Summary

When things get even weirder in Central City, Team Flash realize they need some help. Luckily, Team Grimm knows exactly what’s going on and how to fix it. Well..mostly. Crossover AU. Barry Whump. Nick Whump.

Notes

Rating: M, for Mature, just to be sure. The Flash tends to keep things pretty light, but Grimm, on the whole, doesn’t. There’s violence, death, and killing. But, providing you’re comfortable with both shows, you shouldn’t have trouble with reading this fic as I don’t tend to go to extremes these days.

Disclaimer: I own nothing of The Flash or Grimm, incl. their characters, actors, writers, or plots. 2) Also, I am not medical professional - I’m a whumper. So if the pain seems overdone and the care isn’t medically correct, refer to that statement :)

Author’s Note: In order to satisfy my muse, I decided to write a The Flash/Grimm crossover. Here’s hoping I did a good job, lol. 2: Big thanks to water_4_willows for betaing this fic; without her, this wouldn’t make nearly as much sense. She is such a good beta, you guys, you have NO idea. Any mistakes that continue to exist are my own. 3: Also, this takes place after Grimm season 6. Not sure when after season six, but it’s after. As for Flash, I’ve decided to make it a slight AU. It’s during season 3, but it’s at some magical point where Cisco isn’t pissed at Barry and Barry doesn’t know about Iris’ future. I guess the AU part of it is that Cisco doesn’t stay mad at Barry as long as the show would like us to believe. If that makes any sense, lol.
Chapter 1

There weren’t many days when Barry thought Central City was too weird. In fact, he kinda preferred things strange, at least a little bit, because otherwise life was just boring. But this, he thought as he stared down at the results on his screen, was just too weird. He had never heard of a meta who had both animal and human DNA. Was this a new kind of meta? Or was it something else entirely?

Barry’s phone vibrated with a text, telling him to go down to Singh’s office. He inwardly groaned, knowing exactly what his boss wanted to know and hating that he didn’t have any answers for him.

He was only mildly surprised to find Cisco and Julian sitting in the office too. Julian being there made absolute sense since both he and Barry worked in the same office. Technically, Barry worked under Julian, but ever since Barry had come back to the CCPD, they both had ignored that part and had operated as equals. Cisco’s being there was a bit more of a shock, but only just. Throughout the past couple of years, Cisco had worked so closely with the CCPD, building things to protect and help them, that Singh now trusted S.T.A.R Labs to help when the police couldn’t.

“Ah, glad you could join us, Mr. Allen,” Singh said as Barry closed the door behind him. Barry opened his mouth to apologize for being late but realized that he wasn’t, in fact, late at all, and so stared at his boss in confusion. Singh ignored his expression, looking annoyed. “Have you figured out who’s been wreaking havoc in my city?”

“Sort of,” Barry answered, sitting down.

This wasn’t the answer Singh had wanted. His expression went from his normal level of annoyance to the beginning stages of anger. “‘Sort of’?” he quoted. “Either you have or you haven’t, Allen.”

“Well, I have, but it’s nothing I’ve ever seen before.”

“So it’s a new meta?” Julian asked and dismissed in one.

Barry shook his head. “No. Whenever we’ve taken samples from a metahuman, the results have always come back as human. These had traces of both human and animal. Some type of dog, to be exact.”

“So you’re telling me,” Singh began, eyes suspicious and tone guarded.

“I’m saying that this isn’t a meta attack,” Barry interjected. “This is something else entirely.”

Singh absorbed that for a moment with a blank look then turned to Cisco. “Can S.T.A.R Labs shed any light on the samples?”

“No,” Cisco answered, eyes tracking over to Barry ever so slightly before returning to Singh. “We might need some outside help with this.” Once again he shifted his gaze briefly to Barry, then looked away.

Barry knew what his friend was trying to say. They needed ARGUS’s help. More specifically, they needed Lyla’s help. But Barry wasn’t so sure. For one thing, he didn’t necessarily trust ARGUS with any information they might be given. And for another, Barry had a sneaky suspicion that this was above even their heads.
There was a sigh and then, “I think I know someone who might be able to help.” Barry’s eyes tracked to Singh, surprised that the suggestion had come from him. Usually Singh was the one demanding answers from them not giving them to them. “I’ll let you know when I hear back,” Singh continued, picking up the phone and ignoring them from there.

Knowing they were no longer wanted or needed, the three scientists got up and left. Once out of the office, Julian immediately went up to the lab, leaving Cisco and Barry to try and explain things to Joe, who was waiting for them, as best they could.

oOo

It was a few days before Barry was invited back into Singh’s office. The night before there had been another attack, so he had been in his lab, working alongside Julian, when Joe came up to get them both. When they entered it was to find Singh sitting behind his desk, chatting idly with two men Barry hadn’t seen before.

One sat in one of the chairs opposite Singh’s desk, looking like he had been working here for years. He was a little younger than Joe, and way more fit; looking more like a football player rather than a big teddy bear with a gun. The man looked up as they all came in, giving each one of them an appraising glance before looking back at Singh. The other man sat in the chair next to the first. Both men mirrored the other, each sitting back with their right leg crossed with the ankle on the left knee. Like with the first guy, the second one turned his head to see who came in. His ice blue eyes focused on each of them with a concentration that was more than simple observation. It was like he was trying to see beyond what they showed on the surface. Cause that wasn’t weird or anything.

“Detective West, Mr. Allen, Mr. Albert, meet Detectives Nick Burkhardt” a wave to the guy farthest from the door followed by another to the other guy, “and Hank Griffin. They’re visiting from Portland until we solve these…mysterious cases.” Singh turned his gaze from the two under his command to the newcomers. “Detectives, this is Detective Joe West, lead investigator, Barry Allen, lead CSI, and Julian Albert, lead Metahuman CSI.”

Both men gave nods of greeting but nothing more. Burkhardt stood up and turned so that he could face everyone in the office evenly. His partner did the same, standing just to Burkhardt’s left and making it look like Singh’s office was divided between the Portland faction and the Central City one. “Our captain said that you’ve had some weird cases pop up,” Burkhardt said, though his tone indicated a question as well as a statement.

Joe raised his eyebrows, smiling and adding, “In Central City that’s not an abnormal occurrence.”

Griffin snorted out his understanding but it was Burkhardt who, after a small smile, replied, “Captain Renard said you guys came across some things that you were having trouble explaining.”

“Yeah,” Barry allowed, not sure how these two were going to help. Did they even know what was going on? “We’ve gotten some…unusual results.”
“Unusual how?” Griffin asked. Throughout most of their conversation, the black man had looked like he was there for support more than anything. Now, however, he looked interested; intrigued almost.

“Allen, take Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin up to your lab. You, Joe, and Albert can fill them in on the case there.”

As far as dismissals go, it was one of the nicest ones that Singh had given. He suspected that it had something to do with the fact that the two other detectives were there, but he went with it anyways.

Julian was the first one out the door and as a result was the one to lead everyone up to the lab. Knowing how the Brit liked to take the lead in everything, Barry and Joe shared an eye roll. Barry doubted it was accidental that Julian was the first one out the door, but it didn’t matter.

“Did you know they were coming?” Barry whispered to Joe as they climbed the stairs.

“I knew about five minutes before you did,” Joe answered back. “How much do you think we should tell them?”

“As much as we can,” Barry said, pausing just outside the door so the others wouldn’t hear. “I mean, honestly, I don’t know what’s going on and Caitlin and Cisco are just as stumped. Maybe these guys can help?” Joe raised an eyebrow in doubt, making Barry roll his eyes and add, “But maybe see what Cisco or Felicity can find out about them, too.”

“Yeah,” Joe agreed, pulling out his phone to send a text off.

When Barry and Joe entered the lab, Julian threw Barry an annoyed look. People skills weren’t among Julian’s list of qualities, but the two detectives from Portland either didn’t mind or didn’t notice. They were standing in front of Julian’s desk, scanning through the file that both Barry and Julian had compiled since the attacks began. Burkhardt held the file while Griffin read over his shoulder, flipping up the papers as needed.

“You said there were two types of DNA?” Burkhardt asked, eyes flicking up to Barry and Joe before looking back at Julian.

“Yeah,” Barry answered. He joined them in front of Julian’s desk and took hold of the file. Griffin gave him a look of surprise but Burkhardt allowed him to take the file out of his hands without a fight and stepped aside so that he could look over Barry’s shoulder instead. “Yeah, here,” Barry said when he’d found the right report. “It’s a combination of human and lupus.”

“Like a dog?” Griffin asked.

Julian opened his mouth like he was going to explain how simplistic that explanation was but Barry jumped in before he could. “Yeah. Basically.”

“And what about the victims?” Burkhardt asked, eyes still scanning the report, though God knew what else he got from it.

“Why would we?” Julian asked, looking annoyed. “We already know who they are.”

Burkhardt looked up from the file, eyebrows slightly raised in surprise but expression saying that he thought they hadn’t done their jobs very well. He threw a look over at his partner and then closed the file. His smile was…not cold, per se, but it certainly wasn’t friendly either. It was the kind of smile you gave someone you were pacifying. “Okay.” He handed the file back to Barry,
asking, “So what’s a metahuman?”

“Basically, they are people who gained powers when a particle accelerator exploded,” Joe answered succinctly.

Burkhardt glanced at his partner, who gave a shrug, then refocused on Barry and Joe. “Okay then,” he said in a tone which suggested he was moving on without fully understanding what happened. “I take it that their DNA is indistinguishable from regular humans?”

“Mostly,” Julian answered. “Sometimes traits of their powers can show up in their DNA, but you have to be looking for it.”

“I’m guessing that’s your job,” Griffin said, looking at Julian.

“Among other things,” Julian answered with more than a little annoyance in his voice. He may have agreed to stop hating Barry, but right now, Barry wasn’t sure that Julian actually liked him either. “Why does Captain Singh think you two can help?” the Brit bluntly asked.

“To be honest, I’m not sure that he does,” Burkhardt answered with a wry smile. Surprisingly he didn’t look at all offended by the idea. “We may not know all the quirks of Central City, but whatever you might think, we can help you.” He walked over to the rolling board that used to hold the details of Barry’s mother’s case and studied the map that was hanging there now. “Are these the locations where the attacks happened?” Burkhardt asked, pointing to the five pins sporadically spread throughout several neighborhoods.

“One assumes,” Julian answered, rolling his eyes.

Burkhardt pulled his phone out and took a picture of it. “That’s where we’ll start then,” he said as he slipped it back into his pocket.

What? That was it? They just come in, get a little bit of information and then they’re done? Really?

“Do you even know where you’re going?” Joe asked in a tone that indicated he thought they were idiots.

“No, but isn’t that what GPS is for?” Burkhardt answered.

Barry couldn’t tell if the Portland detectives didn’t want them around, or if they thought they weren’t wanted. Given the vibes coming off everyone at that moment, it could honestly have been one or the other, and there wasn’t an easy way to tell which. Either way, it was clear that the detectives planned to go off on their own. Barry thought about trying to stop them but knew that it would be pointless.

Burkhardt smiled, this time the action looking far more friendly. “We’ll call you if we find anything,” he assured, though Barry highly doubted that was true. “Thanks for the help.”

They left without another word. “Well now that that’s over,” Julian said, waiving his phone which Barry could see had a text from Caitlin. “I believe Cisco wants us back at S.T.A.R Labs.”

Julian grabbed his coat and walked out, leaving Barry standing behind in his wake as his brain tried to process the strange string of events that had just happened. “Curiouser and curiouser,” he quoted on a mumble as he too grabbed his coat and left.
“Check it,” Cisco said as soon as they all walked in. “This is all that Felicity and I could find on Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin.”

Barry stared open-mouthed at the walls of the cortex. Or rather, at the multiple articles and pictures which lined every space that could be found. It looked a little too much like a scene from A Beautiful Mind, but he didn’t say it.

“Was this really necessary?” Joe asked, clearly as dumbfounded as Barry.

“Probably not,” Cisco admitted, “But it was fun. And besides, we couldn’t fit all this on the screens.”

“So what is all this?” Julian asked as he settled into a chair behind the command station.

“It’s mostly a bunch of articles about the cases these guys have worked, and let me tell you, there’s a lot. Some were high profile, but most were just small stuff. Small but weird. In about 93% of their cases, the victim was killed by what appeared to be an animal. Side note - the pictures were not pretty to look at; I’m gonna have nightmares for days thank you very much.”

“What about the other seven percent?” Barry asked, his eyes glued to all the photos and articles.

“Six percent of them were normal deaths, explained by drugs and your normal variety of violence. But get this - they all happened circa Summer 2011. The weirder cases didn’t start popping up with them until after this.” An article popped up onto one of the many TV screens they had mounted to the walls, detailing an event Detective Burkhardt had been involved in, involving the shooting of a man who attacked him and his aunt just outside his home. “Before this, there’s nothing weird or strange in any of their cases whatsoever.”

“And you think that, whatever happened during this fight, what?” Joe said, turning around to look at Cisco. “Changed Burkhardt in some way?”

“That’s just it,” Caitlin interjected. “There’s nothing indicating that this changed Detective Burkhardt in any way shape or form. It’s almost like, from here on, he kept getting the stranger cases by accident.”

“There’s no way anyone’s that unlucky,” Joe said, not believing in coincidences.

“It says they were working on a case when this happened,” Barry said as he speed-read the entire article and then moved on to some of the others. He made sure that his tone indicated both question and statement since he wanted to know what the case was but hadn’t asked.

Like Joe, Barry didn’t believe Burkhardt was getting the weird ones out of coincidence. Though he hadn’t spent much time with the man, there was something about him that seemed different. Similar to how he knew that Vandal Savage wasn’t a metahuman, but something more. Detective Burkhardt wasn’t your average guy but he definitely wasn’t a meta either. Whatever it was about him that made him more - that was what brought these cases to the detective’s door.

The trouble was, even after reading everything that had been pinned or taped to the wall, Barry couldn’t figure out what it was, and that bothered him.

“Yeah, he and his partner, Detective Griffin, were working on the case of a little girl who went
missing. And get this, one of the guys that was under suspicion for the kidnapping is now one of Detective Burkhardt’s best friends. I mean, the guy was best man at his wedding.”

“Detective Burkhardt’s wedding?” Barry asked in confusion. He hadn’t seen a ring on the man’s finger.

“No, the suspect-guy’s wedding.”

“So either the suspect-guy,” Joe said.

“Monroe,” Caitlin filled in.

“Either Monroe knew more about the little girl’s disappearance than he was letting on,” Joe said.

“Or he knows something about Detective Burkhardt,” Barry filled in. The real question was - which one was it?

“Where do these two fit in?”

Barry jumped, not expecting to hear Iris’s voice. He should have known she would be invited to the pow wow too, yet he hadn’t even thought of her until he heard her. She smiled, enjoying the fact that she was able to sneak up on him for once. Barry followed her hand toward the pictures of two women on the walls. One was a pretty redhead with sparkling blue eyes and a friendly smile. The other was a brunette, just as pretty as the redhead but in a different way.

“That,” a red laser dot pointed to the redhead, “is Doctor Juliette Silverton, D.V.M. She was Detective Burkhardt’s live-in girlfriend for four and a half years.”

“Was?” Iris asked.

A sadness that Barry didn’t like seeing crept into Caitlin’s eyes as she answered, “She died two years ago.”

Oh man. Barry looked over at Iris, trying to picture losing her, and failed entirely. He could only try to imagine how Detective Burkhardt felt.

“Yeah, but get this,” Cisco added, “there’s no record of a death certificate anywhere. There’s an obituary in the paper for her and nothing else. No autopsy report, no burial paperwork. Nothing. It’s like she just dropped off the map.”

“So she could be alive,” Iris surmised. “But what about the other one.”

“That is Rosalee Calvert. She owns a Spice and Tea shop in Portland, it’s a small store specializing in medical herbs and teas. She is married to Monroe. Both of them keep a low electronic profile, but from what Felicity could dig up, both she and her husband are best friends with Detective Burkhardt and Miss Silverton.”

“And what about her,” Joe said, his voice wary as he pointed to a woman with short, black hair and cold eyes.

“She is somewhat of a mystery,” Cisco answered. “Before this picture was taken of her,” he brought up a photo of the girl ordering some fast food in a drive-thru, “there’s no record of her beyond her adoption records.”

“She’s a foster kid?” Wally asked, giving Barry a nod of hello when Barry took notice of him.
“Was,” Caitlin answered. “Her foster parents were brutally killed when she was a little girl. She ran away and wasn’t heard from or seen again until she ran into Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin.”

A video replaced the photo, showing the two detectives as they cornered her. She proceeded to do a kind of vault over their car, running into Monroe where she then pulled out... “Hold up,” Barry said, unable to believe his eyes, “is that a machete?”

“Yeah,” Cisco said, sounding excited. “Yeah, she tries to kill Monroe with it before being put into handcuffs. They have a small conversation, probably about what to do with her, then they put her into the back of the car and drive off. Thing is, there’s no record of her being arrested anywhere.”

“If she tried to kill that guy then why didn’t they arrest her?”

“Exactly,” Cisco said without actually answering. “She eventually goes on to live with Detective Burkhardt. What happens from then on is a spotty at best. She doesn’t have any sort of electronic device that Felicity could find.”

“So...” Wally said, dragging it out as he tried to put it all together and failed. “What does all this mean?”

“It means that in spite of killing all these trees, we don’t have a clue how Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin connect to our mystery cases,” Julian quipped. He looked over at Cisco with an annoyed expression on his face. “You couldn’t have led with that?”

“I was hoping that one of you might be able to fill in the blanks,” he defended. “You guys actually met the detectives after all.”

Fair point. “He’s not human,” Barry said, turning around so that he could face the room as whole. “Do you think he’s a meta?” Joe asked, not bothering to question how Barry knew that.

Barry shook his head. “I don’t know what he is, but I can safely say he’s not normal.”

“Uh, maybe you can figure that out while you help him,” Cisco said as an alert flared to life on one of the computer screens.

“Help him?” Iris asked as she looked over Cisco’s shoulder so that she could see what he was seeing.

“Yeah, I may or may not have placed a trace on his phone and have been tracking him ever since he left CCPD.” He did a bit of typing then pulled up a live feed from a street cam facing Bedford Park.

Barry pivoted and saw that Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin were surrounded by about twenty men. Without another thought, Barry and Wally changed into their suits then sped off, arriving in no time.

The scene was a curious one. The camera angle made it look as though the would-be attackers were surrounding the detectives when in actuality, they surrounded a lone man who was on his knees and facing the detectives. He was a plump man and he looked frightened for his life.

There were two men in the group who looked, in black and white, similar to the two detectives, which was where the mix-up came from. Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin were slowly walking towards the group, looking for all the world like they were out for a stroll in the setting sunlight. Or they would have been, had it not been for the short sword Burkhardt held in his right hand and
Barry looked at Wally in confusion. What the? When he looked back, his eyes widened as that confusion doubled exponentially. Slowly, and one-by-one, each of the men changed into something else. Most of them changed into what Barry imagined a dog would look like if you mated a German Shepherd with a black wolf. The man who was on his knees morphed into, Barry didn’t actually know, but he had huge front teeth and lots of fur; he grew even more terrified when he caught sight of Burkhardt, doing his best to curl into a ball of pure fear. Why was he so afraid of the detective? The rest of them, three in all, changed into something Barry wished he hadn’t seen. They were almost reptilian, with yellow eyes and greenish-yellow skin.

“Are we just gonna stand here and watch?” Wally asked in a tone of both worry and surprise.

“Do you wanna rush into that without knowing what we’re getting into? Because I don’t,” Barry answered, pointing at the crowd of...animals. His brother rolled his eyes but he stayed where he was. “And besides,” Barry added with a shrug, “it’s not like we can’t help if they need it.”

“Grimm!”

The word came out as a garbled snarl from most of the creatures. It amazed Barry that they were able to imbue so much hate into a single word, though he didn’t have a clue what it meant. “A what now?” he asked, hoping that Cisco would have a better idea than he did.

“Uh,” Wally said. “Is it me or are their hackles rising?”

Barry refocused on the group. “They’re rising,” he confirmed.

“Uh, guys, the only results I’ve got for ‘grimm’ is the Grimm Fairytales,” Cisco said, sounding both worried and confused.

The sound of metal scraping against metal echoed through the practically empty park, making Barry wince. It reminded him of the sound Savitar’s retractable blades made when they were unleashed. Rather than it being a small spike however, Barry’s eyes widened in astonishment when he saw that it was actually a scythe being unfolded. A friggin scythe? Really?

“I guess Alexandra is smarter than her brother gave her credit for,” Detective Burkhardt quipped in a tone far colder than it should have been. “She sent Reapers with you.”

“Reapers? Really?” Cisco retorted. “As in Grimm Reapers?”

“Kill him!” the lead dog-man-guy snarled.

Barry tensed, ready to end the fight before it began if need be, only to startle as three people fell into step behind the detectives. “What the?” he said, cutting off the curse. “Where’d they come from?”

In his ear he heard Cisco saying the same thing. Over the comms, Barry could hear the team as whole trying to figure out how they got there without being detected but he ignored it, reminding himself that there was a bunch of animal-like people about to attack regular people. Or, at least, one of them was a regular person. Barry wasn’t so sure about the others at this point.

No other word was spoken between the two parties, though Barry had half expected there to be.
The group of dog-like men darted forward, snarling their challenge. Two of the three who had joined ran forward to meet them with Detective Burkhardt in the lead. A woman hung back, rolling her head to the left in a motion Barry didn’t understand. He watched, uncomprehending, as her hair changed from dark brown to pure white. No doubt her face had changed as well, but he couldn’t see her clearly enough from his position to be sure. Whatever it was that the dog-men saw, though, made them hesitate.

“Now are we gonna help?” Wally asked, though he sounded less eager than he had been when they’d first arrived.

Barry rolled his eyes and sped off. Between him and Wally, they evened the fight from twenty against five to ten against five in an instant. Barry would have done more but most of the guys he had hit got right back up and were now growling at him as well as the others. Barry sighed. “Seriously?” He looked to his right to see Wally have the same luck he did, then he took off again, this time making sure to knock them unconscious rather than just off their feet. Whoever or whatever these guys were, they were strong and it took a lot more than it normally would have to make sure they stayed down.

While running around, Barry got a good look at the three newcomers. One of them was the mystery brunette; Barry tried to recall her name only to remember that no one had actually provided it. She held her trusted machete in her hands, her face scrunched into a yell of anger, as she ran into danger. Whoever she was, she was clearly not someone to be messed with.

