The Differences between Enemies and Nemeses

by LiselleVelvet

Summary

The anniversary of his mother's death hits Barry harder than he thought it would. So of course this is when he meets his new neighbor.

Inspired by Redhead's Tumbling Together and began as a Neighbors!trope headcanon from CFTrash. I'm also building off of the amazing fic Crimson wrote, Break on Through as a fix-it for the events during the singularity with permission.

Notes

AN: I began this as a one-shot that has subsequently developed a life of its own. Hope you all enjoy the ride :)

Many thanks to Liu/Pheuthe for her help :)

See the end of the work for more notes.
Not Quite First Impressions

Chapter Summary

AN: I didn't check on Nora Allen's date of death before posting this, and as this grew from a one-shot into a monster, that's a minor issue. Therefore, I'm ignoring the actual date of Nora Allen's murder (in March), and making it August 10th instead.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was the anniversary of his Mom’s death. The night that bastard Eobard Thawne altered the timeline forever, the night he ran back to change…and ended up letting it play out instead. He knew it was a shitty idea, even told the obnoxious, smug asshole about his object lesson in trusting bad guys. And yet…he still fucking did it. He just had to try. Barry had to believe that he owed it to his friends and family to undo all the hurt and chaos Eobard caused when he messed with the original timeline.

Even though it probably meant losing almost all of the relationships he relied on—the people he loved. Yeah, his Mom would be alive, his Dad wouldn’t be in prison, and yeah, in theory he might marry Iris. But…to do that he’d lose Eddie, Cisco, Caitlin, his relationship with Joe. Even though that article showed he knew Oliver in the future…would they be friends, partners? He still couldn’t believe Eobard thought that dangling a future with Iris in front of Barry would have him automatically falling in line and doing whatever the man told him to without question. Like she was some prize to be won. Eobard didn’t know him at all.

He couldn’t hold back his sobs. Not that there was a reason to even try, there wasn’t anyone around to hear him. As much as he appreciated being able to stay with Joe, he found this place a few months ago and fell in love with it. Barry loved the location, closer to downtown, and the clean break it represented, finally moving away from the neighborhood he grew up in. Going back to that night let him make peace with what happened, but moving beyond that, moving forward…he needed a change of scenery.

Fuck, he thought it wouldn’t be so bad this year. Of course it had to be so much worse instead. Having the chance to stop it, save her…and not. Most days, Hell, even right after he fixed shit with the singularity, Barry knew listening to his older self was the right call. Knew that in his heart before ever trying to create that wormhole. But tonight...

He’s not so sure. Which only made Barry feel that much worse, ashamed of that selfish part of him that latched onto the idea of having his family back, having a future with Iris. Barry curled in on himself, hiding his face in his arms. He hadn’t even been able to shrug out of his coat and messenger bag before sliding down the wall, unable to hold it together a moment longer. His grief echoed around the entryway, harsh in the stillness of the cozy apartment. It wasn’t so bad earlier at CCPD, barely even thought about it when he ran a quick patrol of the city. That’s why he turned down Iris’ offer of company, didn’t mention anything to Cisco or Caitlin. Joe was on nights this week, and Eddie had this date planned for nearly a month—he was going to propose to Iris again, properly this time—his words, not Barry’s…or Iris’s, for that matter. He didn’t want to rain on their parade, and honestly thought he’d be ok with pizzas and Pixar.
At least he was able to talk to her one last time, let her know that he and his Dad were ok...though Barry’s not so sure that was for the best after all. Not when it made everything hurt just that much more. A fresh wound once again, with the added twist of a knife to his heart. And now with Eobard gone, there was no way to get his Dad out of Iron Heights.

He just hoped his neighbor wasn’t home. He hadn’t met the guy yet, even though it seemed like they kept similar hours outside of his Flash stuff. But having this breakdown as a first impression would suck. Barry just needed to get himself under control enough to make it onto the living room couch and he’d be set—enough space separating their apartments to make up for the less-than-soundproof walls. And something on Netflix to take away the silence.

Barry wasn’t sure how much time passed, but a soft knock on his door finally caught his attention.

“Hey, you ok in there?” The voice was muffled by the door, but that didn’t mask the hint of concern. Great. Apparently his neighbor was home after all. He didn’t respond, hoping the guy would go away, trying to get himself under control.

Wrong decision. After another minute or two, the guy knocked again, then tried the door. Which Barry, in his infinite wisdom, failed to lock.

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“Are you—Scarlet?!”

Len hadn’t been thrilled when he found out his old neighbor moved out. She’d been perfect—older, quiet, kept to herself. When he learned that she was moving, Len put out feelers for a new place, just in case. But, ten weeks later and he had yet to catch sight of the man that moved in. The only reason he even knew that much was he sang in the shower. Apparently they started their days at about the same time. It was one less thing to worry about, Len hated moving. Odd for someone with his notoriety, but his records never resurfaced and he liked this place. Sure as hell beat a string of safe houses. Appreciated having somewhere to return to, to call his own.

Len was hoping to enjoy a quiet evening, figure out dinner and something for tomorrow’s lunch with Lisa and Mick. The two of them were planning a smaller job, wanted his take on a few things. Offered him a spot on the team, but Len was content to hold off for now, wanting to plan something big, a challenge. It wasn’t like he needed the money. Made more sense to build up a rapport with the metas he freed, slowly bringing Baez and Bivolo into the fold. Mardon still refused to see the light, but Len hadn’t ruled him out yet. And if doing that gave Flash and friends a chance to chill before starting the game up again, so much the better. Len loved the challenge of trying to outwit Barry Allen, he was far too predictable when angry.

At a loss for dinner—he’d been putting off groceries this week—Len was about to head out to restock his fridge and pick up takeout when he heard his neighbor’s door close, followed by a loud thud on their shared wall and...Damn. Took him a moment to process what he was hearing, muffled as it was. Grief. Raw, loud, uncontrolled, an undercurrent of anger. Even through layers of insulation and drywall. And it didn’t stop.

There was something about it. Haunting. Len tried to go about his original plan, but he just...couldn’t. He may be Cold, but his heart wasn’t made of ice. It was impossible to ignore this level of anguish, couldn’t reconcile it with this morning’s rendition of ‘Single Ladies’ in the shower. He grabbed the six-pack from his fridge and a handful of his ‘shitty day survival movies’—Lisa’s...
name for them, not his—and his keys. Knocked softly on the door next to his.

“Hey, you ok in there?” Surprised by the amount of concern in his own voice.

No response, though the sound changed, a little more muffled. But no movement. Len sighed, shifted his weight from one sock-clad foot to the other. Still not sure why he was doing this, but might as well try again. Could always get the ingredients for lunch in the morning. Knocked again...figured he might as well try the knob. The idiot hadn’t even locked it.

Len gently swung the door open, not wanting to hit the guy. “Are you—” Oh, there was no way. It wasn’t possible but “—Scarlet?!”

It was indeed Barry Allen. What the fuck could’ve happened to reduce the Scarlet Speedster to...this.

Kid was hunched over on the floor, arms around his knees. Still in his coat for fuck’s sake—CCPD lanyard around his neck. He froze, as much as one can when hyperventilating, staring up at Len through red eyes, tears still streaming down his face.

Shit. He couldn’t just leave his nemesis like that, not after knowing who it was. Might as well go through with his revised plan for the evening. The speedster could easily make him leave, if that’s what he wanted.

Len took a deep breath, stepped over Barry and softly closed the door behind him, continuing into the apartment, putting his stuff down on the coffee table. Absolutely refusing to think too much about what he was about to do.

The kid hadn’t moved, Len sat down across from him and waited. Not entirely sure what to do now that he was here but at the same time, not wanting to go. Wanted to know why.

It didn’t take long. Barry took a deep, shuddering breath and hid his face against his knees. “Of course,” shook his head, voice muffled. “Of course it’s you. Why are you here, Cold?”

Len...didn’t have a good answer for that. Tilted his head, looking the younger man over carefully. Clearly wasn’t injured. Never expected to see the Flash embody defeat and despair. Even after being zapped by Mardon, on his back on the tarmac at Len’s feet he still had his fire. But he’d been silent too long, the kid tilted his head just enough to peek at Len, making eye contact.

Len sighed, rubbing a hand down his own face. What the hell. “Didn’t have any plans, figured I’d offer up beer and movies. Since it sounded like your day...sucked is probably an understatement?”

Barry lifted his head, shaking it at his answer, clenching his jaw. “No, I mean why are you here? How are you always around when shit blows up in my face?” Kid let out a humorless laugh.

He didn’t think that was fair—from what his research uncovered on the Scarlet Speedster, the younger man was perfectly capable of getting things to blow up in his face without any help from Len.

“I live here,” gestured towards his apartment on the other side of the wall Barry leaned against. The
kid snorted, dropping his face into his knees once again.

Another four minutes and fifty-six seconds passed. Len shifted, about to get up and leave after all.

“What—what movies did you bring?” It was no more than a whisper. He looked up, reading confusion and...something else that Len couldn’t quite place underneath the anguish.

“The golden standards, of course. Holy Grail, Spaceballs, Blazing Saddles, Princess Bride, the Oceans movies. Lisa came up with the name.” He smirked, wondering if the kid would catch on.

Barry snorted. “Must you pun everything?”

Len felt his smirk shift into a lopsided smile as he got to his feet. “I have no idea what you mean, Barry.” Offered the younger man a hand up.

Barry stared for a moment too long before accepting the hand up, getting rid of his coat and bag. Len wanted to ask, but needed to bide his time, wait until he’d likely get an answer.

“What do you want for takeout, kid?”

The younger man winced, “Could you not call me that?”

Len raised an eyebrow, but nodded. Knowing that mattered, had something to do whatever the speedster was dealing with but not sure how it fit. “Alright. What shall we order, Barry?”

That earned him an eye roll. “Don’t care, something that delivers.”

“Not helpful, Barry. Pizza, Chinese, Thai, a five course tasting menu complete with wine, exploring the culinary traditions of Provence?”

A smile for his trouble, shaky and small, but there. “I doubt there’s anywhere that’ll deliver a tasting menu, and you brought beer, not wine. Thai good?”

Len shrugged, pulled up GrubHub on his phone and queued his typical order from the place nearby. Hesitated a moment, then passed the thing to Barry. A risk, sure, but the kid looked like shit and he was reasonably certain he wouldn’t try anything. Assuming the thought even crossed his mind. The kid took it, biting his bottom lip.

“...So I kindof eat a lot...you sure you want me to put it through on your account?”

Len shook his head, looking the kid up and down. “Don’t worry about it—consider it my good deed for the day, feeding the Flash.” Besides, how much could the younger man really eat?

“If you’re sure....”

“Seriously, Scarlet. Order already, I’m hungry.”

Barry clearly was too, if that loud growl was any indication. Len snickered, watching color spread from the brunette’s cheeks all the way to his ears. Handed his phone back without meeting Len’s gaze.

“Kitchen’s through there, I’m gonna...” Barry trailed off, waved a hand like it meant something to someone.

Len put the beer in the fridge, rummaged through the cabinets to find plates and silverware and set that on the stove. He paused...kid did give him permission to look around, after all. Might as well
take advantage.

By the time Barry joined him in the kitchen, Len determined that his nemesis must love to bake. It made an odd kind of sense. Baking was a science, relied on precision, measurements, timing. Chemistry that tasted good...fit with the younger man’s impeccable record as a forensic scientist. He only had the most basic of cookware sets, shoved haphazardly into a drawer. But the stand mixer had pride of place on the island, and a drawer and two cabinets were dedicated to all sorts of bake ware, from spring-pans to muffin tins and a stack of large, well-used baking references next to the toaster oven. Interesting.

He took a moment to study the brunette. He’d changed into a set of S.T.A.R. Labs sweats and a long-sleeved red shirt that looked impossibly soft. His hair was damp, must’ve splashed his face with water before coming back out. Barry’s eyes were still red, sad, but the storm seemed to be over for now. He glanced at Len, rubbing the back of his neck. “How long do we have before the food arrives?”

“Ten more minutes or so, why don’t you go pick a movie?”

By the time he and Barry got the living room set up to the younger man’s specifications, the food arrived. Apparently Flash wasn’t kidding about how much he ate...or was the kid just making a point?

No, as it turned out Barry was entirely serious about how much he could eat. The speedster demolished the takeout—more than enough for Len, Lisa, and Mick combined, with leftovers for the weekend. Where did he put it all?

Len gave up trying not to stare, it was strangely fascinating to watch. “Another beer, Scarlet?”

He shrugged.

“Something stronger, then? Looks like you could use it.” It did, too. Len still had no idea what caused the other’s breakdown, but whatever it was, the speedster hadn’t shaken it off. Still subdued, grief palpable.

Barry scoffed. “I wish. Alcohol doesn’t work--metabolism thing.”

Ah. “Like the food?”

“Hey, I warned you about that—lemme get my wallet...”

Len grabbed his arm before Barry could get up. “Don’t worry about it, Barry. Really. If it bothers you that much, you can return the favor some time.”

Kid gave him a skeptical look, but stayed put. “Sure, Cold. Whatever you say.”

“It’s Len, Scarlet. Why don’t we clear this up before we start Spaceballs?” A moment later and the plates and takeout containers were gone, there was a fresh beer on the table for Len and he heard the stove click on. Curious, he joined the younger man in the kitchen.

“We need popcorn for movies,” motioning to the heavy pot on the range. “Do you think you’ll want hot chocolate...or just gonna stick to beer?” Barry asked from his fridge.

“Any Bailey’s for the chocolate?” Might as well ask, since the kid obviously planned to make the hot chocolate properly.
“Told you, alcohol has no effect on me...though I wish it did.”

“Whoever said it was for you?” Len smirked. Barry smiled shyly in return.

“Yeah, cabinet over the toaster oven. I know you prefer to keep things cool, but any objection to some cayenne and cardamom in the chocolate? It’ll go better with popcorn that way.” The smile grew a bit more.

“Mhm...I can make some sacrifices if it’s for a good cause.”

Barry huffed out a laugh at that, grabbing one of his whisks, slowly starting to heat the milk. Len leaned against the counter, watching the other man shoot him little looks.

“Just ask, Barry, before you hurt yourself.”

“If you want...this is gonna take a few minutes so...If you wanted to...I dunno…” the kid trailed off, biting his lip and refusing to look up.

Len considered for a moment, piecing things together. “Alright...Since we have a few minutes, are you going to lock me out if I bring the DVDs we already watched back over to my place.”

“I have to make sure the milk doesn’t scald, not bother with things like locks and doors.”

Ok...so the kid still didn’t want him gone. But he wanted something…

“If you wanted to go back to your place and grab something more comfy than jeans that’d be ok.”

Len blinked, parsing that out. Sounded like the kid barely stayed below super speed...Ah. Yeah, he could do that. “Back in a few, Red.”

“How have you never seen The Incredibles, Len?!”

“Because I’m not a child?” He flicked the kid’s shoulder. Somehow they ended up leaning against one another on the couch, his arm around the younger man. Len wasn’t complaining.

“So that means you haven’t seen any Pixar?” Barry sounded so scandalized.

Len raised an eyebrow, exaggerated his sardonic drawl. “Of course not, Scarlet.”

The kid shook his head in mock-despair, starting Holy Grail. Barry leaned forward to put the remote on the coffee table, settling against Len’s side, head nearly resting against his shoulder. The brunette seemed comfortable, more relaxed than before. He decided to chance it. “Barry...what happened?”

The kid sighed heavily. “This...my mom died fifteen years ago today.”

Oh. Shit. Tightened his arm around Barry’s shoulder. That explained most of it, though the other’s tone told him there was more to it than that. He didn’t press, let the conversation go. Had a low-level competition to see which of them knew more lines to the movie...it ended in a tie.

Before putting in Ocean’s 11 he and Barry took care of the popcorn and mugs of hot chocolate, killing the lights.
Len woke up some time later to the DVD menu playing on a loop. He stretched, glad the remote was within reach since Barry was sprawled across his chest, using him as a pillow, their legs tangled together. Len knew he should probably go while the speedster was still asleep, but he was comfortable. And stuck. No sense waking the kid up.

Len turned off the TV, wrapped his arms around the other man and went back to sleep.

The next morning was entertaining. Barry’s phone woke them up, the kid was running late for work. Sounded like a regular thing.

Barry was bright red, stuttering apologies. Len just rolled his eyes, calmly gathered his things from the living room as the younger man zipped around getting ready for work, rushing them both out the door. Barry turned to him before racing off, hand on his arm.

“Thanks, Len.”

“Anytime, Scarlet.”

Barry laughed, “Careful, I may take you up on that. Never seen *The Incredibles*, honestly.”

Len found himself hoping the other man would do just that.

Chapter End Notes

Next ficlet will take place about a week later, Barry invades with Pixar because Len hasn’t seen the Incredibles. Which is a crime.

I don’t have any timeline for these, but there will be more of them. Feel free to suggest additional scenarios, though no promises that I’ll end up including them.
This is going to be a chaptered story rather than a series after all. I hope you guys enjoy the second installment, and please let me know what you think!

Thank you Liu and Redhead for your help on this one :D

Last week was weird. Well, weirder than usual, and considering the strangeness that was Barry’s life since the accelerator blew, that was saying a lot. The speedster still couldn’t quite wrap his head around it—‘it’ being his impromptu movie night with his neighbor. Captain Cold. Len.

Barry choked back what would’ve become a hysterical laugh. He lived next door to a supervillain. His supervillain in fact, according to Cisco. Could be worse, he supposed. Len could be more like Slade or the other criminal-slash-megalomaniacs that constantly pitted themselves against Oliver. Barry was willing to admit to himself, in the privacy of his own mind, that the thief had style. And their rivalry was fun, minus the mess at Ferris Air.

At least Cold...Len...was just as surprised to see him curled up on his own floor as he was to see the man sans parka, being all concerned neighbor. For real. Not putting on a show, no ulterior motive Barry could identify, just..there. Offering company and good movies.

The strangest part of all? It didn’t suck. Barry actually enjoyed himself, liked spending time with Len, and really appreciated the company. Especially that night. Even if the other man totally cheated during the Holy Grail quote-off.

Just a quiet presence next to him on the couch, surprisingly light banter in his kitchen, obviously curious about the whole situation but without prying. He didn’t try to get Barry to talk the way Iris or Joe or Caitlin would. And he appreciated silence...something Cisco wasn’t so great at. That was why he gave the man an honest answer when he finally got around to asking what happened. It was like they were friends and had been for years. Comfortable, able to fill in the blanks. It was weird.

The speedster couldn’t stop thinking about it, during quiet moments at work, routine patrols, before settling into bed. It was the best night’s sleep he’d had in...Barry wasn’t sure how long. At least since the singularity. Possibly since before he woke up from the coma. It made absolutely no sense.

His couch was big, but not that big. Certainly not to fit two grown men comfortably. And yet...those few moments between his alarm going off and his brain kicking in to truly register the situation were...he couldn’t quite come up with a term for the sensation. But somewhere that safety, contentment, and relaxation intersected. Barry had no idea why he thought of Len—Cold—as safe on any level, let alone the most instinctive one.

It all came back to that—that his night hadn’t sucked, even when he factored in everything that his Mom’s death brought up. Barry really wanted to do it again, spend more time with Len, although ideally without using him as a pillow this time.

Besides, the man hadn’t seen The Incredibles. Which seemed impossible, considering his
commitment to the whole Captain Cold thing.

He could hear the other man moving around next door and grabbed a handful of movies before he lost his nerve. The evening was quiet so far; Cisco would call him if there was anything that needed the Flash’s attention. But right now, Barry really wanted to force his neighbor to experience the awesomeness that was Pixar, and he refused to think about that too closely. Although he did remember to lock his door this time.

Three tries later, Barry finally managed to make himself knock, biting his bottom lip as he waited.

Thankfully, it didn’t take long for Len to answer. Maybe he was reading into it a bit too much, but the older man seemed almost happy to see him.

“Well, well, well. To what do I owe the pleasure, Scarlet?” Slouched against the door, wearing what looked like an extremely soft sweater in deep royal blue and a pair of fitted dark grey sweats. His feet were bare. Barry wasn’t sure why but that one detail stuck out, firmly separating this man, Len, from his Cold persona.

When he was finally able to drag his gaze back up the man was smirking. Teasing rather than mocking, one eyebrow raised.

Barry felt his face heating up, which only got worse when Len deliberately sized him up.

“Are you busy? It’s way past time for you to see The Incredibles, not to mention Finding Nemo, Monsters, Inc., Ratatouille, and Monsters University.”

Len’s smirk transformed into a lopsided smile. “Nothing that I can’t put off. Although I don’t have enough food on hand to keep up with your appetite, Barry.” He straightened up from his spot against the door, gesturing for the speedster to enter.

“That’s ok, besides I owe you food from last time. Any preferences?” Barry paused, allowing the other to take the lead. It was odd, he should be taking this opportunity to snoop, find out all he could about Leonard Snart to gain an advantage during their confrontations. Instead, Barry did want to find out about the older man, but because he got the sense that he had absolutely no idea who Leonard Snart really was rather than to get intel on Captain Cold. And he maybe really wanted to get to know Len...the man behind the persona. Well, under the parka.

He followed Len into the living room. The setup was similar to his own, but with a wide leather sofa that looked like he could sink into it and never move again. With his movie collection arranged by— that liar.

There, next to the TV was a complete shelf of Disney movies, Pixar included. Although he didn’t spot The Incredibles.

“For real, Len? Never seen any Pixar movies?” Barry crossed his arms, attempting a glare but unable to completely keep the smile off his face.

“Liar, remember? Your reaction was excellent. And I haven’t seen The Incredibles.”

“Sure you haven’t,” he raised an eyebrow, tone skeptical. “But anyway, food choice?” He gave up on suppressing the smile, pulling out his phone.
Len shrugged. “Your call.”

“Nope, you made me choose last time—pick something.”

“Fine,” the other man rolled his eyes. “How does Indian sound?”

“Works for me. Have anywhere particular in mind? I haven’t had a chance to try many places in this area yet.”

He made a few suggestions and Barry pulled up the menus, selecting one and queueing up his order. The speedster hesitated a moment before passing Len his phone. It’s not like Captain Cold could do much to it with Barry keeping an eye on him. “Go ahead and order.”

It took longer than he expected, but a few minutes later he had his phone once more, and the receipt helpfully informed him that food should arrive in about a half hour...but also—”This isn’t my payment information.”

“I have no idea how you feed yourself on a civil servant’s salary. Told you before, just doing my part to support the local hero.” The man’s smirk was completely unrepentant, looking entirely too pleased with himself.

Barry actually managed a glare this time, not ok with the idea of using some stolen credit card to pay for his meal. He also wasn’t thrilled about being in the other man’s debt, even if he was spot on about Barry’s grocery bills.

“Chill, Scarlet. The card is mine. That I pay promptly when the statement arrives. Only thing fake about it is the name.” He tilted his head to one side, considering something.

“If you’re still set on evening the score, I never turn down baked goods. Set-up in your kitchen is impressive.”

"That's not close to balancing things out," the speedster grumbled.

Len rolled his eyes, that lopsided smile of his making an appearance. "You clearly haven't tried to find decent pastries in this area, or Central in general."

"'Course not, I can make my own," Barry grinned. "So what would you like, then?"

And the smirk was back. “Surprise me.”

Barry just shook his head, letting it go for now. He’d see what he had the ingredients for and come up with something. Maybe some croissants, he had chocolate and almonds for filling options, though he’d need to pick up some whole milk and double-check his butter supply. And his selection had nothing to do with wanting to show off a bit. At all.

They’d just finished getting the food laid out when his phone rang.

“It’s Cisco,” he told Len, half-apologetic, as he answered.

“Hey Cisco, what’s-”

“Golden Glider and Heat Wave are hitting one of STAGG’s smaller storage facilities. No sign of Cold yet.”

What?! And no, there wouldn’t be any signs of Captain Cold, since he was currently sitting on his absurdly comfy leather couch, eating Indian food.
Time dilated, his mind immediately jumping to the obvious: that Len—Cold, obviously Cold, Barry couldn’t believe he fell for this again—orchestrated the whole thing to keep him distracted while his sister and partner stole...whatever it was they were after.

Except. Cold was just as surprised as he was last week, and he was the one that invaded tonight, not the other way around. Odds were good that the older man knew what the others were up to, but...A quick glance at the thief told him that Cold at least suspected what the call was about, a slight head-tilt before he seemed to catch himself, expression going blank.

“For real? Any idea what they could be after?” Barry walked into the kitchen, dropping his voice.

“Not sure, there’s a few possibilities, and none of them are good. You still have the spare suit at your place, right? I’ll guide you from there.”

Barry ran a hand through his hair, “Sounds good, man. On my way in a sec.”

“Sweet, and keep an eye out for Cold, he’s probably just waiting for you to get there to show himself.” Cisco ended the call.

Somehow, Barry doubted that.

“I take it you have to race off, Red? Don’t worry, I’ll keep your meal on ice until you get back.”

Barry just shook his head at the other man, unable to figure him out, and smiling despite his best efforts not to. He phased back into his place, taking off with Cisco guiding him to the site of the break-in.

Well, so much for that. Len got to his feet, grabbing his phone. Stared at it. Ramon had to be calling about Lisa and Mick’s heist. He warned them not to use the damn guns, they were a dead giveaway.

Worse, he had no way to give them a heads-up. Lisa insisted on running this part of the plan herself. Refused to give him the burner numbers so he’d have to be hands-off. He did not micromanage.

Job should have been simple, go in through the blind spot on the roof, drop in, grab the tech, Mick would hoist her back out. No alarms tripped, no guards involved. In and out. All in under two hundred seconds. Pointed that out at the planning session last week. Based on his research into the patterns at STAGG Industry’s storage facilities, it would be nearly two weeks before the theft was discovered.

Instead, the Flash was on his way. CCPD too, probably. Even if they did get out with the tech the two week grace period would be gone. Anonymity well and truly blown. Not getting this component would push the main plan back by at least a month. More if they ended up caught. No way he going to let Lisa run point on any jobs for at least a year after this debacle.


Len had no idea if the kid would interpret their agreement to include keeping Mick and Lisa out of
Iron Heights. Not that he wouldn’t break them out, after giving them a chance to cool off for being idiots.

Evening started so well, too. Pleasantly surprised to see the kid at his door. The prospect of another impromptu movie night much more appealing than staring at his phone and waiting to hear from Lisa and Mick.

He sighed, heading to lock his door behind the Flash’s exit. Except the door was still locked. How…?

Yet another mystery to add to the puzzle that was the Flash. Barry Allen. Seemed like the more he found out about the kid, the less he actually knew. Like them being neighbors. His apparent willingness to keep Len’s address from CCPD and S.T.A.R. Labs. That Scarlet enjoyed the other night just as much as he had. Or at least enough to turn up at his door with movies of his own.

Still couldn’t believe he slept in the other’s apartment. On his couch. With Barry using him as a body pillow. It was unexpected but entirely welcome. Kid was all muscle, lean and strong. Hard to imagine the view could get better than the Flash suit, but tousled and asleep on Len’s chest was a good start.

Glanced up at the clock, confirming twenty-five minutes elapsed. Just began to clean up, thought he heard Barry moving around next door. Glanced at his phone—still nothing from his sister or best friend—when he heard a knock.

Interesting. He answered the door to a freshly-showered Barry Allen, looking slightly worse for wear in those S.T.A.R. Labs sweats and red t-shirt. Short sleeves this time. Cut over his left eye, bruises and minor burns on his right arm.

“So I don’t suppose you’d tell me what your sister and Heat Wave were after at that warehouse?” The kid raised an eyebrow, sounding exasperated more than anything else. Posture relaxed.

Len stood to the side, allowing the speedster to enter. “Not how the game works, Red.”

The kid shrugged, laughing. “Worth a shot. Mind if I warm up some food before we get started?”

Len turned towards the kitchen, hiding his surprise. “Go for it, what d’you want to watch first?”

“Incredibles, obviously.”

His phone vibrated. Len checked the text—unknown number ‘Flash crashed the job. Don’t think he knows what we were after. Meet to regroup?’ Len shot back ‘Tomorrow, 1500, your place.’

No sense tempting fate, risk Barry running into Lisa and Mick. He waited until they settled into the couch, close but not touching, to ask the most important question. “Why’d you come back, Scarlet?”

Barry shrugged, looking up from his plate to catch Len’s gaze. “Why didn’t you tip them off? I’m sure you knew where I was headed.”

The other man shrugged. “Didn’t seem sporting. This-” he gestured between them, considering his response, “—is just between us. That’s business.”

That was surprising. He figured Len would have tipped the others off as soon as Barry left, maybe even before Cisco ended the call.
He inhaled the rest of his dinner at super speed, whisking the trash away and flopping down on the couch. Oh man, it was even more comfortable than it looked. He sighed happily, snuggling in further. Barry glanced up at Len, smiling. “Hope you don’t want me to move for a while.”

“Where do you put it all, Scarlet?” The other man looked incredulous, shaking his head. “I’ve got nowhere to be, but isn’t this a school night for you?”

Barry rolled his eyes. “I’m off tomorrow, well, on call, so with any luck I can sleep in. No call yet for that break-in your Rogues pulled, so it’s prolly not going to be my case.” He shrugged. “As for the food...it’s a metabolism thing. You don’t want to know how many calories I need in a day.”

“Oh, I’m starting to get a picture. Flash-cleaning’s a neat trick.” Len smirked. He paused, tilting his head and scrutinizing Barry’s face, arm.

“What? Do I have food on me?” He would not blush.

“No...Your cut’s nearly gone, burns look smaller, too. Part of your powers?”

Barry shrugged awkwardly. He knew it was as good as an admission, but still. Whatever this movie night thing became, as relaxed and affable as he was right now, the other man was still Captain Cold. The injuries in question caused by his sister and partner? friend? he wasn’t sure what the other man considered Heat Wave, not that it really mattered.

“I think that qualifies as ‘business’, Len.”

“Hmmm. Fair enough—shall we start the movie, then?”

Barry nodded, made a show of trying to reach the remote on the coffee table without moving. The couch really was insanely comfortable.

The older man laughed, sitting up to get the remote himself. “No, don’t trouble yourself, Scarlet. I’ll get it.” Len started the movie, settling back into the couch, arm around Barry’s shoulders.

That should make him uncomfortable. Even though Barry was tactile by nature, it was reserved for the people he cared about, that cared about him. Len...shouldn’t be on that list. But maybe, after everything that happened last week...He gave an internal shrug, deciding to take a closer look at that some other time. For now, introducing Len to The Incredibles was far more important. And if he shifted a bit closer, well, he’d think about that later, too.

They barely made it through the opening credits before the commentary began. Barry couldn’t really complain; he had a tendency to do the same thing. Plus, Len’s observations were pretty damn funny.

“Ah yes, ever the hero.”

“Mhm, never mind the rolling firefight, use your super strength to get cats out of trees.” Barry smiled, sinking deeper into the couch.

“Don’t deny you’d do the same, Barry. Points for creativity, though. Efficiency, too.”

“Would not!”
Len raised an eyebrow, face a picture of disbelief.

“Ok, fine, I might. But I’d deal with the gunmen first!” Barry huffed.

“So when are you going to get a sidekick, Scarlet?” Len needled.

He glanced up at the thief, “Really, not suggesting that I’m the sidekick?”

“To whom? Not like there are any other speedsters tearing around. Thought there might’ve been—red lightning to your yellow. Only saw it for a few weeks, could be mistaken.”

Barry tensed, it was automatic, and there was no way Len wouldn’t notice. He knew the other man was incredibly observant, this only confirmed it-

“Chill, I’m not asking for details.”

