**The Oubliette**

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**The Oubliette**

by [ladyofpride](http://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary**

Eobard’s initial attempt at changing Barry Allen's past does not, in any way, go according to plan. However, he knows that by creating the Flash he might still stand a chance of returning to his own time, even if it would mean forgoing this opportunity to eliminate his nemesis once and for all...

Matters take another turn for the worse, however, when Gideon reveals to him that Barry Allen is destined to die almost immediately in foster care. Eobard therefore has no other choice but to care for the boy himself, as Harrison Wells.

(A dark AU of sorts)
Come away with me, figlio perduto

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I want him to know and feel pain,
so that when I alleviate it he’ll also know gratitude
...What I create I must control”
~ Kenneth Langtry

A vein of divinity runs through the line of his descent.

Success is the story of the Thawnes—all men and women of great power, all visionaries, all imperators of some fashion or another.

All villains.

~*~*~

He is privy to the inner workings of time, knows just how far back to turn the dial to change the current flavour of the future. This is, after all, how he has eliminated any who once sought to stand in his way. He visits them in the early hours of their life, you see, when they are soft and weak and mewling

And then he smothers them in their sleep.

Or he travels farther back and conspires against their conception. Sometimes he will target the father; occasionally the mother. His hatred does not discriminate. More often than not though, he will kill his enemy outright, the better to watch the light leave their eyes. That glassy stare, fixed solely on him…

It only seems right that he should be the last thing they ever see.

Barry Allen is almost an exception to this rule.

Almost.

Barry Allan captivates and frustrates him in equal measure; Eobard loves Barry just as fiercely as he hates him. The boy is cocky and willful and so unbearably bright, a veritable streak of lightning against the greasy backdrop of a vulnerable city. Here one moment, gone the next. Not too unlike the flutter of Eobard’s conscience from time to time—brief, but frustratingly still there.

What Barry is first and foremost therefore is elusive. Eobard has never been able to pin him down for more than a moment before the boy would be up and running again, laugh echoing after him into the night. Honestly though, that had once been a greater part of Barry’s allure, this business of playing hard-to-get, despite the fact that he’s sure Barry never intended it to be that way. This too—this blind innocence—had only served to sweeten the chase.

Oh, the things he wanted to do with Barry Allan…

He has since then grown to loath this shining boy. He is sickened mostly by Barry’s efforts to save all men, no matter their merit; this disagreement on who deserves to live or die has divided them
severely. The boy has pleaded with him on numerous occasions to change his mind, but Eobard remains firm in his beliefs: the future should belong to him, because he has both the power and the will to seize it. What right does a weaker man have to take it from him?

Bitter as he has become, Eobard is still enthralled by the hero who had once inspired him as a child. Often, he is uncertain what he wants to do with his arch nemesis. Strangle him, he supposes; kneel over his lithe figure and slowly squeeze the life out of him. How fitting then that Eobard should be the last thing on Barry’s mind, to fill his vision and consume his final waking thought. A violation of the soul of sorts—to strip the boy of his last defences and crawl into his personal space, to cradle his broken body close to his heart as Barry slowly slipped away…

There is no real alternative, to be sure. He could try bending Barry to his way of thinking, but the boy’s values are as steadfast as his own. The only other option then lies at the far, opposite end of the scale: to completely ruin the boy first before ultimately killing him, to deny him a quick and painless death. He would destroy every single last one of Barry’s loved ones first before coming after Barry himself. Creep into the sanctuary of his home in the dead of night—beat him, molest him, do all manner of unspeakable things to him before putting the boy out of his misery. Maybe Eobard would draw it out a little, keep Barry alive for days. Or maybe Eobard would lose his patience and snap his neck fifteen minutes into his surprise visit.

It would all depend on Barry’s ability to entertain a guest.

In his darker moments, Eobard has come close to fulfilling this fantasy. He knows the people dearest to Barry and he knows how soundly Barry can sleep. It would be so easy…

But perhaps it is love that stays his hand. He can never be certain. Whatever the case may be, Eobard decides, after much deliberation, that he does not, in fact, want to see his once-hero completely unmade. He still wants a part of Barry to continue shining in the childhood image preserved in the back of his mind. To desecrate Barry as such would only ruin it, this last shred of his humanity.

Killing Barry in combat, however, is beginning to look like an impossible feat. That only leaves him with the option of turning the clock back once more and snipping the problem in the proverbial bud, although this eternal battle he has been locked in with the Flash has begun to deplete his energy. He can feel his powers waning daily. If he doesn’t act now, Barry will bleed him dry.

Ultimately, he knows he has no other choice.

Oblivion is the only solution.

~***~

He knows something is wrong long before he exits the wormhole created by the Speed Force.

He had wholly intended to kill Henry Allen—the morning after Henry would have proposed to Nora, in fact, because a small part of Eobard had actually wanted the man to perish in peace. He would have crept up behind Henry as he walked down the driveway to his car, braced Henry’s head between each hand and twisted. Quick and easy. No fuss.

Henry Allen would have died long before he hit the ground.

Instead, Eobard can feel his connection to the Speed Force blinking out of existence near the end of his trip, so he cuts his loses and slows almost to a complete halt. Part of him knows that he is many years too late now—eleven years, to be exact, because Barry Allen has already been born—but there is little he can do to remedy the situation. He is well beyond the point of no return.
Barry Allen will just have to die in his father’s place.

Except, the older Barry Allen is directly behind him, just once step shy of catching Eobard Thawne within the wormhole itself. The boy’s hand brushes his shoulder as Eobard sprints down the street to Barry’s childhood home, keeping up the pace as Eobard slips inside the once quiet abode. Nora is standing there in the kitchen, wine glass in hand, and Barry Allen—the younger Barry Allen is fast asleep in his bed, just a storey above his head.

This is where the real chase begins, this spiral of energy and light, dancing around a woman transfixed with fear. His nemesis knows that his hour has come at last, that tonight might very well be his last night on earth; that he has failed everyone, friends and Eobard alike…

True to his nature, the younger Barry Allen is a victim of his own curiosity. He stumbles into the kitchen shortly and is immediately mesmerized by the flashes of red and yellow weaving back and forth across the room, stopping just outside the circle of light at his mother’s behest. Great danger is at hand, but the boy inches ever closer despite her warning.

Eobard wonders if the boy understands that someone must die here tonight.

Despite Eobard’s best efforts, that someone is not Barry Allen. Eobard is so close, his hand outstretched, the boy paralyzed in fear, when the scarlet speedster intervenes. Barry scoops his younger self up into his arms and vanishes into the darkness, running off to god-knows-where. The other side of the country, for all Eobard knows. Far beyond anywhere he could ever follow now, that much is for certain.

In a fit of rage, he makes due with killing Nora Allan instead.

He doesn’t give it much thought really. The knife is simply there on the counter and she is already whimpering in fear, the only available outlet for his frustration. To be honest, he takes almost all his victims where he finds them, so he doesn’t fight this sudden urge to end her.

Flesh and muscle give way so easily beneath the blade. A solid, satisfying thwack to the chest is all it takes to still her racing heart.

In that instant, it feels so damn good…

But the sliver of what remains of Eobard’s humanity, the tiny bit wedged into the hollow of his own blackened heart, aches a little when she collapses to the floor at his feet. He both regrets this particular murder and relishes in it, for what better way to punish Barry Allen than to sever him from someone he holds most dear? Every action had its consequences, after all. Barry should have realized that long ago when he made it his mission to hound Eobard’s every step.

He clings to the idea that justice has somehow been served by her untimely death when he collapses in the middle of the street outside, the last traces of Barry’s energy signature fading into the night. Travelling forward through time is no longer an option for him; he can’t seem to connect to the Speed Force long enough to get up to speed. This trip has just about completely drained him.

He is stranded.

Eobard is so overwhelmed by the thought he simply kneels there and cries for the first time since he himself was a boy. It has been a long time since Eobard has been this powerless. He had always somehow managed to have a firm grip on the Speed Force...

Eobard hopes that Nora’s murder haunts the boy for the rest of his miserable life. He hopes that not a day will go by that Barry won’t wonder who killed her and why they felt she needed to die. He
hopes it consumes him, that he’s institutionalized from the trauma…

As grief slowly gives way to anger, Eobard rises to his feet. He replaces his mask and tells himself that he has all the time in the world now without his nemesis trailing after him to figure out a way to get home. After all, in rewriting history, the Barry Allen that he knows has been completely wiped from existence. Eobard can now recreate the Flash as he sees fit. His enemy could serve as his ticket home…

But that will require another adjustment to history as it now stands. Two rather remarkable players will therefore have to be dealt with before the week is through:

Harrison Wells and Tess Morgan.

~***~

Harrison Wells and Tess Morgan are the brilliant minds behind S.T.A.R. Laboratories and, by extension, the particular accelerator that will ultimately give Barry Allen his powers as the Flash. Eobard has every paper they published memorized by heart. They were pioneers of their day, really, but their methods are archaic in comparison to what has been accomplished in Eobard’s time. Their research reads like beginner’s algebra—daunting to the newly initiated, but practically child’s play to anyone with half a brain.

Eobard could do their work in his sleep.

Being well-versed in all these trivial publications is a boon to him though, because he needs to shorten the ETA on said work well before the twenty plus years it will take to create the Flash. This essentially means that he will personally have to undertake the many projects they’ll attempt to tackle between now and that fateful day when the accelerator explodes. Without them, of course.

Murdering them is far easier than killing Nora Allen. He respects them, honestly, but more so what they are expected to accomplish in their short lives than as actual human beings. The history books state that they marry and throw themselves entirely into their work; that they don’t ever have children, but are content with their lives the way most people are when they’ve lowered the proverbial bar for themselves.

They’re both terribly mundane.

To be honest, killing Harrison is a little hard, but only because Eobard must absorb part of the man to do so. His body aches as he takes on his physical structure; Eobard has never attempted this trick before. It’s like trying to slip into a suit half a size too small for you, one that’s noticeably tight in the shoulders. It works, certainly, but it doesn’t in any way feel right.

Even worse, he gets a brief glimpse into the man’s mind before the transformation is complete. Fear, pain, anger, sorrow—an overwhelming cocktail of human emotions, coupled by a fading memory: Tess Morgan sitting beneath an umbrella on the beach, holding a napkin upon which S.T.A.R. Labs is drawn out in crude detail. She is smiling because she is in love with him; he is smiling because he is in love with her—

Harrison is in love with her, that is. Not Eobard. He has to remind himself of this fact as he settles into his second skin, the fading memory scaring him far more than he would ever care to admit. The thought that a part of the man’s psyche might live on inside of him is unsettling. With the work Eobard has set out for him, he can’t afford to be bogged down by a second conscience.

Thankfully, the sensation passes as Eobard crawls into the wreckage of Harrison’s car and waits
patiently beside the cooling corpse of Tess Morgan for the police to arrive. She is a beautiful woman, he realizes, even in death. Regardless, he does not love her.

And when the ambulance finally comes to whisk him away, he thinks of her and the old Harrison Wells no more.

~*~

They try to treat him for a concussion and a broken heart, neither of which actually ail him. He’s strongly advised to go to therapy after the incident, but Eobard doesn’t need it. All he requires is a bit of peace and quiet, a moment of solitude so that he can figure out how to go about jump-starting S.T.A.R. Laboratories in Central City.

However, the first hitch in his plan—and perhaps the most severe—comes when he confronts Gideon for a little glance into the future.

The day immediately after the car crash, he had read in the present newspaper that Henry Allen had been arrested for the murder of his wife. While this has only sweetened his revenge against Barry, Eobard’s now concerned how this will actually affect Barry’s becoming the Flash. After all, there were only so many variables Eobard could change before he altered the boy’s future completely.

Initially, he assumes that Detective Joseph West will welcome the boy into his house and home—after all, Barry and Iris West are destined for one another—but pestering Gideon for newspaper articles or police records concerning the boy reveals only two things: first, that Barry Allen will be passed rapidly from foster home to foster home following his father’s incarceration; and, second, that the boy is destined to die a little under a year from today due to neglect.

To say that Eobard is stunned would be an understatement. In fact, for the first time in his life he actually feels a little lightheaded. If Barry Allen does not survive until adulthood, Eobard’s link to the Speed Force will never improve. It’s as simple as that.

As loath as he is to admit it, he needs the Flash.

Why Detective West, of all people, never steps up to bat to save the boy is beyond his understanding. He figures that it must have something to do with the fact that the detective has only recently become a widower himself. Raising one child as a single parent would be a daunting task; he might not feel capable of raising another, let alone one as traumatized as Barry Allen. Regardless of the detective’s excuses though, this leaves Eobard in a considerable bind.

Barry Allen cannot die.

Eobard is therefore left to do, perhaps, the one thing he does best:

He alters the past—albeit not in the way he usually would. Thankfully, technology is still somewhat in the dark ages now; hacking into government files is almost painfully simple. So he invents a person or two to better serve his purposes, and then, when he’s able to tap into his powers for more than a few seconds at a time, changes the physical paper copies on the other side of the country. After all, if anyone should go digging, Eobard needs everything to fall neatly into place.

By the end of it all, he’s changed enough records to properly set the stage, leaving enough digital evidence to suggest that Harrison Wells is a second cousin of the recently departed Nora Allen.

Social Services contact him by the end of the month to ask if he would be interested in caring for her son.
There's a much bigger reason behind why Joe doesn't adopt Barry in this version of altered history, but I'll reveal why a little later on. This will, of course, change some things drastically, but hopefully you'll still enjoy the spin I've taken with this story. Thank you for sticking with me until the end of chapter one.

Fun Fact #1: 'Oubliette' is a French term for dungeon. It's an inescapable pit or trap that is only accessible via a door in the ceiling. Usually, prisoners that people wanted to forget about were usually tossed into an oubliette. Eobard has kind of trapped himself in the past, and Barry is kind of trapped with him, so I thought it was a fitting title for this story.

Fun Fact #2: 'Figlio Perduto' means 'The Lost Son' in Italian. It's actually the name of a song performed by Sarah Brightman about a little boy traveling with his father in the night who suddenly sees the elf king. The elf king tries to lure him away first with kind words, but eventually starts to threaten (and hurt) the boy in an attempt to get the child to leave with him. The boy resists, but is ultimately 'lost'. It's interesting to note, however, that the father never says or does anything to help the boy over the course of the song. It seems that the little boy is the only one who either sees or recognizes the elf king and is therefore the only one who can deal with the problem at hand. Either that, or the father himself is the elf king and the boy cannot come to terms that.
For those held captive

Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to Enina. She is, perhaps, one of the most patient people I know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“For all seafarers and travelers,

for the sick and the suffering,

and for those held captive,

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.”

~A prayer, from the Divine Liturgy (“…of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom”)

~***~

The Barry Allen he once knew had a habit of running his mouth.

Barry never missed an opportunity to lecture Eobard, although he supposes he should’ve been flattered. Other than Leonard Snart, Barry never really tried to sway any of his other enemies to the right side of the law.

Whether Barry was motivated more out of fear or respect matters little to him. The fact that the Flash made any attempt to appeal to Eobard’s better nature only reinforces his theory that he was never alone in toying with the idea that they would’ve worked well together. Even if Barry never openly admitted it, some part of the boy recognized that they were truly equals, enough so that he made an honest effort strike up a conversation with Eobard between bouts of trying to kill one another.

The eleven-year-old Barry Allen currently sitting at the little breakfast nook in one Mrs. McCarthy’s kitchen is about as talkative as the dead.

The woman currently fostering him has put a plate of chocolate chip cookies out in front of Barry and the two little girls seated to his left. The girls tear right into the treat but Barry simply sits there, pale-faced, staring down at the table in utter silence, effectively shutting his self out from the rest of the conscious world.

Eobard can’t exactly blame him. Given how drastically Barry’s life has changed in the last couple of weeks, a brief escape from reality is probably just what the doctor ordered.

However, Barry’s apathy might also be due in part to the fact that the old woman taking care of him is a bit of a sociopath. It takes one to know one, after all, although Eobard shouldn’t be so surprised. It’s pretty much common knowledge that there’s an inherent flaw in the foster system that can’t quite be fixed:
Children in distress really do attract the worst sort of attention.

“I have three children of my own,” Mrs. McCarthy says in an half-hearted attempt to make a little small talk between them. The sixty-year-old woman is currently leaning against the kitchen counter beside Eobard, steely gaze focused intently on Barry. Eobard can tell just by the look of her that she’s a real firm-handed bitch. “One is a doctor and two are teachers. All girls, mind you. I think I work better with the girls. Boys? Well…boys are too headstrong, you know. Were you a headstrong boy, Mr…?”

“Dr. Wells,” he replies, putting the slightest emphasis on the appellation. “And yes…you could almost say I was a little stubborn.”

“You turned out alright enough, I suppose.” She lifts a weathered hand to her mouth to chew on a jagged nail, made brittle by time. “I will admit though, I don’t know if you’ll be able to help our little Bartholomew here. You recently lost your fiancé, didn’t you? How’s a man supposed to take care of a child all on his own?”

Bartholomew. It’s a ridiculous name, though Eobard knows he shouldn’t be one to talk. He would laugh except he’s already in a poor enough mood having to be there in the first place, saving his long-time enemy from the clutches of some old hag. She isn’t the one destined to kill Barry, but Eobard’s irked enough by the woman’s attitude that it takes a considerable amount of self-control not to strike her across the face.

“I’ll manage,” he says instead, outwardly composed despite his irritation. “Barry is family, after all. I’ll find a way to make it work.”

“But you hardly know him.”

He does, actually—possibly better than the boy knows himself, although it’s likely that Eobard will be introduced to an entirely different side of the future hero over the coming years. To be honest, he’s looking forward to seeing whether Barry’s current family crisis has any effect on his deep-seated sense of altruism. Wouldn’t it be a lark if that were somehow lost... “Only a fool fears the unknown, ma’am.”

Mildly irritated, she gives him an odd sort of condescending shrug before returning her focus to the boy. Eobard is quietly pleased that he’s at least able to irk her as much as she has him, although he knows that this small victory is shorted lived when the woman suddenly opens her mouth to bestow yet another pearl of infinite wisdom upon him.

She is blessedly interrupted by the sudden appearance of the social worker, a young woman who’d been checking up on an older girl watching cartoons in the adjacent room. She’s a perky little thing, fresh out of college and brimming with good will, but she grates on Eobard’s nerves just about as badly as the foster woman with her perpetual smile and high-pitched voice, too immature in his opinion to handle the work she’s set out to do with these children.

Eobard wonders not for the first time if his being here isn’t just some sort of nightmare.

“Hello again, Barry!” the social worker chirps as she squats down beside his chair. Barry inclines his head slightly to look at her, exerting the minimal effort it takes to acknowledge the presence of another human being. “It’s been a while, huh? Well, remember how I said there was someone special I wanted to introduce you to…?”

Barry’s impassive gaze falls on Eobard then; Eobard’s stomach does a little flip. He’s not sure why. There’s no way in hell the boy could recognize him in this skin.
“Harrison,” Barry replies, seemingly tasting the name. Frowning. Confused. “You don’t look like my mom…”

“We’re only distantly related,” Eobard says by way of explanation. “Your mother and I share the same great-grandparents.”

“Oh.” Barry’s frown slowly dissipates. Eobard can feel his own tension fading with it. “Have you ever met my mom in person?”

“A few times,” he lies, “when we were younger. Long before she met your father.”

Barry nods once in understanding. Then he pushes his chair back from the table and rises slowly to his feet. Addressing the social worker, he asks, “Does this mean I get to go now?”

“Just as soon as we finish packing your things,” the social worker replies. “Is there anyone you want to say goodbye to first, sweetie?”

As if on cue, both girls stop munching on their cookies to stare at Mrs. McCarthy as Barry says, definitively, “No.”

The foster woman arches an eyebrow in indignation, but the social worker merely shrugs off the slight with a small grimace before leading Barry out of the kitchen. Eobard flashes the old woman a too-bright smile before following after them.

Barry hadn’t brought too many things with him, most likely due to the fact that his current bedroom doubled as an old office and storage closet. As such, he shared half the space with a large computer desk and a rack of winter coats. The girls shared two rooms between themselves upstairs, although these were more appropriately furnished.

“Maybe no more boys for Mrs. McCarthy in the future,” Eobard suggests sotto voce from Barry’s bedroom doorway as the social worker crams one last t-shirt into his small suitcase. Barry had already packed most of his things the day before when he was informed that ‘Harrison’ was coming to take him away, although he doesn’t look as particularly excited to go now as Eobard was expecting.

“Maybe,” the social worker mutters reluctantly. “Annie’s tough, but she and her husband have taken care of many foster children over the years. Barry’s the twelfth. I’m sure he’s had at least a little fun in the time that he’s been here…?”

Barry flashes her a look of long-suffering. To see that familiar expression on such a small face, one which Barry exercised so often on Eobard in another life, startles a laugh out of the man.

When both Barry and the social worker turn to look at him in confusion, Eobard tries to mask his unexpected outburst as a bark of disdain. “Given all that Barry’s been through recently, I don’t imagine he’s been having much fun.”

“See—I told you he was understanding!” the social worker exclaims, giving Barry a comforting pat on the back. “I think the two of you will get along swimmingly.”

“He lives in Starling,” is Barry’s solemn response.

Ah. Yes…That must be the deal-breaker then.

Barry obviously thought that he was being relocated 600 miles away from his father. Permanently.
Eobard is aware that Barry already run away twice in an attempt to visit Iron Heights. During the second incident, Det. West had been forced to drag him home personally. Since then, Barry had decided that the best course of action was probably to stay put, but it was obvious that his foster mother hadn’t been too amused by his antics. Taken together with his ramblings of a ‘man in the lightning’, it was no wonder the old hag hated him so much.

Eobard was, at the very least, prepared for this little hiccup. In fact, he held off on picking up Barry until he could be certain of the facts himself... “Over the course of the last year or so, I’ve been making plans to move my lab to Central City, Barry. We’ll be in Starling for the next couple of months while I prepare my staff and students for the transition, but I promise you that we’ll drive down to visit your father as often as possible in the interim. Once we’re permanently settled in Central City, you can see him whenever you want.”

Barry first looks conflicted, as though he can’t quite believe this is true, then a little relieved. “We’re…coming back?”

“Hopefully before the start of September. I want to keep you enrolled in the same school. Unless, of course, you’d rather attend somewhere else…”?

“No,” Barry replies quickly. “Please, no—I miss my friends.”

“Then it’s a deal?”

“God, yes.”

“Language,” the social worker admonishes. To Eobard, she says, “According to Annie, he’s taken to swearing lately. Don’t let him keep it up, okay?”

Barry rolls his eyes in exasperation, but doesn’t bother arguing.

The boy hikes his knapsack up over his shoulder then and slips past Eobard into the hall. Eobard takes the suitcase from the social worker and turns to follow him—only to be stopped by the hand on his arm.

“I know that’s it going to be difficult for you, given that you yourself are suffering a personal loss,” the social worker says quietly, “but Barry has been having…trouble opening up to the therapist. This isn’t something that’s going to go away in a couple of days. If you have any lingering doubts, this is your last chance…”

He’s been hurdling through hoops even since he was first contacted about Barry—convincing Social Services that he was capable of caring for a child on his own despite the death of Tess Morgan had been quite the feat. As it now stood, he would also have to attend therapy as proof that he was making every effort to become the best possible father figure for the boy. Despite the colossal waste of time that promised to be, well…he was willing to do it. He was willing to do just about anything really to get back home.

Eobard gently removes her hand, offering a small smile in return. “Miss Greyson, I wholly intend to keep Barry, for better or for worse. I promise you, nothing is going to deter me from helping that boy achieve the brightest future possible.”

“He’s lucky to have you.”

“I’m as equally fortunate to have him.”
“Then I guess this is it.” The young woman looks a little forlorn suddenly. “We’ll be in contact. Someone in Starling will pay you a visit soon, but we won’t be breathing down your neck forever. Once you get into the swing of things, we’ll gradually back off.”

“Visit however often you like.”

“Sheela will probably call in a while about the actual adoption process.” She shifts nervously from one foot to the other. Her agitation is starting to grate on his nerves, but he’s careful not to let it show. “Tread carefully when you mention the adoption to Barry though. He knows there’s a difference between being a foster child and being adopted, and…well, he’s truly terrified that you’re going to separate him from his father.”

Eobard has every intention of letting Barry visit the man regularly, but he’s been debating whether or not he should slowly wean the boy off this habit over the course of the next couple of years. Eobard doesn’t quite understand the extent to which this whole affair with Nora Allen has changed her husband. Henry might want to distance himself from Barry completely to spare the boy from further heartbreak—or he might insist on being a very active member in Barry’s upbringing, at least as much as one man can be from behind bars. Ultimately, Eobard will always have the last word on what happens to Barry from this day forth, but there’s no telling how the boy’s altered relationship with his biological father will affect his ability to become the Flash.

Eobard will just have to wait and see; play it out as it goes. At least he has Gideon to keep him on the straight and narrow.

Speaking of which, the sooner they return to Starling City, the sooner Eobard can check in with Gideon. After all, there’s no guarantee that his coming here today to save Barry will in any way support the future he wants the boy to achieve. His efforts might be all for naught.

“Henry and I are going to have many long conversations on how best to proceed,” he replies. “Despite what the public thinks of him, I believe Henry Allen loves his son immensely.”

The social worker smiles weakly at him. Eobard can tell that she still feels uncomfortable about something, but he has an eight hour drive ahead of him and a meeting with Gideon before the day is through, so he flashes her one last smile before heading outside to join Barry in the car.

The boy has already climbed into the back of the old blue Cadillac that once belonged to Tess Morgan, his knapsack lying sideways on the seat beside him. He still looks a little out of it, but he makes an honest effort to return the wave the girls give him when they flood outside onto the front lawn to see him off.

Mrs. McCarthy watches Eobard coolly from the porch as he tosses the suitcase into the trunk. He can feel her eyes trailing after him as he slips into the driver’s seat, but he refuses to return her gaze. As far as he’s concerned, she no longer exists in his world. She is minor blimp in this alternate timeline. An anomaly.

With any luck, they’ll never cross paths again.

Finally free of the woman, Eobard turns the key in the ignition and pauses to take a brief glance at the little boy in his rear-view mirror.

He wonders if Barry will ever realize how close he’s come to yet another premature death.

~***~
Eobard is a man of great passion. As such, he's always had something of a temper. When it flares up inside him, this ebullient rage, it removes him from his rational self, severing the fragile fibers of his restraint. He is gracelessly unmade. He becomes a lesser thing.

He has regretted many of the decisions made in such a state, but rarely does he fight the rage when it wells up inside him. Why bother when he has the means to undo all his mistakes? He could start the whole day over if he so desired. He could rewrite the lives of millions.

Not anymore though.

He cannot afford another great outburst now that he is a prisoner of the present time. He will have to keep it all in check, in front of Barry at the very least, the greatest source of his misery. The irony in that is not lost on him. He expects then that he will inevitably lose his temper en route to Starling City, that a wayward traveler and a homesick boy trapped in a small steel box together are doomed to argue at some point given the great injustices that have been delivered upon them both. Their mutual hatred will soon ignite, as it always has before.

But it doesn’t.

Eobard steals glances at him from time to time in the rear-view mirror. Once they’re outside the city limits, Barry pulls out a book from his knapsack, a piece on astronomy with a glossy hard cover and a spine that creaks when he opens it, most likely a recent gift; most likely from Iris West. Barry only flips through its pages for half an hour before he loses interest. Then he leans his head against the backseat window and, eyes slowly drooping shut, promptly falls asleep.

As far as future heroes go, Barry is rather…unremarkable.

Despite this, Eobard is curious. And confused. He can’t exactly explain why. He was expecting a hundred questions from the boy. Perhaps a few tears. Maybe that will come a little later when they arrive at their destination? Or perhaps Barry has already become a mild-mannered person at the ripe old age of eleven, newly orphaned, too exhausted by his grief to put up much of a fight against anyone anymore…

For once, Eobard does not feel compelled to kill him.

That is not to say his hatred of the boy has been extinguished. Once fevered, it has now simply turned cold. It sits like a stone in the pit of his stomach; irritating, but bearable.

This, he thinks, he can probably manage.

So he lets Barry sleep for the two and half hours it takes to reach the first pit stop. He could go longer, but he needs to stretch his legs. There’s also the small issue of food. Given how thoroughly the Speed Force has screwed him over during this little sojourn into the past, he’s surprised that his increased metabolism has not once abandoned him in his time of need.

He doesn’t wake Barry until he’s filled his tank with gas and pulled into the parking lot of a fast food joint. He’s been made aware by Social Services that Barry has been having nightmares lately, and that, as a consequence, it’s made him lethargic during the day. While Barry’s suffering is all that he’s ever really yearned for, he’s not exactly eager now to see how it will affect the boy’s attitude toward a new caretaker. Even so, he can’t let the boy sleep the day away.

After he’s had a moment to collect his thoughts, Eobard turns around in the driver’s seat and gives Barry’s knee a gentle prod, watching as the boy’s eyes slowly flutter open.

Barry frowns at him briefly in confusion before his expression shifts to blatant disappointment. He
might have been dreaming of his family just then. Or maybe just Iris. Whatever the case may be, it’s clear to Eobard that Barry had forgotten, at least for a short while, the disaster that had befallen his family.

Eobard cares little for the Allens as a whole, but he still sits there patiently as Barry makes a gradual return to reality. Once again, he’s struck by the strange sensation of looking at this little boy and seeing the familiar features of his old foe. He had always thought of the older Barry Allen as something of a child. An imp, really. Now though…god, he looks so small and fragile. Even the quizzical arch of his eyebrow as he wonders why Eobard is staring at him so intently, a perfect likeness of his older self…

All of it just makes Eobard want to laugh again.

And he does when Barry scowls at him, because this particular look has always been a favorite of his.

“Why are you laughing?”

“I’ve never taken care of a child before,” he replies honestly. He has never wanted to take care of a child before either, but needs must. “I didn’t realize you would be so little.”

“I’ll grow up someday,” Barry mutters.

“True…” Eobard nods his head at the small burger joint outside “…but growth requires sustenance. Aren’t you hungry?”

“I guess.” Barry glances out the window, wincing as something in his neck pops. “How long did I sleep?”

“Long enough.” Eobard twists back around in his seat and shoves open the driver’s side door. “Come on. We’ve got another four hours before the next stop. You’ll starve before then.”

As it turns out, Barry eats like a bird.

The boy has no idea how ravenous he’ll be on a daily basis after the lightning strikes. Now, however, Barry simply sits there nibbling on his cheeseburger as Eobard packs away three hamburgers—no condiments or toppings, just the incredible flavour of beef. Savory. Umami. A firing of the glutamate receptors on the tongue…

Eobard is pleasantly surprised that the Past finally has something to offer him that the Future never could.

He finishes his meal by the time Barry is only halfway through his burger, staring at Eobard in a bit of wide-eyed wonder. “Where does it all go…?”

“I expend a lot of energy in a day,” he says by way of an explanation.

Barry doesn’t look the least but convinced. “By driving?”

“…When you’re older, you’ll understand.”

Barry gives him the same incredulous look when they stop for another meal four hours later, but sagely keeps his opinion to himself.

~*~*~*~
Tess Morgan inherited her father’s home before meeting Harrison Wells, a modest two-storey house she’d inhabited alone with her fiancé when they first got engaged. It has three bedrooms, two upstairs and one on the main floor, which Eobard has long since converted into an office. Gideon lives there, in a sense. He’d modified an old laptop to house the A.I., the better to recharge her during the day, although he misses having her at his beck and call on his wrist.

He’s dying to talk to her now, to see if the extraordinary effort he’s made to secure Barry’s future has in any way altered it from the dismal ending originally intended for the boy. But he can’t do that when the boy is wandering freely through the house. In hindsight, Eobard really shouldn’t have let him sleep the whole ride over.

Then again, Barry looks pretty much dead on his feet after climbing the stairs to the second floor. With any luck, he’ll pass out once he hits the bed.

Otherwise, Eobard’s not above sedating him.

“You look about ready to drop,” Eobard points out, glancing up at the clock above the little desk in Barry’s new bedroom. It’s only 7 pm, but he needs the kid out of the way, at least for a short while. “Do you want a drink? A snack?”

“A snack?” Barry asks, genuinely surprised. He deposits his knapsack in the corner next to his suitcase and then turns around to sit on the bed. “I’m pretty sure you ate a whole cow today.”

Eobard feels mildly insulted, but lets the comment slide. “You do realize I’m not going to allow you to starve yourself, right? Not unless you want Social Services to drag you back to that woman…”

“I’ll eat tomorrow,” Barry mutters as he lies back on the bed, staring up at the ceiling as he dangles his legs over the edge. “I can’t today.”

‘Can’t’ is a rather peculiar word. Why ‘can’t’ you?”

“I’m nervous.”

“And what exactly are you nervous about?”

“That maybe you were lying.”

That familiar sense of unease starts creeping up on Eobard again. He wonders if it will always feel this way whenever Barry questions his honesty. “Lying about what in particular?”

“Going back to Central City.” Barry glances at Eobard out of the corner of his eye, watching as the man slowly sits down beside him on the bed. “My dad had his own office there, but my mom told me it took him years before he could afford to quit working at the hospital.”

“A doctor’s office is a bit different than a laboratory, Barry.” He crosses one leg over the other, idly watching as Barry gently kicks his feet out rhythmically, one after the other. So much nervous energy… “For starters, there are several people invested in my little endeavour, all of whom want this to be a quick and easy transition. It won’t happen in a day, I’ll admit to that, but we’re going back sooner than you think. You have my word.”

Barry closes his eyes, seeming to give serious thought to his proposal. “…Okay.”

“Okay?”

“I believe you.”
Likely not, but Eobard knows, given time, that Barry will gradually learn to trust him. Being the only caregiver in Barry’s life for the foreseeable future, the boy really has no choice but to trust him.

“Are you falling asleep again?” he asks after a moment, almost hopeful.

“No,” Barry replies, suddenly opening his eyes. “I think I’ll read for a bit.”

*Pft.* Perfectly unpredictable.

As usual.

“I’m going to make you some hot chocolate,” Eobard decides aloud. When Barry opens his mouth to protest, he holds up a finger to stop him short. “Try to finish that at least. It’s my own special recipe. I can guarantee you’ve never tasted anything like it before.”

Barry does, in fact, admit that it tastes a little sweeter than anything his mother used to make. He actually polishes off the cup rather quickly after he’s finished unpacking his things and has settled comfortably on his bed, his new book on astronomy propped open on his lap.

Then the chloral hydrate blessedly kicks in.

~***~

Eobard doesn’t realize how nervous he is until he’s reaching out to open the laptop in his office and notices that his hand is literally vibrating. He makes a fist to rein his powers in, but he can still feel it thrumming beneath the surface of his skin.

Tentative as he is to see this as a sign of hope, he feels as though his connection to the Speed Force has finally begun to strengthen again.

Once he’s had a moment to collect himself, he lets Gideon out of the proverbial box. Her hologram flickers to life immediately between the blank screen and the keyboard and offers him a small ‘Hello, Dr. Wells’ even though she recognizes who he really is beneath the mask. Eobard had instructed her before heading out to Central City to no longer refer to him by his real name lest she fall into the wrong hands, namely the unconscious child upstairs. Not that he plans on leaving her anywhere Barry could find her, but he knows that the future forensic will want to nose around the house sooner or later.

“Give it to me straight, Gideon.” He takes off his glasses to rub his eyes. He’d popped out the prescription lenses a while ago and replaced them with regular glass, but the plastic frame irritates him to no end. He really can’t stand having something constantly resting against his face.

“The first article to be published on the Flash is dated fourteen years, nine months, five days, twelve hours, and fifty-two seconds from the present time.”

Eobard feels something clench inside his chest. In a good sort of way. Like raw excitement, the kind that almost makes you sick to your stomach. “Oh?”

“Would you like to read it?”

“Actually…” He knows he shouldn’t—he really shouldn’t, but he’s just dying to know… “Show me the Crisis.”

A hologram depicting the first page of *The Central City Citizen*, April 25 2024, pops up in place of Gideon’s head. “FLASH MISSING IN CRISIS” is written in bold black letters above an image of the
hero in question.

Eobard slumps in his chair in relief. God, yes...It was a little earlier than he remembered, but that’s fine with him, honestly. So long as the Flash exists, he still has a shot at getting home.

“A little over fourteen years until the first article on the Flash, huh? I don’t want you to tell me the exact details, Gideon, but I’m assuming that a certain particle accelerator goes haywire a couple of months just prior to that?”

“That is correct.”

“Very good… Thank you, Gideon. That will be all.”

The hologram vanishes. Eobard slowly replaces the spectacles on his face. It would appear then that he made the right decision in taking Barry into his care.

For the first time, he wonders if this was not how their relationship was always supposed to be—that he, the admirer, was somehow destined to give shape to the Flash, his idol. Wasn’t that the nature of all art? A sculpture and its creator might be cherished together by millions across the centuries, but the sculpture is nothing more than a lump of stone without the artist, the man who bleeds beauty from nothing. Similarly, Eobard is now destined to seed the storm that will one day electrify every atom in Barry Allen's body, giving birth to the Flash; giving birth in turn to his Reverse.

If this isn’t destiny, he doesn’t know what is.

But he tries not to let this idea get to his head. He will have to play the game very carefully if he is going to survive the next fourteen or so years in Barry’s constant company without revealing the truth or somehow faltering in his quest to remake the Flash. He will have to keep his temper in check. He will have to truly invest himself in Barry’s continued well-being. He will have to find a way to collect the brightest minds of this century to piece together the particle accelerator well before its time.

He can do it though. All of it.

Somehow, he will manage.

It’s only 7:32pm when he closes the laptop and locks the door to his office, but he climbs the stairs feeling about as exhausted as his new ward, wholly intent on calling it a day. He checks up on Barry one last time, mostly because it’s starting to dawn on him that he has, in less modest terms, pretty much kidnapped this child to serve as a gateway to the future, but now that he has him...genuinely has him...

Eobard knows he’s going to sleep soundly tonight.

Chapter End Notes

First off, I promise you, Eobard is not going to sedate Barry silly every night of their continued cohabitation. He's in the middle of an adjustment period. He just needs time to figure things out. Having said that though, please don't ever let your guard down around the man. He's a sociopath to the core. He might just sedate you too---or stick his arm through your heart, since, you know, that's pretty much his thing...
As for fun facts:

(1) I live in Canada, so I realize that Social Services/the Foster System differs here in comparison to how things are operated elsewhere in the world. Also, I don't actually work for either organization, so if you do and you happen see any glaring mistakes, I will humbly listen to whatever you have to say. I try to be accurate when I write, so I'm never upset when people speak up to correct me.

(2) "Chloral hydrate" is an actual sedative that they give to children. Usually before surgical operations, but it can also be administered orally to help with insomnia. I image Eobard would consider stealing a bottle prior to picking up Barry. Because, you know, he's has no clue how to take care of a child like a normal human being.

(3) I won't be writing everything that happens throughout Barry's childhood, because, let's face it, that would make for a very long story, but there are important things that I want to set up for the story prior to jumping back to 2014. Such as the impending rift between 'Harrison' and Tine Mcfee, the introduction of General Eiling, and, most importantly, Barry's altered relationship with the Wests...

That's all for now. Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed the chapter.
An Allen by any other name

Chapter Notes

This chapter was generously brought to you by my summer flu, which has kept me bedridden for over a week now. Seriously, I didn't know that was a thing. It's really hard just lying in bed when you're sweating like a sinner in church.

Curse you, warm weather...curse you...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Names have power.”
~Rick Riordan (The Lightning Thief)

~*~

Often, he dreams of home.

Not the home he was born into, but the one which he made for himself.

Though the people of the 22nd century would like to consider themselves technologically avant-garde, Eobard has always preferred the scientific atmosphere of the 25th. Granted, the farthest he’s travelled yet is the year 2452, but he lives by the stupidly optimistic adage of ‘the future is always brighter’, because experience has taught him well enough by now that all things are inevitably replaced by something grander.

Eobard himself was engineered in the year 2151. His parents were particular in what they wanted in a son: Aryan features, a sharp mind, determination. However, they hadn’t banked on the fact that he would develop an overactive imagination or withering social skills, traits which were seen as shortcomings in the highly disciplined society he had been made part of. Upon the advice of his therapist, they therefore sought to remedy the situation with the birth of their second son, someone who could become a playmate of sorts for their eldest child.

Robern had been a sweet boy. He was boisterous, outspoken, and playful, and in his later years he had become a rather remarkable cop. He could do no wrong, so far as their parents were concerned.

If Robern had been content with the place he had carved for himself in the world, he would have lived a long and prosperous life. As an officer of the law however, Robern had a knack for quashing Eobard’s ambitions in a way that was truly unique to anyone he had ever encountered before—with, perhaps, the exception of the Flash.

Robern had therefore been his first victim. Not in cold blooded murder, of course, but erasing his brother from existence was a heavy sentence all the same. A painless passing though, if he was to be completely honest with himself—the greatest he could ever afford an enemy. No heartache, no grief. Not even a cry in the wind…

Their parents certainly didn’t miss him.
Eobard tries hard not to think of his brother now. Robern cannot be expunged from the universe until every memory of him is dead and gone, including those few bright images of the boy trapped in the darker recesses of Eobard’s mind. He has done it before with the others. It just takes a little practice.

Although, it is exceedingly difficult not to think back on all the people he has seamlessly removed from his life when Dr. Tina McFee bursts into his laboratory one sunny Friday afternoon, demanding to have a word with him in private.

Ever since he concocted the idea of taking on Harrison’s identity, he knew she would be a thorn in his side. He’ll eventually cut all ties with her, but she knows the real Harrison too well. She of all people could potentially see through his carefully constructed façade.

If she pieces together this mystery, he will have no choice but to kill her.

“Good afternoon, Tina,” Greg Bossini, one of his PhD students, offers weakly from his bench nearby the door. Like most of the other students working under Harrison’s tutelage, he is scrambling to finish his Thesis in time to graduate before Eobard moves the lab to Central. Of the twelve people he currently supervises, only one Post-Doc and two lab techs will continue working with him in the other gem city.

“Hello, Greg,” Tina replies curtly. To Eobard, she says, “A word, if you don’t mind?”

Eobard smiles tightly at her as he rises from his seat. Giving Greg a comforting pat on the back, he says, “One of the undergrads hasn’t been balancing the centrifuge properly. Make sure no one uses it until Tom can take a look at it tomorrow, yeah?”

“Was it Kristy?” Greg asks, quite obviously peeved.

“I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“Now, Harrison,” Tina snaps impatiently before waltzing off to his office at the back of the lab, high heels tapping viciously against the linoleum.

Sighing, Eobard trudges along after her.

She lets herself into his office without a word and situates herself beside his window, taking a moment to stare out across the grassy quad toward the university’s newly erected sports centre. She glances at him out of the corner of her eye as he enters the room, cutting him a cold look as he quietly closes the door. It’s obvious that she’s trying to keep her fury from bubbling over, but Eobard knows that it’s only a manner of time before she finally explodes.

Resigned to his fate, Eobard drops into the chair behind his desk. He gestures for Tina to take a seat across from him, but she remains standing, arms crossed. She moves a few steps closer to him though, looming like the god of wrath.

“I have tried to be understanding, Harrison,” she begins. “I know that losing Tess has not been easy on you, but the impromptu call I received from Dr. Ferguson this morning was completely unacceptable.”

“I wholly intended to tell you myself once everything was confirmed,” Eobard replies. “I did not want you to hear about it second hand.”

“I don’t care who I heard it from.” She pauses for a moment here, lifting her hand to cover her mouth, eyes closed; it’s quite obvious the strain she’s under to keep herself composed. “You and I… how many years have we been colleagues?”
Eobard has to think on it for a second. “Nearly fifteen now, I believe.”

“And how many projects have we collaborated on?”

“Countless.”

“And countless more in the years to come,” she mutters. “Or at least that’s what I had assumed when Tess asked me to make the move with you to Central University. Half of my staff is already down there at the new facility, you know. Why then am I only learning now that you turned down your position?”

“I was offered a better deal elsewhere,” he replies. If he’s doomed to sit through one of her jeremiads, he’d much rather rip off the proverbial bandage now and get to the meat of the matter already.

As is to be expected, Tina looks completely shocked by his admission. She takes yet another step closer to him then and uncrosses her arms in favour of bracing her hands against his desk—the better to lean forward and into his personal space.

Eobard doesn’t budge an inch.

“By whom?” she asks, voice dangerously low.

Feeling just the slightest bit vindictive, he says, “I’m not at the liberty to say.”

“Why the bloody hell not?”

“I’ve been asked not to share the details with anyone just yet.” She didn’t need to know what this deal entailed, nor did she need to know anything about the numerous investments he’d made since taking over Harrison’s identity. S.T.A.R. Labs, though not yet fully formed, was now a well-funded development, better than it could have ever been on the money garnered from Harrison’s and Tina’s future research endeavours alone. Eobard didn’t need a university backing him to get what he wanted. In fact, their strict regulations would only hinder him.

Eobard is working on a tight schedule, after all.

“I’m assuming it’s safe to say that you and I will no longer be working together then?”

“You can come with me.” He replies, only half-joking. While it would be exceedingly dangerous to keep her so close at hand, the tachyon technology she is destined to one day develop would be well worth the risk. “If you give me a year, I think I could possibly make it work.”

Tina only rolls her eyes. “You are not the same man I would’ve trusted three months ago.”

“People change.”

“Sometimes in the worst way.” She backs away then and finally takes a seat. She’s changing tactics now, trying to look more exasperated than anything else, but he knows that she’s still trying to dig for the truth. “You used to enjoy it, you know. The teaching, the students… You once told me that the greatest gift you could give the future was itself. You said you wanted to equip your students with the knowledge to improve the world beyond anything you could’ve ever hoped to accomplish in your short lifetime.”

“Maybe I’m only now just realizing that it can be accomplished well within my lifetime.”
Tina looks at him sadly for a moment. “That’s the grief speaking, Harrison. It’s hard not to be reminded of your own mortality when you lose the person closest to you.”

“Tess used to tell me that I shouldn’t be afraid to seize any opportunity to build a better tomorrow.”

“She certainly didn’t intend you to do that at the expense of isolating yourself from your friends, Harrison.”

“I’m not isolated,” he argues. Irritated, he tosses his glasses down on the table between them, pinching the bridge of his nose. He can feel a migraine mounting behind his eyes.

Tina’s expression suddenly turns cold again. “I almost forgot—you have a new project stewing at home. You’ve lost one loved one, so you’ve auditioned someone else for the part.”

“His name is Barry.”

“You have no business caring for that boy and you know it.” Tina’s eyes drift back to the window, to the sunny sky trapped behind the pane of glass. Eobard realizes belatedly that it is getting rather hot and stuffy in this little room. “You’ve both suffered a tragic lose. He needs stability, the kind you’re not capable of offering to him right now.”

“Without me, he wouldn’t survive.”

Tina flashes him an admonishing look, as though he’s just made an awful joke. Then it slowly dawns on her that he couldn’t be more serious. “Give me a break, Harrison. The foster system is not a death sentence.”

“You have no business caring for that boy and you know it.” Tina’s eyes drift back to the window, to the sunny sky trapped behind the pane of glass. Eobard realizes belatedly that it is getting rather hot and stuffy in this little room. “You’ve both suffered a tragic lose. He needs stability, the kind you’re not capable of offering to him right now.”

“You have no idea what’s going on with that boy right now.” Slowly he picks up his glasses, replacing them on his face. “He’s stuck inside his shell, but I’m slowly coaxing him out again. Because I’ve suffered a similar ordeal, he knows he can trust me when I say that I understand exactly what he’s been going through.”

“How’s a man supposed to help a child through the healing process when he himself is in denial of his own grief? You’re really are a fool if you think this is going to end well.”

“My therapist says otherwise.”

“Your therapist has only just met you,” she mutters. “You openly wept when you discovered you couldn’t have children. You’ve only shed half as many tears over Tess’s passing.”

That little tidbit of information genuinely surprises him.

The thought that this body might somehow be…defective feels like a punch to the gut. Not that he ever aspired to have biological children, but having taken this form and fused it with his own, unknowing of such a glaring flaw, feels like a violation. Of course, Tina’s wording is imprecise—by ‘you’ she could have easily been referring to either Harrison or Tess, but the possibility alone…

This small revelation deeply unsettles him, and it becomes openly apparent to Tina when Eobard straightens his glasses, hand trembling ever so slightly as he steadies the plastic frame on his face. It seems to temper her though, seeing this human side of him, even if he never had any intention of showing her his soft underbelly today.

“Harrison…” she sighs, “I’m not accusing you of being heartless. All I want is for you to take a step back and look at how you’re dealing with this situation. I’ve never known you to make rash decisions before. It’s…well, it’s truly terrifying.”
“Thank you for your concern, Tina.” He licks his lips, trying to think of a way to bring this conversation to a close. He doesn’t feel comfortable bickering with her anymore after his brief moment of weakness. “I understand what you’re saying, and I’m not telling you that you’re wrong, but I believe that people grieve in different ways.”

“Then grieve already.”

“I am,” he hisses. “Should I start bawling right here in the office? Would that satisfy you?”

“Actually, you could start by telling me what exactly happened to you after that accident.”

Eobard is getting sick of this game already, but he tries to think back on that night anyway—not from his own perspective, but that of Harrison’s. Faintly, he can still conjure up the man’s dying thought, the image of Tess Morgan on the beach smiling at her fiancé. Even though he was afraid to die, his love for that woman pierced the barrier of his fear, bleeding out into the forefront of his mind.

“…I woke up one morning to discover that my best friend was gone forever,” Eobard replies. “All I have left of her are a few photographs and her dream. I don’t expect you to understand what that feels like.”

Tina sighs heavily at him. Doesn’t say anything, just sits there, chewing on her lower lip, as though he’s finally stumped her once and for all. He can practically hear the gears turning inside her head. Finally, she rises from her seat, tugging sharply at the bottom of her suit jacket to straighten it out. “This conversation between us is far from over.”

“Same time Monday then?” he asks sarcastically.

She arches an eyebrow in agitation but chooses not to push the subject further. He knows she’ll want to stew over what he’s said for a while, come up with a new tactic to unnerve him later.

Tina turns toward the door, but stops halfway there to ask, “Where is the boy anyway? I was told you only took a week off to help him settle in.”

“Science summer camp,” he replies, glancing up at his office clock, “which ends in about fifteen minutes. The therapist said I should get him back into the habit of playing with other children.”

“Barry, hm?” Tina continues her short trek to the door, but pauses with her hand hovering over the knob. Frowning, she says, “I thought you had no living relatives in North America. Is he a foreigner then?”

“What? No. Apparently his mother lived in Central City all her life.”

“Small world…What’s his surname?”

“‘Wells’, once the paperwork goes through.”

She looks mildly irritated at his response, but says nothing of it before finally disappearing through the door.

Eobard knows that she will never let him live down this betrayal. She doesn’t know that he has the military funding a large portion of his research now, but telling her that won’t mollify her in the least. She’s a pacifist. So is Eobard, technically, but he knows how far he can support the military’s projects before he’ll be forced to steer them quietly in a safer direction. He has everything under control.
He takes off his glasses again to rub his eyes. There’s a small stack of files on the corner of his desk containing all of Barry’s information, including the adoption forms. He’s had a couple of visits from Social Services so far, all of which he thinks went spectacularly well. As angry as the boy has been in the last little while, he’s generally quiet and well-behaved. Intuitively, he seems to realize that life will be easier for him if he remains on Eobard’s good side.

As for the topic of his surname, well…Eobard has given a great deal of consideration to whether or not Barry should keep it. Ultimately though, he’s decided that it will have to go. He really doesn’t want the public focusing on Barry’s association with a murderer while he’s trying to build a reputation for himself as Harrison Wells.

Of course, *Barry* doesn’t know this yet, which is why he told the boy this morning to pack an overnight bag for the weekend. As soon as he picks Barry up from day camp, they’re going to drive back to Central City and pay Henry Allen a visit. The last time they chatted over the phone, he brought the issue to Henry’s attention and the man agreed that he would be the one to break the news to his boy. Small mercy there. Eobard has no idea how much Barry is going to like him after this little heartbreak. Hopefully, he won’t throw an almighty fit at the prison.

Not that he finds that Barry is prone to throwing temper tantrums. The boy has had a couple of little outbursts here and there, but he’s at that age where he’s more than capable of calming himself down. Said outbursts have been over small things anyway, like Barry’s eating habits (or lack thereof) and his insistence on sleeping with all the lights on in his bedroom.

The only real issue was the nightmares.

He had sedated Barry the first four nights in his care so that the boy wouldn’t be completely dead to the world during the day. It had worked, for the most part, until Eobard let the drugs slip his mind on the fifth. He had therefore been woken from a dead sleep around midnight to the sound of a soft thud coming from the end of the hall.

He sat up in bed slowly at first, wondering what the chances were that perhaps Barry had simply fallen out of bed and was currently climbing back into it when Eobard suddenly heard the frantic footfalls of the boy racing downstairs. After a beat, Eobard took up off after him, skipping down the last half of the stairs and rounding the corner to find Barry at the far end of the kitchen, trying desperately to undo the deadbolt on the back door.

Instinctively, Eobard reached out to grab him.

He was almost certain he hadn’t tapped into the Speed Force just then, but the world around him almost seemed to slow. It brought him back to that fateful night almost three months ago, when he had reached out for Barry Allen in a similar fashion, but with the sole intent of snapping his scrawny neck.

Suddenly the fire was in his veins again; the excitement. Oh, how badly he had wanted to end Barry’s life that night. He still could, right then and there. There was nothing anyone could do to stop him.

Somehow, though, he was able to stop himself.

Startled, Barry had spun halfway around and kicked him hard in the left knee as Eobard’s arms enveloped him. They collapsed together onto the kitchen floor, Eobard wrestling with the boy until Barry surrendered to exhaustion.

He sat miserably in Eobard’s lap for a moment until he realized where he was and who he was with.
Then he buried his face into the crook of Eobard’s neck and started to cry in earnest.

Knee throbbing painfully, Eobard elected not to move. Instead, he simply sat there with the boy pinned to his chest and asked, “What happened?”

“I dreamt he was back,” Barry sobbed. “He k-killed my mom. Then he was going to kill my dad and me.”

“What?” Eobard asked quietly. Not because he didn’t already know the answer, but to finally have this fear instilled in Barry, to have him cower in his arms…

He felt a shudder run through his body.

His grip on Barry tightened.

“The man in the lightning,” Barry said faintly. He took a few heaving breaths, trying to get himself under control. “He was real—I know he was real, but no one believes me.”

“I believe you, Barry,” he murmured, and it was the solemn truth.

Eobard was, perhaps, the only person who truly believed him.

Whether or not Barry thought Eobard was lying to pacify him, the boy remained quiet. They sat there together for a little while longer in absolute silence until Eobard carried him back upstairs and tucked him into bed.

On Barry’s next visit to see his psychiatrist, Dr. Knox wisely prescribed a mild sedative to help him sleep at night. Eobard almost laughed when he saw that it was chloral hydrate.

When they were about to leave though, the doctor gently took Eobard aside and asked him, quite bluntly, if he would be so kind as to no longer talk to Barry’s as though his hallucinations might actually be real.

The 21st century, it would appear, just wasn’t ready for the man in the lightning.

~***~

False imprisonment ages a man.

So does losing your wife and son, Eobard supposes, although he cares little about the things that keep Henry Allen awake at night. Only Barry.

Seated before Eobard now is the man he had always intended to kill. Though the universe had deigned it necessary to spare Henry’s life, fate has obviously not been kind to him. His hair is whiter. His wrinkles are more pronounced.

He looks tired.

This is the first time Eobard has really had the chance to stop and stare at the man. He’d been too focused on battling the Flash the night he invaded their home to really get a good look at him. They had already spoken on the phone a few times, because Henry’s lawyers kept the man well-informed of anything and everything concerning his son, but it was kind of odd having a seemingly civil conversation with the man now when he should, by all rights, be dead.

Barry is seated on Eobard’s left at the small table in the visitation room, swinging his legs back and
forth in excitement as Henry asks him how he likes Starling City so far. Because Barry is young and because Henry adheres closely to the rules, they are permitted a contact visit without the glass panel separating them, though Eobard can tell that Barry is having trouble sitting still. He’s just waiting for the boy to launch himself across the table.

“It’s okay,” Barry replies. “I think it’s bigger than Central City. Lots of parks. We always go to one in the evening. Harrison runs with me until we drop. I figure that’s why he eats so much.”

Eobard sighs.

“Barry,” his father scolds, but he’s smiling faintly as he says it. “He’s a grown man. We typically eat more than you.”

“I’m only joking.” Barry turns to look at Eobard then, eyes shining with affection. “He’s really cool. He likes chocolate mint ice cream too. He also works in a lab at the university, but he says he’s opening one here in Central.”

“So I’ve been told. I guess that means you’ll be going back to school with Iris, huh?”

Barry blushes furiously. “And David, and Ryan, and Freddie…”

Henry laughs.

Eobard pretends to be none-the-wiser when he inquires, “Is Iris your girlfriend?”

“No,” Barry mutters, followed closely by, “Thanks, dad.”

“I’m sure all your friends miss you very much,” Henry replies. “The whole lot of them. I’m…well, I’m really quite happy you’re moving back here.”

This last sentence is directed more at Eobard, who nods respectfully in response.

“It’s actually rather fortuitous, Dr. Wells.”

“Please,” he says, “call me Harrison.”

“Well, Harrison…I guess now is as good as any time to thank you personally for watching over my boy. I know it can’t be easy.”

“He’s incredibly well-behaved for an eleven-year-old. It’s an absolute pleasure to have him.”

“I thought Nora didn’t have any living relatives left in the States though.” Henry rubs his face a little warily. “I guess it was an absolute stroke of luck that they found you.”

“I’m amazed too,” he replies. “Fate has a funny way of working, I guess.”

“True enough. While we’re on the topic though…” Henry’s attention shifts over to his son. “There’s something very important I wanted to discuss with you today, Barry. Let’s just get it out of the way now, huh? Then we can talk more about your plans for the summer.”

Barry almost seems to shrink in on himself a little then, though he doesn’t look away from his father. “Okaaay…?”

“You already know that Harrison wants you to continue living with him, yes?”

“Yeah.”
“Well, he’s going to be taking on all the rights and responsibilities that I ever had for you. He’ll be your surrogate father.”

“…Surrogate?”

“A permanent substitute.”

“Oh,” Barry says uncertainly. “But you’re going to get out someday, right? This won’t really be permanent…”

Henry shares a look with Eobard. Then he folds his hands together on top of the table and glances down at Barry, visibly pained by what he has to say next. “Barry…there’s no telling when I’ll be released. I’m doubtful it’ll be before you can make any legal decisions for yourself as an adult, so you’re going to be staying with Harrison from now on.”

“But…you’re innocent,” Barry whimpers. Eobard can tell that the boy is trying hard not to cry, but his eyes are getting glossy with unshed tears and he’s trembling slightly at his side. “Why do they think you hurt mom? You love mom.”

“Very much so, slugger.” Henry’s voice wobbles, so he pauses; takes a deep breath. “And I love you with all my heart, Barry, which is why I’m trusting Harrison to take good care of you. That means you have to listen to everything he tells you to do, exactly like you would with me or your mother.”

“But it’s not fair. They won’t even let me hug you!”

Barry turns one of the most vicious looks Eobard has seen to date on the guard standing just a few feet behind Henry, a young man who glances briefly at Barry before looking away again in obvious discomfort.

As though testing the boundaries, Barry stretches his arm across the table then to touch his father’s hand. Henry is too shocked to move, but Eobard doesn’t so much as bat an eye as he reaches out to take the offending hand into his own. He pins it down against his thigh under the table as he slips his other arm around Barry’s shoulders, holding the boy against his side.

The young guard has already stepped forward to intercept Barry, but upon seeing that Eobard has things under control, quietly moves back to his position against the wall. He gives Barry a warning glance.

“I know it’s hard, Barry,” his father murmurs softly. “It’s hard for me too, but you can visit me whenever you want. I promise.”

“I know,” Barry sniffs, “but it’s not the same.”

“All things change, Barry, and sometimes that change isn’t easy. You have to be strong.”

“I don’t want to be strong!”

“You’re going to have to be, slugger, because the change doesn’t stop there.”

Barry wriggles uncomfortably in Eobard’s arms. He frowns, confused. “What?”

“It’ll be difficult when you’re older if people know that you’re my son. So Harrison and I talked about it and, well…” Henry glances at Eobard again; swallows hard. “We’ve also decided that you’re going to share his last name.”
The boy stares at Henry for a moment in absolute horror. Then he completely breaks down, turning his face into Eobard’s chest in an attempt to muffle his sobs.

There’s a young blonde woman sitting at a table nearby, waiting for the guards to lead her boyfriend out. She offers both Henry and Eobard a sympathetic look before averting her gaze.

Eobard is both highly amused and terribly unsettled. He’s glad that the swift stroke of justice he delivered upon Barry Allen’s family was a resounding success, but that does not, however, imply that he enjoys making small children cry. Especially when he’s the one who has to sooth them.

A little at a loss with what he’s supposed to do, he rubs Barry’s back idly and just lets him go at it until he’s about cried himself dry. Henry just sits there silently all the while, giving Eobard this terribly melancholy look, though his gratitude still manages to shine through. Eobard feels oddly pleased with it.

He had never planned to hurt the man in this way, but it almost seems as though a great passing over of power has occurred between them. After all, given what Barry will ultimately become, Eobard is perhaps better suited to rearing this particular child. Maybe this truly is the way fate always intended it to be.

“If it helps,” Eobard whispers to the boy curled protectively against his side, “I think ‘Wells’ is a pretty stodgy name too.”

He does.

Barry sniffs, glancing up at Eobard with watery eyes. “I-it’s not a bad name.”

“Not as powerful as ‘Allen’, I think.” And isn’t that just the truth. The moment he learned the Flash’s civilian identity, it felt as though he was holding a piece of the universe in the palm of his hand. One of the World’s greatest mysteries unravelling at his fingertips… “No matter what we call you, you’ll always be ‘Barry Allen’.”

“This isn’t going to change who you are,” Henry adds. “You’ll always be my little boy.”

Barry rubs at his eyes with the back of his hand. “This sucks…My friends already know I’m ‘Allen’.”

“Your friends already love you,” Eobard points out, “but as you get older, you’re going to encounter people who think you’re a bad person just because they believe your father is a criminal. There’s nothing you can do to help that. The only thing you can do is prevent them from ever learning the truth.”

“Lies get you nowhere,” Barry mutters. Eobard has to wonder whom he heard that from.

“This is your shot at a fresh start,” his father says. “In here, with me, you’ll always be Barry Allen. Out there, you’ve got to take every opportunity to make life good for yourself. That’s all that your mom and I ever wanted for you, kiddo. So do it, for us.”

Barry nods slowly in acquiescence, though he hardly looks satisfied. “But when I grow up, I’m going to get you out of here.”

Henry Allen smiles. “How? You plan on baking a chisel into a birthday cake?”

Barry rolls his eyes. “I’ll be a cop, like Iris’ dad.”
“Please don’t.”

“How else am I going to do it?” Barry glances briefly at the young guard again before his gaze drifts over the barred up windows. “What if I broke you out?”

Trust Barry to dream big.

“Why don’t you become a lawyer instead?” Eobard suggests half-heartedly.

Barry shoots him an annoyed look.

“Maybe we’ll discuss your future ambitions later,” Henry says, looking somewhat relieved to finally get this whole issue off his chest. “Why don’t you tell me about science camp?”

“But this is important!”

“Sorry, but I’m more interested in science camp.” Henry smiles faintly. “I didn’t realize such a thing even existed.”

Barry sighs heavily, but slumps against Eobard’s side in surrender. “…We’re making robots.”

“Big ones?”

“No. Like the size of a shoebox… Next week, we’re going to try racing them uphill.”

They go on like this for another half hour or so, talking about menial things. Eobard tells Henry that he’s already found a flat in Central City, and that he’s taken the liberty of having Barry’s things moved over there from storage. Barry looks disturbed by the fact that he can never return to his old home, but he doesn’t break down in tears again. Just squeezes Eobard’s hand under the table and starts describing the book Iris gave to him before he was put into foster care.

They leave a short while before lunch. Barry looks like he’d give the world just to hug his dad one last time, but Henry tells him that everything is going to be okay. That he loves him so much. There’s no need to be sad.

Barry just nods and follows Eobard out. Once they’re back in the car, heading down the highway toward the city centre, Barry turns around in the back seat to stare at Iron Heights.

“…Do you think there’s still a chance my dad could get out of prison?”

Eobard takes a moment to think about it before he says, calculating, “Quite possibly.”

Chapter End Notes

You made it to the end! *confetti rains down upon your head* Congratulations!!!

 Seriously though, I truly hope you’ve enjoyed the chapter. Expect more on the adventures of Eobard and Barry soon!

And now for the Fun Facts:

(1) "Robern" Thawne: ...Is a legit person. In comic-land, anyhow. Finding solid information on this guy just on the internet is like trying to bleed water from a stone
though. I've started purchasing Flash comics, but until I get my hand on one containing
the juicy bits about Eobard's background, my knowledge of him is limited. Sorry, folks.
I can, however, tell you that he wasn't just any ordinary cop. He worked for the Science
Police! ...But because I couldn't write "Science Police" anywhere in this chapter without
cracking up, I decided to leave that little bit out. For now, anyway.

(2) I truly love Dr. McFee. Tina is like the Terminator. She will be back.

(3) I was genuinely surprised when they wouldn't let little Barry touch his dad in the
show. ((One of my friends works in a prison though and has told me that, yeah, there's a
no-touchy rule. Is that the same everywhere else?)) He's just an angry little beaver. All
he needs is a hug...
The westward wandering man

Chapter Notes

A/N: I apologize for the tremendous delay. I have worked a little bit on this chapter literally every day since my last update, but it decided it was going to be a problem child.

Also, it’s freakishly long.

You have been warned.

“None who enter will leave unchanged. Trespassers will be turned to stone.”

~Brandon Mull (Fablehaven)

~***~

They move into a new apartment building in the Leawood area, just a few blocks away from Central City’s ‘University Town’ District. Eobard secures them a sizeable westward facing flat with an open concept kitchen and living-room floorplan and a fairly decent view of the Missouri River. Part of that view includes the industrial giant of Keystone, the business backbone of the Twin Cities, which looms imperiously just on the other side of the water.

As the sun sets and the sky darkens, thousands of dazzling lights from the neighboring city flicker to life on the horizon. A person could almost argue that the scene the modern behemoth provided was rather beautiful. Somewhat empowering even, like a bright glimmer of the future.

After a long day of hauling boxes around, Eobard retreats onto the balcony to enjoy said view, followed shortly by the boy, who braces his arms and chin against the high railing for support. They stand together like that quietly for all of five minutes before Barry’s curiosity gets the better of him, pointing vaguely to what Eobard assumes is the tall flaming tower atop one of the oil refineries as he asks, “What’s up with that?”

“That’s the Flare Stack,” Eobard replies. “Think of it as a last line of defence.”

“Oh?” Barry cranes his head back, eyes wide and attentive, staring up at him in childlike wonder.

Eobard realizes that he rather loves this aspect of the boy, the fact that Barry always seems wholly invested in listening to whatever it is he has to say, regardless of the topic. Not at all like his older self, really. The Barry he once knew could be rude and impatient, somewhat dismissive even.

This Barry is uncharacteristically charming.

“Most industrial plants have one,” he explains, leaning into the railing beside the boy. “If there’s ever any kind of chemical upset, all the flammable gases have to be vented immediately out of the building. However, if you simply release them into the air, you would end up with a toxic vapour
looming overhead. The gases are therefore redirected to the flame, and the hydrocarbons are then burned off as water and carbon dioxide.”

“So…they always keep the fire burning?”

“Yes.”

“Seems like a waste of fuel.”

Eobard shrugs. “It’s a necessary evil.”

Barry shrugs in concession, gaze drifting back out across the water. They admire the view in silence a while longer before the boy glances over his shoulder at the mess of half-opened boxes on the living-room floor. With a sigh he says, “Are we done yet? My arms feel like noodles.”

Eobard takes one of the boy’s wrists in hand and gives his arm a gentle shake. Barry keeps it completely limp. It flops uselessly between them. “Noodle arm syndrome, hm? Oddly enough, I think the cure for that is more work…”

Barry gives him a look.

“Relax,” he says, dropping the arm. “We just have to find the bed sheets. Then we’ll be done for the night.”

“Yes,” Barry hisses triumphantly, pivoting sharply toward the balcony doors.

Eobard only just reaches out in time to catch him by the shoulder, stopping the boy short. “Before you run off on me though, there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you…”

Barry tenses suddenly under his touch; it gives Eobard a bit of a shock. A little more so when the boy turns to stare up at him in mild apprehension.

“You’re not in trouble,” is his immediate response, although why Barry would ever think he was beyond him. “The last time we chatted with Henry, he mentioned that you attended soccer camp last year. I was wondering if you remembered the name of the team.”

Much to his surprise, Barry’s eyes light up immediately, a complete 180 from his initial reaction. “The Danville Dangers!” he exclaims excitedly.

Eobard gives him a small nod, brushing the child’s odd reaction off as exhaustion. Not that he’s too concerned with preserving every last detail of Barry’s life prior to his mother’s death, but he’s been running out of ideas lately on how to keep the boy occupied during the day. Most of the summer camps he could find in Central City only ran for about a week or two, and many of those operated solely in the morning or afternoon. His next best bet then was to sign him up for some kind of sport, at least until school started again in September.

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“I think it’s too late to sign up though,” Barry adds, shoulders slumping. “It usually starts at the beginning of July.”

“There’s still six weeks of summer left. Don’t abandon all hope just yet.”
The boy shakes his head in mild disbelief but says nothing more of it as Eobard ushers him back inside. They then hunt down the linen box and make up the boy’s bed before he gives Barry his meds and tucks him in for the night.

He waits until the boy has fallen into a dead sleep before unpacking his office, chatting briefly with Gideon to check up on the future stock-market as he fiddles with a series of small cameras he made back in Starling City. There’s an old baseball stadium south of University Town where S.T.A.R. Laboratories will one day be erected—given the deals he’s cut already and his blossoming financial situation, it won’t be long now before he can afford to leave the little military lab he’ll soon be stationed at just outside the city limits. If his predictions are correct, he can begin the construction of the particle accelerator in earnest in just a few short years.

Once he’s certain that all the cameras are in working order, he goes about setting them up all over the apartment. He tucks many of them away above the curtain rods, which usually give him the best coverage, and then he checks their feedback on his laptop before shutting Gideon down for the night.

When he’s finally finished, he unpacks a few more boxes before boredom sets in and he finds himself wandering back out onto the balcony. Taking up a seat in one of the patio chairs, a glass of scotch in hand, he reflects on the odd turn his life has taken these past few weeks as he watches the eternal flame of the Flare Stack burning ominously in the distance.

Looking at Keystone now, he can’t help but wonder how Garrick is holding up trapped in the other dimension.

~***~

By some odd stroke of luck, he’s able to get Barry into his old soccer camp. It runs every weekday from 8:30am-4:00pm, with games played against other city teams every Tuesday and Thursday evening. Eobard’s honestly surprised with how hard the coaches work the kids, but he never hears so much as a complaint from Barry when he picks him up after practice. Exhausted, certainly, and covered from head-to-toe in dirt, but the boy is always grinning from ear to ear, ready to go at it again in the morning.

Barry always had been a natural born runner.

A passion for celerity was in his blood.

Having Barry so thoroughly occupied during the day gives Eobard considerable time to set up his new lab. After an extensive panel interview conducted by other scientists already in the military’s employ, ‘Harrison Wells’ is unanimously awarded the position of lead supervisor in their newest endeavour. Possessing what they consider to be a remarkable range of knowledge in everything from biochemical engineering to medical genetics, they decide to finally introduce him at the end of his first week in Central City to General Adam Iverson, the man with the funding, and Dr. Ted Ferguson, the current lead supervisor of a similar setup just outside Sacramento.

Once they’ve been introduced, the two men prattle on for a while about Eobard’s dual service now to both the safety of the American people and the future of science as they know it. However, the only message he takes home from their little lecture is that they essentially want what all men of power inevitably dream of:

Bigger guns and better soldiers.

“I understand that you haven’t really advertised this unique position up until the last month or so,” Eobard says after a brief tour of the facility. He has plenty of space to work with here, but the
equipment is archaic, at least by his 25th century standards. He’s going to be spending an awful amount of time practically reinventing the wheel with these people. “I’m surprised to see that you already have all the furnishings and yet no one to lead the charge, if you would excuse the pun…”

“You can thank Dr. Robert Clive for your employment,” Ferguson replies. “He passed away about two months ago.”

“Fell off a bloody balcony,” Iverson mutters darkly just a few steps ahead of them. “Never could hold his liquor.”

“They were good friends,” Dr. Ferguson murmurs quietly beside him.

Eobard smiles about as sympathetically as he can manage.

“Dr. Orissa was his proverbial second in command,” Ferguson continues as they show Eobard into a small conference room. They usher him into the chair at the far end of a large table just inside and each take a seat adjacent to him. “Unfortunately, she was involved in a boating accident a couple of weeks ago. She can give you a better idea of what we’re up to here, but that won’t be for a while yet.”

“Lavanya is sweet,” Iverson considers aloud. “She will help you in any way she possibly can, believe me, but I have serious doubts of her ever returning to work permanently.”

Eobard nods in understanding, though he isn’t expecting to see much of her ever really.

Spinal cord injuries had a way of ending most careers, after all.

“Because we don’t trust any of the other people already recruited here to operate at the same level as Drs. Clive or Orissa, we decided to look for a fresh face,” Ferguson explains. “We already have most of the supplies Dr. Clive requested and his overall game plan for the next five to ten years, but we’ve been left scrambling to find someone to fill in his shoes. Hence the lengthy interview process you’ve been subjected to these last few weeks. We truly appreciate your patience.”

Lengthy indeed. Eobard had had to endure two long telephone conferences and three in-person interviews with various representatives of the military back in Starling City before they gave him the green light to visit their base in Central. He’s lost count of how many privacy forms he’s had to sign before today, but it was all worth it in the end.

These are the people who will one day build his collider, after all. He doesn’t mind working on their pet projects in the meantime.

“Perfectly understandable,” he replies. “What you’re trying to achieve here is no small feat. Major Brant warned me about the vetting process.”

“He was really quite surprised, you know,” Iverson murmurs. “He said he contacted you almost a year ago about a similar opportunity, but you politely turned him down. I don’t think he ever expected a call back. What changed?”

“At the time, my fiancé and I were trying to figure out whether we wanted to make a move to Central City or take up another offer made to us by McGill University in Canada. Because your offer did not originally extend to her, it wasn’t really an option for us then. Now that she’s gone though, neither of the other two options really appeal to me anymore…”

Dr. Ferguson nods in sympathy. “I apologize. This must be a difficult time for you.”
“My condolences,” the General adds. “My wife passed away last year. The sting of it never really leaves you, does it?”

“No, but we had the same dream. I think, with your help, that I can finally make it a reality.”

“The particle accelerator, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“We were rather excited to hear about your endeavour from the Major,” Ferguson says. “Although, we’ll all be watching you very closely before finalizing the plans on anything. I’m sure you understand.”

Eobard smiles. He expected nothing less actually. “I don’t plan to disappoint. In fact, I’m rather looking forward to working with you gentlemen.”

Iverson gives him an odd little smile then, almost childish, like someone who’s unexpectedly found a dollar bill in their back pocket. Eobard feels as though he’ll be the easiest person to manipulate in the following years, at least once he’s shown the man the merits of his work.

Ferguson takes this opportunity then to whip out Eobard’s full contract. Despite this little ceremony, nothing is final of course. It’s written right there in the fine print. Should they feel the need, the military will drop him without so much as a moment’s notice.

He’s looking forward to the shock they’ll get once he inevitably drops them.

~***~

While he has no interest in team sports, Eobard makes an effort to watch each of Barry’s Thursday games. Not only does it please the boy, but the fact that Eobard can so effortlessly crave out time from his busy schedule to be with him does not go amiss by Social Services. Whenever questioned, Barry can always confirm that he is rarely, if ever, left alone, and this is ultimately the reason why the adoption papers go through without fail.

Watching Barry does have a downside though and that is the number of inquisitive minds that sit on his side of the field whenever Eobard goes to a game. A few of the children on Barry’s team have known him almost all their lives and their parents are consequently well aware of the fact that Eobard is not his biological father. They subtly try to swarm him during the first match he attends, setting up their lawn chairs near to where he is lying on the grass, and eventually muster the courage to ask him who is he and which of the children belongs to him.

He tells them outright that he is Barry’s surrogate father. They all seem delighted by the admission, going on to say how traumatic life must be now for the boy, but how wonderful it seems that someone has finally stepped up to bat for him. Eobard is irritated by their prying, but he smiles politely and answers their questions succinctly. At the very least, they are impressed with his willingness to consign himself to a life of single-parenthood. One of the older couples even goes so far as to offer Eobard their phone number, just in case he needs anyone to watch over Barry or drive him home after a game.

The fact that they’re all eager to lend him a hand doesn’t hurt, so he bears their company in silence. More often than not, he can pretend that he is so enthralled with the game to chat with anyone. It certainly helps that Barry is a good player.

The boy often scores in a game, or, at the very least, assists in setting up a goal, little legs pumping furiously as he steers the ball to the other side of the field. He’s always smiling too, even when he’s
knocked over by another player, ignoring the pain of scraping his knees in favour of getting even with the enemy.

The Barry Allen who plays out on this little field is very much the Flash. He’s playful but determined. Clever. Fast. Just looking at him conjures memories of a lithe body clad entirely in red, running headlong into danger and loving absolutely every moment of it.

Watching him sets Eobard’s heart racing. He knows that he still hates that same red-clad figure from the future, but then he also wonders if that tenacious young hero will ever truly be the same again…

If Barry ever comes to genuinely love and adore him, perhaps Eobard could find it in himself to part ways with that hatred. After all, where there is love there is also hesitation, and if in loving Eobard this weakens the boy’s resolve to stop him, then, well…that would certainly be the greatest victory of all, now wouldn’t it?

Eobard sighs heavily. This catches the attention of the woman sitting next to him—‘Kathy’, he thinks—who then asks if anything is the matter.

“Barry doesn’t know how to watch his back,” he replies. True enough, Barry has just received a hearty shove from one of the opposing players, hitting the ground face first. Eobard has noticed that this is a recurring problem with the boy. It’s as though Barry never expects anyone to play dirty.

The referee holds up a yellow card just as Barry climbs back to his feet, brushing grass off the front of his uniform. He doesn’t look injured, but he spits dirt out of his mouth with a truly disgusted look on his face.

It’s almost comical to watch.

“Barry doesn’t think he needs to,” an unfamiliar voice says to his left. “He’s too trusting.”

Eobard glances over his shoulder to check out the newest addition to the gaggle of parents lounging around him. Much to his surprise, the voice belongs to none other than Detective Joe West.

Eobard’s first thought is that the man looks haggard. Admittedly, he works unusual hours, but there’s something truly bone-weary about the way he drops heavily onto the grass beside him, suit jacket folded neatly over one arm, that suggests that he’s been weighed down by a little more than just work in the past few days.

“You must be Iris’ father,” Eobard says.

For some reason, Joe seems to find this statement funny. He chuckles as he offers his hand for a shake. “I am…but please tell me you’re not just saying that because I’m the only parent here who’s not Caucasian.”

“Not at all. Barry mentioned you were a detective.” He nods at the badge hanging from a lanyard around the man’s neck, taking the proffered hand politely. Joe’s grip is firm, but friendly. “I’m Harrison Wells, by the way. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you.”

“Joe West. Likewise.”

“Long day?”

“You could say that.”

“Barry’s told me you solve a new case almost every other week. Sounds like tiring work.”
“That might be a bit of an exaggeration, but yeah,” Joe laughs softly, the corners of his eyes crinkling in amusement. It’s easy to see how fond the man is of Barry. “Never a dull moment… You though—I’ve been told that you run your own lab. Sounds a bit time-consuming, considering you’re also raising a child on your own…”

Eobard knows that the man has been digging into his records lately. One of the girls from Social Services had informed him that the detective asks about him and Barry often, always inquiring as to how the boy’s been holding up. Eobard has already told her that she’s more than welcome to pass his phone number along to the man, but she simply stated that Det. West already has access to that kind of information. That he’ll probably call Eobard when he’s ready.

Eobard therefore can’t help but wonder why the man hasn’t contacted him yet.

“Perhaps if Barry was younger it would be a little more challenging,” he admits. “He had his own well-established routine long before we met. He’s just been kind enough to include me in the grander scheme of things now.”

“Barry has this way of adopting everyone into his life.” Joe’s eyes scan the field until they fall on the boy in question. “Iris has certainly missed playing with him this summer.”

“If he hasn’t already told her, you can let her know that he’ll be coming back to his old school in the fall. I think it’s for the best if he surrounds himself with familiar faces.”

“I will. We’re both glad you’re living in Central City now, Dr. Wells.” Joe finally tosses his clean suit jacket on the ground beside him in defeat, the better to lean back comfortably on both hands. It isn’t the hottest it’s ever been outside today, but the man is sweating heavily under the sun. “I’ve actually been hoping to invite the two of you down for dinner sometime soon. Iris wants to ask Barry about his time in Starling.”

“Oh?”

“Tomorrow night, actually, if you could make it. I don’t know when I’ll be busy again.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Excellent. Let’s say 6 o’clock then? Just a quiet barbecue between friends.”

“Where do you live?” Eobard already knows the answer to this question, of course, but he still has to ask, for appearances sakes.

“Next door to Barry’s old place.” Det. West stares down at his lap for a moment, seemingly lost in thought. “We’re moving to another neighborhood next month. I’ll give you the new address then. Iris is always looking for an excuse to invite a friend over...”

“She’s a bold girl.”

True to nature, little Iris West is currently in the process of elbowing a much larger opponent in the ribs, struggling to stay upright as she attempts to kick the ball out from between his feet. She ends up hitting him hard enough below the sternum that the boy keels over immediately, gasping for breath.

The ref whips out yet another yellow card.

“She’s certainly the bruiser of the team,” Joe mutters. “I’ve been told that she gets more flags than any of the other kids.”
“Barry tells me she’s the team hero.”

“Iris!” Joe hollers, startling the wits out of the young girl. She lurches to a halt where she’s sprinting at the far end of the field, utterly surprised to see her father in attendance at the game.

Now that he has her attention, Joe takes this opportunity to slowly shake his head in disappointment. Iris has the decency to look embarrassed.

Eobard laughs.

Joe frowns at him good-naturedly. “S’not funny.”

“I know. Barry got a flag last Thursday after he accidentally head-butted another kid in the face. Iris argued with the ref. on his behalf and was removed the game.”

“She’s something fierce,” Joe solemnly agrees. “She’s been that way ever since her mother died.”

“That’s perfectly understandable. It drives her to do what she deems necessary to protect her friends.”

“And how’s Barry doing? I haven’t been to see him, since, well…”

“Since you arrested him?”

Joe gives him an odd look.

Eobard grins mischievously. “His words, not mine. He said you locked him in the back of the cruiser the last time you picked him up from Iron Heights.”

“For the record, he started off in the front of my cruiser. He booked it out of the car at the first red light, so I had to put him in the back.”

Eobard arches an eyebrow in surprise. “Really?”

“Yeah…He’s gotten pretty fierce himself. He was spitting mad the last time I saw him.”

“Therapy has helped.” Which is true. While Barry was still adamant about there being a ‘man in the lightning’ in his house the night his mother was murdered, he doesn’t seem to get angry much anymore when people try to imply he’s crazy. “He still gets nightmares from time to time, but we’ve learned how to deal with those.”