The second one he passed was a man. Or at least he had been at one point, he assumed. The man, tall and dressed in plaid, was furry, though less so than the dog-men, with crooked, yellow teeth and pointed ears. Overall he didn’t look too vicious until you looked at his eyes. The black of the pupil was surrounded in what looked like a pool of blood. His mouth was open in a snarl as Barry passed him, making him look even more frightening.

Barry shivered then ran passed the woman, knocking down two guys on his way. Now he knew what had made them pause. She was hideous. She looked more dead than alive with the decaying-looking skin that covered her face. Her lips were completely gone, exposing her bloodied gums and broken teeth, while her hands were what Barry expected to see on corpses rather than a living, breathing woman. Her eyes looked like they were made of old blood that had somehow remained in its liquid form as they glared at the men coming at her.

When a gun went off, it scared Barry enough that he stopped running out of sheer surprise. He turned in the direction in time to see Detective Griffin fire off another shot. The bullet hit the dog-man square in the chest, and, needless to say, when he went down, he didn’t get back up. The detective didn’t even blink as he killed the guy. He simply turned his gun on the creature that the tall guy was fighting, waiting until the thing looked like it was going to strike before he fired.

What did it say about this group that they killed without thinking and that it didn’t bother them to do it? Barry felt a bit sick at the thought.

He felt that feeling double tenfold when he heard the sound of shearing followed by a squelching sound behind him. Wally had stopped on hearing the sound as well and his expression of horror was one Barry knew would soon be on his face as well.

Detective Burkhardt stood in the middle of the grassy area, mostly alone. The creepy woman, her face changing from the nightmare inducing sight to that of a fairly attractive woman which Barry somewhat recognized, stood not far away with two dog-men lying dead at her feet; Barry swallowed bile when he noticed that the backs of their heads had exploded, revealing their brains beneath their skulls. Blood dripped from the short sword the detective held. It glistened in the
moonlight as it steadily fell to the ground in fat drops. The detective stood above three of his would-be attackers, looking nothing short of the angel of death. Barry could see several cuts in the man’s clothes but he doubted the detective noticed or cared about them.

When Detective Burkhardt met Barry’s gaze, the ice in the other man’s blue eyes made Barry freeze to his core. It wasn’t the same kind of cold that Killer Frost had infected him with when she’d kissed him. No, this was something far worse and longer lasting. They only shared a look for a second or two, but it was long enough for Barry to fancy that they’d seen into each other’s souls and Barry wasn’t sure he wanted to do that ever again. The detective’s soul seemed so dark and covered in blood, Barry had felt as though he had been drowning in it. Breaking the gaze, Detective Burkhardt looked over Barry’s right shoulder at his partner and friends, “You guys okay?”

“Yeah,” Detective Griffin answered, sounding a little out of breath. “What should we do with the bodies?”

“And don’t say that you need a shovel and some packing tape cause I’m fresh out,” the taller man quipped, shocking Barry into complete silence with his nonchalance.

A small smirk flickered over Detective Burkhardt’s face, but he said, “No, that won’t work this time.”

“This time?” Barry, Wally, Detective Griffin, and both women asked in unison. Barry wasn’t even sure he wanted to know what that meant, honestly. Each time he discovered something new about this group it sent his head spinning as he tried to keep track of it. He was getting dizzy from it all.

“I’m sorry, what is wrong with all of you?” Barry asked, appalled at how easily they were all taking the deaths of several…he didn’t even know what to call the dead, but he knew that they should all be feeling a sense of wrong and the fact that they weren’t bothered him. “You all just killed eight people. Violently. And you can just, what, joke around?”

“Would you rather us have been killed instead?” the woman asked from Detective Burkhardt’s right. Her voice was matter-of-fact; no inflection, nothing. She showed no emotion at all as she looked at him, looking as though she was waiting for him to see the truth of their reality rather than the wrongness of it.

It was then that Barry remembered where he had seen this woman before. She was Juliette Silverton - the woman that they all assumed had died. She looked radically different, of course, but even so, it was her.

“I take it, this isn’t how you normally handle things,” Detective Burkhardt said in a tone which suggested that he understood, in part, where Barry was coming from.

“Not really, no,” Wally answered. For some reason his brother’s calm tone didn’t bother Barry half as much as when it was coming from the other group.

The detective nodded. “Well, thanks for the help Mr. Allen.”

“How-” Barry stuttered.

Burkhardt tapped his ear. Blood glistened on his hand and sleeve, showing how much he was bleeding. Why was he not doing anything about it? “I have good hearing,” he answered with a wry smirk.

“I’ll say,” The tall man, Monroe, mumbled.
“The ones that you knocked out are gone,” the mystery woman pointed out. “They’re probably on their way back to their boss to tell her that we are here.”

“I’m guessing that’s bad,” Barry surmised, hearing Cisco in his ear say something similar.

“If you thought this was bad,” the woman said in the same neutral tone, though she waved her arms at the carnage they stood amongst. “Then you won’t like what’s coming.”

“Which is,” Wally prompted.

A sinking feeling in Barry’s stomach told him he could already guess their answer but he waited for them to say it anyways.

“An army with one goal,” Detective Burkhardt said.

“Kill us,” Detective Griffin interjected for his partner.

Barry sighed. Of course it was.

TBC
“So what are we gonna do with the bodies?” Trubel asked, interrupting the silence that had fallen.

Nick looked over at Eve, “Can HW clean this up?”

Ever since the attack on HW, the organization had been struggling to rebuild. It hadn’t really happened at first, but after the events with the Zerstörer had ended, things had slowly started to get back to normal. Eve had lingered between homes for a time before the HW faction from Germany reached out to her and helped to regroup and reform in Portland. She, alongside two others, ran HW in Portland now.

“Can who do what now?” Allen asked. Nick noticed the kid was no longer trying to disguise his voice. He still wore the mask, but Nick suspected that was more because it was easier to leave it on in the field than it was to take it off.

Nick was still having trouble believing what he’d seen the kid and the one next to him do. Yes, he lived in a world where things weren’t normal by any means, but Nick had never thought he’d see the day when humans gained superpowers. The fact that everyone in this entire city acted like it was perfectly normal was mind-boggling. Nick tried to imagine what it would be like if everyone in Portland accepted the existence of wesen. He couldn’t do it.

“I’ll give Leda a call,” Trubel answered.

While Trubel walked away from the group to do just that, Allen looked towards his friend. “Why don’t you get back to S.T.A.R Labs? I’ll meet you there when I’m done here.”

Nick missed whatever the other Flash-guy said as pain seared through his side. The unexpectedness of it stole his concentration, capturing his attention in a prison cell of fire. He managed to stifle any sound of discomfort, but he couldn’t stop the grimace that creased his face. As stealthily as he could, Nick wrapped his right arm around his stomach so that his hand could press against the fairly deep cut the reaper’s scythe had created. Blood didn’t immediately spill through his fingers, but his shirt was soaked far more than he would have liked.

“Detective?” Allen said in a tone which suggested that he had noticed Nick’s pain.

“You okay?” Hank added as he stepped closer to examine Nick himself.

“I’m fine,” Nick answered, adding a small smile. “Just a few scratches.”

“That doesn’t explain why I smell your blood more than theirs,” Monroe retorted, pointing at the three dead reapers at Nick’s feet.

“I’m sorry,” the second Flash said. “You can smell his blood?”
“Well, it’s pretty distinguishable,” Monroe defended. “And I’ve had several years to get used to the scent.”

“This just keeps getting weirder and weirder,” Flash number 2 mumbled. His face was still vibrating fast enough that Nick couldn’t fully see his expression, but he could imagine it and it made him smirk a little. At least he wasn’t the only one having trouble accepting the new reality.

“Okay, filing that under the very large column of ‘Things That Need to be Explained’.” Allen half murmured and half commanded. “How badly are you injured? Because I may not know what’s going on, but something tells me that if your friend can smell it over that,” he pointed very wildly at the carnage that surrounded Nick, his pallor turning a little too white for a second, “then you’re hurt worse than you’re letting on.”

Nick was about to argue with the validity of the assumption when Eve walked up to him and pulled his shirt up. “Hey!” he objected. It was extremely weird for her to be this physical with him. Ever since they had come back from ‘the other place’, Eve had been careful to keep her distance from him, both emotionally and physically. Although they continued to work together, to help one another, they rarely touched, and of all the people that Eve confided in nowadays, Nick didn’t even make the cut.

“He’s going to need stitches,” Eve announced as she pushed his shirt up even higher so that she could get a better look at the entire wound. She looked up, her blue eyes so familiar and yet so cold, admonishing, “You’re lucky the scythe didn’t go any deeper.”

“One of the reapers got you?” Trubel asked as she joined the group. She replaced Juliette at Nick’s side, her hands exploring what her eyes couldn’t see.

“More than once, if his sleeve is anything to go by,” Allen added rather unhelpfully.

Trubel’s gaze flicked to both of his arms before returning to the cut on his flank. “We should get you back; get this taken care of.”

“We have a doctor at S.T.A.R Labs who can help,” Allen suggested.

“How do we get there?” Hank asked as he pulled out the keys to the Dodge.

A rather mischievous smirk appeared on Allen’s face as he answered, “Isn’t that what GPS is for?”

Nick hardly had time to register Hank’s snorted chuckle before he felt wind and then weightlessness. Pain flared as he was pulled, but Nick only had enough time for it to register before he was standing in a very bright, circular room, surrounded by several people. “What?” he asked, unable to get the rest of his question out because his mind was having too much trouble trying to figure out what the hell just happened.

“Detective Burkhardt,” Allen said with a smile as he pulled his hood off. “Welcome to S.T.A.R Labs.”

oOo
When Nick disappeared in a streak of lightning, Trubel felt an old worry begin to strangle her heart. It had only been a few months since Nick had been found after being taken by a member of Renard’s family and tortured. Thankfully he hadn’t been missing for too long, but it was long enough to damage them all in one way or another. For Trubel it was her complete and total dislike of letting him out of her sight when they were on cases together.

“Nick!” she heard Hank call out in worry but Trubel didn’t bother looking at him.

Instead, she pulled her machete out and aimed it at the only meta-human left in their midst. She didn’t care that he could probably get away from her before she could do any harm. Hurting him wasn’t actually the point. Threatening him was. “Where’d he go?”

“And if you’ve hurt him,” Monroe added as he came up to her left in full woge.

“Guys, chill,” the man said, his voice vibrating like his face to hide his identity. He held his hands out as though to hold them off. “The Flash took him to S.T.A.R Labs to get patched up.” His posture relaxed when they backed off and he muttered, “Geez. What’s your guys’ damage?”

“Let’s just say that it’s inadvisable to do that again anytime soon,” Monroe warned, still looking angry but no longer in woge.

“I’ll try to remember that?” the meta-human answered, though he sounded like he was pacifying them more than caring.

“I’ll drive,” Hank said for the other’s benefit in a tone that showed he was anything but pleased.

“I’ll race you,” Trubel answered, returning her machete to its holster before bolting for her bike. She didn’t have a clue what a S.T.A.R Labs was but from the way Speedy had said it, it should be easy enough for her GPS to find.

As she pulled onto the road, Trubel paid little attention to the scenery around her. Her mind was racing far faster than her bike, replaying the image of Nick, burned and beaten, when they’d finally found him. It was an image that she couldn’t seem to get out of her head. Sometimes, she wasn’t sure that she wanted to since it reminded her why she fought and, to a degree, who she fought for. Sure, she was employed by HW. But it was to Nick that she owed her life and her loyalty. She had let him down once; she didn’t plan on doing it again.

Ignoring the passing flash of yellow lightning that streaked passed her, Trubel took a right then gunned the engine. Speedy Gonzales may get there first, but she would be damned if she let anyone else beat her.

Wally ran back to S.T.A.R Labs while the others got to their vehicles. He was glad to be free of them because that group was intense, and not in a good way. Although he knew that he could have outrun them easily, the fact that they had pretty much wanted to kill him because Barry had taken their friend to get help put them in the ‘Crazy’ column for life. What was wrong with them?

He naturally arrived long before they did, though the weird girl with the machete was making damn good progress on her sweet-looking bike, allowing him time to fill Barry in on what had happened when he’d left.
There was no sign of anyone in the cortex, but Barry, Caitlin, and the other guy - he couldn’t remember the man’s name at the moment - were in the med room. The man sat with his back to the cortex, facing the other two, yet somehow Wally knew that he was aware of Wally’s presence. He stiffened ever so slightly, turning his head to the right as though to better hear what was going on.

“I think we should cut the shirt off,” Caitlin said as she inspected the cuts to the man’s side and arm. “It’ll be easier and less painful than trying to take it off.”

“Seriously?” the detective asked, clearly not liking the idea. “Is that really necessary?”

“We can find you a new shirt, if that’s what you’re worried about,” Caitlin assured him as she turned around and grabbed the scissors. She didn’t give him time to object any more before she began to cut the partially blood-soaked shirt away and then threw it in the garbage.

The man’s exposed back painted a picture Wally didn’t actually want to see. Faint criss-cross lines patterned the bottom, making it look like someone had taken a fine waffle iron and had pressed it against the skin while it was still hot. Give the visibility of the scars, Wally knew the wounds had been healing for a while. If he had to guess, he would have said it was recent, but that was based off this man’s team’s reactions more than anything.

What really captured Wally’s eye, though, was the gigantic gothic-looking ‘G’ in the middle of the detective’s back. It almost looked like it had been squished in there so it could fit in between the shoulder blades, but the formation was too neat for that. Wally did his best not to stare, but it was hard. It was both horrific and curious for him. He had known guys who had branded themselves, tattooing their skin with burns rather than ink, but instinct told him this hadn’t been done voluntarily.

The man shifted a little, as though he were aware of Wally’s scrutiny and wasn’t comfortable with it, placing the brand in better light as he did so. It was then Wally noticed two things he hadn’t before: the first being that the same ‘G’ was branded on each shoulder blade; and the second was that what he had taken for one large brand was actually many of the same small one that had been placed over and over to form the bigger one. That had definitely been forced onto the detective, no doubt about it.

“Hey Barry,” he called, still masking his voice. Just because the detective knew who The Flash was didn’t mean he had to know who Kid Flash was, too. Barry looked up, his eyes looking a little haunted as he did, and nodded in acknowledgement. “Let me talk to you for a minute.”

Barry checked to make sure that Caitlin was all set before he bounded out of the med room and up to Wally. He had his back to the med room, making sure all of his attention was on Wally. “What’s up?” he asked, crossing his arms over his chest in a position that was becoming very normal for him.

“You should probably be more careful about who you super-speed here,” Wally warned. As much as he tried not to, Wally’s gaze kept flicking between Barry and the man’s back. It was like looking at the aftermath of a vicious car accident - you wanted to look away but at the same time you were fascinated by the carnage.

Barry’s brows furrowed in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“He means that Mr. Grimm Reaper’s friends didn’t take too kindly to you making him disappear,” Cisco answered as he walked in and joined the pair. He opened his mouth to say more but he stopped dead when he looked into the room and caught sight of the detective’s back.
“What do you mean they ‘didn’t take too kindly to me making him disappear’?” Barry asked, confused.

“He means that my friends overreacted when I left,” the detective answered before either Wally or Cisco could do it.

“Overreacted how?” Barry whispered.

The detective chuckled as though saying that he could still hear them but he didn’t answer this time. “Well, I’m pretty sure that one of them was going to eat me if I didn’t give them a satisfactory answer and I think another wanted to cut my head off,” Wally quipped.

“Oh geez,” Barry sighed, eyes briefly closing. When he opened them, he looked at Wally then at Cisco and added in a whisper, “And what do you two keep looking at?” He turned ever so slightly to look over his shoulder to see if he could see what they did then kept turning once he did. His arms fell to his sides and his expression became far more solemn as he stared.

“Not very pretty, is it?” the detective called from his spot on the bed.

“What isn’t?” Caitlin asked almost conversationally as she finished wrapping his arm in some gauze.

“My back.” Wally could have sworn he heard a smile in the man’s voice as he said it, but he told himself he was imagining it because the detective’s tone was wry as he added, “At least I’m assuming that’s what your friends are staring at.”

Caitlin looked over at them as she moved so that she could address the cut on the injured man’s side. Her brows furrowed in either disapproval or confusion when she noticed that they were staring. When she walked around the bed so that she could start with the bit that was on the detective’s lower back, Wally heard her breath catch.

Rather than address what she saw, she bent over so she could get a better look at the cut. “I’m want to give you a local anesthetic before I start on this one, are you allergic to any medications?”

“No,” the detective answered, his tone unreadable. What kind of hell had this man gone through that he could take all this in stride?

“What happened to you?” Barry asked as his curiosity got the better of him. To his credit, there was concern in his voice as well, but Wally mainly heard the curiosity. Probably sensing that he shouldn’t have phrased it that way, Barry added, “If you don’t mind me asking.”

“I don’t mind you asking,” the detective replied. From his tone alone, Wally could tell that he also didn’t plan on explaining anything. “But I could ask you the same thing. Something tells me you didn’t become like you are on purpose.”

“No, I didn’t,” Barry confirmed, his voice a bit more distant and sad.

“Are you kiddin’ me?” Cisco interrupted as an alarm went off. He quickly silenced it, looking over at the detective with an annoyed expression on his face. “Man, how did your friends get in here without being let in?”

“Magic,” was the wry reply followed by a chuckle.

“Magic? Really?” Cisco answered in a tone which suggested that he thought the detective was pulling his leg.
“You know two people who can run faster than the eye can see, and you don’t believe in magic?” the detective asked. His breath hitched a bit around the middle as Caitlin made him lift his arm so she could have better access to the deepest part of the cut. Whatever she had given the man, it either hadn’t been enough or it was wearing off because Wally could hear pain in his voice while he talked.

“They can actually run as fast as mach three, but I see your point,” Cisco conceded.

“There you are!” a new voice said as the rest of the detective’s friends entered the cortex. The one who had spoken, the tall guy who turned into an animal, headed straight for the med room where the detective sat. “Dude, this place is huge! You could house, like, twenty trailers in here and still have room for everyone and their mother to live.”

Whatever that meant. Wally was far past the point of asking questions anymore. He hoped there was going to be a time when they all explained things, but he doubted it was right now.

“You okay?” the black guy of the group asked, his voice soft as though he meant it to be under his breath rather than for the rest of them to hear.

“I’m fine,” the detective answered with enough exasperation in his voice that even Wally felt it. “I heard things got a little confrontational when I left?”

“Trubel and Monroe may not have taken your leaving the way you did so well.”

The tall guy, evidently named Monroe, blushed a little. He looked over at Wally, who was still in his Kid Flash suit, with a wince on his face. “Sorry about that, by the way,” he said. “We’re just a bit…touchy when people take our friends out from under our noses.” He looked over to where Caitlin was finishing up the stitches, his eyes turning red for a just a second before changing back to brown. “I’m sure you can guess why.”

Wally probably could but he wasn’t going to just yet. “It’s okay,” he forgave, though he was still a bit worried they would do it again.

“Looks like somebody’s done their homework,” the weird girl said as she walked towards their wall of profiles. If she was bothered by the idea, Wally couldn’t tell.

“As much as we could do, anyways,” Cisco answered. “You, my friend, are a hard girl to track.”

“Good,” she answered, moving past him and joining the detective and the black guy. “You okay?”

“Will you tell them I’m fine?” the detective pleaded, looking at Caitlin as she helped him slip a S.T.A.R Labs t-shirt on. The thing didn’t fit him all that well but it worked for the time being.

“Providing he takes it easy for the next few days, he should be perfectly fine,” Caitlin assured, earning a snort from the black guy - wasn’t he also a detective? - and a raised eyebrow of disbelief from the girl. Evidently the detective was just as stubborn as Barry when he was hurt.

The detective threw a look at his two friends but overall he ignored their reactions as he stood. With his hand pressed firmly against the newly bandaged wound, he began to make his way into the cortex to join the rest of the group. Although he moved almost gingerly, Wally thought that he moved pretty easily for a man who had the several layers of skin split open not an hour ago. Did he heal fast like Barry and Wally or was he just used to pushing through the pain?

“We don’t have time for Nick to take it easy,” the two-faced woman answered in a matter-of-fact tone from the doorway.
Not remembering seeing her enter with the others, Wally jumped in surprise. Barry’s reaction was smaller, the guy merely turned so that his back wasn’t to her, as though he were ready to run at any moment, but Wally could still tell he was just as startled.

“You couldn’t make some noise or something?” Cisco snapped in annoyance as his hand went to his heart.

The woman tilted her head ever so slightly as though she didn’t understand either what was being said to her or the emotion behind it. “You need better security,” she announced after a moment.

It amazed Wally that she could chide them while also making it sound like a statement of fact. He had met few people who could do that. His dad certainly tried but, underneath it all, Joe West was fueled by his emotions, rather than logic. From what he could tell, this woman had no such emotions to drive her.

“Tell us something we don’t know,” Barry muttered under his breath on a sigh.

Wally smirked at the comment, though no one else could see it. He had heard stories of times when they were constantly walked in on by strangers, even after they all had thought they were secure. It hadn’t happened in a while, but then again, intruders didn’t always have to come from outside the walls. Now they seem to get random people coming through the breach room. Oh sure, they were often friends, but they were rarely expected.

The detective - Nick was his name apparently - smirked as well, though he couldn’t possibly have heard Barry since he was by the med room and Barry and Wally near the lab room. “I take it this happens to you a lot?” he asked, looking at Barry.

Damn! How good was his hearing?

“Not so much anymore,” Barry answered. “But it used to.” He looked over at the newcomer. “How did you get in here without being seen?”

The woman looked between Barry and the detective before settling on her friend. “You didn’t tell him yet.”

“We were getting there,” Monroe defended, looking uncomfortable. “But, I think you remember how hard it was to tell Juliette and she at least had an idea about what was going on.”

Wait, wasn’t this woman Juliette? Why were they all talking about this woman like she wasn’t right in front of them?

The woman, or Juliette, or whatever her name was, stared sharply at Monroe until the guy began to fidget. She looked over at the detective, who’s posture, Wally noticed, was slowly getting more pained and more tired the longer he stood. “You should sit,” she said as she raised a hand towards the empty chair by the computer station just to Barry and Wally’s left. They both had to jump out of the way as the chair quickly rolled towards the injured man and stopped just shy of his legs.

“How did you do that?” Barry asked, his expression a mixture of confusion and amazement.

“I’m a witch,” she answered, making it sound like it should have been obvious.