Barry let out the breath he didn’t know he was holding, nodded against the the other’s arm.

“Damn, why can’t my gun do that!?”

He shot Len a smug smile. Of course Captain Cold would like Frozone. “‘Cause there are these things called ‘laws of physics’ that apply in the real world. Told you it’s an awesome movie.”

Len laughed softly but didn’t disagree with him. “Oh, that makes sense now—it’s actual ice.”

He would be fascinated by that point.

“They do make a point about the collateral damage, Scarlet.”

“Hey, the most damage I caused was entirely your fault. Derailing a train, Len? Besides, I’m pretty sure you, Glider, and Heat Wave make bigger messes. Especially Heat Wave.” Barry refused to think about the singularity and technically, technically, Eddie caused it, not him. Which never would’ve happened if he hadn’t—he shut that line of thought down fast.

“I knew you’d get everyone out. Needed the distraction to get an edge on your speed.”

Barry raised an eyebrow. “Right, of course.” Maybe this movie wasn’t the best idea after all, tension in the room ratcheting up a few notches.

Len sighed, sitting up. He paused the movie and pulled away, turning to face Barry. “Why do you think I waited until after everyone was clear to shoot you? Saw the effect the gun had at the museum—wanted you otherwise engaged. Not a body count. Our agreement covers those type of situations. Won’t happen again, Barry.”

He nodded slowly, appreciating the other man’s considered response.

“Keep going, change it, call it a night?” Len asked, eyebrow raised.

“We can keep going? I may not have thought about how awkward it might be to watch a movie about superheroes with a supervillain.” He ducked his head, rubbing the back of his neck.

Len smiled, just the barest quirk of his lips. “A supervillain, Scarlet?”

“You’ve got the costume, persona, weaponry, and mastermind thing going—I think that qualifies.”

That got a real laugh out of the other man as he got to his feet. “Popcorn, since it’s already paused?
I don’t have any cocoa, though.”

“T’ll never turn down more food, and water’s fine, need to rehydrate anyway. Thanks.” He thought for a moment...popcorn would take a few minutes, probably long enough for him to at least start those pastries. He also forgot his phone. “Mind pausing for like ten minutes? I need to take care of a few things over at my place.”

“Go for it, door’ll be open.”

Barry took nearly all of the ten minutes to whip up a quick batch of sticky buns with pecan-caramel sauce for the next morning. They’d finish rising in the fridge overnight and go in the oven first thing tomorrow. Not as fancy as croissants, but really good, and he thought Len would like them.

The other man was back on the couch, legs propped up on the coffee table, two bowls of popcorn, a beer for himself and a glass of water on the table for Barry. “All set?”

“Yeah, thanks.” Barry settled in once again, grabbing his popcorn.

“No problem, Scarlet.”

It didn’t take long for the two of them to gravitate towards one another on the couch. Again. Barry finally gave up trying to come up with a term other than ‘snuggling’ when he handed his (now empty) popcorn bowl to Len and the man’s arm ended up draped over his shoulders once more.

“Wait—the son? No wonder you love this movie so much, the kid’s a speedster.”

“It came out in 2004, Len, ten years before the accelerator blew. My powers have nothing to do with it. Besides, I wanted Violet’s powers when this first came out...still kinda do.”

“Oh?”

Barry nodded. “Yeah. It was four years after Mom died and Dad went to Iron Heights for it because no one would believe me. I wouldn’t let that go, combined with being skinny, awkward, and a huge nerd...invisibility and force fields would have been...” he heaved a sigh. “Really useful. Way more than Dash’s limited speed powers.” And shit. That was way more than Len needed to know. About all of it. Barry held his breath, releasing it when all the other did was slowly nod, studying his face.

“That little kid should come to Central, something amazing happens here all the time.”

Barry didn’t know how to interpret that, or the way Len glanced at him when he said it.

“Wow...I thought that costume was unfortunate before. Do superheroes get mid-life crises?”

“Give the guy a break, he’s been stuck at a horrible desk job for decades. Working for The Sicilian. Shhh, just watch.”

Len snickered at that, but lapsed into silence. At least until Edna made an appearance.
“This is too good. She’s Cisco. He’s aware of his computer generated counterpart, correct?”

Barry grinned. “Oh yeah. Mannerisms aren’t quite right, but the rest? Spot on. Even down to the upgrades. Whether we ask for them or not.” Oliver’s suit in the engineer’s workshop was proof of that.

“Mhm. I appreciate his use of form-fitted material.” The speedster felt himself blushing at Len’s tone, the other man’s tendency to size him up while in costume suddenly taking on a completely different light.

“I’m just glad he didn’t go with the whole the underwear as outerwear approach. I’d never agree to wear that.” He shot back, deflecting.

“Course not. And I was wrong; Edna is a frightening combination of Lisa and Cisco.”

“Now that’s a slightly disturbing mental image...mostly because it’s way too easy to picture.” He snickered, grinning at Len.

“She could certainly do much worse.”

Barry agreed with Len on that, Cisco’s a great guy. Although the engineer would probably be better off with someone less...ruthless. Glider was certainly more cut-throat than her brother; Barry lightly ran his fingers over his left eye, glad to find the cut she gave him finally healed.

“Heh, the monologuing. Least I don’t do that.”

Barry shot him a disbelieving look. “Really, Captain Cold? Because I can think of at least four instances.” He was exaggerating a little, but it was totally worth it to see Len looking so scandalized.

“It’s called style, Flash.”

“Sure Len, whatever makes you feel better.” He grinned, unable to resist.

The thief huffed, almost pouting.

“Good thing that kid doesn’t have a metabolism like yours.”

“Yeah, passing out at random blows.”

Both eyebrows went up that time.

Barry sighed. He needed to remember just who he was talking to. “It took us, and by us I mean Cisco and Caitlin, a while to figure out the increased metabolism thing. The first month or so after I woke up, I’d pass out without warning because I wasn’t eating enough to compensate for using my powers. Cisco worked out how much I need on a regular basis, and he and Caitlin cooked up calorie bars for me. They act as a supplement or boost, especially on extra busy days. Taste horrible but at least it keeps my grocery bills from getting completely out of hand.”

The thief tilted his head to one side, thoughtful. Len must’ve picked up on the omission of Dr. Wells...Eobard...from that list. Barry just hoped he wouldn’t ask, relaxing when the other man turned his attention back to the screen.

Len cracked up. “Has that ever happened to you, Barry? Sudden face-full of bugs?”
“Ugh, thankfully no. But it’s way too easy to imagine, and sadly just a matter of time.”

“I’m sure, the way you race around.”

“That’s one fucked up drinking game.” Len waved at the screen, where Syndrome’s goons were watching the news coverage of the robot attack.

Barry nodded. It was comforting to hear that from Captain Cold, especially after the earlier discussion about the train incident.

He just barely managed not to quote the supersuit discussion along with Samuel L. Jackson. That scene never got old.

“At least I don’t need a super suit to go ice stuff, or race around saving cats from trees. Way easier not bothering with a secret identity.” Len chuckled. “Ever misplace the suit?”

“No, I always know where to find it...though I may have forgotten real clothes once or twice.”

The chuckle turned into a real laugh, honestly amused rather than mocking or smug.

“It’s not funny!” Well, it was now. But at the time it was mortifying, especially since he was already late to that crime scene, and Singh was overseeing it personally. Len didn’t need to know any of that.

“That whole exchange is way too familiar. Whenever stuff at work calms down, or I make plans for an evening, something I can’t ignore happens. Well, minus the whole ‘having a significant other’ part.”

“Really, Scarlet?” He sounded genuinely surprised.

“Yeah, I mean...I never really had much luck with dating? I’m a huge dork, and was in love with someone for a long time and...yeah. Besides, I don’t exactly have a lot of time, between work and Flash stuff. Then there’s the whole hiding the powers issue…” Barry shrugged as best he could while tucked against Len’s side.

“The Underminer could totally give you pun lessons, Len.”

“C’mon Barry, I’m not that over the top.”

“For real? Have you not heard yourself?! Or Heat Wave, for that matter.” He laughed, incredulous.

The lopsided smile was back. “You’re just jealous you can’t pull it off. Good call on the movie, Scarlet.”

*Ratatouille* was next, its place as Len’s favorite wasn’t surprising now that he’d seen the other man’s kitchen. Somewhere between the end of that and the middle of *Monsters, Inc.*, Barry fell asleep stretched out alongside Len on the sofa.
He tried to ignore the sun shining across his face, far too warm and comfortable to want to wake up. Especially since the dream of someone holding him close, arm around his waist, firm chest pressed to his back felt so real. He sighed, wriggling deeper into his blankets.

Except...the light didn’t go away, the arm draped over him tightened, and he could feel deep, even breaths against his neck. And the window in his new bedroom faced west, not east.

Barry’s eyes snapped open, darting around the room.

Right, right he was in Len’s apartment. Leonard Snart. Captain Cold. Who had an insanely comfortable couch and a nearly-complete collection of Disney and Pixar movies. Who refused to let Barry pay for take-out, and didn’t warn his fellow Rogues that the Flash was on his way to break up their heist. And liked to snuggle, if the way he was wrapped around Barry was any indication.

He spent a few minutes trying to figure out how to get up without waking the other man before giving up and using his powers. Barry swapped in a pillow from the recliner and covered the other man with a blanket, grabbing his phone on his way into the kitchen. It was only nine o’clock and he didn’t have any urgent calls or messages. Thankfully.

Barry considered his options. Breakfast just needed to go in the oven, and he could do that here just as easily as in his own apartment. The sticky buns were much better fresh, and if he baked them here…

He opened the oven to make sure the other man didn’t use it for storage, gently removing the cast iron pans and placing them on the counter. He phased back into his own kitchen, grabbing breakfast from the fridge, allowing the dough to come up to temperature while the oven preheated.

This...friendship? That was starting to grow between himself and Len was comfortable. Easy. It made no sense if he thought about it, especially considering their history. But it was refreshing not to have to hide his powers all the time. Expand his circle a little without actually having to tell anyone else about being the Flash. He wanted to see if it was still there in the light of day, especially since he was already probably too comfortable, relaxed, around his nemesis. Better to sort this out now.

A quick peek into the living room revealed that the thief was still asleep. The oven dinged and he got breakfast started, setting a timer on his phone just in case. Barry put the pastry in the oven, at loose ends. He really wanted to take a look around, but settled for perusing Len’s cookbooks instead.

He spent the next half hour completely caught up in *The Food Lab*. Barry’s copy hadn’t arrived yet, Len must’ve ordered his in advance.

“Never imagined I’d get to see you barefoot in my kitchen, Scarlet.” Len drawled, looking...way too good for someone that spent all night on the couch. “Usually the person that owns the apartment makes breakfast the morning after.”

He jumped at the other man’s voice, completely caught off guard. Luckily, the timer went off, giving him a chance to collect his thoughts while taking the food out of the oven and turning it off.

“I doubt this counts as a real morning after. For one thing, we’re both wearing way too many clothes, and you didn’t even let me see the bedroom.” Barry turned, leaning casually against the
counter, willing himself not to blush. “Or offer a shower.” He couldn’t believe he just said that, but nothing for it now. “Besides, you did request baked goods.”

Len did that tilted nod thing of his, chuckling. “True. Let’s see if it’s a fair trade, then.”

“Where would I find a plate or tray large enough for me to invert this?” He was expecting simple directions, not for Len to walk over, briefly trapping him against the stove, chest brushing against his as the other man reached into the narrow cabinet next to the hood. Time slowed, stretched, and he suppressed a shiver, noticing how blue Len’s eyes were.

The moment broke, he could breathe again; Len stepped back, offering a serving platter. “Will this work?”

“Yeah, yeah that’s perfect. Thanks.” Barry turned, checking the clock; still four more minutes to go.

Len moved around him, gathering plates and silverware, putting up water and setting up a French press for coffee. “Does caffeine work, at least?”

“Yes.”

Len raised an eyebrow at his emphatic response.

“I refuse to ask Caitlin or think about it too much—as far as I’m concerned, it still works.” Barry grinned at Len over his shoulder, moving quickly to invert the pastry onto the serving tray, grabbing a spatula to get the last little bits of topping out of the pan.

“Normally these would get a citrus glaze, especially if Iris is the one who wanted them, but I was out of buttermilk after making the dough. They’re also more than sweet enough without it.” Barry facepalmed, “Oh crap, you’re not allergic to nuts, are you? There’s pecans in this.”

Len slowly looked him up and down, smirking. The speedster felt himself bypass moderately embarrassed, going straight to ‘full on tomato’.

“No,” he drawled. “Not allergic to nuts of any sort. Should we start now or wait for the coffee?”

Barry shrugged a shoulder, giving up on anything even approaching dignity, “Your call.”

“Do the honors, then.” Len handed him a spatula and they settled into a surprisingly enjoyable breakfast.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so technically it would’ve been grand theft if Lisa and Mick were able to make it out with their target, but the title worked better this way.

And the dough for the recipe Barry made needs to proof for 2 hours or so before it can be rolled out...for obvious reasons I decided to ignore that part. Everything else in the prep step could easily be done in under 10 minutes with his powers, but one cannot rush yeast, or speed up cooking times.
A Shot in the Dark, of sorts

Chapter Notes

So we have a plot now. I will try to include sleepy snuggles in every chapter, but there will be times when that’s just not going to be possible. I would like to thank Liu and Crimson for their assistance. You guys rock. Plus, Crimson gave me permission to work the amazing headcanon she developed in Break on Through into this fic—it won’t feature prominently, but it’ll…explain some things in future chapters.

Please let me know what you think (and pointing out typos is ALWAYS appreciated :))

Len had no idea how Barry kept his identity a secret. Since learning about their living situation almost a month ago, the speedster stopped making any effort to hide his movements. Len wasn’t complaining. Gave him the opportunity to get a handle on the kid’s schedule. Not that the Flash could ever be accused of being consistent, but there were patterns.

Two days of complete silence from the unit next to his piqued Len’s curiosity. When the aforementioned silence coincided with a conspicuous absence of Flash sightings, it was time for some recon. Wasn’t worried, merely curious. More than ready to take advantage whenever opportunity presented itself. His hacking skills were sufficient, but delegating gave him a chance to build up his Rogues. Checking the kid’s status at CCPD gave him an excuse to test one of the new additions.

Hartley Rathaway came to him about a week after he and Lisa made the most of Ferris Air. Kid was a genius, bitter, eager to prove himself. Not too bloodthirsty. Ideal qualities for a Rogue. He was also arrogant, obnoxious, with one hell of an ego—not problematic, so long as the kid was willing to toe the line. Rathaway had ties to S.T.A.R. Labs, worked there before the accelerator blew. Had a few run-ins with the Flash and his scientists since.

Tasking Rathaway with getting into CCPD’s system offered Len a unique opportunity. Needed to make sure his skills made up for his personality. That he’d take orders, follow through. Especially if he thought it was beneath him. Len also needed additional information. The sly look that crossed the younger man’s face when Len asked him to access the personnel file of one Barry Allen was enlightening and provided most of the information he needed, the CSI’s file filled in the rest. Rathaway knew who the Flash was, and Barry put in for an entire week of emergency leave.

He and the self-styled Pied Piper had a productive chat; reached an understanding regarding the Flash’s identity. Good thing, too. Kid may not have Cisco’s flair, but he was a tech genius in his own right, with acoustic powers that would come in handy. Piper was willing to fall in line, acknowledged Len’s leadership.

Two nights later, the raid on Mercury Labs was a go. He, Lisa, and Mick ran it, went by the book and they were back on schedule once again. Piper had what he needed to finish up their comm units—much more efficient than burners, harder to trace—and he made his point about the importance of planning. Essential to properly upping their game. Took a mere two hundred and eighty-five seconds for him and Lisa to locate their target and get back out of there. Simple, quick, and painless.
Mercury only notified CCPD about the theft that morning. Hartley was monitoring—not that Len wasn’t also keeping tabs to see how well the kid worked with the group and get a better handle on his particular talents. Helped that his intense dislike of Cisco Ramon pissed Lisa off to no end. Making her put up with Hartley might’ve been payback for blowing the earlier gig at STAGG.

Piper actually got along pretty well with Bivolo. Len was cautiously optimistic that they’d develop into a formidable team if given the chance. And a proper nudge.

Rainbow Raider—one of the better code names S.T.A.R. Labs came up with—offered a number of exciting new possibilities. Barry called him ‘The Angry One’ when describing his powers for the doomed transfer, got the chance to see rage in action. Didn’t give it his full attention, given the lightning and laser beams flying around, though. Bivolo assured him that anger was only the beginning. A few test runs were in the secondary planning phases so they could get a better handle on potential uses for the meta’s powers. Bivolo never explored much beyond rage prior to his completely illegal incarceration in the Flash’s little pipeline because it was an easy emotion to evoke with minimal effort. Guaranteed to cause chaos.

Len held out hope that Baez would come around, be willing to offer more than her medical training, but he’d never force her to participate. The stay in the kid’s pipeline—yet another thing he and Barry had to discuss in detail—really messed her up. She only broke the law to help her deadbeat boyfriend. Didn’t enjoy the game like the rest of his Rogues.

So he leveraged her gratitude. Got Peek-a-boo to accept their help, paying for her to go back to school and complete her medical training. Lisa also bullied her into following the specialization of her choice, rather than choosing something that Shawna thought would be most useful to the rest of them.

He probably should’ve taken the raid on Mercury to clue Lisa and Mick into his new neighbor, but as long as Barry didn’t leak his location to the CCPD or his friends at STAR Labs Len would leave well-enough alone.

He should probably talk to Barry about the logistics of living next to each other before it blew up in their faces.

Only his sister and best friend knew the location of his apartment, and neither of them knew what the Flash looked like. The same could not be said for Barry’s entire inner circle. Drawback to making his alias so public. But he loved the role, playing Captain Cold, hamming up his persona. Surprisingly, it also lead to fewer people recognizing him out of costume, a convenient bonus.

The last thing he needed was to run into Joe West in the hall of their building…or any of the kid’s other friends. Granted, he hadn’t heard anyone else in Barry’s apartment, but it was only a matter of time before the younger man had company.

From what he learned while…observing…his nemesis, the kid formed deep bonds with the people he cared about, and those ties certainly appeared mutual. Combine that with the speedster’s complete lack of self-preservation and West’s overprotective streak? Len was surprised the detective didn’t just permanently camp out at the kid’s apartment.

Although that could be why Barry moved out of the West family home and into this building in the first place. Either way, it was a discussion that had to happen.
Had been on his mind since they found out about their living situation…but Barry was running late that first morning, rushing far too much to be awkward let alone have any type of conversation. And when the kid was at his place…Len didn’t want to add to the tension when Barry came back after turning Lisa and Mick’s screw up into a full-blown fiasco. The following morning was just…Fun. Relaxed. Breakfast was delicious, and unless he was very much mistaken, the speedster spent practically the entire time flirting with him. Which was positively fascinating, certainly not worth interrupting.

The sound of footsteps in the hall stopping nearby, accompanied by the sound of keys pulled Len from his thoughts. Didn’t have any other plans for the evening; there were certainly worse options than spending a few hours with Barry Allen.

Len opened his door, casually leaning against the jam and gave the kid a once-over, smirking. Barry looked exhausted, although the smile he directed at Len made it seem like the kid was happy to see him.

It was hard for Barry to believe someone could ever be as exhausted as he was right now. An emergency call from Thea almost two weeks ago had him racing to Starling as fast as he could pack a bag. She, Laurel, and Dig were having issues with some new players the media called Ghosts. Whoever they were, the group was well-organized, heavily armed and ruthless. He had no idea what Joe told Singh for their captain to grant him a week’s vacation on such short notice, but he didn’t question it. Figured they’d easily have everything under control well within that timeframe.

Boy was he wrong.

Barry had to be back at work on Monday. He spent every night since then running back and forth between his day job and whatever fresh hell Oliver triggered by killing Ra’as and letting Merlyn of all people take over the League before riding off into the sunset with Felicity.

Ok, that wasn’t fair. If anyone deserved a normal life, it was Oliver and Felicity. But sometimes that was hard to keep in mind, especially when his absence had Barry running over twelve hundred miles a night for the last three nights, and that was after spending an entire week tearing around Starling, no, it was Star City now, trying to keep his friends alive. Fate, fortune, luck…something finally took pity on them at around three o’clock that morning, so at least Barry’s jaunts to Star City wouldn’t have to happen again for a while. He hoped.

Plus, he was almost positive that Felicity was the source of a lot of the intel, not Thea. Nothing against Oliver’s little sister, but seeing her in action did nothing to change his impression of her as competent with tech, but nowhere near an expert hacker. Combine that with the conspicuous absence of Cisco’s redesigned Arrow suit from STAR Labs when he dropped his own gear off after work just twenty minutes ago…

Barry sighed. He needed a damn vacation, a real one this time. And a few days’ worth of sleep. And food. Not necessarily in that order.

The speedster dragged himself down the hall, looking forward to a night in his own bed. Of course Len’s door opened before he got a chance to get his keys out of his pocket. Barry’s stomach did a little flip and he mustered up a tired smile for the man. He couldn’t help it. The latest foray into dealing with the baddies that plagued Star City made him appreciate his own villains just that much more. Even if he was pretty sure the man had something to do with the infuriatingly clean robbery at Mercury Labs he spent the entire day processing.
Before he could say anything, or even get his door open, the strains of the Imperial March made him groan loudly, forehead thunking into his door as he pulled out his phone.

“For real, Cisco? What part of ‘I’m taking tonight off’ did you miss?” Barry sighed. He didn’t mean to snap at his friend but he was just so tired.

“You sure? I just got an alarm for a massive fire at an apartment complex—” something muffled, then he could tell the phone was on speaker.

“How many times have you heard that from Iris these past few days, man? You even nailed her inflection.”

Cisco’s laughter cut him off. “Cold and his Rogues Gallery will just have to contend with Joe and the others tonight. Besides, we just messed up one of their heists. It’d be pretty soon for them to pull somethin’ else.” Not strictly true—if his suspicions about today’s crime scene were correct— but Cisco didn’t need to know that. Neither did his neighbor.

The subject of their conversation tilted his head, looking endlessly amused.

“Cisco, just let him—give me that.” Caitlin took the phone. “Enjoy your night off, Bear. We’ll see you tomorrow evening.”

“Good night Caitlin. Cisco, don’t worry. I’ll fill you in on all the details tomorrow.”

“Fine, fine. G’Night, man.”

“Night.” Barry shook his head fondly as he hung up.

“Does that mean you wouldn’t be interested in dinner, Barry?” Len drawled.

His stomach growled at the mere thought and they both laughed.

“I never turn down food, but lemme…” He waved vaguely, unlocking his door and going inside. Leaving it open in case Len wanted to follow him in. Barry shrugged out of his bag and coat; hanging them both up while Len walked past him into the living room…which was a complete disaster area.

“Cisco struck me as a Rebellion man.” Len remarked.

“Huh?” Smooth, Barry, real smooth. Intelligible responses were overrated.

“The ringtone.”
“Oh, right. He decided he wanted more dramatic music; changed it the other night while I was… out.”

Len just raised an eyebrow at him, waiting.

“I leave my phone at the Lab. ‘s not like I have any pockets in the Flash suit, and if work calls…that way he can patch it through.”

The older man nodded and glanced around curiously, leaning against the back of the couch. Barry mostly ignored him on the way into his room.

“This is a surprise, after seeing the place the other night.”

“Yeah…things got a little nuts. Haven’t even had a chance to unpack yet.” Barry cringed internally after stating the complete obvious…his suitcase open, contents basically covering the coffee table and couch.

“You don’t say?” His tone was knowing and more than a little teasing.

Barry rubbed the back of his neck, feeling his face start to heat up. “Mmhm, had to take an unplanned trip to help out a few friends…ended up taking a whole lot longer than I thought, but I couldn’t’ get any more time off without coming up with a really good excuse, which…” he trailed off with a shrug. “I’ll be out in a few.” He called over his shoulder, heading into his room to change.

Len just nodded.

Barry made a beeline for the ensuite to splash cold water on his face. He needed to wake up a little. Deciding to forgo a towel, he traded his dress slacks—making a mental note to do laundry tomorrow—for a pair of soft flannel pants Iris gave him for Christmas last year. Exchanging pajamas was a family tradition. The speedster just hoped she wouldn’t give him any of those Flash-themed ones that a bunch of the places in Central started selling recently. He snagged a black STAR Labs long-sleeved tee from his footboard and was back out in the living room before bothering to put it on.

Barry was a little more alert now, thanks to the water, and couldn’t believe he didn’t think about exactly who else was in his apartment. He really shouldn’t give Len a chance to poke around unsupervised. Especially since Barry had his case notes from the crime scene at Mercury Labs in his bag. Even though the other insisted that they should maintain a line between business and their personal lives, he was pretty sure the thief would take advantage of any situation that presented itself.

The man in question had an odd look on his face when Barry’s head emerged from his shirt, one hand smoothing the fabric down his chest. Thankfully, he hadn’t moved from his perch on the back of the couch.

“What?” Barry asked, confused. He glanced down surreptitiously—good, the shirt was neither inside-out nor backwards.

“Nothing, kid. You sure you don’t just want to crash?” The other asked with a pointed look at his flannels.

“Nothing, kid. You sure you don’t just want to crash?” The other asked with a pointed look at his flannels.

Barry checked his watch, not even six o’clock. “It’s way too early…I can’t afford to mess up my sleep schedule any more than it is already. And if I don’t eat first…waking up will absolutely suck.” He bit his lip. Maybe Len had other plans…? “But if you changed your mind about chilling, I can figure something out.”

Len smirked, raising an eyebrow at him like he was…oh.
“Really?” Barry groaned. “I need to stop walking into those stupid things.”

“Cute, Scarlet.”

Barry wasn’t blushing. He just wasn’t. And he most certainly did not have an embarrassing, goofy grin on his face. Somehow, over the past few weeks, Len’s constant use of nicknames went from setting his teeth on edge to something else entirely. Something warm, and…

“Haven’t changed my mind. Think you can hold out another forty-five to fifty minutes so I can throw something together for us?” Len asked over his shoulder, leading them out of Barry’s apartment. He nearly forgot his keys—would have if not for Len stopping dead in his tracks and pointedly clearing his throat.

Barry resisted the urge to facepalm, snagged his keys and phone. “Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.” Len briefly rested a hand on his shoulder as Barry locked up, fingers tracing down his back before disappearing. So much for not blushing.

It was just so easy to get Scarlet to live up to his nickname. Especially when the kid was practically asleep on his feet. Len moved around his kitchen, stealing glances as he gathered ingredients. He briefly considered really showing off, but decided the speedster would probably appreciate comfort food instead.

“Opinion on cheesy chili mac for dinner?” Len asked, catching Barry’s eye. The blinding grin he got in response was answer enough.

“Sounds wonderful. Anything I can do to help?”

“Hmm… I suppose telling you to sit and rest before you hurt yourself isn’t exactly what you want to hear?” He smirked at the younger man over his shoulder, pointedly staring at a chair.

Barry made a face at him. “I doubt anything in your kitchen is out to get me.”

He laughed. Knew that line about injury avoidance and self-preservation the kid gave Cisco hadn’t come from Barry. “Didn’t think so. Tough luck for now. Let me get this started, then you can babysit the meat while it browns. Feel free to grab yourself a drink from the fridge. ‘N while you’re in there, go ahead and grab the meat and cheese.”

“So really, you just want to order me around?” Barry shot back, grinning even as he moved to comply.

“You’re actually listening to me for once, Barry. Can’t expect me not to enjoy that while it lasts.”

Barry laughed, nudging Len with his shoulder as he walked by.

“Want anything to drink, while I’m in here?” The brunette asked, poking around to find the requested ingredients. “Oh! You have fresh cider!”

“I’ll take some of that too, glasses are—”

“To the right of the sink, I remember.” Barry interrupted, speaking at normal speed even as dinner components blurred into existence on the counter.
Len couldn’t help but smile at that.

“Why so run down, Barry? Central hasn’t been that rowdy lately.” He asked, glancing up at the kid from where he stood, mincing onions. Decided to push things, genuinely curious.

Barry tried to scowl at him, but gave up in favor of rolling his eyes at the pun.

Len raised an eyebrow, upping the stakes. “If it helps, I already know you spent most of the last two weeks in Star City.”

Hit a nerve with that. Barry clenched his jaw. “Stalking me, Len? What happened to separating business and personal?”

“Just trying to make conversation, Barry. Your lightning trail isn’t exactly subtle.” The kid had to know Len would keep tabs on his movements.

Barry remained tense just long enough for Len to wonder if he crossed a line. The kid sighed, expression softening.

“True enough. It was a huge mess,” he rubbed a hand over his face. “And I’d honestly rather not think about it right now…not if I want to keep my appetite, or be able to sleep. Either way, ’s not my story to tell.” Barry trailed off, eyes shadowed.

Len could respect that. Although in his experience ignoring the source of nightmares made them worse, not better.

“Still want to help?”

Barry nodded, joining Len at the stove.

The remaining time passed quickly. Companionable silence broken by the sound of utensils against cookware, pasta boiling, chili simmering, metal on metal as Barry whisked the sauce together. He normally hated having anyone other than Mick help him in the kitchen. They had a tendency to get in the way, slow him down—not a concern when his helper was the Flash. Not that he and Barry didn’t end up bumping into each other a few times—but it was entertaining rather than irritating. It was damn near impossible to be bothered with Barry Allen smiling at him like that; tired, happy, and just a little off balance. It was absolutely adorable.

Len never denied that he found the Flash attractive, but spending time with Barry rather than simply playing the game, pitting himself against the kid’s alter ego, changed things. He was fascinated by the younger man, and learning more about his powers wasn’t even what interested him the most.

He was brilliant, a contradictory combination of easily flustered and confident, tendencies towards self-sacrifice that started long before he became the Flash. Always willing to help no matter the risk, if his current state was any indication…not that the last trait was exactly news to the leader of the Rogues.

Kid also had absolutely no idea how appealing he was, the way other people were drawn to him. None whatsoever. Barry was a puzzle that only got more complex as he began putting the pieces together. Len never could resist a puzzle.

“Want to eat here or in front of a movie, Scarlet?” He asked, draining the pasta. Gently nudged Barry from the stove, turning the oven on.

“Movie sounds good. What do you have in mind?”
“Go ahead and take a look. Got about fifteen minutes, maybe twenty, left before we can eat.”

“Only maybe? Don’t have this timed down to the second?”

Barry’s shit-eating grin gave him an unfair advantage, made a snarky response almost impossible.

“Broiler needs to finish pre-heating, the oven isn’t always consistent with that.” Len drawled with narrowed eyes and a mock-scowl. “Not everything can make up for perpetual tardiness with superspeed.”

Barry just laughed and went to peruse his movie collection. ”Wait, why am I picking? I picked last time.”

“Because I cooked.”

“Fine, fine. Although one doesn’t have much to do with the other…oooh. I haven't seen these in ages!”

“‘These’ doesn’t exactly narrow things down, Scarlet.”

“The Pink Panther movies.” Barry said, returning to the kitchen.

Len sent the kid a smile over his shoulder as he put the casserole dish into the oven. “Sounds good to me. Get everything set up? I'll get plates. Any thoughts on salad?”

“I'll get it.”

Len blinked, watching ingredients assemble on his kitchen table—arugula, avocado, heirloom grape tomatoes, cilantro—and combine. If he didn’t know better, he would’ve sworn the Flash was showing off. For him.

