a place of her own; the current frontrunner was an abandoned clock tower. She would have to take a day or two to clean the place out and install equipment and such, but just the thought of having her own hideout filled her with glee. It reminded her of when she had gotten her first apartment years ago.
It was great for logistics too. She knew Nyssa was staying at Green Arrow's place, wherever that was, and traveled there after their nightly patrols were done, but it would be better for both of them if they had another place for her to stay - a place where she and Canary could meet more frequently, even during the day. She obviously could not stay at Ted's gym (Ted didn't even know she had new teacher), but if Canary had her own hideout, that would be the perfect solution.

Black Canary broke away from her thoughts to dodge a kick from her mentor. It seemed it was time for the usual spar.

"I heard you died." Kara greeted Barry calmly with a hug.

Barry winced even as he returned the embrace. "Technically, that was Chance."

"Who was impersonating you." She pointed out as they separated.

"Point."

Kara smirked before looking around. They were at the Queen Mansion; true to his word, Barry had been hiding out in Starling City until all the furor surrounding the heist had died down. With Kara on her own trip, helping out with a rash of disasters that had appeared on the east coast while Oliver was overlooking the construction of the mall over the base and Slade off visiting Grant, Barry had been slotted in as the primary caretaker/watcher of Kal, J'onn, and Nyssa.

"Nyssa's in town."

Not that Kara knew about the latter until now.

The Kryptonian blinked. "Really? What kind of job is she on?"

Barry grimaced. "She's not here for a job."

Kara frowned at that as her thoughts began to race. Why else would Nyssa be here? It's not like Ra's gave out vacation days, not even for his own daughter.

"She's here for protection." Barry sighed, answering her unasked question.

"Protection? Protection from who?"

"Talia."

Kara froze at that.

"Talia?" she asked carefully.

"Talia."

Kara groaned.

"Crap."

"Here's the next box." Iris announced, setting it down on the table.

Ralph, who was lying face down on the hardwood tabletop with a pen hanging loosely between his fingers, let out an audible groan. Eddie and Joe, who were sitting next to him, ignored the sound and
instead started reaching inside the box for the pieces of evidence. Iris scowled at her partner, and started shaking his shoulder.

"Come on, Ralph. Just a few more and then we can go."

"I don't wanna." The man whined, his head still down.

Iris resisted the urge to strangle him. He was still her senior, and she needed to show the appropriate respect. Even if that respect wasn't returned. "You know how this goes, Ralph; you've done it over a hundred times before. Just log in the evidence for the trial and you're done. It'll be up to the DA after that."

Ralph still refused to sit up. Iris, past the point of propriety, did the only thing she could: she picked up Ralph's piping hot mug of coffee with a napkin, and placed the searing bottom of porcelain right on top of his hand. She quickly removed it as he sat up, hissing as he tried to rub the pain away.

"What did you do that for?" he demanded, though it came out rather childish.

Rather than respond, Iris simply tapped her fingers on the edge of the evidence box. Ralph glared at her for a moment before sighing and taking out one of the contents for himself.

---

After their shift was over, the group separated. Ralph had a date with his newest girlfriend, while Eddie was staying overtime. As the head of the Anti-Metahuman Task Force, he had extra paperwork to do in the cases of Shawna Baez and Hannibal Bates, especially the latter - it seemed Bates had gotten a large number of innocent people imprisoned for his crimes since the Particle Accelerator Explosion, and Eddie had to comb through the records for all of them.

Joe and Iris elected to go to Jitters before heading home. They had introduced new themed drinks for the Justice League, and Iris had made it her personal mission to try each one at least once.

"You know, I was worried when Singh told me he was considering you to be Ralph's new partner."

Joe commented as he took a sip of his Green Arrow, which was a mint-flavored black coffee.

Iris frowned. "Why?" In her hands was a Supergirl, a milk latte with cherry and blueberry flavoring.

"Not for any lack of ability on your part," Joe assured her, "but because Ralph isn't the most… diligent of workers."

Iris nodded. She could accept that. "And now?"

Joe breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm glad he did. Not only for you, but for Ralph too. You manage to kick his ass into gear, better than almost everyone in the precinct besides Singh. With him actually having a work ethic these days, we can get so much more done."

Iris smirked. "I aim to please." She took another sip of her coffee, savoring the sweetness of it, before looking to the side, deep in thought.

Joe, sensing his daughter's discomfort, pressed his lips into a line. "Iris? Is everything alright?"

His daughter looked back to him, and there was a troubled look on her face. "Yes. Which is the problem."

Now the senior detective was really confused. "How so?"

Instead of answering that, Iris chewed the corner of her lip, and asked, "How's Barry?"
"Fine. He's living it up in Starling right now, like he always is when he's there. You know how he is with his siblings." Joe was proud to note that the last part passed through his lips without hesitation. It has taken a long time to get used to the idea of the perpetual only child that was Barry having brothers and a sister. Even when he was living with Joe and Iris for those three years, he felt separate from them, a part of the family and at the same time not.

"And he's not distressed about… anything?"

"No. Should he be?"

Iris shrugged. "Considering what he went through, you'd think he would be." She knew better than to elaborate what, exactly, her best friend went through. They were in public, after all.

"You're right about that Iris, and it is strange." Joe swirled his drink a bit. "But it's Barry. You know how he is - even in the most serious of situations, he always manages to find some humor in them." He grimaced. "Even when it's not to his best interest. I'd imagine that after the island, he's had practice coping with danger."

"Yeah." Iris said, trying to hide how unconvinced she was by that answer. "Yeah."

On the surface level, it did make sense. But the more she thought about it, the more it didn't. Because there had to be some mark on Barry. Something that showed he was affected by all that had happened to him. He couldn't just brush off things like this so easily, regardless of what he'd gone through before. The island couldn't be that bad, could it?

And as that thought passed through her mind, another came with it. She didn't know anything about Barry's time on the island, only that there were people with him while he was on it. Whenever they spoke about those ten years, they only ever really talked about what happened to her; Barry only spoke of his trials in broad, vague terms, then deflected the conversation to another subject. And Iris, too happy to have her best friend back, fell for it each and every time.

Suddenly, her coffee no longer looked appetizing.

Another night, another patrol.

Black Canary prowled from rooftop to rooftop, searching for trouble. More specifically, searching for Brick. Every single one of the lowlifes she had taken out in the last couple of weeks had something to do with Brick, whoever he was, and that was not a good sign. More than likely, Brick was some thug trying to fill in the massive power vacuum left behind by Green Arrow, and, to a lesser extent, Supergirl. Whether he succeeded or not was trivial compared to the almost assured collateral damage that would come with his rise.

She already used some of her connections with the DA's office to get a file on him, but some personal anecdotes wouldn't hurt either. Better yet, she could get a location - then either her or Green Arrow could hit the place up and stifle this before it got any worse.

_Crunch!_

Black Canary looked down to see a pair of thugs throwing rocks at a storefront. She knew that storefront - she dropped by there from time to time after her shifts at CNRI for a smoothie or two. The owner was a nice old man who had seen of two children to college.

Infuriated, she didn't hesitate to drop down and attack. The two were no match for her, of course, they were just a pair of punks looking to commit larceny, but even as she brought them down to their
knees and into the thralls of unconsciousness, she felt a fire in her blood. Something was wrong.

"Hello there, pretty birdie."

The vigilante whirled around to see a tall, heavy-set man stepping under a streetlight, illuminating his appearance. He was cracking his knuckles audibly. Even under the night sky, Canary could see the outline of muscles beneath his clothes, and readied herself. This would not be an easy fight.

"You know, my boss is real unhappy 'bout you and the Arrow taking out all our fodder." He said casually, now popping his neck to loosen the muscles there. "But with Arrow always leaving town for some new thing, you're the only real issue for us. He figured it's time we take you out."

With that, he charged. Black Canary blinked at how deceptively fast he was, and dodged his first blow by a hair. But regardless of how fast he was, she was faster, and started making her own attacks.

Unfortunately, they weren't that effective. While Canary was stronger than the average woman, it wasn't enough to really hurt the mass of muscle this man was. He simply grunted with each blow, and then grabbed her by the shoulders and threw her to the side.

Canary hissed as she skidded on her shoulder across the concrete sidewalk. While her suit protected her, she could feel the burn on her skin. She would have to look at that when this was all over. Ignoring the pain, she rolled over to dodge a hard stomp to her solar plexus that probably would've broken her ribs, and jumped to her feet.

Immediately, she jumped backwards to dodge another fast blow, and grabbed the offending arm, trying to flip the man over. But he spread his legs, locking himself in place and countering whatever leverage she had managed to get. Then, using his superior strength, he threw her over his shoulder, sending her flying.

Canary landed on her back, and bit her lip, trying not to let out a cry of pain. While she had managed to ready herself for the fall, including planning her shoulders, it didn't make it hurt any less. She was duly reminded of how much force those training mats absorbed on impact. Before she could get up herself, her opponent lifted her up by the neck.

She tried to scratch and claw away from his hold as it gradually tightened and then -

*Thwack!*

Black Canary breathed in several deep breaths. She looked over to the man who had tried to kill her, and found him completely unconscious. Standing above him was Nyssa, who was holding her bow in her hand.

"Next time, please wait for me." Her teacher deadpanned, as she took out a syringe and plunged it into the man's neck.

"What are you doing?" Canary wheezed, coughing.

"Making sure this doesn't come back to haunt us." Nyssa replied. "This syringe contains a drug that will wipe away the last few hours from his memory. That way whoever his boss is doesn't know about me or your injuries." She dropped the syringe back into one of the compartments of her suit to be discarded, and held out her hand to her student. Canary took it with gratitude. "No more patrol today. That was enough of a scare for one night."

"Where are we going?"
"To my place." At Canary's questioning look, Nyssa smirked. "You didn't think you or Green Arrow were the only ones with a hideout here, did you?"

Nyssa's hideout turned out to be one of the many abandoned construction sites in the more derelict sections of the Glades. When they arrived there via car (which Canary heavily suspected to have fake license plates and tinted windows), she saw that there was a cot, a mini-fridge, a computer, and piles of medical supplies. The assassin set her down on the bed while she rifled her supplies for bandages and disinfectants and anything else she might need.

Canary was still rubbing her neck when Nyssa got back to her with the necessary supplies in hand. The two exchanged a long look, and then Canary sighed and removed her mask.

"Laurel. Laurel Lance."

Nyssa nodded, careful to hide her shock, and got to work.

Once she was all patched up, Laurel used one of the half-completed bathrooms to change in some extra clothes Nyssa had lying around and wash out the dye in her hair. Idly, she wondered how Nyssa was able to get running, clean water in this hideout, but decided she was better off not knowing.

Nyssa handed her a towel after she was done, so she could dry her hair, which Laurel took with a grateful smile. The vigilante sat back down at the cot, and dried out her hair in relative silence. It was a chore to do this every night, but it kept people off her tracks and was far more practical than a wig that could fall off at any time.

After she was done, she handed the towel back to Nyssa, and the two stared at each other, not knowing what to say.

"Thank you." Laurel finally said, feeling that was the best way to start. "For saving me again."

Nyssa shrugged. "Think nothing of it. You are my student, a good one, and you couldn't continue your training if you were dead." She raised an elegant eyebrow. "Though, I must admit I'm surprised you revealed your identity to me so soon."

Laurel sighed. "You saved my life twice. That's enough for me. Plus - I need more training, and I can't have that with this… gap between us. It's better this way."

"Very well then." Nyssa nodded. "You must realize that if you want more, you must patrol less. Even if you didn't have any injuries, I would still advise this."

Laurel gulped. "The city still has Green Arrow and Supergirl."

"That they do. And the Flash is appearing here more often as well. But they are not always available, and they often deal with 'bigger' situations. Are you willing to leave more innocents vulnerable for the sake of training?"

Laurel grit her teeth, then nodded reluctantly. "Yes. Because I'm no used to them dead."

Nyssa stared at her for a long moment, and then smiled. Laurel blinked at the unexpected sight.

"Good. You understand." Nyssa got up to another section of her base, where a duffel bag was sitting. She unzipped it open and started rifling through the contents. "Your drive to help people is
admirable, Laurel, but I've seen it in others as well. You, however, understand a fundamental aspect of your goal that others lack; sometimes, the best way to help others is to help yourself. And the best way to help yourself, and others, is by getting stronger." Finally finding what she was searching for, she took it out of the bag and went over to Laurel.

She held her hands out to reveal a pair of black tonfa.

"I think it's time you learn how to use a weapon."

Laurel gazed at the tonfa in wonder before grinning.

Chapter End Notes

We're going back to Central City next chapter, and after a short mini-arc there (max three chapters), we will finish off the arc in Starling. There will be a short time skip (two months or so) right before the end of the arc; specifically, right before the last mini-arc of Arc III. You'll love it if you're a fan of Laurel, and that's all I'm going to say.

After Arc III finishes, there will be another time skip. This one will be much longer. I won't say why that is, but you'll probably figure it out within the next couple of chapters as things continue to unravel more.

As for the contest, I am thinking of revising the finish date. Initially I planned for when Arc III finished, but I realized that I am going through these chapters faster than I thought I would. So, most likely the finish date will be a chapter in Arc IV. Nothing is definitive yet, so don't hold your breath.

Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be ignored and deleted! Remember to update the TV Tropes page! And don't forget the contest!
Arc III, Chapter 56: It's Marky Mark!

Chapter Summary

Mark Mardon enters the game. Iris wonders.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 56: It's Marky Mark!

He wasn't one for late night autopsies, but pay was pay and the more work he got done the more time he had to get out of town for his upcoming vacation. Years and years of slaving away, cutting open dead bodies and recording the states and weights of bones and organs, all built up for this one trip to the Bahamas. Sand, sun, and beautiful women as far as the eye could see. A true paradise.

At least, that was what he was thinking about five minutes ago. Now, he'd just be content to live to see tomorrow.

"Please…"

"No." The demon above him shook his finger. Above his other hand was a floating ball of ice, rotating menacingly. "Not until you answer my question: who killed Clyde Mardon?"

He winced, and decided his life was more important. After all, if anyone could stop this demon… "The Flash."

A pause. "You sure?"

"A-Ask Joe West or Eddie Thawne!" He stuttered out desperately. "They were there! They saw the Flash cut his throat!"

The demon seemed to contemplate this for a moment. "Alright. I believe you."

He let out a breath of relief. Safe, finally.

"Goodbye."

His eyes snapped back to his assailant, just in time see the ice ball triple in size, and then -

"Guess what, guess what, guess whaaat!" Barry sang, jumping up and down in front of Iris' desk. His voice was loud and off-key, prompting a couple of glares from the surrounding officers.

Iris, for her part, was unperturbed, far too use to Barry's antics to care. "What?"

"I've got tickets to that Japanese zombie movie!" Her best friend announced brightly, producing said tickets for proof. "Want to come?"

"Seeing as you got two, you already have your answer." Iris answered, slightly amused.
Barry frowned. "Not true. I could've taken Joe or Cisco or Caitlin or even Eddie if I wanted to."

"Barry, Dad hates zombie movies, Cisco and Caitlin prefer not to spend any more time with you if they have to, and Eddie…” Iris paused. "I'm not even going to dignify that with a response."

"… Cisco and Caitlin do spend more time with me than they have to." Barry insisted, ignoring the other two accusations.

"And how much of that is because you keep on intruding on their own time?" Iris retorted, already knowing the answer.

"… You haven't answered my question."

"Yes, I'll go with you."

Barry pumped his fist. "Yes!"

Iris held up a hand, halting the celebration before it could get too out of hand. "There will be subtitles, right?"

Barry snorted. "Of course. How else would we be able to understand what everyone is trying to say?" In this case, he wasn't lying - he hadn't gotten around to learning Japanese yet, just some basic phrases. Not everyone could be a linguistics prodigy, after all.

"Good. Now beat it." Iris said promptly. "I have to finish up the last of these reports and you're distracting."

"Iris is so mean."

"Yes, because Iris has a promotion in the pipeline and as much as she loves Barry, she will not let him screw this up for her."

Barry held up his hands at that. "Alright then. I'll see you later, West."

"Don't let the door hit you on the way out, Allen." Iris called back as Barry walked away.

As the theater patrons poured out of the auditorium, many of them were still shuddering and shivering; the movie had not been for the faint of heart. Iris was no exception. She had a wide-eyed look on her face and was rubbing her arms to ward off a cold feeling, even though it was the middle of summer and unbearably hot.

Barry, however, was.

"Now that was definitely high-up the scale." He stated in glee. "I give it an eight."

"I'm glad someone here enjoyed it." Iris responded, not nearly as enthused as her friend was. "How is it that you can stand watching stuff like this?"

Barry shrugged. "Desensitization." As Iris' incredulous look, he clarified his answer. "From zombie movies, Iris. I've watched a lot of them since I got back."

"Must be a lot of zombie movies."

"Oh, yes. From what I've seen, zombie apocalypses have gotten really popular over the last ten years." Barry tapped a finger on his chin. "I wonder why…"
Iris, knowing where this was going, cut in. "No. I'm hungry and if you continue this any longer, I'm going to lose my appetite and wake up tomorrow at six in the morning craving for a steak."

"Alright, alright." Barry held up his hands in a conciliatory manner. "Where to?"

"There's this new Asian Fusion place I've been meaning to try."

"Then Asian Fusion it is." Barry grinned. "I'll pay."

Iris scowled. "Barry…"

"Iris, I have all this money from you-know-who, and trust me, using it to buy dinner is the least he owes me." Barry said, taking out his wallet and waving it around for emphasis.

Iris sighed. "Fine."

"So, what's up?" Barry asked as he finished up a piece of sushi.

Iris, in the process of dabbing her own with a bit of wasabi, frowned. "What makes you think something's up?"

"Because I know you, Iris." Barry answered, dipping another piece in some soy sauce. "You're tense. I can see it from a mile away. What's going on?"

Iris pursed her lips. "Are you alright, Barry?"

"I thought we were talking about you?"

"You're the reason I'm tense, Bare."

Barry blinked. "Why?"

"You're… just really put together. Everything is peachy for you. And normally, this wouldn't be a problem if it wasn't for everything that's happened since you came back." Iris bit her lip. "Almost getting shot, the Undertaking, and that thing we had you do - I don't know, you're taking this way better than anyone else would. You're still joking around after all that. And I'm just worried…"

"… That I'm putting on some kind of act?" Barry finished for her, smirking. "Iris, I'm not suppressing my emotions or anything like that. I'm just really good at processing these things. The island and all that."

Iris' frown deepened. "Barry, about the island-"

**CRASH!**

Before Iris could finish her sentence, what looked to be a person flew through the glass of the front of the restaurant. Barry and Iris quickly got out of their seats and backed away as the person - a woman - rolled in front of their table.

"What the…"

"Why was she-"

"Look!"
They and the other patrons looked outside the window (now completely devoid of a barrier) to see the park outside in chaos. A man was standing in the center, hands spread wide as wind blew from every corner, surrounding him. People trying to flee were caught up in the gales, thrown in every direction. It almost looked as if it was forming a-

"Tornado…" Iris hissed. She took out her phone to zoom in the prospective metahuman, and cursed even louder.

"Iris?" Barry asked, cautious. Carefully, he placed his hand in his pocket and pressed the button of a small device hidden inside. Thankfully, it seemed no one noticed his strange movements.

"It's Mark Mardon, Clyde Mardon's brother." Iris then turned to the other patrons. "Everyone, I'm a cop! Please leave now while I call CCPD!"

"How are we supposed to get out?" One of the customers demanded, fear belying his anger.

Instead of answering, Iris turned to one of the waiters. "You guys have a back door?"

The waiter, scared out of his wits, nodded shakily.

"Evacuate everyone through there." When the waiter hesitated, she snapped out a "Now!" He gestured everyone to the kitchen, and they left, post-haste.

She then turned to her friend once more. "Barry, go with them."

Barry crossed his arms, suspicious. "And you'll be right behind me?" When Iris didn't answer, he almost snarled. "Iris!"

"I'm a trained cop, Barry!" Iris cried out angrily, pressing CCPD's hotline on speed dial and waiting for the dial tone to end. "They might need me!"

"Iris, you're off-duty. You don't even have your gun on you right now. What use could you be to them other than another body for him to throw around!"

Iris had no answer to that, though she still looked defiant. The dial tone of the phone finally ended, and she instead took the call, informing the operator of the situation. After the call ended, she looked expectantly at Barry.

Barry refused to stand down. "At least take me with you."

"No!"

"Iris, your dad will kill me if I let you go after Mardon alone, especially when you're effectively defenseless."

"And Dad will kill me if I let you go with me!" Iris shot back. "You don't have any training at all, Barry! If I go alone, I might have a shot, but if you go with me, I'll have to watch out for you! If we both go, we both die, and there's no point in having that!"

Barry was about to argue his case, but the sound of ice stopped him. He had a moment of clarity thanks to his speed to see Mardon forming icicles in the air before-

"Get down!"

He threw himself at Iris (using his speed for a quick boost to close the distance) knocking her down to the floor as the icicles flew overhead.
Mark Mardon scowled as the wind continued to howl above him. The Flash should've been here by now! You'd think that a tornado in the middle of downtown Central City would've caught the attention of the fastest man alive already.

His scowl deepened when he caught sight of the police speeding over. He increased the wind pressure on their cars, preventing them from getting out - no need to fall from a stray bullet after all.

What was it going to take? He was already pushing himself with the tornado - was he going to have to bury Central City in a snow storm or something to catch that damn speedster's attention? Or maybe a tsunami? While he'd prefer not to destroy the city - he had shit here after all - that should be enough to get the Flash's atten-

Mark blinked as a blue blur started speeding around the tornado he was trying to form. He quickly realized the blur was doing in the opposite direction of the tornado. Now, he wasn't some weather genius (otherwise this situation probably would've never happened), but it didn't take leap to guess why the blur was doing that… and who the blur was.

*Tried for one and got the other. Revenge will have to wait another day.*

Proving himself to be at least marginally smarter than his brother, Mark Mardon fled the scene as quickly as he could muster.

Luckily for Mark Mardon, the damage he had done was enough to distract Supergirl from going after him. Instead, she spent the entire time searching for stranded civilians alongside the police and the incoming EMTs. Once she could see that all the bodies, alive and dead, had been located, she flew off.

Iris and Barry, being treated side-by-side at one of the recently arrived ambulances, watched her go as cheers followed her. They both remembered the first time they saw her in person, that night where Tony Woodward had taken both of them hostage.

"How lucky are we to be saved by Supergirl twice?" Iris asked, wondering.

"I'm more concerned by the fact that we had to be saved by Supergirl twice." Barry pointed out, silently rubbing the bandages covering his forearm. "There is no way the Flash would've left Mardon alone when he was causing this much chaos. He had to be doing something else. So, he sent Supergirl in his place. But what if Supergirl hadn't been available?"

Iris grimaced. "He could've sent that Firestorm guy we've seen lately?" She suggested.

"And what if *he* hadn't been available?" Barry countered. "The Justice League is being stretched thin, Iris. Their goal is sound but they need more members if they're really going to succeed in the long-term. Either that, or…" He looked away, pensive.

"Or?" Iris pressed.

"Caitlin and Cisco have been producing that new technology for CCPD to help combat metas. You should know as you've used some of it." Barry noted. "But they haven't been able to make more advancements thanks to limited manpower. We've tried passing over some of the projects to Mercury Labs for the good of the city, but they've got their own hands full already. If we could hire more people…"

Iris knew where his train of thought was going. S.T.A.R. Labs had finally repaired the damage to the
building from the attack months ago, and had gotten most of the restrictions removed. However, hiring was slow-going thanks to the previous owner's reputation, and the current one's refusal to reveal his identity. Barry had his reasons, of course, and they were valid, but that didn't make things easier. While she couldn't help but feel Barry had ulterior motives for pushing this, his reasoning was sound. "I'll talk to Captain Singh about it. He might be able to push something through."

Barry smiled. "Great."

Iris smiled back, but it gradually wilted. A thought had been tugging at her the last couple of hours, and now was better than ever to voice it. "Barry, how were you able to push me away from that icicle so quickly?"

She had thought back on what happened after things had calmed down. Barry had stomped away from her during their argument and had been far from her when the icicles came. Too far. There had been too many to dodge. Even with the leap, he at least would've gotten hit.

But he hadn't. And neither had she.

"Adrenaline, I guess." Barry shrugged, rubbing one of his hands. Iris followed his movements, and frowned deeper. That hand had a cut on it thanks to the shattered glass present on the floor when they landed. While it hadn't been too deep, it had been deep enough to warrant bandages. Except now, the bandages were gone and the hand had been healed.

"Alright then." Iris responded, just a little too quickly, but Barry didn't seem to notice. She wondered, but she didn't ask.

She had a feeling she wouldn't like the answer.

Chapter End Notes

Iris is getting even more suspicious! We have one and a half chapters in Central City before Starling, and I hope you'll enjoy them. I've been looking forward to both these mini-arcs for the entire arc.

Constructive criticism is welcome, flames will be ignored! Remember to update the TV Tropes page! Don't forget the contest!
Chapter Summary

Barry searches for Mardon. Iris wonders.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 57: Beneath the Surface

Barry had a very uncharacteristic frown on his face as he all but stomped into the Cortex. Caitlin briefly looked up from her place in the infirmary at the sounds of his steps, then got back to her work immediately. There was no way she was dealing with her friend while he was in that kind of mood.

Cisco, unfortunately, did not have the luxury. While he was thankful for the lull in his recently restarted training, having to deal with Barry when he was one bad day away from slaughtering every criminal in Central City almost made him regret it. Almost.

"We got anything?" The speedster all but demanded, leaning over the other side of the computer monitors.

"You," Cisco pointed to Barry, mindful of keeping his finger far away before his friend could bite it off his hand, "I have no clue. As for me, however, nada. I've hacked into like every camera feed in the city and used facial recognition, and gotten zero pings. The dude's a ghost."

"I'd be impressed if he hadn't made a wreck of my city and nearly killed Iris." Barry all but snarled, incensed. "Come on, there has to be something. The guy might have weather powers, but he's a crook, not a criminal mastermind."

"And yet, he's managed to evade you for this long." Cisco countered, only to take a step back when Barry directed his glare at him. "I'm just saying, you don't have to be geniuses like us to be clever, Barry. He avoided detection from us for a long time; hell, we didn't even know he existed."

"I did." Barry admitted, anger now directed towards himself. "I knew he existed. I just assumed he died during the Particle Accelerator Explosion when he failed to show up alongside his brother. I should've known better — bastard probably skipped town when he realized what he could do. Went out of the country and learned how to harness his powers in some place remote so none of the Justice League could find him."

Cisco furrowed his eyebrows. "And why do you suppose he came back?"

Barry narrowed his eyes. "For his brother. You saw their dossier in the CCPD database. The Mardons are — were — scum, but even scum love their families."

Cisco blinked. "Wow. And you managed to figure all that out on conjecture without a hint of the evidence I could have given you."

Now it was Barry's turn to look confused. "What?"
Instead of answering, Cisco pulled out a police report on one of the plasma screens. Barry fisted his hands when saw it - the Head Coroner at the City Morgue had just recently been murdered under mysterious circumstances.

"According to the preliminary analysis of the CSI on the case, our dear coroner was most likely murdered via concussive force to the chest via some kind of large piece of hail. Sound familiar?" Barry growled. "Not only that, they lifted some audio from an automated dictation system that the coroner had installed for autopsy reports. The attacker was demanding the name of whoever killed Clyde Mardon."

"And you couldn't tell me any of this sooner!?"

"I didn't even know any of this happened until recently. The murder just hit the news. And even then, it doesn't really matter - this report didn't tell us anything that we didn't already know."

Barry palmed his face. "Okay, okay, fine. I'm sorry. What about the wand?"

For the first time in the conversation, Cisco smiled. He picked something up and lifted it high for Barry to see. It looked like a wand - if it weren't for the many mechanical protrusions lining the sides.

"I can't believe we were working on the same concept for this." The engineer chuckled. "That's quite a coincidence."

Barry shrugged. "When I first learned of Clyde Mardon's existence, I made the basic schematics just in case he somehow managed to escape me. After I killed him," Cisco winced, "there was no need to make it anymore, so I just left them around to collect dust, just in case I ever needed it for something else. I guess taking down his older brother counts."

Cisco looked down at the wand, bemused. "Being a little paranoid, don't you think?"

Barry slapped Cisco on the shoulder, playfully. All the fury from earlier had finally begun to drain away. "Better paranoid than dead, Cisco. That's something I had to learn all too painfully over the years, and it's something you best take to heart as well if you're really serious about becoming a vigilante. You'll live longer that way." He turned to leave, no doubt patrolling the city for Mardon, again.

Cisco sighed as he sped out, and turned back to the computers. Something had to come up eventually.

Ralph Dibny fingered through some files as he walked up the stairs. There was a new round of crime scene reports he had to hand off to their CSI — a prickly man by the name of Julian — and then he had to continue cleaning out his old case room. Now that the case was over and they had finally finished all the paperwork, it was time for it to be vacated for a new detective pair to start their own big investigation.

He entered the lab, elating in the fact that Julian wasn't present, and left the files in the rooms 'IN' box before fleeing to his old case room. He opened the door - and froze.

"What are you doing here?" He hissed at a working Iris, quick to close the door behind him and lock it. "If Eddie or Joe or even Barry find out you're here, they'll have a goddamn fit! That is the last thing we need right now!"

"I'm working, Ralph." Iris replied, cross. "A couple of bumps and bruises aren't going to stop me from doing my job. I've been cleared anyway."
Ralph leaned against the doorway, making his displeasure clear. "Yes, you were cleared. But if I remember correctly, your father, your boyfriend, and your best friend stressed - quite heavily - that you were welcome to take as much time as you needed. Preferably more than one day."

"And if I remember correctly, it was a suggestion, not an order."

"You and I both know that it was most definitely an order."

Iris huffed. "Oh well. I'm here. What are they going to do about it?"

Ralph sighed, not deigning to answer. He had been around long enough to know not to interfere with the Wests' inner disputes, and while it had been a while since the last one, that didn't make him any less experienced with them. Instead, he turned to the file that Iris had been perusing through, and groaned when he spotted the photo on the page.

"What?" Iris demanded, having heard him.

"Couldn't you have chosen a safer target?" Ralph asked, gesturing to the file.

"I'm not going after him, if that's what you're asking." Iris replied. "I'm just… looking for possible places he might be. And investigating them."

"By yourself, I'm guessing?" Ralph deadpanned. Iris huffed, answering his question. "I'm going with you."

"What? Ralph-"

"No buts, Iris — I'm going. Not only am I your partner, I'm your senior. If you're going to recklessly put yourself in danger like this, I might as well go with you to make sure you don't get killed."

"Fine." Iris sighed. She handed him the file. "The first location's at the top of the page. Let's go."

---

The Flash continued to speed around the shadier parts of Central City, searching for his prey. His time as Bolt had allowed him to further familiarize himself with these areas, and thus he had a better idea of what kind of place a man like Mardon would hide himself in. Unfortunately, even with that knowledge, his search proved fruitless.

"Barry." His comm buzzed to life, momentarily distracting him. The earpiece of the suit was rarely used; he hardly ever needed extra information for his patrols, nor coordination for a fight. Even with Green Arrow and Supergirl, looks alone were sufficient for communication. Years of working together allowed for that, and even his powers had done nothing to diminish their teamwork.

"What is it, Cisco?"

"I've had the satellites scanning the weather patterns like you asked, and we've got an anomaly over at the abandoned airfield. It just dropped below freezing temperature there, suddenly."

"Oh?" The Flash narrowed his eyes. "How interesting."

"The airfield? Really?" Ralph asked, deeply unimpressed.

"We've checked everywhere else, Ralph." Iris defended herself. "This is the last place he could feasibly hide in the city. It's not like the guy is rolling in dough, you know."
"But still — this is the most obvious place to hide. So many criminals have made their hideouts here, the only reason we haven't appropriated it yet is because it's the first place we'd look for the dumber ones. There is no way Mardon is here — he's smarter than that."

"Or maybe he's smart enough to realize that we'd think he's too smart to hide here." Iris countered. She really didn't think that, but it didn't hurt to check.

Ralph paused, and sighed. "Let's go."

The two trekked down the unused runway, which was overflowing with grass, weeds, and dirt. They were walking towards the abandoned airplane hangar — the biggest building in the vicinity, and thus the most likely place Mardon was hiding. With how rundown all the other buildings were, the hangar was the most likely place where Mardon could find some place habitable.

"Is it me, or is it getting colder?" Ralph asked, rubbing his arms to warm up his skin. He had elected to wear a short-sleeved shirt, and was now starting to regret it.

Iris narrowed her eyes. "No, you're right. It is getting colder."

"Brilliant deduction."

The two whipped around, spotting the criminal they had been searching for: Mark Mardon. The man in question had his hands pocketed in his trench coat, and a slimy smirk on his face.

"Now then, what are two cops doing all the way out here?" He mockingly asked, taking out one of his hands and gesturing to the air. From the above periphery, Iris and Ralph could see a gradually forming cloud above them — that looked dark and ominous. Their apprehension was well-founded, as they heard thunder crackle above them.

"Could it be to look for little old me?" Mardon suggested, that blasted smirk still on his face.

Knowing that running was futile, the two cops whipped out their guns, both turning off the safeties and aiming them at Mardon's chest. "Put your hands up, Mardon! No more people have to die anymore!" Iris called out, tensed and ready.

The criminal lidded his eyes. "Now that's where you wrong, sweetcheeks. Plenty of people are going to die, and they're going to keep on dying until the Flash finally shows his sorry ass and dies with them. So, unless you have the Flash on speed dial, I think I'm going to start with the two of you."

With that, a large gust of wind blew at them, powerful enough to rip their weapons away from their hands. Iris and Ralph tried steady themselves, staying grounded, but the strength of the gale was too much — they flew to the dirty ground, coughing and trying desperately to stand back up. Mardon looked back up to the cloud, and with a snap, lightning flew from it, aiming directly at them. Both managed to turn around long enough to see death coming for them, their lives flashing right before their eyes-

-Before they were flashed away.

"The Flash..." Ralph coughed out, trying to get his breath. Beside him, Iris remained silent, shaking. The familiar form of the vigilante both elated her and filled her with dread.

The Flash paid them no mind, and instead sped over to Mardon, holding out what looked to be a... wand?

Mardon saw what he was doing, and burst out laughing. "What? Do you think I'm some kind of
weather wizard and that you can stop me with some magic of your own?" He joked, preparing another shot of lightning.

The Flash shook his head. "No. This isn't magic — it's science." He pushed a button on the wand, and waited.

Mardon frowned, and decided to forego the lightning for some hail — with a speedster, area of effect was for more useful than speedy shots. However, the hail never came. He looked up and gestured again for the hail to come, but the cloud refused to answer him. Instead, it started moving, before gradually drawing itself into the wand the Flash was holding.

The criminal watched the scene in dawning horror, and tried some smaller attacks instead — only for them to be drawn into the wand as well. Realizing that his powers were useless now, he tried to flee, only to be tripped up by the Flash. The vigilante grabbed him by the front of his shirt and held him up, taking out one of his knives to prepare a killing blow.

"Wait! Don't!"

He turned to see Iris running towards him, with Ralph following behind her. "Don't kill him! Please, Flash, there's been enough death already. Just take him to Iron Heights, they can hold him there for as long as they have to."

"He killed over a dozen people with his stunt the other day. He was planning to kill more." The Flash reminded her. Iris was stunned to hear him speak, but overcame her astonishment almost immediately, knowing how dire the situation was.

"Only because you killed his brother, remember?"

The Flash snorted. "The same brother that was going to kill your father and your boyfriend and destroy Central City with a tornado? That brother? Are you asking me to feel sorry for killing him?"

"No." Iris admitted. "You had no choice. There was no prison that could hold him." Her eyes became determined, her voice pleading. "But you have a choice here. You can kill him and prove all your detractors right, that it's only your justice that matters. Or you can leave him alive and let the law handle things from here."

The Flash stared at her for a long moment. A second later, he was gone, leaving Mark Mardon behind him. Iris and Ralph watched him speed away for but a moment, then rushed over to Mardon as fast as they could. They reached his body, breathing sighs of relief when they realized that he was merely unconscious, not dead. They turned his body around to see that his hands had been cuffed, with the same meta-dampening cuffs that S.T.A.R. Labs had provided for them.

"How'd the Flash get a pair of those?" Ralph asked, confounded. Iris simply shook her head, not knowing the answer either.

"Joe, Thawne, welcome back." David Singh said as he watched two of his best file back into the precinct. He frowned when he saw the mood the two were in. "I take it you didn't find Mardon at his old hideout?"

Joe shook his head. "We canvassed his old associates again — nothing. The guy vanished into thin air."

"Maybe we should look over Clyde Mardon's dossier again." Eddie suggested, already plying for more clues.
"No need!"

The three — along with everyone else in the precinct — turned around to Ralph Dibny and Iris West pushing forward a restrained Mardon. The place erupted in cheers at the sight as the two handed their arrest over to another cop for booking. A stunned Joe, Eddie, and David walked over to them.

"Shouldn't you be at home?" Joe glowered at his daughter, clearly unhappy to see her working so soon after her last confrontation with Mardon.

Iris crossed her arms, unrepentant. "I'll tell you what I told Ralph — I'm not gonna let a few bruises stop me from doing my job."

Joe looked ready to blow, as did Eddie. David, ever the voice of reason, cut in before either of them could. "It's done, guys. Iris is safe and Mardon's locked up." He then turned to the other two, curious. "How did you find and catch Mardon anyway?"

Ralph jabbed his thumb towards his partner. "Iris here made a list of hideouts and was planning on checking them out. I went with her because I knew these two," he gestured to Joe and Eddie, "wouldn't be happy if I let her investigate on her own. We checked off every place on the list except for the old abandoned airfield, and guess where Mardon was?"

"The Ferris Air airfield?" Eddie clarified. "The same airfield that every two-bit thug in the city has tried to hide out in at least once?"

"Got it in one, Thawne." Ralph mimicked a gun and clicked his teeth for emphasis. At the unamused looks everyone shot him, he quickly shaped up and continued his explanation. "So, anyway, we found Mardon at the airfield. And as for catching him..." Ralph winced. "... we didn't."

"You didn't?" Joe asked, perplexed.

"We didn't." Iris said again. "The Flash did. He was tracking Mardon, too. Even saved us from Mardon before taking him down."

"How'd he get past the weather?"

Ralph rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. "See, that's the strangest part — and that's really saying something — he used some kind of wand to absorb Mardon's weather powers."

"A wand." David repeated disbelievingly.

"He's not lying." Iris said, knowing that her word counted more than Ralph's despite being the junior partner.

Their captain sighed and waved them off. "Just put all in the report. God knows that with how crazy this city has gotten over the last year, the guys up top will let it pass." He walked away, no doubt taking something for his newly formed headache.

His four subordinates watched him go, then turned back to each other and shrugged.

"Hey, Bare." Iris greeted her friend as the door to her childhood home opened.

Barry leveled her an unimpressed look. "Joe told me about what you did."

Iris let her smile fall and sighed. "I'm alright, aren't I?" she pointed out, gesturing to her body for emphasis.
"From what Joe told me, if it weren't for the Flash you wouldn't have been."

"Barry, please. It's over. Done with. I already got a dressing down from Dad and Eddie. I don't need one from you, too."

Barry narrowed his eyes. "You got the goods?"

Iris held her hands up, revealing the "goods"; bags of popcorn, candy, and chips. "The brownies are in the back of my car."

Barry eyed her a moment more before grinning. "Fine, you're forgiven. Movie night will go on as scheduled." He stepped to the side to allow Iris in. "Just set everything down on the coffee table. I've got pizza baking in the oven."

"Dad let you near the oven?" Iris asked, stunned.

Barry pouted at her. "I'll have you know that those videos were really helpful; I now know for sure how to work that darn machine."

"Fine, fine." Iris held up her hands in surrender. Appeased, Barry went to the kitchen to check on the food, leaving Iris to her lonesome. Iris set down the snacks and watched him leave, and once he was out of sight, quickly spotted his jacket, thrown across the top of the couch. As silently as she could, she leaned over it, careful not to disturb its place as she rifled through the pockets. Once she found what she was looking for, she slid it into one of the many compartments of her handbag, zipping it shut just as Barry returned.

Iris was careful to keep any nervousness out of her voice as she spoke once more. "I'm gonna get the brownies, alright?"

Barry blinked, and shrugged. "Alright."

After movie night was over, Iris drove. However, when she was about to make the turn to her apartment, she instead drove in the other direction, towards another building. A very infamous building.

She felt guilty, of course, of her underhandedness, but she needed to know. It was only in the aftermath of the confrontation with Mardon, when she and Ralph had been driving silently back to the precinct, that everything the Flash said finally sunk in. He spoke of the confrontation of Clyde Mardon, and he had called Joe and Eddie her 'father' and 'boyfriend'. It didn't make any sense for him to know that unless… unless he knew her.

But how did he know her? And that's when everything started falling into place. How fast Barry's cut had healed the other day. How the Flash had almost never appeared when Barry was in the vicinity. Even the less frequent appearances the Flash had coincided with Barry's tenure as Bolt — which wouldn't have happened unless Barry himself knew he was at risk of being found out if he tried to juggle three different identities at once. There was, of course, the incident with Amunet, but considering that one of Barry's crewmates had been a shapeshifter, she wouldn't be surprised if Barry knew someone else to take his place as Bolt.

That is, if Barry really was the Flash.

There was only one way to know: S.T.A.R. Labs. Iris had never been inside Barry's workplace before — not once. Nor had Barry ever offered to show her the place. She hadn't noticed it before, but now… he had to be hiding something there. There was only one way to find out. If she was
wrong, well, better to ask forgiveness than permission.

She parked her car in the underground garage, using Barry's own key card to let her in. She walked over to the elevator, briefly overwhelmed by the number of floors there were, before choosing the one that said "Cortex" — Iris had remembered hearing about a "cortex" while accidentally overhearing a conversation between Barry and Cisco at the precinct.

The elevator stopped, and Iris stepped outside, taking a deep breath to calm her nerves. She walked down the hall, noting how it gradually began to light up more and more with every step she took.

Finally, she arrived at a room. It was wide and spacious. In the front was a computer apparatus with several monitors. She stepped in further, and saw to the left was an infirmary, and to the right was another workshop.

However, the most interesting thing was a cylinder towards the back of the room. It was tinted black glass, obscuring her sight from whatever was inside.

*That's suspicious looking.* She carefully walked towards it, trying to take in every feature. She spotted a scanner on the wall next to it. She took out Barry's key card and held it over the scanner, breathing in as the glass slid upwards. Iris stumbled back when she saw what it was.

A mannequin… with the Flash's suit on.

*No.*

"I should've known you'd be the first to figure it out."

Iris turned around to see Barry leaning against the entrance of the Cortex, with a bitter smirk on his face.

"You always were too curious for your own good."

**Chapter End Notes**

Iris finally learns the truth. You'll see her reaction next chapter, and then we'll be going to Starling City.

Comments and reviews are welcome. Constructive criticism is welcome. Flames will be ignored and deleted. Remember to update the TV Tropes Page. Don't forget the contest.
Arc III, Chapter 58: Fractures

Chapter Summary

Iris wants to understand. Oliver makes plans with Tommy. Kara receives dire news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 58: Fractures

"A lot happened on that island. A lot that you didn't say." Iris said, almost accusingly at Barry. She couldn't - wouldn't - cry, but her voice was coarse, catching in her throat with every other word.

Barry would love nothing more than to wipe the betrayal and pain off her face, but he knew nothing he could say would make that happen. So, he settled for the truth - or as much of it that he could give. "You never asked."

"And would you have told me anything if I did?"

The speedster paused, and shook his head.

Iris fisted her hands into her lap. "I thought so."

They were seated on the steps leading to the infirmary. Iris had no desire to be here any longer than she had to, but the weight of what she had learned anchored her. She didn't want to move, so lost and distraught. Barry, knowing it was his fault, simply guided her to the closest place where they could just sit and talk.

"Oliver and Kara… they're Green Arrow and Supergirl, aren't they?"

Barry chuckled. "Yeah. I guess that's much of a leap to make."

Iris ignored his comment, and pressed on. "Who else knows?"

"Caitlin and Cisco." Barry automatically replied. "Dr. Wells knew too, but only because I couldn't hide it from him. Let's just say he had some insider information. There are others, others I can't mention them and they aren't really important in the long run anyway."

"So, all these people knew before me. Your best friend."

Barry sighed. "Iris-"

"Why didn't you tell me, Barry?" Her voice was barely above a whisper now. "Why? We were best friends, we told each other everything. And when you came back, nothing had really changed between us, not truly, not completely. Except, everything had, and I hadn't realized it. And nothing right now reminds me of it more than that suit."

"I wanted to tell you." Barry admitted. "I wanted to tell you so many times. But that knowledge, Iris, is dangerous. Knowing I'm the Flash is one thing, but with you - I know you would've wanted to
know everything; every single moment that led to this point. All the things that I couldn't say to you, because it could kill you."

Iris blinked at that, and she grit her teeth. "What do you mean? Weren't you only on the island, Barry?"

Barry looked away.

"You weren't, were you? Eddie said the Flash probably had special forces training - and Green Arrow - Oliver…"

Barry still didn't answer, closing his eyes, as if hoping Iris would stop even though he knew she wouldn't.

"Answer me, Barry." Iris demanded, the anger coursing through her.

Barry finally looked back at her, expression steely. "Where I went, Iris - where we all went - you're better off not knowing."

"That's no excuse."

"It is an excuse." Barry insisted, now angry himself. "If I tell you where I went, I'll have to tell you everything. Every single excruciatingly sordid detail, and regardless of whatever you choose to do afterwards, whether we try to patch up our friendship or you choose to cut me out of your life for good, whether you choose to keep this information to yourself or shout it out for the entire world to hear, the people who took me in will **kill you**. Even if you spend the rest of your life with your mouth shut, even if you surgically remove your vocal cords and amputate your hands off, they will kill you, because the very fact you know they exist makes you a liability. A loose end they need to tie up - permanently."

He was heaving now. Iris was wide-eyed, almost **afraid**, and it hurt to see, but if it kept her alive, then it was worth it.

"What happened to you, Barry?" Iris all but begged, trying to understand the man in front of her. The words of Dr. Lamb, said over a year ago, were echoing in her mind, and finally, **finally**, did she realize that the Barry she lost wasn't the one who came back.

"I went to hell, Iris." Barry bluntly replied, and the bitterness in his tone was by its lonesome now, making it all starker to hear.

"I went to hell, and I'm not sure I ever came back."

---

"Mr. Merlyn, your eleven o'clock is here." His secretary called in.

Tommy, looking over some documents on his computer, held the handset with his head and shoulder as he made a few adjustments to one line. "Send them in."

A **click** indicated the call was done, and Tommy set the handset back down into its place on his office phone. He looked away from the computer to straighten himself out for the face-to-face meeting, and waited for his appointment to come in. He blinked when the door opened and he saw who it was.