Wally’s first thought was that that made sense but then logic caught up with his brain and he slammed on the proverbial brakes. Wait…what?
Nick watched everyone from Central City try to take that in, each one of them clearly failing to do so. On some level, he could understand it. Each one of these people, so far as he could tell, were scientists. They relied on facts, reason, and, most likely, on the laws of physics to explain things that were, to everyone else, unexplainable. The realm of fantasy, of magic and spells and creatures coming to life out of the stories, was not something that science could reason away for them, which meant this just got a whole lot harder to explain.

“Did I just hear someone claim to be a witch?” a new voice asked in a tone that said he wanted to make sure he hadn’t misheard or gone crazy. Detective West appeared not long after he’d asked the question with an expression on his face to match the tone of his voice. Evidently he was hoping Eve hadn’t just said that. He stopped dead when he saw that, not only was his own crew in the room, but strangers were, too. He looked to Allen. “Who are these people?”

“Joe, you remember Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin,” Allen began introducing. West’s eyes tracked to Nick and Hank, barely acknowledging them before refocusing on the CSI. “These three are…” the kid trailed off with a shrug, clearly unsure how to introduce the rest.

“These are my friends,” Nick took over. He waved a hand at the three West didn’t know, wincing when he made the mistake of doing it with his injured left arm. “Monroe, Trubel, and Eve.”

“She looks exactly like that Juliette woman,” West announced, pointing at the picture they had of Juliette hanging on the wall.

A small pang tore through Nick’s heart as he looked at the photo. It was a copy of one that he had taken with Juliette at Monroe and Rosalee’s wedding. How this team had gotten a hold of it, he didn’t know, but he didn’t really care either. Even though he was happy with Adalind and he loved his life with her and the kids, it hurt him to see what once was. He darted a quick look at Eve, unable to stop himself, though he knew that he wouldn’t see anything in her face. She returned his gaze with a blank stare as she refused to admit she could feel everything Juliette had felt. She may not have any regrets, but he sure did.

“It’s a long story,” Monroe answered when it seemed like no one else was going to.

“Okay, well, somebody better start talking quick,” West answered with a new note in his voice, “because all I’m seeing right now is a woman who faked her death standing beside three killers.”

“It’s actually five killers,” Monroe corrected, adding quickly, “but that’s besides the point. I’m getting that now. Um. Okay.” He looked at Nick, who still hadn’t sat like Eve had ordered him to. “Where do we start?”

Out of the corner of his eye, Nick saw Eve raise her hand then he felt the chair gently bump against the back of his knees. He glared at the hexenbiest, not appreciating her insistence.

“Please tell me I did not just see that,” West said with a hand pointed towards the chair.
“Joe,” Allen began, cutting off when West focused on him.

The detective looked at Nick and this time Nick was able to put a word to what he saw in the man’s brown eyes - protective anger mixing with flat-out denial. Not only did he not want Nick and his friends around Allen and the rest of them, but he absolutely did not want to admit he just saw a chair move because it was manipulated by magic. “Explain,” he commanded, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Right,” Nick said, pivoting ever so slightly so that he could face the room as a whole. He only really needed to be able to look at those from Central City but he felt weird about putting his back to his friends. “Where to start…” he wondered aloud as he moved the chair out of the way.

“Let’s start with why you and your friends thought it was okay to murder those people,” West demanded.

“If we hadn’t, they would have killed us,” Eve answered. She moved from her spot by what appeared to be the central command center of the room to just around it so that she was closer to Nick. With a look that Nick didn’t even try to name, she sat in the chair that he refused to take.

“What did you do to piss them off so much?” the kid with the long black hair asked, sounding confused.

“Beyond rescuing our friend so they couldn’t torture him any more, nothing,” Monroe snapped, his eyes beginning to burn red with anger.

Four pairs of eyes focused on Nick as the dots connected themselves in their minds. Nick inwardly sighed. This wasn’t getting off to the best start.

“That’s what happened to your back, isn’t it?” Allen asked him. The kid’s green eyes filled with pity and concern as he looked at Nick, making him glance away so he didn’t have to see it. To acknowledge those emotions meant he would have to admit he deserved them and Nick wasn’t entirely ready to admit that yet.

Confusion clouded the West’s face but he was polite enough not to ask. Barry noticed the man’s expression and said, “I’ll explain later.”

“Or I can explain now,” Nick said. He had only just gotten his team to stop walking on eggshells around him. He didn’t want or need another one doing it. “About three months ago, I was abducted and held against my will. I was beaten for the wrongs of my heritage and branded when I wouldn’t vow loyalty to the woman that had taken me.”

He paused to allow them all to digest that, noticing with surprise how many held compassion in their eyes for a complete stranger. Detective West’s hostility lessened, his expression showing shock and little else. “The men we killed tonight were a part of the crew that helped taunt and torture me.”

“And the ones that you let go,” Monroe added, his eyes now fully red and focused on Allen and his friends, “were the men who branded him over and over and over.”

“Monroe,” Nick whispered as he put a hand out to silence his friend. He appreciated the blutbad’s anger; he had felt it himself when Monroe had been taken by the Wesenrein. But at this point, emotions weren’t going to help things; they were only going to get in the way.

Allen’s face went white, which was impressive given the fact that the kid was almost as pale as Nick. “The woman they work for,” Barry began, stopping with an expectant look at Nick.
“Is the woman who ordered it all,” Nick confirmed with a nod.

“She also just happens to be our boss’s sister,” Hank added. As confusion clouded all their faces again, Hank shrugged, “It’s a complicated relationship.”

“It’s not like our relationship with Renard is any less complicated,” Monroe pitched in.

Nick pivoted to his left, grimacing as it hurt, and looked at his two friends. “That isn’t really helping, you guys.”

“We’re wasting time here,” Eve said after observing the Central City group. She stood up, as though to leave, but rather than walk out the door, she stepped closer towards the CSI. Without warning, she woged, scaring the Central City team enough so that Detective West pulled his gun on her and stepped in front of Allen and his speedy friend.

“No!” Nick called, quickly stepping in front of her. His mouth fell open in a silent cry of pain as the wound in his side pulled against his stitches, tearing the skin apart. All things considered, that probably wasn’t the smartest thing he could have done, especially since he knew that Eve could very well protect herself, but he wanted to make sure things never came to that. “Don’t shoot,” he said as calmly as he could. “It’s still her.”

“No,” West denied, voice calmer than it should have been and eyes a little wild as he looked behind Nick’s shoulder. “No, she’s changed.”

“Joe,” Allen murmured gently. The way the two interacted hinted at a relationship that was more than just a working one. They were familiar with one another, willing to protect each other - they were friends at the least. The kid placed a hand on the detective’s arm, forcing him to lower the gun. “It’s okay.” He looked over Nick’s shoulder at Eve. “What are you?”

“A hexenbiest,” Nick answered, panting a little as the adrenaline that had shot through his system flowed back out again. “And I’m a grimm.”

“What’s that?” Speedy asked, his voice still distorted.

“Essentially?” Monroe answered. “You know the Grimm Fairytales?” He waited for all of them to nod, looking a little dumbfounded. “They’re real. Eve is the equivalent of Hansel and Gretel’s witch. And me?” Nick heard the sounds of a woge and watched as the Central City group’s eyes widened even more in fear and shock. “I’m a blutbad. Or,” he changed back, “as Nick’s ancestors put it, The Big Bad Wolf.” Monroe sniffed. “Nick, your stitches opened.”

Nick’s eyes looked to his left, where he knew Monroe was standing behind Eve, but he didn’t move from his position in front of them both. “I know,” he answered, keeping his focus on the detective. He wanted to make sure the man wasn’t planning on shooting either one of them before he stepped aside.

He saw someone out of the corner of his eye move, but it wasn’t until that person touched him that he paid attention to them. When a hand laid itself on his shoulder, Nick jumped, his body tensing for a fight. “Sorry,” he apologized when he realized it was just the woman who had patched him up. “Habit.”


“Wait,” Detective West said, his attention no longer on Eve or Monroe, but on Nick. “You’re injured?”
“We may have forgot to mention that the other guys came armed with scythes, of all things,” the long haired guy answered. “Scythes. Like, who does that anymore? Haven’t they ever seen Raiders of the Lost Ark?”

“Reapers,” Nick, Monroe, Trubel, and Eve all answered at once.

“The who now?” the long haired guy asked.

Whoever he was, he and Allen were clearly good friends. Nick hadn’t heard anyone else speak the way they did. He didn’t know why, but Nick found himself liking Allen. He was kind, compassionate, and was willing to help others. They were rare qualities in the world Nick had grown to know and live in. He hoped he hadn’t contaminated Allen’s neat world with his messier, darker one.

Nick winced as Doctor Snow pressed against the deeper part of the cut. “Sorry,” she apologized, though he hadn’t made a sound. “I need to restitch this.” She straightened, looking between him and Detective West. “Don’t worry,” she assured when she apparently noticed Nick wasn’t inclined to move yet, “Joe won’t shoot anyone.” She looked over at the detective, adding, “Will you?”

“Grandma Esther’s eggnog would be really good right about now,” was the random reply.

The Central City crew laughed while those of Portland looked at them like they were crazy. Then the mischievous look came back into Allen’s eyes. Nick blinked and the kid was gone, extreme wind the only hint he’d run off. Another blink and the guy was back, this time holding a backpack.

“That’s gonna take some getting used to,” Hank murmured.

“Yeah,” Nick agreed, looking around at the faces in the room. “For everyone.”

TBC
Chapter 3

While Barry passed the eggnog around, Joe kept a close eye on Detective Burkhardt. Of all of the visitors from Portland, he seemed to be the ringleader. They all deferred to him, protected him, and though Joe hadn’t known this group long, he could tell they cared for Burkhardt, too. It was in the way they partially surrounded him, covering his back in a formation to defend against all sides except the front. They let him take charge, which he did seamlessly, reminding Joe of how Jessie and Wally responded to Barry.

After another look around the room, Burkhardt allowed Caitlin to lead him to the med room. Or back to it, since he had apparently already been there once before. Half the Portland team did their best to mingle with the others, the other half followed Burkhardt. The two who followed were easily the warriors of the group. They were the ones who gave off scary vibes and looked as though all you needed to do was make one wrong move and they’d kill you.

The dark haired girl followed far enough behind to give Burkhardt some space; she kept a close watch on their surroundings and eyed everything with suspicion. Her gaze never lingered on any one thing, but it did check to make sure Burkhardt was there and okay. Joe supposed he could understand her desire to keep an eye on him - he couldn’t even imagine how he’d react if one of his kids was taken and tortured before being returned - but he thought it a bit excessive given where they all were. Then again, S.T.A.R Labs probably didn’t mean safety to them like it did to Barry and all the others.

The other one, the one that turned into…something else entirely, followed Burkhardt into the med room, pulling up a seat once he was settled. She was less on guard than the other one; her attention was purely on Burkhardt, almost as though the others didn’t exist. She obviously wanted to talk with Burkhardt about something without the rest of them hearing and for some reason Joe wanted to know what that was.

“We shouldn’t remain here,” the woman was saying as Joe got close enough to hear. “It will take too long to explain everything.”

She paused while Caitlin helped the detective lift his shirt chest high, which was evidently enough for her to reach his wound. When all was said and done, not that much skin was exposed, but it was enough to give Joe a glimpse of the marks on the man’s back. They were gruesome, and it was hard to imagine how one human being could do that to another. Still, he wasn’t entirely convinced that it justified killing.

What if that was Barry or Wally? What would you have done then? a voice that sounded remarkably like Iris whispered in his mind. Joe didn’t even have to think about that answer. He would have killed any and all people who were responsible. Could he then, in good conscience, condemn this crew for doing what he would have done?

Once Caitlin started fixing the few stitches that were broken, the woman continued, “These people aren’t ready for the world you’re about to expose them to,” she warned. Joe internally nodded, agreeing with her. Externally, he leaned nonchalantly against the rail of central command. The younger woman kept an eye on him, but he suspected that so long as he remained where he was, she would do the same.

“We can’t just show up, turn their world upside down, and then leave,” Burkhardt reasoned.

“Sticking around isn’t always the best option,” she answered in a quieter, but still even, voice.
Burkhardt stiffened at that, making Joe think she had just managed to barb her words, possibly without meaning to, but he didn’t reply.

“There,” Caitlin said into the awkward silence that followed. Her voice was gentle, her tone pleasant, showing that she knew she was interrupting something she had no business being a part of. She placed a new bandage over the very long wound then pressed the medical tape against Burkhardt’s skin. “Do me a favor,” she said as she looked down at her patient, “try to stay relatively still for the next several hours. I don’t want to have to redo these every time you feel like jumping in the way of a bullet.” There was a pause where Joe imagined her looking his way, then she said, “Or the threat of one anyways.”

“Thanks,” Burkhardt said, a smile in his voice.

“I didn’t need your help, by the way,” the woman admonished, evidently completely ignoring Caitlin.

“I know,” Burkhardt answered, lowering his shirt and standing up. He smirked at her, adding, “Must be the instinct of a cop.”

“I hope so,” she said, still serious. Again, there was an undercurrent of a completely different conversation happening but Joe hadn’t a clue what it was. The two paused just inside the doorway where Burkhardt briefly leaned against the frame, hand clenching into a fist. “What are we going to do about them?”

“I’m going to try and explain things,” Burkhardt replied in a tone that was sarcastically hopeful. He winced as he walked into the room to join the rest of them, his hand snaking around to his side to keep the wound relatively stable while he walked.

“Okay,” Burkhardt said to the room at large, “let’s try this again, shall we?”

“Can we see some magic?” Cisco asked. Practically interrupted, really.

“I’m not a dog performing tricks,” the woman answered. She looked at Cisco, expression oddly blank. “And you wouldn’t like the things I do.”

“I can attest to that,” machete-girl piped in. A sick sort of smile appeared on her face, as though she were remembering something fairly horrific and enjoying it. “I’ve seen her take away people’s eyes, ears, and mouths to get them to talk.”

“Wait, you cut off people’s mouths? How did you manage that?” Barry asked, clearly unable to picture it.

The woman turned her head so that she was looking at the speedster. “I didn’t. I made the skin grow back together so that the mouth was never there.”

Okay, that was both gross and terrifying. From his pallor, Barry thought so too, but was too afraid to say it which was a wise move considering what this woman could probably do to them if she was angry. The more he learned about these people, the less Joe wanted them around.

“That’s awesome,” Cisco said in excitement, adding, “and a little frightening.”

Since Joe could tell the scientist was about to ask her to show him, he stepped in, focusing on Burkhardt. “Why are these…” he stopped in mid-sentence because he simply wasn’t sure what to call the things the Portland team were after.
“Wesen,” Burkhardt supplied, seeing his struggle.

“Why are these wesen here? What do they want with Central City?”

“Aside from a place to hide out and recruit more members? Nothing,” Burkhardt answered. He made as though to cross his arms over his chest but stopped almost immediately with another wince.

“Recruit for what?” Barry asked before the rest of them could.

“An organization called Black Claw.”

“Yeah,” Detective Griffin interjected after he watched them react to the name, “it’s as bad as it sounds.”

“How about you, Cisco?” Barry asked, eyebrows raised.

“Tell me about,” Cisco retorted. “I mean, I have no idea what this group is about but I am almost 93% certain I could have come up with a better name for them than ‘Black Claw’.”

“Maybe you can help them with a new catchphrase, cause I’m gettin’ pretty sick of hearing the old one,” Detective Griffin returned mildly.

Cisco perked up at the idea, but Joe held out his hand to forestall any further comment on the subject. “What does this group want?”

“Basically?” the tall guy, Monroe if his picture was to be trusted, said. He moved so that he was almost shoulder to shoulder with Burkhardt. No doubt it was so he could address the room better, but to Joe it looked like the Portland group was simply closing ranks. “A world run by wesen.”

“And I’m guessing, that would be…bad?” Barry surmised.

“You remember Hitler, don’t you?” was Monroe’s answer.

“Wait, are you tellin’ me that Hitler, the Hitler, was one of these…wesen?” Cisco said, sounding intrigued and excited.

“He was a blutbad,” Burkhardt confirmed, eyes tracking over to Monroe. Wait, did that mean Hitler could turn into the same kind of animal that Monroe could? “With the help of something called The Coins of Zakynthos, he tried for world domination for wesen.”

“We have fought off one assault by Black Claw already,” the witchy-woman said, “but from what my organization was able to find out, we were one of the few who did. They have launched several smaller attacks to gain more followers and more power, and it looks like they are trying for a larger scale takeover here.”

“So, do you know how many of these wesen are in Central City?” Barry asked as he joined Joe in leaning against the railing of central command. He handed Joe a cup of Grandma Esther’s eggnog then took a gentle sip of his own. The kid might not have been able to get drunk, but he could still taste all of it.

“No,” Burkhardt answered. “No, there’s really no way to tell unless the woge.”

“What’s a woge?” Cisco asked, sounding like he wasn’t sure he wanted to know.

“It’s the process that we go through when we change from human form to our more feral side,” Monroe answered as factually as possible. There really wasn’t an easy way to say that they went
from human to animal. At least, there wasn’t a polite one. “You guys can only see it when we want you to. Grimms,” he pointed at Burkhardt, “can see us even when we don’t want them to.”

“How did those guys in the park know who you were?” Wally asked, speaking for the first time in a while. “I’m assuming you weren’t wearing a sign or anything.”

Burkhardt smirked, the expression a very cold one this time. “As I mentioned earlier, this particular group already knew me, meaning they already knew who I was. But for those that don’t, I’ve been told it’s my eyes.”

“Your eyes,” Joe repeated, not understanding it.

“They become black as a marble,” Monroe answered, “reflecting the darkest parts of our nature back at us. The first time it happens, it’s pretty scary. Actually, it’s always a little scary, no matter how many times you see it.” He paused a moment, thinking about something, and then said, “Well, that and the stories we hear.”

“There’s stories about you guys?” Wally asked, looking at Burkhardt.

“Dude, you have no idea,” Monroe answered, though the question hadn’t been aimed at him. “All wesen are raised on stories about grimms. They’re like your boogeyman for us. My mom used to tell me that a grimm would come cut off my head if I didn’t do my chores or something when I was a kid.” When that didn’t get the response the guy was looking for, he jumped in with, “But, trust me, Nick isn’t like that.”

“Coulda fooled me,” Cisco muttered under his breath.

Burkhardt stiffened, his jaw clenching in what Joe assumed was anger, but again, he said nothing.

“Maybe next time we’ll let your two friends handle things. See how you feel then,” machete-girl defended, clearly taking offense on her friend’s behalf.

“We could have done it,” Wally declared with more bravado than Joe thought was necessary. He knew Wally didn’t lack for confidence, but just once he’d like to see the kid be more cautious about what he could or could not do.

“Yeah, maybe,” Barry answered, sounding doubtful. He looked at the Portland group as a whole. “How are these guys so much stronger than us?”

“They’re stronger in their wesen form,” Burkhardt answered, “but in their human form, they’re no stronger than your average, non-meta human.”

“Then what makes you so much of a threat to them?” Wally asked.

“Oh, so many things,” Detective Griffin muttered jokingly. He held up his hands in surrender when Burkhardt glared at him.

“Did you or did you not see him take out three wesen?” Monroe countered as though the answer should be obvious.

Joe had been here long enough to witness some of the carnage the wesen-man was referring to, and remembering it made him shiver. He’d tried to keep his focus on Barry and Wally as they sped around, knocking some of the creatures down. But their methods hadn’t held his attention like they usually did and he’d found himself quickly looking at the others instead.
Detective Griffin’s method was simple - shoot, kill, shoot another. It was probably the best way a normal guy like him could survive in fights like that. Machete-girl’s method was brutal and more violent than it probably needed to be, but still simple overall. She hacked and chopped and fought like she lived for it, not bothering to spare a thought about the blood she was getting all over herself. Monroe’s method was animalistic. It was efficient, but his style was more like that of a wild creature than a human. Witchy was just scary. She hadn’t even needed to touch the guys to stop them in their tracks and kill them.

He had watched them for all of five seconds before he’d moved on to watch Burkhardt, who had the most opponents. At first all Joe had been able to think was that Burkhardt handled the sword fairly well for a homicide detective from Portland. He held it, fought with it, like it was another part of him, showing he’d had practice with it.

But that was all Joe had been allowed to see before his phone had gone off, calling him back to work with the report of a gang fight happening in, you guessed it, Bedford Park. Strange thing was, by the time he and a team of cops had arrived there, no sign of death or violence even existed. Joe wasn’t sure how it had happened but somehow, someone had managed to make it so the fights had never even happened.

“Well, yeah, but,” Wally began.

“But you thought that everyone could do that?” Monroe interrupted, his tone pointing out how stupid he thought the idea was.

“Grimms are just as strong as the wesen they’re supposed to hunt,” Burkhardt interjected, reinserting himself in the conversation.

“I’m sorry, did you just say hunt?” Joe asked, not liking how that sounded.

Burkhardt nodded. “It’s why they’re so afraid of grimms. We are usually brought up and trained to hunt them down and kill them. I think the only reason I wasn’t was because I didn’t discover my family’s legacy,” - said with such disdain Joe knew Burkhardt didn’t appreciate what he’d been expected to do - “until about six or seven years ago when my aunt died.”

“Yes, and then he came to me for help,” Monroe joked. When he received a look of annoyance from his friend he said, “What? You did.”

“How many different kinds of wesen are there?” Cisco jumped in as though he planned on taking notes for later.

“Hundreds,” was Burkhardt’s answer. “That we know of at least. I haven’t met them all but I’ve seen journal entries from other grimms over the centuries.”

“Wait, there’s books on this?” Cisco asked. “Can I see one?”

“It’s not the kind of thing that you carry around with you,” Monroe answered, apparently having seen them for himself.

“Couldn’t you digitize them so you could?” Cisco countered. Joe inwardly chuckled. Trust Cisco to be unable to grasp the idea of things out of history not having caught up with the modern world.

“So what are we going to do about a group we’re not supposed to know about, who has come to invade our city?” Joe asked, wanting to keep the conversation on point.

“Detective Burkhardt should take the night to rest,” Caitlin jumped in when Burkhardt opened his
mouth to answer. She looked at him, adding, “You need to heal before you do much else.” Her brows furrowed and her head cocked in curiosity as she asked, “Do grimms heal like normal humans or do they heal quickly like Barry and Kid Flash?”

Burkhardt looked over at Barry with confusion and inquiry in his face. “How quickly do you heal?”

“A few hours for a broken bone,” Barry answered nonchalantly. “Several hours for something similar to permanent blindness.”