A puff of air later and most of the mess was gone, too. Dirty utensils and dishes stacked neatly next to the sink, cooking detritus gone. Barry leaned against the counter beside him, plates in hand, looking entirely too pleased with himself. Len shook his head, pulling the bubbling casserole dish from the oven and putting it on the stove to rest.

Len chuckled, unable to stop his smirk from turning into a fond smile. “This needs another three and a half minutes of resting time. Care to use your skills to get the other room set up in the meantime?”

“Already done.”

“Show off. I guess you’ll just have to wait patiently.”

Food was gone about halfway into the movie. They paused just after Princess Dala got her dog back to clean everything up. Len tried to wave the kid off, but Barry refused to be deterred. Didn’t take long. Unsurprisingly, there weren’t any leftovers.

When they returned to the couch, things…shifted somehow. Rather than following established patterns, Barry skipped over any pretense. He curled up against Len as soon as he sat down, head of perpetually windswept hair resting on Len’s shoulder, eyes drooping. Len automatically wrapped his arm around the younger man, getting comfortable.
“Sure you’re up for another movie, Scarlet?”

Barry nodded against his shoulder.

“Gonna have to let me get up, then.”

Barry made a face but sat up, rubbing his eyes. “You’re comfy.”

“Thanks, I think.” Len drawled, smiling at the kid. The speedster looked tousled and sleepy even as he got to his feet, stretching.

“Mulled cider?” Barry asked, heading into the kitchen.

“Sure, sounds good. You know where the spice cabinet is; cheesecloth is in the one above the pantry. I’ll grab the bourbon in a moment.”

Barry nodded, disappearing into the other room. Len ducked into his bedroom; might as well swap his jeans out for sleepwear. He snagged a blanket, too. Had a feeling Barry’d need it, couldn’t believe he’d rather let the kid sleep on his couch then send him the few feet back to his own apartment.

Len joined Barry in the kitchen, retrieving two mugs along the way. He put the mugs down on the counter and leaving his arm where it was, not quite trapping Barry against the stove. Len didn’t stop until he was nearly pressed against the younger man’s back where he stood at the stove, absently stirring the cider. Waiting for it to clarify.

Barry peeked over his shoulder at Len, barely an inch separating them, smiling softly. His eyes zeroing in on Len’s lips. Interesting. Len ran his tongue over his bottom lip, watching, fascinated, as the kid’s eyes followed the movement, breath hitching for a moment. Very interesting indeed. He raised an eyebrow, waiting for Barry to catch him looking—ah, there. Couldn’t help wondering just how far that blush went.

They stayed like that—just looking, studying one another—until the cider finished. The air between them charged, but not uncomfortable. Barry had incredibly long eyelashes and more gold flecks in his right eye than his left…although that could just be the lighting.

“I think it’s ready,” Barry whispered, glancing down at the pot. Len reached around him to turn off the burner. Stayed there, arms around the speedster, hovering for another thirty-seven seconds before he grabbed both mugs, holding them for Barry to fill.

“Shall we, then?”

Barry swallowed hard, visibly taking a moment to collect himself. Nodded, accepting the burgundy mug from Len, leaving him with his favorite blue one. Heh.

“Sure, yeah, sounds good.” Scarlet really was adorable when he was off his game.

The kid apparently interpreted their exchange as permission to use him as a pillow. The moment he finished his cider Barry shifted, exhaustion finally catching up with him. Whole process took about thirty minutes; the brunette finally settled with his head resting on Len’s thigh, fast asleep. He just shook his head, absently running his fingers through Barry’s hair. Kid seemed to enjoy that, relaxing even further.
Gave up watching the movie in favor of studying Barry without having to worry about the kid catching him at it. Took note of the freckles scattered across his face, down his neck. Resisted the urge to trace them, wondered how he’d never noticed them before. Completely baffled by the amount of trust the other had in him. Barry was here by choice. Len gave him three obvious outs and they both knew how hard it was to keep the Flash somewhere if he wanted to leave. He wasn’t sure what to think, what this meant. If it meant anything at all.

That his nemesis chose to be this vulnerable around him. Leonard Snart. As far as Barry was concerned, he went back on their deal at Ferris Air. Tried to kill the kid. Granted, he didn’t put much effort into it during their first encounter, and after that? The long-term challenge he presented was worth more than any brief triumph he’d feel at the Flash’s death. And now? Hated to admit it to himself, would deny it to anyone else, but…Len understood what inspired Cisco, Caitlin, and that blonde, Smoak?, to go up against him with a vacuum cleaner to keep Barry Allen safe.

He got up nearly six minutes after the credits ended. Carefully. Snagged a pillow from the recliner to replace his leg and covering Barry with the blanket. Len stood, holding the empty mugs in one hand, allowing himself to indulge a few minutes longer.

Len was awake in an instant, sitting bolt-upright. It took him a moment to place what woke him, until he heard another scream tear through his apartment, coming from the living room.

Barry. The hell…?

He got up, reaching for his cold gun on the way to the living room. Doubted he’d need it, but he wasn’t about to get sloppy now. Barry was tangled up in the blanket, looked like he was trying to fight his way out without much success. Hair sweaty, plastered to his forehead. Shit.

Len wanted to wake the kid up, needed to, but not sure the best way to go about it. He was fully, uncomfortably, aware that he could be part of the nightmare. It took two hundred and fifteen seconds, but he succeeded. Barry sat up, gasping for air. His eyes wide, scared.

“Easy, Barry, easy. Just a dream.”

“Ohgod.” Gulp, focused on Len’s face, his eyes.

Barry stayed frozen for a heartbeat longer, blurring into motion, throwing himself at Len, arms wrapping tight around his chest. Len returned the hug, wincing when his back collided with the edge of the coffee table, knocked off balance by the force of the Flash.

They sat that way for a long time. Len holding the kid tight, cradling Barry’s head against his shoulder, running his fingers through his hair and whispering nonsense…that he was safe, it was a dream, couldn’t hurt him. Dusting off skills he learned a lifetime ago, with Lisa.

Once Barry’s breathing evened out, he pulled back enough to study the speedster’s face. Eyes still wild, frightened. Len quickly considered his options…doubted that whatever got the kid this spooked would be quick to resolve, and having no desire to spend the next hour or two…or more…with the coffee table digging into his back.

“Think you can get up, Barry?”

The other nodded slowly, warily.
“Table’s digging into my back, mind if we go somewhere a little more comfortable to talk?”

Barry bit his lip, looking conflicted.

Len sighed heavily. “Gonna be able to go back to sleep without getting some of this off your chest, Scarlet?”

“No, prolly not.” It was barely more than a whisper.

“Ok, c’mon then.”

He got up, helping Barry to his feet. Len steered them both into his bedroom and got the kid settled.

“I’m gonna go get you some water, ok?”

Barry nodded, curling up, wrapping his arms around his legs.

Len wasn’t gone long. The younger man hadn’t moved, but there were silent tears streaming down his face. Barry leaned against him as soon as he sat down; Len settled against the headboard, pulling the speedster close.

“What happened?” he whispered.

Barry shook his head violently. “Nothin’,s dumb.”

Doubted that, kid went up against the impossible on a regular basis without flinching. Whatever caused this—

“Not dumb, Barry…Something to do with your recent trip to Star City?”

The other nodded a little, then shook his head. Ok, that was clear as mud.

“Your mother, then?” He tried again.

“Not…not exactly? I dunno…kinda a whole bunch of shit all crammed into one. I haven’t exactly been sleeping since…since the singularity.” Barry muttered into his knees.

Right, that thing. Len suppressed a shudder of his own. He’d been taking advantage of the kid’s distraction to pull a score, only to watch a fucking black hole open up over downtown Central. Saw the telltale yellow lightning shoot up into the void, shortly followed by what he would’ve sworn was a man on fire…that could fly. Watched the kid’s yellow lightning circle, blurring into a solid streak of gold, followed by an explosion of fire and light. Then nothing, void gone, no sign of either the Flash or his incendiary friend for a few too many seconds. Len remembered staring up in disbelief, how his stomach lurched unpleasantly at the thought of the Flash, Barry Allen, the very person currently snuggled into his chest, being dead. But then the lightning re-appeared, the other meta burst back into flames and they both came back to Earth, landing hard somewhere near S.T.A.R. Labs, Barry carrying someone in his arms.

“And somehow most of the major things you’ve been dealing with all interconnect?” Len mused, putting the pieces together. “Did whatever you were helping with in Star City also have to do with your showdown?”

Barry shook his head “No, that doesn’t have anything to do with…stuff that went on here, not really. But…”

“But it’s recent, you’re running on fumes, and the mind works in weird ways.” It was a statement,
Barry snorted, barest hint of a smile in his voice. “Again with the puns? Yeah…pretty much.”

They lapsed into silence for a while, he was almost positive Barry fell back to sleep when he spoke.

“You’re surprisingly good at this.”

“I…had a lot of practice. Years ago.”

“With Lisa?”

Len nodded, willing the younger man to drop it.

“Only decent sleeps I’ve gotten since…all of that…were.” Took a deep breath, “were when we ended up crashing on the couches.”

Len couldn’t stop his arms from tightening around Barry—the living embodiment of impossible—running the fingers of his right hand through the other’s permanently windswept hair. He really was something else.

“Ok. Get in, then.”

“Hmm?” Barry lifted his head, finally making eye contact.

“Under the covers, Scarlet. So we can both get some sleep.” Favoring the kid with a lopsided smile.

Of course that was the wrong thing to say. “Sorry. Didn’t mean to wake you or keep you up, I can just go back—”

Len just held him tighter. “Not what I said, Barry. Or what I meant.” He paused, making sure the other was actually paying attention. “Unless you’d rather go back next door?”

“No… well, maybe? For a second, to brush my teeth.”

Len shook his head with a smile, arms relaxing. “Go on, then.”

“‘Kay…back in a sec.”

It was closer to forty-five seconds. He watched Barry tentatively slide under the duvet, so close to the edge he was practically falling off. Len sighed.

“You’re gonna end up on the floor. I promise not to bite…unless you ask nicely.”

Barry snorted, smiling a little, then blurred.

The kid stretched out next to him, head on his shoulder. Len holding him close, sifting fingers through his hair once again. Took longer than expected for the other to drift off again. They talked a little, Barry revealing enough about recent events to make him regret never taking the opportunity to ice Harrison Wells.

When he woke up, Len couldn’t remember ever feeling so content. Barry was gone, but there was a loaf of freshly baked banana bread with chocolate chips on his counter and a fresh gallon of cider in his fridge.
He felt like an idiot. Barry spent the last four days avoiding Len…and he wasn’t even sure why. But for some reason, he just couldn’t handle…everything. That morning. The night before. All the crap that went down in Central and Star City over the past few months. Waking up in Leonard Snart’s arms. In his bed. And…it felt so good. Natural. Safe. He maybe kinda wanted that to happen a lot more often.

Barry sighed heavily. He might just have to accept that he was already really attached to Len. For all of his less-than-admirable qualities, and let’s face it, Captain Cold had a lot of them—Barry was starting to think that there was a lot more to his nemesis than met the eye. He was an amazing chef, great taste in movies…an excellent pillow. Barry also didn’t have to pretend around Len…about anything. The man already knew about the Flash stuff. Captain Cold sure as hell didn’t need Barry to be ok all the time. To pretend that the singularity never happened, that nearly a thousand people died because Barry was a selfish asshole that trusted far too easily.

He phased into Len’s place, carefully setting the latest batch of pastries—chocolate cookies with salted caramel, and a fresh batch of croissants with raspberry preserves—on his kitchen table. The other man was still asleep, Barry checked before zipping to work, actually early.

Barry just needed a few more days to figure out what to do.

Len was tired of the avoidance game Barry was playing. From what he could tell, the kid was spending almost all his time tearing around the city. There were reports of the telltale yellow lightning streaking around downtown, miraculous repairs to buildings and businesses damaged by the singularity. And pastries that mysteriously appeared in his kitchen each morning.

They were incredible; as loathe as he was to put an end to free breakfast, Barry letting himself in and out at will had to stop. Had heists to plan, after all. Couldn’t have the Flash getting a sneak preview.

He hadn’t even finished his first croissant when he heard keys in the lock, followed by Lisa strolling into his kitchen.
“There’s this thing called a phone, Sis. Use it.”

“Like it would matter. It’s cute that you worry about me walking in on something, Lenny.” She sauntered into the kitchen, made a production out of selecting one of Barry’s morning delivery, hopping up on his counter to eat it.

Len glared pointedly, not that it ever did any good where Lisa was concerned.

“So the old lady’s still sweet on you?”

“Who says I didn’t make them.”

“Please. They’re light, flaky, and—” Lisa took a bite, eyes going wide before closing as she let out an appreciative moan. “Oh wow, these are great.”

“Spare me, Lise.” He rolled his eyes at the display.

“You’re no fun. So really, where’d you get these? No fair hogging a good bakery for yourself.”

“Neighbor brought ‘em”

“Mrs. Williams made these?”

“She moved out a little over three months ago. These are from the new guy.” Len winced. Hadn’t thought that through.

As expected, Lisa pounced. “Oh really? Is he cute? When do I get to meet him? What did you do to deserve baked goods?”

He shrugged, crossing his arms. Just needed to weather this out, Lisa was looking for a response. She’d give up soon enough if he didn’t give her one. At least for now.

“Aren’t you here because you wanted to drag me to lunch? Let’s go.”

Sometimes Len hated his luck, nearly running into Barry when he stepped out into the hall. Nowhere to go but forward. Lisa was never going to drop it now.

“Barry, good to see you.”

The kid blushed, lips forming a small smile, eyes quickly flicking up, then down and to the side. Hand coming up to rub the back of his neck. “Hi, Len.”

Something about the speedster’s body language and shy smile reinforced Len’s suspicions that his neighbor was avoiding him. Did nothing to explain why, though. Barry looked good. Dressed for work in fitted dark jeans and his usual layers, sleeves of his lightweight sweater pushed up to accommodate the heat. Sweater was just big enough to hide the lean muscle underneath, sadly. It gave the impression that a stiff breeze would be enough to knock him over—easy to underestimate. Had to admit, red was definitely Barry’s color.

“That’s ok, you two finish mentally undressing each other. I’ll wait.”

Shit. How long had he and Barry been staring? Len gave her an exasperated look, jumping in before the kid said something stupid. Like greeting Lisa without an introduction.

“Barry, this is my little sister, Lisa. We were just leaving.” He hoped.
“There’s no hurry, Lenny.” Lisa’s devious smirk and simpering tones made the likelihood of a fast getaway impossible. “Nice to meet you, cutie. I can see why my brother’s kept you all to himself.”

Len wished the situation didn’t have quite so much explosive potential so he could properly enjoy just how easy it was to embarrass the speedster.

“Um…Nice to meet you, Lisa?”

“So…how did my brother earn himself such amazing pastries?”

“What? I don’t know what you’re talking about—” The kid could not lie for anything; kept shooting little glances his way, probably hoped for a rescue. The sound of someone jogging up the stairs was a welcome—oh shit.

“Hey Bear, what’s taking so long?” It was Detective Pretty Boy, CCPD badge in full view. Len did his best not to react. There was no way the cop didn’t know who he was. Put the cuffs on after he and Mick called Barry out. The blonde finally came to a stop next to Barry, friendly smile still in place.

“Hi Len, Lise.” Nodding to each of them.

…what?!

“Excuse me, do we know you?” Lisa recovered first, fake smile plastered on her face, voice sweet with a hint of steel.

Len glared daggers at…the space where Barry had been standing. Where did…a blink later and the kid was back, holding his messenger bag. Took some doing, but Len managed to resist the urge to strangle him. Scarlet noticed his glare, looking sheepish and mouthed something he chose to interpret as ‘don’t look at me, I’ve got no fucking clue’, Len’s mind adding the expletive for emphasis.

“Let’s go, Eddie. You know how Joe is about waiting.” Kid finally recovered. And shit—West was downstairs? Got lucky it was just Pretty Boy that came to find the CSI.

Barry grabbed the other badge—now he remembered, Eddie Thawne—and something about the way he did it…Len coughed. Kid was about to whisk them both down to the squad car where Detective Joe West waited impatiently. The speedster looked absolutely mortified when he realized what he’d almost done in full view of Lisa, herding his colleague down the stairs instead. Kid had zero chill. Len watched them go, wondering when he learned to recognize Barry accessing his powers.

At least the encounter wasn’t a total loss—Thawne clearly knew Barry was the Flash. How the fuck the badge knew their nicknames…

“How long have you known?” Lisa demanded, in his face. He was impressed she was able to wait a full ninety-three seconds.

“Known what?”

“Don’t play dumb. You know exactly what I mean, Len. How. Long. Have you known you were living next to a BADGE?”

Len just sighed and decided to go for broke. At least the detective showing up distracted her
enough that she missed Barry using his powers. She’d be much more smug about that. Really, how
dumb could the kid be?

“About a month now, sis.”

“Why the hell haven’t you moved yet, you moron? I mean Jailbait is cute and all, but he works with
West. There’s no way he doesn’t recognize you.”

“I have it under control, Lisa.”

“That’s a load of shit, Lenny. You just want to get in the kid’s pants. Normally, I’d be all for it,
hell, probably help, if only because watching you pine over the Flash is just pathetic—”

“Like you’re any better with Ramon.”

“I’m not living next to a cop, Lenny. And if I was, I sure as fuck wouldn’t be on nickname basis
with them. I’d be staying in a safe house, looking for someplace new.”

“The kid’s ok, Lise.”

“Bullshit. Stop thinking with your dick, you’re nearly forty for fuck’s sake. He’s gotta be what,
like half your age.”

“…Thirty-seven is not ‘nearly forty’. And he’s twenty-six.” He grumbled.

Lisa shakes her head at him, laughing incredulously. “You know how old he is. Made a file on him
already?”

Len just glared at her. She was right; they both knew it. Only response that’d get her to back off
involved telling her Barry’s secret.

“Fine. I’ll give you your freeze-out for now. But you better give me some real answers soon.”

Len raised an eyebrow at that, unmoved. Some things were none of her damn business. This…
attraction growing between himself and Barry was something he wanted to explore. Letting Lisa
stick her nose in at this stage would probably scare him off completely. Not a risk Len was willing
to take. Time to deflect.

“Piper refusing to shut up about your precious Cisco, Lisa?”

“Fuck off, Len. Now you really owe me lunch.”

Barry never understood how people could be so horrible. So far both his observations and the
evidence he collected backed up Joe and Eddie’s initial assessment. Not that it mattered, in the long
run. An entire family was dead. Except the father. Post-partum psychosis…the mother—there were
days he hated his job. No amount of ‘proof’ would make a damn bit of difference at this stage.

At least he was done processing the scene. Barry was back in his lab, going over the notes he took,
annotating sketches, and making sure he didn’t leave anything out. He sighed, rubbing his eyes.
These cases always got to him. Kids. Families. They were hard on everyone, but…

His phone going off helped get rid of the images that just…right. He had a text.
‘We need to talk. Tonight.’ Unknown number. What the…?

Normally Barry would ignore it but right now, he could totally use the diversion. Maybe they could even stretch out the exchange to fill the last five minutes of his shift. That way he could leave and spend the next couple of hours as the Flash, dealing with criminals or otherwise actually doing something to make a difference.

‘Sorry, wrong number.’

‘Don't think so, kid.’ The response was almost immediate.

Ok…weird. Did Dig get a new phone? And why wouldn’t he just call? Same with Oliver.

‘Yeah…that really doesn’t clear anything up.’

‘Kid’ a default nickname for you, Scarlet?’

‘Oh, hey :)’ Barry grinned. Len. But how did he get his…ok, there had been plenty of opportunities for the other man to get his number. He took a moment to create a new contact, Frosty.

‘So your place in 20?’

‘Not a good time, Len. Still at work.’

‘You finish in less than 5 min.’

‘I’m out processing, not in my lab’ Ok, a lie. But how did Len know all of that?

‘No you’re not, Red.’

Wha—? ‘how do you KNOW that?’

‘Replied to an unknown number in under a minute. Doubt you’d do that at a crime scene.’

‘Still dunno when i’ll be done.’

‘Don’t care. Got some stuff to sort out.’

Barry rubbed a hand through his hair and sighed—so much for a distraction. There went his momentary good mood. The speedster wasn’t ready to face Len, not after disappearing before the other woke up, and their almost-kiss thing or whatever that was at the stove with the cider. Barry bit his bottom lip, remembering the heat in Len’s gaze, the way it increased when Barry noticed him watching. The way they just fit together. On the couch, in…in Len’s bed. Sleeping.

How liberating it was to have someone to share his burdens with, that he didn’t always have to be strong for. It wasn’t anything new or unusual for Len. The other already saw him down, hurt, bleeding, and beaten. At some of his lower moments. Hell, Len was responsible for some of them. And how fucked up was that? Finding so much comfort in someone that was technically still his enemy, no matter how difficult it was to remember that lately. Either way, Barry wished he took that chance, leaned forward just a fraction of an inch…

He really…he didn’t. Ugh. It kinda sucked, because lately spending time with Len helped his mood a lot more than any of his other friends. Which was just all kinds of weird.

‘Too bad, I already have plans.’
'Make time.'

Yeah, no. Barry was done with taking orders for the day. The last thing he wanted to deal with was Len being all…himself…after having to put up with all of the glances and whispers at work. Whispers that always happened whenever he was assigned something that had to do with families. He really didn’t need the reminder that his Dad would be stuck in Iron Heights for the rest of his life, thanks.

Wells’ lawyer also came by. Again. Thankfully, he was processing that crime scene when the man showed up; leaving yet another envelope that Barry had no intention of opening. He sighed heavily. What was wrong with him, that he’d consider processing…that…better than dealing with an attorney?

Shaking his head, Barry quickly cleaned his work space, locking evidence away, filing his notes and more than ready to get out of the precinct before someone came in and gave him yet another thing to do.

Central was quiet that night, so after a couple laps around the city Barry dropped his suit back at the Lab and zipped downtown. He needed to do something to work off all of his nervous energy and hopefully get him tired enough to sleep without nightmares. Reconstruction was slow going for most businesses. Most of the insurance companies were going out of their way to deny coverage, since no one was certain how to classify…what happened. It sucked for the owners, but Barry didn’t mind it too much. He had the funds, courtesy of Wells—Eobard—and at least he could see some progress with rebuilding. Fixing brick and mortar wouldn’t erase what happened, what he caused, but it was something. A small contribution that he couldn’t fuck up too badly. For once.

Barry skidded to a stop in front of Jitters, studying what was left of the coffee shop. He’d have to tell Cisco that whatever adjustments he made to the compound he applied to the soles of Barry’s street shoes was holding up pretty well, much better than the previous attempts. He was in such a hurry to check the structural assessment at City Hall that morning that he ran there immediately after dropping off the pastries, forgetting his bag.

Right, Jitters. The report said it was structurally sound, so he could get to work, putting the cafe back together. What was left of it, anyway. He’d start on the coffee shop tonight, hopefully progress would make it easier to focus on happier memories.

Barry ignored the strange itch between his shoulders—no one was around, and he was pretty sure his friends didn’t know where he was—and dashed off to raid his cache of tools and supplies.

He only managed one trip. The sound of the cold gun powering up was unnaturally loud, startling him out of a dead run. He stumbled, crashing into a wall hard enough to knock him off his feet, winded. Barry stared up at Len from the floor. Len, who was in full Captain Cold gear, shrouded in shadows.

His nemesis moved towards him deliberately, face barely illuminated even though the hood on that stupid parka was down, tinged icy blue by the power cell on his gun.

The whole thing was way too similar to the way things were. He thought…didn’t know what to think. Barry flashed to his feet, unsettled and angry. No, that wasn’t strong enough. He was furious.

“Why can’t you just leave me the fuck alone?! How hard is it to understand that I’m busy, that this is not the time, dammit. Unless you’ve just been waiting until you found the perfect opportunity to ice me.”
Barry zipped closer, getting in Cold’s face and managing to surprise the other man. For once. Enough that Cold took a step back, his impassive mask flickering for a second, revealing confusion at the venom in Barry’s voice. Part of him winced at that, but mostly…mostly, he wanted to keep yelling. He had so much bottled up at this point that he wasn’t so sure he even could stop.

"Barry, you’re not busy. You’re sulking. It's not your responsibility to rebuild the whole damn city."

“The city is a fucking mess, so many people died. Fuck, this whole—Everything. It’s my goddamn mess. Because I screwed up. So, so badly. No matter what I do, what I try, I can’t stop seeing—”

His hands balled into fists, words continuing to pour out of him. He hadn’t really talked to anyone about what happened with his mom, watching Eddie die. The moments—eons—up in the singularity, knowing Ronnie must’ve—but he didn’t. It didn’t matter that both Eddie and Ronnie were fine now. All of the civilians that died because of that damn thing…the singularity that he caused. Because he was too arrogant, too gullible, too blind—it all came tumbling out. Barry paced the floor, kicking at the rubble that got in his way.

“And nothing, nothing I do can ever make up for it.” He waved an arm at the destruction all around them. “Even when everything’s back to how it was. Like I never fucked it all up in the first place.”

Barry was still kicking himself for ever trusting Wells, Eobard, whatever. “I can’t—THINGS can be put back, but not people. Bastard knew that and pushed anyway. ’n like an idiot, I let him.

“God, that’s not even the worst part—” he choked off a hysterical laugh. “He’s gone and I still can’t get away from him.” Barry shook his head before continuing, telling Cold about how he kept getting letters from the asshole’s lawyer, intrusive, insistent, bringing everything up over and over again. How there were constant reminders of the Reverse Flash and everything he did to meddle in the lives of his friends and family.

Wells-Eobard even left STAR Labs to him, not to Cisco, or Caitlin, or someone who’d have the first clue what to do with a research facility. And he was stuck with it, at least for now. That Ray looked over the contracts and stuff and there wasn’t any way to change it until he met some final condition. That he was still grateful to the man, even now. Knowing everything he did, how much he manipulated all of them. Barry sighed heavily.

“I fucking hate it, but I just can’t seem to stop. Then there’s you! God, you and Lisa must’ve had one hell of a laugh today. That I trust you, even after—”

“Dinner, Scarlet?”

Barry stopped abruptly, turning on his heel to stare at Cold. Except he wasn’t, not really. Len was leaning against what was left of the counter, parka neatly folded beside him, wearing jeans and a light grey Henley, not the rest of his Cold gear. The gun lying dormant atop the coat, holster nowhere to be seen.

“What?”

“Seemed like you were winding down. Was I wrong?”

Barry deflated. “Len, I’m—”

The man shrugged a shoulder. “Had to get all that off your chest some time. I get it, Barry. C’mon. I brought a spare helmet for my bike.”
“You know I could just whisk us back home, right?” Barry asked.

“Offering rides now?” Len’s eyes were a bright warm shade of blue. “And as much as I’d love to take you up on that offer, I have no intention of leaving my bike parked out here at an active construction site.”

Barry looked around at all he could be doing. “Maybe I—”

“Not tonight, Barry. Been this long already, another day or two won’t make a difference. Let’s go.”

Barry took a step, then stopped short. “Wait, I’m confused. Why’d you show up in full Cold-mode if you were planning to take me home all along?”

“Needed to get your attention somehow, Scarlet.” Len smirked, grabbing his leather jacket from the end of the counter, shrugging it on.

Barry automatically fell into step beside Len, whose free hand naturally slid into place at the small of his back. He watched the other man stow his parka and gun in the saddlebags, hands moving automatically to catch the helmet tossed his way. It wasn’t until he was wearing the spare helmet, arms wrapped tight around Len, hands sneaking under that amazing leather coat, that Barry wondered when he started listening to Len without question.

He enjoyed the ride back. It was his first time on a motorcycle, and while it couldn’t even begin to approach the speeds he was capable of, it was still a lot of fun. Barry sighed a little, resting more of his weight against the other man. Superspeed was convenient, but it had some drawbacks. At least now he could get his thoughts in order. Well, try to, anyway.

Barry was so relieved to be wrong about Len…or was it right? It didn’t really matter, just that…all of this between them was real, not Len toying with him. But damn, that was an intense way to find out. And then! Ugh. Just unloading all that crap on Len. The speedster couldn’t remember more than half of what he said, but it did feel good to finally get some of it out in the open.

As the bike coasted into its customary space, Barry decided there was nothing stopping him from whisking them into the building, at least. He waited for Len to stow the helmets and retrieve his gear before taking off, zipping them into Len’s apartment to figure out food.

“Expected us to be in your place, Barry.” Len remarked over his shoulder, putting the parka and gun away in the hall closet.

Barry nearly tripped over his own feet—did he really just think of Len’s place as home? “Uh…I figured you’d want to drop off your gun and stuff first?” He rubbed the back of his neck, unable to make eye contact. “I’ll get out of your hair—”

Len cut him off with a laugh. “Not complaining, Scarlet. What do you feel like?”

“A shower.” He responded automatically, feeling his cheeks heat up once he realizes what he blurted out.

“You’re welcome to use mine if you want. Should probably order first.”
Oh god, he totally should not have looked at Len. That smirk was dangerous. “I’ll eat anything, just go ahead and get enough for both of us.”

“Easier said than done, remember I’ve seen you eat. How hungry are you?”

Barry considered that, biting his bottom lip. “Only had breakfast, then some of the calorie bars… Lunch ended up not happening, and then…” He trailed off with a shrug.

“Got it. Chinese?”

“Sure, whatever you feel like. I’ll be back in fifteen or so.” Barry tapped into the speedforce and phased into his own apartment.

Len stared at the spot on the wall of the entryway that Barry moved through. Somehow. Answered the question of how the kid kept getting into his place. He placed their dinner order, traded his jeans for navy flannels. Probably unnecessary, given how Barry spent the last few days avoiding him. But he was cautiously optimistic. The speedster didn’t shrug off Len’s hand on his back, accepted a lift. Seemed to think of Len’s place as ‘home’.

And that…that was incredible. Almost as hard to believe as everything Scarlet poured out at him in the cafe. Much of it was beyond him without further details, but the amount of guilt the kid was carrying around, most of it misplaced, was staggering. Made no sense that his friends didn’t take steps to help him work through it. Unless Barry hadn’t let them. A knock brought him out of his thoughts.

“So you do know what these things are after all, Barry.”

Kid looked down, biting his lip a little. Len forced himself not to stare, standing aside so Barry could enter.

“Sorry about that. Sometimes I forget.”

“It’s a neat trick, but-”

“I know, I know. You’ve got dastardly criminal things to plan in here.” Barry said with a grin. “I didn’t actually poke around at all, just dropped off breakfast.”

“Right…” he drawled, although he did actually believe the younger man. Far too honest for his own good.

They naturally gravitated to the couch once they finished eating, forgoing a movie for now. Barry was fidgeting more than usual, barely looked up when Len joined him.

“You said we had to talk?” Even the kid’s voice was tense, apprehensive.

“Think we need some ground rules, Barry.”

“What do you mean?”

Len raised an eyebrow at that. Not that the other would notice, still refusing to look up. “We’re neighbors. Should probably keep that to ourselves. Or at least not tell anyone else, since you blabbed to Detective Pretty Boy.”
“How do you know Eddie’s nickname?” Barry finally looked up at that.

“Yes, because *that* is the important part of what I just said,” he scoffed. “Didn’t know it was an official nickname, but I have eyes, kid.”

“Oh, right…I guess that makes sense,” the brunette sighed, looking disappointed if Len had to guess. Odd. “Well, I didn’t tell him! I haven’t told anyone yet…honestly hadn’t planned to. You haven’t told any of your Rogues either, right?”