It’s Joe’s turn to look genuinely surprised. He gives Eobard a good hard look before seeming to come to some sort of internal conclusion. “They told me he’d be okay with you.”

“… ‘They’?”

“Social Services.”

“I see.”

“I’m sorry. I’ve been prying.”

Eobard wasn’t expecting the man to come clean about that. All the same, he appreciates the man’s attempt at honesty. “They might’ve mentioned something of the sort…”

“I wanted to take him in myself, you know,” he admits quietly. He’s got this faraway look in his eyes
now, like he can almost see the future as it should have been; Eobard is all too familiar with that feeling. “But I couldn’t. Not so soon after my wife died. I didn’t want the kids feeding off of each other’s grief.”

“You don’t have to explain yourself to me... Sometimes, when Barry has a particularly bad nightmare, he asks about my fiancé.” It was one of Eobard’s least favourite subjects, mostly because there was very little he actually knew about the women, but he could understand why Barry did it all the same. “I think it’s because he wants us to be in the same frame of mind when he talks about his mother. Makes it easier to convey his thoughts and feelings without having to go into the finer details.”

Thankfully Joe doesn’t offer his own condolences on the death of Tess Morgan, just a small but empathetic smile. “Nora was a sweetheart. She used talk about taking Barry to Europe when he got older.”

“He has an album of all the pictures she took when she was there last,” Eobard recalls. “I think we will go someday when he’s old enough.”

“You’ve ever been yourself?”

Fortunately, Harrison was a well-travelled man, much like Eobard himself. “I’ve been all over the world almost. Not Japan though... Not sure why. I’ve always wanted to visit the Kawakami lab.”

“Any family abroad?”

“Perhaps a few distant relatives in England or Wales. My parents lived in Bath before immigrating to the States. I don’t have many relatives left, at least to my knowledge.”

“Not even in America?”

“No. I remember meeting Nora once when I was very young, but I never realized we were related until after her death.”

“Hm,” is all Joe says, ever the inquisitive mind. “Weirder things have happened, I suppose…”

“The universe works in mysterious ways,” Eobard replies, winding up now for the kill. He knows the makings of an interrogation when he sees one—it’s funny that Joe thinks he can fool him. “Barry needed someone, so Fate provided. Too bad I couldn’t have been Barry’s first choice…”

Joe looks terribly uncomfortable all of a sudden. Ashamed, almost. After all, ‘Harrison Wells’ wouldn’t have been contacted in the first place if Joe had simply taken the boy in himself.

Despite the coincidental deaths of Nora Allen and Tess Morgan, Joe was grasping at straws if he was genuinely looking for a lead here.

“I doubt I would have been Barry’s first choice,” the man says at last.

Eobard scoffs. “His lips are almost tightly sealed on the matter, but he might’ve mentioned that he stayed with you a week before they put him in the foster system. He was quite heartbroken when he told me.”

“You know my reasons,” Joe mutters coldly.

“I apologize.” Eobard removes his glasses then to rub at the bridge of his nose. He can play contrite, if that’s what Joe is looking for. “I’m not pointing fingers. I’m just trying to understand what
happened to him before our worlds collided. He’s angry and confused. Sometimes I just don’t know what to say to him.”

Joe’s agitation is quick to fade. “I’m not…I’m sorry. Letting him go was one of the hardest decisions of my life. If he doesn’t want to see me tomorrow, I understand. Maybe Iris can visit him on her own.”

“We’ll be there tomorrow, you have my word. He misses you too, you know.”

“Who? The guy who wouldn’t let him see his father in prison? I somehow doubt that…”

“Barry has human fears, just like the rest of us,” Eobard says, “but he doesn’t hold grudges.”

He’s suddenly struck by how true that statement really is. The Barry he once knew might’ve been steadfast in his belief that there was no place for the criminal or the corrupt in his fair city, but there was always that element of forgiveness that hung in the air whenever the Flash triumphed over an enemy. Eobard could always see it in his eyes, a glimmer of hope shining through his ever present veil of justice. Even when beaten within an inch of his life, compassion always softened Barry’s blows against his opponents.

Barry only ever seemed to want his enemies to change.

“He’s too good,” Joe solemnly agrees, “but maybe I don’t deserve that goodness…that forgiveness.”

“We’ll let him be the judge of that, hm? I think he will—I hope he will, because if he can’t forgive you of all people, how can he ever make peace with what’s happened to his parents?”

Joe looks stunned for a moment, as though he had never considered that the role he played in this grim tale was not at all inconsequential. Eobard, on the other hand, had never doubted the fact that Joe would always continue to be an important member of Barry’s adoptive family, least of all because the boy would one day marry his daughter.

How well Joe’s continued involvement impacted the boy’s life, Eobard would just have to wait and see. After all, if it ever seemed as though Barry’s trust in Eobard ever wavered due to the man’s interference, he had no qualms about putting the man six feet under. Eobard had already removed two of the boy’s adult figures from the equation. He could easily go three for three.

After a moment of thought, Joe finally concedes with a small nod. “I guess you’re right. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, I suppose…”

“That’s the spirit,” Eobard says.

He adjusts his position on the grass then and goes back to watching the game, eyes focused intently on Barry as the boy scores yet another goal, throwing himself bodily into the goalie in the process. The girl screams bloody murder in retaliation.

Exasperated, the referee throws up yet another yellow card.

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The dinner with Joe West and his daughter goes surprisingly well.

Barry withdraws into himself for the first twenty or so minutes of their visit. Part of that is certainly due to the fact he’s still sore from having been handed over to the foster system, but Eobard doesn’t miss the way that Barry’s eyes drift over to his old house as they walk up the driveway to Joe’s
place. Seeing it again after all this time no doubt conjures bad memories, but the boy boldly refuses to give voice to his grief. Instead, he slips his smaller hand into Eobard’s quietly and lets the man lead him up the porch stairs to the Wests’ doorway, acting bashful when Joe initially greets him but warming slowly once Iris tackles him with a hug.

Det. West is careful not to say anything about Barry’s parents during the dinner. He asks Eobard a little more about what he does exactly and how he likes his new flat, but he leaves most of the talking that night to his daughter. Iris doesn’t seem to mind. Soccer proves to be her favorite topic of conversation, but Barry is so stupidly in love with the girl that he’d probably still hang off her every word even if she were only talking about the wonders of cardboard.

Eobard enjoys the visit despite himself. Joe shares a couple of stories about his most memorable arrests, his favourite being the one in which a man decided to duct tape his face before attempting to rob a convenience store. Joe’s partner had had a wonderful time ripping it off after they took the man down to the station, although the fool then tried to use that as an excuse to sue them for police brutality.

“Didn’t work, of course,” Joe says with a chuckle. “Although the following week another guy tried conceal his face by colouring it with permanent marker. When he asked if we could help him clean it off, we had to politely decline.”

Eobard’s run into his fair share of feeble-minded thugs in the past, so he doesn’t doubt the man. In the not too distant future, when the appearance of metahumans in Central City starts to attract a more quirky crowd of criminals, Barry will have his fair share of bizarre encounters. His rogues’ gallery will inevitably contain an awfully colourful array of individuals.

Despite the fact that he usually puts Barry to bed around 9:30, they stay over until just about 11:00. Both of the children look absolutely miserable when Eobard announces that it’s time to leave, but Joe suggests that they try to make this a regular thing, maybe every second Friday or Saturday evening, depending on their respective work schedules.

Eobard agrees. Barry is pacified.

The arrangement works well. In fact, everything works well. Three weeks go by without so much as a hitch. It gives Eobard the confidence that he can maintain this façade for as long as it takes to put the lightning back in Barry’s veins, possibly without having to end another life. For a year, at least. That’s his goal anyway.

That dream is utterly crushed though when Josh Exley waltzes into their lives.

It’s a chilly Thursday evening and Barry is sitting on the living-room couch, holding a package of frozen peas against his sprained wrist as he watches a documentary on the Insect World, when Eobard hears a knock at the front door. He just finished cleaning up the dinner dishes and he wonders why anyone would need to bother them at this hour, but he swings his dish-cloth over his left shoulder and decides to humour their surprise guest anyway by answering the door.

He’s a little stunned to find a rugged-looking man standing out in the hallway. He’s heavily tanned and looks as though he could use a shave, but his clothes are clean and he’s holding a small box in his hands that’s been crudely wrapped in blue and white pinstriped birthday paper.

The man takes a second to eye Eobard up; Eobard eyes up him in turn. Then the stranger extends his hand politely and, smiling, says, “You must be Dr. Harrison Wells.”

Eobard takes his hand tentatively. “Yes…have we met?”
“Sorry. I’m Josh—Josh Exley. I’m…”

The man’s voice trails off as he catches sight of something over Eobard’s shoulder. Eobard lets the man’s hand slip from his grasp as he turns to discover Barry peeking timidly over the back of the couch at the door. For a long moment, nobody says anything.

At first, Eobard assumes the boy is afraid, but then Barry slowly rises to his feet, smiling, eyes taking on this almost dream-like quality of wonder. Not two seconds later, the boy has bounded over to the door, dropping the package of frozen peas in favour of swinging his little arms around Mr. Exley’s waist affectionately.

The gentleman returns the hug warmly, although when he catches sight of the frozen peas his eyes flicker up to Eobard’s face questioningly, body visibly stiffening. “You hurt, little buddy?” he asks the kid.

Eobard feels something cold and miserable curl in the pit of his stomach at the insinuation, but schools his features carefully as Barry says, “I fell on the field today. Scored a goal though.”

“Still playing soccer, I see.” The man’s mood lightens considerably, though he still looks worried when Barry pulls back from the hug. “I thought I told you to be careful. Can’t be a kamikaze pilot. Too young to abuse that little body of yours.”

“Says the man with the scar,” Barry replies sarcastically.

“Accidents happen.”

Barry glances up at Eobard. “He was attacked by a boar.”

“At the city zoo?” Eobard asks, feigning curiosity.

“Africa,” the man supplies. Seeming to remember the present in his hand, he hands this over to Barry. “I know I was supposed to visit you in back May, but better late than never, you know? Happy Very-Belated Birthday, Barry.”

Barry takes the little box graciously, tearing it open to reveal a series of tiny white fangs threaded together on a long piece of twine. “Whoa,” he gasps.

“One of the men in our camp was attacked by a crocodile. Took three of us to pull him out of the water. Said I could give you these.”

Barry is completely enthralled with the gift; Josh Exley looks as pleased as a peach.

Eobard feels his own mood darken considerably.

“Please, come in,” he says eventually, taking a small step back and gesturing to the tiny kitchen table. “Would you like something to drink?”

“Uh, just water, please, if you don’t mind.” The man leans down to pick up the package of peas, handing it to Eobard before heading over to the table. “I’m sorry for barging in like this. I had your phone number, but I managed to lose that somehow this morning.”

“Not at all,” Eobard replies as he shuts the door. He tosses the peas back into the freezer and grabs a glass of water before joining Exley and the boy at the table, wracking his memory for any account of the man in Barry’s history but drawing a complete blank. “Barry isn’t personally acquainted with too many people that I haven’t had the pleasure of meeting yet, so I apologize for the lukewarm
“Welcome.”

“Josh is dad’s friend,” Barry explains, pulling the teeth out of the box to examine them better.

“Went to med school together,” Mr. Exley elaborates.

“Until you failed.”

Exley ruffles the kid’s hair affectionately. “I’m so glad you’ve retained that blunt sense of humour, buddy…Has he subjected you to the same treatment yet, Dr. Wells?”

Eobard nods. “He keeps insisting that I’m fat.”

“I never called you fat,” Barry mumbles. “You just eat a lot.”

Eobard and his unexpected visitor share a knowing glance.

“Anyhow…yes, I did flunk out of med school. Joined another friend in business a short while later, invested a little money, and now I spend most of my time volunteering in Africa.”

“Josh is rich,” Barry says in a conversational tone, eyes glued to the teeth. He seems genuinely surprised that they aren’t naturally all that very sharp. “Like, ridiculously rich…”

“Just a little,” Exley says, laughing nervously.

“He makes millions,” Barry adds under his breath. It’s clear to Eobard that the boy is only ribbing the man, evident in the way he glances mischievously at Exley out of the corner of his eye.

Now Eobard can’t help but be intrigued. He thinks he would have remembered reading up on a ‘Josh Exley’, self-made millionaire/billionaire, when he originally did his research on Barry Allen. The boy will certainly befriend enough of them in the future—Oliver Queen and Bruce Wayne, to name a few. He doesn’t understand why this one somehow managed to slip through the cracks.

This association between the two of them must be short-lived.

“I see…” Eobard has no clue how to proceed. “So, Mr. Exley, do you live in Central City?”

“No, actually. I live in Virginia. Middle of nowhere, really. Don’t spend much time there though.”

The man’s eyes fall on Barry then, looking suddenly somber. “I only wander back west to visit old friends…I’m terribly sorry, Barry.”

Barry’s face falls a little, but then he takes a deep breath, like the therapist taught him to, and offers the man a small smile. “I know. Thank you.”

“I talked to your dad before heading over here. I know he didn’t do it.”

Barry squirms nervously in his seat.

Eobard tenses.

“I’m catching a red-eye home tonight, buddy, but I’m going to be back in two weeks.” The man pauses to take a sip of water. “Since the police don’t seem to care one whit about your father, I plan on hiring someone else to get to the bottom of this. You have my word.”

Barry completely freezes then, hope warring with grief as he stares at the man in stunned silence. Either than Eobard and Henry, no one has outright told Barry that his father was an innocent man.
Eobard’s half afraid that the kid’s going to start crying.

“I think it’s getting late,” Eobard interjects just as Exley opens his mouth to say something else. “How about I write down our number for you, so you can plan another visit, hm? Barry—” the boy turns his gaze on him numbly “—why don’t you go wash up for bed? I’ll get your medicine ready for you.”

“Medicine?” the man asks dumbly.

“For his insomnia,” Eobard replies, point blank.

“Okay.” Barry says quietly, dropping his gift back into its tiny box as he slips out of his chair. He walks up to Exley and gives the man a tight hug, putting on a brave face as he says, “Thank you for coming.”

The man returns the hug and plants a kiss on Barry’s temple. “I love you, buddy. We’ll talk again soon, okay? I’m sorry for popping in unexpectedly.”

Eobard gets up then to grab a piece of loose-leaf paper from the desk in his office. Then he scribbles down his number and hands this off to Exley as he escorts the man to the door. Barry, in the meantime, wanders off to brush his teeth in the bathroom.

Eobard steps all the way out into the hallway after the man and closes his apartment door soundly behind them. Exley looks confused.

“I know you mean well,” Eobard says, “but please don’t talk about Henry or any plans you might have of getting him out of prison with Barry.”

“I wholly intend to prove Henry’s innocence,” is the man’s blunt response.

“I understand that, but when?”

“…I’m sorry?”

“Wh-en,” he says, slower this time, as though that will help get the meaning across.

The best the man can offer him is a defensive shrug. “How the hell am I supposed to know that?”

“Precisely. You. Don’t. Know…But Barry—” he gestures vaguely at the apartment “—all Barry assumes now is that his father might someday get out of prison, I can guarantee it.” Exley frowns at him, but Eobard forges onward. “So tell me, what if it doesn’t happen in a year? How about two years? How about ten…? Worse yet, what if you end up discovering something that exposes Henry as the real killer? What happens to Barry then?”

“…I don’t know. I didn’t consider that.”

“Believe me, Mr. Exley, I think what you want to do is admirable, but if you’re dead set on playing the hero, then perhaps you should do it in secret.”

Exley stares down at the small piece of paper in his hand. “I…I get that. Believe me. The next time I drop by, I’ll try not to mention it to Barry.”

“Thank you.”

“Goodnight then, I suppose…” The man tucks the note into his back pocket and then turns away, marching solemnly toward the elevator at the end of the hall. Once he steps inside, he stares back at
Eobard curiously as the metal doors slide shut in front of him.

Eobard waits a moment longer before returning inside. He mixes Barry’s chloral hydrate with a glass of ginger ale and then grabs a tensor bandage from the medicine cabinet above the stove before shuffling off to the kid’s room.

He finds the boy sitting upright in bed, staring at the opposite wall in something of a daze. It’s a rather disconcerting sight, a slide back from the progress he’s been making with the boy so far, and it pisses him off to think that this Mr. Exley could almost ruin a month’s worth of hard work in less than five minutes flat.

Back to square one, he supposes…

Eobard sets the glass down on the Barry’s nightstand and sits down beside him on the bed with a sigh, taking his sprained wrist in hand. The swelling has gone down quite a bit since earlier this afternoon, but it’ll be tender for a while yet.

He wraps in up with the tensor bandage quietly, then sets the boy’s hand down on his lap gently and says, “Barry…?”

“Can he really do that?” Barry whispers.

“…I don’t know.”

“It would be nice if he could.”

“It would take a while,” Eobard points out. Heaven help him if Exley ever actually unearthed new evidence. Not that there was any way Harrison Wells could be linked to the crime, but Henry’s release from prison would immediately remove Barry from his possession. “He might not even succeed. Joe was one of the detectives working on the case, after all, and I don’t think he would have slacked off on this.”

Barry looks pained by this revelation, but he doesn’t cry. Small mercy there. “I know. I just…I just really miss him sometimes.”

Eobard doesn’t say anything, just leans forward and kisses the boy on top of the head.

Barry kisses him back on the cheek. “Goodnight, I guess.”

“Goodnight, Barry. Don’t forget your medicine.”

The boy picks up the glass and looks down at the golden liquid pensively. Eobard leaves him like that as he retreats to his office, locking the door behind him as he boots Gideon up on the desk.

Much to his relief, Josh Exley is not just an alias.

The man had indeed attended med school with Henry Allen. After he flunked out, he made a few investments with a close friend, who wound up developing software for Homeland Security. This investment, in turn, made him the millionaire that he is today. He spends most of his free time overseas in Africa though, teaching children how to read and building wells, that sort of thing. Real humanitarian stuff. Fairly mundane.

Most importantly though, Josh Exley is destined to die in a little over a year outside his house near Acrola, Virginia. The police report states that he likely pulled over to help a hitch hiker late one night and was found dead in the ditch by a young couple the following morning.
Eobard laughs.

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Josh Exley is winding slowly through the maze of bald cypress trees in his beat up old Cadillac when 'A Place in the Sun' by Stevie Wonder is introduced as the next song on the radio. It’s 4:00 in the morning and he’s trying hard to keep his eyes open, so he cranks up the volume on the stereo and tells himself he’s only five minutes away from home. No problem, buddy. Just one more left turn and then all he has to do is keep to the straight and narrow…

Except it isn’t that simple.

Visibility is low because it just rained, so it’s hot and muggy and a little foggy to boot, and combined with the ungodly hour of the night that it is, he barely notices the man standing out in the middle of the goddamn road.

All he sees is a dark silhouette as his headlights flash over the seemingly stationary figure, but he’s had enough close calls in his life to keep a level head as he turns the steering wheel sharply to the left. He whips past the stranger in a wide arch, tires kicking up dirt as the momentum of the turn carries the back wheels over into the ditch.

The car drops heavily into the sharp slope before it comes to a standstill. Exley just sits there dumbly for a moment and wonders what the hell just happened.

After a while, he takes a deep breath and thanks God he’s still alive. Same as that damn fool. He thinks.

Except...except from where he’s sitting, staring back across that treacherous turn in the road, Exley doesn’t see anyone anymore. Even when the fog parts momentarily, giving him a clear view of his arching tread-marks, there’s no evidence that anyone had ever been there. Could be that the guy ducked over onto the other side of the road, too spooked by the encounter to hang around, but Exley has to wonder if he didn’t just imagine it all. Maybe he had a little too much wine on the flight home…Maybe he’s just tired…Who the hell knows? He’s just glad that it’s all over now.

He takes a moment to rub his eyes with the palm of his hands, slightly nauseated from the spin. He decides that it’s probably for the best if he leaves his car here and comes back for it in the morning. If someone wants to steal this piece of junk, god bless them. He can afford to buy a new one.

Hands shaking, his first instinct is to reach for the dial and turn off the radio, not the least bit amused when Stevie Wonder sings, ‘there’s hope for everyone!’ He stops short though when a voice behind him says, “Let it play to the end. It’s a classic.”

Exley’s gaze darts up to his rear view mirror. Sure enough, there’s a man sitting in the backseat, dark hair ruffled, smiling in an odd sort of way, like the cat that finally caught the canary.

Fear’s steely nails dig into the base of his spine as he all but tears off his seatbelt in his haste to get out of the car. He stumbles five feet across the dirt road before he pivots sharply to face this mysterious man, terrified at the thought of how long he’d been driving tonight with some psycho lounging across the backseat behind him.

He sees no one though and falls back in surprise.

He knows someone had been there…
Exley waits a tense moment before he starts crawling backwards, trying to get his feet under him again. It isn’t long though until he bumps into something solid.

Glancing over his shoulder reveals two long legs clad entirely in black leather. As his gaze travels upwards, the black gradually bleeds into a sickly shade of yellow before his eyes fall on the pale face of Dr. Harrison Wells.

Exley almost doesn’t recognize the man without the glasses.

“Don’t run,” Eobard says.

Predictably, Exley immediately tries to scramble to his feet.

Not the least bit amused by his antics, Eobard leans down to grab the squirming man by the elbow, twisting his arm harshly to keep Exley on his knees. Despite the sharp cry of agony this draws from the man, Exley continues to struggle.

With a sigh Eobard says, “My eleven-year-old is better behaved than you.”

Exley kicks back blindly then and somehow manages to catch Eobard by the ankle. It doesn’t hurt him in the slightest of course, but it’s the principle of the matter that irks Eobard, so he yanks the man’s arm farther upward than it has any right to go and listens with a sick sense of satisfaction as something in the poor bastard’s shoulder pops.

Exley screams.

Eobard holds his arm at that awkward angle for a moment longer before releasing him, straightening slowly to his full height as the man collapses to the ground at his feet.

Cradling his arm close to his chest, Exley rolls over onto his back and hisses, “Fuck…You sick fuck…”

Eobard has little tolerance for foul language, so he delivers a swift kick to his ribs, hard enough that it lifts Exley’s torso completely off the ground.

The pitiful man makes the most amusing noises as he struggles to breathe.

Somewhat belatedly, Eobard realizes he has to pace himself if he wants to get anywhere with their little conversation tonight, so he gives the man a moment to catch his breath. In the meantime, he gazes across the misty road at the faint glow of the Cadillac’s headlights, twin beacons in the night. There’s a faint breeze rustling the branches of the cypress trees around them, and in the background the voice on the radio is softly crooning, ‘…like this tired troubled earth, I’ve been rollin’ since my birth, movin’ on…movin’ on…’

Eobard hums along to the chorus. He’d almost forgotten how much he loved the oldies. “You know, some things never go out of style.”

The man gasps. Then he shudders; this odd sort of full body spasm, like he’s about to be sick.

When he’s finally able to, Exley wheezes, “W-what do you want?”

Eobard can barely hear him, so he crouches down beside the broken man, balancing on the balls of his feet, and says, “I don’t think spending time with you is good for Barry.”

“What?”
“You’ve gotten his hopes up with this whole business of finding Nora’s murderer.” Eobard smiles. It’s all teeth. “That’s me, you know…or haven’t you figured that out already?”

If Exley wasn’t afraid before, he is now. He starts shuddering again, but this time it doesn’t stop, the severity of this situation finally sinking in. “But…but Barry—”

“Don’t worry. He’s in good hands.”

“Y-you’re not human…”

“Neither is Barry.” He glances down at his gloved hands, making a fist with one slowly. The leather creaks pleasantly at the joints. “Someday, I mean. That’s why he needs to stay focused. That’s why he needs me.”

“You can’t—”

Eobard lashes out then. Aims right for the mouth.

Exley squeals in pain, lifting the hand of his uninjured arm to cover his lips. Blood dribbles down between his fingers.

He’s choking again, but Eobard doesn’t care.

“The reality of the situation is this…” Eobard tilts his head to one side, trying to get a better look at Exley’s tear-stained face. When the man finally manages to meet his gaze, Eobard continues. “The war between Barry and I spans centuries. While I don’t believe we were always meant to be enemies, per say, it’s become clear to me now that we were at least always destined to be an integral part of one another’s lives. Simply put, I am his and he is mine…Do you understand?”

Exley stares at him long and hard before slowly shaking his head.

Eobard grabs the hand covering his mouth by the thumb and forces it all the way back. “At least you’re honest,” he muses aloud.

“P-please!” the man cries, trying frantically to pull his hand free. It’s actually quite funny, considering he can barely use his other arm to help him. “Stop!”

Eobard relents, relinquishing his hold on Exley’s thumb, watching the man whimper on the ground like the pathetic sack of meat he is.

He wonders how he ever survived Africa.

“I’m going to kill you now, Mr. Exley,” Eobard says after the man’s had a moment to collect himself. In his mind, he can picture where Exley’s heart is beating frantically now beneath his breast. “But I don’t want you to die worrying about Barry. Please believe me when I say that he will be well taken care of. Once I educate him, he will want for absolutely nothing.”

This only seems to make Exley cry harder. Why, Eobard couldn’t possibly imagine.

“Close your eyes,” Eobard says, lifting his right hand slowly, vibrating. “This will only take a second.”

Sagely, Exley takes his advice.

Eobard makes it quick.
He runs all the way back to Central City without faltering once, the sense of elation he gets from ending Exley’s miserable life following him all the way home. He could have easily let the man die as fate intended, but he didn’t want to take that risk. If Exley ever got around to hiring a PI, Eobard might never be able to identify the detective. After all, Gideon’s link to the timeline was limited by what information was recorded digitally. She was far from being omnipotent.

There’s also the fact that he hasn’t killed anyone in an awfully long time.

He’s not going to lie. It had felt good.

It reminds him of what he’s truly fighting for here, this feeling of freedom. That’s what he deserves, after all. He put in the time and effort to obtain this power. He should be able to exercise it without fear.

As always, however, the sensation is short lived.

He’s only just skidded to a halt in the kitchen, his suit collapsing neatly into his ring, when the vertigo strikes. It takes him completely by surprise. One moment, he’s standing upright, that old fire burning in his veins—the next, the room is suddenly tilting sharply to the left, almost toppling him over into the kitchen table.

Somehow though he manages to stumble forward instead, speckles of light dancing across his vision, the blood rushing in his ears…It feels an awful lot like that one time the Flash nailed him in the back of the head with a crowbar. He had honestly thought he was about die.

He blacks out momentarily, coming back to himself suddenly when he smacks his head against the cushioned armrest of the living-room couch. Shaking, he uses it to lift himself up and onto the sofa, collapsing sideways onto the pillows. After he’s had a moment to collect himself, he realizes he must’ve pushed himself too hard. He hasn’t run that far or that fast in a considerably long time.

He had been too caught in up in killing Exley to notice the drop in his blood sugar.

He closes his eyes; tries to will back the migraine he can feel coming on. He just needs to rest for a second. Then he’ll get up and—

When he opens his eyes again, he’s surprised to find Barry standing in front of him. Instinctively, he reaches out to grab the boy, hand closing around the soft tensor bandage he wrapped around Barry’s wrist earlier that evening before he realizes what it is he’s doing.

Barry gasps, but doesn’t recoil. He’s holding a tall glass of orange juice in both hands, a little sloshing over the rim and onto the floor when Eobard lashes out. He seems pretty determined though not to let the whole thing spill over, so he just stands there and waits patiently, expression indecipherable in the dark.

It takes Eobard a moment to get with the program and release the boy. He can’t believe he just did that, but he’s possibly more surprised with the fact that Barry doesn’t immediately run once he’s free. The boy just continues to stand there…waiting…

Not sure what to do, Eobard accepts the glass silently and starts to drink.

Barry takes this opportunity then to leave. Eobard’s vision is still blurry around the edges, so he just assumes that the boy has gone back to bed, but a minute later he returns, this time with another tall glass of orange juice in hand and a package of trail-mix bars tucked under one arm. He sets both of
these down on the coffee table in front of Eobard and then flops onto the loveseat adjacent to him.

Eobard polishes off the first glass and makes it halfway through the second before starting on the energy bars. He figures that this must be freaking the boy out, even if just a little, but he doesn’t know how he’s going to explain it to him. He’s too famished to really think about it at the moment. He just considers himself lucky that he hasn’t slipped into a coma yet.

After a while, Barry finally says, “My mom had it too.”

...Too?

For once in his life, Eobard is completely lost.

The confusion must be clear on his face because then Barry says, “Diabetes.”

He’s…

Well…he’s shocked, really, because what are the chances...?

Eobard still doesn’t know how to contribute to this conversation, so he just reaches for a second energy bar. At least it makes sense now why Barry’s first thought upon finding him in the living-room was to grab a glass of orange juice. He must have seen his mother faint before.

“I’m sorry about making fun of you when you eat,” Barry says after a while, as though trying to fill the silence. “I don’t think you’re fat. I actually think you’re really really skinny, and I promise not to bug you about it anymore.”

Well, at least there was one upside to this little fiasco…

“And I didn’t drink the medicine,” Barry adds quietly, which explains why he’s wide awake at 4:30 in the morning. “I know I get awful nightmares, but I wanted to go out on the balcony to look at the stars because my mom really loved them.”

Eobard nods slowly. He might be mistaken, but he’s getting the feeling that the boy is somehow anxious now. He’s—

“She wanted to be an astronaut when she was as old as me.” Eobard opens his mouth to speak, but Barry just barrels on— “I think I’m too scared to go into space though because it’s dark and cold, but she loved it and I like to pretend that’s where she is right now. Up in space. With the stars. Being happy.” Barry slides down a little in his seat. Eobard realizes he’s trembling. “Please don’t be mad at me... I don’t want you to be mad at me.”

Eobard finishes chewing the gooey bits of nuts and berries in his mouth. Swallows thickly.

“Come here,” he says.

Barry looks as though he’d much rather sink into the floor. Eobard gives him a moment though and eventually the boy slips off the loveseat to join him on the couch. He sits down uncertainly on his left just as Eobard leans forward to snatch the TV remote off the coffee table.

He turns it to the Discovery channel and turns the volume down low. On the screen, a bull shark is gliding gracefully past an underwater camera.

When he settles back again, he wraps an arm around Barry and pulls the boy up tight against his side. Barry is tense at first, but gradually relaxes into Eobard’s hold until he’s calm enough to rest his
head against Eobard’s chest.

Eobard waits until the tension eases in the boy’s shoulders a little more before he asks, “Are you happy with me, Barry?”

The boy squirms a little then, but only so that he can crane his head back comfortably to look up at Eobard. It’s dark in the living-room and the light from the TV illuminates his little face in the most peculiar way, but his small smile is unmistakable.

“I love you,” Barry says, as though Eobard is an idiot for ever thinking otherwise.

The boy settles his head back down against Eobard’s chest then, easing a little more against his body. Eobard kisses him on top of the head before returning his attention to the program, watching as a somewhat smaller shark circles in the water, one dead eye focused intently on a diver in a metal cage.

Exhausted, they soon fall asleep together on the couch.

Chapter End Notes

*Collapses* Oh my God...never again. That was too long, maybe, but I have nobody to blame but myself. We'll be making leaps and bounds through time now, darlings. I just had to set up a few more important points. Hopefully I didn't bore you...

(Also, this is un-beta'd, so I'll be skimming through it over and over again to catch any mistakes I might've missed. I apologize if you run into anything that irks you in the meantime).

And now it's time for Fun Facts!

(1) The map of Central City: I actually found a crudely drawn layout of the city. So, yes, the Leawood area is located just north of the University Town District, and Central as a whole is situated along the Missouri River. Keystone City, which is the original home base of Jay Garrick and Wally West, is located just on the other side. Barry Allen will eventually become the hero of both.

(2) Jay Garrick: You have no idea how excited I was to hear that they've already casted someone to play the first Flash for Season 2 (I mean, remember his helmet???)!!! I firmly believe that the only reason Eobard thought he could get away with killing Barry Allen in the first place was because he assumed that the Speed Force could exist without Barry, possibly through someone like Jay Garrick—i.e. the Reverse Flash could still exist in his absence. I imagine he's gone toe to toe with the man before and that Eobard is well aware of the other dimension(s)...

(3) The Danville Dangers: I have no idea if this is a real team in the comics, but "Danville" is the community where Barry and Iris will eventually buy/build their first home together. I just had to throw that in.

(4) Joe's Caucasian joke: Eobard isn't a racist. He hates everyone equally.

(5) Josh Exley: Josh is indeed a fictional character, but not from the comics...He's from the X-files! He's played by Jesse L. Martin, actually, who also plays Det. Joe West in
the show. Since, deep down inside, Eobard really wants to kill Joe West, I thought I would give him someone else to go after in the meantime.

(6) 'A Place in the Sun' by Stevie Wonder: If you ever get the chance, check out this old song on youtube. I practically listened to it on loop while writing the second half of this chapter. In fact, reread Josh’s death scene while you listen to it. I can guarantee it'll crack you up. Or make you cry. There are two kinds of people in this world, after all...

(7) Bruce Wayne: Batman will be making a cameo in this story. I'm not sure what the nature of that cameo will be yet, but he is one of my all time favorite comic book heroes and I just can't help myself. I'm sorry. If I ever get around to finishing this story, he will have more of a presence in the sequel *fingers crossed*. PS: Batman once said that he hoped, had his parents lived, that he could have turned out more like Barry Allen. He truly admired Barry's good will and lively spirit. *Wipes tear from her eye* Me too, Batsy...me too...

(8) I think Eobard gets off on killing people. Don't try to convince me otherwise.
Fool me twice

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hold on to your hats, kiddies! You’re in for another long one...

For reals this time, you guys.

For reals.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The dumber people think you are, the most surprised they're going to be when you kill them.”

~William Clayton

~***~

As a child, Eobard was often told that a man’s greatest achievements could only be obtained through hard work and perseverance.

Eobard would beg to differ. That’s not to say that he doesn’t believe in ‘hard work and perseverance’, but the aim of the game is to work smarter, not harder. In fact, the first time he almost succeeded in killing the Flash, he didn’t even break a sweat. The opportunity simply presented itself and he was all too happy to take it.

It was just that easy.

He tries not to think about such things now—the taunting, the fighting, the killing—because this is a future he is now actively trying to avoid, but the subconscious mind is its own master. Dreaming, he is often the victim.

This particular memory is conjured with only the briefest of warnings, the taste of ozone, the blood rushing in his ears. Anamnesis envelopes him with tender arms and delivers him back to that fateful night, to the old Ferris Air hanger and his enemy standing within, Mark Mardon lying prone on the ground at his feet.

The Flash’s back was turned to door, little spritz of lightning looping through the air around his slender body. Eobard could almost feel it himself, the pleasant hum of the electric, Barry unwittingly acting as a beacon to the Speed Force before filtering it back out into the air. It was a siren’s call of sorts, one which was slowly sucking Eobard in.

He was helpless to resist.

He hadn’t been consciously looking for the Flash at all that evening, only happened upon the hero on his way to track down another long-standing foe. The young man was taking large, heaving breaths for once in his short life, shoulders slouched in exhaustion. Whatever he had just accomplished, it had clearly drained him.
Eobard hadn’t given much thought to what he was about to do next. He just saw the iron rod lying there beside the hanger door and decided to arm himself.

And then he ran.

The boy barely had enough time to turn around before flesh and muscle gave way gracefully to the cold harsh sting of metal. Eobard had taken great care in his aim—between the ribs, but not too close to the heart, completely missing the spine in favour of watching the Flash writhe bodily on the ground, arms and legs spasming, curling defensively in on his side…

Hurt and confused, the boy vibrated on and off for a while, aware that he had been wounded but unable to focus long enough on the rod to phase through it. Shock settled in quickly afterwards as his spasms grew shorter in duration and weaker in substance. Soon, he knew the boy’s mind would recede completely into that welcoming darkness.

Eobard took the opportunity then to kneel over his enemy, fingers ghosting over one end of the rod before taking it firmly in his grasp and giving it a good hard twist.

The boy threw his head back and screamed, his own hand curling over Eobard’s as though to pry it free.

“Stay with me,” Eobard whispered. He touched the corner of the Flash’s lips, dabbing at the blood gathered there. Then he traced his fingers down to the edge of the hero’s mask, tempted to pull back the hood. “You’re going to look me in the eyes as I kill you, Flash. It’s what I deserve.”

He wanted to have that final point of connection, for his image to be the last thing on the hero’s mind. He also wanted to remove his glove and press his fingers against the young man’s throat, to feel his rapid pulse diminish into nothing, his skin to cool, his muscles to relax… How intimate an act it would be.

How resounding a defeat.

Except he never got that far. He recalls something colliding with the back of his head before the dream ended, both figuratively and not. By whom, he can’t quite remember. Someone, he supposes, motivated by their own vicious cocktail of love and loathing for this shining, dying boy.

Everybody, it seemed, wanted a piece of Barry Allen.

~***~

He wakes to the smell of coffee.

Caffeine had never really had much of an effect on him when he first obtained his powers, but five long years of perfecting the art of disconnecting from the Speed Force has since weakened him to human vices. He’s never completely severed that connection of course—he can still feel it thrumming in his veins, just a touch away from lighting every nerve on fire, but he finds that he can access more of it at a time if he deals with it in shorter spurts. All things in moderation, after all. He’s got to save up.

He also wakes to Barry’s smiling face—sixteen and much taller than he was half a decade ago, voice deeper, body lean and beautiful in a way all children seem to be once they reach the cusp of adulthood. Awkward too, but hilariously so, as though it was Barry’s solemn mission to make the world laugh.

Eobard lets his eyes droop shut again, still haunted by the dream.
“I made you coffee,” Barry says.

“…I can tell.”

The bed dips as the younger man takes a seat beside him. “It’s almost ten o’clock, you know.”

Eobard cracks an eye open, glancing at the alarm clock on his bedside table. The glowing red numbers tell him it’s 09:47.

Their appointment is at 11:00.

“We’ll make it in time,” he replies.

Consciously or not, Barry starts bouncing his left knee gently. It rocks the bed. “Another late night at the lab, I take it?”

Eobard smiles faintly, “We’re on to something big.”

“You can tell me over breakfast then.” Barry waggles his eyebrows enticingly. “I’m making waffles.”

“Don’t destroy anything,” he mumbles before burying his face in his pillow. Then, as an afterthought, he says, “I love you, Barry.”

Barry doesn’t say anything. Just scoffs before patting him affectionately on the hip and disappearing from the room. Faintly, Eobard can hear the tell-tale sound of dishes and utensils being thrown about in kitchen, a veritable warzone in the making. Barry somehow always managed to make an utter mess of things.

But his waffles were good.

Two years ago they had moved into a much larger house. It was still situated in the Leawood area, with a lovely view of the Missouri River and Keystone City beyond, but it afforded Eobard a greater deal of privacy than the apartment complex. He could zip in and out of their apartment usually without fail, but he had faltered once in the stairwell, soaking wet from the rain and slipping on seemingly nothing. Unfortunately, the night guard had caught sight of him on camera and was therefore dealt with accordingly.

Eobard never really wanted that to happen again.

Barry never questioned the move. It afforded him more space, after all, which meant that he was always outside doing something in the yard with his friends—playing soccer, lounging in the sun, or building their own mobile planes. ‘Kid stuff’. Inside the house though he was more reserved; read quietly, studied, stayed out of the basement…

Eobard’s office was in the basement.

Barry would visit him sometimes in the early evening, to bring him a snack or tea, but Eobard had asked him once a long time ago not to go nosing around on his own. Barry readily agreed. He had, of course, seen Barry linger outside the basement door a few times when reviewing the security feed of the house, though the boy never hesitated for very long. Barry was well aware of the fact that Eobard worked for the military, after all. He understood that there were some things Eobard simply couldn’t share with him.

Life had been—to put it plainly—slow since his being marooned in the past. The municipal
government and Central City University had both approved his request to purchase the land where
the old Stadium used to be. The military in turn gave him the green light to continue his research for
them in what would someday be known as S.T.A.R. Labs. Construction had since begun on the
basic offices and laboratories for the future Collider, but it would be a while yet before they would
see any real progress. It was being built, but only a little at a time…

When the clock reads 10:00 on the dot, Eobard rises from bed and retreats into his en suite bathroom.
He goes through his morning routine at what feels like a snail’s pace, counting down the seconds in
his head. Despite the fact that everything is going according to plan, lately he’s been feeling
somewhat hollow inside…weak almost; tired. In trying to sequester his connection to the Speed
Force and better adapt to this mortal life, it seemed as though he was cutting himself off from life
itself.

He had been mortal once before, of course—despite the fact that he was engineered, he was still
born human. Did it feel always like this though? He can hardly remember. As a child, he was weak
in more ways than one…

Once he’s finished shaving, he leans against the bathroom sink and stares at his reflection in the
mirror. Then he closes his eyes and reaches out tentatively for the fringes of the Speed Force. He can
feel it like a city senses the first faint quivers of an earthquake, building momentum steadily beneath
their feet.

He knows, deep down inside, that it wants to break free.

It lurches suddenly, reaching out for him in return, and this is how he knows that Barry is back even
before the boy knocks on the bathroom door. He wonders if the boy can sense it himself, this energy
mounting just beneath the surface of his reality, beckoning him into the light. It will take the storm
seeded by the particle accelerator to break down the last barrier standing between this unnatural force
and Barry Allen, but the Speed Force is like a living thing, actively yearning. It would take the boy
now if it only knew how.

It appeared to be as obsessed with Barry as he was.

Sometimes, though, Eobard wonders if it isn’t the very root of his own obsession…

“The waffles are getting cold,” Barry says, voice muffled by the door. “For once, we’re not going
to be late because of me.”

“You’ve been late to see your therapist almost every other appointment for the last five years,”
Eobard retorts. “What’s one more day?”

Barry opens the door then, invitation or not, reflection grinning at Eobard in the mirror. “It’s my last
day. In just three more hours, I won’t have to listen to anyone tell me I’m crazy anymore.”

Eobard turns to face him then, smiling softly. “Who in their right mind doesn’t want to be crazy?
Nobody normal ever has any real fun.”

~***~

Dr. Fredrick Knox had been Barry’s first therapist, a wizardly old man with a scruffy white beard
and a warm smile. Regretfully, he had retired a year ago and Barry had since then been passed over
to one Dr. Isabella Markov, a fiery little woman with a zero tolerance policy for bullshit. She had
helped Barry considerably in learning how to cope with his fear and anxiety, although his insistence
on there being a ‘man in the lightning’ irritated her to no end. She had taken Eobard aside on several
occasions to explain how troubled she was by the boy’s obsession, but since it didn’t impair Barry’s ability to function in everyday life there was really nothing she could do about it.

Eobard wasn’t very fond of her either, so he asked Barry a couple of months ago if he was ready to cut the proverbial cord. Not surprisingly, Barry had been all too happy to agree.

Almost five years since the night of his mother’s murder, Barry attends his last appointment. Dr. Markov had known that this day was a long time coming, but she is still thin-lipped when she escorts Barry out of her office at half past noon. She gives him a gentle pat on the back though and looks sincere enough when she says, “If you ever need the talk to someone, Barry, you always know where to find me.”

“I know,” he replies softly. “And believe me, I’m grateful for everything you’ve done for me, Dr. Markov. I can’t ever thank you enough.”

Barry offers his hand to her then for a shake. She seems surprised at first, but then she eventually takes his hand, looking a touch wistful by the gesture. “Goodbye, Mr. Wells.”

Barry grins—all perfectly straight teeth and gently crinkled eyes, the true face of child-like mirth and good will. She can’t help but smile in return.

When her hand slips from his grasp, she turns then shake Eobard’s hand, although any warmth Barry’s smile might’ve engendered in her fades from her eyes completely when her fingers curl uncertainly around his own.

There is an almost austere quality to her voice when she says, “I wish you and your son all the very best, Dr. Wells…”

Of all the times he has listened to his private recordings of Barry’s appointments, he has never once heard the boy question his behaviour. In fact, Barry had nothing to say but praise for his surrogate father whenever Markov steered the conversation toward his home life. For all intents and purposes, she should have believed the boy when he said he was happy with Eobard and simply left it at that.

Every once in a while though she would probe a little deeper, usually when Barry seemed to be in a less than accommodating mood, which was typically the case if he hadn’t gotten enough sleep the night before. The questions themselves were ridiculous: ‘Has your adoptive father ever said or done anything that made you feel unsafe?’; ‘Do you ever feel as though Harrison puts too many restrictions on your social life?’; ‘Has he or anyone else ever touched in you a way that you felt was inappropriate?’—

More often than not, Barry would burst out laughing, but that last question pissed Eobard off to no end. Granted, Barry strolled into her office that day sporting bruises on his wrists and neck, but that was from being held down by Tony Woodward in the schoolyard, not because his sole guardian was taking advantage of him.

He could understand her reasoning though. Nightmares, trouble sleeping, a fear of the dark, a loss of appetite, spacing out on occasion—the signs were troubling, no doubt about it, but these had cropped up well before ‘Harrison’ had stepped into Barry’s life. In fact, in all the time that Barry has been with him, he has never once raised his hand against the boy. After all, the last thing he wanted was for Barry to fear him.

The aim of the game was to garner Barry’s adoration.

If Dr. Markov had been Barry’s first therapist, Eobard would have snapped her neck without so
much as moment’s hesitation, but he supposes that age has made him somewhat lethargic. Coupled
with the fact that the sudden death of Josh Exley had shaken Barry up pretty badly all those years
ago, Eobard really couldn’t afford to kill much of anyone else in the boy’s immediate circle. There
was a point where Eobard needed to learn how to exercise a little restraint.

That’s not to say he hasn’t come close to putting an end to her before. Once, Barry had asked her
why she seemed so fixated on Eobard when, in fact, Eobard was really the only one who ever tried
to help him. Her quiet response had been, “Sometimes we love out of necessity, Barry. Especially
when we are children.”

The uncharacteristic silence that followed worried Eobard, but since he had only bugged her office
with listening devices and not cameras, he couldn’t tell whether Barry had been stunned by the truth
of that statement or if he was merely confused. Whatever the case may be, he would never know. Dr.
Markov didn’t care to elaborate on that point, choosing instead to change the topic of their
conversation completely.

Standing before her today, her smaller hand cradled in his own, he fights the sudden urge to tighten
his grip. “Thank you, Dr. Markov. I don’t know where Barry would be without your help.”

“I’m going to miss working with him,” she says softly. “If there’s anything you ever need, please
don’t hesitate to call.”

For a moment, he can’t quite read the peculiar look in her eyes, so he slows time by a fraction of a
second and stares a little harder. Her face is so open, unguarded—an invitation almost—but then it
dawns on him that she’s only affording him this little search in order to better examine him in return,
and that snaps him back to reality faster than anything else in his entire life.

He wonders then if she can feel his involuntary flinch when he releases her hand. He wonders too if
she realizes yet that he’s a sociopath.

It’s a thought that haunts him for years to come.

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Every once in a while though, he wonders if Dr. Markov wasn’t really on to something.

Though he believes that he and Barry make a perfect pair, there are days when his old and
implacable anger stirs in its shallow grave. Not often, of course, but as mild mannered and polite as
Barry can be he is still very much a human child, one who is prone to making mistakes. He keeps
secrets and tells little white lies, breaks the occasional glass, scraps his knees when he runs and falls
—the usual song and dance.

Consequently, Eobard has reacted as well as any parent could be expected, raising his voice to be
heard over Barry’s own flawed reasoning or grounding him on the rare occasion that such a measure
is truly warranted. Barry is a smart boy though, quick to learn the error of his ways. Punishment is
not often required. Eobard finds that he is easily pacified with a sincere and heartfelt apology.

There are times though, as singular as they might be, when Barry makes the same mistake twice.

And it is times like these that the blackened beast of Eobard’s ire rears its ugly head.

It catches him completely by surprise one warm Saturday afternoon, mostly because he’s standing
alone in the garage, rummaging through a trunk of old hardwood tools—which is, to be honest, an
terribly boring task, not the expected scene of a grown man’s impending meltdown. Usually Barry is
charged with maintaining the yard, but their neighbor’s tree had fallen against the fence and
dislodged one of the wooden planks, a job Eobard feels more comfortable completing himself. However, since tidying the garage last weekend, he had unwittingly rearranged everything in such a way that he could no longer find the most innocuous items, and was therefore honestly struggling in his search for a decently sized hammer.

Exasperated, he pulls the trunk away from the wall, wondering if anything had perhaps fallen over the edge and out of sight. It is then that he discovers the small paper bag tucked safely away behind it.

At first he’s confused—he had, after all, swept behind the trunk when he cleaned earlier—but when he picks up the bag and peeks inside, realization pierces through the haze and brings with it that all-too familiar spark of fury. It sucks the air clear out of his lungs. His vision blurs. The room spins.

He feels a bit like his old self then, because a long time ago this fury had once been the only thing that kept him going—truly, it had been his reason for living. Any time that he had been beaten down, it raised him up and above his broken self to that realm where Thought was pure and simple. No one could reach him there. Not his enemies; not his allies.

Not even the infamous Barry Allen.

He knows that he can’t succumb to it though, as easy as that would be, so he lets it slip numbly from his grasp. It still burns at his core, a tiny flame licking tantalizingly at the boundaries of his self-control, but he can breathe again at the very least.

Coming down from this unusual high, the room finally slots back into focus. Dimly, he realizes that the front wooden panel of the trunk has been cracked in half; he realizes too that his right foot is throbbing painfully. No great mystery there. It’s not often that he lashes out without conscious control of his actions, but it’s been so long since he last buckled to that white hot rage, he really shouldn’t be so surprised. Thankfully, this is peanuts in comparison to some of the things he’s done in the past.

As his anger fades, he becomes more aware of the noisome warmth of disappointment coiling in the pit of his stomach. His rational self tells him firmly that he will deal with this situation as any concerned parent would—because he is, of course, concerned. Barry’s done his fair share of stupid things in the last five years, but this really takes the cake…

Mildly surprised that he managed not to crush the bag or its contents during his little outburst, he drops it carefully onto the ground beside the trunk. He has a meeting with Ferguson scheduled in an hour before he has to pick Barry up from the library. Then, as per usual, they’ll pay a quick visit Henry Allen, but he still has the fence to fix before he can leave. Maybe it’s for the best though. He needs time to cool off before he can face the world with a level head again.

With a heavy sigh, he goes back to rummaging through the trunk until he finds a hammer, then he wanders around to the side of the house to nail the wooden post back into place.

When his neighbour eventually ambles outside to evaluate his handiwork, Eobard doesn’t hesitate to remind him whose tree it was that collapsed against the fence in the first place. He also doesn’t hesitate to describe in precise detail what he’ll do with the next post if the man leaves any future repairs up to Eobard or his son.

The colour drains from his neighbour’s face in the most amusing way before he hot-foots it back inside his house.
Growing up, Eobard never had much in the way of friends.

He had associates. Oodles, in fact. He was a well-respected scientist, after all, even in his own era. People used to come to him in droves to apply for a position in his laboratory.

As much as they respected him though, Eobard never felt secure in sharing any of his triumphs or tribulations with them. For the longest time, he viewed them all as potential enemies, knowing that they would see any sign of weakness as an opportunity to beat him down. In fact, many had tried; a few had almost succeeded. It was an awkward kind of game, one that he didn’t particularly enjoy playing, but at the very least he always managed to come out as the victor.

His view has changed a little since coming to the past. Most of his new associates are far beneath him in intelligence, and for this reason he’ve found it remarkably easy to befriend a number of them. They know that he has them beat in almost every way imaginable, and so they’ve collectively decided from the get-go that there’s no use trying to outshine him—instead, they’ve simply made it their goal to impress him.

Now, he says that he befriended them, but there are actually only a handful of people whose company he truly enjoys for any extended period of time. In his small circle of friends, this includes Joe West, who often cares for Barry when Eobard is short on time; Henry Allen, who is perhaps the most cordial inmate Eobard has ever had the pleasure of knowing; and Ted Ferguson, one of the men who originally vetted Eobard for this position as the lead supervisor at Central City’s little military base. In fact, if Eobard had to choice, he would perhaps considers Ferguson to be his closest confidant of the three.

Funny thought there—a close confident.

Who’d of guessed…

To all outside appearances, he and Ferguson are two very similar people. They’re both men of science, who are, by default, never quite satisfied with the military’s involvement in their research. They both also happen to be single fathers, although Ferguson had only become a widower a little over a year ago, and his daughter, Tabatha, is almost twenty-four by now (this, at least, gave Eobard someone other than Det. West to discuss all the little peculiarities of raising an older child, because as accommodating as Barry could be at times, some of his habits remained a mystery even to him). And lastly, neither one of them knew whether or not they could trust General Iverson anymore, especially since he had recently become somewhat more…obstreperous with age.

In fact, it is because of General Iverson that Eobard is now sitting across the table from Ferguson in CC Jitters, sipping at his black coffee and wondering for the umpteenth time how he came to develop an addiction for caffeine. His associate is currently staring pensively into his own cup of green tea, mind undoubtedly occupied by something of a more sinister nature. At least, that’s what Eobard is assuming, given the man’s dour expression.

Eobard is both worried and not worried. He doesn’t like hitches in his grand plan for the particle accelerator, but he is more capable of steering the timeline in a more favourable direction despite whatever obstacles life chooses to throw his way. Whatever reason prompted Ferguson to pull this little rendezvous together, Eobard is confident he can handle it.

However, after a long, awkward silence following their obligatory salutations, Ferguson utters one solitary word: “Macaques.”

“…Macaques?”
Eobard knows that this genus of primates happens to be one of the most widespread in the world, second only to humans.

He’s also well aware of the fact that they are a favoured species in animal testing…

Already, he doesn’t like where this conversation is going.

“Dr. Roger Feldman is one of the lead neuropsychologists in Canada right now.” Ferguson explains. He pauses to sip his tea then, wincing when he burns his tongue. “His main focus is on the overlap between movement imagination and execution, although lately he’s been trying to branch his work out into, let’s say…more controversial areas of research.”

“I hate him already,” Eobard mutters into his cup. And to think, he’d been half hoping to have a lighter conversation before confronting Barry about his little discovery. So much for that.

His honesty earns a humorous snort from Ferguson. “Still won’t budge with your stance on primates, will you?”

“I made it clear to the Iverson when we were building the animal care facility that I wouldn’t supervise any research on primates.” Mice, rats, zebrafish—just about anything else was fair game so far as he was concerned. It wasn’t that he didn’t care any less about god’s smaller creations, but there was just something so unsettling about using such intelligent and sensitive creatures for scientific gain. Eobard didn’t care much for hurting people that had absolutely nothing to do with his grand scheme either. “He can try to intimidate me if he likes, but every project I’ve undertaken for him so far has gone above and beyond his expectations. He has nothing to threaten me with.”

“I agree, but look at it this way—I’m a complete pushover.”

Eobard blinks.

Ferguson smiles at his confusion. “It’s true, isn’t it? I laid down a couple of house rules myself when I started working for the military, and yet they’ve been able to trample over each and every one.”

“I think you’re being a bit harsh on yourself, Ted. Besides, what does it matter? Is this Dr. Feldman angling for a position in your lab?”

“I chatted with Iverson last week…” Ferguson’s expression quickly sours. “The General is still very much aware of your aversion to working on primates and is therefore investing the minimal effort in persuading Feldman that I have the better facilities, but let’s face it—your lab is the one scientists the whole world over fancy. Even Feldman. All the work that you’ve done so far is incredibly meticulous. It’s as though everything you touch turns to gold.”

“You’re too generous.”

“Don’t be modest. It really doesn’t suit you.”

Eobard cracks a grin.

Ferguson relaxes marginally at the sight of it. “Is it a wonder really that Dr. Feldman wants to work under your supervision? At least with you at the helm, you can tightly regulate the structure of his experiments. Me, on the other hand…? Well, he’d walk all over me.”

Grimacing, Eobard leans back in his chair and glances across the shop at the two young girls serving coffee behind the counter. They both look completely drained, and yet their hands fly flawlessly over their work, never seeming to miss a beat.
“…You said he’s working on the overlap between movement imagination and execution?” Eobard inquires.

“His pet project is on mirror neurons actually,” Ferguson elaborates. “You know—monkey see, monkey do?”

Eobard knows what mirror neurons are—they fire either when an animal is performing a specific action or when it witnesses the same action being performed by another. There was still a great deal of speculation on how these neurons supported an animal’s ability to ‘imitate’ though, and Eobard didn’t see how that niche of research fit into their line of work.

Scanning the room briefly to ensure that no one is within hearing range, Eobard leans forward on his elbows and murmurs, “Given the nature of the research the military typically funds, how the hell does this Dr. Feldman plan on weaponizing mirror neurons?”

Ferguson laughs so hard, he chokes on his tea. It takes him a minute to compose himself again. “That’s what I said, and yet Iverson had the audacity to look insulted…Poor fool. You know, he’s due to retire soon? I hear he’s got Alzheimer’s.”

“I’m aware.”

“His replacement is an absolute dick.”

Eobard laughs.

“No, I’m serious.” Ferguson looks visibly distressed. “Colonel Wade Eiling. You ever heard of him? I think the word on the grapevine is that he’s going to be promoted soon. He also has his sights set on your lab.”

Its Eobard’s turn to be surprised. “I’m sorry, what?”

“He’s actually the one trying to recruit Feldman. Iverson says he can’t stand Eiling much either but that the guy gets results. The powers-that-be seem to think that the two of you will be the dynamic duo of the century.”

The corner of Eobard’s lip curls in disdain. He doesn’t particularly enjoy being thought of as a prized pony, least of all by these Neanderthals. “I see…”

“Anyhow, Feldman is flying down from Toronto next week to meet with you. I wanted to give you a heads up, and, uh…” Reaching into his coat pocket, Ferguson produces a USB device. This he slides nervously across the table to Eobard. “I copied the proposal for Feldman’s work. I’m pretty sure no one informed you of his upcoming visit because they figured it’d be easier to bully you into accepting a new deal if they caught you unaware. However, I thought that if you could find a way to tear his proposal to shreds before his arrival, then you might be able to scare him off completely.”

“How generous of you,” Eobard replies, smiling, as he pockets the device.

“I’m going to warn you though, it’s…it’s an interesting read.”

“What exactly is he proposing?”

“You’re not going to believe me…”

“Try me.”
“I think…well, I think he’s trying to prove that telepathy is achievable.”

This startles a laugh out of Eobard. “Telepathy…are you kidding me?”

“I wish I was, but the way he goes about describing it…I’m no neuropsychologist, Harrison, but since you seem to be an amateur professional in just about every other avenue of science, maybe you’ll have an easier time figuring out what exactly it is he’s trying to achieve here.”

The funny thing is, telepathy is a real phenomenon. Eobard knows. He’s seen some rather peculiar things in his time, so he’s not about to throw that particular notion to the wind, but the thought that someone from the 21st century might already be taking the first few steps toward unraveling that mystery…

“You know, I think I’m actually looking forward to meeting this Dr. Feldman,” Eobard says. “I like a man with a sense of humour.”

“Whatever you do, please exercise caution with Colonel Eiling,” Ferguson warns. “He thinks he can whip us science-y types into formation with the snap of his fingers. I think he might actually enjoy butting heads with you.”

“Duly noted,” Eobard replies, tipping his coffee cup cordially at his companion. He knows exactly how to deal with brutes. One could almost say he’s dealt with them almost all his life.

Cut them behind the knee and they pretty much all buckle the same way.

A small smile creeps onto Ferguson’s face then. If Eobard had to give his expression a name, he would call it ‘faith’. The man knows Eobard is a heavy hitter. He won’t be pulling any punches, least of all where this Colonel Eiling is concerned.

Eobard Thawne is nobody’s puppet.

~***~

As pleasant as his visit with Ferguson went, Eobard’s earlier discovery still weighs heavily on his mind when he swings by the library to pick up the boy. In fact, his mood takes another turn for the worse when he pulls up in front of the building to see Barry sitting outside on a bench next to two young ladies.

The one on Barry’s left is completely occupied with her flip-screen cell phone, thumbs tapping away furiously at the number pad, brows furrowed in concentration. Eobard recognizes her as Mary Thompkins, the girl Barry is currently tutoring in calculus. The other is seated on Barry’s right, twirling a large, curly, black lock of hair around her finger as she openly stares at his son, eyes wide and dark, seemingly captivated by just the look of him.

Eobard recognizes her as Rebecca Cooper, the girl who had been held back a year in junior high and who had supposedly already dated a quarter of the boys on their high school football team. If Eobard had any say in the matter, he wouldn’t let that girl within a half mile radius of the boy.

The last thing he needed was for Barry to die prematurely of some venereal disease.

Thankfully though Barry is, as usual, completely blind to the affections of any girl who isn’t Iris West. Case in point, he’s currently gesturing wildly with his hands, gaze fixed upward on the sky, obviously going on some long rant about the latest advances in space exploration. Eobard’s willing to bet he’s talking about the recent landing of the Huygens probe on Saturn’s largest moon, Titan. After all, Barry couldn’t stop talking about it at the breakfast table this morning.
Eobard doubts Rebecca really gives a damn about the Huygens probe or any other achievements in astronomy, but she sidles ever closer, eyes focused intently on the boy’s lips. If Eobard waits long enough, he’ll probably witness Barry’s first kiss.

Taking pre-emptive action, he thumbs down the button for the passenger side window, then leans over in his seat to get a better view of the teenagers before shouting, “Barry!”

He doesn’t know which of the three kids he startles more. Miss Thompkins raises an eyebrow at Eobard indignantly, Barry smiles sheepishly, and Miss Cooper…

Well, Miss Cooper looks remarkably upset.

Before Barry can get up off the bench though, the girl makes a grab for his thigh. Eobard wonders if she’s honestly so bold as to sexually assault the boy in broad daylight, but then he realizes that she’s simply snatched Barry’s cell phone off his lap. Flipping it open, she types what he presumes to be her phone number before dropping it into Barry’s hand and pressing a quick kiss to the corner of his mouth. Then she takes off like a rocket down the street, pausing only momentarily to glance back at Eobard with a vicious gleam in her eyes…

Barry sits there for a while, completely stunned, as he watches the little strumpet trounce off into the distance.

Thompkins looks up long enough to give him a proud pat on the shoulder before returning her attention to her phone.

Eventually, Barry is able to shake himself out of his daze. He rises slowly from his seat and approaches Eobard’s car, hand pausing on the door handle as he mutters, “Why does life have to be so complicated?”

Eobard sighs. “I hate to break it to you, but it’s about to get a whole lot worse.”

Barry’s wide-eyed confusion is a truly comical sight as he finally opens the door and drops into the passenger seat. He jumps though when he realizes he just sat on something, reaching between his legs to rescue the small, crumpled paper bag.

It takes a moment, but eventually realization dawns on his face. “Oh, wow… I can explain.”

“You can try,” Eobard replies, trying to keep his voice level, “but I’m going to tell you right now that there’s absolutely nothing you can possibly say to me that would make me believe you could be trusted as a mature individual for the next ten or twenty years.”

“…Have I ever told how truly terrifying you are when you’re angry?” Barry says quietly, voice edged with fear. “Because you don’t have to say anything else. Your disappointment is rolling off you in waves. I can practically feel it.”

“Barry,” he warns.

The boy finally closes the door and tugs on his seat belt, slumping into his seat as he stares at the little paper bag.

Eobard takes a second to pull safely out into traffic, trying to keep his composure despite the fact that he can feel his temperature rising, before he continues with their conversation. “You know, most teenagers do weed. But not my boy, Barry. He’s something special…”

“I promise you, this is not as bad as it looks.”
Eobard glares at him out of the corner of his eye. “Don’t be a moron, Barry. I told you not to do it again, but you went behind my back and did it anyway.”

“I’m sorry.”

“You say that, but for the first time in my life I honestly don’t think you mean it. I mean—” Eobard’s grip tightens on the steering wheel, knuckles turning white from the strain. Barry definitely takes notice. “—you lost both of your eyebrows last time. I though the humiliation would have deterred you from making the same stupid mistake twice.”

“I didn’t know what I was doing then,” Barry says quietly, slumping further in his seat when Eobard shoots him another look. “Okay, I think you’ve just reached a whole new level of scary here. I’m going to shut up now.”

“No,” Eobard snaps. “You’re going to tell me where you got the materials to make another firework and who the hell is storing them for you.” Barry quickly opens his mouth to interject, but Eobard beats him to the punch. “—And don’t you dare tell me that you used leftovers from before, because I cleaned the garage out last weekend in case you hadn’t remembered.”

“I-I…I don’t…I mean—“

“So help me god, Barry…”

“I’ll get you the other fireworks and the rest of the materials myself. I promise.”

“I don’t care. I want a name.”

Agitated, Barry runs his fingers through his hair. “Please don’t do this…”

Eobard lets out an irritated huff. He keeps quiet though until they reach a red light, turning to look Barry dead in the eye as he says, “Either you tell me now or I’ll inform Joe that someone at your school is handling explosive materials again.”

Barry goes about as white as sheet. The kid knows that making fireworks is illegal. You can’t even set them off within the city limits, so why Barry felt the need to make them is completely beyond him. Joe had warned the boy himself. In fact, while Joe would probably take some small measure of pity on Barry for his stupidity, he was bound to come down hard on whoever it was Barry was working with.

Eobard stares at him for a while longer, giving him ample time to make his decision before the light suddenly turns green. As Eobard hits the gas, he returns his focus to the road and says, “Very well. If this is how it’s going to be, then I’ll—“

“Danny,” Barry hisses between clenched teeth.

“Danny…As in Danny Krupin?”

“Yes.”

It’s a good thing Eobard wasn’t in the habit of killing children anymore, otherwise… “Just Danny?”

“Yes. His uncle leaves the stuff lying around at his workshop sometimes. Danny has collected a crate of it in his basement.”

Some of the tension eases from Eobard’s shoulders. He was going to call the Krupins tonight and let
their son have it. Then he was going to drop by their house and take everything the kid collected so far so that Eobard could destroy it himself once and for all, maybe give someone back at the base a fun job for Monday evening…

“That wasn’t so hard now, was it, Barry?”

Barry doesn’t say anything, just stares down at the paper bag in his lap.

“…I’m still talking to you,” he says sternly.

“I know. I just…please go easy on him.”

“Why?” he asks incredulously. “You almost died the last time one of those things went off. I don’t think Danny cares half as much about you making it to your next birthday as I do.”

“It was my idea.”

“You’re a horrible liar.”

“At worst, we’re equally to blame. Danny can’t make them as well as I do. He wouldn’t have done it again unless he knew I’d be able to help.”

Eobard’s grip on the steering wheel tightens again. Here he thought only outside forces would ever threaten Barry’s well-being. He never considered the fact that the young man would be a danger to himself, or that he would so foolishly invite other people to cause him undo harm.

Barry doesn’t know how lucky he is that Eobard is trying to be a better man.

“Barry…I’m not going to murder him, if that’s what you’re worried about. His parents can punish him however they see fit.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he can tell that Barry is still pretty miserable about having to give up his friend’s name. Well, his loyalty is horribly misplaced. Eobard isn’t exaggerating anything here. His little idiot of a friend could have easily gotten him killed.

Agitated as he is, Eobard doesn’t particularly enjoy the strain this little fiasco is causing between them, so at the next red light he reaches over to grab Barry by the back of the neck and cards his fingers through his hair. The boy tenses at first, but quickly relaxes. “Barry, I don’t know what I would do if anything happened to you. I would kill for you, if I had to. You know that, right?”

Barry snorts, but the corner of his lip twitches briefly in relief. “Yeah, though I certainly hope not.”

Eobard almost laughs at the irony. “Desperate times call for desperate measures.”

“I know, but…but you don’t have to tell my dad, do you?”

He gives Barry one more comforting scratch on the back of the neck before returning his hand to the steering wheel. “I don’t know. I think Henry has a right to know, don’t you?”

“Seriously?” Barry grumbles. “I don’t want him to worry.”

“He’s your biological father. It’s in the job description.” Barry frowns at him, but Eobard doesn’t buckle. “Also, you’re grounded.”

“For how long?”
“Until further notice.” Which reminds him—“This includes an immediate halt all extracurricular activities.”

Barry blinks at him incredulously. “Wait, what? But I spend almost all of my free time tutoring.”

“How can you possibly say that?”

“How does she play with her phone every session?”

“I rest my case.”

Barry looks incredibly annoyed, which is funny considering the amount of trouble he is in at the moment. All the same, if this keeps him from seeing Rebecca Cooper for the next little while, Eobard doesn’t really care how upset the boy is with him.

Fortunately, Barry knows a losing battle when he sees one, so he braces an elbow against the car door and rests his chin against his cheek, attempting to ignore Eobard for the remainder of the trip.

Eobard smiles smugly to himself and turns on the radio.

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Henry Allen looks about as amused as can be expected. Holding the receiver up to his ear, he stares at his son for a good long time before finally saying, voice muffled to Eobard’s ears by the glass, “Seriously, Barry?”

Barry swallows thickly, offering his father an awkward sort of half shrug. “Uh…yeah?”

“…What colour?”

Eobard frowns, which only seems to amuse Henry, although he quickly tries to school his features again for Eobard’s sake. “Honestly though, slugger, don’t do it again.”

“I know.”

“I know you know, but do I have to go over the whole spiel of why you have to take better care of yourself again, or has Harrison already seen to that?”

“I’ve already heard the spiel. I’m also grounded until further notice.”

“Good…how long exactly is ‘until further notice’?” This question is directed at Eobard.

Eobard doesn’t miss a beat. “It means ‘until further notice’.”

The guard on their side of the room steps forward then to tap Eobard on the shoulder in warning. The receivers aren’t there so much that they can hear each other properly as to record all the conversations that the prisoners might have with their visitors. This is why Barry and Henry had been careful to only refer to the fireworks as ‘that-one-thing-Barry-foolishly-made-before-and-foolishly-made-again’ during their conversation instead of simply as ‘fireworks’.

Eobard waves the guard off in understanding. As annoying as it is, he actually doesn’t mind the
system. After all, he had the receivers bugged himself. He also has cameras situated on both the prisoners’ and the visitors’ side of the visitation room, the better to keep tabs on what Barry discussed with his father when Eobard wasn’t there to escort him to the prison personally.

Barry waits until the guard has returned to his position by the door before he continues. “Apparently, this also means I can’t tutor.”

Henry raises an eyebrow at Eobard.

Eobard shrugs.

“Well... ‘tough love’ got its name for a reason, Barry. Besides, you can’t say you’ve really lived until you’ve been grounded in the most painful way imaginable. Think of it as a rite of passage.”

Barry snorts into the receiver. “So, I should feel privileged that I’ve been grounded…?”

“Barry, I used to get grounded every other week when I was your age. The last time Harrison put you under house arrest was when you fell out of that tree in the park. If memory serves me right, that was nearly two years ago.”

Eobard nods in remembrance. Barry had only done it because Iris had dared him. He had broken his collarbone as a consequence.

He easily could’ve broken his neck though.

Eobard had been furious.

“I’m not complaining that I’m grounded. I’m complaining because Mary has to pass her exam next week.”

“How’s that been going anyway? Making any progress?”

“She’s done phenomenally well on her last couple of homework assignments. I mean, she’s practically done almost a complete 180 in the last month alone. She’s like...she’s like…” Barry turns to look at Eobard then, eyes dangerously narrow. “She’s like my particle accelerator.”

Eobard chokes on a laugh then, removing his glasses briefly so that he can rub the tears out of his eyes. He can’t believe Barry just made that comparison...

Even so, it gets the boy’s feelings on the matter across just fine.

“…When Harrison can breathe again, pass him the phone, please, Barry.”

It takes a moment for him to collect himself, but eventually he takes the proffered receiver from Barry and presses it against his ear. Quite seriously, he says, “I haven’t been at this job for very long, but I’m pretty sure that the most effective parenting is accomplished when one parent doesn’t openly question the decisions of the other.”

“I agree. That’s why I’m not going to tell you that you’re wrong.”

“Thank you.”

“However…”

“…You think he should continue tutoring?”
“There has to be a middle ground here.”

Eobard runs a hand through his hair wearily. “I suppose so.”

“I won’t be so bold as to suggest what that middle ground should be, although…”

“I already know what it should be, but you have to admit—” Eobard steals a glance at Barry “—it’s fun watching the kid squirm.”

Barry gives him a look of long-suffering.

“Whatever else you decide to do, you have my complete support.”

“I know.” Sighing, he sets his jaw and says to the boy, “If you want to continue tutoring, your students have to work at the house. This includes Mary Thompkins and Simon what’s-his-face. This does not include your other friends.”

Barry nods slowly in acquiescence, although he still looks somewhat hopeful.

“…Except, perhaps, Miss West.”

Barry does a silent upward victory punch.

Eobard’s gaze flickers back to Henry. “Are we agreed?”

“One hundred percent.”

“Good. Now…was there anything else you wanted to discuss with me, or do you want me to hand you back over to your son?”

“In a bit. I enjoy your company too, you know.” Henry smiles then, open and honest, which only accentuates the premature wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. Eobard feels the briefest flutter of regret beneath his breastbone. “Besides Joe, I don’t get too many outside visitors in here.”

It takes Eobard a moment, but eventually he catches the small problem with Henry’s statement. “I’m sorry—Joe visits you?”

“Well, yeah…He never mentioned it?”

“To be honest, we don’t ever talk about you. Period.” Eobard runs his hand through his hair again. “You know, considering the fact that he’s the one who arrested you…”

Henry makes an odd sort of face and shrugs. “True enough, but our conversations have been pretty civil so far. I think he’s trying to make amends.”

“I see,” Eobard feels something clench inside his chest. He doesn’t want to admit it, but he’s suddenly feeling remarkably nervous. “But when you say ‘making amends’, it sounds as though Joe thinks he might have made a mistake…”

The brief sidewise glance Henry gives his son before he says, softly, as though hoping that the glass will muffle it completely, “I thought this was something we agreed never to discuss in front of Barry” is very telling.

Oh god.

Unless he’s reading into this the wrong way, he thinks Henry is trying to tell him that Det. West has
it in his mind to reopen the case.

It’s odd, but for a moment Eobard feels somewhat betrayed. It’s strictly police business, so he understands why Joe wouldn’t have mentioned it to him before, but the thought that a man he’s comes to recognize as a close friend could potentially ruin the absolute control he has over Barry’s life doesn’t sit well with him.

It’s stupid, really, but that’s just how he feels.

During his little lapse, Barry reaches out suddenly to steal the receiver. Looking none-too-pleased with the unexpected turn in their conversation, and obviously more capable of reading lips than either of them would’ve given him credit for, the boy says, “What did you agree to never discuss in front of me?”

“Barry…”

“I’m not eleven anymore,” Barry mutters. “I promise I won’t try to tackle-hug you if you tell me something I don’t want to hear.”

Henry winces, obviously recalling the day he had to explain to Barry that he was going to be adopted. “It was hard enough trying telling you I might never get out of here all those years ago, Barry. Harrison and I agreed that we didn’t ever want to give you false hope, even if it looked as though the police were going to reopen the case.”

Barry edges closer in his seat. “Is that why Joe is visiting you? He’s really reopening the case?”

Henry’s gaze falls on Eobard then, as though silently asking for permission to tell Barry what the boy so desperately wants to hear.

Since Eobard can’t move so much as a muscle without giving anything away, he just sits there and stares. For once, he’s completely at the mercy of the other man…

A position which Henry abuses shamelessly when he says, “Pretty much.”

Eobard can feel his temper rising. Agitated, he takes off his suit jacket and slings it over the back of his chair.

He has no idea what grounds Joe has to reopen the case, only that if he gathers significant evidence to suggest that Henry isn’t responsible for Nora’s murder, Barry might very well return to Henry’s care. The boy is old enough now that there is nothing Eobard can really do or say to stop that from happening, at least legally.

For the first time in a long time, he feels as though he’s about to lose control of everything.

For a long moment, Barry just sits there, stunned, so Eobard gently coaxes the receiver out of his hand and asks, “Has Joe said why?”

“He hasn’t shared any of the details with me yet. I don’t know if he can, seeing as I’m still the number one suspect.”

“But did he give any indication of how confident he was that he could prove your innocence?”

Henry sighs heavily on his end, though he looks happy. “To give you an idea, he sat down in front of me and cried. Then he apologized and cried some more. Need I say more?”
A sudden numbness spreads to Eobard’s extremities. He’s surprised he doesn’t drop the receiver, he can barely feel where it sits in his hand.

He’d bugged the prison in order to monitor the conversations Barry had with his father when he was alone—Eobard had *not*, however, thought to check if anyone else had been visiting Henry in the meantime. He’d have to rummage through the older recordings to see what exactly Joe had said to the man. Maybe then he could get a better idea of what he was dealing with here.

“That’s great news, Henry,” he manages to say, trying to sound enthusiastic. “I hope we hear more about it soon.”

Barry seems to snap back to himself then, reaching out beseechingly for the receiver. Eobard can’t think of anything else to say, so he surrenders it without a fight.

“I’m sorry for not telling you sooner, slugger. I just didn’t want to get your hopes up for nothing.”

Barry smiles softly, eyes a little wet with unshed tears. “I know, and…and even if nothing comes of this, you know we’ve never questioned your innocence, right?”

“I know. And really? That’s all that matters to me.”

Eobard nods slowly—then jumps when someone taps him on the shoulder. Turning around in his seat, he frowns when he sees the guard. “What? I didn’t say anything.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” the young man replies, “but we have to ask that you and your son leave.”

“We’ve haven’t broken any of the other rules, at least to my knowledge.”

Barry turns then to see what the problem is, glancing briefly at the empty chairs lining the wall beside the door before he says, “No one else is waiting to see a prisoner. I thought we could stay until the end of the visiting hours?”

The guard smiles sympathetically. “You haven’t broken any rules, kid. We do, however, need you to leave the visitation room.”

Eobard wishes the young man would just say why, but glancing back at Henry through the glass reveals that the guard monitoring the other side is relaying the same instructions to him. Henry nods in understanding, then pulls the receiver back up to his ear to say, “I have to go now, Barry. I love you. We’ll talk again soon, okay?”


“I’m afraid so.”

“Okay, I guess… I love you too, dad.”

Henry nods at Eobard through the glass.

Eobard returns the nod, waiting for Barry to hang up his receiver before following the boy out of the room and into the hallway. The two guards at the far end of the hall seem to be listening intently to their radio. One looks considerably upset. “Well, that was abrupt.”

“You’re telling me,” Barry mutters.

“Which reminds me—” Eobard holds out his hand expectantly. “Could I borrow your phone?”
Barry doesn’t hesitate to pull it out of his pocket and hand it over, although he does look curious when Eobard flips it open. “Did you forget yours in the car?”

“No.” Angling the phone away from Barry, he scrolls through the contacts list and deletes the number under Miss Cooper’s entry. Then he hands it back smugly. “That’s for trying to manipulate your father into getting you out of being grounded.”

“Wait, what?” Barry stares down at his phone for a second before he realizes that there’s now a blank space beside the girl’s name. Then he looks up at Eobard, completely horrified. “Why did you do that?”

“Because I have serious doubts that she means well by you, Barry. Besides, if she’s *genuinely* interested in you, she won’t hesitate to give you her number again when you ask for it next week.”

Barry snaps the phone shut viciously before shoving it back into his jean pocket. “How am I supposed to explain to her that my father deleted it on a whim?”

“She already knows that I hate her. She’ll believe you.”

Barry’s frustration is completely replaced with confusion, although Eobard doesn’t care to elaborate. Mostly because he realizes then that he’s missing his suit jacket.

Also, because he realizes that Det. West has just stepped through the door at the end of the hall and is now making a beeline for them.

*Fuck.*

Thankfully, Barry seems to brighten at the sight of the detective, stepping forward to greet the other man. “Hey, Joe. Here to see my dad?”

“Uh…” Joe slows as he approaches, completely blindsided by Barry’s question. “Yeah, I might be. Why do you ask?”

“They just kicked us out,” Eobard replies.

“That’s because eight guys just made a break for it. You’re going to need someone to escort you to your car.”

“Can that be you?” Barry asks.

“Yeah, I don’t see why not.”

“Hold up,” Eobard interjects, “I left my jacket in the visitation room.”

“I can grab it for you. I’ll meet you guys in the atrium in ten minutes, okay?”

Eobard smiles thinly, though Joe doesn’t seem to catch it, walking briskly past the two of them toward an unmarked door at the opposite end of the hall. Quietly, Eobard makes his way to the atrium, Barry trudging miserably along behind him, playing with his phone until Eobard stops them short at the front doors. “…Barry, I’ve deleted things on my phone by accident before. Please believe me when I say you can’t undo it.”

Barry doesn’t say a word. Just shrugs.

Then it dawns on Eobard— “Are you asking Miss Thompkins for that girl’s number?”
Barry looks up at him suddenly, like a deer caught in the headlights.

Good lord, Eobard is ready for this day to end already. “Give me your phone.”

“But—”

“Now.”

Barry hands it over with a huff. “How am I supposed to get in touch with Mary and Simon?”

“You could try talking to them face to face at school. That’s still a thing, isn’t it?”

Barry shoves his hands into his pockets and sighs, “This has been one hell of an afternoon…”

“You’re telling me,’ Eobard thinks to himself, just as Det. West rejoins them in the atrium.

He hands Eobard his coat with a grin and nods to one of the guards stationed by the door. “I’m going to see these two gentlemen out, okay?”

“Who escaped?” Barry inquires.

“I don’t know about everyone,” Joe replies as they head outside, “but apparently one is some guy who’s taken to calling himself James Jesse.”

Eobard almost can’t believe his ears.

It’s been a long time since he last heard that name...

“Is he a psychopath?” Barry asks, completely obviously to the way Eobard has stiffened beside him.

“From what I’ve heard, pretty much. I’ll tell you more about him some other day though. Where did you and your father park?”

“At the far end of the lot.”

Fortunately, it’s still light enough outside that Eobard doubts anyone can sneak up on them. Even so, Joe escorts them all the way to their car, checking the back seat and the trunk before letting either of them climb inside.

“Did you drive here yourself?” Eobard asks as he settles down behind the wheel, door ajar so that he can speak with Joe. “Or would you like a ride back into the city?”

“I’m fine, thank you. My partner is still inside. We’ve got a bit of work to do here before we can head back out.”

“Good luck with the escapees, I guess.”

“Yeah, isn’t this just the start of a beautiful evening,” the man mutters, offering Eobard a tired smile. “Have a good night, you two.”

Joe shuts his door for him, then turns away to jog back across the lot toward the penitentiary.

Eobard watches his retreating form for a while before he reaches inside his jacket pocket for his keys. He finds them easily enough, but he feels oddly disturbed, as though…as though…

Eobard starts rummaging through his other pocket.
Sure enough, it’s gone.

“Did you forget your phone?” Barry asks quietly, watching Eobard struggle with his jacket.

“No…I just forgot why I suddenly had two,” he lies.

He puts both of his hands on the steering wheel then and closes his eyes. Realistically, he might have dropped the USB device somewhere inside the prison. In fact, he’s really hoping that’s the case, because there’s nothing on the device that he needs to hide and he can easily get another copy from Ferguson later.

He’s still dreading though the thought of what might’ve actually happened…

“Are you okay?” Barry asks after a while, turning sideways in his seat.

“It’s nothing. It’s just…you’re right. This has been one hell of an afternoon.”

“I’m genuinely sorry about the fireworks,” Barry replies, obviously assuming Eobard’s lingering agitation is a product of their earlier fight. “And for trying to manipulate my dad into getting out of being grounded.”

“You might be surprised to hear this, Barry, but it’s okay to be a little manipulative every once in a while.”

Barry arches an eyebrow in surprise. “Seriously?”

“Yes, just…I wouldn’t advise you to try it on your family anymore.”

“I don’t think I like the idea of manipulating anyone really,” Barry muses, “but, uh, thanks for the advice.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Really, though, I have to ask…” Barry shifts uneasily in his seat. “Are you upset at all? I mean, about my dad getting out of prison?”