Burkhardt’s brows rose in surprise. “Okay, we don’t heal that quickly,” he said, pointing at Barry. “But we’re a little quicker than most.”

“Still,” Caitlin insisted, “you should rest.”

“Why don’t we all go home and get some sleep?” Barry, the one most likely to act as caretaker to everyone, suggested. “Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin can meet Joe and I at CCPD in the morning. We’ll fill Julian in as best we can before you get there and then we can try to work out a way to help you.”

Yeah, trying to loop Julian in on all this was going to be fun. Joe didn’t even fully comprehend it all. How was he, or Barry, going to try and explain what they didn’t understand themselves?

“We’ll have HW try and pinpoint Alexandra’s location,” Machete-girl added, getting off the med room steps, where she had been ever since Burkhardt had come into the cortex, and stepping closer to her team.

“Don’t you need starting points for that?” Barry asked.

“We have them,” Machete-girl assured, though she didn’t elaborate.

“Okay then,” Cisco said, “I guess that means this meeting is adjourned. You can all go back to your lives. Or whatever it is you people do when you aren’t killing scary people that can turn into even scarier creatures.”

“Nick,” Joe called, grabbing the man’s attention before he disappeared with his group. It felt weird using the guy’s first name when he didn’t really know him that well, but since they were going to start working together, he figured he might as well start to as well. Besides, the detective had looked…uncomfortable whenever his last name had been used. Like not only wasn’t he used to it, but he didn’t like it. “Can I talk to you for a minute?”

Burkhardt turned when he’d heard his name being called, face scrunching into a grimace as he did so, and he now nodded. “After you,” he said in invitation. Did everything the man said sound sarcastic?

Although Joe normally favored the hallway for private talks, he didn’t think that would work this time. Not only was the cortex too crowded, meaning anyone could interrupt them at any time, but he wanted to make sure he actually got Burkhardt - no, Nick - alone, rather than just separate. So, he headed for the closest room with a door. He patiently waited for Nick to follow him into the lab before he shut the door, not missing the way Nick’s friends watched them like hawks all the while. Man, this group did not trust easily.

“I’m guessing this has something to do with what Eve said earlier,” Nick said, catching Joe off guard. How had he known Joe had been listening?
“Yeah, look, I don’t know what it is that you have brought with you into my city, but cutting us out of it isn’t going to work.”

Nick raised an eyebrow at the warning. “Okay,” he said, sounding curious but not asking the question.

“Barry is a good kid,” Joe explained. “But he’s nosy as hell and helping people is almost the same as breathing to him. He’s not just gonna let any of this go, no matter how weird this gets.”

“I get that, and I can appreciate it,” Nick acknowledged. He looked over Joe’s shoulder, presumably at the kid in question. “But are you sure you want him getting involved? You both have seen a small portion of what my world is like and I don’t want to see you guys jump into something that none of you are ready for.”

“You think we haven’t seen darkness?” Joe quietly countered, remembering all that Barry has gone through in his short life.

“I think he hasn’t had to kill anyone to spare someone else’s life,” Nick answered, surprising Joe. Most people who met Barry thought the kid hadn’t experienced any traumatic events; he was too happy, too trusting for that. Had Burkhardt seen something in Barry to make him think the opposite? Or was he simply being diplomatic?

“Are you planning on killing more people?” Joe asked, unsure how he felt about that. He had always lived by the ideals that there was a right way and a wrong way to do things. Killing people was the wrong way, but even Joe could allow that sometimes you didn’t have a choice in the matter. As a cop, he understood that. As a father making sure his kids were ready for this, he wasn’t so sure he could agree.

“As much as I would like to say no, I can’t,” Nick admitted. “Black Claw is a kill or be killed sort of group. They tell most recruits join or die, and when it comes to their enemies, they definitely aren’t as lenient.”

“Do you honestly think that you can stop Barry or Kid Flash from helping you?” Joe challenged since he didn’t have an answer to that.

“No,” Nick answered, blatantly honest. “But I saw Barry’s reaction tonight and he’s not ready for my darkness to invade his world.”

“Shouldn’t that be something I get to decide for myself?” Barry’s unexpected appearance made both men jump. Joe had completely forgotten about the door that entered the lab from the hallway. Although Barry was an adult and fully able to make his own decisions and judgments, Joe still thought of him as a kid. One that needed to be protected.

“Sorry,” Barry said when he saw the pain he’d inadvertently caused Burkhardt. “It looked like you guys were discussing something important so I thought I should come and see what it was.” He walked further into the room, sitting down in a chair at one of the desks. “Do you want us to help you?” he asked, looking at Burkhardt.

“I don’t want to get you, your friends, or your family killed,” was Nick’s reply.

“But it’s okay for you to?” Barry challenged, the concept foreign to him.

“No,” the detective answered shortly. This guy was good at being straight-up honest, Joe would give him that. But this time there was an ice in the man’s blue eyes he didn’t like. He’d seen that
look in Barry’s green eyes every once in awhile when he thought no one was looking. It was the pain of loss after loss. “But they already know what they’re getting into. They’ve lived this life for years. You and your friends? You fight these meta-humans, you give them cute names, and then you lock them away in a prison. You have yet to learn that sometimes, there’s no other way.”

“There’s always another way,” Barry challenged.

A sardonic smirk appeared on Burkhardt’s face, one that Joe recognized as a cop who’d seen too much. “In most cases, you’re right - there is another way,” he admitted. “And believe me, I’d much prefer to arrest these people than kill them. But that’s not usually an option.”

“Why not?” Joe asked, confused.

“Because what little we can prove isn’t illegal by human law and there’s no one strong enough to challenge them for the wesen laws they’ve broken.”

“Except you,” Joe guessed, still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that these people had their own laws. He tried to imagine what it would be like if metas had their own laws they had to abide by as well as the human ones and he failed entirely.

“Those who are committing major crimes are smart enough and connected enough not to get caught,” Burkhardt continued to explain, ignoring Joe’s comment. Did he not think he was strong enough? Or did he simply not want to go into that right now? “My captain’s sister is a member of a royal family in Europe.”

“And she’s the one in charge of the group here,” Barry continued, though Nick’s statement could have been left on its own. His brows furrowed. “Doesn’t that mean that she technically has diplomatic immunity?”

“And I’m guessing there’s no way to connect the murders, here or anywhere else, to her,” Joe added. What were they expected to do with all of that? Something told Joe they couldn’t very well stick the woman or her underlings in the pipeline.

Another sardonic smirk crossed Nick’s face as he took in their expressions when they grasped the situation. “So you tell me,” he invited, “how do you arrest someone you don’t have the authority to arrest?”

“We could connect the men she hired to the murders,” Barry suggested.

“Not in a way that would make sense to anyone who doesn’t know what’s going on,” Nick argued back. “You can’t take a sample with two different types of DNA to a court and expect them to think that you aren’t crazy.”

“Yeah, but this is Central City. We deal with the impossible every day,” Barry returned, refusing to give up.

He had a good point. Or, at least Joe had thought so until Burkhardt said, “You think so? How well did you guys react when you saw the men in the park change? Or when you saw Eve woge? The case would stop being about catching a killer and become a war on wesen instead, and I don’t want that and I’m guessing you don’t either.”

“Whatever we do, it will affect a lot of innocent people,” Barry murmured. He tilted his head to look up at Burkhardt. “Still think you don’t need our help?”

“I never said that I don’t need it,” Nick countered. “I said that I want to make sure you’re ready
before I involve you.”

“Well, look, I’m already involved whether you like it or not.”

“You’ve skimmed the surface,” Burkhardt argued. “The moment you start acting against these people, they will come for you without mercy.”

“They’d have to catch me first,” Barry answered with a smile full of confidence. His brows furrowed again then he asked, “Hey, I’ve been meaning to ask you, how did you know it was me under the suit? I mean, I know you said that you have good hearing but…”

“I could hear it in your voice when you spoke.”

“But I was vibrating my voice,” Barry said, looking up at Joe in mild bewilderment.

Joe gave him a shrug, showing he didn’t have any better clue than Barry did but inwardly he was chuckling. It was good for the kid to have new experiences. Maybe it would teach him to be more careful.

“Yeah, and that actually kind of hurts, by the way,” Nick said, making the statement sound like a side note. “But underneath all that, it’s still your voice. You still have the same timbre, the same cadence, and the same speech pattern as when you’re being a CSI.”

“Huh, I never thought of that,” Barry admitted, looking up at Joe as he said it.

“Nick?” Detective Griffin said as he poked his head in. When his friend looked at him, he said, “You ready?” Behind him stood Monroe, coat on and looking ready to leave. “Trubel and Eve have already gone back to HW.”

“Yeah,” Nick answered. He looked at Barry and then at Joe. “I guess we’ll see you two in the morning.”

“See you,” Barry answered, his eyes tracking the man as he stiffly walked out. “Think we made the right choice?” he asked once they were all well out of earshot.

“Honestly, Bar,” Joe admitted. “I don’t know.”

TBC
Chapter 4

Explaining things to Julian was about as fun as Barry had been expecting. The Meta-human CSI had had as much trouble grasping the idea of there being wesen out there as the rest of them had. No, scratch that, he’d had more trouble simply because he hadn’t seen what they had. It had taken both Joe and Barry over an hour to convince him that, not only were they not pulling his leg, and that this was real and happening. He still didn’t look convinced, but he stopped trying to get them to admit they were joking after that.

It was a relief, then, when Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin walked in with their friends Monroe and…Barry supposed he should call her Eve since that’s what he’d heard the others refer to her as. Since she still wore the face of Juliette, he was a bit confused on that point, but he recognized that, for the moment, it wasn’t something he should push to understand.

The detectives didn’t walk in together so much as one of them walked in with the - what was he called again? blut-something. Monroe and Griffin - or Hank as he’d been called by his friends - looked a bit annoyed as they entered the lab, but that changed as Monroe began to inspect the lab on the whole, becoming fascinated with their machinery and chemicals, and Hank partially sat on Barry’s desk in nonchalance.

“Where’s Detective Burkhardt?” Barry asked when the man hadn’t followed his friends directly.

“Oh Nick will be here,” Hank assured. “It’s just taking him a bit longer to get up the stairs.”

“Yeah,” Nick agreed, a pained smile on his face, as he walked into the room with - Eve? - behind him. “Won’t be doing that again soon.”

“Why didn’t you take the elevator?” Barry asked. He knew from experience that when you were hurt, particularly with a side or rib injury, those stairs were torture. He’d had more than his fair share of moments when he’d had to learn and re-learn that the hard way.

“He will be from now on,” Eve assured, throwing a mild - for her - glare at the back of the detective’s head.

“And what happened to you?” Julian asked, looking at Nick with what could generously be called a sneer. Man, he really needed to work on his personal skills.
Nick stood near Hank, arms crossed over his chest, which had to hurt, and looked between Julian and Barry. He did that a few times before landing on Barry, asking, “You didn’t tell him?”

“He’s having a hard time believing anything we’re telling him,” Barry answered on a sigh.

“Right,” Nick said. He looked over at Julian. “Basically, I was in a fight with several people who wanted to kill me and they got a couple good licks in,” he summarized, pausing then adding, “With a knife.”

“You were stabbed?” Julian asked, his expression mildly confused but his voice saying that he thought there was more to the story than that.

“Sliced would be a better description, but let’s go with stabbed.”

The easy way that Nick talked about how he’d been hurt, or kidnapped and tortured for that matter, bothered Barry. Those were the kinds of things that should have left some lasting damage. Nick should have been uneasy about people wanting to kill him, to recapture him. He should be unnerved by his past experiences with those same people, not able to mildly joke it all away and act like it was a part of his everyday life. Even if it was, that wasn’t the kind of thing he should be getting used to. It was just…wrong.

“Should you even be walking around?” Julian asked with surprise as his blue eyes roamed over Nick, silently studying the man’s posture with the practice of a scientist.

“Surprisingly, I’ve had worse,” Nick assured, again in the same mild tone.

After seeing his back, Barry could believe it. The sight of it still flashed in his memory from time to time. He vaguely recalled having dreams of the same experience happening to Joe, Wally, or Cisco. He couldn’t believe this group would ever do that to a woman, so thankfully he was spared from picturing it happening to Iris or Caitlin. When he woke, he was determined that Black Whatever-it-was was never going to get its hands on his family. Barry also felt a small amount of anger at the group on the detective’s behalf. He may not have known the man for very long, but there was something about him that made Barry think he was a good man and certainly didn’t deserve what had been done to him. No one did, really.

“And who are these two?” Julian asked, looking disdainfully at Eve and Monroe. Barry almost smiled when Eve returned his feelings before dismissing the Brit entirely, but he covered it.
“These are my friends, Monroe and...Eve.” Barry didn't miss the way Nick tripped over the woman’s name, as though it were still foreign to him as well. It had only been a second’s pause, mind you, but it had been there. Curiouser and Curiouser. “I figured they could help explain things better than the rest of us.”

“How’s that?” Julian asked with snooty disbelief written all over his features. He crossed his arms over his chest, mirroring Nick, and practically challenging the man to prove him wrong - something he clearly thought couldn't be done.

Eve left her spot beside Nick and walked up to Julian. The overall aura coming off of her was threatening and Julian took a couple of steps back in response to it. She didn’t smile, per se, but Barry swore she had been happy to see the Brit’s fear. She stopped a few feet in front of him, looking like a warrior answering a challenge. “Like this,” she said with no inflection before tilting her head ever so slightly to the side.

Even though Barry knew what to expect, he still jumped when the transformation took place. It was both amazing and terrifying that she could go from a mildly attractive - though emotionally dead - woman to a creature that nightmares were made out of. Barry wondered if he would ever get used to seeing it happen or if he’d jump every time.

Julian’s response was just as violent as Barry’s and it was hard not to laugh. Joe didn’t even try. From his spot by the window, his father chuckled, looking pleased as punch by the meta-human CSI’s reaction. Out of the corner of his eye, Barry saw both Nick and Hank smirk but they too held their full expressions in. Monroe’s reaction surprised Barry for the simple reason that he winced as Eve changed, like he were scared of her too, though he had to have seen her like this enough times to be used to it by now.

Rather than change back to her human side, like Barry expected her to do, Eve stayed in her scary form. She stepped back to put some distance between her and Julian, but still, she remained in her changed form. Barry hoped she was staying that way in order to allow Julian time to get used to her. Otherwise, he didn't have a clue as to why she didn’t just go back to normal.

Disgust was the most prevalent expression on Julian’s face as he stared at the woman in front of him. It was mixed with fear, of course, but since Julian wasn’t likely to let fear show while he was in a room filled with people he didn’t trust, it was the disgust that plastered itself across his face. “What are you?” he asked with a wince.
“She’s a hexenbiest,” Nick explained. “And Monroe is a blutbad.”

The man stayed where he was on the other side of Hank, his head tilting less so than Eve's had done and his face changing into that of an animal. Julian’s response was to step back even further from the group as a whole while the disgust from earlier grew to something akin to terror.

Nick stepped forward, inserting himself between Julian and his two friends. “They aren’t going to hurt you.”

“So where do you fit into all this?” Julian asked, looking at Nick as though he expected the man to change too.

“He’s the one who’s supposed to kill us,” Monroe answered, now in his human form. Curious since Eve still hadn’t changed back.

“So why haven’t you then?”

“Because not all of them deserve to be killed,” Nick answered with the slightest note of exasperation in his voice. Had he gone through this with others? Did everyone expect him to become a cold-blooded killer?

“Looks like it to me,” Julian sneered, eyes flashing over to Eve who stood just behind Nick.

“Beyond being different, what have they done to you?” Nick countered, looking between his two friends and the CSI.

Though he was trying to portray calm, Barry could see anger slowly start to seep into Nick’s posture. In spite of his injury, his back had straightened immediately after Julian had finished speaking, and the feeling of nonchalance which had been exuding from Nick ever since he’d walked in was no longer there. Barry wasn’t sure how he could sense it, but he felt threat coming from the man now, and it all seemed to be aimed at Julian.

“Nick,” Eve said, her voice normal as she changed back.
It took longer than Barry would have liked, but eventually Nick looked over his shoulder. What relief Barry might have felt disappeared when he saw that the detective’s skin was no longer its normal pale hue. Instead it was…grey, washed out almost. The best way that Barry could think of to describe it was that the man looked dead. *What the hell?*

“Yeah,” Nick said, his color coming back. Eve said nothing but her expression must have told Nick something because he looked at everyone from Central City and sighed. “Sorry,” he said, stepping away from Julian and rejoining Hank by Barry’s desk.

“Uh, what was that?” Joe asked, pointing at Nick and sounding confused as well as a bit scared. Barry didn’t blame him. If Joe hadn’t asked, Barry would have.

“Long story short,” Hank answered, “it’s a side effect of a poison Nick was exposed to.”

“Poison,” Joe repeated. The more Barry heard about the life Nick had led, the more he couldn’t decide if he should be surprised or not. From the sound of his father’s voice, Joe was having the same thoughts. “What kind of poison could cause,” he pointed at Nick, “that?”

“That would be the long part of the story, and we don’t have time for that,” Eve answered. She looked at Barry, asking, “Do you have anything that could help us pinpoint where Black Claw is located? We were able to triangulate a general idea, but there’s still too much ground to cover.”

“Well, Kid Flash and I could help with that,” Barry offered. He wondered why they hadn’t asked him to help sooner, since covering a lot of ground in a small amount of time was his and Wally’s specialty, but he said nothing. Trusting others came easily to Barry; it obviously didn’t to this group.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Hank offered, showing an interest in Barry’s help for the first time. He looked between his friends, not missing the way at least one of them wasn’t all for it. “What? The kid and his friend could find the compound in no time.”

“And what are they going to do when they find it?” Joe asked. “Walk away?”

“That’s exactly what they’re going to do,” Eve answered.

“Yeah, I don’t want you guys going anywhere near that compound by yourselves,” Nick agreed,
“Why not? Kid Flash and I could be in and out before anyone knows we’re there,” Barry argued, not understanding. “This could be all over before it begins.” He looked at Nick. “Isn’t that the definition of ‘other options’?”

“Except that they will know that you’re there and you won’t make it out in one piece,” Eve countered.

“Barry can move faster than the speed of sound,” Julian argued back, “and Kid Flash is faster than that. How, exactly, would these people know they’re even there?”

Eve looked at the Meta CSI. “Because they aren’t people. They’re wesen, most of whom have ten times the hearing and sense of smell that you do.”

“Not to mention that there's more of them than there are of you,” Monroe added. “You may be able to, I dunno, zoom past, or whatever it is that you guys do, a dozen or so, but what about when there’s fifty. Or a hundred?”

“Is that how many people there are?” Joe asked.

“We don’t know,” Nick answered. “The point is, there could be, and I don’t want Barry or the other guy getting trapped in there.”

Okay, that was fair. “You think that these,” Barry stopped, looking over at Nick, “What are they called? Specifically, I mean.”

“Most of them will be hundjägers,” Nick explained.

“They’re the ones from last night that looked like a coyote mated with a mutt,” Monroe filled in, some of his feelings about the creatures coming through in his description.

“Right,” Barry said. An image of the creature that they were describing popped into Barry’s head and he made sure to memorize it so that he would remember it when he saw one face-to-face
again. “Any others?”

“There’s no way to be certain who all they might have recruited,” Nick answered. “We know that the hundjägers will be there because the verrat work for the royals.”

“I’m sorry,” Julian said. “The royals?”

“Our boss is a bastard of one of the royal families in Europe,” Hank answered. “His half sister is the one we’re looking for.”

“So let me get this straight, our main suspect is possibly a member of a royal family, who is no doubt here with diplomatic immunity. And you’re just going to, what? Walk in and arrest her?”

“If only it was that easy,” Hank muttered.

“It’s a bit more complicated than that,” Barry said, though he had a feeling he didn’t fully understand just how complicated it was.

“The least of which being that she’s wesen herself, and she’s a lot stronger than most,” was Eve’s less than helpful summary.

“Well, what is she then?” Barry asked, curious as well as worried.

“A regnant.”

“Okay, and what is that?” Joe asked, wearing the same blank expression that Barry no doubt had as well.

Monroe looked between his friends then said, “Well, there isn’t much that’s known about them, but from what we’ve read, they are basically a dragon.”

“A dragon,” Joe said in a deadpan voice.
“Yes,” Nick said with enough conviction in his voice that Barry knew he’d seen the creature up close. “She didn’t share much with me about her kind while I was being held, but she took pleasure in showing me just how much stronger than me she was.”

That would be hard for anyone, but for a someone who is used to being at the top of the food chain, it had to be humiliating. Yet, Barry didn’t sense anything the like coming from Nick - only anger. And pain. How did this man manage to exude so much without saying a thing or moving a muscle?

“I’m sorry,” Julian said, looking as though he were having trouble keeping up with all the information. “Are you saying you were not only held against your will, but that your captor is the person we are searching for?”

“Yeah,” Nick answered. “And now I think you’re all mostly caught up. So,” he looked at Barry, “can you and your friend search the area if we can get you the coordinates?”

“Yeah,” Barry answered, “shouldn’t be a problem.”

Nick looked to Eve, evidently needing her cooperation. She returned his gaze, holding it for a good couple of minutes, before answering, “I’ll call Trubel.”

“So what do we do while Barry and Kid Flash are running down the lead?” Joe asked.

“Nothing,” Nick answered, surprising all of those from Central City. “Chances are good that Alexandra knows we’re here.” Nick’s gaze took in all of them as much as possible but it was mostly to Joe that he was talking. “I want to keep your exposure to us to a minimum.” Now he focused solely on Barry, adding, “All of you.”

“And why is that exactly?” Julian asked.

“The less Alexandra knows of your involvement, the safer all of you will be,” Eve answered this time.

“But you’re still okay with Barry looking for the compound. How does that keep him safe?” Julian asked, surprising Barry with the show of concern for his welfare.
The group from Portland waited for Nick to reply but when he didn’t, all of them focused on the detective. With his arms still crossed over his chest, the man was stock-still and his head was tilted towards the windows like he was listening for something only he could hear.

“What is it?” Eve asked, picking up on something that Barry clearly wasn’t.

“We need to leave,” Nick replied with a sense of urgency in his voice.


“She’s here, along with three of her body guards.”

“If she’s close enough for you to hear her, isn’t it a bit too late to be running off?” Joe asked.

“Is there another way out of here?” Nick asked, his breathing increasing slightly as his adrenaline no doubt kicked in.

“I could speed you out,” Barry offered but Nick was already shaking his head.

“You wouldn’t be able to get us all out.”

“Isn’t it just you that she wants?” Barry countered.