"Ollie?"
"Tommy." Oliver smiled. Tommy laughed and stood, exchanging a hug with his best friend over his desk.

"What are you doing here? You don't need to make an appointment to meet with me, you know that."

Oliver shook his head. "I actually do have some business to discuss with you - just some things about a couple of investments between QC and Merlyn Global."

"And they sent you for that." Tommy asked, confused. "You're not a part of the family company."

"While that is true, I do own a significant portion of the shares, gifted to me by my parents when I was a kid. I've been managing them along with a couple other investments ever since I got back from the island."

At Tommy's incredulous look, Oliver shrugged. "Investors are all well and good, but it'd look bad if Kara and I hadn't fronted the majority of the money for the mall, you know."

"Right." Tommy nodded. "And the other reason you're here?"

"To invite you to have dinner with me and Laurel." At Tommy's scoff, Oliver pleaded his case. "Come on, Tommy, we haven't eaten out together in ages. Laurel and I miss you."

"And I miss you guys too, but I prefer not to be glared by the public." Tommy crossed his arms, stubborn.

Oliver sighed. "Tommy, those glares aren't going away for a while, but they will appear less frequently the more the public gets used to seeing you around again."

Tommy stayed silent, not convinced.

"Tommy, there are always going to people who are going to hate you for what Malcolm did." Oliver said calmly, careful to make sure his friend wasn't offended by his words. "I'm sorry, but it's the truth. But not everyone will, once you show that you aren't like him. You're a good person Tommy, and the more people see that, the more they'll come to accept it. However, they aren't going to see that if you coop yourself up in your house and office like a recluse. So please, go out with Laurel and I tonight."

The young billionaire looked at him for a long moment, then let out a sigh of resignation. "Fine, but only if I can bring Isabel with me."

Oliver frowned. "Isabel? Why?"

"She's new to the city and her presence will soften the glares directed at me, hopefully." Tommy said, then smiled slightly. "Plus, she's a friend."

Oliver looked reluctant, but squashed it down. "Alright. She can come. I'm sure Laurel won't mind."

"Alright, now jab." Nyssa directed. Laurel, tonfa in hand, complied, striking the dummy with force.

"Again." Thwack!

"Again." Thwack!

The exercises continued. After she was sure Laurel had perfected a movement and struck the dummy
enough times with the correct form, they moved on to another and then another. While they wouldn't be quite ready to use in a fight yet, they would be instinctive enough for Laurel to start connecting them together in combinations.

This routine went on for at least an hour, until Nyssa finally called for a break. Laurel drew in a deep breath, setting down her weapons onto a nearby table and grabbing her water bottle. She took small sips to help her body gradually cool down. No need to faint from over-exhaustion in the summer heat.

Suddenly, a phone started ringing. Nyssa grabbed hers first, checking it quickly and shaking her head at her student. Laurel, realizing it was hers, set down her water bottle and rifle through her bag for her phone, quickly accepting the call.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Laurel."

"Ollie!" Laurel brightened immediately. Nyssa perked up at the name, but quickly schooled her expression into something more neutral.

"What are you doing? You sound a little out of a breath."

"Nothing big, just working out a bit." Laurel said, and she technically wasn't lying. "Hey, did you meet with Tommy?"

"Yes. Our meeting just finished. He said yes."

"Thank God, staying home like that all the time cannot be healthy."

"Agreed. Though he has one condition."

"What is it?"

"He wants to bring Isabel with him."

"Isabel?" Laurel asked, a little surprised and a bit apprehensive. It wasn't that she disliked Isabel - she didn't know the other woman nearly enough to have an opinion. However, something felt… off around her.

"Yeah. Is that a problem? 'Cause I told Tommy it wasn't..."

"No, no! I was just surprised, that's all. Tell Tommy she's welcome to come, okay?"

"Alright. See you tonight."

"You too, Ollie." Laurel smiled as the call ended. She let out a sigh of fondness as she set her phone down.

"What is the name of the main character of Bleach?" Kara enunciated slowly. She blinked at the word 'Bleach'. "What kind of person names a TV show Bleach?"

"One, it's not a TV show, it's a manga/anime. Two, Tite Kubo. Three, the answer is Ichigo Kurosaki." Kal huffed, clearly incensed by Kara's unintended insult.

"Correct." J'onn announced lazily. "Again."
Kal cheered and used his heat vision to mark the standing board, adding another mark under his name. The current scores saw Kara with five, J'onn with seven, and Kal with twenty.

"How are you beating us both at this?" Kara asked her charge, ready to tear out her hair at the wide discrepancies between the scores. Of course, being in last place didn't help.

Kal shrugged. "I'm a thirteen-year-old with a ton of free time and unlimited access to the internet. Plus, my best friend is intent on teaching me as much pop culture as she can because she thinks my ignorance is a travesty. Pick whichever one makes you feel better."

Kara blinked at his explanation and groaned. "I knew Oliver shouldn't have left you with Barry for so long."

"He's our brother, Kara." Kal pointed out.

"Yes, and I love our brother, but that does not mean I want you to pick up his less admirable personality traits. One Barry is more than enough for the world."

Ring!

"Phone." J'onn claimed, disinterestedly. He was more concerned with the cookies he was currently consuming more than anything else.

Kara sighed once more, standing up and picking up her phone from where it had been charging on the kitchen counter. She checked the caller ID and resisted the urge to groan, instead taking the call with as much reluctance as she could muster.

"What do you want, Amanda?"

"You and J'onn need to get to the Starling A.R.G.U.S. base now."

"I'm going to hate government bases for the rest of my natural lifespan." J'onn claimed as he and Supergirl finally touched down in front of Starling City's A.R.G.U.S. base.

"And how long would that be for a Martian?" Supergirl asked curiously as the guards let them inside.

"Far too long."

"Miss Danvers. Mr. Jones."

The two aliens cut off the conversation to see Amanda Waller with her arms crossed. The usual smirk she had on her face was not present, which was the second major indication that something was wrong.

The first, of course, was Amanda outright ordering them to come here in the first place. Kara was almost tempted to disobey for her presumption, but common sense won out in the end. Amanda knew where she stood with them, and if she was willing to disregard it for whatever reason, that reason had to be a good one.

"Come with me." She turned around, not bothering to see whether or not they complied, because she knew they would. Supergirl and J'onn followed her, both confused and apprehensive.

"J'onn, you remember Agent Smith, correct?"
"More than I wished." J'onn admitted.

"Well, when I… questioned him, I appropriated some of his operations. One of them was this."

They finally arrived at their destination: a steel door. Amanda entered the passcode onto a keypad mounted next to the door, and it slid open. The three entered inside, but Supergirl and J'onn stopped when they saw what was in the center of the room.

There was a tall installation of a glowing red elliptical orb. It was held together by some form of brown metal, and connected by wires to a circular console that was surrounding it in every direction. Supergirl had never seen anything like that before. J'onn, however…

"Is that…?"

"Yes." Amanda answered for him. "Agent Smith was their primary contact for this planet. Just today, we picked up a transmission from one of their vessels, and after entering it into the translation program he and his techs developed, we learnt it was a message that was being sent to all their major vessels."

Her voice sounded haunted - nothing like the Amanda Supergirl had come to despise and loathe over the last year. The director of A.R.G.U.S. turned to the two aliens, and breathed.

"In one year, the Dominators will try to invade… and conquer Earth."

Chapter End Notes

And there's your final major villain(s) for Arc IV: The Dominators. The order in which they will be confronted for Arc IV I will keep under wraps, but I will say it won't be in the order they were introduced.

If you're wondering why Iris is taking this badly, think of it this way: learning Barry is the Flash is far more earth-shattering than it was canon. The Flash is a far darker character here, and completely unlike the Barry Iris thought she knew. Iris thought she knew Barry better than anyone else - now, she thinks that she doesn't know him at all. While she'll eventually realize that the Barry she knew isn't completely gone, it will be a while before she and Barry will reconcile. I won't say how or when, but it will be something momentous.

Next chapter, Starling City with the dinner between the Arrow trio and Isabel Rochev.

Comments and Reviews welcome! Constructive criticism welcome! Flames will be ignored and deleted! Please update the TV Tropes page! And don't forget the contest!
Chapter Summary

Oliver, Laurel, and Tommy reach a crossroads. Later, the League prepares for the future.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 59: Spiraling Away

Oliver handed his keys off to the valet along with a preliminary tip, then walked towards the entrance. Through the glass, he could see that Laurel had arrived before him.

"Laurel!"

Laurel turned around and smiled. "Ollie!" The two embraced.

"You look great." Oliver complimented her when they separated, taking in her appearance: A wine red dress that hugged her body well, a long-sleeved black cardigan and a pair of black heels. She had even put her hair up in a tight bun, with some of her bangs framing her face.

"Thank you. So do you." Laurel replied, gesturing to his black jacket, shirt, and shoes. At least he wasn't wearing khakis.

They quickly walked over to the hostess to confirm their reservation, and then waited in the lobby for Tommy and Isabel to arrive. The hostess would not take them to their table until all of their party was here.

"Tell me, why The Palm again? Not that I'm complaining, but we've been here a lot, Ollie."

Oliver flinched. She was right, but… "You're right. I would've preferred we go to a new place, but, well… The Palm doesn't discriminate."

Laurel paused to take in his words, then winced. He was right. The Palm didn't discriminate, as Frank Bertinelli's years of patronage proved. Tommy may be the son of the most hated man in the city, but compared to Bertinelli he was small potatoes. At least Tommy himself had never committed any crimes.

"But just in case, I got us a private booth." Oliver continued, oblivious to her thoughts.

"Smart." Laurel noted.

"Yeah. I told Tommy that in order for most of the glares to go away he has to be seen, but just because he has to be seen does not mean he has to be glared at while we eat." Oliver explained, crossing his arms. "That being said, I doubt most of the people here actually care about the Glades, unfortunately."

Laurel put a comforting hand on his arm. "Speaking from experience?"
Oliver nodded. "And God, do I wish that wasn't the case."

The two waited together in comfortable silence until finally, Tommy arrived, with Isabel in tow. Both Oliver and Laurel noticed that their friend had elected to wear muted colors; no doubt to avoid notice. It seemed Isabel had followed the suit, if only for his sake. She was wearing a dark navy-blue dress that fell to her knees and matching heels, with her black hair let loose. Even her makeup was light - you would have to look hard to see it.

"Laurel. Ollie." Tommy greeted, keeping his voice low. He gave them both short hugs, lingering a little bit with the one he had with Laurel. "You remember Isabel, yes?" He gestured to his companion.

"Indeed. Hello again, Isabel." Oliver shook her hand politely.

"Yes. It's nice to see you again, Isabel." Laurel put on a polite smile and followed Oliver's example.

"It's nice to see you both, too." Isabel said, though there was a strange glint to her eye.

Now that they were all here, Oliver went to the hostess to tell her they were ready. Not long afterwards, they were being guided through the throng of patrons towards the back of the restaurant, where the private booths were. These booths had high walls that were curved in, except for a small opening in the front, for the waiter to stand and take orders and set down food. The high walls limited visibility to such an extent that the opening was the only place you'd be able to look inside and see who was actually dining there. Perfect for allowing the son of a disgraced businessman/terrorist to dine with friends in peace.

The four filed into the booth one-by-one, careful with their steps. Tommy frowned when he noticed that Laurel had decided to go inside first, seating her next Oliver and not him. He knew better than to make a complaint, however, and sat next to his best friend with Isabel sitting on the other side. The hostess handed them their menus and then left.

"What do you think? Should I get the usual or something new?" Oliver asked, looking at Laurel, though his question had been for everyone.

Laurel patted him on the thigh. "Something new, Ollie. Steak is nice and all but you're going to regret eating so much of it when you're older."

Oliver sighed. "You're right." He turned the page, letting his finger linger on each dish and their description. He blinked at one in particular, and grinned. "They have chili!"

"No." Laurel and Tommy said in unison, not even bothering to look up from their menus. Isabel watched all three and resisted the urge to laugh.

"But-"

"No." The two said again.

Oliver pouted.

"-and then the speakers blared out that whistle for what seemed like hours. In reality, it was probably only just a few minutes, but the ringing stayed for a good while." Oliver said, finishing off a story about his high school days with Laurel and Tommy with a flourish smile.

"They never caught us." Tommy bragged, smirking.
"But I did." Laurel idly commented, twisting her knife in her pasta. "And the only reason I didn't rat you two out is because you promised to show me how you did it."

"And were you impressed?" Oliver asked.

Laurel shrugged. "A little. So, which member of the AV Club did you guys bribe for this, again?"

"Gordon Godfrey." Tommy admitted. "He wanted tickets to a rock concert downtown. It was pocket change to get."

"Spoken like a true trust-fund baby." Laurel noted good-naturedly.

"But would you have us any other way?" Oliver shot back, now smiling directly at her.

Shaking her head, Laurel grinned back, not noticing how the humor had now drained from Tommy's face. "No. I don't know where I'd be without you."

Oliver's smile softened, turning a little more genuine. He radiated fondness. "You'd be fine, Laurel. You're one of the strongest and smartest people I know."

Isabel watched the moment with a neutral expression on her face. She had stayed silent throughout the story for the most part, besides an occasional comment or two. As Oliver and Laurel continued to gaze into each other's eyes, her own eyes shifted to Tommy, whom they remained completely oblivious to. Like her, he was also watching, and no one could deny the look of jealousy on his face. His business partner saw this, and allowed her the smallest, most imperceptible smirk grace her lips.

"That was nice, huh." Laurel commented as they exited The Palm. She and Oliver were walking together, so closely that they were almost hand-in-hand. "We should do this again, some time."

"I agree." Oliver concurred, then turned to his best friend. "What about you, Tommy?"

"No."

Oliver and Laurel blinked in confusion. "What?" Oliver asked.

Tommy turned to them while Isabel was talking to the valet, waiting for their car and trying to ignore the brewing confrontation. Thankfully, there were no other patrons outside except for them. He had an extremely upset and angry expression on his face. "I said no. We aren't doing this again. Or at least, I'm not doing this again."

"What?" Oliver asked, now upset himself, and just a bit angry. "Why?"

"Tommy, is everything okay?" Laurel followed, concerned.

"No! Everything is not okay!" Tommy replied, the volume of his voice increasing. He wasn't quite shouting, but it was a near thing. Both Oliver and Laurel stepped back, startled.

"The two of you can go out whenever and wherever and as many times as you want, and dance around each other until you're so fucking dizzy you can't see straight, but don't drag me into it. You don't need to rub into my face that I'm your goddamn third wheel." Tommy ranted, seething. Oliver and Laurel didn't bother to respond, too shocked by his words to say anything.

Just then, the valet arrived with his car. Without bothering to wait for Oliver and Laurel to regain their bearings, Tommy took his keys from the valet and handed him a tip before barking at Isabel to
get in. Isabel shot both of them a somewhat apologetic look before entering the car.

Oliver and Laurel remained silent, watching sadly as their friend drove away.

"I don't get it, Isabel! What does she see in him? Is it because he was stupid enough to get stuck on an island for ten years?" Tommy blurted out in rage, still steaming over the dinner earlier. They were at Isabel's apartment right now; Tommy had driven her home, and she had invited him in for a drink so he could cool down. The last thing she needed was for him to drive home angry and accidentally hit someone.

"I've got money, my own company, everything he has and more! Sure, there's my dad, but she wanted him even before my dad was an issue." Tommy continued his tirade, before downing another shot of his drink.

"Tommy…" Isabel said cautiously, reaching out to try and calm him down. She laid a hand on his arm, and she could feel him relax under her touch.

Tommy set down his drink a palmed his forehead, looking tired now. "Why doesn't she want me, Isabel? Why? Am I just not good enough?"

"No, Tommy." Isabel shook her head. "She's just blind. And if she can't see how great a guy you are, then she doesn't deserve you. Just wait and see - you'll find a woman who'll appreciate and love you, and one day she's going to see that and regret not choosing you."

Tommy let his hand fall to his side. He looked at Isabel, and gave her a small. It was small, and tired, but it was genuine in all the ways that mattered.

"Thank you, Isabel." He said gratefully, taking her hand in his.

Isabel shrugged. "It's only the truth, Tommy."

Tommy gave a little nod at that, but didn't let go of Isabel's hand. The two continued to gaze at each other, every second growing heavier as they passed. Before either of them knew it, they were almost face-to-face. Fleetingly, he thought that he should stop this. That he was just vulnerable, confused, and there was still so much more to be resolved. There was still Laurel in his mind.

But he'd be lying if he said that Isabel wasn't in there, too.

Both of them closed their eyes as their lips met.

"Tommy hates me." Oliver announced as he entered the Foundry, throwing his jacket across one chair before throwing himself on it as well. He began to rub circles into his temples to ward off the growing migraine he was beginning to have.

Barry and Kara, who had been looking over some intel on the computers, turned around at the sound of his entrance and looked at him quizzically.

"And why does Tommy hate you?" Barry asked, deciding he had to be the one to bite the bullet.

Oliver sighed, slouching further into his chair. "We, along with Laurel and Isabel Rochev went out to dinner tonight. I thought it went fine, but when I suggested to him and Laurel that we should do this again, for some reason he said no and started ranting about me and Laurel 'dancing around each other' and rubbing in that he was a third wheel, whatever that meant. Then he left before Laurel or I
could say anything." He threw his hands into the air. "I just don't get it. What did I do wrong?"

Kara and Barry exchanged exasperated looks. "Oliver," Kara said carefully, waiting for her older brother to turn his attention to her, "Do you remember when you told me that you might have feelings for Laurel?"

Oliver nodded, a little confused. "Yes?"

"And do you remember when you told me that you wouldn't mind starting a relationship with her?"

"Yes." Now he was really confused.

Kara drew in a deep breath. God, oldest sibling or no, Oliver could be such an idiot sometimes. "Did it ever occur to you that in order to have this relationship, Laurel would have to have feelings for you?"

Oliver opened his mouth, then closed it, realization finally dawning on him.

"And did it ever occur to you that Tommy, who has been crushing on Laurel for years, wouldn't like to see that? Especially when she has been rejecting him almost continuously for the last year?"

Instead of answering, the archer simply groaned, burying his face into his hands.

"Yeah." Kara deadpanned, crossing her arms. "That's what I thought."

"Plus, there's also Nyssa to add to the equation." Barry cheekily pointed out.

"How did I get from having no love life to this?" Oliver asked the universe, hoping for some divine answer that would never come.

Barry smirked. "It's alright, Ollie. At least you're not the only one whose best friend hates them."

Oliver snapped out of his self-pity when he heard that. "What do you mean by that?"

"Iris knows." Barry said simply, waiting for the fireworks.

Now both Oliver and Kara were staring at him. "WHAT?" They both shouted in unison.

"How?" Kara continued, while Oliver started cursing.

Barry shrugged. "She was too curious for her own good and started connecting the dots. Plus, I may have accidentally let a few things slip while I was taking down Mardon. I wasn't really thinking straight at the time."

Oliver clicked his teeth, unamused. "So, I guess she knows who we are too, huh?"

"Yup." Barry confirmed, popping his lips.

"Wonderful, just wonderful." Oliver looked just about ready to give up.

"Oh, that's not it. I've also got something to add to the bad news train."

Oliver and Barry whipped their heads to Kara, who suddenly looked ten years older and a lot more bedraggled.

"Amanda called me and J'onn over to the local A.R.G.U.S. base." The Kryptonian continued. "The
Silmence.

"When?" Oliver asked, deathly quiet.

"Within the year. That's all we have so far."

Barry abruptly stood up and looked about ready to start things around. His frustration couldn't be more obvious.

"So, on top of all our personal problems, we've got Talia mucking around with the League and an alien invasion that we have nowhere near enough manpower for. Great, just great."

"The militaries of the world-

"-are outgunned, Ollie, all three of us know that." Barry cut him off, glowering. "Even with Task Force X - who can't be seen in public, mind you - we don't have enough people. Hell, we don't even have enough people to police our own cities. If you haven't noticed, we've still got three empty chairs to fill in the Hall of Justice or whatever we're calling it!"

"Then that's what we'll do." Kara advised, trying to calm Barry down. "We fill up the roster. J'onn has already offered to become a vigilante and station himself in Hub City. You know we've been meaning to station someone there."

"J'onn was a frontline soldier during his own planet's war with the Dominators, so he does have experience fighting, but…" Oliver trailed off.

"Social training, I know." Kara rubbed the back of her head. "We're going to fast track it as much as we can, and he'll keep ownership of his apartment as long as needed to facilitate that."

"And after he doesn't need it anymore?"

Kara shrugged. "Lodging? Nyssa isn't going to be the last person we're going have to host here, after all."

"Does he even have a codename yet?" Barry asked, not entirely convinced yet.

"Martian Manhunter."

Both men stared at her.

"He's planning on using a modified variation of his original form for his superhero identity." Kara clarified, in some vain hope of defending her friend. "It did well with testing!"

"Okay, okay, whatever." Barry took in a deep breath. "We have J'onn. We need at least one more right now, preferably not near the west coast. If the Justice League is going to be a thing, we need to show that we're not too exclusive."

"Kara?" Oliver ventured, knowing she had been the last one to visit Amanda.

Kara sighed. "There is one. He's good for diversity and he's experienced. We're just not sure he'll accept."

"Put him on the plasma."
She did, accessing his dossier via the computer. His picture, along with other pertinent information appeared for all three of them to see.

Oliver and Barry made impressed and appreciative noises.

"Yeah, I think he'll do."

Jefferson Pierce sighed as he dropped his keys onto the counter, before removing his jacket and loosening his tie. Annissa and Jennifer were out, Lynn was at her own house, and here he was, all on his lonesome. Hopefully, nothing else would come up toni-

Click!

He whirled around, readying himself for a fight, only to drop his stance in disbelief when he saw who, exactly, had broken into his home.

Green Arrow, flanked by Supergirl and the Flash, walked forward, arms crossed in an appraising fashion. Jefferson felt himself slightly unnerved by the hardness of his gaze.

"Black Lightning. We have an offer for you."

Chapter End Notes

After this chapter, there will be a short time skip of about two months, to the beginning of the school year in September. That's where the final mini-arc will begin.

As for Tommy and Isabel, that mainly happened for plot purposes. I initially planned to have no Tommy ships, but then I realized I needed to figure out a way to have Tommy trust Isabel. Seduction was both the easiest and most in-character way to make that happen. Tommy is a former playboy after all, and Isabel isn't above using seduction to achieve her ends, as we've seen in canon.

For the record, all you people telling me to do Olyssa makes me less inclined to do it. As for you people telling me to do Merlance, Merlance was never happening. Ever. Let this be the final nail in the coffin for it.

Reviews, comments, and constructive criticism are all welcome. Flames will be deleted and ignored. Please update the TV Tropes page. And don't forget the contest!
Arc III, Chapter 60: Signs

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 60: Signs

Hub City was known as the crime capital of the west coast. Surpassing even Starling City in its depravity, Hub City was swamped with the lowest of the low. Murder, theft, and rape ran rampant on almost every corner; the people that lived there only stayed either because they lacked the funds to get out or they were one of the few beneficiaries of the chaos.

So, when a major hospital, one for children no less, was taken hostage by one of the more violent gangs, coverage was minimal. The local news kept abreast of the situation, but other than that it was hardly any noise to the local residents. Unfortunately, it was just another day to them.

Or, that would've been the case two months ago.

For two months, someone had made their home in Hub City - a vigilante. Normally, vigilantes were no cause of concern to the resident crime lords of the Hub. Every once in a while a vengeful citizen would rise up and try to "cleanse" the city, only to be killed a few months in. It had been routine long before even Green Arrow had come into the picture as The Hood.

Unfortunately for the less morally-inclined, this particular vigilante was not so easy to get rid of. For one thing, he had no issue operating in the daylight. For another thing, he wasn't vengeful so much as dutiful and not easy to goad into his (potential) death.

Oh, and he was also an alien from another planet with freaky powers like Supergirl.

That last part was the main reason why they were failing to get rid of him.

Hell, that last part was why they were never getting rid of him.

Hub City's new vigilante promptly tore through the town's criminal element like a hot knife to butter. Scores of gangs were beaten down and promptly thrown at the police to be arrested. Usually, this would be a mood point because Hub City's police department was compromised, proportionally to the city's own. That is, to say, they were corrupt down to the last beat officer.

However, around that time, the county and even state governments had suddenly come down hard on Hub City, and began gutting both law enforcement and city administration on every level, replacing them with new officials. New officials that weren't going to bend the law for anything short of the apocalypse. It was strangely fortuitous for the city's new self-appointed protector.

The smarter ones saw the coincidences and realized they weren't coincidences. Every single one of those developments had been coordinated. With that realization came the need for self-preservation,
leading to a great migration of major crime families who had no desire to go the way of the Bertinellis and the Triad. With this migration came all their grudges, both true and petty, and led to a domino effect that resulted in the streets being much safer to walk for the common citizen.

Thus, for the first time in forever, the people of Hub City saw hope. No longer would they have to hide guns and knives in their homes for fear of being robbed, or being collateral damage in some gang war. No longer would they have to hoard their money to pay off "protection fees" for their businesses and schools. No longer would they have to be afraid. And for that, they owed to their vigilante, nay, hero: the Martian Manhunter.

And so, when Martian Manhunter phased into the hospital and laid waste to their children's captors, they cheered. When he led the children out of their prison, they roared. When he presented each and every single one of those criminals to the police to be tried and charged, they screamed.

And when Supergirl descended from the sky to hand him a League ring, all of Hub City rejoiced.

"Breaking News! Just right now, it seems Supergirl has offered the Martian Manhunter of Hub City membership in the Justice League. This is coming off the heels of the induction of Black Lightning of Freeland to the League two months prior, after he, with the help of Green Arrow, the Flash, and Supergirl, exposed and detained a rogue government organization operating in Black Lightning's hometown."

"And another one enters the books." Laurel commented, taking a sip of her shake.

"The Justice League must be really intent on showing how serious they are about their mission." Oliver said, munching on a hot dog.

They were eating lunch together at a local shop in the Glades, one not far from CNRI. Oliver had decided to drop in and take Laurel out spontaneously after a morning of nothing but watching construction over his and Kara's mall. While it was a "friendly" outing, there was an unspoken feeling of more to it, one that had been lingering for longer than they cared to admit, and one that they both understood they weren't quite ready to discuss yet.

"Black Lightning, Martian Manhunter… do you think they'll add anymore anytime soon?" Laurel asked, curious.

Oliver shrugged. "One or two more, maybe. Seven is a lucky number, and the more members they add the more time they need to take to coordinate themselves as a team. They want this to be an international thing, Laurel, that much they made clear when they first debuted. But for something that big, well - Rome wasn't built in a day."

"True." Laurel conceded. "I wonder who they'll pick? There's this rumor of this guy in Coast City, and then there's that Firestorm guy that occasionally shows up in Central."

"Whoever they choose, it's probably going to be someone who really stands out." Oliver suggested. "The Justice League thrives on their visibility. It's the reminder of their presence that helps the crime rate down in their cities."

Laurel nodded in agreement. The two continued to watch the broadcast, taking bites of their food as it concluded with the video of Supergirl handing a League ring to Martian Manhunter. The cheers of Hub City's adoring public faded out as the news program started its next topic.

Finished with their meal, Oliver and Laurel discarded their trash and left the shop. They still had about another hour before Laurel had to return to CNRI to finish her shift, and had decided to walk
together and observe the state of the Glades. The would-be Undertaking had been months ago, and while the effects of that event had yet to completely dissipate, things were much better than they used to be. Buildings had been patched up and renovated, people were walking about freely, and there was just a general air of contentment. While the Glades were still the poorest and most crime-ridden neighborhood of the city, it was significantly better than it used to be, thanks to many volunteers, donations of the city's richest citizens, and the local vigilantes.

"It's better now." Oliver said, smiling at a group of children who were playing hopscotch on the other sidewalk.

"Yeah. And it'll become even better the more people work on it." Laurel concurred, a similar expression on her face. She gave an appreciative look to her friend. "Your mall will no doubt help as well."

"It's Kara's mall too, you know." Oliver joked.

"Yeah, and she'll get her due, but that doesn't mean you deserve the credit any less."

Oliver's eyes softened. "Thanks, Laurel."

"I'm simply saying the truth." Laurel said, playfully. Her expression suddenly sobered up. "Have you talked to Tommy, lately?"

Oliver's face fell, and he groaned. "No. Did you have better luck?"

Laurel shook her head.

Ever since that night at The Palm, Tommy had effectively cut himself off from his two best friends. He refused to accept any calls from them and banned them (banned!) from Merlyn Global. They had to hear via secondhand gossip from Laurel's friend Joanna and the bane of Kara's life, Carter Bowen, that he was officially dating Isabel Rochev. Neither of them had any idea how to feel about that information, wanting to feel happy for him but at the same time resentful of how he wasn't talking to either of them.

"Mom and Dad have tried too - he won't talk to them either. Hell, he won't even talk to Thea. The moment he realized it was her he immediately ended the call."

"What?" Laurel demanded, angry. She regarded Thea as a surrogate sister, and was incensed that Tommy would treat her so callously.

"Yeah, I know. Thea was devastated, and God, I wanted to punch Tommy so much for that."

Laurel crossed her arms. "I don't blame you - I want to punch him right now just after hearing about it."

Oliver sighed. "How about Sara? Did she try? She and Tommy have always had this rapport between them."

"Yes. No luck. Even Mom and Dad tried, but he wouldn't answer their calls either." Laurel drained the anger from her face, and now there was worry and concern. While she might not feel for Tommy the same way he had felt for her, he was still one of her closest friends and practically family. The fact that he was acting like this, so unlike himself and out of character, wasn't a good thing. "Something's wrong, Ollie. I can understand not talking to us. But cutting everyone else off too? That's not right."
"It isn't." Oliver agreed. "But until Tommy starts talking to us again, there's nothing we can do about it. I just hope..." he trailed off.

"Hope what?" Laurel asked.

"Hope that it doesn't take something drastic."

Barry dropped the last notebook into the bag and zipped it shut. "All packed."

Joe, leaning against the sill of his door, chuckled. "I never thought I'd have to go through the First Day of School ritual with one of my kids ever again." His grin widened. "But I'm glad I get to do it with you."

Barry smiled genuinely at his foster father, touched. "Thanks, Joe."

The detective gave him a short nod, then frowned. "Iris isn't here to see you off."

Barry gave a half-shrug. "Yeah, well, things are still... difficult between us."

That was putting it mildly. Ever since that night at S.T.A.R. Labs the two of them had had a wide berth between them. Whenever Barry went to visit the station, it was either business or to eat with Joe. He avoided Iris like the plague, and Iris was doing the same with him.

This hadn't gone unnoticed. Eddie had a hard time hiding his slight glee at this development, knowing that it would earn his partner's disapproval. Ralph was deliberately staying out of the crossfire, greeting Barry and then leaving the vicinity whenever Iris was nearby. Only Joe was really involved, unsurprisingly; the situation uncomfortably reminded him of his own estrangement with Iris. He had tried to breach the subject with both of his children, only to divert the conversation almost immediately. Eventually, he gave up - both were too stubborn to talk.

"I'm worried, Barry." Joe said finally, a concerned look on his face. "Are you sure-"

Barry held up a hand to stop his foster father. "This isn't something you can fix, Joe. Iris and I - we have to work through it ourselves. And we will. Eventually." Hopefully.

Joe didn't look entirely convinced, but decided to let it go.

It was Barry's first day of college, after all.

"Your first day of school!" Kara exclaimed, pinching Kal's cheeks. He suffered the affectionate abuse of his face with a resigned look on his face.

"Kara..." he whined.

"I know, I know, this isn't actually your very first day of school, but it is the first time you'll be starting a new school year from the beginning! Isn't that wonderful, Kal?"

Kal didn't bother answering, simply sighing in response. There was no curbing his sister's enthusiasm.

Beside him, Ruby was suffering her own adjustments under the well-practiced hands of her mother. Sam gave her daughter a critical look over, before nodding in satisfaction.

"You've got everything your backpack?"
"Yes, Mom." Ruby said boredly. It was like this at the start of every school year.

"Your wallet?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Pencil bag?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Pa-"

"Mom." Ruby cut Sam off before she could continue. She did not want Kal to hear that. "We triple-checked the bag last night, and again this morning, right before we left. I have everything."

Sam sighed apologetically, then brought in her daughter for a hug. "I'm sorry, sweetie. You know how I am. It'll take a while to get back into the groove of all this again."

"Then for both our sakes, could you get into it faster?" Ruby asked hopefully as she returned the embrace.

Sam chuckled. "Sure thing."

"He's growing up so fast!" Kara almost cried as she watched Kal and Ruby disappear behind Balliol's doors, merging in with the crowd of students. "It feels like just yesterday, I was feeding him boiled rainwater with a leaf, and now he's starting his last year of middle school!"

Sam blinked momentarily at the 'rainwater' bit, but then went ahead and brought the sobbing Kara into her arms, patting her comfortingly on the back. "It's alright Kara, it's alright. Come on, let's go grab some food at that new restaurant in the square. It'll make you feel better."

Kara sniffled, then looked up at Sam with wide, bright eyes. "And then a shopping spree afterwards?"

Sam smiled. "And then a shopping spree afterwards." she promised.

The two women departed for Sam's car. So caught up in the emotional significance of the day, both of them failed to notice a strange young man standing far-off to the side, well away from the throng of proud and depressed parents. He was young enough to be a student of the school, but clearly wasn't, judging by the clothing he was sporting.

But that didn't stop him from staring directly at Balliol's entrance. Barry heard the whispers start as soon as he entered the room, and subsequently ignored them. He knew that being substantially and blatantly older than most of the students here made him the source and subject of gossip. Unfortunately for these adolescents, he had no interest in being baited. He was here to, well, not learn so much as earn certification for what he already knew. He resigned himself to tedious homework and papers for the next few months.

It's going to be a long four years...

The classroom fell silent when a tall, broad-shouldered man entered the room and started writing on the whiteboard. Doubtlessly, he was the professor. Barry could hear gasps from many of the girls around the room, and resisted the urge to groan. While he couldn't exactly blame them, the man was
certainly very easy on the eyes, that did not mean he want to spend the semester having to deal with barely legal girls making googly eyes and loving sighs at their teacher.

Barry almost breathed his own sigh of relief when the man turned around, catching everyone's attention. Now he could focus on class and nothing else.

"Hello, everyone. My name is Hunter Zolomon. I will be your professor for this semester."

Chapter End Notes

Is it who you think it is? I don't know, who do you think it is?

The next chapter will take place a week after this one. The last chapter of this arc will be chapter 63, after which I will go on a hiatus of whatever length to plan out Arc IV.

Get ready, everyone! We've only just begun.

Reviews, comments, and constructive criticism are all welcome. Flames will be deleted and ignored. Please update the TV Tropes page. And don't forget the contest!
"Grk!" The last thug fell to the ground clutching his midsection. All around him, his buddies were in similar forms of disarray, bruised and a little bloodied.

Black Canary let in a deep breath, allowing her eyes to look over her handiwork with satisfaction. Another gang was off the streets. Once Nyssa had gradually lifted the partial-ban on patrol (citing that experience was the best way to really break in her new skills), the criminal element of the Glades found themselves beaten back by Black Canary with even greater ferocity than before. There was no getting by her anymore.

And just in time, as well. Green Arrow's presence in the Glades had already been limited by his desire to patrol all of the city; now, as the Justice League was expanding, he was traveling more and more out of it. Granted, the body count (dead and injured) had kept the overall city crime rate down. He wouldn't be comfortable leaving Starling otherwise. But someone had to stick around to keep the peace, and she was his best bet.

"Canary." *Speak of the devil and he shall appear.*

"Arrow." Canary turned around and greeted her counterpart calmly. She blinked when she who was next to him: Supergirl.

While her mouth wasn't visible, Canary could feel the other woman smiling at her. "Black Canary. Green Arrow has told me a lot about you. It's a pleasure to finally meet you." She held out her hand, which Black Canary took gratefully.

"It's nice to meet you too, Supergirl." She let go of Supergirl's hand, and looked expectantly at both of them. "May I ask why you're here? I have a feeling this isn't a social call."

Green Arrow nodded. "It isn't. We're here to tell you that we'll be out of town for a bit. Vixen has been dealing with some metas from Central that have migrated to Detroit, so Supergirl is heading over there to help her out. I'm going to Freeland - Black Lightning has some 100 members that he's been having trouble pinning down and he needs a fresh set of eyes."

"What about the Flash?"

This time, it was Supergirl who spoke. "Hub City. There's been a couple of meta-sightings over there. While we're sure Martian Manhunter can handle it, Flash still wants a crack at him. He's left an associate of ours, Firestorm, in charge of protecting Central City until then."

"And we're putting you in charge of Starling City while we're gone in return." Green Arrow
finished.

Black Canary blinked at that, a little overwhelmed. "Are you sure? I mean, that's a lot of responsibility, and I'm still in training--"

"Canary." Green Arrow stepped forward, and placed his hands on her shoulders. "You've been doing great work this past month. We wouldn't leave the city in your care if we thought you weren't ready for the responsibility. We trust you. I trust you."

Black Canary gazed up at her inspiration, her mentor, and nodded slowly, touched by his faith in her.

"Don't worry." Green Arrow continued. "It'll only be for a night or two. Whatever happens, I'm sure you can handle it."

After that heavy meeting, Black Canary finished up her patrol and made her way back to her hideout - another development that had occurred since her training with Nyssa had started. After a few more weeks of perusing, she had ultimately selected the abandoned clock tower as her secret hideout. With Ted's help, she had outfitted the place with some training equipment, a laptop, a small cot, a mini-fridge, and small box television with a cable hookup. She wasn't exactly sure how Ted had managed that without someone noticing, and she had a feeling she wouldn't like the answer, so she just said nothing and thanked him for his help. After informing her teacher about her new hideout, the duo switched between hers and Nyssa's every week, so training wouldn't be too monotonous.

This week was her week, so Nyssa was waiting for her at her clock tower. As Canary increased her skill and experience, Nyssa had gradually lessened her accompaniment on patrol. Now, she only joined Black Canary once or twice a week, mainly for observation. Other nights she was mission control, spending time observing the news and the internet, occasionally calling if there was something Canary needed to check out.

As soon as Black Canary finished ascending the stairs, Nyssa was there with a water bottle in hand and some food. Her student took both gratefully, taking off her mask and seating herself in a second chair next to the computer to begin to eat.

"Did something happen?" Nyssa asked, noticing the pensive look on Laurel's face.

Laurel swallowed down a bite of her sandwich and sighed. "Green Arrow and Supergirl are going to be out of town for the next day or so. They've put me in charge of the city until they come back."

Nyssa blinked. "Well then, it's a good thing you have tomorrow off for work." She stated casually, not at all perturbed.

"Nyssa, I'm not sure I'm ready for this." Laurel said, letting her fears be known. "The Glades are one thing, but the entire city? I'm just one person, no matter how skilled I am."

"Laurel." Nyssa said firmly, putting a comforting hand on the lawyer's leg. "It's only going to be for a day or two. You'll be fine. And besides, you won't be doing it alone."

Laurel cast her a confused look.

"I'll be patrolling the city too. At night, of course - I need to stay in hiding and all - but you're right, the city is too big for one pair of shoulders to bear."

"Really?"
"Really." Nyssa smiled.

Laurel returned the expression gratefully. "Thank you."

Nyssa nodded, and then her expression turned serious. "Did you find anything on Brick?"

Laurel became grim, and shook her head. "No. Not a peep. Even his 'recruitment drives' have gone scarce."

They were both referring to Daniel "Brick" Brickwell. Laurel had used her contacts to get a dossier on him from the DA's office, and nearly cursed when she saw the length of the rap sheet. Despite being a relatively "small" fish, Brick had been plenty busy since he first started his criminal career twenty years ago. Judging by his ruthlessness and the fact that he was still out on the streets despite his blatant criminality, he probably would've been higher up the ladder in Starling's underworld had it not been for the established powers like the Bertinellis and the Triad keeping him down.

That was both a curse and a blessing. While he was denied the finer things in life, Brick had the benefit of being low enough on the totem pole not to catch Green Arrow's attention. While Green Arrow was taking out mob bosses and corrupt one percenters, Brick kept his head down and amassed resources, until the wind blew over with the Undertaking and left a massive power vacuum that needed to be filled. A position he was ripe to take for himself.

Since then, there had been word on a street that he had something big planned, big enough to put his name on the map. Both Black Canary and Green Arrow had been investigating it, but Green Arrow's increasing responsibilities with the League stopped him from fully committing, leaving the investigation almost entirely in the hands of Canary, who was just as dedicated but lack the resources that Arrow had.

"I'm worried he might try something if he hears that Green Arrow and Supergirl are out of town." Laurel commented, taking another bite of her sandwich.

Nyssa interlaced her fingers together. "Indeed. We have a direct line to Green Arrow in case of emergencies, but whatever Brick is planning, it might take more than me, you, and him to resolve."

"Agreed." Laurel sighed. "But there's nothing we can do about it now, so I guess we'll just have to wait and try again tomorrow night."

"Opening ceremony?" Kal asked quizzically as he and Ruby filed into Balliol's indoor football stadium.

"Yup! It's this big fancy event they have on the second week of school to celebrate the start of the new year. We have a bunch of performers come and sing, dance, you name it! Then we get to eat at this big buffet in the end." Ruby explained as they started looking for some seats. She noticed an empty pair near the front and dragged Kal over there in haste, before anyone else noticed.

"How is it I've never heard about this before?" Kal asked as he sat down, looking around the stadium, particularly at the huge circular stage set up in the center of the field.

Ruby shrugged, then pointed at something. "Hey, look!"

"What's with the cameras?" Kal asked, peering towards the direction she had indicated.

"Balliol airs the ceremony every year on one of the city's local channels. I don't know why, really, but it doesn't matter - we might get to be on TV! Maybe mom will DVR it and show it to Kara when
she gets back from her trip! I know she always watches it every year just to catch a glimpse of me!"
Kal hummed. "What about Balliol College? Are they a part of the ceremony too?"
Ruby shook her head mournfully. "No. They still have classes and stuff. We won't be seeing Thea
today until after school." Thea had graduated from Balliol Prep the year before with top honors and
was now a student at its award-winning college.

People continued to file into the stadium, meeting up with friends from different grades and sitting
themselves in the designated areas of the stands. Once all the students had been seated, the doors
closed and the ceremony began.

Unbeknownst to the students, there was still one opening to the stadium left unattended. A loading
crew, carrying equipment inside for the ceremony, was still carrying items to and back from the
building. If one were to look a little closer, they might notice that these items were bags. Bags that
had faces pressed against the material from the inside.

And if one were to watch the loading crew, they would notice that some of the group had gone
missing. And that some of these missing people were now wearing different clothing. Specifically,
clothing that was identical to the uniform of Balliol Prep's guards. The ones in charge of school
security.

They'd especially notice how these 'missing' people were walking directly towards one of the
entrances to the field.

Laurel lazily flipped through the channels of her TV while Nyssa sharpened one of her knives next
to the computer. The vigilante blinked when she landed on a particular channel and started showing
a very familiar scene.

"Oi, Nyssa!" Said assassin looked up. "Come over here."

"What is it, Laurel?"

"It's Balliol Prep's annual Opening Ceremony!" Laurel squealed. At Nyssa's confused and somewhat
amused ceremony, the lawyer reddened and rubbed the back of her head sheepishly. "It's my alma
mater."

"I see. And what is so special about this… 'opening ceremony', if I may ask?"

Laurel turned around and gesture to the TV. "It's an event that Balliol does every year to celebrate
the start of a new school year and showcase their wealth to the city. They bring in some performing
acts and have this huge show for the students currently attending the academy. Then, after the
broadcast is over, they have this banquet where the kids can mingle with their teachers and some
alumni. It's one of the biggest local events in Starling."

Her smile turned wistful. "I always loved the opening ceremony. I mean sure, as I got older I came to
the realization that it was just another way for the administration to stroke their egos, but I never let it
diminish the enjoyment Sara and I got out of it. There were never repeat performances either - every
year they got new acts for the ceremony. And the banquet had so much food, we often took home a
huge box of leftovers for mom and dad to eat with us for the next couple of days."

"What happened to the rest of the food?" Nyssa asked, curious.
Laurel shrugged. "Donated to the homeless shelters. It is a rich kid school, after all, and there's no better lesson to learn in rich kid school than optics and good publicity. I think they also do it so people don't call them out on changing their admissions policy; it used to be that everyone in the city could attend Balliol, and needless to say, nobody liked it when the policy was changed. There's still bad feelings over it even though it's been over a century since the change happened."

Nyssa nodded along to Laurel's explanation, until something on the broadcast caught her eye. "Does the mayor usually attend the opening ceremony?"

Laurel shook her head. "Only every once in a while, usually after some big event. I remember the year of 9/11, the ceremony had been delayed a week for mourning, and that the program had been modified to include a speech from the mayor. This year, it could be any number of things, though my best guess it's the Undertaking or the Justice League."

She then looked at the screen a little closer. "Why is that security guard walking on stage?"

Steven Rune, executive assistant to Dean Poppy Balliol, tapped a pen on his clipboard as he watched his boss continue her speech to the crowd of bored students. He couldn't blame them - Poppy was a sweet woman, but she was also a bit full of herself. Her speech was laden with offhand, subtle praises to herself, and many of the children had been hearing and deciphering them for most of their school careers. They were no doubt waiting for her to finish so they could move on to the mayor and then to the fun stuff. He couldn't help but sympathize. He had organized most of the event, after all, and he had cherry-picked quite a few top-notch acts this year. He couldn't wait to watch them too.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see one of the guards standing up and getting up onstage. The guard was bald, tall, and a bit heavyset. He must've been the ones they outsourced for the ceremony. That was the only thing that could explain why he was standing up and walking onstage and catching everyone's attention and ruining everything! Steven snarled. He was not going to have some meathead screw up one of the four most important events of the school year!

Steven moved towards the stage to drag the security guard away, only to freeze when he heard a click behind his head.

Laurel and Nyssa gaped in disbelief as Dean Balliol was suddenly grabbed from behind by a guard and gagged and restrained. Behind her, several school officials and the mayor were similarly attacked by other guards, beaten and tied up. Students screamed as the stadium was suddenly filled with people; people bearing guns and other weapons. One of the students suddenly stood up and walked towards the gangsters and was handed a gun. He fired it into the air to calm the crowd down.

Once there was silence in the stadium, the camera changed feeds and now was directly back on the guard - and both women gasped when they recognized the face staring back at them.

"Hello, Starling City! My name is Danny Brickwell, or Brick as many like to call me! And this," he gestured to the stands, and another feed flew over the crowd of terrified students, "is my debut, I guess you could say. This is my way of saying that Starling City," he leaned forward, allowing the camera to get a closer look of his face, "is my turf now."

"Now, for all you rich bastards out there - I have your kids. And if you want your kid back, you gotta pay me four million in cash to have them back. Not four million in total, but four million each. You've got four hours to get the money, or else heads start flying."
He grinned nastily. "Peace."

And with that, the feed cut out.