“Maybe I didn’t word that properly.” Barry frowns in concentration. “…What I meant to say is that you look terribly sad.”

The boy is not exactly wrong. Eobard is terribly depressed with the way their visit with Henry turned out today, just not in the way that Barry is obviously thinking.

Eobard doesn’t know what to say to him, so he just shrugs.

“You know…whether or not my dad gets out of prison, you’re not ever going to stop being my father either.”

“I know,” Eobard replies quietly. “I just don’t want you to think that I only ever loved you out of necessity.”

Which is not entirely true. Loath as he is to admit, Dr. Markov was right—sometimes people love because they have no other choice. He needs Barry. He needs Barry complacent, which requires stomping out his old hatred for the boy and replacing it with a genuine sense of concern for his well-being. He supposes it’s only natural then that concern would gradually turn to love, humanity’s
greatest infliction.

It makes him sick now to think of hurting the boy, but it’s a vicious cycle that has no end. He’s hurt Barry in the past in order to influence his future, and he’ll continue hurting him to ensure that everything goes according to plan.

For that simple reason, Henry Allen has to remain in prison.

Barry just grins at him, the corner of eyes crinkled in mirth. He is just about the only person Eobard has ever met who smiles with his whole body and soul.

“I don’t,” is Barry’s quiet response. “Even though I didn’t show it much in the beginning, I loved you since the day we met. You saved me from a miserable situation, and you didn’t ask for anything in return. It almost seemed to be too good to be true.”

“You know…Joe wanted to save you himself.”

Barry sighs then. “Yeah. But he didn’t. As much as I love Joe, he’s not the one who took me in without question or concern. That was all you.”

Eobard smiles faintly. “I appreciate your gratitude.”

“Good,” the boy replies, smile widening. “Now, let’s blow this joint before some maniac crawls into the trunk. I don’t think I want to meet this Jesse guy in person.”

Eobard wants to tell him that he doesn’t have much of a choice in the matter, considering the Rogues Gallery he’ll develop in the not-too-distant future, but says nothing of it as he pulls out of the penitentiary parking lot and onto the highway.

Trying to get back into the city is a bit of a hassle. There are cruisers already running up and down solitary road to the Keystone City, and Eobard is pulled over twice along the way so that his car can get checked by the police. Thankfully though, they make it home before dark.

It’s only eight o’clock on a Saturday night, but since Barry knows that Eobard was being completely honest about the whole ‘you’re grounded’ thing he retreats quietly upstairs to his bedroom. ‘Grounded’ generally means no visitors and no late night escapades into Central City anyway. He can play a video game if he gets bored.

With a heavy heart, Eobard retreats down into his basement office. Locking the door behind him, he drops wearily into his chair and boots Gideon up.

“Good evening. Dr. Wells.”

“We’ll see soon enough, Gideon. Pull up today’s feed for Iron Heights, please.”

“Beginning at which time point?”

“I don’t remember…just after Barry and I leave.”

The hologram of Gideon’s face is immediately replaced with a view of the visitation room. Gideon picks an early hour in the day and then speeds through the recording until just after they leave. A few minutes later, Joe shows up.

Eobard can’t believe how suddenly his entire body tenses just from watching the man pick up his suit jacket. It doesn’t look as though Joe has any intention of rummaging through his pockets, but the
man picks it up the wrong way and the contents spill out onto the floor—keys, phone, and USB device. Joe kneels down quickly to collect the items, although he pauses when he reaches the USB device, staring curiously it in his hand as he straightens to his full height. For a moment, Joe looks as though he’s going to stuff it back into the Eobard’s jacket pocket, but instead he frowns and pockets it himself…

Eobard’s having a hard time believing he was just robbed by the police.

“That’s enough, Gideon. Thank you.”

The screen pauses on Joe’s retreating form, halfway outside the door into the adjourning hallway.

Frustrated, Eobard tosses his glasses onto the desk next to his laptop and pinches the bridge of his nose, willing away the oncoming migraine.

He feels horribly abused. He never had any reason to assume that Joe wasn’t his friend in all the time that he’s known the man, but clearly Eobard has fallen into a false sense of security over the past few years. How could he have been so stupid?

He can’t begin to wonder why Joe would be suspicious of him. For anything really. Was it true that new evidence had surfaced in Nora Allen’s murder? Or could it possibly be that Joe never trusted him to begin with, not since the day he first walked into Barry Allen’s life?

Eobard sits there for a long time, wondering how he’s going to deal with this little mess. It’s not as though Joe will get anything useful from the USB device, but it’s the principle of thing that matters. There’s a large part of Eobard that doesn’t want to do anything about the situation, really, but he can’t banish his old demons so completely. He still needs that element of cruelty to pull him through with what he needs to do in the next couple of years.

He reaches out for the Speed Force then, because that always seems to rekindle his old flame, and almost immediately he knows exactly what he has to do.

Lowering his hands, he looks at the frozen hologram and says, “Gideon, I need you to pull up a biography for me…”

~***~

As far as hideouts go, there’s nothing too original about an abandoned factory. All the same, it’s dark, it’s quiet, and it’s been heavily booby-trapped for almost a decade now, so the chances of any unsavory persons stumbling safely through the door are next to nil. In essence, this gives the place a tried-and-true quality that he can’t exactly argue with. After all, his secret lab was currently housed in his basement.

According to what Eobard knows of the original Trickster, James Jesse had established well over a dozen bolt holes in the Central City area alone when he first began his life of crime, many of which will never be found until well after his death. Eobard has already zipped through two of them tonight before stumbling through this tiny office suite in an old packaging company, although he’s willing to bet his compressor ring that this is where James will retreat based on the clean file folder sitting on top of one of the dusty old desks in the corner and the large blue balloon declaring ‘It’s a boy!’ that accompanies it.

Sure enough, at about a quarter past midnight James Jesse bursts into the darkened room with all the gusto of a freshly-minted free man, eyes latching immediately on the file folder and the balloon with an almost maniacal degree of wonder. The man reaches over immediately to turn on the little desk
lamp and then takes the file in hand, eyes scanning the result of the paternity test within before breaking out into a fit of giggles.

“Mindy, my dear, you’re an absolute doll!” he exclaims, turning to look for the girl in question. “I don’t know how you did it, darling, but—oh…”

Only now does he seem to notice the unconscious woman sprawled out on the floor behind the door, sporting a rather remarkable bruise just below her left eye. Eobard had tried to be gentle when knocking her out, but sometimes he forgets his own strength—something else he obviously has to work on in the future.

For the moment, Eobard himself is seated at the far end of the room in front of one of the boarded up windows. It’s not completely covered though and the light from the street lamp streams into the room between the cracks. As such, Eobard’s dark silhouette is all that the man can really see, although this doesn’t seem to faze James in the slightest. If anything, he just seems to be a little put out by the fact that ‘Mindy’ is currently curled up comatose in the corner and not dancing around the room in excitement.

“This was supposed to be a private affair,” James mutters darkly, but then he sighs and smiles a little and tosses the file back onto the table with a glamorous flick of the wrist. “But what the heck—today I’m a father and I don’t really care who knows it!”

Eobard tilts his head to one side. He could easily pull his hood up now and move a little closer, but he knows that the glowing red eyes and vibrating voice tend to turn most people off. He doesn’t want to spook the man before he can decide how best to proceed.

After a beat, he says, “Congratulations.”

James bows lowly at the waist. “Thank you. He’s almost sixteen now, but at least that little mystery’s finally over.” He straightens slowly, this time producing a small pistol from inside his sleeve, which he aims directly at Eobard. “Thank you also for ending my dry spell. I haven’t killed anyone in a long time now. I’d almost forgotten how exhilarating it felt—”

James pulls the trigger.

Eobard watches as the bullet spirals sluggishly from the muzzle before he lifts himself out of his seat and sprints across the room. He swats the bullet aside and then yanks the pistol from James’ hand viciously before tossing it off somewhere to his left.

He slows down again just as he returns to his seat, the better to watch James’ comically wide eyes trail after the pistol as it arches in the air before landing on the desk with a clatter.

“I’ll be damned…” James stares down at his empty hand before squinting up at Eobard’s silhouette. “Neat trick, stranger. Is it congenital?”

Eobard considers the question carefully before saying, “I have a son about the same age as yours. He has the potential.”

“Jesus Christ.” James glances then at the small nick in the wall where the bullet is embedded. “Maybe we could set up a play date for the kids?”

“They’ll meet on their own soon enough. Not yet though. Neither one is ready.”

“Wise beyond yours years, are you?” the man replies tartly.
“I’ve seen the future.”

The man arches an eyebrow but only seems mildly surprised by this new development. Given Eobard’s first demonstration, it’s understandable.

“Would you like me to show you?” Eobard offers.

The man doesn’t look as though he knows exactly what is being offered here, but waves his hand in exasperated affirmation. “What the hell—who can say no to the devil?”

Eobard raises his left arm and says, “Gideon?”

He doesn’t often bring the AI along for the ride, but he knew in advance that he would be requiring her assistance tonight. In fact, he had told her before heading out here what exactly he wanted her to show the old Rogue.

Sure enough, Gideon projects a large hologram of a newspaper article into the centre of the room—not the standard Crisis piece Eobard typically uses to keep track of how his plans are progressing, but rather a different front page blurb from twelve years in the future. It consists of two large photographs situated side-by-side—one of James Jesse, old and weathered in his prison suit, but smiling violently at the camera, and one of Axel Walker, decked out in his studded trench-coat and plaid trousers, strolling down the middle of the street as an apartment building blazes fiercely in the distance behind him.

Above these two pictures, the headline reads: Twin Terrors Strike Again—Tricksters Loose in Central City!

James looks completely stunned. He raises a hand slowly to his slack-jawed face and strokes his chin, then points at the hologram. “That’s him? …The kid with the domino mask?”

Eobard waits a moment longer before tapping his modified wristwatch; the hologram vanishes.

“Axel Walker? Yes, that is your son.”

“He’s got his mother’s nose,” James says quietly, laughing a little under his breath. “She was one of my first molls, you know? Smartened up when she found out she was pregnant though. Conveniently forgot to tell me, though.” The man’s expression darkens suddenly. “But I have my ways.” His eyes drift down to the young woman in the corner. “She was secreting letters to him for me and collecting evidence…You didn’t kill her, did you?”

“She’s still alive.”

“Good. I’ve got another letter I want her to deliver.”

Eobard laughs.

James shrugs shamelessly. “I’m not much of a romantic.”

“But you care a great deal about this boy.” Which, to be honest, Eobard finds a little surprising. “Why is that?”

It’s James’ turn to laugh now, as though the answer should be obvious. “Tell me, stranger—do you not know what a child is?”

“An irrational and much smaller human being than myself.”
James rolls his eyes. “God, it’s a wonder you ever reproduced… Children are a legacy. They have the potential to carry the fear associated with your name well into the future.”

“Legacy…” Eobard tastes the word. Before Barry, he never had any intention of having children, not since he was more than capable of terrorizing people for centuries well enough on his own. “This is your best bet at immortality then?”

“More or less.”

“But what if you were immortal?” Eobard asks.

“Are you…?” James inquires tentatively.

“Not quite.”

“Please, don’t elaborate.” The man takes this opportunity then to pull out the old rolling chair behind the desk before dropping heavily into the seat. “Weeeeeeeeeeellll—then I guess I’d have another hundred kids or so, give or take a few.”

Eobard blinks in surprise.

His lack of a response is not lost on James, who laughs a little as he says, “All those nobodies out there in the world today don’t care one whit about you or your ideals. But your kid…? Oh boy—when your offspring love you, they love you good, my friend. Like a god on earth. Your word is practically gospel to them.”

Eobard realizes what James is saying is incredibly true. He enjoys the adoration and respect Barry heaps upon him daily. The late night conversations, the hesitant requests for advice, the feather light kisses on his cheek, the unsolicited ‘I love you’-s—all of it was in conflict with his memories of the older Barry Allen, who undoubtedly hated Eobard and yearned for his hatred in return.

He doesn’t know who the original Barry Allen loved as a child or how he loved them. He can only hope that this connection he’s built with the boy never completely breaks, that when the time comes for Barry to learn the truth about Eobard, that his resolve buckles and he accepts whatever solution his surrogate father offers to him.

Thinking about the boy now gives Eobard a little flare of excitement. In remaking the Flash, he now has the opportunity to watch his evolution, to guide and mentor him as much more than just a father figure. When Barry has his first real brush with the Speed Force, Eobard will feel it too, like a live wire spitting sparks, reaching out to consume both their worlds.

Just the thought of it causes his connection to the Speed Force to momentarily intensify, as though he’s excited that mystical energy in turn. So he closes his eyes to compose himself and then opens them again to see James squinting at him in the darkness.

“Did you know that your eyes glow?”

“…Yes.”

“Well, now I’ve seen everything.” The man throws his hands up in the air. “And here I thought all the weirdos lived in Gotham.”

Eobard straightens in his seat. As much as he’d love to chat, there’s a certain CCPD detective he still needs to punish before the night is through. “I’m sure you’re wondering what this ‘weirdo’ is doing in your little haven…”
“I was, up until the point I realized I was sharing family advice with a radioactive time-traveler. What’s the point in asking when absolutely nothing else makes sense?”

“Fair enough… I came here to warn you that the police are already closing in. Your Great Escape isn’t actually scheduled for another nine years.”

James mouths the words ‘nine years’ in disbelief. Slowly then he rises from his chair and begins pacing back and forth behind the desk. “Guess I’ve got to ditch this town tonight, huh? Well, thanks for the visit, John Titor. We’ll do lunch sometime.”

“You can run,” Eobard interjects, “but you’ll be back in Iron Heights Penitentiary before the morning news. In no timeline does this end well for you.”

This is a lie, of course.

While it’s true that the police will eventually check this location for the Trickster, if James Jesse leaves Central City tonight, there’s a very good chance that he can evade them for a while longer. However, Eobard would much rather have his assistance in his little endeavour than attempting to kill Det. West outright by himself. If it’s true that Joe hasn’t trusted him for a long time now, Eobard doesn’t know who he’s shared his suspicions with and what they might think if the man dies in a peculiar way.

“Then what do you suppose I do about it?” James mutters. “You’ve ever been to prison, sunshine? Nobody there can take a joke.”

“If you continue to communicate with your son, he’ll spring you out of jail when the time is right. Believe me.”

“But I don’t want to believe you!” His shout reverberates off the walls. The woman on the floor stirs. Then James takes up his seat again, shoulders slumped, looking about as old as Henry Allen probably feels behind bars. “So what do you suggest then? That I just sit here and wait for the do-do nutters to break down the door? I don’t know what you’ve heard of me, stranger, but I’m not much of one for twiddling my thumbs.”

“You can whine,” Eobard mutters, “Or you can go out with a bang. The choice is yours.”

“I’d love to, honey, but I’m a bit strapped for explosives at the moment. I left the ticking time bomb in my other playhouse.”

“I think I’ve got you covered in that department.”

James mood visibly lightens at the sound of that. “You don’t say…”

“All I ask is that you target the CCPD’s headquarters downtown. I’ll even carry you there myself. They won’t see you until it’s too late.”

The man stares down at his lap for a moment, contemplating the deal. His answer should be pretty obvious though, and this thought is confirmed when James smiles with just the slightest crook to his lips.

“I guess it’s a date then,” James replies, voice dangerously low, eyes sparkling in the darkness. “You bring the fireworks, darling, and I’ll put on the show…”
The station is abuzz with the news of the recent prison break. Eight convicts in total had made a daring escape only a few short hours ago, six of which were now back in custody. That only left a small time crook called Timmy McNeil and Central City’s very own terrorist, James Jesse, both of which were thought to still be in Keystone City, but could have easily passed over into its Missouri twin by now. There were, however, reports that McNeil might actually be making his way down to Starling.

The press were currently gathered in the CCPD’s atrium, waiting for the Captain to make a public announcement on the mass escape and the nature of the two men still at large. Joe is lingering in the main office area, leaning against Fred Chyre’s desk as his partner finishes up his phone call. Joe doesn’t quite know who he’s talking to, but he sounds excited, like he’s got another lead.

“—Yes. Thank you, ma’am…Uh-huh…Yeah, the one by 107th? I know what you’re talking about. My uncle used to work there. Please, don’t hesitate to call us again if anything changes. Goodnight, ma’am.”

Hopeful, Joe asks, “Well?”

“He’s was spotted by one of the old ladies of the night by the abandoned Chesterfield packaging plant, still wearing his prison jumpsuit and a large trench coat. She said she knows its him because she knew James in the good old days.”

Joe laughs. “Oh my god—did you just call an old call girl a ‘lady of the night’?”

Fred shrugs, almost sheepishly. “Yeah, so what?”

“Never mind, just grab your coat. I’m going to tell the Captain.”

“Okay, but first—” Fred stops short suddenly, eyes focused on something behind Joe. “What the devil…?”

Joe turns slowly, not entirely sure what he should expect to see. It certainly isn’t the sight of James Jesse in his jumpsuit and stolen trench coat strolling leisurely past Joe’s desk.

At first, he can’t help but wonder if maybe his eyes are playing tricks on him, because—first—how the hell did James Jesse waltz into the CCPD undetected, and—second—why the hell would James Jesse want to waltz into the CCPD undetected? Men like James didn’t have much love for the police.

“Did you miss me?!” the convict exclaims before skipping across the office floor toward the huddle of news reporters in the atrium. For a second, absolutely nobody else moves. Then one of the women seems to realize that James Jesse is running directly at her, so she does the most natural thing in the world by screaming her pretty little head off.

Two of the younger officers have already taken up after the criminal, and, really, now that they know James is here, there is nowhere the man can possibly run. They tackle him to the ground in ten seconds flat, James still laughing like a maniac and kicking up a fuss. He knees one of the officers in the ribs before they manage to roll him over onto his stomach, pining his hands behind his back.

Joe is so entirely confused by the whole affair that it isn’t until after the gaggle of news reporters stop flashing their cameras and clapping their hands that he hears the subtle tick-tick-tick coming from the unfamiliar suitcase sitting on top of his desk. He has no idea how he missed that, but given the pretty incredulous display he’s been subjected he can’t exactly blame himself.

He has all of two seconds to scream “Everybody, get down!” before the bomb goes off.
Eobard doesn’t like to leave much up to the hands of fate. That is, essentially, why he was so intent on building his own future, painstakingly tailored to suit his every want and need from scratch. Occasionally though, Fate is a benevolent creature. It gave him Barry, after all. It knows how to be kind.

But it knows how to be kind to others too.

He’s not going to lie—he’s remarkably pissed with the way things have turned out today. Det. West should be burnt to a crisp, but instead he’s only suffering from second degree burns, a broken arm, three broken ribs, and a cracked cranium from when his computer monitor collided viciously with his head. Eobard re-watched the explosion on his own security feed several times over, just for kicks. Seeing that flash of light before Joe’s body was propelled violently across Det. Chyre’s desk is the only joy he can seem to get out of this little affair.

At least the box of evidence from Nora Allen’s murder was tucked under Joe’s desk when the whole thing went up in flames.

The man of the hour is currently lying in a hospital bed on the burn ward, drugged up to his eyeballs on pain killers and heavily sedated. It’s 2am in the morning and both Iris and Barry are dozing lightly in the chairs by the window as Eobard stands beside the detective’s bed, hovering over his vulnerable form. The lights in the room and the hallway outside have all been turned down low. Nobody else is up and about.

They are completely alone.

“Am I not merciful?” Eobard hisses to the man before him, though the words echo loudly in his own ears. “I could have killed you at any time in the last five years, but I restrained myself under the assumption that I had somehow managed to make a friend.” Something curls miserably in the pit of his stomach at the confession. The thought that he could have been such a fool… “I could just as easily kill you now.” Given the amount of drugs he was on, Joe would hardly notice.

He lifts his hand then. Holds it flat against Joe’s chest, right above his heart. Doesn’t vibrate it though.

Doesn’t know quite what to do.

A muscle twitches in his jaw as he makes his decision. Glancing briefly over his shoulder to make sure that the children are still fast asleep, he lifts his hand off the man’s chest to brace it instead against the pillow beside Joe’s head.

“Next time you feel like gambling with your life, just remember: Barry’s growing a little thin on allies.”

Leaning back, he closes his eyes and counts down from 10; crams his rage back into its tiny little crevice at the back of his mind and turns away to join the children.

He sits down in the empty chair beside Barry and wraps his arm around the boy’s shoulder, maneuvering the child’s head so that it now rests in the crook of Eobard’s neck. One of Iris’ aunts is due to arrive in about half an hour to pick the girl up. He’ll wait until then before waking Barry and dragging him back home. Tomorrow morning they’ll probably shuffle back to the hospital again and wait around until the man regains consciousness, so he sees no reason why they should have to linger.
He sighs, somewhat bored. This seems to be the motion that eventually rouses Barry from his sleep.

The boy huffs a deep breath against Eobard’s neck, obviously too tired to lift his head, struggling to connect the right words in his sleep-addled brain before he finally manages to say, “I’m glad no one died tonight.”

“…I agree.”

Barry doesn’t say anything else immediately, so Eobard just assumes he’s fallen asleep again, but then he says, “Considering the things Joe’s been through, I think maybe he has a guardian angel or something.”

“Or something,” he echoes hesitantly.

Whatever the case may be, some greater power sure did love the detective…

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I apologize if you get bored at all with long chapters. I really wanted to get through this whole fiasco in one go because we'll be taking yet another leap into the future in the next one, darlings!

Thank you for both your incredible patience and your wonderful support, ladies and gentlemen *bows deeply*.

And now it's time for---you guessed it---FUN FACTS!

(1) "Fool me twice": The whole saying actually goes 'fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me'. Since Eobard was aware that Joe was kind of edgy around him five years ago, he really shouldn’t have been all that surprised with the man's behaviour in this chapter. In fact, I was this close to calling this chapter 'That one time Eobard had a really really bad day back in 2005 that he doesn't want to talk about anymore nope go away Barry stop trying to make things better he's a grown man for god's sake'. No joke. This close... Anyhow, Eobard can't have a happy ending every chapter. True fact.

(2) Macaques: As you can imagine, I'm trying to set the stage for Grodd (and, by extension, General Eiling). I was actual rather surprised that Eobard seemed to care so much for the gorilla in the show. As vicious as he is with his enemies, I don't think he really wants to do anyone (or anything) any undo harm...as odd as that might sound... ???*buries her face in her hands* I'm so confused! I just want to hate Eobard in peace! Why won't he let me?!...

(3) The Huygens probe...: Really did land on Titan in 2005. I had a fun time looking up popular news/stuff from this particular year---especially the flip phones! Did anyone else here ever own a flip phone? *waves her Nokia* Gawd, you could probably kill a bear with one of these things...

(4) The infamous Becky Cooper: I don't know if she's half as bad as she appears in the eyes of Eobard Thawne, but once he finds a flaw in somebody's character, watch out! When this man hates, he hates wholeheartedly...
(5) Fireworks: Back when I was in high school, the parents of a close friend asked me if I thought their son was acting at all suspicious. They were concerned that he had either: (A) joined a cult; or (B) taken up drugs. So, I enlisted the help of two other friends and we stalked him out into the woods one day. He entered a shady little shack, which completely freaked us out, until we kicked down the door and realized he was making fireworks. When we told his parents, his dad was so relieved he cried. That was the first time I had ever seen a grown man openly weep... Said friend was still horribly, horribly grounded. It was hilarious.

(6) Eobard and Barry have to fight every once in a while. That's just what families do, no matter how hard everyone might try to make the other people happy. You know what I mean?

(7) James Jesse: I have no shame---I am Mark Hamil's number one fan. I kid you not. That is why he is in this chapter. Also, he is a convenient plot device, because Eobard needs to learn how to play nice with other villains... Can't beat the good guy on your own, you know?

(8) John Titor: An imaginary time traveler. Back in the years 2000 and 2001, all these posters kept popping up, supposedly made by a man named "John Titor", who claimed to be from the year 2036. In fact, I think he claimed to be from the future of an alternative timeline, having come to our universe to warn us about an impending WWIII. Wiki him if you ever get the chance. It's a pretty interesting read.

(9) Stay tuned for Hartley Rathaway, another favorite character of mine! *coughcoughandatripgothamcoughcoughcough*...

Peace out.
The man in the yellow suit

Chapter Notes

Fair warning: The second half of this chapter was heavily influenced by the New 52 Story Arc, ‘Zero Year’. I apologize if I end up spoiling anything for you. It’s a great read, though. You should totally check it out.

Also, the incredibly long delay in posting this chapter stems from the fact that I wrote it, hated it, deleted it, and then wrote it all again from scratch.

And it’s freakishly long. Again.

No surprise there though.

Enjoy!

**LEGIT WARNING:** Minor--and very brief--mention of some secondary character you’ve never seen or heard before getting raped and murdered years ago. I find that I can get triggered by the most innocuously seeming things, so I thought I would just point that out now...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“You can know a thing to death and be for all purposes completely ignorant of it. A man can know his father, or his son, and there might still be nothing between them but loyalty and love and mutual incomprehension.”

— Marilynne Robinson, Gilead

~***~

Even with only the base constructed, S.T.A.R. Labs is a goliath.

By the summer of 2010, the minor offices and laboratories are completed and cleared for operation by the Department of Health and Safety. There remains, however, an empty ring at the core of this incredible structure where the collider will one day be erected, like an effigy to the future of science, an indestructible icon of humanity’s progress. The whole of North America has now come to realize the importance of what Eobard is trying to achieve here, and the media speaks of him often as both a visionary and a figurative savior, however the facts remain as they’ve always been since he first purchased this land:

Without the accelerator, S.T.A.R. Labs is still very much an empty husk.

Eobard already knows its exact design down to the last detail, but building permits are not usually given to people without some form of education in either architecture or engineering. Therefore, he ends up wasting months on end interviewing aspiring young men and women for the job. The military hand picks three gentlemen for him, as a sign of good will, but Eobard has been steadily cutting ties with them over the last couple of years. He doesn’t trust them not to convert his research centre into a bolthole for their more nefarious research, so he turns away each man after their first interview despite the fact that at least one of them almost looks promising.
It’s a disheartening experience, to say the least. He’s tired of being patient. He’s tired of watching the world pivot slowly on its axis as the Speed Force howls at him just beneath the surface of reality. It echoes in his ears in the dead of night, like a living thing in constant agony, begging for the comforting touch of a boy too young yet to understand the importance of his very being.

Sometimes, though, Eobard wonders if he isn’t the one really screaming.

Then he receives a résumé one sunny afternoon in June and the screaming stops, if only for a short while.

Mr. Ronnie Raymond is a charming young fellow currently working for CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research somewhere in the south of Geneva. Technically, he’s only a structural engineer overseeing the repairs for the Super Proton Synchrotron, but he has a solid background in most of the research conducted by their accelerator, and, as such, answers any high-energy physics scenarios Eobard throws at him with relative ease. His reasoning is sound, his deliberation fluid…

It feels almost as though Eobard is conversing with someone from his own time, so roughly two hours into their meeting, he interrupts Ronnie halfway through one of his answers and just offers him the job.

Mr. Raymond is, in a word, stunned.

It takes the man a moment to process this information before he rises out of his seat and accepts Eobard’s firm handshake, the expression on his face warring rapidly between elation and disbelief. “I mean…I mean, really? I was told that this interview might take all day. All week, even… Isn’t there supposed to be a second or third wave of interviews?”

Eobard shakes his head. All of his decisions concerning the particle accelerator have been made with the utmost care. The collider is, after all, his golden ticket home. “Believe me, Mr. Raymond, I’ve no doubt in my mind that you are the man I want for the job.”

“I’m…shocked, I guess—and grateful. Insanely grateful. You have no idea…” When Eobard releases his hand, Mr. Raymond drops it to his heavily side as though he doesn’t know what to do with it now, clenching and unclenching it nervously into a fist. “I’m sorry. It’s not often that I’m this edgy…”

Eobard waves it off with a small smile. Truthfully, he finds it hard not to be flattered by the awe he evidently inspires in the younger people of this century. “You remind me a little of my son. He’s a mess when he’s excited, but level-headed when it comes to his work.”

“I promise you, I take my own work very seriously.” Mr. Raymond consciously relaxes his hand then. Stands a little bit straighter. “Speaking of which, I’m flying back to Geneva at the end of next week. My supervisor knows I took time off for this interview, but I have to go back and train my replacement before I can work here permanently.”

Eobard had assumed as much. “I understand. If you could make it, though, I would like you to come to the departmental meeting tomorrow afternoon. I think the earlier I introduce you to the rest of my team, the better.”

“Absolutely.”

“A word of advice though, Mr. Raymond…” He gestures vaguely to his throat. “Wear a tie. A loose collar is seen as a foible by many of my associates. They’re not the most forgiving people in the
Mr. Raymond’s hand twitches imperceptibly at his side, though he manages keep his overall expression neutral. He’s a quick study. “I’ll keep that in mind, Dr. Wells. Thank you.”

They shake hands one more before Ronnie Raymond disappears out the door and down the hall. Eobard watches him quietly through the glass walls of his office as the young man makes his way to the elevators.

He feels as though a great weight has finally been lifted off his shoulders.

True to what Mr. Raymond had said earlier, Eobard had been prepared for another 5-6 hour long interview today, with perhaps only a short break somewhere in between for lunch. Other than the fact that he has pick to Barry up from the airport at 7pm, he’s free now to do exactly as he pleases.

And as he pleases, he retreats to the first sub-level of his laboratories, side-stepping a small group of new recruits gathered just outside the stairwell door, each with a clipboard in hand, likely going through the last few stages of their safety orientation. They smile and nod politely at him as he passes, wide eyes trailing after him as he disappears around the corner at the end of the hall, seemingly mystified by the unexpected appearance of the Dr. Harrison Wells...

Out of sight, he smiles to himself.

Down here, in the sanctuary of his labs, he feels the most at peace. His non-military staff are still in the process of moving their things over from the base, so for the most part he is alone. One of the lab techs might wander by every hour or so to check up on him or the equipment, but he finds that he can while away the hours at his work bench mostly uninterrupted. This is, in essence, his fortress of solitude.

It is here, after all, surrounded by these clinically white walls and gleaming metal surfaces, that he can pretend that he is a world away, in another time and place, free to unravel the darkest mysteries of the universe as he had always intended in his youth...

His hope for privacy, however, is completely dashed when he rounds the next corner and almost collides head-on with yet another unfamiliar face. Said face belongs to a relatively shorter and younger man than Ronnie Raymond—a kid, really, arms crossed as he stares contemptuously at a seminar announcement pinned to the wall beside the entrance to Eobard’s lab.

Eobard is too startled to think of anything to say at first, but eventually the stranger gets around to breaking the awkward silence for him. He adjusts his wide-rimmed glasses with a heavy sigh before turning to Eobard and saying, “I’m going to warn you: listening to one of Dr. Archibald’s talks is about as riveting as reading the instruction manual to a lawnmower.”

Curious, Eobard glances at the announcement in question. The seminar it’s advertising is scheduled to be presented at Mercury Labs’ newest interdisciplinary centre this upcoming Friday. It’s nothing particularly special, just some hour long spiel on the latest advancements in nanotechnology, more of an excuse for science folk to drink champagne and admire that extra bit of funding Mercury Labs has apparently garnered this year from their benefactors.

Much to his surprise though, the host for the event is none other than Dr. Tina McFee.

One of the lab techs must have posted it here as a joke.

“…He suffered a mini stroke almost two months ago,” Eobard replies, trying to focus on the matter at hand, namely the young man without a visitor’s pass or nametag. “I’m surprised he returned to
work so soon.”

“Well, you know what they say. Pride goes before the fall…”

Normally, Eobard has no patience for intruders, but it’s not too often he encounters someone so young and pretentious in these hollow halls. It’s a change from the norm and he’s intrigued despite himself. “Are you speaking from experience?”

The corner of the boy’s lip curls in disdain. Evidently, pride is very much his chosen vice. “All too often, I think honesty is mistaken for hubris…”

“I humbly disagree. After all, Tennessee Williams once said, ‘All cruel people describe themselves as paragons of frankness’.”

“Tennessee Williams led a rather tumultuous life. I don’t think he was the greatest judge of character.”

“Fair enough.” Eobard slips his hands into his pockets, resigned to the fact that he probably isn’t going to get any privacy today after all. “So, are we going to continue waxing philosophy out here in the hallway, or are you going to tell me why you’ve decided to trespass in S.T.A.R Laboratories?”

“I was thinking of applying for a position, actually.” The boy’s gaze falls once more on the announcement. His eyes linger at the bottom of the page, where Mercury Labs is written in big, bold, obnoxious letters. Then he says, sounding blasé, “What do you enjoy most about working here?”

“…Not much, really. It’s slow. It’s empty. The boss is a prick…”

His companion smirks. “Is that what you’re peons think of you?”

Good. At least this kid knew who Eobard was. “I’m only guessing. Their apparent default mode is to stop and smile whenever I enter the room.”

“So, what, nobody has the gumption to stand up to the great and powerful Harrison Wells?”

“Only if they’re a member of the U.S. military,” Eobard mutters.

The boy seems to consider him for a moment. Then he offers his hand. “Hartley Rathaway.”

Eobard takes it without hesitation. “Rathaway? As in…”?

“If you’ve been watching the news lately, then, yes.” He smiles then, all straight white teeth and cold sincerity. “I’m the gay one.”

~***~

Like many of the people whose company Eobard chooses to keep, Barry is, by his own right, something of a genius.

It makes it easier for them to connect with one another, he thinks, not only on an intellectual level but on an emotional one as well. Barry has a natural love for science, after all. Listening to Eobard talk about his work for hours on end has yet to bore him to tears. If anything, it seems to have only inspired him in his own search for the ever elusive ‘truth’, given him hope to explain away the mystery surrounding his mother’s death with the cold, hard facts of science, just as Eobard always taught him.
It comes as no great surprise to Eobard then that Barry eventually grows to become a close confidant of sorts, someone he can vent to when he’s irritated with the slow progress of his associates or when he feels bogged down by any residual interference from the military. Eobard’s given the boy a glimpse of his true nature in the process, perhaps more than he would’ve ever anticipated, but he’s come to realize now that he has little, if any, reason to hide himself entirely from the boy. Barry has almost seen him at his worst by now, knows that Eobard can be a pretentious bastard when the mood strikes, but he also knows that his surrogate father is also capable of great kindness, that he is still has his human weaknesses, as loath as he is to admit to them.

Barry has adored him for so long now that it’s only natural that that same adoration would inevitably be reflected in Eobard’s own eyes, that Barry’s steadfast devotion would rekindle the admiration Eobard once held for this budding hero in his youth. It’s such a vicious thing though this circle of devotion, a cycle without end, steadily building momentum... It festers inside the hollow chambers of the heart. Sometimes, it physically burns.

_Sometimes_, it makes him want to confess, even if it’s only a detail, a _word_—but Eobard is, first and foremost, a selfish man, and he doesn’t trust Barry not to oppose him when he learns the truth. All love aside, Barry might very well want to kill him. After all, Eobard loved _him_ long before he ever wanted to end Barry Allen’s life…

He knows how fickle love can be.

Dwelling on the things that have not yet come to pass does nothing for him though, not now, with four years yet to go. So he contents himself with Barry’s quiet company and watches as the boy plays out his part in history, all roads inevitably leading back to the boy’s childhood vow to bring justice to his broken family.

As history dictated, Barry won a scholarship in his senior year of high school that saw him whisked far away to the eastern coast. It paved him a clean path into the Honor B.Sc. program in Forensic Science and Chemistry at Sun City University, a grueling four year venture that kept him well away from the visitation halls of Iron Heights Penitentiary. The boy visited Henry whenever he could, of course, but Barry’s long stretches of absence during his classes were a hard thing to bear.

Mostly because they gave Henry hope.

“_Sometimes, I dream he meets a girl and decides to settle down rightthere in Florida._” the man admits to him once during one of their private conversations, looking about as old and beaten as ever. “_I dream that he forgets all about me and goes on living his life while he’s still young... Wouldn’t that be nice?_”

Eobard has always hoped for just the opposite, so he never lets Henry give in to this ideal. Sometimes though, hearing such a thing makes him almost giddy, the primitive part of his brain taking glee in fact that the wrong man is currently sitting on Henry’s side of the glass. Other times, he almost feels sick with his own twisted visions of hope, wishing, perhaps, that he could offer Henry's freedom in exchange for Barry’s honest help.

But he knows that hope is the devil’s plaything, so he quashes those feelings when they arise in him and reminds Henry that their son is a stubborn boy. As accommodating as Barry can be when dealing with the needs of others, this pursuit for justice is selfishly his own.

Henry nods silently in defeat.

Eobard has no doubt that the man will go on dreaming anyway.
He thinks, however, that Henry might pull out of his slump now that Barry is going to be a more permanent fixture in Central City again. After all those years of lectures and exams, Barry only has the final portion of his practicum to complete before he can officially graduate from his program. Just four consecutive months in a crime lab is all that’s left. Then he’ll be done.

Over the phone, Barry tells him that the CCPD has already approved his request to work with them.

In person, he says, “I’m going to Metropolis.”

It takes a moment for Eobard to comprehend the unexpected change in plans.

Barry had only just walked off the plane, but already he’s managed to throw him for a loop.

“Hold on,” Eobard interrupts, wondering if this isn’t the making of some elaborate joke. “I thought your program already secured you an internship here in Central?”

They’re currently standing in the baggage drop-off area, waiting patiently beside the conveyor belt for Barry’s small red suitcase to appear. He’s already got his computer satchel hooked over his left shoulder, his right arm cradled uselessly in a sling against his chest. The boy had broken his wrist falling off a step-ladder of all things and had only just removed the cast a couple of weeks ago.

“They did, but one of the CSIs from the MPD asked me if I would be at all interested in spending the first two months with them. My supervisor said it’ll look better when I apply for a full-time position at the CCPD if I have a good reference from another lab.”

Barry doesn’t typically do anything without discussing it with either of his fathers first, so Eobard can’t help but feel mildly disturbed that he wasn’t consulted beforehand. Not that it changes much, he assumes, but the boy had only just turned 21 a couple of months ago and already he seemed to fancy himself a mature adult, capable of individual thought and feeling…

Eobard wonders if all parents experience this bizarre sense of betrayal when their children leave the roost or if this uneasiness is just a by-product of his own obsessive nature.

“Why not Starling?” he mutters. Given how things have picked up at work, he’ll have a harder time keeping tabs on Barry if he’s all the way over in Delaware. At least Starling was just a train ride away.

Barry just smiles at him, eyes twinkling benignly. He’s almost as tall as Eobard now, though he’s hasn’t gained much in the way of muscle mass over the years, still very much that shy little boy who once tutored his friends in calculus and physics in exchange for snacks. Only now, he also examines crime scenes on the weekends, head often tilted quizzically to one side as he wonders ‘whodunit’ and how long it’ll take the police to figure out it wasn’t a suicide.

Admittedly, Eobard is beginning to fear his budding deductive abilities.

“This is a rare opportunity,” Barry explains. “I’ve been told that the MPD usually only goes head-hunting for interns at Metro University. My supervisor said I would be crazy not to accept.”

“You just got the one offer from the MPD then?” he asks, meaning no disrespect.

Barry knows this of course, but he still crooks an eyebrow mischievously. “You know, I can still take up that other offer from Bludhaven…”

“Forget I said anything.”

“They’re currently offering full-time positions.”
“No.”

“And they pay twice as well as the CCPD.”

“Barry,” Eobard says sternly. “Stop.”

Barry winces in faux concern. “But think of all the good I could do!”

“You’re a fragile child—a short drop from a stepladder was all it took to break your wrist. Believe me when I say Bludhaven will break much worse.”

“Unless I’m mistaken, I climbed that step-ladder to change a light bulb for you.” Barry hikes the strap of his satchel into a better position over his shoulder. Eobard’s already offered to take the bag from him, but Barry is adamant about handling it himself. He’s gotten awfully stubborn since going away to college. “I will happily sacrifice every bone in my body for the people of Bludhaven. I think they need a hero.”

Oh, they’ll get a hero alright. Just not the Flash…

Eobard can’t think of anything to turn this conversation in his favour, so he just gives his son an unbearably blank look. He knows that Barry has taken to calling this his ‘stfu-you-little-punk’ face.

Barry softens his expression. “So…we cool about Metropolis?”

More suitcases tumble down the slide to the conveyor belt beside them then. Eobard keeps his eyes peeled for anything red. “That depends…Where are you going to stay?”

“Danny’s aunt lives in Metropolis. She says that I’m more than welcome to use her guest bedroom while I’m in the city.”

“You’ve really thought this whole thing through then, haven’t you?”

Barry shrugs, suddenly seeming nervous. “I knew that if I told you about it before finalizing all the details, you would find a way to talk me out of it. The fact that Gotham is located just on the other side of the Delaware Bay isn’t lost on me, you know…”

Eobard removes his glasses then to rub his eyes. “Thank you for reminding me, Barry. I’d almost forgotten.”

“You have nothing to worry about. Metropolis isn’t anything like Gotham.”

That’s just about the dumbest thing he’s ever heard, but Eobard waves off Barry’s comment in lieu of pointing out the obvious. While it was true that Metropolis really wasn’t anything like Gotham, the two cities were still connected by the Metro-Narrows Bridge. Danger would always be lurking for the boy just on the other side of the water…

What’s done is done though, and, besides, it’ll only be for two months.

He’s hopes.

“I’m going to have to send Danny a fruit basket one of these days for all the things he’s ever done for this family.” He replaces his glasses, taking a deep breath to quell his rising temper. “How is Mr. Krupin doing anyway?”
“Still living in fear of you,” Barry jests. “Just graduated from law school, actually. He’s articling at some firm in Gotham now.”

“Why am I not surprised…” Really, he shouldn’t be. “Has he been mugged yet?”

“No.”

“All in good time, I’m sure.” There’s a young woman standing not too far off to his left, obviously a native of the city if the look she gives Eobard is anything to go by. Too bad he doesn’t give a damn. “Do you think he’s at all aware of the number of degenerates living in that city right now?”

For some reason, this earns him a laugh from Barry. “Oh, I think he’s well aware of the number of degenerates living in Gotham. Do you honestly think he’s ever in want of clients?”

Well…

Point taken.

Just then, Barry’s suitcase rolls down onto the conveyor belt. Eobard snatches it before Barry can make a grab for it though, waving him off toward the exit instead. “Iris is going to throw a fit. I think she was looking forward to seeing you regularly again for more than a week at a time.”

Barry almost comes to a complete stop in front of him; Eobard’s hand between his shoulder blades keeps him moving forward though. “Iris?”

“She sends her love, by the way,” Eobard admits. “She’s been incapacitated by a stomach flu, otherwise she would’ve been here tonight.”

Barry glances back at him over his shoulder and does this ridiculously doe-eyed thing with his face that Eobard hasn’t a hope in hell of describing in the English language.

It’s a well-known fact that Barry is—and always has been—madly in love with that girl. Eobard knows it, Joe knows it, Henry knows it—even Barry himself knows it, yet it remains a mystery to them all as to why the boy couldn’t seem to muster the courage to ask her out already.

Sometimes, Eobard wonders if this has anything to do with his being there. In the original timeline, Barry and Iris had fallen fast in love. That’s not to say that the bud of their old romance is no longer there, but the opportunity to nurture that connection has obviously disappeared. How or why, he can’t say.

All in all, Eobard doesn’t quite know what to make of Barry’s love life anymore. Or lack thereof. As long as it doesn’t change the boy’s future drastically though, he’s content to leave it free of interference.

He would like to keep the Becky Cooper debacle of 2005 his only foray into that particular arena of Barry’s life, than you very much…

Mentioning Iris seems to derail Barry’s good mood completely though as Eobard ushers him into the airport’s parking lot. The boy remains uncharacteristically silent as they climb into the car and pull out onto the highway back to Central City, leaning the side of his head against the cool surface of the passenger side window in something of a daze.

Eobard already promised himself that he wasn’t going to get himself involved in Barry’s love life, so he attempts to change the subject by saying, “I hired two new gentlemen today.”
It takes a moment, but eventually this seems to perk him up. “Two guys in the same day, huh? Isn’t that supposed to be the first sign of the apocalypse?”

“I’m not fastidious by choice, you know. Can’t have just anyone mashing away on the keyboards.”

“My point exactly,” he replies. “I’m assuming one has to be a Nobel Laureate then.”

“No, but one currently works with the Super Proton Synchrotron in Geneva. I’ve decided to make him my lead structural engineer.”

Barry looks genuinely surprised. “Wow, that’s…that’s amazing, actually. Talk about a lucky break.”

“You’re telling me.”

“Who’s this other guy then?”

Eobard smiles a little. “The black sheep of the Rathaway family.”

“…Who?”

“You know who the Rathaways are.” Barry should, really. They hosted the last charity function Eobard had dragged him to just this past Christmas. “I introduced you to Osgood and Rachel Rathaway back in December.”

“I remember them,” Barry admits, soundly mildly upset. “I had an interesting chat with Mr. Rathaway a little later in the evening. He asked me outright if I had been orphaned or if I was simply abandoned at birth.”

Eobard doesn’t mean to laugh but he just can’t help himself. That sounds exactly like something one of the Rathaway’s would say.

“When I refused to give him any details, he told me there was nothing to be ashamed of,” Barry continues darkly. “Apparently, he thinks there’s nothing wrong with handing a child over to the state.”

“Don’t take it too personally,” Eobard tries to reassure him. “I think your awkward conversation might have something to do with the fact that he wishes he had handed his own son over to the state long ago.”

“That’s…a truly terrible thought.”

“When you meet Hartley, you’ll understand. He’s incredibly conceited, but nowhere near as old-fashioned as his parents.”

“…Did you just call him conceited?”

“I did.” No point in lying about it. “I think your awkward conversation might have something to do with the fact that he wishes he had handed his own son over to the state long ago.”

“Trust me, you’ll love him.”

“I’m getting the vibe that you actually believe this is true.” Barry shifts uncomfortably in his seat, scratching idly at his right arm under the sling. “I have no idea why. I wouldn’t describe any of my other friends as arrogant.”
“You love me, don’t you?”

“You, but you feed me. Food is life and life is love—technically, then, I’ve been *conditioned* to love you.”

Barry has no idea how close he is to the truth.

“You’ll see,” Eobard says. He’s not sure why he’s so certain they’ll make such good friends, but Barry is just so magnanimous and Hartley strikes him as the sort of fellow that would easily go for someone with Barry’s warm smile. “If nothing else at all, I know he’ll fall fast in love with you.”

And Hartley does, in fact, fall fast in love Barry.

Very fast indeed.

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Perhaps against his better judgement, Eobard invites Hartley to the upcoming departmental meeting.

He’s able to introduce Mr. Raymond without hearing so much as a peep from Rathaway’s spot at the far, far end of the table, although some of the older members of his team don’t hesitate to openly question Ronnie’s experience, given his age. Surprisingly, Mr. Raymond doesn’t seem at all perturbed by their impromptu examination, likely due in part to the fair warning Eobard gave him during his interview. The young man fields their questions patiently, assuring them that he intends to do everything in his power to see the brain child that is the particle accelerator come to fruition, the same way he’s spent years taking care of the collider in Geneva. He’s confident that they can find no man better suited to the job.

Since Hartley will be, according to the boy’s own reasoning, one of Eobard’s ‘peons’, there’s really no point in introducing him. So, Eobard then takes his seat at the opposite end of the table then and allows the heads of his various departments to relay their latest updates one by one. Hartley gives no indication that he minds. He just sits there, quietly observing the older men and women seated around the table, hands folded together over his lap in peace. He looks, for all intents and purposes, content just to be there.

It isn’t until Dr. Maury Phelps waves his hand vaguely in Hartley’s direction and says, “I didn’t realize you were hiring undergraduates now too,” that all hell breaks loose.

Hartley blinks once, adjusts his glasses, then coldly and systematically slaughters Dr. Phelps’ current quest for developing an acoustic metamaterial capable of cloaking underwater devices from sonar. When Dr. Hannah Shelby jumps to her stunned associate’s defense, Hartley then takes the proverbial axe to her own efforts on improving the sensitivity of nuclear magnetic resonance, taking great care to point out that a small lab in Israel is already well ahead of her, despite the fact that they have—at least by his estimate—probably half the amount of funding.

This causes a chain reaction that sees two thirds of the people seated at that table similarly humiliated before Eobard manages to call their meeting to an end. To be honest, he’s rather enjoying the spontaneous massacre, but he knows that there’s only so much trauma his associates can withstand before they succumb to their injuries and threaten to quit, so he stands up, announces that it’s almost noon, and informs them that he has better things to do with his day than argue.

This little catastrophe doesn’t particularly endear his senior staff to him, but it does help him to realize something about Hartley Rathaway though:
This boy’s tongue is a veritable whip.

In fact, everything the young man says in the eight and a half minutes it takes to tear these people apart, Eobard has found himself wondering at one time or another. It’s a liberating experience, actually. Having to tip-toe around these men and women for nearly a decade now has felt not too unlike being a prisoner of his own mind. It’s nice to know that someone else with a superior intellect actually agrees with him.

Hartley doesn’t immediately move from his seat when Eobard adjourns the meeting though, most likely to afford everyone else a chance to book it out of there before he leaves the room. Even Mr. Raymond glances hesitantly at Hartley as he makes a beeline for the door, promising to speak with Eobard on Monday after he’s had a chance to look over the files he received just that morning.

Eobard smiles and nods, wandering slowly to the other end of the room, before he crosses his arms and leans back against the edge of the table beside this peculiar boy.

Hartley just stares off into the middle distance for a minute before he adjusts his glasses again and looks up at Eobard. A muscle in his jaw twitches irritably. “I suppose this is where you tell me that I’m fired…?”

“No, at all,” Eobard replies. “Unless, of course, this is where you tell me that you want to quit?”

“Well, no, but…”

“Then it’s settled.”

Hartley tilts his head back, baffled. “That’s it? How are you not upset right now?”

“Why would I be upset? If anything, I’m impressed. You’ve clearly done your research on these people, and yet you still wanted to apply for a position here.”

“I didn’t apply here to work with them,” Hartley replies hotly, although his voice quickly fades into a whisper. “I came here to work with you…”

“And you will. Personally.”

Hartley looks speechless. “…I…Really?”

“Really. Although you are henceforth banned from any and all departmental meetings. I’m sure I don’t have to explain why.”

“Not at all.”

“Excellent. Now…do you have any pressing business to attend to this afternoon or would you care to join me and my son for lunch?” Eobard glances down at his wristwatch. “Assuming, of course, that he bothers to show up on time.”

Hartley still looks somewhat bewildered, although the invitation gets him to sits straighter in his seat. “Yes, thank you. I just… I just need to grab my jacket…”

“I’ll meet you in the lobby then.”

Hartley nods mutely and scurries off.

Eobard waits a moment longer before stepping out into the hallway himself. He rides the elevator down to the lobby and steps off onto the main floor just as Barry dashes through the front doors,
chest heaving, leaning forward to brace his one good arm against his knee as he tries to catch his breath.

Eobard stuffs his hands into his pockets and saunters over to his son, dress shoes tapping softly against the linoleum floor.

Barry looks up as he approaches, smiling nervously before straightening up. “Please, don’t say it…”

“You’re late.”

“By, like, five minutes. You’re out early, anyway. Didn’t you have a meeting at eleven?”

Eobard smirks before nodding down at Barry’s arm. “Whether or not you’re running late, you should try to take things easier. At least until you’ve fully recuperated.”

“My wrist doesn’t feel all that bad anymore, actually.” Barry shifts his right arm in its sling. It’s a little windy outside today, so his light jacket hides most of the appendage, but Eobard remembers what it looked like when the cast was first removed, pale and thin, muscles atrophied after nearly a month of disuse. It’s odd to think of how rapidly such injuries will heal for the boy in the future. “I’ve been pretty diligent with the exercises. My writing still looks like a twelve year old’s though.”

“When has it ever looked otherwise?”

“Ha. Very funny.”

Eobard’s comment raises an interesting point though… “How are you going to work with your arm like that?”

“I can still pipette with my other hand,” Barry argues. “Besides, I have a week yet before I have to fly back out east. It’s getting stronger every day.”

Eobard shakes his head, but Barry’s optimism is endearing. He hopes that it endures long after the lightning strikes.

“We going to head out now?” The boy inquires, cluing in to the fact that the two of them are lingering aimlessly in the lobby.

“Soon. I hope you don’t mind, but I’ve invited a guest to join us for lunch.”

A small smile creeps onto Barry’s face, eyes bright with excitement. “You rarely go anywhere with your colleagues. Is this one of your new recruits?”

“Yes, actually. I thought you might like to meet Hartley Rathaway.”

Barry’s eyebrows creep up toward his hairline. At first Eobard assumes he’s disappointed, but then the boy says, “Poor guy. I might have googled him last night, you know, because of his stellar first impression with you…”

“What? I said he was great.”

“You said he was conceited.”

“I think it gives him character.”

“He’s still stuck in a sad situation, don’t you think?” Barry shrugs weakly. “I mean, the moment his
parents found out he was gay, they wrote him out of their will. I’m pretty sure they’ve cut all forms of communication off with him now.”

Eobard understands the stress Mr. Rathaway must be under now due to this recent dispute with his parents, but he’s always found that it takes a tragedy to make a small man great. Barry has already undergone a similar ordeal with his mother’s death.

Hartley is just another masterpiece in the making.

“I very much doubt Mr. Rathaway is interested in communicating with them after having been so thoroughly abandoned. What reason could he possibly have to speak with them again?”

Barry looks at him as though he can’t believe Eobard just said that. “Uh, how about ‘reconciliation’?”

Eobard scoffs. “Tell me: if I suddenly disowned you and refused to ever speak to you again, would you be at all be interested in reconciliation?”

Barry narrows his eyes mischievously. “I thought we already established that our relationship is based solely on food.”

“If I’m disinheriting you, then I’m obviously not going to feed you anymore. So honestly, Barry…”

Honestly…

It dawns on Eobard then, all jesting aside, how important this conversation between them really is. It’s one thing to hear Barry say ‘I love you’ at the end of day, or ‘I’m sorry’ after breaking one of the house rules, but he’s never actually made Barry angry at him; doesn’t know what the boy would truly think or feel if Eobard opposed him as strongly as the Rathaway’s had their son. They’ve had arguments in the past, minor quarrels that Barry has easily forgiven him for, but Eobard has spent all these years trying to burrow his way into Barry’s heart. He doesn’t know what Barry would do if the boy actually hated him.

Ten years later, and now that old horror returns. He tries not to let it show as he says, “Hartley lived for his work—lived for the moment that he would one day inherit his grandfather’s business and turn the world on its head with his research. His parents have betrayed him by taking that away from him. Now, put yourself in his situation... Imagine if I betrayed you in the worst way imaginable, whatever you might consider that to be. Wouldn’t you hate me beyond reconciliation?”

Barry is still smiling, but the mischief has faded from his eyes. “I think… I think you’re confused.”

The boy has never outright told Eobard he thought he was wrong. ‘I think you’re confused’ is about the closest he’s ever gotten.

Eobard must have made a rather amusing face then because it startles a laugh out of Barry. “I think reconciliation depends entirely on how much one person loves the other. Since love and hate are not mutually exclusive, I don’t think hating someone with every fibre of your being means that you still can’t find it in yourself to forgive them.”

“That’s…very big of you, Barry.”
“Having said that,” the boy continues, smile slowly diminishing, “I don’t know how much Hartley’s parents loved him to begin with. Reconciliation might never be an option. From what I’ve read, they treated him like more of a trophy son growing up than anything else.”

Eobard nods, feeling numb.

He hopes that Barry remembers this conversation when the time comes.

He hopes it curls around Barry’s throat and chokes his hatred out before it can reach his tongue; taint his thoughts. He hopes that the lightning doesn’t burn Barry’s compassion to a crisp.

He hopes that Barry grows to be every bit the hero the history books make him out to be.

Lost in thought, Eobard hears him before he sees him—Hartley Rathaway strolling down the lobby stairwell, one slow step at a time. The young man is cleaning his glasses with a small white cloth, so he doesn’t look up right away, but when he replaces them on his face his eyes latch almost immediately on Barry. He pauses for a fraction of a second then before continuing his descent, seemingly dazed.

Grateful for Hartley’s well-timed arrival, Eobard drops his hand onto Barry’s good shoulder and gestures to Mr. Rathaway with the other. “Let me introduce you to Dr. Hartley Rathaway. Hartley, this is my son Barry…”

Hartley drops from the last step heavily. He holds up his right hand for a shake as he approaches, but lowers it when he spots Barry’s sling. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Wells…”

“’Barry’ is fine,” the boy replies, eyes alight. His smile is disarming. “Unless, of course, you want me to call you ‘Dr. Rathaway’?”

“’Hartley’, please…” he says, swallowing hard. “So, where are we going?”

Eobard takes that as his cue to herd them out the door. On the walk over to the restaurant though, Hartley asks Barry about the arm, which then leads into this bizarre recollection of all the injuries they’ve ever accumulated over their short lifetimes. Given his daring spirit, Barry easily has Hartley beat, both in the number and uniqueness of his wounds.

He has no idea the wealth of injuries he’ll inherit in the future.

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The week passes in a blur.

Barry hangs around S.T.A.R.s most of the time, barring that one afternoon he spends with Henry at Iron Heights. He visits Eobard during his breaks and bothers Hartley the rest of the time. Either he realizes the massive crush Hartley has on him and is leading him on—an unlikely scenario, given his personality—or Barry has mistaken Hartley’s blatant flirting for good-natured ribbing. Whatever the case may be, Hartley’s boldness is cancelled out by Barry’s enduring naiveté, and what results is a series of awkward conversations that can almost always be interpreted in one of two ways.

Hartley is the first to admit that there’s a problem, fiddling with a tangle of wires at the far end of Eobard’s workbench, mood having clearly taken a turn for the worse since Barry flew out to Metropolis two days ago. He frowns at Eobard, as though he can’t quite figure out whether or not he’s being made a fool of by his son, and then he says, “You do realize that I’ve been hitting on your son, yes?”
“…Yes.”

“And that doesn’t bother you?”

To be honest, he doesn’t understand the prejudice some people have against one particular sexual orientation or another in this day and age. It seems like such a waste of time and energy. Besides, he already promised himself he wasn’t going to interfere in Barry’s love life anymore, so, really, he isn’t all that bothered. “Not in the slightest.”

“Then enlighten me, please: do you think this is all a game to him or is he really just that innocent?”

“He’s really just that innocent. Although, having said that…” Eobard pauses here to take his glasses off, the better to stare Hartley dead in the eye. “You can flirt with him until you’re blue in the face, Mr. Rathaway, but unless my poor, stupid boy signs a consent form detailing every little thing you want to do to his person, you’re not to touch so much as a hair on his head. Are we clear?”

Hartley arches an eyebrow. Either he’s insulted, or he’s just accepted that as a challenge.

“…Will size 12 font suffice?”

As a challenge, evidently.

“With a witness signature,” Eobard replies, “if you would be so kind.”

Hartley shrugs, as though it’s no big deal. Given his tenacity, he just might write one up.

Eobard wonders if he should be worried.

He probably should be worried.

Probably…

However, he doesn’t have much of a chance to ascertain the extent of Hartley’s true intentions with his son before one of his lab techs pops her head into the room and tells him that he needs to get down to Mercury Labs, like, right now, because Dr. McGee was just on the phone and she didn’t sound at all happy if the tone of her voice was anything to go by.

Eobard is hopelessly confused, but Cecilia books it out of there before he can press for more information.

“Does that happen a lot?” Hartley asks quietly.

“…Cecilia is responsible for maintaining the equipment on three sub-levels,” he sighs. “She tends to pop up unexpectedly from time to time.”

“I meant the phone call,” the boy elaborates, the corner of his lip quirked in the most peculiar way. “I didn’t know you were friendly with the competition…”

“I’m not,” Eobard replies, although he knows that it certainly looks that way. He hasn’t heard much from Tina in, well…ages actually. “I mean, we were friends. Once. I’m pretty sure she still hates my guts.”

“Then this is going to make for an amusing story. Promise you’ll tell me all about it when you get back?”

“Not a chance.”
Hartley lets out an irritated huff, but is wise enough to keep his mouth shut. Besides, if the way he’s grinning down at his wires is anything to go by, he must be pretty confident that he’ll hear about the details sooner or later.

And really, Eobard doesn’t care. He’s more preoccupied with figuring out what’s the worst that could possibly happen should he choose to ignore Tina’s call. He’s not exactly enthused that the woman assumes she can just summon him down to her office on a whim, but it’s not as though she’s been missing his company as of late. If she’s still half as mad at him as he thinks she’s is, Tina would rather have bamboo shoots jammed under her fingernails than invite him over on a lark.

Whatever is happening down at Mercury Labs, Eobard knows he’s going to have to deal with it firsthand.

Tired, he swaps his lab coat for his suit jacket and tries to ignore the smirk Hartley is sporting as he makes his way out.

The bus ride there takes him about fifteen minutes—fifteen long minutes, which he spends wondering what Dr. McFee has been up since their last little chat. He already knows about her Tachyon research. He also knows that she had only recently been made a head laboratory manager at Mercury Labs about a month ago. According to those of his associates who knew her personally, she was still the same steely and cold Dr. McFee from Starling University, but she was not altogether that bad of a person. Highly motivated, certainly, but she had a good rapport with her team and it was clear that she only wanted the very best for her underlings.

Eobard doesn’t know how to approach her.

Regardless, he’s always been pretty quick on his feet, and, besides, it only takes a few well-timed words to turn any conversation in his favour, so he breezes into the lobby of Mercury Lab with more confidence than he’s feeling and marches right up to the stunned receptionists as though he owns the place, before he says, “I’m here to see Dr. Tina McFee.”

“Uh…” The two young men working there share a look before one turns to him and says, “Good afternoon, Dr. Wells. Do you have an appointment?”

Eobard knows that it’s often his complete lack of emotion that scares most people witless, so he only allows the faintest arch of an eyebrow before he asks, “Why would I need an appointment?”

Before the young man can say anything else, his co-worker smacks him on the arm and waves Eobard toward the elevators. “Seventh floor. Her office is at the far end of the hall. You can’t miss it.”

Eobard nods curtly to the pair before wandering off, confused as to why she wouldn’t have thought to warn them that he was coming.

She must be caught up in something truly terrible indeed.

The elevator ride takes what feels like ages to him, and he briefly considers the consequences of turning around now before entangling himself whatever mess is lurking in wait for him on the seventh floor, but then the doors open and he’s greeted with a similar glass layout to his own office back at S.T.A.R. Labs, and then he literally sees the problem…

General Wade Eiling.

…Fuck.
Eobard genuinely contemplates turning back right then and there, but then Tina spots him from behind her desk, which then prompts Eiling to glance over his shoulder and down the hallway toward the elevators, and then, of course, Eobard is truly past the point of no return.

Maybe he’s imagining it, but he’s almost certain he can feel a blood vessel bursting somewhere inside his head.

Since his air of impassivity is perhaps his greatest weapon as a mortal man, he puts on a mask of cool indifference and strolls down the hall at a leisurely pace before inviting himself into Tina’s office. She rises from her seat as though to greet him, but when his frigid gaze falls squarely on her she slowly settles back down again, as though he’s somehow managed to wound her with a look alone.

Eiling doesn’t budge much at first, just gives Eobard this look of utter disdain, but since this has always seemed to be the General’s default state Eobard doesn’t try to read too much into it.

“Thank you for coming on such short notice, Harrison.” Tina folds her hands neatly together on top of her desk, eyes flickering between the two men in front of her as Eobard drops into the chair to Eiling’s right. “I’ll be honest, I didn’t think you would arrive here so soon…”

Eobard offers her a strained smile.

Eiling, at least, has no qualms about cutting to the chase. He turns slightly in his seat to get a better look at Eobard then and says, “No offence, doctor, but I don’t think this conversation really concerns you.”

“Don’t be coy,” Tina cuts in suddenly. “You were going to pay him a visit later today anyway. I just saved you a trip.”

“Don’t assume you know my schedule,” Eiling grumbles.

“I know certainly more than you think,” she snaps. Her gaze falls on Eobard then. “Dr. Roger Feldman—ever heard of him?”

Oh.

Oh.

He’d always wondered where that neuropsychologist had disappeared off to…

As originally intended, Dr. Roger Feldman had gotten around to paying Eobard a visit five years ago when Eobard’s lab was still stationed at the military base. And, as was also originally intended, Eobard spent their little meeting tearing the man’s research proposal apart.

General Eiling had been escorting the man at the time, because it had been his idea to recruit Dr. Feldman into the military’s employ in the first place, and he had not taken too kindly to Eobard’s interference. They argued sensibly at first, but since Eobard was a stubborn son of a bitch and because Eiling was a warmonger at heart, their conversation quickly devolved into a rather spectacular fight that resulted in Eiling leaving the base red in the face and muttering curses under his breath all the way back to his car.

Truth be told, it’s one of Eobard’s fondest memories of the man.

Eobard is broken from his reverie when Tina leans forward to brace her elbows against the top of her desk. Eobard knows that she’s still on full offensive mode right now, but he has no doubt that she’d been having a screaming match with the man before Eobard dropped by and the exhaustion from it is
starting to show.

“It’s come to my attention that Dr. Feldman has not been keeping to the AWA’s standards for animal care and treatment,” she explains at long last, steely gaze focused intently on the General. “As such, I am terminating his employment here at Mercury Labs, effective immediately.”

“And as I’ve already told you,” Eiling seethes, “Dr. Feldman was already given permission to—”

“Do I look like I care?” She snaps, eyes flashing dangerously. “I refuse to be strong-armed by some high school drop-out with a buzz cut and a bloody god complex. I’ve already had Roger escorted off the premises. I trust that you are more than capable of finding the door by yourself.”

Eiling shifts uneasily in his seat, face going red. “Dr. Feldman has every right to work in your facilities, Dr. McGee. Now, either you turn over his data and his access key, or this issue about to get a lot harrier than you ever anticipated.”

Ah.

And now Eobard understands why he’s been called here today…

Though he no longer works for the military, he still supervisors and provides the necessary permits required for animal research to some of his older associates back at the base. In fact, a handful of them are still working out of S.T.A.R. Laboratories, at least until they’ve completed the projects he started with them while he himself was in the military’s employ.

“I think…” Eobard finally interjects, just as Eiling cuts him a cold look, practically daring him to put one fucking toe out of line, “…that I need to take a closer look at the various projects your people are conducting at my own facility now, General.”

The man sets his jaw tightly, teeth clenched. To be honest, Eobard is actually well aware of what Eiling’s men are up to at S.T.A.R Labs, but putting a halt to their research until it can been reviewed by the heads of his various departments would be an awful waste of somebody’s time and money…

A long, tense silence follows, one which Eobard knows Eiling is only putting on for show, but it successfully keeps Tina on edge until the man glares at her and says, “That data is property of the U.S. military. As are the gorillas. You have twenty four hours to comply.”

Having said his piece, Eiling rises suddenly from his chair, shoots Eobard one last withering look, and then marches his way out of Tina’s office, posthaste.

Both Tina and Eobard keep their eyes trained on his back until he disappears down the hall and into the elevator. The tension between them continues to hang heavily in the air until the metal doors slide shut behind the General, cutting him off from view.

Tina sighs aloud and slumps in her chair.

All irritation aside, Eobard is oddly amused with the bizarre turn of events. He never would’ve expected Dr. Feldman to stick around in the U.S. after the way Eobard had embarrassed. “Forgive me for asking, Tina, but what on earth possessed you to hire that man?”

“What makes you think I did?” she asks, probably intending to sound tetchy, but the effort just isn’t there. She’s obviously just too relieved to finally have Eiling out of her office. “My predecessor hired him. I think he knew Dr. Feldman was working with the military, but he failed to mention that in any of his reports.”
“He just assumed you would never go digging?”

“He had an aneurysm,” she sighs. “I don’t believe he intended to die before his contract with Feldman was up.”

Eobard has to laugh at that. Tina gives him an odd look, but he doesn’t care. She already knows about his darker sense of humour. “I wonder why Feldman never approached Stagg. I think they would’ve made quite the pair.”

“Stagg is too controlling. Besides, I have a feeling he’s been stealing research from his employees.”

Well, that doesn’t sound too surprising at all…

Now that Eiling’s gone, Eobard eases a bit more into his own seat. “Since I was kind enough to run to your rescue, my dear, I think now would be the appropriate time for you to fill me in on the finer details of this little situation of yours.”

“You didn’t run,” she scoffs.

“I took the bus. Same difference.”

His quick admissions coaxes just the shadow of a smile onto her face.

“There’s nothing much to it, really,” she begins, looking thoughtful. “So many things just didn’t add up with that man…”

“He’s fairly good at dodging questions.”

“Too good,” she agrees. “I never could get a straight answer out of him…Anyhow, one of his techs eventually confided in me that the operation he was performing on his primates was never outlined in his proposal to the AWA. When I asked him about it, he refused to speak with me, so I had security escort him out this morning. Within the hour though that General showed up…” She makes a face at the memory. “He told me that if I didn’t continue supporting Feldman’s research, he knew someone who would. That was how your name popped up in our conversation.”

“But you already know that I don’t support research on primates,” he says, smiling.

“Precisely. I don’t think he expected me to call him out on his bluff, although I think he was even more surprised that you bothered to show up. So promptly, in fact. I think I’m a bit shocked myself…”

“What are friends for?”

Tina doesn’t look particularly pleased with that little jab, but she lets it slide. “That’s the long and the short of it, Harrison. Now, I have five sickly apes to deal with and a small army pounding on my front door.”

“You’ll weather through it, I’m sure,” he replies, rising from his seat. “You always do.”

Tina seems mildly surprised to see him go. “Oh…That’s it, then?”

“That’s what?”

“You expect me to believe that you came all this way for old times’ sake? I’m sorry, but you don’t strike me as the sort of man willing to do something for nothing.”
“Way to shot yourself in the foot there,” he says, taking up his seat once more. “Now that I know you’re paying for my services, what are you willing to give me?”

“…How about five gorillas?”

This earns her a chuckle. “I am not at all equipped to care for those animals and you know it.”

“I don’t want to euthanize them,” she admits quietly. “I think one might pull through, but you should see the others…”

“When the AWA launches their investigation, they’ll instruct you on how to proceed. If the gorillas are that far gone, then euthanize them you must.”

Tina closes her eyes and rubs at her temples. Eobard can understand her frustration.

There isn’t really too much she could do here though.

After she’s had a moment, Tina opens her eyes again and straightens in her seat. “Alright then… Is there anything you want, Harrison?”

Eobard chuckles a little.

A hand in her tachyon research, for starters…

Not that he would ever say as much aloud, but it’s really the only reason he was happy to help her here today. If Eiling had been successful in bullying her into allowing Dr. Feldman to continue his research under her management, any hint of foul-play leaking out into the public would have meant her downfall. Considering then that Eobard doesn’t see her finishing her research behind bars, it’s in his best interests to put an end to this whole affair once and for all.

However, since Tina still trusts him about as far as she can throw him, Eobard knows better than to mention the tachyon prototype she’s already developed, and instead says, “How about we just consider this an I.O.U. and call it a day?”

She stares at him steadily, brows furrowed in consideration. “…The last place I want to be is in your debt,” she confesses after much deliberation, “but since you charged blindly into battle for me, I suppose you’ve earned it. An I.O.U. it is.”

Satisfied, Eobard rises from his seat again. He pauses though to straighten the front of his suit jacket, wondering if now would be the best time to straighten the front of his suit jacket, wondering if now would be the best time to slip further into her good graces while he still has the chance. “You know…ten years is an awfully long time to stay mad at an old friend, Tina. Do you imagine we’ll always be enemies?”

She crooks an eyebrow at his comment. “You tell me.”

“I had an interesting conversation about reconciliation with my son a while ago.” He fiddles with his cuffs, trying for an air of uncertainty. “You should drop by S.T.A.R. Labs someday, even if only to scope out the competition.”

This definitely seems to get her interest, but not in the way he was expecting when she says, “Only if you promise to introduce me to Barry.”

He’s shocked that she remembers his name. Of course, most of his associates know about his son, and since many of them run in the same circles as Eobard and Tina, it really shouldn’t come as much of a surprise to him...
“Alright,” he agrees tentatively, not entirely sure why she would be interested in meeting his adoptive son. “He’ll be out east for the next two months though.”

“Oh?”

“He’s almost a fully-fledged CSI now. He’s finishing up some sort of practicum for his program.”

“Didn’t quite follow in your footsteps, did he?” She asks, clearly amused. “I like him already.”

“He’s still very much a lab rat.”

“Fair enough…” Suddenly though, she frowns. “When you said ‘out east’, you weren’t referring to Gotham, were you?”

“No, Metropolis. Why do you ask?”

“Their power just went out. With a hurricane on the way, Gotham is now in a state of emergency.”

Considering all that goes on behind the scenes in that godforsaken city, this comes as no great surprise to him. “Is that all?”

“Is that all?” Tina mimics incredulously. “Haven’t you read the papers?”

She’s starting to get on a little on his nerves now, but he tries not to let it show. “I think you can already guess the answer to that.”

“It was a terrorist attack,” she elaborates, drumming her fingers against the surface of her desk thoughtfully. “Some manic shut everything down with a single electromagnetic pulse. The press was toying with a name...the Riddler, I think. Or some such other nonsense.”

“The Riddler…” There’s name he hasn’t heard in a while.

A cunning criminal strategist with a penchant for all things green, Edward Nygma was not a man to be trifled with. His engineering skills were admirable and his own deductive abilities rivaled that of the Dark Knight himself, which earned the man a degree of respect from Eobard. Like Hartley Rathaway, the Riddler was a man ahead of his time.

Thankfully though, he wasn’t the Flash’s problem.

“I agree,” Tina says, “it sounds ridiculous. Even so, I pity those people…”

“Why?” he asks. “Gotham has a vigilante.”

“I don’t believe in vigilantism.”

“Oh?”

“It’s difficult to hold a vigilante accountable for the ways in which they handle their targets. How do you defend yourself against someone working outside the law?”

“Try not to turn to a life of crime?” he supplies.

Tina looks anything but amused.

“Well,” he says, taking her blatant disappointment as his cue to leave, “as lovely as it was to see you again, I really should be going. Best of luck with the Dr. Feldman and his supporters…”
She doesn’t say anything right away, but just as he’s about to walk out the door she finally asks, “Do you have any last advice for that man?”

“For Eiling, you mean?” He stops halfway out into the hall to ponder her question. There really is only one way to deal with that man, and that’s to stay several steps ahead of him at all times. Which is easier said than done, of course. Brute that he might be, Eiling is no fool. “I wish I did. Truly. He’s a force of nature, one which I’ve been actively trying to avoid for the last five years.”

“There’s no hope ofretribution then?” She asks, sounding morose. “That…that beast just gets to walk free?”

“He’ll get what’s coming to him,” he assures her. “Not now, but someday. There’s only so far a man can run before his sins catch up to him.”

Tina sighs but says nothing more.

Eobard turns away from her then, tilting his head just a little to one side to ease the tension in his neck.

He’s got a funny feeling that he’ll be dealing with Eiling again himself soon enough.

~***~

He tries not to let the news about Gotham worry him, but he calls Barry as soon as he gets home from work anyway. While the incoming hurricane is speculated to stray clear of Metropolis and rain all unholy hell down upon the state of New Jersey alone, Barry is still living along the fringes of its warpath. Given how unpredictable the weather can be, there’s no telling really whether or not the super storm will take a sharp turn south before making landfall.

Barry, unbelievably, is still just as cheerful as ever.

Eobard finds himself pacing back and forth in the kitchen as they chat, fighting the urge to check up on things with Gideon. He’d had a nasty shock only two years ago, when he’d been conducting a routine check-up on the 2024 Crisis, and discovered, for once, that the AI couldn’t show him anything. The hologram of April 25th news article rapidly flickered in and out of existence briefly before she informed him that the future was in a state of flux, as though Barry had reached a point in his life where he was truly free to either stay the course he was on or veer off the beaten path completely into the greater unknown.

To this day, Eobard has no idea why that had happened. Maybe Barry had attended an aspiring seminar that morning? Maybe he had had a close brush with death? Whatever the case may be, Eobard was ten seconds away from taking a spontaneous trip to Sun City when the usual headline suddenly reappeared:

FLASH MISSING IN CRISIS

The experience was an important reminder though that nothing was written in stone, that he could only control so many aspects of Barry’s life before destiny wrenched the reins away from him and handed them back over to the boy. As a time traveller, Eobard should’ve know better than to assume he could trust the future to play out exactly as Gideon always showed him. Every minute that he, a man of the twenty-second century, spent mucking about in a time not his own was bound to alter the very fabric of time around him.

This is ultimately the reason why Eobard refuses to speak with Gideon tonight. The headline could
change a thousand times while Barry is in Metropolis, and all that checking would serve to do would be to drive him half mad with fear.

Wearing himself out with his own pacing, he retreats into the living room and collapses into his usual spot on the couch, trying to focus on what his son is saying instead of the figurative crystal ball in his basement.

Barry tells him that he’s shadowing a woman named Irene Weathers, a sixty year old firecracker who’d been a cop in Gotham up until a bullet to the gut ended her career. She couldn’t stand to be away from the force for long, however, so she went back to school in Metropolis and took up a job in forensics, where she kept the CSIs in check and had a healthy amount of fun playing with all the shiny new lab equipment the MPD could afford.

She had spent all of yesterday familiarizing Barry with the lab and quizzing him on basic principles. When she was satisfied that he was just as smart as she’d been hoping for, she asked him then to tag along with her this morning to a murder scene—a double homicide, in fact. Two guys had been gunned down in the alleyway behind a 7-11. Neither one had a criminal past or a connection to the mob. No witnesses had been around to give a statement either…

It sounds just like the kind of mystery Barry usually adores, so once Eobard’s confirmed that his son is happy right where he is on that side of the Delaware Bay, he bids him goodnight and promises to chat with Barry again at the end of the week. Barry says that he loves him and vows not to break any other limbs while he’s away.

Eobard hangs up feeling marginally better that Barry seems to be so preoccupied with his work in Metropolis that he doesn’t even once think to mention the current situation in Gotham.

He should’ve known better than to let his guard down.

Four days later, he’s watching a news update on the worsening state of the city, when his cell phone buzzes on the coffee table. A glance at the Caller ID tells him that it’s the West residence calling, which, in and of itself, is not such an unusual thing, except that it’s a quarter past 11 o’clock and Eobard is just about ready to turn in for the night.

After the incident with James Jesse, Det. West had slipped into a coma—not an entirely unexpected occurrence given that the man had been hit in the face with a flying monitor before he landed square on his head somewhere on the other side of his partner’s desk. When Joe eventually woke up again, he had a considerable amount of trouble forming new memories and had almost no recollection of what had happened to him in the two months leading up to the attack, his mind now a blank slate concerning anything and everything Eobard wanted to know about his brief foray back into the cold case box of Nora Allen’s murder.

Eventually though, Joe pulled through. The amnesia remained, but he was able to return to work by the end of the year. He rode a desk more than anything in the beginning, but he’d gradually been working toward becoming his old self again, a fierce detective who worked long hours and continuously worried his young daughter half to death.

This still left Eobard in something of a lurch.

After reviewing his security footage of Iron Heights, Eobard was able to determine that Joe had only started visiting Henry two weeks prior to the incident. They chatted about menial things mostly. Joe really did break down initially and apologize profusely for throwing Henry in jail in the first place, which then prompted him to explain that he had, indeed, reopened the case. Beyond that, however, Joe never explained why he was doing it or what might have triggered him to look at the evidence
As agitated this made him, Eobard was at least grateful that Joe seemed relaxed around him once again. Eobard spent so much time escorting Barry and Iris to the hospital in those first few months after the incident that it gave them the opportunity to build upon their old friendship. Of course, Eobard understood that he still had to keep a close eye on the man, but at very least he now knew that he had one less problem to worry about.

Even so, unanticipated phone calls in the dead of night had a tendency to make Eobard feel just a bit apprehensive…

He stares at the Caller ID for a good, long time before answering the call. Delaying the inevitable will do him no favours in the long run. “Hello?”

“Hey, Harrison.”

“Good evening, Joe. Another late night?”

“You could almost say that,” the man quietly admits, sounding suspiciously as though he has something important to say. “I hope I didn’t wake you.”

“Not at all. I was just watching the news.”

“I take it you’re up to date on the situation in Gotham then?”

Eobard takes a deep breath. He has a funny feeling he knows where this conversation is going. “That’s pretty much the only thing anyone is talking about nowadays.”

“Things don’t seem to be looking up much for those people…”

“…And now this is the part where you tell me things aren’t going to be looking up much for me either.” He reaches over for the remote and turns off the TV. “As much as you and I love to chat, I don’t suppose you would be calling at this hour unless it had something to do with Barry…”

The subsequent silence does nothing to relieve him of his mounting fear.

“…Joe?”

“Nothing has happened to Barry,” the man says at long last. “At least, not to my knowledge.”

“I’m sorry, but that’s not the sort of thing you say to a man if you don’t want to worry him about his son.”

“I have no intention of worrying you, Harrison, but I would like to know whether or not Barry has tried to contact you at all in the last couple of days.”

“We chatted four days ago over the phone.” Eobard feels stupid that he hadn’t tried to call Barry again sooner. He feels even worse now that he’s been avoiding Gideon.

He’s such a fool…

“How long has he been missing, Joe?”

“Roughly fifteen hours.”

“In Metropolis?”
Eobard can hear the man holding his breath on the other end of the line before he says, “He didn’t go missing in Metropolis.”

... 

The urge to run wells up inside of him suddenly, but Eobard doesn’t know where to go. Not downstairs certainly, because he dreads to think of the headline Gideon might share with him tonight. Not the east coast either, because he feels too weak to manage the long trip to Gotham without collapsing somewhere along the way.

What he ends up doing instead is just sitting there numbly for a moment before fury, his old friend, beats its way to the forefront of his mind, prompting him to say, “Well what the hell is he doing in Gotham?”

“A call was sent out law enforcement agencies across the country asking for assistance after the EMP blast,” Joe explains. “At least a quarter of the men from the MPD are on the other side of the bay right now. I’ve been told that this woman mentoring Barry took him with her as part of the second wave of support.”

Eobard doesn’t know Irene Weathers personally yet, but already she’s on his short list for a fist through the heart.

He not sure what he can say without giving away his murderous intent, but thankfully Joe forgives onward. “I’m not sure when exactly they left, but my friends at the MPD called me a while ago to say that they never returned to Metropolis this morning to swap shifts.”

“Were they ever going to call me personally?” He snaps.

“The MPD has lost track of a number of their people,” Joe replies, sounding just the least bit miffed. “It’s practically a dead zone over there, Harrison, which makes it incredibly difficult for them to communicate with one another. I’m not saying that anything has happened to Barry or the others, just that an old friend thought to call me and give me a break down of the situation as it stands.”

Eobard runs a hand through his hair, feeling frustrated. “I’m sorry, Joe. I just don’t understand why Barry would run off without giving me a heads up first.”

“If it helps, Barry wasn’t given much warning himself. I believe he was told that he’d be sent over for at least 48 hours to help the GCPD before that storm hits. Just prepare yourself, Harrison. Even if he gets in touch with us again, they might require him to stay over in Gotham for a while longer yet.”

Not if he has anything to say about it...

“Thank you for calling,” Eobard replies, deciding then and there that this conversation is as good as done. He has places to be, after all. “I’ll let you know if he tries to get in touch with me.”

“Likewise. And, Harrison...I’m sorry about this whole mess. I want him to be okay too.”

“I know,” he sighs. “And I genuinely appreciate your help, Joe. I’m happy to know there’s someone else looking out for my boy.”

“Always,” Joe replies, his voice a soft rumble in his ear. “Goodnight, Harrison…”

“Goodnight.”
He waits until Joe hangs up before he drops his cell phone onto the coffee table.