“What if they were to leave?” Hank suggested, pointing at the Central City-ers. “It might be easier for Barry to get the other two out and then Alexandra only sees us.”

Nick looked between the three of them, resolve filling his face and making him calmer. When Nick’s gaze focused on Barry, though, he saw what was really driving the detective. He was scared. Nick didn’t want to come face to face with this woman anymore than Barry wanted to see another hexen-whatever-their-name-was again. The idea of leaving the man to meet his tormentor was not one Barry liked.
“Go,” Nick said just as Barry began to shake his head. “Get them, and go.”

Barry didn’t hesitate. He took off, grabbing Joe first and racing him over to the elevators before going back for Julian. “Go,” he instructed them.

“What about you?” Joe asked, concerned and curious. When Barry hesitated, Joe got the look on his face that he usually did when he guessed what Barry was about to do and he shook his head. “Bar, he doesn’t need your help.” Evidently Joe had seen the same fear in Nick. “He’s got his friends there with him.”

“Maybe so,” Barry admitted. “But I’m not just gonna leave.”

As much as Barry wished he could say otherwise, it wasn’t out of loyalty that he was sticking around. He was curious. He had seen Nick face over a dozen opponents without blinking an eye, so the idea that this one woman could scare the man so much had Barry wondering what she was like. Was it merely the psychological damage she had done to him? Or was she truly that formidable?

Barry ran back in before Joe could argue with him further, noting as he did so that while he had been busy making Joe and Julian disappear, Hank, Monroe, and Eve were also gone. Where they went and how they did it so quickly, Barry hadn’t a clue. Needless to say, he was impressed.

“What are you doing here?” Nick asked when Barry stopped running.

“I wanna meet the woman who is planning to tear my city apart,” Barry answered with a nonchalance he didn’t feel. The fear and stress Nick was giving off was infectious and Barry could feel his cells beginning to buzz from the sheer amount of it. “Where’d your friends go?”

“You aren’t the only one who can make people disappear,” Eve’s voice came from behind him, scaring the bejeesus out of Barry. He looked towards the direction of the voice, half expecting to see the group hiding quite adeptly behind the shelving of chemicals, but he saw nothing. Holy crap! She could do that?!

Barry opened his mouth to say just that when he heard the sound of high heels on the floor in the hall. He pivoted as though to go to his desk but he didn’t move much more than a couple of inches before he felt some force pull him away from the detective and over to where the rest of them were standing.
“She isn’t supposed to see you,” Eve chided, not bothering to explain how he could all of the sudden see them as well as Nick.

Barry thought about asking why it was only Nick this mystery woman was allowed to see. It didn’t make sense at all, especially given that her henchmen would no doubt have told her about all of them from their fight last night. But since he guessed that whatever kept them hidden would only work if they were quiet, Barry bit his tongue and settled for watching everything happen instead.

The woman who walked in was not Barry’s definition of intimidating. She was short, probably not even 5’5, with long brown hair and enough curves to make any man want to check her out. She walked in with the air of someone who thought all the world was beneath her, looking disdainfully at the lab around her with eyes as brown as her hair, but cold. The smile that creased her face when she saw Nick looked warm and welcoming, like she was actually happy to see him. To be fair, Barry didn’t have any proof that she shouldn’t be happy to see Nick, but he still found it odd.

“Nicky,” she greeted in a cultured British accent. She opened her arms wide, as though to enfold the detective in them but didn’t actually advance to do it. The expression on her pretty face was nothing short of pure delight upon seeing him. “It’s so good to see you again, my pet.”

Nick stiffened, though whether it was at the name, the nickname, or the fact she looked like she wanted to give him a hug, Barry didn’t know. “Lexie,” he greeted, making her smile fade ever so slightly. “Fancy meeting you here.”

“Oh come now, Nicky,” she pouted, lowering her arms so that they were by her side. “You and I both knew that you expected to find me here.” She paused, no doubt to allow Nick to debate about whether she meant in CCPD or in Central City, and then she started walking forward. Nick froze as his proximity to her increased. “I heard you had a run-in with a few of my reapers.” She stopped moving when she was close enough to touch him without effort. Her hand reached up and rubbed against the spot on Nick’s side where he’d been hurt. The move would have been erotic if it wasn’t for the fact that she was purposely causing the detective pain - and loving it. She looked up into his face when she found the wound. “Are you quite well?”

For the most part, Nick had done his best not to react to her. Sure, he’d stiffened when she’d gotten closer, but otherwise he was stone. He hadn’t shown any more reaction to her before she had practically tried to hump him than he had afterwards. When she’d practically petted his side, he’d stared expressionless at the three men who had come in behind her. Nick looked down when she’d asked after his health, the pair of them looking like a couple of lovers rather than enemies. He smirked, saying, “Actually, I feel a little sick. But that could just be the fact that you’re touching me.”

The woman, Lexie or Alexandra or whatever her name was, stepped away from Nick, her face
clouding with anger. Her arm moved and then, before Barry had time to tense in case he was needed, the sound of an open hand meeting flesh echoed through the lab. It took him a moment to register that she had slapped Nick. She must have put some real force behind it, too, because the detective’s head snapped to the right and when he turned it back to continue looking at her, still stone-faced, there was quite the impressive red mark on his cheek. Barry probably should have expected the woman’s reaction but, honestly, he just hadn’t.

After a second, the stone in his face crumbled and a smirk replaced it. For real? Was this guy seriously enjoying getting a reaction out of her?

“That wasn’t very nice, Nicky,” Alexandra pouted.

Once again she got into Nick’s personal space, rubbing against him like a cat. He winced this time when she pressed, hard, on his wound. His hands flew up, grabbing hold of her wrists and stopping her, his knuckles turning white from the strength of his grip. The men behind her growled, each one changing from their human forms to that of creatures. Two of them changed into the hund-whatevers from last night. The last was one Barry hadn’t seen yet, resembling something close to a black bear. Honestly, Barry couldn’t decide which of them looked fiercer.

Nick looked over at them, smirking. “Clearly you three haven’t been with her long,” he quipped. Returning his gaze to the shorter woman, his expression changed to one of controlled anger and hate, he said, “If you had, you’d know that she likes things rough.”

A new element of the detective’s torture came into Barry’s mind and he immediately felt sick to his stomach. Had this woman done things...? He couldn’t even finish the thought, honestly, because the idea of it was just...horrible. It was just horrible.

When Barry looked over at Nick’s friends to try and gauge their reactions, he found nothing but anger. They had already known. Eve looked over at him, apparently sensing his gaze. They said nothing but Barry could practically feel her threatening him if he made a sound.

“Oh, come now, Nicky,” Alexandra purred again, not bothering to try and free herself. She stood on her tip-toes and whispered something into Nick’s ear.

Since Barry had super-speed and not super-hearing, he didn’t know what she said. But whatever it was, it made disgust mix in with the anger and the detective’s hate became more obvious. “You should go,” Nick said, releasing her wrists and stepping away from her.
“Please, we both know that you won’t do anything here, in the middle of the Central City Police Department,” Alexandra sneered. “Just like I wouldn’t.” She smiled, the expression managing to look a bit more cruel. The expression didn’t match her next words, that was for sure. “Besides, I’m not here to see you. I was told that I could find Mr. Allen up here.” She looked around, a knowing look coming into her eyes as she focused in on where Barry and the others were hiding. “It seems I have missed him.”

Barry tensed as he prepared to speed away so that he could enter but stopped when he felt Eve’s hand on his arm. Naturally, she said nothing, but she shook her head, silently telling him to stay where he was. Barry cocked his head to the side, not understanding why they didn’t want him involved and asking as well as he could without saying a word. If Eve knew the answer, she wasn’t giving it. Instead, she kept her hand on his arm and returned to watching the scene in front of them.

Alexandra chuckled when she didn’t receive a response. It was like she knew Nick was hiding something and she was taking absolute joy in the fact he thought he could hide it from her. “Besides, lover,” she said, her tone not matching the sheer strength that Barry could feel coming off her.

She changed with no hint that she was going to at all. When all the others had done it, they tilted their heads a little, as though that was what made them change. Maybe it helped them; Barry didn’t know. But when this woman did it, there was no warning at all. It just happened. One minute she was standing in front of Nick looking like a tiny woman. The next, she was this huge creature who filled up the space of the lab with ease. For some reason, Barry suspected that she was still just a tiny-looking woman when compared to the rest of her kind. It made him feel fractionally better, but only just.

Where Barry had no warning, Nick must have had some because he immediately began to step away from her so that, by the time she had fully changed, he was far enough away not to be crushed under her. Even so, she shoved him to the floor with one huge forefoot, pinning him there like a cat playing with a mouse before the kill. Barry winced at the sound of the detective’s head smacking against the concrete floor. Beside him he heard a small growl and he looked to his right to find Monroe, in animal form, looking angry. Eve changed her grip from Barry’s arm to Monroe’s, holding him where he stood. The three bodyguards looked their way but soon their boss’s voice drowned out any sound the tall man was making.

“We both know,” Alexandra said, continuing her thought from earlier, “that you aren’t strong enough to beat me.”

Nick grimaced, body moving as though he were trying to get free but couldn’t. Barry was so sorely tempted to help, but something told him that it would not be appreciated. Not that Burkhardt was the macho type, unable to admit when he needed help. No, that was the last way Barry would describe the man. It was more like Burkhardt and his friends had plans for Barry, and though he
may not know what they were, they clearly involved keeping him out of this woman’s crosshairs until they were ready to reveal him to her.

_How_ had no one downstairs heard all this? It had to be making a terrible noise and yet no one seemed bothered enough by it to come and check it out. Had something happened while this woman had been here to divert everyone’s attention downstairs to somewhere else entirely?

“You forget that I have before,” Nick said, his voice almost a growl.

His pallor washed out again, but this time Barry knew that the man wasn't as dead as he seemed. The woman must have seen this before too, because she immediately stepped off of him, changing back into her human form and therefore stopping whatever it was he was about to do.

“Now, now, pet,” she chided with smile in her voice, though Barry thought that he could see the smallest hint of fear in her expression. “Let's not forget where we are.”

“If there had been anyone to disturb, you wouldn’t have woged,” Nick reasoned, voice cold.

As he took a step towards the woman, Barry suddenly recognized the menace in the man’s gait.

_I've seen this before_ , Barry thought in surprise. He’d seen a small part of it last night as Nick had stood in the middle of the carnage. Was that what he was capable of when he got like this? Was that what being a grimm meant? Barry tried to tell himself no, that both he and Joe had been told that this was a side effect of some poison or something, but it was hard to argue with the sight before him.

Apparently one step was all Nick had planned on taking since he stopped right after that. The ensuing smirk on his face held a mixture of things, but all that Barry saw was threat, triumph, and joy. Had Burkhardt seen Alexandra's fear too? Or was he happy about something else?

When Nick moved forward again, Alexandra didn’t back away; she allowed him to come. With each step, Nick’s pallor changed back to normal but the feeling of danger, of strength, never left him. “You haven’t beaten anyone, Lexie” he said, looking down on her in more ways than one. “You just think you have.”

The answering smile from Alexandra wasn’t encouraging. She stepped forward, like she was going
to whisper into Nick’s ear, and wrapped her hands around to his back. She dragged her nails down it like they were involved in some carnal act rather than standing fully clothed in the middle of the CCPD’s crime lab. Nick seemed to stiffen but the smirk remained in place. “You forget lover,” she said in a loud enough voice for everyone to hear, “that I already have.”

She stepped away, turning her back on Nick as though he couldn’t kill her right then and there and probably not think twice about it. “Tell Mr. Allen that I’ll try him again later.”

It was hard letting her just walk out, after everything that she had said and done, but Barry did it, grinding his teeth in anger. Although the tides may have turned a time or two, the bottom line was, she had just spent her entire visit toying with the man she had tortured, and that wasn’t sitting well with Barry at all.

She must have passed Joe on her way out because not thirty seconds after she’d left, he walked in. Even from where he stood, Barry could see his father was tense. His right hand lingered near his gun, ready in case he needed to use it. In his left was his cell phone, the screen showing first just Joe and Nick and then revealing all of them as whatever Eve had done wore off. Barry was suddenly thankful that he hadn’t taken out the cameras Thawne had placed in his lab. It had allowed Joe to keep an eye on them, to watch and listen in safety, without being noticed.

“What the hell was that?” Joe asked. He could have meant whatever ju-ju Eve had done to make them all disappear but Barry doubted it.

“That,” Nick answered, his chest rising and falling rather noticeably, “was Alexandra Eleanor Renard. Crowned Princess, and our target.”

Joe looked at the door, then at Nick, then back at the door again. The next words out of his mouth were ones that Barry would have pictured Cisco saying, but never Joe. He looked at Barry and Nick’s other friends before returning his gaze to the detective. “We’re gonna need a bigger crew.”

Yeah, Barry thought, rolling his eyes and looking up at the ceiling. *If only that was an option.*

*TBC*
“Dude. Jaws? Seriously?” Monroe quipped from his position with the others, looking at West like he was an idiot.

“Don’t knock it,” Hank warned as he made his way back to the desk then leaned against it. “It’s a good movie.”

Nick didn’t agree. He wasn’t, however, in a position to say one way or the other as he was too busy trying to get his emotions under control. Although he wouldn’t admit it to anyone, Alexandra’s visit had shaken him. Seeing her again had awakened feelings in him he had thought buried, something which she hadn’t seemed to struggle with at all. She had seen his fear and she had reveled in it, lapping it up like a dog dying of thirst. His disgust, while second-most prevalent, had been batted away like an annoying bee; it had managed to sting her, but otherwise she couldn’t be bothered about it.

Then she had changed and pinned him to the floor. It was a move she had pulled on him at least once for every day she’d had him, but even though Nick had known what to expect, it hadn’t helped. He had still gotten trapped under her foot, held to the floor in a move that still had his head throbbing from the force of the contact. The pressure of her foot on his side had been calculated to hurt. She had pushed down as best she could right where he’d been injured, making sure she caused pain - she was sadistic like that.

At the time, Nick had managed not to show just how much it hurt. He wasn’t entirely sure how he’d done it, but he suspected it had something to do with the blank state of mind he’d gotten into the longer he stayed pinned. Now, his heart raced as the fight or flight instinct continued to tear through his system. Struggling to take control again, Nick couldn’t hide the wince as the wound on his side began a steady throb. A slight tickling sensation told him his stitches had torn again, but since he was sure there would be more than a trickling of blood if it was bad, he ignored it. The heavy pounding in his head was less easy to ignore as it felt like his brain was trying to break free of his skull. Still, he did his best as they slowly came together as a group to discuss their next move.

“I mean, it was alright,” Barry argued, slowly walking towards Detective West, who still stood by the door. “It does tend to get quoted too much, though.” He cast a pointed sideways glance at the older man, but said no more.

“Hold on,” Mr. Albert said, coming into the room in time to hear Allen’s comment. “Are you lot seriously talking about a movie rather than discussing the woman, who can change into dragon by the way, that just walked out this door?”

“What else should we be doing?” Monroe countered, looking confused. The Portland team hadn’t ever really been good at taking things seriously. They were fully capable of doing so, but it usually took a threat to one or all of their lives for it to happen. Alexandra, no matter how much of a threat she was, was something they had handled before and could handle again.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Albert retorted with a sneer, “maybe trying to figure out how to keep us all from being food for these…animals.”

“They aren’t animals,” Nick argued, not liking the way the CSI phrased it. Something in the way the man acted told him that if Albert had his way, he would round all the wesen up and shoot them then and there. It wasn’t abnormal, but Nick had hoped that, with the way things were in Central
City, things would be a little different here. Evidently, that wasn’t to be the case.

“Well, we sort of are,” Monroe argued, not helping matters. He shrugged when Nick glared at him. “It depends on your definition of the word, really.” He looked back over at Albert, then added, “She wouldn’t eat you, though. We don’t eat people.”

“How comforting.” Albert retorted with a sneer.

“We need a new game plan,” West said, changing the direction of the conversation before it could truly go off the rails. “Because something tells me, she won’t be as unprepared for Barry as we think.”

“She’s won’t be,” Eve confirmed. She briefly looked at Nick and then again at the others. “She could sense us.”

“Yeah, how did she do that, by the way?” Barry asked as he and West came closer so they could complete a circle. He looked at Eve, saying, “I mean, I’m guessing that people can’t usually see you unless you want them to.”

“She could smell us,” Eve answered evenly.

“Cause that’s not creepy or anything,” Barry retorted sarcastically.

“Oh, it definitely is,” Hank agreed. “And it’s not easy or pleasant to get around either.”

“But you know how to get around it,” West insisted, sounding hopeful.

“Yeah, about that,” Monroe interjected, looking at Nick with a wince. “I don’t know if I can do that again.”

“You don’t have to,” Nick assured. “With Barry and his friend doing the leg-work, you can sit this one out.”

Monroe gave a sigh of relief. Then his eyes changed color and Nick knew his friend had smelled his blood.

“I’m sorry,” West said, stepping out of the circle to lean against the desk Hank also occupied, effectively distracting Monroe. “I’m still having trouble accepting that there are actual people who can turn into dragons.”

“Wait, who can turn into a dragon?” a young woman with similar coloring to West asked. She was a beautiful young lady with long, black hair flowing past her shoulders and eyes as keen as West’s; there was no doubt in Nick’s mind she was related to the man. One look at the way Barry noticed her - his face lighting up in a smile that was nothing short of love - told Nick how the kid felt about her. She stopped dead when she noticed that it wasn’t just her and her friends in the room, eyeing Nick and the other newcomers with equal parts curiosity and suspicion. “Hi,” she greeted with an awkward smile, no doubt trying to cover up her reaction.

“Iris, Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin,” West said, waving towards them. Then he waved towards the other two. “And Eve and Monroe.”

“Hi,” she said again, her smile a bit friendlier in spite of her tone which suggested she still didn’t know what to make of them all. She then looked up at West, “So what’s this about a woman who can turn into a dragon?”
“It’s a long story,” West - or should Nick start calling him Joe since that was what he seemed to prefer? - answered, clearly not wanting to explain everything right then and there.

“I’m assuming you’ll fill me in later?” she asked, though it sounded more like a demand. Her gaze flicked over to Allen, her eyes hardening ever so slightly as she added, “Since Barry doesn’t feel the need to.”

“In my defense, you were asleep last night when I got home,” Barry defended. “And,” he added when Iris opened her mouth as though to argue, “I also didn’t find out about this whole dragon thing until today.”

Iris nodded, her gaze absently straying to those she didn’t know. When she noticed Monroe, she stiffened a little then whispered to, Nick assumed, her father, “Why is that guy’s eyes red?”

Nick sighed, sitting down in one of the desk chairs before his legs gave out from under him; the adrenaline crash was starting to hit and Nick really didn't want to fall to the floor. “Because he smells blood.”

Iris’s eyebrows rose, a move which indicated both surprise and a slight challenge. “He can smell blood,” she said, her voice indicating disbelief. She quickly moved past that to ask, “Whose blood is he smelling?”

“Mine,” Nick answered with yet another sigh.

“Your stitches opened again, didn’t they?” Monroe asked, eyes still bright red. For some reason, Nick’s blood was more potent to the blutbad which meant that it always took longer for Monroe to regain control after smelling it. It could be because Nick was a grimm, but he couldn’t be sure. Honestly, he’d never tried too hard to find out; as long as Monroe got control again, that was all that mattered to Nick.

“I’m fine,” Nick assured, not wanting the focus on him.

Hank snorted, showing his own disbelief.

“Am I supposed to understand what’s going on?” Iris whispered to her father.

Over her head, Joe looked at Barry; well, glared really. Then he mumbled, “Apparently not since someone hasn’t filled you in.”

Barry shrugged, giving as poor an excuse as any man could as to why he hadn’t told her anything. “Look, why don’t we meet at S.T.A.R Labs? We can have Caitlin look at Nick’s side and figure out what to do about the dragon-lady.”

“I don’t need someone to look at me,” Nick argued. “I’m fine.”

“But,” Nick added, ignoring Allen’s comment, “I do think we should meet back there to figure out what to do next.” He waited for some form of general agreement before he turned to Barry, tactfully ignoring the way the room spun. “I’m guessing you guys have access to satellites?” When the kid nodded, Nick said, “Good. We can use that access to try and get a better idea of what Alexandra’s residence looks like. Once we have that, then we’ll know where…The Flash and Kid Flash can begin looking.”
Nick had almost used Barry’s name rather than his “superhero” name. He stopped himself just in time, in case others were able to hear. The precinct didn’t seem too occupied in this area, but one could never be too careful and he wasn’t going to be the one responsible for outing the kid to everyone else.

“Yeah, and while we’re doing all that, Caitlin can take a look at you,” Barry said, a smile on his face as he placed his arms across his chest, looking triumphant.

Great, Nick thought as he offered a smile in return, just what I needed, another mother-hen.

oOo

Rather than speeding off like he was comfortable doing, Barry opted to ride in Iris’s car back to S.T.A.R. Labs. As this gave them a chance to talk, Iris was perfectly fine with that. Talking, however, didn’t actually help since the more Barry said, the less things actually made sense. She hadn’t realized she recognized the woman with short, black hair and cold, blue eyes until Barry mentioned her connection with the picture of Juliette Silverton; the woman she had met in the lab had seemed completely different to the smiling face she’d studied in the photo Cisco had taped to the wall. There was a story there, Iris could feel it. Whether or not she would be able to find it was a different matter entirely.

While she drove, Iris tried to figure out what she thought of all she had seen, heard, and been told, and how she felt about the group from Portland. As much as she loved Barry, he was too trusting - a flaw which Iris didn’t share. She wasn’t inclined to automatically believe in people she just met; she’d inherited her father’s cop instincts and they were screaming at her that something wasn’t right. There was definitely something off about all of them, but the one at the center, Detective Burkhardt, gave her heebie-jeebies. He didn’t feel…evil, like Zoom or Savitar. Just different. Cold. Powerful. Dangerous. For the right girl, it could be a heady combination, but for Iris, it just made her wary.

Arriving at the same time at S.T.A.R Labs, the Central City team took the first elevator, with the Portland team following in the second. While her dad and Barry waited for the others at the elevator doors, Iris walked into the cortex. She came to an abrupt halt when she was met with yet another stranger - a woman with short, dark hair, sitting at one of the monitors.

“Hi,” she greeted, hoping she covered her surprise as she looked around the room for a face she recognized.