Chapter End Notes

I've been waiting for this arc forever. Tell me, how do you think it's going to end?

Reviews, comments, and constructive criticism are all welcome. Flames will be deleted and ignored. Please update the TV Tropes page. And don't forget the contest!
"Thea!" Moira called out, her husband trailing behind her as they pushed through the crowd of worried parents. "THEA!"

"Mom?" Thea turned around, catching sight of her mother. A second later, she was in both her parents' embrace. While usually, she would try to end it as soon as possible, this time she returned the hug with desperation.

After a few minutes, the family of three reluctantly separated. "Are you alright?" Robert asked his daughter, concerned.

Thea nodded. "I'm fine. They evacuated the college as soon as the broadcast went off the rails. I'm more worried about Kal and Ruby. They're inside the stadium."

Moira and Robert blanched; in their relief of their daughter's safety, they had momentarily forgotten the other reason they were here.

"Ma'am, MA'AM! I'm sorry but you can't go in there!"

"What do you mean, I can't go in there? MY DAUGHTER'S IN THERE!"

All three Queens whipped around to see Samantha Arias trying to muscle her way through the police barricade. She was yelling and screeching, and most prominent of all, crying. Without thinking, they went to her, and Moira, the bravest of them, hesitantly touched the hysterical woman's arm.

Sam whirled around, paranoid and ready to strike, but when she saw who it was, she stopped cold. Emotionally overwhelmed, she collapsed into Moira's arms, sobbing. The Queen Matriarch said nothing, simply rubbing comforting circles into the younger woman's back, while Robert and Thea looked on with sympathetic looks.

After a few minutes, Sam finally got her emotions under control. Her eyes were red, she was sniffling, and her makeup was a mess, but she looked put together enough to just talk.

"Ruby's in there." She said quietly. "And the money… I have just enough, I think, but there's no way I can-"

Robert cut her off. "We'll pay it."

Her eyes widened. "What? No, I'll-"
"Sam, it's fine," Robert stated, putting a comforting hand on her shoulder. "We've already sent word to the bank get eight million in cash. Half of it was for Kal, and the other half was for Thea. Since Thea is alright, we'll simply use it to pay for Ruby's ransom. If it's really that off-putting to you, you can just pay us back later, okay?"

Sam stared at him, then gave a watery smile. "Thank you."

Moira took her hands into her own. "You're our friend, Samantha. You're Kara's best friend. And your daughter is Kal's. It's the least we can do." Sam nodded lightly at that, grateful.

"Speaking of Kara," Thea started. "Have you gotten any word from her, Barry or Ollie about what's happened?"

"They've already called, telling us they know about the situation, and they're getting on the next flight as we speak, but by the time they get back, everything will already be over." Robert let out a sigh of exasperation. "For this to happen while they're in New York, they must be losing it over there."

"Have you contacted Green Arrow?" Laurel asked, zipping up her suit. Thank God, she hadn't washed out the dye in her hair yet; with a situation this time-sensitive, she couldn't waste a single moment. Nyssa, having already dressed up in her own garb, looked up.

"Yes. He, along with Supergirl and the Flash, are trying to get here as soon as they possibly can but, well…" Nyssa had a pinched expression on her face, "… they've hit a bit of a snag."

Before Laurel could ask her to elaborate, Nyssa pulled up four different feeds. Laurel quickly noticed they were news channels - specifically, local news channels for Central City, Hub City, Detroit, and Freeland. She listened to the different anchors, and cursed.

"Simultaneous gang riots and metahuman attacks? In four different cities? At the same time that the Balliol students were taken hostage?" Laurel gripped the front of one of her chairs in anger. "That cannot be a coincidence."

"I agree." Nyssa narrowed her eyes. "This was pre-meditated. Brick had this planned for months."

"He drew Green Arrow and Supergirl out of Starling deliberately. Then he distracted them, and the rest of the Justice League with these crime sprees. Since Flash and Supergirl are the only ones who can get here fast enough to deal with the crisis, he had to make sure they were too occupied to come." Laurel concluded, adding on her own observations. "He even incited riots at Hub City and Central City, just in case. Now even Firestorm can't come to help. For a thug, he's very devious. The only thing I can't figure out is how he was able to convince all these gangs and metahumans to go to bat for him."

Nyssa looked up at her at that, then looked at the TV, which was broadcasting the outside of the stadium. "How many students typically attend Balliol Prep, Laurel?"

"Around a thousand." Laurel answered. At Nyssa's astonished look, Laurel shrugged. "Balliol is one of the top private schools in the world, Nyssa. Rich people typically want the best of the best when it comes to education, and few schools are better than Balliol."

"So that means there are approximately a thousand children in that stadium?" Nyssa asked, legitimately horrified.

Laurel flinched and nodded. "Yeah. Plus the employees, whatever performers managed to get there
before things went pear-shaped, and the mayor and his retinue."

Nyssa placed her forehead into her hand. "And when you charge four million per head, that
approximates to around four billion dollars."

"There's no way everyone will be able to pay on time." Laurel reminded her, feeling sick as the
words passed through her mouth. "The parents of a lot of those kids are out of town. And that's not
even accounting for the scholarship students."

"But still," Nyssa gritted her teeth. "If even a fraction of the students' parents pay the ransom, it will
be a lot of money. And in the hands of someone like Brick…"

"… or Church." Laurel's eyes widened, coming to a sudden realization. "Tobias Church, one of the
top crime lords on the west coast, has confirmed ties to Brick. He's how Brick has been able to incite
so much chaos in so many different cities. He's been trying to expand his operations for years, but
with the current rise of the Justice League and law enforcement, his efforts have been stymied."

"If he gets his hands on that money, the west coast will be flooded with drugs and weapons by the
end of the year." Nyssa noted grimly.

Laurel let out a breath. "Alright, so we know now why this is happening. But that doesn't matter
right now, Church can be dealt with later. We have to handle Brick first. We need to save those
kids."

"Do you have any ideas? You attended Balliol for thirteen years."

Laurel put a thinking hand on her chin. "Provided they haven't altered the layout too much, I should
be able to get us into the stadium relatively undetected." At Nyssa's expectant look, she continued.
"Ollie and Tommy used to sneak out of school all the time, and had a secret passageway they used to
get in and out. It's an old tunnel that was left untouched after the main building's first renovation.
They showed it to me and Sara a little bit before Ollie was thought to have gone down with the
boat."

"Okay, so entry is taken care of. What about the army? Even with me, we can't take out that many
people - not without at least some of the hostages getting hurt or even killed."

Laurel continued tapping her finger on her chin, and then her face lit up, as if lightbulb had turned on
right above her head, and she snapped her fingers. "I've got it."

"What have you got?" Nyssa asked curiously.

"I'll tell you on the way." Laurel said, grabbing her mask and placing it on her face.

It was time for the Black Canary to sing.

Kal-El kept a whimpering Ruby in his arms and close to him, glaring at any thug that got too near.
All around, he could see many others doing the same for their friends, siblings, or significant others.
Seeing his classmates in such terror enraged him, but he kept a lid on it, as he had been trained to do
since he was young.

He wasn't stupid. His powers were half-developed, and he had none of the advanced training or
control his sister had. Even disregarding that he would be blowing his, and Kara's, and possibly
Oliver's and Barry's covers as well, there was no guarantee he could save everyone here with no one
getting hurt. Only he had that benefit, unfortunately.
Kal grit his teeth. He was a Kryptonian. He could shoot lasers from his eyes, take bullets to the chest and breath frost from his lips. He was one of the most powerful people on the planet.

And right now, he was completely helpless.

"How many people have showed up with their money?" Brick asked Xavier, gruffly.

"Around two-fifty, boss."

"Tch." Brick scoffed. "Not everyone. Figures. Ah well, one billion is plenty enough to go around. Charon will be pleased."

"It's too bad, though." He continued, cocking his gun. "I'm not sure we brought enough bullets. Eh, a knife will do just as well, don't you think, Mr. Mayor?" He leered at the captive official, who simply glared back.

At least until the whistle started.

Or was it a siren or an alarm? It was some kind of mix between the three, and it was loud and piercing and debilitating. Almost immediately, everyone, hostage and captor, fell to the floor, trying to block out the sound by covering their ears. Many of Brick's gang dropped their guns in their haste, which made them right for the picking for what came next.

Black Canary entered the stands through one of the entrances, fearlessly knocking out each and every one of the gangsters that had taken the students of her old school hostage. She even knocked out the one who had managed to disguise himself as a student. Running from aisle to aisle, crossing over body after body, she rushed the entire area until each of member of Brick's gang that was in the stands was knocked out.

She quickly made her way to the field, and then lifted up one of her tonfa towards a specific direction.

In the main control room, Nyssa peered into one of the screens. Seeing the signal, she quickly clicked on another button, watching as soundproof, and more importantly, bulletproof glass rose in front of the stands, blocking off the hostages from the remaining members of Brick's gang. As she watched her student sprint around the field, she thought back to when Black Canary first told her about her plan.

"Are you sure this will work?" Nyssa asked, looking doubtfully at the controls. They had already knocked out all of the gang members who had been patrolling the stadium for potential infiltrators and found the unconscious performers piled together in one of the storage rooms. Now, they were in the control room of the stadium, where Black Canary had outlined her plan to Nyssa.

Canary nodded firmly. "Positive. Tommy and Ollie played this trick during a school assembly, using a glitch in the sound system that they had learned from one of the AV students. They told me about it in return for not ratting them out. I never thought I'd have to use it for something like this, but..." she shrugged.

"Very well then. And the glass?"

Canary winced. "It's something from a previous opening ceremony, involving a very enthusiastic
rock performer. Not only did he play very loud music, he was also a bit… liberal with his stage effects. The glass was installed for the safety of the students for future ceremonies."

"Alright then. Are you sure you don't want to be the one up here?" Nyssa asked, slightly concerned.

"Yes. You said it yourself, Nyssa - you can't be seen. It was pure luck that none of those guys got a good look at you."

"Very well. Show me what to do."

Nyssa continued to watch Canary take out the remaining gangsters, leaving only Brick. She felt both satisfaction at the successful plan and pride in her student. Canary had done well.

She was broken out of her thoughts when she heard the slightest wind change behind her. Nyssa leaned back, falling to the floor as a bat struck the control panel. Faintly, she could hear the siren stop, and the tell-tale signs of the glass panes sliding down.

Black Canary advanced on Brick, only to stop momentarily when she noticed the glass walls slide back into their hiding places. She then turned to Brick, seeing him begin to shake off the effects of the siren, and realized what was going on.

Knowing every one of his allies were out and would be for a while, Canary acted quickly, moving to strike Brick down. But she had paused too long - Brick had regained enough of his bearings to pull on one of her legs, flipping her onto her back.

But Black Canary was no longer so inexperienced. She immediately followed up with a double kick to the chest, causing the big man to stumble back to his feet. Kipping up back into a standing position, the two circled each other. Brick threw fists, Canary dodged and struck with her tonfa. That was their dance.

Normally, a few hits with the metal would be enough to knock a man like Brick out. But Brick was not normal - he didn't get to the top of Starling's underworld by being a wimp. He tanked Canary's hits, and continued taking them even as he continued to bleed. If it weren't for the current situation, she might have even been impressed.

Eventually, just a moment too long and Brick finally connected with a monstrous hit to the face. Canary was dazed, and struggled to get up as Brick walked towards her with a savage grin on his face. He picked her up by her hair, and savored the moment, elate to see his main nuisance for the past couple of months in such a vulnerable state.

While he was doing that, however, Black Canary was thinking back to the many lessons Ted, Green Arrow and Nyssa had passed down to her throughout her short time as a vigilante. *Use your opponent's strength against them, always look for weak points…* She gazed downwards.

And kned Brick in the groin.

*And never play fair.*

Canary dropped to her feet, and in one smooth notion, used her remaining tonfa to slam one last earth-shaking hit to Brick's temple. He went down, out like a light.

She panted, kneeling down to make sure he was unconscious, before surveying the rest of the stadium to make sure the gang members had remained incapacitated and none of the hostages had
been hurt. Said hostages had remained silent during her fight with Brick, thanks to a combination of trauma, fear, and not wanting to distract their potential savior from the fight.

Content that everyone was safe for now, Canary went towards the bound and gagged mayor. She removed the gag first, then worked on removing his bonds. Once the rope was gone, she helped him to his feet.

"Why weren't you affected by the siren?" Was the first thing he asked.

Black Canary said nothing, simply taking out the earplugs from her ear and showing them to him.

The mayor chuckled at the sight, and gave her a soft, appreciative look. "Thank you."

Canary simply smiled.

"Any word yet, Quentin?" Robert asked his friend worriedly.

Detective Quentin Lance, who had arrived a few hours earlier with several members of the SCPD, simply shook his head. "Nothing. All radio contact with Brick just cut off suddenly. It could mean anything."

Off to the side, there were piles of large bags, each containing four million and marked with the names of specific students. It was something mandated by Brick so he wouldn't get swindled. It was also in case the situation changed and the money was no longer needed and had to be returned.

Suddenly, a large collective gasp spread throughout the crowd. The front doors to the stadium had suddenly opened, and everyone watched with bated breath to see what it meant.

The first go out was the mayor, followed by Brick. Everyone stared in disbelief at his bedraggled form, but even more so at who was guiding him forward. A tall, blond woman in a black leather suit with a mask on her face. The name "Black Canary" spread throughout the crowd.

The trio stood in the front of the crowd, waiting. And then…

"MOM!"

A young girl ran between them, charging at the crowd. Her mother, now in tears, was let through the barricades to take her into her arms. Behind the girl, more children ran through, calling for their parents. Other students, older, simply walked outside, standing together and waiting for directions. A massive cheer of relief echoed throughout the crowd at the sight of them all, safe and whole.

Detective Lance and Lieutenant Pike waited for the rush of children to slow down, then went to the mayor, who was standing next to Black Canary and the still restrained Brick. With a nod to the vigilante, Canary handed Brick over to Lance, who cuffed the man and started reading him rights.

"Black Canary and I and the rest of the adults restrained Brick's underlings in the stadium." The mayor informed Pike. "You can send people through the back to apprehend them. There are also the performers - there in a storage in the south side of the stadium. They were unconscious, and we think they've been injected with some kind of drug to keep them that way."

"Thank you, sir." Pike nodded. He gave Black Canary a nod of acknowledgment, which she returned, and then left to hand out orders.

"So, you took out Brick, huh?"
Canary turned to see Lance giving her speculative look over. She tentatively nodded.

He suddenly smirked, and gave her a congratulatory slap on the shoulder. "Good job."

The next hour was spent reuniting children with their parents and looking them over for any apparent injury. While most of the students were physically unharmed, mentally was another matter - Balliol would probably be sinking a lot of money into their psychiatry program for the next couple of years. Black Canary stuck around in the meantime, comforting students whose parents had yet to arrive for various reasons, and accepting well wishes from others and their parents.

In one of the brief moments she had to herself, she spotted Nyssa standing in the crowd, having changed to normal clothing and hiding her face behind a large hat and sunglasses. However, the wide bright smile on her face was still present, and Canary couldn't help but return it with a small one of her own.

She should be here with me, Canary thought, but I guess her need for anonymity is more important. Besides, it's not like we did this for fame anyway. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Kal being looked over by the Queens, and Ruby having the life hugged out of her by her mother.

No, they hadn't done any of this for fame at all.

An audible hush then fell over the crowd. Black Canary perked up, then turned her head to the left to see Supergirl descending to the ground with Green Arrow holding onto her. The two landed just as the Flash sped in, some dust billowing in the wake of his run.

Everyone watched quietly as the three most famous superheroes in the world looked around, taking in the scene. Eventually, they all zeroed in on Black Canary, who was watching them pensively. Green Arrow turned to his compatriots. They nodded at him.

He walked towards his protégé, his steps echoing throughout the silence, and stopped right in front of her. He zipped open one of the compartments in his suit and took something out, and then held it out to her. Canary's jaw dropped slightly when she saw it was.

A League ring.

Black Canary looked up at Green Arrow, right in the eye, silently asking if this was real. She could feel him smiling at her, and at his slight nod, she took in a deep breath. She reached out, her arm slightly trembling, and took the ring. She slid it onto her finger, feeling a thousand emotions coursing through her.

She then looked out to the crowd, and held up her ring for everyone to see.

They screamed and cheered, chanting her name, and as she exchanged one last look with Green Arrow, Black Canary could honestly say that she had never felt happier in her life.

Chapter End Notes

And now, Laurel joins the Justice League.
When I was deciding the O7 lineup for this story's Justice League, I admit I hit a bit of a snag. I knew that Black Canary was going to be one of them (I was just struggling on how I was going to do it), and I decided on J'onn not long after. The last member is where the issues came. I was debating between Black Lightning, Green Lantern (yes, he will be coming into the story eventually, don't ask when), Cisco/Vibe, and Firestorm. I discounted Cisco immediately, along with Green Lantern. I went with Black Lightning because I felt he'd added a lot more than Firestorm does narrative-wise.

Now, someone guessed what was going to happen last chapter, but they got one thing wrong - none of the leads "held back" so Laurel could prove herself. Not when there were so many kids at risk. The Justice League genuinely got caught off-guard by Brick's plot, as did A.R.G.U.S. It makes sense when you think about it - of the current members of the League, only Green Arrow is really street-level. Everyone else deals with metas and other major disasters to varying degrees. And with Green Arrow playing support for them and going out of town (plus his need to patrol the entire city, not just the Glades), Brick was able to stay under the radar long enough to get everything in motion.

Well, that's enough of that for now. Next chapter is the last chapter of the arc, after which I will take another hiatus to plan Arc IV. Also, next chapter I will announce the new deadline for the contest.

Reviews, comments, and constructive criticism are all welcome. Flames will be deleted and ignored. Please update the TV Tropes page. And don't forget the contest!
Arc III, Chapter 63: The Parted Veil

Chapter Summary

Black Canary has joined the Justice League.

The wheel of fate continues to turn.

Chapter Notes

**The Prompt**: Draw your favorite scene of To Hell and Back. Any scene. You can have as many entries as you like.

**Dates**: From the day this chapter is posted to **the day the first chapter of Arc V is posted**.

**Submission**: Submit your drawings to the story's official blog on Tumblr (the link can be found in the first chapter beneath the chapter summary on the AO3 version). If that is not feasible, then simply post it to your preferred image-hosting platform and send me the link via messaging on either AO3 or FFN.

**Winning**: There are three ways to win.

1. Author's choice. Whatever piece I favor the most.

2. Beta's choice. Whatever piece Kara Smoak, my beta, favors the most.

3. Fan's choice. I will put up a poll (either on FFN or Tumblr) and have all the readers vote via that.

**Prizes**:

1. For the fan that wins #1 (my choice), your piece will be the cover page for FFN, the first chapter of AO3, and the TV Tropes page!

2. For the fan that wins #2 (beta's choice), your piece will be the background image of the Tumblr blog, which is scarcely bare.

3. For the fan that wins #3 (fan's choice), your piece will be inserted into the first chapter of Arc IV.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 63: The Parted Veil

"And now, a recap on the story that everyone's been talking about. Two days ago, Chrysanthemum Balliol Preparatory Academy for the Gifted held their annual opening ceremony. What was
supposed to be a fun day of music and dance and food for its one thousand students turned into a nightmare when a local gangster by the name of Daniel Brickwell took the students, several teachers, and the mayor of Starling City hostage, demanding four million dollars a head."

"With all members of the Justice League occupied in other cities trying to put down simultaneous gang riots and metahuman attacks, the situation was poised for a tragic end. Thankfully, Black Canary, Starling City's third vigilante, was here, and took on a daring rescue. Using her wits and skills, she managed to subdue Brickwell and his associates, and release the hostages. Afterwards, she was personally invited into the Justice League by fellow Starling City vigilantes Green Arrow and Supergirl, and Central City's vigilante the Flash."

"Black Canary is the third hero to join the Justice League in the last two months. The self-proclaimed protectors of the world are proving to be true to their word and expanding their ranks at a rapid pace. The question now is: what will they do next?"

"… and this," Vixen parted the glass doors to reveal a room filled with foliage, flowers and trees alike, "is the garden. It's mainly used as a place to relax. There are a few benches to sit and a small lawn to lay on, too. There are also some stairs to the right that lead to a balcony that overlooks the garden as well, in case you want a view. It was the last room to be constructed, mainly because the architects wanted our input with it. If you have any requests, you can mention it at our monthly meeting and we'll write it down for consideration."

Black Canary stepped inside, gazing in wonder at how much color there was. "It's beautiful."

"It is, isn't it?" Vixen stepped next to her, eyes wistful.

After things at the Stadium finally calmed down, Canary had a short meeting with her three new teammates. She was instructed to go to a private airfield two days hence, in full gear, with a couple changes of clothes for both her vigilante identity and her civilian identity. There, a plane would pick her up and fly her over to the Justice League's private airfield, where she would then be escorted to the Hall of Justice for full tour and complete orientation of her new 'job'.

They told her that there was one catch: she would have to reveal her true identity to the other Leaguers. In return, they would reveal their identities to her. It was to foster trust between teammates, because trust was often the difference between life and death. After some ruminating, Canary had agreed to this condition - she wanted to be a part of this, and she had seen enough of each Leaguer's deeds on the news and in person to know they meant well.

Those two days were spent healing up her wounds and making arrangements for a few days off. Thankfully, Laurel Lance had built up plenty of vacation days during her time at CNRI and had no urgent cases to work on, so arranging a few more days off was not an issue. It helped that she had a well-publicized friendship with the Queen Family - most of her coworkers had implicitly assumed that she would be visiting them after the scare Balliol had. There was also Nyssa, who promised to watch over the city in Black Canary's absence - unlike her student, Nyssa had gotten out of the mess unscathed.

When she arrived at the airfield, a private plane was waiting for her just like they said, with state-of-the-art facilities. It was a short plane trip, about an hour long, to the Hall of Justice, and when she arrived, another teammate was waiting for her: Vixen. Vixen had elected to be her guide, as she was the only 'veteran' member Canary had yet to meet. It was her who explained the Hall of Justice's location at the very, very far outskirts of Central City, and then directed Canary to the building itself.

After showing her how to enter the building using her ring, and also a concealing function for the
ring to use when in her civilian identity, Canary was shown to her own private quarters. Each Leaguer had been given their own room to stay in while at the Hall of Justice for an extended period, one that they could personalize if they so wished. Canary left her clothes in a drawer there before continuing tour.

She was shown the locations of the library (with computers), game room, training room, kitchen (fully-stocked!), mission control (if needed), weapons arsenal (both lethal and non-lethal), pool, dining room, and finally, the garden. The meeting room would be the last location she would be shown, where she would also meet the rest of the League - and share her secret identity with them. Canary would be lying if she said she wasn't nervous, so she was taking as much time as she could in the garden to prepare herself.

Vixen touched her arm softly, and Canary turned to look at her. "Are you ready?"

Canary took a deep breath, and nodded.

The seven chairs surrounding the stainless-steel table in the meeting room had been spread out. Instead of a semi-circle, the chairs now encircled the entire table, though still in the same order they had been placed when they were first shown to the nascent League by Amanda.

When Black Canary arrived, she saw that everyone was already there, each standing at their positions. Vixen guided Canary to one of the empty spots, before moving to her own between the Flash and Black Lightning. Canary herself was between Black Lightning and the Martian Manhunter. Rounding them out were Supergirl, who stood next to Manhunter, and Green Arrow between her and the Flash at the head of the table. Canary stood, waiting for someone to break the silence.

"This is the meeting room, Black Canary. As you can probably guess, this is where we make our reports, discuss potential missions and threats, and generally do any official business that requires four or more Leaguers." Vixen explained. "If you could look down at the chairs, you'll notice that yours is bare while ours have logos on them. If you could submit a logo within the next two days, we will have etched it into your chair by your next visit to the Hall."

"Alright." Canary nodded, a little awkwardly. "I'll do that." She looked around, noticing that everyone was a bit tense themselves. Revealing your secret identity was always a momentous occasion, as it should be; it was a secret that could mean life or death, after all.

"I'll go first." Tentatively, she removed her mask, revealing her full face. So nervous about what she was doing, she didn't notice the widening of Green Arrow and Supergirl's eyes. The Flash, for his part, merely crossed his arms - to the people who knew him well, they could sense the slight smirk on his face. Martian Manhunter was the only one who didn't allow his reaction to show.

"My name is Laurel Lance. I'm a lawyer for Starling City's Necessary Resource Initiative," Laurel introduced herself. "Unfortunately, this isn't my complete civilian identity - I dye my hair platinum blonde when I become Black Canary. My real hair color is brunette."

The tension now broken, Black Lightning followed the suit, removing his own mask. He gave Laurel a bright smile, and the two shook hands. "Jefferson Pierce. I'm the principal of a local high school in Freeland."

"A fellow public servant, huh?" Laurel smiled back.

Jefferson shrugged. "When I quit being Black Lightning the first time, I still felt the need to help
people, and educating the youth of Freeland certainly counted. Now I help them both day and night."

"I can relate."

Laurel then turned to Vixen, who was muttering something while pressing two fingers to the head of her necklace. At her confused look, Vixen gained a sheepish expression.

"I'm deactivating the glamour my necklace gives me. See, this necklace is a magical artifact from my homeland called the Anansi Totem. It's bonded to me, and is the source of my powers." Vixen explained. "Now, can you remember my face?"

Laurel blinked, and thought hard, and realized that her memories regarding Vixen had become a lot clearer. She looked at Vixen, and that was enough of a confirmation for her.

"Good. My name is Mari McCabe, and I'm fashion design student and aspiring model from Detroit."

Having already exchanged pleasantries right before the tour, Laurel simply exchanged a grin with Mari and then turned to Martian Manhunter.

Martian Manhunter stared at her, long enough to become a bit uncomfortable, before speaking. "This is a modified version of my true form. My name is J'onn J'onzz, the last son of Mars."

"However," he continued, stopping Laurel from moving, "you know me by a different name, Laurel Lance."

Laurel watched in astonishment as he morphed into a vaguely familiar face - one that she had seen occasion during her outings with Kara and Sam.

"You're John Jones!" She exclaimed. "Kara's neighbor!"

"Yes." John nodded. "It is good to see you here, Laurel."

"Oh my God." Laurel said as she shook John's hand, not noticing the confused looks Jefferson and Mari exchanged and then shot at the three remaining Leaguers. "If Kara knew who you were…"

At that, John looked down. Laurel's glee dimmed as she blinked confusedly at his actions. She was about to ask what was wrong, until a voice interrupted her.

"Actually…"

Laurel looked up as John moved to the side, to see Supergirl removing her hood and veil. Her jaw dropped when she saw who it was.

Kara Danvers.

"Kara, you're-"

"Supergirl, yes." Kara said, clutching the back of her chair tightly. "And my real name is not Kara Danvers. It's Kara Zor-El, of the House of El, of the planet Krypton."

Laurel's eyes were ready to pop out of her skull. "Then, does that mean Kal...?"

"Yes. His name isn't Clark Calvin Kent. It's Kal-El."

Laurel was speechless.
Which, of course, the Flash took as his opportunity to speak.

"She's not the only one, Laurel." Laurel turned towards him, just in time for the Flash to become Barry Allen. Laurel fell into further disbelief.

"Barry, you too?"

Barry shrugged. "Guilty as charged."

Laurel shook her head, completely at a loss. "Kara, you're Supergirl, and Barry, you're the Flash, then-"

She stopped, then turned to Green Arrow, her face completely blank. He, in turn, stared back at her. As their eyes met, Laurel wondered why she had never been able to recognize his gaze.

She'd known it all her life, after all.

Green Arrow remained silent as he removed his headwear, revealing Oliver Queen in all his glory. Unlike Laurel, a dozen emotions seemed to reflect in his eyes, and he looked at her with a small, but thoroughly genuine smile.

"Hey."

Laurel, meanwhile, felt herself flashing back to when she had first met Oliver after he had returned home. She remembered feeling so happy, she could cry. But she hadn't cried, because she figured he had already seen enough tears. Enough to last a lifetime.

This time, she couldn't hold them back.

"Hey." Laurel replied, a watery smile on her lips.

Iris West whistled as she arranged the dining table, setting down four place mats, and then the silverware, followed by the dining ware. Weekly West Family Dinner was a go.

"I see you didn't arrange a fifth place for Barry." Joe commented as he threw a stained towel over his shoulder. Iris turned around to glare at her father.

"Because Barry isn't coming, remember?"

"Who knows?" Joe shrugged. "He might drop in."

Iris looked away. Joe sighed. "Iris-"


Joe pressed his lips together. "If you're sure." He turned back to the kitchen to continued preparing the food.

Iris turned back to the table and glared at the spot where Barry would normally sit - next to her, fistng her hands. It hurt so much just thinking about him, all the confusion, the anger, the pain. It was hard to keep it all bottled up, and she was glad Barry had the sense to stay out of her way. At the same time, however, she wished he'd stop ignoring her, because there was no other way of putting it. It'd be so much easier if she could just cut him out of her life for good, but she couldn't. Because Barry was still a part of her father's life, of her mother's and Wally's. Hell, even their jobs were connected.
She couldn't imagine her life without Barry, because he had always been a part of it - even when he had been hundreds of thousands of miles away.

The doorbell broke her out of her angry thoughts. She schooled herself, trying to make herself appear happy. It wouldn't do for her mother and brother to see her so conflicted.

Iris walked to the foyer, opened the door, and -

This man was not her mother or brother.

"Hello, I'm Hunter Zolomon, a professor at Central City University." The tall, handsome man said. "Is this the residence of Barry Allen?"

Iris slowly nodded.

"Is he here right now?"

"No." Iris managed to jilt out. "No, he - he's out right now. Do you need anything?"

"Oh, no." Hunter laughed, handing her a folder of papers. "I'm just here to give back some corrected homework. He forgot to pick it up when he was in class yesterday. Normally I would just give it to him next class, but I was passing by and figured I'd just see where my oldest and most mysterious student lived."

Iris took the papers, still stunned. "O-Okay." She swallowed, and finally regained her composure. "I'll give it to him later."

"Thank you." Hunter grinned. "Is it alright if I ask who you are?"

"I'm Iris. Iris West." Iris said, hesitating for a moment. "I'm Barry's best friend, I guess."

Hunter raised an eyebrow at that last part, but said nothing. "Alright. It was nice to meet you, Iris."

"You too, Professor Zolomon."

"Seeing you here…" Laurel sighed. "I can't quite put it to words."

"Me either." Oliver chuckled. "I'm surprised, and at the same time, I'm not. I feel like I should've known it was you. There had always been something familiar about Black Canary, something I couldn't quite touch on."

"Same here." Laurel replied, twisting her hands together. "Looking back, there were signs, and they've become so much more obvious now that I know the picture."

They were sitting at a small table, located in the balcony that overlooked the garden. After Oliver had revealed his identity, the meeting broke immediately. Even Jefferson and Mari noticed that things had become too heavy to talk business, so everyone departed to give Oliver and Laurel some time to talk.

"A lot happened on that island, didn't it?"

"Yeah." Oliver said, solemn. "Yeah. Laurel-"

Laurel placed a hand on top of his, cutting him off. "Don't. You don't need to tell me anything. I can tell you're not ready yet."
"Laurel, you deserve to know." Oliver let out a strong breath. "You deserve to know what kind of man I am. Who I am."

"I already know who you are, Ollie." Laurel countered. "I know it down to my bones. You're a good man. One of the best I've ever known."

Oliver looked at her, and she leaned forward, placing the elbow of her other arm on the table. He could hear the sincerity, the faith in her words, and felt slightly overwhelmed.

"Whatever hell you went through, Ollie, whatever crimes you committed - they don't matter anymore." Laurel continued her speech, knowing she had his full attention. "Because you came out of it a hero. Whatever your misdeeds, you're redeeming them with all of this." She gestured to the Hall of Justice.

Oliver looked around, taking everything in, and closed his eyes, feeling a weight lifted from his chest. "Thank you, Laurel."

Laurel smiled softly. "It's nothing, Ollie. Just the truth."

They fell back into a comfortable silence. Laurel rubbed her thumb over Oliver's hand back and forth, thinking.

"Laurel." She looked up, to see Oliver watching her intently.

"That guy you never got over." He drew in a breath. "The one who left. It was me, wasn't it?"

Laurel opened her mouth, and then closed it. She closed her eyes. "Yeah."

"Good."

Laurel's eyes snapped open, and she had just a moment, before Oliver drew her into a kiss.

An hour later, a beaming Oliver and Laurel entered the meeting room. The rest of the League turned to look at them. The newly-formed couple blinked when they got a real look at what their teammates were doing.

"Are you guys playing Poker?" Laurel asked, shocked.

"Nah." Barry said, smirking. "Go Fish." He jabbed his thumb towards John. "This one's a cheat."

"Your own fault for agreeing to playing against a telepath." John shot back, stacking his many pairs of cards.

Oliver sighed, and then steeled himself. "Well, clean it up. It's time we discuss business."

Barry clicked his tongue and before Laurel could even blink, the cards were all gone, packed back into their box which the speedster was now tapping on the steel table, to the annoyance of everyone.

"Gonna take a while for me to get used to that." Laurel muttered as she let go of Oliver's hand and went to back to her seat.

Oliver shot Barry an unimpressed look, then became serious again. He went over to the back of the room and pressed a few buttons on a keypad mounted there. A large, square screen flickered on, and an opening in the wall revealed a remote. Oliver grabbed it, then turned to his teammates - the now fully-formed Justice League. Each and every single one of them had all traces of mirth wiped from
their faces now, the picture of professionalism. Good.

"Laurel, Jefferson, it's time you know why you were recruited." He began, catching everyone's full attention. "As you know, the Justice League was created in response to the Undertaking. Initially, it was just intended to be a casual endeavor. The occasional team up when an enemy proved to be more than one hero could handle. However, circumstances changed."

He pressed a button, showing the picture of a government base - the same base he, Kara, and Barry had found J'onn. "Our benefactors, the alphabet agency A.R.G.U.S., sent us to deal with an off-the-books government installation manned by an Agent Smith. It was here that we found J'onn, and he alerted us to a new potential threat. After that, we started scouring the world for potential recruits, observing and monitoring different vigilantes from around the globe. Then, about two months ago, the threat became imminent, and shifted our time table."

"In response, J'onn agreed to join the Justice League and take one of the three remaining spots. We assigned him to Hub City, which was in sore need of a vigilante that couldn't be killed by conventional means and couldn't be bribed. While J'onn was building his reputation, we recruited you, Jefferson. You had actually been earmarked for recruitment for a while, but we planned to wait until a more opportune time to make our offer."

Oliver then shifted his attention to Laurel. "The last position, we had a number of candidates for. You were one of the frontrunners; what you lacked in power and experience, you made up in heart, determination, adaptability, and overall potential. After saving all those people two days ago with the aid of only one person, we knew you were ready."

He then looked at John, who nodded and stood up, everyone's attention now on him. "About a thousand of your Earth years ago, I was simply another Martian, one of many, with a wife and family. And then…they came. I was a soldier in our war - a war that was lost. They captured me, put me in some sort of stasis, and when I awoke, my home was a desolate planet and I was the last son of Mars. The last Martian alive."

"And now, they come here."

Jefferson and Laurel looked at John in dawning horror, realizing what exactly he was talking about. The sound of bullets being fired caused them to shift their attention back to the screen, where it showed black and white footage of American soldiers fighting against almost giant humanoids with bulging heads.

"They are called the Dominators. And in one year, they will invade Earth."

Isabel smiled as she and her boyfriend separated. Tommy's hands lingered around her waist, and she was oh so tempted to stay the night. Alas, she had a busy day tomorrow, and couldn't afford a night at the mansion when she could be so easily distracted.

"Night." Tommy smirked lazily, planting one more kiss on her cheek.

"Tommy…!" Isabel squealed. She reluctantly pushed him away, and with one last wave, entered her car.

As her driver pulled out of Merlyn Mansion's driveway, Isabel's expression changed. No longer was she besotted; instead, she was tired and apathetic. Her phone ringed, and she picked it up, uncaring of whoever was on the other side of the line.

"How are things going?" Isabel sat up when she realized who it was. It wouldn't do to sound
uncaring with this one.

"Things are going fine. He's falling for me more and more every day."

"Good. Don't screw this up. He's pivotal to my plans."

Isabel grinned. "Don't worry. I've got him under my thumb. He'll be yours before you know it."

"Very well then. Farewell, Isabel."

"Farewell, Talia."

---

**ARC III: CONFLICT**

**END**

**NEXT: ARC IV: RESPECT**

---

Chapter End Notes

Arc III is finally over.

This took way longer than it should have, especially since it was eight chapters shorter than Arc II. The perils of writer's block.

Anyway, yes, Barry did guess Laurel was Black Canary but didn't bother to confirm it. He's too smart for his own good. Also, yes, Oliver and Laurel are now a couple. We will touch on the Nyssa side of the equation next arc. Barry and Iris will reconcile next arc as well, though I won't say how and when.

When will Arc IV be? Well I don't know. I still need to plan it out using the notes I made before I even started this story, and then modified to fit all the changes I've made to the story since then. Then there's writing it. I won't make any promises (because it seems I can't keep them well enough), except that Arc IV WILL come out eventually.

As for the contest, the date has been modified. The last day to submit something is the day the first chapter of ARC V is posted. That gives everyone anywhere from three months to an entire year to submit something. So, if you want to participate, you don't have that excuse not to anymore. I will post the original contest details with the new due date on AO3, FFN, and Tumblr.

Please comment or review. I prefer longer comments and reviews, particularly with what you like and what you don't like, but if you just want say "Good Job!" go ahead.

Please update the TV Tropes page. I imagine there will be a lot of tropes that can be added now that Arc III is over.

And finally, don't forget the contest!
Chapter Summary

Six months after Black Canary joins the Justice League, the world faces its greatest crisis yet.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 64: At the Precipice

"... I'd like to thank you all for your support. This couldn't have been possible without contributions from every part of the city and beyond, not just the Glades." Oliver spoke into the microphone, his public smile wide and welcoming. The speech continued, hitting all the usual notes, and finished with his arm flourishing towards the front of the building, where the mayor had the customary giant-sized scissors in hand. A snip! later, the Queen Outlet Mall was officially open.

As numerous residents of Starling crowded their way in through the entrance, Oliver and Kara went over to where the cameras were still snapping away, allowing photos to be taken and making other niceties. Finally, after an hour or two, the song and dance finished, and they could witness the fruits of their labor firsthand.

"Ready?" Laurel asked her boyfriend, linking her arm with his.

"Ready."

Next to them, Sam playfully nudged Kara with her elbow. "You two should be proud. You've been working on this for how long?"

Kara smiled. "As long as I've known you. It's too bad everyone couldn't be here."

"Well, Thea has been dying trying to get through college, and mom and dad had a board of directors meeting that they, unfortunately, could not ditch. Barry is still dealing with his... business, and Tommy..." Oliver trailed off, wincing. That situation was something that still stung.

Sam frowned. "It's been eight months. He still isn't talking to you two?"

"He's been ignoring all our calls, refusing every invitation we've sent him for events we're hosting — including the one for this event — and avoiding us during ones hosted by others." Laurel replied, looking tired. She was really starting to get fed up with Tommy's attitude. "At this point, we've learned to accept it. We're not going to stop trying, but right now it's all on him."

Sam blinked, then frowned. "How unfortunate. What about you, Kara?"

Kara gazed back at her, exasperated. "No luck either. As far as Tommy is concerned, Kal and I are Queens, so that means we no longer exist to him. As you said, it's unfortunate, but Laurel's right — we've made every attempt to reach out to him, but it's up to him to reach back." She shrugged. "At the very least, he isn't playing lone wolf anymore."
She was, of course, referring to Tommy and Isabel's relationship, which had been going strong during these last eight months of no contact. According to one of the local rags, Isabel had moved into the Merlyn Mansion already, and there were rumors that he was going to propose soon. It was disheartening and degrading that they had to learn about that development from the words of others and trashy gossip magazines; but it did serve as a perfect metaphor for the current state of all their friendships with Tommy.

Oliver couldn't help but wonder why things had turned out like this. All his life, he and Tommy had been as thick as thieves, brothers in everything but blood. Even after ten years of separation, it wouldn't be wrong to assume that, when the day came, Oliver would be by Tommy's side, supporting him as his best man. But now? Now, he (and Laurel for that matter) would be lucky to get an invite to the wedding.

What a sad state of affairs.

"Mr. Queen?"

The aforementioned Mr. Queen broke out of his melancholy thoughts and turned to the speaker; a handsome young man with brunette hair. He looked to be around Thea's age. "Yes?"

"My name's Roy Harper, sir. I work as a salesman down at Ziggy's." He introduced himself, taking a deep breath. "I'd just like to thank you for this opportunity."

Oliver smiled, genuine. "Think nothing of it. Just make the most of it, alright?"

Roy smiled back. "Yes, sir."

"Roy!" The young man turned around to see his boss and manager of Ziggy's, Rene Ramirez, calling for him. With an apologetic look, he left.

"What a nice young man." Laurel commented afterwards.

"Yeah." Oliver agreed. "I have a good feeling about him. I think I'm going to keep an eye on him."

"Both of us, you mean." Kara interjected, looking amused at her brother. "This is a team effort, remember?"

Oliver smirked at her playfully. "Like I could ever forget."

"Oliver! Kara!" The group turned their attentions to another patron. Sam didn't recognize her, but the other three did.

"Mari! Are you enjoying our grand opening?"

Mari McCabe nodded vigorously. Between her fingers were several business cards. "You bet. Thank you for inviting me to this."

"Anything for a friend, Mari." Kara said, then turned to Sam. "Sam, I'd like you to meet a friend of ours. This is Mari McCabe, an up-and-coming fashion designer from Detroit. Oliver and I met her on one of our business trips."

Sam held out her hand. "A pleasure to meet you, Mari. I'm Samantha Arias, founder and CEO of A-Corps."

As the group chatted amongst each other, they remained oblivious to the pair of blue eyes peering at
them from a corner of the mall. The observer centered his gaze on Oliver, shooting the man a glare, before losing themselves into the crowd. *Another day*, he thought.

Tommy Merlyn was absorbed in fixing his cuff links until the familiar name of ‘Oliver Queen’ filtered into his head. He looked towards the television mounted on his bedroom wall, where the local news was doing coverage on the recent opening of the Queen Outlet Mall, his former best friend’s pet project ever since he returned from that island over a year ago. He scowled at the sight, grabbing the remote and turning the offending screen off.

A knock on the door caught his attention, and he smiled when it opened to reveal his beautiful girlfriend, Isabel Rochev. Poor Isabel had caught a bit of a fever today, and at the insistence of her lover, had elected to take the day off, sequestered within the walls of Merlyn Mansion. Tommy wasn't worried; Isabel was strong, and Tommy had learned enough from her tutelage to tough out one day at Merlyn Global without her.

"Ready to go?" Isabel asked, moving to fix up the rest of his suit.

"Yes. I'll try to get home on time, but don't wait for me. If you need to turn in early, go ahead."

Isabel smiled up at him. "I know. Now come on, you're going to be late."

Tommy grinned. "I'm the boss, Iz. I can be as late as I want."

Later, after Tommy had long-since disappeared from the driveway in one of his designer cars, Isabel crept back up to his office. Thankfully, all the staff had cleared out, going about other tasks in the mansion that needed tending to. Nevertheless, Isabel was careful to be quiet. She made great efforts not to disrupt the placement of anything the room — after the mansion had been turned inside out in the wake of the Undertaking, Tommy was very possessive of whatever effects remained. Even she wouldn't be able to get away with messing up his office.

She opened one of the hidden compartments within her boyfriend's desk, revealing a hidden safe. Then, using a few hidden "features" in her phone, she identified the numbers commonly pressed upon the keypad; recognizing them as the same ones as her birthday, she smirked. A few clicks later, the safe opened to reveal her prize: a diamond ring. And, if her memory served her correctly, not just any diamond ring — this was the engagement ring of Rebecca Merlyn.

After a few minutes of observation, she closed the safe once again. She straightened the office out once more, making sure everything was as Tommy originally left it, before closing the door and leaving for the backyard terrace. There was a small secluded area there, where no one went — she'd discovered it during one of her explorations of the mansion. There were no bugs within the room, or cameras, and no windows for an eavesdropper. It was the perfect place for her to conduct her business with everyone else none the wiser.

Tapping a single contact on her phone, Isabel's smile took a nasty tint, completely unlike the bashful gaze she set upon Tommy earlier that morning. "He's taken the ring out of storage. It's only a matter of time before he proposes to me."

"Good. Are you sure he's completely in love with you? That the Lance woman is longer on his mind?"

"He's positively smitten with me. And as for Lance, he hasn't talked about her in months."

"Wonderful. I will send someone to meet with you in a few days to discuss the next phase of the plan."
Cisco Ramon opened his eyes and blinked.

"Better, Cisquito?" Hartley Rathaway drawled, placing the glasses on the side.

"Kinda?" Cisco said, gesturing so with his hand. "These vibes I'm getting are still a little unstable; I'm really having issues trying to filter the information I get from them into something useful."

"Well, that's your problem, not a tech problem, so you're on your own for that." Hartley stated bluntly, before turning to leave.

Cisco watched him go, annoyed. "Dick." He muttered. He turned to Barry. "Why the hell did you hire him again?"

Barry shrugged. "I need more employees besides you, Caitlin, Stein, and Ronnie. He's smart and he knows my secret identity. Plus, he hasn't done anything for me to even remotely consider killing him."

"I'm still disturbed by the fact that you and your friends still consider killing as a viable option."

"Cisco, if this were a perfect world, I'd agree with you." Barry sighed. "Despite how it looks sometimes, none of us actually enjoy killing. But this isn't a perfect world, and there are people out there where killing is the only option. We're not going to condemn the world by holding up some unrealistic ideal."

Cisco looked down. Barry let out another sigh, then put on a comforting smile, placing a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"I'm not saying you have to be like me. I only became a killer because I had to, and while I didn't like it at first, I've come to accept that it's a part of me that will never quite go away. I'm just asking that, when I do have to make that choice, you understand."

The hero-in-training looked up at that, and gave a tentative smile. "I think I can do that."

Barry smiled back. "Thank you."

Cisco's smile faded away. Having known Barry for over a year now, there were still things he hadn't quite deciphered about his friend. But he knew him well enough to know there was something that wasn't quite right with him. He had a feeling as to what it was.

"Barry, this might be a bit personal but... are you and Iris still not talking?"

The speedster paused, and his smile turned decidedly fake at that. "She at least says hi to me when I see her. That's something, right?"

Iris blinked as a takeout bag landed on her desk. She turned away from her typing to look at the perpetrator — her boyfriend, Eddie Thawne.

"Hey babe." Eddie grinned, leaning in for a kiss.

His girlfriend kissed back, chastely. "Hey yourself. Big Belly Burger?"
Eddie gave her a coy look. "Can't mess with the classics."

"So, I was thinking — I know our date night is usually Friday, but this Thursday we get off of work early, so I was thinking we have our date then and you can stay over for the night." And tomorrow, went unsaid.