Then he rises to his feet and makes his way downstairs.

He almost doesn’t want to know what this little lapse in judgement has cost him (but, really, he’d left Barry alone for months at a time in Sun City without having to worry about his untimely death, so why should his internship at Metropolis play out any different?), but it’s time to pay the piper and there’s nothing he can do to remedy the situation without first knowing what might happen to Barry’s future.

He boots up his laptop and waits for Gideon’s shimmering silver face to appear before he says, “Show me.”

A newspaper article dated 25 April 2024 pops up in front of him. The headline reads: FLASH MISSING IN CRISIS.

Then the image flickers.

“Dr. Wells,” comes Gideon’s disembodied voice, “the future is in a state of—”

“—flux. Yes. I figured as much.” And yet…and yet, the original newspaper article remains. This suggests, at least, that Barry is still alive and well and very much capable of becoming his noble alter ego in the not too distant future.

There is, however, a chance that that could all change.

“How do you wish to proceed?” Gideon inquires after an exceptionally long stretch of silence.

He’s still mulling over his choices here, but there really only appears to be one solution for the matter at hand.

“We’re going to Metropolis,” he says at long last.

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He could run.

But he flies instead.

There are two reasons he does this: first, should anyone (namely Joe) question how he came to be in Metropolis in just five short hours, he’ll have proof that he travelled by mortal means; and second, he still has to conserve energy. Since there’s no telling what’s happened to the boy, he doesn’t want to exhaust himself simply by making the trip. With the power out and a sudden peak in looting, there’s no telling what trials await him in the seedy streets of Gotham.

As soon as he’s slipped on his compressor ring and strapped Gideon to his wrist, he takes the next red eye to Metropolis and winds up hammering on the door of Danny Krupin’s aunt at about a quarter past five in the morning. The elderly woman is absolutely livid for having been roused at such an ungodly hour, but her anger is quick to dissipate when she realizes who it is exactly that’s standing on her doorstep. She timidly admits to him that Barry has yet to return but also that she’d given the boy the address to Danny’s flat in Gotham before he left, knowing full well that the young Krupin wouldn’t hesitate to let Barry have the run of the place while he himself prepares to evacuate the city.

Eobard copies the address down for himself and accepts the spare key that she offers to him, taking a
moment to thank her for her incredible help before running off to catch the next bus for Gotham.

The driver thinks he’s nuts.

Considering the sheer number of people scrambling to flee the city before the storm hits, getting into Gotham is remarkably easy. The transport bus Eobard is on is nearly empty, being just one of the few contracted by the city to evacuate anyone interested in leaving the city while escape was still possible. The driver tells him that if the power hadn’t suddenly gone out, chances were more people would be willing to hunker down and wait out the incoming storm, but, as it stands, Eobard has likely one day—two tops—to get in and get out again before he’s trapped by the weather himself.

Eobard smiles and nods politely, wholly intent on extracting Barry before the end of the day.

He’ll sedate the kid and carry him back to Metropolis over the bay if he has to.

Despite the throng of people wandering around in the presently hot and humid weather, Eobard has more freedom of movement as soon as he hits the city streets. He immediately zips into Danny’s apartment just a few blocks south of the GCPD’s headquarters, half hoping to find Barry fast asleep, only to instead discover that the spare bedroom is bare except for a small red sports bag tossed haphazardly in one corner. Barry’s things are stuffed inside, but Eobard doubts that the boy has been back here since he first came to Gotham.

There are pictures of Danny and a girl on display throughout the small apartment, but neither of the two tenants are anywhere to be found. He figures it’s because Danny got wise and left Gotham before it was too late, which is perhaps the smartest thing Eobard has ever known the kid to do.

After a quick search of the apartment that turns up absolutely nothing in the way of clues as to Barry’s current whereabouts, Eobard briefly debates lying in wait for the boy to return versus searching the veritable jungle that Gotham has become, a task he’s not entirely convinced he has the energy the achieve at the moment. As good as he’s gotten at adapting to this low-Speed Force diet, he just doesn’t have the juice to run every inch of the city.

Waiting, however, is not an option, so he decides to pay the folks down at the nearby precinct a visit.

The officer manning the front desk can’t seem to help him though.

“So far as we know, everyone from Metropolis is still out on the streets,” the young man tells him. “Is he a cop, your son?”

“He’s an intern for the CSI.”

“Brave kid,” he laughs, grinning like a fool. “We appreciate that, you know. Every little bit helps.”

Eobard gives him a blank look.

Uncomfortable now, the officer straightens in his seat and clears his throat. “Uh, well, I wish I could help you, sir, but I’m not even sure how. We’ve been trying to keep track of people over the radio, but we’re stretched pretty thin at the moment and barely anyone is responding. If he came here with an injury, like you said he did, then chances are we’ll ship him back to Metropolis before the end of the day. Especially if he came with Ms. Weathers. I’m not sure why the MPD let her come in the first place…”

“Thank you,” he sighs before retreating back outside. His next best bet is to do a quick inspection of the surrounding neighborhood, at least to keep an eye out for police cruisers and the like, but the chances that he’ll run into Barry just like that are pretty slim.
Except that he does.

In fact, he spots Barry the moment he steps outside.

The boy is standing at the bottom of the stairs leading up to the main entranceway of the precinct. He’s got one foot up on the first step but his head is turned away, his focus wholly directed at some detective who’s just ducked into the driver’s seat of an old 1980s Dodge Diplomat.

Eobard’s just about to call out to him when Barry runs over to join the man.

Irritated as he is, Eobard lets him go. Tracking Barry slowly over the course of the day, at least until he returns to the apartment, will require considerably less energy than tearing this city apart, so, really, the hardest part of his little mission is already good and done for him.

He waits until no one currently mulling about on the staircase is looking his way before he takes off after the detective’s car.

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Not surprisingly, Barry heads off to process a crime scene.

The detective he’s travelling with parks his car at the mouth of an alleyway between a dilapidated apartment complex and an old book shop. Inside said alleyway are only two other people. Living people, that is—another detective, who’s got his hands stuffed in his trouser pockets as though he can think of better places he could be right now, and an older woman with shockingly white hair, kneeling over what appears to be a badly burned corpse that’s still somewhat smoking. They’re each sporting an equally disgusted look on their face—which is perfectly understandable considering the smell that’s wafting off the charred body…

“Hey, Bullock,” the older woman says when she finally catches sight of Barry and his escort. “You’re never going to believe this, but I think Spence has finally lost his marbles.”

“Fuck you,” her companion mutters. “I know what I saw. The guy lit up like a fucking Christmas tree.”

“People don’t spontaneously combust, Det. Thompson.”

“It wasn’t ‘spon-tan-e-ous’, Ms. Weathers.”

“Simmer down children,” Det. Bullock interjects, laughing a little until he gets a good whiff of the corpse himself. “Jesus fucking Christ…I’m going to be smelling that all week, aren’t I?”

Barry, who looks hot and irritable and about ten seconds away from falling asleep on his feet, practically chokes on the smell when it finally hits him. He turns about as white as a sheet, holding a hand over his mouth as though he’s about to retch.

Of course, Eobard doesn’t blame him. He’s having a hard time putting up with the smell himself from where he’s crouching on the fire escape overhead. At least this isn’t the first time he’s been accosted by the scent of burning human flesh.

It is, indeed, something that clings to you for days…

Once he’s had a moment to get his bearings, Det. Bullock gestures to Barry and says, “Why the hell would you want me to bring the rookie to this, Irene?”
“My rookie is a smart cookie,” is her cheeky retort, obviously impressed with her own witty remark. “Besides, he likes weird cases. Don’t you, Barry?”

Barry nods, albeit slowly. “Yeah, kind of, but…but what the hell happened to this guy?”

Weathers doesn’t say anything, just tilts her head back to stare at Det. Thompson.

Det. Thompson gives her a dirty look in return. “I swear to god, Irene…He tore open a packet of Icarus, downed the powder in one go, and then ducked into the alley. He made it only twenty feet before he caught fire.”

“And—what—you didn’t see a lighter or anything?”

“No, because he didn’t light himself on fire. Why do you find that so hard to believe?”

“Because it sounds ridiculous.” Weathers turns her head to Det. Bullock. “It sounds ridiculous, right?”

“Welcome to Gotham,” is his solemn response.

“…Seriously? You actually believe this guy?”

“I wish I was joking, but this isn’t even the first account we have of someone bursting into flames after ingesting the stuff.”

“Is that a common occurrence?” Barry asks tentatively, as though afraid to interrupt their conversation. “I mean, do you have any reports of people using Icarus and, you know…not catching fire?”

At first, Det. Bullock just blinks at him, seemingly surprised by Barry’s contribution to their little discussion, but eventually he nods. “Well, yeah. I mean, people have been taking it because they claim it gives them extraordinary powers. In fact, two weeks ago we had this one guy who almost jumped off the roof of Stagg Enterprises because he thought Icarus could make him fly.”

“Powers, huh…?” Barry’s eyes flicker down to the body before focusing on Det. Thompson. “So, after he ate that stuff, did he hold onto the packet or did he toss it aside?”

“I, uh…he dropped it. I think. Back that way, kid.”

“Okay,” Barry says before he pulls out two black nitrile gloves from the small satchel at his side, turning away to make his way slowly back toward the street. His three companions watch him go in silence as he struggles to fit the rubber glove over the tensor bandage on his right hand.

Once he’s out of earshot, Det. Bullock glances back at Irene Weathers, waiting until she’s straightened up to her full height before he asks, “Has the kid even had his sweet sixteen yet?”

“He might be young, but don’t be fooled, Harve. Mr. Allen is as sharp as a tack.”

“He’d have to be,” the man sighs. “You loath most interns.”

Bracing her hands against her hips, Ms. Weathers leans back slowly to stretch out her spine. “I’m so old now. I want to retire. I was actually thinking of asking him to stay in Metropolis, or, you know…”

Det. Bullock’s entire demeanour darkens considerably. “No.”
“But he’s smart. And he likes crazy cases, just like this one. I think he’d love it here.”

“Hell no.”

“Why not?”

“Irene, please…” He shoves his hands into his trouser pockets furiously, looking somewhat annoyed. “This isn’t the kind of place any sane person settles down willing, least of all to work for the GCPD.”

“Stuff it, Harvey. The GCPD needs good people.” She waves her hand toward Barry, who is currently crouching at the corner, shifting through a small pile of crumpled paper. “Like Barry. He’s the kind of guy that just wants to do the right thing. That’s his goal in life.”

Harvey doesn’t waver though. “Maybe he can, but not in Gotham. In Gotham…? Well, I look at his pretty little face and think of another young somebody who wound up raped and murdered in an alleyway not too unlike this one three years ago.”

Irene Weathers flinches, as though slapped.

Even Det. Thompson looks down and away, suddenly uncomfortable with the sudden turn in their conversation.

“You…you can’t…” she sputters. “Peter shouldn’t have gone off on his own, and we both know that. He didn’t know what he was doing.”


This only succeeds in riling her up more. She takes a step closer to him, invading his personal space, eyes flashing menacingly. “Barry is not going to run off on his own in the middle of the night. He’s not a detective. He knows that.”

“Peter knew that too.”

“Stop lecturing me about Peter.”

“Well why the hell not?” he snaps, voice low, dangerous. “He’s a prime example of how thoroughly this city screws unsuspecting people over. Look around you, Irene—the power was shut down in one fell swoop by some maniac calling himself the Riddler. Only a short while before that, we were being terrorized by a group of thugs prancing around in red hoods. Now, there’s some guy dressed up like a bat serving up his home-made brand of justice like it’s fresh from the fucking oven. This is hell, Irene. Why in God’s name would you advise anyone to join the GCPD?”

“Because you have some of the most unusual unsolved cases in North America,” Barry says, suddenly standing just five feet away. His mysterious appearance gives both Ms. Weathers and Det. Bullock quite the start. “Uh, sorry about that…Did I miss something important?”

“Not at all,” Det. Thompson chimes in. “Just a good ol’ pissing match.”

Barry doesn’t look the least bit convinced, but there isn’t too much he can really say about it. Instead, he holds up a clear CSI bag containing two small packets, one which is empty and one which is loaded with a fine white powder. “I found these. One is still vacuum sealed and insulated.”

Irene Weathers clears her throat. “Thank you, Barry. When you get back to the lab, show Rodney what you’ve found. There isn’t too much we can do to analyze it for the time being, but he’ll take a
look at it once Gotham’s back in order.”


“I’m going to wait for someone to come and collect the body, but you and Harvey are going to head on back now. You need to catch up on a little shut eye, hon…” The look she gives the detective is glacier. “Spence can keep me company in the meantime.”

Det. Bullock doesn’t rise to the bait. Just gives her a worn look in return before turning sharply about-face to march back toward his vehicle.

Eobard decides then and there that he kind of likes this detective, this jaded man who’s seen the worst of this city and doesn’t give a damn about trying to excuse its cruel nature.

Irene Weathers, on the other hand?

…Not so much.

~***~

Knowing that Barry only has one stop left before he heads back to the apartment, Eobard figures that he can wait a while longer before making his presence known. So, he follows the pair back to the precinct and lurks in the shadows just outside the building, wondering how he’s going to confront Barry about his wild and unprecedented journey into the darkened alleyways of Gotham City, when the boy reappears two hours later, his shirt sleeves burnt to a crisp.

From what Eobard can see, Barry doesn’t look too badly burned himself, although his tensor bandage is obviously a little worse for wear. The boy is in the process of rolling up what’s left of said sleeves, looking a mite pissed as he jogs down the precinct stairs, when Det. Bullock exits the building behind him and takes off after him.

Barry doesn’t notice the man though until he taps him on the shoulder, jumping so hard he nearly misses a step. “Oh, hey—hi? Do they need me back inside?”

“No,” the man replies, “but I saw the smoke. What happened?”

“Rodney opened the sealed packet.”

Det. Bullock looks slightly stunned. “Holy crap. That fire was caused by the drug?”

“Pretty much.”

“So…” Bullock reaches up to scratch the corner of his jaw, probably irritated by his stubble. “That’s it, then? No more sample?”

Barry nods apologetically. “It ignited maybe ten seconds after he opened the bag, although…that actually tells us something important about the drug itself.”

“Yeah?”

“Well, it’s about 86 degrees outside right now, and even higher than that back in the lab, thanks to the power outage. I think the sample might contain white phosphorous, because, you know, it ignites upon contact with the air at high temperatures.”

“Of course,” the man says drily.
“Sorry,” Barry replies, “I didn’t mean…I’m a bit of a Chemistry nut.”

“I can tell.”

“If you think I’m bad, you should meet my father.”

“So…white phosphorous?”

“Oh, yeah—given how relatively new this drug is, I think your vic was given an uncut sample of *Icarus* by mistake. I mean, having your customers burst into flames isn’t exactly the best business model in the world.”

This earns a chuckle from the detective. “You’re telling me…”

“Given how volatile this stuff is, the producers would have to store and cut it somewhere cold. If you think they’re still in operation now, even with the power out, try looking for people who have backup generators for storing large quantities of perishables and the like. That’s about all that I can tell you, detective. I hope it helps.”

“More than you know, kid,” he says appreciatively. “And I really do mean that. It’s a good place to start.”

Barry is clearly pleased to be of assistance. He flashes the man one of his thousand-watt smiles and then turns around, making his way back down the stairs. “Glad I could help, detective! I guess I’ll see you later tonight.”

“Hold up—” Bullock drops his hand heavily onto Barry’s shoulder before he can get too far. “I just had a chat with your friends from the MPD. Irene shouldn’t have come here because of her condition. *You* shouldn’t have come here either, given the state of your arm. We’re sending you both back to Metropolis tomorrow morning.”

“But my arm is fine,” Barry protests. He holds his right hand up and wiggles his fingers for emphasis, although the way he winces isn’t very convincing.

“…Yeah, *no*. I saw how you struggled to take notes yesterday morning.”

“My writing always looks like chicken scratch.”

“So does mine,” the man snorts, “but at least I don’t have to hold the pen like a complete retard. Do you honestly think you’re fooling anyone?”

Barry shakes his head, shoulders slouching.

“…Good. Now, where’re you staying? I might be able to give you a ride home, permitting the streets stay clear for a while longer.”

“That won’t be necessary.” Barry gestures down the road. “My friend’s apartment is only four blocks that way.”

Bullock’s eyes trail down the street. More people have dared to venture outside now that it’s mid-morning, but storm clouds have gathered overhead and it feels as though the unbearable warmth that’s been bogging everyone down for the last week or so is about to come to an end.

Even with the worsening weather, the streets are still busy, although the only people wandering about in this neck of the woods don’t look like they’re up to much good.
The detective is obviously thinking the exact same thing because decisively he says, “I’m going to walk you.”

“It’s okay. It’ll only take me about ten minutes.”

“No. People have literally been mugged at that first intersection over there, kid. That’s within spitting distance of the GCPD.”

“In broad daylight?”

“In broad daylight.”

Barry looks like he wants to roll his eyes, but he gestures down the street instead. “After you, I guess…”

Satisfied, Det. Bullock leads the way.

They make it to the apartment without too much fanfare, although they bump into a prostitute along the way, one who hurtsles slurs at them for no apparent reason, and some weirdo that trails after them for about block, staring bug-eyed at the back of Barry’s head until Bullock turns around to scare him off.

Eobard keeps his distance by following them on the other side of the road. It’s an odd sensation, really, this business of spying on someone in person. He’s accustomed to taking a more active role, confronting his target head on rather than slinking around in the shadows. All the same, this experience has taught him something, that Barry works competently enough to impress the folks down at the MPD and, quite possibly, even those at the GCPD. It’s something Eobard will have to watch out for when Barry eventually starts working in Central City.

The trip is indeed only a ten minute walk, at the end of which Det. Bullock successfully delivers Barry to Danny’s apartment complex. The man pauses only briefly to say something else to the boy before heading back the way he came, Barry’s eyes trailing curiously after him before he walks up to the front door, hand lifted to open it when he suddenly stops.

Dread settles hard and heavy in the pit of his stomach as Eobard watches the boy turn slowly to stare at a man drinking a bottle of beer against the side of the building. The guy doesn’t look like much of a hoodlum, but it’s pretty obvious that he’s a far cry from sober, not someone you would normally introduce yourself to unless your birth name was Bartholomew Henry Allen.

Oh, for fuck’s sake…

Eobard is too far away to hear what Barry says to the guy, but the man seems delighted by his question. He waves both of his arms in the air, beer sloshing over the lip of the bottle as he gestures wildly down the street. In the opposite direction of the GCPD, in fact.

And Det. Bullock’s retreating form.

Barry glances back at Det. Bullock, who is now across the street and making good speed, obviously keen on dodging the crazy bug-eyed man on his way back to the precinct. For a second, it looks as though Barry’s about to take up after the detective, but then he thanks the drunkard, stuffs his hands into his jean pockets, and wanders off to god-knows-where.

Eobard contemplates stopping Barry right then and there, but part of him wants to see what the boy is up to first. Curiosity is such a potent thing.
He wants to know what could possibly prevent Barry from returning to Central City.

~**~

Barry ends up hitting five bars and two pubs in the span of roughly twenty minutes.

Eobard barely avoids bumping into him as the boy passes in and out of the third one, always only dropping in long enough to speak briefly with the bartender before moving on. More often than not the bars are actually closed for business, but about three of them are genuinely still opened, serving up warm beer and whiskey to their patrons in this destitute little corner of town, and generally not giving two shits about their complaints.

Finally though, Barry seems to find what he’s looking for when he walks up to this final bar and catches the eye of the girl behind the counter. She smiles, leans in close to hear whatever it is he whispers to her, and then winks at him before ducking down to grab something under the counter. She surfaces again shortly, this time with a bottle of beer in hand.

Barry reaches into his pocket to grab his wallet, paying the girl but refusing to take the bottle itself. At first, she’s confused, but then he says something else to her that prompts her to whip out a pen and a pad of paper. She scribbles something down and hands the note off to him.

Barry gives her his biggest and brightest smile before disappearing once again.

Eobard plans to continue tailing the boy, but first he steps up to the counter and waves down the same girl. “I hate to bother you, but I’ve been trying to catch up with my son. Young guy—barely looks legal. Brown hair. Hazel eyes…?”

“The cutie?” she asks, eyeing him up and down. “Yeah, I can see the resemblance.”

Other than their lean physiques, Eobard doesn’t see how this could be possibly true, but it’s fairly dark inside and he really needs to leave, so… “How long ago was he here?”

“Not long actually. You just missed him.” She nods toward the door. “Asked for a cold beer and then seemed surprised when I actually had one.”

Considering the power outage, that was a little odd. “How is it that you have cold beer?”

“The owner’s got a friend in the fish business,” she explains. “He’s has backup generators for his warehouse, so he’s been storing stuff for just about everyone lately. Brought us a whole bunch of ice only an hour ago.”

Now he sees where this is going…

“I take it my son asked for his address?”

“Yeah, said he might want to store something himself.” She laughs. “It’ll cost him a pretty penny, but whatever. You want it too, hon?”

“Yes, thank you.”

She whips out the notepad again and writes down the address, tacking a phone number to the end. “Pass this along to your son for me, would you? He’s got a smile like the sun, that boy…”

Eobard thanks her and then scrambles back out onto the street.

Once he catches sight of Barry down the block, he crumples the piece of paper in his hand and tosses
Barry’s quest takes him to a warehouse at the docks. It’s hard to miss. The surrounding buildings are dark and quiet, but this one has its outside lights on already, illuminating the entranceways. Barry approaches one tentatively, hand raised as though to knock, but then he grabs the door knob instead and gives it a good yank.

The door nearly hits him in the face as it swings open, a small cloud of condensation escaping as he stares into the dimly lit, cold storage warehouse. Slowly, he lets the door swing shut again—but stops it at the last possible moment, cracking it open again to peer inside. Eobard doesn’t know what it is that catches his attention, but it prompts Barry to slip inside quietly, glancing back over his shoulder once as though to see if anyone is watching him.

Unsure of how long Barry intends to linger behind the door, Eobard decides to play it safe by entering through the opposite side of the building. Once he’s in though, he understands what piqued Barry’s interest.

He originally thought the interior was dimly lit throughout, but there are actually only a few overhead lights on near the centre of the warehouse illuminating a single row of containers. Inching closer to the source, Eobard stops one row over and peers through a space between two crates at two men standing around a large open box.

“—shouldn’t have let Nicky do inventory,” one of the men grumbles, tossing a small white packet back and forth between his hands.

“Are you kidding me?” The shorter one snaps. “Thank god he did. What if Cory had actually gone to the cops?”

“He’s a little chicken shit liar. He never would’ve snitched.”

“Yeah, but that’s another body in the morgue. How long before the police come snooping?”

“If the GCPD hasn’t figured it out already, they never will. Thanks to this Riddler guy, no one is going to prioritize the death of a couple of druggies over dealing with these looters.”

Agitated, the little man starts chewing on a nail. “Whatever. I still think we should move this crap while we still have the chance. It’s gonna flood, man. I ain’t wasting my time fishing these crates out of the fucking bay.”

“Relax. Just two more days and then we’ll be—”

‘We’ll be what’ goes unsaid, however, due to the appearance of Det. Spencer Thompson. He’s flanked by two other men, one of which is holding a gun to Barry’s head.

Eobard experiences a miasma of emotions at the sight of him. Worry, fear, surprise, irritation—but mostly anger. The kind that usually makes him lash out before he can really think things through.

Fortunately though, with ten years of experience setting things to right after Barry’s less than brilliant moments in life, Eobard manages to clench his hands and count down from ten without breaking anything in the immediate vicinity. It’s not as though he can just dash to Barry’s rescue now, a burst of air and a streak of red lightning the only indication of his presence before he floors the lot of them. The last thing he needs is for Barry to think that the Reverse Flash has moved to Gotham. There’d be no hope of dragging him back to Central City if it came to that.
“Change of plans,” Det. Thompson sighs. “Donnelley is bringing a truck tonight. The cops know we need to keep the stuff cold.”

“What?” Shorty snaps. “Already? And who the fuck is that?”

“Lab rat from the MPD.” Det. Thompson gives Barry an appraising look. Stupid kid… Looks paler than he did when he saw that body earlier today, like he’s about ready to pass out. “It won’t be long before somebody else catches on. Unless you’ve already told someone, Mr. Wells…?”

As terrified as Barry appears to be right now, he doesn’t say anything.

The man holding the gun reaches up to grab a fistful of Barry’s hair and yanks his head back.

Barry winces, but still refuses to speak.

The first man stares down at the packet in his hand thoughtfully. “What about this kid, huh? A dead badge is not exactly the best way to keep under the radar.”

“You guys have a tendency to get worked up over nothing….” Det. Thompson turns back to Barry. “I know Harvey’s already told you the story, but people get some pretty awful ideas after sampling our stuff. One guy actually thought he could fly off the roof of Stagg Enterprises. In fact, somebody got the same idea today about the New Trigate Bridge…”

“Really?” Shorty asks.

Thompson gives him a blank look. “Yeah. Some young CSI from Metropolis.”

“No,” Barry gasps, catching on.

It’s clear to Eobard when the boy’s fear finally overrides all rational thought. He just about has a heart attack when Barry foolishly tilts his head to one side and out of the way of the gun before slamming his left elbow up into the face of the guy behind him.

There’s a sickening crack as the man’s nose gives way under the blow, followed by a howl of pain. Barry manages to hit him so hard, he actually drops his gun.

The other men just stand there for a moment in stunned silence as Barry pivots sharply on his heel and darts toward the adjacent row of crates.

Thankfully, this is just the kind of break Eobard was looking for. If Barry can make it to the door without looking back, Eobard can take care of the men himself, either by phase through them and rearrange their innards or simply snapping their necks one by one. He hasn’t quite decided yet. He wants to make it memorable though, considering how long it’s been since he last killed anyone…

He lets his suit out of his compressor ring then, feeling more like his old heartless self again as it envelops his body—just as the beaten brute collects himself long enough to whirl around and catch Barry by his wrist.

His broken wrist.

Barry’s the one that screams this time as the man yanks him back sharply by his injured arm, collapsing to his knees as the man gives it a sinister twist. “You little bitch,” the man hisses, blood streaming down from broken nose and into his mouth. “You wanna play? We’ll fucking play alright. Then I’ll toss you off that fucking bridge.”

Brady shoots Det. Thompson a dirty look, but obeys him all the same. He’s just in the process of wrestling Barry onto his back when Eobard decides that he has to act now before the kid winds up dead, consequences be damned. He’ll find some other way to draw Barry back to Central City after all of this is done. Or maybe he’ll concuss the boy first, then kill everyone while he’s out cold…

It’s then that he hears a sound off to his left, down at the far end of his aisle. It’s hard to see, but he’s pretty sure he can make out someone lurking in the dark.

Something else glints in the corner of his left eye, farther off into the shadows.

Eobard taps into the Speed Force just in time to scale the crates. He perches at the very top, staring down at Barry and the thugs, as the GCPD’s boys in blue round the corner of the centre aisle, led by none other than Det. Bullock.

“Brady fucking Smith, get the hell off that kid,” Harvey Bullock growls as he approaches, gun pointed first at the brute before taking aim at Det. Thompson. “And as for you, Spence…”

Anger twists the features of Det. Thompson’s face, superseding any thought of self-preservation as he reaches into his coat for his gun.

Eobard knows what that feels like, this willingness to set the whole world on fire just to get in one last jab. The man should be running like his partners, but he’s smarter than that. He knows that the gig is up. Whatever life he lived up until to this point in time is well and truly done.

Eobard hopes he himself has more control over the situation when his own charade comes to an end.

Harvey Bullock—born and raised in this hellhole of a city—doesn’t look all that surprised when Det. Thompson levels the barrel of his gun with Harvey’s head. This probably isn’t the first friend that’s ever betrayed him. Likely not the last one either. It must help to ease the pain as he finally pulls the trigger, blowing a hole directly between Det. Thompson’s eyes.

Det. Thompson’s own bullet clips Harvey’s left ear as he collapses to the ground.

The four cops accompanying the detective take up after the other thugs. Brady is caught right from the get-go because he was already down on his knees when the GCPD appeared, spitting blood and some of the filthiest language Eobard has heard in all his life as his hands are cuffed behind his back.

“How did you find me?” Barry promises solemnly. “And, uh…I’m sorry…about, you know, Det. Thompson…”

Bullock casts a baleful eye on the fallen man. “Yeah, well…Spence knew what was coming for him. I’ve had my suspicions about him for a while.” He spares a quick glance at Mr. Smith, still writhing on the ground under the cop, then off into the shadows where Eobard had been lurking mere seconds
before the GCPD burst in. “I’m not 100% positive, but I swear to god someone else was trailing you earlier.”

Barry frowns in concern. “When?”

“Along 110th street, between the pubs. Tall guy. Dark hair. Didn’t see his face though…”

Almost intuitively, Det. Bullock shifts his gaze upward at the top of the crates.

Eobard leans back, out of sight, and holds his breath. He can’t believe he hadn’t noticed the detective at all during the trip.

God, he’s out of shape.

Thankfully though, it’s all over now.

He has no doubt that this brush with death might’ve been the reason behind the flux Gideon mentioned earlier. He’ll have to check with her again as soon as he leaves this place, but he’s certain that the discussion he plans on having with Barry once he returns to the apartment will put to rest any notion the boy might have of working permanently out here in the east.

Satisfied that things have been dealt with, Eobard turns to leave. He intends to zip quickly through the city streets straight to Danny Krupin’s apartment, but then he catches sight of something else, a flicker of motion in the shadows, this time far above him in the rafters.

Eobard tilts his head back to gaze up at the man history will forever remember as the *Batman*.

He knows that he’s reached dangerous grounds here—even worse than anything he could’ve encounter in Central City, because meddling in Gotham will change the timeline far beyond anything even he could control. Anything he does that could possibly hinder the Batman’s ability to keep his own Rogue Gallery in check just might have a detrimental effect on other budding heroes in the U.S., including the Flash.

For this reason alone, Eobard knows that he cannot afford to engage the Dark Knight.

Not now, at least.

The vigilante obviously has other ideas as he crouches low on his perch, taking on the stance of someone waiting to pounce, but already Eobard has slowed time and is on the move again, jumping off the stack of crates and making a clean break for the door.

He zips outside, past the police cruisers parked outside and into the empty parking lot of a nearby school, pausing only long enough to feel along the back of his neck and shoulders for the kind of tracker the vigilante is usually famous for. Sure enough, he finds it, holding the tiny device between his index finger and thumb before crushing it triumphantly

Once he’s put an end to that, he takes off once more, sky darkening rapidly as storm clouds continue to gather overhead.

The sooner he leaves Gotham, the better.

~***~

It takes Barry almost an hour to show up.
Eobard is sitting at the kitchen table, chair angled so that he can keep an eye on the front entranceway and still glance out the window at the people lining up outside at the small grocery store on the corner below. Now that it’s begun to rain, they’ve apparently come to accept the fact that Hurricane Rene means to make good on its threat to flood the city. Batteries and bottled water are hot commodities right now, but Eobard has already witnessed an intense fight between two men over something as trivial as a can of beans…

If they were smart, these people would pack an overnight bag and leave while they still had a chance, but it’s obvious that they’ve been stranded here by their fear. In all likelihood, they loath this city just as much as he does, but it’s a familiar demon to them, one whose beating they’ve endured almost all their lives. If they can survive muggings in broad daylight, surely they can handle a little rain?

Eobard shakes his head.

When he hears a key turning in the door, he keeps his eyes trained on the street below until Barry steps inside the apartment and notices his silhouette at the end of the hall. The boy gasps and drops his satchel then, nearly knocking over the vase on the small table by the door in his surprise.

Eobard leans back in his chair, arms crossed, inclining his head to one side to look at Barry.

“You’re…in Gotham,” the boy breathes once he’s gotten over the shock of seeing his father. He’s wearing a sling again, although this time his right arm has also been fitted into a makeshift wooden splint. He probably spent the last little while with a medic. “I mean, you’re actually here—this isn’t just some side effect of the drugs?”

Sighing, Eobard removes his glasses, folds them, and sets them down on the small table in front of him.

“And…you are so incredibly pissed right now,” Barry mumbles, tentatively making his way into the kitchen. He takes up a seat across from Eobard, eyes downcast. “Um, do you want me to start, or is there anything you want to say first?”

Eobard is careful to keep his expression neutral. As mad as he is, he knows that Barry’s inability to read him scares the boy sometimes more than anything. “You have the floor, Barry.”

Nervous, the boy starts fidgeting in his seat. “I’m not supposed to be here. I mean…I wasn’t supposed to be here, but Gotham was still short on volunteers and the MPD asked me if I would help evacuate people.”

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“Okay…” Eobard says slowly, waiting.

Barry swallows. “The woman I’ve been shadowing—Irene Weathers—she started helping out in the lab here. Since I’m supposed to stick with her, we both ended up working some of the GCPD’s cases. There are a lot of people out there taking advantage of the fact that the power is out, you know, so they’ve been pretty bogged down lately…”

“And the bit about me not getting wind of this until Det. West called me last night?” Eobard inquires. “What about that?”

“I should’ve called you,” Barry admits, eyes darting up briefly to take in Eobard’s cold expression before casting his gaze downward again. “I wasn’t supposed to be here this long. I thought I would be back in Metropolis before our next scheduled chat.”

Eobard shakes his head, temper finally bubbling over. “You should’ve called, regardless of how
long you intended to stay. Look—” He glances out the window again, down at another fight. Barry follows his gaze “—this city is dangerous enough with all the lights on. What if something had happened to you? You could die before help arrived. Do you know what that would do to me? …Do you know what that would do to Henry?”

“I…” Barry’s answer dies in his throat.

Eobard finds that it’s relatively easy to beat Barry emotionally into submission by dragging his biological father into the conversation. He also realizes it’s even easier when he blatantly invades the boy’s personal space, such as now, when he leans forward suddenly and reaches out for Barry’s broken arm.

Barry flinches, jolted by the sudden movement, although he ultimately doesn’t move away. Instead, he just sits there, completely frozen, as Eobard ghosts his fingers over the back of Barry’s hand, tracing the front edge of the splint…

Looking up at his son, he asks the million dollar question:

“What happened to your arm?”

The boy’s got this glossy sheen to his eyes now, like he’s fighting back tears. Eobard knows that Barry wants to lie to him, to minimize the damage of what he’s done, but this is a test of sorts, to see how much this child really loves him.

He hopes for both their sakes that Barry makes the right decision.

The boy swallows again, brows creased, choking on the truth. Then he finally admits, “I was attacked.”

‘That’s putting it lightly,’ Eobard thinks, but he can’t deny the relief he feels at having Barry come clean to him. He furrows his own brows though in concern and acts surprised when he asks, “How?”

“I was following a lead,” Barry says quietly. “You…you were right about this place, okay? You’re always right. When are you never…”

Eobard barks out a cold laugh. “Do you think I care about being right? Do you think I would’ve run all the way here just to rub that in your face?”

“No, but…”

“I know you’re an adult, Barry, and I know that you’ve seen man’s cruelty firsthand in your line of work, but I’ve been on this earth a lot longer than you, and I know—I know how easily you could’ve died at any point these last couple of day…”

A tear escapes then, trailing lazily down Barry’s left cheek. The kid is probably sore and hungry and tired, and there’s no doubt he’s still shaken by what had happened to him in the warehouse, but this is the actual breaking point here. This is where Eobard wrests back control of Barry’s destiny and sets it on the course he’d always intended for the boy.

Eobard settles his hand down more firmly over Barry’s then, gently stroking the boy’s knuckles with his thumb. He tries to soften his expression, to mimic the air of a troubled soul, before he continues. “I know it’s selfish of me to say this, Barry, but after Tess died you became my reason for living. If I have to, I will follow you to every crime scene in this godforsaken city until you return to Metropolis, because if anything were to happen to you, I don’t think I could live with myself…”
This definitely strikes a chord with Barry, because the boy knows, all too well, the pain of losing someone dear to him. It’s clear in the way he lifts his uninjured hand to cover his face, sobbing now in full force as Eobard continues to stroke the back of his other hand.

“I don’t know what you’ve been through today,” Eobard sighs, “and you don’t have to tell me the details if you don’t want to, but I would like to put this whole experience behind us now. No more fireworks; no more Gotham… Do you agree?”

Barry doesn’t try to say anything. Just nods instead.

Eobard smiles softly and sits there patiently as Barry cries himself out.

Eventually, the boy is able to compose himself again. His eyes are red and puffy, and he’s still as pale as a ghost, but what’s done is done and it’s clear to him that Eobard’s message has made its mark. “I’m sorry. I don’t know why I’m crying so much. Today has been…a really shitty day.”

“I can tell,” Eobard remarks, eyeing his splint.

Barry laughs a little. Then sniffs. “I have to admit, you scared the hell out me when I just walked in… How did you find me here?”

“I visited Mr. Krupin’s aunt in Metropolis. She gave me the address to this place and one of her spare keys.” Eobard leans back finally, retracting his hand as well. “I stopped by the precinct on my way over, but no one could tell me where you were, so waiting here was really my best option for finding you.”

Barry shifts uneasily in his seat, ashamed. “You have no idea how sorry I am…”

“You’re not a bad kid, Barry. As stupid as you can be sometimes, the mistakes you make are few and far between.” He reaches down to grab his glasses, checking to make sure the lenses are clean before replacing them on his face. “Now, tell me that you’re not planning on staying here for much longer. I don’t know how they expect you to help out with your arm like that anyway.”

“They’re sending me and Irene back to Metropolis tomorrow morning.”

“Thank god.”

Barry nods, then tilts his head a little to one side, giving Eobard a curious look. “Did you really come all this way just to convince me to leave Gotham?”

“Does that surprise you?”

“Not really…” Barry’s gaze drifts back to window. The fight in front of the grocery store below has escalated to include three other men. Two police officers are jogging across the street now to intervene. “You’re pretty hard core as far as fathers go. You always seem to go that extra mile for me…”

“Before I met you, I never thought I would be a father,” Eobard confesses. Never in a million years would he have pictured himself where is he today, so wholly invested in the well-being of someone other than himself. “Not a good one, anyway. You have no idea how was scared I was when I took you in… I thought we would clash. I thought you might hate me.”

Barry smiles, still a little teary eyed, though certainly more relaxed. “How could I possibly hate you?”
Eobard stares down at his hands. “Yes, well…now I know better. You were a sweet child when we
first met and you haven’t changed much since then. Other than the fact that you would go
gallivanting off to save a whole city, of course, but I digress…”

“So says the man that would go gallivanting off to save his son.”

“I would do anything in my power to keep you safe,” Eobard replies. Barry has no idea how much
he really means that. And not only as a means to an end.

Eobard doesn’t have much experience with love, but if anyone in this world has earned his hard-won
affection, it’s certainly Barry Allen.

Barry sniffs again. Nods his head. Now that this little confrontation between them is winding
down, exhaustion is slowly creeping up on him.

“You look like you’re going to pass out,” Eobard remarks.

“You’re not wrong,” Barry snorts. “But if I lie down now, I won’t sleep at all tonight. Just…talk to
me for a while. Please? Other than learning that your son ran off to Gotham, has anything else
happened since I left Central?”

Eobard sighs. “Oh god. I guess now is as good as any time to tell you about Dr. McGee…”

And tell him about Dr. McGee he does, although he omits any information pertaining to General
Eiling. Barry and Eiling occupy two areas of his life that he would like keep separate at all costs,
however he’s completely honest about the tumultuous relationship between Tina and himself. Barry
had always known of Dr. McGee, but their longstanding rivalry was still a mystery to the boy. Now
though, Eobard feels he should be honest about their history—to a degree—since he does believe
introducing her to Barry could prove useful to him in the future. Barry’s natural charisma could
easily disarm her.

They end up chatting aimlessly about anything and everything until almost three o’clock in the
afternoon. The rain has picked up outside, but there are still people out in the streets, scrambling to
find the last of life’s essentials before the worst of the storm hits. Barry reminds him then that they
should probably eat, so Eobard rummages through the dry food in the cupboard until he finds a box
of crackers and a can of diced vegetables. They make a meal of it, complimented by the jug of
orange juice left behind in the fridge, which isn’t past it’s due date but—at least according to Barry—
tastes truly awful from sitting so long in the heat.

This is, of course, actually because Eobard drugged it. Not that that’s something Barry needs to
know. He didn’t spike Barry’s glass with a particularly high dose, mind you, just enough to help him
fall asleep, which he nearly does right then and there at the kitchen table before Eobard helps him
into the guest bedroom.

As soon as his kid is out, he retreats back into the small kitchen and wakes Gideon.

“Show me,” is all that he says. And really, it’s all that he’s ever needed to say to her, because already
she knows his preferred waypoint, his beacon of light for a better future…

Return to Sender: U.S. Post Office Shuts Down Permanently

Fear lances through his body.

This can’t be right.
This can’t be right.

“Are there any references to Barry Allen?” He asks immediately, feeling a little light-headed. It’s not often that he goes into complete shock.

“There is 1 reference, Dr. Wells.”

“What about ‘Barry Wells’?” he snaps, frustrated.

“There are twenty-eight news articles; one three-hundred and fifteen page report by the Arving Mitch, published in 2097; twelve—”

“Stop,” he commands, confused. “What is this report by Arving Mitch?”

“A bibliography.”

“Summarize it.”

“Barry Wells, born Bartholomew Henry Allen. Director of the Gotham City Police Department, CSI division. Posthumously confirmed associate of the Batman—alias ‘the Wren’—for approxima—”

“That’s more than enough,” he says.

The fact that something could still draw Barry back to Gotham after this calamity does not sit well with him, even less so knowing that the boy might one day join the infernal ‘Batclan’ founded by that emotionally constipated lunatic, Bruce Wayne. At least now he knows it seems as though becoming a hero is always in the cards for Barry…

Even so, what good does that do him? Unless the ‘Wren’ can run faster than the speed of light, there’s no point in letting this particular future unfold.

“Is there any mention of Barry possessing some measure of extraordinary physical abilities?”

“Negative.”

“No account of superior speed?”

“Beyond human standards, negative.”

He wishes he could ask her where it all went wrong, but Gideon’s knowledge is limited only to data that’s been collected electronically over the years. He doubts there’s a file floating around somewhere in her artificial memory labelled ‘Your mistakes’. There’s really no point drilling her for more information…

“Thank you, Gideon,” he murmurs as her hologram vanishes. As easy as it would be to panic right now, he can’t let this little hiccup deter him. After all, this isn’t the first time he’s had to take drastic measures to steer Barry back on course.

In fact, he think he knows exactly what he needs to do now…

~***~

Mercury Labs, while almost as monumental in pioneering science as his own facility, still consists of only a few small laboratory centres dotted throughout Central City. Their main focus is nanotechnology, of course, specifically that which could be utilized for medical research, although a small subset of their scientists have been working on other forms of technology in the field of
medicine, such as mobile prosthetics and improved cochlear implants. Thumbing through the files on Dr. Feldman’s research, it becomes apparent to Eobard that the neuropsychologist had tried to write off his work as just that—using the gorillas to test implants that would ultimately ‘improve the functionality of a damaged inner ear’…

Eobard laughs and tosses the manila folder into the fire. In the distance, he can hear someone screaming.

Not just someone, though. The moment night fell in Gotham City, he raced back to Missouri, tracked Dr. Feldman down to his last known address, and dragged the man out of bed. He ruffled good old Roger up a little bit then, just so that he would reveal how many copies of his work Eobard needed to destroy and where he could find them all, before hauling him off to Mercury Labs.

The whimpering man had told him that General Eiling eventually wedged his foot into the door concerning his research, and so Dr. Feldman had been coming in almost every day outside of Dr. McGee’s working hours to erase any of the information Mercury Labs currently had on him. Eobard’s a bit peeved that the General evidently got what he was aiming for, but the fact that Dr. Feldman has access to his old lab almost makes up for it.

After all, it’s a perfect excuse to have the man here late at night just as Eobard intends to raze the whole goddamn building to the ground.

Dr. Feldman’s not his fall guy, mind you. Eobard just finds it convenient to kill the man alongside the last traces of his research, locked into one of the upper offices, too high to jump out the window without dashing his brains against the pavement below.

Eobard runs through every room, destroying just about anything he can get his hands on. All but the security cameras, of course, because he wants someone to watch what remains of the video surveillance when he’s finished here tonight.

He thinks it’s about time that the rest of the world knew about the man in the lightning.

Eventually though, the security cameras sputter out, falling victim to the fire, just as he makes his way through the animal facility. These rooms are designed to withstand a widespread fire and he has absolutely no intention of killing these creatures, but as he jogs back up to Feldman’s old lab, he realizes that the man hadn’t even bothered to move the gorillas somewhere safer. Or ‘gorilla’, he should say, because the sickly ones had been euthanized a few days ago and all that remains is this young solitary ape, cowering in the far corner of its cage, eyes wild as it witnesses the flames slowly spreading across the room.

Eobard stops in front of its cage, wondering where he’s going to put this animal before the fire gets to him. He could maybe—

‘HELP.’

…What the hell?

Eobard stops vibrating, but doesn’t remove his cowl. He knows there were other people in this building earlier tonight, but they all high-tailed it out of there long ago when the mysterious fire first began. Already, he can hear sirens in the distance. Maybe he was just—

‘HELP.’

‘…Is that you?’ he says aloud, looking at the ape. It stares back at him, directly in the eye, so he takes a step closer and—
He’s assaulted then by an image of a surgical team leaning over him. He’s strapped down to some sort of table, the overhead light nearly blinding him until Dr. Feldman steps into view, smiling as though he’s found the Holy Grail of science…

Once the vision end, it triggers Eobard last memory of the man—of locking him in that office after setting a nearby desk on fire. Of pausing outside the door to savour the man’s screams before leaving him to meet his maker. Of—

He feels an odd sense of warmth then, an odd mix of adoration and relief. The gorilla visibly relaxes and inches closer to Eobard in its cage. ‘HOPE,’ it thinks.

“I can’t believe that son of a bitch did it,” Eobard whispers.

It’s baffling, really, but he’s too amazed by what Dr. Feldman accomplished to care how he did it at the moment.

‘Hope…?’ the gorilla repeats, this time tentatively.

“Oh, believe me, I have no intention of leaving you here,” he assures the beast, taking the lock on the cage in hand and vibrating it hard enough to shatter. “I don’t know how much of what I’m saying you can understand, but when I take you outside don’t run away. Be patient. Let the authorities catch you.”

Either the ape understands him and agrees or it’s just too happy just to see him throw the door wide open to really care, but the young gorilla doesn’t hesitate to hobble over into his arms. Thankfully it isn’t an adult, otherwise carrying it outside and to the far end of the parking lot would be a hell of a feat, considering that Eobard is running on the very last of his reserves right now…

The small animal clings to him tightly for a second, so Eobard just lets him. To be honest, it kind of reminds him of when Barry was younger and he’d wake up from a nightmare, arms fastened securely around Eobard’s neck until he could soothe the boy back to sleep.

The gorilla apparently likes this mental image, because when it releases Eobard it shares with him the sensation of familial fondness.

“Yes, I have a son,” he says quietly, “and I suppose you can thank him for your freedom.”

He has an odd feeling that the gorilla seems to be very grateful to Barry indeed right now.

“Stay,” Eobard says, hoping that the gorilla can obey simple commands. “If you do, there’s a very good chance we’ll meet again someday…”

The small gorilla drops down onto its haunches right there in the parking lot. Once the fire brigade shows up, they’ll probably call animal control to take care of this poor creature, but knowing that Dr. Feldman, its own personal devil, is good and dead now seems to put the gorilla at ease. Any traces of the fear it might’ve once harbored for this facility have almost all but vanished now, burned clear away with the rest of the laboratory that once housed it.

Eobard glances back over his shoulder to admire his handiwork before vanishing from the Central City altogether. He passes out almost immediately after he returns to the apartment in Gotham. Thankfully though, the sedative he gave Barry keeps the boy under long past the time it takes Eobard to regain his senses early the next morning.

Then he eats through the remainder of Danny Krupin’s canned food and wonders what exactly Tina and General Eiling know about Dr. Feldman’s work.
It takes them almost a whole day to get back to Metropolis, at which point Eobard genuinely feels like he’s about to die, given how little he’d actually eaten after he had exerted himself like that last night, but thankfully Mr. Krupin’s aunt is a benevolent women. She takes one look at them out there on her doorstep and decides to fry up all the eggs and bacon in her fridge for dinner. Eobard isn’t complaining. He wolfs down his food before Barry is halfway through his meal, then stumbles into the woman’s spare bedroom to pass out again.

He wakes a couple of hours later to someone’s hand on his shoulder, shaking him gently to rouse him from his sleep. He cracks his eyes open to see Krupin’s aunts hovering over him, looking worried.

“I’m sorry to wake you,” she whispers, “but your son is awfully distressed. He says there’s nothing wrong, but I think you need to talk to him.”

Eobard doesn’t need to be told twice. He collects his glasses off the bedside table and wanders out of the bedroom to find Barry sitting alone in the dark in the living room, watching the rain patter against the large bay window as the news plays quietly on the old television set in the corner. Evidently, the storm has finally hit Gotham in full force.

It’s an absolute disaster.

Eobard takes up the empty spot beside Barry on the couch, noticing then the cell phone on the boy’s lap, plugged into the power outlet by the wall. Paled faced and a little jittery, Barry pulls out the recharger and hands the mobile to him.

Eobard turns on the screen to see a series of texts that had been sent to the boy over the past few days. By Hartley Rathaway of all people…

-Yeah, no problem. When you get back, I'll show you how to replace the lens.

-Your father just disappeared off the face of the planet...

-So did you, apparently.

-...Hello?

-Are you still alive?

-Where are you?

-I’m going to guess Gotham.

-Because you’re an idiot.

-With a death wish.

-When you get back to Metropolis, call me. Detective West just dropped by to look for your father and now he’s concerned that you’re both dead.

-Please don’t be dead.

-Seriously, guys. I just got this job.
You’re never going to believe what happened at Mercury Labs. People seem to think it’s either some military experiment gone awry or an elaborate hoax. I hacked into their security feed to check it out for myself (you’re welcome):

Hartley included a photo here from Eobard’s night in Mercury Labs. It’s not a bad shot either, being one of the few moments he had actually bothered to stand in one place, still vibrating, eyes glowing red…

-It looks like that guy you were telling me about.

-They’re calling him ‘The Man in the Yellow Suit’

Eobard was expecting Barry to find out about it on the news first, but this is just as well. As concerned as he is that Hartley already has Barry’s phone number, his new protégé is proving to be useful in more ways than one.

He hands the phone back to Barry and stares at the boy for a good, long time before asking, “Is that really him?”

“Yes,” he breathes. “That’s the man in the lightning…”

Eobard takes off his glasses, folds them, and deposits them on the coffee table. Then he inches a little closer to Barry and wraps an arm around his shoulders.

“All this time, he’s been in Central City.” Barry continues faintly, shaking his head in disbelief. “Do you think he lives there? Do you think he walks around like a normal person during the day…?”

Eobard makes a very calculated move when he says, “You don’t have go back to Central City, Barry… Not if you don’t feel safe.”

Barry shakes his head again. When he turns his face to Eobard, there’s a familiar fire in his eyes, one Eobard remembers from his days fighting the Flash.

“Ten years…” Barry says. “Ten years ago was the last time I saw him, and since then I have always wondered if I was crazy. Now that I know that he’s real though…I have to be the one to bring him in.”

Well, no one will ever truly bring him in, but he doesn’t tell Barry that. Just hugs him a little closer, letting the boy sag against his side.

They sit there together for a long while, watching the news update on Gotham City. In a couple of days, Barry will return to work for the MPD. When his two months are up, he will then begin his internship at Central City, as they had originally discussed.

And when Eobard talks to Gideon later on from the safety his own home, she shows him the future as it should be:

FLASH MISSING IN CRISIS

In just four short years, Eobard will be reunited with his other half.

Chapter End Notes
So, um, wow…four weeks since the last update, huh? I hope the length of the chapter made up for the long wait. There was just so much I wanted to cover before the next time jump, so thank you for your tremendous patience and support. You guys really are the best audience a writer could ask for.

And now, the moment I know you’ve all been waiting for—FUN FACTS!!!:

1) CERN: This is, seriously, the European Organization for Nuclear Research. I don’t know what Ronnie’s exact background is in the New 52 universe, but I thought it wouldn’t hurt to give him stellar credentials. I can hardly wait until Caitlin comes into play…

2) Hartley Rathaway: Obviously, this was just a brief introduction to Hartley, but since they never actually mention in the show when he gets disowned by his parents, I decided to start with him being openly gay. He’s a pretty cool character, despite the fact that he tries to kill those people on the bridge…Expect more of him in the future.

3) Sun University: In the comics, this is where Barry really goes after he wins that scholarship. I’ve been scouring the net in an attempt to discover where Sun City is located, but all I got was that it’s somewhere in Florida. Feel free to correct me if I’m wrong. Also, his particular degree (plus the bit about his practicum) is actually a hash-up of information I gleaned from three separate friends who are CSIs. Depending on where you go to university, the programs can vary wildly.

4) Gotham/Metropolis…: And while we’re on the topic of locations, these two cities have most recently (at least?) been situated across from each other on the Delaware Bay. There really is a supposed to be a bridge connecting them (as incredible as that sounds).

5) Grodd: The shows interpretation of Grodd’s origin story seems entirely different from that of the comics, so I thought I would take full liberty in how he’s introduced to Eobard. My other theory is that perhaps Grodd was actually captured from the wild and then experimented on by the government (i.e. he has his powers before they start picking apart his brain), but until the show goes into more detail, I’m going to run with what I’ve got going now.

6) The AWA: Refers to the “Animal Welfare Act of 1966”. If it’s anything like Canada’s CCAC, then you require approval from the AWA to conduct research on animals (in particular, vertebrates). If you’re not up to snap with your permit, or if you decide to go outside the boundaries outlined in the proposal for your research, you will never receive funding from anyone again. Ever. Additionally, you can get charged a fine and do some jail time to boot.

7) Tina returns! As promised. Expect more from her as well.

8) Zero Year: There is no possible way I can describe how awesome this story arc is in the New 52 without writing a 50000 word essay on it. It is focused in Gotham, particularly the point at which the Riddler shuts down all the power with an EMP blast, although it also includes little side stories from other budding heroes, including the Flash, Black Canary, Nightwing, Batgirl, etc. I tried to keep to a similar theme with Barry’s Zero Year story, but there are some glaring differences. Irene Weathers, for one, is a stand in character for Iris West, because there’s no way in hell I can see Joe letting her go to Gotham. Also, the reference to someone getting thrown off the New Trigate Bridge is actually a reference to Jim Gordon’s Zero Year story (which is amazing). Just…just go read the comic. You’ll have fun. I promise.
(9) Det. Harvey Bullock: I know most people aren't fans of the Gotham television show, but I've always been impressed with Donal Logue's interpretation of the character. He's the guy I pictured while writing Harvey's part in this chapter.

(10) Don’t be fooled by Eobard. He still enjoys killing people just as much as he did a decade ago.

(11) The Wren: while Barry ultimately becomes the Flash in this story, the Wren idea is still very much alive and well inside my head. You might see allusions to his alternative alias in the future, but only because Eobard is a nervous wreck, constantly reminded of all the ways in which his plan could have gone wrong. I'm very tempted to write out the whole Wren AU on the side though...

(12) tumblr: Someone emailed me to tell me that I should use tumblr for discussions. Is that a thing? Is tumblr preferred really to the AO3 'comment' section?
A/N: Dearest readers,

I sincerely apologize.

I originally wrote this chapter a very long time ago. Even made two copies. No joke. Then my computer crashed and I ‘misplaced’ (i.e. dropped into the river) my usb device. The only thing I could think of to do then was scream into a pillow. Then breathe. Then scream some more.

It took me a while to rewrite the whole thing, and even now I'm pretty sure I'm missing something, but that's life for you. If you're still reading this story, I applaud you for your patience. Truly, you are a saint among men.

*bows graciously*

Enjoy the long overdue chapter, my darlings.

-H

PS: I'm still finding errors, so feel free to criticize me if you want. I don't mind. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Evil doesn't die. It never dies. It just takes on a new face, a new name. Just because we've been touched by it once...doesn't mean we're immune to ever being hurt again.

Lightning can strike twice.”

— Tess Gerritsen, The Surgeon

~***~

There isn’t too much the 21st century has to offer him in the way of mysteries. It’s one of the few downsides of hailing from the future. You’re already well aware of every ground-breaking discovery slated for the next couple of hundred years, and even some of the lesser-known inventions, should you dabble in the subject area personally.

Grod is a rare exception.

Following the fire at Mercury Labs, the gorilla had, as Eobard anticipated, been apprehended by animal control and was subsequently whisked away to Central City Zoo. There were three other gorillas living there at the time, one of which was a remarkably aggressive silverback male which had killed a surrogate son in the past and was therefore a cause for concern. Taking into
consideration then that Dr. Feldman’s ape was both sickly and small, keeping him at the zoo was a less than ideal situation.

Immediately upon returning to Central City, Eobard offered them his services. He hired a handful of specialists, built a separate facility within S.T.A.R. Labs to house and treat the abused primate, and then wandered down to the zoo with his small team to collect the gorilla personally.

The moment the ape caught sight of him, it reopened its mental connection with Eobard. Relief, confusion, anxiety, excitement—he was hit with a myriad of emotions, the wave of which made him feel faint. As he had requested earlier though, the gorilla did not reach out to anyone else in the immediate area, linking itself solely to Eobard, although inadvertently flooring him with the mental strain in the process.

Trying to ease into the psychic connection then, and as a way of formally greeting the gorilla, Eobard inwardly asked the creature for its name. It supplied him with a single image:

4

As his team prepared to enter the cage and sedate the young animal, Eobard subtly shook his head. ‘First of all,’ he thought, ‘you are a ‘he’, not an ‘it’. Secondly, a number is not a name.’

The ape tilted his head in confusion, paying no mind the handlers as they entered his small enclosure. Through their connection though, Eobard could also sense hope, as though the ape was waiting for him to bestow ‘4’ with a greater epithet than the one Dr. Feldman had given him.

Eobard smiled.

~***~

“…Grodd?”

General Eiling had been none too amused.

Even though the man was not in any way, shape, or form invited to view the gorilla once the ape began its slow recovery at S.T.A.R. Labs, the General still somehow managed to muscle his way into the building. Eobard had been informed of his unsolicited visit halfway through one of his departmental meetings and therefore had to bring it to an abrupt end, practically flying down the stairwell to the lowest sublevel in order to kick the man out himself.

He finds the General standing in front of Grodd’s cage, alone, hands folded loosely behind his back. Eiling barely inclines his head to take note of Eobard’s sudden presence before continuing his silent evaluation of the ape behind the thick metal bars.

Even from halfway across the room, Eobard can still feel the fear rolling off the primate in waves.

“What the hell is a ‘Grodd’?” Eiling scoffs, staring at the small nameplate in front of the cage. “Is that the sound it makes?”

‘Grodd’ is a famous 23rd century poet. One of Eobard’s favourites, actually, one who happened to share his strange fascination with the concept of time.

“He—” Eobard amends “—doesn’t make a sound, which is abnormal for an ape. I’m not sure if that’s a consequence of having his brain probed by a lunatic, or if the damage is simply psychological—considering, again, that his brain was probed by a lunatic.”
Eiling’s smile is just as dismissive as ever, but there’s less of a bite to it than Eobard is accustomed to. Honestly, the man looks uncharacteristically tired today. “You’ve made your point, Harrison. Dr. Feldman was horribly wrong in this pursuit.”

“I am that an admission of guilt?”

“Only if I had committed an offense,” Eiling mutters. “Which I haven’t, by the way.”

Eobard can feel his jaw tensing. No one could rile him up these days quite like General Wade Eiling. “You would be if you try to remove this animal from my care. Just look at him. He’s dying because you and Roger wanted to play god.”

Eiling glances back at the ape, eyes ghosting over his small, trembling form before returning his attention to Eobard.

For one so obsessed with Dr. Feldman’s research, Eiling is showing a remarkable lack of interest in his late crony’s handiwork…

“I know,” Eiling replies.

As much as Eobard hates being one step behind in the game, he is a little at a loss at the moment. “Then why are you here?”

“To be completely honest with you, I am partly here for the ape. Not to take it, mind you, seeing as I think its only shot at survival is in your care. All I ask is that you keep us updated on its condition. It used to act a little…weird around Dr. Feldman. I just want to know if that behaviour persists once it recovers.”

“My team will publish any and all headway they make with Grodd during his recovery. You can google his progress in the coming months.”

Eiling laughs a little, but doesn’t seem annoyed.

This, in turn, annoys Eobard greatly.

“Harrison…” Eiling starts, taking a small step forward. Eobard fights the urge to step back. “I know our first meeting was nothing short of a disaster. I shouldn’t have tried to intimidate you into letting Dr. Feldman work on the base, and I shouldn’t have let that encounter spoil my overall opinion of you all these years. Looking back on what you did for the military, your work was always above and beyond anything we could’ve hoped for. You might’ve been a bit picky with respect to the projects you chose to carry out or support, but you never ceased to impress.”

“…This sounds an awful lot like some sort of recruitment spiel.”

“It is.”

“Oh,” Eobard says. “Well, now that you’ve said your piece…” He gestures toward the door.

Eiling’s eyes follow the motion, but the man himself doesn’t budge an inch. “I’ve decided to move to Central City permanently, at least while I’m stateside. I’m looking for someone to head my latest project, and I know you’re the man for the job.”

“I would be more than happy to recommend someone else to you, but I’m really not the man for your job,” Eobard replies tersely. “I never have been and I never will be.”
If Eiling heard anything Eobard just said, he makes no indication of it. “We’re looking into a new technique for treating injured soldiers. Considering your boundless empathy…” The man steals a quick glance at Grodd “…I think no one is better qualified for the position than you.”

“I’m still not interested.”

“I didn’t think you would be. Not now, anyway. You really should sleep on it.”

“And I think you should leave.”

“Once we send you the proposal, I know you’ll be on board. You’re such a bleeding heart, Harrison.”

Nearing the limit of his patience, Eobard removes his glasses and folds them together in his hand.

“Not really,” Eobard sighs, letting a little of his old self shine through. “The number of people I care about is quite limited. So far as I’m concerned, soldiers go to war to die. If they’re not dying, they mustn’t be doing their job right.”

Eiling shifts his weight from one foot to the other.

He’s doing a good job of concealing it, but Eobard can sense the General’s growing unease.

“My true passion is science,” Eobard continues, taking a small step of his own forward. “Making any headway with it though is too much for any one man to achieve on his own. It takes a team and a lot of funding—both of which require that I play nice with the public. So, please, do not mistake my ‘boundless empathy’ for a love of mankind. I don’t give a damn about your soldiers.”

“But you care an awful lot about that boy.”

Eobard blinks in surprise. “Excuse me?”

Eiling looks as though he’s uncertain whether or not he’s walking on thin ice here, but since he’s always been the adventurous type, he forges onward. “Oddly enough, I’ve already been warned that you might actually be quite apathetic, that you’re just some sociopath putting on a show. Most great men are. But you love your son... Barry, right?” Eiling grins. “My people tell me he’s like the sun and the moon to you. You’d probably die for him, even though he’s technically not yours.”

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“Barry is every bit my son,” he replies, voice low and dangerous. “He’s the exception to the rule.”

“Wonderful boy,” Eiling continues, easing now into his little speech. “I’ve heard only the very best about him. Kind, quiet, and intelligent…one day, he might even follow in your footsteps. Wouldn’t that be exciting?”

Barry will, but not in the way anyone could ever imagine. Someday soon, Barry is going to tap into the same unseen force that flows in Eobard’s veins, and then Eobard can begin molding him in earnest.

“Let me be perfectly clear about something, Wade.” It’s subtle, but Eobard can detect the slightest twitch at the corner of Eiling’s jaw. For all his posturing, the General is still a coward at heart. “You can come here and threaten me all you want, but if you ever reach out to my son or do anything that would otherwise hurt him, I will kill you.” He pauses a moment to let his message to sink in. “In fact, I already know what to do with your body.”

An awkward silence ensues, whereupon Eiling studies him long and hard before saying, “Is that so?”
“I’m an innovative man. Do you really want to know how creative I can be?”

Eiling takes a deep, slow breath. “Not really, although you’ve certainly piqued my interest now.”

“Then I believe this conversation is over.”

“You can still expect to get a copy of that proposal from me soon,” The man mutters before turning away toward the door. “I’ll see myself out.”

Harrison doesn’t say anything else. Just stands there and watches the man saunter off into the hallway until he can no longer hear Eiling’s polished shoes taping against the linoleum floor.

Eiling does get around to sending that proposal eventually.

Eobard still says no.

~***~

Three years later and Eobard’s still not sure what to make of their bizarre encounter.

Not that he really wants to know. The man will call every once in a while to book an appointment with him, but Eobard waves him off without so much as a second thought. So long as Eiling and his people make no further attempts to trespass on Eobard’s property, the General can do whatever the hell he pleases.

In the meantime, every other facet of Eobard’s life proceeds as well as can be expected.

Eobard moved yet again in the last year, although more on a whim than anything else really. The ‘mansion’, as Barry liked to call it, had been put up for auction after the elderly couple who originally built it passed away. It was spacious and quiet and ridiculously modern, the same way Eobard’s own home had been back in the 25th century. It was also situated farther outside the city centre than their last home, affording him the ability to run freely without fear of notice, with the small exception, of course, of whenever Barry decided to drop by.

Which, surprisingly, was not very often.

As was to be expected, the boy eventually wanted an apartment of his own. However, he had also admitted to Eobard that he didn’t feel quite comfortable living in their new home. When Eobard pressed him for an explanation, Barry merely shrugged. Maybe it was all that empty space, the boy suggested, quartered out by thick glass panels and sharp metallic edges. Or maybe it was the hollow silence that persisted in almost every room, a reminder of the how truly isolated they were all the way out here on the very edge of the city. You couldn’t even see Keystone or the river anymore through all the trees.

According to Barry, it had the feeling of a cage.

Considering that the boy had already lived on his own while studying in Sun City, Eobard’s not entirely surprised that the boy would want a little place of his own. All the same, he bugs Barry’s apartment on moving day and keeps a few of the boy’s leftover trinkets in a room upstairs, a permanent place for Barry to retreat to on the odd days that he bothers to pay Eobard a visit.

As for work, Eobard’s staff is ever changing. He hires Dr. Snow after meeting her at a conference in Dallas, Texas of all places, just before a representative of Wayne Tech swoops in to offer her a job. That same year, he takes on a most memorable couple—Dr. Arthur Light, a renowned physicist, and Dr. Kimiyo Hoshi, an astronomer and MD. They are two exceptionally talented individuals who
contribute equally in their own avenues of research, although their polar personalities see them split before the year is through. Arthur’s bizarre behaviour and cruel tendencies toward his coworkers also winds up getting him fired just a few weeks later. Even Hartley, who is occasionally cruel in his own special way, isn’t the least bit sorry to see him go.

The work on the particle accelerator continues to go smoothly. Ronnie Raymond is as diligent an engineer as they come, putting in extra hours to see that they stay on schedule even after he proposes to Caitlin Snow. He works tirelessly to give shape to ‘Harrison’s’ dream, none the wiser to the fact that the true dream resides in the young man who occasionally brings Mr. Raymond snacks in the dead of night, Barry being the so-called patron saint of sustenance at S.T.A.R. Labs.

And Hartley is…well, Hartley. When Eobard introduces Cisco to the young man’s team in the hopes of balancing their own extreme temperaments, Hartley takes it as a personal slight. He’s terribly moody at first, verbally sparing with the younger engineer whenever the opportunity arises, but thankfully Barry is quick to step in as a mediator between the two. Barry is Hartley’s ally first and foremost, but Cisco’s affable demeanour makes them fast friends. That’s not to say that the rivalry between Hartley and Cisco vanishes completely, but the banter between them loses some of its hostility, and what results is two employees who accomplish great feats in their field thanks in part to their eternal game of one-upmanship.

As for Grodd…

Grod grows. Both mentally and physically. Dr. Snow studies his quiet behaviour during the day while Eobard nurtures his physic abilities at night. Even though Eobard is not a telepath himself, he’s no stranger to their touch, so he teaches the ape to enter the mind undetected as best he can, to parse through a person’s memories before projecting the gorilla’s own thoughts and feelings into their conscious mind.

Case in point, he’s been sharing old memories with Grodd lately, particularly those of Barry as a small child: fierce, though quiet, and full of energy. Grodd truly adores the boy. Practically considers him a brother, which suits Eobard just fine, because he’s been feeding into this idea lately that Eobard is a father to them both, the patriarch of their convoluted little family.

Fortunately for Eobard, Grodd already has this preconceived notion of familial order and control. For gorillas, it’s not too unusual for the new alpha male of a group to kill off the offspring of the previous leader. Therefore, the fact that Eobard has taken both Barry and Grodd into his personal care without question, neither of which are obviously his own, is nothing short of saintly in the gorilla’s opinion. Eobard is their saviour. Eobard is their god, a good and righteous being deserving of only the utmost respect…

Which is why Grodd’s telepathy is the greatest contingency plan Eobard could’ve ever hoped for.

~***~

One warm Sunday evening, just a month shy of the particle accelerator’s big debut, Eobard finally lets the gorilla in on said plan.

He pulls up a chair in front of Grodd’s cage, sits down, and says, “Barry is going to oppose me in the near future.”

Right off the bat, confusion is the only thing Eobard can sense from the primate, so he searches his own mind for a genuine memory of his old enemy to help explain his fears. He eventually settles on an image of Barry as the Flash, decked from head to toe in red, hood pulled back and murder in his eyes.
As reluctant as the ape is to believe this memory could be real, Grodd growls at the image of Barry in his menacing posture.

“I’m not mad at him,” Eobard clarifies, waiting for the sudden overwhelming sense of anger and betrayal to fade from their mental link before he continues. “I’ve been keeping a secret from him. I don’t want to lose him when he discovers the truth.”

‘Secret?’ The ape inquires, having taken to responding with more complex words and short sentences over the years. While it’s apparent that the ape struggles with utilizing the English language, Grodd can understand everything Eobard says to him remarkably well.

Eobard sees no reason to lie to him, so he elaborates with: “I killed his mother when he was a child.”

Grodd’s shock is palpable. ‘…Why?’

“That’s a difficult question to answer. Ultimately, I suppose, it was so that I could take him into my custody.”

Though Grodd is still clearly surprised by his admission, the idea that Eobard only murdered Barry’s mother to exercise his power and control makes sense to the ape. After all, why shouldn’t the great and benevolent Eobard Thawne have everything he ever wanted? ‘Yes, yes...Yours.’

“But if I can’t make him see reason, I’ll need you to reach into his mind for me,” he explains. “Be gentle though. He’s young yet. I don’t expect him to understand what I’m trying to achieve here.”

Grodd shares with him a sense of compassion for the boy. ‘Gentle. Very gentle…’

“I can’t stress that enough,” Eobard says. “You can’t fumble into his mind the way you sometimes do with mine. You might alarm him to your influence. Worse yet, you might damage him.” Lord help him if he were to fry Barry’s brain. “If it looks as though he wants to oppose me, I need you to nurture in him a subtle sense of compliancy.”

‘He already loves you,’ the ape replies, using what is probably the driest mental expression Eobard has experienced to date.

He’s mildly annoyed with the gorilla’s retort, but he doesn’t snap at the ape. “Be that as that may, a man is still capable of hurting the people he loves. Do you want Barry to hurt me?”

‘...No.’

“Then I want you to start practicing.” Eobard waves vaguely at the empty desks and benches in the room behind him. “Anyone is fair game, with the exception of Dr. Snow. Is that clear?”

‘Never Cate,’ the gorilla replies.

“Good...now, do you want to practice today or would you like a rest?”

‘News.’

“What do you mean?”

Grodd shares a memory of his own then, of a young man standing in front of his cage, staring at the ape. Even though the stranger is in a lab coat issued by the facility, his face is very familiar to Grodd in a different way.
The ape recognizes the man as one of Eiling’s lackeys.

Eobard runs a hand through his hair in frustration. He never did believe Eiling when the man said he was no longer cared what happened to Grodd.

“Did you ever exercise your telepathic abilities in Eiling’s presence when Feldman was alive?”

‘No,’ the gorilla replies, ‘he just knows.’

“Of course he does…” Eobard mutters. “I’ll deal with him. I promise, I won’t let him hurt you again.”

A sense of love and adoration trickles through their mental connection. Grodd starts bouncing up and down inside his cage.

Eobard rises from his seat, wrapping his hands around the metal bars as he leans in close. “In a little under a month, you’ll be free. I plan on releasing you the night that I give Barry his powers.”

Grod’s excitement peaks at the news. ‘Free? FREE?!’

“You’ll have to hide from the public, but, yes, you’ll be free.” Eobard smiles. “You are a god in your own right, Grodd. I don’t believe you belong in a cage.”

Grod was born in captivity, but he’s seen enough of the outside world through Eobard’s eyes to know that this is something he wants. As cooperative as he tends to be with Caitlin and her team, the gorilla would like nothing more than to be able to do his own thing.

“Just a few more months,” Eobard assures him. “In the meantime, practice. I’m going to need your help sooner than you think.”

Grod finally settles down inside his cage, but his excitement doesn’t abate in the least. Unsure what to do with all this pent up energy, the gorilla hunkers down in the far corner of his little habitat and curls up into a ball.

Given his massive size, it’s truly remarkable how small he can make himself appear.

“Good night, Grodd,” Eobard murmurs.

Grod’s eyes shine mischievously at him in the dim light before he buries his face in the crook of his arm. ‘Good night.’

Quietly, Eobard steps back from the cage, making his way toward the door.

He only just pushes it open when he suddenly finds himself face to face with Hartley Rathaway.

Not surprisingly, he gives Hartley a bit of a scare too. The boy freezes with his left hand poised to open the door; in the other, he’s holding a can of coke. “Oh…good evening, Dr. Wells.”

“Hello, Hartley.” The boy takes a step back to accommodate him. Eobard follows him into the hallway before closing the door. “I thought you left already.”

Hartley pushes his wide-framed glasses up his nose, taking on a familiar look of frustration. “I did. Then I found out Cisco was still here, working on his pet project. Wouldn’t want him burning down another office, you know?”

Eobard would laugh, if not for the fact that Hartley’s worries weren’t entirely unfounded.
Since hiring Cisco, Eobard had given Mr. Ramon permission to work on just about anything that fit his fancy. Overall, this wasn’t a bad decision, however Cisco had a tendency to throw caution to the wind. As such, he had set his office on fire on two separate occasions in the past month alone, the latest incident requiring a considerable number of repairs before it was safe for anyone to work in his little corner of the second sublevel laboratories again.

Even though the situation brought no end of amusement to Cisco’s long-standing nemesis, Eobard had made it clear to Hartley that his supervisory skills were truly lacking if Mr. Ramon was capable of doing that much damage in such a short amount of time. While this initially pissed Hartley off to no end, the young man was quick to find a way to get even with Eobard by promptly moving Cisco to the Cortex instead of one of the lesser known offices in sublevel 5.

The Cortex was Eobard’s command centre of sorts, a room that would see more use once the particle accelerator was fully functional, but was still a hub of activity in the meantime. Hartley had his own workshop in one of the side offices, so he was certainly justified in saying that he could keep a closer eye on Cisco if the boy was also situated up there, although Eobard lived in a constant state of fear now that Cisco would inevitably destroy the Cortex in a manner not too unlike his last office.

“Is he playing with fire again?” Eobard mutters.

“In a manner of speaking.” Hartley shrugs, impervious to Eobard’s somewhat cool stare. “I think it’d be easier if I just showed you. Ruin his surprise for the next departmental meeting, if you know what I mean…”

“Hold up,” he says wearily. “If he’s working with flammable materials again, I’m going to need a drink.”

Hartley quirks an eyebrow, but doesn’t try to stop him as Eobard starts down the hallway toward the elevator. “It’s not that bad. Loath as I am to admit it, I think you might actually be impressed.”

Eobard glances over his shoulder at the younger man. “The way you’ve been behaving lately, I get the impression that you think I’m too easily impressed by everything nowadays.”

Hartley looks uncomfortable with Eobard’s honest observation, but he doesn’t immediately snap at him the same way he had been the last couple of months. Instead, the boy mulls over the proper response carefully as he steps into the elevator after Eobard before saying, “I have been more insensitive than usual, haven’t I?”

Eobard is stunned. “Are you having a personal crisis here, or did something happen to you?”

Hartley shrugs. “A little of both, actually.”

“Is there something you wanted to talk about?”

“No,” is his blunt response, and that is more like the Hartley Rathaway he knows and loves. “This is the kind of problem that will sort itself out. Believe me, it’s nothing you need to concern yourself with.”

“Even so, if you feel that you need a little time off or anything…”

Hartley very really sneers at him as they finally step off the elevator. “Right, because a couple of months before we plan to flip the switch is prime time for a vacation.”

Eobard doesn’t feel like arguing with the boy anymore, so he shrugs off Hartley’s smart remark and continues on down the hallway toward his office.
Hartley is wise enough to keep his mouth shut as Eobard pours himself a glass of scotch in his office. Also smart enough not to say anything on their way back up to the Cortex, although he can practically hear the gears turning inside Hartley’s head all the way there.

The building is almost completely dark on this level, due largely in part to the fact that most of the more active laboratories are located on the sublevels below. The only real light comes from one of the side offices where Cisco has set up shop.

Now, Eobard doesn’t necessarily smell smoke, but the dead silence that greets him is cause enough for concern. Cisco can get fairly loud when he’s throwing something new together. In fact, the boy’s only ever this quiet when something has gone terribly wrong…

Bracing himself for the worst, Eobard takes a tentative step into the Cortex.

And that’s when he sees him.

Standing at the threshold of Cisco’s workstation, silhouetted by the sole industrial lamp on the boy’s desk, is Barry Allen—decked from head to toe in his red tripolymer Flash suit. He doesn’t bat so much as an eyelash when he spots Eobard though. Just stands there and stares, expression dark and resolute, the way it often is whenever they’re about to come to blows.

Stunned, the glass of scotch drops from Eobard’s hand.

He taps into the Speed Force just he feels it slipping between his fingertips, the usual *fwip-fwip-fwip* of the air vents slowing to a dull hum around him. Eobard rescues the cup smoothly, guiding his hand around the glass by touch alone as he keeps his eyes trained on the boy.

This crisis came to a head a hell of a lot sooner than he anticipated. He realizes he has maybe milliseconds to figure out the significance of Barry coming back to *this* night in particular before the situation spirals completely out of his control—although perhaps the Flash hadn’t chosen to travel back to this time at all. He’s young yet, he might be making the temporal jump in leaps and bounds, not entirely sure how to direct himself to the eve of his mother’s murder.

*Then* Eobard sees it…

When a person is stimulated by a sudden change in their visual field, their gaze is drawn to the new point of interest by a brief saccade, a quick flicker of the eyes from one place to the other. Barry’s eyes should’ve made a similar jump to the falling glass, but instead the motion is slow. Smooth. Sluggish, almost.

Which only means he’s moving *nowhere* near as fast as Eobard.

It’s then that Eobard also notices the strange absence of Barry’s lightning emblem, that big, bright beacon of hope on his chest. This is…

This is *not* the Flash.

Eobard’s heart is racing, but he manages to slow everything else down, returning to a normal pace just as Barry’s eyebrows shoot up toward his hairline. “That was…an *amazing* catch.”

Eobard is still too stunned to speak. He feels as though he’s about to have a heart attack.

He hasn’t been this frightened in a *long* time.

“…Dad?”
Shaken, Eobard pulls out a chair behind the main console and sits down. Some of his scotch sloshed over the rim when he almost dropped the glass, but there’s still enough for him to down in one go. Of course, having just tapped into the Speed Force, his metabolism burns through the alcohol in about 0.5 seconds flat, but the sharp sting at the back of his throat helps to ground him all the same.

He can hear Hartley opening his can of pop behind him before the boy replaces it with the empty glass. At first Eobard’s confused, but then, oh yeah, everyone thinks he’s *diabetic*…

Which he kind of is, if he were being honest.

Eobard takes a sip of the coke as Barry drops into the seat next to him. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he lies. “I just…I lost track of the time. Missed dinner.”

“Big Belly Burger it is,” Hartley says faintly as he exits the Cortex.

As soon as he’s gone, Cisco creeps out of his office to join them, brow furrowed in concern. “Do you have, like, glucose pills or something tucked away down here?”

Eobard shakes his head, then takes another sip of his pop. “It’s not usually this bad. Just give me a second.” He glances at Barry. “Nice suit.”

Barry smiles. “Thank you. I think I wear it better than Hubert.”

“Hubert?”

“The mannequin,” Cisco supplies. “I wanted a living, breathing person to try it on for a change, you know? To see if it had enough give at the joints.”

“Tripolymer?” Eobard inquires, even though he already knows the details.

“Got it in one.”

“Flame retardant?”

“Absolutely.”

Eobard frowns.

Cisco realizes his mistake a moment too soon. He shoves his hands into jean pockets nervously, taking a small step back. “Oh, uh…before you ask any more questions, I would just like to say that I personally did *not* test the suit against an open flame.”

Eobard focuses his stare on Barry then.

Barry tries his hardest to keep a straight face, but eventually he has to look away, crumbling under the pressure.

Eobard slaps him on the knee. Not particularly hard, but it gets the message across all the same. “What the *hell* did I tell you?”

Barry flinches. “In my defense, I was not wearing the suit at the time. Also, we had two other techs on hand earlier to make sure nothing happened.”

That’s a relief. All the same, Eobard’s still a bit miffed. “To be honest, sometimes I wonder if you *want* to win the Darwin Award.”
“I don’t. I mean that. It’s just…” Barry looks down at the suit, grinning. “Is this not the coolest thing you have ever seen?”

Barry’s grin is contagious, because it coaxes a smile out of Cisco as well, who nods wholeheartedly in agreement. “Imagine if we could get the fire department to test drive it? It’s incredibly lightweight. And it breathes. Barry hasn’t broken a sweat yet.”

“It’s beautiful,” Eobard concedes. “You…you look really good in red.”

“His favourite colour, right?”

“That would be green, actually.” Eobard smiles at Cisco’s startled expression. Barry’s nod only serves to confuse him more. “Red’s his second favourite.”

“But you have so much red in your wardrobe!”

“I look really good in red,” Barry reiterates.

“Seriously?” Cisco mutters. “It’s like I don’t even know you, man.”

Barry smiles, but Eobard catches the tension at the corner of his eyes.

He’s been noticing that a lot lately…

“Now that I think about it,” Eobard says, “I think I do have a bottle of glucose pills down in my office. Would you be so kind as to grab it for me, Cisco?”

Cisco’s still clearly confused by this bizarre revelation, but he smiles anyway and nods the affirmative before wandering out of the Cortex.

Barry’s eyes trail after him. “I love Cisco. He’s such a funny guy.”

“I think Hartley would beg to differ.”

“Hartley’s a great guy too,” Barry says. “I just think a lot of his anger and frustration stems from the fact that he doesn’t believe it himself.”

“Speaking of anger and frustration…” Eobard clears his throat. “Is there something troubling you, Barry?”

The question catches Barry completely off guard. Surprised as he is, the boy moves as though to stand, a poor attempt at an escape, the same tactic he usually employs whenever Eobard catches him unaware. “Nothing, really. I’m just going to—”

“Sit down,” Eobard says, grabbing Barry by the wrist. The triopolymer material creaks gently under his touch.

Seeing Barry in the Flash suit gives him such an unexpected thrill.

Just a few more months now…

“I don’t…” Barry starts weakly, slowly lowering himself back into his seat. “I mean, it’s nothing bad.”

“Oh?”
“No, it’s just…it’s the book.”