“Course not, Barry. Promised I would keep your identity under wraps months ago. Can’t exactly tell any of them where you live without blowing your cover.” Not to mention only Lisa and Mick knew about his apartment in the first place. “If you didn’t tell Pretty Boy, then how the hell did he know my nickname?”

“No idea. I meant to ask him, but Joe was with us the entire time and that…would not have gone well.”

Small mercies for that, at least Barry had some common sense. “You’ll let me know once you find out?”

Barry nodded. “Of course.”

The kid hesitated a moment too long, biting his lip. “So…anything else?”

“Nothing critical. But I have many questions, starting with *how* you’re able to let yourself in and out of my place whenever you feel like it.” Len smirked at the guilty look on Barry’s face.

Scarlet finally began to relax, let out what could only be called a giggle. “Guess it’s not ‘business’ if it’s used to drop off breakfast, huh? It’s called phasing. My powers…it’s not just straight up speed, but I guess everything relates back to that?”

Len thought about that for a moment. Got the impression things were about to get very strange indeed. “…Ok. You know what, I have a feeling I’m gonna need a beer for this. You want one?”

“No, but water’d be great…or cider, if you have some left.”

“Want to help me heat it up?” There was no way he could resist that kind of setup. He smiled, letting his gaze roam, linger. Taking note of the blush, the pleased smile. How Barry’s eyes automatically focused on his lips.

Barry got to his feet, less flustered than the blush would indicate. “No. Cold is fine.”

“Why thank you, Scarlet.”

“You’re impossible. You know that, right?”

“Coming from you, Barry, that’s quite the compliment.”

They spent the next few hours talking. Barry was surprisingly open about his powers, although Len was careful to stick to things he saw Barry do out of costume, for now.
He wanted to get into all the guilt the kid was carrying around, but decided leave that alone for the time being. Needed some time to consider everything he learned, figure out the best way to approach the speedster. Get him to actually listen and process instead of ignoring or avoiding him all together. The gun was effective, but not something he wanted to use too often. Certainly not for such delicate topics.

Barry was relaxed, finally. They were stretched out together on the couch, talking about nothing in particular. Len nudged Barry after the third huge yawn in under a minute.

“C’mon, let’s go."

“Hmm?”

“Bed. You’re practically asleep."

It took a bit more prodding to get Scarlet up. Len stretched, cracking his neck and rubbing away the stiffness on his way to his room. When he didn’t hear any other movement he stopped, turning. Barry was just standing awkwardly next to the couch, looking painfully unsure. Len suppressed a sigh.

"That was an invitation, Scarlet. Far be it for me to send you home alone when it seems you sleep better with company. And I’m certainly not complaining."

Barry’s slow smile was breathtaking. “I’ll be right there.”

The kid wasn’t the only one that slept better when they shared.

“I’ll get it!” Barry flashed to the door. About time Caitlin and Iris showed—

“Hey, Scarlet. Any plans tonight?”

Barry stepped out into the hall, shaking his head with a smile even as he closed the door behind him. He did not need Cisco following him out. Len’s smirk faded a little at that.

“Sorry, Cisco’s here and Iris and Caitlin are on their way. Apparently I haven’t been social enough lately.” He made a face at that. They meant well, and yeah, he had been pushing them away for a little while now, and hadn’t invited any of them over since he moved, but still. “Rain check?”

“Suppose that’ll have to do.”

They shared a smile before Len’s expression sobered.

“Speaking of the Wests. You get a chance to speak with Pretty Boy yet?"

“No. I haven’t been able to get him alone, but he hasn’t told anyone.”

“How can you be so sure?” Len’s eyes narrowed, calculating rather than angry.

Barry laughed at that. “Are you kidding? If he told Joe, there’s no way he’d even finish the
before Joe’d be on the phone, letting me know exactly what he thinks about this. As for Iris, she’d corner me somewhere…pretty much the same reaction, only with less yelling and more guilt. Especially since I maybe kinda promised not to keep any more big secrets,” he shrugged.

Len was silent a little too long, clenching his jaw. Barry raised an eyebrow in confusion—he certainly hadn’t expected that reaction and hurried to reassure the other man.

“I know,” he raised a hand. “It’s important. And I have been trying to talk to him, but we can’t exactly risk anyone overhearing the conversation for…so many reasons.” Barry rubbed the back of his neck, suddenly nervous.

“Agreed.” Len nodded, relaxing a little. “Doing anything interesting tonight?”

The speedster pounced on the subject change. “Takeout, probably some Sci-Fi on Netflix. Cisco’s insisting we play at least a few rounds of Catan, he just got the Traders and Barbarians expansion…so there’s that.”

“Oh? He have any to expand the player count?”

“Of course.” He brightened for a second, and he nearly extended an invitation before catching himself, biting his lip. “I don’t really recommend you join us, at least not tonight. Gotta say, I was expecting some dig about us being nerds.”

“Please, Scarlet. That goes without saying.” Barry decided he really, really liked that lopsided smile. “Surprised Miss West is willing to play, however.”

Barry laughed outright. “Oh that would be a huge mistake. She’s ruthless. Cisco totally underestimated her the first time, even though I warned him. Hell, even Joe warned him…It was amazing.”

“That I’d have to see.”

“Lenny, Jailbait…Imagine finding you two flirting. Again. At least you toned down the eye-fucking.”

Barry froze, going bright red when he registered what Lisa said. They were not flirting…were they? And he was twenty six, dammit.

A quick glance assured him that Len hadn’t been expecting his sister to show up.

“Lisa, what an unpleasant surprise. Barry was just going to join his friend in his apartment now. Isn’t that right, Barry?”

The speedster rolled his eyes, snapping off a quick salute. “Aye, aye, Captain Cold.”

Glider’s entire being lit up, like Christmas came early. “Oh this is just too good. On every level. Nice to finally meet you, Flash.”

Time slowed down, Len froze. Oh, shit.

Barry shook her hand on autopilot, watching in detached fascination as she started to laugh, and he wished he knew what was so damn funny.

And then he heard Cisco. “Hey man, what’s taking so long,” as the door to his apartment swung open.
“Hey Iris, Cait—Oh hell no…Captain Cold. Female Inmate.” Cisco took a half-step back into the open doorway. “What—Have you been out here all this time talking to them?!”

Barry cringed, shooting Len an apologetic look. Even though he was pretty certain that the current mess was both of their faults. Somehow.

“That’s not very nice, Cisco. You gave me such a wonderful code name, the least you can do is use it.” Lisa was having fun with all of this.


“That wasn’t so hard, was it?” Oh god, she was doing that sugary-sweet voice with the fake pout and Cisco was melting, the beginnings of a goofy smile on his face.

Barry rolled his eyes, resisting the urge to snicker. And Lisa said he and Len were bad.

“So…how long have you two…You know what—what the hell is going on here?” Cisco managed, shaking off the effect of Lisa’s flirting.

Len gave him a look that he chose to interpret as ‘he’s your friend, you deal with him.’ He sighed.

“So…you know how I moved in here not that long ago? Guess who my neighbor is.” Barry said with a sheepish smile.

“And you haven’t told anyone. Why haven’t you told anyone, Barry?”

“No real reason to, I guess?”

Ugh. Did he really say that out loud? Judging by the nearly identical incredulous expressions from Len, Cisco, and Lisa, he definitely did.

“Ooookay. So…what? Does this mean you guys are friends now or something? Fremeses?” Cisco looked confused and frustrated, but not angry. That was something, at least.

Barry shrugged a shoulder, smiling a little, growing wider when Len didn’t disagree with Cisco’s assessment.

“Certainly explains why you don’t want to move, Lenny.” Lisa smirked.

”Um…Ignoring that weirdness for the moment.” Cisco waved a hand for emphasis, “I shouldn’t tell everyone else because…?”

“Because having him live next door actually makes things a lot easier?” Joy, the strange looks were back.

Barry ran a hand through his hair. “For real, though. Len already knows who I am, so it’s not like I have to worry about slipping up and letting yet another person in on that secret. So I can blast in and out whenever I need to without having to bother with stealth mode.

“And so far, he’s kept my identity a secret and left all of you guys out of…everything. I don’t have to come up with a way to explain my closest friends working at STAR Labs, somewhere I shouldn’t have any connection to. Besides, other than Lisa and maybe Heat Wave, I doubt any of the other Rogues know he lives here. So, yeah…” He trailed off with a shrug, looking at all three of them. “Oh! And this way I have something on him again…Finally. Evens things out a bit.”

“How do you figure, Scarlet?”
“Please. You think I don’t know you pulled that job at Mercury while I was out of town?” Barry crossed his arms and raised an eyebrow.

The thief’s expression was way too self-satisfied. “For the sake of argument, let’s assume you’re right. Not gonna do you much good with all my records deleted.”

“Yes, the physical evidence that CCPD collected is gone, and all active electronic records. You never mentioned anything about backups stored in digital repositories,” he grinned. “And I’m pretty sure Interpol has a couple boxes gathering dust somewhere, too.” Barry couldn’t help be smug about that. Even if it was a complete fluke that he stumbled across the archived data and saved a copy before it went live and got erased by Felicity’s program.

Len’s reaction was gold, his mouth actually falling open in surprise for a moment. But he recovered pretty quickly. “Gotta say, I’m impressed. Didn’t think you had it in you, Barry.”

“C’mon, you know I’m full of surprises.” The speedster’s face was starting to hurt from grinning so much.

“Never doubted that for a moment, Scarlet,” he drawled, head tilting to the side as he looked Barry up and down, blue eyes flaring with heat.

Warmth spread throughout Barry. Len’s gaze was so focused it almost felt like a physical caress.

Lisa’s loud scoff brought reality crashing back. Barry closed his eyes, trying not to blush.

“That…actually makes a lot of sense.” Cisco said. It came out a little strangled, and he cleared his throat. “Fine, I’ll keep it quiet for now. But you better keep up your end of the agreement, Cold. You too, Glider.”

The sounds of Iris and Caitlin coming up the stairs preempted any further conversation, but Len’s deliberate nod told Barry all he needed to know. He’d make sure Lisa kept Barry’s secrets.

Barry smiled at his friends, glad to see them. And the food. Even if he maybe would rather be curled up with Len watching a movie.

Chapter End Notes

AN: I'm playing with their ages a bit, since there is no established age for Len in CW canon, and I still can't believe that Wentworth Miller is 42.
Thank you Crimson and Liu for beta help, and Redhead for our headcanoning about the guns (that ended up being pretty darn close to canon after all).

Apologies if I make you hungry with this one, but Liu shares a little bit of that blame!

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It took four more days, but Barry was finally able to get Eddie alone long enough to talk to him about Len. Of course, Iris joined them before they were more than halfway through lunch, but Eddie was able to provide enough of the big picture to convince Barry that his friend would keep quiet about his new neighbor. Barry believed him, hard not to when the lunch itself served as proof that something happened, and Eddie had no reason to lie about it.

He just needed to figure out how to explain everything to Len. The whole idea of multiple worlds, different versions of them for each version of Earth that existed out there…not an easy task when all of the circumstances were just so hard to believe without living through in the first place. Barry flicked through his contact list, sending ‘Frosty’ a quick text.

‘Finally talked to Eddie. you free tonight?’

He didn’t have long to wait for a response.

‘Nothing I can’t rearrange’

‘So…?’

‘Yes, Barry. Will adjust my busy evening just for you’

Barry could practically hear Len rolling his eyes…of course that didn’t do anything to dampen his grin.

‘Cool. my place, 7ish?’

‘Very specific, Scarlet.’

‘:P’

‘That an offer, Barry?’

‘just gonna have to wait and see ;’)’ Oh god, did he really just send that? ‘Unlike you, most crime doesn’t keep a precise schedule’

Barry set his phone down, returning his attention to the Mercury Labs inventory sheet. He knew Len and the others were behind that—well, Len, Lisa and probably Heat Wave driving the getaway car. He was trying to figure out exactly what they stole, but so far Dr. McGee was unwilling to provide
the CCPD with a comprehensive inventory.

Although...hmm, STAGG Industries had been more open, even though he foiled that heist completely. The warehouse was a mess, but Heat Wave and Glider had to ditch their loot in favor of getting away. Barry opened the file, putting it and the list from Mercury on one of his displays. Maybe examining both spreadsheets for overlap would help.

Not that he had any confirmation that the Mercury Labs theft was to make up for him crashing Glider and Heat Wave’s party at STAGG. It could be entirely unrelated, but the quick turnaround led him to believe otherwise. He absently took a bite of his sandwich, eyes darting back and forth across the screen as he chewed.

He grabbed his phone as soon as it began to vibrate.

‘Excuses, excuses.’

Barry grinned, another message arriving before he came up with a response.

‘Your place or mine?’

‘mine this time?’ Barry figured he might as well offer, since they spent most of their time next door.

‘Depends. It still look like a tornado hit it?’

‘No. of course not’ That might’ve been a little bit of a lie. He did his laundry and finally unpacked, at least. It wouldn’t take too long to clean up the rest.

His phone vibrated.

‘So if I go over there right now it's not going to look like a disaster area?’

Barry rolled his eyes, unable to keep the smile off his face. He quickly checked the status of the tests he was running. He totally had five minutes.

He grabbed his phone, just in case someone wandered into his lab while he was gone, and zipped off to his place. It was the work of moments to load the dishwasher and set it ahead. From there, Barry folded and put away all of his laundry. He stopped for a moment, fresh sheets in hand. Should he...? Might as well. There was nothing quite like clean sheets, and maybe, just maybe Len would stay over. Barry’s stomach flipped, feeling both nervous and excited at the thought.

It certainly wasn’t something he ever imagined, but for some reason sharing a bed...or couch...with Leonard Snart kept the nightmares away. Iris was the only other person that really came close to that anymore. She and Eddie let him crash on their couch for a little over a week following the singularity, after a few massive nightmares that practically shook Joe’s house down. Finding his own place reduced their frequency, but Len made them go away completely.

Barry tossed the dirty linens and clothes into the hamper, did a quick once-over of his bathroom and peeked into his fridge—pretty empty, he needed to pick up a few things after work—before returning to his lab at CCPD.

The tests weren’t even done yet. He flopped into his chair, sending Len a quick response and taking another bite out of his sandwich.

‘Nope go right ahead’ although he really shouldn’t be encouraging his neighbor's criminal tendencies.
Scarlet, I heard you over there. You’re not fooling anyone.’ Len’s response was almost immediate.

Barry laughed softly. ‘i dunno what you’re talking about’

He made decent progress cross referencing the inventories from Mercury and STAGG for his case, identifying twenty potential areas of overlap. Barry was just about to compare what he found against the list of what went missing when he was interrupted by a knock.

Joe poked his head into the lab. “Hey Bear, c’mon. Got a call.”

Barry slid into the passenger seat of the squad car, tossing his kit into the back seat, fiddling with his phone and staring out the window. Barry’s phone vibrated just as the yellow tape came into view. He checked it eagerly, biting his lip to keep himself from smiling at a crime scene.

‘See you tonight, Scarlet.’

“I know that face.”

“Huh?”

Joe nodded at his phone, giving Barry a knowing look. “That’s your ‘someone I like just texted me’ face. Got a hot date?”

“Haha, oh. Um, no, nothing. Just making plans with a…friend. For tonight.” Barry sighed, trying to figure out how long they’d be at the scene. His shoulders slumped a little. “But I’ll prolly have to cancel now, we’re gonna be here a while.”

“Hard to tell until we get a good look at things. Someone new, huh?” Joe nudged his shoulder, smirking a little.

“No…not entirely,” no matter how hard he tried, Barry couldn’t keep the smile off his face. “But someone…” He dropped his voice a little. “I feel like I’m finally starting to see who he really is. And that’s…” he trailed off with a shrug.

“‘He,’ huh? Been a long time since a guy managed to draw your attention.”

Barry ducked his head, feeling his face heat up but nodding anyway, looking up at Joe. He knew he shouldn’t be nervous or worried about his father’s reaction to Len being a guy. The issue—if this thing ever went any further—was Len being, well…Len.

“C’mon son, you know I don’t care about that. Just promise me one thing?”

That never preceded anything good. Barry nodded slowly.

“Once you sort things out, you’ll tell people? None of that sneaking around crap like Iris and Eddie.”

Fat chance of that happening. It’d be such a disaster. Joe would pull a gun, Len’d pull a gun, and everything would go downhill from there. Which kinda sucked, if he let himself think about it too much. Because…yeah.

Barry nodded, but couldn’t quite make eye contact. Joe grimaced.

“It’s not—” Joe dropped his voice even more, looking around, “the Arrow, is it?” he hissed.

Barry laughed at that. “Nope, not Oliver. Far as I know he and Felicity are deliriously happy in
Coast City.”

Barry tried to ignore the relieved sigh Joe let out at his response. Joking about his plans being a date made it impossible for Barry to think of it any other way; if the thought of him being with Oliver produced that kind of reaction? It didn’t bode well for when—if. Just if.

Thankfully, Joe was parking in front of the tape. He’d be able to lose himself, focus on gathering clues and solving the case instead of puzzling over his neighbor and worrying about something that might never happen anyway.

There was glass everywhere. Whoever pulled this off was barely a notch above bumbling amateur. He couldn’t help imagining Len’s critique—no style, evidence everywhere, and from what he could tell practically everything they stole would be easy to trace. It’d still take a while. Barry figured he’d still be able to make it home around 8ish, but he wouldn’t really have time to make dinner, unless they wanted to eat super late.

He pulled out his phone, sending Len a quick text.

‘We jinxed it. at a scene now not sure when i’ll get home. dont worry about waiting for me to eat… wanna reschedule?’

‘Got it, Scarlet. Duty calls.’

‘sorry :/’

‘Don’t worry about it, just lemme know when you’re on your way’

‘its not super complex. might be able to do 7 still, but wont have time to get groceries for dinner’

‘Very subtle hint. See you tonight.’

That made it sound like Len was going to cook for them. It wasn’t something he expected or was angling for, but now…Barry really hoped his suspicions were correct.

Len put his phone down, slightly irritated with the kid’s day job. No wonder Barry never ran on schedule.

This alteration made cooking together impractical, but it’d give him something to do for the next few hours. Besides ignoring Lisa’s calls, texts, and insinuations about the reason he hadn’t joined the rest of them at the safe house. Especially because she was spot on about everything. Minus the sex.

He took stock of his fridge, but nothing caught his eye. Len took a moment, considering what he could take to about 90% and finish up at Barry’s in less than ten minutes. As much as he’d like to show off, especially after all the pastries, what came to mind wouldn’t work. It’d been a while since he made paella—lot of work for one person and Lisa was allergic to shellfish—but the dish was too time-sensitive.

However, fresh pasta with shrimp and scallops, maybe a sauce base of pancetta, leeks, shallots…with some roasted garlic and mascarpone to act as emulsifiers…that would work. Making fresh pasta took time, but it wasn’t like he had anything else to do that day. And he was damn good at it. Since he was going out anyway, might as well pick up some squid ink, too.

Len had everything ready to go, including a good bottles of rioja chilling to proper temperature—a rosé that he knew complemented the richness of the sauce, balancing against the seafood quite well.
Len glanced at the clock, deciding to throw together a quick champagne vinaigrette to pair with arugula and radicchio. Managed to use up the last of that flat bottle Lisa opened for no good reason the last time she stopped by.

Finally heard from Barry at 19:32.

‘Freedom! on my way, come over whenever’

He snickered at that, taking a few minutes to load everything into one of his larger reusable grocery bags. Len was almost to the door when he doubled back, deciding to bring over his big sauté pan, too. Didn’t think Barry had something large enough, or good enough, to properly toss the pasta and finish it in the sauce.

Barry’s door was wide open; he could hear the kid banging around in the kitchen. Len kicked the door shut behind him and followed the sounds.

“Hey.”

“Hi.” Scarlet smiled in greeting, eyes lighting up even more when he saw what Len was carrying.

“Thank you! You didn’t have to make dinner.”

Len shrugged, “Had the time. Takeout gets repetitive.”

“Cool.” Barry stood in the middle of the pass awkwardly for a moment. “So how long do I have?”

“Need water to boil. After that, less than five minutes.”

“‘Kay. Just shout if you can’t find something you need,” Barry smiled and dashed off.

The kid was back before Len had a chance to do more than set out the containers and put up the pot of water. Good thing he grabbed his own pan; Barry didn’t have anything large enough to toss everything together.

Of course, Barry had to open all of the remaining containers. “Set the table if you can’t just sit and relax, Scarlet.”

“We’re actually sitting down to eat this time? Seems pretty official…you know, for us.” Kid bit his lip nervously after saying that, clearly not what he meant to say.

Len snorted. “This isn’t couch food. Please tell me you have wine glasses?”

“Yeah, Iris gave them to me. Why?”

“I brought wine. Obviously.”

“Okay…you do remember that the whole ‘wining’ part of ‘wining and dining’ doesn't work on me, right?”

Len crossed his arms, spatula in hand, and leaned against the stove to give Barry his most judgmental look. “Even you have to be aware of the concept of pairings, kid,” he drawled.

Barry just rolled his eyes at him and laughed, grabbing the requested items and adding them to the place settings already on the table.

“Do you want to serve from the pan, or…?”
“Pan is fine. Gonna need something to toss the salad in, though.”

“Yup, already got that.”

Sauce was in the pan, water nearly at a boil—soon as it did, he’d put the scallops and shrimp back into the sauce, drop in the pasta…

“That smells amazing.” Scarlet practically whispered, suddenly standing right behind him, nearly a reverse of the setup with the cider a few weeks ago. The urge to kiss the kid was a lot stronger, though.

“I know,” he smirked, earning himself an incredulous laugh. “Grab me a strainer then go sit down, Barry.”

“Bossing me around again, Len?”

“Told you, gotta take advantage when you’re willing to play along.”

A few minutes later and they were sitting down to eat at Barry’s kitchen table. The whole thing felt so damn domestic.

“Ok, wow. This is…where did you find squid ink pasta?”

“Made it.” Len couldn’t help preening over the kid’s obvious enjoyment of the meal.

“For real?”

“No, I’m lying. It’s like you said, Barry—don’t need to know where to get it when I can make my own.”

The brunette laughed. “Fair enough. This is so much better than takeout, but next time I’ll make dinner.”

“Suppose this might make us even for all the pastries you kept dropping off.”

“Way more than even.” Barry took a sip of his wine, followed by a bite of pasta, accompanied by an appreciative moan that Len would love to hear more of, especially under slightly different circumstances.

“I’m going to hate myself for admitting this, but you were right about the wine.”

“Already aware of that, Scarlet.” He smiled at the kid’s soft huff and rolled eyes.

It didn’t take long for Barry to start telling him about the crime scene he spent the last few hours processing.

“It was a huge mess! About the only thing they did right was get the cameras with black spray paint, and wear masks. All of them weren’t even wearing gloves.”

“Gotta say, I’m surprised you’re telling me all this, Barry.”

“Please, it isn’t like you were involved…or any of the Rogues. Way too sloppy, and they took really generic pieces, mounted stones, most of which were micro etched. As soon as they try to pawn them, it’ll all be over. Assuming we don’t track them down before that; they smashed the cases by hand, with predictable results.”
Len snorted. “True.”

“Besides, there were decent pieces there—in the back, getting cleaned, resized, and appraised. Loose stones, too. All of those were completely ignored, even though the suspects exited that way.”

“No easy to be observant when running, Scarlet.”

“I manage just fine. Besides, they left a good few minutes before anyone from CCPD arrived at the scene, so there’s really no excuse for being that sloppy.”

“Careful, it almost sounds like you wish they were competent. Odd attitude for one of Central’s finest.”

Barry shrugged at that. “Well…I mean if they’re gonna potentially ruin my evening, they should at least make it interesting, right?”

He laughed at that. Allowing the lighter mood to go on a little longer before sitting up, getting serious.

“So what did Pretty Boy have to say?” Len waited until they were finished with everything but the wine before reminding Barry why they made plans in the first place.

Barry rubbed the back of his neck. “I’m not really sure how to explain it. Basically, he died. Got shot, and then his—he was pulled into the singularity. It served as some sort of weird gateway, to other…other worlds. Different versions of Earth. He met different versions of all of us. You. Lisa. Without you or Lisa, or the others he never would’ve survived or made it back, and well…” The kid shrugged. “Eddie is Eddie. He’s really loyal once you earn his trust, and that’s why he won’t tell anyone where you live, not even Iris. He stopped talking as soon as she showed up.”

“And you believe this?” Len asked, eyebrows halfway up his forehead at this point.

Barry shrugged, fingers playing with the stem of his wine glass. “Yeah. I mean…he has the scar. From the bullet wound.”

Len was trying to process what the kid told him, not entirely sure how it connected with his impressive rant in the ruined cafe. “How’d the good detective end up shot in the first place?” He asked, more out of idle curiosity than anything else.

Barry gave him an empty, devastated look.

“It’s not important, Barry. You don’t have to explain.”

Barry took a big gulp of his wine. Len tried not to cringe at that—it was an excellent bottle of rioja and should not be gulped, especially since the speedster wouldn’t get any liquid courage out of it.

“No, that’s ok. Maybe it’ll make more sense if you hear the whole story. Or the important parts at least, the whole thing will take forever. Eddie shot himself to stop Harrison Wells—who turned out to be Eobard Thawne, the Reverse Flash.”

Len remembered that name, Reverse Flash, kid said that’s who murdered his mother.

“He traveled back from a few centuries into the future and got stuck here.” Barry held up a hand to stop the questions Len knew were written all over his face from spilling out. “Yes, I know how crazy that sounds. I really do. But Eddie killed himself to stop the Reverse Flash from killing Iris and me. And everyone else.”
“How does that work?”

“Eobard was chatty when he kidnapped Eddie and held him captive under the pipeline. Apparently the guy is…was…will be?…something like that. Anyway, he’s a direct descendant of Eddie’s. Since Eddie died without kids, Eobard ceased to exist, un-making him in this timeline. Saving…all of us. Which lead to the singularity. I’m not entirely sure why or how; but Cisco and Professor Stein are pretty sure they figured it out. Not that it matters at this point.” Barry looked down, fidgeting with his fork.

“But that’s why I couldn’t help believe what Eddie told me. Because in order for Wells to be gone, Eddie had to truly be dead. Only to fall out of the singularity, alive and well, not even fifteen minutes later.

“Apparently the other-yous…you, Lisa, Heat Wave, and a couple others we’ve gone up against, saved him. They gave him medical attention, did the physical therapy, and figured out how to send him and Ronnie back here. Which is why Eddie’s here, and alive. His—” Barry paused, taking a deep breath.

“His body was one of the first things that got sucked into the singularity when it formed, and the other versions of you found him quickly enough to save him. He said he still feels that connection. Misses you guys, I guess? Well…the versions he got to know.” The speedster finished quietly, finally looking up at him.

“How’s that possible if he was only gone for what, minutes?” Len decided to go with it for now, it was clear that Barry believed what he was saying.

“On our world, yeah. But he had to be there a whole lot longer. The bullet wound was completely healed and the scar is just a light pink, not bright red. Plus, he obviously underwent physical therapy, and that takes at least a few months for an injury like that.”

Explained the use of his nickname, if very little else. Len didn't get how the detective would feel a connection to him when he'd known some completely different version in some other world. No matter how long the detective spent there. But he wasn't going to complain if it meant Thawne kept his address and neighbor a secret from his colleagues.

“Ok. Suppose that makes a certain kind of weird sense. No stranger than sitting across from someone that can go through walls and run up buildings.” Len quipped, earning a small smile.

They got up and began cleaning up after their meal. He very pointedly doesn’t ask what lead up to Thawne choosing to remove himself from existence. It was obvious that Barry hardly even scratched the surface, based on what Len observed during the pipeline transfer. The Flash needed to move the metas because Wells—Thawne?—turned the accelerator back on. Kid didn’t mention any of that.

Reminded him that he and Barry had another thing to discuss now that the opportunity presented itself. He and the Rogues were pulling a job in a week and a half, ideally facing off against the Flash. They needed to discuss the pipeline. Things were already tense and he couldn’t put it off any longer.

“Speaking of the pipeline—”

“Don’t worry,” Barry interrupted. “We have no intention to use it as a prison ever again. Worst case, someone might have to spend a few days there.”

“Explain.” Len turned to face Barry, crossing his arms.

“Cisco is working with Joe and the CCPD’s new meta human taskforce. He’s very close to
developing dampeners, to contain peoples’ powers while they go through proper channels.”

Len raised an eyebrow, impressed in spite of himself. Not entirely surprised; Cisco was a genius, the only surprising part was that it took this long for the kid to work out an alternative to indefinite solitary confinement without trial.

“He already worked out a way to expand that containment field from the transport truck. It’ll be installed in that new wing at Iron Heights. The dampeners will allow due process without making remand the only option.”

“Alright. Why’d you qualify your initial response?” Len wasn’t exactly thrilled with ‘trusting the system’, expecting it to work properly, but it was better than what the Flash and his crew had been up to.

“The dampeners probably need to be customized to the individual, and that’ll probably take a day or two each time. It’ll also give us the chance to figure out if they’re actually criminals, or don’t know how to use or control their powers. Like Bette.”

Len had no idea who that was, but he nodded.

“And as long as they haven’t committed murder…we’ll work with them to develop and master their powers.” Barry said, sincerity clear from his voice and body language.

“Interesting. Why do the ‘dampeners’ have to be tailored when the wing itself is more one-size-fits-all?”

“It has to do with the energy requirements. Supplying enough juice in a building isn’t exactly difficult, but in a wearable device? Totally different story.

“Cisco only has me and Firestorm to help with the testing, so progress hasn’t been as fast as he’d like. It’s hard to extrapolate with such a small test pool…not to mention that Ronnie and Professor Stein merge…Firestorm’s powers work in a very different way than mine. And that’s even after you ignore what we can do. Caitlin’s hoping that we can customize things using DNA samples, but it’ll still take time to manufacture. Until they’re made…the pipeline is currently the only place we can house them.

“Things’ve been kinda quiet lately, too. Which helps. The few metas I faced were more catch-and-release than anything else. That’s how it’ll be until we have everything else in place.”

By this point the kitchen was tidied, dishes washed or in the dishwasher. Barry leaned against the counter next to the sink, Len facing him, by the entrance to the living room.

Barry ran a hand through his hair, expression serious. “While I’m not…thrilled that you double-crossed us, I still wanted to thank you. For preventing the transfer, and keeping my friends safe. I didn’t…we couldn’t—” he sighed heavily.

“The original plan was rehabilitation. Nimbus was the first meta that…the first one that lived. He’s really, really dangerous—was in the process of being executed when he was affected, and the pipeline was the only real option. Aside from killing him. After that…coming up with a way to rehabilitate them, and remove or contain their powers kept getting shoved aside by a new crisis. Then everything—it all went bad so fast. So yeah, thanks.”

Len tilted his head, considering what the kid said.

“You’re welcome. Explains why you never put my info back. Gotta say, that had me curious.”
Barry smiled a little, nodding as the tension drained out of his shoulders. “So…movies and popcorn?”

He couldn’t help but laugh at that, slowly looking the younger man up and down. “Seriously, Barry, where does it all go?”

He allowed the subject change, feeling himself relax as well. It was good to know that the Scarlet Speedster and his friends had no intention of continuing to operate their detainment center. Briefly allowed himself to wonder if Scarlet would consider allowing him and the Rogues to help with metas that fell into the non-homicidal category. Maybe even bring them into the crew.

Len mentally snorted. No way Red’d ever agree to that.

It was nearly midnight when Barry finally stopped trying to pretend that he wasn’t falling asleep. Not that he was very successful. They were laying down on the couch, practically spooning. No, definitely spooning. Scarlet’s back against his chest, Len’s arm around the kid’s waist, their feet tangled together. He could easily feel each attempt to hide his yawns.