Iris stopped chewing her burger, swallowing awkwardly before offering a shaky smile. "Sorry, babe, but Dad and I have our own dinner with Wally and Mom that night. Family only."

Eddie stared at her, perhaps wondering why he wasn't considered family already, before giving an understanding nod. "Okay. We still on for Friday?"

"Of course."

"Then that's good enough for me."

They finished the rest of the meal in silence. Eddie, in charge of investigating another potential metahuman criminal — a serial killer who broke his victim's necks — gave her another kiss goodbye before heading up to meet with his partner for the investigation, a bubbly newbie by the name of Patty Spivot. Iris watched him go, let out a small breath of relief when she watched him disappear around the corner.

"You know, you didn't tell him Barry was going to be there."

Iris jumped slightly, then turned around to glare at her father. Joe, for his part, was unapologetic, opting to instead take Eddie's seat. He gave his daughter a searching look.

"Well?"

"I don't see how that matters." Iris looked away. "Barry's family. It was implied. Eddie would understand that."

"But you still didn't tell him. It's not like he would mind — you and Barry don't hang out anymore." And boy, wasn't Eddie happy when he realized that.

"So, what?"

Joe let out a tiny groan, rubbing his temples. He was so done with his daughter right now. "Iris, you're avoiding him."

"What's between Barry and I—"

"Not Barry, Iris. Eddie."

Iris whipped around. "What do you mean?"

"Baby, the dinner is an if-thing and you know it. We're still not sure if Francine and Wally can make it Thursday. You could've mentioned this to Eddie, but you didn't. Not only that, you've deflected any attempt he's made to invite you to his apartment — don't look at me like that, he lets things slip out sometimes, just because I don't want to hear it doesn't mean it works — and now you won't tell him that your best friend who you're on the outs with is also gonna be there. What's going on?"

Iris stared at him, unable to say anything. What was she supposed to say? That she wanted to minimize interactions between Eddie and Barry as much as possible because Eddie still hated the Flash? Of course, she couldn't say that, and it wasn't even the complete truth. The truth was, she
wasn't sure about their relationship anymore. She cared for Eddie, loved him even, but the spark from their first go-around just wasn't there.

At first it was good — great even — but there was this wall between them that she'd only begun to notice when she wasn't blinded by the idea of "first love". A wall that, she'd realized, had always been there, in different forms. Eddie's obsessive hatred of the Flash was the first sign, and even after her ultimatum, she could tell he had never been able to let it go. She could see it every time she saw him watching the news. That deep, all-consuming fire in his blue eyes darkened every time the Flash's name coincided with praise.

Then there was Barry. Iris had never said to anyone what happened between them, but everyone could see the tension. Eddie had played the part of the concerned boyfriend, kind and comforting, but she could sense the glee emanating from him. He was happy Barry and her weren't talking. At the time she had been grateful for his support, but now, with perspective, she was alarmed. How could he be happy that she and her best friend were acting like strangers to each other? She knew he didn't like Barry, but that much?

And then there was Barry being the Flash. As conflicted as she was, she still wasn't hesitating to protect her best friend by keeping this secret from her boyfriend. While telling Eddie might finally help him resolve his issues over the Flash (or possibly make the situation worse), she would never throw Barry under the bus like that. He was her best friend. He would always be her best friend.

All these thoughts passed through Iris' mind at lightning speed, but she knew she couldn't voice them. Not now, possibly not ever. But she could voice something of the truth.

"I'm… not ready to take it to the next level." She confessed.

Joe gave her unamused look. "Baby, he asked you to move in with him months ago. Almost a year ago, in fact."

"Hey, we weren't together at the time!" Iris defended her actions.

"But you were for several months beforehand. Relationships go at their own pace, but this one doesn't seem to be going anywhere at all." Joe pointed out. "Iris, I know I shouldn't be meddling in your relationships like this, but I care about Eddie. He's my partner. And while you're my daughter, I can't ignore the fact that you're basically stringing him along. If you love him and you're sure, you have to be willing to take the plunge. Otherwise, you need him to let go before one of you does something you'll regret."

Iris' expression saddened, and she averted her eyes downward. She knew he was right.

Joe took her hand, rubbing comforting circles into the palm.

"Just think about it, alright?"

Barry twitched.

The giggling didn't stop.

He twitched some more.

"You don't like teenagers." Jefferson observed, idly taking a bite of his hot dog. They were having a day out at the park, taking a walk. Barry desperately needed a break from the lab, and Jefferson was in town for some sort of educational conference.
"No. What I don't like, is giggling, lovesick teenage girls. You try having Hunter Zolomon for two semesters straight, where everyone with ovaries drool over him."

Jefferson gave him a look. It made him look like Joe. "Barry, I'm the principal of a high school. I've been dealing with lovesick teenage girls for years."

"Yeah, but he's suspicious. I don't like him."

"Then why are you in his class?"

Barry pouted. "He's also a great teacher. His homework is constructive and he doesn't call on me often."

"That is a remarkably petty reason to stay with a teacher you don't like and are suspicious of." Jefferson deadpanned.

Barry opened his mouth to argue back—

"Hey, look!"

They looked. Up in the sky, there was streak of smoke and fire, like a crashing plane.

Or at least it did, until it blasted away the table right next to them.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, Act I is going to be the Dominators. It's going to be fourteen chapters, with the last one being Chapter 77.

As for what's going on, it's been six months since Black Canary has joined the Justice League. Secretly, they and the world's governments have been preparing for the invasion. This means that our lovable vigilantes have been traveling to each other's cities often, under the guise of work. It's been determined that the three most likely targets are going to be Starling, Hub, and Central, since that's where the biggest threats are (Supergirl, Martian Manhunter, and the Flash + metahumans).

As far as personal matters go, Lauriver and Merbel (I just made that up) are both going strong, though one half of Merbel still refuses to talk with Lauriver. Nyssa is no longer in Starling City, having departed to continue evading Talia's forces after she deemed Laurel's training complete. She will be appearing in this act, however, in a cameo or two.

Iris and Eddie have hit a bit of rough patch, though they're both refusing to acknowledge it for different reasons. Barry and Iris' reconciliation has been slow going too. Then there's the situation with Iris' feelings for Barry, which she hasn't realized yet — such as the fact that she didn't hesitate to choose Barry over Eddie when it came to the Flash situation.

It's a right mess, and it's going to get messier.

In other news, Emily Bett Rickards isn't going to be in the last season of Arrow. All the best to her, but to be honest, I'm glad I won't have to see Felicity for those last 8-10
episodes. They also made Black Siren Black Canary finally, so yay!

Finally, the biggest news: I saw Avengers: Endgame. I won't spoil it for anybody (and anyone else's attempts to spoil it for those who haven't seen it will be deleted without remorse), but it's amazing. Like, the perfect finale without being an actual, true finale. It definitely deserved breaking all those records.

Woo. I had a lot to say. Ta Ta everyone!

The contest is still on. Submit your entries either on Tumblr or via link through comments/reviews!

Don't forget to update the TV Tropes Page! Check the Tumblr for news! All links are on the first and last chapters of the AO3 version!
Chapter Summary

Flash, Firestorm, and Black Lightning try to repel the Dominators’ first attack. Elsewhere, Isabel receives her new task.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 65: The Invasion Begins

"Duck!"

Barry and Jefferson ducked. Behind them, another table exploded. Firestorm, wreathed in flames, flew in above them and countered the shots, trying to provide cover for the fleeing populace.

"Are they all gone yet?" Jefferson whispered. Barry looked around, eyes sharp.

"Just about." He whispered back. "Firestorm should be able to hold out until then."

As if to prove him wrong, one of the Dominators made another shot at Firestorm. He dodged it — only to fly into another volley from the other Dominators present. It took all the skill hours of flight training had blessed him with to dodge.

"Never mind." Barry winced. He took another glance at the surrounding vicinity. Empty.

Without warning, he grabbed Jefferson and ran off to S.T.A.R. Labs as quickly as possible. With his lightning speed, he switched their civvies for their suits, before returning to their original location. While Black Lightning tried to reorient himself, Flash took action, charging at one of the Dominators. He ducked under another energy blast before using his momentum to kick the alien in the chest. They went flying, headfirst into a nearby tree — which promptly fell over it, crushing its body.

Behind him, another Dominator made to swipe at him from the back, only to be blasted off by Black Lightning's electricity. Before it could get up, it found itself stabbed in the head by one of the Flash's knives. Firestorm, now with more breathing room, navigated himself around a smaller volley of energy blasts before dashing another.

The remaining Dominators (two in total — a small scouting force, most likely), now outnumbered, evidently thought caution was preferable to rash bravery, because now they were fleeing back to their ship. Two knives to the neck stopped them, and they crumpled into a pair of dead heaps.

"That was surprisingly easy." Firestorm commented, before scowling. "You know that we had it in the bag! Yes, we did! Look, man, I…"

Black Lightning and Flash stared at the scene, before shrugging and turning to each other. "A.R.G.U.S.?" Lightning suggested.

"A.R.G.U.S." Flash agreed, before re-configuring his comms to the appropriate frequency.
"Everyone better buckle up. The Invasion has begun."

"Sir, we have received a report from our Central City base that Justice League members Flash and Black Lightning, along with their associate Firestorm, have intercepted a Dominator scouting ship that landed in Central City."

Maseo Yamashiro was careful to keep the shock and alarm off his face, and turned to the reporting agent. "Were they victorious?"

"Yes, sir. Director Waller has already directed a cleanup crew to the scene to collect the bodies and the ship. Per her instructions, the Invasion Protocol is now in effect."

"Very well then. Contact all A.R.G.U.S. agents and inform them of this development. Have them liaise with the appropriate governments, as previously instructed."

"Sir." The agent nodded, and turned to relay his instructions.

Once she was gone, Maseo slumped into his chair and rubbed his temples. The Invasion Protocol had been created several years prior during A.R.G.U.S.’s inception, after extraterrestrial beings were confirmed to exist. The protocol had been modified several times since then, due to the recent increase in metahuman activity in the wake of S.T.A.R. Labs' Particle Accelerator exploding and the formation of the Justice League. Once it was confirmed that the Dominators’ invasion was imminent, the protocol had been put into standby, to be put in effect in a moment's notice.

The protocol in itself was simple. After aliens were confirmed to exist in the 1950s, a secret council had been held between the governments of the world to discuss the possibility of an extraterrestrial threat. It was decided that every government would set aside money in preparation for such a threat, left untouched under any and all circumstances except in the event of an alien invasion. Hidden in line items and shell companies, that money would be put into use to build weapons to arm both military and law enforcement on every level to defend the civilian population from the invading force.

Smith had originally been in charge of that division of the government, but Amanda worked her magic and had it reassigned to A.R.G.U.S. instead. Once the transmission regarding the invasion was received, the money was immediately put to use in constructing the weapons needed to combat the Dominators. Several scientific constitutions were consulted in this endeavor, including S.T.A.R. Labs, via small teams that had been stringently verified by A.R.G.U.S. Construction was then done in hidden factories in the most remote corners of the world, whose contents were then gradually ferried to their designated cities in small bursts.

Once they neared the projected time frame of the Invasion, A.R.G.U.S. dispatched several of their agents to large population centers to act as liasons to the local government. Among them included members of Task Force X. Even Maseo’s own wife Tatsu had joined him in preparation for the upcoming invasion, even daring to take out her family blade: the Soultaker Sword.

The Justice League, meanwhile, were concentrated in two different cities: Starling and Central. Those two cities were the most likely to be attacked first by the scouting forces and anything else the Dominators would try to throw at them to take out the planet’s most powerful protectors, Supergirl and Central’s collective metahuman population, respectively. When the actual full-scale invasion started, however, they would be more spread out to act as rallying points for the populace.

"Sir!" Maseo turned to see that another agent was running at him, a harried look on his face. "The satellites have sensed another ship breaking the atmosphere!"
Isabel Rochev kept her head down as she navigated through the backstreets of the Glades. While the world was still reeling in shock about the recent alien attack in Central City, she had taken the opportunity to slip out of work to meet with Talia's contact, giving Tommy an excuse of having to survey a possible location they could buy and use for some sort of outreach center to prop up their PR. He bought it, just like he bought everything she said, only reminding her to stay safe.

She couldn't help but smile. Tommy, admittedly, was starting to grow on her. Handsome, rich, eager to please, so very oblivious to her manipulations and good in the sack, too. He was everything she wanted in a husband when she had taken that internship at Queen Consolidated all those fateful years ago. And, now that he had fallen out with the Queens, she could move forward with Talia's plan to destroy them without him trying to stop her. When it was all said and done, she would have to ask Talia to keep him alive; even with his family's spotty reputation, he'd make the perfect trophy husband.

Isabel perked up when she finally saw Talia's contact. The back of his jacket had a demon emblazoned on the back, just like her boss said. She reached out to touch his shoulder, and when he turned around, she couldn't help but blush a bit. He was a handsome young man around her age, with dark brunette hair and some of the brightest blue eyes she had ever seen.

"Isabel Rochev." He said, a cheeky grin on his face.

"Are you from the shadows?" She prompted. That was the phrase she had been instructed to use.

"Cast by the demon." He nodded, and she allowed herself to relax. "Come with me. I know somewhere we can talk in private."

He took her to a small, out-of-the-way, dimly lit bar. There were no occupants besides the bartender, who was payed extra alongside their drinks to give them a private room. Isabel sat down, nursing a glass of vodka, while her companion opted for a virgin drink. He had been taught not to indulge in alcohol while on business, he explained.

"Mind if I have your name?" Isabel asked after a few minutes of silence.

The man smirked. "Sure. You can call me Adrian Chase."

"Well then, Adrian, what do you need to know?" A flirtatious smile played on Isabel's lips, one that Adrian couldn't help but return.

The next hour was spent discussing Isabel's time in Starling City, particularly the relationship between Tommy and his former social circle. Isabel took particular glee in explaining why Tommy had fallen out with the Queens; the Lance woman he had feelings for apparently never returned them, preferring Oliver Queen, Tommy's now-former best friend. It had been easy to turn his attentions to Isabel instead, especially with his father out of the picture. Merlyn had done them quite a favor.

But her greatest triumph was finding Rebecca Merlyn's diamond engagement ring in his personal safe. That engagement ring had been in storage in one of the Merlyn family's many accounts ever since the death of the woman herself. Apparently, neither Merlyn could bear to look at it in the wake of her passing, and hadn't bothered to move it once in the twenty years since then, not even after the Undertaking. Tommy having it in his personal safe could only mean one thing — he was planning on asking her to marry him.
Adrian looked pleased by that development, and after their drinks were done, suggested they go somewhere to celebrate. Noticing the underlying implications of his request, Isabel was eager to comply. Yes, Tommy was great in bed, but something told Isabel that Adrian would be even better.

They stepped outside, bidding farewell to the bartender. After walking a little bit away, Adrian stopped, and Isabel stopped with him, confused.

"You know, this place used to be a clinic." He noted.

"Really?" Isabel said, though she really didn't care. She just wanted him to hurry up already with whatever he wanted to say so they could get to the fun stuff.

"Yeah. It was shut down after the original proprietor was murdered in broad daylight. Her husband refused to help any of the people here in the Glades, the people who allowed her to bleed out on the pavement. Sad story, really."

"How interesting. Look, are we gonna go or—" Isabel stopped, an epiphany striking her at the worst possible moment. Adrian's words resonated in her mind, the story achingly familiar.

She tried to run, but was too late — a gun materialized from out of nowhere in Adrian's hand, and then there was a click!

There was a burst of pain and then nothing but numbness. Isabel slowly moved her arm to her stomach, feeling the sticky ooze of her own blood on her hand. She collapsed onto her back, trying to focus her sight, trying to move.

Dimly, she could hear Adrian continuing to speak.

"...Talia would like to thank you for your hard work, Isabel. Don't worry, everything is going according to plan, and your death won't be in vain. We will fulfill our deal with you to bring down the Queens once we have completed our own objectives. Your life, meanwhile, is a necessary sacrifice to achieve that. Take comfort in that."

Isabel tried to speak, but the blood was bubbling up in her throat. It wouldn't be long until… until…

Adrian watched dispassionately as the life faded away from the woman's eyes. Mission complete. Now he needed to take care of the bartender and remove any possible DNA he may have left behind. Perhaps stage a scene so no one could suspect this was a targeted hit. That would be counterproductive to the objective they were trying to reach.

A blast of strong wind hit him in the face, and he looked up. At the sight of the descending alien ship, much larger than the one seen in Central earlier, he couldn't help but whistle, impressed.

"How lucky."

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter in the books. A little short, but this was the logical endpoint, at least for me. Sorry for the wait, I've been busy with real life right now.

As for this — yes, Isabel is dead. Yes, that was the exact same spot where Rebecca
Merlyn was killed, in the exact same way (an unfortunate case of bullet in the gut). To top it off, Isabel even has a superficial resemblance to Rebecca. I won't spoil the rest of Talia's plan, but you can probably guess at least some of it at this point.

As for Adrian, he's an official member of the League of Shadows in this continuity and Talia's right-hand man. I won't say why, since it'll be in the second act.

The contest is still on. Submit your entries either on Tumblr or via link through comments/reviews!

Don't forget to update the TV Tropes Page! Check the Tumblr for news! All links are on the first and last chapters of the AO3 version!
Chapter Summary

The Dominators attack Starling City. The world prepares. Tommy waits for Isabel.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 66: Inversion

"Green Arrow and Black Canary are en route." Green Arrow commed to the rest of his team, as he and Black Canary sped through the streets of Starling City on his motorcycle.

"Supergirl and Vixen are in position." Vixen answered back.

"What's the situation?" Canary asked, also activating her comm.

There was a brief amount of static, and then… "Nothing so far." Vixen reported. "The ship is just floating there."

"Maintain your position, and do not engage unless they attack first. It's most likely a trap." Arrow ordered.

"Understood. Vixen out."

As the telltale static of a cut connection rang through their ears, Canary leaned over a bit closer to her partner's ear. "What do you think they're planning?"

"Nothing good." Arrow growled back. "That ship is here for a reason. What that reason is, I'm sure we're not going to like."

The pair of vigilantes arrived to the ship's site — a field just outside of Starling City. Both Supergirl and Vixen were already present, standing a little way's off from the ship itself, prepared to move if it decided to attack the city. Green Arrow parked his motorcycle next to them, but remain seated, while Black Canary got off and drew her new tonfas, specially-designed by Barry Allen and Cisco Ramon with a small device that allowed her to run an electric current through them. Combined with some special gloves, they would make effective weapons against the Dominator threat.

"Nothing yet?" Arrow asked Vixen, who shook her head.

Canary frowned. "What are they waiting for?"

As if to answer her question, the ship unleashed a beam onto the ground below. The vigilantes immediately prepared themselves for combat, only to falter slightly when they saw that all the beam did was float down some kind of device — a tall, metallic structure with a red, glowing orb in the center. The ship then flew off, disappearing from view.

Vixen blinked. "What just happened? Weren't they here to fight?"
"I guess not." Supergirl shrugged. "I wonder what kind of device that is."

"Something dangerous." Arrow grunted. "No one goes near it for now. I'll call in A.R.G.U.S. and they can bring in some special equipment to move it."

Before he could, however, a beam shot out of the device, hitting Supergirl. Vixen and Black Canary jumped back, while Green Arrow swung on the back of his motorcycle, ready to let it rip at a moment's notice. "Supergirl!"

Supergirl didn't reply. Instead, she glared at them all silently, then fired her heat vision. Green Arrow barely managed to dodge by driving out of the way, while Vixen and Black Canary dived to the side.

"What the—Kara! What are you doing?" Canary demanded, briefly slipping into using her teammate's civilian name. Instead of answering, she shot another blast of heat vision, flying high up into the sky. Canary ducked, rolling out of the way.

After seeing that, Vixen didn't hesitate. Pressing two fingers to her totem, the silhouette of hawk appeared around her. Using her arms to simulate the wings, she flew upwards higher than even Supergirl, then allowed herself to drop, catching the Kryptonian unaware from behind. She clutched her friend into a bear hug, the silhouette of an anaconda wrapping around her.

As Supergirl struggled for a bit, Canary turned to Arrow. "Do you think it's the device?"

Arrow nodded. "Has to be. It must be one of those mind control devices that J'onn spoke about." Without another word, he notched one of his explosive arrows and fired. The arrow embedding itself into the red core before blowing, but when the smoke cleared, there was no damage, much to both Canary and Arrow's horror.

A second later, Vixen landed (read: thrown) onto the ground next to them, worse for wear with some faint bruises on her. Supergirl made another swipe for the three of them, but Arrow firing another arrow, this time with a green arrowhead, stopped her. It pierced her shoulder, causing her to collapse to the ground in pain.

Canary gasped. "Did you use a Kryptonite arrow?"

"Yes." Arrow growled, though it wasn't directed at her. "It was precaution in case she was ever put under some kind of mind control and we needed to stop her before she did too much damage. This definitely falls under that category."

"It won't... hold her... for long..." Vixen stilted out.

"She's right." Arrow agreed. "We need to do something about the device."

Knowing the severity of the situation, Black Canary looked down at her tonfa, then at the metal structure. Making a quick decision, she flicked on the electrifier on one of the tonfa and rushed towards the device. From behind her, Supergirl had finally gotten the Kryptonite arrow out of her body and was about to charge her until Vixen, with a burst of adrenaline, bum-rushed her, this time with the projection of a gorilla around her. Green Arrow readied another Kryptonite arrow, just in case.

Once she arrived to the device, Canary jammed her electric tonfa into one of the metal junctures, making sure that the electrifier was on its highest setting. Noticing the current beginning to run through the metal, she quickly ran away, plugging her ears.
"GET DOWN!" She screamed to her teammates.

Arrow followed her instructions immediately. Supergirl threw Vixen off her and was about to charge at Canary again, when the device exploded. The electric current from Black Canary’s tonfas had supercharged the energy cell inside, overheating it and causing it to blow. Almost immediately afterwards, Supergirl collapsed to her knees, grabbing her head.

"What happened?" She asked groggily.

"How did you all not die?" Kara demanded. She was seated in one of the infirmary rooms, on a bed. In front of her was J'onn, who had his hands on her temples, scanning her mind to make sure there was no lingering taint of the mind control used on her.

After the incident with the ship in Starling, everyone had forgone the Foundry for the local A.R.G.U.S. base. Unlike the rest of the Justice League, J'onn had not been deployed to Central or to Starling, remaining in Hub City or in the A.R.G.U.S. bases, helping parse through the Dominators' transmissions. He wasn't quite ready to face the destroyers of his people quite yet, despite being the planet’s foremost expert on them. Once he had been made aware of what happened to Kara, he had insisted on checking her over just in case they had implanted any suggestions or triggers in her mind.

"I honestly don't know." Oliver admitted. "You should've been able to kill us instantly. Instead, for whatever reason, you were fighting far less than your full capacity; it almost seemed as if you didn't know how to use your own body."

"When the Dominators used such devices against my people," Everyone, startled, turned to J'onn, who was still scanning Kara's mind, "they would activate the device themselves by touching the orb in the center. The Dominators are telepathic like I am, but they cannot control another's mind by themselves. They need the devices they designed as an intermediary; that is, the device controls the mind while the Dominators use their own abilities to amplify its effects."

Laurel blinked. "There wasn't a Dominator to activate the device. It did that on its own. Does that mean that they didn't have full control over Kara's mind?"

"Possibly. Mind control comes in many different forms. Implanting suggestions and triggers, modifying or inverting a person's state of mind, but it seems the Dominators prefer the crude approach of overriding a person's thought processes entirely. Expedient, but if not done right you hamper the person's ability to act in whatever fashion you wish for them to act in an effective manner."

Mari raised an eyebrow. "How so?"

J'onn shrugged. "When you override a person's thought processes, they can't act on their own. You need to give them orders, as if you were playing a video game. And if you override their thought processes to the point that they can't even move without you giving orders, that's even worse — you have to manipulate them like they were puppets on a string, and we all know that puppets aren't for much movement beyond being jerked around. By the looks of it, the lack of a Dominator's presence meant Kara got the latter option, with the machine holding the strings. And no matter how advanced a machine is —"

"—it's still a machine." Oliver finished for him, eyes narrowed. "Why didn't they leave someone behind to man it for them? Why just the device? And why only Kara? They could've easily had someone activate it and mind control all of us before having the ship beam them away."
"Perhaps it was a distraction?" Mari suggested, but Laurel shook her head.

"Maybe, but if that were the case they would've done a better job with it. Even though it was Kara, we subdued her fast enough that anything they could've tried during that time frame we would've been able to react to immediately." The lawyer explained.

Kara frowned. "Then what other reason could there be?"

"Reconnaissance." Oliver snapped his fingers, a figurative light bulb over his head. "From the transcriptions of the most recent intercepted transmissions, while they've determined that Earth has metahumans and alien refugees, they've only been able to identify them as possible threats. They want to see who else might pose threat against their plan, even if they don't have anywhere near the amount of power you three have."

Laurel's eyes widened in realization. "They were looking for baseline humans that might resist, those who would know more than others. People that would rally the rest of the population into standing next to metahumans and alien refugees to resist the oncoming invasion." She turned to her boyfriend, making deliberate eye contact with him. The message was simple: They were looking for us.

Oliver grimly nodded. "We need to send word to Amanda. We'll have to continue monitoring the transmissions, but I think this confirms our worst fear: the Dominators are planning a worldwide invasion, not just on Starling or Central or even the United States. The rest of the planet needs to prepare."

"Hello, people of the world. We are the Department of Extraterrestrial Operations, a worldwide organization dedicated regulating the activities of extraterrestrial beings, better known as 'aliens', here on Earth."

"As you are no doubt aware, there have been two attacks on the west coast of the United States in the last twenty-four hours; the first on Central City, and the second on Starling City. These attacks were performed by a race of alien invaders called the Dominators, who have wreaked chaos and destruction across countless planets, eliminating any races who are advanced enough to be considered a threat to them."

"We first learned about them from a survivor of one their purges. You might know of him as the Martian Manhunter, a member of the Justice League and the vigilante protector of Hub City. After the destruction of Mars, Martian Manhunter managed to escape here to Earth, and made a new life here, with us humans. While he grew increasingly fond of us and his new home here on Earth, he could never shake the feeling that the Dominators would come here as our society continued to advance."

"As such, he revealed his existence to us and warned us of this threat. Since then, we have secretly and diligently prepared for this day, and it seems to have come. All the governments of the world have already been informed of the situation, and the decision is unanimous — we, the human race, and others that have made this planet their home, are at war."

"As of right now, all law enforcement and military around the world have officially been drafted. Trucks containing hardware specifically designed to combat the Dominators are being shuttled to every major population center in the world. We are sending our agents to give you a crash course in their use, along with combat exercises to prepare."

The message continued from there, detailing logistics of the newly created worldwide-spanning army, before continuing on to the civilian populace's own responsibilities. Barry tapped his fingers
against the railing of the Cortex’s control center, humming thoughtfully. Next to him, Jefferson watched with rapt attention.

"The best lies really are mixed with truth." He muttered thoughtfully. "Though creating another alphabet agency to limit A.R.G.U.S.’s exposure is next level."

Barry shrugged. "Theatricality is deception. It’s why the best acting performances are those that come from the soul."

"Do you think this will work?"

"Maybe. We do need the numbers, and it’s better than having unprepared screaming civilians around hampering our efforts to combat the Dominators. I’m just worried about what comes afterwards."

Jefferson adopted a flat look. "Ah, yes. The recent injection of military hardware onto the streets."

"Yeah, there’s no way that’s not going to haunt us when this is over." Barry winced.

**Ring! Ring!**

"I think that’s you." Jefferson noted, looking over his own phone and finding it unresponsive.

Barry sighed, then took his phone out, clicking the call button without even bothering to glance at the caller ID. "This is Barry Allen. I’m pretty sure you shouldn’t be talking to me right now and instead should be watching the TV. Alien invasion and all that."

"**How long have you known?**"

At the sound of that familiar voice, Barry immediately stood straight, slightly stunned.

"Iris?"

"Yes, Barry, Iris." Iris snarked into her phone. After the announcement began and mentioned the Martian Manhunter, she had snuck away and hid herself into a secluded room. Thankfully, she still had that anti-eavesdropping technology from the Amunet case, preventing the rest of precinct (most notably Eddie), from listening in. "How long has the Justice League known about the invasion?"

"**What makes you think we knew?**"

"Other than the fact that Martian Manhunter is one of your members?" She pointed out snidely. "You guys went into a recruitment drive all of a sudden despite having shown no interest in new members during your debut, starting with Black Lightning and ending with Laurel — yes, Barry, I know Black Canary is Laurel, once she and Oliver went public with their relationship it wasn't hard to figure out — and after that you guys became far more active with your team-ups. It's not like you guys didn't team up often before, but now it seems the seven of you unite and stop some city-wide threat in a different corner of the world every week, even when it could be handled by just two or three of you. It's like you all were training for something."

"Not to mention, several members of the Justice League were present at both attacks, as if they were expecting it. That cannot be a coincidence, because there is no such thing as coincidences when it comes to you guys. So, tell me — how long have you guys known about this invasion?"

There was a period of silence on the other end of the line, finally broken by Barry's amused laughter.

"**You’re so smart, Iris — and correct. We’ve known about the upcoming invasion for about nine**
Iris blinked. "Great. That's great. That's very reassuring." She responded, taking a deep breath.

"… You plan on fighting, don't you?"

"I am in law enforcement Barry, and they'll need everyone they can get. It's just… it's a lot to take in."

"I understand completely. We've been preparing for this for months and even now, I still have some doubts." He paused. "We'll just have to do our best, won't we?"

"Yeah. And we will." Iris sighed, then allowed a tentative smile to form on her face. "Good luck out there, Barry."

"… Good luck to you too, Iris."

"The world has gotten so weird these last two years." Tommy commented to himself as the announcement continued to play on the television. He let out a huff, looking at the empty bedside to his left, before looking down at his phone. Where was Isabel? He had left numerous messages already, and she wasn't answering. It couldn't take that long to check out a derelict building in the worst part of town. Perhaps something had come up at the office?

He looked back at the TV. The channel was replaying the announcement. Deciding that he had already heard and memorized the important points, Tommy ran down to the kitchen. Most of the staff had gone home for the night, so it was him to sate his appetite. He was rifling through the fridge for a soda, having already grabbed a bag of popcorn kernels from the pantry, when he heard the telltale sound of the doorbell. Grabbing the soda and laying it next to the popcorn on the kitchen countertop, he walked to the front door as the doorbell continued to ring.

He opened it… and adopted a neutral look. "Detective Lance. Detective Hilton."

An oddly-morose Quentin gulped slightly, while a similar-looking Hilton simply nodded. "Tommy." The father of his former friend/crush said hesitantly.

"If this is about my father—" Tommy began, looking slightly annoyed.

"No." Quentin interrupted him. "No, this isn't about your father, Tommy."

Tommy frowned. "Then what is this about?"

The detectives exchanged looks.

The soda and popcorn were left forgotten for the rest of the night. When the maids arrived, one of them tossed both into the trash.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Tommy. And yes, I wrote that scene to deliberately mirror the one where Malcolm
found out Rebecca was dead. The parallels continue.

In other news, the D.E.O. does exist — as a cover for A.R.G.U.S. Though, after this, chances are it will be made real as another part of the organization. Who knows?

As for the reconnaissance thing, it's deliberate. In canon, the Dominators singled out Barry for creating Flashpoint. However, Barry did not create Flashpoint in this timeline (and never will), so other than Kara and J'onn, they don't know anyone else who would really stand out as a threat. Those attacks were basically to suss out the Justice League and determine which of them were the 'weak links', so to speak.

The contest is still on. Submit your entries either on Tumblr or via link through comments/reviews!

Don't forget to update the TV Tropes Page! Check the Tumblr for news! All links are on the first and last chapters of the AO3 version!
When Tommy Merlyn was eight years old, his mother died.

He remembered that night vividly. His father had come into his room, face blank and unseeing, the news passing through his lips in a robotic, detached manner. Malcolm Merlyn remained in that state for the next two weeks, all the way through the funeral, with his phone clutched tightly in his hands. Tommy would see him listen to it whenever his father thought himself to be alone, and it wasn't until he was older that he would understand why.

When the funeral came, Malcolm did not cry. He just existed. Only the occasional touch from his parents' closest friends, Robert and Moira Queen, did he ever show a hint of life. Tommy saw and saw and when his father left not long after, he cried because it was then he realized that he had not lost one parent, but two. And when his father came back, he changed, and it would be a long time before Tommy learned how much.

It was fine, he thought. I already have another father. During the two years Malcolm was gone, Tommy stayed with the Queens. While they would never quite fill the hole their friends left behind, they still found their own places in his heart regardless. Alongside Oliver Queen, Tommy's own best friend, their friends Laurel and Sara Lance and, nine months later, baby Thea Queen, Tommy began to thrive again. When Malcolm returned, he couldn't be what his son had needed, and that was fine, because Tommy didn't need him, not anymore. He had already moved on.

And then Oliver died.

Tommy hardly remembers the days that followed, mostly because he didn't want to remember them. Those had been the darkest days of his life. His family and friends had all made efforts to try and pull him out of his grief, but Tommy couldn't, wouldn't, because losing Oliver was like losing a brother and there wasn't a time in his life where he could ever imagine a life without his closest friend. They were supposed to graduate high school together, college (when they finally got around to actually going to class), be the best men at each other's weddings, be the godparents to each other's kids... they were supposed to do everything together.

Ironically, it was the father that had once abandoned him that pulled him out of that rut. Cutting him off was a cold and harsh move, but it forced Tommy to finally grow up. He got rid of the drugs, reconnected with his friends, finished college and finally got a job at the family company. He worked his way up the ladder to be one of the top executives, the clear successor to his father's then-untarnished legacy. It was during this time that he and Malcolm reconnected — enough to be devastated when the truth finally came out. Because even the loss of Oliver had not been enough for him to comprehend the loss his father felt the day his mother died, the anger and the rage at the
world, all centered onto one place.

Even at his lowest points since then, Tommy didn't believe he would ever understand.

At least, not until he saw Isabel Rochev's cold body on a metal slab.

A small crowd surrounded the grave site that now marked the new home of Isabel Rochev's body. Inch-by-inch, the finely-crafted casket was lowered into the rectangular hole below, the largest, most extravagant wreath of flowers centered on the lid. Tommy had spared no expense for his ill-fated lover's final resting place, his last gift to her before she left his life for good. Accompanied with the wake, the long, lavish funeral service, and a prime spot in Starling City's most lucrative cemetery, it was a fitting send-off for the would-be monarch of one of Starling's two most prominent families. Isabel, were she alive, would be pleased to see such splendor in her honor.

Finally, after the casket landed on the bottom of the hole and the final words were said, the crowd gradually dispersed. One of the funeral-goers, Samantha Arias, kept her head down as she slowly walked to her car. She only stopped when she saw a familiar face walking the opposite direction, towards the mourning Tommy. Oliver Queen, and a little bit behind, next to his car, was Laurel Lance.

"Oliver." She said quietly in greeting, catching his attention. "I saw you at the funeral. You were avoiding him."

Oliver shrugged, a little listlessly. "I didn't know how'd he react if I tried to talk to him then. Last thing I wanted to do was cause a scene. But now…"

Sam put a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I get it. I can't say if this is the best idea, but he needs all the support he can possibly get right now." She looked away, and took a deep breath. "I didn't like her, you know. Some might even say I hated her. But regardless of that, I never wanted her to die."

Oliver smiled sadly at her, and returned the comforting gesture. "Of course you didn't, Sam. You're a good person." After a moment or so, he let go, and with an exchange of nods, they parted ways.

The vigilante turned his attentions back to the grave, and he silently made his way down the hill, to Tommy. He waited until he was sure there were no stragglers from the crowd left. If this didn't end well, the last thing they needed were witnesses.

Finally, after the area was empty, Oliver cleared the distance. He opened his mouth to speak. "Tommy—"

"What do you want, Ollie?" Tommy cut him off, his tone flat. His gaze refused to leave the grave.

Oliver took a deep breath. "I came to see you. I'm not going to ask you if you're okay because I know you aren't. I just…"


"No." Oliver shook his head. "No, Tommy. I'm not leaving. The last thing you need to be is alone —"

"So? You're just going to stay here with me? Follow me home? I'll call the cops then and have them put you up on charges. We can make it a long legal battle, it'd be a great way to kill time." Tommy
burst out, laughing bitterly.

"You won't do that. That would be ridiculously petty, and I know that's not who you are."

Tommy smiled grimly. "Ollie, whoever you knew isn't who I am. Not anymore. Now, I suggest you take your girl, a woman who's too much of a coward to face me herself, and beat it, or I really will call the cops. And also, stop inviting me to your shit. You'd think by now you'd get the message."

Oliver stared at him, stunned and aghast at the uncharacteristic callousness. When Tommy refused to waver in his glare, Oliver sighed and held up his hands.

"Fine, whatever you want. Just... just know, that despite how things are between us right now, you'll always be welcome in our home, alright? That me and my family, Laurel and Sara — we're still here for you."

Tommy said nothing, simply turning back to Isabel's grave. Oliver knew it was as close a dismissal as he was going to get, and left.

As he sadly marched back to Laurel and his car, he failed to see a shadow suddenly appear behind one of the taller grave markers.

The car ride back to the Queen Mansion was silent. Oliver, not in the mood to drive, bummed over to shotgun while Laurel took the wheel. He leaned against the car window, mindlessly watching the cemetery disappear and bleed into the gray tone of the city. His city.

"It didn't go well, did it?" Laurel said knowingly, flitting her eyes over to Oliver.

Oliver turned to her, and smiled. It didn't reach his eyes. "He's angry. So very angry. It's scary. For a moment, I thought he hated me."

"He could never hate you, Ollie. Despite everything, you're still his best friend."

"I'm not sure about that, Laurel. At least, not on his end." Oliver closed his eyes. "I can understand why he doesn't want to see me, or talk, and he told me to leave him alone, but I can't do that. I'm scared he'll revert to how he was after his dad was exposed and arrested."

Laurel slowed down the car as they approached a yellow light. "I remember. You gave updates, and it sounded..." she took in a deep breath, "it sounded horrible."

"It was worse than that." Oliver said quietly. "He didn't eat unless it was with us, he shut himself up in his room, barely talked to any of us. He was just there, you know? In some ways, it was a relief when Merlyn Global was cleared. When the news came, it was the first time in a while that we saw any real life in him. We didn't want him to leave after that — we knew that he still wasn't okay — but he was insistent."

"It's why I asked you to visit him as often as you could. I was terrified of leaving him alone for too long; it was already bad enough that he was staying at Merlyn Mansion by himself. After that blowout he had with us, the only reason I didn't try harder in getting some kind of accord from him was because of Isabel. Despite my reservations, she was good for him. At least, it seemed to be the case."

Laurel nodded along. She, of course, had heard about J'onn's observation of Isabel's mind, but like Oliver, she had decided to reserve herself from judgment. Isabel had yet to do anything to indicate she was anything other than a competent businesswoman and Tommy's girlfriend. Combined with
Barry's background check picking up nothing on her, it had been best to leave her alone for now. "And now that Isabel's gone, you think he's at risk again."

"Definitely. Especially considering the similarities between her death and Aunt Rebecca's. There's no way that hasn't been lost on Tommy."

"No doubt." Laurel blew a stray strand of hair out of her face. "Hey, I know we were planning to go to your house, but want to head to the Foundry instead? All this talk about Tommy is clouding my head, and I need to release some pent-up energy."

"Yeah, I could use some training too," Oliver agreed readily, as Laurel changed course.

"Are you sure about this?" Barry asked Amanda candidly as they watched metahuman after metahuman being released from their cells and led through the prison to trucks outside.

"We need all the manpower we can get."

"We also can't trust any of them."

Amanda smirked. "Which is why they'll be getting bombs implanted into their spinal cords to force them into compliance."

"You are a horrible, vile person." Barry stated flatly.

"Why, thank you, Mr. Allen." Amanda replied, the smirk widening. "It's a gift."

Barry shook his head in disgust as the door behind him opened to reveal Kara, who seemed to be scowling at something. That something, upon closer look, was her phone.

"Hey, Barry, did Oliver tell you he was going to be off-grid today?"

The speedster blinked. "No. Why? Can't you reach him?"

Kara shook her head. "I can't. I can't reach Laurel either."

Barry hummed and went to one of the computer consoles, taking out the specially-designed drive that contained his A.I., Gideon. Unbeknownst to most of A.R.G.U.S. and the rest of the world, each member of the League's personal hideout was connected to a shared server, which, in turn, was connected to their respective security systems. These systems were installed with identity verification, keeping track of who entered the respective hideout, including the time of entry and departure.

It had been one of the many suggestions made during one of the Justice League's many brainstorming sessions, in light of the growing metahuman population. The system was designed so that if there were any discrepancies in check-ins (such as, say, two of the same person entering within minutes of each other), the rest of the Justice League would be informed via an alert on their phones.

After going through the necessary identification checkpoints, Barry clicked on the Foundry's log, noting that Oliver and Laurel had entered it only two hours prior. Frowning, he pinged the computer, noting how it pinged back. There were no connection problems, so why weren't they answering Kara's calls? As his final precaution, he hacked into the computer's camera to get a live feed of the room.

He cursed at the sight that greeted him.
"What is it?" Amanda asked, having briefly broken her observation of the departing metahumans to watch Barry at work.

"Oliver and Laurel checked into the Foundry two hours ago, and never left." Barry replied, typing furiously. "But I just checked a live feed of the place, and they're nowhere to be seen. I'm checking the security footage of the last two hours to see what happened."

Another feature of the security system was that the camera on the computers were set to record at all times. The footage was then directed through several intermediary dummy accounts and addresses before being filed away in the Justice League's server, under the strongest encryption that Barry and Cisco could devise. It was a last-ditch security effort, only to be accessed on the possibility that one of their bases were compromised.

After several minutes of typing, Barry finally accessed the security footage for the Foundry. He immediately clicked on today's footage, adjusting the time stamp to match Oliver and Laurel's entry time. He sped through the next two hours, using his super speed to keep up, until…

"Crap."

Laurel let out an 'oof' as she landed on the mat, right on her back. Before she knew it, Oliver was on top of her, fist at the ready. "I give!" She called out, laughing. "I give."

With a smile, Oliver offered her his hand. Laurel took it — and twisted it, throwing her legs over to force him into an armbreaker. Oliver had seen right through her ploy however, immediately lifting his back into a bridge and clasping his hands together to prevent her from completing the hold. With great effort, he skipped up, carrying his opponent with him. Laurel was forced to let go, falling ungracefully onto the padded floor. Spent, she laid there. Oliver knelt next to her heaving body.

"Now do you give?" He asked, cheekily.

"Yeah, yeah." Laurel waved him off, trying to catch her breath. "Still can't beat you, huh?"

Oliver sat down, one knee bent. "You'll get there one day, Laurel. To come as far as you have in such a short amount of time is astounding."

The lawyer sat up, blushing slightly at the compliment. She pressed her lips to her boyfriend's cheek. "Thanks, Ollie. If it weren't for you and Nyssa, and Ted too, I would have never gotten as far as I have now."

Oliver's smile widened, and he opened his mouth to reply, but before he could, some sort of strange light fell upon his girlfriend, like an ominous veil. Laurel noticed it as well, and looked up.

"Ollie?" Was all she could get out before she disappeared in some sort of static.

"Laurel!" Oliver cried out, reaching out to where she once was. Realizing she was gone, he immediately rushed towards the computer, where his phone had been placed, but before he could reach it, that same light fell upon him. A second later, he was gone as well, as if he had never been there to begin with.

The moment he got home, Tommy dove for the bottle. His father had a scrumptious collection of wine in one of the cellars of the kitchen, which Tommy had resisted after Malcolm's arrest. Now, however, he didn't bother — only alcohol could numb the pain of everything he had gone through these last few weeks. Not even work, which had been his refuge after Malcolm Merlyn's fall from
grace, could distract him from the insurmountable feeling of loss. No, if anything, it only served as another reminder of the woman he loved.

Isabel was the one who pulled Merlyn Global out of the red, who convinced the Board to back him again, who made him a player in Starling's High Society, who comforted him when Oliver and Laurel's little romance had become too much.

Isabel was the one who helped him live again.

And now she was gone. She was never coming back.

What was the point anymore? No matter how hard he worked, how hard he tried, nothing would ever be able to fill the void she left behind. And even then, even with all of her — their — efforts, the Merlyn name still wasn't respected like it was before everything went to hell. Merely tolerated, at best. It probably never would be again, at least not in this city.

Maybe it was better if he just sold the company. Left this city. Find some other place to start over. Or maybe stay in the mansion. Waste away, all alone. It's not like anyone would care.

"Mr. Merlyn."

Tommy blinked at the sound of such an unfamiliar voice, and turned around. There, sitting on one of the couches of the living room he planned on wallowing in, was a beautiful woman of Middle Eastern descent. Normally, Tommy wouldn't be ashamed of admiring such a figure, especially since he knew he wasn't going to touch, but now, he couldn't find in himself the energy to bother. It felt like a betrayal if he even tried, anyway.

"Who the hell are you and why the hell are you in my house? And how'd you get past my security?" Were they slacking on their jobs? He did hire an entirely new force after his father's arrest, and it took using the greediest firm in the entire city to find people worth hiring.

The woman simply held up a dart. Tommy blinked. "Blow darts? Really?"

"Cliche, perhaps, but effective. Don't worry. None of them are dead. In about four hours, they'll wake up with no memory and no worse for wear."

"Well then, what are you here for?" Tommy asked, throwing himself down onto another couch, adjacent to where the woman was sitting. "Here to kill me? Go ahead. Half this city would gladly throw a party in your honor afterwards. Not like I care anymore anyways."

"No, Mr. Merlyn." The woman shook her head. "I'm here to help you. See, my name is Talia. I was a friend of your girlfriend, Isabel Rochev."

Talia simply looked at him. "I couldn't be seen. I have many enemies, and if any of them saw me at her funeral, you and everyone else that went would've been in danger. In fact, I believe that it's one of these enemies that killed Isabel."

The billionaire scowled. "What do you mean?"

"Your police have already investigated Isabel's murder, yes? Have they found a suspect?"

"Some punk named Simon Morrison was arrested the other day for it. He'll be doing time for a long time if I have my way." Tommy smiled viciously.
Talia blinked, and took out her phone, bringing a picture up to the screen. "Is this him?" It was the picture of a duck-faced young man with short, black hair.

Tommy squinted at the screen and nodded slowly.

"I see." Talia took a deep breath. "That's not Simon Morrison, Tommy."

Her companion froze. "What do you mean, that's not Simon Morrison?" He demanded, angrily.

"That was Derek Sampson, one of Simon Morrison's many lackeys." She pulled up another picture on the screen, this time of a handsome young man with brunette hair and blue eyes. "This is Simon Morrison, though these days he goes by Adrian Chase. He's a big name in the criminal underground, an untouchable terrorist with connections to people very high up in governments across the world. Isabel was one of the people who opposed him, and in return he framed her for an attempted hostile takeover of Stellmoor International. I helped her out of that situation, but I guess he couldn't let his grudge against her go."