If the young woman noticed the complete lack of warmth or welcome in Iris’s tone, she didn’t show it. “Hi,” she returned warily, her gaze calculating. She spared Iris a thirty-second glance before focusing on someone past Iris’s shoulder. Her tone warming considerably, she greeted whomever it was with a, “Hey.” Her gaze went down then up, then she asked in a more serious tone, “What’s wrong?”

Even though she knew there was someone behind her, Iris still jumped when Detective Burkhardt spoke. “They met Alexandra today.” He gave a wincing smile as he looked over at Iris and said, “Sorry.”
“Where?” the woman asked, her voice angry and eyes hard. She stood, probably out of instinct, as though ready to battle her enemy. Iris sensed the same similar feeling of dangerous power coming from the woman that she did from Detective Burkhardt. It was different to his, darker almost, but it was there.

With that expression, it was like the pieces clicked together on who this was. Iris immediately looked over at the wall nearest the med room where the picture of Theresa Rubel, Trubel according to Barry, was pinned. Both the picture and the person in front of her held the same expression - that of someone who would - and could - kill another being without thought or conscience.

“At the CCPD,” the Juliette-looking woman, Eve, answered as the rest of the group slowly entered the cortex then spread out.

“You okay?” Trubel asked, her gaze focused solely on Detective Burkhardt.

If Barry hadn’t explained all that had happened to the detective, both today and in the past, Iris would have wondered at the sheer amount of worry she sensed coming from the younger woman. Iris still had trouble believing the man had gone through the ordeal Barry had told her about. His demeanor alone didn’t give any hint of it whatsoever, which she found suspicious. An experience like that was bound to leave a mark, and not just a physical one. She might do some investigative work, just to make sure that the detective’s story checked out. Given how secretive these people were, Iris doubted she’d find anything, but she had to try. The more she knew about these people, the better; she wasn’t about to let another stranger betray Barry again, not if she could help it.

“I’m fine,” the detective answered, his voice a bit harder than it needed to be. He threw a look which bordered on a glare over at Barry, who held his hands up in surrender and didn’t say anything to the contrary.

“Uh huh,” Trubel said, sounding disbelieving. Her gaze flicked over to the taller, more friendlier man of the bunch, and asked, “Would that explain why Monroe’s eyes are woged?”

All eyes looked at the man called Monroe. Her dad, Barry, and Iris all gave each other “what is she talking about?” looks, but said nothing. Burkhardt’s mouth tightened and his posture stiffened. That it was a signal, Iris didn’t doubt, but a a signal for what, she couldn’t tell. Had the woman given something away that he’d wished to keep secret?

“Wait,” Dad said, his finger pointing at the woman, who had gone back to sitting in front of the monitor. “Is she a grimm too?”

“Yeah,” Trubel answered, looking over her shoulder. “I’m the scarier kind.” Her gaze briefly went to Burkhardt, Nick, then she added, “The less pacifistic kind.”

“All eyes looked at the man called Monroe. Her dad, Barry, and Iris all gave each other “what is she talking about?” looks, but said nothing. Burkhardt’s mouth tightened and his posture stiffened. That it was a signal, Iris didn’t doubt, but a a signal for what, she couldn’t tell. Had the woman given something away that he’d wished to keep secret?

“Wait,” Dad said, his finger pointing at the woman, who had gone back to sitting in front of the monitor. “Is she a grimm too?”

“Yeah,” Trubel answered, looking over her shoulder. “I’m the scarier kind.” Her gaze briefly went back to Burkhardt, Nick, then she added, “The less pacifistic kind.”

“I’m sorry,” Barry said, the doubt in his voice written clearly on his face, “are you calling him ,” pointing a finger at Detective Burkhardt, “a pacifist? Cause, judging from what I’ve seen so far, that’s hard to believe.”

“Yeah, well, I’m more of a shoot first, ask questions never kind of grimm.”

That, Iris had no trouble believing. She wasn’t sure if she believed Nick to be the “gentler grimm”, but she didn’t doubt this woman would kill you first then maybe stop to wonder if she should have done it after.

“Is Kid Flash on his way?” Nick asked into the silence which had stretched far too long for it to be
comfortable. “We should probably start formulating a plan before you guys just…speed off.”

It was still hard for Iris to imagine this group knowing who Barry was. At first, she had thought Barry had told them, or shown them; Barry had learned the hard way to be careful, but everyone slipped up from time to time. But then Barry had told her that it had been simply because the detective had heard it in his voice. It made more sense that the man had been told by someone with better investigative skills than they had - no one’s hearing was that good - but Iris hadn’t argued with Barry’s explanation; there was time to figure things out on her own.

“I called him on the way over,” Dad said. “He should be here,” a flash of lightning brought Wally, making him pause for a moment before finishing, “soon.”

A small part of Iris wondered why they just didn’t reveal Wally as Kid Flash, but the rest of her was glad they hadn’t. The new group didn’t need to know all of their secrets just yet. At least, not until Iris was sure they could be trusted.

“I’m sorry,” Monroe said with a huge smile on his face, “but that will never stop being cool.”

Barry smirked, apparently pleased that someone was still impressed with what he and Wally could do, and though Iris couldn’t see her brother, she knew he was doing it too.

“What are Caitlin and Cisco?” Barry asked, still looking like the cat that ate the canary.

“We got hungry so Caitlin went to get us burgers,” Trubel answered, pivoting so she could continue to watch the screen. “I think Cisco is around here somewhere.”

“Did HW find where she’s hiding out?” Nick asked as he peered over her shoulder at the screen. He moved as though he were going to bend down to get a better view, but, with a wince on his face, he soon stopped, and placed his hand over his lower left side. Surreptitiously, Burkhardt pulled his hand away and glanced down at it before quickly replacing it at his side.

It took a minute for Iris to realize that the brief flash of red she’d seen on his hand when he did that, was blood. She looked at her dad and Barry to see if they noticed, but they were looking that the image of a farmhouse on one of the other monitors and hadn’t seen a thing. Flicking her gaze back to Burkhardt, Iris froze for a minute upon meeting his cool, blue eyes. She hadn’t realized he’d noticed her staring at him. Burkhardt said and did nothing before returning his gaze to the screen. What was she supposed to do with that?! Figuring if he wasn’t worried about the wound, she shouldn’t be either, Iris turned her attention to the topic at hand.

“Yeah, and with access to S.T.A.R. Labs’ satellite,” the woman, Trubel, said, pausing long enough to acknowledge Cisco, who had just walked in, “they were also able to give us a better view, too.”

The main screen in the room flickered to life with a satellite view of a farm. On the surface it looked innocent, and not like the kind of place where an evil dragon-lady would hide. Sure, it was secluded, which made it harder to get to without someone noticing you a mile away, but that was all that could be said for it. Then the view changed to one taken with an infrared lens and Iris immediately changed her stance as dozens upon dozens of people became visible.

“Once we knew where to look, HW decided to find us a better views,” Trubel said into the dismayed silence. “So far as we can tell, Alexandra has a small army with her inside that farm.”

“Yeah, but there’s no way that house can hold that many people,” Barry argued, pointing at the screen capture of the quaint homestead.

“It’s far more likely they’re all under the house,” Eve answered.
“In like, what? A cave?” Cisco asked, his tone half incredulous, half intrigued. Looking at the image, Iris could see how he had gotten that idea. Although the red spots indicating people were spread out, they were grouped in such a way that could make someone think they were hanging out in tiny alcoves of some sort.

“The Royals like to host illegal fighting rings,” Nick said as he gingerly folded his arms over his chest, smoothly hiding the blood on his right hand as he did. “When all this first started, one of my first wesen cases involved one of them, hosted by a löwen. I didn’t learn ‘til much later that our boss, Sean Renard, had sanctioned it at the time.” The muscles in his forearms jumped as he curled his hands into fists. “When Alexandra had me, she held one every night.”

“What was your role in these fights?” Wally asked, his tone curious even through the vibration.

The detective gave a sardonic smirk. “I was the main attraction.”

Oh. Oh. Although it probably should have, it hadn’t clicked right away what he meant. Now that it had, it served to shine a different light on Nick than what Iris had previously seen him in. She still didn’t fully trust him or feel comfortable around him, but she thought she was beginning to understand him a little bit better.

“Hold up,” Cisco interjected, pointing at the screen. “Did she hold you at the same house?”

“No. When she had me, it was in Portland.”

“Right under our noses,” Monroe added with a growl in his voice.

“Seems that might be a thing with her,” Barry said in a distracted tone. His green eyes straying towards the photo of the farm. “How far away from Central City is this?”

“It’s about five miles from where you and Joe stopped Clyde Marden,” Cisco answered, his voice softening ever so slightly.

Iris kept her gaze focused on the screen. She knew that Cisco, along with Barry and her dad, were looking at her as memories of all that had changed, of Eddie, came to their minds. There was no question in Iris’s mind that she loved Barry, but when she thought of Eddie, of his death, it still hurt. She wasn’t strong enough to hide that from her closest friends, so she ignored them instead. Out of the corner of her eye, Iris saw the Portland team watching the exchange. She could feel their curiosity, but none of the asked. “Alright,” she said, doing her best to fight the tears which wanted to well in her eyes, “what’s the plan?”

“Easy,” Barry replied. “Kid Flash and I run over, check the place out, then report back on what we find.”

“That’s not a plan,” Eve said, her gaze even in spite of her tone, hinting she thought they were idiots.

“I mean, it’s a bit basic,” Barry defended.

“But it’s the best one we’ve got,” Nick supported. When Barry smiled, the detective added, “which isn’t to say that we won’t be adding more to it. Technically, we already have an idea what we’re up against, so sending both you and Kid Flash out isn’t really necessary.”

“Yeah, we may know a rough estimate of the numbers we’re up against,” Barry argued, “but there could be more that we can’t see in a photograph. Having a pair of feet on the ground could help with that.”
“Seriously, you guys,” Wally said, his voice and face vibrating to hide his identity. Burkhardt winced and Iris raised an eyebrow. Could the guy really hear that well? “This is a quick in and out.” He shrugged, the action obvious in spite of his constant state of movement. “We’ll be back in a flash.”

Even though the man didn’t know who Wally was, or even know him that well, the other detective, Detective Griffin, looked at Wally incredulously. “Seriously? You went there?”

Again, Wally shrugged. “Seemed appropriate.”

Detective Griffin snorted, smiling and shaking his head, but said nothing.

“I don’t like it,” Eve said, for once showing the slightest hint of emotion. Her unease, though muted, was palpable and Iris found herself agreeing with the other woman.

“Don’t like what?” Caitlin asked as she entered, carrying multiple bags of food from Big Belly Burger and a drink tray. If the neuroscientist was surprised to see everyone within the cortex, she hid it marvelously, barely sparing any of them a glance before she handed Cisco and Trubel their own Burger and drink.

“Barry and…Kid Flash want to go investigate a farmhouse that is supposedly occupied by a small army,” Dad answered, momentarily tripping over Wally’s identity. If it was possible, he obviously liked the idea even less than Eve and Iris, though that didn’t actually surprise his daughter all that much. He rarely liked sending his kids into unknown situations where danger could arise at any moment, Iris included.

“‘Supposedly’,” Caitlin echoed as she sat down and opened her salad. “Meaning that we aren’t sure.”

“It’s unlikely Alexandra has more people hidden,” Burkhardt said, looking around at the group. “There are only a few wesen who can hide their heat signatures and they don’t tend to fight in wars.”

“But there could be more that are magically hidden, though, right?” the man, Monroe, asked, looking to Eve.

“I’m not sure if it hides their body heat,” she answered, her tone giving nothing away.

“Which means, Kid Flash and I should go investigate.”

Burkhardt unfolded his arms, placing his hands at his hips and looking frustrated. With another wince, he immediately lowered his arms, placing his left on the chair that Trubel occupied and pressing his right hand over his lower left side once more. “Something about this doesn’t feel right,” he said quietly, as though to himself, his gaze locked on the image.

Trubel, no doubt distracted by her friend’s unease, looked up at him. Her gaze swept over him, then she rolled the chair so that she was eye-level with his left side. For his part, Burkhardt ignored her, carefully standing upright when he no longer had the chair to lean on. He continued to ignore her even as she lifted his shirt, exposing a large, rectangular, blood-spotted gauze patch which covered a fair amount of the spot above the detective’s left hip.

When Trubel went to peel the bandage away, the detective moved out of her grasp, wincing as he did so. “I’m fine,” he said, his voice quiet but hard. Clearly he wanted to be left alone about this. Why, Iris couldn’t understand at all. She wouldn’t want the attention on her, of course, but she also wouldn’t want to be slowly leaking blood, either.
“So, we could have already been back,” Wally said, his tone that of someone wondering why the task hasn’t been done yet. “Are we gonna do this or not?”

The group as a whole looked first to Barry and Dad, then to Burkhardt and Eve. Dad shrugged, showing that he wasn’t happy about the plan, but that he also hadn’t come up with anything better. Eve, her face a mask of calm, said nothing, apparently choosing to defer to Burkhardt. When the detective looked at him, Barry held up his hands, “Don’t look at me, I was ready to go before we left the precinct.”

Why was everyone letting Burkhardt make the final decision? Iris didn’t mind, per se, but she found it odd that someone who had just joined the group was now, essentially, leading it. Figuring that it was partly because Team Flash had entered a world they didn’t understand, a world which Burkhardt was familiar with, Iris pushed her curiosity about the change in hierarchy to the side. It was definitely something that could be addressed later.

Burkhardt sighed. “Alright, go,” he said, sounding like he really didn’t want to say it. “But be careful,” he added once Barry was in his suit. “Alexandra has something planned and I don’t need you guys getting caught in the middle of whatever it is.”

“Don’t worry, man,” Wally said, his confidence never-ending. “We got this.”

They both sped off before more could be said, probably to ensure Dad couldn’t tell them not to go at the last second. In the quiet of the room, Iris heard Burkhardt whisper, “I hope so.” Iris spent five seconds being affronted on Barry’s and Wally’s behalf. Then the tone he used registered and she calmed down. He may not have known them long, but the detective seemed genuinely concerned for the two speedsters. Clearly he knew something the others didn’t. And Iris would be damned if she wasn’t going to find out what that was.

TBC
Wow! I am SO sorry it has taken me so long to update this, you guys! I promise I haven't abandoned it by any means, but the muse has been fickle and getting it out has been a slow process.

Thank you for your patience, and I hope you enjoy the chapter.

ATTENTION: Barry whump within!

For those of you who have been eagerly waiting for some, here is a little bit for you. More will be in the next chapter, as well.

It didn’t take long for the mother-hens to descend once Allen and his friend had left. Since he knew it wouldn’t do any good to argue, Nick didn’t bother trying, allowing Trubel to lead him to the medical room where Doctor Snow was waiting to take a look at him. It cost him another shirt, but once she was satisfied he was in no immediate danger of passing out or dying, he was allowed to go to the central desk of what he had recently discovered was called the cortex and listen to what was happening with the two kids he’d just sent out.

In spite of their vibrato, and the way they both attempted to disguise their voices, both Allen and his friend were essentially just kids. Kids who had inherited abilities most people could only dream about, sure, but kids nonetheless. Nick wasn’t happy with the idea of sending them out to do reconnaissance, but, as he also hadn’t been able to find a way to bring one of his team into the plan, he’d been forced to do just that. He didn’t doubt the two speedsters could get the job done. He didn’t even doubt they could do it far faster and more efficiently than any of the rest of them could. No, what he had a problem with was that he didn’t trust Alexandra as far as he could throw her. Like Eve had said, Alexandra wasn’t as unprepared for Allen and his friend as they had thought, and although Nick didn’t know what it was, he knew there would be a trap waiting for the two men. He just hoped they would be able to avoid it.

“Barry, it looks like there might be half a dozen men guarding the perimeter,” Cisco Ramon - a kid that Nick was very quickly growing to like - informed.

“We saw ‘em,” the speedster answered. “There’s another eight men about fifty feet or so closer to the farmhouse.” There was a pause as two blips on the screen seemed to blink in and out of existence before settling about five miles away from the house. “It looks like half of the heat signatures we saw in the photo are placed strategically around the property. Kid Flash and I are going to do another run around to try and get a more accurate count so we at least have a better idea what we’re up against.”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Nick asked, unable to hide his worry.

“Dude,” Cisco said after taking a Tootsie Pop out of his mouth, “chill. They’ve done this hundreds of times.”
Nick thought about pointing out the fact that they probably hadn’t come across people who had the sharp senses of animals and the use of hexenbiest magic, in their previous adventures, but he held his tongue. He wasn’t positive that the wesen would be able to sense Allen and his friend; sure, the hundjägers could smell and hear and see better than most humans, but the fact of the matter was that the speedsters moved so fast, Nick doubted even the hundjägers would be able to sense them; the hexenbiest magic would be a problem, but none of them would know how it was being used until the speedsters ran into it.

“Don’t worry.” Allen said, his tone reassuring and confident, “we’ll be fine.”

“Famous last words,” Hank said under his breath. Cisco raised a challenging eyebrow at Hank, probably offended at his lack of faith in Allen, while Snow, the two Wests, Monroe, and Nick all nodded their heads in agreement. Every time one of them thought things would go smoothly, something invariably happened to overthrow them and create havoc. Nick and his team had accepted it as inevitability, but apparently this crew had yet to do that.

“Aren’t you the cheery bunch?” Cisco said, briefly focusing on them before returning to the monitor in front of him.

Every so often two blips would appear on the screen, their distance to the house so quickly decreasing that Nick was amazed that the technology could keep up with the speed at which the two men were traveling.

“Ahh!”

“Barry!” both Iris and Joe West called out at once, obviously recognizing the voice. The team from Central City crowded around the main console, looking at the screen as though Allen himself were on it. “Barry, what happened?” Iris asked, her tone surprisingly calm in spite of the fact that Nick could tell she was worried.

“Whoever this lady is, she hid wolf traps all over the place,” Kid Flash answered. “I managed to see it before I stepped in one, but Barry got caught.”

A hidden wolf trap wasn’t quite as sophisticated as Nick had expected Alexandra to be, but it was definitely effective against a speedster. Given Allen’s healing abilities, Nick doubted the injury would slow him down long, but it would be enough to give Alexandra’s men time to find him.

“You need to get him out of there,” Nick said, not caring if the others didn’t want him butting in.

Kid Flash didn’t answer, but it couldn’t have been more than a couple of seconds after he’d finished saying that before a streak of lightning breezed in and the two speedsters were there in the center of the room, where they promptly collapsed onto the floor.

“Barry!” Iris cried out, rushing over to, Nick assumed, her boyfriend the moment he was visible.

At the same time, Joe cried, “Wally!” and went rushing to Kid Flash.

“Get them onto a bed,” Doctor Snow, Caitlin, commanded, easily taking charge of the situation.

Being the closest and used to reacting in an emergency, both Nick and Hank stepped forward before any of the others had time to move, grabbing the injured Allen and easily carrying him to one of the beds in the med center. Allen cried out at the movement, the sheer pain in the kid’s voice making Nick clench his jaw in anger. When he had escaped from Alexandra’s hospitality, Nick had been determined that she wouldn’t hurt another person like she had hurt him. Granted, Allen hadn’t been tortured or abused, but that had only been because his friend had been able to get
him back to safety before he’d been caught; Nick had no doubt in his mind what Alexandra’s intentions would have been had that not been the case.

In one fluid motion, Hank and Nick set Allen onto the first bed they encountered then stepped aside to let Doctor Snow work. Rather than potentially clutter up the room, Hank left, passing Iris on his way out. Though it was obvious she wanted to be closer, the young woman stayed at the doorway, watching them with tears in her eyes. It had to be killing her, seeing someone she cared about in pain like Allen was. When she looked at Nick, the worry he had seen in her briefly vanished and something he couldn’t quite place replaced it. It wasn’t exactly blame, but Nick got the sense that she was angry with him. It was fair; Nick doubted anything like this had happened before he and his friends had showed up in these people’s lives.

“All right, we need to pry this thing off Barry’s leg before his body starts to heal with the teeth still in it.”

“That can happen?” Nick asked, watching as Caitlin looked for the release button.

Rather than answer, Snow nodded, keeping her focus on the barbaric contraption attached to her friend’s leg. “I’m actually worried it’s already started.” Holding her finger above a spot on the trap, she looked up at Nick, “Can you press the lock once I have the trap open?”

“I’ve got a better idea,” he said, stepping forward and coming to stand beside her. “I’ll force the thing open and you press the lock.” Nick wasn’t sure how strong Snow was, but he was more confident in his ability to get the trap open than he was in hers. “Should you numb his leg first?”

“I can’t,” Caitlin answered after slightly shaking her head no. “His metabolism would just burn right though it.” Okay, that was something that Nick had anticipated. He hadn’t connected Allen’s ability to quickly heal with how fast his metabolism worked; the idea hadn’t even occurred to him. “But we will need someone to help hold him still.”

Iris and Joe immediately stepped forward, each one flanking Allen and putting a tender hand on his arms. Barry looked up at them, clearly drawing comfort in their presence in spite of the pain he was in. Knowing that the next several minutes were going to suck for the guy, Nick firmly gripped the sides of the strong jaws, ignoring the way the filed down edges of the teeth bit into his hands, then looked at Caitlin. “Ready?”

When she nodded, Nick began. Allen immediately let out a cry of pain as Nick slowly and carefully pried the contraption loose. The kid’s leg jumped involuntarily, the muscles no doubt spasmning without Allen’s control, making Nick’s hands slip against the razor-sharp teeth when his grip was briefly dislodged. “Ah,” he quietly cried out in pain as one of the teeth sliced into the heel of his right palm. When blood quickly started to pool and drip, he grabbed the closest thing he saw, his old shirt from earlier, and used it to staunch the flow. He cradled the hand against his torso, stepping to the side so he didn’t contaminate Barry’s wound with his blood; he didn’t know if Barry would react to his blood like Adalind had, but he also didn’t want to take a chance and find out.

“Nick,” Hank said, apparently having been watching. He came up to Nick to grab his hand and inspect the wound, but Nick pulled it away.

“You okay?” Joe asked him, his grip on Barry more comforting than restraining.

Nick nodded, wrapped his hand several times within his shirt, then stepped up to try again.

“I got it,” Monroe said, gently pushing Nick out of the way. “I’m surprised you didn’t ask me to do
“You know, Monroe, I am capable of doing things without your help,” Nick quipped, wincing as Hank took hold of his hand and looked at the cut.

“Hurry,” Caitlin said, her tone quietly urgent, “Barry’s healing seems to have been slowed somehow, but it is working.”

After slipping some gloves on, Monroe woged and then replaced Nick at the foot of the bed. Gloves. Why hadn’t Nick thought of that?