Barry squeezed his hand, sliding forward a little to sit up and rub his eyes. “So, um. Do you want… Could—” he cut himself off, taking a deep breath.

Len was amused, but decided that this time he wanted Barry to ask, instead of simply offering a solution. He needed some confirmation, especially after Lisa’s rather pointed observations about the two of them. No way he was gonna rush anything.

Didn’t matter how tempting it was to imagine pinning Barry against the wall, devouring his mouth, memorizing the way he tasted, tongues warring for dominance. Trailing lips and teeth down that long neck, nibbling, sucking. Until they needed more, arms wrapped around him, clawing at his shoulders under his sweater; Scarlet’s amazing legs wrapped around his waist. Stumbling to the nearest surface…or giving up entirely, peeling off just the necessary fabric. Taking the sharp edge off. Working off some of the heat between them, cooling the urgency enough to laugh, to appreciate… everything. Slowly, carefully, removing the rest of their clothes, frequently stopping to look, linger, worship on their way to bed.

Barry’s voice pulled him back to reality. “Do you want to stay over? In my room, I mean. Not out here…obviously.”

“Obviously.” Len smiled, getting to his feet and offering the brunette a hand up. “Why mess with tradition now, Scarlet?”

The kid’s thousand-watt grin should be illegal.

“Back in a few. Gonna bring everything back to my place. Not everyone can just phase through walls.” Len teased, getting a blush.

“Sounds good. Just lock the door when you come back in.”

Len didn’t dignify that with a response, rolling his eyes at Barry. The younger man looked like he wasn’t thrilled that Len was going to leave, no matter how briefly. Kid had no reason to worry. Len didn’t intend to sleep anywhere else, even if it was becoming more and more difficult not to let his mind wander, picture where all this might lead.
But as difficult as it was to keep things mostly platonic, he had to maintain that boundary. Len and the others were pulling a job soon, and he had no idea how Barry would react. The kid always seemed to enjoy their showdowns, so that was something, at least. Figured there was about a 50% chance that this wouldn’t change too much. Talking about the pipeline, how Ferris Air turned out improved his odds. Len increased the likelihood that things between them wouldn’t change, no matter how the next round between the Flash and Captain Cold turned out to about 60-75%. But…

If he was wrong, having this disappear would be…less than ideal. Learning how the kid tasted, felt, moved? Only to have that taken away. Not worth the risk. Better to never know.

Len had no intention of quitting the game. He loved the challenge, enjoyed leading the Rogues, was looking forward to the upcoming job. It was planned as a test run, seeing how they worked together, dealt with bystanders, and, most importantly, how they’d fare against the Flash and S.T.A.R. Labs.

He changed into lightweight lounge pants—Barry was a space heater—but decided to leave the sweater alone, take that off next door. Len preferred sleeping without a shirt, had nothing to do with wanting to see how Barry reacted to his tattoos. Nothing whatsoever.

Len splashed cold water on his face, taking a little extra time before heading back next door. Purposefully making a production out of locking the door behind him.

Scarlet was smiling shyly, hands in his pockets, probably to stop himself from rubbing his neck. “Ready?” He asked, just the hint of a blush coloring his cheeks. “Lead on.”

Hadn’t seen Barry’s room before. It wasn’t quite what he expected. Queen-sized bed, solid looking wooden frame, antique unless he missed his guess. Something he rarely did. Meant closer quarters—not that it mattered; they’d end up tangled together quickly enough. Desk overflowing with papers, books, and water bottles. Bookshelves across an entire wall…But only two pictures in the entire room. The entire apartment, now that Len thought about it.

They were small, on the shelf above the desk. One was a family portrait. Old. Barry couldn’t be more than ten or eleven—his smile hadn’t changed much over the fifteen years or so since it was taken. Len recognized Henry Allen from newspapers at the time, and his own extremely brief stays in Iron Heights. Never interacted with the man, but made note of him—it was obvious that the former doctor didn’t belong there with the rest of them. Barry’s mother had striking red hair and those same hazel eyes. They looked so happy. Len couldn’t help but wonder what that would’ve been like. A happy home.

The other photo was much more recent, Barry with the Wests. Pretty Boy Thawne was the one behind the camera, visible in the mirror over Scarlet’s shoulder. There was something strained about the kid’s smile in this photo, sad. A third frame stood empty.

Barry turned on the lamp on the nightstand. “Kill the big light?”

“That’d be great. Which side do you want?”

“Looks like that’s your side,” he said, gesturing to the left side, with its glass of water and stack of books. “I’ll take the other one.”

Len tugged off his sweater, folding it and draping it over the desk chair and heading to the bed.
Barry’s reaction was flattering, no denying it.

Eyes wide, staring. He smirked and stood there, allowing Barry to look his fill.

Unsurprisingly, the kid blushed when he realized just how long he spent staring. He grabbed the blankets, removing all but the sheet and a well-worn quilt, quickly folded and draped over the foot rail. Barry fiddled with the corner of the sheet for a few seconds before looking up at him. “Do you mind if we just…?”

Len raised an eyebrow, waiting.

“Settle in now, instead of pretending we’re not going to end up snuggling.”

“No arguments here, Scarlet.” He said with a smile.

Laid down on his back, stretching an arm out towards Barry, inviting the younger man to settle against his side…, which the kid did readily. Fast by normal, rather than Flash, standards.

Barry ended up throwing an arm and leg around Len, his head pillowed on Len’s shoulder and chest. In almost no time at all, Scarlet’s fingers began tracing the Celtic knot work and snowflakes decorating his stomach, ghosting over lines of ink, detouring to follow musculature rather than artwork. Len took a deep, steady breath, willing himself not to react.

Except if Barry explored for too much longer not even he’d be able to keep his cool. Len grabbed Barry’s hand as it skated up over his ribs, lacing their fingers together to stop the kid.

Barry raised his head and gave Len a questioning look.

Len sighed. He needed to say something. Maybe deflect a little? Didn’t want to shut Barry down, somehow tip him off about the job coming up. Sure as hell didn’t want Scarlet to find the massive scar only an inch or so away from his wandering fingers. Covered by ink, but raised and obvious to the touch…

“Thought you were falling asleep, Barry?”

“Mmm. Inna minute.” Nods against Len’s shoulder, tucking himself closer. “These are…amazing.”

Laughed softly at that, ran his free hand up the kid’s back and into his hair. “Thank you. Designed most of them myself.”

“When’d you get the snowflakes?”

“Started a while ago…twelve years, give or take, for one of Lisa’s skating competitions. Been adding to them ever since.”

Barry snickered, “Cisco sure had your nickname right from the start.”

“Now you know why I like it.”

“Mhm. ‘e figured was jus’ th’ gun.” Barry squeezed his hand.

Len continued running fingers through Barry’s hair, feeling the speedster relax even further, eyes drifting closed and staying that way.

“G’night Len.”
Len woke up to a light tickling sensation on his chest, basking in the warmth of having someone by his side. Not just any someone, either. He kept breaking all his own rules for Barry; staying over, letting—encouraging—the kid to stay at his place, putting off joining the Rogues in the lead up to a job. Best laid plans always went to hell around the Flash.

Fingers tracing over that wide raised scar near his hip, extending up his ribcage, ending below his right nipple. The one he stopped Barry from finding last night. Without opening his eyes, he reached up and grabbed the kid’s hand.

“Sorry.” Barry murmured.

“’s ok.” Len opened his eyes. “Doesn’t hurt or anythin’”

“I meant for waking you…?” Barry said, brows drawing together in confusion.

“Oh.” Great. Len wasn’t sure what to say to make sure he didn’t ask.

Scarlet settled against him once more. “Sleep ok? You know, aside from not as long as you would’ve liked.”

“Mhm.” Tightened his arm around the younger man. Closed his eyes, refusing to give into the urge to lean over for a good morning kiss. “And you didn’t. Wake me, that is.”

They just laid there together for a few minutes.

“Isn’t this the part where you check the time or your phone rings and you realize that you should’ve been at work ages ago?” He couldn’t resist the urge to tease.

Barry laughed softly. “Not this morning, don’t have to be in ‘til 10:30.”

“Ah. Even you can’t oversleep that badly?”

“Oh I totally can. Especially when some people keep me running around for all hours of the night.”

“No idea what you mean, Scarlet.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you don’t.”

He craned his neck enough to see Barry grinning at him.

“Nobody’s making you come after us.”

“True, but you’d be disappointed if I didn’t show.”

Barry had no idea how correct he was about that.

“I do love a challenge.”

“Never woulda guessed.”

Len chuckled at Barry’s dry, skeptical tone. “I hide it well.”
Barry’s stomach interrupted whatever retort the kid came up with.

“Looks like you have somewhere to be after all.”

“Mhm.” Barry nodded but made no move to get up. If anything, he pressed closer.

“Wanna stay for breakfast?”

“Thought you said your fridge was empty?”

“Might’ve picked up a few things before I texted you, quiche ingredients. Threw together a pie crust, too.”

“Aren’t you sneaky.”

“I have my moments.” Barry squeezed Len’s hand, sitting up, stomach protesting again. “Ugh. Ok, need food soon or things’re gonna get really uncomfortable.”

“Bet no one told you superpowers would have downsides.” Len got up too, standing and stretching. Making it take longer than usual when he noticed Barry staring. He considered grabbing his sweater, but decided to leave it where it was for the time being, glancing at Barry with a knowing smirk.

The kid blushed, but that didn’t stop him from giving Len a slow, deliberate once-over anyway. The appreciation stamped all over Barry’s face was...something.

“Go on, don’t you have breakfast to make?” he asked, making a shooing motion with his hand.

Barry rolled his eyes, grabbed Len and zipped them both off to the kitchen before he even finished the gesture.

It didn’t take very long for them to throw things together, getting the quiche in the oven and coffee brewing. He volunteered to watch things while Barry got ready for work—a true sacrifice on his part. Especially when Barry wandered into the kitchen in just his towel, stray drops of water decorating his chest and back.

Len didn’t bother trying not to stare, not after the way the speedster traced his ink with admiration and warm, curious fingers. Len dropped his free hand into his lap to prevent himself from doing the same. “Still got at least eleven minutes.”

Barry nodded, swiping Len’s mug of coffee and draining it. “Wanted caffeine.” He made a face, putting the now-empty ceramic back on the table. “Geeze, enough sugar in here?”

“Don’t recall forcing you to drink it.”

“That was my mug.” The kid sounded so adorably indignant.

“Didn’t feel like getting up to make more. Yours was getting cold.” He shrugged, then forced a heavy, put-upon sigh when Barry’s only response was an obviously fake pout. “Fine. Suppose I can put up another batch if I must.”

“It’s such a hardship, I know.” Barry grinned. “Beans are—”

“Back of your fridge, Scarlet. And the grinder is still out on the counter.”

“Yup. And don’t forget to—”
“Clean the press. Not my first time, kid.” Len drawled, taking a moment—or three—to watch Barry leave the kitchen, hand clutching the towel when it started to slip.

Time passed quickly, too quickly. The way it had a tendency of doing whenever Len was in the Flash’s presence. Breakfast was delicious. Conversation was easy, electric charge building between them with each laugh, flirt, tease, glance. Although Len was partial to just the towel, Barry looked pretty damn good in a light button down, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and those dark, fitted jeans.

A pointed cough and glance at the clock had Scarlet scrambling to gather his things. Len followed at a more reasonable pace, grabbing his keys from the bowl by the door but decided to leave his sweater behind.

He had the door to his apartment open when Barry reached out and grabbed his arm. Len turned, saw Barry biting his lip. They stood there for forty-three seconds before the kid’s nerves transformed into determination.

Len raised an eyebrow, in no hurry. Barry darted forward, lips lightly pressing against the corner of Len’s mouth. Len went very still, eyes wide before reacting. No way he was going to waste the opportunity now that Scarlet took the initiative. Even—especially—if it was the last civil exchange they had.

His hands came up, framing Barry’s face, fingers skating over cheekbones on their way to tangle in slightly damp hair, trace along his jaw. Repositioning just enough…there. Eyes sliding shut, lips moving slowly, deliberately. Keeping it from getting any deeper—no easy task. Let it continue longer than he should, longer than he meant to, finally pulling back. Held onto the kid long enough to keep Barry from chasing the kiss, then let his hands drop.

Len turned away, smirking over his shoulder at the stunned brunette. “Enjoy your day at work, dear.”

Smirk transforming to a smile, he closed the door.

Barry had been so distracted this past week and a half, even worse than when he first became the Flash. He had no idea how he made it through work and Joe’s teasing after he and Len kissed in the hallway. He still wasn’t sure what made him do it. Not because he couldn’t come up with any reasons, but because there were just so many.

Joe’d been right, in the car. It totally was a date.

Len showed off more than a little with the sauce and the wine and the fresh pasta. God, sitting down, talking about his day. And the flirting, it just happened! Without even trying—which was weird. Barry knew he was usually awkward and clumsy around people he liked, but not with Len.

Then there was the kiss. After he disappeared next door, Barry spent the next way too long just standing in the hallway, hand to his lips, trying to commit everything to memory. Every single sensation. Until Joe called—he was late, again—which meant many, many days of teasing from his father. At least he hadn’t told Iris about Barry’s ‘date’, there was no way she’d drop it until he gave in and told her everything. He wasn’t ready to do that yet.

To make things even more confusing, Len vanished. His bike was gone, the two texts Barry sent got no response, even though he knew the other man read them. Barry spent the next few days worrying that he’d pushed things too far, between the kissing and the bed-sharing and, oh man, the tattoos. At
least until he got an anonymous delivery for ‘Scarlet’ from the Thai place near home.

He was working late at the precinct when it arrived. He had no idea how Len knew he was there, but he decided to interpret it as Len’s way of letting him know that disappearing had nothing to do with Barry. Or the kissing. Especially since he kept sending food. It was a good thing that none of his friends were around during the deliveries...he had no idea how to explain.

But if Len wasn’t avoiding him for personal reasons...he had to be getting ready to pull a heist. The thief wasn’t anywhere near as subtle or covert as he liked to think he was. And it was only fair that he get some kind of warning, since Len must’ve used their shared wall to figure out that Barry was out of town to break into Mercury. Whatever Captain Cold and his Rogues were planning, he kinda wanted them to get on with it, already. As reluctant as he was to return Len’s sweater—which was soft and warm and smelled amazing, like sandalwood and crisp winter air—he missed movie nights.

The Imperial March pulled him out of his head. Cisco.

“Hey—”

“Barry, where are you? The pizzas you ordered just got here.”

“The wha? I didn’t order any—” Oh, there was just no way...

“Well your name’s on here, and Caitlin and I didn’t get ‘em. They’re from that fancy wood-fired brick oven place you love. I didn’t even know that place delivered.”

It didn’t. At least not as far as he knew. He was grinning. Barry could not believe that Len would do that for him. He replaced Len’s sweater with one of his own and took off for STAR Labs. It was strange, though. The other man knew exactly where he was with all of the other deliveries...

He got his answer about an hour later, when the satellites Cisco ‘borrowed’ picked up the signature of both the heat and cold guns in use near the freight depot by the railroad hub.

Barry tried to hide his excitement from his friends at the Lab, for sure ignoring the pointed looks Cisco kept sending his way. He quickly changed into his suit before heading out, way more excited than he expected. Both at the prospect of seeing Len, and getting the opportunity to mess up his plans for the night. Len—Cold, Barry had to remember to call him Cold or Snart while in costume, especially since Iris just got to the cortex before the alarm went off and Joe and Eddie were probably on their way, too—had had it way too easy lately.

He had no idea what would interest them at the rail-yard, but he couldn’t wait to find out. Especially since the location was pretty much just warehouses, with minimal bystanders at this time of day. They wouldn’t even have to worry about a ton of collateral damage...theoretically.

He slowed down about three blocks from where Cisco told him the guns were being used, taking a page out of Oliver’s book and surveying the area before rushing in. He didn’t think Len would go easy on him just because they weren’t just nemeses any more. Fremeses didn’t quite fit either, but it would do for now.

“Flash, nice of you to show up. The boss will be so pleased.”

Barry turned towards the unfamiliar voice automatically and his whole world turned red.
What Len made for their date night:

The recipe for the sauce only

(because making pasta well takes practice and I'd much rather buy it than make it...especially with squid ink, and I usually just go with regular old dried pasta instead of getting all fancy)

I've developed it over a while, and amounts vary depend on how many people I'm cooking for (hence the COMPLETE lack of measurements), but the basics are:

- Shrimp (shells on), maybe 5 or 6 medium-sized ones per person, fewer if you add scallops (it also works w/ lobster or crab)
- Scallops (optional)
- Pancetta or bacon, also optional
- Garlic--plenty
- Onions (or shallots, leeks, a mixture. Anything but sweet onions will work)
- Olive Oil
- Dry white wine
- red pepper flakes (also optional)
- Tomatoes (handful or two of grape, or 2 or 3 of the plum type, goal is some of the acid from the tomatoes but not to have it overpower anything)
- Mascarpone or creme fraiche
- parsley
- salt and pepper as needed
- Parmesano--freshly grated, please, the pre-grated stuff loses taste SO FAST

So you start with a saute pan, clean and de-vein the shrimp-do NOT discard the shells.

Add some olive oil to the pan, and some garlic.

Cook the shrimp to about 80% done or so, remove them, put 'em in a bowl. Do the same for the scallops if you're using them.

Put the shells into the oil now, saute those to get out as much flavor as possible, then pull those out and discard (You CAN skip this step, or as an alternative, put the shells in the white wine and simmer for a while, strain the wine before adding it to the sauce)

(If you're using bacon/pancetta, chop it and add it to the pan now. Render thoroughly)

Add in the rest of the garlic, saute that for a minute or so before adding your chopped onion(s) of choice--I like onions, so when cooking for 2 people I usually put in about the equivalent of one medium-sized onion. Typically I'll use red onions, or shallots, or leeks (or a mixture of the last two).

Sweat them in the pan until soft, but NOT brown, then add the tomatoes and wine. Cover the pan and let that cook down for like a half hour on a low simmer, until the tomatoes are all soft (I dice plums, cut the grapes into halves or quarters--you want fresh tomatoes with FLAVOR, grapes are usually a safe bet from a grocery store)

Uncover the pan and reduce the sauce until it's not super liquidy
TASTE-adjust with pepper as needed, you can also toss in sage at this point, if you feel like using it.

When I put the pasta water on, that's usually when I stir in one of those larger soup spoonfuls or so of either mascarpone or creme fraiche (you can omit the cheese for a lighter sauce).

Let it reduce a bit more...then when the pasta is about 2.5 minutes away from being strained, I add the seafood back into the sauce to finish cooking. Drain the pasta, toss it into the saute pan with everything else, toss to coat and finish cooking (at least 30 seconds in the pan, so the sauce adheres properly and the flavors all meld.

Liberally sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve promptly so nothing overcooks. You can add some Parm at that stage, or let people add their own as they want to.

This is just a base recipe--from here you can do stuff like add in roasted garlic, or take out the seafood entirely, or add in mussels or clams or whatever...it also works for grilled chicken breast (toss that in when you'd put the seafood back in to get it back up to temp and have the flavors meld), or as entirely vegetarian.

Basil is also a nice addition/alternative, and some lemon zest also goes very well.

Chapter End Notes

For those who are curious, here's the timeline I'm working off of:

The singularity happened in early May, Barry moves next to Len on June 1.
Fic starts on August 10
Right now it's October 2...
Flash Day and the premiere of season 2 start in early November
This story will start to catch up to newly established canon events in a few chapters, at which point I will pick and choose what I incorporate—probably just snippets except for Family of Rogues—and go on from there.
“Headed your way, Boss.”

Raider’s voice was crisp and clear over the comm system Hartley created for them. No feedback, even with relatively close proximity. Only downside they ran into so far was that the microphones were always open. Piper insisted that he should be able to refine that, but not until they conducted rigorous tests on the current configuration under realistic operating conditions.

He couldn’t deny being excited. Len thoroughly enjoyed his face-offs against the Scarlet Speedster—both solo and with a team of his own. Barry should appreciate the steps he and his Rogues took to minimize collateral damage, and keep civilians out of the way. Took a deep breath, allowing himself a few moments to consider the reason why his jolt of adrenaline was more intense than past confrontations.

The outcome would also serve as a way to figure out if everything building up between him and Barry would survive a contest of wills between the Flash and Captain Cold. Needed to know how Scarlet would take it. Before he allowed himself to get any more wrapped up in the kid’s smile, his long, lean body, and, well…everything.

The Central City railyard was largely deserted. Got damaged by the singularity and the city took that as an opportunity to upgrade and enlarge the hub rather than just fixing it—most of the traffic was being shunted to Keystone. Just left them a skeleton crew of guards and overnight construction workers to deal with in preparation for the fight.

Everyone was in place. Mick climbed up on top of a boxcar off to his left. Lisa crouched slightly behind and to his right, between two passenger cars undergoing repairs. Hartley hunkered down behind a backhoe and collection of empty oil drums for cover. Which they checked. No sense having the kid take refuge behind a fireball waiting to happen. Not with Mick around. Hart also had his tablet on hand, to monitor the surveillance cameras in the area, monitor their communications, and provide ranged backup as needed. Piper might be a meta, making him more durable than he looked, but that didn’t say much. Bivolo found himself a convenient hide on a nearby building, acting as lookout. Len stood alone on the tracks. Wanted to be the first thing the Flash saw when he got there.

So far everything was going to plan. Bivolo successfully used his powers to induce fear in the few civilians present—easily encouraging them to leave the area before lifting his influence. Good to know the meta didn’t have to rely on the effects wearing off over time; that he could release people from a distance. That level of precision would come in handy—allowed them greater control over
potential variables, made clearing the area of civilians much simpler.

In addition to clearing the area, Raider proposed trying to use his powers on the kid. Ending the fight before it started. Len nixed that idea early in the planning phase. Raider didn’t even know if it’d work on Barry, didn’t stick around to find out. Bivolo did say the kid seemed back to normal when he and Arrow tracked the meta down less than a day later. But that told Len nothing. Raider’s powers wore off fast if he didn’t put energy into maintaining his hold.

Until they had more data, wasn’t worth the risk. Barry felt emotions deeply, and even without the added complication of being a metahuman, forcing him to channel everything he felt into a single, powerful emotion didn’t sit right with him. Was unpredictable enough already, didn’t want to make that even worse. It was an easy decision, one he reached before he and Barry became…whatever they were now. Good thing, too. Lisa was being insufferable enough already.

Once the area was free of civilians, he and Mick fired up their guns. He was confident that Cisco hadn’t been able to place any tracking chips in the guns themselves, since Len provided all of the components when the engineer rebuilt them. But he wanted to test his theory that STAR Labs figured out another way to pinpoint their location while in use. Wouldn’t be a definitive test—there were surveillance cameras in the area that he elected to leave alone in order to keep tabs on the area and CCPD’s potential arrival; Piper ensured that the footage wasn’t archived on any server but the one he set up.

The purpose of the job was running a series of tests, not stealing anything. Needed to see how the group worked together, give Rainbow Raider a chance to demonstrate what he could do, gather data on the comm system and headsets under fight conditions—all necessary components for the big job he was building towards.

The nearby covert military research facility was ‘rumored’ to be developing weapons and technology specifically to use against metahumans. None of what reached Len’s ears sounded nearly as benign as the measures that Barry and STAR Labs had under development. Sounded a hell of a lot like the components necessary to weaponize metas, turn them into something that resembled A.R.G.U.S.’s Suicide Squad. Not gonna happen. Breaking the tech down to basic components and selling it would be extremely lucrative.

But that was months away—needed to focus on putting the team and the Flash through their paces.

Kid had some really shit timing. Len was…displeased that he had to leave after that kiss, but he had a schedule. Ideally, Scarlet would get the gist. Appreciate the gesture, the time he put into selecting the meals and conclude his sudden absence had nothing to do with Barry. At least not on a personal level.

“Ready, Buddy?” Mick called from his perch.

“As always.” Len stood on the tracks, illuminated by the rising moon and sputtering floodlights nearby. Lisa and Hart took care of those, throwing a few breakers, unscrewing a few bulbs. Not their usual style, but when Piper suggested the less destructive route, he saw no disadvantages. Surprisingly enough, Mick was the first to get on board. Central was already a mess, no sense making more work for the grunts at the bottom of the ladder.

Gun powered up, hand raised, posture deceptively relaxed. Now all they needed—excellent. Sixteen seconds slower than anticipated, but that wasn’t a surprise, given how often Red was late.

“Well, well, well. Nice of you to race over, Flash.”
“I told you before. This is my city, not yours, Cold.” Lack of response to the (admittedly bad) puns was disappointing—he thought they rated at least a scoff.

Red darted in, a blast from the heat gun forcing him to dodge, instead of running Len down on the tracks. He zipped to Mick’s perch, grabbing him by his turnout and throwing him off the boxcar—a good fifteen foot drop.

The hell…?

“Mick!” he and Lisa shouted simultaneously. Something wasn’t right. Why would Barry throw the pyromaniac off the train car instead of flashing him off the roof and tossing him to the ground from a more reasonable distance?

“Good airtime. But you lost points on the landing, Heat Wave.”

Len fired, forcing the kid away from Mick while Lisa rushed in to cover.

“Status.” Piper barked, standing up and sending a few bursts from his gloves towards the Flash. None managed to connect.

“Look who else is here—found some new boots to lick, Hartley?” Flash taunted, his face contorted into a cruel sneer. The speedster picked Hartley up and pinned him to the backhoe he was using for cover. “I bet Cold enjoys seeing you on your knees.”

Where the fuck did that come from? Len had no idea what gave Barry the impression—was that how the kid really thought of him?

“I’m not a huge fan of playing the submissive, Flash. However, leather and bondage remains a recurring fantasy. We’re already halfway there if you want to finally take me up on that offer.”

Offer? Len forced himself not to consider the possibilities, given the context. Piper was such a little shit; that kid’s mouth had better not make the situation any worse.

“Still quiet on the perimeter. Need me there, Boss?” Bivolo checked in two minutes after the Flash arrived, as agreed. At least he was capable of following those directions, because Len was now convinced that the meta used his powers on Barry after all.

That would be a firm ‘no’. “Stay there for now, Raider. Anything you left out about his arrival?” If his suspicions were correct, Len wanted Bivolo out of range so he wouldn’t be tempted to ice the man for adding an extremely potent variable to the equation. At least maintaining his post as lookout would ensure that no one else came under fire.

Mick was back on his feet—only winded and a little banged up—a blast from the heat gun finally landing on target. Red dropped Hart in an untidy heap with a laugh.

What happened next was anything but funny. The Flash snatched Mick’s gun, hurling it behind him. Towards Hartley, who reacted quickly enough to catch it. Len was frozen, mouth dropping open as the kid unloaded on Mick. Couldn’t count the strikes, no matter how hard Len tried. Only able to see his friend’s body reacting to the hits, the speedster a blur of yellow lightning around him. Beating the shit out of him, landing who knew how many blows before Lisa came to her senses—faster than him—bringing her gun into play.

Got the kid to back off Mick, at least. But now he focused on Lisa. Which—Len brought the cold gun up, aiming wide, unwilling to risk hitting her—was not a great alternative. A blink and blur of lightning later, Flash emerged alone.
“Lise?!”

“Fine, Lenny. He stuffed me into the maintenance SUV.” The sound of shattering glass was loud in his ear, but he couldn’t risk taking his eyes off the speedster to glance around for her.

“Bivolo, what the fuck did you do?” Lisa’s voice was that soft and sweet that meant you were dead and she hadn’t figured out just how creative she wanted to be about it.

“Can’t blame me for wanting some payback,” he laughed. “The Flash deserves to know how it feels to lose all control. It’s not as satisfying as locking him in a box, but it’ll do for now.”

“Bivolo, you thought it would be amusing to hit the Flash with rage with us as the only possible targets?” Piper’s tone was scathing.

As vicious as Flash's blows appeared, Mick was only slightly banged up. He got to his feet with a grimace, shuffling forward to meet up with Len. They were able to establish a facsimile of their typical Flash-fighting pattern, with Red dodging blasts of fire and ice. Mick expertly bringing the heat gun to bear, forcing the kid to keep moving while Len iced his path.

“You fucking insane, Bivolo?!” Mick growled.

Len heard feet on gravel, followed by a gleam of gold as the Flash snatched him off his feet by the front of his parka. Lisa freed herself from the SUV. Her aim was perfect, as always. Gilded the back of the cowl.

Before he could turn to follow the trail of lightning, Flash reached Lisa. A loud snap echoed through his headset and around the railyard, followed by Lisa’s scream.

“Take. The rage. Off. NOW.” Len ground out. Cold gun whirring in his hand, striking Red’s back. He specifically told Bivolo not—

“Fine, fine. No need to lose your cool. It’s off.”

Bastard was lucky he was too far away to get iced. Or burnt. Or turned into a golden statue.

Nearly as soon as Bivolo said that, Len found himself fifty yards away. Gun torn from his hands, lying under the pool of light where he’d been standing less than a heartbeat ago. The Flash slammed Len into the side of a rail car hard enough to dent the sheet metal, wind knocked out of him as he fell to the ground. Twin blasts from the heat and gold guns had the kid moving again, allowing Len a few moments to catch his breath, scramble back to his weapon.

“Didn’t work, jackass.” Mick roared, nowhere near full volume.

“Then it never took effect in the first place, Rory. Far as I could tell, there was no eye contact.”

Bullshit. Bivolo had no way of knowing what happened when the Flash traveled at speed. This wasn’t Barry. No matter how angry the kid’d been in the past, might be with Len now for pulling this job, he was never needlessly violent. Was always mindful of his strength, pulled his punches against all of them, knew they weren’t as durable as the metas he usually fought. Especially Lisa. Time to pull the plug.

“Mick?”—Len

Key word being ‘yet’. The job was a wash, all because Raider prioritized petty revenge over the rest of them. No way they could handle this without backup. Hartley mentioned breaking into S.T.A.R. Labs’ systems before, kid better not have been exaggerating. If the rage didn’t come off when Bivolo tried to release it, that meant they couldn’t rely on the effects just wearing off on their own. Doubted it’d happen fast enough to keep Barry from killing someone.

Len had never been afraid of the Flash; immediately knew his weaknesses, lines he wouldn’t cross. But now he was almost terrified. Of Barry and for him when he snapped out of it. The Flash was giving them the runaround. Only going in to do real damage when hit directly. And the kid had already knocked them around worse than all of their previous confrontations combined. He did not want to find out what would happen to them when Red went after them for real.

“Hart—can you get us connected to S.T.A.R. Labs?”

“Yeah, but—”

“Do it.” Len snapped. “I’ll keep him occupied.” Knew he was in better shape than either Mick or Lisa, just a little banged up.

He got to work, gun in hand once again. Iced whole sections of the ground and rail cars, Lisa and Mick assisting when they could, keeping the kid on the move and away from Hartley. Kept Red’s attention focused his way. Len briefly considered ordering Lisa to run. Would’ve done it if he thought for a moment that she’d listen.

“Flash has things turned off from his end.”

“Meaning?” Len demanded.

“I need to determine the frequency they’re transmitting on rather than simply piggybacking the signal from the suit. It’s weaker, and surprisingly not the same as the one they were using when I hacked in before. Give me a minute or two, Snart.”

They didn’t have seconds, never mind minutes.