Tommy wrung his hands around angrily. "I'll ruin him."

"You can't." Talia stated bluntly, causing him to glare sharply at her. "Even with all the resources at Merlyn Global's disposal, Adrian Chase is far beyond your reach, Mr. Merlyn. If you wish for him to pay, you must do it yourself."

"And how do you propose I do that?" Tommy asked, incensed and desperate. "I go be Green Arrow and attack him with a bow and some arrows?"

Talia smirked. "Yes."

Tommy stared at her. "You have got to be kidding me, right?"

Instead of answering, Talia leaned against the armrest of the couch and smirked wider. "I read the police report on the attempted raid of your father's office, the night of his failed Undertaking. It said that the entire team was murdered by his enforcer, a man they're still searching for. But that isn't true, is it?"

Tommy's heart stopped. "You know about that?"

"Very well, Mr. Merlyn. I am one of those who trained your father, after all."

"What? How old are you?" That had to be over twenty years ago! Talia didn't look a day over thirty-five.

"Don't you know how rude it is to ask a woman's age?" She scolded him. "But if you must know, my youth is a… family secret, I guess you could say. As for your father, he came to us a long time ago, trying to find purpose. We gave that to him, but it wasn't enough. He was too angry, seeking revenge on those he held responsible for your mother's death. We let him go under the pretense that he would keep to our principles, and he betrayed that trust."

"We will not make the same mistake with you. We will help you get revenge for your love's murder, but in return, you must swear yourself to us for the rest of your life. You must serve the Shadows until the end of your days, until your bones are buried and become dust. Is that satisfactory for you?"

Tommy hesitated, but only for a moment.

"Yes."
That was one elaborate lie Talia made up, huh?

As for Oliver and Laurel, we're getting into the Dominators' Lotus-Eater Machine. For the record, it's only going to be them in there, and this will play a big part in the next act of this arc. Plus, the Justice League will be getting a new ally soon. You'll see who it is soon enough.

In other news, I saw *Detective Pikachu* the other day. Great movie, at least if you're a fan of Pokemon. While it's still a film for kids, there are enough laughs in there for adults to enjoy too.

Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be removed!

The contest is still on. Submit your entries either on Tumblr or via link through comments/reviews!

Don't forget to update the TV Tropes Page! Check the Tumblr blog for news! All links are on the first and last chapters of the AO3 version!
Arc IV, Chapter 68: Another Life

Chapter Summary

Oliver and Laurel are stuck in a fantasy. Barry and Kara do damage control.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 68: Another Life

BRRRRIIIINNNNG!

WAP!

A hand slammed down onto the alarm clock's snooze button, shutting off the ear-piercing ringing. A groan was heard, and Oliver Queen lifted himself away from his wonderfully soft pillow to look at his bed companion, who assuredly had not been there when he had gone to sleep last night.

Laurel Lance, fiancee and love of his life, had her face scrunched up while rubbing one of her temples in a soothing manner. Her hair was in a beautiful disarray, splayed out on her own pillow in a messy manner. As he looked at her, Oliver couldn't help but think about how lucky he was, that he would be waking up to this every morning for the rest of his life.

"Long night?" He whispered, laying back down onto the pillow.

Laurel opened her eyes and turned her head towards him, smiling tiredly. "Like you wouldn't believe. I regret letting Sara plan my bachelorette party so much right now, no matter how fun it was in the moment."

Oliver chuckled. "I get what you mean. Tommy didn't hold back either. Almost felt like he was preparing for his own wedding."

Laurel quirked an eyebrow. "You think he's ready to pop the big one to Sara?"

"Maybe. I know his mom passed on her old engagement ring to him last week, but don't tell anyone, especially your sister."

"Cross my heart and hope to die."

Oliver leaned in at that, so their foreheads touched. "I love you, Laurel Lance."

"And I love you, Oliver Queen." Laurel returned, leaning in for a kiss.

After an hour of lazy kissing, the two had finally decided it was time to freshen up. People were arriving at the mansion right now, many of them staying over the night for the rehearsal dinner tomorrow night. As the bride and groom, it was their job to greet them all.

Oliver was done first, descending the stairs and entering the dining room, smiling at who he saw.
there: the longtime friends of the Queens, the Merlys.

"Oliver, how good it is to see you." Rebecca Merlyn, his honorary aunt and godmother, was the first to reach him. She pulled him into a hug, her strong arms wrapping him tight.

"Let him breathe, dear!" Her husband Malcolm laughed. Pouting, she let Oliver go, who took in a deep breath and shot his godfather a thankful look. Malcolm grinned and pulled the other man into a hug of his own.

"I hope you and Tommy didn't have too much fun last night. Need to be in tip-top shape for the rehearsal dinner tonight."

Oliver shook his head, snickering when heard the familiar whine of "Daaaad!" from his best friend. Behind Malcolm, Tommy Merlyn emerged, shooting his father an embarrassed look. Next to him was his long-time girlfriend Sara Lance, the sister of Oliver's own fiancee Laurel Lance. Sara snickered, before pulling her boyfriend over so they could greet their friend.

Iris blinked at her ringing phone, noting the caller ID: Barry Allen. Hesitantly, she picked up. "Hello."

"Iris. Good. You picked up. I need your help."

Iris grimaced. Barry was talking in short sentences. That could only mean he was panicking about something. "What kind of help?"

"If anyone calls you about Oliver or Laurel, tell them that they're at S.T.A.R. Labs with me."

"What? Why?"

"Because there's something going on with them right now and they're not in Starling currently. I can't say much more, but Kara's telling everyone that they made an impromptu trip to Central to visit me. So, if anyone asks, tell them that they're at S.T.A.R. Labs with me, okay? And tell Joe that they're there too. Try to divert him from asking too many questions."

"O… kay?" Iris replied, slightly confused and scared.

Barry set the phone down, sighing in relief. "Okay, Iris is on board, so that's taken care of. Cisco and Caitlin are in the know, Mari and Jefferson are protecting Starling in the mean time. We've got all our bases covered. We need to hurry though, because this lie can only hold for so long, even with me simulating Oliver and Laurel's voices. Has Jor-El finished locating them?"

"Your primitive Earth technology is hampering my progress, but it shouldn't take much longer." The hologram proclaimed.

The speedster blinked. "Well, that was insulting."

Kara turned to him with an unamused look. "You deserve it. I can't believe you implanted tracking chips inside Oliver and I without telling us!"

"It was a necessary precaution, as you can tell!" Barry defended himself.

"Barry, I understand your paranoia, and even share it, but even I think that's ridiculous, and I'm sure once Oliver finds out, he'll agree. You could've bothered to ask us first!"
"You would've said no!"
"You don't know that!"
"Yes, I do."
"No, you don't."
"I do."
"You don't."
"I do!"
"You don't!"
"I do—"

"I am done locating Secondary User Oliver Queen. Please stop bickering like whiny children."

Huffing, Barry turned to the computer, blinking at the coordinates he was given. "That can't be—shit, shit, shit. Of course they're up there, where else would they be? Kara, get Amanda, we're gonna need her help."

Kara frowned. "Barry, what's wrong?"

"The coordinates Jor-El gave me, they're negative."

"Is that even possible?"

Barry gave her an unhappy look. "It is… if you're in space."

Kara's eyes widened.

"Oh."

"We… acquired this ship from Fort Rozz, and have been tinkering with it ever since. It should be able to handle all three of you, with enough fuel for a round trip." Amanda said, gesturing to the spaceship, which had been relocated from one of their many labs to the base's plane hangar. It looked like an enlarged version of Kara and Kal's old ship, only painted black and with much more technology and controls. There were also three seats, with the one in the back big enough to fit two people - probably an escape ship of some sort, in case Fort Rozz was ever compromised.

Kara peered inside the cockpit, and blanched. "I can't fly this."

Barry shrugged. "I could probably figure it out if you give me a couple of days."

"Which we don't have." His sister reminded him.

"Valid point. What do you propose?"

Kara had no answer for that.

"If I may make a suggestion?" Amanda, however, did.
"No."
"Kara—"
"No."

"Oliver, Kara. Oliver and Laurel."

"If they were here, they'd agree with me."

"Kara, you know they wouldn't. Not if you or I or anyone else we cared about were in their places."
Barry sighed. "I don't like it either, but when it's my brother and another close friend on the line, I'm willing to do anything to get them back."

"And so would I!" Kara turned around, almost shouting. "But we can't trust her, Barry! She hates humans, she won't listen to anything we have to say."

"She'll listen to you." Amanda pointed out, a bored look on her face. She, no doubt, had seen this coming.

Kara stubbornly turned away again. "What about J'onn? He probably knows his way around a spaceship."

"J'onn has been sitting out of the Dominator attacks for the past two weeks, Kara, and you and I both know damn well why. He can barely work up the nerve to join Hub City when the invasion finally comes. There's no way we can send him to the middle of enemy territory with minimal backup and not expect something to go wrong." Barry pointed out, not flinching when she turned her glare to him.

"We still can't trust her!" Kara insisted.

Barry sighed and turned to Amanda. "Can you put a bomb in her spine too?"

"Yes, but I have no idea if it can kill her once she gets her powers back. And we don't have time to do the surgery on her anyway, not if we want Oliver and Laurel back alive."

"See! We have no leverage on her!"

Amanda tilted her head. "We do. We have one more bargaining chip, one last card we can play."

Both Barry and Kara stared at her, and then realization hit. Kara shook her head violently, but Barry, having enough, clasped her by the shoulders and looked at her, right in the eye.

"Kara, please." He wasn't pleading, but he was close.

Seeing that, Kara took in a deep breath.

"Give me a minute to… to regain my composure." She took in another breath. "I don't want her to see me like this."

---

*I can do this.* Kara thought, trying to calm her mind. *There's nothing she can do to me. Nothing. I beat her, and since then I've only gotten stronger, while she's been wallowing away in prison. She was nothing before anyway.*

*Nothing.*
The door slid open, and Kara walked inside, measuring her steps deliberately. She kept a neutral look on her face, trying to betray none of the stress that plagued her. She couldn't afford to show weakness here.

She stood in front of the prison, a tall glass fixture that was bathing in red sunlight. Its sole occupant was sitting on her bed, cozying up next to her pillow. In her hands was a book; upon closer inspection, Kara spotted several other books, spread around in stacks that dotted the floor. She shouldn't have been surprised — being cooped up in a room like this couldn't be conductive to mental health. Amanda had to give her some kind of distraction lest she become a raving maniac, which was the last thing they needed in a Kryptonian.

Several minutes of silence passed. Kara continued to watch the prisoner, ramrod straight with not a hint of movement. The prisoner, on her part, continued to ignore her, eyes still on her book. The only sounds that could be heard were the crinkling of paper as she turned page by page. Finally, fifteen minutes after Kara had entered the room, she closed the book, placing it down on top of one of the many stacks. It was only then that she deigned to stand and look Kara in the eye.

"Hello, little one."

Kara pursed her lips. "Astra."

The past year had not been kind to her aunt. Her hair was matted and frayed, and she was a tad bit skinnier than before. Amanda had assured her that Astra was getting a full diet and sufficient exercise (something Barry verified for her) — the weight loss could only be chocked up to grief and depression. Kara had heard that Astra had spent the first few weeks of her imprisonment switching between crying and ranting, but had deliberately avoided learning anything more than that. She didn't owe Astra anything, least of all her guilt.

"What brings you here, my dear?" Kara internally winced at the term of endearment, "You haven't bothered to visit me for the past year, so why now?"

"I — We need your help." There. She said it.

Astra raised an eyebrow. "The Dominators?" Kara's eyes sharpened immediately, "Don't look so surprised, Kara. Amanda made a similar offer several months ago, after the invasion was confirmed. I rebuffed her, obviously. So, I take it she sent you here to change my mind?"

"No." Kara tapped her fingers against her arm. "I'm here for something else. Several hours ago, the Dominators abducted two important agents of ours. We've already located them, but we need someone to pilot the ship so we can get them."

"And you want me for that." Astra immediately deduced.

Kara nodded.

"Very well then. What do you offer in exchange for this? When Amanda asked me for help with the invasion, she offered to release me from this prison, but only on a leash. I would've had to wear bands simulating red sunlight on me at all times and would be required to do her dirty work. I assume it is the same here?"

"You assume wrong, Astra." Kara narrowed her eyes. "If you help us with this task, you shall have complete freedom. You can even leave this planet if you so wish, completely unbound."

Astra tilted her head, perplexed. Her face was completely blank. It was a little unnerving.
"How interesting. That is quite the bargain for such a simple task. Dare I ask why?"

"You'll be going into the heart of enemy territory."

Astra snorted. "Don't patronize me, niece. With the power yellow sunlight imbues into us Kryptonians, the Dominators are hardly a physical threat to either of us. As long we evade their mind control devices, escape will be easy. No, there's something else at play." She walked closer to the edge of her chamber, placing her hand against the glass. "Tell me, little one, who are the captives to you? Why are you willing to let me go in exchange for them? They must be people very dear to you."

Kara silently gulped. Here it was. "They took a very close friend of mine, and... and my brother."

Now that stunned Astra. For the first time since Kara came to see her, she showed genuine surprise, before adopting a calculating look. "I take it this brother is not Kal-El? Immature as he is, he is still a Kryptonian and likely far too powerful for anything they could use him for. Even if they sent him to the battlefield, you would be able to subdue him easily enough."

"You guess correctly. This brother of mine is human. We do not share blood. But... he is still my brother, in all the ways that matter."

"And the friend?"

"A fellow hero, one of my comrades, and my brother's girlfriend."

"Ah. So he wouldn't like it if we left her behind." Astra pretended to think for a moment, and then smiled. It was cruel. "No."

Immediately, her niece felt rage surge within her, and it took all the years of training she had to keep it down. Kara glared angrily up at her aunt, teeth bared. "Why." She demanded.

"Simple, really." Astra shrugged. "Your offer means nothing to me. While it would be nice not to be cooped up in here, there's nothing for me outside of this place. Not anymore."

"Why, is it because of humanity?" Kara asked, still seething. "I told you, you can leave—"

"No, Kara." Astra cut her niece off. "It's not because of the humans. Admittedly, I am still not very fond of them, but as you said — I don't have to deal with them if I don't want to. It's as I told you: there's nothing left for me outside of this place."

The former general's eyes took on a faraway look, as if she was reminiscing about something. "Since the day of my birth, my only purpose was to serve Krypton as one of its shields. My very genes were molded to ensure my physical and mental abilities were always at peak performance. I trained day in and day out, studied our greatest battles, both victory and defeat, all in the name of becoming the perfect soldier. My entire life was our planet's safety, future. Nothing else mattered."

"But Krypton is dead now, and has been for decades. Any hopes of recreating our glorious race here on this planet have been dashed by you. My husband is dead, my comrades dead, and Myriad is now a distant dream because Indigo is dead as well. I have nothing left, Kara. Nothing."

Astra returned her gaze to her niece's form. "Nothing... except you."

Kara felt her lip quiver a bit. "What do you want, Astra?"

"Time with you, little one. You and Kal-El." Astra traced Kara's face with her finger, smiling softly.
"I want to know how and why you became the way you are now. I want to know why you chose this planet over me, your true family. I want to know everything, little one, so don't you dare leave anything out. And once every secret you have has been spilled from your lips, only then will I exercise my freedom. Whether that is to kill you, or the humans, or to leave this place forever, I have yet to decide."

The vigilante trembled, fists clenched. "And if I agree to these terms?"

"Then I will pilot the ship and help you rescue your brother and his girlfriend. I'll even help fight off the Dominators, as an extra incentive."

"Fine." It was a better deal than what they were originally trying for, anyway.

Astra smirked as Kara went to a nearby computer console and input the commands. Immediately, the red sunlight generators were turned off. The glass panes that surrounded her cell slid upwards. As Astra basked in her release, Kara rushed her, grabbing her by the neck and slamming her against the wall.

Astra reached for her hands, clawing at her grip, while Kara clasped something around her wrist. "It's a red sunlight bracelet. Only I can deactivate it, and I will only do that when we're within reach of my friends' locations." Once she was sure the bracelet was secure, she loosened her grip around Astra's neck, letting her aunt drop to the floor.

The older woman was panting, trying to gulp back in the necessary air to breathe normally again. She glared up at her aggressor, suppressing the urge to snarl. "How ruthless of you, Kara."

Kara ignored her, glowering. "Let me make this very clear to you, Astra In-Ze. If you do anything to compromise the safety of my family, my friends, or this planet, I won't need a Kryptonite sword to kill you. No, I'll gut you open with my bare hands, rip out your heart, and feed it to the dogs, while leaving the rest of your body to rot, whether that bracelet is on or not. Am I understood?"

"Noted, little one." Astra hissed, using the wall to help her stand back up. Kara refused to reply, instead turning away to leave.

"Follow me. I'll take you to the hangar."

Astra said nothing as she began to walk, simply glaring at her niece's back.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, this was an emotional chapter, wasn't it? Lots of feels going around here.

For who knows Oliver and Laurel are missing, it's only Amanda, Cisco, Caitlin, and the remaining members of the Justice League. Iris suspects, but she's trying not to confirm it because the thought of that stresses her out, which is the last thing she needs right now in this situation. Slade and Kal don't know, and Barry and Kara intend to keep it that way — there's nothing they can do about it anyway.

Oliver and Laurel begin their It's a Wonderful Life-like illusion. I interpreted the one of the show as a combination of removing a nail and a perfect reality. This will be more obvious next chapter with the other changes that will be seen, but I'll elaborate more on
what's in this chapter.

Obviously, Rebecca Merlyn never died. As such, the Undertaking was never conceived and so the Gambit never sank. Oliver's one greatest wish is that he never missed out on ten years with his friends and family, so that's what he has here. He and Laurel started dating in high school, went to college together, and are now getting married. He also got to see Thea grow up. He's also the biological son of Robert in this reality, but seeing as he doesn't know that's not the case in the real world, that's a little redundant for him.

Since Oliver and Laurel started dating at a much younger age, Tommy never developed feelings for Laurel. Instead, he ended up with Sara. Now, that's never going to happen in the real world, because Tommy did develop feelings for Laurel and any potential relationship he could have had with Sara would always have that hanging over them, making the latter seem like a replacement. Not to mention, Sara is currently traveling the world right now while Tommy is… indisposed. As another consequence of that, his friendships with Oliver and Laurel are still going strong, with Tommy being Oliver's best man.

Another consequence is that Oliver never met Barry and Kara. You'll see what happened to them next chapter.

As for Barry and Kara themselves, they're both fraying at the seams. Previous chapters have claimed that Oliver is their rock, and it shows here — both of them are frantic with him gone. Kara is more prone to emotional outbursts, while Barry internalizes his feelings and acts succinctly, almost on autopilot, to achieve his objectives, only showing his desperation when Kara is being too stubborn and Oliver is on the line. They're also both supremely worried about Laurel as well, both as her friends and comrades, and as Oliver's girlfriend.

Kara also seems to be afraid of Astra in this chapter, and in a way, she is. She recognizes that Oliver's survival hinges on Astra's cooperation, and she fears that Astra will use that to her own gain. Especially since Kara has to be the one to do the negotiating — in their last confrontation, Kara admitted to still loving her, and now those feelings are another tool that Astra can use here, which she has to great effect. That being said, as much as Kara loves Astra, she loves Oliver and Laurel more, which is why she agreed to those demands. It's also why she threatened Astra; that is not an empty threat, and Kara will go through with it if her aunt gives her a reason to.

As for Astra's motivations, the answer is simple — she really does have nothing left except for Kara. And Kal-El, but really, it's Kara that she care about. And while she still loves her niece, she also can't help but also hate Kara for what she did: killing Non, destroying her plans, defeating her in one-on-one combat, etc. So she isn't going to make this easy for Kara either, and that includes wringing out every single one of Kara's secrets and acting belligerent at every turn. Her threat also wasn't empty. Depending on what Kara tells her, Astra will either kill the humans, kill Kara, leave, or whatever she thinks is the best course of action. Whether she'll succeed is a different matter, but it's the spirit of it that counts.

Next chapter will completely focus on Oliver and Laurel, so strap in for the feels.

Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be removed!

The contest is still on. Submit your entries either on Tumblr or via link through comments/reviews!
Don't forget to update the TV Tropes Page! Check the Tumblr blog for news! All links are on the first and last chapters of the AO3 version!
Chapter Summary

They’re childhood friends and high school sweethearts living the perfect life.
...Aren’t they?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 69: Perception

"Hey, look." Tommy held up his phone to Oliver's face, smirking. "The wunderkind from Central did it again."

Unamused, Oliver plucked the phone out of his best friend's hand. He brought his gaze downwards, frowning as he scrolled down the screen. "Bartholomew Henry Allen, better known by his nickname 'Barry', has been the leading trailblazer in quantum physics for the past five years. Now, with his latest discovery, he has made the dream of his mentor Harrison Wells, the owner and head scientist of the world famous S.T.A.R. Labs, a reality. A fully-functioning particle accelerator is currently being constructed in the heart of this research facility at this very moment thanks to his work, and when it activates, the world will never be the same."

"What a success story, huh? Hard to think that he started out some no-name kid from the suburbs." Tommy grinned. "Not to mention his wife..."

Oliver scrolled down, gazing at a picture of Barry and said-wife: the gorgeous Iris West-Allen, model and head-anchor for Central City Picture News. "Don't let Sara or Laurel hear you saying that. Wouldn't want them to think you have any ideas."

Tommy held up his hands in surrender. "Hey, I don't. Doesn't mean I can't look. Sara would understand anyway — hell, she'd probably be looking with me."

Oliver couldn't deny that, so he handed Tommy his phone back instead. Behind him, the sounds of hushed whispering grew in volume. Oliver couldn't help but turn around, seeing his beloved little sister Thea bickering with their mother about something.

"Now, mom? At the rehearsal dinner!?"

"Oliver will understand, dear. He always does."

"That doesn't mean you should do it! This is a really personal occasion! It's already bad enough you've invited half the city to the wedding!"

"Thea, sweetie, Oliver has always known what's been expected of him as a member of this family. He won't care."

Okay, that was enough for him. "I won't care about what?"
Both women turned to look at him, Thea frowning and crossing her arms while Moira plastered on her classically benign smile. "Your sister and I are having a dispute about a guest. They RVSP'd at the last minute, you see, and she's unhappy that we're still allowing them to come to the rehearsal dinner."

Oliver, having been raised as a Queen, read between the lines easily. They were courting an out-of-town potential investor/business partner and his parents had invited them to his and Laurel's rehearsal dinner to impress he or she. It wasn't the first time something like this had happened; more often than not Oliver found many of the charity events he held for the city crashed by such individuals for the sake of Queen Consolidated.

In his younger years, he would've agreed with Thea; he had no desire to make such special occasions like this vehicles for his family's advancement. It would have just been another reminder of how he was not seen as "Oliver Queen" so much as "Robert Queen's son". But he was older now, and while he still didn't like it, he could endure it. As long as he and Laurel had their time together, that was enough for him.

Nonetheless, he shot Thea an appreciative smile before responding to his mother. "It's fine. I take it they'll be here soon?"

BZZZZZ!

"That should be them right now!" Moira stated brightly, gesturing for her children to follow her. "You as well, Tommy!"

Tommy, who had been in the middle of stuffing himself with Raisa's famous cookies, audibly groaned and moved to follow.

By the time they arrived to the foyer, they could see Robert greeting a tall man with dark hair, peppered with a bit of gray. Judging by his accent, he was most likely Australian. Next to him was a petite Asian woman in a white dress and coat. Upon closer inspection, there was a bump protruding from her stomach, the slope of which suggested that she was carrying.

Robert glanced away from the conversation, perking up at the sight of his family. He gestured them to the couple, his pride pervading through his tone as he introduced them. "And this here is my family. My wife Moira, my daughter Thea, my son Oliver — who is getting married in just a few days — and my godson Tommy, whose father Malcolm you met a little bit earlier. Everyone, this is Slade Wilson and his wife, Shado Wilson. They're recent investors for QC that are visiting for the week."

Slade made his way towards Moira and Thea, while his wife started with the boys. Shado Wilson smiled sheepishly as she held out her hand in greeting. "It's nice to meet you. Sorry about crashing your wedding preparations like this, but your parents insisted."

Oliver took her hand first, giving her an understanding look. "It's nice to meet you too. As for crashing the party, don't worry about it. You aren't the first, and you won't be the last." His eyes flitted downwards, and he furrowed his eyebrows. "I'm sorry, this may seem rude to ask, but are you...?"

Shado's smile became more genuine. "Yes."

"Congratulations."

"Thank you. It's terrifying and exhilarating, waiting to be a mother."
Oliver blinked—

"Every light casts a shadow. Remember that, Oliver."

A baby gurgled happily as a slender finger wiped a bit of drool from the corner of his mouth.

There was blood. So much blood, and it was from her chest and nononononononono, he wasn't ready for this, he wasn't ready for this at all, she couldn't leave them, she couldn't—!

"Ollie?"

Oliver blinked, and regained his bearings, ignoring the concerned look Tommy was giving him, and the racing beat of his heart. He kept his eyes on Shado, making sure to meet her eyes, to be sincere.

"I think you'll make a wonderful mother, Shado."

Shado flushed at the unexpected compliment, and was barely able to stutter out her gratitude.

Great." Barry said dryly as Kara entered the hangar with Astra hot on her heels. They had made a quick stopover so Astra could change into a more appropriate outfit — she was now wearing a black suit not dissimilar to the one she wore when plotting for Myriad, just with more pockets and provisions. "You're here. I've already programmed the coordinates into the guidance system. Now we just need the pilot."

"Which would be me." Astra said haughtily, standing next to her niece.

Barry nodded and tossed her something, which she just barely managed to catch. It was a small device with a screen on it. "I know. Here's a little something in case the guidance system, God forbid, goes out. It'll act as a homing beacon, either to Earth or to where our agents are, whichever destination you need to get to at the time."

"Useful." Astra commented, placing the device into one of the compartments of her suit. "And who might you be?" He looked very familiar, for some reason.

"The middle sibling."

"Middle sibling?" The older woman turned to her niece. "You failed to mention you had more than one brother."

Kara shrugged. "It's not my fault you aren't connecting the dots yourself. You've done enough homework on my civilian identity to figure that out on your own."

Her aunt frowned, only for realization to dawn on her immediately. "Ah yes, the two boys who were with you and Kal-El on the island." She turned to Barry. "I knew you looked familiar. Barry, correct?"

Barry said nothing, and a woosh! later he had an arm around her neck and a knife at her throat — one whose blade was glowing a disturbingly familiar green color. Astra silently gulped, trying to keep her voice steady as she spoke.

"You're also the Flash, I see."

"You try anything, I'll carve you up like a fucking turkey. Got it?" Scowling, Astra managed to shift her head a little into something that resembled a nod.

Kara sighed. "Bare, I've already made my own threat. Let her go."
Her brother reluctantly did just that, crossing his arms while Astra tried to regain her bearings. "I'm just making sure she knows it's a mutual thing, Kara."

"Yeah, yeah." She turned her attentions back to her aunt. "C'mon. It's time for us to go."

Astra rubbed her neck, and shot a glare at Barry before going to enter the front of the spaceship. Guns from various agents were trained on her the entire time. Meanwhile, Barry went up to Kara, and whirled her around for a hug.

"You be careful, alright?" He murmured into her ear. "I don't want to be the one to explain to Slade how he lost two kids in a single day."

"I'll be fine, Barry. Me and Ollie will be back before you know it." Kara whispered back. She gave him one last pat on the back before going to follow her aunt to the ship.

Silently, she strapped into her seat, helping pull down the top cover. Simultaneously, the A.R.G.U.S. agents outside opened the front of the hangar, revealing the runway for take-off. Outside the window, Kara saw Barry hold up a hand in farewell as they sped away.

After meeting the Wilsons, Oliver and Tommy had opted to hit up town and run a few errands. As they drove through the newly-renovated Glades, among which included QC's new outlet mall, Oliver spotted a tall new building he hadn't seen before. On it was the familiar logo of S.T.A.R. Labs.

"They're opening a new lab here?"

"Yup." Tommy answered, keeping his eyes on the road. "The wunderkind is going to be in charge. It's in the article I showed you."

Oliver immediately took out his own phone and looked up the article in question. As he flicked down the screen, another image caught his eye: it was a picture of Barry Allen and his mother, Nora.

"Queen? As in the Queen family of Starling City?"

"You have a family to get back to!" The other boy screams, and Oliver can't understand the rest of his words, because why doesn't he see—!

"You're going to change the world! Me, I'm just some useless rich kid! I'm not going to let you die here, not if I can do anything about it!"

"Ollie!" Oliver turned to see Tommy gazing at him in concern again. "Are you okay man? You've been spacing out a lot today."

"I'm fine, Tommy." Oliver waved him off. "Just… there's just a lot on my mind."

Tommy was still frowning. "You're not having second thoughts, are you?"

"No." His friend replied instantly. "Never. It's just… I'm just stressed about a couple things. You know, with QC and all. Nothing I can't work through."

"Alright man, if you say so." Tommy parked the car and turned the engine off. "Now c'mon. We got to get this stuff done soon. If we're late the girls will kill us."

"Well, the boys will be running it a little close, but it looks like they'll be here on time." Sara
informed her sister, reading the text her boyfriend sent her.

Laurel let out a breath of relief. "Oh, thank the Lord. I can't handle all these people by myself." She lightly flourished her arm towards the swathes of guest that were milling around Queen Mansion. The dining room where the rehearsal dinner was to take place was currently being set up by the mansion's staff (directed by the ever-so-efficient Raisa) in one of the building's largest dining rooms, those left untouched save for the biggest and most important of functions.

Sara chuckled. "Better get used to it, sis." She teased. "You're marrying Starling City's first son in a couple of days."

"This coming from the girl who's dating Starling's second son?" Laurel pointed out in turn, taking a sip of her drink.

"Touche."

"Miss Lance!" Both women turned around to see one of the staff rushing towards them. "The live entertainment have arrived. Their director wishes to speak with you." The man directed himself towards Laurel, making it clear which Lance was needed.

Laurel shot her sister an apologetic look before following the man to one of the anterooms. There, a group of men and women in black formal wear were carrying cases into the dining room where the rehearsal dinner was being set up. Instructing them was a tall, Middle Eastern woman with brunette hair. She was wearing a dark maroon dress with a black cardigan and heels. When she turned around, Laurel immediately stopped, and her breath hitched in her throat. She's beautiful, the lawyer couldn't help but think.

"Miss Lance, Director." The staffer introduced her to the woman.

The newly-revealed director held out her hand. "Hello. I am Nyssa Raatko, Director of i demoni della musica, the Demons of Music. I take it you are the bride?"

"Yes." Laurel confirmed, surprised at how calmly she was speaking. "I am Laurel Lance. My fiance, Oliver Queen, is currently out running some errands with his best man, and won't be back until later. So for now, if you have any questions, either direct them to me or to his parents."

"I will." Nyssa smiled, and Laurel was struck by how nice the expression looked on her. "If it is not too presumptuous of us, we'd like to extend to you the same courtesy. While we already have the set you and your fiance requested, please do inform us if you wish to make any changes as soon as possible. Make no mistake, my company is fully capable of improvisation, but we do prefer to have some preparation beforehand."

Laurel smiled back. "Of course, though I doubt that it will be necessary." She then hesitated for a moment, before mustering up her resolve. "I do have one question, though: the 'Demons of Music'?"

Suddenly, Nyssa looked sheepish, rubbing her arm absently. "It was my father's idea. When it comes to naming things, he is not what you would call subtle, so to speak."

"Ah. I empathize. My dad can be a little on the nose too — Ollie still shivers about the time he greeted us with a shotgun after our first date."

Her companion laughed, and Laurel drowned in the sound—

"No, no, like this." Her teacher lightly grasped her arm, slowly moving it to the proper position. Her
other arm snaked around Laurel's waist, gently guiding her hip to the side, and the student bit her lip, momentarily distracted by the unexpected softness of her mentor's hands.

"I do not understand the appeal of this." She gestured to the meal, the fries, burger and shake, and Laurel snickered. "It is all junk."

"Maybe, but it's good-tasting junk, and that's all that really matters right now." Laurel countered. She still looked reluctant, but Laurel wouldn't be swayed. "C'mon, live a little!"

She finally acquiesced, dipping her fry into her shake like Laurel had, and couldn't help the moan she released when she finally popped it into her mouth. Laurel's snickering evolved into full-blow laughter, and her companion's humiliation over her reaction succumbed to her own mirth as well.

"Miss Lance?" Laurel felt her gaze shift back into focus, and saw that Nyssa was looking at her, confused.

"Sorry. It's just your laugh was pretty. Musical." She smiled awkwardly. "Must be a result of your job."

Nyssa's perplexity melted away, and she blushed. "Why, thank you." The sound of something dropping cut through the moment, and she sighed. "I must get back to work though. It was nice meeting you, Miss Lance."

"It was nice meeting you too, Director Raatko." She looked down at her drink as Nyssa returned her attentions to her people, and downed it in one go.

What was that?

The moment they arrived back at the mansion, Oliver left Tommy to handle settling everything back in while he took a walk through the Mansion's gardens, claiming that he needed time to clear his head. His best friend was reluctant and skeptical but had accepted the excuse easily enough, allowing Oliver to go with nary a protest. Oliver was grateful, and absentmindedly reminded himself to do something nice for Tommy later.

Walking through the gardens, Oliver barely took note of the greenery, his mind on overdrive. He was seeing things, visions, whatever. Of another life. Maybe he was drugged? That bachelor party last night was pretty wild, he would've have put it past some of the people there to slip something in his drink when he wasn't looking. But if that was the case, why had it taken so long for the drugs to take hold? A designer drug, perhaps? The people at the party were certainly rich enough for something like that…

So stuck in his head, Oliver jumped back a bit, tensed, when he bumped into something. He looked up to see that it was a metal railing, and sighed. He looked up to see large white crystal with a bluish tint, situated in the center of his family's gardens. Oliver had vaguely remembered it being one of the family's crown jewels, a priceless fixture that his family had lobbied millions for at one of Starling's most exclusive auctions.

Another wave a pain hit his head—

"Hey, hey, it's alright!" Oliver waved his arms around, trying to convey some of his peaceful intentions. It was futile however; the girl continued to cry, and she set off the baby in her arms too.

"You need to relax your hold a bit. Grip it too tightly and you'll strain yourself." He placed a comforting hand on the much smaller arm, smiling as the young boy loosened his hold.
"Look at me." She stifled her tears and did just that. "I said it once and I'll say it again: it wasn't your fault. If you hadn't done what you did, all of us would be dead, and if he were here, he'd say the same thing. So please, stop blaming yourself. Because we never will."

Oliver heaved, clutching the metal bar in front of him. What the hell is happening to me?

It felt so real. But he had never seen that girl before. He had never met Barry Allen. He had only met Shado today. But…but…

Laurel. I need to see Laurel.

"We're coming up on the fleet. Activating stealth cloaking." Astra announced fifteen minutes after they had taken off.

Kara blinked as she saw the metal and glass shimmer briefly. Other than the glass taking on a blackish tint, there had been no change as far as she could see. Then again, she couldn't see much, so she could only assume the cloaking had worked.

Astra, ignorant of her niece's thoughts, continued her announcements. It seemed she was taking this piloting gig seriously. "We're coming up on their position. I'm searching for an entry point right now."

If that was the case, then she'd be in the throes of combat very soon. Kara tensed, readying herself.

Wait for me, Ollie, Laurel. I'll be there soon.

Oliver navigated through the crowd of well-wishers, giving short, robotic greetings as he desperately searched for his fiancee. He needed Laurel. He needed to feel her in his arms, needed her understanding words, her comforting presence. He knew that the moment they were together, everything would make sense.

Finally, after a quick inquiry with his sister, he found her. She was getting dressed in their room, changing into more appropriate attire for the dinner. He didn't bother knocking, instead choosing to barge right in.

Laurel, who had been observing herself in front of the mirror, turned around in surprise. "Ollie?"

"Marry me." He gasped, gathering her into his arms. "Marry me right now."

Laurel lightly pushed on his chest, causing a small separation between them. She looked up at her fiance in concern. "Ollie, are you alright? Tommy was saying earlier that you were acting weird—"

"I don't know." Oliver blurted out, cutting her off. "I don't know what's happening with me, what's going on — I just know that I love you, and I want to marry you, right here, right now. Please, Laurel."

But Laurel shook her head, denying him. "Ollie, as pleased as I am to hear that, we can't. Not with all those people down there, not to mention your parents. They'll kill us." She smiled understandingly. "If you want, just stay here. Skip out on the rehearsal tonight. Everyone will understand. As long as you're at the ceremony, there to greet me and Dad at the end of the aisle, no one will care."

Oliver stared at her, looking to argue, ready to go on his knees and beg for her to leave with him,
because he couldn't stay here in this city, where he didn't know what was real and what wasn't—

A knock sounded on the door. Laurel patted Oliver on the arm and went to open it, revealing a tall woman with dark hair. "Miss Lance, one of the staffers told me you were here. Pardon the intrusion, but I need to talk to you about the placement of the stage at the reception."

"That's fine," Laurel perked up. "Here, come in for a bit, I'd like to introduce you to someone—" She turned around to gesture to Oliver to come over, only to stop when she realized his attention wasn't on her.

Oliver gazed at the woman, his heart clenched. "Nyssa." He breathed.

"Heir to the Demon? What do you mean by that?" Oliver asks, and she doesn't answer, simply barking at her men to take them.

A clash of metal rang through the halls, and they separated, both hardly winded. She smirked, he smirked back, and the battle began anew.

There is a kiss on his cheek, and Oliver froze, allowing her to embrace him. "I think it is you I will miss the most." She says, and he can't help but smile at that.

"Laurel is every bit of amazing as you said she was." She murmured as they watched the sunrise together from one of the rooftops. "Both as herself, and as Black Canary. You two are lucky to have each other."

Oliver, touched, places a hand on her shoulder, feeling his heart lighten a bit at the compliment. "Thank you."

Nyssa smiled at him, and shook her head. "No. Thank you for allowing me to meet her, for asking me to be her teacher. It was one of the best experiences of my life, and I will never forget for as long as I live. Just promise me one thing, Oliver."

"Anything." He'd do anything for her, like he would for his family. Like he would for Barry. For Kara and Kal. For Slade.

For Laurel.

"Promise me, that no matter what happens..." She looked back at the horizon, taking in the brightening sun. "...you two will never let each other go. That you'll always be by each other's side. Because I can see that, no matter what happens, you and her will always need each other."

Was that it? "Of course, Nyssa. I couldn't imagine my life without her." Because that life was a distant dream that he no longer cared to reach for again.

She was smiling again.

It was breathtaking.

Laurel, forgetting Nyssa momentarily, reached back to her fiance. Oliver was standing there, first staring at Nyssa and then into space, as if he were in a trance, or, at the very least, lost in deep thought. "Ollie...?"

Suddenly, he reacted, clutching at his chest. His eyes flickered up towards Nyssa, then at Laurel. He walked towards the door, asking the other woman to give them a minute, then closed it, turning back
"Laurel, I want you to do something." He said, his face oddly serious.

Laurel blinked. "Okay…" She said awkwardly. "What is it? If it's about eloping again, Ollie, we can't—"

"No." He cut her off. "No. It's not about eloping. As much as I want to marry you, I can't, not right now. I want you to think back to the last thing we did before we woke up this morning. The last memory you had of last night."

Hesitatingly, Laurel nodded, and closed her eyes. She tried to think back to her bachelorette party, trying to remember Sara dragging her out of the club like she said she had—

"Hey there, pretty bird." And there he was, the Hood, Green Arrow, whatever he was calling himself these days, standing right there. She could feel him smirking, and flushed.

Laurel stared at the black, leather suit in awe. "Where'd you get something like this?" She asked her mentor, who smiled knowingly.

"Again."

Laurel grumbled, but thrust the tonfa towards the dummy, blinking as it caved in the material at the point of impact. "I did it!" She cheered.

It's been ten years, and oh God, what was she going to say? 'Hey, I'm glad you're not stuck on an island anymore!' would definitely not go over well. She was panicking, she was panicking…!

"Hey." She turned around. He was there. He was smiling at her. She felt like she could cry.

But she wouldn't cry. He'd probably seen enough tears already.

"Hey." Laurel smiled back.

"The Dominators…!" Laurel choked out, looking at her fiancee, no—boyfriend, with wide eyes.

Oliver grimly nodded.

"This isn't real, Laurel."

Laurel turned her gaze towards the door, where she could hear the sounds of the party below. It was wrong, all of it, all of this—!

"None of it is real," she stated somberly. "We need to go, Ollie. We need to go now."

"Agreed."

And with that, he took her hand, fleeing the room post-haste.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter took longer than usual. A combination of writer's block and distractions delayed me. As compensation, this chapter is about almost two thousand
words longer than my average chapters.

As for this chapter, we now see the visions and the hold the Dominators have over Oliver and Laurel breaking. The final stab to the heart are their feelings for Nyssa. Oliver is in love with Nyssa, almost as much as he is in love with Laurel. Laurel isn't quite in love with Nyssa (yet), but she does have strong feelings for her. So, for Oliver, nothing makes sense until he sees not just Laurel, but Nyssa as well. Because if there is anything his mind knows subconsciously, is that he's in love with them both.

As for other aspects of the illusions, in this reality: Barry's parents were never killed so Barry became an award-winning scientist who will one day succeed Harrison Wells as the head of S.T.A.R. Labs. Iris became a model and journalist here, and without his insecurities, they started dating and got married earlier.

Slade, after the death of his first wife, met Shado, who was doing a residency in Australia after completing medical school. They got married, and now Shado is expecting their first child. Yao-Fei is alive as well, of course, as a venerated member of the Chinese military.

The bluish white crystal is a small piece of the Fortress of Solitude that broke off. The Fortress is still in dormancy, because Krypton never blew up. Both Kara and Kal are middle-aged Kryptonians living normal lives. Kara is a judge like her mother; Kal chose to join the military. They're both married to people by now, and have their own families.

Nyssa is a musician, because the al Ghuls (Raatkos) are an old music family instead of being assassins. Nyssa took over as Director of the company after Ra's got too old and Talia decided to start her own company.

Well, that's it for now. Wait for the next installment. I should have it out by the end of the week.

Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be removed!

The contest is still on. Submit your entries either on Tumblr or via link through comments/reviews!

Don't forget to update the TV Tropes Page! Check the Tumblr blog for news! All links are on the first and last chapters of the AO3 version!
Oliver and Laurel try to escape back to reality, but face dangerous obstacles in their path. Kara and Astra wreak havoc.

"Where do we go?" Laurel asked quietly as she and Oliver rushed through the hallways, trying to avoid as many people as they could by using the employees' paths. They had been familiar with these halls thanks to exploring every single inch of the mansion that they could when they were kids. "The new S.T.A.R. Labs building downtown. That building isn't supposed to exist, so I can only assume that it's our ticket out of here." Oliver replied in a hushed voice, dodging another one of the mansion's staff. "We're gonna cut through the garden to Dad's garage, grab one of the cars there, or maybe my motorcycle. Now that we know that this is an illusion, I wouldn't put it past the Dominators to do whatever they can to keep us here, and that includes using whatever people they generated to try and convince us to stay. Be on your guard."

The very moment he finished that sentence, such a person did appear: Rebecca Merlyn. Oliver and Laurel stopped moving at the sight of her, slightly stunned. Now that they knew the woman was dead, the aftermath still so clear in their minds, it was strange to see her standing there, alive and aged.

"Oliver, Laurel!" Rebecca put her hands on her hips, a frown on her face. "What are you doing out back here? The rehearsal is going to start soon!"

Oliver swallowed. "Aunt Rebecca," he began haltingly, "I'm sorry, but Laurel and I, we needed a break. A bit of fresh air. Things have been… stressful… lately, and we wanted a bit of alone time together."

Rebecca eyed them suspiciously, before huffing. "Alright then, go on, but I better see you within the hour or your parents will have security flip this place over to find you two."

"Got it." Oliver smiled awkwardly, inwardly berating himself for the sudden degradation of his acting skills. He gestured Laurel to rush forward, while he went to Rebecca herself, and pulled her into a hug. Rebecca let out a small 'oof' in surprise, before relaxing into the embrace. Laurel stopped by the door to watch the scene, gripping the doorsill tightly.

"You're amazing Aunt Rebecca." Oliver said, trying to keep the sadness he felt at bay. "Tommy and Uncle Malcolm are lucky to have you."

"Why thank you Oliver, but don't think this gets you off the hook." Rebecca scolded back as they released the embrace. "Your mother will be hearing about this, so don't think you can butter her up like me."
"I wouldn't dare." At Laurel's pointed gaze, Oliver reluctantly let his godmother go. "I'll see you later."

"I better. Laurel!" Laurel caught Rebecca's eyes at the sound of her name. "Make sure he comes back, alright?"

Laurel tried not to grimace. "Of course, Mrs. Merlyn."

"We're in." Astra muttered as her and Kara's ship docked in a remote corner of the shipbay of the large, intergalactic cruiser. "What now?"

Kara unlocked her seatbelt, and then clicked on something on her wrist. Astra let out a startled gasp as she felt her powers return. "Now, we go looking for them. Barry gave me another locator with a smaller range that will allow us to find them on this ship. You are coming with me."

"Don't trust me, little one?" Astra smirked.

"No." Kara stated bluntly. "Keep the ship's cloaking on. I assume you have stealth training?"

"You assume correctly."

"Good." Kara fingered a small blade in one of her suit's hidden compartments. Thanks to the discreet nature of the mission, she hadn't been able to bring her sword. "We're gonna be quick, and we're gonna keep hidden as long as possible until we find them. After that..." she narrowed her eyes, "... well, we'll see."

After the emotional encounter with Rebecca, Oliver and Laurel rushed through the garden, only to stop when they saw a small group of gangsters. At the head of them was Danny Brickwell, laughing. The couple immediately moved into fighting stances, waiting for the battle to begin. Brick eyed them for a moment, before pointing forward, initiating his groups to charge.

"What I wouldn't give for my tonfa." Laurel grumbled as she blocked one thug's attempt to shank her with a knife. She quickly twisted his arm, disabling him, before taking the knife and stabbing him in the leg. He let out a scream of pain that was quickly silenced by Laurel braining him with the handle.

"This guy's got a crowbar," Oliver commented as he kicked the weapon out of another thug's hands, grabbing it. With a mighty swing, he knocked out the other man before grappling another of their attackers and restraining him into a hold. "Want to switch?"

Laurel paused, ducking a punch and retaliating with one of her own, before knocking the guy out with a double kick to the neck and face. Silently, she tossed the blade to her boyfriend, taking the crowbar in return. Smoothly, she brained another gangster in the head, before using the curved end to pull another one forward using the neck of his shirt. The thug yelped, stumbling and dropping his bat, then letting out a high-pitched keen as Laurel kneed him in the groin. He grabbed himself, legs buckling, allowing Laurel to finish him off with another knee to the chin.