Wanting to make sure there wasn’t another incident, Nick took his hand back, re-wrapped it in the shirt then went to Barry’s left side and pressed down the left leg.

“Gah!” Allen cried out as the process was started over, his body arcing in spite of being held down.

“Hang in there, Bar,” Joe encouraged in a whisper, his eyes glued to what Caitlin and Monroe were doing.

“Okay,” Caitlin said to Monroe. “you can pull it free now. Give me a minute to,” she paused as the sound of the metal device being broken in half then falling to the floor echoed through the room, “lock the trap.” She pursed her lips pleasantly. “That works too.”

Nick let go of Barry’s leg, once again cradling his hand as pain pulsed in it anew. Then something Caitlin said earlier registered with him. “You said that something was slowing his ability to heal. Do you know what it was?”

“My guess would be a chemical compound of some sort on the trap,” she answered as she wrapped a bandage around Barry’s leg, “but I’d have to test it to be sure.”

Nick looked over at Monroe. “Can you call Rosalee and see if there’s a mix that could somehow slow down a person’s metabolism, or slow down a person’s ability to heal?” He honestly wasn’t sure if that was the way it worked, or if that was even what was happening with Allen, but he figured it was a good place to start.

“What are you thinking?” Hank asked, standing inside the doorway and watching all of them.

“I’m thinking Alexandra wasn’t as unprepared for Barry and Kid Flash as he had hoped.”

“But we already knew that,” Joe said, still standing by Allen’s side.

“That’s true,” Nick admitted. “But what if she wasn’t as unprepared as we had thought she would be?” Everyone including Allen seemed to perk up at this suggestion.

“You think Alexandra already knew about us and planned for our arrival ahead of time,” Allen said, his tone partway between a statement and a question. Pain was still evident in his voice, but he was definitely feeling better. The kid’s ability to quickly recover was unbelievable. Hearing about it was one thing, but seeing it was another thing entirely. Nick was impressed as well as jealous.

“That would make sense,” Joe said. “Especially if she’s been in town as long as you think she has.”

“Even if she’s only been in town for a couple weeks, she would have done her research ahead of time and found out all she could before coming here,” Nick said, his tone not quite dismissive, but
Frustration built in Nick. They should have thought of this! He knew better than to underestimate Alexandra so why he did he continue to do it?

Looking over at Allen, at the thick bandage wrapped around the kid’s calf, Nick knew they were going to need a new game plan if they were going to get Alexandra.

After his hand had been bandaged, Nick left the medical room to allow Dr. Snow to attend to Barry. Beyond strategizing what their next move should be, there wasn’t much Nick could do if he stayed, so he went in search of Allen’s friend instead. Triage had demanded that they all focus on Barry at the time, but something about the concern he heard in Detective West’s voice told Nick that something was wrong with Kid Flash, aka Wally, as well and he wanted to check in on him.

Seeming to guess what he was after, Trubel said, “He’s two floors up, first door on the right.” She paused a minute then added, “Are you okay?”

Nick smiled, appreciating her concern for him, but knowing it to be unnecessary. “Yeah. Fine. If they ask, let the others know where I am.”

“Sure,” she said, sounding as though she doubted she would be asked.

It took a moment for Nick to figure out the controls to the elevator, but once he did, he arrived in no time. The speed with which the technology moved astounded him. First the GPS tracking software that could keep up with the speedsters, then the elevator which barely seemed to move before the doors were opening on a completely different level? Portland PD still had to fix the elevators once a week because they kept getting stuck or breaking down.

The room in which Kid Flash lay was little more than a lab with a spare cot in it. Machinery of all shapes and sizes occupied most of counter space, leaving only a small table clear for someone to work. Glancing at it, the room appeared to be the epitome of organized chaos, with multiple cabinets and shelving units sitting beneath the work spaces and a see-through work board with God only knew what kind of math on it standing near the back. Against the wall to the left sat the cot and the second speedster.

Although a blanket lay over him, Nick could tell that Kid Flash was still in his suit; the top part of a lightning bolt peeked out from under that grey wool, adding color to the drab cloth. His hood had been removed, however, giving Nick a glimpse of a kid similar in coloring to Detective West and Iris, with a small stud in his left ear, and his eyes moving fast with REM sleep under closed eyelids. Next to him sat Cisco Ramon, his right ankle sitting on his left knee and a data pad in his lap.

“How is he?” Nick asked, making Ramon jump.

“Geez! Make a noise or something next time, will ya?” the kid griped.
“You couldn’t hear me getting out of the elevator?”

“Sound-proof walls,” was the quick answer. “It can get a little loud in here so we had to reinforce the walls to prevent curious officials from getting too close.”

Nick nodded, unsure how to respond to that. The fact that this group didn’t want officials near their operations made sense; Nick and his crew had the same concerns back in Portland and it was a struggle finding a place where the police or well-meaning neighbors wouldn’t put their noses where they didn’t belong. “So, how is he?”

“He’s okay,” Ramon answered, his tone indicating there was more to say.

“Shouldn’t he have woken up by now?” Nick asked, guessing it was unusual for a speedster to sleep this long.

Ramon nodded. “And that’s what’s worrying me. Normally, he or Barry wake up fairly quickly after a trauma. For Wally to still be out is…weird.”

“Doctor Snow mentioned something on the wolf trap slowing down Barry’s ability to heal,” Nick said. “Could Kid Flash have been cut or scraped by something with the same substance?”

“It’s possible,” the kid granted, his tone indicating he wasn’t convinced, “but Wally said he managed to avoid the traps.”

“Which doesn’t mean that one didn’t manage to cut him, just that he was able to avoid stepping into one,” Nick countered, beginning to think he was right. He looked around the workspace then stopped when he recognized that he wasn’t going to be able to find anything without help. “Do you have a glove?”

Ramon’s brows furrowed in confusion. “What do you need a glove for?” he asked, even as he stood, found one, and brought it over to Nick.

“I cut my hand trying to help pry the wolf trap off Barry’s leg,” he answered, slipping the work glove over his bandaged hand. “In case we do find a cut, I don’t want my blood mixing with Kid Flash’s.”

“Why, you got some kind of disease or something?”

Doubting the kid needed it anyways, Nick peeled off the blanket, setting it down on Ramon’s vacated seat. He immediately began searching the kid’s legs, fairly certain he was going to find something there. “Or something,” he answered, making sure to be gentle as he rotated Kid Flash’s left leg to get a better look at his calf. “There,” he said, pointing to a cut which ran the width of the kid’s calf.

“That wasn’t made by a wolf trap,” Ramon observed as he leaned stepped out of the way so Nick could get a better look.

“It’s probably from one of those scythe-type thingies the guys were carrying,” Kid Flash answered sounding groggy. “They got me right as I was leaving.”

“It doesn’t look too deep,” Nick assured, kneeling down because constantly being bent was beginning to hurt his back. He looked at Ramon, “Can you go get some gauze pads and something to hold them in place? I think that whatever got into Barry’s system got in his and we’re gonna need to give him time to heal.”
“Yeah, sure.”

“I’m Wally, by the way,” the kid said once Ramon was gone.

Nick already knew that, but he didn’t say that. “Nice to meet you.”

“Is Barry okay?”

“I think he’ll be fine eventually,” Nick assured. “But there was something on the trap that appears to be slowing down his, and yours, I think, ability to heal. Your friend Caitlin was bandaging him up when I came down here.”

“Why did you? Come down here, I mean.”

“I wanted to check on you,” Nick answered, confused as to why that wasn’t obvious. “Your father’s reaction to your entrance made me think something was wrong, so I wanted to check and make sure you were okay.”

Wally nodded, but didn’t look convinced. At least one of these guys had a suspicious streak!

When Ramon returned, it was with a couple more people in tow. “Caitlin said to bring him downstairs so she could see to him.”

Nick raised an eyebrow at the people who had come along. “And you guys volunteered to help?”

“More like we were told to help,” Monroe answered, looking like the command didn’t bother him at all. When Nick opened his mouth, fully prepared to say that he could have helped bring West downstairs, Monroe stopped him with, “And don’t even think of volunteering to help. The doctor said that you weren’t allowed to because you’re still injured.”

“Guys, I can make it up there by myself,” Wally interjected, his overconfidence not diminished in the least.

“Snow also said that if you tried to get there without us, she’d stick in you something called the pipeline,” Trubel said. Then she looked at Ramon. “What’s the pipeline, anyways?”

“It’s a prison where we hold the dangerous metahumans.”

Nick’s brow furrowed. “Is that legal?”

“Not even a little bit,” Ramon answered as both he and Nick got out of the way so that Monroe and Trubel could help Wally up. “But since Iron Heights can’t hold them, it’s either that or we kill them and Barry is really against killing them.”

“And you aren’t?” Nick asked, confused. He could have sworn that all of them were against killing other people, not just Barry.

“No, I am,” Ramon replied, stepping to the side so Trubel and Monroe could get Kid Flash down to Caitlin. “I’m just not the one fighting them, so we generally leave it up to Barry to decide.”

“I see you got him to listen to reason,” Caitlin said as they all entered the cortex. She looked up from her spot at the center console and added, “And that you managed to keep Detective Burkhardt from helping. Good.”

“I am capable of taking care of myself without instruction,” Nick pointed out, earning a snort from Hank and an eyebrow raise of disbelief from Trubel.
“Since when?” Monroe challenged, outwardly voicing what the rest of Nick’s friends didn’t.

Nick gave his friend a small glare, but didn’t argue with him. After all, he wasn’t wrong. “Where’s Eve?”

“Leda called to check in,” Trubel answered, warily eyeing those that were left in the cortex.

Nick nodded then turned back to Monroe. “Did Rosalee have an idea about what could be on the traps?”

“Not off the top of her head,” Monroe answered. “She said she’d get with Adalind and see what they could figure out.” His brows furrowed in confusion. “What’s with the glove?”

Nick glanced down at his hand then took the thing off. In all that had happened, he forgot that he’d been wearing it. “I was checking on Wally and didn’t want to take the chance of a contamination.”

“Did you think he had some sort of disease that you could catch?” Iris asked of him, her eyes flaming.

“No,” Nick said, not taking the bait. “I didn’t want to run the risk of my blood doing anything to him.”

“Why would your blood do something to Wally?” Allen asked as he slowly and heavily limped into the cortex, wincing with every other step. Upon seeing what he was doing, Iris went over to him, allowing him to lean on her as he made his way.

“I don’t know that it will,” Nick hedged. “It’s just a precaution.”

“Okay, then why do you think it would do something to him?” Cisco asked, drawing out the word ‘okay’.

“If Nick’s blood gets into our systems,” Monroe answered, drawing all attention to himself, “it can make us human.” He shrugged with almost everyone gave them disbelieving looks. “We did it once.”

“I didn’t know this,” Trubel commented, her tone between a question and an accusation.

“It’s not something we like to talk about,” Nick answered. He and Adalind had been through so much that he often forgot it had happened. He definitely had forgotten to tell both Eve and Trubel about it. He addressed the two Flashes again. “Like I said, I don’t know if anything would happen if my blood were to mix with yours, but I don’t want to risk it. This city needs men like you.”

“I may be able to help with that,” Caitlin said. “I can take some blood samples from you and Barry and see how they react when they’re added together.”

In spite of wanting answers, Nick didn’t immediately agree to her proposal. Though he had lost plenty of blood during his time as a grimm, had sometimes freely given it when it was necessary, the idea of letting strangers get a hold of it bothered him. They all seemed to mean well enough, but Nick knew better than most that those who wanted to help you could just as easily hurt you.

“Can I think on that?” he asked, not wishing to offend, but not ready to consent.

Caitlin smiled, her gentle expression showing she understood, or at the very least, that she wasn’t offended. “Sure.”
“In the meantime,” Barry said, his voice stronger than it had been, but still holding notes of pain. For a minute, Nick wondered if maybe whatever had been on the trap was doing more than slowing down the kid’s ability to heal, but he let idea go, pushing it to the side to ask about later if the need should arise. “Iris and I are hosting a dinner at our place. We were wondering if you guys would like to join us?”

Surprise made Nick’s brows furrow. As friendly as this group was, he would never have thought to be invited for, what he believed was, a family gathering. He looked to Iris to gauge her reaction. Of the Central City crew, she seemed to be the one that trusted them the least, and so if any of them were to object, he thought it would be her. When her expression remained neutral, neither encouraging nor discouraging, Nick then looked to his friends, wanting to know what their thoughts were before he agreed for all of them.

Hank’s expression equaled Iris’s; neither showing one preference or the other, seemingly content to allow Nick to decide for the both of them. Eve, who had rejoined them shortly before Allen had spoken, looked more curious than anything to hear what he’d decide, her head cocked ever so slightly to the side as she stared at him. Both Monroe and Trubel look almost eager for him to accept the invitation, both wearing differing expressions of hunger, though Trubel’s was better hidden than Monroe’s.

Plastering on a smile that Nick didn’t yet feel, he answered, “We’d love to.”

TBC
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Thanks to @Beth0524 for the suggestion of having Diana show up. It was a fantastic idea and I hope I did it justice. :)

That evening, Barry sat on the couch in the apartment he shared with Iris, thinking over what had happened in the past few days. In spite of how crazy things could get in Central City - and things could go end of the world crazy in a second’s notice - things seemed to have gotten worse since the team from Portland had arrived. Not that it was Nick’s team’s fault, since things had slowly been happening right under Barry’s nose, but even so, it was a lot to take in.

The fact that there were people out there who could turn into creatures was still mind boggling. He’d seen several of them, in varying different forms of animals, but still Barry couldn’t quite process it. And then you have this team from Portland, who don’t seem to have problems killing, being soaked in blood, and that makes it all the more confusing.

How could anyone be okay with murder? It didn’t matter that some of these…wesen were after Nick and his team, it still isn’t okay to end lives. And yet. Having met Nick and his team, Barry believed them to be good people. Scary, but fundamentally good. Barry had never believed in black or white; he knew better than most there were grey areas, but this? He struggled to come to terms with all of it.

“Hey,” Iris greeted, approaching him with a warm smile. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Barry lied, offering a smile of his own. “Yeah, I’m good. Just thinking.”

Iris sat on the coffee table, leaving the couch entirely for Barry to occupy. Not long after they’d gotten home, Iris had ushered him to the sofa, making him prop his injured leg onto pillows, avoiding applying pressure to the trap wounds as she did so. She’d refused to allow him to move ever since.

“Look, Barry,” she said, her voice gentle, like it usually was when she was going to tell someone something they didn’t want to hear. “I know you want to help these people, but there’s something about them I don’t trust.”

“Iris-” Barry began before she cut him off.

“And it’s not just because they’re secretive. Secretive I get, but this group takes it to a whole new level. They let us in just enough for us to help them, but nothing more than that. They’re distant, and there is something very wrong about Detective Burkhardt. I can’t quite put my finger on it, but he’s different than all of them.”

Barry tried to fully sit up and face her, but she stopped him by sitting on the sofa by his hip so he wouldn’t have to. He grabbed her hand then gave her knuckles a kiss. “I hear you,” he assured. “And I appreciate and trust your instincts. But, I can’t just walk away from this. They need my help.” He thought about Detective Burkhardt, and added, “Some more than they think. I can’t just ignore that.”
“I’m not asking you to walk away, Barry,” Iris assured with something akin to impatience in her tone. Her hand squeezed his. “I just want you to be careful. I don’t want you getting caught in whatever that group is mixed up in.”

“I’m pretty sure it’s too late for that,” Barry said, hating that he couldn’t give her what she wanted. “Whoever this Alexandra person is, she already knows of me, without Nick’s help. She’s smart, and, from what I’ve seen, she likes to toy with people. I will try to be as careful as I can, but I can’t promise more than that.”

“I guess that’s all I can ask, then.” She smiled, leaning in for a kiss. Which was, of course, when the doorbell rang. Sighing heavily, Iris went and answered the door, mumbling unhappily, “Let the party begin.”

oOo

The get together was under full-swing by the time Nick arrived. Having been on a call with Adalind, he’d been the last to arrive, which was just fine with him since he was fairly certain Iris West didn’t want him there at all. Not that he entirely blamed her, but her mistrust of him seemed to go beyond his actions, almost like there was something about him, personally, that she was affronted by. Nick wasn’t sure what to do about that or how to fix it, or if he should even try to fix it.

The first person to greet him was Wally, sans Kid Flash costume. His smile was wide and welcoming as he held out his hand. “Welcome to Barry’s and Iris’ home, man.”

“Thanks,” Nick answered, hesitating briefly before taking the kid’s hand and shaking it. “It’s nice to meet you outside of the costume.”

Wally was saved a reply by the entrance of Iris, who walked up to greet Nick with an insincere smile on her face. “Detective,” she greeted, doing her best to hide the fact that she didn’t want him there. “Thank you for coming.”

“Well, once Barry gets an idea in his mind, it’s usually easier to go along with it than fight it.”

Something in the way she said it made Nick think she wasn’t referring to the party in the slightest. His smile froze as he tried to think of something that would help her feel better about his group’s presence in Central City, but he came up with nothing. “I’m beginning to see that,” he answered, briefly looking off in the speedster’s direction before returning his attention to Iris. “Look, I can’t promise that everything will be okay,” he said, not bothering to try and placate her. From the very start it was clear that she was smarter than that and deserved more. “And I know that this will mean absolutely nothing coming from a complete stranger, but if I could, I would keep both Barry and Wally out of this.”

“Because you think they can’t handle it?” she asked, a challenge in her voice.
“No,” Nick answered, definitively. “Because I don’t want anyone else getting hurt.”

“Seems a little late for that, don’t you think?” she challenged without scorn. At least she seemed to be trying to understand him rather than simply condemning him.

“Something tells me your team is used to handling things like cuts and traps,” Nick answered, crossing his arms over his chest and ignoring the pain the shot through the wound in his side.

“Going by what I’ve heard about your experiences with this Alexandra, I’m guessing that’s not the worse that could happen to them.” She mirrored his stance, crossing her arms over chest as well.

“And something like that,” Nick said, probably a little more vehemently than he should have, “is precisely what I’d like to protect them from if I could. But like you said, once Barry gets an idea in his head, you can’t talk him out of it.”

Iris looked about ready to say something when the lights suddenly flicker and the sound of broken glass drew everyone’s attention to the kitchen where Joe West stood, looking like he’d seen a ghost. “Dad, you okay?” Joe’s only response to was to point to something just over Nick’s left shoulder.

“Uh, Nick, I think it’s for you,” Monroe said, making it sound like it was a phone call rather than what Nick suspected it actually was.

Turning around, Nick saw Diana standing by the window. Unlike the first time she’d done this, she was fully clothed, wearing jeans and a dark blue polo shirt which her school made her wear as a uniform. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail and she wore a necklace in the shape of a butterfly. Nick tried not to tear up when he recognized it as the necklace he’d gotten her for her birthday.

Nick’s relationship with his adopted daughter had been a rollercoaster from the beginning. At first, he wouldn’t have even presumed to call her his daughter, adopted or otherwise, as he suspected she would have reacted badly to it. She’d always insisted that Adalind was her mother and the Renard was her father, not Nick. If he ever tried to talk to her, instruct her, help her, like a parent would, she would throw the fact that he wasn’t her father in his face…usually before throwing him into the wall as well. Over time, she’d learned to control her temper and her powers, but it was still a long while before she allowed him to try to connect with her. Before he’d left, she’d told him to be careful, which he’d taken as a good sign, but he suspected that it was because of how his dying would affect her mother and brother more than how herself. To see her wearing the necklace now meant so much to him, though he tried not to let her see it.

Diana scanned the room, her expression shifting between a smile for those she knew and a frown for those she didn’t. When her gaze landed on Nick, her smile grew warmer, though it immediately faded. “Mom says you’re hurt,” she said in a voice which showed how much she’d grown since she’d first come to live with him. She crossed her arms, frowning at him as her eyes became a gentle purple. “I thought I told you to be careful.”

“Believe me, I tried to be,” he assured her. “But you know Reapers.”

“Sadly, yes, I do.” She paused for a minute, her face wrinkling into an expression of confusion, then she said, “Mom also says that she’s not going to help you until she knows for certain how badly you’re hurt.”

Ignoring the snickers he could hear coming from behind him, Nick said, “Well, your mom and I talked before I came her. I told her how bad things weren’t.”
“I know, but she doesn’t believe you. She wants me to confirm it instead.”

“Can she perhaps confirm it later, when there aren’t a dozen people staring at us?” he asked, lowering his voice just a little.

Diana paused, presumably to relay his request to Adalind.

“I’m sorry,” Cisco spoke into the silence, “are we all just going to ignore the fact that there is a little girl, who looks like a ghost, by the way, standing in Barry’s loft?”

“This isn’t the first time it’s happened,” Monroe assured, though Nick doubted it worked.

“It isn’t?” Joe asked with doubt in his voice.

“Nope,” Hank answered. “The first time was when a gang led by our captain was approaching Nick’s home with the intent to kill all of us.”

“Okay, when this,” Cisco waved at Diana, his voice trailing off as he tried to figure out a term for what was happening, “whatever this is, is over, y’all gonna have some explainin to do.”

Diana blinked and Nick felt pressure along his side. Since he knew it was her checking on him without drawing attention to it, he stayed silent, wincing only when the pressure became painful. She withdrew then, and smiled. “Mom says that’s acceptable. Miss Rosalee says the herb you’re looking for is more commonly known as Stranglehold. The actual name is too hard for me to pronounce, but she says that if you go into any wesen herb store, they should have some on hand. Mom says that it’s used in a spell that’s meant to kill off intruders in your cells.”

“So, theoretically,” Caitlin interjected, “if someone were to have more than human DNA in their blood, this…spell would attack those non-human cells?”

There was a pause and then Diana nodded. “Yes.”

“For how long?” Barry asked.

“They say they don’t know,” Diana answered. She frowned. “They say that, because of your metabolism it could be a couple of days or a couple of weeks.”

“How long would it be if he were wesen?” Nick asked, thinking that if they could narrow that down, then Barry and his team would have some sort of starting point.

Diana’s smile faltered, then she frowned. “Mom says the spell is meant to work forever.” Her frown deepened. “Miss Rosalee says it’s a chemical equivalent of mixing a grimm’s blood with a wesen’s.” She paused, then, “They also say they don’t think it’s going to affect Mr. Allen or Mr. West the same it would a wesen.”

“If I could test the mixture on a wesen’s blood, I would be able to determine if that were true or not,” Caitlin said, briefly looking over at Monroe before returning her attention to Diana.