Barry was all over him now. The kid’s speed making up for lack of technique; landing body blows faster than his brain reacted to being hit. Len went limp, surprise dead weight having the desired result. Made Barry stumble, broke his rhythm, gave Len a chance to stow his gun. He kicked out, bringing the kid to the ground next to him, immediately moving to pin him down. Len struck back, countering Barry’s punches when he could. Only managed to keep the advantage for twelve seconds, before Red used his powers to flip them around.

Len changed tactics, using the bulk of the parka to his advantage, managing to deflect some of the force behind the hits that made it through his guard.

Mick sent a barrage of fireballs their way, bursting overhead. Must’ve surprised the kid, got him to stand, holding still just long enough for Mick to land a glancing blow off Barry’s shoulder. Close enough to singe his parka as well as the Flash suit. Len took the opportunity to roll underneath a nearby passenger car, regrouping. Mick must’ve done the same, because when he peered out from his hiding place, Flash was looking around for them.

“Got it.” Hartley’s exclamation was unnecessary, given that Len could hear Cisco and Caitlin shouting in his ear.

“Open line, kids.”
Cold?! What are you—"

“The hell’s wrong with the Flash, Cisco!” Len had no desire to answer obvious questions right now. Needed confirmation that Raider’s influence was responsible for this. That the scientists knew how to undo it, ideally remotely.

Cold gun whirring once more, ice seeping through his gloves and into his bones as he fired. Created a circle of ice around Mick and Lisa, forcing the kid to pull up short, change paths.

“You’ll need to be more specific, Snart. He shut us out before he made it to your location.” At least Snow knew something was wrong without having to spell it out.

“He’s going nuts.” Lisa snapped. “Your little hero threw Mick off a boxcar, broke my arm.”

“Accidents happen when you’re a criminal. I’m sure he was just defending himself, you are his enemies.” The voice was female, not familiar—probably West’s daughter.

“Oh shit. Fuck shit balls.” That didn’t bode well.

“Real helpful, Cisco. I take it you know something?” Len cut in. He caught movement out of the corner of his eye. Hartley was on his feet, leaving his cover. Len waved him off. Needed Piper to stay out of it for now, keep the line between them and S.T.A.R Labs open.

“Is Rainbow Raider with you?” Cisco demanded.

The quiet ‘Oh fuck, please say no’ from the doctor in the background proved the dread building in Len’s stomach was not unfounded.

“Don’t know how that’s any business of yours, Ramon,” Hartley drawled. The last thing Len needed right now was those two getting into a pissing contest.

“Hartley? What the hell, man!”

“Articulate as always, Cisco.”

“Cut the crap. Is Bivolo with you or not?” Snow spoke over whatever retort Cisco came up with.

“Yes.”

That response triggered the sound of running feet and Cisco, yelling. “Joe, Eddie, get the van, we gotta go!”

Before Len got a chance to ask, Snow spoke, “The only time something like this happened was when B—the Flash got hit by Rainbow Raider.”

Well, fuck.

“You should’ve stayed in the car, Glider.” The speedster was fixated on Lisa now. Darting around her, pausing just long enough to present a target, then dashing off again. Lightning forming a golden ring, cutting her off.

Len wasn’t sure how to draw Barry off this time. Not without potentially—probably—hitting Lisa. But he had to act, soon. Or she would, patience not exactly her forte. As far as he could tell, the speedster seemed happy to toy with them as long as they kept missing. Not like usual, where Barry looked for the best way to disable them without much injury. But he only closed in with intent to do serious damage when they landed a hit. Len refused to allow Lisa to set herself up for that again.
“Get down,” he snarled, firing as he spoke. Aiming head-high. The blast was wide, but the distraction worked.

“Your brother’s a lousy shot. No wonder he’s never managed to beat me.” Len could hear Barry through her microphone, a dark twist to the kid’s familiar teasing tones.

They would have to refine the comm system—having so many people on at once made concentrating on anything but the cacophony a challenge. Not a distraction he could afford, given the current situation.

“What the hell, Cisco?” West asked.

“Barry’s been whammied by Rainbow Raider again, c’mon!”

A simultaneous expletive from West and Thawne was not reassuring in the slightest.

“How long?” West said, sounding like he was jogging.

“I dunno. Cold, how long?” Cisco demanded.

“How long’ what?” Another whirl of his gun, successfully tripping the kid up, sending him careening into the side of a boxcar. Right next to Mick. Shit.

“How long ago did he get whammied”

“No more than four minutes.”

“Wait a—Damn. He’s already in full rage mode?” West shouted.

Lisa got Barry away from the pyromaniac, pulling him into a more open area. Finally. Now there was enough room for the three of them to work together.

“If this isn’t ‘full rage mode’ I want to be nowhere nearby when that happens.” Lisa shot back, her voice tight with pain.

“We’re on the way, just keep him there.” West’s voice was tense.

“Great. Because keeping the Flash from running off is no challenge at all.” Len snapped. Signaled for Mick to cover him, striding forward and engaging the Flash directly.

“Keep him busy. Keep him moving, don’t let him focus on any of you. Just keep him there!” Snow responded. “And don’t die.” she added, an afterthought.

“Open to suggestions here, doc.” Mick growled.

He and Len worked together, trying to maintain enough distance. Giving themselves at least the illusion of a buffer. Didn’t count for much, not when the speedster could close in on them in less time than it took to blink. But it was better than nothing.

“Can’t Raider take it off?”

“Already tried, it didn’t work.” Raider sneered.

The Flash suddenly disappeared. Len heard a yelp and the sound of Hartley’s gloves. Had him turning, gun already activated. He missed. Took thirty-four seconds, far longer than he would’ve liked to get Barry away from Piper.
“I think you’re going to have to use your gun, Snart.” Snow spoke, sounding deliberate, determined.

“What?” Len heard Cisco and West’s voice joining his own.

“Look at this logically, the cold gun was designed to stop the Flash. Whatever Hartley did to get into our communication system reactivated the feed of his vitals, too. I’ll keep tabs on that and let Snart know so we can slow him down without seriously injuring him and keep him from killing anyone.” The doctor elaborated.

Finally, something that resembled a plan. Not one he was entirely thrilled with, but he could at least rely on Snow to make sure he didn’t hurt Barry too badly. Which was an odd thought. One he usually tried to avoid. The growing desire to help the kid, make his life easier. Not directly. But keep the more mundane criminal underworld in line so Barry could concentrate on the really crazy shit. Even entertained himself considering an actual partnership—didn’t matter.

“You really think the kid would—” Len asked, voice less steady than he’d admit.

West’s immediate, “yes,” told Len more about this situation than he wanted to know.

What followed were some of the longest 10 minutes and 34 seconds of Len’s life. Worst fears confirmed, Len, Lisa, and Mick worked together. Trying to keep Red at a distance.

Barry flashed right into Len’s face, so his voice was picked up on Len’s microphone. “I can hear you. Thought you liked ‘playing the game’, Captain Cold.”

“Fuck this.” The roar of Mick’s gun nearly drowned out his voice. He lit the kid up, scoring a brutally direct hit. The Flash shouted in pain, rushing the pyromaniac. Dammit. Len thought the earlier beating was serious, but now…

Now it was obvious that the speedster was just playing with them. He slammed Mick to the ground, on the rails. Arms blurring. Len had to get the kid off, fired off a volley without success. They needed to get Barry away from Mick before he beat the pyromaniac to death. It was one thing to know that the speedster always pulled his punches with them, and another to see what the Flash without any morals or self-control was capable of. Was this what it was like for Barry, going up against the Reverse Flash?

Lisa had a better angle, a gilded stripe appearing on the kid’s back. Got him to drop Mick. Who… didn’t get up. Shit.

“Lise!” His shout was unnecessary, she was already running towards Mick’s crumpled form. He wanted to check himself, tamping down on the distraction, refusing to think about it. Forced himself to pull the trigger, aim dead on, as always.

Hartley rushed out into the open, firing as he ran.

“Hart—” Len warned.

“Not a chance.” Piper cut him off, “I heal better than you three.”

Len quickly changed the settings on his gun, about to put some of the modifications he and Hartley made to the test. Sent a stream of ice towards the kid this time, going for center of mass.

“Fine, but stay wide.”

Len hated this, but under the circumstances… he needed to do something. Was willing to trust Snow
to monitor his vitals closely and Barry’s own augmented healing to keep him alive.

“Couldn’t you use something else to counteract the rage?” Snow’s voice was tight, worried.

“Problem, Snow. Rage is a powerful emotion. Can you think of something we could induce that’s equally powerful? And there’s no way of knowing if it’ll replace rage or simply add to the mix.” Len would rather not take that risk.

“Doesn’t matter,” Hart muttered. “Bivolo ran off about a minute ago.”

Goddammit. He’d have to do something about Rainbow Raider—probably for the best that he ran off. That way none of them would end up shooting the asshole.

“You’re gonna have to get him to stay still so we can fix him,” Cisco said.

Great. Just great.

“Status, Snow?” he barked.

“Nothing of note. His glucose levels are dropping, but nowhere near low enough to help,” she said, almost to herself. “I’ll let you know.”

Wished he knew her well enough, knew what she considered noteworthy. But he’d trust her with this, had to. Knew she didn’t want Barry dead any more than he did.

“Lisa?” Hartley prompted.

“He’s alive, but knocked out. No obvious bleeding, at least, and from what I can tell his neck and back are fine.” She got to her feet, moving to take up a defensive position over Mick. Gun in her left hand, right arm zipped into her jacket like a makeshift sling.

“Ok, sis. Try not to draw any heat your way this time.”

Lisa snorted. “Not likely. Hart, head over here and cover Mick, I’ll help Lenny.”

He wanted to argue with her, gritting his teeth. But she had a point. Even injured they worked together better than he and Piper.

Barry paused, looking between the three of them.

“You know, Cold, you’re pretty obvious about your weaknesses too.” The kid taunted.

Len recognized what Barry was about to do just fast enough to react first. Directed his gun towards the kid’s feet, starting there, icing them to the ground, then lifting his gun. Encasing the Flash’s legs in ice.

“West, you better be close. Just really pissed him off.” Len growled. He could see the kid’s eyes, glowing an eerie red. Visible even thirty feet away.

“Still at least three minutes out.”

Fuck, this better hold. He wanted to reinforce the ice, but…

“Snow—”

“He’s showing more stress, but nothing severe.”
“Blood sugar?” Please be low, within range of the kid passing out. If Len thought it’d help, he would’ve crossed his fingers.

“No major change.” She sounded disappointed, too. Shit.

Barry got free. Hart sent a blast, connecting this time. Len didn’t need Snow in his ear to know how serious that hit was. Didn’t stop the speedster from slamming Piper into the ground, though. But he had slowed down.

Len iced the kid again, could hear Hartley groaning in his ear, knew he was still conscious at least. He covered more of Barry this time, up to mid-thigh. Reinforced it with a few layers when Barry’s eyes glowed red. Len suppressed a shudder.

“Under two minutes now. Hang in there, guys!” The fact that Pretty Boy Thawne’s words of encouragement actually had the intended effect just proved how fucked up the entire situation had become.

“I think you’re going to have to use his name.” Dr. Snow said.

“What? Why?” Not that it mattered, with Raider gone. Len saw Barry gathering himself to break free again. Gritted his teeth and pulled the trigger once more.

“Last time, using his name got him to hold still long enough for us to fix him,” West elaborated. “You’re gonna have to lure him in close, use his name to get him to stop.”

“Sure about that?”

“Not really, Snart. But it’s our only shot”

“Fine, West. Tell me when you see us, and I’ll take care of the rest.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m gonna have to take one hell of a hit. Only gonna have one shot at this.” Len steeled himself, watching Barry work himself free of the ice.

“Now!” Cisco shouted.

As anticipated, Barry ran straight at him. Len braced himself, letting the kid body slam him and holding on tight. Force of the impact jarring his left shoulder, gritted his teeth, biting back a scream.

“Barry, you’re not a killer. You’re so much better than that. Better than me. Better than the scum that killed your mother. Don’t be like him.”

Thank fucking god Snow was right. Barry froze long enough for Len to get him in a headlock. Which fucking hurt like hell. His left arm practically useless, barely responding at all. But it was enough.

Kept him still long enough for that weird light panel mounted inside the van to do it’s magic. Knew it worked when Barry slumped against him, stopped fighting.

“Welcome back, Scarlet,” he sighed.

“Len—?” Barry turned around, eyes going from confused to horrified. Looked like the kid was about to throw up.
“Not—” Len found himself on the floor of the van, quickly joined by Lisa and Hartley. “—your fault, kid,” he finished the sentence anyway.

“Caitlin, get ready.”

Barry lifted Heat Wave as carefully as possible, heading directly to the med suite.

He felt empty. Hollow. Sick. He couldn’t believe—the speedster quickly shut down that line of thinking. He needed to get Heat Wave to Caitlin. That was it. Nothing else to think about. Not yet.

At least he was able to keep his hands from shaking, carefully putting the pyromaniac down on the bed in the med suite at STAR Labs. *His* bed. From the coma. Barry swallowed back bile. He needed to get out of there. God, he nearly killed the Rogues. Len. Was—oh. He almost didn’t make it to the nearest bathroom before throwing up.

He almost killed Eddie and Oliver, too. Hand shaking uncontrollably. Barry just stared at them. At himself. In the mirror. He needed to get out of there, before he hurt anyone else. It didn’t matter that he wasn’t whammied anymore. This was just the latest in a long line of close calls and near misses that happened to the people he cared about since waking up with powers. Len was wrong. About him, about all of it.

Barry called on his powers, loathing the rush even as he changed out of the suit and into regular clothes. He needed to get away, leaving his cellphone in the lab at CCPD on his way out of town.

Chapter End Notes

AN: SNAFU and FUBAR are (or at least started out as) military acronyms, standing for ‘Situation Normal All Fucked Up’ and ‘Fucked Up Beyond All Reason’—summing up the events of this chapter very nicely.
Barry found himself in Coast City before he even realized that he wanted to talk to Oliver. He wanted, ok, needed, to know how his friend and mentor was able to keep going, no matter what. How he was able to live with himself after everything he had to do to survive. What Barry did tonight…it was…way closer to torture than a fight.

He ran a hand through his hair, staring at the doorbell. It was the middle of the night; all the lights were off and the neighborhood silent. What was he doing? Oliver managed to get away from the darkness. Finally. Barry didn’t feel right about barging in and waking him and Felicity up.

He hadn’t seen either Oliver or Felicity in a while. They spoke on the phone sometimes, but the last time he saw Oliver was when he took down Wells…Eobard with that nanotech Ray created. For him. Because he wasn’t strong enough, fast enough, to do it himself.

Maybe ditching his phone was a mistake after all. At least then he could’ve texted. Barry sighed again, looking around for a place to sit and—that would work. Barry sank to the ground on a hill overlooking their house. He wasn’t ready to go back to Central yet.

Len was wrong. So, so, wrong about him. He wasn’t good, not by a long shot. If he were…oh god if he were, they…this whole mess wouldn’t have happened. He never would have tried to kill Eddie; never would have almost killed Oliver. Raider’s powers didn’t invent anything, they just intensified what was already there. His friends, his family…the people he loved wouldn’t have spent the last year in constant danger.

Barry ran a hand through his hair and down over his face, biting back a hysterical laugh. It went back so much further than that. If he wasn’t the Flash, his mom would still be alive, his dad wouldn’t be in Iron Heights for…forever. As much as Dad insisted otherwise—But he tried not to go there. Couldn’t let himself fall back into that cycle. Barry trusted his future self and made his peace with not saving his mom. He had to. But, fuck, not with the singularity, not with Eddie having to sacrifice himself to clean up after Barry’s mess—nope, not gonna go there either. Len was a surprisingly good listener, and Barry repaid that by beating the crap out of him.

God, what about Len? Barry didn’t want to think that he had told Raider to whammy him, but… He snorted. ‘But’ indeed. He couldn’t imagine Len tolerating that kind of insubordination, or that much deviation from ‘the plan’. Which meant that he had to have given Bivolo permission. Or not cared either way. That hurt a lot more than it should’ve. He was—Barry could admit it now, especially after what he just did—he was really starting to give a damn about Len. He was fun to be around, to be with, and Barry wasn’t sure what all of this meant, not in the bigger context of—caring. Because leading up to the fight it really felt like Len was on the same page. Now, though, he wasn’t so sure.

Except…except that didn’t make sense, either. Len was meticulous to the point where Barry
suspected a mild case of OCD. Between the lack of evidence at his various crime scenes and the dedication he put into something as inconsequential as providing Barry with takeout during his absence, he wouldn’t be surprised. Seriously, for the number of crimes he was suspected in, only having four bankers-boxes worth of evidence and case files was pretty damn impressive. Not that he’d ever tell Len that, the man did *not* need the ego boost.

The whole thing just sucked. He’d almost killed Len, Lisa and the others. And as much as he tried not to think about it…the whole thing probably happened on Len’s orders. It didn’t *excuse* what happened, but at least then it wasn’t entirely down to him.

Yeah, no. That didn’t really help.

Fuck, what if Len hadn’t been there? Without the cold gun, or Oliver…how much damage would he have caused on his rampage, how many more people would’ve died because of him?

It all came back to him. No matter how Barry looked at it, *he* did all that damage, because on some level he *wanted* to do it. Just like the last time. When he said all of those horrible things to Joe, and Oliver, and Singh…and attacked Eddie for no reason other than his own petty envy.

Barry sat there for what could only have been hours, watching the moon set. He took off for Central as the sun came up over the horizon. Even if his powers made it seem like an eternity. At least his day job didn’t put anyone else at risk.

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*Things weren’t exactly running smoothly back at the railyard, either.* Not that Len expected anything else, given just how badly the night unfolded.

“I gather that Barry wants you to take us back to S.T.A.R. Labs.” Len avoided stating the obvious, especially since West already had the key in the ignition, but confirmation couldn’t hurt. West glared at him in the rear-view mirror for using the kid’s name, not that it mattered.

“Of course we’re bringing you back there” Not giving his colleagues Len’s address was one thing, but Thawne sounded almost upset that Len doubted their intentions.

He, Lisa, and Hartley exchanged incredulous looks.

“What exactly do you plan to do with us, Detectives?”

West heaved a sigh. “Let Caitlin patch you up, then we’ll play it by ear.”

“Then into the pipeline again, I take it? I’ve already experienced your hospitality once, thanks. You can let me out here,” Hartley snapped.

“We should. This mess is pretty much all on you,” West growled. “Sadly, the most we got on you tonight is some property damage. A fine, tops. ‘m not in the mood for that much paperwork.”

“Please, Detective. We were model citizens,” Len couldn’t help rolling his eyes at Hart’s tone, or Cisco’s nearly automatic scoff.

“Yeah, I’m sure. Just wanted some fun at The Flash’s expense,” the detective spat back. “Least it blew up in your face. We aren’t usin’ the pipeline anymore, an’ bringing you three to CCPD’d raise a helluva lot of questions I can’t answer.”
Cisco gently touched Lisa’s uninjured arm to steady her as the van took a particularly sharp turn. “Plus, it’ll help with the guilt,” he muttered to himself.

Understatement on both counts. Even if Len had his doubts about Cisco’s optimism. Len clenched his jaw and stopped glaring daggers at the back of West’s head long enough to catch Cisco’s eye. He wasn’t sure how to interpret the look on the engineer’s face.

“What’s the catch?” That Lisa felt the need to ask told him that she couldn’t find a downside, either.

“There isn’t one,” Thawne really was a gigantic puppy in human form, almost as much as Barry. “It’s the least we can offer after how badly the Flash banged you up.”

“Even if it’s your own damn fault.” West interrupted his partner. “We get your weapons while you’re here. All of ‘em, not just the guns.”

“Of course, West.” Len smoothly cut in before Lisa could do more than glower at the prospect.

“Any other conditions?”

“Yeah. You’re gonna let us. It’s the least you can do after setting Barry up like that.” Cisco glared at all three of them. Until his tablet beeped. “Joe, Ronnie’s on his way in.”

“Good.”

Hartley’s head shot up at that. Len considered asking, but decided not to bother. He’d have an answer soon enough.

Lisa may not like it, but there was no advantage to refusing treatment. Mick was already there, presumably, and he knew their injuries were beyond what Shawna had the equipment and expertise to treat. They needed proper imaging and…he had a growing suspicion that his shoulder would need surgery this time. Hurt a lot worse than the last time it got dislocated, and he knew from experience that some injuries needed more than time to heal, especially as he got older.

He wasn’t thrilled with the message being sent by them going back to STAR Labs, how that could be interpreted by Shawna and the other prospective additions to his crew, but needs must. The detectives weren’t planning to arrest them. Going back to the Flash’s home base would make it easier for Len to corner Barry and talk to the kid about what went down before he spent too much time wallowing in guilt over the whole thing. He meant what he said—that none of this was Barry’s fault, how much better Barry was than practically everyone. How, even though Len’s certain he could have killed them all in seconds—if it’d even take the speedster that long—he didn’t.

Barry wasn’t anywhere near as gentle as usual, but that didn’t matter. Not to Len. And he doubted that Lisa, Hart or Mick would hold a grudge against anyone other than Bivolo for it. All that was left was talking to Barry, getting the kid to accept that none of how the night turned out was on him.

Len helped Lisa and Hartley out of the van as best he could. Thawne stepped in to offer Hartley a shoulder to lean on. Hartley accepted, although Len suspected that had more to do with the opportunity to drape himself all over the detective than any real physical necessity.

Cisco shot him a tentative look, wrapping an arm around Lisa’s waist. He gave the engineer the expected low-watt glare out of habit, even as the corner of his lips twitched into a small smile. That didn’t take long. He turned to follow them, biting the inside of his cheek to avoid wincing. Just a few more steps, then—no such luck.

West stepped in front of him, blocking his path. Len raised an eyebrow, trying for nonchalance while he waited the detective out. Refusing to cave first. It was petty, but the small power play was
familiar. Knew West wasn’t a bleeding heart like the rest of Barry’s inner circle. Although, Len grudgingly admitted, the man was honest. More than he could say about most cops.

“Oh no. You ‘n me gotta talk first. An’ you better hope you’re convincing.” West was tense, alert. Hand not quite hovering over his gun.

“Tell me this wasn’t your goal, Snart. A new plot to destroy Barry.”

Len didn’t bother trying to hide his anger at the insinuation, though he was surprised by its intensity. Found himself in West’s face, “You can’t be serious.”

“So y’re tellin’ me you had no idea how that’d turn out?”

Len growled, but West wasn’t done.

“That if you had known what Bivolo’s powers did to him, YOU, of all people, would’ve stopped it from happening in the first place?!”

He clenched his fists, swallowing back his own burst of rage at the insinuation that he’d intentionally put Lisa’s life in danger, set Barry up to—took a deep breath. West had no way of knowing, and he sure as hell wasn’t gonna tell him.

“Of course not, West. I enjoy the game. Not getting myself killed. Or my crew. The kid and I agreed, no unnecessary deaths. Turning Barry into a killer was never the plan.” Wanted to correct the detective’s assumption that this happened on his orders, or as a result of his indifference. But he refused to admit that he lost control of his crew. Not to West. Mick going off the reservation was one thing, blatantly ignoring his orders was another. Met West stare for stare.

They stared each other down for another forty-eight seconds.

“Coulda sworn your little ‘agreement’ included keeping Barry’s identity to yourself. How’s that square with letting Rathaway and your sister in on his identity?”

The detective could not be serious. “No, that is entirely on you. And Snow.”

“Don’t give me—”

Len cut him off. “Snow told me to use the kid’s name, something you agreed with. Knowing that the lines of communication were open.”

West clenched his jaw, nostrils flaring, “better make sure they—”

“Neither of them will say a damn thing. Hartley’s known since your son and his friends locked him away in the basement—if he was gonna spill, he would’ve. We done?” He demanded, shoulder throbbing.

West turned, started walking. Len kept pace.

“Yeah, ‘Len.’ We’re done.”

What? How did West know…?

“That’s what I wanted t’ hear. Do not give me a reason to regret this. And another thing…” The detective turned slightly, far enough to scowl at Len. “Since when are you and my son on nickname terms?”
Len snorted and walked faster in favor of answering.

By the time Len and West reach the cortex, Cisco already gathered their weapons onto a rolling cart. Len carefully removed the entire holster—not the easiest task with only one arm—adding his gun to the collection.

Dr. Snow was busy with Mick in the medical suite, Cisco appeared to be x-raying Lisa’s arm with a portable machine, and an unfamiliar brunette—presumably the ‘Ronnie’ Cisco mentioned—was guiding Hartley through a concussion protocol with less snark than usual. Len scanned the room, looking for the one person he most needed to talk to. Who…wasn’t there. The Flash suit was back in its niche, but there was no sign of Barry anywhere. Dammit.

Thawne stepped towards him, Len grudgingly accepted the help to remove his parka. After two failed attempts, the detective ended up cutting him out of the sweater to avoid making things worse.

“He really got you, huh?” the blonde asked, nodding towards his shoulder. Len snorted.

“Had worse. Barry could’ve easily done worse,” it was true. His father dislocated that same shoulder during a few particularly pointed ‘lessons’.

“Oh, no macho crap, I’m too tired for that. Give me a rundown of your injuries so we can prioritize?” Snow asked, never looking up, hands in motion while she worked on Mick.

It took hours, but Snow, her husband, Raymond, Cisco, and West’s daughter—‘call me Iris’—got them all patched up. Final tally of injuries was nothing to sneeze at, either.

Mick had four broken ribs, the rest were cracked or bruised, or both. Hairline fracture to his jaw, right femur. Pretty severe concussion. In addition to the spiral break to her right arm, Lisa had a severely sprained left knee and ankle. Hartley had a concussion, broken wrist, and hairline fractures to both forearms—defensive wounds.

Len had those, too. And his shoulder was…a mess. Snow immobilized it as best she could, but—

“It’ll take longer than normal to heal…and you might even need surgery.” Snow told him, looking apologetic.

Len grimaced at that. Knew it was pretty bad, hoped to avoid going under the knife.

“I’ll give it a few days and do another MRI to check your progress, but based on what I saw… You’ll need to keep it immobilized for at least two weeks, and then spend another month in a sling. After the second round of imaging we can develop a schedule for physical therapy. Even then, I can’t promise that you’ll be able to regain the full strength and range of motion.”

“What did you see?” He raised an eyebrow, face otherwise impassive. Both needing and dreading the answer.

Snow glanced around, leaning closer and lowered her voice. “You already had extensive prior injuries to the joint when you were much younger. Based on the scarring—” the doctor shrugged, biting her bottom lip. Her expression going soft.
Len froze. She knew. Or at least suspected. At least she didn’t ask.

“Shoulders are tricky due to their mobility. You probably already know this, but each new injury takes longer to heal. Given the amount of pre-existing scar tissue and the severity of this most recent dislocation…Even if you don’t need surgery, there’s no way to predict the outcome.”

Len gave her a curt nod. Figured. He always had rotten luck.

She reached out like she wanted to touch his hand, paused, thought better of it. “Thank you.”

“Feels like that should be my line, Dr. Snow.”

She shook her head with a small smile. “No. Well, yes. That. But I owe you one, too. For staying and doing what you had to, to help Barry. For working with me. And showing restraint, despite the way he attacked you. It’s a lot more than we’d expect from…most people.” She left the ‘especially you’ unsaid, but he heard it loud and clear.

“And call me Caitlin, you’ve earned it. Hearing ‘Dr. Snow’ gets old after a while.”

Raised an eyebrow. “What makes you think we’ll be around ‘a while’?”

“Just a hunch. I’ll get real painkillers in the morning.” With that Snow—Caitlin—headed to the lounge to join her husband. Raymond was staying at the Labs to ensure he and the Rogues ‘behaved’.

Len spent the next fifty-two minutes trying to get comfortable before giving up and getting to his feet. Between his shoulder, leftover adrenaline from the fight, and his racing thoughts…sleep wasn’t gonna happen any time soon.

He wandered through the Lab, checking on Hartley and Mick. They seemed peaceful enough, all things considered. Len paused for a few minutes, staring at the Scarlet Speedster’s suit on his way to Lisa’s bedside, snagging one of the rolling chairs along the way. They had no idea where he ran off to. He was worried about the kid, especially when Cisco’s attempt to track his phone didn’t pan out—must’ve taken out the battery.

According to what Caitlin told Cisco, he sped in, got Mick settled on the bed and zipped out before she or Iris got a chance to say anything. Or check him over. Len accepted that he couldn’t have hurt him too badly, but the kid’s mental state was a whole different story.

Either way, Len had no way of knowing how badly he ended up hurting Barry with the cold gun. Knew he’d be beating himself up over the whole thing. Shouldn’t be, wasn’t his fault. If anything, it was Len’s. He was the one that brought Bivolo into the Rogues and failed to get the meta to fall in line.

The sound of someone flopping down into Snow’s chair startled him. Len turned, trying to ignore that tiny glimmer of—he sighed. Cisco.

The engineer nodded to him, “Good thing you figured out something was wrong so quickly, Cold. It would’ve gotten so much worse.”

He scoffed. Right.
“She’ll be ok, man. It’s not your fault.”

“Whose is it, then. Barry’s?” he snapped.

“Of course not. No…it’s pretty much no one’s fault.”

Len swiveled to face Cisco, incredulous. “How do you figure, kid? If I hadn’t brought Bivolo—”

“Ok, fine, maybe it’s Raider’s. If you really need to assign blame. Because somehow I doubt you told him to make Barry see red.”

He…had no response to that.

“I mean it—you wouldn’t. Whatever the hell you and Barry are right now—totally not asking, by the way—you’re not enemies anymore. Even if we ignore how stupid it is to enrage the Flash without any other targets…you wouldn’t do that to Barry.”

Really wanted to argue on principle. Didn’t like how easily the engineer was able to read him, but Cisco wasn’t done.

“Besides, it’s not even Raider’s fault. Not really. And yeah, I’m still pretty pissed that you sabotaged my setup at Ferris Air. But seriously, think about it for a sec. Let’s say you didn’t screw us over and the metas were stuck in that prison. The pipeline was bad enough, but having them on Lian Yu would’ve been so much worse. ARGUS never would’ve let ‘em go. Keeping the metas in the pipeline wasn’t right, and after a while we kinda forgot not to be OK with it. What you did was pretty shitty…but less horrible than what we were doing.”

“Get to the point, Cisco.” Where was the engineer going with this? Although it was good to have confirmation that the Flash and his merry band of scientists were out of the prison gig.

“Ok, ok. So you freed Rainbow Raider—what if he decided to go his own way? Or ‘sell’ his powers to the highest bidder?”

Len raised an eyebrow in response, not willing to play guessing games.

“You’ve got a metahuman that can…I mean…sooner or later someone was going to die because of his powers. Prolly sooner, especially if he went to one of the mob families. If he’s one of your Rogues, playing by the conditions you and Barry set up in the woods…the likelihood that his powers result in dead people goes way down.”

“Forget who you’re talking to here, kid? Altruism is your thing, not mine.”

Cisco was in his face. Len was impressed, didn’t think the kid had it in him. “Don’t bother running that bullshit by me, Cold. ‘Len.’ Seriously. How could you have known? Hell, Raider had no way of knowing, because he never saw what happened. It took nearly ten hours for Barry to go all ragefest last time. So if he had no way of knowing, how can you expect yourself to?

“And really…if this means we can add ‘no whammying Barry with Raider’s powers’ to the list of things you’re not gonna do…I’m all for that. It sucks that this happened, but at least no one died. And everyone’ll heal. So…” Cisco trailed off with a shrug.

Len stood up, glowering down at the engineer. “Right. It’s all just fine. We’re just ignoring that Barry took off to who knows where without the suit or his phone? The hell do you explain that.”