Oliver used his newly-acquired knife with great efficiency; while he wasn't Barry, he was proficient enough with knives to be considered an expert. He sliced the arm of another thug, forcing him to let go of his gun, before giving him two more slices to the chest and a punch to the face. Absentmindedly, he blocked the metal bat of another, the blade grinding against it making an unpleasant sound, before twisting the bat out of the thug's hand with his superior strength. He cut the man's wrists, specifically aiming for certain nerves, before stabbing him in the shoulders. The man collapsed in pain, writhing on the grass.
As Laurel finished off the last man, Oliver turned around to see Brick charging at them. Wordlessly, he threw the knife, watching as it pierced him in the neck. Brick collapsed immediately, pulling out the knife and trying fruitlessly to stem the blood flow with his hands.

"Ollie…” Laurel said, a little disapprovingly, before sighing in acceptance. Oliver took her hand, rubbing circles in apology.

"I know. But we're in a hurry."

Laurel sighed once again. "It's fine. He isn't real anyway. I just thought that being a lawyer and a cop's daughter would better prepare me for stuff like this, but even after almost a year of being a vigilante, it's hard to watch."

"Good," Oliver said, surprising her, "It should be hard to watch. It means you still have something human in you left." He had a faraway look in his eyes as he finished.

His girlfriend was about to put another comforting hand on his shoulder, only to jump back as an arrow nearly pierced her hand. The two whirled around to see another contender: Nyssa, garbed in her gear. Next to her was an older man with dark, but graying hair; Laurel noted that he shared a vague resemblance to their friend. He was dressed similarly to her, with a sword strapped to his waist.

"Ollie, who is that next to her?" Laurel asked, tensing herself, feeling Oliver do the same.

"Ra's al Ghul. The most dangerous of my teachers… and Nyssa's father," Oliver revealed, momentarily stunning the woman, "Most of all, however, he's the second-best warrior on the planet."

Laurel looked sharply at him. "Second-best? Then who's the best?"

Nyssa fired another arrow. This time, they were ready. Laurel shift herself to the side as Oliver plucked the arrow from the air, twisting his body to throw it back at a startling speed. Quickly realizing it was too fast to catch, the two assassins leaned away, allowing the arrow to pass through the opening they created and plunge itself into the grass behind them.

"Me." Oliver growled, before charging. Laurel followed him, ducking under another barrage of Nyssa's arrows.

With that, the two pairs of adversaries clashed.

Kara pressed her back against the walls of the ship, gesturing to her aunt to keep quiet before leaning forward to peer around the corner of the hall they were in. She watched as a pair of Dominators conversed, before leaving down another corridor. Using her super vision to confirm they were gone, she turned back to Astra, lifting the locator Barry had given her.

The screen came to life as she turned it on, revealing a series of grid lines on a blue interface and three dots. One green one, presumably representing them, and two red ones, representing Oliver and Laurel. The red ones were practically on top of each other, which was relieving — it meant that the two were close to each other, most likely in the same room. With another silent gesture from Kara, the two Kryptonians walked down the halls, their steps silent.

Nyssa sheathed her bow as Laurel engaged her, blocking her fast blows with little difficulty. Laurel was not deterred, instead dropping down sweep her legs in a perfect arc. Nyssa stumbled back, but righted herself with a backflip, only for Laurel to fearlessly tackle her. She mounted the false figure
of her teacher and started throwing several punches, while Nyssa blocked them with her forearms before using the strength of her thighs to throw Laurel off to the side. They were back on their feet instantly and started circling each other, searching for openings.

Several feet away, Oliver and Ra's were engaged in their own battle. Ra's had already drawn his sword and was swinging it with deadly precision. Oliver had to constantly move to dodge the blade while at the same time trying to break Ra's' grip on the handle by countering with his forearms and hands. Finally, he managed to grab his opponent's hand and twist, forcing Ra's to drop the sword into Oliver's own waiting palm. Weapon in hand, Oliver thrust the blade towards Ra's' head, only for the man to dodge and kick him away.

Elsewhere, Laurel and Nyssa continued their fight, throwing barrages of blows at each other. However, it became patently clear that Laurel was wavering. While she had come far in the months since becoming a vigilante and falling under the tutelage of Oliver and Nyssa, she was still inexperienced compared to them and not as conditioned. It was only her familiarity with Nyssa's own style that she had managed to keep up for this long.

Finally, it became too much — a well-placed jab to the mouth sent Laurel sprawling to the grass, and she let out a groan. Through the corner of her eye, she could see Nyssa stalking her, and she rolled away to dodge a boot to the sternum. As she did so, she spotted something that could turn the tide of the fight: the arrow that Oliver had caught and thrown at the beginning of their encounter with the assassins. Her adrenaline pumping, Laurel burst forward, grabbing it with an outreached hand. Shaking, she turned back to the false Nyssa, who was impatiently tailing her.

Making a silent apology to her Nyssa, she charged at the false one with another burst of speed, surprising her opponent. Laurel grabbed her by the back of the head, and slotted their lips together in a deep kiss. Suitably stunned, the fake Nyssa was unable to dodge the arrow piercing her chest. Laurel released the kiss as soon as the wound was deep enough, and her opponent backed away with blood running down the side of her mouth, gazing at her in betrayal before collapsing completely in a dead heap.

Laurel allowed herself only a moment to feel, before going to the cooling corpse and depriving it of its bow and one of the arrows in its quiver. She turned to watch Oliver's battle with Ra's, Oliver's lessons on archery at the forefront of her mind as she readied herself to aim, only to stop and gape.

The two men were a blur, exchanging so many different movements, one after another, that they almost looked like a standing, flailing tangle of limbs. She had initially planned to fire an arrow at Ra's and give Oliver an opening to end things quickly, but there was no way she could do that with them so close to each other and moving so fast. Not to mention the sword the two of them seemed to be exchanging every minute. If she timed it incorrectly, then Ra's could just block it with the blade.

Laurel had seen Oliver spar with many people since she had joined the Justice League. Barry, Kara, Nyssa, Jefferson — all spirited affairs that left her in awe and even more determined to one day reach his level. But none of them had compared to this battle, where every move was calculated and not a single moment was wasted. It had honestly made her fight with Nyssa look like a playground brawl.

So, this is what it means to be the best... She thought to herself, recalling Oliver's claim. No, there was no way she would be able to interfere, to help. All she could do was leave her faith in the man she loved.

Oliver grunted as Ra's got a particularly hard shot to his ribs, and retaliated with another slice of the sword. Ra's leaned back to dodge, and then kicked the handle out of his hands, slapping the blade with two palms before swinging the handle upwards in an arc and grasping the handle. Now it was Oliver's turn to evade, each swipe intended for his neck. From the corner of his eye, he could see
Laurel watching the battle in worry, and steeled himself. It was time to end this.

Ra's jabbed forward with the blade, aiming to pierce his heart. Instead of leaning backwards, Oliver moved forwards, dodging at the last second. The steel passed by the side of his head, barely missing his ear; Oliver paid it no mind, instead grasping Ra's arm like he had before. He elbowed the man on the chest with his arm while using his left to twist the sword out of the older man's hand and back into his own. Now armed once again, Oliver sliced Ra's abdomen, feeling the familiar resistance of flesh. Ra's was driven back immediately, but it was too late. Two more slices followed, both to the chest, and then Oliver was driving the sword through his heart.

Laurel watched as Oliver let go of the sword, as Ra's al Ghul fell to the ground, dead, and let out a breath of relief. She moved towards her boyfriend, noting how he had yet to let his eyes waver from the gruesome sight. As she got closer, Oliver abruptly turned around, as if sensing her approach. The two stared at each other.

"Are you alright?" Laurel prompted first.

Oliver took another look at the corpse, then turned back to her. "I will be. And you?"

Laurel looked down. Unlike Oliver, she didn't have the strength to look back where the fake Nyssa's cold body laid. "I don't know."

"It wasn't her, Laurel." Oliver assured her, his words comforting. "And if she were here, she'd tell you the same thing. Hell, she'd probably be proud of you, for beating her like that."

"You saw that?" Laurel blushed.

"Yes." Oliver admitted. "To be honest, I was a little jealous."

He grimaced, not sure if he wanted to answer. That was a can of worms that he didn't want to open just yet. Laurel noted his expression and patted him on the shoulder, understanding emanating from her. She knew exactly how he felt. If their positions had been reversed… well.

"We need to go." Oliver stated, once the awkwardness had passed. Laurel nodded in agreement. After checking around to make sure there were no more surprises waiting for them, the two ran towards the garage, where their escape awaited.

Kara's lips curled into a smile as they got closer and closer to Oliver and Laurel's location, ducking behind another corner with Astra following her lead. Hopefully, the two would be in decent shape when they got there. It would make escape easier. They had managed to avoid detection thus far, and, as long as Oliver and Laurel were able, it seemed they'd be able to get out of this with the Dominators being none the wiser.

Of course, it was right after this thought passed through her mind that things went to shit.

Despite her senses being on high alert, Kara almost didn't notice the growing glow of the blaster until it was too late. She whirled around and slammed her aunt against the wall, wincing as the beam of energy passed by where they had just been standing. She powered up her heat vision, and blasted her own twin beams into the offender, burning a hole through him.

"So much for stealth." Astra grumbled, flying forward to punch another Dominator in the face.
After some quick deliberation, the couple determined that the motorcycle was the best way to go. It was faster, and allowed them better mobility in case the illusion did decide to send someone to pursue them on the way to S.T.A.R. Labs. Oliver grabbed two helmets, tossing one to Laurel and putting on his own before going to start the machine up. He sat down towards the handles, and once he felt his girlfriend's familiar embrace, he opened the garage and they fled into the night.

Thankfully, it seemed the illusion had decided stopping them was pointless, because they had no pursuers. Oliver, however, had refused to take any chances, parking the motorcycle in a dirty alley. Sneaking in had been surprisingly easy; it seemed that this Barry, or whoever was in charge of S.T.A.R. Labs' security, hadn't cared enough to go beyond the most basic of security systems. They would have had more difficulty breaking into a retail store.

Entering the building, they found the bottom floor had a glowing, green portal waiting for them. The energy within swirled together ominously.

"You think that's it?" Laurel gulped, grasping his hand tightly.

Oliver narrowed his eyes. "Only one way to find out." He stepped forward, readying himself to charge through.

"Oliver."

The two swiveled around to see Shado standing before them. Except, it wasn't the Shado that had attended their fake rehearsal dinner. This Shado was younger, wearier; her clothing was the same she wore the night she died, Oliver idly noted. There was this glow around her, and upon closer inspection, she was translucent. She wasn't really there, he realized.

"Take care of them, Oliver." It was her voice, but her mouth wasn't moving. Nonetheless, Oliver felt the prickle of tears in his eyes, and he desperately tried to will them away.

"They'll need you. They'll always need you." She was smiling now, and it was such a painfully familiar sight that Oliver couldn't help but nod.

Laurel's solacing touch broke him out of his reverie, and with reluctance he turned away from Shado. He allowed Laurel to guide him away, back to all the real, living people that were waiting for them on Earth.

"Who was she?" Laurel asked quietly, just as they were about to pass through the gate.

"Family," was all that Oliver said, before the world blinded them.

Waking up was painful.

His neck was sore, and there was a piercing headache that was only now beginning to fade. Oliver blinked as he tried to get feeling back into his limbs. Across from him, he could see Laurel was in a similar state, rolling her shoulders back and forth and stretching out her neck left and right.

"Where are we?" He murmured, stepping down from whatever pedestal he had been standing on. Looking back, he could see some kind of open pod bursting from the ground in an upright position. Was this how the Dominators' had kept them captive? But why?

"Uh, Ollie." Oliver turned back around to see that Laurel had also moved and was now staring at… something. He followed her line of sight and blinked, eyes widening.
"Almost there, almost there…" Kara chanted as she and Astra flew through the halls. Behind them were a crowd of Dominators chasing after them, blasting them with barrages of energy beams. Astra was flying backwards to counter them, only turning whenever Kara tapped her on the shoulder. It was a system they had made up on the fly after their enemies had crowded together in a pack to chase after them.

Normally they would've just used their super speed and rushed through the halls that way, but on top of this being an unfamiliar area that they just barely knew how to navigate, using super speed left them vulnerable to all sorts of nasty surprises that the Dominators might have left on their ship, like barriers or mounted guns. Not wanting to risk that and leave themselves vulnerable, the women had resigned themselves to going at semi-normal speed and hoping that said surprises, if they existed, didn't spring up too fast and leave them unable to counter or dodge.

Kara looked down at the locator. If this was correct, then the next room around the next bend was where Oliver and Laurel were. Satisfied, she turned around and stopped. Astra stopped as well, and they exchanged a silent look, before turning back to the charging crowd. Together, they took a deep breath and blew, watching as everything before them froze. The floor, the ceiling, the walls, the flying energy beams, the blasters and even the Dominators themselves. Soon, the entire area was a miniature, wintry wasteland.

Not wishing to wait for more Dominators to show up, the two women left the scene. Making one last turn, they stood in front of a large pair of double doors. Kara gestured for Astra to stop, and pressed her hand against the metal, focusing her hearing. Beyond the door, she could hear her friends' familiar voices.

That was enough for her.

She stepped back, and curled her hand.

BAM!

Oliver slammed himself against Laurel, sending them sprawling as the pair of metal door flew overhead. The two landed with a loud clang!, before sliding to a stop. Once they did, the two vigilantes got to their feet and dusted themselves off, turning to what had once been a firmly shut and closed doorway.

Standing there was Kara, next to a vaguely familiar woman. Neither of them cared for her though, eyes trained solely on what looked to be their comrade and friend. Kara had spotted them as well, letting her arm fall back to her side as she felt her body relax in relief.

"Ollie. Laurel." She said, smiling.

Oliver didn't return it. He pulled Laurel close, eyes narrowed. "What's the number one rule we have about Dhaka?"

Kara blinked, then realization hit her and she sighed. "That Dhaka never happened and anyone that says otherwise is a big, fat liar," she recited immediately in a well-practiced fashion.

At that, Oliver lost all his suspicion, and before anyone knew it he had barreled into her, hugging her
with everything he had. Kara returned the embrace fervently, allowing herself to melt in the familiar warmth of one of her oldest protectors, of her brother. "We were so worried..." she muttered quietly into his ear. He said nothing, simply tightening his hold.

After a long minute, he released her, and then there was Laurel. While their embrace wasn't as long or as tight, there was just as much comfort there, if only of a different kind.

"How did you find us?" She asked after they separated as well.

Kara scowled. "Barry implanted tracking chips into all the members of the Justice League without telling anyone."

The couple stared at her, stunned, before Oliver groaned and palmed his forehead in disbelief. "Dammit, Barry!"

"What does that say about us that I'm both surprised and not surprised?" Laurel deadpanned, having also grown familiar with the speedster's more... *outlandish* antics.

"I know exactly how you feel." Kara said soothingly in reply to her, as Oliver continued to curse his younger brother in a low voice, kicking the air for good measure.

"As entertaining as all this is, don't you think it's time we leave?"

Immediately, the three Leaguers stopped to look at the fourth person in the room. Laurel failed to place her; Oliver had no such issue.

"What is *she* doing here?" Oliver growled, fisting his hands.

Kara placed a hand on his back, trying to calm him down. "We needed someone to fly the spaceship to get you two. She was our only option."

"Barry could have probably learned it in a couple of days." Oliver argued.

"Ollie, we didn't *have* a couple of days, and you know that. Whatever the Dominators needed you here for, it would only last so long before you became a liability and they killed you both." Kara countered.

"Um, could someone please fill me in?" Laurel piped up, cutting through the brewing row between the siblings. "Who is this woman?"

Astra smiled, and she held out her hand to Laurel. "General Astra In-Ze. Kara's aunt. And I take it you are Laurel Lance, the Black Canary, yes?"

Laurel blinked, and then her eyes narrowed. She crossed her arms, pointedly refusing to return the greeting.

"Aren't you the crazy woman who was planning to brainwash the planet into being more eco-friendly?"

Despite the tense atmosphere, both Oliver and Kara had to stifle their snorts at Laurel's ridiculously apt description of Astra's plans. The woman herself dropped her arm immediately, and she glared at Laurel, snarling. She made a step forward, as if she was preparing to attack — something that did not escape Kara's notice.

"Astra." Her niece said with authority. Astra turned to her to see Kara waving the remote control to
her cuffs in a blatant fashion, sending a very clear message.

"I've got Kryptonite arrows at home," Oliver added in, glowering. "Don't think I won't use them."

Knowing she was beaten, Astra huffed and turned to leave, mindful of the three glares burning into her back.

"Let's just go already. I can't stand being in this overgrown tin can any longer than I have to."

"Are you positive?" Barry asked evenly, trying not to show the panic that was coursing through his veins.

"Yes." A grim-faced J'onn replied, red eyes serious.

Barry turned around and kicked the wall next to them, ignoring the sharp pain that shot through his foot. "Fuck."

"Sir!" The two men looked right to see an agent running up to them, "The ship has reentered the atmosphere. It will be landing here in about half an hour."

Barry and J'onn exchanged nods, and then made their way to the landing strip.

The moment Oliver's feet were back on Earth soil, he was accosted by his speedster little brother. Barry was uncharacteristically silent as he clutched onto his form, not even making a comment about the drab wardrobe change Oliver had undergone over the last several hours. Knowing that this behavior change could only come from worry, Oliver rubbed comforting circles into the younger man's back.

"Hey, I'm alright." The archer said softly.

Barry said nothing, but he did let go, giving Oliver a nod. He then turned to Laurel and gave her a hug as well. Laurel gave him a small pat on the back, then a playful slap on the shoulder when Barry said something to her. Oliver smiled at the familiar byplay, only to stop when he saw Amanda approaching them with a serious expression on her face, her classic smirk having disappeared. Next to her was J'onn, who looked even less happy than she did.

"It's good to see you both back, Oliver, Laurel," she said, drawing everyone's attention. "But we need you in the conference room. We have news."

"Jefferson, Mari, thank you for watching Starling over for us." Oliver said to his last two fellow Leaguers.

He, Laurel, Barry, Kara, Amanda, and J'onn had relocated to the conference room after Oliver and Laurel had given reports. After a change of clothes, food, and a warm shower, they were mostly refreshed and ready for battle. A conference had been called once Barry had finished his analysis, with the entire Justice League in attendance. Since Starling couldn't be left undefended, Jefferson and Mari were video-calling from the Foundry.

"Think nothing of it, Oliver." Jefferson replied. "We're just glad you and Laurel are alright."

"Do we have any idea why you were taken?" Mari asked next to him.

"After getting full reports from Oliver and Laurel and conferring with J'onn and the other scientists
located here at Central City's A.R.G.U.S. base, we believe they were taken for information." Barry answered, shuffling through some papers. "The pods they were held captive in had a neuromorphic interface that allowed the Dominators to parse through their minds while the pods distracted them with a realistic mind-based illusion that was cobbled together using their memories."

"But why us?" Laurel asked, sitting next to Oliver. "I get Oliver, he's basically our leader, but why me? Barry would've been a farther better choice since he would have all the intelligence regarding our technological and scientific advancement. And if they could just teleport us away then they could have taken all three of us anyway."

"We believe it's because you two are the only ones who aren't metas." Barry responded, gesturing to himself and J'onn. "The Dominators would have no idea how their technology would react to a meta, and even if they did they would have to reconfigure it differently to handle different molecular make-ups; even metas have differing biologies amongst each other. Baseline humans, however, are a different matter."

Kara tapped her finger on her chin. "Okay, so we know the why? The question is now: what were they after?"

Oliver frowned when he noticed that Barry, J'onn, and Amanda's faces had all closed off at that question. "What's wrong?"

Amanda sighed. "We intercepted another transmission while Kara and Astra were rescuing you. According to J'onn, the Dominators are planning to unleash something on Earth — a weapon of some sort."

"And while Amanda was busy preparing for your arrival," Barry continued, "We intercepted another message about the weapon itself: it's a bomb."

Everyone froze at those words. "And just what kind of bomb would that be?" Jefferson asked, very hesitantly.

"A meta-gene bomb. One with enough power to wipe out millions." J'onn said angrily. "They're going to detonate it right on top of Central City to eliminate as many metahumans as possible."

The room fell silent as everyone looked at J'onn in horror.

**BANG! BANG! BANG!**

As one, everyone turned to the metal door, which was rattling from the incessant banging of someone on the other side. Amanda stood up and walked purposefully towards it, mind churning over the most recent revelation. With a press of a button, the door slid open, revealed a disheveled agent that was struggling to catch his breath.

"Ma'am, the satellites have just picked up the presence of dozens of hostile vessels approaching the planet."

Sharp gasps were heard from behind her. Amanda understood the sentiment. "ETA?"

"Twenty-four hours."

"Sound the alarm, and call in Sub-Director Yamashiro and the rest of Task Force X. Have them video-call to this conference room. I'm calling in the council." Amanda stepped outside the door, knowing that everyone's eyes were on her.
"It's time for the Earth to prepare for war."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait everyone, but I've been busy and distracted lately. In return, here's a super-long chapter to satiate you all.

Yes, I have finally confirmed that Oliver has surpassed Ra's al Ghul, as seen when Oliver defeats Ra's here. As you can also see that Oliver is conflicted over killing Ra's — while the man press-ganged him and his family into the LoA and essentially brainwashed them (even if it didn't fully take), he did train them and was partially responsible for making them as strong as they are today. Not to mention, he is Nyssa's father.

Speaking of Nyssa, Laurel can't beat her yet, at least not in a fair fight. She will be capable of that feat one day, but it will take a couple more years before then. That's why she decided play dirty and used a kiss to distract Nyssa. For the record, she wouldn't have gotten that idea if she hadn't had a love epiphany the previous chapter.

We're reaching the climax of this act, everyone! Buckle in, because it's going to be chaos from here on out!

Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be removed!

The contest is still on. Submit your entries either on Tumblr or via link through comments/reviews!

Don't forget to update the TV Tropes Page! Check the Tumblr blog for news! All links are on the first and last chapters of the AO3 version!
"I don't like to remember the day they came to Mars. It's not a happy memory."

"Are they sure the mansion won't be caught in the crossfire?" Moira murmured to her husband Robert as they watched military personnel guide Starling City's evacuees into their home. They had nestled themselves near the stairs, directing staff and volunteers as they handed out supplies. Near the front door, Thea was greeting every family that passed through, offering them blankets and food.

"For the initial battle, yes." Robert muttered back. "But if the army is beaten back…" He shrugged. Moira sighed, as Sam walked up to them with a pile of blankets in her arms.

"Oliver and Kara picked quite a time to go to Central City." The businesswoman noted as she set the linens down next to the floor next to them.

"At least they'll be with Laurel, Barry, and Iris when things go down." Robert pointed out.

"How are Kal and Ruby?" Moira asked.

"In the upstairs den with the younger kids," Sam answered, "They're trying to keep their minds off the Invasion. I was surprised at how calm they were being, but I guess this really isn't any different from the hostage situation. Just a lot more widespread." She shrugged, smiling bitterly. "After all, it's only the end of the world."

"What I do like to remember is my family. My wife, my children, my brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces. Before they took them away from me."

Quentin and Dinah Lance parted from their kiss, hands clutched tightly together.

"You be careful, please." Dinah begged her husband. "I'm not ready to be a widow just yet."

Detective Lance just nodded, his grip tightening. With great reluctance, he let his wife go, watching her enter the bus with the other evacuees. He continued to watch as the doors closed and the bus drove her away to one of the city's many evacuation shelters.

His partner, Lucas Hilton, walked up to him, slinging his arm around Quentin's shoulders. "C'mon. They're waiting for us at the precinct."
"Us Martians weren't really any different you humans. We divided ourselves with inconsequential things. Money. Location. Appearance. But when someone threatened our world, we came together in the end."

Sara Lance wiped the sweat off her brow. She leaned against the fence, watching as the dark-skinned civilians were evacuated, while the South African military marched in the opposite direction.

"But despite that, we still fell in the end. Perhaps because it was because we had become too set in our ways, stagnating our society. I think it was because we were too similar. Once you knew how to beat one Martian, you knew how to beat all of them."

Hartley blinked as Cisco handed him a pair of gauntlets. "And these are…?"

"Upgraded. Allows you to modify frequencies and amplify sounds easier."

The Pied Piper hummed, and took something out of his pocket. Cisco frowned when he noticed they were glasses. His glasses, to be exact.

"These make it easier for you to locate sources of vibrational energy and manipulate them."

"This changes nothing, you know that?"

"Why would I ever think otherwise?"

"You're both idiots." Caitlin informed them as she walked past, a backpack full of medical supplies hanging off her shoulder.

"That's where we differ from you humans. When I first came here, I was amazed by how diverse your species was. You may have not have the powerful, innate abilities we had, but your ingenuity made up for it in spades. And eventually, some of you caught up, or surpassed us."

Iris stared at her phone for a long moment, wondering if she should press 'send' or not. Finally, after much deliberation, she did, hoping that the recipient wouldn't take offense to her message.

"Iris?" Joe West peaked around the corner. "It's time."

His daughter took a deep breath, and nodded. "Coming, Dad."

She followed around the corner, falling in line with the other officers. Up ahead, she could already see Ralph being handed his blaster, one of many in the dozens of carts being trucked up to the precinct by the hour.

"It's when I saw, that I realized that they would come for you, too. And that is also when I realized that I didn't want the fate that befell my world, to befall yours as well."

Akio Yamashiro masked himself, before purposely diverting himself away from line leading to the evacuation boats. With uncanny skill, he blended in with the mixture of soldiers and law enforcement marching through the crowded streets of Tokyo.
"We are all individuals, but we are also all residents of Earth. So for today, and for many days afterwards, let us move past our differences, and stand together as one."

As fighter jets flew over the skyscrapers of New York, Nyssa emerged from the shadows of one of the rooftops, one of her hands twisting at an arrow in her quiver. In the rooftops surrounding her, other assassins appeared, each focusing their gazes on the sky above.

"We're not asking you to fight — that is your choice. But if you choose not to, then please, support those that do."

Annisa looked herself in the mirror, making sure her suit was fully-fitted and ready for battle. Behind her, she could see Gambi silently cleaning his gun. Next to him, a computer monitor showing the feed of the local news channel displayed her mother and sister guiding the citizens of Freeland to temporary safety.

"Whether that is by handing out supplies, by helping with the evacuation, or even by just staying out of the way. Every little bit helps, and we need all the help we can get."

In an alleyway in Coast City, a tall, broad-shouldered man with brunette hair silently made his hand into a fist, watching as the ring on his finger glowed an eerie green. He was engulfed in a similarly-colored light, emerging in a spandex suit and a mask on his face, the sigil of his ring on his chest, before taking to the skies.

All around the world, men and women of similar dress were going out into the streets, preparing themselves for battle. Here and now, they could no longer afford to keep hidden. The world was at stake, and they had a duty to protect it, no matter the cost.

Years down the line, this day would mark history. People would call it 'The Dawn'.

For it began the Age of Heroes.

Barry momentarily looked away from the briefing at the short vibration of his phone. Keeping one ear on Amanda's voice, he took out the device to see it was a text from Iris. Considering how rare an event that was these days, he couldn't resist looking at it. The message was very succinct.

'Be careful. Please.'

Using his super speed, he typed out a quick 'Thank you.' and hit the send button before turning his attention back to Amanda, who had called for him and Stein to come up and explain their latest invention. Shoving the phone back into his pocket, he stood up and followed the old professor to the front of the room, which was projecting various members of the Justice League and the Suicide Squad.

"This device was created using data from a dissected body of a deceased Dominator that was collected from the attack in the 50s." Stein held up a small, circular disk, with miniature, clawed attachments on the back.

"Once activated, it will emit a powerful frequency that will ripple through their skins, inducing them in crippling pain." Barry shrugged. "It's crude and cruel, but it's effective, and this is war."
"Well said." Amanda nodded. "Once the fighting starts in full force, the Flash will be traveling across the world, tagging as many Dominators as he can with these devices. As soon as a sufficient number of these devices are concentrated in every population center on the planet, I will activate them — hopefully that will be enough to leave us alone. Supergirl will also be helping him, along with mitigating as much collateral damage as possible from the invading ships."

"As for the bomb, we've managed to derive which ship it's on from our latest intel. Astra will fly Firestorm up there to transmute the bomb into something harmless while she holds off anyone who tries to interfere. As for everyone else, you will be helping lead our forces all around the globe against the Dominators' ground forces."

"Green Arrow and Black Canary are, of course, in Starling City. Vixen, Martian Manhunter, you two will also be in your home cities." The four Leaguers nodded.

"Black Lightning, you're in charge of Metropolis. Deathstroke, Sydney, Australia; Maseo and Katana, Tokyo, and Chien na wei, Hong Kong. Plastique, London. Deadshot, Los Angeles…" Amanda continued the assignments, listing agent after agent, before finally coming to an end.

"This is where we part. I just have this to say: it's judgment day, everyone, and despite how you may all feel about me, I still hope to see you all on the other side. And if you can't make it there — then make sure to give them hell first."

Chapter End Notes

This is just a filler chapter. I apologize for any mistakes, my beta is currently on vacation. Next chapter is when the fighting starts.

I've decided to go with Hal Jordan as Green Lantern, because the Arrowverse has more-or-less confirmed that Dig is their equivalent of John Stewart. Since I'm purposefully not putting Diggle in this story, it makes sense to go with Hal, especially since I hinted at him first.

Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be removed!

The contest is still on. Submit your entries either on Tumblr or via link through comments/reviews!

Don't forget to update the TV Tropes Page! Check the Tumblr blog for news! All links are on the first and last chapters of the AO3 version!
Chapter Summary

The war begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 72: Judgment Day

When Green Arrow and Black Canary rode into Starling City, they barely recognized it. The place was swarmed with soldiers (both formal and informal) each diligently preparing for the battle that was to come. Battlements were raised, tanks rolled down the asphalt streets, orders were shouted — it slightly resembled those picturesque scenes made in war movies, the kind that were vividly cruel and rosy at the same time.

But this was no war movie. Even now they could see the slightest hints of disorganization, the panic. This wasn't a conventional war after all. They didn't have days, weeks, months before they met their enemy. They didn't have enemy strongholds to siege upon, to starve out. There weren't even any rules of war that they could adhere to, because their form of war was so very distinctly different from humanity's.

They flew in gigantic ships that could warp from one end of the galaxy to the next. They teleported onto battlefields, not marched, and when they did, it was as individuals, not in formations. They didn't use bullets, but laser beams, not shields, but forcefields. They spoke with their mouths and their minds, and could take control of others given the right materials and enough time.

The Dominators were the very manifestation of every negative alien stereotype out there. If not for J'onn and the distinct lack of a significant extraterrestrial presence on Earth, this could've flared something far worse come the aftermath. Perhaps it was time Supergirl unveiled a portion of her origins to the public. To cut off any resentment and discrimination before it could build into a real problem.

But that is for another time. Green Arrow thought, as he parked his motorcycle to the side. None of that mattered if they lost this war.

Nothing would matter at all.

A tall, stout man with dark skin greeted them upon arrival, introducing himself as General Roy Stewart, the man charged with leading the forces currently stationed in Starling. He had greeted them amiably and had assigned them to different parts of the city. Green Arrow would be alongside the general himself in the downtown area. Black Canary would be in the other side of the city, in the Glades, with the SIC and some of the trusted police, who would help coordinate troop movements.

Which is how she ended up standing next to Detective Quentin Lance, waiting for Armageddon to begin.

"Are you sure those sticks of yours are going to help?" Quentin asked quizzically as they stood on
the streets with the other soldiers, waiting for the ships to break atmosphere.

Black Canary looked down at her tonfa, and then flicked on the electricity. Quentin stepped back a bit as the familiar buzzing sound assaulted his ears.

"Ah, I see." The detective gave an approving nod. Canary beamed at him, but before she could reply, the people around them began shouting. They looked up at the sky to see ships teleporting above the city, one by one. The defenders of Starling City tensed, readying themselves for battle.

"Be careful. Please.'

Barry stared at the text Iris had sent him, resisting the urge to rub his fingers against the screen. Right now, he was in one of A.R.G.U.S.'s most secure locker rooms in Central City base. He was already dressed in his suit, the devices stored in a bag on his back with numerous calorie bars similarly hidden on his body. Of course, that was no means enough to travel the entire world; there were hidden caches of similar cargo hidden about in just about every major city, with a map of their locations loaded into a special phone that he was also taking with him. With the current situation, some of the caches may have been compromised, so they had elected to place more caches than what was necessary in every city, just in case.

"You ready?" Kara asked, entering the room. She had just seen Astra and Firestorm take off into space, ready to deal with the Metabomb.

"As much as I'll ever be." Barry exhaled. "You?"

Kara shrugged. A beeping noise broke any further conversation; Kara took out her phone and narrowed her eyes. "We're approaching saturation. It's time."

Barry nodded. He took his regular phone and placed it into one of the lockers, taking care to take out the phone that Amanda had given him and strapping it into the pouch on his back. Beside him, he could see Kara do the same. The two siblings took deep breaths in tandem with each other, exchanging a final nod before bursting away in a bout of super speed.

When the first Dominator appeared in front of him, Black Lightning didn't think — he blasted it with a fist full of electricity before aiming for the next one. It wasn't long before the men and women around him followed his lead as more and more Dominators materialized on the ground. Within minutes the area surrounding him had become a war zone, and he often had to dodge both friendly and enemy fire.

It decidedly reminded him of his early days as a vigilante: attacking members of the Hundred, interfering in shootouts between gangsters and policemen alike, ducking around corners after everything was over… All of that, of course, wasn't exactly comparable to an alien invasion at the surface, but in practice it was very much the same.

There was chaos everywhere, people shouting out orders, bodies littering the ground; these were all hallmarks he was intimately familiar with. Hallmarks that haunted his dreams, that helped to keep him away from this life for so long. He may have quit because Lynn couldn't handle the sight of his haggard body collapsing onto their bed every night in pain, but it was trying to process the trauma of everything he saw that kept him from entering the thick of it all again.

Until his girls were taken and Tobias Whale reared his ugly head again. Until the Justice League came, promising their support in exchange for his. Until he heard of the Dominators, and realized
that this had become so much bigger than him, than his family, than Freeland. He wasn't a fool; he knew
that entering the wider world of superheroics could end in his death.

But what kind of man would he be if he chose to turn his back on all of this again? When there were
threats to the world like this?

Grunting, Black Lightning spied on a group of Dominators cobbling together, trying to overwhelm a
nearby squad. With great effort, he charged electricity into his right arm, blue energy dancing around
his body as he gestured towards a nearby car. He lifted the car and thrust it forward, the automobile
hitting the invaders like a bowling ball.

*A happy man.* He thought. *And a selfish one too.*

Not for the first time, Vixen wondered if it would've been better if she had left the Anansi Totem
with Kuasa. Then she thought better of it — while it may have been Kuasa's birthright, it was one
with no purpose. Zambezi was gone, dead. And Vixen highly doubted that with their village a husk,
Kuasa would be selfless enough to use it to protect the world in its stead.

No, she would've used it for revenge first, like she had with the Water Totem. And then she
would've used it for far more selfish pursuits, to futilely fill the hole their family left behind, a hole
that her revenge would've never been able to satisfy. Because revenge was all Kuasa had lived for all
these years, with no focus on what happened beyond that.

Meanwhile, with the totem in *her* hands, she could do *this.*

The familiar silhouette of a gorilla shadowed her, and with a roar, she grabbed the arms of one of her
assailants and spun around, knocking down two others before throwing the Dominator down to the
ground. Another silhouette appeared around her, this time of an elephant, and Vixen followed up her
assault with a definitive *stomp*! Immediately, the Dominator's head caved in, and it ceased to move.

Yes, there were times when Vixen wondered if keeping the Anansi Totem with her was for the best.

But — as she looked around for enemies to take out, for comrades that needed help — it was times
like this that reminded her that it *was.*

If the people of Hub City had to describe the Martian Manhunter in one word, it would be 'reserved'.

Granted, all the members of the Justice League were reserved to some extent, but they tended to
emote occasionally, even the infamous three that covered the lower half of their faces. Martian
Manhunter, meanwhile, *never* displayed emotion; his famous interview explaining the death of his
planet was the first time any member of the public had seen him expressing feeling whatsoever, and
even that was rather subdued. If it weren't for the clear pain in his eyes, people might've even
claimed he was making the whole thing up.

Now, whatever doubts about the Martian's sincerity had been put to rest. No amount of acting skill
couldfake the pure hatred and rage on his face as he tore apart Dominator after Dominator with
uncharacteristic savagery. Under normal circumstances, his fellow soldiers would've found it
disturbing, damaging the superhero's currently pristine reputation. Considering that the Dominators
were a genocidal race of world conquerors that were currently invading their planet, however, many
of them didn't particularly care and even silently cheered J'onn on as they fought side-by-side with
their city's protector.
"Are we there yet?"

"No."

There was a beat of silence.

"How about now?"

"No."

More silence. And then…

"What about—"

"By Rao—NO! WE ARE NOT THERE YET! ASKING EVERY TWO SECONDS IS NOT GOING TO CHANGE THAT!" Astra all but screamed as she whipped around to face Firestorm, teeth gnashing. Firestorm simply held up his hands in surrender, leaning back into his chair in a show of submission. Satisfied, Astra turned away, facing the vast expanse of space once more.

You're really pushing your luck right now, Ronald. She is as powerful as Kara, remember? Angering her would not be a wise discourse.

Ronnie snorted, ignoring the sharp look Astra shot him. Relax, Professor. I'm only trying to lighten up the atmosphere. We've been stuck in this ship for close to an hour and the silence was killing me. And besides, if she tries anything, Kara will hunt her down and carve her up like a pumpkin.

Oh? Ronnie could just feel the old man lifting his eyebrow. Am I not a sufficient companion? Do I bore you, Ronald?

Ronnie thought to himself for a moment. … Do you really want me to answer that question?

Ronald!

"We're here." Astra announced, unintentionally saving Ronnie from what would've been a very uncomfortable conversation. Firestorm leaned his head forward to look, spotting the familiar sight of a Dominator ship, and grinned.

"Oh, I am so going to enjoy this more than I should."

Chapter End Notes

Short, and not my best chapter, but I couldn't keep on leaving you guys hanging. There's only five or so chapters left in this act anyway, so once I get the motivation the Dominator arc should be done within a week.

The only thing I want to comment on is the Stein/Ronnie relationship. It's a lot more vitriolic, as you can see, thanks to the different circumstances of their merging compared to Stein/Jax. Another reason is because Stein views Ronnie as more of an equal to him than Jax. That's not a knock on Jax, but he didn't really get to develop his intelligence until Rip made him the Waverider's mechanic. Ronnie, meanwhile, was the chief engineer of the Particle Accelerator and is engaged to Caitlin Snow, a verified genius and someone else Stein would view as a peer. He's presumably much smarter than Jax
is, at least at this point.
Chapter 73: Crescendo

Stuck in the throes of battle, there were barely any shouts of alarm from the people of New York when a line of Dominators was suddenly knocked down with a supercharged kick from a red blur. The Flash's recognizable form stood, blurred at the edges, until he zipped around all the invaders of the city, tagging them with the discs that would, hopefully, be their planet's salvation.

Alas, New York was one of the most populated cities in the world, and thus a comparatively-sized invasion force had been sent to conquer it. The Flash was barely halfway done before he had to go for a resupply, picking up some rations at the nearby station to keep up his energy. Dropping down into one of the now abandoned subway stations, he zipped inside, jumping over the turnstiles and speeding up the stairs. He looked across the platform before spotting the correct trash bin, lifting it up to reveal a hidden hatch. He twisted it open, then picked up the large bag of disks and calorie bars within.

He quickly ripped off the wrapper of one of the bars and crammed it into his mouth, chewing and swallowing faster than was strictly safe. Already, he could feel the calories metabolizing in his body, that hidden pit of hunger being satisfied. The Flash finished the bar post-haste, and was quick to open another one and bit into it with a gusto.

Still need to work on the taste, he thought as he swallowed once more. Then, he picked up the bag of disks and poured its contents into the large backpack attached to his suit, and bolted.

Screams in Russian were heard as a stray beam from a nearby building broke off and started rolling towards the mass of people on the street. Both humans and Dominators alike scrambled to get out of the way — but before it could crash into the group, a blue blur appeared, lifting the beam away. The silhouette of the Maid of Might shadowed over Moscow, before she shoved the mass of wood, plaster, and concrete through one of the nearby ships, causing it to explode in a most spectacular manner. A ragged cheer went out, the sight invigorating the Russians to fight harder.

Supergirl watched the fruits of her labor for a short moment, before diving down to the streets at supersonic speed, tagging Dominators left and right while at the same time trying to limit the collateral damage. Once she was sure all the invaders were tagged, she flew away onto the next city, knowing that time was of the essence.

Amanda sat within the safety of her underground bunker in Central City, watching the chaos of the world above as she directed several of her agents around the globe. Remote, hidden cameras that had been installed at her instruction kept an eye on the action, though due to the increasing damage, she
had the agents with her switching the feeds constantly.

One feed showed China White shouting out orders to nearby soldiers, ducking and rolling as she shot away at their alien enemies from a safe distance. In another, Deadshot had a specially-designed rifle shooting down Dominators as well, hiding himself in a cleverly obscured nest in one of the medium-sized buildings in LA.

Grimly satisfied at what she was seeing, she switched the screens again to a color-coded map, watching as sections of the world began to stabilize. The color red, indicating a dense population of Dominators, was a startlingly common color.

The Director of A.R.G.U.S. took a deep breath, and clutched the arms of her chair.

"Okay, we need to be as stealthy as possible," Astra whispered to Firestorm as they exited their cloaked ship. Suddenly, they felt the ship move, stumbling at the unexpected turbulence.

"What was that?" Firestorm grunted as he grabbed at a nearby wall, steadying himself.

"Bad news," his companion replied, "they're starting their descent towards the atmosphere. That can only mean they're about to drop the bomb soon."

Firestorm clenched his fist. "Then we can't afford to be stealthy anymore — we're gonna have to be quick."

Astra smirked at him, then punched a nearby wall, denting it. She punched it again and again, and once she was satisfied that the metal had been weakened enough, she tore it apart, opening a hole for them. On the other side were Dominators that heard the commotion, but before they could fire, they were flash-fried by twin blasts of searing hot flames.

Firing bursts of fire behind him, Firestorm flew through the hole, following Astra as she punched and kicked her way through the swarming Dominators. Idly throwing his own attacks on the way, he scanned the halls, looking.

*Any ideas, professor?*

*Mmm…the bottom levels, perhaps? If they intend to drop the bomb instead of launching it, they would have to have it on the lowest level of vessel for logistic's sake.*

Ronnie shrugged mentally. *Works for me.* Out loud, he shouted, "Hey! Astra!"

Astra turned away from a group of Dominators she had just frozen to look at him.

"Bottom level."

The former general blinked before her face lit up in realization. Wasting not another moment, she punched the iced-up floor, watching it crumble. Grabbing Firestorm, she flew up and then down to generate some velocity as she punched through subsequent floors with impunity.

Firestorm did not enjoy this. At all.

"WHY!" He screamed in despair.

"Because you're too slow, that's why!" Astra shouted back.

Finally, after punching away floor after floor, a gleam of silver caught their eyes. They landed back
on their feet as they stared at a humongous silver orb that was sitting on top of the gateway to the world below.

"What the hell…?" Firestorm breathed out, stunned.

Astra crossed her arms. "I'm not a scientist, but the size isn't a good thing, right?"

"Barry and J'onn said that if the Dominators projected this bomb, it would be able to kill millions. I didn't really believe them until now."

Perturbed, Astra looked up, and saw the Dominators in the higher floors fleeing. "We need to hurry. Do you think you can transmute this bomb?"

Firestorm paused, then nodded. "I can, but I'm going to need time and concentration." He flew above the bomb and landed gently on it, placing his now bare hands on the shining surface.

Only to cling onto the sphere for dear life as the ship shook unexpectedly. He yelped as he felt the floor open beneath him and he fell down into the blue sky above.

"Firestorm!" Astra yelled in alarm, then dove after him and the bomb at a breakneck pace. The shaking — it must have been a warp! They must've decided to move up the time table of the bombing after they realized we were on board!

In the shock of his unexpected fall, Firestorm had been forced to let go of the bomb briefly. However, he quickly reoriented himself and chased after it, desperately using his fire powers. He spotted a flash of black from the periphery of his eye and saw Astra manage to get under the bomb and try to slow its descent. However, whatever that bomb was made of was exceptionally dense, because the gravitational pull on it was too strong. Astra could barely slow it down, only enough to give Firestorm time to land on it and restart the transmutation. Already she could see the shaking of her arms as she tried to push back against the bomb.

Knowing that their time frame had been cut exponentially, he concentrated on the molecules within, willing them to shift as fast as possible.

"C'mon, c'mon, c'mon…" he chanted under his breath.

Amanda grimaced as one of her air cams spotted Firestorm and Astra's current predicament. At this rate, Central City and all its surroundings would be a crater.

"Patch me into Supergirl and Flash's comms now!" She barked at a nearby tech.

Then, with great urgency, she grabbed a nearby bottle of wine and took a deep swig, grateful for the sudden buzz of alcohol.

It's times like these when I really hate this job.

Chapter End Notes

Another short chapter, but now we're reaching the climax. In hindsight I should've merged this chapter and the last one together, but it was planned separately so I went
with it that way.
Arc IV, Chapter 74: Diminuendo

Chapter Summary

As Firestorm fights to transmute the bomb, the rest of the world is gradually overwhelmed by the Dominators.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 74: Diminuendo

Deathstroke roared as he slammed into a Dominator, lifting it by the waist and throwing it into one of the burning fires on the street. Its screams were barely audible over the raging gunfire. Beside him, Supergirl bowled over another half-dozen or so, pushing them into the flames as well.

"Supergirl! We need you to head over to Central City now!" Her comm blared to life, Amanda's urgent voice cracking slightly.

"What's going on?" The Flash's voice followed.

"The bomb has been released. Astra is currently trying to slow its descent while Firestorm transmutes it, but she isn't strong enough. We need another Kryptonian there immediately!"

"What about the rest of the cities? I haven't tagged all of them!"

"Flash, you'll handle it; I'll transfer all the data from your phone, Supergirl, to his. And Flash, if you need more calories, just hit up the supply centers. They'll understand."

"Copy that."

"Copy that as well. Making a beeline for Central City as we speak," Supergirl responded, before turning off her comm. She looked to Deathstroke, who gave her a single, unspoken nod. With that, she took to the skies.

Flash turned off his comm and turned to Plastique, who had just thrown a bit of concrete she loaded at a nearby group of Dominators. "Change of plans. I'm going to have to split sooner than I thought. Think you can handle things here?"

Plastique gave him a disbelieving look before pointedly slapping the gun of a nearby Dominator. Flash zipped over and picked her up, ducking as the gun exploded.