“Your biography,” Barry supplies. “The one they’re releasing next week.”

He nods. “I know. Might this have anything to do with the little blurb about you? You don’t want people to know you’re adopted?”

“Most people already know that I’m adopted. I mean…when they ask me, I have no problem telling them, but then they start digging for the circumstances surrounding my adoption and I choke up.”

Eobard watches as the boy rises to his feet again, making no move to stop him this time. “Barry…”

“I feel so selfish.” Barry mutters, crossing his arms defensively. “I hate talking about the adoption because I hate talking about my dad. It’s a constant reminder that I’ve failed him.”

Eobard rises out of his own chair to stand before the boy. “You haven’t failed him, Barry. You’ve just—”

“But I have,” the boy snaps. “It’s been almost fourteen years since he was arrested. Other than the attack on Mercury Labs, I have absolutely no idea who my mother’s murderer is and what he’s been up to all this time.”

“You’re just a boy,” Eobard argues. When Barry moves to turn away, he grabs his son gently by both arms. “Henry and I know how dedicated you are to proving his innocence.”

“But what if I can’t prove his innocence?” Barry asks. “Ever? The more I think about, the more I realize that nothing short of a confession is ever going to prove what that stranger did to my family. Enlighten me—how am I supposed to track down and squeeze a confession out of the fastest man alive?”

Eobard just about laughs at Barry’s choice in words.

Instead, he gives the boy’s arms another comforting squeeze and says, “When the particle accelerator is up and running, I think you and I should take some time off to look over the case again. I know I was against hiring a detective in the past, but maybe it’s time to let somebody else in on the mystery. Perhaps even Joe could help?”

Barry shakes his head. “The evidence from that night was destroyed when Joe tried to reopen the case years ago. It all went up in flames, remember?”

“Then what do you want to do?”

“I want to figure out where he’s been hiding.” Something electric passes behind Barry’s eyes. Anger, perhaps. Or excitement even. “I’ve been looking into bizarre cases in other cities, but he’s only ever been spotted here in Central.” The boy shakes his head. “What sort of trouble do you think he gets up to when he isn’t running circles around us? Do you think he has a family? Do you think he has a 9-to-5 job?”

Eobard snorts at his questions. “Does it really matter to you what he does in his spare time?”

“Sometimes,” the boy admits quietly.

Eobard sobers up immediately. “Really…Why?”
“Sometimes I imagine he’s this solitary man, alone in life, but happy with his situation. Apathetic to others though. Cold almost, the way you imagine a killer would be. And then sometimes… sometimes I imagine he has a wife and a child of his own, that he’s capable of loving another human being. When I think about him like that, it’s harder to hate him.”

Barry always was a compassionate soul.

“You might be right,” Eobard says, somewhat stupefied by Barry’s enduring grace and empathy. “We don’t know the reason why he attacked your family. For all we know, he could be a human being.”

“But I don’t understand why I’m trying to humanize him,” Barry murmurs. “There’s an equal chance he isn’t a real person at all. I mean, all that I actually saw that night was the likeness of a man in a whirlwind of light. Even the pictures of him at Mercury Labs are sketchy at best.”

“It’s because you have an all-encompassing love for mankind,” Eobard replies. “It’s one of the things I admire about you.”

Barry smiles faintly. “Oh yeah? The great philanthropist Harrison Wells thinks I’m a benevolent person?”

“You’d have to be to put up with Hartley as well as you do.”

The boy shakes his head. “I don’t understand why you and the others are always bullying him. He’s a nice guy once you get to know him.”

“That’s debateable. He’s nice to me because he admires my work. He’s nice to you because he’s madly in love with you.”

“True enough, but I think he might be warming up to Cisco as well. He’ll probably never admit this to anyone, but he helped a little in designing the suit.’”

“Just the dimensions, I imagine.”

The boy shifts his shoulders then, narrowing his eyes in suspicion. The suit does fit him awfully well. “You know, I don’t think you’re wrong…”

“He’s been acting a little weird lately,” Eobard admits, finally releasing Barry’s arms. He sinks back into his chair and takes another sip of the coke, still feeling a bit edgy from having tapped in and out of Speed Force as rapidly as he did. “This is the third time this month I’ve found him wandering aimlessly through the building. I think he was on his way to see Grodd tonight.”

“I like to sit and stare at Grodd sometimes myself. I’m pretty sure he’s bigger than what a normal gorilla should be at his age.”

Eobard shrugs. It could be that Hartley’s just bored, but there’s more going on behind the scenes at S.T.A.R. Labs than the research being conducted by his many employees. He’s worried now that Hartley might stumble across something he shouldn’t…

“Has he said anything unusual to you in the last couple of weeks?” Eobard asks. “He hasn’t tried to propose to you, has he?”

“Only every second Tuesday,” Barry murmurs fondly, dropping into the chair beside him. “And no, nothing too unusual. He might’ve gotten another call from his parents though, just to remind him that he’s a ‘lecherous sack of flesh and bones’. Nine times out of ten, that’ll usually put him in a bad
mood.”

“Is that really what they say to him?”

“I’ve listened to their messages before. His mom is kind of cold and aloof, but his dad…His dad has got quite the vocabulary. I think he genuinely believes his son is the devil.”

Eobard’s always known that the Rathaways were pissed to all high hell that their only son was a homosexual, but Hartley never talked about them much around him. For the most part, Eobard thought all communication between the boy and his parents ended the moment they publically disowned him. He didn’t know the Rathaways were still harassing the boy.

It’s old prejudices like these that fuel Eobard’s hatred of the past. Hartley is such a brilliant individual. His sexuality shouldn’t matter to them. The enterprise the Rathaways have been building all these years would’ve truly flourished in his capable hands.

Oh well—their loss. If they hadn’t kicked Hartley to the curb, Eobard wouldn’t have gotten to know him half as well as he did, and what a treat that had turned out to be. It was probably safe to say that if there was anyone in this century Eobard loved almost as much as Barry, it was Hartley. He and the boy were something of kindred spirits, after all...

Which is why he doesn’t want to have to kill Hartley if the boy clues in to work Eobard’s been doing behind the scenes.

“Maybe once the particle accelerator is operational, Hartley should take a little time off himself,” Eobard says. “In all the years that he’s worked for me, I don’t think he’s ever gone on a vacation.”

“Mexico,” Barry replies, grinning. “He’s told me he’s always wanted to go to Mexico.”

“What’s in Mexico?”

“I don’t know,” the boy admits, “Not his parents, that’s for sure.”

Eobard tries hard not to laugh.

~***~

Fourteen years of watching another man suffer for his crimes and Eobard is still envious of Henry Allen.

The pang of jealousy is not a constant infliction, but it still niggles at the back of his mind from time to time, such as now, at Iron Heights, where Eobard and Barry are seated on the opposite side of the glass partition from the man of the hour. The conversation between the two Allens has long since devolved into a heated debate on sports, so Eobard sits there silently, only half listening, as he figures out how he’s going to go about double crossing his surrogate son.

Back when Eobard first decided to build the particle accelerator, he had always known that he would need Barry to return to his time. As a speedster—and one of the strongest of his era—Barry could potentially run Eobard home without the aid of a wormhole, but convincing the boy to return him to the 25th century out of the goodness of his heart would be an impossible feat. Not only would Barry have no motivation for traveling that far into the future before potentially exhausting his powers, but discovering even the smallest detail of the truth concerning Eobard’s real identity would only make the boy feel less inclined to help his oldest enemy. Asking Barry outright for help would certainly never work.
The beauty of using a wormhole is then two-fold—not only is it a more stable form of transportation, but it allows multiple users to travel simultaneously in opposite directions. If he therefore presented Barry with the opportunity to save Nora Allen from her untimely death, Eobard knew that the boy would valiantly accept the consequences associated with opening such a wormhole, primarily presenting Eobard with his own opportunity to escape.

Fourteen years ago, Eobard had initially decided that he would then stop his younger self in the 25th century from making that fateful trip into the past. Not once and for all, of course—he still very much wanted to see his nemesis dead, he just knew that he would have to put a little more thought into his plan. If he wanted to succeed in killing the younger Barry Allen, he would obviously have to devise a better way to outsmart the older Barry Allen first.

After getting to know the boy though, Eobard began to entertain the idea of stopping his younger self altogether. With his intimate knowledge of Barry’s past, Eobard could figure out another way to defeat the older hero, one that might not even result in Barry Allen’s death. They had more in common than he had originally thought, after all. He just had to figure out a way to convince Barry of that.

Later still, Eobard began to truly enjoy fatherhood. Never before had he known anyone so selflessly invested in his happiness. His own parents hadn’t cared one ounce about his emotional well-being, and yet here was this small boy, with bright eyes and an even brighter smile, who enjoyed Eobard’s company not only for his intellectual conversation, but because just being around Eobard brought Barry a sense of comfort and security. With Barry, he was needed. With Barry, he was loved.

Naturally, then came the jealousy, in all its unholy glory. He began to hate it when Barry turned those adoring eyes on his biological father. Even hardened as he was by the time he’d spent in prison, Henry would always be adulated by his son simply because he was one of the boy’s creators. And why was that? If anything, the love between them should’ve been considered a lesser thing for its compulsory nature. After all, Henry suffered no great sacrifice in bringing Barry into the world. All he really needed to do was fuc—

“—a Red Sox fan,” Barry says as he gives Eobard’s foot a little kick. “Right? You always cheer for Boston.”

Eobard straightens in his seat. “So? You support the Gotham Knights.”

“The Gotham Knights are always entertaining to watch,” Henry muses on the other side of the glass, and just like that he takes the conversation once more under his control.

Eobard crosses his legs and slouches back into his seat, trying not to let his irritation show. Whether or not Barry succeeds in making the trip through the wormhole to the scene of Nora’s murder matters little to him, because Eobard will see to it that that fateful night never happens. He will redirect his younger self to a later point in the Barry’s history, to some occasion when Henry and Nora Allen are alone. He’ll kill them then without witnesses, much in the same way he destroyed Harrison Wells and Tess Morgan, and take Barry once more into his care.

Knowing what he does now about the joys of raising a child, he has no qualms about experiencing these last fourteen years all over again.

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Four weeks prior to the particle accelerator’s big debut, he arrives home to find the lights already on.
He’s a little paranoid, because he’s still waiting for the other shoe to drop so far as Eiling is concerned, but when he steps through the doorway and peaks around the corner, he immediately spots Barry’s long and lanky figure stretched out across the couch, one leg hooked over the armrest, bouncing rhythmically up and down.

“This is a surprise,” Eobard says, relaxing, as he strolls straight through the living room and into the kitchen, wholly intent on pouring himself a scotch. “The prodigal son returns.”

“‘The prodigal son returns’?” Barry mimics under his breath, lifting his head to stare at Eobard over the back of the couch. “I had coffee with you only yesterday.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Still upset I moved out, I see…” Barry drops his head back down, out of view. “You know, I’m already late to work on a daily basis living as close to the precinct as I do now. Staying here would only complicate matters.”

“You could always drive to work.”

Barry snorts. “Yeah, no. I have a tendency to speed and you know it.”

Eobard shrugs as he pours his scotch. “Would you like anything to drink?”

“I already have a glass of water, but thanks anyway.”

Eobard joins him in the living room shortly, taking a seat at the opposite end of the couch as Barry straightens up in his seat. The boy bends his head to one side to stretch out a kink in his neck then says, “Your birthday is coming up awfully soon…”

Harrison’s birthday is coming up awfully soon, not Eobard’s. Not that he cares.

Technically, he hasn’t even been born yet.

“You’re going to be 50,” Barry continues, grinning. “The big 5-Oh…”

“You came all this way tonight to rib me about my age, did you?”

“No. I actually came all this way to convince you to let us throw you a party.”

Eobard isn’t big on parties. Barry can pretty much tell from the look on his father’s face that Eobard’s attitude toward large get-togethers hasn’t changed at all since the last time Barry tried to throw him one. “Oh, come on. You live in a mansion. Most people would jump at the chance to show this place off.”

“I enjoy my solitude,” Eobard murmurs as he sips his scotch.

“Then you shouldn’t have let your publisher plaster your face on the cover of your biography,” Barry says. “I mean, even the hipster’s down at CC Jitters are chatting about you now, and the most complicated science-related topic I’ve ever heard them discuss was why you add salt to boiling water.”

Eobard chokes on his drink.

Kids these days…
Barry rubs his shoulder gently. “It doesn’t have to be a large gathering. Just a few people from work, your old friend Dr. Ferguson, maybe even Tina…” Barry trails off here, seemingly lost in thought. Then he says, “Can I ask you a personal question? I mean, you don’t have to answer it if you don’t want to, but…”

Eobard’s still trying to breathe properly, so he just nods.

“Oh, well… have you ever had a crush on Dr. McGee?”

Eobard winces. More so from the burn of the alcohol going down the wrong pipe than his son’s personal question though.

Not that he hasn’t found himself wondering the same thing at one time or another…

He eventually did get around to introducing Barry and Tina after their return from Gotham. It didn’t mean that Eobard and Dr. McGee were as thick as thieves now, not in the way that Tina had once been with the real Harrison Wells, but her attitude toward him had softened considerably after seeing firsthand how sweet and affectionate Barry had turned out under his care. They chatted more often and sometimes dined out together if they happened to attend the same symposium. Occasionally, she would even drop by S.T.A.R. Labs to discuss future research.

Their was an odd sort of relationship, to be sure.

Tina McGee was a fierce woman with a sharp wit and an even sharper tongue, which excited him in a way he would never feel comfortable admitting to anyone. Honestly, if she had been just another woman of the 25th century, he might’ve pursued her, but the fact that she once knew the real Harrison Wells made her a constant enemy. Should she ever discover the truth about him, he couldn’t hesitate to kill her.

Sighing, he says, “Every once in a while I find myself appreciating the way she looks, but that’s the extent of it, Barry. She was one of my closest friends when I was with Tess.”

Barry immediately looks as though he regrets asking his question. “I’m sorry. I was just wondering, you know, because she’s on Hartley’s shortlist.”

Eobard blinks. “Hartley’s shortlist of what?”

“Of guests. Sorry. Did I forget to mention he wants to help plan the party?”

“Don’t lie to me. He’s probably the one who suggested the party in the first place.”

“…Maybe.”

Eobard leans forward to deposit his glass of scotch on the coffee table, shaking his head. “You and I usually just have a nice, quiet dinner together. Why break tradition?”

“Because you’re one of the most amazing people of our time and yet you hide away in your big, empty mansion at the end of the day like some kind of hermit.”

“If you’re worried about my being alone all the time, you could always move back in.”

“If I promise to stay for, like, a month, would you let us throw you a party?”

Eobard leans back again. Takes off his glasses. Closes his eyes and rubs the bridge of his nose.
Eventually, he says, “Ferguson lives all the way in Sacramento, so I don’t know if he could make it.”

Barry’s smile is almost blinding. “He already said yes.”

“Figures,” Eobard mutters.

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Hartley is a curious boy.

His inquisitive nature is what endeared Eobard to him in the first place, although lately it’s become something of a nuisance. It’s all fine and dandy when Hartley is focused solely on his own work, but when he turns his gaze inward toward the lesser known machinations of S.T.A.R. Labs itself, well…

That’s when it begins to be a problem.

“As a rule, Mr. Raymond is usually a forgiving person.”

Hartley is sitting at his desk when Eobard enters the boy’s office, the light from his computer screen glaring off of his spectacles. It makes it harder to discern Hartley’s expression as the boy turns to him and says, “Too forgiving, perhaps.”

“Not so far as you’re concerned, apparently.” He pulls out one of the chairs in front of Hartley’s desk and takes a seat. “He’s tired of you pulling out panels in the pipeline. He already has enough to worry about without you tearing the place apart.”

“For whatever reason, the magnets are misaligned,” is Hartley’s blunt response. “I’ve been running diagnostics and I think something else is off down there, I’m just not sure what.”

“I understand your concern, but everything you’ve analyzed so far has already checked out.”

“Then someone is trying to sabotage us.”

“Such as…?”

“The military.”

Eobard barks out a laugh. Technically, he’s the one who’s been cutting wires in the dead of night, but Hartley’s theory works just fine for him. “You can’t be serious.”

“There was a man in Dr. Snow’s lab on Monday posing as a member of her staff. He works for the military. Wouldn’t say why he was here though. Could be Grodd.” Hartley shrugs, as though he doesn’t entirely believe that to be true. “Could be more than that.”

“I’m aware of Eiling’s many attempts to spy on us,” he sighs. “Considering his experience, I’m a little surprised by his lack of stealth.”

“I believe men like the General are more accustomed to getting what they want through brute force. The fact that you haven’t buckled yet must be foreign territory to him.”

“He’s been heckling me for years. I’m beginning to think he wants to be caught.”

Hartley stops typing. When he turns his head to look at Eobard, the glare disappears from his glasses. “There’s an interesting notion. But why would a man in his position want to be caught?”
Eobard isn’t sure, but he feels as though he isn’t far from the truth. There’s just something he’s missing here. If he stretched a little farther, he knows he would find it. “…Because he angling for a confrontation.”

Hartley raises his eyebrows briefly before returning to his work, fingers flying across his keyboard. The glare returns. “If it’s all the same to you, I think I’ll keep my eyes on the pipeline from afar. The fact that you have minimal coverage with the security cameras on both the accelerator and the other sublevels makes it difficult to determine when exactly his men decide to drop by.”

“I still have cameras in the labs themselves,” Eobard replies. “Which is the only place they’re needed, really. His men are welcome to wander up and down the halls to their hearts’ content.”

Truth be told, Eobard’s hidden vault is on the same floor as Hartley’s office. He’d transferred Gideon’s central hub there when he moved out of his last house, as well as an electrified stand for his suit, a little something he’d been working on lately to channel the Speed Force. It was peanuts in comparison to Tina’s Tachyon device, but he found that it gave him a little extra oomph when he wore the suit, the same way he sometimes felt more energized after touching Barry.

Needless to say, he didn’t want anyone to see him running through the halls faster than the naked eye could see or slipping into his vault after hours, so he had minimized the number of cameras in the halls over the course of the last year. So far it was working. Besides, in just two more weeks the particle accelerator will disappoint the whole world over and no one will be around anymore to see him really.

Or so he hoped.

If Hartley kept this up, drastic measures would have to be taken.

“We’re going live soon,” Hartley says quietly. “I just don’t want anything bad to happen.”

“I know.” Eobard tries to soften his own voice. He doesn’t want to argue with the boy anymore. He’s tired of all their little squabbles. “But try to have a little faith in me. In all my other endeavours, large and small, have you ever known me not to take every precaution necessary to ensure that I would succeed?”

“Never.”

“Then why do you think the particle accelerator is any different?”

“Because too many cooks spoil the broth,” Hartley mutters, “and we have the largest collection of minds crammed into this one project.”

“Some of those minds are the greatest of this century, Hartley, including yours.”

“And Mr. Ramon’s.”

Eobard’s laugh is bitter. “Oh god, not this again…”

“Contrary to what you think, this is not the same song and dance you and I have been having over him since the day he was hired.”

This certainly surprises Eobard. “Oh?”

Hartley turns his head to stare directly at Eobard again. He looks incredibly pained. “I swear to god I will kill you if you ever tell him this, but I do have a great deal of respect for Cisco. In fact, I think
some of his inventions are ingenious. If he were to be more business orientated, he could easily build a lab of his own.”

“But?”

“He’s reckless. He’s not afraid to task risks, which is great when you want to get ahead of the competition, but when you’re whipping together a machine that could easily kill hundreds of thousands of people, I think a more delicate approach is called for.”

“You know as well as I do that the people who are truly reckless never last long here. Cisco might be a bit of an odd ball, but only with respect to his personal projects. The work he’s done on the particle accelerator itself meets my standards.”

Hartley shrugs. “Fine. I just felt I owed it to you to tell you what was on my mind. I’m anxious now and I suspect I’ll be this on edge until we’ve gone our first year with the accelerator without incident.”

Eobard usually doesn’t let his employees dismiss him in such a manner, but he’s willing to let it slide this time.

Because it’s Hartley.

“Alright,” he sighs. If Hartley’s going to continue inspecting every inch of the pipeline, Eobard will just have work harder at covering his tracks. “But I think it’s only fair that you keep Ronnie in the loop. He built the pipeline. He deserves to know what’s happening behind the scenes.”

Whatever tension Hartley had been carrying in his shoulders until then eases at Eobard’s offer. Perhaps he hadn’t expected Eobard to capitulate so readily. “I…Okay. I will. Thank you.”

“Don’t ever hesitate to talk to me, Hartley. I value your opinion. You know that, right?”

Hartley nods.

Eobard glances down at his wristwatch. “I have a meeting in twenty minutes, but before I run out of here, was there anything else you wanted to chat about?

“Nothing in particular.”

“Not even the party?”

Hartley’s whole expression sours immediately. “Barry wasn’t supposed to tell you about that.”

“Barry couldn’t keep a secret to save his life. Also, he’s aware that I despise them.”

“Parties or secrets?”

“Both, although I was referring to secrets.”

“We’re only throwing you a party because you’ve become something of a hermit lately.”

Eobard frowns.

“His words, not mine. I offered to help, seeing as there once was a time when I was invited to my parents’ soirees. If any good ever came from our relationship, it’s that I now know the best caterers in Central. City”
Somehow, that gets a laugh out of them both.

“Barry did warn me that you never celebrate your birthday publicly though,” Hartley adds, “so I made sure to tell everyone that it was just a little something to toast all the hard work we’ve put into building the particle accelerator. I think it’s fortuitous that your birthday is only a few days shy of its big debut.”

“That’s a relief.” And it is. Really. The only time he enjoyed someone singing him the infernal birthday song was Barry when he was a small child, and that’s only because it was sort of cute.

“Anyhow, thank you for dropping by. I promise to keep you up to date on my inspection.”

Eobard rises to his feet. “I know you will. In the meantime, I’m going to see what our dear friend General Eiling has been up to lately.”

“Tread carefully,” Hartley warns.

“You do realize there’s nothing he can do inside this facility without our knowing about it, right?”

“He’s a Major General,” the boy mutters. “If he’s smart, he’ll know that S.T.A.R. Labs isn’t the only front he can battle you on.”

Eobard pauses for a moment before turning away toward the door.

He tries not to let it show how surprised he is by that notion.

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Lately, his dreams have consisted of more than just memories.

For example, tonight he finds himself wandering through a graveyard, the sky overcast, the wind whipping at his hair. He’s walking between the tombstones, all weathered and grey, stopping every now and again to read the names carved into the granite. Some of them give him an odd sense of familiarity, likely belonging to the people he’s erased from time. Others he knows are long dead enemies and heroes, people who lived and died prior to the 25th century.

One of these belongs to Henry Allan.

He almost misses the man’s gravestone at first because it’s dark outside and he can barely read the name. There’s something scribbled below it, an epithet and his passing date, although Eobard has to squint to see them. Even then he can’t quite make out the words.

He wants to kneel down to read it better—but then his head is suddenly moving of its own accord, turning to observe the young man on his left.

Barry stares at him beseechingly, pale faced and worn out, eyes puffy and red from crying. Then he whispers, “Let me go.”

Eobard wants to ask Barry what he’s talking about, but instead he says, “No.”

“You have no right to keep me here,” Barry argues. “You have to let me go.”

“Leave whenever you want,” he lies. “I won’t stop you.”

“You know I’m weaker now. Please…” Barry takes a tentative step back.
Eobard catches the boy by the wrist to halt his retreat, “Then I guess you better get comfortable.”

“Stop it—you’re hurting me.”

“You think this hurts?” Eobard hisses, tugging him closer. He can feel the Speed Force dancing between them, down Barry’s arm and up his own before looping somewhere beneath his breast, electrifying his senses. It flutters immediately back into Barry then, a perfectly closed circuit. “When the people you love turn away from you—that hurts.”

“Eobard—” Barry starts, trying to pull his arm free.

Eobard yanks him closer still, reaching around with his other hand to grab Barry by the back of his neck. “You will not call me by name. To you, I’m—”

“—Dad?”

Eobard bolts upright in bed, chest heaving, skin covered in a light sheen of sweat. There’s a figure beside him in the dark, so he reaches out to grab the stranger by his arm.

That stranger is Barry.

The boy is sitting on the bed beside his hip, turned at an angle to face Eobard. He flinches when Eobard touches him. Doesn’t fight him though. Doesn’t try to ease Eobard’s grip either, just reaches up slowly to wrap his own hand around Eobard’s arm in return, giving it a comforting squeeze.

“Bad dream, huh?”

Eobard takes another heaving breath. His throat is parched, his voice nothing more than a dry rasp as he says, “You have no idea.”

Barry’s frown of concern is discernible even in the dark as he leans over to pass Eobard the glass of water on his bedside table. Barry doesn’t let go of Eobard though, grounding him as his father wets his tongue. “What was it about?”

As always, Eobard contemplates the perfidy of truth as he decides which details are safe to share. After he’s had enough water, he says, “You and I were in a cemetery.”

“Yeah?”

“Standing over your father’s grave.”

Barry is silent for a moment. “…Maybe your mind’s still lingering on the conversation we had back in the Cortex?”

‘Maybe I subconsciously want to kill the man who sired you,’ Eobard thinks bitterly. He knows he’s envious of the man, but he doesn’t think he actually hates Barry’s biological father. Not really. Like every other enemy Eobard’s encountered in his life, Henry’s just another domino in the long line of people he has to topple over on his way to perfect happiness.

“Well, I’m glad you’re disturbed by it, and not, you know...unfazed.” Barry shifts in his seat on the bed. “Anyhow, I was going to fry up some eggs and bacon. I wanted to know if you’d like to join me for breakfast.”

“Yeah, sure...I’ll be down in a minute.”
“Happy birthday, by the way.” Barry gives Eobard’s arm one last comforting squeeze. They release each other simultaneously. “Coffee should be ready in a bit.”

“Thank you.”

“Oh—and someone called about a minute ago. Said his name was Wade.”

Eobard freezes. “Did he leave a message?”

“‘Happy Birthday’,” Barry replies. “That’s about it, really. I offered to wake you, but he said he’d call you back some other time. Is he a friend?”

“‘Wade’ is General Eiling.”

Barry has never met the man personally, but some of Eobard’s employees let it slip a long time ago who Eiling was and why he wasn’t allowed in the building.

Barry makes a face. “Is this the guy who’s obsessed with Grodd?”

“One in the same.”

“And he called you today just to do what exactly, taunt you?”

“Who knows?”

“I swear to god, you have the weirdest enemies,” Barry mutters as he rises to his feet. “He isn’t going to, you know…kill something and leave it on our doorstep, is he?”

It’s Eobard’s turn to make a face.

“Sorry. Godfather marathon last night. Cisco and I tend to have the most unusual conversations.”

Eobard waves off his apology.

“Anyhow—eggs and bacon, coming right up.”

“There’s no rush, Barry.” Eobard returns his glass of water to the bedside table, reaching up to scratch the stubble on his neck. He’s still covered in a cold sweat, still terrified by the intensity of his own emotions. “Before you go, I have to ask—is something wrong?”

Barry pauses on his way to the door. “Wrong? No.”

“You’re a horrible liar.”

“Am not,” Barry mutters, but that’s the extent of his fight. He bounces nervously on the balls of his feet for a moment before saying, “I don’t know why, but suddenly I have all this pent up energy. I feel as though I’m about to fly out of my skin.”

Eobard throws his covers back and rises out of the bed. He takes a second to stretch before walking over to his son. “I’m flipping the switch in just a couple of days. I’m feeling a bit high-strung myself.”

“I guess.”

Eobard reaches out to rub Barry on the back of the neck then, the way he usually does to sooth his son, when the Speed Force suddenly goes ballistic. Eobard’s so startled by the wave of energy, that
he doesn’t know how to react when it surges through his body, yearning for the boy.

Rather anticlimactically, it gives Barry a small static shock.

Barry flinches away. “Ow.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I know.” Barry’s frown fades into a small smile. “Oh man, I must be tense if a little zap’s enough to get me going. I hope this isn’t some sort of omen.”

As always, Barry’s choice of words astounds him.

“I’m going to take a shower,” Eobard says, patting the boy on the shoulder. “If you get any other bizarre phone calls, let me handle them.”

“Next you’re going to tell me to stay away from all the doors and windows.” At the disapproving look Eobard shoots him, Barry cracks a nervous grin. “I’m kidding. Be quick. Hartley’s supposed to be here in an hour.”

“Eager to finally see the house, is he?”

Barry winks at him before making his way to the door. “Who isn’t?”

As far as parties go, this is probably one of the more enjoyable gatherings Eobard’s ever attended.

There’s about thirty people in total, most of whom are his employees. No big surprise there. The people he works with are the same people he sees on a day-to-day basis, with the small exception of Tina McGee and Ted Ferguson, of course, who are probably the only people more surprised than Cisco Ramon to finally set foot in the mysterious Wells ‘manor’.

“I won’t deny it,” Tina says after taking a sip of her champagne. “You have a great sense of taste, Harrison. How did you find this place?”

“The house was donated to a benefit auction for the CC General Hospital. In an odd twist of fate, I was the only person who made a bet on it.”

Ted whistles lowly. “Did you think you were actually going to win?”

“No,” he admits, “but I certainly hoped so. It’s very peaceful out here.”

“Had a hell of a time finding the place though. Your son sent out detailed instructions, but the number of back roads in this area is insane.”

“The man likes his privacy,” Tina quips.

Ted smiles fondly. “And don’t we know it?”

Eobard laughs a little, but the offhanded comment gets him thinking about Eiling again. “You’d be surprised the lengths some people have gone to just to find me.”

Tina’s eyes shine in the ambient light. “Social Services, for starters.”

Eobard doesn’t know whether or not she’s teasing him with that statement.
“Speaking of Barry,” the woman continues, now scanning the crowd of people mulling about in Eobard’s dining hall, “where is he? He greeted me at the door and then disappeared.”

“Busy, I imagine.” Sure enough, Eobard can’t see him anywhere either. “Believe it or not, he and Hartley are the ones who pulled this whole thing together.”

“I’m glad you decided to celebrate,” Ferguson says. “You never used to celebrate anything.”

“I celebrate my son’s birthday,” he argues.

“Yes, but this is the first time in years I’ve seen you celebrate yours,” Tina interjects. She toasts her champagne glass to him. “By the way—Happy Birthday.”

Eobard had honestly forgotten that she knew.

“It’s your birthday today?” Ted murmurs, mystified. “How come you never said anything?”

“Again, I’m not big on celebrations…”

“His always hard at work, but I don’t believe he thinks very highly of himself,” Tina says, sounding sincere. Eobard doesn’t know what to make of her tonight. Something is definitely off about her, that much is clear. “You’ve accomplished incredible things, Harrison, but you always seem to be working toward something more.”

It’s then that Ted apparently clues in to the fact that there might be a bit of tension rising between them. Sagely, he stares out into the crowd and says, “I think I’m going to talk to Mr. Raymond and his fiancé,” before wandering off.

Eobard waits until the man is out of earshot before he takes a step closer to Dr. McGee. “I know we’ve had some truly fantastic arguments in the past, but is there a reason you’re gearing for one tonight?”

Tina opens her mouth to speak, but almost immediately closes it again. Somewhat sadly, she stares down into her champagne glass. “I feel conflicted.”

Eobard generally tries not to think of women differently from men, but he’s beginning to wonder if he’s missed some sort of important female cue during their little discussion. “And I’m confused. Be blunt with me, Tina. You’re usually good at that.”

She gives him a long, level look. “Why didn’t you tell me about Barry?”

Eobard blinks. “What about Barry?”

“That he’s Henry Allen’s son,” she hisses, although she tries to keep her voice down for his sake.

Eobard can’t even begin to imagine how she could possibly know that, so he tries one last time to play dumb. “What are talking about?”

“I hired a private detective,” she admits, not sounding the least bit sorry. “Oh, don’t give me that look, Harrison—this is not about you. This is all about that bloody General.”

“What about him?” Eobard asks, the hair prickling on the back of his neck.

“I know Eiling’s been digging around at S.T.A.R. Labs lately, and since I still think he had something to do with the fire at Mercury Labs, I thought it would be prudent to send someone after him for change. The man I hired said he couldn’t find anything of interest, but he let slip your son’s
birth name: Barry Allen.”

Eobard’s irked that she would do such a thing without confronting him first, but then their friendship always has been such a fragile thing. “And you’re mad at me because?”

“Because even though Barry’s name was never mentioned in the papers, Henry Allen was quoted as saying that both he and his son saw a ‘man in the lightning’.”

Ah.

Now it all falls into place.

“You’re upset that I never told you about Barry’s encounter with the man who burned down your first facility,” he says faintly.

“At first, yes…but now I’m merely worried.”

“About what?”

“That that monster is going to show up at your facility someday soon. It appears to me that whenever General Eiling doesn’t get what he wants, bad things happen to us.”

“Please don’t forget, Eiling’s own lackey was killed in the fire at Mercury Labs.”

“Yes, but I wouldn’t put it past him to murder his own people.” She glances back down at her glass. “Do you think that thing could be working for Eiling?”

A waiter breezes past them just then, hoisting a tray of champagne. Eobard snatches a small flute and downs it in one go. Tina looks mildly surprised.

Never has he been so (indirectly) insulted in all his life.

“I don’t imagine someone as chaotic as the legendary ‘man in the lightning’ could handle taking orders from a pig like Eiling.”

This earns a small chuckle from Tina. “Fair enough, but do you think he might be searching for the same thing as Eiling?”

“Possibly.”

“Well then…stay safe, Harrison.” Tina lifts a hand then to squeeze his left arm gently. “Both you and your boy. I would hate for something to happen to you.”

“Thank you, Tina.” All this talk about Eiling though now has him genuinely worried. He scans the room again, looking for his son. “Now, if you’d please excuse me, I’d like to figure out where Barry’s disappeared off to….”

She waves him off with a small smile, turning away then to chat with Dr. Donna Weisz, the head of genetics at S.T.A.R. Labs. Eobard slowly makes his way through the crowd, keeping his eyes peeled for his son, but Barry really is missing. Which shouldn’t surprise him, really, because he could very well be talking with the staff, except the random call from this morning sets Eobard’s teeth on edge and he has to wonder if Eiling would have the balls to do something to Barry just to get back at him.

He’s about to take his search into the kitchen when Caitlin suddenly pops up beside him. “Hello, Dr. Wells.”
“Hello, Dr. Snow.” Nervously, he fiddles with the button on his dress coat, trying hard to resist the urge to brush her off.

“Thank you for inviting us all here tonight,” she says, glancing up at the glass ceiling. “I had no idea this place would be so…big.”

“Barry said pretty much the same thing when we moved in.”

“Speaking of Barry—” Much to his surprise, Caitlin gestures toward the open patio doors “—he wandered outside a while ago. Asked me to give you a heads up if you went looking for him.”

He’s relieved. He’s also aware that it probably shows. “Am I really that obvious?”

“To be honest, I think we’re all a little more nervous than usual. In just a few more days, your dream will come to fruition. I’m pretty excited myself.”

He gives her a gentle pat on the arm. “Thank you, Caitlin.”

She flashes him one of her thousand watt smiles before turning away to rejoin her husband.

Eobard releases the breath he wasn’t aware he was holding before wandering across the hall to the yard. As soon as he steps between the two glass doors he spots Barry around the corner, sitting in one of the patio chairs, bathed in moonlight as he gazes up at the stars.

“…Did your mother have a favourite planet?”

Barry inclines his head to one side to look at him. “Jupiter apparently, although she never said why.”

“It’s the largest planet in the Solar System. Has 67 moons. Might also have underground oceans.”

Eobard shrugs. “As far as planets go, Jupiter sounds pretty cool to me.”

It’s the trivial little comments like these that usually get a smile out of Barry. As always, it does just that. “You’ve been brushing up on your astronomy, haven’t you?”

“Every now and again I see something interesting in the news.”

Barry returns his gaze to the night sky. Eobard drops down into the patio chair beside him. “There is definitely one advantage to living farther away from the city centre. It’s a lot easier to see the stars.”

Eobard nods. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

Barry hums in agreement.

Eobard wonders what’s on his mind.

He leans down to put the empty flute on the ground beside his chair before he crosses one leg over the other and relaxes into his seat. “You seem distracted.”

“Just a little,” the boy concedes, smiling faintly. He turns to look at Eobard again before extending his hand out to him. In it is a small black box. “Happy birthday, dad.”

Eobard takes note of Barry’s subtle feint but gives up on his little interrogation in favour of taking the box. Every year, he tells Barry not to get him anything.

And every year, Barry ignores him.
He removes the lid to find a small silver pocket watch tucked inside, old, but in fairly good condition. From the early 1900s, perhaps. On the outer lid is an intricate etching of the world map; inside it is a quote:

‘There are no secrets that time does not reveal.’

‘...Jean Racine,’ Eobard breathes, fascinated with the gift. ‘He was a 17th century playwright.’

Barry shrugs. ‘The quote reminded me of you. You’ve been so patient building the particle accelerator all these years, and in just a short while all that waiting is finally going to pay off. The mysteries of the universe will unravel at your fingertips…I don’t know. I just hope you like it.’

‘I love it.’

‘Then you’ll keep it?’

‘Absolutely,’ Eobard gives it one last look before slipping it into his pocket.

It feels heavier than he anticipated.

‘Is that all you wanted to talk about?’ Eobard asks, returning to the matter at hand. ‘Or has something else been bothering you as of late?’

‘I do actually have something else to tell you…’

‘Is this a big something or a small something?’

‘It’s a medium-sized something.’

‘So…there’s a good chance I just might freak out?’

‘You’re not going to freak out,’ Barry says, although more as though he’s willing Eobard not to lose his cool than as a matter of fact. ‘I’m taking the train to Starling City tomorrow morning. I’ll only be gone for a day or two.’

Eobard hisses softly between his teeth.

Barry winces at his reaction. ‘Relax. It’s not like I’m absconding to Gotham again. This time you know where I’m going.’

‘Yes, but why?’

‘It’s just a case,’ Barry explains. ‘I won’t be gone for long. I promise. I wouldn’t miss your big night for the world.’

‘You won’t. I know.’ Eobard tilts his head back and closes his eyes. He can feel the Speed Force thrumming lightly in his veins. ‘I’m not flipping the switch until you’re back.’

‘I won’t be late.’

‘You’re notoriously tardy,’ Eobard reminds him.

The boy shifts in his chair, clearly agitated. Eobard opens his eyes again to stare at him.

Barry just stares right on back.
The boy is not going to buckle.

“I won’t try to stop you,” Eobard relents, “but I’m serious about the accelerator. If I don’t see you in person when you get back, everyone is going to be very disappointed.”

“I’ll be there.”

“I know.”

“I mean it.”

Eobard sighs. He has a feeling that this is all going to work out in the end, but he already almost lost Barry once before to Gotham and its savage crusader. He knows he can’t ever be certain of anything anymore until the moment the lightning strikes.

Eobard repeats himself, softer this time. “I know.”

Barry reaches out to pat him on the arm—and like a moth to the flame, the Speed Force surges forward once again. A tiny spark arches off of Eobard’s arm and toward the boy’s fingertips.

Barry yanks his hand back in surprise. “Jeez—that’s the second time today.”

“Hm,” Eobard hums, puzzled by the Speed Force’s odd behaviour. He’s hesitant, but he wants to believe that this is a sign that everything will come to pass exactly as it should.

“Is that me or you?”

“It’s me, I think.” Eobard rises to his feet, glancing out across the yard toward the trees. For a moment, he imagines Eiling’s men crouching there in the darkness, eyes trained on Barry and the house. “Let’s get back inside. There are other people looking for you.”

Barry rises with him, taking a tentative step closer. Intuitively, Eobard knows the boy wants to give him a hug, although he also knows Barry’s afraid now of getting shocked again.

Chuckling, Eobard wraps his arms around him.

Barry relaxes into his embrace.

~***~

Predictably, Barry sleeps through his alarm and misses the first train to Starling City. Eobard gives him a lift to station so that he’ll make the next one out, and then returns home quickly to pick up a few things for work. While he’s there, he decides at the last moment to check the house’s security feed from last night.

Except, there isn’t any.

He’s got a camera trained on almost every room in the house, and each of them was recording perfectly fine up until Barry answered the phone yesterday morning. Since then, they’d been turned off. Not damaged, mind you, just…idle.

Pissed, Eobard nearly crushes his computer screen with his fist.

On the upside, Eobard had removed everything related to his alter ego to the hidden vault at S.T.A.R. Labs a long time ago, so if someone thought they would find anything of interest in his home office, they were sorely mistaken. On the downside—someone hacked his fucking security
system and did God-knows-what inside his house yesterday. He can’t be certain of when exactly they were there, although he’s willing to bet that they were probably working for Eiling.

FUCK.

He has neither the time nor the patience to dwell on what might’ve happened, so he grabs his things and drives down to S.T.A.R. Labs.

The place is a hive of activity. Nerves are running high and even Ronnie Raymond looks a little antsy when Eobard drops by unannounced to check up on him and his team, but this doesn’t worry him in the slightest. He always expected everyone to be almost sick with excitement...

Hartley, though, acts remarkably subdued.

During their brief departmental meeting, the boy doesn’t say a word. Doesn’t even rise to the bait when Dr. Wilhelm openly lauds one of Cisco’s latest inventions. Just sits there quietly, looking uncharacteristically sad, gaze focused on the middle distance...

During his lunch break, Eobard calls Barry.

“I made it to Starling alright,” his son says after they’ve made their obligatory salutations. “Just analyzed the weirdest crime scene I’ve seen in a long time though. Someone killed two guards and stole an industrial sized centrifuge from Kord Enterprises.”

“How is that weird?”

“You mean other than the fact that people don’t usually steal centrifuges?” Barry laughs. “Whoever the culprit is, he broke a guard’s neck with one hand. That’s like, well…insanely hard to do.”

Eobard tries picturing how a non-metahuman would actually go about doing that. Personally, he’s killed people with one hand before, but that was by phasing through their sternum and rearranging their inner organs.

Boy, he’s in a bad mood today…

“Promise me you won’t pull another ‘Gotham’ and track down the perp yourself.”

“I promise.”

“I’m serious, Barry.”

“Honestly, I’m having an exciting enough day already. You won’t believe this, but I actually met Oliver Queen this morning.”

“Oliver Queen?” Eobard echoes faintly.

Unless he’s mistaken, that’s the Green Arrow.

“Yeah. Not the warmest person you’ll ever meet, but I imagine being stranded on a remote island for five years will do that to a guy.”

Oh, Eobard knows a thing or two about being stranded. It has the potential to soften a man as well, as it had with him, and that’s what he tries to think about when his mind inevitably drifts back to Hartley.

“I apologize for changing the subject, but did Hartley seem a little…off to you last night?”
“Honestly? ...Maybe a little. He didn’t say anything too much to me, but I get the feeling one of his aunts just died. I know his cousin sent him an email a few weeks back to tell him she was in the hospital.”

Eobard certainly hopes that’s the case. “You mean to tell me someone in the Rathaway family is still on speaking terms with Hartley?”

“She’s the exception to the rule. I think Hartley was even in her will. Not that that matters to him, considering how unlikely it is he’ll be invited to the funeral…”

“Knowing Hartley, he’ll go anyway.”

“Not until the accelerator is up and running he won’t. If he’s acting weird, it’s probably due to the bad timing.”

“I’ll see if I can chat with him before he leaves tonight,” Eobard sighs. “I’m sorry for bothering you.”

“Oh, it’s no bother. I imagine some people are running around headless right about now.”

“It’s to be expected.”

“Oh well, you always exude confidence. I’m sure they’ll calm down once they realize their fearless leader isn’t freaking out.”

“But I am freaking out.”

“Only on the inside.”

Eobard laughs a little, but then something clenches inside his chest and he falls silent. In all his excitement about finally creating the Flash, he’d almost forgotten about the lengthy coma in store for Barry.

This was likely one of the last few conversations they were going to have for a very long time.

“Stay safe, Barry,” he says faintly.

“Always!” Barry chirps before hanging up.

Eobard hits End Call on his cell phone before dropping the mobile onto his desk.

For once in his life, he’s dreading what’s to come at the end of the week.

~***~

Hartley is MIA for most of the day.

His peons tell Eobard that at least the young engineer made sure everything was in working order before disappearing. They speculate that the boy generously took a hike in order to give them a little breathing room so that they could perform their last few duties in peace. Eobard nods, as though that was always the plan, and then asks security to call him whenever Hartley is spotted again. They ask him if he wants them to escort Hartley off the premises, if need be, confused as to why Eobard would want them to track one of his own employees.

Eobard tells them no and continues his rounds of the facility.

He doesn’t get a call until around 8pm, when just about everyone else has left the building. Security
informs him that Hartley is in Caitlin’s lab of all places right now, not doing much, just leaning quietly against one of the work benches as though he’s waiting for someone.

They ask him again if he wants security to accompany him.

Despite the sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach, Eobard lets them know that that won’t be necessary.

Sure enough, he finds Hartley in Dr. Snow’s lab, standing at the far end of the room, opposite of Grodd. Despite the distance between them, Hartley is still watching the gorilla from where he’s leaning against the bench, arms crossed, seemingly lost in thought until Eobard steps in front of him. Only then does the boy look at him, expression indecipherable.

Eobard feels a brief pulse of anxiety from Grodd before the ape shuts down their mental connection completely.

Eobard shifts his weight subtly from one foot to the other.

“There’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you for a while now,” Hartley finally says. He tilts his head to one side, inquisitive. “In fact, I have something of a personal question for you, if you’re up to the challenge.”

Eobard rarely, if ever, backs down from a challenge.

All the same, he fears what comes next.

“Ask away,” he replies.

The corner of Hartley’s lip twitches. Almost a smile. Maybe a snarl. Then he says, “Beyond what Barry has told you, what do you know about the ‘man in the lightning?’”

Eobard takes a slow breath. Ahead of him in is a fork in the road.

Either way could lead to ruin.

Eobard could lie. After all, he is a lie... In fact, he is the lie. The greatest invention of this time. This face, this voice, this name—‘Harrison Wells’…

The most important man of the 21st century.

He feels anything but right now. There’s a part of him that doesn’t want to lie anymore. Not to Hartley, anyway. He’s grown affectionate of the boy, this young man who reminds him so much of himself…

Hartley Rathaway is Eobard Thawne without the façade.

Hartley is one of the truest people he knows.

Eobard shifts his weight back to the other foot, but this time the boy notices.

Time will go on with or without his answer, so Eobard finally bites the bullet and says, “He’s not the only man who can run that fast...”

Hartley’s mask is a thing of wonder, Eobard’s half confession doesn’t so much as earn him a flinch as the boy presses onward. “So you admit that there are other people like him out there?”
“Many.”

“And you know this *because?*”

Eobard smiles a little, inhibition slipping.

At the end of the day, he’ll always be a sucker for a good reveal.

“I count myself among their number.”

This does it then. Cracks the façade. Hitches Hartley’s breath in the back of his throat.

The boy drops his arms to brace against the desk behind him. He doesn’t seem scared though. Just… resigned.

Hartley licks his lips. “I noticed that someone was removing equipment from my office a while ago, but I couldn’t prove it because you don’t have security cameras in the hallways down there. So I hooked up my own and… I saw you one night. Moving. In a blur of light.”

He should’ve known that someone would’ve seen him eventually.

Should’ve *known* that the one to catch him would be none other than Hartley Rathaway himself.

“Now you know,” Eobard replies quietly, calculating. He’s not sure where to go from here. Does he kill the boy?

Does he *have* to kill the boy...?

“Does Barry know?” Hartley asks.

Eobard shakes his head.

This seems to light a fire in Hartley’s veins. The boys’ face darkens in outrage. “Don’t you think he deserve to know?!”

“Someday,” Eobard replies, short and to the point. “But not any time soon. He’s not ready yet.”

“And why the hell not?”

“Because Barry’s family was ravaged by a man who moved ‘in a blur of light’. What do you image he’ll think of me once he discovers what I can do?”

Hartley opens his mouth. Then closes it with a snap. After he’s had a moment to collect himself, he continues with his interrogation. “Is it a coincidence then that you of all people adopted him after his mother was killed?”

“Not at all.”

“Then why did you take him in?”

“To *protect* him,” Eobard breathes. The truth of it bleeds out into his voice. Must soften his expression too, because Hartley’s rigid posture relaxes marginally at the admission. “I want him to live a long and fulfilling life. I want him to do incredible things. I want…”

“…You genuinely love him,” Hartley says. It sounds more like an observation than an actual question. The boy appears almost wistful for a moment. “Then you should tell him. Sooner rather
than later. He deserves to know—not just about you, but about the man in the lightning too.”

“I will.”

“When?”

“When he gets home from Starling, after the particle accelerator is up and running.”

“That won’t be possible.”

Eobard inhales sharply. “Why not?”

“Someone is trying to sabotage us,” Hartley mutters, “and I have proof. I don’t know who it is, but we have to delay our start date, at least until we figure out who’s been trying to screw us over.”

Eobard knows then that he has to remove Hartley from the picture once and for all.

He feels something akin to grief roiling in the pit of his stomach.

Security is watching him now, so he’ll confront Hartley again tomorrow. Have him escorted off the premises. Then, when Hartley is home and alone, well…

Eobard will do what he does best.

“I see,” is all that he says.

If Hartley’s aware of Eobard’s inner turmoil, he makes no sign of it. Instead, he forges onward with his speculation. “The only person I think of who would possibly want to wreak havoc on this city is your friend in the yellow suit. What exactly do you know about him? What does he want? Why did he kill Barry’s—?”

Patiently, Eobard waits for Hartley to finish his sentence. But he never does. Just sort of frowns and falls quiet, staring off into the middle distance yet again.

For a second there, Eobard wonders if Hartley’s at all prone to having ‘absence’ seizures.

“…Hartley?” He’s tempted to snap his fingers in front of the boy’s face, but that would be petty. He does take a small step closer though. “Dr. Rathaway?”

‘…Good?’

Bewildered, Eobard turns around slowly, staring out across the lab at the gorilla in his cage. Grodd is crouched down low behind the bars, seemingly nervous.

‘Is this you?’ Eobard thinks aloud.

‘…Yes.’

‘You’re inside his head?’

‘…Yes.’

Excitement trickles into their connection. From whom, Eobard can’t say. ‘You’ve been practicing on Dr. Rathaway?’

‘Yes,’ the gorilla says, this time more firmly. ‘Can make it go away. All away.’
‘What do you mean?’

Grodd bounces once in frustration. ‘The bad thoughts.’

The revelation of what Grodd is truly capable of here completely floors Eobard. ‘Do you mean you can change his opinions or that you can remove his memories?’

The gorilla seems uncertain of how to properly explain his abilities, but he makes an attempt anyway: ‘The memories.’

Eobard glances back at Hartley. As tremendous as that sounded, they still had no idea what kind of effect Grodd’s meddling would have on a human being. ‘Then do it already and release him. I don’t know how his mind is going to handle this.’

Hartley blinks then, almost as though on cue. He slouches a little to one side, still leaning back against the work bench, and nearly topples over. ‘What is…?’

“Are you alright, Hartley?”

Frowning, the young man glances around himself at the empty room. “Yeah, I’m…We’re in Caitlin’s lab?”

“We are.”

“Oh,” Hartley scratches the back of his neck. “Why do I feel so agitated?”

Eobard tries to wrack his brain for a logical topic of conversation. Eventually he settles on the only plausible thing he can think of: “You were telling me that your aunt died.”

“She did.” Hartley’s frown darkens with indignation. “Those bastards wouldn’t even me visit her at the hospital. Self-righteous sons of—”

“I think you should go home now, Hartley,” he interjects. “You look tired. I need you at your best this week.”

“I know.” The boy’s expression falls, as though wounded. “I’m…I’m sorry. I don’t know why I’m acting so erratic.”

“Everyone’s been a little off lately.”

“I’ve never had a mental breakdown before,” he mutters, pushing off the work bench to head toward the door. “I’m…I guess I’ll see you tomorrow. Good night, Dr. Wells.” Hartley pauses to nod at their resident gorilla. “Good night, Grodd.”

Grodd huffs in response, eyes trained on Hartley as he disappears out into the hall.

Eobard stands there quietly for a long time, feeling equally relieved and confused. Just a few moments ago he was contemplating the best way to kill his protégé. Now…now Grodd’s just given the young genius a free pass on life.

Grodd’s abilities are truly an astonishing thing, but at the moment Eobard is more overwhelmed by the reality of how badly he didn’t want to kill Hartley just then.

He’s in shock.

‘…Good?’ Grodd asks him tentatively, obviously concerned he’s somehow overstepped his
'If I had known you were going to use Hartley as a guinea pig, I would’ve advised you against it, but…that was beautiful.' Shaking, Eobard leans against the work bench himself for support. ‘How long will the amnesia last? Is it permanent?’

Eobard tries not sound too hopeful with that last question, but there’s no use trying to hide your emotions from the ape once he’s inside your head. ‘Yes/no,’ Grodd says simultaneously. ‘Buried. I can recall.’

‘So, it is permanent,’ Eobard clarifies, ‘but you can bring back the memories at will?’

‘Yes.’

‘How do you know? Who else have you tested your abilities on?’

Almost coyly, Grodd finally lets him in on his big secret—that he’s been practicing his trade long before Eobard asked him to, back when the first of Eiling’s men showed up on their doorstep.

Grodd’s been parsing through the minds of just about every person who’s ever set foot inside the facility. Not altering anything about them, mind you, just keeping an eye out for people who possessed memories of Eiling or anything else related to the military. Then Grodd would lure them down to Caitlin’s lab and wipe their minds clean before sending them back on their merry way.

Eobard has always known that Grodd had an incredible amount of potential for manipulating the human mind, but this…this is beyond anything he could’ve ever dreamed of.

‘What a clever boy,’ Eobard thinks fondly.

Grodd starts pacing back and forth inside his cage, huffing in excitement. ‘Good? Good?’

‘Not good. Excellent.’

Grodd gives an odd sort of hoot then, something Eobard’s never heard before. He can tell through their connection though that the gorilla is incredibly happy.

‘I’m going home now, Grodd, but I’m very proud of you. You have no idea how pleased I am right now.’

Grodd crawls over to his favourite corner then and hunkers down, curling his arms under and around his head. Eyes shining mischievously, he says, ‘Good night.’

“Good night,” Eobard replies, making his own way to the door.

He can feel Grodd’s eyes trailing after him as he steps out into the hall.

He can feel Grodd's mental connection longer still until he’s on his way home...

~***~

It’s the day of the particle accelerator’s big debut, and Eobard still hasn’t heard from Barry.

He’s spent the whole morning resisting the urge to run to Starling City, although slapping Gideon onto his wrist and having her update him regularly on the future Crisis paper helps to keep his sanity in check. So far as she can tell, the future is pretty much set in stone at this point. There’s nothing to suggest his son won’t make it home in time.
Today is the day Barry meets his destiny.

Eobard still worries though. Checks his mobile constantly to see if he’s missed any calls or text messages. Drives Cisco nuts, because the kid keeps making science jokes that Eobard inadvertently misses. Drives Caitlin nuts too, but she’s more polite about it, reminding him that Barry wouldn’t miss today for the world.

And sure enough, a little while after noon, he gets the call he’s been waiting for:

“I’m back.”

“I thought I told you that unless I see your smiling face, I’m not going to believe you.”

“I know, just—” Barry’s voice is muffled as he moves his phone around. A second later, Eobard hears Detective Joe West’s deep rumble on the other end of the line as the man says, “He’s back in Central City.”

“Is he in one piece?”

“From what I can tell, pretty much.” Joe sighs. “He’s got a tonne of work to get through today though, so he’s going to be a little late to the party.”

“Just as long as he’s here,” Eobard says quietly.

Joe chuckles, then hands the phone back to Barry, who says, “See—I told you I’d make it in time.”

“I’m willing to bet you tried to catch an earlier train back here though. Am I right?”

Barry is silent for a minute. “Well, you wouldn’t be wrong…”

Eobard closes his eyes. “Whatever. I’m just glad you’re back. Is there any way I can see you before tonight or are you completely bogged down at work?”

“I’ll try to duck out if I get the chance. Iris and I have decided we’re going to watch you flip the switch from the crowd tonight. At the very latest, I’ll see you afterwards in the Cortex.”

There’s something in Barry’s tone of voice that’s a little off. He sounds almost…determined.

Eobard wonders just how exactly this trip to Starling City has changed him.

“You want some alone time with Iris, is that it?”

“…Do you have to be so blunt?”

“After I’ve watched you pine over her for the last fourteen years, I feel like I have the right to taunt you.”

“Well, thank you for your support. And, yeah…I am going to tell her. Change is in the air, you know? Why waste another day without her?”

Eobard feels a brief pang of guilt. He tightens his grip on the phone.

He’s about to destroy the simple life Barry’s always wanted.

“Please try to call me if you do get a break. The world really is going to change after tonight.”
“Only for the better,” Barry assures him. “Now, I’ve got to get going, otherwise Joe is going to confiscate my phone. I love you.”

“I love you too,” he murmurs, holding the phone up to his ear until he can hear Barry hanging up on the other end.

He pretends not to notice how his hand is shaking as he finally drops his cell phone into his pocket.

~***~

Success is the story of the Thawnes—all men and women of great power, all visionaries, all imperators of some fashion or another.

All villains...

Although one could easily argue that Eobard is the worst of them all.

~***~

Barry doesn’t get a chance to call him back or visit him. Bitterly, Eobard realizes that their short conversation earlier in the day was the last time he’d hear Barry’s voice again before the Speed Force had its way with him.

When Eobard steps up onto the podium though, he spots him in the crowd. Front and centre, with Iris West at his side, eyes shining with pride. As always, Barry is smiling too, the poster boy of youth and exuberance. He’s so excited for his surrogate father that neither he nor Miss West notice the thief until the last possible moment, when the man snatches the satchel right off Iris’ arm before booking it into the crowd of spectators.

That there is the true moment the Flash is born, when Barry takes off after the culprit without so much as a second thought, no clue as to what he’ll do when he actually catches up to the man, but still hell bent on retrieving Iris’ bag.

It gives Eobard a small sense of comfort knowing that Barry will slip easily into the role of a hero when he wakes from his coma. He tries to think about all the good this will do his son when he walks up to the Cortex’s main console and initiates the collider. Someday, he thinks, Barry will thank him.

For a moment, the room is silent. Nothing happens.

They assume the worst is behind them.

He watches in fascination though a short while later as the champagne from his celebratory bottle rises up toward the ceiling, a fluid form momentarily given life before it collapses altogether, splattering across the floor. The sirens sound. A storm rumbles overhead.

He can feel the Speed Force writhing just beneath the surface of his skin. Eobard is a dead end, so far as it’s concern. It wants to run the length of the universe and back again, to expand, to complete the proverbial circle…

The members of his team then split themselves into two groups: those who try to reduce the inevitable damage that the accelerator is about to cause the city and those who flee for their lives. In the ensuing madness, Eobard slips away into his vault, checking in on his personal security feed of the CCPD to see how his son is holding up.
He knows how the story goes, knows that Barry will meet his destiny in that tiny little lab at the precinct--and sure enough, Barry curls both of his hands around the chain to the old skylight window just as an energy blast radiates out from S.T.A.R. Labs. The Speed Force rockets up into the angry stormclouds after it before bleeding into the surrounding stormclouds, searching…

When it finds Barry, it’s not at all gentle in its taking.

The lightning strikes.

The circuit closes.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Sometimes, I think the Speed Force is a dick.

No, seriously. When I tackle-hug someone, I don’t put them in a 9 month coma…

*heavy sigh*

[[And now the real moment you've all been waiting for--FUN FACTS!]]

(1) 'Grodd' is not the name of a poet. I totally made this up, because 'Eobard' and 'Robern' are funny names and I figure everyone's got one in the future.

(2) You're going to be seeing way more of Eiling in the future. And Iris, although obviously not in the same scene, lol.

(3) Hartley and the suit: I wish I could find the link to the video I got this idea from, but the producers originally intended to credit Hartley with designing the Flash suit. In fact, I think they also intended for him to be a part of Team Flash in the beginning of the show, except that would've made his villain arc a bit tricky to pull off midseason. Whatever. I'm totally happy with the way the show is going. I just hope we see another cameo of the Pied Piper soon.

(...And that's about all that I can think of for the moment, but after I've had a little caffeine I'll probably remember the rest. Once again, thank you for being so incredibly patient with me)
A creature of habit

Chapter Notes

A/N: I guess you could consider this a brief ‘interlude’ of sorts (but only because Barry spends the whole chapter as the Amazing Coma Boy). I’m going to warn you though that there is more violence in this chapter than you’ve probably seen since Exley’s death. Then again, if you made it through chapter four without wincing, I’m fairly confident you can stomach this one too.

Now, prepare yourselves for some spine tingling madness!

Seriously.

Seriously.

-H

[Aside: Spoilers for season two of Arrow are in this chapter, but I’m, like, 99.9% certain most of you are up to date on that show…]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“If someone puts their hands on you make sure they never put their hands on anybody else again.”
— Malcolm X

~*~*~

“Do you think there’s a heaven?”

In his mind’s eye he’s back in Starling City, fourteen years into the past, simply going through the motions of life.

He’s straightening one of his dress shirts on a hanger to put away in his closest when the boy poses the question to him. It’s early in the evening yet, though he still has dinner to make, and little Barry Allen is lying on the bed behind him, only half aware of the world around him, somewhat dazed by the summer heat.

Eobard had turned on the air conditioning the moment he set foot inside the house, but it’ll take a while yet for it to really kick in. As it stands, he’s feeling rather lethargic himself, so he shuffles over to the bed and stretches out beside the boy. Not touching him, just watching him, fascinated by this tiny creature…

“Are you genuinely asking?” Eobard sighs. “Or are you trying to be philosophical?”

Barry scrunches up his nose a little, evidently unfamiliar with that last word, though he apparently gets the gist of Eobard’s inquiry when he says, “I want to know. For real.”

“And what makes you think I would know the answer?”

“Because you’re the smartest guy I know.”
Eobard tries, and fails, not to feel flattered. Given the number of non-convicted adults in Barry’s life right now, the competition is sparse.

All the same, he appreciates the compliment.

Running a hand through his hair, Eobard rolls over onto his back, staring up at the ceiling as he ponders the boy’s question.

He’s doubtful that there is a so-called heaven, simply because he doesn’t believe there’s some deistic being passing judgement on his every decision in life from atop a mountain of clouds. But as both a man of science and a thing of wonder himself, he would never openly disapprove of that belief. No…his main concern has always been the existence of the soul.

He knows that there’s some incorporeal aspect of every living creature. He’s witnessed firsthand the separation of body and ‘spirit’. He’s seen the divine; been touched by the discarnate. Is it eternal, though? Therein lies the mystery. Though the life of a man is tied intrinsically to his body, the elimination of his very being is not mutually inclusive of his death…

Every man and woman once was and forevermore will be.

The concept worries him though, because then he has to wonder if he’s truly succeeded in removing his enemies from time, namely those whose conception he has long since obviated. He knows that no one is real before the physical creation of their body, but if they existed at least once in the convoluted spiral of time, does that then mean there is always the possibility of their return?

He can’t say.

It worries him too, because he often thinks of the Speed Force as a spirit of sorts, one which is channelled primarily through Barry Allen. He always thought it existed prior to the Flash’s ‘birth’, otherwise how else would Eobard be connected to it now? However, in trying to kill the boy, he very nearly destroyed himself. It would seem then that he must always favour the creation of his greatest enemy.

Truly, without the Flash, there could be no Reverse…

But he knows the real reason Barry is asking him this question tonight and it has absolutely nothing to do with existential philosophy, so Eobard glances over at the boy and says, “I have no doubt in my mind that your mother is still watching over you.”

Barry’s eyes flicker away briefly, contemplating the truth of Eobard’s statement. There’s a great deal of emotion in that small gesture, a heady cocktail of grief and hope and longing, but this silent anguish is slowly becoming a familiar beast to the boy now and he manages not to cry as he shuffles closer to Eobard on the bed, the better to rest his head against his father’s chest.

Seemingly settled, Barry then closes his eyes.

Surrendering to his own exhaustion, Eobard wraps an arm around the boy’s shoulders, wondering what fresh hell the metaphorical ghost of Nora Allen must be experiencing now knowing that a monster has stolen her son.

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He watches as the first officer crouches over Barry’s prone figure and feels conflicted.

Even though the power is out in the station, everyone on the main floor heard the commotion upstairs
when the skylight shattered and Barry’s body was propelled violently across the room into an aluminum shelf. He lies there for a short while, lightning licking at his limbs, until the first cop skids into the room. She promptly drags his limp figure off said shelf and onto the floor, a better position to begin chest compressions when she realizes he’d been electrocuted.

Hands poised, arms braced, Barry’s sternum breaks under the first hearty pump. He gets thirty seconds of this savage treatment before someone else arrives with a defibrillator, though they wait until they think he has something resembling a pulse before hooking him up. Briefly then they administer a short sharp shock. Then another. And another.

Miserable, the Speed Force surrenders to them the rhythm of his heart.

They don’t know that it never once stopped beating though, that they’re probably doing more harm than good, but that matters little now that Barry’s finally been connected to the Speed Force. Whatever damage has been dealt to him will be undone, just as soon as his body’s adapted to the invasion of this second soul.

Barry will be alright.

Eobard tries to remember this as he closes the security feed, because at the back of his mind he can feel Grodd reaching out for him, begging for his help, frightened by the scampering humans and longing to be free.

Caitlin’s lab is deserted by the time Eobard gets down to him. He’s upset that no one thought to stay and help the beast, but it’s probably for the best that there are no witnesses around when he opens the gorilla’s cage and steps inside. Channeling the Speed Force himself—which is so potent now, a veritable fire in his veins—he kicks the bars outward, to make it appear as though divine intervention released Grodd back into the wild and not his surrogate father.

Grod’s fear quickly gives way to gratitude as Eobard finally releases him from his prison. ‘I am free?’ he asks tentatively, almost as though he can hardly believe such a thing could be true.

“Yes,” Eobard says, “but there’s something I need you to do for me first.”

Hunched forward on his knuckles, Grodd slowly crawls out after him into the lab. Eobard raises a hand stroke the gorilla’s left bicep soothingly.

‘Anything,’ the gorilla projects graciously

Eobard steps closer, continuing to pet the ape, a modest attempt to alieve the gorilla of his fears.

“Anything? You give me your word?”

‘Anything,’ Grodd repeats, resolute.

“Good,” Eobard says quietly, “then follow me…”

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Once the hallways are clear, Eobard leads the gorilla down to the pipeline.

Just then, another explosion on the lower level rocks the building, one of the overhead lights swinging down suddenly before crashing to the floor at his feet. Up ahead, just around the bend in the hall, Eobard hears a shout.

Then silence.
He approaches quietly, gesturing for Grodd to follow at a distance to ensure that no one sees him. When he rounds the corner though all that he sees is Hartley, comatose himself, trapped under one of the fallen wall panels. A small pool of blood is gradually forming under his head.

Eobard crouches down to lift the panel and toss it aside. The boy isn’t dead, but he’s bleeding from his right ear. Not the most encouraging sign in the world, but by his estimation EMS should be here soon.

There’s hope for the boy yet.

Sighing, Eobard walks a little further down the hall until he encounters a small pile of rubble where part of the concrete foundation gave way in the initial blast. Mentally, he then coaxes Grodd forward, trying to banish his own fears from his mind as the massive gorilla approaches.

Grodd himself is afraid, but not of the crumbling building or the limp figure in the corner. He crawls toward Eobard slowly, almost sadly, eyes downcast until they’re standing side by side.

“It will only be temporary,” Eobard assures him. “I’ll see you again in a couple of hours.”

Grodd whimpers pathetically but tries to focus, heartbeat a fierce staccato as he leans forward to wrap his arms around Eobard’s slender waist. Eobard hooks his own arms around the gorilla’s neck, closes his eyes, and then takes a deep breath.

The gorilla shudders briefly, shifting his embrace. He whimpers again, tensing.

Suddenly then, he flexes his arms.

Eobard’s back snaps like a twig.

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This is not his first spinal injury.

High speed chases and accelerated fist fights tend to leave their mark when you slip up. That’s not including the trauma he’s sustained just from being at the wrong place at the wrong time—falling off a building, for example, or catching fire. He’s been stabbed, beaten, burned, and very nearly drowned on a number of occasions, but he knows by now that the Speed Force will always repair the damage, no matter the severity. His closest call with the Great Beyond was a broken neck, and since then he’s gotten better at watching his back.

The Speed Force, however, does not in any way diminish the pain.

That’s why the break is incredibly painful at first. Near blinding, in fact. Grodd tries to put up a wall inside Eobard’s own mind to block out the sensation, but he bats the gorilla away as kindly as he can manage as he suddenly loses all feeling in his legs. Already he can tell that the Speed Force trying to undo the damage, reaching in without permission, dancing up and down along his spine. It takes every ounce of energy he has to slow its effect as Grodd retreats into the shadows, just in time to avoid being seen by EMS as two young responders round the corner.

He slips in and out of consciousness on the way to the hospital. Manages to keep it together until they roll him into the ER at least. Grodd tries to follow as covertly as he can, hunkering down on the roof of the hospital to keep Eobard unconscious when they begin surgery, given that sedatives have no real effect on him. The poor ape sits there, focusing, for the six and a half hours that they work on him, then wanders off to find food when Eobard is finally wheeled off to the recovery room.
Grodd checks up on him periodically during his three week stay in the hospital, just in case anyone clued in to the fact that Eobard is healing faster than anticipated. The initial damage is between the 11th and 12th thoracic vertebrae, his paralysis deemed incomplete due only to the preserved sensory function beneath the break. According to the ASIA Impairment Scale, they give him a rating of “B”, doubtful that he will ever regain motor function in his legs, unaware that he can already tighten his thigh abductors.

The pain persists however. He’s not much of one for crying, but sometimes even he has to break down. It’s a constant battle with the Speed Force to keep himself as weak as he needs to be before he’s sent to rehab, where Grodd can manipulate his therapists into believing that he will never walk again. It doesn’t help though when Joe visits on his first day after the surgery, tears in his own eyes, to explain that Barry’s in the ICU. Has been there for a while actually, having been resuscitated god knows how many times since he was electrocuted.

As if on cue, the Speed Force flares back to attention, like some lovesick girl at the name of her beau. Angry and afraid, Eobard clenches whatever muscles he can currently control below the waist and screams.

~***~

Before traveling back in time, Eobard never once cared about Barry’s suffering.

He’s been reminded of that fact a lot lately, often dreaming of one of their earliest and most memorable battles, the one in which he swung a lead pipe at the Flash just below the navel and fractured a pelvic bone. The boy had crumpled to ground almost immediately, eyes screwed shut, screaming himself hoarse.

Stupidly, Eobard stood over his fallen enemy to watch him squirm. He didn’t realize then that the Flash had snatched something up off the ground when he wasn’t watching, not until the boy jabbed it viciously into his right leg, rupturing his Achilles tendon.

It wasn’t the worst injury the Flash had ever inflicted upon him, but the pain was excruciating all the same. It brought him to his knees, hand hovering tentatively over the glass shard still embedded in his calf.

“Fuck,” Eobard swore under his breath.

The boy didn’t swear though, even though the blow Eobard had dealt to him was arguably worse. No, curse words were below the poster boy of Sunday school and shining fucking fuck—

“God, I hate you,” Eobard hissed, taking a moment to brace himself mentally before pulling out the shard. The gouge in his leg smarted like all unholy hell, but he knew it would’ve been worse if he tried to remove it after the wound began to heal. “Oh, you little bitch…”

The young man choked out a sob. Gradually, he stopped writhing though—still wincing, still clearly suffering, but Eobard imagined that the kid’s own heightened healing factor was finally starting to kick in.

Furious, Eobard hoped he didn’t just fracture a bone. He hoped that he’d broken something important, that the Speed force would mend it wrong, that this stupid kid would have to break it all over again just to set it right…

Christ, his leg hurt.
Eobard needed another minute to get his bearings, but he didn’t want to afford his enemy the same reprieve, so he reached forward with his free hand and grabbed the boy by his ankle, giving it a good hard yank, even as the Flash begged him not to. The pain must have been something special though, because the kid fell completely silent then, head lulling to the side as he passed out from the agony.

Somehow, that managed to piss Eobard off even more, because he hadn’t picked a fight with the sunny hero just so he could sleep off his injuries. Even so, he knew better than to stare a gift horse in the mouth. The Flash was lying there at his complete mercy, after all. If ever there was a time to kill him, that time was now.

Staring down at the sizeable shard in his hand, Eobard decided then and there that he was going to bury it in the boy’s heart. Then twist it. Then maybe pull it out and do it all over again. As many times he could, in fact, because, really, who knew how much damage the heart of a speedster could sustain?

Eobard’s gut coiled with misery and fear though as he crawled forward over his prone victim. It made him sick. He hurt so much—his leg, his back, his own fucking heart. He…he…

He couldn’t—

“—okay! Calm down! It’s okay!”

Eobard’s hand isn’t wrapped around the shard anymore. He’s actually got his fingers curled around the wrist of one of the male nurses, clenching harder as pain flares up his back.

“…It’s not okay,” Eobard mutters, only realizing now that his face is wet with tears.

How long has he been crying?

The man doesn’t say anything, just stares at Eobard sympathetically until he relinquishes his hold.

Eobard tries to calm himself. To be honest, he’s always known that this was going to happen—had wanted it to happen this way, in fact: Barry and the lightning; Grodd and his back. In a couple of months, when he’s ‘better’, he’ll move his comatose son to S.T.A.R. Labs, which has been abandoned by almost everyone now that FEMA’s declared the facility a level 4 hazard. A little while later Barry will wake up again, and then the epic journey of the Flash will begin anew, all according to plan…

Hur-fucking-rah…

Eobard still has no idea why he continues to dream of Barry as his mortal enemy. He supposes it might be fear—the fear that Barry will take the power Eobard has bestowed upon him and use it against him. Or maybe it’s just guilt. Maybe his conscience isn’t so dead after all…

“I want to see him,” Eobard says faintly.

The male nurse opens his mouth as though to protest, but he snaps it shut almost immediately. Caught off guard by his request, the young man retreats out into the hallway to flag down one of the doctors.

Eobard’s only been in a wheelchair twice before today. Using the sliding board the first time had been quite the fiasco, and sitting up for more than a few hours at a time still agitates him, but the swelling in his back has gone down considerably since the surgery and he knows he’s well enough to make the trip.
The staff don’t know that though. They’re always careful with him, sometimes to the point that he wants to swear at them, but their hesitance to get him up and moving again so soon after the accident is justifiable. However, they’re also well aware of the fact that his son is in a coma in the next ward over and that the chances of Barry ever waking up again are pretty slim. Who then, in their right mind, would try to keep a father and son separated from each other in such a dismal situation as this?

As expected, the doctor relents. Two nurses help Eobard into a wheelchair and roll him down the hallway. It’s literally a five minute trip before they reach Barry’s room.

The second bed in the room by the window is empty, but they’ve still hidden Barry from view with the green curtains around his own. The nurse tells Eobard it’s because the paparazzi keep trying to take photographs of him. Despite how pissed Central City seems to be with Eobard for the damage he’s caused, the fact that both he and his son suffered the consequences is more than enough to garner the majority of the public’s pity.

In fact, Barry Wells’ unfortunate coma is one of hottest topics on twitter right now.

Unamused, Eobard asks the nurse if he would be so kind as to lower Barry’s bed before leaving.

The man takes his cue gracefully, adjusting the height of Barry’s bed until Eobard can take his son’s hand comfortably into his own. Then he disappears off into the hallway, telling Eobard that he’ll return in a few.

Eobard can feel the Speed Force humming beneath the surface of Barry’s skin now. Although, whereas Eobard’s been fighting tooth and nail to keep it at bay, this unnatural force has free reign over Barry’s body. It’s changing everything, making him stronger. *Faster.*

It wants Barry to *run* already.

Eobard strokes the back of Barry’s pale hand with his thumb, sighing as he tries to clear his mind. As terrifying as this whole experience has been for him so far, he knows the boy will be fine. *He* will be fine.

Again, everything is happening exactly as it should.

“…Am I interrupting?”

Eobard can’t really turn in his chair, so he has to wait for Cisco to step into the room and around the hospital curtains before acknowledging the young man’s presence. Softly, he says, “Not at all.”

“Dr. Snow’s here too, but she wanted to grab something to eat first before…well…” Cisco gestures vaguely to Barry’s comatose form. “We try to visit every afternoon. Tried to see you too ages ago, but the staff said you didn’t want any visitors.”

“I’m sorry,” Eobard murmurs. After a brief chat with the departmental heads of his facility and Tina to ensure that anyone who wanted to continue the research they started at S.T.A.R. labs had somewhere to go, he requested that everyone leave him alone until he was out of the hospital. “I’ve been in a bit of a mood lately.”

This startles a laugh out of Cisco. “Oh my god—you don’t have to explain. You deserve a little space.”

“I know, but…it’s good to see you again.”

Cisco grins. “It’s good to see you too.”
The corner of Eobard’s lip crooks into a smile. “So, Caitlin’s here? How about Ronnie?”

Cisco’s cheery expression falls completely flat then. The look alone tells Eobard all he needs to know, but Cisco is still kind enough to elaborate. “He’s one of the few people who died that night actually. He ducked into the core chamber to shut down the particle accelerator manually. Caitlin’s still in shock, I think, so maybe don’t mention it when you see her.”

“I’m so sorry,” Eobard breathes.

And he means it too.

“It’s not your fault. She knows that. We did everything in our power to make sure nothing like this would happen.”

“Even so…”

“Shut up,” Cisco mutters. “This is no more your fault than it is Ronnie’s or mine. Nobody knew the particle accelerator was going to go completely awol that night.”

That’s not true and Eobard wishes he could tell Cisco that, but instead he ducks his head and continues stroking the back of Barry’s hand, marveling at how warm his boy is despite his deathly complexion.

“Um…not that I want to really focus on the consequences of the explosion right now, but has anyone been keeping you up to date on Hartley? He’s really the only other member of S.T.A.R. Labs who was critically injured in the blast.”

Eobard sighs. “Yes. And no. Dr. McGee informed me that he was in the hospital. Last I heard, he was also in a coma.”

“He woke up a couple of days ago actually. Not in the best mood, mind you. Complained of tinnitus and a sensitivity to loud noises. They’ve decided to sedate him until he has surgery again.”

It makes sense, given the state Eobard found him in. He regrets Hartley’s own suffering, truly, but at least the young man is still alive, not at all vaporized like Ronnie Raymond.

“He’ll be my next visit,” Eobard replies.

“Props to you for getting out of bed so early,” Cisco says, “but maybe you should conserve your energy? I’m sure Hartley will visit you himself once he’s feeling better.”

Eobard doesn’t try to argue with him. Just nods his head. Maybe he will visit him personally; maybe he won’t. His main concern right now is Barry and the silent thrum of the Speed Force between them as it builds him anew.

Tentatively, the Speed Forces reaches out again to touch Eobard, a small trickle of heat at the base of his spine.

He shuts it out almost immediately.

Hesitantly, Cisco says, “Dr. McGee said something about you wanting to move Barry to S.T.A.R. labs…”?

“I do.” Eobard glances up at the young man. “I’m better equipped to sustain him for however long he’s in this coma.”
“I agree. And, I mean, at least our power won’t go out just about every time he flat-lines.”

For one terrifying moment, Eobard wonders if Cisco’s actually pieced two and two together.

Evidently not though, if Cisco’s casual shrug is anything to go by. “Then again, his hasn’t flat-lined once this week, so I think that’s a good sign. Also, Caitlin really wants to help, so once he’s moved she’ll finally be able to get her hands on him.”

Eobard blinks in surprise. “I’m sorry, what?”

Cisco grins. “You didn’t think we were going to abandon you, did you?”

“It’s never been a question of loyalty,” Eobard replies. “Many of my other employees are still technically working for me, but FEMA’s made it clear that no one is allowed to carry out their research at our facility anymore. Tina can find a place for you, if you’re interested, but I can’t—”

“I’m just going to stop you right there,” Cisco says, holding up a hand to silence him. “If FEMA is too chicken to venture into S.T.A.R. labs to physically confiscate my toys, I’m going to play with them to my heart’s content. And besides,” Cisco gaze shifts to Barry, “I want to be there when he wakes up. He’s going to need someone other than his father to help him back on his feet.”

“I…I understand.” Which he really doesn’t, because he never expected this level of support from any of his employees, let alone these two. “Thank you, Cisco. Really.”

“No problem.”

“Speaking of fathers, though…” Eobard clears his throat. “Do you have any idea how Henry Allen is holding up?”

Cisco frowns, staring down at his hands. “Despite being probably one of the most well behaved inmates at Iron Heights, they won’t let him out to visit Barry. I ran into Det. West here a couple of days ago, and from what he said, I don’t think Henry is taking this very well.”

Eobard wonders how upset the man must be with him right now, considering that Henry probably isn’t expecting Barry to wake up any time soon. So far as Mr. Allen knows, Barry’s as good as dead because of him.

“I see,” he says.

“Don’t worry about that now,” Cisco tries to assure him. “Just, you know, get through rehab so we can take you home already. I’m sure Caitlin can figure out how we should set Barry up at S.T.A.R. Labs. We’ll get this done one small step at a time.”

“I know,” he murmurs, nerves putting a knot in his stomach.

Cisco touches his shoulder lightly. “Okay then, I’m just going to duck out and grab a cup of coffee. I’ll be back in ten.”

Eobard nods quietly in response.

Once Cisco disappears behind the hospital curtains, he lifts Barry’s hand up to rest against his cheek, warm to the touch and gently buzzing with life.

Solemnly, he closes his eyes and thinks of the trials that lie ahead.

~***~
They move him into the rehab facility across the street as soon as they can, teaching him the basics of life: how to get in and out of a chair, how to roll onto his stomach, how to maneuver his body in the shower or bath. It’s then that he lets the Speed Force have free reign again, eager to heal him fully so that he can leave and make preparations for Barry’s transfer. What’s left of the damage disappears in a day. He can feel his leg muscles spasming well before dinnertime, protesting the long period of disuse.

He’s careful to keep his recovery a secret though, asking Cisco to collect one of their motorized wheelchair prototypes from S.T.A.R. Labs when he’s ready to go. Caitlin helps him with Barry’s transfer, even going so far as to interview and hire two part time nurses to assist her with the boy’s daily care. There are dark circles around her eyes and she’s lost some weight since the accident, but she’s just as sensible as the day he first met her, shifting through Barry’s medical records with a keen eye as the hospital staff preps him for the move.

“I find it odd,” she says quietly, standing off to one side with Eobard and Iris West, “that it’s been almost two months since he’s been here and he hasn’t shown signs of muscular atrophy yet. They haven’t even had to apply splints to him once.”

“Splints?” Iris whispers.

“After a period of disuse, soft tissue can become fibrous and harden,” Eobard explains. “Muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints—they shorten and cause a semi-permanent deformation of the limbs that often requires orthopedic surgery to undo.”

“You would see something along the likes of curling at the wrists or bending at the elbows. Splints are usually applied to the joints to minimize this effect.” Caitlin elaborates. “Now, I know someone’s been coming in periodically to bend and stretch his arms and legs, but this is incredible…I’ll need to get in touch with his therapist.”

Eobard feels bad about answering Iris’s question now though, because the girl suddenly looks hopeful. “But that’s a good thing, isn’t it? I mean, he’ll be back on his feet sooner than most people when he wakes up, won’t he?”

“If he wakes up,” Caitlin replies. Almost immediately though she realizes her folly, giving Eobard a horrified look as she covers her mouth with her hand. “I’m sorry. I didn’t—”

“It’s okay,” he sighs. And really, no one can fault her for her blunt response. He imagines losing Ronnie probably killed something inside of her. Namely ‘hope’.