Cisco actually laughed a little; Len was pissed. “Welcome to the club, I’m making t-shirts. We’ll call
tonight’s pizza your entrance fee.”

Well, shit. Len tilted his head, gave him an incredulous look. Did not expect that reaction at all.

“It’s not easy worrying about a superhero.” Cisco trailed off, giving Len a considering look, sizing him up.

“Look, Cold. I don’t know what’s going on between you two…but it’s obvious that something is because you actually care. Which is all kinds of strange, but that’s besides the point. He’s gonna tear himself up over this, probably avoid all of us for a few days. And I bet this’ll make him realize just how close he came to killing Oliver and Eddie the last time he and Raider crossed paths.”

“Oliver?” He raised an eyebrow, sitting back down on the corner of Lisa’s bed, wishing he could properly cross his arms.

“A friend of ours.” Cisco looked off to the side when he said it.

“Wouldn’t happen to be Oliver Queen, would it?”

“I can neither confirm nor deny that statement.”

“You do know that’s as good as a yes?”

“Shut it, Cold.”

Len smiled a little, in spite of himself. Figured out the Arrow’s identity months ago, when he and the Flash teamed up. Interesting that the ties between Starling City’s vigilante included Barry’s team.

“Anyway, Barry’s gonna need some time. If you want…I can keep you in the loop?”

“What do you mean, in the loop? I’m not leaving S.T.A.R. Labs until Lisa and Mick are out of the woods and Barry shows back up here—”

Cisco shook his head. “He prolly won’t come by the Lab as long as you guys are still here.”

“What? why not?”

“Because…If there’s one thing Barry does well…It’s guilt.” Cisco got up, heading out of the room.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to hit me up on tumblr
Slow Recovery

Chapter Notes

As always, thanks to Crimson and Liu for their betaing, and shoutout to WacheyPena for the title :D

I always love to hear comments and opinions :D

(Let me know if there are typos, please)

It had been a really, really long couple of days. Since the Rogues…just. Yeah. ‘Since.’ Barry was doing his best to avoid everyone…not exactly the easiest thing to do when he worked with Joe and Eddie. But as far as he could tell, everybody else was still at STAR Labs. And as much as Barry really, really wanted to pull up the cameras and check on things…he didn’t want to know how badly he hurt the Rogues. Not knowing let him pretend it wasn’t so bad, at least.

Not that he’d be able to keep up that particular fantasy for much longer. Len was his neighbor after all. Barry wasn’t spending much time at home, mostly because it didn’t really feel like home. It was too empty and quiet. He found himself straining to hear any signs of life, listening for the tiniest indication that Len was back next door. But so far, Len hadn’t come home. Which meant he had to be pretty badly hurt, because Barry couldn’t imagine Len wanting to spend a whole lot of time at the Lab. But he’d be back soon, and then Barry wouldn’t be able to ignore what he did. He just…Barry ran both hands through his hair. Oh god, what did he do? What was he going to do?

Maybe…maybe Len would stay at a safe house for a while, instead of coming back to their building. Barry wasn’t sure if that’d be better or worse, though. Because he really…really needed to see him. He needed to make sure Len was okay, or that he’d fully recover.

Lisa, Rory and Hartley, too. Fuck. All of them. Barry knew…well, he was pretty confident…that Len took their safety seriously. More than his own, at any rate. The ‘why’ didn’t really matter, Barry was the one that hurt him, them. Len was…Barry sighed. At least he had a little breathing room to figure it all out. Assuming Len wanted anything to do with him at all. Barry wouldn’t exactly blame him if he didn’t.

Not that he knew how to face any of them yet. Joe kept finding excuses to come up to his lab, but thankfully he and Eddie got a new case. After taking one look at him, Singh assigned Fisher to them for this case instead. He assigned Barry a stack of additional reports and a box of cold case files. Which his captain delivered personally, with a ‘take your time, Allen’, a quiet nod, and a far too knowing glance. Barry would’ve hugged him if it were at all appropriate to do so.

Barry sighed. He really needed to talk to Oliver, but…it just didn’t feel right to drag him into this mess, too.

He usually preferred fieldwork to his lab, but under these circumstances? It was the perfect way to avoid everyone and be productive enough that he couldn’t dwell too much. Most of the cases Singh brought him took place in the months before and immediately after the accelerator exploded. It wasn’t surprising that a number of cases were…well…sidelined was the only way to describe it,
even if it sounded kinda horrible. But it didn’t really matter why they weren’t closed. Barry prided himself on putting everything he had into a case, regardless of the circumstances, and if he could solve his mom’s case—even if he couldn’t do anything about it—He’d use his self-imposed exile to bring as many of these files back on track as possible. It wasn’t exactly part of his job description, but that didn’t matter.

Three files were spread across his desk at the moment. Something about them felt familiar, somehow. Maybe—

The alert from STAR Labs security flashed across his monitor. Crap.

After…when he got back to Central, he added biometrics for Len and the others to the list of exceptions, so whoever was at the Lab had no reason to be there. Barry flashed around the room, closing the door and bringing up the security feed. Oh crap. Bivolo was there, heading towards the cortex with a determined look on his face.

Barry could feel the lightning thrumming under his skin. He needed to be there to protect them. Except. The…Every time he went up against Raider…it didn’t end well. Barry forced his powers down. If…if he, they needed him, Barry would be there in seconds, but. But. If he was just overreacting—well. He’d stay and watch from here. He wasn’t ready to face any of them again, not yet. And having Bivolo there…even without using his powers…it’d probably make whatever…however…everyone reacted to seeing Barry again…so much worse.

He was such a coward.

He fell back into his chair, eyes fixed on the screen. Brutally crushing the part of himself that was excited about seeing Len, no matter the circumstances. Len, who was striding across the cortex to meet Bivolo in the hallway, blocking the meta’s progress.

Barry had no idea how Len knew someone else was in the building, but the thief always seemed to know when Barry was around, so…He bit his lip. Len’s movements were stiff, even though Barry could tell he was doing his best to hide it. The speedster probably—ok, definitely—wouldn’t have noticed before getting…spending so much time with him. Len’s shoulder was bound and strapped into a sling. Not that it did anything to diminish his presence. Apparently Bivolo agreed, because he stopped in his tracks and seemed to shrink a little. Lisa was right behind her brother, arm in a cast—Barry took a deep, shuddering breath.

Watching this was a mistake. But he couldn’t bring himself to close the feed, and he couldn’t look away. Not when Len and Lisa were hurt, and unarmed, and…and couldn’t defend themselves.

Bivolo took another couple steps forwards, with his arms spread, palms up in a classic ‘no threat’ posture. Barry snagged his earbuds and turned up the sound.

“—you doing here, Bivolo?” Len spat. “Caused enough of a mess already.”

“I know, I know. I royally screwed up. You were right. I should’ve listened when you told me not to try my powers on the Flash.”

Barry gasped. WHAT?! Wait—so Len was trying to protect him all along? Did he really tell Bivolo not to do that? But—oh god—he was gonna be sick.

Lisa’s voice drew his attention back to the screen. She stalked towards the meta, tone sending chills down Barry’s spine. “What my brother is too polite to mention is that fuck-ups of this magnitude do not just go away.” She smirked, running her index finger across Bivolo’s shoulders. The meta
flinched. “Oh don’t worry. We probably won’t kill you. It would violate our agreement, after all.”

“The one your brother made with the Flash? I can see just how cozy you really are, since you’re holed up at his headquarters. Enemies I know don’t patch each other up after a fight,” he snapped.

“Bleeding hearts called it payment for snapping their precious hero out of his rampage without any casualties.” Len was all Cold now; cool, collected, and contemptuous. Barry shuddered.

“And you should be on your knees in front of the Flash, because that agreement is the only reason you’re not a pretty ice statue with gilded accents.” Lisa took over the conversation once more, looking so much more intimidating than Barry had ever seen her before. It was a surprise…but then…Barry really shouldn’t have expected otherwise. ‘Helpless’ wasn’t exactly in either Snart’s vocabulary.

“What you failed to grasp, unsurprisingly, given your lack of foresight, is that the ‘agreement’ Lenny has with the Flash benefits all of us. He keeps the big, bad fish distracted with all of that tight red leather so we don’t have to waste our time with them.

“We get to focus on our own plans. Yes, occasionally the Flash benefits when we keep other factions in line. In return, the Flash and the Rogues mostly ignore each other. You nearly blew that.” Lisa emphasized her point by jabbing Raider’s chest. “On top of nearly getting us killed, while you ran away scared. You think a simple apology is going to be sufficient?” Lisa purred, right in his face.

Wow. She was a lot scarier than Len.

“I don’t want you as enemies. I’ll keep all this quiet—your arrangement with the Flash and S.T.A.R. Labs, being cozy enough that the Flash’s sidekicks were willing to patch you up. You wouldn’t let me test my powers on Hartley; how was I supposed to know what would happen? I swear, I won’t ever use my powers on the Flash again. Or any other metas. Not without your say-so.”

Len pushed off the wall he was leaning on. “That’s a start.”

“What else can I do?”

“Let me think about it.”

Everything else faded out after that, his mind racing as the content of their conversation hit him like an avalanche. Good thing they seemed to be done. Barry followed Bivolo’s progress out of STAR Labs without truly seeing the image before closing the window, thoughts a chaotic mess.

He stared at the now-blank monitor. Len…god, Len hadn’t set him up. He was…he stuck to their agreement, maybe even expanded it. And Barry—

It was all his fault. How could he…God. He had…there was no possible way he could ever make up for this. At all. And Len sounded so…cold. Hard. Angry. If that was how he dealt with a team member. Fuck. Barry didn’t know if he’d be able to go back to how things had been. But he barely…

He…fuck. He totally should not have watched. Or listened in. Mostly the listening. It was bad enough, before. It hurt to think that Len ordered that to happen…but at least that way it was…well…not entirely his fault. Which Barry hated thinking, but he clung to it. Because at least that way…The thought that Len hadn’t really valued their time as much as the game of Flash vs. Cold hurt. But god. It was so much easier to handle than this. Than knowing that it all meant something, only to find out that the way everything turned out was Barry’s fault.
For someone who said he always play to win, that claimed to only be out for themselves, Len had a weird way of following through. Staying, keeping Barry from running off, getting in touch with Cisco and the others to fix things...That wasn’t...those weren’t the actions of someone who...shit. Except he ruined it. Barry couldn’t imagine that Len would ever be willing to look past what happened, after all the damage he caused.

Not when Barry didn’t even know where to begin to forgive himself.

Len glared at Bivolo’s retreating back, impressed in spite of himself. Took balls for the meta to show up at S.T.A.R. Labs at all, never mind the mea culpa. Didn’t count for much, but Len knew how the newer Rogues felt about the place. Except Hartley.

Still wanted to ice the asshat. A feeling that intensified as Barry continued to be a no-show.

“Huh, that’s not what I thought would happen,” Cisco said, breaking the tension.

He and Lisa whipped around, startled. He thought the Rogues were alone.

“Where were you hiding, kid?”

Cisco grinned around a straw. “My workshop.”

“Then how did you know anything happened?” Lisa asked, walking back into the cortex.

Cisco held up his tablet, showing them a feed of the room, “like this. We do have security here.”

Interesting. “Should’ve expected that.”

Cisco just grinned and nodded. “Yup!”

His sister laughed. “Could’ve fooled us.”

“Oh come on, I know it’s not great right now, but the place is kinda in limbo until Barry—” Cisco cut himself off. “Right. Nice try, Glider, but I’m not gonna outline our security issues for you.”

“That’s really not fair, Cisco. Just think of the advice we could offer,” Lisa pouted, looking up at the engineer through her lashes.

“Nope, not gonna happen. There’s no way I’m letting you help—you’re the most likely people to break in here in the first place!”

Len suppressed a snort. Gotta give the kid credit, few were able to resist Lise’s flirting like that.

The sound of heels on tile announced Dr. Snow’s arrival. “Oh good, you’re up.”

“G’morning to you too, Caitlin.”

She gave Cisco a long-suffering look. “Did you even leave last night? Never mind. Coffee’s in the lounge, Ronnie and Dr. Stein should be here soon, too. They’re bringing bagels.”

Good. Len inventoried the food in the Lab yesterday and was less than impressed. How’d they keep up with Barry’s metabolism with so little in the way of provisions? Len made a mental note to follow up on that after coffee. Hart should be fine to do a food run, if none of Barry’s friends were willing.
Sadly, coffee would have to wait. Caitlin intercepted him with a gentle hand on his arm. Managed not to flinch.

“Leonard, before you eat we should do another MRI.”

He grimaced at the use of his full name. “Len will do, doc. Lead on,” made no sense to protest.

“Len it is.” She led the way, carefully helped remove the sling and his shirt.

“I know you’re probably hungry, but if you need surgery…” she trailed off.

He got it. No general anesthesia on a full stomach, and the sooner the better if it had to happen. Really hoped it didn’t. Len laid back on the cold table, closing his eyes when Caitlin turned on the machine so he wouldn’t have to stare at the confined space.

Controlled his breathing, tuned everything out until he felt the table moving again.

“Prognosis, doc?”

“Um…Give me a moment, please.”

Len clenched his jaw, tensing. That did not sound good. He sat up in time to see Cisco running into the observation room. Not good at all. Len and Caitlin were animated, looking between the monitors. Len had no idea what expertise Cisco had to offer—the kid was brilliant, but didn’t have any medical background that he was aware of and he made it his business to be aware.

Their discussion took another five minutes. Len braced himself for the worst when the scientists finally joined him.

“Well?” Len demanded.

“It seems to be healing well so far. But I’d like to take a blood sample, just in case.” Caitlin bit her lip and glanced away.

He narrowed his eyes, “why?”

“It’s just a precaution. To make sure you aren’t allergic to any of the anesthetics we have access to. Your medical records are, well, ‘spotty’ is generous,” she shrugged.

He tilted his head, thinking it over. While what she said was true, the doctor was too nervous for it to be the real reason behind her request. Couldn’t figure out what her angle was, though.

“No plans to integrate my results or DNA into any systems beyond your own? CCPD, or the FBI, for example?”

“None whatsoever. I am asking as your doctor, with all of the confidentiality that goes with it.” Caitlin raised her chin, looking him in the eye. Truth. Although he had a feeling…

“That apply to Cisco as well?” Len didn’t mention Barry, as much as he wanted to.

“With your permission, I would like to discuss the results with Cisco, yes. Barry too, to make sure we can get the proper supplies.”

“But no matter what, none of this leaves S.T.A.R. Labs, man.”

Len stared them both down. They were sincere about his records not leaving their system, and he
knew from experience that hacking into those particular records was extremely difficult. Well beyond Hart’s abilities.

“Fine, but West will not find out you have this sample.”

“I promise.”

Len offered Caitlin his arm.

Rest of the day passed quickly enough. He spent some time with Mick, trying to keep the pyromaniac calm. Occupied. Not the easiest task when he was confined to a bed. But Cisco brought them a tablet and he and Mick brainstormed potential improvements to the heat gun. The pyro also entertained himself by coming up with ways they might be able to convince Cisco to actually make said improvements.

Lisa and Cisco spent most of their time in the kid’s workshop with her gold gun. Didn’t look like they actually made any changes, but it was only a matter of time. Learned years ago not to get in Lisa’s way when she truly set her sights on something…or someone.

Was surprisingly relaxed. Not how Len imagined being confined to Flash’s headquarters would go. The only real excitement was right before dinner. Caitlin excitedly pulled Cisco aside, closing the door behind them.

“Yes!” Cisco’s triumphant shout pulled everyone into the cortex at a run.

“What’s going on, Cisco?” Iris asked. She tended to stop by for a few hours each evening, on the off chance that it’d be the night Barry finally joined them. Hadn’t happened yet. Len found himself enjoying her presence and the atmosphere she brought with her to the lab. Although it was a little frightening how well she and Lisa got along.

Also helped that she gave them updates, presumably from Thawne (her fiancé, apparently), or her father. So far neither cop had any luck getting through to the speedster, or getting him to talk about anything other than work.

“It’s Barry. He’s in one of the older suits,” the engineer had a huge grin on his face.

Len found himself fighting a smile of his own. It’d been two weeks. Two long weeks at STAR Labs with no sign of Barry. Len was still in the sling, but his shoulder seemed to be healing well. Faster than he expected. Mick was up and about, a little. Good thing, too. For everyone else’s sanity—if he’d been confined for much longer, the place would’ve gone up in flames.

Hartley and Raymond had done a run to one of their more obvious safe houses to pick up clothes and supplies. It was…refreshing to see Piper like this. In his element. The kid was a scientist first and foremost; Len would hate to lose him, but wouldn’t hold the kid back if he managed to carve out a place for himself at STAR Labs once more.

That smile quickly disappeared on its own when it became clear that Barry disabled the comms. However, they did have his vital feed. Counted for something. Not as good as seeing Scarlet for himself, but at least they had confirmation that any physical damage he did to Barry had healed
without a problem.

Mick limped up behind him, all of them watching as Cisco and Hartley pulled up traffic cameras, worked to pinpoint Barry’s location. Kept the bickering to a bare minimum. For once.

“Found him!” They all crowded around Hartley’s monitor—

Barry. The image quality was sub-par, but he’d take it. Band of tension around his chest loosened at seeing the Scarlet Speedster on his feet. Except the Flash wasn’t alone. He was facing down a handful of gunmen—looked like muscle for hire.

“Oh crap. Nimbus is there, too,” Cisco pointed to what looked like a patch of dense fog that quickly coalesced into the Mist.

Len was moving before he even realized it, heading for Cisco’s workshop and their guns.

“No way, Lenny. You’re in no shape to go tearing around on your bike right now,” Lisa snagged him by the strap of the sling as he stormed past.

“Let me go, sis. Kid needs backup.”

“She’s right, if you do anything else to that shoulder—”

“We’ll go,” Raymond grabbed one of the comm units. “Martin, c’mon!”

That made no sense. Raymond looked like he could handle himself in a regular fight, but the professor? Not so much.

“Cisco, lemme know where to go once we’re airborne.”

Raymond pulled a strange device out of his pocket, fixing it to his chest as Stein jogged into the room. Holy—

“AWESOME!” Mick’s eyes were the size of saucers, reflecting the actual, real, honest-to-god flames dancing across Raymond’s shoulders.

The meta tossed the pyro a grin on his way out of the room. “This is how it’s done.”

Well…now he knew who helped Barry with the black hole.

Iris brought up the external feed on the third monitor at the workstation with a grin at Mick. “You’re gonna want to see this, too,” letting his friend watch Raymond and Stein take flight. “They’re Firestorm.”

Mick just nodded. Probably without actually hearing her, eyes glued to the screen.

The fight ended pretty quick once Firestorm arrived on the scene. Raymond and Stein both tried to talk to Barry—sounded very, very odd, hearing the professor’s inflections coming from Raymond. The speedster took off as soon as Nimbus went down. Firestorm may be able to fly, but they couldn’t keep up with the Flash.

This routine was getting old. Almost three weeks since the fight in the rail yard, and still no sign of Barry. Not physically, anyway. The kid was back to suiting up regularly, but refused all attempts at
communication. Took more risks than usual, if West’s reports were accurate. Had Len’s teeth on edge. Firestorm wasn’t always able to provide backup, either. After watching Barry get his ass kicked last night…Len was done with this shit.

Beyond showing up at CCPD and the limited information STAR Labs received every time he donned the Flash suit, the kid might as well have been a ghost. Len even went so far as to borrow Caitlin’s car and make a run back to their building, but he wasn’t home. Wanted to wait, but Len wasn’t ready to leave the Rogues at the Lab without supervision.

All of them were still there. Practically living alongside the scientists. Even though it would be easy enough to go home and return to STAR Labs for physical therapy sessions with Caitlin. He, Lisa and Mick were nowhere near a hundred percent, but that wasn’t unusual, and they were more than capable of coping.

But there still wasn’t any sign of Barry. Mick now had Raymond and Stein to talk to…anyone else and Len would be tempted to call the whole thing ‘cute’. Mick practically followed both halves of Firestorm around the place, bombarding them with questions and requests. Both men were surprisingly accommodating, and he’d never seen the pyromaniac so relaxed. Especially since he hadn’t burned anything since the fight.

Lisa wasn’t exactly in a hurry to leave either. Not when she got to spend so much time with her precious crush. Cisco, for his part, was still refusing to do more than flirt…and upgrade her gun.

Following Barry’s return to being the Flash, Cisco approached the three of them, full of ideas to make their weapons more versatile. Additional settings for the cold gun, tweaks to the substance emitted by Lisa’s baby to make it permeable to oxygen, and reversible. Mick’s was still in the brainstorming phase. Fire was much more difficult to control, and would take more than a handful of temperature settings to make the gun manageable. All of it was a work in progress, in a fascinating new direction.

Hartley split his time between working with Stein on something relating to sound and bickering with Cisco over the weapons and how to best go about realizing their planned improvements.

Without looking, their uneasy truce began to take on a life of its own. West wasn’t thrilled, but he kept most of his barbed comments to himself. Team Flash—Len was so disappointed with Cisco over such an unimaginative name—weren’t letting the detective’s asides interfere with this new dynamic.

Now Barry just needed to get his head out of his ass. Len wasn’t alone in thinking that, either.

The Wests were having yet another discussion about their less than stellar attempts to get through to the kid. That they were perfectly comfortable having said discussion in the lounge, with him and Lisa there said a lot about the current state of affairs. Between the Rogues and STAR Labs. Between Barry and the rest of them.

“Dad, I’ll give him ‘til Monday, then I’m staking out his lab until he finally talks to me.” Iris sighed.

“Good luck. Hopefully you’ll be able to get through to him. Bear couldn’t get away from me fast enough at the scene this morning.”

“Mhmm. What did you do? Bring up Flash Day again?”

The detective’s sheepish expression said it all.

“Seriously, Dad?”
“I know, baby. but at least it got a reaction out of him. That’s—” he shrugged, “something.”

The reporter shook her head. “I love you both, but I really wish Barry didn’t pick up on your silent treatment routine. With his powers he can avoid us forever.”

Len couldn’t believe they were willing to let Barry shoulder all of this crap alone. Between knowing the kid better than literally anyone and the sheer scientific genius on hand at STAR Labs—letting Barry continue this lone wolf act was not helping. Monday wouldn’t do. Scarlet already wallowed for far too long.

“Lenny…”

“Lisa?”

“Just go already, Lenny. I’m tired of watching you mope around.”

“Lise—”

“You’re making the rest of us miserable. All of your brooding is scaring Cisco,” she pouted.

“What? Um…no, no it’s not,” Cisco’s head shot up. “But…she’s got a point, Cold. Caitlin said you’d be fine as long as you keep the sling on, and Barry’s always had a hard time backing down from challenges, so…” he shrugged. “Joe said he’s sleeping at the apartment, so, I dunno…ambush him? I’ll even let you take the cold gun if you promise not to actually shoot him with it.”

Len doubted the cold gun was the right prop this time, but it was tempting…Len tilted his head, considering.

“Oh for fuck’s sake, just go Len. I’m more than capable of keeping Hartley in line, and Mick has yet to stop fanboying over Firestorm, so we don’t have to worry about him.”

He crossed his arms. Attempted to, frowned when the sling made that…difficult. Wouldn’t do to cave too quickly.

Cisco glanced at his phone. “His shift is over at 5 today.”

Len raised an eyebrow at that, not quite sure he wanted to know how the engineer knew that.

“I don’t have his schedule memorized or anything—texted Eddie.” Cisco grinned. “Plenty of time for you to go home, shower, and plan an ambush.”

“Saying I stink, kid?” Len glared without much heat.

“Well, you did just finish up PT with Caitlin, so…” he trailed off amid Lisa’s laughter.

Len turned on his heel and left instead of bothering to respond. He had a speedster to corner, after all.

Chapter End Notes

Also, feel free to hit me up on tumblr

And yes, I did borrow Mick and Ronnie's lines from the Fight Club, with some slight alterations
Almost...

Chapter Notes

Ack, sorry this took so long, guys, the muses were not cooperating. THANK YOU so much Crimson and Liu, for your continued help and assistance, and to EVERYONE who continues to read, enjoy, and review.

Please let me know what you think!

Barry sighed, glad for the escape that having his own apartment offered. It hadn’t been easy these past few weeks. Trying to come to terms with what he did...yet another stellar example of why he was too dangerous to be around. It was bad enough that he put everyone he cared about in danger simply because they were close to the Flash, but now he knew, he had proof, that he himself also presented a real threat to their safety. Barry should’ve realized it earlier; the first time he and Bivolo crossed paths, but he’d been caught in the fun of everything, the comradery, being able to help, working with Oliver, having a team of his own. Now, though, he knew better.

He tossed his keys and phone at the table beside the door, shrugging out of his coat and bag and leaving them in a heap. At least here he could just be; he didn’t have to spend so much energy dodging Joe and Eddie...and Cisco, and Iris. Hell, even Caitlin stopped by his lab at CCPD yesterday. Between them and Wells’ lawyer, and the bullshit that was the upcoming Flash Day—which he would not attend, he was no hero—Barry hadn’t felt so powerless in years. Not since his dad was arrested.

It was just so hard. Barry knew that pushing everyone away was the right thing to do, but it wasn’t easy. Ok, the actual avoiding was, especially with his powers, but he didn't realize how much he came to rely on and enjoy...well, having more people in his life. More than his dad, Joe, and Iris.

He could reach out to the few friends he kept in touch with since college. Except they were more along the lines of acquaintances, especially now. Barry also didn’t have the energy to come up with something that would explain why he was such a mess. Telling anyone else the truth was out of the question. He wished—ok, fine, Barry wished a lot of things. But right now, it’d be nice...he wished Len was home, or that he didn’t know the risks of messing with the timeline.

Barry made his way further into the darkened apartment on his way to the kitchen. At least he restocked his fridge, for once.

The lamp clicked on when he entered the living room, making Barry nearly jump out of his skin. His mind was racing as he tried to get his heart rate under control, trying to figure out what to do. Because Len was here. In his apartment. Looking so, so good. Even though he was glaring. Barry just stared for far too long, making note of the sling on his left arm, the fading bruises on Len’s cheekbone...Barry tried not to cringe at the visual reminders of what he did. Instead he focused on the way the black dress shirt stretched across Len’s chest and shoulders.

Barry knew he missed Len. Between the thief’s disappearing act following their kiss in the hallway and then...after. It was just so good to see him. A little worse for wear, but clearly alive and healing. It was a huge relief; some of the tension left Barry’s shoulders. But it didn’t last—nerves rushing in to fill the vacuum.
Len dragged the desk chair out of his bedroom to pull it off. Of course he did. Barry couldn’t help the small smile at his supervillain chair swivel reveal. He had no idea how long the other man had waited there staring at the wall and waiting for Barry to walk in the door, all in the name of a dramatic entrance. Under practically any other circumstance, Barry would be giving him crap for being such a huge dork. But this was different.

But for real, what was Len doing in his apartment? It didn’t—

“What, no hello?” Len drawled, getting to his feet.

“Hi?” Barry didn’t get it. At all. He thought…given what happened, and—

“Look,” Barry rubbed the back of his neck, looking down. “I…you—” he sighed and started over. “You didn’t have to…to come here and go through all this trouble. I mean, I know you don’t—that…that, even if there was anything…You. It’s over. Now. And I don’t…I get it completely. ‘m not exactly safe to be around, and…” he trailed off, shrugging, eyes fixed on the edge of the rug. It was hard enough to get that out. There was no way he would’ve managed anything at all if he had...if he looked up and saw the contempt on Len’s face.

Why was this so fucking hard?

“Barry—”

“No, it’s fine. I get it. You can go now, and—” he swallowed around the lump in his throat, “you don’t have to worry. I’ll…” he wrapped his arms around himself, “I’ll stay away from you. The Rogues, too.” It was the least he could do, after what happened.

Barry kept his eyes glued to the floor, even as he heard, and then saw Len moving towards him. He tensed. Not that he had anywhere to run to, not now. Not anymore. Joe was probably home having dinner, and everyone else barely left STAR Labs since the fight, and Len was here. Less than a foot away.

“Barry…”

He flinched. Len sighed.

“Scarlet, will you just look at me?” Len’s voice was quiet and cautious, like he was trying to keep Barry from bolting.

Barry hated that it worked. Len used the same tone after Barry woke up from that nightmare, while they talked. He glanced up at Len, eyes drawn to the fading bruises, then fixed on a point on the wall just behind the older man. He still couldn’t bring himself to look Len in the eye for more than a few seconds at a time.

“Thank you. Now, what’re you talking about?”

“What? Um…you’re kidding, right? I almost—why would you…?”

“No, Barry, I’m not. None of how that played out is on you.”

“Bullshit it’s not. If I hadn’t—” he brought his hands up, shaking his head. How did Len not get it?

Barry stormed off to the kitchen. It wasn’t exactly far, but he needed a moment. Or five. And some space. It wasn’t easy to think with Len so close, especially not with the obvious evidence of the fight-gone-wrong. This was not how he pictured their first interaction would go. Not that Barry let
himself think about it in too much detail, but still. He wasn’t ready for this.

“Don’t even think about flashing out on me again.” Len was hot on his heels. “I’ll say it again; third time’s a charm, right?” The corner of his lips quirked up for a second. “Nothing that happened at the railyard was your fault, Barry.”

It would’ve been so easy to tap into the speedforce and get the hell out of there, but as much as he really, really wanted to run, a larger part of him wanted to stay. He wanted, probably needed, to hear what Len had to say.

“But—”

“No.” Len cut him off. “I brought Bivolo along. Not like you asked to see red.”

Barry paced the couple steps between the island, sink, and fridge. Frustrated. He was keyed up—his powers were definitely tied to his emotions at times like this, making him even more restless. He stopped, whirling to face Len, one hand rubbing the back of his neck. “Yeah, fine. But that doesn’t change what I did,” he waved his free hand for emphasis, indicating the sling, bruises, all of it.

The urge to run was getting stronger—maybe not away, but at least back into the living room where he could pace properly. But Len was in the doorway, boxing him in. It would’ve been easy enough to shoulder past, but he didn’t want to make things worse.

“And it’s not like you planned for it to happen either. You told Raider to leave me alone.”

Len’s eyes narrowed at that. “Take it Cisco isn’t the only one with access to STAR Labs surveillance system. Should upgrade that, by the way.

“Barry...you rouged us up more than you would’ve otherwise, but—”

“‘But’ nothing, Len. Bivolo doesn’t invent anything. He just makes it...more intense. I hurt—” he swallowed, “I went after you guys like that because on some level I wanted to.” Barry slumped against the counter, “how can you possibly be ok with that? Or be willing to look past it?”

Len actually laughed at him, even though the sound had no humor in it. “Would’ve taken you seconds to kill us. Less. You didn’t.”

“Not for lack of trying.”

“Bullshit. If you had tried, we’d be dead.”

“Awesome...because my body count isn’t high enough already.” Barry sneered.

“Stop with the guilt crap. No way you coulda known about the singularity, Barry.”

“We knew it was a risk. I should’ve—”

“Should’ve what Barry? Not have been human?” Len closed the distance between them. “Don’t have all the details, but I know enough. Wells—Thawne—whatever, he manipulated you from the moment you found out about your powers. Hell, probably before that. He offered you the one thing you wanted for well over a decade and played you like a fiddle until you agreed.”

“He didn’t exactly have to do a whole lot of convincing,” Barry muttered.

“Doubt that. Shit went sideways, but you fixed it.”
“Not fast enough. Not before all those people—”

“Christ. Stop holding yourself to such an impossibly high standard. Use just a fraction of the understanding and forgiveness you’re so free with and give yourself a goddamn break.”