**Boom!**

As the sky began to rain Dominator bits, an all too common occurrence in London for the past few hours, Flash nodded as Plastique smirked at him.

"Right. That answers that," the superhero set the woman down back to her feet, "I'll be heading to Paris, then."
Unlike other cities, things were not peachy over in Starling City (relatively speaking). With Supergirl currently busy tagging Dominators and trying to stop bombs, her city lacked metas in their forces. While Green Arrow and Black Canary were far more skilled than almost all of their comrades, with enemies like the Dominators, their contribution wasn't much more than any other soldier their.

Green Arrow had long since run out of arrows and was now fighting with a sword that had been blacksmithed for him by the Flash. While it was strong enough to cut through Dominator skin, he had to fight up close, and thus had to take extra care to avoid friendly fire. Black Canary, meanwhile, had gone the opposite direction: her tonfas had long since run out of reserve power, and she had been forced to resort to grabbing one of the guns of her fallen comrades and using years of shooting lessons to good use.

It was while evading a barrage of enemy fire that this training paid off. From the corner of her eye, she spotted another Dominator aiming their blaster directly at Quentin Lance. Reacting entirely on instinct, she screamed at Quentin to "Duck!", aiming her gun directly at the Dominator's head. Thankfully, the detective did exactly that, allowing the shot to sail over his head and connect. Their assailant collapsed like a puppet with cut strings.

Quentin turned around to look briefly at the invader that had nearly killed him, before nodding his thanks to the vigilante. The two then stood back-to-back and continued to fire away at the growing hordes.

"What the hell are they doing over there?" One soldier called out, pointing to the group of Dominators circling around something.

Martian Manhunter flew up, and saw red. With a roar, he dove down, avoiding shots of enemy fire along the way. He picked up one Dominator with his immense strength, squeezing and crushing its neck before using its body as a bludgeon, knocking all the other Dominators away. Then, he turned to the object of ire: one of the Dominators' mind control devices.

He kicked the devoice down before slamming the skull of the Dominator he just weaponized onto it, denting the metal and breaking off the glass. The device fizzed out, before darkening. Panting, Martian Manhunter let the dead Dominator go, before turning back to the rest of the battlefield.

Akio Yamashiro ripped the arm off of one Dominator and used it to knock the gun out of its other hand. Then he shot it in the head using his own gun.

"Akio!" His mother chided, slicing away at Dominators herself using her Katana.

"Everyone else is distracted, mom." Akio replied to the unspoken scolding. "They'll just mistake it as a hallucination or something. Plus my face is well-hidden."

"Besides, I'd rather have him exposed and alive rather than hidden and dead, Tatsu," Maseo added on beside them, aiming another shot.

Tatsu groaned. Her boys were impossible!

"You think this will work?" Cisco muttered as he readied his hand.

"Doesn't hurt to try," Hartley shrugged, similarly readying his gauntlet.
At a silent count of three, they fired at the same time, merging Cisco's vibration blast with Hartley's sonic wave. The effect was instantaneous: the two attacks reverberated together, hitting every Dominator in the vicinity and throwing them off their feet, crashing into concrete and debris. The soldiers, who had been directed to hide behind the two metas, followed up with a rampage barrage of gunfire, killing their stunned enemies.

Cisco pumped his fist while Hartley threw up his hands in cheer, followed by a high-five.

"We totally need to work on that later," Cisco insisted.

"Yeah," Hartley smirked, before turning back to the battlefield when the sounds of fighting began to start up again. "Just not with an alien invasion going on."

"What the hell was that!?!" Eddie shouted after the sounds of the blast subsided.

"Don't know, don't care! Keep firing!" Ralph shouted back, his gun firing round after round at the approaching Dominators.

Beside him, Iris was doing the same, before she was suddenly knocked off her feet. She blinked her eyes open, only vaguely recognizing her father, before his scream of "GET DOWN!" caused her to protect her head. A large explosion could be heard, rocking the ground near her.

"Dad, what…?"

"Grenade, Iris," Joe cut her off, "one of the other soldiers got desperate."

Iris nodded, not that Joe could see it, before her eyes spotted a black speck in the sky that was steadily getting bigger.

What is that? She wondered, unexplainable dread creeping up her body.

Astra grunted as she turned around, her back to the bomb as she used her feet to push against an invisible, non-existent wall. With no leverage, however, the effect was negligible at best. The bomb was still falling at high speed, and it would land before Firestorm could transmute it in time.

"ASTRA!"

The general whipped her head around, spotting her niece's approach. "Kara…!?" Then, realizing what her arrival must have meant, "KARA! HURRY!"

Supergirl complied, pushing her super speed to its limits. She arrived at the bomb and began to push at an angle, trying to get more leverage. Already Astra could feel the bomb's descent slowing down, but still, it was falling.

C'mon Firestorm, you need to hurry too!

Concentrate, concentrate… Ronald Raymond and Martin Stein thought as one, feeling more of the molecules shift.

Gotta do it, gotta do it, the world's depending on us, Clarissa and Lily and Caitlin are depending on us…!

They pushed and they pushed all the power they had into the bomb, rearranging and rearranging the
Supergirl stopped as the large bomb she and her aunt had been pushing against disappeared. And in its place was…

"Candy?" Astra looked down at the colorful orbs in her hands, befuddled.

The other Kryptonian popped one into her mouth as Firestorm flew up beside her. "Mmmm…milk chocolate. My favorite."

Chapter End Notes

Third short chapter, but it also has ten parts, so whatever. Next chapter will be the last leg of the invasion, and the chapter after that, the immediate aftermath.
Chapter Summary

co·da (/ˈkɑdə/) - a concluding event, remark, or section

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 75: Coda

"So. Much. Candy."

"Supergirl."

"I love candy. I love it so much."

"Supergirl."

"Marry me, candy, marry—"

"KARA! ALIEN INVASION!"

"Alright, alright," Supergirl groused, storing the rest of the candy away in a hidden pocket, "Don't get your panties in a twist, 'Manda. I'm already on my way to Russia as we speak. I should be there in, like, ten minutes."

"Good, because Flash has already shifted his course to Asia. We can't afford anymore delays."

"And there won't be any. Once I get to Russia, it'll be a quick zip through the remaining cities. Just like how Flash is doing right now."

"DODGE!"

The Flash stumbled to the ground, watching as an RPG flew over his head and impacted one of the Dominator ships. Idly, he took out another calorie bar and shoved it into his mouth.

"Quick zip through, she said," He almost buried his head into the mud, "Bleh."

Green Arrow groaned. Black Canary, who was sitting next to him, gave him a sympathetic look before handing him a ration bar. Her partner nodded his thanks, taking the offering and slowly unwrapping it with trembling hands.

They, along with the rest of the initial wave, had retreated back to a recovery center near the edge of the city that had been set up before the battle started. In turn, another wave of fresh troops, having been held back specifically to replace them, had marched in, covering their escape. Now the two vigilantes, along with their surviving comrades, were recuperating from their long battle, preparing themselves for the possibility that they would have to be sent out there again.
"Hey," Black Canary turned around to see Quentin standing near her, rubbing the back of his head sheepishly, "thanks for the save back there."

"Don't mention it." Canary replied, once again grateful for the voice modulator, "You would've done the same for me."

Before they could continue their conversation, they were interrupted by an audible "Ugh!". They turned their attentions to Green Arrow, who was trying to pick himself up using the bench he was sitting on as leverage.

"Arrow, what are you doing?" Black Canary asked, suspicious.

Arrow didn't bother to look at her as he replied. "I'm going back out there."

That immediately alarmed both Canary and Quentin, with the former immediately sliding over to push him back down to the bench.

"No. Absolutely not," Canary said firmly, "You're exhausted, and can barely move, Arrow. You'd be no help at all out there."

"But—" Arrow tried to protest, but this time it was Lance who cut him off.

"But nothing. You've spent the past two years protecting this city every night, just like you have today. Just this once, let us protect you."

Green Arrow gaped at him, both stunned and slightly touched. Canary took this opportunity to shove another ration bar into his hands, hoping to distract him from trying to make another break for the battlefield.

Shit. The Flash thought, feeling that brief pull of the temporal plane. Gotta slow down.

Spotting a small, nearby alcove next to a hill he was passing by, he jumped forward, tumbling forward until he crashed into the rock wall. He took in several deep breaths, feeling his legs begin to cool as the adrenaline left him.

If I went any faster, I would've time traveled. He shoved his hand into one of the compartments of his suit, searching for one of his increasingly more rare calorie bars. Or burned up into a crisp.

"Flash? Are you alright? Our sensors have indicated that you stopped moving." Amanda's much unwelcomed voice floated over his comm, and Flash resisted the urge to groan.

"I'm fine. I was just going too fast and needed to catch my breath. I'll be heading to Dubai in a few minutes, so don't worry."

"Good. Supergirl has already finished up in St. Petersburg, but a ship went down there and crashed into a section of the city. She's currently too busy trying to rescue soldiers from the debris to help you."

"Really?" Flash grunted as he got back up. "I better get a move on then."

"See that you do. Waller out."

"THEY'VE BROKEN THROUGH THE LINE!"
Immediately every head in the recovery tent shot up, with many soldiers taking to their feet. Among them, Green Arrow and Black Canary held onto each other for support as they made unsteady attempts to stand.

"Well, looks like you'll get your wish after all, Arrow." Quentin quipped as he reached for his gun.

_This is almost as bad as New York._ Flash thought as he ran through the streets of Dubai. Already he was beginning to tire, but the streets didn't seem to end. There were still so many Dominators he needed to tag in this city before Amanda could activate the disks and end the invasion. The fate of the world was literally riding on his shoulders right now.

So, with nimble fingers, he grabbed his last calorie bar, chomping through it as quickly as he could without choking. Psyching himself up, the Flash took one last deep breath, before sprinting through the streets, careful to keep his speed just under the necessary velocity needed to time travel. He tagged every Dominator he could find in Dubai, tapping them _just_ long enough for the disks to attach to their skin.

However, the energy was burned through quick, and as he reached the last Dominator, he could already feel himself stumbling. Slapping the alien with the final disk, he fell to the ground, struggling to breathe. So distracted, he barely noticed as the Dominator aimed for his back, ready to pull the trigger…

"Ma'am! Saturation confirmed!" The tech called out to his boss. "Approximately 95% of all invading forces currently on Earth have been tagged."

"Your orders, ma'am?" Another agent asked.

Amanda smirked darkly. "Let's send 'em home."

The Flash waited for the pain to come and then… nothing.

He watched as his assailant fell to its knees, screeching an unholy sound as its elongated fingers grabbed at its head. Soon another Dominator mimicked him, and then another, and before he knew it, every Dominator in Dubai was on the ground, screaming. They clawed away at their faces, at an invisible force they couldn't hope to touch, too distracted to continue fighting. Some of the soldiers took advantage of that and shot dead the invaders, but most were too enraptured at the sudden turn of events to do the same.

This wasn't just happening in Dubai. It was happening all around the world. One minute the Dominators were bearing down on Earth's forces, seemingly endless and unstoppable, and the next they were all on their knees, writhing in agony. Some attacked, but people mostly watched, disbelieving and hopeful that this would finally be the end to all the fighting.

Finally, after what seemed to be an eternity, but was most likely just a few minutes, a decision had been made. One by one, Dominator after Dominator was teleported off the battlefield. Very soon, the Earth was Dominator free, and as the ships began to warp away, a sudden silence fell upon humanity. After what seemed to be an unending fight for their survival, the unthinkable happened.

They had won.

There was no way to know who started it. But a single yell of victory shook the people awake. And
then another and another, and screams and cheers and clapping and slapping, and very soon the entire world was celebrating victory. Against all odds, they had won.

In Starling City, Green Arrow and Black Canary embraced, while in St. Petersburg, Supergirl helped a fallen soldier up. Dubai saw the Flash riding high above all others as he was picked up and put on shoulders. The people of Metropolis swamped Black Lightning, while Vixen roared a victory cry side-by-side with Detroit citizens.

The Martian Manhunter stared up at the sky as Hub City relished in their victory. Amidst the furor, he stood silently, unable to sort his feelings.

"You alright?"

He turned around to see it was one of his fellow soldiers, a Hub City citizen like himself. J'onn thought the question over, and immediately his mind led to his lost wife and children, his dead planet.

He smiled softly, and nodded. "I will be."

Above the applauding world float Astra In-Ze, who had discreetly removed herself from the proceedings once victory had been assured. She stared down at the celebrating humans, before taking out something from one of the compartments of her suit — the spy beacon, whose partner she had shared with Kara all those years ago. She fiddled with it with one hand, clasping it tight, before flying away.

Chapter End Notes

Done. Finally. I now officially hate big battle sequences. Hopefully the next one I write won't be so complicated.

So, there's about two chapters left in this act, and then I'm taking a bit of a break while I plan out Act II. I already have a general idea of what's going to happen for the rest of the arc, it's just a matter of organizing it all into chapters.

In others news, Spidey may no longer be in the MCU. Thankfully the next Spider-Man movie wasn't going to be for a while anyways, so maybe Sony and Disney will reach a new deal eventually. Neither of them want to deal with fan outrage — remember when Disney fired James Gunn for dumb comments he made well over a decade ago? Yeah, they don't want a repeat of that.

Also, you guys are making a really big deal of the joke at the end of last chapter. Now this isn't a knock on you, but I don't understand the humor in it. Turning the bomb into candy was what Jax and Stein did in canon — though admittedly I think they turned it into gumballs instead of chocolate.

Please comment and review! Also, update the TV Tropes page! Oh, and the contest is still on, but I'm tired of posting all the details so just search it up in an earlier chapter!
Chapter Summary

The world begins to recover from the Dominator Invasion as the Justice League take a short break to celebrate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 76: Moving On

"It's been three days since the Dominator Invasion, and the public is still trying to recover. In every part of the world, tents and impromptu shelters are popping up…"

"… Several major companies, such as Queen Consolidated and Wayne Industries, are donating money…"

"… The President's televised speech talks about a new dialog of international cooperation that is opening in the wake of the invasion…"

"… The Justice League, after spending the last two days helping the local governments of their cities with the collateral damage, have now made themselves scarce…"

"Barry, you're back!" Joe West said joyously as he saw his foster son enter the precinct.

Barry shrugged, smiling, as he went up to the detective's deck, plopping down a bag of Big Belly Burger. "Well, the government finally decided that the Dominators weren't coming back and that they didn't need us eggheads anymore, so they finally took off my leash and let me go home. I'm glad too — I was sick of running on coffee and bad cafeteria food."

Joe laughed, slapping the younger man on the back, "Good, good — the house just wasn't the same without your baby face in it," he leered at the food, "and I see you brought Big Belly Burger! Of all the places to survive the invasion mostly intact…"

"What can I say? The gods are smiling down on us." The speedster looked around in a contemplative manner. "I see you officers are still working cases even as the contractors are covering up the leaks in your roof." He pointed upwards, where construction workers were doing exactly that.

"Crime stops for no one, Barry." A voice piped up. Both men turned around to see Iris walking up to them, her eyes intense. "Not even for the end of the world."

An awkward silence fell upon the group as Barry and Iris stared at each other. Joe, feeling the tension, made a hasty excuse and grabbed the food, bolting for Ralph's desk. As the other man voiced his complaints in the background, Iris silently gestured for Barry to follow her, making her way up the stairs and to the private room where she and Barry had planned that fateful operation all those months ago. Barry, after some hesitation, followed, greeting some people along the way.
Iris had Barry enter first, following him and closing the door behind her. She locked it, then activated the anti-eavesdropping device. Satisfied with the security and content they wouldn't be disturbed, she turned back to her — former? — best friend, crossing her arms. The silence ticked on, until…

"You did good out there."

Barry smiled, his expression soft. "Thanks. I heard you did pretty good too."

Iris gave a small, deprecating smirk. "Maybe I did. But I didn't run around the world and help scare the Dominators off-planet."

"I wasn't alone in that."

"Doesn't diminish what you did. You helped save the world, Barry."

Barry frowned and placed a hand on her shoulder. He was relieved to find that she didn't tense up at his touch. "We saved the world, Iris. Supergirl and I may have run around the world attaching those devices, but we wouldn't have been able to do that if it hadn't been for you, and everyone else fighting, occupying them long enough for us to get everything in place. It wasn't just us, or just the Justice League — everyone had a part to play."

Iris' smirk turned into a genuine smile, but after a moment, tension returned to her body. Barry, sensing the change, quickly let his hand fall back to his side.

"Barry, about what happened—" Iris started to say, only to stop when she saw him hold up a hand.

"You're still uncomfortable with it," He noted.

She opened her mouth to half-heartedly refute his statement, only to let it fall closed. There was no point in lying. He'd see right through it. Barry took that opportunity to pull her into a hug. Iris stiffened at the gesture, melting into the embrace several moments later.

"We don't have to talk now." Barry murmured into her ear. "Take your time, Iris. I'll be there when you're ready."

Iris nodded into his chest, clutching his shirt. They stayed like that for a while, only separating when Barry's phone rang with a text. Barry sighed, taking it out and reading it.

"Now this is a party! Chug! Chug! Chug!" Cisco chanted as Ronnie poured shot after shot down his throat. Next to them, Caitlin shook her head in an exasperated manner.

"As uncouth and unrefined as ever, Cisquito." Hartley commented primly, taking a sip of his drink.

Cisco threw his arm around his neck, causing Hartley to stumble and fumble his glass, just barely managing to avoid spilling any wine. "Lighten up, Rathaway! We just saved the world!"

The two men started their habitual bickering, while Ronnie called for more alcohol. While Caitlin tried to talk her fiancee down, Martin Stein slid over, dragging his daughter over with him.
Following them was Clarissa, happily carrying a platter of warm brownies.

In another corner, Jefferson was talking in hushed tones on his phone.

"No, Anissa, you are not joining the Justice League. You're not experienced enough for this yet… I don't care if you fought in an alien invasion, everyone did that, the entire world was at stake… We're not hurting for members anyway! And even if we were, you're not on the long list, let alone the short one! Listen to me, young lady…"

"Ah, the joys of parenthood." Mari said jokingly to J'onn, taking a bite out of some nachos.

"Indeed." J'onn observed in bewilderment as Jefferson's voice grew in volume.

"Everyone looks happy," Oliver commented, leaning over the balcony to look over the garden, "I'm glad. We could use some smiles after all this."

Beside him, Laurel giggled, taking a sip of her wine. Oliver pulled her in close, trying to kiss her on the corner of her mouth. Laurel turned her head so their lips met fully instead. Buzzed, Oliver found that he couldn't deny his girlfriend, returning the kiss with enthusiasm.

After a few minutes, they finally separated, with Laurel resting her head against his chest. A comfortable silence settled between them as they watched the ongoing festivities in relative peace.

"It was wonderful, you know?"

Oliver looked down to see a melancholic look had entered Laurel's eyes.

"Mrs. Merlyn was alive. The *Gambit* never sank, and you and I — we got those ten lost years back. It was a world where we had everything we ever wanted."

Oliver sighed. "Not just us. Barry's mom was alive. There was no sign of Kara or Kal anywhere, meaning their planet probably never exploded. It wasn't just wonderful — it was perfect."

Laurel lifted her head to look him in the eye. "Perfect… except for one thing."

And at that, Oliver sees a flash of olive skin and dark eyes, and knows immediately what Laurel is talking about. But he isn't ready to go there, and he knows that neither is she.

"It would've been happy," he says instead, because it's the closest thing to the truth that he's willing to give.

"But never full."

"No," And Oliver sees Barry snacking on popcorn and Kara munching on brownies, and adds, "Not even close."

Kara was on a mission. And no one was going to stop her.

It would take all of her stealth training. Every inch of all those hours staying perfectly still and silent, of mastering her steps so not even the most fragile leaf would crunch beneath her feet. The smallest gestures of feinting and slipping things, all to snag her prize.

She was careful. Careful to keep her presence unnoticed, to avoid the gazes of everyone around her, to make no contact whatsoever, not even the slightest nudge. And it worked. No one noticed a thing.
Zeroing in on her prize, she reached over, ever so slowly—

SLAP!

"Aww…” The Kryptonian whined, pouting under Clarissa's disapproving glare.

"No, Kara. You've already had five, and I made these for everyone. No more for you."

"But Clarissa…”

"No. I raised Lily, Kara, that is not going to work on me. You are not getting any more brownies. If you want more, either make or buy your own."

"So why do I only get five while Barry gets a dozen?"

Clarissa whirled around in horror, getting a front seat to a guilty Barry Allen dammingly licking his fingers, with smudges of chocolate on the corners of his mouth. He froze when he spotted Clarissa glaring at him, before speeding away. Clarissa let out an angry scream before giving chase, yelling for Barry to show himself and face punishment. Kara watched the scene in amusement, before her sharp eyes spotted a spare brownie left on the platter. It seemed Barry had done her a solid after all.

She picked the brownie up and munched happily away, pleased as punch. Punch that was happily placed next to the brownies, complete with ladle. Once she was done eating, she picked up a paper cup and poured herself a drink, downing in it with bliss.

"I see you haven't lost your love of sweets, little one."

Kara sighed, turning around to see Astra standing there with a small smirk on her face. Surprisingly, she wasn't wearing her suit — instead, she was wearing a black jacket over her dark red t-shirt and navy blue jeans. It looked… domestic. Casual.

Human.

"How'd you get in? And why are you here? I'd figured you'd try to find the most remote place on the planet and stay there after all this was over," Kara asked instead.

Astra smiled lightly. "The one you call Ronnie let me in. And as for why I'm here — you haven't forgotten our deal already, have you?"

Oh. "Right. That." Kara sighed once more, "I take it you want to cash that in now?"

Rather than answering, Astra took a quick look around, "Can we continue this in private? There are some things I need to say that no one else needs to hear."

Kara looked apprehensive, before complying, gesturing Astra to follow her.

"Here." Kara said, letting Astra into the room before sliding the door shut with a press of a button. "We won't be disturbed here."

Astra looked around, noting the expensive-looking furnishings. "Impressive. A lot of money must've been put into the construction of this base. Though, I must admit, having its location publicized isn't particularly wise."

Kara refrained from voicing out loud that they shared her concerns and that the Hall of Justice was only their temporary base. Astra may have aided them in the recent battle, but that didn't make her an
ally. "We're not here to make small talk, Astra. What do you want to know?"

The former general turned to look at her, and said nothing. Instead, she seemed content to stare at her niece, an indecipherable look in her eye. After a minute or two of this, Kara had to resist the urge to fidget or tell her aunt to get it over with. It wouldn't do to show weakness.

"You've grown, Kara."

"Yes. I remember you saying as much before we fought." Kara replied, trying to keep the irritation out of her voice.

"Well, forgive me for repeating my words." Astra said in turn, though her tone was more melancholic than angry. "It's just something hard to see, knowing I've missed out on so much of your life."

Kara had nothing to say to that, simply crossing her arms instead.

"You've become so beautiful, so strong. As much as it saddens me, it also fills me with pride, knowing you've grown up so well."

"Funny." Kara said bitterly, "You sounded angry about how I turned out the last time we talked."

"Because I was angry. Some of my anger was at you, but most of it was at whoever it was that forced you to such extreme lengths. The people that threatened yours and Kal-El's safety to the point that you felt the only way to protect him and yourself was to become a killer. I knew that those people could be human, so I hated humans in turn, and now I realize that I was wrong to do so. I was just so angry at everything…" Kara's harsh gaze softened slightly at this. She knew how that felt.

"… Most of all, however, I was angry with myself." Astra continued, stunning her niece with her words. "You shouldn't have had to make those choices. If anyone had to, it should've been me. You are my niece, the closest thing in the world I have to a daughter — the only family I have left. I wasn't there for you when you needed me, and because of that, you suffered so much."

"That wasn't your fault, Astra." Kara said immediately, cutting off her aunt before she could say more. "You couldn't have known we were alive, let alone on this planet. It's not like we were publicly declaring ourselves Kryptonians to the entire world."

"Not until you started flying around with a cape." Astra noted, managing to get an amused smile in response. "In all seriousness, I should have. Indigo was the one that got Fort Rozz out of the Phantom Zone. She had to have known it was your ship that pulled us out. If I had just pressed her for more information…"

"She would've hidden it from you anyway. Information like that is too important to just give away. She was probably planning to blackmail you with it later down the line."

Astra sighed. "Yes, she probably was. Regardless, I am sorry, Kara. For everything."

Kara looked at her searchingly, trying to determine whether or not she was sincere. Seemingly satisfied, she moved forward, pulling Astra into an unexpected embrace. Astra stiffened briefly before relaxing and returning the hug.

"I'm sorry too." Kara's muffled voice echoed in her ears. "Not for my actions, because I know that they were necessary. But the pain it caused you… that's something I never wanted. Even after everything, you are still my aunt, and I love you."
Astra felt tears fill her eyes as she clung tighter to her niece, burying her face into Kara's blonde hair.

After all their tears had shed, Kara and Astra had settled down on one of the couches. The party was still in full swing in the garden and other main areas, but neither of them had any desire to return to the festivities. Instead, Kara had used a pot and stove in the small kitchen attached to the room to brew them some hot chocolate.

"I can see why you love the people of this planet so much." Astra commented while Kara blew on her warm mug. "Now that the haze of rage is gone, I can see there's a charm here. They have their individualities, but when it truly matters, they stand together. It's a remarkable difference from Krypton."

"How so?" Kara asked, intrigued. She so rarely talked about Krypton these days. At first, it had been because the memories were painful, but eventually stories had been coaxed out of her. However, even those stories faded — with the League, she had never been allowed to dwell on the past for long. It was only when Kal-El was old enough to understand that she had been able to revive their heritage, teaching him their tongue, their legends, their family's history; but the information was fragmented. Time had worn and washed it all away, leaving it smooth and undetailed. If there was anything in the world Kara had regretted, it was that.

Astra looked at her sadly. "What do you remember of Krypton, Kara?"

"Not much." Kara reluctantly admitted. "I remember the important things, like our family, and our culture, but everything else…"

"That's hardly surprising. You may have been much older than Kal-El the day Krypton ended, but you were still a child. You wouldn't want to remember that day, and the less you try to remember, the more you forget." Astra looked oddly wistful. "I wish I had that luxury."

Kara took a sip of her drink, now feeling uncomfortable. Things had taken a rather dim turn.

"Krypton…" Astra looked like she was struggling to say the right words. "Krypton was stagnant, Kara. We were one of the most advanced civilizations in the universe, yes, perhaps even the most advanced — but somewhere along the way, we lost our vision, our spark. During our golden age, we were explorers, discovering planets, founding colonies, making advances that no one else in the galaxy could even dream of."

"But eventually, we stopped, our creativity giving way to expediency. We abandoned our outposts, started mining resources from Krypton. We narrowed our scientific pursuits to the safety and security of our people, rather than those that could revolutionize life itself. We even started genetically engineering our children so they would be predisposed to certain professions; your cousin was the first natural birth the planet had seen in centuries. We no longer cared for enriching our culture and our futures, merely for maintaining the status quo. And, around the time you were born, we realized the folly of this."

Kara blinked. "Wait a minute. I thought the rumors about Krypton's imminent destruction only started around the time of Kal's birth?"

Astra shook her head. "It wasn't that simple, Kara. Your father and uncle and other scientists had discovered Krypton's depleting natural resources long before that. In truth, most of the upper castes, especially in the science community, had been seeing the signs for decades if not more, but were content to ignore it. It was a problem for future generations to deal with. Even with this discovery, all it ascertained was that Krypton was to die a slow death, over the course of several centuries, perhaps
"No one was all that alarmed at first. Planets came and went, as did races and civilizations. It was the nature of life. Of course, people wanted to delay the destruction of Krypton as much as possible, so the science caste proposed a rationing of resources. While the High Council resisted it, the idea took root in the military. It was my inspiration for Myriad, along with General Dru-Zod's ill-fated coup."

"It wasn't until Kal's birth that we learned how bad the damage truly was. Our planet would not have lifetimes, but a measly year and a half, before all was lost and we were all gone. The High Council tried to decry it as false, but it only took hold with the lower castes. For top military officers like myself and Zod, and scientists like your father and uncle, and all their loved ones, we knew the truth."

"And while you and Zod tried to stop Krypton's destruction, my father and uncle were building us an escape ship?" Kara asked, incredulous and more than a little bit angry.

Astra shrugged, bitter and resigned. "They were scientists. The data they must've gathered told them that it was pointless to try. Your mother... your mother was planning to anyway, using compassion instead of control to spread my ideas, but your father, for all his El-esque idealism, was never as naive. Krypton wasn't meant for a slow death, but a quick one, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. In hindsight, it was the merciful end we didn't want, but it was what we were going to get."

Kara frowned and looked down at her hot chocolate, which suddenly looked very unappetizing.

"I'm sorry I told you all this, Kara." Astra apologized. "I'm sure you wanted to hold onto good memories of our home, and now I've tainted them."

"Don't be. All you did is provide some clarity. It's better I learn this now, so I can pass on the information to Kal when he's old enough to really understand. He knows the basics, but he'll ask for more, I'm sure."

Astra smiled. "You've educated him on Krypton?"

"When I had time." Kara responded solemnly, idly stirring her drink.

"I was under the impression you were stuck on an island for ten years." Of course, Astra knew that couldn't be true. The training and general world-weariness Kara had couldn't be found on some remote island, no matter who else was on it with her.

"If only." Kara sighed. "What do you want to know?"

"As much as you're willing to tell me." Astra put a comforting hand on her niece's arm. "I have no doubt you'll tell me everything when you're ready."

Kara's returning smile was small but genuine, and she leaned back into the couch, getting comfortable. They'd be here for a while.

"Then just the important bits. I guess we should start with Barry and Oliver..."
Finally done with this chapter. This is about as long as the last two or three chapters put together. Thank Astra for that.

If it seems like Kara is forgiving Astra too easily, maybe she is. But Astra is her aunt and the only blood family she has besides Kal. Unlike Malcolm, Astra had genuinely good intentions with her actions and never did anything Kara couldn't forgive. Plus, she helped save the world (admittedly thanks to a deal), so it gets her some brownie points. Finally, Kara is tired of holding onto all that bitterness and anger, especially knowing she did wrong to Astra too, no matter how justified it was. Even after everything that's happened to her, that isn't who she is, nor is it someone she ever will be.

So there's one more chapter left in Act I, and then this story will go back on hiatus so I can plan out Act II. That one is going to be much smaller in scale than Act I, while Act III will be somewhere in-between. However, there's a lot of planning needed for Act II due to a lot of plotting between characters, so I need time to really plan it through.

Until then, please comment and review! And don't be afraid to edit the TV Tropes page!
Chapter Summary

Three months after the Dominators invaded, the Justice League learn that their troubles have only just begun.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 77: The Omen

"As you can see, our primary concern are the missing caches of weaponry that were used during the invasion three months ago," Amanda began her presentation with, using a laser pointer to circle the picture of a familiar gun. "While these guns were specifically designed to harm Dominators, their ammo can be harmful to humans as well. All it would take is a determined engineer to modify them to increase the lethality of their blasts. Knowing this risk, we absolutely cannot afford to allow these weapons to enter the black market — as everyone used these models during the invasion, any criminal that gets their hands on one is highly likely to already know how to operate and maintain it. In the hands of so much as a street gang with that sort of expertise could have catastrophic consequences…"

Quite boring, isn't it?

Really J'onn? Oliver thought in exasperation.

You cannot blame me, Oliver. Normally, I would be perfectly willing to listen to one of Amanda's mission brief-lectures, but when she goes into one of those diatribes about how we cannot fail this or that mission, it gets bland in very little time. I'm sure you agree.

Perhaps. But I listen anyway because she might let something slip.

Because you and your siblings are always looking for ways to get out from under her thumb, I know. Everyone knows. It's the worst-kept secret in the Justice League.

Oh, like any of you are any diff-

"Excuse me boys, am I boring you?" Amanda angrily interrupted their mental conversation. Apparently, Oliver and J'onn had unconsciously turned their heads so they were facing each other while in the midst of their silent bickering.

Oliver opened his mouth to make a snarky excuse but J'onn cut him off with a blunt, "Yes." The archer groaned and slammed his head down on the table.

"Very well then. Just for that comment, you two will be in charge of recon and research for this mission. I'll send Black Canary and Vixen into the field instead."

"I hate you." Oliver hissed to J'onn, who simply bit down a cookie in response.
"Thanks for doing this, Kara. Things with the company are really ramping up and my workload has doubled in the last few weeks." Sam babbled to her friend as she watched Ruby sit down with Kal to watch TV. Kara, who was leaning against the doorway alongside her, simply patted her on the arm.

"Think nothing of it. I'll keep an eye on her, and if something comes up I've got the Queens and the Lances on speed dial. Worse comes to worst, Barry can take a few days off to watch them." She did a half-shrug. "It's the least I can do. After all, it's my fault your workload's gotten so big."

She was speaking, of course, of A-Corps recent purchase of half of Merlyn Global's shares. Tommy Merlyn disappeared three months ago, only leaving behind an email and a photo for his assistant to assure the public that there was no foul play, and putting up his shares of the company for sale. Merlyn Global's stock plummeted immediately after losing their CEO so soon after the last one, leaving them prime pickings for the rest of the major corporations in Starling City. Queen Consolidated immediately took advantage of the situation and bought out half the company; the other half went to A-Corps.

The primary intention of both purchasing stakes was so they could sell the company back to Tommy if he ever came back. The Queens, of course, still saw him as family and desperately wanted to repair their relationship with him. Robert and Moira originally intended to just offer Tommy a job when he — hopefully — returned, until Oliver convinced them to take this course of action instead. Sam, who only knew Tommy as an acquaintance, was urged to do the same by Kara in case something happened to the Queens and left them unable to sell. Sam consented, though she did inform Kara that the longer Tommy stayed away, the likelihood of Merlyn Global shutting down and being absorbed into their respective companies would increase.

"It would've happened either way." Sam waved her tacit apology off. "Anyway, before I go, I've been thinking, and I wonder — would you consent to being Ruby's godmother?"

If Kara had been drinking something, she would’ve spat it right out. "Are you serious?" She asked, trying not to shriek. "That's kind of a big thing to just drop on someone, you know!"

"I know and I'm sorry, but I've been run ragged lately and I've been meaning to ask you for a while anyway. There's no one else I trust with Ruby more than you, and if I don't declare a godparent or some other alternate, she'll go to Patricia if something happens to me. And after the alien invasion and all, that's something I can't risk."

"Patricia? Your guardian?"

"Yes." Sam almost growled. "She treated me well at first, only to kick me out of the house when I got pregnant with Ruby. I haven't seen her in years, and I have no reason to believe she'll be any kinder to Ruby than she was to me. And with Ruby being the heir to A-Corps and all... I don't trust her, Kara. Not like I trust you."

Kara silently gulped, a little overwhelmed and touched by Sam's admission. "Alright then. If you insist."

Barry whistled as he entered Jitters, holding up a hand to greet the barista, Kendra Saunders. The line clear, he gave her his order, handing over the required payment before stepping away to wait for the other barista to complete it. To kill the time, he took out his phone, smiling when he saw a text from Iris.

Ever since the invasion three months ago, things had eased up between them. While they still weren't as close they used to be, the bridge between them was beginning to mend. He dropped by the station
more often, bringing food not just for Joe but for her as well, and during those visits, they talked about how their days were going. Thankfully, he didn't have to ask her to be discreet — she was good at talking around certain sensitive topics like he was, no doubt thanks to her police training.

Unfortunately, things weren't all that peachy. Now that Iris had let him back into her life, he was able to see her troubles all the more easily. While he still didn't know what to think about Eddie Thawne (other than annoyance at his unwarranted frostiness), he did know that Iris loved him. Which is why it was so troubling to see the invisible wedge between them.

It's not that Iris didn't spend time with Eddie, but their interactions were lacking intimacy, chemistry. They were short, stilting, without the warmth they used to have. And the most frustrating thing about it is that Eddie didn't seem to notice. Barry could see the looks of guilt on Iris' face as things became increasingly awkward between her and Eddie, making it obvious, to him at least, that she was aware that her relationship was beginning to fray. Eddie, however, had no such indicators. It was almost as if he was blind to it all, and unfortunately, Barry had a good idea why.

Everyone who spent any decent amount of time in the precinct knew that Eddie had never given up his grudge on the Flash, that his obsession with tracking down and arresting dangerous metas was driven by his innate desire to show the Flash up. It was the only consolation he had now that he couldn't arrest Central City's premier vigilante. Everyone, including Iris. It was one of the reasons why their relationship was on the rocks — one of Iris' caveats for their reunion as a couple was that Eddie not let the Flash dominate his life again, and he was essentially breaking it. And Iris was letting him, even though it was tearing their relationship apart again.

Barry didn't want that again. He never wanted that, to be the person that caused Iris so much pain. He had been that person enough for one lifetime. So the only solution was to figure out how to get Eddie to give up on his grudge against the Flash, something easier said than done. Until now, Barry had cared little about the fact that his best friend's boyfriend hated his vigilante alter-ego so much. Perhaps he should have been more concerned, but, quite frankly, it was more of annoyance than anything else. Barry had far more dangerous things to worry about than some pretty boy detective with a bruised ego.

So how? How was he supposed to get Eddie Thawne to stop hating the Flash? It's not like he purposefully went out to spite the detective. As far as Eddie and most of everyone else who knew of the grudge, the Flash wasn't even aware Eddie existed until the detective trapped him about a year ago. Of course, the beating he gave Eddie wasn't exactly gentle, but a person would figure that he would've gotten over it after seeing all the good the Flash had done since then. All the other police he had taken out that night certainly had; Barry had gotten confirmation from their mouths himself. So why hadn't Eddie gone the same way?

As he continued to ponder this conundrum, absentmindedly picking up his order and making way to one of the empty tables, he felt someone tap on his shoulder. Clamping down on his reflexes, he turned to see that it was Hunter Zolomon.

"Professor Zolomon!" Barry plastered a smile on his face.

"Hello, Barry," Hunter smiled, a little too genuinely. "I see we've run into each other again."

That was putting it mildly. Since Barry had started the term, he had 'coincidentally' met Hunter no less than six times. Central City was not a small city. Barry was starting to suspect stalking.

"Fate works in mysterious ways," the speedster shrugged, sipping his coffee with a happy expression.
For all his complaints about lovestruck girls, it wasn't the real reason he was so unhappy in Zolomon's class, nor was the man's teaching aptitude the reason he stayed. The truth was, he had never been comfortable around Zolomon. There was something off about him, something that Barry had never been able to pinpoint. For all his affability, there was a barrier between him and Hunter Zolomon that Barry had yet to breach, and he had a sinking feeling there was a reason for that. Unfortunately, instinct wasn't enough to tip off the police, so he stayed, hoping that the man would slip something up.

"Or maybe we just have similar lifestyles and tastes," Zolomon suggested.

"Perhaps." Barry nodded. *Though I doubt it.*

Later that night, Rathaway Industries threw its annual summer gala at the newly-rebuilt ballroom in Central City's convention center. Well, actually, it was their annual *spring* gala, but the Dominators had put a damper on those plans. No matter. The rest of the world had recovered enough by now to not view an event like this in distaste. Rathaway Industries would not see a drop in stocks the next morning.

While Central City did not have a particularly prominent socialite scene like, say, Starling or Gotham, it was still rather active. Fundraisers and galas dotted by men and women bedecked in designer clothes and jewels had events for every week in every month of every year. Anyone who was anyone in Central City, and often their sister city Keystone, attended these events, rubbing shoulders and trading polite words as they beheld themselves above the rest of the riff-raff of society.

At least, until the Particle Accelerator Explosion happened. Now that same riff-raff had powers beyond comprehension, and attending a socialite event like this became a perilous endeavor. Until the Flash made himself known, attendance at galas dropped dramatically as metas with ill-intentions used their gifts to rob and kill the one percent of society. After the Flash came along, however, they all went into hiding, knowing that misusing their powers would see them with a vibrating hand in their hearts.

So, it was with that knowledge that the Rathaways heartily greeted the arriving guests as servants flittered about, carrying trays of drinks and food. Months of rearranging caterers and entertainment had gone into this night, and nothing was going to ruin it!

Fittingly, that's when the lights went out.

A furious whisper blanketed the crowd as the Rathaways tried to restore order. Oh, what humiliation! To have what was touted as Central City's social gathering of the year suffer such a hiccup. As Osgood Rathaway all but shouted at his event planner to find some way to get the power back on, a flash of blue and a harsh wind suddenly zipped through the crowd. People gasped and screamed in shock at the sudden sensation, all turning towards the source, which had reached the stage.

In the darkness, they could only see a vague, darkly-clad figure — until blue lightning arced up his body, exposing his stitched face and pitch-black eyes. For one heart-stopping moment, Central's Elite could only gaze at this terrifying visage in stunned, silent horror.

Then the man — was it a man? — grabbed Osgood's event planner by the neck and shoved a vibrating hand through his chest. The victim let out a single, choked up gasp, before collapsing to the floor. Dead.
Another beat of silence. Then came the screams.

"Barry, we're detecting a sudden rise of 911 calls emanating from the convention center."

"Copy that." The Flash replied. "And Vibe, remember what I said?"

"Yeah, yeah. Only codenames on the comms. You never know who's listening."

"Good. I—" The Flash cut off whatever he was about to say, having arrived at the convention center. The sight before him was shocking, to say the least.

He had tangentially remembered that the Rathaways were throwing their annual gala here. Hartley had mentioned as much, in an understandably bitter tone, sometime earlier this week. The only reason it was worth any notice was because Barry, when he eventually unveiled himself as the new owner and head scientist of S.T.A.R. Labs, would probably be invited to this gala.

He had been to his fair share of such events, both as a member of the League and as Oliver's friend and surrogate brother. As such, the gala had been a reminder of his inevitable fate as one of Central's elite — and his quiet reluctance and displeasure at such a thing. He would rather be in the lab or training than buttering up a couple of souped up not-nobles for extra funding.

Except, now those souped up not-nobles were running for their lives from a terror he had yet to see. And he had yet to see it, because he was too entranced by their own appearances. The stately manners of Central's elite were nowhere to be found as they ran screaming away from the convention center. Many of the women had the hems of their dresses torn and were fleeing on bare feet; the men, their shirts and buttons loose.

A sound of a crash broke him from the trance, and he gazed at the windows. Flashes of blue could briefly be seen zipping around at an unnaturally fast speed. Feeling both anticipation and dread, he sped in himself, stopping at the ballroom. Keeping his steps silent, he slowly opened the door — and froze.

It was horrifying, all the bodies spread out on the ballroom floor. Even on Lian Yu, even with the League of Assassins, he had never seen so much death; only the Invasion months prior could compare, and even that was different. That was war. This? This was cold-blooded murder.

And the worst part was there was not a hint of blood. None of life's nectar was flowing on the floor, just broken bodies with wide, unseeing eyes. He followed the trail, seeing the flashes of blue, and froze when the perpetrator revealed themselves.

It was a man, or at least looked like one. He was wearing a black, leather body suit that looked sewn together, patched with a reverse lightning symbol. However, his most striking picture was his face. His entire head was covered in a black mask, with the mouth stitched on. And his eyes…

"What the hell is that?" Vibe's garbled voice asked, hushed and afraid.

The Flash didn't know what that was.

Except, perhaps, a speedster.

And, more importantly, a monster.

"Who are you?" The Flash asked, glad he was able to keep his uncharacteristic fear in check.
The monster didn't reply. It just gazed at him, pondering. The two men unconsciously began to circle each other, sizing each other up. The Flash slowly fingered the knife hidden beneath the sleeve of his arm, drawing it forward inch by inch. He would need it soon, he knew.

"Zoom," the monster — Zoom — breathed, dark and husky, before speeding away, chased by wild, blue lightning. The Flash watched him before giving chase.

"You see that?" Linda Park asked her cameraman as she pointed to a window showing the front area outside their station. The cameraman, Harry Sims, popped his head up, seeing the familiar lightning trails of the Flash, and smirked. In seconds Linda was in front of a live camera, mic in hand.

"Huh, they're filming one of Barry's fights live." Oliver caught the attentions of his fellow leaguers, turning up the volume of the plasma as Laurel, Mari, and J'onn crowded around him, briefly abandoning their mission preparations. On-screen, the field reporter, Linda Park, was excitedly explaining the situation to the viewers, before opening the door, exposing the two combatants.

The camera trailed over the Flash before falling upon his opponent, stilling into place. Slowly, ever slowly, it closed in on Central City's newest supervillain, and the excitement this impromptu audience once had drained away immediately.

"Who is that?" Laurel asked, very quiet.

"What is that?" Mari corrected, her volume no different. Next to her J'onn just stared.

And Oliver? Oliver felt as if a bucket of cold water had been dumped on him. For the first time since he had joined the League of Assassins, since Lian Yu, fear entered his heart, and he felt it beseeching him to pray.

The Flash only had a moment before they clashed.

Zoom was fast — faster than even Thawne, if he was remembering correctly. It was all the more obvious when he tried to employ the same strategy he had used with Thawne during their first fight, and Zoom was still catching up to him, his blows still connecting. Flash kept a lid on his frustration, and instead dropped backwards, kicking Zoom away as he flipped. He had drawn two knives during his ascent, and he threw them with all his strength as he landed, before drawing more and more, throwing them. His super speed created a barrage of knives, so numerous and fast that not even a speedster could dodge them.

So, fittingly, Zoom caught them instead.

"Ronnie! Ronnie! Please, pick up!" Caitlin begged her phone as it rung once, twice —

"I'm already on it, Cait!"

"Kal?" A yawning Ruby stumbled into the living room of her current quarters, "What's going on? Where's Kara?"

Kal, who had been enraptured by something, suddenly rushed forward, angling his body to cover the television. "Kara had to rush to do an errand she forgot about. Don't worry about it Ruby; why don't you go back to sleep? You look really tired."
Ruby didn't fight his attempts to herd her back to her temporary room. He was right, after all. Therefore, she didn't see the channel on the TV, nor Kal's desperate gaze towards the open balcony.

Zoom dropped the pile of knives with an audible clatter, then used his forearm to block the Flash's rushing stab. Undeterred, the Flash dropped the knife, grabbing with his other hand, only for that attempt to be blocked as well. Zoom pulled his arm back, kicking out his leg, and retaliated with a punch to the face. And another, and another, and another, until the Flash was stumbling back, trying to get his wits back.

Alas, there was no reprieve. Zoom pushed forward, continuing his barrage with his own superspeed, and the Flash was barely able to put up his arms to block the furious blows. It was no use, however — he did not have the invulnerability or strength of Supergirl. His guard dropped after the first few blows, and he was forced to take most of the hits, only barely managing to dodge a scant few. Zoom finished his attack with a final punch to the gut, and the Flash felt himself cough out a glob of blood.

"By God…" Joe West whispered to the silent precinct behind him. Next to him, Eddie Thawne, the Flash's biggest detractor, could only nod, jaw low.

All work had stopped. Every cop in CCPD's 1st Precinct had their eyes to the set of screens hanging in the center of the station. So stuck on the terrifying footage, none of them spotted Iris West watching with a hand on her mouth and a horrified look on her face, almost on the verge of tears.