“I get it,” Iris says quietly. “I know that the longer he’s in a coma, the slimmer his chances of ever waking up again are, but…” she gestures at Barry with her hand, eyes glossy with unshed tears. “He’s been my best friend my whole life. He’s also the kindest and most compassionate person I know. I don’t understand why the hell he had to be the one struck by lightning.”

Iris doesn’t understand that this is really a gift, that the Speed Force probably couldn’t have chosen a better vessel in this day or age. Perhaps she will in time. That depends entirely on when Barry decides tells her his new secret—if he ever decides to tell her at all.

Eobard reaches over to take her hand in his own, giving it a comforting squeeze. “Barry is going to be in the best care at S.T.A.R. Labs. You know I’m going to do everything in my power to help him.”

“You don’t have to say it,” she chokes out, squeezing his hand back. “Barry’s your son. I know no one is hurt more right now than you or Henry.”
“You can’t measure pain,” he says. “Who’s to say your grief isn’t equal to my own?”

She smiles a little, still teary eyed and about ready to burst, but clearly she appreciates the sentiment. “Thank you,” she murmurs.

He lets her hand slip from his own, watching as she turns to stare at Barry. There’s something a little like love shining in her eyes now, although she must still be blind to it—or maybe not blind, per se, but she’s certainly prepared for it to die a slow death, the way love often does when two paramours are separated by forces beyond their control.

And he continues to watch it die, day by day, every time she slips into S.T.A.R. Labs to visit Barry. Once, she even kisses him, assuming that she is alone, that no one is monitoring the security cameras as she leans over to brush her lips briefly against his gently parted mouth. It’s a bitter kiss, a ‘goodbye’ kiss, and she really drives that message home when she comes in the next day to tell Barry that she’s seeing someone else now, some detective ‘pretty boy’ from the CCPD.

Eobard pities Barry. Pities Iris too, because clearly she has no idea how much that stupid boy adores her. She’s supposed to be his lightning rod, the element that grounds him. The Speed Force will continue to have a mind of its own when Barry wakes and he’ll need someone to help him focus it.

That focal point was always meant to be her.

Eobard sighs. He will, of course, teach Barry how to tame the beast. There will be a Flash, with or without Iris West. Barry will always be a hero and a champion and one of the strongest men to walk this earth…

Eobard will make sure of that.

~***~

Fourteen years, and only now does his patience wear thin.

He supposes it’s a lot like Christmas. You know it’s coming at the end of every year, but it isn’t until the last few days leading up to it that you truly feel the excitement bubbling up inside of you. Counting down the months left in Barry’s convalescing sleep is a similar affair. Gideon tells him that the boy should be out for approximately nine months, tops.

Eobard’s about ready to lose his mind after the first three.

He tries to keep busy in the meantime. FEMA does a review of what safety measures were taken during the particle accelerator’s construction and whether or not Eobard knew an explosion was likely to occur. Thankfully, Ronnie’s no longer alive to give his testimony and Hartley, who kept his internal investigation on the down low, has no recollection of his initial concerns. That just leaves Eobard’s word and the S.T.A.R. Lab’s modified safety records for FEMA to go by, both of which lead the public to believe that the meltdown could never have been anticipated.

Some people are still understandably upset—17 people died that night, after all—but the combined suffering of Harrison and Barry Wells is almost enough to quench their thirst for blood. At the end of the day, Eobard gets a slap on the hand in the form of a harshly written piece about the careless mien of scientists-made-entrepreneurs from the Citizen and a hazard sign stapled to the chain link fence surrounding S.T.A.R Labs. One of the holding facilities in Starling City, where many of his lab’s prototypes are being stored, also ends its leasing contract with him unexpectedly, but that’s pretty much the extent of it.

All in all, Eobard gets out of the situation relatively unscathed.
There are still a few things he has to worry about it the meantime—Hartley, for example, who disappears almost immediately upon his release from the hospital. The boy did get around to visiting Eobard while he was still in there though, once to chat about Barry and then again to say he was needed in Starling, that his parents were fighting tooth and nail to make sure he didn’t get his share of the inheritance from his late aunt. He looked so utterly miserable standing at the foot of Eobard’s bed, with his pale face and dark eyes, wincing every time Eobard raised his voice above a whisper. The boy had been fitted with some sort of implants to help with his tinnitus, but loud noises still bothered him, so much so that he covered his ears when he retreated into the bustling hallway, heading back to the quiet sanctuary of his room.

Eobard’s other problem comes in the shape of Felicity Smoak.

She’s one of the other big name players in the silver age of superheroes. Brilliant, ballsy, and braver than your average hacker—that’s her in a nutshell. She’s also due to die in the next couple of years, although Eobard can only speculate on that matter now. After all, Nora Allen was supposed to live until the ripe old age of 80 and look at how that turned out.

Felicity Smoak shows up out of the blue one day to visit Barry, talking in short nervous bursts, a little teary eyed and wringing her hands together as though she isn’t quite sure what to do with them. Since Eobard has no clue what role she’s supposed to play in the boy’s life, he doesn’t approach her himself, just watches her over the security cameras as she makes small talk with Caitlin and Cisco, asking what they intend to do with all of S.T.A.R. Labs’ prototypes now that they’ve been stranded in Starling City.

Removing his glasses, Eobard closes his eyes and rubs the bridge of his nose.

He’d almost forgotten about the warehouse.

“We’ll have to check the inventory one last time in person before we decide where to send everything,” Caitlin says after Felicity’s visit. “According to our records, just about everyone who stored anything there moved to Mercury Labs in the last couple of months. It should be relatively easy getting a hold of them through Dr. McGee.”

Pulling the lollipop out of his mouth, Cisco leans against the Cortex’s main console with his right hip and says, “Why? Technically, it’s all property of S.T.A.R. Labs. Do you really need their permission to move it?”

“Legally, we don’t.” Replacing his glasses, Eobard folds his hands behind his head and leans back in his chair. He’s just dying to stretch his legs. “But some of it is fairly dangerous equipment and I don’t want anyone touching it until we can figure out how to do so safely. Arthur Light, for example, built some bizarre weaponry that I confiscated from him after terminating his employment here. I stored his gun there with a handful of his other inventions.”

Cisco blinks. “He built a ‘gun’? …What kind of gun?”

“He said it was an energy ray…I think.” Eobard frowns. “Don’t ask me to explain it. He was crazy. Need I say more?”

“I want to see it.”

“What?”

“I want to see it—I mean, I could totally check through the inventory in record time. I’d be there and back in a day.”
Eobard lowers his arms. Actually…it would be kind of nice to be alone for a day or two.

Turning to look at Caitlin, Eobard says, “When was the last time you took a day off?”

Eyes widening, she points to herself uncertainly. “Wait, are you talking to me? I can’t leave. I have to watch Barry.”

“I don’t think Barry is going anywhere anytime soon,” Eobard replies, glancing over at his son’s bed on the other side of the console. “Besides, I think I can manage his nurses for a day.”

She opens her mouth in protest, but ultimately makes no objection at all. Eobard can tell that there’s a part of her that desperately wants to go, no matter how brief the escape. “I mean…if you think so, I suppose…”

Cisco pumps his fist up into the air. “Oh yeah—road trip!”

“No,” she snaps, startling both Eobard and Cisco. “We’re taking the train. I am not driving 600 miles there and back again in a day.”

Cisco shrugs, somewhat deflated. “Fine. Whatever. The train’s cool too…”

Satisfied, Caitlin smiles for the first time in months. “Okay then. I guess you and I are going to Starling City, Cisco. This shouldn’t take very long at all.”

Except it does.

In fact, it takes them three days in total, due to the fact that they are intercepted by some maniac wearing a half orange, half black mask in the S.T.A.R. Labs’ warehouse. Cisco swears over the phone that the man had every intention of killing them, but that he apparently disappeared into the night after nabbing a bio-transfuser.

Eobard knows who Deathstroke is, but what he plans on doing with a bio-transfuser of all things is beyond him.

Some sort of blood work, perhaps?

Clearly, Eobard needs to pay more attention to the news in Starling…

He doesn’t think anything of it at first. With Cisco and Caitlin occupied outside of Central, Eobard finally has a chance to stretch his legs, to walk freely as he works, to reach over comfortably as he cards his hand through Barry’s hair, wondering if the boy can still dream, given the state that he’s in.

“If your old self could only see you now…” he muses aloud. “I’m sure he’d be terrified. The last time you were unconscious in my company, I tried to carve out your heart.”

He’d certainly started, but a quick save by Gotham’s dark knight prevented Barry from becoming one of Edgar Allen Poe’s waking nightmares. Even then, a stab wound and fractured pelvis put the Flash out of commission for almost a week, giving Eobard more than enough time to slouch home and lick his own wounds. Infuriated as he was by his defeat, he was still in better condition than his greatest adversary.

Eobard shakes his head, perplexed by how he ever managed to think straight back then. His loathing of Barry Allen had hung around him like a fog, permeating his every thought and feeling. It fueled him and drained him in equal measures. It was…
It wasn’t the way he wanted to live anymore.

“I hated you—and I enjoyed hating you, because I think that hatred gave me definition.”

He runs his fingers through the boy’s hair again before stepping back, moving around to the other side of the bed so that he can adjust Barry’s glucose drip. If this experience has taught him anything, it’s that he was always wrong about the boy. After watching Barry grow all these years, he doesn’t know how he could ever come hate him like that again—not this Barry anyway.

Not his son.

When he’s satisfied with the IV, he turns back to Barry, resting both hands on the guard rail running along the side of the bed. He wishes he could be this open with is conscious son, that he didn’t have to keep all of this a secret anymore. “You’ve changed me though. Now I love you more than anyone else, Barry, and I want you to work with me, the way the old you blatantly refused once before.”

He leans forward then, eyeing Barry’s pale face and gently parted lips, the whisper of a breath passing soundlessly between them. “But make no mistake, I am still every bit the selfish man you once knew. I will abuse your weaknesses; I will use your emotions against you. I will even punish your friends if I have to, because there is nothing I won’t say or do to get what I want.”

If Barry is smart, he’ll surrender quickly. Eobard doesn’t necessarily want to hurt the others.

What he wants is a short battle and sound defeat.

What he wants is Barry to finally agree with him.

“Power and protection is what I offer to you in return,” he continues softly. “You’ll need both if you want to survive the monsters lurking in your future. They’re not half as civil as you and I. They won’t stop until you're dead.”

He reaches down to squeeze Barry’s hand, then pulls back away from the bed, walking across the room toward the main console.

Despite his dreams for the boy’s future, an image of two black beady eyes come unbidden to his mind, cold and soulless, drinking in everything before them like an endless void…

Thinking about them now sends a shiver down his tender spine.

~***~

Cisco and Caitlin return the next day, informing him that nothing appears to be missing from the warehouse, aside from the bio-transfuser, of course, and to hand him a vial of some blue fluorescent liquid.

Frowning, Eobard takes the vial from Cisco carefully and holds it up to the light. “I have no recollection of this. You found this at our facility?”

“It’s from Queen Consolidated actually,” Caitlin informs him. “Apparently someone is planning another terrorist attack on Starling City. Miss Smoak tells me that it’s probably going to be in the form of an angry mob of super-strengthened lunatics.”

Eobard stares at her, waiting for the punch line.

After a moment, he realizes she isn’t joking.
'Lunatic' doesn’t even begin to describe Slade Wilson…

“And this—” he says, waving the vial gently “—is what’s powering them?”

“No,” Cisco replies. “That’s the antidote. She asked if we could mass produce it and then ship it back to Starling, ASAP.”

“How much do they need?”

“I don’t know. At least thirty times whatever is in that vial. By ‘mob’, Caitlin means twenty or so Iron Heights escapees who are working for the same nut job who tried to kill us at the warehouse.”

Eobard winces. “I’m sorry. I should’ve never sent you two alone.”

“Pft,” Cisco huffs, grinning. “Are you kidding me? I found Dr. Light’s freaking ‘gun’ in all that mayhem and fired it off in that sucker’s face. I got a copy of the security feed, if you don’t believe me. You so totally need to see it.”

“Absolutely.”

Still grinning, Cisco swipes the vial from his hand and marches off to his work station.

It takes them a while to figure out the composition of this so-called antidote before they can produce more of it, but in a couple of weeks Cisco rings up someone from Queen Consolidated to inform them their order is almost ready. Either he or Caitlin will hand it off to a courier no later than the following afternoon.

Feeling somewhat satisfied that they’ve managed to do some good in the world after the whole particle accelerator fiasco, Cisco and Caitlin go out that night to celebrate with drinks. They invite Eobard along, of course, but he tells them he has other work to do, choosing instead to retreat to his vault the moment they leave the facility.

He’s actually busy going over the schematics of the pipeline, trying to figure out how much time it’ll take him to repair it on his own, when someone sets off the silent security alarm. Occasionally, Iris West or her father will drop by in the evening after they’ve finished work, but the screen Gideon suddenly pulls up in front of him only shows two men wearing ‘Queen Consolidated’ work jackets stepping off the elevator on the same level as the Cortex.

Apparently, S.T.A.R. Labs’ security system still isn’t working properly on the main floor.

Startled as he is by their visit, Eobard immediately jumps into his wheelchair to intercept them. When he eventually rolls off the elevator though he only finds one of the two men waiting patiently for him in the hallway. The other, Eobard assumes, has probably wandered off into the Cortex.

“Excuse me,” Eobard says, not bothering at all to hide his irritation. In his haste to get here, he’d forgotten his glasses in the vault. “We already called to say your order wouldn’t be ready until tomorrow. We were going to send a courier as soon as we finished.”

The man glances briefly over his shoulder down the hall, frowning. “Where is it?”

“Not on this level.” Lifting his hand to his wheelchair’s toggle, he starts rolling forward. “I have a patient in there, so if you’ve be so kind as to leave—”

“Patient?” the man asks, side stepping to block Eobard. “You mean your son, right?”
It takes Eobard a fraction of a second to figure out what exactly is going on here.

These must be Slade’s men.

Sure enough, the man then reaches behind himself to whip out a gun. He isn’t so crass as to aim directly at Eobard though, just holds it loosely at his side, an open threat. “We want you to scrap the old order, Dr. Wells. There’s something else we’d like you to work on now.”

“Some other serum, I suppose?” he replies drily. If he had to guess, he’d say Slade Wilson probably wants to continue expanding his army.

“If you don’t mind.”

“And you’re going to use my son as collateral so that I comply with your request?”

Smirking, the thug nods. “Knew you were smart.”

“I’m flattered.” Bracing his hands against the armrests of his chair, Eobard slowly rises to his feet. “But you really don’t know anything.”

For what it’s worth, the man’s shock only lasts a second or two before he levels the gun at Eobard’s face. Eobard tilts his head to the side just as a bullet whizzes past him, smiling as the man stares at him in sheer disbelief.

The man squeezes the trigger to fire again but Eobard is already sprinting forward, batting his arm aside. Not expecting the blow, the gun flies from the intruder’s hand, skidding to a halt a few feet away on the floor.

“I can understand the allure of enhanced strength,” Eobard says, “but the real secret of success lies in knowing where to hit.”

Before the man can move, Eobard makes a fist, extending his middle knuckle slightly before jabbing it into the soft spot between the highest point of the man’s jaw and his left ear.

There’s a loud popping sound as Eobard dislocates his jaw.

To his credit, the man doesn’t scream. Makes a weird high-pitched whimper though as he stumbles back a step, bending forward somewhat to cradle his face in his hand.

Eobard takes this opportunity then to yank the man’s head farther forward and down, tucking it under his arm before tensing his muscles. With a subtle twist, he snaps his neck.

The man dies in an instant.

God…

He’d forgotten how good this felt.

Feeling oddly satisfied with himself, Eobard lets the man slump lifelessly to the ground at his feet. Stepping over the body then, he strolls casually down the hall to the Cortex.

Sure enough, he finds the other intruder inside, leaning over Barry, examining the IV in the boy’s arm as though he can’t decide whether or not it’s safe to pull it out. He stares at it for a good long time before he finally notices Eobard in the corner of his eye, staring up then at the reportedly paraplegic man with no small amount of surprise. “But you’re—”
Eobard whips around the main console in the blink of the eye and grabs the second thug by the back of his neck. He yanks him downward too, although this time over Eobard’s knee, nose giving way with a sickening *crunch*.

Howling in pain, the man stumbles back, blood streaming down between the fingers of his raised hand.

“I don’t respond well to threats,” Eobard mutters. “Least of all when it concerns my child.”

The man drops his hand, curling the other into a fist at this side as he winds up to deliver a blow of his own. To any ordinary person, his reaction time is extraordinary, but Eobard’s so far gone into the Speed Force now that the man might as well be standing still. Honestly, it’s like facing off against a mannequin.

No fun at all.

Exasperated, Eobard delivers a swift kick up and under the man’s left armpit, tearing shoulder tendons and ligaments as he dislocates the offending limb. He gives the man a second to register the pain before he then takes a small step closer and punches his hand through his heart.

Blood spurts out between the man’s lips as the light slowly fades from his eyes. He twitches once before dying altogether.

Eobard pulls his hand out swiftly, letting his body drop to the floor as he inspects the splatters of blood on the front of his shirt. Thank god he’s wearing black today. For the life of him, he can’t remember how he’s supposed to wash that out…

He figures he’s done for the night though, so he can take his time cleaning up, but then his wristwatch chirps at him, a sign that Gideon absolutely needs to speak with him.

“Yes?” he says, wondering what the night holds in store for him now.

“Third intruder identified,” she replies, just as he hears the elevator doors pinging opening at the end of the hall. “Deathstroke the Terminator.”

The hairs of the back of his neck stand up straight. The heat rises on his face and neck.

Eobard’s so phenomenally pissed right now, he doesn’t know what to say.

He takes a moment to zip out of the Cortex and down the opposite end of the hall toward the stairwell, ducking briefly into the vault to slip into his suit. He already knows he’ll succeed in scaring Slade off tonight, but the last thing he wants is for the man to know his true identity.

He races back upstairs immediately afterwards, taking a brief detour into the Cortex to grab the second thug’s body before racing toward the elevator to greet the mercenary. He finds Slade decked out in his signature black and orange suit, mask on, obviously baffled to see one of his men lying dead on the ground if the way he’s crouched down and examining the fallen soldier is anything to go by.

Skidding to a halt, Eobard uses the momentum to hurl thug number 2 at his uninvited guest.

Under normal circumstance, he doubts Slade would’ve had any difficulty dodging the attack. Up against a speedster though, he doesn’t even see Eobard before the body collides with him, hitting him so hard it sends him skidding across the floor and into the far wall.
From where he’s standing, Eobard can hear him wheezing for breathe.

“Slade Wilson,” his hisses, voice vibrating, eyes glowing red.

Slade isn’t one for chit chat though, raising a gun and firing off a shot before he even has a chance to get his breathing under control. Eobard side steps deftly and then dashes forward, grabbing the man by his throat to prop him up on his feet.

“I could care less what you do to Oliver Queen,” Eobard mutters, leaning in close. At this distance, he can see Slade’s one good eye widen behind his mask, evidently surprised by Eobard’s show of knowledge. “Bartholomew Wells is mine.”

“Heh,” the man laughs.

Slade obviously thinks him a fool, but Eobard’s learned well enough from his many battles with the Flash to never hold anyone this close and expect them not to take another shot at you. Quite literally, in this situation. He only just reaches down with his free hand in time to grab Slade by the wrist, slowly crushing the joint until the mercenary drops the other gun in his hand.

Irritated, Eobard spins sharply around, hoisting Slade up and over his shoulder as he goes. Super speed does not always equate to super strength, but by tapping a little into the Speed Force as he pivots, he’s able to toss Slade so far down the hallway that he hits the first curve in the wall and leaves a sizeable dent the metal panel.

Not one to be so easily defeated though, Slade struggles to his feet, groaning.

Once he’s managed to stand again, Eobard zips up in front of him, less than an arm’s length away, close enough that he can gouge Slade’s heart out if he so desires.

Instead, he lowers his voice and says, “This is your only warning.”

Slade tilts his head back slightly, chest heaving. He’s probably just as angry as he is hurt, but common sense wins the day when he eventually says, “I don’t give a damn about the kid. I just want to destroy the antidote his father is working on.”

Eobard crooks his head to one side, considering.

Then he grabs Slade by one of his many harnesses and drags him outside.

Once he’s past the chain link fence, he tosses the man onto the ground. Gentler than he has before, but Slade still has to struggle to get back on his feet.

“No,” he says.

Slade shouts something at him then, but Eobard is already gone, racing back into the building to collect the two other men, one at a time, which he then deposits at Slade’s feet.

“So far as the world is concerned, you were never in Central City tonight. You can destroy the antidote when it arrives in Starling City.”

Frustrated, the mercenary clenches his fists. “Give me a second, devil, then we’ll settle this once and for all.”

“Are you sure you can handle that?”
“Enhanced strength isn’t the only power *mirakuru* has to offer.”

Eobard moves in close again. “*I know.*” He distinctly turns his head down, waiting for Slade to follow his line of sight to the gaping hole in the second man’s chest. “*You heal faster than the average man. But if I tear out your spine, do you suppose it will grow back again?*”

Slade is silent for a long moment, calculating.

Eventually, he looks back up at Eobard and says, “What the hell *are* you?”

Eobard almost laughs. “*Haven’t you heard? I’m the fastest man alive.*”

Without further ado, he then disappears back inside.

He watches Slade for a long time afterward on the security cameras. The man paces back and forth outside for a short while, divided on whether he should take Eobard’s threat to heart or try to break into the building again. Slade’s always been a clever fellow though, so Eobard’s not entirely surprised when a truck arrives a few minutes later to pick up both the mercenary and his two dead companions.

Eobard knows that he’s made a powerful enemy tonight, but if the Arrow is half the man the history books make him out to be, Slade Wilson won’t be in the game for much longer anyway. Chances of him showing up in Central City again are slim.

Satisfied with the way things turned out given his lack of practice, and oddly energized after having indulged in his old habit again, Eobard slowly strips out of his suit and slips back into his civilian clothes. Affectionately, he hangs his uniform back on its stand, then wipes the security feed from tonight’s impromptu battle and joins his son in the Cortex.

With any luck, someday Barry will become something of a speed demon himself.

After all, there’s so much a man can accomplish once he learns the art of fear…

**Chapter End Notes**

A/N: *le gasp* I know. It’s short. *But* Barry’s going to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed next chapter, so hopefully that makes up for it. Also, you’re finally going to see Hartley and Iris in the same room together. Exciting times!

**Fun Facts:**

(1) Defibrillators: Despite what TV shows and movies lead most people to believe, they don’t actually ‘start’ the heart, per se. They’re designed to apply an electric current that interrupts the chaotic (and often fatal) rhythm of the heart, but this isn’t done until there already *is* a rhythm to work with. That’s why chest compressions are usually required to get the organ pumping again first.

(2) I debated for a long time whether or not Eobard ever actually broke his back in the show or if he faked it all along. With Grodd’s help, he could probably brainwash EMS personnel into *believing* he was injured in the explosion, but I imagine that if Joe went snooping into his past he might find no medical records to suggest Eobard was ever admitted to the hospital in the first place. Given how arrogant he, I therefore wouldn’t
put it past Eobard to believe he could snap his spine and then be back on his feet again in a couple of weeks. At the very least, he’d had the X-rays to prove his injuries were real.

(3) …Having said all that, my knowledge of spinal injuries stems from what my friend has told me (she’s a physiotherapist at a hospital) and what I could find posted on forums for people recovering from such injuries online. Long story short, I’m probably not 100% accurate in the Eobard’s whole ordeal, so I completely understand if you know better. I’m just going to say that there are some seriously sad stories floating around on the internet today and that I bawled like a little baby while reading a handful of them. I consider myself very fortunate that I can walk… :(.

(4) …And also on that same note: as creepy as this sounds, Barry Allen really did break Eobard’s neck in the comics, the only difference here being that injury killed him immediately. Eobard eventually gets resurrected (pft, of course…), but I’m just going to pretend that the injury didn’t outright kill him. *does some hand waving of her own*

(5) ‘…black beady eyes…’: which is Zoom. Whom I hate. With a burning passion. It seemed as though Eobard recognized Jay Garrick’s helmet when it came through the wormhole in the season finale, so I’m just assuming he knows Zoom too. Maybe not ‘Earth-2’ Zoom, but if there are infinite Earths, I’m betting Eobard’s either visited one himself or had to deal with someone from another world at one time or another. That man sure has an interesting life…

(6) Slade Wilson: When I first watched Arrow it was actually after I had watched the first seven or eight episodes of The Flash. I really found it weird then that Slade was such a hands-on and proactive guy, but that he made no attempt to stop S.T.A.R. Labs from producing more of the mirakuru antidote after Felicity got her hands on it. He just kind of killed the courier when he got to Starling (and failed to steal the antidote anyway, so, you know, smarten up, Slade).

(7) Funny side note: I accidentally clicked on ‘bookmarks’ instead of ‘comments’ for this story the other day and took a gander at the list. Someone wrote ‘family values’ as a pseudo tag. I don’t know why, but it’s killing me. In a good way though. *keels over laughing* I really love you guys…
A/N: Sorry, guys. Tumblr high-jacked my brain for a while. I think I spewed out almost 50,000 words of randomness on AO3 as a result…

*bury her face in her hands*

Anyhow—this chapter was, originally, almost one hundred pages long. However, because it had no foreseeable end in sight, I decided to look for a more natural break earlier on so that I could at least give you guys an earlier update. If anything about it looks off—words, grammar, sentence structure, etc.—please do not hesitate to drop me a note.

Also, thank you for your incredible patience, my dears. If you hate my guts right now for the incredible wait, I completely understand.

Chapter warning: One of the characters briefly has suicidal thoughts. Only for this chapter though and I think right off the bat you’ll understand why…

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Chess is all about getting the king into check, you see. It's about killing the father. I would say that chess has more to do with the art of murder than it does with the art of war.” — Arturo Pérez-Reverte, The Flanders Panel

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This meeting between them is long overdue.

Eobard realizes he should’ve visited months ago, but between the weeks he spent in the hospital and the time it took to deal with the state of limbo both Barry and S.T.A.R. Labs were currently in, he likes to pretend he had a valid excuse for putting this off as long as he did.

At the end of the day though, he knows he’s only been delaying the inevitable.

So he tries to tell himself that he’ll keep it brief. Just a quick in-and-out visit to discuss matters as they stand. But as he wheels himself into the room, he finally takes notice of the thin sheen of sweat on the palms of his hands and the small quiver in the pit of his stomach, an odd sense of weakness roiling in his gut. Part of this sensation he recognizes as fear.

The other, he recognizes as guilt.

He tells himself that there’s no reason he should feel this way, that he’s justified in any perceived wrongdoing, but that uneasiness only grows when he stops before the glass partition in the Visitation Wing and watches quietly as Henry Allen is led out into the room.
He thought he’d already seen Henry at his worst, but the prisoner that trudges up to the glass and drops heavily into the chair opposite Eobard is a truly broken man. There’s no substance to him anymore. Even the way in which he lifts the phone receiver to his ear is slow and lethargic, as though he barely has the strength to try.

Eobard can feel his heart pounding against his ribs.

He picks up the other receiver and swallows.

With a small nod, he says, “Henry.”

Henry nods his head minutely in return. Although his dull, dark eyes are fixed on Eobard, it feels as though the man is not entirely ‘all there’, like an essential part of him has retreated into the farthest recesses of his mind.

Eobard swallows again. Tries to think of something to say to coax the man back out from under the shadow of his depression, but Henry, surprisingly, beats him to the punch: “I know what you’re thinking.”

“Oh?” Eobard replies, although the word comes out softer than he intended.

“…I’m not angry at you.”

That roiling sensation suddenly returns in full force. He feels vaguely sick.

Why is he trembling?

Henry sighs, deep and baleful, like something’s sucking out his soul and he’s seconds away from surrendering it completely. “You know…I remember when I was first arrested. My cousin and his wife were Barry’s legal godparents, but they passed away in an accident earlier that year, so I…I had no idea what was going to happen to him.”

Eobard opens his mouth to say something, but slowly closes it again. He should’ve been better prepared for this. All this time he was expecting Henry’s ire, not these soft spoken words of understanding. He doesn’t know to deal with grief… Barry grieved for a long time, but the boy always had something to look forward to, and so his sorrow was something he learned to control himself. Henry, on the other hand, has absolutely nothing to keep him going. And Eobard…

Well, he has no idea what he’s supposed to do.

Henry pauses for a minute and drops his gaze. Eobard doesn’t know whether the man is waiting for some sort of response or if he’s just run out of steam. Eventually though, Henry starts again.

“When I found out they put him in the foster system, I was so…so afraid.” His voice wobbles a little here, an almost imperceptible quiver at the back of his throat. His eyes are red and glossy, like he’s about to cry. “But then you came along, and…and I remember a time when he still called you ‘Harrison’ instead of ‘dad’, but I know that he loved you from the start. You were always his hero… H-he had such a good life with you.”

“Henry…”

“Thank you,” he chokes out, clearly intent on saying all that has to be said before the last of his strength is gone. “F-for everything.”

Uneasy, Eobard tries to straighten up in his chair. Then he takes a deep breath and says, “He’s not…
he’s not dead, Henry.”

“Eight months,” the man says miserably. “Eight months, Harry. My little boy…I know…I k-know…”

Henry covers his mouth with his other hand and starts to cry in earnest.

The guard standing behind him shifts uncomfortably from one foot to the other, making eye contact with Eobard briefly before averting his gaze.

Eobard wants to tell him that Barry’s physical condition looks promising despite the time he’s spent in a coma, but Henry is a doctor. He knows the statistics—knows that at this point there’s only a 10% chance Barry will wake up at all tomorrow morning and an almost 60% chance he’ll be dead by sunrise. And every day he spends within this unnatural slumber, the prognosis only worsens…

Henry has every right to believe he’ll never see his son again. He knows that even if Barry did miraculously pull through, most people who’ve been comatose for this long never regain their full cognitive abilities. So far as Henry is aware, Barry’s old life is well and truly over.

And it is…

But it’ll be better than before. Better than anything Henry could’ve ever hoped for his son, because very soon Barry will have his first conscious brush with the speed force and he will become something much more than just a mortal man. He will be a god.

He will be Eobard Thawne’s equal.

“Henry,” he says softly. “It’s not over yet.”

The man is staring directly at him but Eobard doesn’t know if Henry is really listening to him anymore. Tears are streaming silently down his face, rolling under his chin and dripping onto the front of his faded prison uniform, as though he’s finally reached the point of no return.

Eobard has never wanted to run so far in his entire life.

“Thank you,” Henry echoes again, “for having faith in me…for having faith in Barry.”

“Henry—”

“I need to go,” he interjects, the tone of voice completely dead. “We’ll talk again…soon.”

Eobard doesn’t try to fight him on that. Just nods, because he doesn’t know what he could possibly say to fill the void between them. Henry’s resigned to Barry’s apparent fate and Eobard…

Well, Eobard has one more month to wait before he can stop pretending that his son’s life is over. It feels like a small eternity from where he’s standing right now, even though he’s waited even longer to get the goddamn particle accelerator up and running.

God, he’s so tired of waiting…

Eventually, Henry bids him goodbye and rises from his seat, led out of the Visitation room by the young guard.

Eobard waits until he’s out of sight before he turns his wheelchair around and rolls into the hallway. Another young guard is standing there, holding the door open for him as he passes through, so Eobard turns to him and asks, “Do you know Henry Allen? Personally, I mean.”
The kid smiles. “Yeah, he’s…actually, he’s a pretty nice guy. One of the easiest prisoners to deal with, I find.”

“When he found out about his son, was he…” Eobard scratches behind his ear, glancing up and down the hallway quickly to make sure no one is within earshot, “…was he ever put on watch for…”?

The kid drops his gaze to the floor, clearly uncomfortable with the question. “I’m sorry, I’m not supposed to discuss—”

“Please?” Eobard asks, putting more emphasis on that single word than he normally would. If pity doesn’t win him any points, intimidation usually does the trick. “I’m family. I should’ve been informed if he was acting suicidal.”

“We couldn’t reach you when you were in the hospital.” The young man replies. Then he winces, realizing his little slip. “So…yeah. We watched him for a while. But rest assured, he’s doing much better now.”

“Thank you,” Eobard sighs. “That’s all I needed to hear.”

“You’re welcome,” the guy murmurs, mildly upset, before he gives Eobard a small wave and walks away.

Eobard waits until he’s gone before he slowly rolls down the length of the hallway, wondering for the first time since the night that particle accelerator went off what sort of hell Henry went through when he found out about his son…

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“There is something very wrong with this city,” Caitlin mutters as she turns down the volume of the newsfeed on the flat screen tv above Barry’s bed. The reporter, a young blond woman standing across the street from one of the east side banks, is going over the details of a recent robbery, one which had apparently been accompanied by an isolated hailstorm. It’d shattered the skylight windows above the main entranceway of the building and injured twelve people inside before almost immediately frizzling out of existence.

Kicking his legs up onto the main console desk, Cisco pulls another twizzler strand from the bag on his lap and bites off the end. “Yeah, this definitely isn’t the first time we’ve heard reports of some seriously bizarre robbery or murder…”

Simultaneously, both of Eobard’s employees stare at him out of their corner of their eyes.

He’s pretending to read over Barry’s most recent medical report, but they know he can hear them, so he hooks the clipboard onto the side of his son’s bed and folds his hands together over his lap, frowning in careful contemplation. “We’ve already discussed this. I’m well aware of the unknown energies that were likely dispersed throughout the city after the explosion, but knowing that doesn’t help us.”

“Dude,” Cisco says, grinning at him over the monitors. “What if the explosion created people with, I don’t know…abilities? There’s already been one other weather-related robbery in Central City. What if there’s some weirdo who can generate hailstorms at will?”

Eobard gives him a blank stare. “That…would be truly awful.”

“But not impossible,” Caitlin clarifies, as though checking that her boss really is on board with what
they are suggesting. As though to emphasis her point, she wanders over to Barry’s prone figure and pulls his bed sheet down to his hips.

Barry’s naked from the waist up because he tends to flat line whenever he gets too hot, although Caitlin’s already clued into the fact that maybe his heart is simply beating too fast to register properly on an EKG. Eobard’s finally openly conceded to her theory, but only because he’s no longer concerned with hiding the truth from them.

After all, they’ll be seeing the magic first hand soon enough.

“He looks as though he’s developing abs,” Caitlin announces, flustered. “*How?* He didn’t have them when we transferred him here. I’ve given him enough sponge baths to know.”

Eobard shrugs.

She frowns at him, confused. “You’re…you don’t look too concerned.”

“Maybe I’m just being hopelessly optimistic,” Eobard replies, gesturing vaguely to the other screen above Barry’s head, the one recording his neurological activity. They’ve gotten some weird readouts in the last couple of weeks, but there’s far more activity in his frontal lobe today, as though he were genuinely dreaming. “I think maybe he’s almost ready to wake up.”

He knows that Caitlin usually rolls her eyes at him behind his back whenever he talks about the day Barry’s coma will come to an end, but she’s too excited by the readouts this time to give him one of *those* looks. Already she’s pulled out her pen light, leaning over Barry to flash it in his eyes. “Cisco, put some music on.”

“But you said—”

“Something *other* than Wicked, please.”

Chuckling, Cisco kicks his feet off the console and leans forward to scroll through the playlist on his computer. “Uh…how about Green Day? Barry likes Green Day.”

“Whatever,” she snaps, stepping back with a sigh. Obviously, she’s not getting the response she was hoping for, but her eyes flicker back up to the screen, still seemingly mystified. “This is what I’m talking about. He’s not…he’s not getting worse. He’s getting better—much better… What do you think is going on?”

Eobard shakes his head. “The storm that put Barry in this coma was seeded by the particle accelerator. We won’t know for sure until he wakes up, but it is possible that he’s one of these…”

He glances over his shoulder at Cisco. “What did you call them?”

“Haven’t had a chance to come up a cool name yet,” Cisco replies, gradually turning the volume up on his music. “*How about…*meta-humans?”

Caitlin arches an eyebrow at him.

Eobard smiles coyly. “I like it.”

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He’s not sure why, but he makes a habit of visiting Henry on a regular basis during the last month of Barry’s coma. He knows that this is due mostly in part to the persistence of his own guilt, because he understands that Henry is an admirable man undeserving of his punishment, although a considerable
part of this is also due to his anger, the most galvanizing emotion of all—anger at the fact that Henry would ever contemplate committing suicide when both Barry and Eobard needed him most, albeit for entirely different reasons: for Barry, as yet another pillar of support as he grew into his new mantle as a hero; and for Eobard, well…

Henry Allen is the best bit of leverage Eobard will ever have in the 21st century.

The man is no mere pawn. No…Henry is the king, Eobard’s most coveted piece, one which must be perpetually kept in check. There’s nowhere Henry can run in Iron Heights, always available for a surprise visit from the man in the yellow suit should Barry make one wrong move in the coming months…

Perhaps the only other person who comes close to Henry’s level of importance in Barry’s life is Iris West, although that might change in this timeline depending on how forward Barry is now with his true feelings.

“I know you’re a busy man, Harry—you don’t have to visit me if you haven’t got the time,” Henry says the next time he sees Eobard. He’s in a much healthier state of mind today—more focused and a little less pale, but Eobard’s not about to take any chances by leaving Henry alone to his own devices for too long. After all, he knows well enough how looks can be deceiving.

“You’re very important to me,” Eobard replies, receiver cradled comfortably against his right ear as Henry stares at him quizzically through the glass. “More so than you probably understand.”

Henry looks down, ashamed. “I…yeah, I guess. I’m just saying, if you ever don’t have the time—”

“We share a son,” Eobard interjects. “Busy as I might be, I will always have time for you.”

Henry gives him a look of uncertainty, as though he doubts to his own self-worth, but slowly his features relax as he comes to accept the fact that there’s no use arguing with a man like Eobard Thawne. “Thank you…”

Eobard smiles.

Then he leans back in his chair as comfortably as he can without moving his legs and begins their conversation in earnest by commenting on the weather.

~***~

Barry’s condition continues to improve.

Gradually, the muscles in his arms and legs become more pronounced. He still cuts a remarkably slim figure, but it’s pretty clear to the three of them that Barry is undergoing much more than just a complete reversal of his injuries. So much so, that Caitlin freaks out a little after realizing Barry’s gained a little weight, which is odd, considering she hasn’t changed his diet.

“He’s steadily been getting…” She opens her hands and closes them repeatedly, as though physically grasping for the right words, “…heavier? Not ‘fatter’, per se, it’s just that his muscles are bulking up more. I thought the abs were weird, but this is…”

“So cool,” Cisco says under his breath, then clears his throat when he realizes both Eobard and Caitlin are staring him. “I mean—not cool. What if he just…continues growing, until he’s nothing more than a hulking mound of muscle?”

Eobard gives him a dry look. “Thank you for that visual.”
“I don’t know what to do,” Caitlin murmurs, looking small and lost and moderately horrified. “What if he develops hypertrophic cardiomyopathy? His heart’s a muscle too, Cisco. This could very well be the beginning of the end for him.”

“He’s getting better,” Cisco says in all sincerity, giving her a sympathetic look. “He has to. He’s…”

“I never thought I would ever wind up treating a friend like one of my science experiments…” Miserably, she glances up at the vitals on the screen above Barry’s head. Then she pivots away suddenly, walking briskly toward the door. “I’m sorry, guys. I just—I’m going to grab a coffee.”

Cisco moves as though to take up after her, but is halted by the Eobard’s hand on his arm. When he opens his mouth to protest, Eobard cuts in with a whispered: “Give her some space.”

“But she’s—”

“This is about much more than just Barry.”

Cisco grimaces in disagreement, but quickly relents, slowly sinking back into his chair. “I really do think Barry’s going to pull through this. She’s going to save him.”

“That’s not the way she sees it,” Eobard says quietly. “She lost Ronnie in an instant. She’s losing Barry now too, only at a much slower pace. Because of the particle accelerator, Caitlin has the unique pleasure of experiencing death in its many forms.”

“Lucky girl,” Cisco mutters. “She’s lightened up a bit since the explosion, but she’s still a little distant. I feel like I’m one good hear-to-heart conversation away from breaking through her icy exterior.”

Eobard had to applaud him. The boy had a far greater deal of empathy than Eobard could ever hope to achieve, because here Eobard was, stressing over the fact that he had no idea how to deal with Henry, whom he’s known personally for over a decade, while Cisco’s slowly been coaxing the once stern Dr. Snow out of her frigid shell.

“She’s fortunate to count you among her friends, Cisco.”

“You think so?” Cisco asked, almost bashful. Then he frowns in consideration. “I’m sorry. Sometimes I forget that you’re grieving too. You just have a way of…I don’t know, keeping a level head.”

“Everyone grieves in their own way. I just prefer to do so in private.”

“You don’t have to cry by yourself,” Cisco offers quietly. “I’m always free for a chat.”

Eobard gives him a small, tired smile. “I don’t really cry all that much, Cisco.”

He just gets angry.

~***~

And afraid.

His nightmares have become more frequent since the explosion. At first, he attributed the sharp increase to his broken back. Pain had a way of playing with a man’s mind, after all, but as time progressed the nightmares continued, both in the dead of night and during those few rare moments when he nodded off at work, exhausted from all the extra hours he spent at S.T.A.R. Labs repairing
the particle accelerator behind his employees’ backs.

Like the others, today’s vision creeps up on him completely unaware. One moment, he’s sitting at Cisco’s workbench in the storage room, looking for the boy’s tool kit—the next, he’s lounging on the living room couch in the old apartment he once shared with Barry. It’s dark in the room, the only illumination being the eerie blue glow of the muted television screen, and it’s deathly quiet tonight, somehow missing the familiar sounds of the bustling city…

Barry is curled up beside him, fast asleep, wedged comfortably under Eobard’s right arm. A glance at the clock above the television tells him it’s almost 3 o’clock in the morning, well past the boy’s bedtime.

His back hurts, so he shifts his weight—which, in turn, jostles Barry. But it doesn’t rouse the boy. Instead, Barry’s head drops to Eobard’s lap, weightless in his lethargy, like a rag doll. Or something dead.

Eobard touches his shoulder and gives the boy a gentle shake. When he gets no response, he shakes his son again and says, “You have to wake up now, Barry.”

The boy doesn’t move.

“…Barry?” He slips a hand under his son’s jaw, fear slowly creeping up his spine as he checks for a pulse. It’s there, he thinks, although that doesn’t explain why Barry is unresponsive. So Eobard shakes him a little harder, trying to keep himself calm. “You have to get up now, Barry…Barry. You have to—”

He’s startled awake by the high-pitched trill of his cellphone.

Leaning the way he is, with his elbow braced against the armrest of his wheelchair and his fist tucked up against his cheek, his dislodges his glasses by the sudden jolt, knocking them to the floor at his feet. It takes him a second then to get his bearings before he finally answers his phone with a curt, “Hello?”

“Dr. Wells, get down to the Cortex, like, right now.”

“Cisco, I—”

“He’s awake! And he’s—whoa, buddy, do not try to get up. Your dad’s going to be here in—”

“Cisco?” Eobard asks again, hopeful, but then the line goes dead.

Barry is awake…

Barry is awake.

~***~

In his excitement, he nearly forgets his glasses.

Stupid, he knows, but this is a project that was fourteen years in the making, a dream that took a far greater emotional investment than he once thought himself capable of, because today isn’t just the day that Barry wakes up. No…

This is the day Eobard Thawne meets the Flash.
The one that hasn’t yet been tainted by hatred, who isn’t cocky or miserable, but is rather an outstanding young man, molded by Eobard himself, both by his direct guidance and his more subtle influence. Eobard’s hero, partner, and protégé, all wrapped up in one…

And he has that same blinding smile, the one that crinkles the corner of his eyes and lights up his whole face, exactly as it did as a child. Eobard is once more the focus of that joyous expression as he enters the room, and it stirs something in the pit of his stomach, some new emotion between relief and yearning, a bitter happiness aged to perfection by the many months of separation.

But he almost forgets himself when he rolls to a halt before his son, because while the wait is finally over for him, it doesn’t take long before the wheelchair registers in Barry’s mind. Almost immediately then that light in his eyes begins to fade, smile twisting into a grimace as he turns to Cisco and says, “You said I was asleep for nine months.”

“Yeees?” Cisco replies sheepishly, confused.

“Barry—” Eobard starts to say, but then his son is staring at him again, eyes a little glossy with unshed tears.

“Have you been in a wheelchair all this time?” Barry asks. “Why are you in a wheelchair? Are you okay? What happened to your legs?”

“Barry,” Caitlin interjects this time, sounding firmer than Ramon. “Please—sit down.”

Barry opens his mouth as though to refuse, but Eobard chooses then to wheel himself a little closer and take one of the boy’s hands in his own, warm to the touch and thrumming with the Speed Force.

Barry stares down at their joined hands curiously. At first, Eobard wonders if the boy is alarmed, but either Barry doesn’t sense it the way he does or he’s been asleep too long to remember what touch itself feels like because he doesn’t say a word. Just tightens his grip on Eobard’s hand and gives his father this terribly say look, like the bottom of his world just fell out.

“Can you give us a minute?” Eobard says aloud, staring at Barry, but addressing his two employees.

Neither Caitlin nor Cisco needs to be told twice. They clear the room almost instantly as Eobard lets Barry’s hand slip from his grasp, before rolling around the main console to pull out a chair for his son.

Obediently, Barry trails after him. But instead of dropping into the seat, he leans down against the armrest of Eobard’s chair, bending awkwardly sideways to give him a hug.

Stunned, Eobard wraps his arms around the boy in return.

They don’t say anything for a long while. Eventually though, the awkward angle gets to be too much for Barry to withstand and he has to let go. Then he finally takes his seat, hand shaking as he runs it through his hair. His cheeks are wet. He looks utterly miserable “I’m so sorry.”

Eobard blinks in surprise. “What on earth do you have to be sorry for, Barry?”

“I was so excited when I first woke up. And scared, yeah…that too, but then I saw these—” he gestures to his stomach. Either Cisco or Caitlin had given him a S.T.A.R. Lab’s sweatshirt, but Eobard knows he’s referring to the abs “—and I thought I had just dodged the biggest bullet in my life, because my body wasn’t crippled from disuse, but then I look at you and…and…” Barry chokes here, so similar in his mannerisms to his biological father. “Why the hell are you in a wheelchair?”
It’s difficult empathizing with Barry’s despair when he himself is elated by Barry’s return, but he understands that there needs to be an adjustment period before he can truly celebrate.

There will be time enough to express the excitement bubbling under the surface of Eobard’s cool veneer later.

“Part of the foundation collapsed in the explosion,” Eobard replies, deciding then and there not to mince words. The sooner Barry faces these sobering facts, the better. “I broke my back on my way down to check the pipeline.”

Barry’s face contorts suddenly in horror, which then triggers a fresh batch of tears.

Seemingly embarrassed by his breakdown, Barry leans against the console, covering his eyes with one hand.

“It’s okay,” Eobard says softly, reaching over to take Barry’s other hand in his own again. “I’ve had plenty of time to come to terms with my injury. I’m okay—you’re okay. As long as I have you, I don’t need much of anything to make me happy.”

Barry glances up at him, still leaning against the console for support, red faced, but trying to smile for his father’s sake. “I’m sorry. You don’t deserve this.”

“I put my own son in a coma,” Eobard sighs. “I don’t deserve anything.”

Barry squeezes his hand. “Shut up. You didn’t know. This isn’t your fault.”

“And this isn’t your fault either, so please stop apologizing. You’re alive. Do you have any idea how happy Henry is going to be?”

The boy freezes then. A stray tears rolls down his face, the last hint of melancholy before it slowly gives way to shock. “Oh my god, my dad…”

“I’ll give Joe a call, see if he can pull any strings to get you into Iron Heights this afternoon. I don’t think Caitlin would mind giving you a ride.”

“She’s been caring for me all this time, huh?” That brings the shadow of a smile to Barry’s face. “Cisco stuck around too, I see.”

“S.T.A.R. Labs has been significantly downsized since the accident,” Eobard sighs. “But we’re still self-sufficient. I actually think I prefer it this way. Less hassle.”

Barry glances down at his legs, but doesn’t say anything about them. Instead, he mumbles, “If…If you’re okay, then I guess I’m okay too. I just…I think it’s going to take a while to get over the fact that I lost nine months of my life. After that lightning strike, I—I had the weirdest dream.”

“Dream?” Eobard inquires, genuinely curious.

“Yes…It only feels as though I’ve been out for an hour. This is—” he gestures to the screens above his bed, the ones showing the data from his last status report, “—this is impossible. I still don’t understand how I’m still alive…”

Eobard fiddles with the toggle on the armrest of his chair, slowly backing up before angling himself toward the door. “Let’s take a walk, shall we?”

At Barry’s disappointed look, he grins and adds, “No pun intended.”
He takes Barry to the floor just above the pipeline, to the spiraling catwalk that winds around the outside length of the track so that his son can stare over the railing at the wreckage down below. FEMA had offered a while ago to help clean the mess up, but only with the caveat that they would also have permission to dismantle the rest of collider in the process.

Naturally, Eobard declined.

“FEMA has classified us as a class 4 hazardous location,” Eobard explains as Barry continues to ogle the pipeline. “Seventeen people died as a consequence of the explosion and almost twice as many were injured. Roughly half of my former employees cut their losses and left while I was still in the hospital. The others, who are only a little less loyal than Caitlin and Cisco, asked that they continue their contracts with S.T.A.R. Labs at other facilities. Many are working under Tina for the time being; the remainder have been taken in by Ted.”

“In Sacramento?” Barry asks, baffled.

“He’s actually running the old facility outside of Central City now,” Eobard sighs. “More as a favour to me than for any personal interest of his own, I believe. He can’t tell me much, considering I’ve cut all ties with the military, but I think he’s running defense against Eiling.”

“He’d just love to get his hands on this place, wouldn’t he?” Barry mutters. But then his features soften and he smiles. “So, Ferguson’s back in town, huh? He’s been keeping you company?”

Eobard sighs.

“He…he hasn’t come at all?” Barry asks in utter disbelief.

“He’s tried,” Eobard replies. Then he gestures vaguely to his legs. “To be honest, I haven’t really been in the mood for visitors.”

“I’m sorry—I didn’t, I mean, I…” Wincing, Barry rubs the back of his neck. “It’s going to take some time to get used to all of this.”

Eobard waves away his concerns. “Anyhow…the night the particle accelerator went off, the energy from the detonation seeded a storm cloud, which, in turn, generated the lightning bolt that struck you. You were hospitalized immediately. However, while you were in the hospital, the building continuously experienced unexplainable power outages, so we took the opportunity then to move you here, where we could care for you personally at S.T.A.R. Labs. It wasn’t until after Caitlin had been able to look over your records that she realized the power outages coincided almost perfectly with every episode of cardiac arrest you experienced in the hospital.”

“That is…freakishly weird.”

“Oh, it gets weirder.” Eobard smiles, mesmerized by the miasma of emotions flittering across Barry’s face, though most overwhelming that of awe and fear. “You weren’t flat-lining at all, Barry. Your heart was simply moving too fast for the EKG to register it.”

Barry works his mouth wordlessly, then slowly closes it, brows furrowing in concern. He looks so small and confused—so open, waiting for his surrogate father to take the mysteries of his life and weave them together into a proper story, one which can be explained to him in easily digestible, logical bites.

Barry truly is the canvas upon which Eobard will rewrite history.
“You’re right,” the boy says faintly, “that is weirder.”

“We still don’t know why, but now that you’re awake we can run some tests, figure out what exactly is going on now with your physiology.”

“But…but maybe that can wait?” Barry asks, almost timidly, as though searching for permission. “I want to see my dad—and Iris. Oh my god…” His eyes widen marginally. “I need to see Iris…”

For a moment there, Eobard almost spills the beans about Iris’s mysterious lover, but instead he coughs awkwardly into his fist and says, “Yes, well, by all means, I’ll give Joe a call. Like I said earlier, I’m sure Caitlin would be more than happy to give you a lift.”

“Yes, please. I’ll be back as soon as I’m done,” Barry says, leaning forward suddenly to peck Eobard on the cheek. All too suddenly then, he is jogging down the hallway, body moving effortlessly, as though he hadn’t only just been bedridden for the better part of a year. Over his shoulder, he adds, “I promise!”

“Barry!” Eobard calls after him, because there’s other things they still need to discuss—like Barry’s new living situation—but already his son has disappeared, footsteps fading in the distance, just as impulsive as ever…

Eobard rolls his eyes.

Some things will never change.

~***~

He gives Joe a call almost immediately, although he has a hard time getting through the conversation, because Joe breaks down almost every minute to sob in relief. Which is understandable, given the situation, but Eobard’s having trouble sympathizing with the man when he feels so differently about Barry’s return to the waking world. He’s so exhausted by all these people openly grieving, when in reality he knows they should be elated. Barry is awake, after all.

Barry is going to be a hero.

Somehow—he doesn’t know how—he makes it through to the end of the call without losing his patience. Then he debates over whether or not he should watch Barry’s reunion with his father live via the security cameras he planted inside Iron Heights, but ultimately opts to watch the recording later. The last thing he needs right now is to see that mess of emotion…

He ends up spending most of the day mulling about the Cortex, watching Cisco as he wheels the gurney and other hospital equipment into one of the side offices while simultaneously pretending that the boy isn’t side-eyeing him the entire time.

Eventually though, Cisco finally musters the courage to say, “Shouldn’t we be afraid that he’ll…you know, relapse?”

“It’s a possibility,” Eobard cedes, although, really, he’s not that worried. Not about Barry relapsing, anyway. He does have other concerns though, like perhaps Barry accidentally phasing through a floor. “If anything happens, I’m sure Caitlin will call us.”

Cisco chuckles and shakes his head, then starts rolling one of the trolleys laden with Caitlin’s more expensive surgical equipment into the other room.

Eobard, meanwhile, rolls behind the main console and turns on one of the monitors, pulling up the
live feed of this morning’s news. He’s not really interested in the mundane comings and goings of Central City as it stands now, without its fledgling hero and the colourful plethora of villains that will one day declare themselves his enemies, but he finds himself oddly intrigued by the news reporter standing in front of the Gold City Bank today, gesturing to the many men and women currently being escorted out of the building by the police. Each of the civilians is bundled up under a gray shock blanket, hair wet and shivering, as though it wasn’t currently 75 degrees Fahrenheit outside.

Though perhaps the only thing more bizarre then their behaviour is the small child standing in the background, as equally as wet as his disgruntled mother, but looking utterly mystified by the fist-sized ball of hail he just picked up off the ground.

~***~

When Caitlin returns to S.T.A.R. Labs alone, Eobard’s mood takes a turn for the worse.

He doesn’t explode on her, per se, but she winces when she sees his face all the same because she can already guess why he’s upset.

“I tried giving him my phone, but he ran off before I could stop him,” she says in way of her defense, side-glancing Cisco where he’s awkwardly hovering in the far corner of the room, as though hoping he’ll stick around as back up. “He’s with Iris.”

“Do you know that for a fact, or...?” Eobard asks softly, dangerously.

She chews on her bottom lip for a second, a horrible habit she had almost successfully kicked when she had been with Ronnie, then says, “I saw them duck out the back of CC Jitters together. I waited a while, because I thought he would come back, but I think they left to see either his father or Detective West.”

Eobard closes his eyes and starts counting down from five...

He doesn’t know why, but his heart suddenly feels as though it’s beating a mile a minute. He shouldn’t be worried though, because nothing bad could possibly happen to Barry. The Crisis article hasn’t wavered once in all the time that Barry had been asleep, but he feels sick to his stomach now, and his lower back aches where Grodd snapped his spine, and he feels like...like...

“Dr. Wells?” Caitlin asks, voice laced with concern as she takes a hesitant step forward, cluing in to the fact that he is having some sort of panic attack—

—but he’s not the one having a panic attack. It’s the Speed Force actually, crying out to anyone who cares enough to listen, because something has changed. Another channel has finally been completed, kicked wide open by—

—Barry Allen, who enters the room in a bolt of light, skidding to a halt beside Eobard, semi-crouching, clinging to one of the wheelchair’s armrests as he smiles...

Smiles like the personification of pure unadulterated joy itself.

Caitlin screams.

Cisco drops the beakers in his hands, glass shattering into a hundred tiny pieces at his feet.

For one terrible moment, absolutely nobody makes a sound.

Then Eobard reaches out to lay his hand over Barry’s, smiling a little himself as he finally says, “You
have no idea how much I’ve missed you…”

~***~

Chapter End Notes

A/N: While I’m obviously going into great detail about the Pilot episode in this chapter (and the next), I’m going to try to stay away from regurgitating information verbatim from the other episodes in future chapters.

Anyhow, I sadly do not have any fun facts for this chapter…well, except maybe one:

(1) Eobard’s back: in the show, during the crossover episode between the Flash and Arrow concerning Kendra Sanders and Vandal Savage, Barry mentions that he can still sometimes feel where Oliver shot him in the back with his arrows. I imagine he, like Eobard, still feels some small measure of pain after his many injuries. It could be purely psychological, of course. Or it might not. I’ve written Eobard’s pain as mostly being psychological though…

Side note: If you want to send me a private message, I’m on tumblr now. You can find me at the following link: ladyofpride

PS: It’s 2am right now, so I realize there is probably a plethora of mistakes in this chapter, despite the number of times I’ve edited it so far. I will be checking it over again (and again and again…) to hopefully catch them later on.
The prodigal son returns - part two

Chapter Notes

A/N: *clears throat* So…I’m late again, aren’t I?

*collapses, sobbing at your feet* I’m so sorry!!!…On the bright side though, I’ve also written the last three chapters of the story (which we’re nowhere near at the moment, but inspiration strikes in the most curious ways, does it not…?)

Anyhow, I hope you enjoy this long overdue chapter~! All criticism is fair, so if you feel like giving me a tongue-lashing, I will completely understand.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hate so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.” - James Baldwin

~***~

Sitting on the edge of his old gurney, staring straight ahead at Caitlin’s trolley, Barry sighs and says, “Don’t do it, bro.”

Cisco, who’s standing at the other end of the small office, hands folded together behind his back—and from where Eobard is parked beside him, he can see the small rubber ball clutched in his right fist, the kind you can get for a quarter at the grocery store—gives Barry a weird look and laughs. “Do what, bro?”

“You always get a little stiff in the shoulders when you’re about to do something you probably shouldn’t,” Eobard replies.

“It’s very telling,” Barry adds.

“Hey,” Cisco protests, sounding both deeply offended and pleasantly surprised. “Your mind’s still pretty sharp for someone who’s been comatose for almost a year…What’s my middle name?”

“Paco.”

Grinning, Cisco starts bouncing on the balls on his feet like an excited two year old. “This is amazing, bro. You’re a bona-fide medical miracle! You’re like some kind of—”

He chucks the ball.

Barry’s attention is currently focused on Caitlin and the needle she’s lining up with one of the veins on his arm and therefore only notices the ball when it’s about a handbreadth away from his left temple. Eobard watches the scene unfold slowly, holding his breath as the proverbial switch flips inside Barry’s head.
The boy taps into his powers at the last possible moment, raising his hand to catch the ball before it can connect with his head, arm a blur as it whips through the air. “Hey!” he snaps, surprised.

Needle point hovering uncomfortably close to the crook of Barry’s other arm, Caitlin fixes one of her trademark glares on Cisco. “Ramén!”

“I’m sorry!” Cisco replies, raising his hands in mock surrender, although his apology would probably sound more sincere if he wasn’t current grinning like a fool. “I just—I had to, man. But I promise I won’t do it again.”

“He’s not a toy,” Eobard mutters, hiding his own fascination at Barry’s flawless catch behind his scowl. Cisco has the decency to look sufficiently cowed by his expression though, so he softens it marginally and sighs, “Think about what tests we should run him through next, and then maybe see if the old Ferris Air runway is available tomorrow. We’ll haul our monitors out there and watch him do a couple of laps first thing in the morning.”

Cisco’s face brightens again. Barry, on the other hand, gives him an odd look. “Why wait until tomorrow?”

“You need to slow down,” Caitlin explains, eyes focused on his arm as she collects the last sample of blood for her own tests. “We don’t want you lapsing into another coma.”

“And let’s not forget,” Eobard quietly interjects, “didn’t you want to see Henry today?”

Eyes widening, Barry at least has the sense to wait until Caitlin has extracted her needle before he jumps off the gurney. Rolling down the sleeve of his S.T.A.R. Labs sweatshirt, he begins frantically pacing across the room. “What time is it? I need to go. Like, now. They don’t allow visitors in Iron Heights past—”

“They’re willing to make an exception for you today,” Eobard sighs, waving his cell phone. “Joe just sent me a text. Take this with you—and Caitlin. If you collapse, she’s the one you’ll want to have on hand.”

“Oh, yeah…” Worrying his lower lip, Barry gives her a pathetic look. “I didn’t mean to ditch you earlier. Iris and I…we…”

Smirking, Caitlin goes about labelling the last vial of blood on her trolley. “No explanation necessary. Just let me store these and we’ll be on our way.”

“I’ll grab your coat,” he offers weakly, snatching the phone from Eobard’s outstretched hand. Then he darts out of the side office—at human speed, thankfully, so that Caitlin can follow close behind with her trolley.

“Promise me you’ll take it easy!” Eobard calls after him.

“I will—but really, I feel fine,” Barry replies before running through the Cortex and out into the hall.

Eobard takes off his glasses once his son is out of sight and rubs his eyes wearily. Barry doesn’t yet understand the number of calories he’ll burn through per second once he starts using his powers on a regular basis, but…

Oh well.

This is just one of the many lessons Barry will soon have to learn the hard way.
Satisfied, at least, that Barry has enough common sense to take Caitlin with him this time, Eobard plans on rolling down to the time vault to watch Barry’s visit with his father in private when Cisco suddenly turns to him and asks, “Tell me you’re at least a little freaked out by all of this.”

Surprised by the question, Eobard takes a moment to contemplate his answer before saying, “To be honest, I’m absolutely terrified.”

Apparently, Cisco was expecting him to say something else if the way his eyebrows shoot up toward his hairline are anything to go by. “Well…you certainly don’t look the part. Are you being sarcastic here, or are you actually scared?”

“No…if I was, he’d end up just where he is right now.” Cisco says with an exasperated sigh. “But I’m not. I really am terrified. Barry just woke from a nine month coma, seemingly unscathed. He shouldn’t be in such a perfect condition right now. So, yes…I’m am. Sooner or later, something’s got to give.”

“We’ll keep an eye on him,” Cisco promises, even though there’s no way he could hope to accomplish that. Barry can run in and out of a room before the average man can blink. Monitoring him now, even with his surveillance cameras, is going to be absolute hell. “Tomorrow, we’ll run a couple of tests and figure out where to go from there.”

“My thoughts exactly,” he sighs. And then something dawns on him. “I hate to burden you, but I need a favor.”

Cisco tilts his head curiously to one side. “Ask away.”

“I want you to promise me you’ll let me know if you think there’s anything off about him.” Eobard replies. “Mentally, physically, emotionally—and I mean anything. I realize Dr. Snow is his primary physician, but he’s my son. I want to know everything that’s going on with him.”

“But Barry wouldn’t keep secrets from you,” Cisco argues, grinning, although his smirk slowly dies as he realizes that this is not, in fact, the truth. “I mean, okay, maybe we were never 100% honest about some of the side projects, and maybe Barry told me about the fireworks he made in his youth—but he loves you. I can’t ever see him lying to you about something as important as his health.”

“Too spare me the grief, perhaps?” Eobard inquires, eyebrow crooked.

“Um…maybe?” Uncertainly, Cisco drops his gaze to his shoes. Knowing Barry as well as he does, he’s well enough aware that the boy would underplay an injury, physical or otherwise, to protect his friends and family from misery. “Yeah…I guess you’re right. But I’m willing to bet you anything he won’t. I don’t think he knows what to do with himself now that he’s…changed, so I’m sure the last thing he’ll want to do is keep a secret from us.”

“We’ll see.”

Cisco looks like he would like to argue with Eobard, but instead he nods in understanding. “I get it. You’re his dad. Being inordinately worried about him is part and parcel of the job. But don’t worry—I’ll keep you posted on him, I promise.”

The smile Eobard flashes him is genuine.

In the coming days, weeks, months—years?—once Barry has honed his skills to the point that Eobard is confident he can open a wormhole, Eobard will have to carefully craft the way in which he will reveal Barry’s destiny to him. But for as long as Eobard has been preparing for this day, and as cautious as he’s been in concealing his true identity, there’s no guarantee that Barry won’t discover the truth before Eobard is ready to share it with him.
It’s therefore crucial to keep a closer eye on Barry now more than he ever has before.

And he can think of no better way to do that then through one of his son’s closest friends.

“Thank you,” is Eobard’s soft response.

Cisco winks at him, then practically twirls on the spot before wandering off into the main hub of the Cortex. “On a happier note—if Barry’s going to be working out tomorrow, he’s going to need some kind of suit, one that won’t combust when he reaches his maximum speed. And I think I’ve got just the thing…”

Eobard allows himself a small smile, because he’s admittedly a little excited to see Barry in his classic tri polymer suit. It’s his second skin practically.

It’s just as much a part of the Flash as his super speed.

Except Cisco doesn’t immediately make a beeline for the suit where it’s draped over the mannequin in his little side office. Instead, he kneels down in front of one of his work benches and pulls out a large cardboard box. Eobard rolls up behind him and glances down inside just as Cisco pulls back the flaps.

Eobard immediately cracks a smile and tries to hide it behind his hand with a fake cough because, Jesus Christ…

Oblivious, Cisco whips out the red spandex unitard and holds it up against the light for inspection. “I went through something of a phase last year where I thought I could design sportswear… I’m not actually sure the phase ever ended, but whatever—I came up with this beaut at the peak of it, and if it works the way it’s intended, it won’t chaff when Barry runs.”

“I think…” Eobard says slowly, choosing his words carefully as he takes in Cisco’s proud expression. He honestly can’t tell if the boy has any idea how ridiculous Barry is going to look in this getup or if he’s just messing with Eobard right now. “…this will serve our purpose beautifully.”

“Awesome.” Smiling, Cisco folds it over his arm and continues rummaging through the box. “I could’ve sworn I also had a GoPro in here…”

Eager to return to his vault, Eobard turns his wheelchair away then and starts rolling toward the hall. “I’ll take Barry to Ferris Air around 9 o’clock tomorrow morning. I’ll see you then, Cisco.”

“Later, Dr. Wells,” the boy murmurs, still rummaging through his things as he begins humming softly to himself.

Eobard figures the boy must have some inkling that Barry is going to want to kill him once he sees the unitard

~***~

Much of Barry’s chat with his father goes about as smoothly as Eobard imagined.

Henry Allen was informed of Barry’s return to the world of the waking almost immediately after Eobard told Detective West, so the man knew to expect a visit. Even so, Henry looks completely shocked when the boy waltzes into the Visitation Room, eyes wide and mouth agape in the grainy, off-angle shot of one of Eobard’s many surveillance cameras. It’s comical really—except Henry starts to cry, which triggers Barry’s own waterworks, and then they have a particularly boring discussion about how happy Henry is to see Barry up and about again with such vim and vigor.
considering he’d been a vegetable for the better part of a year.

And then their conversation takes a peculiar turn when Barry says, “You didn’t kill mom... You know I knew that, right?”

Henry tilts his head to one side and smiles, “You believing me is all I need.”

“But you deserve more,” Barry replies, leaning forward onto his elbows. There’s a gentle vibration in the way he huffs into the phone receiver, either from excitement or nerves. “You shouldn’t be the one sitting on that side of the glass.”

Henry sighs. He’s all too familiar with this little song and dance, but his smile doesn’t waver. Clearly, he’s just glad to see his son again. “Barry...there are just some things in life that are beyond our control. You have to learn to yield to them if you want to move forward.”

“But we can catch him,” Barry says, ever so softly, face crumpling—and for a moment there Eobard wonders if the boy is about to let Henry in on his secret. Which would be disastrous, considering Eobard is not the only one recording their conversation right now—and, frankly, a little disappointing, seeing that Barry never thought to consult Eobard on the matter first. But Barry quickly demonstrates that he has a better presence of mind when he licks his lips and murmurs, “I can’t explain it right now, but I... I think I’ve found someone like him, someone who can potentially stand up to him.”

“Barry...”

“Dad, it’s—”

“Shh. It’s... it’s okay, Barry.” When Barry drops his gaze, Henry reaches forward and gently taps the glass between them. “We’ve talked about this. It’s time to let it go. You have to stop worrying about me, and live your life.”

“But—”

“You just got out of a coma, Barr. And in far better condition than most people. Take this opportunity to heal; to make yourself happy...”

“I am happy,” Barry replies weakly, having a hard time maintaining eye contact through his tears. “I would just be happier if you were exonerated.”

Realizing that they’re well on their way to arguing in circles now, Henry simply nods—then quickly takes the opportunity to change the topic. “I guess you woke up just in time to watch the World Series.” He says, “For some reason, I feel like the Giants are going to make it through to the end.”

“I haven’t been keeping up.” Barry admits quietly, trying to smile for his father’s sake, and they continue their conversation in much the same vein for the remainder of their visit: plenty of sports, with occasional awkward pauses to talk about Henry’s own health and the overall well-being of everyone else in Barry’s life—many of the things Eobard already knows.

Eobard’s therefore only half-listening by the time Barry’s visit is over. The guards generously let him have an extra thirty minutes past their usual visitation hours and promise to squeeze him onto the list for Saturday evening, which he readily agrees to. And even though both Barry and Henry are a little teary-eyed again when their time is up, Henry is overall visibly uplifted by their reunion, grinning to himself on his way out of the room and down the hall, until he’s beyond Eobard’s limited surveillance area, secure in knowing that his son’s has been given a second shot at life.
Eobard sighs.

He knows Barry’s main focus in life had always been to apprehend his mother’s murderer, but to see him fixate on this goal again so readily surprises even Eobard. He wonders, then, what Barry’s primary motivation for increasing his speed will be.

In the boy’s mind, this grand adventure he’s embarked on will undoubtedly end, of course, with Barry’s fantasy of finally catching the man in the lightning, but Eobard is more concerned by what might fuel him—justice for his mother, absolution for his father, or simply the satisfaction of exacting revenge on the man who snuffed out his happiness with one well-aimed jab of a kitchen knife? Having raised Barry himself—having seen, first hand, the level of his compassion, Eobard imagines that Barry’s main focus now is solely on his parents. But the Speed Force is divinity and disease all wrapped up in one, and any person, large or small, is subject to the temptation of abusing power once it’s been bestowed upon them, no matter their intentions.

The truth is, there is a subtle darkness creeping in the Speed Force. Eobard has been compelled by it on more than one occasion. It appears as a natural shadow at first, nothing more than a trick of the light beneath your feet—but then comes the tiny prick in the tender pad of your heel before its venom slowly takes its course, enhancing not only the natural abilities of the human body but all emotions as well. It intensifies every sliver of jealousy and hot bust of anger, seeding newfound obsessions and deepening those that have already taken root, a poison that cultivates the brain before slowly worming its way into the heart…

Eobard once wouldn’t have had it any other way.

He’d defined himself by his hatred for so long, and he knows that Barry will fall victim to his own hatred at some point in his time as a speedster. It’s inevitable, because the Flash he once knew was steadfast in his own ways and Barry has been haunted by the Reverse Flash all his life, so there will come a time when Barry will be tempted to hurt the ‘man in the lightning’ for no other reason than to see him squirm.

Eobard assumes so, anyway…The Flash he once knew was arrogant, and arrogance is merely a symptom of much darker thoughts.

As always, he will just have to wait and see what happens, then plan accordingly.

With any luck though, Barry might never turn out to be the man Eobard once knew…

~***~

Caitlin calls him on his office phone to inform him that Barry’s visit is over and to him ask where she should drop the boy off. Eobard tells her he’s already arranged to have someone take him home and that he would appreciate it if she delivered his son there. He’ll tell Barry the ‘bad news’ himself.

She thanks him quietly and hangs up—and then arrives a full twenty minutes later at his house than Eobard would’ve expected. He figures out why soon enough though when he opens his front door to find Barry standing there, two large pizza boxes balanced on one hand.

“Sorry—I’ve been starving all day.” Kicking the door shut behind him, Barry makes a beeline for the kitchen to deposit his dinner on the island counter. “Feel free to take some if you’re hungry. I’m not actually sure I’ll be able to eat both of these on my own.”

“I’m not, but thank you.” Twirling his wheelchair around, he trails after his son. “I take it the talk with your father went well?”
Barry pauses midway through opening the first box to give Eobard a sad look. “It did…in a way. He was happy to see me, but I can tell this past year has been hard on him. I haven’t seen him age that much since my mother died.”

“And did you tell him?” Eobard asks, gesturing vaguely to Barry. “About yourself, I mean?”

Taking a deep breath, Barry closes the pizza box and leans into the counter with his hip. “No…I wanted to, but I have no idea how I would do that without having him think that lightning bolt fried my brain. It’s not like I could do a lap around the room at super speed without freaking out the guards.” Agitated, Barry stares down at the back of his left hand, wiggling his fingers, frowning. Eobard imagines his sudden resurrection is a still a mystery even to Barry. “I broached the subject of the man in the lightning to him again and I can tell that worried him. If my dad finds out what I can do, he’ll only live in fear of the day I eventually hunt down my mother’s murderer.”

Eobard wheels himself a little closer, stomach roiling with nerves and excitement. He wants Barry to seek him out, but he wants his son to be more afraid than angry when he does. “That’s what you plan to do, is it? Hunt down the man in the lightning?”

Barry scrunches up his face in guilt, realizing only then that he let his secret slip. The boy had always been pretty lousy about hiding the truth. “I mean…maybe? I can move about as fast as him now. If I don’t take him down, who will?”

“But you’re not as fast as him,” Eobard snaps, not making any attempt to hide his own alarm at Barry’s proposal. He expected the boy to wait a while longer, to get a real feel for his powers first before realizing he could utilize them to track down his mortal enemy. “Barry, this man has been running for at least the last fourteen years. He’s had ample time to get a handle on his powers and he’s effectively used them on at least one occasion to get away with murder. Even if you are just as quick on your feet, you’d still be fighting a killer. Do you really want your death to be the evidence that finally exonerates your father?”

Barry opens his mouth, then immediately snaps it shut again, shifting uneasily against the counter. His gaze drops to the ground. “No, but…we can’t let him have all this power completely unchecked. Maybe when he realizes there’s someone who can take him on, he’ll get a good scare out of it?”

“And how do you plan on informing him of your existence?” Eobard mutters. “Are you going to hang a banner outside the CCPD?”

“…No.”

“Good…because I’m not outright telling you ‘no’, Barry, but I think you need to better understand these changes to your physiology long before you attempt to use your speed to fight this man—and don’t give me that look,” he sighs, referring to the kicked-puppy expression Barry has spent all his life refining. “You’ve never finished a fight in your life. Anytime someone pushed you too hard on the soccer field, Iris had to be the one to run to your rescue. I’ve seen that girl slam more faces into the dirt on your behalf than I can count on both hands.”

Barry cracks a grin at the mental image. “Well, okay, that’s kind of true…but this is going to be a thing, yeah? With your help, I want to prepare myself to bring this man to justice.”

Bracing against the armrests of his chair, Eobard adjusts himself uneasily in his seat, wishing suddenly that he could stretch his legs.

He’s still hesitant to say yes.
“Okay, I get it. Bad time to broach this subject. But—” Barry’s got that stupidly hopeful twinkle in his eye, like he knows it’ll only be a matter of time before he can convince Eobard that this is actually a good idea, “—once we’ve figured out what we’re dealing with here, we’ll talk about it again. Right now, I just want to eat something and catch up on what you’ve been doing lately and then head home.”

Eobard coughs nervously into his fist.

Barry cocks his head curiously to one side. “What?”

“Nothing. It’s just…you’re not going to like what I have to say.”

“About my dreams of becoming a vigilante?”

“About your ‘home’.”

Barry’s face falls. “You mean my apartment? Why would…”

“You’ve been in a coma for nine months,” Eobard reminds him. “We thought that even if you did wake up, you’d need assisted living, and since you were situated on the tenth storey of one of the crummiest apartment buildings in Central City…”

“But I loved my apartment,” he whimpers, shoulders sagging. “I mean, I get why you did it, but it was so close to the precinct…”

“You could probably run to work from here in under a minute.”

The corner of Barry’s mouth twitches in amusement. “I guess…”

“Although I’m sure you’d still wind up late.”

Barry tilts his head a little to the left in annoyance, reaching out blindly to flip open the top pizza box. “I’m not always late.”

“Oh, you most certainly are.”

Shaking his head, Barry finally turns his full attention to the pizza. Eobard can practically see the boy’s eyes glossing over, all concerns in life melting away as the primal part of his brain latches onto the sinful scent of triple cheese and pepperoni. Barry’s retort of ‘Am not’ is muffled around the first slice he stuffs into his mouth.

In three seconds flat, he moves on to the next one.

“Don’t forget to breath between bites,” Eobard chuckles. Watching Barry is making him hungry though, so he spins around and wanders off into the living room. “I left everything in your room the way it was before your coma, although the furniture from your old apartment is stacked up in the basement. You’re welcome to stay here for as long as you want.”

Eobard’s hair is ruffled by the sudden gust of wind that accompanies Barry as he dashes past him and dives headfirst onto the couch. Glancing over his shoulder, Eobard spots the now empty pizza boxes neatly crushed together on the counter, ready to get stuffed into the recycling bin.

“Are you sure this isn’t going to annoy you?” Barry asks as he tucks one of the couch pillows under his head, either unaware of the fact that he just inhaled his food in record time or too exhausted to care. The boy doesn’t know it yet, but he ate nowhere near enough to sustain himself until morning.
“I mean, I can control myself now, but it feels like I could explode at any minute. Not literally, but it’s…it’s…”

Eobard leans a little over to his left, elbow braced comfortably against the armrest of his chair. He knows Barry is trying to describe that tremendous swell of energy he now feels in every cell of his body, pushing both inwards and outwards simultaneously, practically screaming to break free. Eobard’s felt that way for decades so he’s come to think nothing much of it now, but hearing Barry’s own thoughts and feelings on the Speed Force makes it seem somehow new again. Pure, almost…

Although, God knows it’s anything but.

Staring silently up at the ceiling, squinting, as though he expects to find the answer written somewhere up there, it takes Barry a minute to figure out how to put his thoughts into words:

“It’s kind of…minty.”

Eobard almost chokes on his saliva, he’s so shocked by the boy’s response. He understands that everyone experiences life a little differently, but to hear someone describe this intimate connection with what is perhaps the most powerful force in the universe as minty is…well…”

Eobard can’t help himself.

He bursts out laughing.

Barry sighs, loud and long and utterly annoyed. “I struggled through each and every English Lit class in high school and you know that. Don’t make fun of me.”

Eobard would like to comply, but he’s laughing so hard now he can barely catch his breath.

Barry chucks the pillow at his head.

Eobard catches it, but just barely.

His son gives another long suffering sigh and turns over on the couch until he’s facing the back of it. Once Eobard can breathe again, he inches his wheelchair a little closer and pats the boy on his thigh.

“Barry…Barry, I’m sorry. I promise, I won’t laugh anymore.”

“…Liar.”

“Please.” Eobard clears his throat. He feels like he’s about to have another fit, but somehow he manages to keep his voice level as he says, “I want to know why you think it feels ‘minty’.”

“Go away.”

“Barry… Don’t be childish.”

The boy gives a petulant little huff air and then rolls over onto his back. He doesn’t look at his father, but Eobard still accepts his surrender for what it is. “Please, just…forget I said anything. I really don’t know how to describe it.”

“Barry, ‘minty’ is fine. It’s—” Now that he thinks about it, Barry’s choice of word is quite particular. “—rather descriptive, actually.”

Barry side-eyes him, like he’s not sure if Eobard is still mocking him, and then stares up at the ceiling again. “When I focus on it…it feels like I’m on fire. Like I’m burning up inside—but it’s kind of a cold burn. Sort of reminds me of extra minty gum. You know what I mean? The first couple of bites
are almost painful, but then the intensity of it suddenly dies down and it just feels…”

“Refreshing?” Eobard supplies, intrigued.

“Yeah—like I’m coming off the pain and tasting that first bit of sweetness. All my nerves are raw, but there’s only good stuff to come, and everything is just so… so wonderful.”

Barry finally turns his head to stare at Eobard. He’s smiling, glowing, and there’s a light in his eyes, and his hand is so soft and warm as he slips it into Eobard’s—and something clenches in Eobard’s chest as he realizes how lonely he’s been all these years without someone to share this little secret with, even if Barry isn’t aware that this will never be his secret alone. It’s what really connects them, after all; makes them whole.

They exist for one another.

“I missed you,” Eobard says quietly, and he means for much longer than just nine months.

“I know,” Barry replies, even though he really doesn’t.

Eobard gives the boy’s hand a good, hard squeeze.

Relaxing, Barry’s eyes drift shut. “I know I just woke up from a ridiculously long nap, but I feel like I’m about to pass out again.”

“You should get upstairs before that happens then,” Eobard replies as he relinquishes his hold.

“Although, I’m curious to know whether or not Caitlin tried to convince you to stay at S.T.A.R. Labs overnight. I’m sure she would’ve wanted to continue monitoring your condition.”

“She did, but she mentioned that you wanted her to drop me off here instead, and I wanted to spend more time with you anyway.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Eobard chuckles.

Opening his eyes, Barry gives him a drowsy smile. Only briefly though before his expression fades into something vaguely haunted. “But everything that’s happened to me today is just so… weird. What if it’s all just a dream? What if I’m still in a coma?”

“You woke up,” Eobard assures him, although he understands his son’s concerns. He also understands that telling Barry this won’t make the boy believe his reality is any more real, but he says it anyway, yielding to this knee-jerk reaction to soothe him.

“Then what if this is like ‘Flowers for Algernon’—everything in my new life is going to start off grand, but I’m slowly going to deteriorate with time?”

“…Of all the things you remember from English Lit, ‘Flowers for Algernon’ just so happens to be one of the stories made the list?”

“It was a really sad story,” Barry protests. “Thinking about it used to keep me up at night.”

“There were plenty of things that kept you up at night when you were a kid,” Eobard replies, sobering up a bit. “But I hope this experience doesn’t become one of them.”

Barry nods, eyes drifting shut again.

“…Wake up.” Eobard says, grabbing Barry by the wrist and giving his arm a shake. Barry lets the limb flop uselessly in his grip, but opens his eyes. “Don’t fall asleep on the couch. Go upstairs and
get a good night’s rest, because tomorrow morning we’re going to put you through your paces.”

“Alright,” he mumbles, pushing himself up off the couch. Before he leaves the living room though, he leans over to kiss Eobard on his head and murmurs, “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Eobard replies faintly as he watches the boy go…

Barry doesn’t know that he’s crashing right now, that he’s going to be overly emotional and tired for the next couple of days, just like Eobard was when he first gained his powers. The boy will therefore fall asleep tonight and wake up tomorrow morning feeling as though his hunger is physically trying to gnaw its way out of his stomach, but Eobard’s not too concerned about that, because he’ll pitch the idea of a protein bar to either Cisco or Caitlin sometime soon.

But again…

Not just yet.

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As expected, Eobard rolls into the kitchen the next morning to discover his son scarfing down a dozen fried eggs and god knows how many slices of bacon.

“I’m sorry,” Barry mumbles into his cup of coffee. The food smells good. Eobard’s delighted to see the boy left a plate out for him at the other end of the table. “When I woke up this morning, I was so hungry I thought I was going to die. If I stay here with you, I can guarantee your fridge will almost always be empty.”

Eobard shrugs. Food and money are of no concern to him, really, although the fact that he’ll have to exercise more caution around the boy while he’s here will be a bit of an issue. But…whatever. He doesn’t mind having Barry back at home. Somehow he’ll find a way to make it work. “I can afford it. As long as you’re the one physically restocking the pantry, you can eat to your heart’s content.”