“That would probably be best,” Diana agreed with a smile. “Mom says I have to go now. Bye!”

She was gone in the blink of an eye, and the silence that followed made Nick’s back itch. Without turning around, he knew that all of them were staring at him, half of them wanting explanations while the rest simply waited to see what he would do. Nick pivoted to face everyone. “I know that a lot of you want explanations,” he said, focusing on the Central City team, “and I promise to give them as best I can. But first, let’s see if we can’t get a head start on what’s being done to Barry and
Wally.” He looked at Caitlin, “Do you have enough of the compound to run tests, or do you need more?”

Caitlin looked over at Cisco, waiting until he nodded before she answered, “We have enough.”

“Okay, good. Monroe can give you some blood so you can start running your tests.”

“Wait, why me?”

“Because you’re the only natural born wesen and it could corrupt the data if we went with Eve.” To be honest, it was more because Nick knew Monroe would go along with it. He couldn’t say the same for Eve.

“I would also like a sample from you,” Caitlin said. “I need to be able to compare the reactions between the chemical compound mixing with Monroe’s and Barry’s blood, and your own mixing with their blood.”

Nick blinked. “Wow, you guys really are thorough.”

“No, we’re scientists,” Cisco correct with an almost primness in his voice.

“Good to know,” Nick answered, moving on. Refocusing on Caitlin he asked, “When do you want us to come by S.T.A.R Labs?”

“Dude, don’t worry about that,” Cisco answered, now making his way to the front entrance and, coincidentally, Caitlin’s purse. “She carries that kind of equipment with her.”

Nick’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “Really?” he asked, looking at Caitlin.

She shrugged. “It’s proved helpful on more than one occasion.”

Nick wanted to ask what sorts of occasions had popped up that they’d needed to immediately draw blood, but he pushed that side for now. He doubted this group really wanted to be answering any questions, especially if they came from him. Right now, they simply wanted answers.

“Where do you want us?” Monroe asked, joining Nick, but addressing Caitlin.

The doctor looked around for a second, but it was Iris who answered. “How about the living room? That way you guys aren’t in the way while everyone else sans Barry helps set up for dinner.”

“Sounds good,” Caitlin agreed, rifling through her purse. “You guys go sit down and roll up your sleeves. I’ll grab what I need and meet you over there.”

They complied with the doctor’s orders, with Monroe taking the leather chair to the right of Barry and Nick choosing the loveseat to the left. Nick didn’t miss the way Barry’s eyes tracked both of them while they moved, watching them as they sat down and began rolling up their sleeves. What he was thinking, Nick couldn’t tell, but whereas he saw mistrust and suspicion in Iris’ eyes, he saw only curiosity in Barry’s.

“You’d think with how much you’ve been bleeding since you got here they would already have enough of a sample from you,” Monroe joked.

“We have more integrity than that,” Iris answered, her voice showing she found the joke offensive rather than funny.

Monroe’s glance at Nick showed his discomfort at the rebuke. Nick offered a small smile and a
minute wave, telling his friend to let it go. He didn’t blame Iris for her attitude towards them; it was obvious her main goal was to protect her friends and family and, right now, she saw Nick and his friends as a threat.

“Hey, look, I’m sorry about all of this,” he said to Barry, watching out of the corner of his eye as Caitlin began to withdraw a couple vials of blood from Monroe. Though he knew that none of this was truly his fault, Nick couldn’t help but take the blame for it. Once again, his world was intruding into someone else’s normal existence and completely turning that person’s world upside down.

“Did you know any of this was going to happen?” Barry asked, his tone curious.

The question caught Nick off guard and he blinked, his brows wrinkling in confusion. “No. But I should have.”

“Come on, Nick,” Monroe said in a consoling voice as he lowered his sleeve. “You’ve only been at this for less than a decade. That is no where near enough time to fully understand the wesen world or your own heritage, and you have had way more to deal with than most grimms do their entire lives. I mean, you’ve stopped the world from ending.”

“Really?” Caitlin asked as she approached Nick.

“Well, the world as we all know it anyways,” Monroe amended. “If it wasn’t for him, the world would be a much darker place, believe me.”

“Why?” Barry asked, curiosity mixed with confusion in his voice.

“That should probably wait until everyone can listen,” Nick answered as Monroe opened his mouth. “I don’t know if it’s background everyone will need,” he added, ignoring Caitlin as she inserted the needle into his vein, “but it’ll be easier to tell it once rather than multiple times.”

“Especially since all of us have different takes on what happened,” Trubel interjected, now joining them, sitting on the coffee table in front of Nick.

“Different takes on what?” Cisco asked as he carried a platter with two whole chickens to the dining table.

“On Zerstörer,” Eve answered from right behind Nick.

Not having realized she’d been so close, Nick jumped, pulling the needle out as he did so. “Sorry,” he apologized to Caitlin.

“It’s okay,” she forgave, putting the used needle into a baggie and then sealing it. “I was done anyways.”

“The point is, you are doing as good of a job as anyone could expect,” Monroe said, bringing the conversation back to its original topic. “Better than any of the others, if you ask me, because you actual try to help rather than just kill.”

“None of us blame you for any of this,” Barry assured.

Nick wasn’t so sure of that, but to insist on it would sound like he was pouting and feeling sorry for himself so he held his tongue. As much as he appreciated the support, it did nothing to ease the guilt he felt. He honestly doubted anything would help, but, again, there wasn’t a point in saying it.
“If Caitlin’s finished,” Iris said, looking to the doctor for confirmation. “Dinner’s ready.”

“Do you need a hand getting to the table?” Nick asked Barry as he stood.

“I’ve got him,” Iris answered for her boyfriend in a tone which clearly told Nick to back off.

Nick raised his hands in surrender. “Okay,” he said, offering a smile he didn’t feel.

“Nick,” Eve said from her position behind the loveseat. “Can I talk to you?”

Nick’s brows furrowed, but he said, “Yeah.”

“How honest do you plan on being with this group?” Eve asked him when they were alone…ish.

Nick looked at the table where everyone was assembling, debating his answer. “I need to tell them everything I can,” he said at last, resigned. “If any of us are going to have a hope of taking down Alexandra, we need to be able to trust each other. Right now, these guys don’t trust us.”

“And you think telling them all about the past eight years will change that?”

“I don’t know. But at this point, I figure it can’t hurt.”

Nick walked away before she could ask anything else. Like everyone else, Eve had reservations. But unlike everyone else, she was one of the few people Nick was likely to listen to when she began to earnestly express them. Was he confident in or comfortable with revealing his history? No. But it was necessary.

“Thank you for welcome us into your home,” he said as he sat down at the table. His smile was forced and as uncomfortable as he felt, but he held it in place as he looked around at the group.

“It’s been awhile since we’ve sat down to a family meal like this.”

Strictly speaking, that wasn’t true. They all sat down to family meals all the time. It was rarely with this many people, and it was never without casework also occupying the table. If it wasn’t for the fact that he felt almost like an intruder, this meal would have felt wholesome and comforting. As it was, he pretended not to notice the tension running through the group, not missing how the rest of them did likewise.

“We thought it would be nice to try and get to know everyone outside of the work setting,” Barry answered, his smile mirroring Nick’s. He looked around at his friends for support, but he found little. West seemed inclined to stay out of everything, quietly eyeing them all, waiting for the right moment to insert himself into the conversation. Caitlin, Cisco, Iris, and Wally offered smiles to any who met their gaze, but they, too, stayed out of it.

“The little girl is my adopted daughter, Diana,” Nick said, diving in. Judging from the looks they were all giving him, they were dying to ask him about Diana’s appearance, but were simply too polite to do it, so, he brought the subject up for them. “She is the natural born daughter of my boss, police captain Sean Renard, bastard of one of the royal families of Europe and my fiancee, Adalind Schade.”

“That sounds like it has an interesting story behind it,” Cisco said with a mischievous smile in his eyes.

“Not as juicy as you might think,” Hank answered as he put some chicken on his fork. “Just complicated.”
“How complicated?” Barry asked in a tone that said he was almost afraid of the answer.

“Well, at one point Renard tried to have Nick killed, then when that didn’t work, he tried to have Nick arrested, then when that didn’t work, he settled for a tense truce,” Monroe answered.

“Wait,” Barry said, “your boss tried to you have you killed first and arrested second?”

“Welcome to how complicated it all is,” Nick answered wryly. He set his fork down with a sigh. “He didn’t start off on the opposite side. For several years, he had our backs. Then Black Claw got to him, and though he didn’t know who they were or what their agenda was, he fell for their promise of absolute power.”

“‘Absolute power corrupts absolutely’,,” Joe quoted, sighing as though he knew where things had gone from there.

“Precisely,” Nick agreed. “By the time Black Claw in Portland had been suspended, Renard was in far too deep. His main options had been to either frame me for the murder, or go to jail for it himself. Self preservation kicked in. What finally brought Renard back to more middle ground was the appearance of Zerstörer.”

“It says something that the end of the world is what it finally took to get through to Renard, if you ask me,” Monroe muttered loud enough for all them to hear.

“How was this Zer-guy the end of the world?” Iris asked, seeming more engaged now that information was being shared.

“Technically, it wasn’t the end of the world,” Nick corrected.

“Had he gotten a hold of Diana, it would have been the end of the world as we know it,” Eve argued.

“Why would he want her?” Caitlin asked before taking a bite of asparagus.

“He planned to take her for a bride and create lots of little demony-Zerstörer babies,” Monroe answered.

“He planned to take that little girl,” Joe said, pointing to where Diana had stood, “and make her have children with him?”

"That's what you're focusing on?" Cisco asked. "Really? Not the whole, a real life demon tried to take over the world?" 

“What made him so powerful?” Iris asked, ignoring the looks the two men were exchanging over her.

“He had this staff that helped him control everything,” Trubel said.

“It didn’t control everything,” Eve corrected, her tone even in spite of the fact that she had lived through the same nightmare as the rest of them.

“But it controlled enough,” Nick said, casting a brief glance at the hexenbiest.

It suddenly struck him that the table was divided into sides, with the Central City group on one while the Portland group sat on the other. He wasn’t sure if that had been planned or if it had just happened that way, but either way it didn’t matter as it made it easier for them to converse.
“With that staff in his hand, you couldn’t touch him,” Nick continued. “Believe me, we all tried.”

The memory of it all crept back in and Nick swallowed against the tears he felt spring to his eyes. He ducked his head, just in case, and clenched his hand. Pain from the cut slowly burned the images of those he loved dead, but not before he felt both Monroe and Hank lay comforting hands on his back. None of them had been able to remember a thing, but they’d believed what he’d told them about what had happened and had done their best to be understanding and patient with him while he’d recovered from the grief.

“What happened?” Barry asked in a gentle voice, not missing the silent communication that had passed between Nick and his friends.

“In another reality, they all died trying to defeat Zerstörer,” Nick said, his stomach churning with each word.

“Was it another reality or another timeline?” Cisco asked, seeming not to have noticed the emotions Nick expressed.

Nick’s brows furrowed in confusion. “What’s the difference?”

“An alternate timeline implies that other choices were made and those choices are where the timeline splits,” Barry answered. Nick suspected the kid was dumbing it down for him, which he appreciated because otherwise it wasn’t likely he would have been able to follow. “An alternate reality is a universe that is functioning independently from our own; no matter what decisions we make, things will continue going as they would have.”

Nick thought back to that night and what had made things revert back to the beginning. “I think it was an alternate timeline,” he said after a few minutes. “Zerstörer came from an alternate universe,” he added definitively, “but when it comes to how things went down, everyone except me, Trubel, my infant son, and Diana died in an alternate timeline that ended when I stabbed him in the chest with his own staff.”

“Something tells me we’re getting the cliff notes version of this story,” Cisco said, his tone teasingly suspicious.

“Dude, it’s been almost two years and I still can’t fully wrap my head around it,” Monroe said. “Trust me, the cliff notes version is as close as you’re going to come to understanding it.”

Cisco didn’t look satisfied, but he let it go. “Okay,” he said, drawing the word out. “So, wait, whose side is your boss on?”

“His own,” Trubel, Hank, Monroe, Eve, and Nick said at the same time. “But that’s neither here nor there,” Nick said, “because he’s not here and we are.”

“Yes, but he sent you, didn’t he?” Iris asked. “So why should we trust you?”

Nick paused, unsure how to answer. “Maybe you shouldn’t,” he said with a shrug, sitting back and crossing his arms over his chest with a wince. “But you need our help. And we need yours.” He sat forward again, pushed aside his plate and laid his arms on the table. “Look, I know my world is confusing - to be honest, yours doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me either - but I can guarantee that my explaining it isn’t going to make it make any more sense. And if it seems like we’re hiding something from you, I can promise you that we’re not planning anything. Much like you don’t know if you can trust us, we aren’t sure how much to trust you with.”

“While we’re on the subject of secrets,” Barry said, his tone curious and nothing more. “What’s
with the grey thing you do? You said it’s a side effect of poison, but I don’t know any poisons that can do that.”

“With most people, it wouldn’t have been a side effect,” Monroe assured. “But grimm’s are different, biologically, and so different substances effect them differently than they would normal people.”

“How different?” Caitlin asked, her interest piqued.

“Honestly? We don’t know,” Monroe answered. “Rosalee and I know how things well effect wesen, and that’s mainly through history and tradition. None of our resources are meant for grimm’s and this is the first time that I can think of in history that a grimm has been willing to work with us, so there’s no precedent for how any of our herbs, spices, or potions will effect them.”

“Well, it’s a good thing you have me, then,” Caitlin said, smiling. “I can probably help shed some light on how grimm’s are so different.”

Nick tried to appear pleased by the offer of help, but he doubted he succeeded. He didn’t like the idea of becoming a test subject, and he couldn’t really hide that.

“Don’t worry, man,” Cisco assured, “she won’t strap you down and experiment on you. Though there may be some tests she’ll want to run that go beyond biology.”

“Back up,” Barry said, his brows wrinkling in confusion. “How were you poisoned? I mean, after seeing a small amount of what your world is like, something tells me it wasn’t anything as simple as someone putting something in your food.”

“There’s a wessen called Cracher-Mortel. The earliest record we have of one of them has them originating in Haiti.”

“They’re like a walking pufferfish, except that instead of spitting water, these guys spit tetrodotoxin that seeps into your skin and shuts down the neurosignals, essentially causing suspended animation, making you appear dead,” Monroe filled in.

“There are four stages the victim goes through,” Nick picked up, “the last one being death. But with grimm’s,” he gestured towards himself and Trubel, “it’s different. From what I heard, we don’t make it past the third stage - rage.”

“What do you mean, ‘from what you heard’?” Barry asked.

Nick quickly glanced at Eve, who showed no signs of recognition, evenly meeting his eyes. Even though it had happened over half a decade ago, he could still see the bruise he’d left on her face. He ducked his head as shame burned through him. Offering a wry smile to the speedster, he said, “Yeah, I don’t remember anything after the Baron spit in my face.”

“I’m assuming a raging grimm isn’t a good thing,” Joe surmised, glancing at each one of them for an answer.

“Let’s just say, I hope I don’t ever have to deal with one ever again,” Monroe said. “Although,” he added, his tone indicating he had just thought of something, "if it had been anyone else, we wouldn’t have tried so hard to take him down without shooting him.”

“I was one more hit away from shooting him,” Hank added, offering a shrug when Nick looked at him in surprise. “Sorry man, but you were more animal than man. Even with the five of us, you only stopped because Rosalee got the antidote into you.”
“And how does all of this lead to you looking like you’re dead?” Barry asked.

Nick looked over at his friends then refocused on Barry and his team. “We don’t know, exactly.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know?” Iris asked, her tone doubtful.

“As far as we know, Nick is the only grimm to have been attacked by a cracher-mortel.” Eve filled in, her voice firm, informational.

“It’s almost like Nick’s system reverts back to the first stage,” Monroe added, “except that he’s, of course, alive.”

“Do you think it happens when you feel threatened?” Barry asked.

Nick’s brows furrowed. “I don’t know,” he answered, trying to think back to the times he’d experienced it.

“What makes you think that, Bar?” Joe asked, looking at the kid.

“Well, I mean, I’ve only seen it happen twice, but each time, it seemed like he had sensed a threat. The first time was in the lab with Julian; he was talking about killing the wesen. I don’t think he was serious, but Nick, you seemed to take it badly, like something in you thought he might be, like you thought he was a threat.”

Nick still thought the meta-human CSI was a threat, but he kept that opinion to himself. He didn’t know the man nearly as well as the others did, so he had to trust in them, as far as he could at any rate.

“And the second time was when Alexandra had you pinned,” the speedster continued. Nick’s heart stuttered a beat at the reminder, but he said nothing, allowing the kid to finish his thought. “I don’t know, specifically, what she was doing to you, but I would think being trapped beneath a dragon’s clawed-hand would be something worth considering a threat.” The kid cocked his head to the side. “What do you feel when it happens?”

“Nothing,” Nick answered honestly. “It’s like my mind goes blank. I feel and think nothing, while my body goes on autopilot.”

“Speaking of Alexandra,” Iris said. “What are we going to do about her? I mean, if Barry and Wally are out of commission for the foreseeable future, are you guys even going to wait for them to heal before going after her? Or are you going to attempt to take her on by yourselves?”

That was an excellent question, one which Nick didn’t have an answer to. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “I haven’t really thought much about it.”

“I think you should wait until I can find out more about how the…potion affects all of you,” Caitlin interjected, her gaze taking them all in. “If it takes out Barry’s and Wally’s ability to heal, I’d hate to think what it could do to someone like Monroe or Eve. And this way, it would give Barry, Wally, and Nick time to heal before they try and take on Alexandra or any of her people.”

“Sounds reasonable to me,” Trubel said, dishing her third set of helpings onto her plate. She looked down the table at Nick. “I know I’d feel better attacking her if I knew you were at full health.”

More waiting. Great. But, as much as Nick hated to admit it, they all had a point.

“It would also give Adalind and Rosalee time to find out more, if they can,” Monroe pointed out.
“All of which isn’t to say that you won’t be doing anything in the interim, Detective,” Caitlin assured. “Like Cisco mentioned earlier, I’ll need you in the lab.”

“Oh joy,” he said. “Tests.”

“You don’t seem all that keen to find answers,” Barry observed.

“Would you want to be poked, prodded, and tested on?” Nick countered.

“I was eager to see just how much I could do, yeah,” the kid answered.

“I’ve had years to figure out what I can do,” Nick said, unable to stop the bitterness from seeping into his voice.

“And he’s got the scars to prove it,” Monroe quipped before taking a drink of water. “What?” he innocently asked when Nick threw him a glare. “You do.”

“Could you be there as well, Mr. Monroe?” Caitlin asked before Nick could reply.

“It’s just Monroe,” the blutbad said, “and I guess so. Why?”

“Just in case I need more blood,” she answered with a reassuring smile. Her glance briefly met Nick’s before returning to Monroe’s, telling Nick there was more to it, but he pretended not to notice.

“Do you want help with the dishes?” he offered, changing the subject.

The table, which had been full of food, now looked like famine had come through. Every serving dish held crumbs, but nothing more. Between Trubel, Barry, and Wally, the food had disappeared pretty quickly. Normally, Monroe would have helped as well, but as there had been quite a bit of meat, he’d stuck to eating small bits of what he could. No doubt he’d get something on the way back to their lodgings.

“I can get it,” Iris assured, getting up and, with the help of her brother, began to clear the table.

Normally, Nick would have gotten up to help in spite of her reply, but he still sensed a strong undertone of ‘back off’ from her, so he let it go. Smiling, he pushed his chair back. “Well, in that case, we should go.” He looked at the others, happy to see them also excusing themselves from the table. Although Iris had clearly said she’d take care of it, both Monroe and Trubel took their plates, and others, to the kitchen, depositing them on the island counter to be dealt with when there was time. Nick looked back at the speedster, who had remained sitting at the table. “Thank you, again, for having us.” He offered his hand out to Barry to shake, bending down so that it was easier for the speedster to grab it. “I’m sure that what we told you was more confusing than anything, but I hoped it helped you to better understand us.”

“Something tells me it’ll be a while before we come close to understanding one another,” Barry answered with no malice or suspicion in his voice as he took Nick’s hand. The kid’s grip was firm, showing a strength which wasn’t obvious on the surface. He quickly gentled his hold when Nick winced. “Sorry,” he apologized. “I forgot that you cut your hand.”

“It’s fine,” Nick forgave, ignoring the gentle throbbing in his hand and side as he slowly straightened back up.

Barry’s gaze seemed to miss nothing, however, because he said, “Seems like a couple days to heal isn’t so bad an idea.”
Nick smiled. “Maybe not,” he conceded. “Think you can sit still that long?”

“Oh, probably not,” the speedster admitted. “But I’m probably not going to get much of a choice in the matter.”

“Nope,” Joe instantly answered, a smile on his face.

Barry rolled his eyes, loving exasperation in his face. “I can recover perfectly well at work, Joe.”

“What are you gonna do there, Bar?

“There are tests I can run.”

“Which Julian is just as capable of running,” Joe argued. “Nick isn’t the only one who needs to heal, Barry.”

“I wouldn’t use Nick as a role model,” Trubel said, rejoining them with a roll in her hand. “He wouldn’t be taking a break if he wasn’t being forced to.”

“That’s not true,” Nick argued, though he knew she had a point.

“Nick, your side is being held together by string, and you can’t use your right hand without pain,” she argued back, sounding far too reasonable. “How long do you think it will be before the Verrat wear you down and kill you in a fight?” Nick clenched his jaw, refusing to answer. Seeing his silence as a win, Trubel nodded. “That’s what I thought. Now come on, Eve’s leaving.” She spun around and headed for the door. “Hey, Doc, what time do you want us there tomorrow?”

Caitlin’s brows furrowed. “You all don’t need to come,” she assured. “I just need Nick and Monroe.”

“Where Nick goes, I go,” Trubel answered definitively.

“Since when?” Nick challenged, not wanting or needing a babysitter or bodyguard.

Trubel looked him over, though he was certain that to the others it looked like she had barely spared him a glance. “Since now.”

“Cisco and I will be there around eight,” Caitlin said. “You’re welcome to come anytime after that.”

Trubel nodded. “We’ll be there at eight. Come on, Nick.”

Nick smiled at the doctor. “I guess we’ll see you in the morning.”

“Try to take it easy until then,” Caitlin replied, a twinkle in her eyes showing she was teasing him.

“I’ll do my best,” he assured with tolerable confidence in his ability to follow through with the advice. How much trouble could he really get into in eleven hours?

TBC

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!