*Barry…*

The glint of the knife, shining in the moonlight, is what saved his life.

He may have been outmatched in speed by a near insurmountable amount, but he was not outmatched in skill. Far from it. So, when Zoom took one of his knives and slashed downwards for that final, finishing blow, the Flash was able to counter it. He grabbed Zoom's wrist with what little strength he had left, twisted it sharply, forcing the other man to drop the knife. It was, perhaps, his most successful move in this entire fight.

However, it would only save him once. The Flash was spent. And thus, he could do nothing but watch as Zoom's vibrating finger pierced his chest. The vigilante let out a strangled gasp, his mind repeating a mantra — *pain is inevitable, suffering is optional, pain is inevitable, suffering is optional* — and then he collapsed, unable to fight any longer.

Zoom observed the fruits of his labor for a long moment, then turned to the camera that had been filming the entire confrontation. He grinned, his torn, stitched mouth stretching into a wide crescent.

"This is your hero, Central City? Your protector?" He stepped onto the Flash's chest, pressing downwards, and was rewarded by the slightest of groans. "He is nothing. Not to me."

He pointed towards the camera, then spread his arms out, his grin deepening. "My name is Zoom, Central City, and I shall be your reckoning. And when that day comes, no one, not even your Justice League, will be able to stop me."

He picked the Flash up by the neck, and started vibrating his hand for the final blow. But before he could, a blast of fire knocked him away. The camera awkwardly shifted views to reveal Firestorm landing onto the street, arms ready to fire another blast. Zoom looked ready to fight him as well, but before he could, another unexpected presence stopped him.
Supergirl slammed into the street, next to her teammate. She knelt forward, taking in his form worriedly, before glaring up at the man responsible for his state. Zoom gave her a mocking tilt of the head, before fleeing. He had no designs on facing off with the Kryptonian today. Supergirl watched him go, perhaps contemplating on chasing after him, before deciding otherwise.

The Flash's life was far more important.

"I want at least two squads over at the convention center now. The rest of you, find out where Zoom went." David Singh laid out his orders to the precinct.

"But sir…" One brave cop piped up. "The Flash…"

"I know." Singh said shortly, sighing. "But we still need to know where he is. Or at least, where he could possibly be."

As the crowd broke, Iris collapsed back to her chair, breathing heavily. The sight of Zoom beating down the Flash's body kept repeating in her mind's eye, and it was taking all her self-control not break down and weep.

"Iris?" She looked up to see Ralph peering at her in worry. "Are you okay?"

"I—I—"

"I take that as a no." Ralph smiled sadly, before turning around. "Captain!"

"Yeah, Dibny?" Singh turned to him, only to stop when he saw Iris' distraught state.

"I think she needs to go home." Ralph stated.

Iris shook her head unconvincingly. "N—No. I can help. I should—"

"—go home, Iris." Singh said sympathetically. "It's fine. That was a little hard to watch for all of us, and if it's really that bad for you, then we won't miss you for a day or two."

Iris stared at him, then nodded her thanks and rushed to gather her things.

The moment she turned on the ignition, Iris had only one destination in mind: S.T.A.R. Labs. While there were other places Barry could go for treatment, that was the nearest and by far the most anonymous. Chances are that Kara had flown him there as quickly as his injuries would've permitted. Iris wanted to speed there as fast as she could. But she couldn't. A car driven by a cop, breaking speed limits just to reach the abandoned S.T.A.R. Labs? People would ask too many questions. And even without that, Caitlin would still be treating Barry right now.

So, reluctantly, she first stopped home instead. Knowing the likelihood of her staying the night, she packed a bag of toiletries along with a pillow and some sheets and a change of clothes. She knew there were probable some at S.T.A.R. Labs, seeing as Barry slept overnight there frequently, but with Kara and many others also present, it was better safe than sorry.

Once she was done, Iris left her apartment with the new cargo in tow and all but ran back to her car. This time, she took an entirely different route, using the rarely-driven back streets. It took longer, but she passed only a few cars on the way, severely reducing the risk of suspicion. It felt like forever, but when she finally arrived at S.T.A.R. Labs, she could finally breathe.
Iris grabbed her night bag and ran towards the elevator, tapping erratically as she waited for it to take her to the Cortex. She all but burst into the hallway as the doors finally slid open, running down the hallway, having to grab the side of the open entrance to stop herself from sliding away. Taking a moment to catch her breath, she looked up to see Kara, Cisco, Ronnie, and the professor all gazing at her with solemn eyes.

Slowly, she stood up and walked towards the infirmary, the group parting to make a path for her. When she finally entered the room, she saw that Caitlin was leaning over a shirtless Barry, taking note of his vitals and finishing the dressing of his wounds. Iris watched her, and found herself dragged back into a memory.

The worst memory of her life.

Iris let out a sad sigh as she finished up the last of her stitches, frowning at how uneven they looked. It seemed this feminine art was lost to her. Oh well, she still had baking.

But I can't send brownies to Barry. Not while he's in China, Iris thought in exasperation.

It had been three days since her best friend had departed for China, and Iris was already missing him. Things had been a little frosty between her and her dad since then, and so Iris occupied her time by trying to make something for her first care package to Barry. She had decided (rashly, in hindsight) to try making him a scarf at first, but found that her knitting skills were… lacking.

Maybe a brownie mix? His host family could make it…

"Iris, baby? Could you come here?" Her father's voice, unusually gentle, called out to her.

Iris frowned, setting down her needles. She walked down the stairs, opening her mouth, ready with a question, only for her steps to slow. Joe stood with a solemn look on his face, and next to him were two official-looking men in suits.

"Dad? What's going on?" Iris asked, suddenly scared. "Did something happen?"

"It's Barry, Iris." Joe replied, his voice hoarse. He paused, looking hesitant to say more, before steeling himself, taking a deep breath.

"His connecting flight was cancelled, so he tried to take a boat. But the boat… it sunk."

"What are you trying to say, Dad?" Iris spoke, refusing to believe it. All the dots were there, and she refused to connect them.

"I'm sorry, baby." Joe said, pulling her forward into a hug. "He's gone."

Iris had never seen Barry so vulnerable.

Not when she had first found out his identity. Not when he'd first come home. Not when the bullies at school had been roughhousing with him at school. Not even when his mother had died. Even at his weakest moments, there was a strength to him, just beneath the surface, willing him forward.

There was no such strength here.

Barry laid on a cot, bruises coloring his unnaturally pale skin. There were some bandages around him, centered on the spot where Zoom had pierced him with his finger. Most of all, he was
completely unconscious, only the slightest rise and fall of his stomach indicating he was alive.

She couldn't hold herself back any longer. She collapsed into the chair Caitlin once occupied, daintily grabbing one of Barry's hands with both of hers. Clasping it hard, she pressed it against her forehead, as if in prayer.

Sobbing hard, Iris West felt her world fall apart once again, and desperately hoped this would be the last time.

*Please. Don't leave me again.*

Chapter End Notes

This took forever. But I finally got this chapter out, and I am seriously happy about that. I've been waiting for this moment forever, and now that we're finally here.

Now, if you've read this story, you'll know how much I love Zoom. He's so freaking menacing and evil, and I hope to God that I got him right here. Please tell me, because Zoom is super important for this arc, and I'll be investing a lot into his and Barry's adversarial relationship. If I can't get him right, then this arc goes to the dogs.

And some WestAllen! I know there's a lot of you who don't like WestAllen, but I'm sorry, it's the only Barry ship I'm considering. The next two arcs are going to be heavy on WestAllen, because it will play an important part in forwarding the narrative. It doesn't make sense now, but you'll see as the story further unfolds. I'm just warning you now, in case you want to turn back.

Particularly, Barry's insistence on trying to fix Eddie and Iris' relationship. Here, he wants to help because he knows Iris loves Eddie and he partially blames himself for driving a wedge between them. What he's failing to realize is that they need to work that out on their own, and if they can't, then that just proves they aren't good together.

This is the final chapter of Arc I. I will be taking a break to write out Act II (which, I have previously noted, will be particularly plotty, so don't be surprised if it takes a while). In the meantime, don't be afraid to review or edit the TV Tropes page or whatever. And the contest is still on (not that I've gotten any entries), so there's that as well.

Until next time!
Chapter 78: Calm Before the Storm

The light hurt.

*What hit me?* Barry thought groggily as he slowly began to awaken, trying to blink the pain away. *The last thing I remember is—*

**hartleyciscogalakararonnieZOOM**

His eyes immediately widened and he moved to sit up, only to be stopped by the pain in his sides and a weight on his chest. Grasping at his chest, he looked down to see an unexpected sight; a sleeping Iris.

As if sensing his awakening, Iris herself began to arouse from her own slumber, rubbing her eyes with one hand. When she finally saw Barry awake, a look of pure joy crossed her face.

"Barry! Thank God!" She said elatedly. "Caitlin! Come in here! Barry's awake!"

Oddly reminded of the first time he awoke from his coma when he first received his powers two years ago, Barry was beset immediately by a frantic Caitlin, with a reluctant Iris moving away to allow the good doctor to do her work. As Caitlin looked him over, asking him prompt, terse questions during her checkup, Barry saw other people joining Iris as she watched the show. Oliver, Kara, Laurel… and if his hearing was accurate, several others had come to visit him as well. The human part of Barry was warmed to know so many people cared about him, that they were willing to leave the cities they protected to be assured of his well-being.

The rest of him wondered if they could afford to.

After Caitlin deemed him well enough for visitors, Barry saw himself barraged immediately. Iris was first, of course, and she refused to leave his side for the most part. First after her was Oliver and Kara, who smothered him with light hugs and well-wishes from Kal, Mari, and Jefferson; all of whom, reluctantly, could not come to visit on such short notice. Laurel lingered behind them after giving him a hug of her own, but her own soft smile assured him of her genuine gratitude for his health.

After repeated assurances of his person, Oliver apologized and told him that he (and Laurel) could not stay for long. Kara would be staying to ward off metahuman threats in Barry's place while he healed, but with her extended stay, they would have to return to Starling for the sake of the city's protection. Neither of them were under any delusions that their combined might could ever compare
to a Kryptonian, but some protection was better than none.

After them came others, after Oliver and Laurel departed. Cisco, Ronnie, Professor Stein, and even Hartley had all popped in, asking for not just his physical but also emotional well-being. And of course, they did so while tip-toeing around the main problem, the elephant in the room that no one, not even his siblings wanted to talk about.

Barry didn't know whether to appreciate it or resent it. Ignoring it wasn't going to make it go away, after all.

They were the last of his visitors — or, at least the last Iris would know about. No doubt Slade would drop in when Iris was no longer at his bedside, but other than him, and those who were too far away and bogged down by too many responsibilities to visit, there would be no more guests in his impromptu hospital room. Barry knew that, intellectually. It was the price he paid for keeping the rest of the Wests and his father out of his vigilante life, and thus, out of the auspices of his many enemies, who only became more powerful with time (as his current state attested to).

Yet, he couldn't stop the pang of pain that came with the thought. More than once, he was reminded of how little support he had from the parental figures in his life. Slade tried, of course, but he had five children to juggle and was leashed around with a rope that could quite easily be his noose if Amanda willed it. And as for the others… it was not their faults. They didn't know, could never know. Because if they did, it would mean eventually confessing truths that made it hard to sleep at night, truths that he already dreaded parting to Iris. He didn't want to lose them, but no matter which direction he went, he may lose them regardless.

Not for the first time, Barry wondered if keeping up this secrecy among his loved ones was worth it. It was amusing with Caitlin and Cisco and the common man, but was trying and exhausting with everyone else. Maybe it was time to let the secret out?

*Not today, though.*

Slade's visit came when the limitations of humanity made themselves apparent — to both him and Iris. Neither of them had eaten all day, and while Barry had the excuse of being bedridden and an attached IV, Iris did not. Even so, she was reluctant to leave him, only doing so at his urging and the knowledge that Caitlin was only a shout away. Barry purposefully neglected to mention that Caitlin would probably be using this time to catch up on her own needed sleep, but Iris would only be gone for a short while, so no harm, no foul.

As soon as she was strapped into her car, Slade appeared from beyond the hall, dressed casually. His one visible eye was completely trained on Barry alone as he sat himself at his bedside. Barry, not entirely in the best of moods right now, still managed to muster up a smile for his surrogate father.

"Before you ask, I've had better days. But I'll live and make a full recovery, which is the best we could've hoped for in this situation."

"I'd rather you'd not have to make any sort of recovery at all." Slade admitted tersely, grasping his middle son's hand.

"Yeah, well." Barry moved to shrug, only to wince at the pain that came with the gesture. "We're called metahumans for a reason. Even we have our limits."

"Your current state isn't a matter of limits, Barry, and you know it."

"But isn't it?" Barry asked in response, eyes stuck on the ceiling, unwilling to meet Slade's gaze. "I
wasn't fast enough. So, I lost."

"You were fast enough to beat Thawne."

"The first time I fought Thawne, it was barely a draw. If he hadn't run out of speed when he did, he would've beaten me and we both know it. Second time, not only was I prepared, I had a ton of help. Third time, he would've killed me if not for that freak portal that I still haven't found an explanation for." Barry calmly narrated, though there was no mistaking the bitterness tinging his voice. "I was never 'fast' enough to beat Thawne, Slade. Just lucky enough. But all that luck wasn't enough to cut it with Zoom."

"So, get faster." Slade said immediately. "Isn't that what you were planning on doing anyway? Train up your speed to match Thawne if you two ever faced off again?"

Barry groaned. "Yes, but it's easier said than done Slade. If I go any faster I risk accidental time travel, which could have consequences for the entire world, not just us. It's been difficult trying to increase my speed while avoiding that — every time I hit a higher benchmark, I can feel whatever force that drives time trying to pull me into the flow of it, and it gets harder and harder to resist it."

"Then you just need to push past it, Barry, ignore whatever force is calling you; it's the only way you have of beating Zoom."

"You think I don't know that?" The speedster griped back. "Under different circumstances I'd say we find the guy and sick Kara on him; but as powerful as Kara is, none of it matters if she can't catch him, if her speed can't match his. He even might be able to kill her if given the opportunity. So now it's all on me, and everyone in the world knows how poor a job I've done so far."

Slade sighed. "You're too hard on yourself. Barry, we always knew Thawne's return was a possibility, but at least we knew it was there. This guy — nobody could've known this guy existed. The fact that he was able to hide himself from us is proof enough, considering the resources at our disposal. So don't say you've done a shit job taking down this guy when nobody, not even you, knew you had to take him down at all."

There is a brief silence at that. Barry, despite his poor disposition, couldn't help but smile at Slade's encouraging words.

"Thanks." He offered.

"Don't, Barry. I'm only telling it as it is." Slade let out a deep breath. "But as I said, this does beg another question — how the hell has this guy been able to hide from us for so long? We've kept meticulous records of who was inside the city that night, and the kind of skill this guy has displayed with his speed had to come from a lot of practice. He could've gone somewhere extremely remote, but…"

"… we would've noticed that." Barry finished for him. "I know what you mean. It's another mystery for us to solve."

Slade snorted. "I'm getting sick of all these 'mysteries' we need to solve."

"You're not the only one." Barry muttered.
but she wasn't in yet. She would be, one day, but until then, Barry was happy keeping certain things to his chest.

"You sure you don't want some fries?"

"My jaw is still healing, Iris. Maybe tomorrow."

An awkward silence fell between them, saved the occasional sound of Iris' chewing. Eventually, even that stopped, the crinkle of wrappers replacing them. Iris briefly got up to discard the remaining waste from the meal, returning with a cup of tea, which she sipped from as the silence persisted.

"I've been an ass, you know." Barry turned his head at that statement, to look directly at Iris, who had a wistful look on her face. "For the past months, I've been nothing but a complete ass to you."

"And to Joe." Barry tacked on, a little mirthfully. "Don't forget about him."

"Oh, I haven't," Iris said, leaning back into her chair, placing her tea on a small table Caitlin had placed next to the bed. "I just don't know how to apologize to him. I was being unfair to him, I realize that now. He was hurting too, from losing you. But I was so angry, Barry — and I guess that's my problem. I hold onto things longer than I'm supposed to. Like my anger at you. And I'm so very sorry for that, Barry."

Like your relationship with Eddie, Barry briefly thought, before banishing it from his mind. This wasn't the time for that, and besides, it was between Eddie and Iris only. "I accept your apology and... I-I know how you feel. I was angry at you too, you know; even though I understood, I was still angry at you."

"What is there to understand, Barry? I was selfish."

"And worried, Iris." Barry reminded her. "You said it yourself. Selfish, a bit controlling, perhaps, but deep down, it's because you cared. I should know — I'm no different with you. It's why I've kept you at a distance for so long."

Iris frowned, but not maliciously. At her unanswered question, Barry continued, "I didn't want you to get involved in this. In any of this. You still have the chance at a happy, normal life; a life that won't be haunted by the danger of being my closest friend, of knowing this secret, let alone the many others I have." He closed his eyes. "I'm scared, Iris. I've lost so much — I don't want to lose you too."

"Barry..." Iris reached out to take his hand, much like Slade had earlier. "I'm touched by your concern. But that isn't your choice to make — it's never been your choice to make. It's always been mine. You're my best friend, the one person who has always stood beside me until fate decided to take you away from us. I don't care about the danger that may come from it; through hell or high water, I will never leave your side."

"Just not today." Iris added lightly, before patting his arm comfortably. "I'm fine with that."

"Riding in first-class on a train seems like a waste with the trip so short," Laurel grumbled as she and Oliver exited the train.
"Maybe, but we've got a busy night so I'd rather we'd be as rested as possible. I'm the one paying, after all." Oliver replied as he moved to signal his family's driver.

Laurel had to concede to that, but was soon distracted by something else. She looked around the station, bemused. "Ollie, have you noticed?"

"Noticed what?"

"There are a lot more people than usual. The station is getting overcrowded."

"Huh." Now that she had pointed it out, Oliver couldn't help but see it. There were more people than usual. From the corner of his eye, he could see trains moving to and from the station at a much faster pace, not giving much time for the passengers to board before disembarking to whatever location they were destined for. "That's strange. I wonder what's the cause?"

Laurel was about to shrug, only to freeze. One of the televisions hanging around the train station had changed feeds to the local news. Oliver made an instant connection, and followed her line of sight, his jaw dropping slightly when he saw just what stunned her.

"Oh. That would do it."

All around Starling City, countless televisions were all tuned to local news channels. Each anchor reported the same thing, with the same pictures, and a similar graphic banner beneath. And on those banners, were the same headline:

**MERLYN PUBLIC TRIAL PENDING**

Chapter End Notes

Barry has awakened, and now things are truly about to begin. The trial of Malcolm Merlyn is about to start.

I've been waiting to write this act for a while, and here we are — there are a lot of things planned, shocking things that will have you at the edge of your seat, and I hope I can do what I've planned justice.

Constructive criticism is welcome! Flames will be ignored! I'm not getting rid of WestAllen, so stop asking! Please update the TV Tropes page!

Until next time!
Chapter Summary

Malcolm Merlyn is set to go to trial.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 79: Prometheus

"The two of you are actually going to watch the trial in person?" Quentin questioned, incredulity coloring his tone.

Laurel shrugged, fingering her cup of coffee. "Normally, we wouldn't — but Tommy hasn't been heard from in months and it looks like he won't be attending. And Oliver… Oliver wants to see Malcolm one last time. He obviously hasn't forgiven him, for trying to kill all those people, but Malcolm was his godfather. The Queens loved him like family. His parents can't face him, nor can his sister, so it's left to him." Mostly because he, more than anyone else, wants to make sure that Malcolm can't get away with his crimes.

While Laurel didn't know most of what happened during Oliver's ten years on that island (though she suspected some of it, due to her association with Nyssa), Oliver did tell her how he ended up on that island. Listening to the whole sordid situation, how Malcolm had emotionally blackmailed Robert and then literally blackmailed both Robert and Moira into complying with his plans, made Laurel sick to her stomach. While it was questionable whether or not Oliver's parents should face at least some penalty for aiding Malcolm in his plans (if unwillingly), Laurel wasn't going to lose any sleep over it. The Queens had already been punished enough, as far as she was concerned.

Quentin sighed, rubbing his temples. "If you two are sure, then I see no point in stopping you. Besides, it's not going to be much of a trial; his guilt is unmistakable with all the evidence we've gotten. The trial is mostly to determine whether it should be the death penalty or just life in prison."

"Because, even though he planned it and nearly succeeded, he failed and no one died — directly, in any case." Laurel surmised.

"Got it in one. If those machines had actually set off, it wouldn't be a question. But since they didn't…" Quentin shrugged. Laurel nodded; as a lawyer, such deliberations of morality in accordance to the law were familiar to her.

"Well, whatever the courts decide, it will be no less than he deserves."

Malcolm Merlyn didn't know whether to be grateful that he was finally out of that cell or to resent the fact that he was about to be paraded in front of the entire world as he was marched to his farce of a trial. He wasn't a fool; Amanda clearly had some powerful friends in some very powerful places, and no doubt left no stone unturned. With all the evidence out there and his own power over SCPD broken, there had to be only two verdicts left on the judge and jury's minds — life in prison, or death. He'd obviously prefer the former over the latter, since there was still the slightest chance of escape,
but he couldn't disregard the latter either. And if they did choose the death penalty as his punishment… well, all he could hope for after that is to delay the inevitable with whatever number of appeals the courts deigned to give him. If only so he could handle whatever business he had left.

Tommy and Oliver, obviously, were at the top of the list. There were so many things he wanted to say to his boys, so many things that he needed to pass on, and he might very well never get the chance. Tommy, perhaps, hated him, for having the stain of his sins besmirching his own name for the rest of his life. And Oliver… Oliver didn't know the truth, may never know the truth because Robert and Moira certainly wouldn't tell him. And Malcolm couldn't live with that, because Oliver deserved his inheritance as much as Tommy did. And he wouldn't be able to have it if he didn't know.

Then there were his traitorous former partners. Frank Chen was probably squirreled away in some remote part of the world with his daughter as payment for publicly selling him out, while the Queens were living the high life in Starling, having gotten off completely scot-free, with their names only coming up as friends to Walter Steele. Walter had been the one to take the blame for the Queens' actions during the early half of their tenure with Tempest, lauded as a martyr for trying to stop Malcolm's insanity only to be murdered for it.

The latter half had been spread out to the other members of Tempest, including Frank, and all of them except Frank and Malcolm were dead. They had either "committed suicide" or been "murdered" around the time of Malcolm's arrest. Unquestionably another move to ensure the Queens remained unblemished in exchange for their cooperation. With their deaths, there was no one left to point the finger except Malcolm himself, and nobody would believe him. Even if they did, all the Queens would have to do is to point to the Gambit, and the entire world would sympathize with them. All they'd get for punishment would be slaps on the wrists.

It boiled him to know Robert and Moira were reaping the rewards of his downfall, and he swore that if he ever got out of these chains, he'd make them pay. The only snag was Oliver; even if Malcolm revealed himself to be his son's true father, there was a strong possibility that Oliver would remain attached to his mother and surrogate father regardless. He'd never stand for harm on their person, much less from Malcolm. He'd have to plan this act of revenge carefully.

Speaking of revenge, that left the last person on his list to deal with: Green Arrow. Immediately, Malcolm felt the fury he had for Frank and the Queens multiply tenfold as it turned towards the foolish brute who had denied him his chance to avenge Rebecca. That damnable vigilante… Malcolm had never hated anyone more in his entire life, not even the no-good thug that had taken his beloved wife away from him. If he ever got free, he would never rest until the man that had taken everything from him paid for his sins.

As Malcolm drowned in his bloody thoughts, his escort were keeping themselves alert with wide eyes and sharp ears. Even so, none of them could prepare for the sudden lurch that sent them all tumbling towards the back of the van. Malcom, restrained by several pairs of handcuffs, was barely able to use his fingers to grab the edges of the bench to steady himself.

"What the hell was that?" One officer asked as he righted himself.

Up at the front of the van, another officer found the answer to his question in one of the side mirrors. Behind them was a nondescript black SUV, that had somehow broken through the police escort and now had some sort of grappling hook device to attach themselves to the prison transport. He had the officer sitting next to him try to call for help while he drove, but found that both their phones and radios were jammed.
The van went through another lurch after the SUV went into a sudden stop, and this time the driver had no choice but to use the brakes himself so they wouldn't flip over. Almost immediately, all the officers grabbed their guns and readied themselves for a fight. The S.W.A.T. team at the back quickly put themselves into position, the two upfront readying themselves to jump outside while the two in the back aimed their guns at the door. The driver and his seatmate also grabbed their guns, readying themselves for a firefight.

Once again, the mirrors proved their value, as the driver saw the doors of the SUV snap open. Lightly tapping on the metal wall separating him from Malcolm and the S.W.A.T. team, he alerted them all to the impending attack, before unlocking the safety in his gun. Popping outside the window, he aimed it true and then—

Malcolm only sighed when he heard the brains of the two officers' up front were splattered on the sides of the van. Waiting boredly for the other shoe to drop, he was rewarded for his patience when the back doors were pulled off their hinges, and two of the S.W.A.T. team were killed before they could get even a shot off. The other two began firing, but it was a simple game of waiting for them to run out of bullets before they too were killed. As the dead bodies began to cool around him, Malcolm looked up to see his 'rescuers': men and women, all wearing black clothing and motorcycle helmets. Completely nondescript.

"So, who do you lot work for?" He asked idly.

Rather than answer, one of them put a burlap sack over his head and dragged him forward using the chain between his handcuffs. Malcolm sighed. Of course it wouldn't be that easy.

"Ollie, what's going on?" Laurel asked worriedly as she entered the Foundry, setting down her bag on one of the chairs. She had been on her way to the courthouse when Oliver had abruptly called her, telling her to head to the Foundry immediately.

"Malcolm escaped." Oliver answered, angrily typing away at the computer. Laurel's eyes widened and she started cursing under her breath as her boyfriend pulled up a video feed up on the new plasma that they had set up a couple weeks back for video conferences. A prudent venture made after members of the League found themselves busy but still needed to conduct meetings with their teammates for more wide-spanning topics.

On-screen was a clearly unhappy Amanda. Laurel had never liked the woman, nor did other members of the League. Hell, Oliver and his siblings hated her, though they had yet to explain why. However, if there was anything they could agree on, is that Amanda ran a tight ship and was very efficient. The Justice League wouldn't run nearly as well without A.R.G.U.S.'s support. Something that Amanda was about to prove once again.

"What happened?" Oliver asked, voice terse and to the point.

"Merlyn was on-route to the courthouse, but before he could even enter the city, they were attacked."

Amanda explained, equally unamused at the situation. "Thankfully, I had the foresight to implant a tracker on him before he left, so we have a possible location — however, it's only going to be the two of you. Kara cannot leave Central City until Barry has fully recuperated from Zoom's attack."

"Any clue as to who was responsible?" Laurel asked.

Amanda shook her head. "I've got people combing the crime scene now, but whoever did this was good; professionals, most likely. And since they didn't kill Merlyn on the spot—"
"—They want him for something." Laurel continued, having realized this almost as soon as she learned Malcolm had help in his escape. "So that means he's probably alive?"

"Probably. There's no guarantee, but if they put in the effort to take him somewhere instead of just killing him immediately, then they probably won't kill him until they get whatever they want from him."

Oliver nodded. "Send us the information. We'll start suiting up right now."

"Done and done." Amanda nodded back, before the feed flickered back into nothing.

A few hours later, Green Arrow and Black Canary were staking out an abandoned factory on the outskirts of town. They had already taken note of several guards setting up a perimeter out of the place, and the heat-seeking binoculars that had been gifted to them by Barry for missions like this indicated that there were more waiting inside for them. Not easy, but doable.

Communicating silently, the two blended into the night and silently approached the perimeter. Together, they made their way into the building, quietly knocking out each and every guard they came across before said guards knew what was even happening. It was a slow-going process, but if it avoided them detection, then it was worth it.

Finally, they made it into the main work room of the factory, which had been bolted close. On closer inspection, however, the bolting was proven to be a recent action — an extremely recent action.

Green Arrow quickly busted the doors open with one of his exploding arrows, and he and Black Canary took a quick appraisal of the area, checking for any traps or guards. Finding none (a very suspicious thing), they approached the center of the room, where a man in an orange jumpsuit and a burlap sack over his head was sitting. His arms were wrenched backwards, bound by a pair of handcuffs.

The vigilantes slowly approached him, with Green Arrow ripping off the burlap sack in one quick motion once he was close enough. Canary's eyes widened while Arrow's narrowed once they saw the man. He was dead.

And he most assuredly was not Malcolm Merlyn.

"Surprised?"

The two whipped around, Arrow notching another arrow while Canary readied her tonfas. In front of them was another mask, one that was almost a dark reflection of the archer beside her. He was wearing a completely black body suit with a hood and pockets in front, containing throwing stars. On his back was a quiver of arrows and a bow, and a sword. His face was covered with an unnerving scarecrow-like mask; the longer she looked at it, the more Canary tightened her grip on her tonfas. Even with her relative inexperience to her partner, she could tell that the man in front of her was dangerous.

"Where is Malcolm Merlyn?" Green Arrow demanded gruffly, arrow still aimed at the mysterious intruder.

"Gone." The man answered promptly. "It was a bitch getting that tracker out of him without alerting Waller, but it was worth it to send him on his way with you all none the wiser."

"And would you mind telling us where you sent him?" Canary followed up, making it clear that her request really wasn't a request at all by brandishing one of her tonfas.
"No. See, my boss needs him, and like any good employee, I followed orders and didn't ask questions."

"That's too bad," Green Arrow commented steely, "That means you have no use to us."

The man shrugged. "I wouldn't say that, Al Sah-him."

Immediately, the atmosphere changed. Black Canary didn't know what the name meant or why the man called her partner that, but Green Arrow certainly did. An arrow flew, fast and true, aimed directly at the heart — and was cleaved in two by a throwing star, the broken pieces falling to the floor as Green Arrow dodged the star, causing it to lodge in one of the broken pieces of machinery scattered around the room.

"Now that wasn't nice." Mr. Scarecrow scolded them.

Green Arrow ignored the reprimand. "Who are you?" He demanded.

"I guess you can call me… Prometheus." The newly-christened Prometheus revealed. "And as for who I am, just consider me one of your many victims, Green Arrow."

"Prometheus," Black Canary let the name roll off her tongue, trying to get the feel of it. "The man who stole fire from the gods and gifted it to humanity. You think quite highly of yourself, don't you?"

Prometheus shrugged once more, and she could feel him smirking. "Don't we all? You two run around in Halloween costumes, serving your own brand of justice on low-lives and think it equal to society's. That takes arrogance equal, if not greater than my own. Don't think for one moment you have the moral high ground, Black Canary — the man beside you certainly doesn't, and you'll learn that soon enough."

"This isn't about moral high ground." Green Arrow snarled, cutting Canary off before she could retort. "Fact of the matter is, you kidnapped a wanted terrorist and absconded him to places unknown, killing several police officers along the way and damaging government property. You will be coming with us to answer for your crimes, and tell us who and where your boss is so we can find that bastard so he can answer his crimes. Even if we have to drag your bloodied and battered body to the nearest station ourselves. So, are we going to do this the easy way," and once more, he notched another arrow onto his bow, with Canary beside him tightening her stance, readying herself for combat, "or the hard way?"

Rather than answer, Prometheus responded with a smoke bomb. The vigilantes immediately covered their faces, backing away from the scene. By the time the smoke dissipated, Prometheus was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter took a while. Lack of inspiration, distractions, real life, and NaNoWriMo coming up have all kept it from coming out.

But hey, here's Prometheus! And yes, he is Adrian Chase, not Tommy. Tommy will be reappearing soon, that much I can promise you, but what state will he be in? You'll just have to wait and see!
You may also notice that Adrian is a little different here. A lot less menacing and obsessed with Oliver. There's a reason for that, and it will be explained in a couple of chapters.

Now, as for NaNoWriMo, there will be no updates for November as all my writing energies will be devoted to my fanfic idea. I'm not sure if this one will get off the ground (last year's certainly didn't, and probably won't for a long time), but I'm still writing it because I put a lot of effort into planning it, and the story itself has been stuck in my head for a long time. So this story will be on hiatus for November.

That's all I have to say for now. Please comment or review, flames will be ignored, constructive criticism welcome, and don't forget to update the TV Tropes page!
Malcolm learns how precarious his position is.

Chapter 80: Lazarus

Malcolm would never willingly say to anyone that he missed his cell at A.R.G.U.S., but that didn't prevent him from privately admitting as much to himself. Ever since he had been kidnapped, he had been dragged and pushed around, and even briefly knocked out so his kidnappers could perform some good old-fashioned back alley surgery to get Amanda's tracker out of him without triggering its alarm. He hoped he didn't have an infection from that. It would probably be a painful way to die.

Then, they shoved him into another car and onto a plane to God knows where — all with this godforsaken burlap sack over his head the entire time. It was starting to smell in there, and he desperately needed to breathe fresh air; if he ever got out of these cuffs, he was going to slash this sack to pieces, regardless of the pointlessness of such a gesture. He was hungry, and tired, and suddenly facing all of Starling City with all his supposed crimes thrown back into his face sounded like a very tempting prospect. It would be much better than the absolute hell he'd gone through in the last twenty-four hours. Whoever wanted him better had some pretty good leverage, or he'd kill the bastard, consequences be damned.

Finally, after another hour or so of bemoaning his fate, the gods had deigned to smile upon him again. The sack was removed, allowing him to take in a deep breath as his eyes adjusted to light once more. The room he had been taken to was surprisingly comfortable — he was sitting on a couch, for one thing, and there was a fireplace behind the coffee chair facing him. The walls were lavishly decorated with artwork and there was even a piano in the corner. It looked like something that would be found in his own home, or the Queen Mansion.

As Malcolm observed his new surroundings, the door to the room, located right behind where he was sitting, opened silently. In entered a woman with dark, long hair and equally dark eyes. She had a tan complexion, and was wearing a full-cover leather suit that hid the fitness of her body. She was not young, but she was not old either, having aged like fine wine since her departure from home.

Malcolm finally saw her as she sat down in the coffee chair across from him, and his face flickered in recognition.

"Hello, Al-Sa-Her. It's been quite a long time, hasn't it?"

The man pursed his lips, and sighed. "Indeed it has, Talia."

Talia al Ghul, eldest daughter of the current Ra's al Ghul and (in her mind) the rightful Heir to the Demon smiled beatifically. "Despite the… circumstances in which we found you, you look well."

"You as well," Malcolm said politely back. "You've aged quite gracefully, I must say."
Talia's eyes sharpened, as did her smile. "You must be wondering why I've aged at all."

Malcolm shook his head. "No. I already know you're no longer with the League and don't have access to the Pit anymore. If you were, you would've killed me already. So you must want me for something."

"You always were a smart one Al Sa-Her," Talia commented after a moment of silence. "You are correct. My father refused to name me to my rightful place as heir, so I left. And as for why you're here… tell me, do you suspect why?"

Malcolm said nothing, only glaring at her. Nyssa may have been the more talented of the sisters, but Talia was the more cunning, ambitious one, and that made her dangerous. After all, the former still had lines she wouldn't cross. He doubted Talia had lines at all.

"My father may have been foolish enough not to monitor your activities, but I was not. After I set up shop, I made sure to have one of my best students tailing you at all times, keeping note of your activities. This… Undertaking, of yours, was still unexpected, but not a surprise nor a concern to us. After Al Sa-him—"

"Al Sa-him?"

"I believe you know him as Green Arrow," Talia noted casually, ignoring how Malcolm's face grew enraged at the mention of his hated enemy, and continued on, "After he defeated you, we thought to stop monitoring you — until something of note caught the eye of one of my agents. A police report, covering the crime scene at Merlyn Global in the wake of your arrest."

Almost immediately, whatever rage Malcolm felt drained away, and he paled dramatically.

"It said that your son, Thomas Merlyn, had been found covered in his own blood, but with no wound. A most curious thing that no doubt would've prompted many questions; luckily only a few had seen the real report, and it didn't take much to silence them. After all, the entire city was in chaos after your actions were revealed. It's hardly unexpected to find a few officers dead trying to quell it."

"What are you trying to say?" Malcolm asked, mind racing a mile a minute. She couldn't know, could she?

Talia smirked. "You saved his life using the waters of the Lazarus Pit, didn't you?"

Malcolm internally cursed, "I did. I stole some from your father before I left Nanda Parbat for good, kept it in a vial locked in one of my most secure safes—"

Talia laughed.

She laughed, long and hard, and Malcolm felt his insides freeze. She knew.

Finally, after two minutes or so, her laughter gradually diminished into a chuckle, and Talia wiped an imaginary tear from her eye as she leveled her gaze back at him. "Did you honestly expect me to believe that my father, one of the most paranoid men on the planet, allowed you to steal from him? Let alone that of which he values more than anything else in the world besides the League itself?"

Suddenly, her face settled into an angry sneer. "Do not take me for a fool Al Sa-Her. My father may have been arrogant enough to let you go unwatched, but that was only because he knew he could have you killed whenever he wished. But if you ever once hinted having designs on the Pit, you would've never left Nanda Parbat alive. Nobody touches those waters without his consent."

"Then how else do you explain me acquiring those waters? There is nowhere else—"
"Stop lying, Al Sa-Her. You found another Lazarus Pit, didn't you?"

Malcolm fell silence once more, and he looked to the floor. There was no point in denying it any longer. Talia had gotten him.

She too noticed his sudden quietness, and made the appropriate conclusion. "I see you no longer deny it. Then you must know what I want now. Where is it?"

"Do you think I'd tell you now, knowing that it's my only card to play?" Malcolm asked, gaze rising to meet hers. "What's to stop you from killing me when I tell you? No, what makes you think I'll tell you at all? I am a terrible man, Talia, I can admit that much to myself, but you… you are so much worse than I could ever hope to be."

Talia peered at him searchingly, before smirking. She clapped her hands once, twice, all loudly, and a minute later two of her men entered the room. Malcolm noted that their garb was similar to the League, except their armor was black instead of gray and used more cloth. Each went to a different side of him and picked him up by his armpits, dragging him away, with Talia following.

---

With the sack gone (which he would forever be glad for), Malcolm was now able to see where his captors were taking him. He was getting an inadvertent tour of Talia's new abode, and he was stricken but not entirely surprised to see the differences and similarities it had with Nanda Parbat.

For one thing, the location. It was a temple up in the mountains — which mountains, he could not say — and while he could see some snow from the surrounding peaks, the temperature itself was cool, not unbearably cold. Otherwise he, with his lack of winter wear, would most likely be already dying of frostbite by now. He could even see some greenery from the open windows; a deep contrast to Nanda Parbat, which was not a building but a fortress carved into a near-desolate mountain.

For another, the atmosphere. Nanda Parbat had life, yes, but that life was not lively in the least. With few exceptions, the Assassins were stoic, obedient, and rarely expressed any emotion in public. Whatever feelings they needed to vent, they left in the privacy of their rooms, where no one could see them.

Talia's temple was different. Her students were dutiful, and professional, but they spoke far more, expressed more. However, what they expressed was not the grief and sadness that often plagued the Assassins, but arrogance, pride, and even greed at times, from what he could hear of the few snatches of the conversation made around him. It seemed students truly did reflect the teacher, because they all shared some similarity with Talia herself.

Malcolm remembered meeting the eldest daughter of Ra's al Ghul twenty years ago. While he had impressed upon Nyssa enough to gain entry into the League, Talia was another matter. She had been on a mission when he first arrived to Nanda Parbat, and when she returned they had not gotten off on the right foot. In Ra's and in Nyssa, there was arrogance and pride, and perhaps rightfully so. But in Talia, those traits were magnified tenfold, and she had never successfully managed to hide it, let alone temper it. She was haughty, vain, temperamental, and by the standards of the League, excessively cruel. Combined with her entitlement issues, Malcolm did not understand why Ra's had never bothered to straighten her out before. Perhaps it was because he had never intended for her to succeed him.

Or perhaps it was because she was a brilliant assassin. For all her faults, Talia was a talented combatant and extremely cunning. She had not evaded her father for all these years thanks to mere luck. Most of all, however, Talia respected those whose skills were comparable to her own. Not surpassed — unless they were her father, Talia never liked anyone better than her — but comparable.
Once his own skills had grown to something worth noting, she had come to grudgingly respect him as well. Enough to take him on whatever missions that needed two assassins of their caliber.

It was on one of those missions that he saw the true depths of her depravity. It had been a routine assassination. Some warlord in a third-world country he could scarcely remember the name of. She had infiltrated the man's harem as a dancer, he as one of the hired mercenary guards. The warlord had a tendency for throwing truly decadent celebrations that lasted weeks, in-between whatever scuffles or wars he had gotten himself embroiled in; a form of spending money as you go, just on a more grand and violent scale. The League, whose list of targets never seemed to end, had finally decided he needed to go.

Despite the man's proclivities, he was also paranoid and surprisingly competent. It had taken the League's scouts months to find some sort of opening they could exploit that didn't involve bombing the entire area and inviting attention they could not afford. It had taken half that amount of time to plant Talia and Malcolm, but to say the vetting process was rigorous was an understatement. Every bit of training that the League's various teachers had beaten into Malcolm was utilized just to avoid detection; he imagined Talia had it harder, since she needed direct access to the guy for the assassination to succeed.

The one fault the man had was a special dish that he ate at every party. It was not a particularly tasty dish, but it was an expensive one. However, what was noticeable about the dish was not the dish itself but how he ate it — using the mouths of his harem.

Malcolm refrained himself from learning any more of the details, because he still had some limits, but Talia, of course, knew everything. She wasn't one for failure either, so if this was what it took, then that is what it took. Talia's entire life was to serve the League, and she'd dare not falter from her duty now.

It was only supposed to be the warlord that died. Just him. The League knew that another one would be lining up to take his place soon enough, but this one needed to go regardless. Talia knew that as well, so he left the assassination in her hands. His job was just to get her out once the deed was done.

To this day, he wished he had left her to the dogs.

The plan was simple - she would poison the piece given to her, feed it to him, and then take the antidote while no one was looking. A few hours later, he'd die of a painfully ruptured digestive tract, and she'd panic and scream with the rest of the girls, and in the midst of the chaos they'd leave. Not the most elegant or safe plan, but effective enough.

But on that fated day, one of the girls had insulted her. Something about her looks, no doubt driven by some form of misguided jealousy. An insignificant slight from an insignificant girl. Malcolm had no doubt Talia heard her, but she had hardly batted an eyelash at it. She carried on, the moment came, she did the deed, and a few hours later, the warlord was dead.

Along with his entire harem. Over fifty girls, all dead except for Talia.

And Malcolm knew.

Knew it was her, knew why she did it. Talia, of course, spun a tale for her father, one that he nodded along with, but inside he was sickened. There was being extreme, there was being petty, but this… this was neither of those things. This was just wrong.

Staying in Nanda Parbat was no longer an option, not after that. He had everything he wanted from the League besides — skill, clarity, understanding. He threw himself before Ra's and asked for his
release, and when his master agreed, Malcolm finally felt as if he could breathe. He'd leave this place, return home to Tommy and begin his crusade to avenge Rebecca.

But he never forgot that day. And when the rumors came, of Talia's disinherittance, of her flight from the only home she had ever known, he was not surprised in the least. It seemed Ra's had never been fooled by his daughter at all. And, God willing, she'd be gone from this world soon enough.

But, as Talia's men continued to drag him away, Malcolm knew that God wasn't willing. Not yet at least.

Malcolm let out a silent breath of relief when his guards finally stopped dragging him about. Instead, they pulled him back up on his feet, directing his head towards one of the windows of the building. Well, it was less a window and more a balcony of sorts. He was pleased to note that his initial observations about the area were correct; that would be useful for his inevitable escape.

He looked downwards — the balcony had a view of a vibrant, manicured green field. Dotting it were various groups of men and women, all practicing familiar katas and the like. Some were even sparring. So caught up in the sight, he barely had time to hold back a flinch when he felt Talia move to stand next to him.

"Impressed?"

"Somewhat," Malcolm admitted honestly. "But if you're trying to intimidate me, Talia, you're failing."

"Oh, Al Sa-Her, have your eyes begun to fail you in your old age?" Talia asked him mockingly.

Malcolm frowned. Instead of explaining further, Talia simply pointed. He followed her line of sight to find—

Immediately, he began to pale. It almost felt as if the world was spinning.

"No."

"Next."

Tommy took a deep breath and settled into his stance, watching his opponent do the same. They circled each other for a moment or two, then pounced.

Block, block, dodge, punch, parry, kick, parry, block, punch, kick, kick, catch, drop—

_Gotcha_!

A second later, Tommy had the other man on the grass, pinned beneath him. A hand was wrapped around the man's throat, a chop angled above his head. It was a win.

"Winner: Merlyn!"

"He's quite the talented one." Talia commented casually as Malcolm continued to watch his son spar amongst the members of his group. "It won't be long until he joins the advanced classes, and if he does well enough, I'm thinking of taking charge of the rest of his tutelage personally. Of course, it's only to be expected, he is your son."
"And after he's done with your training?" Malcolm felt himself asking the question before he could really think it over.

"He'll make a great successor." Talia answered, smiling. "That is, if he can live long enough to fulfill his potential."

"… what do you want to know?"

"His name is Adrian Chase." Amanda announced, knowing she had Oliver and Laurel's full attention. "He's a terrorist and mercenary-for-hire that's been making a name for himself the last five or so years. His origins are unknown, as are his motives. However, whatever he wants with Malcolm Merlyn can't be anything good."

"Do we have a handle on his location?" Oliver asked before Laurel could.

"We're tracking him down now." Amanda confirmed, "Once we have it, it's yours. However, this time you won't be going at it alone."

"Who's joining us?" Laurel asked her.

"Me."

Oliver and Laurel turned around to see a smirking Mari McCabe leaning against the door.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the abrupt ending. Needed to get things going.

That's right — Tommy was a hostage all along. Talia went through all that trouble to get Tommy out of Starling City and under her control without alerting the Justice League, A.R.G.U.S., and the League of Assassins. All so she could use him as a hostage against Malcolm to find the location of the extra Lazarus Pit. Of course, that's not to say Malcolm is out of the game yet. He's still got a few tricks up his sleeve.

You'll notice there's differences between this Talia and Arrowverse Talia. That's deliberate - I was going for crazy, genocidal Talia from the comics vibe. I think this a logical progression; you have to remember, Bruce Wayne never became Batman in this world. Bruce always brought out the best in Talia, and without him Talia has nothing really holding her back from the deep end. She's never met Oliver either, so he has no impact on her character either, unlike the one he has on Nyssa.

Next chapter, we get our next confrontation with Chase and Oliver. More of Talia's plot will be unveiled as this act goes on.

Until then, review, comment, and/or update the TV Tropes page! Flames will be ignored!

End Notes
One of my hopes for this work is that it at least makes it to the Arrowverse TV Tropes Recommendations Page, if it doesn't get its own TV Tropes page altogether.

Edit: And now it does! If you want to edit the page, see here.

Tumblr here.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!