Barry grins around the next mouthful of eggs as he dives back into his meal. As he becomes more accustomed to powers, he’ll figure out a way to siphon off a little the energy from the Speed Force to sustain himself directly. That way, he won’t have to eat his weight in food twenty times a day.

But, again, all good things in time…

Once they’re finished, Eobard has the boy drive him down to the abandoned Ferris Air runaway where Caitlin and Cisco already parked one of S.T.A.R. Labs’ field trucks and set up a work station. Cisco is fiddling with a speed gun when he spots Eobard and Barry headed his way.

“Looking good~” the boy says as he high-fives Barry, “but you’re about to look even better. I’ve got a suit for you in the truck, something that won’t burst into flames when you run.”

Curious, Barry disappears into the company truck. Cisco waits until the door closes behind him before he gives Eobard a tight smile, like he’s screaming inside his head. “He’s going to hate my guts when he puts that thing on.”

“I’m sure he’ll forgive you,” Eobard replies as he wanders over to where Caitlin is standing beside the computer consoles.

But sure enough, when Barry opens the door and steps out in that red unitard, lips pursed in disappointment, the first words to come out of his mouth are: “I hate you with every fibre of my being...”
Smirking, Cisco gives him a suggestive once over, complete with a little eyebrow waggle at the end. “How’s it fit, handsome?”

“Well, it’s a little snug…”

“Relax, bro. You’re going to be moving too fast for anyone to see.”

“Nice, but you have no idea just how uncomfortable this thing is.”

“Suck it up, dude. We’re doing this for science.”

Barry rolls his eyes, pushing past Cisco to get into position on the runway. Caitlin takes off after him with her touch pad, so Barry glances over his shoulder at her and says, “I forgot to ask you yesterday—how’s Ronnie doing?”

Eobard doesn’t hear her response as they make their way to the starting block, but he can tell by the sudden wide-eyed expression on Barry’s face that Caitlin’s blunt in giving her answer.

Eobard winces.

“Look at what I made,” Cisco trills excitedly to his left. Eobard inclines his head a little to the side and glances down at the small device in the boy’s hand. Whatever it is, Cisco decided it needed a lightning emblem—which shocks Eobard a little at first, until he realizes that Cisco would be the one to come up with Barry’s symbol of hope for the city, given that he’s already created Barry’s iconic red suit.

“Are those headphones?” Eobard replies, because they look an awful lot like his own.

“Yep. Two way headphones with a built in camera. Hopefully, he’s more appreciative of these than the unitard.”

“I’m sure he will be.”

Pleased, Cisco runs off to share his new tech with Barry, just as Caitlin returns to join Eobard at the console. She looks worn out.

Wisely, Eobard decides not to say anything.

Once Cisco’s mounted the headphones on Barry’s helmet, he runs back to the workstation to grab the speed gun and then gets into position behind his friend. “Everyone ready?!”

Barry turns to look at them.

“While I know we’re extremely eager to determine your full range of abilities,” Eobard calls out to his son, “I do caution restraint…”

Barry smirks at him and nods, and then crouches over the starting block, slotting his feet into place.

Eobard slips on his sunglasses to protect his eyes.

And then Barry is off.

Cisco is blown off his feet by the resulting blast, dust whipping in everyone’s faces as Caitlin’s notes are thrown up into the air. His two employees are stunned speechless as they watch Barry’s red figure blur into nothing more than a tiny speck on the horizon.
“He just passed 200 miles per hours!” Cisco exclaims, pointing his gun in what he assumes to be Barry’s general direction as he clambers to his feet.

Snatching a pair of binoculars off the workbench, Caitlin searches for Barry in the distance. “It’s not possible…” she murmurs, despite what she’s just borne witness to.

Eobard’s small smile goes unnoticed by them both.

He keeps his own eyes trained on the Barry as the boy zigzags across the runway, crying out in unadulterated joy over the headset, amazed by the perceived limit of his powers. Eobard turns his head to also monitor the live video feed of Barry’s run and it’s then that he notices the first few frizzles of yellow light, that excess energy flying of his body in sparks until it bleeds together in one long streak.

Eobard fondly remembers chasing that same streak of lightning in his younger years.

It also then that he notices Barry stumble. He’s reached the end of the runway, where Cisco had set up a wall of plastic water barrels the night before, which Barry should use as a turning point in his little race. Instead, he runs headlong into it, crushing the barrels so forcefully that the water shoots straight up into the sky.

Eobard’s heart leaps into his throat.

Caitlin gasps and makes a beeline for her car, which is parked just on the other side of the company truck. Cisco takes off after her and jumps into the passenger seat, and then together they race down the runway to collect poor Barry, who, according to the live feed, is still alive and conscious, making pained little noises as he cradles his right arm close to his chest.

“Caitlin’s coming to get you,” Eobard says into the nearest microphone. “Don’t move.”

“I won’t,” Barry replies, voice tight with distress. “I promise.”

Eobard slips off his sunglasses and runs a hand through his hair.

He’d always known that he was the Flash’s greatest nemesis—his greatest threat, but being reminded now of how young and naïve Barry is, how easily one mistake could hurt him, gives Eobard uncomfortable flashbacks to the day his son nearly blew himself up with a homemade firework.

Training the boy as hard as he needs to in order to get him up to speed is going to be more difficult than he anticipated given the familial bond he now has with the boy. He’s almost tempted to lock Barry up in a room when they get back to S.T.A.R. Labs with nothing more than a treadmill and a year’s supply of protein bars…

Eobard honestly doesn’t know how he’s ever going to feel comfortable letting the boy fight crime.

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Once they’ve successfully shoved Barry’s trembling form into the backseat of Caitlin’s car, they circle back to the company truck where Caitlin’s makeshift medi-station is set up. She checks out Barry’s wrist and splints it before cleaning up the abrasions on his arms and legs while Cisco packs up their equipment, both of them trying to ignore the way Eobard hovers irritably in the background.

Once they’re all set to go, they immediately head back to S.T.A.R. Labs where Caitlin takes an X-ray of Barry’s arm and orders him to lie down on the gurney stashed in one of the Cortex’s side
office. Barry quietly obeys her and promptly falls asleep.

Cisco vanishes to grab them all something to eat.

Eobard continues to brood in silence.

“…Stop that.”

Annoyed, Eobard gives Caitlin a level look. “Stop what?”

“Sulking,” she sighs. “I’m the only one who’s allowed to sulk at this facility.”

“Oh?”

“Look…” She glances briefly at the darkened side office Barry is currently occupying, and then, lowering her voice, says, “I can’t imagine how hard it must be to see your kid get hurt like that, and so soon after finally being reunited with him, but…Barry’s going to be fine. Stop staring at him as like you expect him to vanish into thin air.”

He knows he’s being a bit dramatic here, but she doesn’t know what Barry plans to do with his powers. He wants to be a vigilante like that goddamn ‘Green Arrow’…

“I just think…” Eobard says slowly, because he’s not actually sure what to tell her, “…that Barry should stick to the treadmill for now. We can put padding on the wall behind him. That should lower his chances of injury.”

Caitlin gives him a blank look. “I’m sorry—what treadmill?”

“The one Cisco wants to build Barry next week.”

“Cisco never sleeps, does he?” she murmurs. “Well…alright then. Have fun telling Barry he’s limited to using his powers at S.T.A.R. Labs.”

Eobard sighs, “What? You don’t think I could talk some sense into him? I know how to argue with the boy. I raised him, after all.”

“And it’s clear to me that he loves you dearly, but let’s not forget that this is the same guy who ran off to Gotham in the middle of a terrorist attack. I don’t think he ever wants to hurt or disappoint you, but Barry’s moral compass is stronger than most people. He’ll do whatever he thinks is right, consequences be-damned.”

Eobard blinks in confusion. “I’m sorry. What exactly are we talking about here?”

Laughing nervously, she crosses her arms and clears her throat. “I, uh…I thought for sure he would’ve talked to you about the whole Hunt for the Man in Yellow thing last night…”

“He did, I just didn’t realize this was something he was trying to rally everyone in to help him with.”

“Oh, don’t worry—I told him it was crazy,” she assures him. “I mean, even with what happened at Mercury Labs, I’m still not sure this guy exists. The security footage that leaked was awfully blurry—but what I’m trying to say is that if Barry tells me he really wants to sprint across rooftops or run up the side of a skyscraper, I want him to know that I’ve always got his back, because I know that with me on his team he’ll be safer out there in the streets.”

Eobard takes a deep breath and then releases it slowly. He doesn’t know why he’s freaking out over this matter as much as he is. Barry is destined to become this city’s saviour, there’s no point fighting
He’s just…not accustomed to relinquishing so much control. If he were to let Barry do whatever the hell he wanted, it would add too many unknown variables to the equation, and since Eobard’s knowledge of the Flash’s past is limited, pretty much anything could happen.

He might end up with another ‘Wren’ dilemma.

Or he might end up with a dead son.

Eobard shudders.

“I understand,” he finally says, and just like that her entire posture relaxes. “Barry’s…lucky to have you on his side.”

“Barry’s an amazing guy.” She glances back at the darkened room. “I feel bad that he crashed today. He really did a number on his arm.”

“How bad is it?”

“It’s a distal radius fracture. Fairly common wrist injury, actually. Once the swelling goes down a little more, I’ll be able to set it.”

“Thank you,” He says softly.

She smiles. “No problem.”

And it really isn’t a problem—because Barry’s arm heals itself in just under three hours.

They make this little discovery when Caitlin goes into the office to check up on him a little later on, only to discover that he’d rolled over onto his arm in his sleep. She wakes him immediately of course, but he doesn’t appear to be in any pain. In fact, he can already flex his fingers, despite Caitlin’s insistence that he not. So she takes off the splint and checks his wrist, then takes another X-ray in the hopes that she can figure out what the hell is going on.

Eobard, of course, already knows that Barry’s arm has healed itself. It probably would’ve taken less than three hours if he wasn’t half starved, but it’s still a miracle by human standards.

“…How is that even possible?” Barry murmurs once he sees the X-rays.

“We don’t know yet.” Caitlin admits. She looks terribly intrigued, like she’d like to run more tests but doesn’t want to come off as rude.

Chewing on a piece of licorice where he’s seated behind the console, Cisco grins and says, “Dude, you really need to learn how to stop.”

Barry looks like he’s about to start off on a bit of friendly banter with Ramon, so Eobard cuts to the core of the matter by saying, “What happened out there today? You were doing pretty well and then something caused you to lose focus.”

“I just remembered something,” Barry replies sheepishly. He’s sitting on the edge of the same gurney he occupied for the past nine months, swinging his legs gently back and forth as he considers his words. “I was thinking of my mom.”

He doesn’t have to elaborate on what happened to her. Cisco and Caitlin have already heard the story, and thus their smiles slowly fall from their faces.

“You were thinking about…him, Barry?” Eobard presses. “Why?”
“The night she died, she was trapped in a ball of red and yellow lightning. I started generating it myself when I was running today, and it just suddenly brought me back to that night.”

Cisco’s jaw drops open. “Dude, you can generate lightning?!”

Ignoring the boy’s comment, Eobard continues, “It spooked you into crashing?”

“Kind of,” Barry admits, although the way his shoulder’s slump suggest there’s more to it than that. “It reminded me of how much I missed her…It also reminded me of the fact that he’s still out there.”

“But he hasn’t been active in Central City since the whole Mercury Labs incident,” Cisco says. At the curious look everyone gives him, he slides down a little in his chair. “What? Barry’s allowed to monitor all the weird stuff that’s going on in North America and I’m not?”

Eobard glares at the boy, which seems to cow Cisco at first, but then the boy notices the look of gratitude on Barry’s face and he sits up a little straighter, smiling.

Not prepared to lose this battle, Eobard turns his glare on Barry next. “I thought we talked about this.”

“I’m just stating a fact,” Barry argues, but he looks sufficiently subdued. “The lightning reminded me of him, that’s all.”

Eobard taps the index finger of his right hand irritably against the armrest of his chair, because he still thinks it is far too early for Barry to consider vigilantism, despite his previous conversation with Caitlin. What ensues then is an awkward kind of silence that no one really knows how to comfortably break. That is, of course, until Caitlin musters the courage to say, “I could really go for a cup of coffee right now.”

“Me too,” Cisco chimes in.

“CC Jitters?” Barry offers.

“Yes, please.”

“Consider it done,” Barry says.

And then he vanishes from the Cortex.

“Be careful with your arm!!!” Caitlin shrieks after him, loud enough that even Eobard winces. “Honestly, Dr. Wells…sometimes your son is such a moron.”

Cisco bursts out laughing at her admission.

Eobard rubs the bridge of his nose in irritation.

That irritation turns fear though when Barry fails to return with their coffee.

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Thankfully, it only takes a minor amount of sleuthing to figure out where Barry disappeared off to, because after Caitlin fires off a text to Iris West they immediately discover that the boy is, in fact, with her. Seeing that Iris works at CC Jitters, Eobard really isn’t surprised by this revelation, although Cisco looks mildly upset that Barry clearly forgot to grab them anything to drink.

Fear alleviated, Eobard goes back to being irritable again. He spends most of that afternoon quietly
entertaining the thought of sedating Barry in the evening and implanting a GPS chip somewhere at the base of his skull. This fanciful idea gradually turns to genuine contemplation though when he realizes that any incision he makes would heal and fade before the sedative wore off, meaning that Barry would have no idea he’d just been tagged…. 

He’s saved from this dark thought when Dr. McGee breezes into the Cortex.

“Good afternoon, Christina,” Eobard says as she makes her way around the main console to stand before him. “To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?”

“I thought I would say hello to Barry,” she replies, glancing first at one side office and then the other. When she catches sight of Caitlin making up the sheets on the empty gurney, she gives Eobard an odd look. “The last time we spoke, you said you’d been keeping him in here. Did you move him?”

“He moved himself, actually,” Eobard says, keeping his face straight. Behind her, he can see Cisco rolling his eyes. “I’m sorry to say, I’m not sure when he’ll be back. You’re more than welcome to wait for him, though.”

“I think I will…” she murmurs, frowning. “He’s certainly active for someone who just woke from a coma.”

Eobard nods slowly. “Speaking of which—how did you find out he was awake?”

“Certainly not from any phone call from you,” she mutters, but there’s no bite to her words. She’s just ribbing him. “Which I find surprising, since I thought I was his unofficial godmother.”

“I apologize, but that still doesn’t answer my question.”

“I asked Dr. Snow to let me know if his situation improved. She left me a message yesterday evening to say he was conscious, but that’s about it. I had no idea he would be fully mobile after all this time.”

“It’s…” Eobard tries to search for the right word. He’s not ready to let Christina in on Barry’s big secret just yet. He’ll have to have a chat with Cisco and Caitlin about the importance of not sharing such sensitive information before discussing the matter with him. “…something of a miracle.”

“Clearly.” Glancing around once again, she lowers her voice and says, “While I’m here, there’s something else I would like to discuss with you.”

Eobard gestures toward the hall and then leads the way out of the Cortex. Tina catches up to him quickly and walks alongside him down the winding corridor toward the lower level offices.

Once he knows they’re well out of earshot, Eobard glances up at his companion and says, “I’m assuming this has something to do with General Eiling?”

“My, you always were so clever…”

“I haven’t heard from him in a long time,” he admits, “but he’s your white whale, so I’m assuming you’ve seen some trace of him looming on the horizon?”

“Someday, I will figure out what his connection is to that man in the yellow suit, Harrison. Don’t mock me.”

“I would never dream of it.”
“In any case—word on the vine is that the man in the yellow suit isn’t the only person with extraordinary powers in Central City nowadays.”

Eobard tries to look surprised. “Oh?”

Tina pulls up short suddenly and so Eobard slows to a halt beside her.

“Have you not seen the news about the robberies?” she asks. “Some man apparently seeded a storm inside a building. I thought it was just a hoax at first until one of my sources told me Eiling was interested in finding this man for himself. Imbecile that he is, Eiling’s not crazy. If he has a reason to believe this thief really can control the weather, these accounts might very well be true.”

“That’s all very interesting, but I don’t see how this concerns me.” And truly, he wants to have absolutely nothing to do with Eiling.

Ever.

“I don’t have the same kind of history with Dr. Ted Ferguson as you do,” she says outright, referring to Eobard’s old friend in the military. “I know he works on the same base as the General, but I think asking him for any information directly would prove futile. I was wondering then if you could perhaps speak with him on my behalf.”

Eobard laughs a little, because Ted asked him quite a while ago never to ask him anything about Eiling—but Eobard doesn’t really need to talk to Ted about this, because he’s more than capable of spying on Eiling himself.

Not that Tina needed to know that.

“You’re still intent on getting your revenge, aren’t you?” Eobard muses. He doesn’t bother to hide his smile.

Tina looks annoyed, but only a little. “Knowing what Eiling did to those gorillas…Yes, I would very much like to see him behind bars. He’s a danger to everyone, Harrison.”

Eobard couldn’t agree with her more.

Which is why he nods and says, “I can’t promise you anything, but…I’ll see what I can do.”

Tina smiles. “Thank you, Harrison. I truly appreciate this.”

“I know.”

She opens her mouth to say something else, but then her phone trills merrily in her coat pocket. She whips it out to glance at the screen. Eobard can’t see what’s written in her latest text message, but Tina’s face falls when she reads it. “Looks like I won’t be able to wait around for Barry. Give this to him, would you?—”

Tina unzips her purse then to pull out a white envelope, one which undoubtedly contains a Well Wishes card.

Eobard takes the envelope and flips it over in his hands. “I’ll see to it that Barry opens this once he returns.”

“Thank you,” she replies. “And let him know I would like to see him in person sometime. If he’s already venturing out into the world again, maybe we could do lunch?”
“I think he would enjoy that.”

Tina smiles again, grey eyes crinkled gently.

Eobard didn’t realize how much he’s missed her company.

“Have a wonderful day, Harrison,” she says as she turns around to head back down the winding hallway toward the elevators. “Don’t be a stranger.”

“I’ll try,” he calls quietly after her.

Then he glances down at the card in his hand, flipping it over again before dropping it on his lap and wheeling back to the Cortex.

Despite himself, he wonders what sort of trouble Wade Eiling is getting himself into nowadays…

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For the first time in his life, Eobard’s receives a tongue-lashing from Barry.

His son bursts into the Cortex later that day—long after Cisco had been hoping to get his coffee—looking particularly livid as he glances around the room and says, “I wasn’t the only one affected by the particle accelerator, was I?”

Eobard glances over his shoulder at his two employees, both seated behind the main console, neither of which look as though they want to deal with Barry’s little outburst.

Resigned to his fate, Eobard faces Barry again and says, “We don’t know for sure.”

“When you were telling me what happened with the accelerator, I assumed that the city was safe—that there was no residual danger. But that’s obviously not true, so what really happened that night?”

Eobard doesn’t appreciate the boy’s tone of voice, but he supposes Barry has every right to be angry. “Well, the accelerator went active…” Taking remote control of the Cortex’s screens via the touchpad on his wheelchair, he pulls up a schematic of the collider and initiates Cisco’s little digital representation of how everything went to hell in a hand basket that fateful night. “…we all felt like heroes, and then it all went wrong. The dimensional barrier ruptured, releasing unknown energies into our world—anti-matter, dark energy, x-elements—”

“Those are all theoretical.”

“And how theoretical are you?” Eobard reminds him. “You reached a speed of 200 miles per hour on your own two feet today. Prior to the coma, you could barely outrun your childhood crush.”

Eobard doesn’t mean to strike that particular nerve, but his mouth forms the words before he can give it much thought and there’s no use trying undoing the damage once it’s been done.

Thankfully, as pained as Barry looks after that snide remark the boy says nothing in retaliation. Eobard pulls up a map of the city on the screen. “We mapped the dispersion throughout and around Central City. Without having any idea what—or who—was exposed, we’ve been subtly searching for other ‘meta-humans’ like yourself.”

“Meta-humans?” Barry asks.

“That’s what we’re calling them,” Caitlin explains, although Cisco’s really the only one who’s been using that term up until now.
“I saw one of them today,” Barry replies, fire suddenly returning to his eyes. Eobard feels his blood run cold. “He’s a bank robber and he can control the weather.”

“This just keeps getting cooler,” Cisco says to no one in particular.

Barry’s eye flicker sharply to his friend, “This is not cool, Cisco. Alright? A man died.”

Swallowing thickly, Cisco averts his gaze.

Barry’s livid expression wavers momentarily. Clearly he didn’t mean to hurt the boy, but he obviously still feels justified in his anger as he returns his attention to Eobard and says, “The robber is known as Clyde Mardon, and I believe he got his powers the same way I did, from the storm cloud. More importantly, he’s still out there. We have to stop him.”

As if expecting there to be no form of retaliation, Barry pivots sharply on his heel and makes a beeline for the door. Thankfully, he doesn’t decide to sprint out of the Cortex like he did last time, which is the only reason he hears Eobard when he shouts, “Barry, that’s a job for the police!”

Stopping dead in his tracks, Barry turns back around and gives him an incredulous look. “But I work for the police.”

“As a forensic assistant.”

Frowning, Barry says, “I don’t understand—you’re responsible for this. For him. Don’t you feel at all obligated to stop him?”

“The police are more than capable of capturing a thief,” Eobard snaps, reaching the end of his proverbial rope. He will not have Barry hurt himself over a matter as trivial as this. “What’s important, Barry, is you. Not me. I lost everything—I lost my company, I lost my reputation, I lost my freedom…”

Consciously or not, Barry’s eyes flicker down to Eobard’s legs. Then the boy shifts his weight uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

Sensing that he finally has the upper hand here, Eobard pushes onward. “Then you broke your arm, Barry, and it healed in three hours…Inside your body could be a map to a whole new world—genetic therapies, vaccines, medicines, treasures, deep within your cells, which I think would be a far greater contribution to humanity than having you die at the hands of a criminal simply because you want to go out and play ‘hero’.”

Barry flinches at that last word. So does Cisco and Caitlin in the corner of Eobard’s peripheral vision.

He doesn’t mean to make it sound as derogatory as that, but if this is the only way he can get through to Barry, then…so be it.

“You’re not a hero,” Eobard says firmly, eyes locked on Barry’s as his son stands stock-still in front of him, face completely flush of colour. He suddenly reminds Eobard of that listless little boy he saved from foster care all those years ago, eyes dull in a way that suggested he’d been forced to give up on something he once trusted beyond a shadow of doubt. “You’re just a young man who was struck by lightning…”

Barry is dead silent for an uncomfortably long time, brows furrowed in frustration as though he doesn’t know whether he wants to scream or cry. Then he glances at Caitlin and Cisco, as though looking for some kind of support.
Neither one of them says anything.

Wounded by their betrayal, Barry spares one last look at Eobard and then storms off.

Eobard contemplates taking up after him. He doesn’t, after all, want Barry to hate him…

But instead, somewhat wounded himself, he excuses himself from the Cortex and retreats to his time vault. Quietly then, he asks Gideon to show him the news article.

He finds only the smallest measure of peace in learning that the future is somehow still intact.

~***~

By the time he was in the sixth grade, Eobard knew almost everything there was to know about the Flash.

He knew all about his limited gadgets and his colourful enemies; knew the greatest battles he had ever fought and all the bizarre allies he made along the way; knew that he was compassionate and kind and clever and brave—more so that then the supposed ‘Man Without Fear’, or whatever it was they called the first human Green Lantern…

The Flash was the truest hero in the world.

And Eobard wanted to be just like him—compassionate and kind and clever and brave—because a man couldn’t live in fear or isolation if he wanted to change the world, and there was no nobler cause than to change the world for the better. It didn’t matter to him that the Flash had occasionally been beaten within an inch of his life, or that he now, quite obviously, was dead and gone, his graceful form folded lovingly into the earth after so many years of faithful service to humanity. The Flash had survived so much…and he still was surviving, in a way, given that his name had been remembered for centuries now and would be remembered for centuries yet to come.

Eobard obviously didn’t know the man personally at the time, but he admired him as though he had known him in the flesh because as greatly as the Flash had suffered in life, he was what Eobard imaged to be a truly good man. And that is why Eobard wanted to meet him some day, to see if he could, perhaps, guide the Flash away from the greater hardships in his life, because if Eobard could save the man from even a fraction of that agony, there was so much more his hero could do for the world…

So that became Eobard’s goal in life when he was still young and naïve and good himself, to turn back time and become both a mentor and a friend to his childhood idol—and how magnificently had Eobard failed in that endeavour. Despite his best wishes, he became the greatest source of the Flash’s anguish, had come to hate him so violently that he was almost willing to destroy himself in his endeavour to ensure that the Flash’s suffering would have no end.

But when he thinks back on that hatred now, he tries to remember what Leo Buscaglia once said: “The opposite of love is not hate—it’s apathy”. There’s a great deal of truth to that quote, he believes, because he has never felt anything approaching apathy as far as Barry Allen was concerned, which only goes to show that he never stopped loving his idol. In fact, he understands that that vicious hatred of his was born of love and was similarly buried by love over the course of this past decade, and so he thinks it’s true what people say: that love triumphs over all…

Keeping this in mind, Eobard doesn’t try to ignore the pain he feels following his argument with Barry. He realizes that a pain such as this is merely a product of love and not something that needs to be rectified. It will fade with time, he knows. It only hurts this much because he loves this stupid boy,
and it will continue to hurt him because the only way to love his boy is to let him follow his destiny, regardless of the innumerable threats lying in wait for the Flash.

Because Eobard loves him, he knows he has to let the boy fight.

And so he remains in the time vault when Gideon informs him that Barry has returned, watching his personal security feed in silence as the boy convenes with Caitlin and Cisco to devise a plan against Clyde Mardon. His heart rate increases at the thought of his son facing off against the man less than two days after gaining his own powers, but he feels hope creeping up on him again as Cisco finally reveals the finished product of his tri polymer suit—which he graciously gifts to Barry, smiling so hard, a person might think he’d won the lottery.

Barry dons it without question and then runs off into the night, not yet certain how he plans to fight a literal force of nature, but still willing to give it the good old college try.

Eobard keeps himself at bay for as long as he can manage, listening in on Caitlin and Cisco frantically trying to instruct Barry on how to unravel a tornado without having it fling him to another state—and then when he is flung, Eobard takes that as his cue to join the fray, returning to the Cortex and ignoring Cisco’s shocked expression as he leans over the microphone and says, “You can do this, Barry.”

For a second he hears nothing and worries that the boy has been knocked unconscious. But then the boy takes a shuddering breath and Eobard continues: “You were right… I am responsible for all of this. So many people have been hurt because of me, and when I looked at you all I saw was another potential victim of my hubris. And yes, I created this madness, but you, Barry… you can stop it. You can do this…” There’s a lump in his throat that he suddenly finds impossible to swallow, and he doesn’t know what to else to say, but then Henry Allen of all people comes to mind and he remembers the man’s last words to Barry before his imprisonment like a shock to the brain: “Now run, Barry—run!”

When he’s only met with silence, even Caitlin begins to look a little worried. But Barry’s vitals look good on her screen, and suddenly they can all hear Barry’s labored breaths again as he begins his run anew. Gradually then Cisco’s schematic of the tornado begins unravelling on screen until, presumably, Barry dives boldly toward the eye of the storm where Mardon reigns as a god.

For a long, tense moment, all they hear over the radio is static.

Eobard feels vaguely sick.

“…Barry?!” Caitlin asks hesitantly.

Suddenly then, they hear him breathing again.

“Hey…” Someone says over the mic. They sound faint, as though they’re standing at a great distance. Eobard assumes that this stranger is Clyde Mardon. “I didn’t think there was anyone else like me.”

“I’m not like you,” Barry growls. The words come out crisp and clear over the mic—powerful, the way Barry sounded in another time when he and Eobard were bitter enemies. “You’re a murderer…”

Eobard tenses.

He tenses even more when he hears the gun go off—once. Twice. Two sharp raps over the microphone followed by an eerie silence.
“Barry!” Caitlin cries out, pale faced, tears welling up in her eyes.

Cisco himself looks a little numb, as though he can’t believe he’d somehow been instrumental in the death of one of his best friends.

“It’s over,” comes Barry’s voice suddenly over his headset. “I’m okay.”

Cisco sighs with relief in his chair. Caitlin buries her face in her hands, shaking gently. Eobard can’t tell if it’s because she’s laughing or crying.

He himself still feels a little overwhelmed. He doesn’t think he’s feared for anyone’s life like this since Barry ran off to Gotham. “What happened?” he asks.

“Joe’s here. He shot Mardon.” There’s a brief pause. Then Barry says, “I’m going to stick around for bit. I need to talk to him. I’ll…see you in the morning.”

“Take all the time you need, Barry.”

“Thanks, I…” There’s another pause, longer this time. “I love you. You know that, right? I didn’t mean to yell at you today.”

“You don’t have to apologize, Barry.”

“But I do, because you’ve been looking out for me ever since my mother died and I shouldn’t have exploded on you for trying to look out for me today. You didn’t deserve that. I’m sorry.”

Eobard feels some of the tension lift from his shoulders. “I understand, Barry.”

“Good. Well…I guess I’ll see you in a couple of hours.”

Barry switches his mic off just as Eobard hears Joe’s voice faintly in the background. He turns their own mic off too and then leans back in his wheelchair.

Beside him, Cisco sighs and says, “I think I could use a drink right about now.”

Caitlin lifts her face from her hands. Her makeup isn’t smeared, so Eobard’s assuming she was laughing hysterically rather than crying. “Me too, but I don’t think my legs can support my weight right now. I’m not going anywhere any time soon, you guys.”

“That’s alright,” Eobard replies. “I have a bottle of scotch in my office.”

Both of his employees smile.

~***~

Nobody ends up going home that night.

Caitlin falls asleep on Barry’s old gurney for a couple of hours while Cisco retreats to his little office and pours the last reserves of his energy into working on only-god-knows-what. Eobard, in the meantime, gets a little shut eye himself in his own office before returning to the Cortex around 9am when Barry calls him from Joe’s cellphone. The boy shows up five minutes later to hand his suit over to Cisco.

“Even though this will always be ‘my’ suit,” Cisco says as he slips the thing back over its designated mannequin, “you’re the only one that’s ever going to wear it, man. No way in hell I’m going to let this thing collect dust.”
Barry gives Cisco a devious look, like he plans on donning said suit again sooner rather than later.

Eobard pretends he isn’t watching the two of them like a hawk from across the room.

Cisco disappears then into his side office and returns just as suddenly clutching something in his right hand.

“What’s that?” Barry asks curiously.

“You’re new emblem,” Cisco replies as he slaps it onto the chest of his suit. Eobard figures this is what the boy spent the better part of the night working on.

“Why is it shaped like a lightning bolt?”

Cisco looks at him as though he can’t believe the sheer stupidity of that question. “Uh, so it doesn’t look boring.”

“…I think it looks tacky.”

Both Barry and Cisco pivot around sharply. Eobard also whips his head around to stare at their unexpected guest, who is standing in the entrance to the Cortex as though he belongs there.

Which he technically does…

Hartley Rathaway looks a little worse for wear, what with his sickly complexion and the dark circles under his eyes. His dour expression brightens considerable though when his eyes latch onto Barry.

Grinning, Hartley says, “Did you miss me?”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: After careful consideration, do you know what I think? …I think the show needs more Hartley. Just drizzle a little of his wit into every episode, and I guarantee everyone will have a good time. Trust me on this. 10/10 would banter with again. Much fun. Such awesome. Not a word of lie…

Anyhow, I realize I followed the script for the show very closely in this episode/chapter, and that’s not really my intention for future chapters. Barry’s still going to fight the same people and I’ll give little nods to them in the story (I’m actually going to spend a decent amount of time on Leonard Snart, Gorilla Grodd, and General Eiling though, as you can probably already tell), but this is really Eobard’s story and how his destiny has been changed alongside Barry’s, so buckle yourselves in for something new, ladies and gentlemen!

FUN FACTS:

(1) Hero in a day: If any of you have been re-watching season one, you might argue that the pilot episode occurred over the course of a single day. However, Barry does an awful lot for someone who just got out of a coma. Like…a lot. He goes to CC Jitters, then the police station, wanders back to S.T.A.R. Labs, ventures out to Ferris Air, comes back to S.T.A.R. Labs yet again, runs off a second time to CC Jitters, nearly gets hit by a police car chasing down Clyde Mardon, makes another trip to S.T.A.R. Labs…
you get what I’m saying here? Also, I wanted an opportunity to talk about Barry’s apartment, because a person usually can’t hold onto one unless they have insurance, and insurance companies (at least where I live) will only cover a place if someone checks up on it at least one out of every three-four days. Unless Iris and Joe dropped by regularly (which I don’t imagine they would’ve had much time for, what with their jobs and visiting Barry while he was in his coma), I’m pretty sure Barry had to find a new place once he woke up.

(2) Flowers for Algernon: Apparently this is a novel now, but I remember reading it when it was still just a short story. Basically, a man named Charlie Gordon, who has an IQ of only 68 and works as a janitor at a bakery, becomes the perfect candidate for a surgery that will increase his intelligence (which has already been tested on a small laboratory mouse named Algernon). He continues to become more intelligent every day, to the point where he’s soon classified as a genius, and begins to realize that the people he once thought were his friends only enjoyed hanging out with him so that they could ridicule him. As time passes, Algernon’s intelligence rapidly declines and the laboratory mouse eventually dies. Charlie is soon faced with a similar regression, although he’s still innately aware of the fact that he was once smart. Unable to stand everyone’s pity, he therefore plans to “leave” New York (my Language Arts teacher always argued that he himself was about to die), but not before requesting that someone put flowers on Algernon’s grave…Sad, right?

(3) The Man Without Fear: You know what else this show needs…That’s right—Hal Jordan. I am, like, dying for Barry to bump into him somewhere, even if it’s in the middle of a time stream. I swear to god, those guys are the Bestest Friends Ever in the comics…

[By the way, I’m also on tumblr now if anyone wants to haunt me there. Drop me a note sometime if you ever want to chat: ladyofpride]
A/N: This chapter is for my husband, who always inspires me in new and unusual ways, and IamBumbleshootTheMagnificent, who has to be one of the most dedicated fans I have ever encountered. Both have given me considerable strength to continue this story after losing my drafts and much of my notes from the shows. If anyone out there happens to know where I can get my hands on the written scripts (with the lines labelled with which character says what), I would be eternally grateful to you. A lot of time and effort went into trying to write up my own scripts from the show, which were lost when my laptop went kaput.

Needless to say, if you're still reading this after all this years, god bless you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“True fear is a gift” — Gavin de Becker

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Hartley Rathaway is an unknown variable.

Eobard is both delighted and horrified by his return. On the one hand, he’s glad to see the boy in good health; on the other, Hartley’s timing couldn’t have been worse. Discovering Barry is a speedster is not inherently a bad thing, per se, because Hartley is probably one of the few people Barry can trust with a secret of this magnitude, but the possibility remains that such an event will somehow jog Hartley’s memory of Eobard’s powers, and that cannot be allowed to happen.

It therefore works in Hartley’s favour that he still has amnesia.

“You don’t even remember Jonah?”

Perched on the edge of the main console, tablet in hand, Hartley doesn’t bother to raise his head as he says, “Who?”

“Dude, you dated him for a month,” Cisco chuckles, probing for more information. He takes one long suck of his watermelon lollipop as he tries to come up with another question. “How about… Tyler?”

“Tyler?”

“Your lab tech.”

Raising his head, Hartley squints in concentration. A faint smile graces his lips. “Oh, yes…Blond fellow, right? I recall kissing him once, but that’s about it.”

“You gave him some mega hickeys, man.”

That impish smile widens marginally. “He enjoyed those hickeys. Didn’t wear a scarf or anything. I think he considered them a badge of honour.”
Sitting in Cisco’s side office, scrolling though Barry’s latest stats on his own tablet, Eobard shakes his head in bleak humor as he openly eavesdrops on their conversation. As he recalls, Hartley’s love-life was once a hot topic around the proverbial water cooler. There were occasionally betting pools on who he would bed next, which Eobard tried his damnedest to pretend didn’t exist—until he learned that there was a year-long bet running for Barry. Then he was forced to drag one sorry engineer after another into his office with an HR rep to remind his team of elite scientists why gambling on romantic relationships was an unethical pastime.

When Hartley caught wind of the betting pools, he simply smiled and walked away.

Eobard’s still not sure what to make of Hartley’s return. He’s taken every opportunity to inquire about the young man’s whereabouts during his extended leave of absence, and, thus far, everything checks out. After he’d been cleared from the hospital, Hartley journeyed up to Canada to collect the inheritance his aunt left him and then spent some time reacquainting himself with his more amiable cousins. Then he checked himself into a clinic in Montreal for an experimental implantation surgery for his ears. At the moment, he was satisfied with the operation. He claimed that the tinnitus was gone and that he was no longer as sensitive to sound.

Seemingly cured of his ailments, Hartley promptly returned to S.T.A.R. labs, presumably to resume his research.

Presumably.

It could very well be that Hartley’s ordeal has given him a new outlook on life, but Eobard still can’t get over how much his young colleague has mellowed toward Cisco Ramon. There remains a sliver of tension between them, of course, and their banter is just as sharp, but these ordinary conversations have now become the norm. Hartley’s vicious streak has been broken.

Eobard doesn’t like it.

Thankfully, the current discussion of Hartley’s old conquests peters off into silence as the rapid tap of Caitlin’s heels against the linoleum floor grows in the distance. Eobard turns his wheelchair around just in time to witness her breeze into the room like a storm cloud over a calm waterfront, her eyes immediately searching out his own in a way that does not bode well.

“Do you know what the boys have been up to?” she asks. There’s just enough of an upward edge to her tone of voice to suggest she’s not impressed with whatever it is ‘the boys have been up to’.

Cisco’s eyes widen momentarily in horror before he ducks his head behind his monitor at the main console, pretending to work. Hartley, on the other hand, lowers his tablet and casually leans further back against the console, obviously prepared to defend himself from her coming criticisms.

Eobard folds his hands over his lap and braces himself mentally. “Does it involve fireworks?”

“Worse,” she mutters. “It involves an actual fire.”

Eobard’s gaze flickers to Hartley.

“Barry didn’t start it,” the young man offers. “If that’s what you’re wondering.”

“What I’m wondering,” Eobard replies, “is what Barry was doing in the vicinity of any fire.”

“Saving people,” Cisco says quietly.

“A whole building’s worth,” Hartley elaborates, side-eyeing Dr. Snow. “We thought it would be
prudent to have Barry test the wear and tear of his suit prior to his next metahuman battle, so he’s been running around the city in his spare time every morning. Far be it from me to discourage him from performing small feats of heroism while he’s at it.”

Caitlin’s eyes narrow as she takes a step closer to her old co-worker. Her hard stance reminds Eobard of Tina in an unusual but fond way. “What about the ‘wear and tear’ of Barry himself? We still don’t know his personal limitations. How long can he run before he tires out? Is there a limit to his healing abilities? If he’s in motion for too long, will he damage his own—”

“Hold up, girl,” Cisco interjects, eyes wide at her onslaught. “The suit keeps a running record of his vitals. We know exactly what’s going on with him at all times.”

“You should be performing those tests in a controlled environment first. Think of what could’ve happened if his powers suddenly quit on him when he was in that burning building. He’d be more than likely dead right now.”

Cisco’s eyes flicker briefly toward the monitor in front of him before he focuses his attention back on her. The fact that he doesn’t move any other muscles is a dead giveaway of his guilt.

Eobard’s willing to bet something did happen when Barry was dealing with that burning building.

Caitlin and Hartley both turn expectantly toward him.

Sighing, Eobard closes his eyes, removing his glasses with one hand and rubbing the bridge of his nose with the other. He never explicitly stated that he would allow Barry to embark on this heroic journey, but Barry will expect nothing less than his full support in all his minor missions. Trying to ban him from running down petty criminals or saving people from their own stupidity will only serve to put a barrier between them.

Not for the first time, Eobard misses the days when Barry was small and easy to manipulate.

“While I think starting off with small feats of heroism is the best way to prepare for the greater battles that lie ahead, there is a certain wisdom to what Dr. Snow is proposing here.” He replaces his glasses slowly, catching sight of the brief smirk Caitlin lets slip at his deliberation. “Once Barry finishes his shift at the CCPD, call him down to the lab. He can spend his mornings running the streets, but I want him to dedicate his evenings to solving the mysteries of his powers.”

Eobard, of course, already knows how those mysteries will unfold, but letting Caitlin run her tests will slow down Barry’s efforts in getting himself killed. Even more so, Eobard might be able to focus Barry’s attention solely on increasing his speed if Eobard can keep him occupied in the lab often enough. After all, Barry doesn’t need to learn how to throw a punch in order to open a wormhole.

Having deferred to his better judgment, Hartley and Caitlin share a courteous look of shared satisfaction before Dr. Snow slips past Eobard and into her office. Hartley continues to fiddle with his tablet as Eobard rolls across the Cortex and into the hallway.

As he suspects, Cisco takes up after him.

“Dr. Wells?”

Slowing to a halt, Eobard cranes his head back to observe Mr. Ramon before pivoting his chair around. “Is there something you wanted to add to the discussion?”

“Not really. It’s just…” Cisco shoves his hands into his jean pockets and rocks back on his heels. “A couple of days ago you asked me to be open with you if there was anything off about Barry…”
Calmly, Eobard folds his hands together over his lap once more. Knowing that Cisco has apparently taken his request to heart provides him with no small measure of relief. “Something was ‘off’ about him this morning, wasn’t there?”

“A minor blimp in his vitals,” Cisco winces. “Lasted all of two seconds.”

“Two seconds is a long time for a speedster, Cisco.”

“Yeah, I guess…” The boy cracks an unexpected grin at him. “‘Speedster’, huh? I like it. Did you come up with that yourself?”

Eobard’s brain screeches to a horrifying halt.

In all his time with Cisco Ramon, he has never once slipped up before.

Not once…

“Yes,” he finally says, chest tight. “It’s short and sweet…What were you planning on calling him?”

Cisco shrugs. “I don’t know. I was toying with ‘the Crimson Comet’ for the longest time, but ‘Speedster’ sounds…faster somehow. Maybe even the ‘Scarlet Speedster’? What do you think?”

“I think Barry would probably prefer to come up with his own alias.”

“Of course!” he laughs. “But, you know, it wouldn’t hurt to give him a few suggestions. And honestly, I think he would take anything over ‘the Streak’.”

Eobard squints at him in confusion. “The what?”

“Barry moves too fast for most people to see,” Cisco explains. “But there’s already security footage of a ‘red streak’ circulating on social media. The public is still out to lunch on whether he’s a person or a natural phenomenon.”

Given what Eobard’s seen Barry’s future self accomplish, he’s tempted to argue that the boy is somewhere in between the two.

“That’s a ridiculous name,” he finally says.

“It’s driving him nuts,” Cisco agrees gleefully.

Reining the conversation back in, Eobard clears his throat and says, “Thank you for being up front with me about this, Cisco.”

“Anything for Barry,” the kid agrees, giving him a wink before wandering back to the Cortex.

Eobard lingers a moment longer in the hallway after his young colleague disappears. Once Ramon rounds the corner, he smiles and continues on his way.

He wonders how long it will take the team to come up with ‘the Flash’.

~***~

As expected, Barry is finally suffering the effects of hypoglycemia.

Instead of swinging by S.T.A.R. Labs immediately after his shift at the CCPD, Barry attends an award ceremony at Central City University for Simon Stagg with Iris, firing off a text to warn
Eobard that they should expect him a little later in the evening. Eobard knows there are far better people deserving of that award, but he is pacified by the thought that the day nearly ends with Stagg’s death, a delightful tidbit Barry shares with him once he manages to drag himself into the Cortex and half collapses into a chair.

“You look completely wiped,” Hartley murmurs as he and Cisco each take an arm and haul the boy over to his old gurney.

“This is exactly what I was talking about earlier,” Caitlin snaps from her side office, swiping the satchel of medical equipment off her desk. She takes Barry’s vitals with a cool composure, stretching out the awkward silence of the room purposefully as she works. Eventually, she asks, “How long?”

Barry inhales deeply through his nose. Then he says, “My first dizzy spell was this morning.”

“This morning? I can’t believe you didn’t share that with me!”

“I didn’t want to worry you,” he mumbles.

“Barry,” she snaps. Then she licks her lips, clearly trying to rein in her emotions. “Look…we’ve known each other for a long time. Your health is my primary concern right now. What if you were suffering cardiopulmonary failure or a transient ischemic attack?”

Baffled, Barry slides his gaze over to Eobard.

“Mini stroke,” Eobard elaborates. “Probably not.”

Caitlin takes a deep breath of her own. “I think…I think you should take a spin on Cisco’s monstrosity so we can figure out what’s really going on here. I don’t feel confident in letting you leave before we know what the problem is.”

“Hey,” Cisco argues weakly. “It’s a treadmill, not a monstrosity.”

“You completely cleared out my second office to build it,” she shoots back. “It’s unnecessarily bulky.”

“In my defense, I have never made a treadmill before.”

Caitlin rolls her eyes and storms off to the room in question. Before Hartley can take off after her, Cisco hooks his arm in the crook of Hartley’s elbow and says, “Help me grab the boxes from my workshop.”


“No reason,” Cisco replies, hot footing them out of there.

Barry frowns curiously, turning back to Eobard.

“I have no idea what he’s up to,” Eobard says. “So…other than saving a security guard from certain death, how was your evening with Iris?”

Unexpectedly, Barry’s shoulders slouch in defeat.

Eobard blinks in confusion.

Then he remembers…
“It was nice hanging out with her again,” Barry muses quietly. “It was just…awkward, kind of, since she’s dating somebody now.”

Eobard’s always been firm in the belief that he has no business interfering in Barry’s romantic life, but he finds it difficult not to reassure his son that he and Iris can still make quite the pair someday. She hasn’t been dating this Detective ‘Pretty Boy’ very long yet, and Eobard has an inkling she only sought someone out because she assumed Barry was never going to wake from his coma.

“Have you met this gentleman yet?” Eobard asks.

“His name’s Eddie,” Barry sighs. “He’s Joe’s partner, if you can believe it. I want to hate him…but he’s actually kind of nice.”

“I’m sorry, Barry.”

The boy shrugs. “It’s my own damn fault. I waited too long to ask her out and now the moment’s passed.”

“Your fate isn’t written in stone,” Eobard replies, although he only half believes that. Everyone does have a specific fate, but there’s a level of flexibility concerning the path between Here and There. Their own togetherness, for example, is something he feels will never change, but Eobard’s decision to adopt Barry has obviously altered their relationship in a way he was once incapable of anticipating.

Maybe Barry Allen will romance his future wife despite the odds.

But, then again…maybe not.

“Then what do I do?” Barry asks, eyes pleading. “I’m not going to sabotage their relationship. I’m not that kind of guy.”

Eobard rubs his fingertips over his lips and considers his next words wisely. Iris West, after all, is an important figure in the Flash’s life. Great care must be taken when considering her. “Just…be there for her, as you always have. Don’t judge her; don’t pressure her. If—and only if her current relationship falls apart, speak your mind and then give her plenty of space to think things through.”

Barry makes a weird face. “That’s…the most mediocre advice you’ve ever given me. I could’ve gotten that from a self-help magazine. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” Eobard deadpans. “But it’s true. You can’t make a woman’s decisions for her, Barry. If Iris realizes she has your support through thick and thin—and if she genuinely likes you—she’ll come to you. That’s the only way it’s going to happen.”

Dejectedly, Barry nods. “I know.”

“Good.” Eobard waves his hand toward the door. “Now, let’s figure out what’s wrong with you.”

“Nothing at all,” Barry mutters, but he obediently wanders off to Caitlin’s old storage room. The woman in question is sitting in an adjacent room, behind a thick glass window, staring at something on her computer monitor as Barry sizes up the treadmill.

The boy scoots off to one side quickly as Hartley and Cisco arrive with the boxes, already taped together in some kind of wall. They drag the make-shift structure behind the treadmill.

Barry points at it questioningly.
“Just a little padding,” Cisco assures him.

“I still think he’ll go through the wall if he trips,” Hartley mutters.

“I think I agree,” Barry says uncertainly.

Cisco tries to mollify him with a wave of his hand. “Trust me. I designed the treadmill to stop on a dime. If you trip, you’ll be fine.”

“How fast exactly can this treadmill of yours go?”

“It’s been ‘Cisco-d’, so…pretty fast.”

Eobard shakes his head as he rolls into the control booth and parks his wheelchair on Caitlin’s left. Cisco and Hartley quickly scuttle in after him, closing the door as Barry hops on the treadmill and begins his routine. Caitlin’s monitors display his baseline vitals for only them to see.

In the span of maybe 9 or 10 seconds, the treadmill hits its maximum speed. Cisco then freezes the velocity to prevent it from dialing up any further.

“Heart rate, blood pressure, nerve conduction…” Caitlin murmurs, “all normal.”

“For Barry,” Eobard amends, because there is certainly nothing ‘normal’ in the staccato beating of the boy’s heart.

Caitlin shrugs. “His brainwave function is within standard limits.”

Eobard finds it mildly amusing that she’s caught up in looking for a neurological problem that isn’t there. In fact, if she’d just look at the lower left-hand corner of her screen, she would realize what’s going on immediately.

Barry’s blood sugar is plummeting.

He gives her a second more to figure it out for herself before he quietly says, “Caitlin, look at the glucose levels.”

She glances downward and then rolls her eyes, annoyed by her own stupidity. “Oh my god, of course.”

“It’s his glucose levels,” Eobard reiterates, leaning in toward the mic on the desk. To his son, he says, “Barry, we think we know why you keep—”

His boy trips and hits the box wall hard enough to send the Styrofoam packing peanuts flying everywhere. Their view of the room is momentarily obscured by the makeshift snow.

“—passing out,” he finishes weakly, squinting at the mayhem on the other side of the glass. His employees are already on their feet, bursting through the door to dig Barry out of mess. Quite unfortunately, the boy sailed clear through the boxes and hit the far wall, knocking himself out on impact.

Irritated, Caitlin orders Hartley to help her haul Barry onto her gurney as she sends Cisco off to collect as many IV glucose bags as he can find. What follows is a mad dash to hook Barry up and have his vitals stabilized before he can slip into yet another nine-month coma, which is thankfully not the outcome.

After his glucose levels begin their slow creep toward normalcy, Caitlin looks at Eobard sheepishly
and says, “This is going to take a while. A couple of hours, at least.”

Eobard glances at Barry’s slumbering form and nods. “I think it’s for the best that we get out of your way then. I’ll be in my office. Please, call me as soon as he wakes up.”

She gives him a reassuring smile and then shoes her other colleagues out of the room. Hartley and Cisco begrudgingly wander off to argue over future inventions in the workshop down the hall as Eobard rolls into the elevator and up to the top floor.

Once he’s parked his wheelchair behind his desk, he dashes down into the accelerator.

Sliding to a halt in one of the security cameras’ many blind spots, he pulls aside a panel-cum-door and proceeds down into the tunnel system he built long ago beneath the facility. The inner metallic meshwork of S.T.A.R. Labs gradually gives way to concrete as he drops down a ladder. Here he is surrounded by the harsh glow of a handful of flood lights and the faint smell of stale water and damp fur. If he were to continue onward, he would eventually reach a hidden entrance to the sewer system.

He can feel Grodd poking around inside his mind before he sees the gorilla just beyond the limit of the light.

Recognizing Eobard, the ape finally lumbers out from the shadows. It seems like every time Eobard sees him, he’s grown a little bit taller.

Sensing Eobard’s thought, Grodd preens. ‘Stronger too.’

“I have no doubt,” Eobard agrees, admiring his companion. Grodd will make somebody a formidable foe one day. “Have you found anything of interest for me?”

Grodd hesitates and then nods his head.

Confused, Eobard narrows his eyes at the ape.

He’d sent the gorilla a while ago to track down and mindread General Eiling, just as much for Tina’s sake as his own. Grodd had been ecstatic with the assignment, wanting nothing more than to tear Eiling’s psyche apart, but the military base had been somehow fortified in such a way that Grodd couldn’t read anyone’s mind beyond the front gate. Taken together with the fact that Eiling quite often slipped in and out of the facility unseen, Grodd had no hope of finding out what the man was up to directly.

Eobard had therefore instructed Grodd to probe the mind of anyone he could off-base, even going so far as to suggest Dr. Ted Ferguson last night, his old friend.

“Does Ted know something?” he presses.

‘Cage,’ Grodd says—and then suddenly the warmth of the flood lights is replaced with a cool blue glow that fills Eobard’s vision entirely. He’s been transported to his old army base, standing before a glass cell approximately 10x10x10 feet in size, men and women in uniform bustling hurriedly around him. Within the cell is a slim, steel stretcher bolted to the floor, complete with leather restraints.

It’s currently unoccupied.

‘I’m sorry—I lost track of the time.’

Eobard glances to his left where Eiling is waving off one of his underlings. He gestures to the door behind Eobard urgently. ‘Shall we?’
‘What is this?’ Ferguson asks at the back of Eobard’s mind. His voice echoes loudly in the memory, momentarily blurring the finer details of the overall vision itself.

‘That’s none of your concern,’ Eiling retorts, just as the room melts away, slowly transitioning back into the narrow tunnel.

“…Did he say who the cage is for?” Eobard asks against all hope.

Grodd shakes his head.

Eobard feels something like fear seeping into their connection. He takes a step forward to pat Grodd on the arm in a gesture of comfort. “It isn’t for you. It’s a little too small for that, don’t you think?”

‘Yes,’ the ape agrees, but the fear still lingers. Clearly, he’s beginning to remember why he was once afraid of the military.

“Maybe a change of scenery is in order?” Eobard suggests. “As it so happens, something came up today, and I need your expertise.”

Grodd tilts his head curiously to one side.

“Barry has taken to engaging in petty heroics,” he explains, trying to conjure a mental image of exactly what he thinks of his son’s new vocation. “I know you can’t outpace him in the streets, but his reckless behaviour worries me. Situate yourself somewhere below his precinct and keep me posted on his activity. I want to know what he’s thinking and when he’s thinking it.”

He can tell Grodd’s interest is piqued by the request. Though the gorilla perused Barry’s mind during his coma and savored a few of the boy’s more robust memories, he’s never ventured to the CCPD to watch Barry in action before. This assignment will be a useful exercise in learning how the CCPD functions behind the scenes, information that will no doubt come in handy once Grodd has his first real brush with the law.

“Any information the police have on potential metahuman sightings would also be appreciated,” he adds. If Grodd can keep him up to date on bizarre reports, Eobard can head Barry off on any misguided acts of self-sacrifice.

There’s a deep rumble of assent from Grodd before the ape bows his head and crawls back into the darkness. Eobard stands there for a while longer, listening to the faint trickle of water in the distance until Grodd’s unique musk disappears. Then he allows his mind to entertain a most frightful thought. Namely, whether Eiling realizes the Streak is a human being yet…

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Barry wakes without much fanfare.

It takes him 40 IV bags to regain consciousness, but he’s up on his feet again in no time, debating the perfect guacamole to sour cream taco ratio to keep him fully energized with Ramon. Eobard is just about to inform Barry that he needs to consider a healthier diet when his cell phone unexpectedly buzzes in his pocket.

A glance at the screen tells him it’s Joe.

Rolling out into the hallway for a little privacy, Eobard finally accepts the call. “To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?” he says.
“I hate to dampen your mood, but did you know Barry keeps some creepy conspiracy board hidden in his office?”

Eobard doesn’t have mics at the CCPD, but he has a few cameras, most of them situated in Barry’s lab. So, he has, in fact, seen the poster-board once before in its nascent stage, but he imagines Barry’s been adding to it a little every day as he conducts his covert investigation into Nora Allan’s death.

“No,” Eobard replies.

“In a way, I can understand why he has it. He pretty much joined the force to clear his father’s name, but now that there’s reports of a red streak stopping muggers and rescuing people from burning buildings, I’m getting a little concerned…He’s told you about that at least, I hope?”

“As a matter of fact, I discovered that myself second-hand this morning.”

“And what do you think about it?”

Eobard has to take a moment to remind himself that Barry needs to be a hero in order to inspire Eobard’s younger self to become his Reverse, but it’s difficult. Ever since he’d taken Barry in for his own, he’s had this lingering fear that some unknown force of nature or wicked slight of fortune’s hand would steal the boy’s life away him.

He can feel anxiety’s noisome warmth roiling around behind his diaphragm.

“I think I need to have another chat with him,” Eobard replies, realizing how true that really is.

“I’m glad we’re on the same page,” Joe sighs. “I tried talking to him earlier, but I know he won’t listen to me the same way he’ll listen to you. I’ll chat with you later. Have a good one, Harrison.”

“You too,” he murmurs.

The call disconnects.

Eobard finds himself mulling over possible conversational starters that won’t rile Barry the wrong way.

And then, like a perfectly timed play, Barry appears.

“I have to get back to work,” the boy says, straightening out the sleeves of his dress shirt and attempting to re-hoop the buttons. “I still have samples to work on from this morning.”

“A moment first, please,” Eobard says quietly.

Barry tilts his head over ever so slightly to one side. Eobard can see the gears spinning in his head as Barry tries to figure out what he did wrong and how his father managed to find him out.

“Just a word of caution,” Eobard explains, attempting to put the boy at ease. “We’ve already had this conversation once before, technically, and since I hate repeating myself, I would like to make this brief.”

“Is…this about the whole crime-fighting thing?” Barry asks, sounding more than a little exhausted with this topic of conversation.

“It absolutely is.”
“I know it was stupid of me to not to realize how much energy I need to burn now,” the boy concedes, “but I’ve been properly chastised by Caitlin already. Nobody gives a better tongue-lashing than her.”

Eobard holds up his hand, a silent request for Barry’s patience. “I’m not going to chastise you. I just want to point out that there could be other limits that you may not be aware of yet. Therefore, as tempting as it probably is to run headlong into danger, I would advise you to take things slow.”

“I will,” Barry promises, reaching out to squeeze Eobard’s hand comfortingly. Then he disappears in a burst of light.

Somehow, Eobard doesn’t think he gets it.

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But he soon does.

Barry’s vitals flicker to life on the overhead screens in the Cortex the following afternoon for no discernible reason. However, it’s an automatic response for whenever Barry puts on his suit, so they all intuitively know something’s come up.

They automatically gather around the main console as Cisco opens a channel between the Cortex and the mic in Barry’s uniform. “What’s up?” Cisco asks as he pulls Barry’s vitals up on the central screen.

“Whoever you are, give yourself up.”

Either Barry doesn’t hear them, or he’s too busy to respond. They sit in an uneasy silence as someone else on Barry’s end of the line says, “Sorry, we’re not going anywhere.”

Realizing that Barry is evidently facing off against another criminal, Eobard feels an uncomfortable roiling sensation in the pit of his stomach. It only gets worse when the voice of Barry’s opponent turns into a small chorus as he then says, “—Until Simon Stagg is dead.”

“What the hell?” Cisco mutters.

They’re forced to stew in their confusion during the ensuing madness, listening to the soft punts of fist and foot against flesh and the pained grunts of someone receiving a thorough beating. Thankfully, Barry’s vitals suggest that he’s the one delivering said beating—at least at the start. Suddenly, Barry’s adrenaline spikes and he gasps in pain, oxygen levels dropping when he’s winded by one counterstrike after another.

“Barry?” Caitlin asks urgently. She turns her frantic eyes on Eobard.

Shifting in his seat, Eobard wonders how long he can stand this before he’s forced to intervene, forced to do away with this façade and ruin years of hard work—

Then, all at once, it stops. Barry’s adrenaline is still high, but he’s breathing heavily again, if somewhat panicky. In fact, the brief stretch of silence from his opponent worries Eobard more than the sound of the thrashing his son just received. It suggests a moment of deliberation, of possibly escalating a mere fistfight toward something more calculated and cold.

Meanwhile, Eobard makes an important decision of his own.

But before he has a chance to act on it, there’s the sharp rapport of gunshot that cuts off suddenly.
The continued sound of Barry panting frantically suggests that the boy was finally able to put some distance between himself and his opponent.

Eobard’s grip on the armrests of his wheelchair gradually relaxes as he slowly and subtly lowers himself back down the inch or so he rose from his seat a split-second again. Thankfully, no one notices, too caught up on listening to Barry almost breathe his last breath into the microphone. There’s a collective release of tension as Barry finally says, “I’m heading back now, guys.”

“Got it,” Cisco sighs, leaning back in his chair, “Just…take your time, man.”

Caitlin, meanwhile, rises from her seat, making a beeline toward her office to grab her equipment. Because, even with Barry’s heightened healing abilities, she knows a few sutures or splints might be needed to help things along.

Sure enough, Barry sprints into the Cortex twenty seconds later with his hood back, his face bloodied and still panting pretty hard, either because he’s running low on energy or because he’s broken a rib. Either way, he looks a little worse for wear.

“What happened?” Hartley asks, beating Eobard to the punch.

“He—he split,” Barry gasps, wincing as he drops into Caitlin’s vacant chair on Eobard’s left. “I mean, every time I took one of them down, he divided again.”

“Are we talking about just one guy here or many?” Cisco asks, confused.

Barry takes a deep breath. Then another. This time, he doesn’t wince, which is a good sign. He probably only bruised his ribs instead of breaking them. “They all had the same face. I’m pretty sure its just one meta-human with the ability to clone himself.”

Cisco suddenly stare into the middle distance, mumbling to himself as he contemplates Barry’s description, “Considering the conservation of mass, how is that even possible…”

Eobard ignores him at that point, pulling out the clean handkerchief from his trouser pocket and handing it to Barry, who graciously uses it to dab away the blood on his lip and his brow. He also has a nasty abrasion on his cheek, but Caitlin has already returned before he can get to it, swatting his hand away gently. “Even if that’s clean, that’s not 100% sanitary,” she admonishes Eobard.

Eobard nods but remains silent. He’s too stunned to do much of anything else at the moment.

Rather alarmingly, he doesn’t see how he can continue to let Barry pursue this idea of becoming a vigilante.

“Suit off,” Caitlin continues, waving Barry toward a stool in the corner of the Cortex. “The light’s horrible over here.”

In the blink of an eye, Barry’s back in his civilian clothes, looking less frantic and more defeated as he takes up a seat beside one of the side desks.

Cisco practically jumps to his feet then, making his way briskly toward Barry’s suit where the boy propped it back up on its mannequin. “Do my eyes deceive me, or is that blood I see on my suit?”

Barry bows his head, ashamed, and says nothing.

Eobard’s cellphone buzzes just then. He whips it out of his other pocket and glances down at the screen, opening the message Joe just sent to him detailing the most pertinent details of their case. The
image and the name at the top of the message stirs only the vaguest of his memories.

*Danton Black*…

“What it is?” Hartley asks, still seated at the main console beside him.

Eobard tilts his phone toward him. “See what you can pull up on this gentleman. Unless I’m mistaken, this looks like one of Simon Stagg’s former employees. I’m sure I met at a conference somewhere…”

While Hartley fire up a good old google search, Cisco ducks into his side office and returns with a miner’s light on his head and a wet cloth, setting to work on cleaning his suit. Caitlin, meanwhile, dabs away the rest of the blood on Barry’s face, seeming in no hurry to start on any stitches.

“The abrasions are already rapidly healing,” she says, sounding impressed.

“Yeah, I got my ass handed to me,” Barry mutters, sounding a little less so.

“You got blood on my suit,” Cisco snorts.

Which was apparently the wrong thing to say, as Barry returns with a sharp, “I think some of it belongs to him, another not-so-friendly meta-human.”

Eobard almost feels like asking him what he expected, if not a confrontation—even in the 25th century, it was more the norm for new meta-humans to join the growing criminal enterprise in Central City than turn their interests toward law enforcement or vigilantism. Barry needed to come to terms with the fact that, if he truly wanted to become the city’s darling hero, the enemies he would need to face over the years would be numberless.

Instead, he pulls up Hartley’s findings on the various screens around the Cortex and wheels himself around to sit beside Barry. “Danton Black,” he says, finally giving a name to Barry’s mysterious opponent. “He’s a bio-geneticist specializing in therapeutic cloning—basically, growing new organs to replace failing ones.”

“Apparently,” Hartley chimes in, “Stagg stole his research and then fired him. Stagg said the main reason behind terminating Black’s contract with his company was due to his unethical practices of ‘self-experimentation’. Even so, that doesn’t justify stealing his work…”

“I saw Black create duplicates from his own body,” Barry says, squinting at the screen curiously, no doubt connecting the dots between Black’s powers and his field of research.

“That’s pretty ironic,” Cisco chimes in, turning his attention away from the suit to join their brainstorming group. “The guy specialized in cloning and now he can make xeroxes of himself.”

Oh, they have no idea how common it was for people to become the embodiment of their research once dark matter was thrown into the mix. Danton Black will hardly be the greatest oddity they’ll encounter. “If he was experimenting on himself when he was exposed to the dark matter wave released by the particle accelerator, then he has himself to thank for the nature of his powers,” Eobard explains, trying to nudge them in the right direction.

“Meet Captain clone, I guess.” When everyone turns to share a weary look with Cisco, he clears his throat and follows up with, “Don’t worry—I’ll come up with something cooler.”

Shaking his head, Barry hops off the stool and makes his way toward the door.
“Where are you going?” Caitlin asks.

Barry stops and turns halfway around, glancing first at her and then at Eobard. “I’m…” He gestures vaguely with his hands for a moment, struggling to find the right words. He’s frustrated, that much is clear—but, more importantly, Eobard is picking up the slightest whiff of fear from his son.

This could be good. Or…

…or this could be bad.

Eobard’s divided.

“It’s like what you and Joe have been trying to tell me,” Barry finally continues. “I’m in way over my head. Yeah, I’m fast, but I’m no warrior. I could barely fight one meta-human, let alone six.”

Just as the boy is about to leave again, Eobard—impulsively—stops him by saying, “Barry?”

Barry halts again, glancing back at him, waiting for either a small lecture or a few words of encouragement or support.

Eobard’s mouth feels dry all of a sudden. Growing up, the Flash had always his favorite hero. He was the speedster that had seen the worst that their fair city had to offer and made the greatest sacrifices of them all—Eobard’s seen, firsthand, how ferocious an adversary Barry can be when he puts his mind to it. But…

But that Flash was born much later in time. This Barry Allen is too young, and it shows, because when Eobard looks at him, all he can see is that scared little boy he met so many years ago.

“…I understand,” he finishes, faltering. “Go, get some rest.”

Barry’s posture relaxes, like he was hoping Eobard would say that. Nodding in agreement, he finally leaves the Cortex.

He leaves a long, uncomfortable silence in his wake, one that speaks volumes of how much Eobard’s employees disagree with the way he handled the situation. Not surprisingly, Hartley is the one who breaks it: “You’re…going to give him a proper pep talk after he’s had a chance to cool down, right?”

Both Cisco and Caitlin suddenly find a reason to make themselves scarce, disappearing into their respective offices as Eobard wheels back over to the main console. Unlike Hartley, they know better than to criticize the way in which he chooses to deal with his son.

“Tell me,” Eobard begins, folding his hands together over his lap. “Do you think Barry has some unspoken duty to defend this city with his life?”

“No,” Hartley replies, much to his surprise, “but I do think it’s very much in Barry’s best interests to learn how to defend himself against other meta-humans.”

“He doesn’t need to know how to fight if he doesn’t intend to go around town picking fights.”

“What is he supposed to do if someone decides to bring the fight to him?”

Eobard cocks his head to one side, curious.

Taking off his glasses, Hartley closes his eyes and rubs the bridge of his nose. He does that quite often now, usually before he has a full-blown migraine, a lingering consequence of the blow he took to the head during the particle accelerator explosion. “Barry’s told me countless times before what he
saw the night his mother was murdered. He *knows* his powers are very much like that of the Man in
the Lightning.”

There’s an uncomfortable flutter in the pit of Eobard’s stomach. He feels very much like they’ve
played out this tableau once before, back in Caitlin’s old lab, when Hartley was dangerously close to
losing his life; Grodd’s interference was the only thing that saved him.

“And?” Eobard asks, probing.

Hartley replaces his glasses, now leaning against the main console with his right fist propped up
against his jaw. He looks more tired than confrontational, which brings Eobard some small measure
of ease. “This morning we had something of a discussion about all the possible meta-human
’sightings’ Cisco’s been keeping track of over social media. Theoretically, everyone will be affected
by the particle accelerator in a different way—for example, Danton Black, who likely developed his
cloning abilities due to his experiments on the same subject, is probably never going to be as fast as
Barry or summon a storm the way Clyde Mardon could.”

“What you’re saying,” Eobard replies, speaking slowly, quietly alarmed by the amount of thought his
son has already given this delicate subject, “is that Barry thinks there is some essential…*substance*
he and his mother’s murderer share, enough to give them the same powers.”

“Potentially, yes. But that’s not even the most distressing thing about this whole matter.”

“Oh?”

“What are the chances that a man who can move at inhuman speeds will break into the home and kill
the mother of a child that will one day—many years down the road—also gain the ability to move at
inhuman speeds?” Hartley postulates. “What if that man *knew* Barry would be just as fast as him one
day? More importantly, what if he isn’t *done* with Barry yet?”

That flutter in Eobard’s stomach turns into something a little more noisome. He had no idea Barry
was so close to the truth already. “The chances are *slim*, I agree…,” he replies, trying to think of a
way to add a little uncertainty to the mix. Thankfully, he comes up with a solution rather quickly, “…
but I think you’re working in the reverse order here.”

Hartley blinks at him, confused. “What do you mean?”

“How was this intruder supposed to know he was attacking the family of a boy who would one day
share his powers?” he points out. “Barry often talks about the lightning that surrounded him that
night, of the raw energy that spirited him away from his house. Wouldn’t it make better sense if
Barry was someone affected by this energy that night, thereby predisposing him toward adapting
similar powers during the particle accelerator’s explosion?”

Hartley opens his mouth and then immediately closes it again. “You know…I don’t know why we
never considered that before—that Barry was predisposed toward gaining his speed due to his
exposure to whatever was fueling the man who killed his mother.”

A wave of relief washes over Eobard, although he’s careful not to show it. “All the same, I know the
point you were trying to get across to me at the beginning of our talk—that Barry is somehow in
danger, as a potential target of the Man in the Lightning. That…certainly explains his apprehension
today.”

“He still could be in danger,” Hartley replies. “If you were the Man in the Lightning, how would you
react to knowing that there was another speed demon in your midst?”
Eobard shakes his head, feigning ignorance. “I can’t say, but I think I can see now why Barry needs to continue this endeavour he’s already undertaken. He needs to be prepared for whatever the future brings him.”

“Exactly,” Hartley smiles. He rises from his seat, pressing a hand against the small of his back as he tries to stretch it out. “I’m going to give Barry a call and tell him about your theory. I think it would lay a few of his fears to rest.”

“Thank you,” Eobard replies, “But, Hartley, could you also tell him that he shouldn’t be afraid to have these discussions with me? I know he hates the Man in the Lightning, but I had no idea he was still so afraid of him. The way he talks about bringing the man to justice, it seems as though he has no idea what kind of trouble he’s getting himself into.”

“I will,” Hartley promises, bowing his head goodbye before he disappears into the corridor.

Eobard sits there for a while longer after he leaves, mulling things over. Their talk was rather enlightening. Not only did Eobard discover that it was crucial to keep a closer eye on Barry, but Hartley revealed a rather important piece of information, one that would help Eobard decide how to eventually approach the Scarlet Speedster.

Barry is afraid of him—of him, Eobard Thawne.

Eobard smiles.

~***~

Following the lack of a heated argument, Caitlin and Cisco eventually slink back into the Cortex. Caitlin, curiously, only remains long enough to hunt down the rag Cisco used to clean Barry’s suit and then retreats into one of the sublevel labs to work in peace. Cisco, meanwhile, drags Eobard into his side office to show off his latest inventions, that being the fabled ‘protein bar’ Eobard already reversed engineered for himself.

“One of a kind,” Cisco beams proudly, breaking off a small grey crumb for Eobard. “What do you think?”

“You want me to eat it?”

“Well, yeah. You know what Barry likes

. Do you think it’ll meet his standards?”

Amused, Eobard pops the small portion into his mouth. He’s rather shocked by the flavour, given the grainy texture of the bar. “…Why cotton candy?”

Cisco’s face falls a little. “Is that a no-go?”

“Well, no.” He breaks off another small piece to sample. He usually makes his protein bars flavourless. “I’m just trying to figure out how long you’ve wanted to be Willy Wonka.”

“Ha,” Cisco deadpans, although he knows Eobard is only ribbing him. “I was limited in what syrups I could find at the supermarket. I haven’t figured out how to make a full-course meal-in-a-bar just yet, Miss Beauregarde, so don’t get too excited.”

“Just plain will do,” Eobard replies, although he actually really likes the cotton candy. “Vanilla would also work…and mint.”
“Mint?”

For some reason, Eobard’s caught up on the memory of how Barry described his connection to the Speed Force. He said it felt… ‘minty’.

After a beat of silence, Cisco asks, “What’s on your mind?”

“…Barry.”

“I figured—what about him.”

Eobard runs a hand through his hair, feeling uncharacteristically tired. “…I’m divided on whether or not I should push Barry toward becoming a ‘hero’. Deep down inside, I know he’s meant to do it”—and he does, because he’s read the history books and seen what Barry’s future self is capable of—“but the part of me that is his father desperately wants to keep him out of harm’s way.”

“You can’t stop Barry from doing something that’s potentially dangerous to his health,” Cisco replies, no hesitation. “Case in point: making illegal fireworks.”

Eobard nods slowly in agreement. “Some days, he’s more of a danger to himself than anything else in this world.”

“Yeah…he’s seems to be pretty talented in shutting down the part of his brain that’s supposed to run regular risk assessments on his bright ideas—which kind of works well with his need to help people in risky situations. I mean—” Cisco puts the protein bar down on his desk and crosses his arms, trying to give off a serious vibe for a change “—I get it that you’re his dad and you don’t want anything to hurt him, but I know he’s got what it takes to do this. Once he’s had a minute to clear his mind, he’ll realize that too.”

Eobard knows he’s right.

He doesn’t understand why he’s at war with himself over letting Barry become the Flash. He knew this was Barry’s destiny when he took the boy in and allowed himself to care for the child; he knew it just as well when he allowed the particle accelerator to put Barry in a nine-month coma, striking the poor boy down with enough power to kill an ordinary man.

He has to let Barry do this.

Nodding, Eobard retreats from Cisco’s office and wheels off to his own upstairs, where he sits and stares at the phone for an ungodly length of time. He wants to call Barry and talk to him, to find out if Hartley somehow rallied him back into the game or if Eobard needs to be the one to gently guide him back on track—but he’s interrupted by a curious message from Cisco, one that simply states: ‘You should probably get back down here. You’re never going to believe this.’

Eobard’s seen enough oddities in his lifetime to believe the unbelievable, but he comes anyway, surprised to find his employees gathered around someone in the Cortex. They have the gentleman seated with an EEG cap strapped to his head—wheeling around in front of him, Eobard’s momentarily alarmed to discover Danton Black in their midst.

“This…is a fake, isn’t it?” Eobard inquires, glancing over at the screen they wheeled out next to their test subject. According to the irregular readout, this man might as well be brain dead.

“A clone,” Caitlin corrects him excitedly.

Eobard balks at her for a moment. He knew she was a cut above the rest when he hired on her onto
his team, but *this* is still above and beyond what he thought her ever capable of. Clearly Ramon was no longer the master at completely blindsiding him with unorthodox inventions.

“Before you get too excited,” she continues, putting the brakes on his internal praise of her work, “I didn’t have to do too much of the heavy lifting here. I was only trying to culture the leukocytes from the blood sample on Barry’s suit for further analysis. He pretty much grew himself.”

“Barry’s going to love this,” Cisco says—just as Hartley murmurs, “Barry’s going to hate this.”

Merrily, Caitlin removes the cap from her subject’s head and begins maneuvering the clone out of the chair. “Lend me a hand so we can find out.”

Honestly, Eobard doesn’t know how Barry is going to react to this, but he keeps his mouth shut as his team straightens the man out, trying to keep him naturally balanced on his feet as Caitlin whips out her cell phone. The words have barely left her mouth as she tells Barry they need him there ASAP when a bright flash of light heralds Barry’s return. The boy skids to a halt directly in front of the clone, standing between the anomaly and his team, the corner of his lip curled into the barest snarl.

Seeing Barry assume such a familiar pose—to see him situate himself between his friends and the perceived source of danger in this room gives Eobard an unexpected thrill.

*This*, he thinks, *is the Flash.*

“Barry!” Caitlin hollers before the boy can damage her test subject, “it’s okay!”

“It is *not* okay!” Barry snaps, “Black is here, and he’s just—just…standing there.” He turns a quizzical look on Caitlin. “This isn’t him, is it?”

“It’s one of his replicates,” Eobard explains, finally finding his voice.

“How did you get it?”

“I grew it,” Caitlin replies softly, waving her hand toward the screens on the far wall. Barry follows her, staring first at the bizarre EEG readings and then at the microscopic images of Danton Black’s blood samples. “I isolated a sample of Black’s blood from your suit to see if I could trigger the in vitro cultivation process and learn how Black multiples. When I exposed the leukocytes to a protein gel, they began replicating into a person.”

“Are you kidding me?” Barry breathes, looking both fascinated and confused. He turns back to Danton’s replicate, waving his hand in front of the clone’s face. “Why isn’t he—it doing anything?”

“We did a brain scan,” Eobard explains, rolling up his sleeves. “Involuntary motor functions are active. Little else.”

“We think it’s acting as a receiver,” Cisco adds from where he and Hartley are sitting at the main console, skimming the clone’s overall stats.

“The clones are an empty shell without Black,” Caitlin elaborates. “Shut down the real Black, and you might shut them all down.”

Oddly enough, Barry doesn’t look relieved by this revelation. He moves closer to the replicate, eyeing it up, gaze lingering on all the tiny imperfections of Danton Black’s face, blessed with a moment to observe his opponent at his leisure.
Eobard knows that feeling. Hovering over Barry while he was comatose, speaking plainly to him for the first time in years, is a cathartic experience. Usually, when two enemies are this close together, one hardly has the time to take in the other; the only thing that exists in that small, sacred space is the potential for a killing blow.

“How do we know which one’s the real Danton Black?” Barry asks.

Caitlin is evidently pleased by his question. “That occurred to me, given your own passing out. Black has limits, just like you. Controlling all of those clones must require a tremendous amount of physical strength, so look for the one showing signs of weakness or fatigue. He’s the prime.”

“Just a theory,” Eobard adds, “but one you might want to put to the test, Barry.”

Barry finally tears his eyes away from the clone, fixing his gaze on Eobard. There’s a gentle furrow to his brow, a touch of confusion that relaxes as he says, “Do you think I can do this?”

Eobard feels a small flutter in his stomach. But it’s the good kind, this time. It’s the feeling of being needed by his greatest hero.

Quietly, Eobard nods.

The corner of Barry’s lip quirks into a smile, one that quickly works its way up into his eyes as Cisco rounds the main console with one of his monstrosities in hand. “By the way, I whipped up these high calories protein bars for you to keep your metabolism up. The flavour is a work in progress, though.”

Barry snorts softly in amusement.

Almost as if in response, Black’s clone lets out a sharp huff of air and moves.

Caitlin screams, almost tripping over her heel as she moves to put some distance between herself and her creation. Eobard simply blinks in mild surprise, wondering if Danton is currently cloning himself naturally and calling his makeshift army to arms. It would be fascinating to get a look at the replicate’s brain activity while under command.

Unfortunately, Joseph West kills that idea altogether, quite literally, as he appears in the threshold of the Cortex. Eobard is the only one facing the door, and, therefore, he’s the only person braced for the sound of gunshot as Joe promptly buries two bullets in the clone’s head.

Hartley, who’s sitting nearest the detective, reacts as if a bomb went off behind him, head hunched forward, hands over his ears. The look he throws back at Joe is one of pure vitriol.

“Sorry,” Joe mumbles. He glances around the room, his weapon still drawn. “Any more of them?”

“Nope,” Caitlin offers meekly.

“Why did it start moving?” Barry asks, directing his question at Eobard.

Eyeing the dead body slowly dribbling blood onto his pristine white floor, Eobard sighs and says, “I guess the prime is on the move.” He waves a hand at their fallen adversary. “This heard the summons to battle.”

“And I know where he was summoned to,” Joe mutters as he holsters his gun. “Stagg Industries.” He looks to Barry now, eyeing the boy up, as if trying to gauge his reaction to the that information.

“You sure you don’t want to call this in?” Barry asks, obviously referring to a previous discussion
between the two of them.

Joe spares a quick glance at Eobard and then shakes his head. “You were right. Police can’t fight this. What Black’s become, like Mardon… it’s beyond me. The only person it’s not beyond is you.”

Barry smiles a small smile, then offers Eobard a quick wink before he approaches his uniform, which was lovingly cleaned by Cisco and hung up once more on Hubert the mannequin.

“Have fun,” Eobard murmurs as he feels the Speed Force rearing up inside him, that brilliant blaze of freedom the moment Barry taps into his powers.

And, of course, Barry does.

~***~

Albeit, not as carefully as he should.

Danton Black’s tale ends about tragically as one can, a man who, failing in his endeavour, chooses to end his life rather than living out the rest of his days in a prison cell, suffering an incomplete existence without his late wife and friend. However, it isn’t Barry’s lack of success in apprehending Black before the man ends his life that unsettles Eobard. Rather, it’s the fact that Barry encountered Simon Stagg prior to squaring off against Black, that he allowed that… scum a glimpse of what resided at the core of the brilliant streak of lightning that now patrolled the streets of Central City.

Though he and Stagg hardly occupied the same social circles, Eobard knew enough of the man to never want for his company. Stagg was a beast when it came to business, cutting down competitors with an almost maniac glee, although he had little common sense in the sciences to speak of, which was odd, considering he specialized in innovative technologies. He was never a ‘scientist’ in the literal sense, but he has enough honorary awards to give the allusion that there’s more going on inside his head than there really is. In fact, the only reason he’s even on Eobard’s radar in the first place is because Stagg was the sort of person Eiling could make use of with frightening ease.

Knowing that Stagg knows about the Flash worries Eobard enough that he hardly feels up to celebrating Barry’s recent victory, although he hides his concern well. In fact, when Barry leaves for a late shift at the CCPD the following night, the boy is none the wiser to Eobard’s quick trip into the city, bypassing Stagg Enterprise security with ease by claiming to be there to see one of his past employees. While he does know a few people on Stagg’s payroll, he goes straight for the room at the top of building, rolling into the man’s office feeling much calmer than when he left his home that evening.

Stagg, of course, gapes like a fish out of water once he catches sight of Eobard in the doorway, no doubt surprised he didn’t hear Eobard coming in. “Wells? Who the hell let you in here?”

Eobard nods his head back slightly, “You’ve been having a party out there?”

Stagg curls his hand around the glass of scotch on his desk, gently scoffing at the mess in his lobby, the remnants of Barry’s battle with Black. “I’m sure you saw on TV. A former employee of mine tried to kill me.”

“A former employee with the ability to replicate…” Eobard nods, watching as Stagg takes a swig of his drink. “…faced off against a man who could move at superspeed.”

As he suspected, Stagg glances down and away for a moment, fighting back the smile on his lips, like he has another business venture in mind, a dark secret he’s not certain he wants to share.
God, Eobard hates him…

“You’ve seen him too,” Stagg murmurs, looking up at him again, “haven’t you?”

Seen him, raised him, made him—Stagg has no idea just how much closer Eobard is to this divine being.

“Indeed, I have,” Eobard replies.

Stagg doesn’t try to hide his smile anymore, shaking his head, as if in disbelief. “Extraordinary,” he says, rising from his seat, drink abandoned on his desk. “The power he possesses—it’s like…it’s like the gods of old. It’s like Mercury on Earth.”

Eobard closes his eyes briefly, because that imagery resonates well with him.

He and Barry.

Gods of old.

Stagg, of course, ruins it by taking it a step too far. “Can you imagine if you could control his power? If you could—if you could harness it?” The old fool throws his hands up into the air, making his way over to Eobard. “You could change what it means to be human. The man in the red mask is the key…” His smile eases a little, something dark simmering in his eyes. “And I’m going to get him.”

Briefly, Eobard wonders if he should let this slide. After all, as far as threats go, Stagg ranks quite low on the totem pole. But if Stagg decides to run his mouth off to someone in Eiling’s employ, it won’t be long before the General makes a move to ensnare Barry himself. Eobard can’t let that happen, because Barry isn’t ready to face off that kind of danger just yet.

Also, because Eobard simply doesn’t want to let this slide…

What he wants—what the creeping cold in the pit of his stomach wants is the red-hot rush of satisfaction from watching the light die in someone’s eyes. Eobard hasn’t killed anyone since Slade tried to infiltrate S.T.A.R. Labs, and even longer still before that. Fatherhood has softened that old instinct in so many ways, but it’s also sharpened it in others.

Eobard doesn’t try to fight the smile that slips out as he removes his glasses and stuffs them into his jacket pocket. “The man in the red mask,” he replies, “he’s called the Flash.”

Stagg tilts his head curiously to one side, clearly wondering how Eobard managed to get his hands on that kind of information.

“Oh, at least, he will be one day.”

Eobard can feel the darker side of the Speed Force thrumming in his veins, taking quiet delight in the way the smile falls from Stagg’s face as Eobard rises to his feet, towering over him.

Stagg’s eyes are momentarily glued to Eobard’s legs as he tries to process what he’s seeing. Then he looks up at Eobard, angrily perplexed. “What the hell?”

That anger turns to fear as Eobard slips the small knife into Stagg’s liver, as smooth as butter, silently rejoicing at Stagg’s soft gurgle of pain. As tempting as it would be to punch the man’s heart out with his hand, Eobard doesn’t want this to end too quickly. He doesn’t know when he will get the chance to kill again, to hear a man’s stuttered breath and knowing that his life is coming to a close all because of him.
“This isn’t personal,” Eobard says, allowing Stagg to scramble at his shoulder, trying to hold himself upright as Eobard twists the blade. Stagg makes the most exquisitely wet sound of agony. “Not entirely. The man in the red mask—the boy? He’s mine. We’re creatures of a different breed, and it will only be a matter of time before I prove that to him.”

Stagg shutters against him, eyes glossing over. Too soon, Eobard thinks, but he’s gotten his high, so he slips the blade back into his pocket with practiced ease and allows Stagg to slouch down onto the floor, slipping into a brief interlude of shock before his heart fails him altogether.

Eobard stares at the blood pooling on the floor at his feet. It’s been a while since he’s had to clean up a mess like this, but he’s dealt with far worse.

For now, he simply stands there while he can and enjoys it.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Just can't shake that murder kick, can he...?

PS: Very little of what comes next is going to tie in closely to the episodes, so I hope you enjoy the next kink in Eobard's meticulously laid out plans...
Chapter Notes

A/N: I expected way more people to have abandoned this story when it went on hiatus for three years. Thank you for sticking with it for so long. Here–have yourself a nice, long chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.*

~ Carrie Fisher

~***~

The only thing history loves more than a good hero is a good villain.

Honestly, it’s the dichotomy that really draws the public’s interest, the idea that all things are balanced, good and evil, even the mightiest among them. That’s why the masses down in Gotham eat up any headlines that include the Clown Prince of Crime and the Dark Knight. One is always pushing the other toward greatness.

One intuitively completes the other.

The same could be said of Barry and himself. Eobard is, quite literally, the Flash’s ‘reverse’, his counterbalance in this great game of universal equilibrium. The people of Central City understood that their fates were intertwined long before Barry Allen knew that himself, that Eobard’s wickedness was key in defining the Flash’s virtues. They were two forces trapped in orbit, ever circling, simultaneously kept together and apart for all eternity. The same could be said of any vigilante and their nemesis, although nobody was as crucial to the Flash’s definition as—

“Leonard Snart,” Barry supplies with something of a lopsided smile, as if he thinks this is somehow funny.

His quick sprint into the Cortex sends Cisco’s stack of notes on the main console flying, although in another burst of light he collects them all before they can touch the ground. Cisco tries to look unamused by the feat, but he fails miserably.

“I take it you’re referring to one of the men that tried to steal the Kahndaq Dynasty Diamond?” Eobard asks. Barry had sped off that morning to intersect the stolen Blackhawk truck delivering the precious stone to the museum, although he had to sacrifice the arrest in favor of rushing an injured guard to the hospital. The thieves got away, putting an end to his winning streak that week against a slew of other robbers and Kyle Nimbus, whom Cisco lovingly named ‘The Mist’. He’d been in something of a mood when he left to start his shift at the CCPD following the heist, so it’s good to see him in better spirits now that he has a name to work with.

Eobard, on the other hand, can feel his admittedly good mood taking a sudden nose drive.

It’s not that he *hates* Leonard Snart…except that he kind of does. He’d worked with the man on more than one occasion, and he was admittedly impressed with Snart’s ability to carry out the brunt
of his plans flawlessly, even before the man became a meta-human, but Snart wasn’t much of a team player. He was arrogant and cold and utterly undeserving of any amount of consideration Barry invested in a man roughly 15 years his senior. It was childish, really, the way in which Snart sought out the boy’s attention for nothing more than a quick thrill. It was therefore downright ridiculous that some historians considered the fabled ‘Captain Cold’ to be the greatest friend and enemy of Central City’s beloved Flash.

“Thankfully, we have his mugshot in our database to work off of,” Barry elaborates, scanning the room. Only the three of them are there for the moment, which evidently baffles him. “Did Felicity leave already?”

“She had some crisis to deal with back in Starling,” Eobard replies, though he’s not entirely sure what that crisis entails. Undoubtedly, it somehow involves Oliver Queen and the ‘Arrow’. Not that he particularly cares. Having Miss Smoak show up unexpectedly this morning was an unpleasant surprise, especially when he realized she had already learned that Barry was a speedster—from Queen, no less, although when Barry found the time to tell the other man is beyond him.

Eobard takes off his glasses and rubs the bridge of his nose. Apparently, things have been snowballing behind the scenes ever since Barry ran off to Starling City the night before the particle accelerator exploded. Eobard’s been trying to squeeze information from the boy concerning what he’s been up to lately, with moderate success, but it’s hard not to feel as though he’s stuck in a freefall now, that he somehow lost control over the whole situation the moment he connected Barry to the Speed Force. And Snart…well, Snart is yet another unknown variable in this little disaster, someone he has neither the time nor the patience to deal with just yet.

Fortunately, Snart isn’t due to build his cold gun until several years down the road. He’s not smart enough to pull something off like that just yet. With any luck, Eobard will be well on his way home by the time ‘Captain Cold’ makes his big debut.

“Tired?” Barry asks as he drops into the seat between Eobard and Cisco, glancing over at the free-hand notes Cisco is trying to transcribe into a more permanent file on his computer.

“I feel a headache coming on,” Eobard replies.

“You want an Advil or something?”

“I think I’ll survive,” Eobard assures him. Conventional drugs do nothing for him, and he doesn’t want to have to pretend he’s feeling better once he’s taken a pill. “I take it you’re going to leave this business to Joe, seeing as Snart and his crew are now beyond your reach?”

“More or less,” Barry sighs, “I mean, if Joe tracks this guy down, he knows that he’s always free to ask for my assistance. I do still feel kind of bummed out, though, that this guy managed to get away…”

“Without the diamond,” Cisco cuts in helpfully. “You made him leave empty handed, which I bet rankled him pretty badly. Look—” Cisco pulls up an image of Snart and his criminal file on the main console screens. “This guy has been implicated in over 30 cases of grand larceny, which he has yet to be brought to justice over. You just broke his ten-year winning streak.”

Eobard stares at Leonard’s stony expression, blue eyes glittering in his mugshot, and frowns. Even apprehended, he’s able to exude a cool confidence Eobard has rarely seen shattered.

Hopefully, Joe will figure out a way to track him down without Barry’s help.
Barry smiles appreciatively, though the expression quickly folds under his confusion. “Did you hack into the CCPD’s database?”

“Felicity taught me.”

“Please exercise caution when committing your own petty crimes,” Eobard warns him.

“Hey, it’s not like I’m going to hack into the Pentagon next.” Leaning back in his chair, Cisco waves triumphantly at the screens. “But just think about it, you guys. If we encounter any meta-humans engaging in criminal activity, there’s a good chance they already have a criminal record. If I can figure out how to mount a camera on Barry’s emblem, we can potentially use facial recognition to identify our perps the moment Barry encounters them.”

“That would be insanely helpful,” Barry breathes, staring at the screens, seemingly mesmerized by some unknown quality of Snart’s file.

Eobard clears his throat. “Are we to assume you’re finished for the day, or were you merely dropping by for a visit?”

Barry glances down at his wristwatch. “Oh, I’m on my lunch break right now. I thought I would grab a bite to eat with Felicity and then head back to the precinct, but I guess that plan’s moot. I was really looking forward to taking her to the Trivia Night at Jitters this evening.” He glances at Cisco. “…Are you free later today?”

“I might be busy,” Cisco says, resuming his transcription. “One of our janitors didn’t show up for work this morning, so I need to track him down to see if he’s taking this off as a sick day. Why are you so eager to go? —Also, is it movie trivia? Because if so, I will absolutely slay the opposition. You might not enjoy yourself so much.”

“I’m not ‘eager’,” Barry mumbles, suddenly quiet, “It’s just…Iris asked me to come.”

Cisco’s eyebrows creep up toward his hairline, lips twitching into a tentative smile. “Like…as a date?”

“As a ‘double-date’,” Barry explains, somber. The boy was never very good at masking his disappointment. He also does the kicked-puppy look so well. “She’s going with Eddie. I was going to bring Felicity so I wouldn’t feel like a third wheel, but now I guess I’m fresh out of luck.”

“I’ll try to come—but if you want to really make Iris jealous, you should probably bring someone a little ‘sexier’…” Cisco muses, glancing over his shoulder.

Eobard and Barry crane their heads around to find Hartley standing in the threshold of Cortex, a mug of tea in one hand, looking more than a little tired. Hey yawns and blinks curiously as their small trio.

“I’m sorry? All I heard is ‘sexier’…?”

“Barry needs a partner for Trivia Night,” Cisco supplies before Barry can get a word in edgewise.

Hartley shakes his head, slowly making his way toward Cisco’s side-office, where he’s apparently set up shop in recent days. It’s too bad Eobard doesn’t know what exactly he’s been working on lately, but he plans on having a chat with the boy in another day or two to bring himself up to speed. “Regrettably, I have another engagement tonight.”

“Did Hartley just turn you down?” Cisco whispers, sotto voice. “I can’t believe that just happened.”

Smirking, Barry elbows his companion gently in the ribs. To Hartley, he says, “What’s his name?”
Hartley stops halfway across the Cortex, pivoting around smoothly on his left heel, grinning. “I find it funny that you automatically assume it’s a date.”

“Do you really expect us to believe otherwise?”

“Well…he is a rather handsome fellow with a deliciously devil-may-care attitude. Somehow, I don’t see this relationship going far, but I do plan on enjoying his company while it lasts.”

Eobard snorts in amusement. “Do you plan to leave a string of broken hearts in your wake forever, Hartley?”

Hartley glances pointedly at Barry; to Eobard he says, “Not forever.”

There’s a split second of silence before the three boys burst out laughing. Eobard shakes his head in mock disapproval, though he knows Hartley would genuinely pursue Barry if he knew there was even the slightest chance his feelings would be reciprocated.

“Well, enjoy your date,” Barry replies, sincere. “Where are you going anyway?”

“Oh, just a little bar along 117st. We’ll see where it goes from there.”

“That’s a block away from the museum,” Cisco says, side-eyeing Barry with something like pride. “You should check out the exhibit on the Kahndaq Dynasty Diamond. It wouldn’t be on display tonight if not for Central City’s friendly neighborhood speedster.”

Hartley looks quite pleased with his suggestion. “I will absolutely bring that up tonight.” Then he offers them a small salute and, after taking a careful sip of his tea, retreats into the other room.

With a sigh, Barry slowly rises from his seat. “So, is that a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ for tonight?”

“I’m 90% positive I can come,” Cisco replies, glancing over at Eobard. “I mean, unless you want to take your dad, because I can think of no better way to spoil someone’s else’s date than bringing along parental supervision.”

With a sharp bark of laughter, Eobard puts his wheelchair in reverse and smoothly spins away from the main console. “Have fun, boys,” he says, giving them a small wave over his shoulder. He already has his own plans tonight.

Because the particle accelerator, regrettably, won’t repair itself.

~***~

Later in the day, Eobard receives frightening news.

He’s deep below the pipeline, trying to figure out what supplies he still needs in order to continue his work, when he feels something tugging at the back of his mind. He’s communicated long enough with Grodd that he can feel the gorilla’s emotions well before Grodd can formulate a way to describe them. Today, for example, Eobard catches a whiff of a deep primal anger and fear before he retreats further underground to meet with his covert companion in crime.

“What happened?” Eobard asks, even before he reaches the end of the ladder, swallowed up by the grimy darkness of Grodd’s subterranean domain. He installed floodlights down here a while ago, but Grodd has chosen to leave them off today, which means he’s more agitated than usual. “Are you alright? Is there something wrong with Barry?”
He can’t see Grodd, but he hears his low whine of misery.

Eobard’s heart flutters nervously in his chest.

Unable to explain the source of his agony, Grodd jumps right into the relevant memory—

Right off the bat, Eobard can tell Grodd has been mucking around in someone else’s mind. Earlier today, he’d chosen to invade one of the officers at the precinct, someone standing nearby Barry’s lab on the second floor, half-concealed by one of the balcony pillars. Grodd’s host relaxed involuntarily under the mental invasion, almost dropping the mug of coffee in his right hand. He somehow managed to keep his grip on it as his arm swung down, spilling its contents across the floor. The resulting splash is loud in Eobard’s ears, but the fact that the man didn’t drop his glass was probably what prevented Grodd’s small slip-up from alerting anyone in the vicinity to the fact that something was amiss.

The only person Eobard can see through this man’s eyes is Barry. Part of him, at least, his left side obscured by the pillar between them. In the memory, Grodd moves his host a half-step to right, the better to see the man Barry is conversing with.

And that man is none other than General Wade Eiling.

‘—know each other?’ Barry asks, head tilted quizzically to one side. He has a large brownie covered in saran wrap in one hand and a cup of coffee from CC Jitters in the other, no doubt just now returning from his lunch break.

‘I’m an old acquaintance of your father,’ Eiling replies, glancing past Barry at his laboratory. He offers his hand for a shake. ‘It’s good to see you share his love of science, even if in another field.’

Barry’s confusion quickly morphs into a subtle sort of apprehension. Eobard’s known him long enough to recognize the way his shoulders stiffen minutely, as if bracing himself to run. He won’t run now, of course, because someone is watching him, but the reflex is now as natural to him as breathing.

The boy doesn’t take Eiling’s hand, though he does stare down at it in stunned silence for a moment. When he looks up at Eiling again, he says, ‘I think I remember what exactly you are to my father, General...’

Eiling lowers his hand to his side, seemingly unaffected by Barry’s cold reception. ‘Do you have a minute to talk, Mr. Wells?’

‘My lunch break just ended.’ Turning slowly, Barry nods his head toward his lab. ‘And I’m swamped right now, so, no, I don’t really have a minute.’

‘Not even to talk about the Man in the Lightning?’

The shock from that one statement is enough to stop Barry dead in his tracks, half turned away, still poised as though he wants to leave.

It also short-circuits Eobard’s brain for a moment, because he honestly can’t believe the man’s audacity at bringing up such a sensitive subject with Barry of all people.

Knowing he has the boy hooked now, Eiling slips his hands into the pockets of his neatly pressed trousers and says, ‘Your name popped up when we were digging around for more information concerning the entity. As you probably well know, he’s the one responsible for the fire at Mercury Labs about four years ago. The public likes to refer to him as ‘the man in the yellow suit’.’
‘Yes,’ Barry says faintly, uncertain.

Eobard can feel Grodd’s emotions ebbing and flowing. The gorilla is afraid, but he begins to seethe in the face of Barry’s own fear. Grodd knows what it feels like to be pinned by Eiling’s stare, knows how it feels to have your fate entirely in Eiling’s grimy hands. No good could possibly come of this meeting.

Eobard feels much the same.

‘When you were a child, you had an encounter with something like him,’ Eiling continues, taking a half step closer. ‘Most of the evidence from that case was destroyed during an attack on the CCPD by James Jesse, but a few things, including your statement to the police, were still in the database. The way you described him is on par with what we observed on the Mercury Lab security recordings. Needless to say, I think our speed demons are likely one in the same.’

Blinking in surprise, Barry shakes his head, trying to rouse himself from his stupor. ‘Like you said, the evidence from the night my mother died was destroyed. Even if you have proof that this man exists and is responsible for what happened at Mercury Labs, you can’t say they’re one in the same.’

‘But I can.’ Eiling glances down at his own chest, at the stupid medals sewn over his breast—nothing more than a colourful array of threads, in Eobard’s humble opinion. Unfortunately, that colourful array of threads means power, which Barry understands. ‘And if I was to suggest that what a boy saw in his kitchen fourteen years ago is as real as you and me—and as real a threat to our country as any of our other great enemies—then you better believe it’s gonna be the truth.’

‘That would exonerate my father,’ Barry says, not interested in beating around the bush. However, he still sounds faint, like he can’t believe what he’s hearing. ‘But... what do you want from me?’

‘That’s something I would prefer to discuss in a more private setting,’ Eiling replies, removing his right hand from his pocket. In it is a small white card, no doubt containing his contact information. He extends it to Barry. ‘I know your surrogate father isn’t my biggest fan, but it’s water under the bridge between the two of us, so far as I’m concerned. Tell him I said hi, would you?’

Tucking his brownie under his left arm, Barry tentatively takes the card. He stares down at it numbly as Eiling nods his head farewell and turns away, strolling confidently toward the stairs, knowing he’s got Barry right where he wants him.

Eobard is seething—but he’s startled by the shadow that creeps into his vision, someone hovering in the periphery of Grodd’s host. It turns out to be another officer, staring at said host in concern, ‘Hey, man. Are you having another seiz—’

The memory ends there.

Eobard blinks rapidly, momentarily confused by his apparent blindness. Then he remembers that Grodd shut the lights off and takes a deep, slow breath as he listens to the gorilla pace back and forth in agitation.

“He came for your brother,” Eobard breathes, still amazed by the gall of that man. “I can’t believe he did that…”

‘Family!’ Grodd hollers at the back of Eobard’s mind, incessant. ‘He comes for FAMILY!’

“I think he’s only using Barry to get to me,” Eobard elaborates, hoping to ease the gorilla’s fears. However, it’s no easy feat when he’s seeing red himself. The urge to cave someone’s skull in right
now is particularly fierce—and not an easy one to fight with Grodd gleefully trying to feed into that anger. “Calm down, please. I can handle this. Once I find out what he’s up to, we can decide how we’re going to kill him.”

‘Not kill,’ Grodd replies, eerily quiet all of a sudden. ‘No, no…Tear him apart. Inside...then outside.’

“As you wish.” Far be it from him to stop the primate from exacting his revenge according to his own fantasies. “But for now, proceed only as I instruct you. Is that understood?”

Grodd hesitates before sharing a brief snippet from his memories, that of Barry watching Eiling leave, face pale, body stiff with fear. It had taken everything in Grodd not to intervene during that brief conversation.

“If he openly threatens Barry or tries to remove him from the premises, you have my permission to act as you see fit,” Eobard elaborates, sincerely hoping it doesn’t come to that. As soon as Eiling discovers Grodd is alive and openly interfering with his work, the General will bring the unholy might of the US government down upon them. Grodd might need to leave Central City to evade capture, where he will be of absolutely no help to anyone. “Otherwise, stay hidden. You need to take your own safety into consideration here as well.”

Grodd shares the sensation of strength and swollen pride, flexing his muscles, both figuratively and literally, to demonstrate how little his own security matters in this whole affair. But Eobard quickly shares, in return, the emotions he felt from Grodd when first observing this awful memory, highlighting the poignant fear the gorilla shared with his adoptive brother, which puts an end to that nonsense. Grodd falls quiet, humbled.

Taking off his glasses, Eobard rubs the bridge of his nose. He still needs to get in contact with Ted Ferguson, who’s about the only person that can give him the most direct information concerning what Eiling’s recent activities in the last few months.

“Take this opportunity to rest,” he sighs, replacing his glasses. “Eiling won’t be returning to the precinct again any time soon. Eat, sleep—return to your duty with a fresh mind. You can’t protect Barry if you’re not at your best.”

There’s a stretch of silence from Grodd as the gorilla mulls over his advice. Eventually, there’s a soft huff from the primate. Some of the tension in the air eases as he projects a quiet, ‘Yes, father.’

Eobard nods, even though Grodd probably can’t see him in the dark. He stands there for a while as he listens to the ape lumber off, still mulling over that memory, of Barry’s stunned expression at the prospect of exonerating his father.

For obvious reasons, Eobard can’t allow that to happen.

He runs back aboveground to grab his wheelchair. As expected, now that his cellphone has reception again, he gets a loud ping to alert him to the fact that he has 7 missed calls, all from Barry. There are no messages though, which implies that Barry’s probably going to try calling again or swing by to speak with him in person.

The latter turns out to be the case, as Eobard discovers when he rolls off the elevator and bumps into Barry in the little foyer outside the Cortex. The boy looks relieved to see him.

“Back so soon?” Eobard quips, trying to fake a little humor despite the way he’s still seething on the inside.

“I tried calling, but you wouldn’t answer.”
“My cell is almost dead,” he lies, just a smidgen of his concern bleeding out into his voice, “so I left it in my office to charge…Are you alright? Did something happen?”

Barry runs a hand through his hair, scowling momentarily at the wall behind Eobard as he struggles to find the words. He’s always been a little awkward like this, easily tongue-tied by even the smallest of upsets. “I’m… alright? I just— It’s just—”

Eobard reaches out to steady him, emotionally and mentally, by gently encircling Barry’s wrist in his hand—

There’s a sudden spark between them, a harmless twitch under Eobard’s warm palm. They both flinch away before Barry looks up at him, eyes wide.

“I—” Eobard begins to say, heart in his throat.

“I’m so sorry!” Barry says simultaneously, laughing, eyes crinkled with mirth as some of his tension melts away. “You know, I shocked Iris earlier today, too. I’m not sure how to control that yet.”

There’s a great deal about his powers that Barry doesn’t know how to control yet, but Eobard is satisfied in letting the boy think that little slip-up was entirely his own fault. “That’s fine,” he says. “Now, what was it you wanted to discuss?”

A little more relaxed now, Barry is finally able to give voice to his thoughts. “I met General Eiling today. He came down to the precinct after my lunch break.” Fishing around in his back pocket, Barry produces the business card Eiling gave him earlier, offering it to Eobard. “He said he wanted to talk to me about the Man in the Lightning.”

As upset as Eobard is with Eiling’s interference, it does him good knowing that Barry wouldn’t hesitate to share this kind information with him. It’s crucial that there are no secrets between them, at least on Barry’s end.

Eobard glances at the two numbers on the card. One he recognizes; the other, for his office, is new. “…What about the Man in the Lightning seems so intriguing to him that he would now call upon the CCPD for assistance?”

“He didn’t say much,” Barry replies. “I mean, he mentioned the incident at Mercury Labs four years ago, so I imagine he’s still trying to figure out what the Man in the Lightning’s objective was then. I’m guessing he wants to get a better idea of what he’s up against here, which is why he went digging for my testimony from the night of my mother’s murder.”

When Barry holds his hand out in the expectation of having the card returned to him, Eobard says, “Do you mind if I hold onto this for a while? I feel like I should call him.”

“Sure,” the boy agrees, albeit hesitantly. “But, I mean, please don’t get up in arms on my behalf.”

“I won’t,” which is a lie. The next time he speaks with Eiling, he’ll make sure to warn him well away from his son. “But there’s nothing new Eiling can really get from you. I saw your testimony. You were abundantly clear on what you saw that night. Ergo, the General is simply using you as a means to get to me.” In one fluid motion, Eobard tucks the card into the small pocket under the cushion of his wheelchair’s right armrest. He’ll feign losing it later today, to hopefully keep Barry and Eiling apart a little longer, at least until he figures out what Eiling is up to. “In fact, I’m sure he promised you something practically fantastical to pique your interest, just enough of a hook to get you to reach out to me for my opinion on the matter.”

Barry blinks at him, stunned. Then his face crumples a little, gaze dropping to the floor, as though
Eobard had just quashed his dreams. Which, technically, Eobard did, because he has serious doubts about Eiling going to bat for Henry Allan, a man he barely knows and can hardly make use of.

“I guess you’re right,” Barry sighs, rubbing the back of his neck. “I should get back to work. I still have another two hours in my shift.”

“Are you still going to your Trivia thing tonight, or should I expect you home early?” He enjoys having Barry under his roof again, but he might have a few errands to run, depending on how this next call plays out. The one downside to living with the boy now is that extra care needs to be taken with his comings and goings.

“Cisco relented. We shouldn’t be out too late though.”

“Have fun then.”

Barry winks at him, eyes alight with mirth again, so easygoing and jubilant when he’s able to shake off his concerns. Then he brightens up the corridor with a long, arching streak of lightning that curls around the bend toward the nearest stairwell, leaving the faint taste of ozone in the air. Eobard often catches a whiff of it when he himself runs, but there’s still something unique about Barry’s signature. It’s often softer and sweeter. Refreshing almost.

Alone again, Eobard wheels his chair around and takes the elevator up to his office on the top floor. He has a good view of the downtown core from here, tall white and grey stone giants jutting up into the sky, title boards lighting up in neon colours once the darkness of night settles upon them. In the evenings, he can usually spot Mercury Labs, a blue beacon in the distance.

He locks the door to his office and rises from his chair, taking a moment to stretch out his lower back as he wanders over to the window. Sliding his cellphone out of his pocket, he almost punches in Tina’s office number before he thinks better of it. Instead, he calls her cell.

Once the call connects, Eobard smiles and says, “Good afternoon, Christina.”

“Hello, Harrison,” she replies warmly. “I was just thinking of you.”

Eobard allows himself a moment to imagine she was doing so because of her affection for him, but he knows that Tina, much like himself, is almost always at least subconsciously focused on her work. Even so, he doesn’t mind playing along with social niceties. “Fondly, I hope.”

“Of course,” she assures him, sounding amused. “Both you and that boy of yours. In fact, I was wondering when I would be able to see him again…Is it too much to hope that you’re calling to arrange a meet-up?”

“Not at all,” he replies. “I would very much like to have you over for dinner sometime this week. What’s your availability look like?”

There’s a pause, punctuated by the soft sound of Tina sipping something next to the phone; Eobard imagines he caught her during her lunchbreak. “Wednesday evening I have another engagement. Otherwise, I’m all yours. Shall I bring a bottle of wine?”

“That would be wonderful, thank you. I’ll ask Barry what works best for him, but we might need to schedule it around another guest before I can finalize a date.”

There’s another pause from Tina, this one more thoughtful. “…Would this other guest, by chance, be our dear friend Ted Ferguson?”
“It would indeed.” He doesn’t know how he’s going to get a hold of the man—knowing Eiling, he probably has both the man’s office and home phones tapped. Of course, Grodd tailed Ferguson for a while before Eobard reassigned him to watching over Barry, meaning the gorilla probably has an idea about his civilian habits, such as when he when and where he runs his usual errands. Eobard will just have to track him down when he gets the chance.

“Is it safe to assume this party of ours is more than just a celebration of Barry’s convalescence?”

“Perhaps.” He turns away from the window, wandering over now to his desk. He picks up the paperweight next to his computer monitor, a smooth, black ball of stone. The weight feels good in his hand. “Your white whale visited Barry at the precinct today.”

“That’s bold of him,” she mutters, no more amused with Eiling’s antics than he is. “What did my white whale want with Barry?”

“Help chasing down his own white whale.”

There’s a thoughtful hum from Tina. “Barry was, what, 10 years old when he met the Man in the Lightning? I know the boy has a marvelous memory, but it’s been well over a decade since his encounter, and I doubt there’s anything more a person could glean from questioning him.”

“My thoughts exactly.” He tosses the ball lightly into the air and catches it again. It’s small but heavy. He wonders what it would feel like to lob this at someone, even at a normal speed. “I could be wrong, but I think Eiling’s trying to pressure me into calling him.”

“That sounds more like him,” she mutters. “Him and his old scare tactics... The cad apparently still has friends in my organization. He’s the reason I no longer feel comfortable taking lunch in my office.” There’s a brief sigh, as though there’s more to this story than what she’s telling him. “There’s definitely something afoul going on at Mercury Labs.”

More than likely, she’s right. In fact, that’s the reason why Eobard called her cell; he wouldn’t put it past Eiling to have her phone tapped too.

“On that note...” she continues, somewhat tentative, “...would you mind terribly if I dropped by S.T.A.R. Labs later this evening? There’s something I wanted to discuss with you. In person.”

“I’m always here late,” he replies, intrigued. “I only ask that you give me a ring before you swing by, just in case something comes up.”

“Perfect.” She sounds genuinely relieved.

Eobard wonders what kind of trouble she’s been getting up to lately.

There’s a part of him that wants to ask—but he’s interrupted by a soft beep on the line, an indication that someone else is trying to get a hold of him. Considering the ordeal Barry’s been through today, Eobard doesn’t want them to go to voicemail.

“Someone’s else is calling me. I’m afraid I need to hang up now.”

“Well, thank you for reaching out. I’ll see you later.”

“Goodbye, Christina.”

She ends the call before he does, her call screen switching immediately to that of Joe West. Eobard frowns in confusion before he answers. “Good afternoon, Joe.”
“Hey. How busy are you right now?”

Busier than he would like to be, especially with the amount of work he still needs to get done on the particle accelerator. Even so, it seems like fate wants him to waste his time on putting out fires today.

“I’m just loitering around my office,” he sighs. “Why do you ask?”

“I just got a call from Henry. He had a visitor earlier today—some General asking about the night of Nora’s murder. He said he was a friend of yours.”

“That would be General Wade Eiling,” Harrison clarifies, feeling the skin on the back of his neck prickling with heat and perspiration. The Speed Force is humming inside him, licking up his anger. “And, no, he is most certainly not a friend.”

“Hm,” is all that Joe says in his somewhat unique way of completely understanding Eobard’s frustration.

“What did he ask?”

“I don’t know. I have a steak out I need to get to in about fifteen minutes, but I was going to swing by Iron Heights later today to find out what this Eiling guy said. I’ll keep you posted.”

“Thank you,” Eobard replies, the gears whirring inside his head as he tries to figure out how to mitigate any of the potential damage Eiling has done by visiting Henry. As a quick side-note, he says, “Please don’t tell Barry about this until we’ve had a chance to discuss this in more detail. Eiling came down to the precinct earlier today to question him briefly, and that completely threw him off his rhythm. I really don’t want him to get distracted, considering the…sensitive work he’s engaged in.”

There’s a weary laugh from Joe on the other end of the line. “Yeah, I get that. I call you later.”

“Thanks again.”

No sooner does Eobard end than call than he’s racing down to the Time Vault, feeling energized in the worst possible way as he pockets his cellphone and waves his hand over Gideon’s sensor to wake her up.

“Good afternoon, Dr. Wells.”

“Gideon, pull up today’s feed for Iron Heights, please.”

“Beginning at which time point?”

“Beginning whenever General Wade Eiling visits Henry Allen.”

A semi-transparent, holographic screen swaps places with Gideon’s avatar, displaying the video feed from one of the ceiling cameras in the visitation room. Gideon speeds through the feed until General Eiling waltzes into the room and takes a seat, shortly greeted by Henry Allen on the either side of the glass. As soon as they both pick up their respective receivers, Gideon is able to relay the audio recording of their visit.

“I’m sorry,” Henry begins, sounding politely confused, “but I think you’ve requested the wrong man. I don’t believe we’ve ever met.”

“Dr. Allen, I apologize for suddenly dropping in on you like this,” Eiling replies. As always, to the untrained ear he seems like an ordinary member of the older and more respectable American
population, seemingly harmless, until he guts you. “There’s a sensitive subject I need to discuss with you. It concerns the untimely passing of your wife.”

There’s a long and uncomfortable pause here. Eobard can’t see much of the finer details of Henry’s face with the grainy video feed, but he can picture the weariness in his eyes, the familiar pain that flares inside him whenever someone brings up Nora Allen.

“…What does the military have to do with my wife?”

“Well, our focus isn’t exactly on your wife, per se, so much as it is the man who killed her.”

“According to the jury that convicted me,” Henry replies irritably, “you’re looking at him.”

“I’m most certainly not.”

Eobard takes a slow, deep breath. Belatedly, he realizes he’s still holding his paperweight in his other hand. The urge to hurtle it at the nearest wall is overwhelming, but he doesn’t want to risk busting up Gideon’s sensitive circuitry.

It takes Henry a moment to shake off his surprise. He still sounds exhausted, his faith in his fellow man having been wheedled away after years and years of doubt, as he says, “If that’s what you believe, then you’re one of very few, General.”

“I assume you’re referring to your son and Harrison Wells?” Eobard can hear the small smile in Eiling’s voice; it just pisses him off further. “You know, Harrison and I are old colleagues. He’s a good man. His trust and admiration are not often misplaced.”

Eobard snorts out a laugh at that. Eiling only knows that to be true because Eobard has never trusted or admired him.

The seemingly innocuous comment does the trick though, putting Henry at ease, erroneously establishing that Eiling as a friend-of-a-friend in his mind. “He is a good man. He’s done a lot for our family.”

“And I think you’ve been kept apart from that family long enough. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Henry is silent again, long enough this time that Eiling foregoes waiting for a response and continues. “I would like to apprehend the monster that killed your wife. This creature poses a level of threat to our national security unlike any other. If I catch him—once I prove he’s the one that invaded your home that night, you can finally walk free again.”

“That’s a big ‘if’,” Henry remarks sagely, his heart and soul already weathered against false hope.

“I’m the kind of man that isn’t afraid to take a few risks. I’m also the kind of man that gets the job done. Make of that what you will.”

Henry rubs at his eyes, still tired more than anything else. “Alright…but I take it you didn’t come all this way just to give me a pep talk. Considering I didn’t leave a single detail out of my interview with the police, what could you possibly want to know?”

“Just a bit of clarification on one particular point.”

“That being?”

“The moment your son was taken.”
“He just vanished, really. One second, he was in my arms. The next, he was gone.”

“That’s exactly what you said in your interview.”

“Because that’s what happened.”

Eobard shifts his weight from one foot to the other irritably, wondering where Eiling is going with all of this.

“Try to be a bit more descriptive,” Eiling urges him. “I know you were worried about your wife at the time, but was there a certain sound or smell when your son disappeared?”

“Well, no, but…it looked as though a branch of lightning from the storm surrounding my wife struck him. I initially thought he was…I don’t know. Vaporized? Then a second later, the storm died down and something knocked me unconscious…That’s pretty much it.”

“A branch of lightning…” Eiling echoes, tasting that particular detail, savouring it. “A second entity, perhaps?”

Something seizes inside Eobard’s chest.

No one has ever gotten this close to the truth before.

“Pause it,” Eobard commands, taking a step back from the projection. There’s a sliver of fear worming its way through the haze of his anger. He doesn’t know what good it does Eiling to unveil the fact that there’s a second speedster, other than it might help to bolster any argument he could make toward them being some kind of unseen invasion, a problem that needs his particular brand of…fixing.

Eobard shifts the paperweight from one hand to the other, taking slow, even steps down the length of his vault before turning back again. Eiling needs to die—Eiling needs to die a long and painful death, but that can’t happen at the moment, because the General is not operating in a vacuum. He has at least a few underlings and colleagues who have an idea of what he’s up to and who will continue his work after he’s gone. In fact, they will perhaps approach his unknown project with more fervor if Eobard were to martyr him prematurely. Therefore, the General is going to get an underserved stay of execution.

For now, at least.

Taking this moment to clear his head, Eobard comes to the realization that the only thing he can presently control about this situation is Henry’s and Barry’s perceptions of the General—and Eobard needs to disillusion them both of the notion that Eiling has any serious intention of removing Henry from prison. Prison is where Henry needs to be right now, and so prison is exactly where he’s going to stay. The best way to ensure that, of course, is make sure neither of the Allen men continue to cooperate with Eiling.

“Shall I continue?” Gideon asks, her disembodied voice sounding just the least bit concerned.

“Yes,” he replies, hoping Eiling hasn’t done anymore damage with this conversation.

Fortunately, he hasn’t.

As soon as the recording resumes, Henry says, “Possibly. I only saw one man, and that was briefly. Why do you think there were two?”
“Because one force of nature removed your son several blocks from home while a second stayed behind to kill your wife. It’s just…a part of a working theory, really.”

“Well…I hope I’ve been helpful.”

“Absolutely.” The General pauses to glance down at his wristwatch. Then he says, “That’s all the time I have for now. If I have questions in the future, can I come calling?”

“You may.”

“Thank you. Then I guess this is goodbye. For now, at least.”

“Have a good day, General.”

As soon as they hang up their respective receivers, Eobard waves the projection away, replacing it with Gideon’s head. She tilts it in curiosity but says nothing.

“Well,” Eobard sighs, trying to fill the silence, “this is problematic.”

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Not wanting to sit on this information for too long without acting, Eobard calls Det. West and asks the man if he could please convince Iron Heights to slip in a visitation for him in a couple of hours. He’s expecting Joe to question him on why he wants to speak with Henry without him, but the detective is apparently still trapped in surveillance. Therefore, a few calls are made, and, after enlisting Caitlin’s help in giving him a ride, Eobard is well on his way to doing a little damage control.

“Do you want company?” Caitlin asks once she’s helped him wheel his chair down the small ramp from the S.T.A.R. Labs van. She eyes the prison warily, as if she would rather be anywhere else in that moment.

“I’d rather go alone.” Eobard replies. He nods his head back down the winding road from the parking lot, the one that teeters precariously over the ocean at one particularly sharp corner. “Get yourself a coffee. By the time you come back, I should be done.”

Flashing him a quick smile, Caitlin hops back into the van and leaves him to his dark machinations.

After he’s dropped his phone and wallet off at the reception centre, he’s led to the visitation room by a young, familiar guard named George and waits fifteen minutes before Henry is escorted from his cell, looking mildly confused by the second interruption to his strict daily schedule. Then he spots Eobard on the other side of the glass, and, brightening up, offers Eobard an easy smile as he takes a seat, lifts the receiver on his side of the partition, and says, “How’s it going?”

“Busy, as usual.” Eobard smiles in return, relaxing marginally, because he knows he has nothing to worry about here. Between Eiling and himself, Eobard is the familiar face. Eobard is also ‘family’. His word trumps Eiling’s any day. “How are you doing?”

“Not too bad myself, although I’m unexpectedly popular today.”

“So I’ve been told.”

Nodding slowly, Henry says, “I take it Joe let you know I had a visit from an old acquaintance of yours.”
“He’s more of an enemy, actually.”

Henry’s furrows his brow, perplexed. Clearly, he wasn’t expecting Eobard to be this blunt. “Oh?”

Closing his eyes, Eobard searches for the simplest way to express this severity of this situation without sounding overly paranoid. Thankfully, he knows the perfect example. “Did we ever tell you about our gorilla? The one Dr. Snow was responsible for rearing?”

“*The mini King Kong?”* Henry asks. “Yeah. Barry said he loved that guy. Did you ever find him?”

“No,” he lies. “Which is unfortunate, because he was the only gorilla from Mercury Labs to survive a series of experiments sanctioned by General Wade Eiling.”

Henry leans back in his seat, nodding once, slowly, remembering the finer details of this story. “You rescued him from some Dr. Feldman, right? ...General Eiling was funding this maniac?”

“Yes.”

“So…I take it you’re trying to tell me to steer clear of this guy?”

“Precisely,” Eobard replies, leaning forward against the small counter in front of him. He can see the tension at the corner of Henry’s eyes, that ever-present fear of the world outside, the one which his son still inhabits without him. “He might claim to be some kind of monster-hunter, but he’s really only searching for a new biological weapon. If he were to ever catch the man that destroyed your family, I can guarantee you he would then bury every trace of their existence and silence anyone who knew anything about them…”

The man looks disconcerted by Eobard’s analysis, chewing on something at the back of his mouth, jaw working tensely. He knows Eobard used to work with the military, that he’s seen how they operate on the inside.

This is *not* an exaggeration of how Eiling would respond to finally getting whatever the hell it is he’s after.

After much thought, Henry asks, “Why now? Barry’s been professing my innocence to anyone who’ll listen for the last fourteen years. This seems like an odd time to pick up on an old lead.”

“I think it has something to do with the recent metahuman sightings,” he postulates. “It’s spurred the idea that what you saw was real.”

“‘Metahuman’?”

Sometimes, Eobard forgets that the rest of the world is still getting up to speed on the new age of heroes and villains. “Someone with unnatural abilities,” he explains, waving his free hand vaguely. “For example, there was talk of a man who could control the weather in the papers recently. Did you hear about that?”

“I did. I just thought maybe it was a hoax.”

Henry’s belief or disbelief in the matter has hardly any bearing on future events, so Eobard doesn’t bother arguing otherwise. He does, however, find it rather amusing that Henry would assume such a thing was a hoax, considering what he’s been through.

“Clearly, Eiling thinks otherwise.”
“Alright,” Henry replies, apparently satisfied with his answer. His posture relaxes marginally. “So, we’re dealing with a power-hungry nut-job...what do we do about him?”

“Stonewall him.” There really isn’t any more Henry can do. However, stemming the flow of information is often one of the more powerful tactics a person can employ in a game such as this. Henry can get on Eiling’s nerves just fine by refusing to cooperate with him.

“What about Barry? I get that I’m fairly well contained here, but Barry’s kind of out in the open with this guy, isn’t he?”

One on one, Barry could take Eiling any day. However, Eobard can understand the man’s concern. To Henry, Barry is still a mortal man, and a vulnerable one at that.

“I know how to deal with Eiling,” Eobard replies, confident in his ability to handle this particular thorn, “and Barry is already aware of the threat he poses. Rest assured, I will take care of everything on this side of things.”

Though still clearly annoyed with the situation, Henry has no complaints. He knows Eobard is as good as his word. He also knows Eobard is more than capable of taking care of Barry, even if he doesn’t realize yet the lengths Eobard would go to keep the boy safe.

“Then I guess that’s that,” Henry murmurs before their conversation turns to simple small talk in the ten or so minutes remaining for their unscheduled meeting. As per usual, that talk revolves predominantly around Barry. Of course, Eobard doesn’t leave so much as a clue toward Barry’s newfound side-gig as a budding vigilante, but there’s plenty else to discuss, namely how Barry still appears to be catching up on everything after missing nine months of his life.

George returns before too long to escort him out, so Eobard bids Henry farewell and rolls back out to the visitor centre, where Caitlin is waiting for him. She shifts anxiously from one foot to the other as he collects his belongings from the desk. When they finally pass through the front doors into the parking lot, she fills him in on the situation. “Don’t freak out,” she says, “but Barry went toe to toe with a criminal tonight.”

“Was he hurt?” Eobard asks, although he’s confident that isn’t the case. Otherwise, Caitlin would be racing back to Central City right now without him. “Was someone killed?”

“A handful of bystanders suffered a few minor injuries,” she elaborates, fishing the keys to the van out of her coat pocket. Given how late it is, the parking lot is relatively empty; she didn’t have to park too far from the door. “But no one was killed, fortunately. Cisco said there was one instance in which Barry was a hairsbreadth away from losing someone, but he pulled through for them in the end.”

Eobard doesn’t know how to feel about that. On the one hand, he’s pleased that Barry’s beginning to hit his stride with this whole hero business. On the other hand, he’s not comfortable with the idea of Barry flirting with danger quite like this so early in the game. A ‘hairsbreadth’ is still a close call for a fledgling speedster.

Annoyed as he is for missing the fight entirely, Eobard knows his team will have no problem filling him in on the details. “Did he apprehend the criminal?” He asks, wondering if it’s a metahuman.

“No,” Caitlin sighs, thumbing the key fob to unlock the van. The side door slides open automatically, Eobard’s ramp extending itself with a soft, familiar whine. “It looks like Leonard Snart has evaded capture yet again.”
Eobard slows to a halt at the base of the ramp, wondering if he heard her correctly. “Did you say…Snart?”

“Yeah,” she sighs, pulling out her cellphone, scrolling through her most recent texts. “Hartley says they’ll give us the low-down once we get back into Central.”

It’s something of a struggle not to fidget in his seat as he rolls up the ramp into the van. Caitlin helps him secure his wheelchair to the floor, closes the door, and then jumps into the driver’s seat, whipping her way out onto the freeway with a haste that he appreciates.

This isn’t good.

Snart, that is. He never gives up on a heist, but he usually allows for a bit of a cool-down period before pulling another one of his stunts, at least until the police lose interest in his work again. Because the Kahndaq Dynasty Diamond isn’t going anywhere any time soon, striking twice in so little time betrays his excitement, and Eobard’s willing to bet anything the diamond isn’t what’s piqued Snart’s interest in this situation.

Unfortunately, it looks like Barry’s developed something of an admirer.

He debates firing off a text to Cisco or his son, to perhaps squeeze a bit of information out of them before they make it back into the city, but he knows it would be more fruitful to discuss tonight’s heist with everyone in attendance. Eobard can impress upon them all at once the importance of not fooling Snart for any run-of-the-mill criminal. He’s an urgent threat that needs to be put behind bars before he takes a third shot at the diamond, because, more likely than not, Snart’s already gleaned enough information from Barry in their past two encounters to formulate at least some measure of outmaneuvering him. It won’t be long then before he devises a way to maim, kill, or unmask Barry.

Eobard finds himself fidgeting despite himself as Caitlin pulls into the S.T.A.R. Labs parking lot, impatient and agitated and wishing that either Eiling or Snart suffers a myocardial infarction sometime in the next few hours. The long elevator ride to the Cortex only further agonizes him—although not quite like the irritable tableau the boys paint when he finally wheels into the room.

Hartley and Barry have seated themselves in front of the main desk; the former looks annoyed, the latter tired. Cisco, meanwhile, is pacing back and forth across the Cortex, wringing his hands, like he expects the inevitable heat death of the universe to suddenly pop up around the corner. He, of course, spots Eobard first, the colour draining from his face in such a way that Eobard immediately understands two things: first, they’ve screwed up; second, Cisco is the source of said screw-up.

“What happened?” Eobard asks, keeping his tone low and level, if still a bit stern.

“Nothing,” Barry says, albeit quietly, as if he’s secretly hoping that will keep Eobard from questioning them further.

Hartley snorts humorlessly and then types something into the nearest keyboard. The blank vital readings for Barry’s suit are replaced with several frozen frames of Central City Museum’s security feeds. Each one depicts Snart—Snart and his cold gun.

Eobard feels like the air’s been knocked out of his chest. For once, he doesn’t bother hiding his surprise. It is far too early for Snart to have developed his signature weapon. For one, no one has invented the nascent technology that will then inspire him to craft it. Second, he hasn’t known the Flash long enough to have figured out that freezing a speedster would be the easiest way of slowing
them down. Yet, here is he, cold gun in hand, a blue spire extending from the handheld cyclotron toward a streak of yellow lightning. Ahead of the trail is a red bur, Barry Allen, a millisecond away from colliding with—and saving—a terrified security guard.

“How?” Eobard breathes. There’s a noisome weight in the pit of his stomach, turning over and over again as he tries to predict the new timeline trajectory toward Barry’s first losing battle against the criminal. At this rate, Snart might pin Barry down permanently by their next encounter.

“I can explain,” Cisco says, somewhat breathless, as if he might pass out at any given moment.

“Explain what?” Eobard asks, already confused. He gestures toward the empty chair at the console. “Sit down.”

“I would rather stand,” he squeaks. Turning away, he waves his hand at the screens against the far wall. “This…this is the cold gun.”

Securitizing the still-frame images again, realization slowly dawns on Eobard, followed rapidly by shock and anger. “You made that?” he snaps. “You made a cold gun?”

“Dad—” Barry begins, shifting uneasily in his seat, as if he intends to literally jump to his friend’s defense.

“Don’t move,” Eobard growls, pointing at Barry as he wheels around the main console. He feels ridiculous moving at such a snail pace, and he would much rather prefer to loom when he’s usually this riled up, but fortunately Cisco is still rattled by his temper, arms crossed, shoulders hunched tensely, defensively. “We don’t make weapons! That has always been the one rule here, Ramon. Anything else you could ever desire is fair game—but a weapon?! My god, how could you just—”

“Dad,” Barry interjects, sounding a little stern himself, albeit frightened, too. The times they’ve argued are few and far between, and it’s clear that the boy still struggles to raise his voice against Eobard. “He only did it for me.”

“Why?” Eobard barks. “What possible reason does he have to develop a weapon that could potentially destroy you, his best friend?!”

“The Man in the Lightning,” Cisco finally pipes up, emboldened by Barry’s support. “We’ve already had a lengthy discussion on how ill-equipped Barry is in going toe-to-toe with him right now, so I thought—I thought he could use a little oomph if the other speedster showed up.”

“Did you ever stop to consider the fact that if the Man in the Lightning found out about this weapon, he could easily steal it for himself or destroy both it and it’s creator?!” Eobard doesn’t actually think he’d go so far as kill Cisco over this, but he knows many a criminal who wouldn’t hesitate to murder the boy if they knew he was assisting the Flash. “Look at how simple it was for Snart to lift it from you—” He pauses a moment to glance at Cisco’s side office, baffled over how long the boy’s been hiding this secret from him. Where was he even storing it? In his workshop? Possibly, but it wasn’t in there any of the times that Eobard dropped by, which implies he kept it in their main storage unit up until it was stolen, down in the basement. “How long has it been missing?”

When Cisco can’t come up with an immediate answer, Hartley responds for him. “One of the janitors didn’t show up for work this morning. We’ve already tried calling him, but his number has been disconnected. He probably stole it last night, at the end of his shift.”

“Did he take anything else?” Eobard asks, eyes on Cisco, hoping to every force in the multiverse that this was the only weapon he was stupid enough to develop.
“No,” Cisco replies. “We think he took it because it was the only piece of technology that looked… sell-able? It’s probably the only thing in the building with a purpose that’s simple to guess on sight alone, being that its shaped like a gun.”

A small mercy that. Eobard takes a slow, deep breath. He’ll ask Gideon to run through their security feed and do a quick inventory check when he has time later, although who the hell knows when that will be.

As much as he would love to continue tearing Cisco a new one, Barry’s starting to look awfully antsy by his reaction to this unintentional betrayal, and this verbal thrashing is stealing them of what precious time they have to deal with Snart. It is therefore with great personal strength that Eobard pushes through the haze of his ire and says, “Can you rewind the tapes. We need to analyze the fight, figure out what Snart is up to.”

“He still wants the diamond,” Barry supplies, confused.

Swiveling his chair around to face the screens on the far wall, Eobard shakes his head. His poor, stupid boy has so much to learn. “You can’t just assume that. Now, be quiet and watch.”

He hears the gentle rap of Caitlin’s high heels against the linoleum floor as she takes a seat at the main console and the rapid-fire tap of Hartley’s fingers across his keyboard as he rewinds the recordings. It takes him a minute to synch everything up before Eobard is able to watch tonight’s main event unfold, bearing witness as Snart waltzes into the museum in broad daylight and sets Barry to task defending innocent bystanders from harm. And Snart, of course, is a skilled marksman, conserving his energy as he creeps slowly across the main floor, choosing his targets with care, firing with absolute precision. He’s a master at his game, and it’s obvious to Eobard that the other man is enjoying himself, even if he leaves the museum empty-handed.

Although, he doesn’t really leave empty-handed, now does he?

Once the tapes have run their course, Eobard takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes. He thought he had his hands full enough with Eiling. This…this is the last thing he needs right now.

“He’s testing you,” Eobard finally says. He knew that before he watched the failed heist, but he hopes Barry can see his reasoning with the recording fresh in his mind. “He starts off by firing directly at you and then quickly shifts to the bystanders. The next time he comes after you, he’s going to kill you.”

When he spins back around, he finds Barry staring at him in disbelief. “But I’m faster than he is,” the boy replies.

“That doesn’t matter, because he doesn’t have to shoot at you, just your intended target, which will always be anyone whose life is in peril. And, believe me, this is not the sort of man who would leave any perceived danger to his work unattended. He knows you have to die if he wants to continue safely operating in this city.”

Barry blinks at him, as if he’s honestly surprised by the fact that someone out there wants him dead. It takes him a while to come up with a response, which is simply, “What am I supposed to do about this?”

“Well, we—” Eobard glances first at Hartley, behind the console, and then at Cisco, who is standing a safe distance away from him, “—are going to figure out how to track him down. You, in the meantime, should eat something and rest. It won’t be long before Snart strikes again, not least of all because he doesn’t want you to have enough time to think of a way to apprehend him, and you’ll
want to be prepared when he does.”

Gaze shifting briefly to Cisco, as if waiting for his friend to ask him to stay, Barry slowly rises from his seat. With a small nod, he leaves the Cortex, probably to find a couch to crash on while he waits.

“T’m…going to do a little prep,” Caitlin says, retreating as well, “in case he’s injured in the next battle.”

Eobard waits until they’re both out of sight before he stares at Cisco and says, “Don’t you ever do something like this again.”

Eyes glued to floor, looking all the world as though he wishes it would open up and swallow him whole, he meekly says, “Yes, sir.”

Hartley straightens in his seat, “Well, now that that’s off our chest…how are we going to track Snart?”

“I wish Felicity were here,” Cisco mutters. “I could send an update to the gun, but I wouldn’t know how to track it through the wireless network. That sort of thing is right in her wheelhouse.”

“Don’t let that discourage you,” Hartley replies, whipping out his cellphone. “Text me her number and then get to work on that update. I’ll ask her to walk us through it.”

Cisco blinks, surprised, then pulls his own phone out of his back pocket. “Oh, yeah…I guess that would work. Sorry, my head is…not on my shoulders right now.”

Eobard slumps somewhat into his chair, feeling a bit of his anger melt away. He doesn’t enjoy yelling at the younger members of his team. In fact, they are among the few people he holds in high regard in this day and age. “Cisco…it’s a good idea. How long do you think you’ll need?”

“Like fifteen minutes,” the boy replies, relaxing a little himself. As soon as he’s fired off his text, he hotfoots it into his side office. Over his shoulder, he says, “We’ll just be waiting on Felicity, really.”

Leaning back in his chair, Hartley dials her up.

In the end, it takes thirty minutes to get a hold of Felicity Smoak and another twenty for Hartley to write down her instructions in such a way that he can understand them when he reads them back to her. Unfortunately, in that same amount of time, Eobard gets a text from Detective West, warning him that Snart has finally managed to steal the diamond.

It’s as he’s reading said text that Barry darts into the room, slipping on his suit with practiced ease. “Joe just told me that—”

“—Snart is at it again,” Eobard interjects, worried. This is far too soon. Barry’s not ready. “You shouldn’t go this time. He’s only baiting you.”

“I can’t do that,” Barry sighs, pulling his hood up over his head. “If I ignore him, what’s stopping him from coming up with some elaborate plan, one that will put even more lives on the line?”

It frustrates Eobard that he’s right, although he’s glad to see Barry is able to anticipate the kind of trouble this opponent is capable of. It’s still hard sitting there as Barry dashes from the room, lightning licking at his heels as Hartley reads off the cold gun’s current location over the microphone. He wants to stretch his legs and run after him.

He wants to kill Snart.
Falling into a kind of daze, both angry and afraid, entertaining all the different ways in which he can render flesh from bone as he waits for Barry to say something over the mic, he’s not entirely aware of the conversation going on around him until he hears Cisco say, “—cold gun 1.0.”

“What?” Eobard lifts his head to stare at Cisco, frowning. “I thought you only made one weapon.”

“And I did,” Cisco quickly clarifies, “but our janitor obviously didn’t know that and so neither should Snart.”

“I don’t understand where you’re going with this,” Caitlin says, having rejoined their group without Eobard’s notice, leaning back against the desk in the corner of the room.

“Snart’s made it abundantly clear that he’s capable of taking Barry down on his own, which means Barry probably isn’t going to win this fight without an assist, someone that can distract Snart. However, we don’t have anyone like that, now do we? Barry’s the only one equipped to fight any bad guys in this city.”

Caitlin shakes her head.

Hartley glances quickly at his computer screen and tells Barry that Snart’s apparently making a beeline toward the train station before returning his attention to Cisco. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but it sounds to me as though you want to whip up another cold gun in the very limited time we have here.”

“That isn’t even remotely possible,” Cisco clarifies. He glances briefly at Eobard and then says, “Also, it probably isn’t a good idea to make a second cold gun considering how easy it was for someone with questionable morals to get their hands on it. No—instead, I’m proposing we use a decoy gun, something we can just wave at him and distract him with while Barry side-blinds him.”

Caitlin eyes her wristwatch and winces. “If I’m willing to break several traffic violations, it’ll take me at least seven to eight minutes to get to the station. How long is it going to take you to make a dud?”

“No time at all!” Cisco exclaims, practically jumping in excitement as he dashes into his side-office. Perplexed, Eobard and his other companions wait with bated breath until Cisco returns ten seconds later with some kind of monstrosity in tow.

Hartley is the first to break their silence. “…Is that our vacuum?”

“I was bored and trying to brainstorm how to make the original cold gun,” Cisco explains, slapping the top of the LED bedazzled vacuum cleaner with pride. “I know it’s hideous, but I promise to return this to its original condition once we’re done.”

It is hideous, but Eobard is too caught up on the fact that Cisco is serious about this that he doesn’t really care. “I don’t think—”

“I’ll get the car,” Caitlin says, jumping to her feet.

Grabbing his supped-up vacuum cleaner by its long nozzle, Cisco follows hot on her heels into the corridor.

Hartley looks up from his work at the computer, blinking rapidly, perplexed. “I… I should I go after them?”

“Yes,” Eobard replies. “Talk some sense into them, please. I’m going to try to get a hold of Detective West and warn him of the disaster that’s heading his way.”
Hartley doesn’t need to be told twice. He snatches his cellphone off the counter beside his keyboard and races out of the room.

Eobard waits until he can hear the elevators sliding shut at the end of the hall before he darts into his Time Vault, where he jumps into his own suit. “Gideon,” he says, “keep me linked to Barry’s channel and continue tracking Snart. What’s his current location?”

“He’s moving away from the station now,” she replies, “to the south. And gaining speed.”

Pulling his hood up, Eobard presses the receiver button over his right ear and says, “Barry, he’s on a train heading south.”

“One just left the station. That must be him.”


“I will,” Barry says, which turns out to be an empty promise, because as Eobard’s running to catch up to him, he hears the boy say, rather smugly, “There’s nowhere to run.”

It’s tempting to just roll his eyes and leave Barry to discover on his own just why you should attack first and talk later, but Snart isn’t the kind of criminal Barry can afford to learn this lesson from.

Faintly, over the rattle of the train, Eobard hears Snart say, “I didn’t see you before. Your mom know you’re out past your bedtime?”

Eobard is now coming up on the train station. He skids to a halt beside a detached caboose, scanning the rails to determine which train is in motion. Glancing southward, he sees one chugging along toward Star City and races after it.

He hops onto the back and crouches down on the roof, trying to think of how he’s going to intervene without Barry noticing. It would help, of course, if he could figure out which car Barry is in. Knowing Snart, the man would want to maximum whatever damage he’s planning on doing and would therefore likely try to situate himself near the front.

“If you wanted to get away, you should’ve taken something faster than a train,” Barry quips.

Annoyed, Eobard taps his earpiece and hisses, “Barry!” though he has little faith that the boy will get this show on the road any time soon.

In the background, he hears Snart retort with, “That’s if I wanted to get away,” before he begins to vibrate, phasing through the roof of the rear car, microphone cutting out as he drops down inside. He’s light on his feet, and he’s fortunate that no one is looking his way when he enters the train; there are only two passengers in this car, a young woman and her son, whose about seven or eight years old, both standing at the opposite end of the car as they try to get a glimpse of what all the ruckus is through the small window in the partition door.

No sooner has Eobard landed when the train goes off the rail.

He dips back into the Speed Force entirely on reflex, body tensing as he loses balance. In that first second of chaos, he sees the woman’s head thrown back, eyes squeezed shut, blood on her forehead where she collided with the glass. Her son’s face is frozen in fear, his tiny hand slipping from his mother’s as he’s thrown up into the air.

There’s a moment, then, that Eobard freezes as well. He knows Barry is probably already evacuating
passengers from his end of the train. The odds are, he’ll get here in enough time to save the unfortunate pair, but every car he needs to run through, every person he needs to remove from danger, gives Leonard Snart that much more time to prepare his killing blow.

Moving before he’s even made the conscious decision to act, Eobard braces his foot against the nearest seat and vaults himself forward. He catches the boy under his right arm and slips his left around the woman’s waist, gently turning her body toward his own, tucking her head under his chin. Then he vibrates, allowing the Speed Force to do the rest of the work, utilizing it in a way that will take Barry ages to master as Eobard phases all three of them through the train.

He lands deftly on the railway tracks, watching the car as it continues skidding at a horrendous angle away from them, metal screaming at it contorts into a literal death trap. He relinquishes his hold on the kid first, then steps aside to lay the woman out on the soft grass a few feet away from the tracks, careful not to jar her. She moans gently as she’s moved, but that’s not a guarantee her injuries aren’t severe.

“Mom!” the boy cries, stumbling over his own feet to reach her. Eobard braces a hand against the child’s chest just before he falls upon his mother, pushing the boy back a step.

“Don’t move her!” Eobard snaps. It takes him a moment to remember that this is a small child he’s dealing with here, not someone who knows the basics of first aid. “Just…sit beside her and wait.” He glances down the track, back toward the station. Just barely, he can see the blue and red lights flashing in the distance as the CCPD tries to race after this calamity in motion. “The police will be here soon.”

When the boy turns his head to follow his gaze, Eobard darts ahead, crouching behind a car that’s been flipped onto its roof. Through the shattered glass windows, Eobard watches as the horrified passengers Barry saved himself flee from the destruction, half sprinting toward the hilly field to the left while the others scramble toward the gated road in the far distance to the right. The only person not in motion is Leonard Snart, standing proudly amongst his handiwork. His gun is drawn, its business end fixed on Barry, who is already pinned to the ground under a blanket of ice.

It’s in that very moment that Eobard knows his cover is as good as blown. If he doesn’t intervene directly, Snart will kill Barry.

He feels the cold burn of his fury at the back of his throat, the all-encompassing rage he once harbored for only one man, the man that no longer exists, his enemy turned son, his god turned disciple. How dare Snart force his hand before his time. How dare he assume himself worthy of this little game between the divine. He should be cowering, begging for mercy. He—

Eobard’s train of thought is thrown for a complete loop when he suddenly spots the gaggle of team members approaching Snart from behind, dragging the vacuum cleaner between them. He feels a pang in his chest at the ridiculousness of it all, annoyed that he can no longer hear what Snart is saying, his voice buried under static, either because the reception here is poor or because Barry knock his head some time during his mad dash to save people. Whatever the case may be, Snart looks utterly perplexed, even with the shades on. He gives the vacuum-cum-pseudo-weapon a long, hard look and then decides to engage Cisco Ramon in conversation.

Eobard lowers his hands to the ground, poised to sprint should things get a little harry. Fortunately, though, Cisco appears to have everything under control. He shakes the nozzle of his vacuum at Snart menacingly and goes on some long, uninterrupted rant, at the end of which Snart pulls up his gun, albeit with a smile on his face. Then the man turns his back to Cisco and waltzes off into the distance, obviously not convinced of the danger Cisco thinks he poses, even if Snart is willing to humour him with this small victory.
As soon as Snart ducks out of sight, strolling around a train car tipped over onto its side, Barry’s companions descend upon him, hacking at the ice with anything in hand, including the heels of Caitlin’s designer shoes.

Eobard knows he should be pleased that Barry survived the night, but Snart isn’t fooling him. The criminal is well and truly intrigued. Now that he has the diamond, he’ll sit and ponder his next big heist, something bold enough to steal Barry’s attention once again.

Leonard Snart needs to be dealt with tonight.

Darting around what remains of the train, careful to stay clear of Barry’s line of sight, Eobard takes up after Snart. He can’t exactly see where the other man went, but there’s a ditch up ahead just below the railway, which leads down to a service door. Far below them, Eobard knows, is part of the subway system, a labyrinth of old and new tunnels that house the Circle Line, the outermost route in the city. From there, Snart can disappear off to about anywhere in Central, long gone before the cops realize he’s vanished.

The service door is ajar when he gets to it. Beyond it is darkness, the air damp and heavy with the smell of stagnant water. It gives Eobard pause when he enters the corridor, turning his head first to the left and then the right, listening carefully, wondering which way his quarry went. Dipping into the Speed Force, he darts to the right.

Then his whole world explodes in pain.

It’s not a regular explosion either. Instead, he’s hit by a vibrational wave that jars up along his legs, his pelvis, his spine, all the way to the crown of his head, resonating in his ribs and his skull. He hears a soft sound of pain choked out at the back of his throat as he comes crashing down to his knees, his world spinning, every muscle in his body seizing. The pain barely recedes as the vibration fades away, leaving him to feel weak, somehow broken. Each sharp intake of air burns.

What the hell was that?

He shifts his left leg forward, laboring to keep his weight balanced forward against his foot as he pushes himself upright. He wants to run again, but he feels as though he would shatter the moment he took off. That blast, that—anomaly could easily kill him if it struck again.

But it doesn’t. Instead, the dark corridor ahead is lit up by a soft blue light a second before Eobard is hit by the blast of Snart’s cold gun.

He tries to twist away from the shot, but it still catches his left elbow, knocking him back onto the ground, pinning his arm to the concrete floor. The cold blast bestows a different kind of pain upon him, one that has him gritting his teeth together, consciousness tipping precariously over the edge.

Eobard leans his head back against the floor and takes a deep, shuddering breath. He can’t believe he fell for one of Snart’s traps. The man must’ve set it up as a contingency, just in case Barry was able to evade his attack aboveground. Eobard should’ve known better.

Snart’s gun is still powered up, glowing dimly in the darkened corridor, glinting off the tinted frames of his goggles. He takes a few steps forward and, gun still trained on Eobard, crouches to snatch a small, metal disc off the ground. “Not bad,” he remarks in his all too familiar drawl, full of satisfaction and conceit. He glances down at the detonator and then pockets it, smart enough not to leave any evidence of his activity behind. “It’s a shame its not reusable.”

“More stolen tech?” Eobard seethes, ribs aching, head still spinning, a thousand tiny needles setting
his arm aflame under the sheet of ice. If he’d just been a little more careful, he’d have his hand through Cold’s heart by now. “Couldn’t get the job done with your own supposed ‘genius’?”

“It was a gift, actually.” He pats his coat pocket for emphasis, seemingly unperturbed by Eobard’s jab. “And where would I be without it right now? Dead, I suppose.” Snart takes another step forward, head tilted to one side, securitizing his fallen enemy. “You’re not like the kid. He’s a goody two-shoes. You, on the other hand?” He offers Eobard a small, sly smile. “You’ve got murder on the mind, don’t you?”

Given how irate Eobard is, it would difficult to lie to that question. Eobard therefore elects to say nothing. Let Snart know him for the threat that he is.

“…I’ll take that as a yes.”

Eobard tries to vibrate his arm then, to either phase through the ice or shatter it, but he still feels fragile from the blast. Pain lances up his arm when he tried moves it. He’s genuinely afraid he might fracture something if he continues to push his luck.

Snart’s smile widens, but he doesn’t fire off another shot. Not yet, anyway. “You know, I remember you…I had a side-job lined up for Mercury Labs, a quick grab-and-go that went up in flames when you decided on a lark to burn the building to the ground. That was you, wasn’t it?”

Eobard knows Snart’s going to get tired of the sound of his own voice sooner or later, at which point he’ll ice Eobard for good. It’s therefore in Eobard’s best interests to convince Snart to take his finger off the trigger. He doesn’t even have to threaten the other man, just…just give him a reason to think killing Eobard would somehow be a detrimental to his health.

With his limited options, Eobard grasps Snart’s question and tries to do as much damage as humanly possible in just a few short words: “I’m hardly the only speedster.”

It’s the truth, even if he and Barry are the only ones occupying this time on this Earth. Let Snart think there are more of them—more enemies, more unknown variables to consider. Let him think there will be hell to pay if Eobard meets his maker tonight.

Somehow, that seems to do the trick. Snart stands there in silence for a long moment, mind running along the same chain of logic, because even if Snart has the confidence to take on a single speedster on his own time and in a location he can bait with traps, he knows he won’t fare well against any more than that, and certainly not when he’s the one being hunted.

“We protect our own,” Eobard continues, which is actually something of a lie, depending on which speedster you ask. “Lay off the kid.”

“I suspect the ‘kid’ is old enough to decide for himself whether he would like to continue this little game of ours,” Snart replies, dismissive. However, he finally lowers his gun, taking one slow step back after another, still smiling as he makes his retreat. “Let him know he’s free to retire from the hero-gig whenever he wants, but he can expect more trouble from my quarter if he doesn’t.”

“The next time you face off against him, you won’t be so lucky,” Eobard warns. He’s confident that if he can’t track Snart down himself, he’ll at least make sure Barry is better equipped to apprehend the other man during their next encounter. Once he’s behind bars, there will be nowhere for him to run.

“We’ll see,” Snart quips, finally powering down his weapon, plunging them into darkness.

He leaves Eobard to his misery, cold and broken on the floor, beaten for the first time in so many
years.

Eobard will, of course, ensure it’s the last.

~***~

Getting back to S.T.A.R. Labs in one piece turns out to be quite the event.

He spends the longest five minutes of his life pinned to the ground, trying to phase his arm through the ice just before he loses all sensation in the limb. Once he succeeds, he waits just long enough for the other pain to pass before he makes any attempt at rising from the ground, his body already healing from whatever damage that detonator dealt to him, although his arm still aches something fierce when he frees it, cradling it against his chest as he makes his way blindly to the door.

If course, emergency services are having a field day aboveground. There are a few minor fires that the fire brigade is trying to put out. The police are also there, escorting people toward a row of ambulances that just pulled up in the adjacent field. Barry and the others are nowhere to be found, which means they were probably able to pile into the van before anyone spotted them. Eobard needs to make a similar disappearing act, so he dips into the last reserves of his power, nearly depleted as his body tries to mend the worst of the damage, and zips back to S.T.A.R. Labs, collapsing in the underground parking lot when he gets there, struggling to get back to his feet.

By the time he shrugs on his regular clothes—thankful that his shirt covers the worst of his injury, some of the necrotic tissue already sloughing off around his elbow—and jumps into his wheelchair, his team members have returned. He bumps into them in the corridor just outside the Cortex, the second after the door to his Time Vault seals itself shut.

Pushing his own pain to the back of his mind, Eobard glances down at Barry’s legs as the boy limps around the bend, and says, “What happened? Your mic died after you caught up to Snart.”

“I’m not sure what happened to the mic,” Barry replies, head ducked in shame as Cisco and Hartley help him hobble into the Cortex, toward Caitlin’s medical station.

Dr. Snow brings up the rear of their little group, disappointment clear in her eyes. “Snart got away again, this time with the diamond—and he nailed Barry with his cold gun. He already showed signs of healing when I checked on him in the van, but another blast like that could’ve easily killed him.”

Eobard nods. Barry doesn’t know just how lucky he was that Snart decided to relent in his attack once the others showed up. “If it’s any consolation, Snart’s records seem to imply that he won’t strike again for a very long time now that he has the diamond.”

“Hopefully we can figure out a way to stop him before he does,” she murmurs as she takes up after Barry, tossing her coat onto a chair in the Cortex as she rolls up her sleeves, prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure Barry a speedy recovery.

Of course, Barry’s injury has almost entirely mended itself an hour later, limp noticeably missing as he changes into his civilian clothes and returns his suit to its mannequin. Cisco and Hartley have already headed home, and Caitlin is just in the process of packing away her equipment before she herself heads out. Eobard, of course, doesn’t have the energy yet to move from where he’s parked himself in front of the Cortex’s main computer, watching the late-night news. By now, everyone knows what went down at the train station. The city has also already found a moniker for Leonard Snart: ‘Captain Cold’, no doubt one of Cisco’s suggestions to Det. West, who handled the intervene for tonight’s piece.
“Caitlin says you think Snart’s going to ground now,” Barry says, glancing over Eobard’s shoulder at the anchorman standing in front of the warped remains of a burnt car. “Do you really believe that?”

He’s known Snart long enough to understand how the man operates. Snart’s methodology won’t change much over the years, even when he makes the switch from career criminal to reluctant hero. Going to ground is indeed what the old con’s done tonight.

Taking off his glasses, Eobard rubs his eyes. “He’s a smart man. He wants the police to lose interest in him, which won’t happen until he’s vanished from their radar for a while. We have time yet to figure out how to stop him.”

“I didn’t think I would lose to someone so early in my career,” Barry admits, sounding somewhat wounded.

Eobard wants to tell him not to be ashamed, that Snart is near the top of the hierarchy of villains that he’ll face in said career, a difficult man to defeat. Instead, he glances over his shoulder and says, “You’re young yet. Snart’s just taught you not to underestimate anyone, least of all non-metahumans, and I believe you’ll become a hero for it. Try not to be so hard on yourself.”

Barry’s gaze is still focused on the screen. Snart’s smug expression is plastered on the top right-hand corner as the newscaster does his little spiel. “You know…he easily could’ve killed me tonight.”

Replacing his glasses, Eobard snorts out a small laugh. “Oh, believe me…we know…”

“No, I mean…” Barry shifts his weight from one foot to the other, squinting in concentration. “He absolutely did not believe Cisco was going to shoot him, so I can’t help but wonder if Snart decided to hold his fire because I was much younger than he initially thought or, perhaps…” He shrugs, not entirely certain where he’s going with this.

It’s far too early for Barry to consider the possibility that Snart is worth more than his salt as a petty thief, that there’s an ally waiting for him in the not too distant future, so Eobard puts an end to this nonsense immediately. “He put a lot of lives on the line today, Barry. The only reason there were no fatalities is because you are much stronger than you give yourself credit for.”

This brings a small smile to Barry’s lips, still so shy when it comes to praise, such a modest boy. “You really think so? It felt like I barely had time to think when he sent that train off the rails. I lucked out.”

“You didn’t luck out,” Eobard assures him. “You saved countless people from imminent death. They lucked out on the fact that there’s a young man who can find it in himself to care so deeply for a complete stranger that he would be willing to lay his lie down for them in a heartbeat.”

Barry’s smile brightens a little more, dropping his gaze in embarrassment. Eobard is proud of him, still so compassionate and sincere, abashed by the compliment. He’s very much the hero Eobard idolized in his youth, the man he so desperately wanted to meet when he began his quest for a connection to the Speed Force.

“Thanks,” Barry mumbles, trying to contain his smile. “I think I’m going to head home now. Did you want me to give you a lift?”

“No, but thank you,” he replies. “There’s some paperwork for FEMA that I wanted to tackle tonight. I just might sleep over if I don’t get it done. Otherwise, I’ll call DATS and ask them to drive me home.”
“If you say so.”

“Before you run,” Eobard adds quickly. “Christina wants to see you now that you’re no longer in a coma. I promised her dinner sometime this week. Can you figure out what your social schedule looks like and get back to me on that soon?”

“Of course,” Barry replies, looking utterly delighted. “I’ll let you know tomorrow, alight?”

“Thank you.”

With a wink, Barry turns away and vanishes in a streak of light, whipping past Caitlin hard enough that it blows her hair back from her face. “Barry!” she snaps, though she knows he’s too far away by now to hear her. Glancing at Eobard, she says, “He’s still recuperating!” and then storms off into the corridor.

Smiling, Eobard turns back to his computer screen, pulling up his most recent email from FEMA, annoyed that they want to do another inspection by the end of the month. Barry will have to take his suit home the night before, and they’ll have to pack away some of their other equipment, make it seem as though they closed up shop after the explosion instead of turning this into their covert base of operations.

A short while before nine o’clock, Tina fires him off a text to ask if he’s still around. He lets her know that she’s free to drop by if she likes, even if it’s a little late, and keeps an eye out for her on the parking lot camera after he hides Barry’s mannequin in Cisco’s workshop. It only takes her twenty minutes to show up. He buzzes her in and wonders if he should put the kettle on in Caitlin’s side office, knowing that she always did appreciate cup of tea in the evening.

While he’s mulling over how best to receive her, he hears her heels tapping down the corridor, slow but steady, if a little heavy, as if she’s tired. Eobard turns to face her as she enters the Cortex—and is completely side-blinded by the look of her.

There’s an ugly blotch of a bruise on the left side of her face, stretching from the soft side of her cheek to the edge of her brow, arching up around her eye, as if she took a solid, flat blow to the head. Her right hand is also wrapped up in a cast, one which extends from her knuckles up to her wrist, disappearing under the cuff of her crisp, blue suit-jacket. She offers Eobard a sad smile when he sees her, gaze falling momentarily to the floor, as if she’s embarrassed by the state of herself.

“Hello, Harrison,” she says quietly, lifting her briefcase onto the main console and gingerly taking a seat in one of the empty seats beside him. “Thank you for agreeing to meet with me on such short notice.”

“Christina…” he says, still shocked. He feels a pang inside his chest, which feels suspiciously like concern, something he usually doesn’t harbor for anyone but Barry. “What happened to you?”

“This—” she says, lifting her injured hand, “—was from a vehicle accident two weeks ago. Someone rear-ended me into a busy intersection. The airbag broke my wrist when it was deployed. This—” she motions vaguely toward her face, eyes downcast again, shoulders slouched in defeated, “—was from an attempted mugging outside Mercury Labs Thursday evening. Fortunately, two young men were nearby and came to my aid when they heard me scream.”

For a moment, Eobard forgets about his own pain. He knows why Tina looks defeated, why she carries a weariness that is so unnatural for a woman with her kind of fire.

She suspects these incidents are somehow connected, that someone is out to get her.
Eobard doesn’t think she’s wrong.

“There was a fire in one of our labs today,” she continues, finally meeting his gaze, brows furrowed in anger. “Like I said earlier, I think something foul is going on behind the scenes at Mercury Labs.”

“How long have you felt this way?” he asks, not because he doubts her, but because he knows she would’ve been careful to take note of any suspicious behaviour as soon as it started cropping up, even if she wouldn’t know in the moment how to deal with it.

“About a month,” she sighs. “I don’t know why, I just… I was conducting my own internal review, because one of my researchers published a considerable number of papers last year, more then what seemed feasible given how little time he spends in his lab. I suspected he was fudging data, but one of my other employees informed me that he has contacts in the military and would often meet with some ‘General’ outside of work, one who’s name he was careful to share with no one.”

“General Eiling, you mean.”

“Of course,” she confirms with a mirthless laugh. “I realized then that he was publishing work from his other lab, one that is being funded by Eiling, so I fired him and started digging a little further. I’ve sacked three other employees since then. It looks like Eiling doesn’t have the authority to condone the kind of research he wants done, so he’s been paying some of my employees to carry it out and sign off on it as ‘Mercury Lab’ business for him.”

“You’ve rocked the boat, and now he wants to get rid of you,” Eobard mutters. He’s angry again—he’s been angry all day, but this feels like the last straw. Maybe Grodd was right. Maybe Eiling needs to die now before he makes life so much worse for all of them.

“Yes. I’ve also noticed that someone’s taken to digging into my own business, including a few personal projects I believe could do a lot of damage in the wrong hands.” She glances at her briefcase. “You’re my third and final stop of the night. I sincerely hope you can help me. You’re one of the few people I would ever trust with this particular project.”

Intrigued, Eobard watches as she pressed her thumb against the small scanner on the lock of her briefcase and pops the lid open. Eobard almost can’t believe what she has tucked away inside, his anger melting away into an electrifying sense of excitement and gratitude.

“This is my tachyon prototype,” she explains. “I started it years ago on a lark, because I always had a dream to work at NASA. It’s finished, technically, but I don’t want to begin testing while I’m under attack. Ergo, I need somewhere to put it for now.” She glances aside at Eobard, the request clear in her eyes, hopeful, but still a little worried. “There are so few people here at S.T.A.R. Labs, I thought this would be the ideal place to hide it. It’s not like Eiling could plant one of his spies in your small group.”

Eobard almost laughs, because after today’s fiasco with the cold gun, he doesn’t know if he can even trust his own janitorial staff anymore. But he doesn’t tell her that—he’ll keep the device in his Time Vault, anyway, the safest place in all of Central City right now.

“I would be more than happy to help you,” he replies, heart still fluttering in excitement. Here he always thought he would have to steal it once she was finished developing it. By fostering a friendship with her, albeit one that started off a little shaky, she had instead given it to him freely, even if she didn’t understand the magnitude of what she was doing for him with this seemingly small gesture.

It’s an honest effort to peel his eyes away from her device. Trying to keep himself focused on the
problem at hand, he says, “You don’t think Eiling will get a little antsy when he sees you cleaning up shop, do you?”

Tina gives him a small shrug, still clearly exhausted and afraid. “I don’t know what he’s going to do, honestly, and I have no idea how to protect myself. I’m just…going through the motions of my day so far. What else can I really do?”

Eobard licks his lips, thinking. There really isn’t anything Tina can personally do for herself.

It’s a good thing, then, that Eobard feels indebted to her.

“You could try leaving the city for a while,” he suggests, even if he knows his advice is weak. If Eiling is gunning for someone, he’ll pull all the stops to get to them. “Or, at the very least, stay with friends to reduce the likelihood of someone catching you alone. I have a spare room, if you’re interested.”

“Thank you,” she replies, reaching over to squeeze his hand, grateful despite the futility of his gesture, “but hopefully he loses attention in me now that my witch-hunt is over and my research is out of reach. I’m going to head home and have a cup of tea and…try to relax, I suppose.”

Eobard flips his hand over to squeeze hers in return. As much as he enjoys striking fear into the heart of his enemies, he doesn’t want her to be frightened. She’s only trying to do what’s right.

“I look forward to our dinner,” she says in an attempt to change the subject, her hand slipping from his as she rises to her feet. Her voice wobbles minutely as she bids him adieu. “Good night, Harrison. Please, take care.”

“You as well,” he murmurs, watching her go, gaze shifting to the S.T.A.R. Labs security feed so that he can follow her all the way to the parking lot, where she gets into her car, sits there for a solid five minutes, likely having a good cry, and then drives off into the night.

Tentatively, from several stories below the Cortex, Grodd projects one of his fantasies to Eobard. In it, he has Eiling’s head braced between his massive hands, slowly squeezing, watching the man beg for his life before his brains are squeezed out through his ears.

Eobard shifts his eyes to the tachyon prototype. It won’t cure him of his weakened connection to the Speed Force, but it will give him quite the boost. He’ll heal much faster, and he’ll be able to run for longer stints before tiring.

Lifting the device out of the briefcase, thinking about how easy it would be to modify it for his own use, he says, “What say you and I have a little Father-Son bonding time, Grodd?”

Eobard feels a sliver of excitement through their connection.

“And yes,” Eobard clarifies, “it will certainly involve violence.”

Chapter End Notes

TLDR: Eobard has a long, hard day. Christina has a long, hard month.

Somehow, it's all going to work out for them in the end...
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