“You don’t get it. I have these powers, and I don’t...I can’t—I should be helping people. Not putting them in danger, or getting them killed.” He swallowed hard, wiping angrily at his eyes. “Or killing them myself.”

“You’re not responsible for everyone, Barry. Sometimes, shit just happens. It’s the risk we all take —”

“Yeah. Right. Sure.” Barry stared down at the granite counter top, hanging onto the edge hard enough to turn his knuckles white. “I’m pretty sure I’ve burned through way more than my fair share of chances by now.” He turned around to face Len once more, arms crossed. “You’re right about one thing at least. Shit does happen. Is this your way of telling me that you’re gonna keep working with Bivolo?”

Len’s eyes narrowed, “Fuck no,” he growled.

If he could’ve, Barry would’ve been tempted to take a step back in the face of Len’s sudden anger.

“Why not? He didn’t know that’d happen.”

“He disobeyed my orders. Got the four of us, the rest of his goddamn team, seriously injured. Recovery will take weeks if not months.” Len’s voice was cold and precise. “He also ditched us.”

“But—”

“No. There’s no ‘but’ here, Barry. His desire for a trick, a minor twisted revenge is what got us injured. His actions, not yours. Got it?”

“I—” The speedster looked down again, crossing his arms more tightly and shook his head. “No, I can’t accept that. Bivolo? He didn’t know, and...and I did. Last time,” he sighed. “It wasn’t pretty. I should’ve been more careful, done more recon. You practically told me you were gonna recruit him at Ferris Air, so it’s not like I should’ve been surprised.” Barry let out a humorless laugh. “Besides, we’re not exactly on the same side. And having Rainbow Raider as a Rogue gives you one hell of an advantage.”

“Not if he won’t stick to the plan.”

“Yeah, because Heat Wave never goes off-book.”

“I am intimately familiar with Mick’s particular brand of improvisation and can easily counter when necessary. Came to terms with it years ago. Bivolo’s new, trying to make a name for himself—don’t need that kind of ego.”

“But his powers provide more of an asset than Rory’s gun. He can keep people away, create hands-off distractions…basically make it so much easier for you to keep up your end of our agreement.”

“His talents are useless if he cannot fully control the outcome,” Len snapped. “Stop defending him.”

Wait...Barry paused for a second, retort on the tip of his tongue, confused. “Why are you pissed? I’m just pointing out the obvious.”
“Not pissed, Barry. Furious.” Len stalked closer, glaring. “I’m furious because it would’ve been so easy for anyone to kill in that state. For you to kill while you were like that. Would’ve destroyed you.”

Barry scoffed. “That’d make your life simpler,” Len’s glare intensified and what he actually said finally caught up with the speedster. “Wait...what?” he blinked, “me? Why does that matter?” His voice was barely a whisper. “Why do I matter?”

“Because Central City needs the Flash.”

Barry’s shoulders slumped and he curled in on himself a little more, but Len wasn’t done.

“Because your friends and family need you.”

Right. So he could put them in even more danger.

But Len was close now, so close. Practically pinning him to the counter. Not that it was necessary. Barry was trapped, eyes fixed on Len’s. They were steely blue, still angry but giving way to something else. Barry couldn’t look away if he tried.

“Because you fucking matter to me. Flash. Barry.”

Len didn’t give him any time to process, closing the last distance between them and kissing him hard.

Oh. Ohhh. Yes, wow. His arms immediately wrapped around Len’s shoulders, pushing off the counter. Barry couldn’t quite believe it, but there was no way he could do anything but respond with enthusiasm. Especially after last time.

Len’s good hand slid up into his hair, blunt nails raking his scalp. Barry whimpered, pressing closer, nipping Len’s bottom lip, sucking, then soothing with his tongue.

Then it was Len’s turn to groan and Barry took advantage, licking into his mouth. Slowly and thoroughly mapping, tracing along teeth. Or that was the plan, until Len’s lips twitched a bit and he began to suck, teasing Barry’s tongue with his own, making it far too easy to imagine that talented mouth wrapped around an entirely different part of his body. But that would mean they’d have to stop kissing.

Hands continued to roam while they kissed…ok, practically devoured each other. And damn could Len kiss. It had been a while, but still Barry had never been kissed quite like this before. Or kissed someone else like this. It was deep and possessive, frantic yet somehow unhurried. Like they knew they had all the time in the world, but still couldn’t believe they wasted so much time not doing this. Barry couldn’t, anyway, but judging by Len’s responses he would probably agree. If stopping to have dumb conversations was somehow a better option than this. Which it so, so wasn’t.

Air was starting to become an issue, but—he moaned, brain short-circuiting a little when Len did that. Oh yeah. Air. Totally overrated.

Barry shivered slightly—ok, more than slightly, since somehow Len managed to tug his shirt up until it bunched under his arms—when his back made contact with the pantry door. Barry had been just as busy, one hand halfway up the back of Len’s shirt, the other tugging at his jeans, thumb hooked into the waistband. He managed to work the rest of his fingers under the fabric, both denim and cotton, trapped against warm skin. Not exactly ideal, but Barry was all for touching skin.

Oh, except—yes. Len shifted and Barry slid his hand forward enough—well, not quite enough, but better—his thumb finding the crest of Len’s hip, pressing there, fingers splayed—as much as they
could be—along his thigh. And, damn, *that* was why…Len’s fingers traced along his abs, under his pec…yeah. Clothes were definitely starting to be a problem.

Somehow they stumbled out into the living room, attached at the lips, unable—unwilling—to stop, not even for air. The speedster had no idea how much time passed. And he really couldn’t care less, at least not until Len started to draw back. Barry chased his lips, catching the bottom one, always full, but now kiss-swollen, between his teeth, biting less gently. It made Len gasp, his hips jerking forward enough to make them both groan.

“Lose the shirt, Scarlet.”

Oh. Len sounded, wow. Barry bit back a moan. Len’s voice was rough and deep and smooth and oh so hot. The fact that he was nosing along Barry’s neck, behind his ear, also totally did *not* help when it came to coordination. He bit his lip, sighing internally because he’d have to…oh…yeah, no, that would totally work.

Barry caught Len’s eye, grinning for a moment before putting his powers to one of the best uses ever—flashing out of his shirt and getting Len’s belt off, pants unbuttoned in less than a blink.

“Handy.”

The speedster already knew he liked Len’s lopsided smile, but it looked so much better at close range, when his lips were that shade of red. From kissing Barry. Not that he got long to admire the expression, Len wasted no time, lips finding that spot behind Barry’s ear again, then down his neck…wow. Good thing for the wall, because his knees were officially jelly. Barry’s hands found their way to Len’s hips again, sliding his jeans down until both hands found warm skin covering strong muscle. Hanging on.

Barry knew his neck was a weak spot, but nothing like this. He did his best to stay quiet, but Len noticed anyway. Because the older man was nothing if not observant. Barry felt him smirk, then teeth and sucking heat…fuck. So much for staying quiet, but he couldn’t help it. Len was so good at this. What little brainpower Barry still had left was going towards controlling his powers. Because if he thought things got steamy with Linda, it was nothing compared to now. Who knew Captain Cold ran so hot? Barry stifled a snicker at the horrible pun, gathering himself a little. There were way better places to do this than the wall next to his TV.

He surged forward to kiss Len when the man drew back slightly to admire his handiwork—there was no way Barry’s neck wasn’t covered in hiccups, or wouldn’t be soon enough. Good thing he healed fast.

Barry pushed away from the wall, taking over the kiss, not quite as deep as before, but still scorching, directing them towards the bedroom. Easier said than done; Len stumbled, not entirely surprising—or it wouldn’t be if thinking were a priority—given that his jeans were halfway off and falling. They steadied, Barry giggling out of the kiss. Len just smirked and rolled his eyes, failing so hard in his attempt to look annoyed. Barry grinned, darting in to kiss the tip of his nose, then his lips, working together to get the jeans off. Which only succeeded *after* Len stepped out of his shoes.

Somehow Len had his jeans undone by the time they made it into the bedroom, Len’s hand oh so slowly pulling down the zipper, making him groan around their tongues, already more than halfway hard, and if Len kept doing *that* with his fingers, it wouldn’t take long.

Len took a large step back, tugging Barry along by his now-open fly. Well, tried to, anyway, but they were a lot closer to the bed than anticipated. Happy accidents. Len fell backwards onto the mattress, bringing Barry down on top of him. Perfect—
“Shit—“ Len groaned.

Barry’s head flew up, catching the pained wince and grimace before Len could mask the expression.

Oh fuck, what had he done? Barry froze as reality set in. Guilt and concern chased away the heat from seconds ago, way more effectively than any cold shower. Probably appropriate, since Cold got him all hot and bothered to begin with. He bit his lip, flashing up and away from Len. Well, he tried to, anyway.

Len was faster, grabbing his shoulder and holding tight. “Don’t you dare, Scarlet.”

“But…” Barry frowned, staring down at the strap of the sling on Len’s shoulder, holding himself up.

Len huffed, sliding the hand up into Barry’s hair, guiding him closer. Close enough for Len to stretch up for another kiss.

He tensed. Barry knew he should probably pull away, check on Len’s shoulder, and finish that talk. But…it was downright impossible for him to resist. Especially since he really didn’t want to. It may have helped that Len started carding long fingers through Barry’s hair. He sighed, relaxing into the soft kiss; so different from earlier. He shifted his weight to settle onto the mattress next to Len rather than hovering over him, legs still tangled together.

The kiss ended slowly, Barry’s eyes drifted open to find hooded cool blues barely inches away. Nowhere near as blown as before, but still different, warmer somehow. Maybe even content. The speedster opened his mouth to say…something, he’d figure it out, when his stomach decided to go first, growling loudly.

They stared at each other for a few seconds before Len’s soft chuckles had him grinning and laughing along.

“Sounds like our cue, Barry,” Len smirked, starting to untangle his legs and sit up.

Barry nodded, darting forward to steal one last kiss before he could talk himself out of it, sitting up himself. “Yeah, I guess so,” he smiled shyly. “You’re…um…you’re gonna stay, right? There’s actual food in my fridge for once, we could cook something. Or order takeout if you’d rather do that, just let me get my phone. I think it’s in my coat, and—“

“Why don’t we start with the fridge? I’d hate to undo all of our hard work,” he got to his feet, turning to face Barry. Len’s gaze was physical, looking him over, lingering on Barry’s lips, the marks that had to be obvious on his neck, down his chest to the still obvious bulge in his underwear, clearly visible given the open fly of his jeans. Barry didn’t even try to stop the blush, it was a lost cause. Plus, having Len look at him like that was really, really flattering.

He returned the favor, especially since he didn’t get a chance to admire earlier. And yeah. Putting clothes back on was totally a bad plan. Len looked amazing—not that he ever really looked bad. A rumpled, but still somehow fully buttoned, black dress shirt on over boxer-briefs with…Barry leaned closer unconsciously, then laughed. Snowflakes. Of course.

“For real, Len?” Barry grinned, laugh dying when he saw heat flare in dark blue eyes, realizing exactly how close they were, how close he was. Yes, that was an awesome—his stomach growled again. Later.

“Would you believe me if I told you Lisa gave them to me?”

“No for a second. You’re way more committed to the persona than she is.” Barry got to his feet,
fastening his jeans on the way to the kitchen. “So here’s what we’ve got to work with…”
Plans are Overrated

Chapter Summary

In which things are both familiar and entirely new

Chapter Notes

I'm gonna try the curated review option to see how it works and whether or not people like it. If you would like to keep your review private, please put *PRIVATE* on top. Otherwise, all of them will be posted.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Barry’s head was spinning...or something like that, anyway. He brought a hand up to his lips for a moment, knowing they were red and swollen. They had to be, since they were still tingling. Not to mention stretched into a huge, goofy grin. Good thing Len was behind him and couldn’t see just how big of a dork he was.

Or maybe not. After a moment’s hesitation, Barry decided to go with ‘not’. Because if Len were leading, then he’d be able to admire the other man on the way to the kitchen. The way Len was probably staring at him at that very moment. Barry shook his head a little, trying to get the butterflies in his stomach under control.

Speedster powers came in handy, Barry thought, allowing time to dilate a little. Although they had their drawbacks...without them, his tummy wouldn’t be protesting so much. Meaning he and Len would still be on his bed. And Len’s hands would probably be...

Right. That line of thought was Not Helping. God, not that he was complaining. At all. And he was totally looking forward to picking things back up after dinner. Probably.

Barry pulled open the fridge, glancing at Len over his shoulder. And kinda got stuck, because...wow. The, well, everything hit him at once. How incredible the other man looked, sauntering into the room with just the hint of a smile teasing his lips. That Barry could still taste. Half-dressed, confident in his own skin and Barry’s kitchen. Kinda maybe like he belonged. Sortof.

It was new, and definitely exciting. Even though they’d done this part before—the cooking together, and it helped. It was comfortable. Almost...almost like a beginning.

“What’re you in the mood for?” the speedster asked, grinning even as his face heated up when Len blatantly looked him up and down before answering.

To say that Len was pleased with the most recent developments between himself and Barry was an understatement. Hadn’t expected—or even hoped for—anything like this when he decided to end the
disappearing act. The most he allowed himself to consider was a conversation—rant—along the lines of what happened in the cafe. Len suppressed a snort but didn’t even bother trying to hide his smirk; Barry always surprised him. Never should’ve expected this to go any different.

He followed the speedster through his apartment, admiring the view. And what a view—The play of muscles in his back and shoulders, all long lines and understated power. Underestimated power, really. Even by Barry himself.

Len’s gaze traced over the younger man, lingering on his trim waist, narrow hips. The way his jeans rode lower than usual without a belt. Sadly they were not in danger of sliding off. Obscuring Barry’s endless legs. It was a shame Len hadn’t had the chance to get those jeans off. He couldn’t wait to appreciate the younger man from head to toe. But he could be patient. Had a feeling he’d eventually get his wish.

Now that he thought about it, this was his first opportunity to see Barry shirtless. Despite a few rounds of bed sharing, Scarlet always covered up. Hiding that incredible body of his beneath baggy layers. When he wasn’t tearing around the city in skin-tight red leather, anyway. Hard to believe, but even the Flash suit didn’t do Barry justice.

Worst part was Len knew Barry had no idea how appealing he was. How much he had to offer. Had to be the case. If not...If Barry had any concept of how incredible he was, how much he brought to the table there was no way he’d ever consider Len deserving.

Being interrupted, while inconvenient, was probably for the best. Knew that Barry dove into things head first, but Len? Not for years. He hadn’t been so impulsive since his first few years after escaping, after abandoning Lisa—

This was uncharted territory. Barry didn’t do casual, Len knew that. Deduced as much from his research into the Flash. Barry would...assume. Draw certain conclusions. Ones that Len wasn’t entirely comfortable with. He never did relationships. Not after the first few—and yes, three counted as a ‘few’, Lisa—horrible failed attempts early on.

His eyes were drawn to the bruises and bite marks scattered across Barry’s neck and shoulders. They wouldn’t last, not with how quickly the speedster healed. Until then, the marks were a reminder. Proof that it happened, that this wasn’t a dream. Speed healing just meant Len would have to repeat the process. Conduct tests, research. Until he could predict how long they’d last.

Quite the hardship. For both of them; Barry’s neck was exceptionally sensitive. Not just his neck, either. Scarlet was so responsive, more than anyone else Len had encountered. More than he imagined possible.

Barry’s voice pulled him out of his thoughts, slowly looking him up and down, taking his time.

“Many things, Scarlet,” Len grinned and stepped up beside the speedster, perusing the contents of the fridge. Standing closer than strictly necessary, of course. Shoulders touching.

One good arm limited things, and they’d need to go for quantity. And high calories. This close it was easy to tell that Barry hadn’t been eating properly. Face more gaunt than Len remembered. It was subtle. Probably would’ve missed it if not for the impulsive kiss a few weeks ago.

“Any preferences?”

Barry hummed thoughtfully, leaning against Len. Relaxed even more when Len gave into impulse, good arm wrapping around his waist. Hand sliding lower, fingers tracing the groove of Barry’s hip,
earning him a subtle shiver.

“I’m gonna stick to things relating to food for now.”

“It’d be helpful, Barry,” Len said, “given the downside of ignoring your stomach, hmm?”

“Mmhm. Something quick’d be good. Or quick-ish. Too bad I didn’t know you were coming.”

Wasn’t *that* interesting. “Oh? Any reason in particular?”

“Yup. I would’ve grabbed the ingredients for that chili mac and cheese.” Barry grinned.

“Knew it. Only interested in my cooking skills.” Len mock-sighed, attempting to sound mournful.

“What’d you expect?” he teased. “I *know* you’re good at that...everything else’s just speculation.”

“That how you wanna play it?” Len drawled. Enjoying Barry’s noticeable reaction when his voice dropped to a rumble. “Consider recent…events,” eyes slowly moving from Barry’s lips to his neck, “a test run.”

“You sure? Awfully small sample size to draw a meaningful conclusion,” Barry needled, mischievous smile lighting his face.

Len couldn’t help shaking his head at that. “Grade on a curve, Scarlet. Or call it an incomplete since I’m one arm down.”

Barry stiffened, tensing instantly, stepping away. Shit. Len closed his eyes for a moment, arm falling away.

“Barry that’s not—”

“Len, it’s…” he heaved a sigh. “What about pasta with a half-assed Bolognese? I’ve got sausage, tomatoes, and everything else to throw together a quick sauce.”

The thief nodded, frowning. Left it for now, allowed the subject change. “What kind of pasta?” he asked from the pantry.

“Just...whatever’s fine.” Barry was a blur, pan appearing on the stove, pot filling in the sink.

“Not terribly helpful, but I can work with that. More to the point, one box or two?” Wanted to keep Barry talking, try to recapture the banter from before.

“C’mon. One’s more than enough.”

Len’s raised eyebrow expressed his opinion on the matter, seconded by another protest from Barry’s stomach. “Sure about that?” he smirked.

“Fine, better make it two.” Barry rolled his eyes. “Opinion on adding cheese?”

Len shoved an energy bar into the sling, grabbed the pasta, shutting off the sink as he went. Reached for the pot until the sling tugged. Right, one-handed did no good for now. It was strange—he was used to aching for months after a dislocation, ever since the first two. But there hadn’t been pain for a few days now, not including landing on it earlier. Only stuck with the sling in deference to Caitlin. And Lisa.

He shook his head, setting that aside and stepping up behind the speedster. “Depends. What’re you
“thinking?”

“Taleggio, gorgonzola dolce...maybe some mozz, too.”

“That works. I grabbed rigatoni—thinking baked?”

Barry grinned. “Can do, especially considering the rave reviews of my baked goods,” he finished with an exaggerated wink.

Heh. Two could play that game. “Pastries aren’t all I found delicious, Scarlet.” Len purred with a smug smirk and long, lingering glance. He was impressed—Barry managed to keep a straight face for a whole eighteen seconds before dissolving into giggles.

“Yeah, right. Bet you pun like that with all your dates,” Barry said, shaking his head a little.

“Only the ones that’ll appreciate it,” he tilted his head, catching Barry’s eye. The kid really had no idea when he was being complemented. Appreciated. Len made a mental note to work on that; falling into the familiar teasing, flirting, and banter that happened when they cooked together.

Not entirely familiar; Len allowed Barry to take the lead with the prep work. Contributing where he could without pushing too hard. Didn’t want to draw attention to his injuries. Not now. Instead he studied Barry as he darted around the room.

Made some progress, Len was pleased to note. Barry was lighter than he was when he walked into the apartment. Happier. Smiles reached his eyes. But the cloud was still there. The guilt. Blame. Self-doubt.

Grief.

Had more to discuss. More to do—Barry was stubborn, and Len was beginning to suspect that actions counted the most when it came to the speedster. He got the ball rolling, but he’d need...assistance. To keep things going in the right direction.

Len pulled out the energy bar, waiting for Barry to close the oven. “Here,” he held it out, recapturing Barry’s attention. “Should probably down one of these while we wait.”

Barry scrunched his nose, shaking his head. “That’s ok. They taste horrible, I can—” his features shifted into a grimace, one hand rubbing his stomach. “Ugh. Ok, fine,” he sighed. “Prolly need the calories anyway.”

Len chose not to comment, watching Barry down the bar at Flash-speed.

“Gross,” he chased the bar with a full glass of water. “I keep forgetting to talk to Cisco about these.”

“Hmm?”

“Yeah. Between the two of us we should be able to make these things taste ok.”


“Not at all. You’re just underestimating how disgusting they are to begin with.”

“Doubtful,” he had to choke down some vile things the first few years after he left home.

“For real, though, calling these cardboard is an insult to the box.”
Len snickered at that. “Any thought to changing the base? Makes sense if they’re as bad as you claim.”

“Given the amount of calories we have to pack into these, there isn’t a whole lot of wiggle room in the basic formula,” Barry said.

“In that case…” Len tilted his head, considering. “Perhaps the three of us should put our heads together.” He was already considering potential options. Needed to find out the exact calorie count and nutritional breakdown from Cisco. Confer with Caitlin to discuss Barry’s metabolic requirements —

Barry laughed.

“What?” Len narrowed his eyes at the giggling brunette.

“Nothing.” The kid’s grin said otherwise. “Movie?”

He rolled his eyes at the clumsy subject change. “Sounds good. What’re you in—”

“Nope. You get to choose this time. I picked the last two lineups.”

“Fair play is new territory for us. Sure you’re ready for it?”

Barry responded by sticking his tongue out. So much for playing fair. Something that childish should not be so distracting. “Don’t worry, I’m sure you’ll work out an advantage soon enough.”

He wanted a taste. “Hmmm,” Len stepped closer, into Barry’s space. Tilted his head just enough to fit. Stealing a kiss, smiling when Barry chased his lips. “Netflix and chill, Barry, or an actual movie?” he murmured into the nearly nonexistent gap between their mouths. Eyes focused on the heat in Scarlet’s hazel eyes. The way it grew along with that blush. Barry was clearly considering his options, hands finding Len’s hips, thumbs lightly stroking skin.

“Start with a movie and go from there?” Barry asked, biting his lip, eyes dropping to the side. Expecting the worst, the confidence from earlier draining out of him.

Len resisted the urge to sigh, knew it would just give the wrong impression. “I’m flexible,” Len quirked a smile.

Which only made the speedster tense further for some reason. Perfect.

This time he did sigh, shifting his weight to give Barry more space. Not wanting him to feel trapped. Not too far, though. Didn’t want to break the connection between them. Lose the warmth of Barry’s hands on his hips. “Barry…” he paused, carefully choosing his words. “Momentum, teasing, thorough enjoyment, and lack of clothing aside, there’s no rush. Or expectations.”

“I didn’t think so, or…” Barry made eye contact again, taking a deep breath. Apprehension joined by desire and vulnerability. “It’s not that I don’t want to pick up where we left off, but…” he trailed off.

“Things are...complicated?” Len offered with a rueful smile.

“Yeah.” Barry chuckled, “yeah, that’s one way to put it.” He brought a hand up to rub at the back of his neck.

“Chill, Barry,” he smirked. It became a smile when the speedster rolled his eyes at the pun. “May not be what you’re used to, but there’s something to be said for taking your time. Just because you can
go faster than sound doesn’t mean you should.” That got a laugh. “Best things require patience. Not your forte, I know. But I’d be happy to show you how it’s done.”

“I’m sure you would,” Barry grinned, leaning against the counter and letting some of his nerves go.

All the food was gone less than twenty minutes into Robin Hood: Men in Tights. Cleanup took three. Mostly because Len insisted on loading the dishwasher himself. Only fair, since Barry did most of the cooking.

From there...well. Len barely had a chance to register the determined glint in Barry’s eye before he found himself flat on his back. On the couch. With Barry stretched out on top of him wearing a hesitant, hopeful smile.

“There are these things called words, you know.” Len couldn’t help but tease.

Barry pressed closer, tangling their legs together as he did. Slipped a thigh between his legs—lean and firm against his cock. Rough denim against Len’s bare skin. Shit; should not feel as good as it did. “Yeah, but this was way more efficient.” He said with a sunny grin. “Besides, I didn’t think you’d object.”

“Fair enough.” No, Len had no intention of objecting. He was half-hard already—Barry, too—right hand settling at the small of his back. Slid his foot up the couch just enough to increase the pressure a fraction; Scarlet rewarded him with a quick inhale. So very responsive. Index finger tracing along the waistband of Barry’s jeans. Slipped under both denim and elastic. He was rewarded with a shiver and happy-sounding sigh.

“Comfy?”


Len inhaled sharply when Barry decided a detour was in order. Circling Len’s nipple with blunt nails. He licked his way into the speedster’s mouth, exploring. Something Barry took as a challenge. Or opportunity.

Scraping Barry’s tongue with his teeth elicited a full-body shiver, grinding their hips together. Definitely an opportunity.

Of all the times not to have full use of his arms—Len knew Barry’s scalp was sensitive, but taking advantage meant he’d have to remove his hand. Not happening. Not when he had a firm grip on Barry’s incredible ass. Len squeezed; rewarded by a loud moan.

And a snicker.

“No, no, no.”

Len glanced over in time to see Broomhilde glare at Maid Marion.

“Sorry, that line always cracks me up,” Barry apologized.

“My fault, I picked the movie.” Len smiled, eyes hooded. “Probably for the best, this next part…”
“Lend me your ears”
“...That’s disgusting.”

The Churchill speech and Dave Chappelle’s warm up had them both laughing and quoting along.

“Yeah,” Barry kissed his lips, chin, jaw before nuzzling—there was no other word for it—closer, tucking his head into the space under Len’s chin. “This whole next bit, actually...at least through the stealth catapult...Kissing probably isn’t safe. Quote off?”

“Sure,” tightened his grip on firm muscle, “got a reward in mind?”

“It’s a—” Barry gasped, subtly rocking into his hand, “—secret.” And retaliated by biting Len’s collarbone.

“Challenge—mmm—accepted,” Len managed, stifling a much louder moan when Barry followed up by blowing softly over sensitized skin.

Of course Barry just took that as encouragement. Len did his best to focus; hand wedged between them. Worked to get Barry’s jeans open and off.

“No fair,” Scarlet attempted to pout. Even as he shifted to give Len more room to maneuver. “Your shirt’s stuck.”

“Thought you were Ahh—” teeth scraping along, followed by—fuck—Barry was tracing, no, licking. Following ink with a hot tongue and the hint of teeth. Somehow still managing to whisper along with the movie.

He’d have to fix that. Now that he got Scarlet’s jeans open it shouldn’t be too difficult. Len made full use of the space available, tracing the outline of Barry’s cock through the cotton of his underwear; palmed him. Wringing a breathy moan that Len could not wait to hear more of. Chased by a full-body shudder that left him tingling. Damn, that was something else—

“Oh fuck, yes. That.” Barry groaned, “do that—”

Len obliged, rewarded by another tingling shiver. And—goddamn—by a hot mouth closing over his nipple. Drawing out a low “shit, Barry—”

“Again.” the other panted. “Wow. Len, that’s...Mmmmm.”

“Mmmmm, indeed.” Len smirked, couldn’t help it. Voice sounding rough even to his own ears. He repeated the action a third time, then shifted. Wrapped his arm around Barry once more, palming his ass. Used the leverage to bring their hips together.

Rocking once. Twice. And fuck, there was that shiver—vibration?—again, gone almost before Len registered the feeling. Replaced by cool air on his overheated skin. What the—?

What just happened? Where was—Len sat up, spotting Barry across the room, staring at his hands. Jeans a puddle by the coffee table.

“Barry?”

“Sorry! sorry. That was—weird, right? I didn’t mean to do it, it just happens sometimes, when I’m...well...Turned on, I guess. And god, I’m so...yeah.” The rambling continued, but Len was more interested in his body language. Eyes downcast, rubbing the back of his neck, shoulders hunched.
That wouldn’t do. “It’s all ruined now. Right? Sorry—”

He got to his feet, making his way to the speedster. Careful not to box him in. “Hey,” he tilted Barry’s chin up to make eye contact. “Nothing’s ruined, and you have no reason to be sorry.” Punctuated his words with a soft kiss.

“Really? It’s just…” he sighed. “It’s kinda a side effect of my powers. And it’s totally embarrassing because I can’t control it. Not like I’ve had much chance to practice…” Barry bit his lip and Len kept silent, waiting.

“When I get turned on, like really really into it I lose control of my powers and I vibrate everywhere.”

Len just blinked. That was a little fast for him.

“And shit, that was at superspeed, wasn’t it?” he didn’t wait for a response. “Um… long story short…I kinda… Vibrate. When I get turned on.”

Oh. Oh. That was—Len’s jaw dropped, mind whirling with the possibilities. Fuck. The kid could vibrate. Except Barry was still talking.

“It’s way too weird, right? I haven’t—”

“No, no. Not at all,” Len insisted, kissing the incredulous look off Barry’s face. “You can vibrate, Barry.”

“But—”


Barry nodded, beginning to perk back up.

“Control will come. Or not. But either way I look forward to finding out.”


“Lead the way. Got an extra toothbrush?” Len stole a quick kiss on Barry’s sunny grin.

“Of course—Isn’t yours next door? Never mind.” Barry took a breath with a nod, taking Len’s hand in his with a shy smile.

They brushed their teeth side by side. Complete with stolen glances in the mirror. Not that he could help it.

Len couldn’t get enough. All that smooth skin, the freckles, his marks scattered across his neck and shoulders. Some were fading already; sadly. Couldn’t help the satisfied smile on his lips, even around the brush.

Barry caught him looking and rolled his eyes. “What?”

“Red looks good on you, Scarlet,” he smirked a little wider, blatantly looking Barry up and down.

Scarlet promptly blushed—making the marks stand out even more—living up to his nickname, and scoffed. “I look like a leopard.”
“Cheetah would be more appropriate.” Len said, chuckling when Barry bumped his shoulder. “Can you blame me for getting carried away?”

Barry just shook his head and they finished up, taking Len’s hand to cross the short distance into the bedroom.

Len gave his hand a gentle squeeze. He got it. This time it’s different. So very different. It’s not them falling asleep on the couch, or falling into bed together to ward off the nightmares. It wasn’t even like earlier that evening, caught up in what was happening. In each other. Momentum pushing them over any hurdles. But this wasn’t all of those other times. It was deliberate.

Going to bed. Together. And neither of them had to pretend it was platonic. For some reason that made Len nervous and excited and giddy all at the same time. He hid it well enough, but it was there. It wasn’t like all those times with others. Quick hookups, hotel rooms, pay-by-the-hour flops. Or even earlier attempts at building something. This time...this time it didn’t seem doomed to fail. He hoped.

“Mind giving me a hand with this?” he asked, gesturing towards the sling. Didn’t exactly need the assistance, but Barry...Barry looked like he needed to help. And Len...enjoyed the kid’s touch.

“Don’t you...shouldn’t it stay on?”

“I don’t need to sleep in it anymore, according to Caitlin. It’s fine.” Len explained, watching the furrowed brow smooth out when he mentioned the doctor.

“Well...if you’re sure. And ‘Caitlin’?” Barry’s touch was gentle, confident, as he undid the sling and carefully removed his shirt. Pressing a soft kiss to his injured shoulder. Face falling.

Len ducked his head for a proper kiss, kept it soft. Chaste.

“Mmm. There’ve been a few changes around STAR Labs that you missed.” Len winced after saying that, not wanting to ruin the mood by rekindling Barry’s guilt.

“That...sounds kinda ominous. Should I be worried?” Barry’s smile was dimmer than normal.

“Depends. Watching Mick follow Raymond and Stein around like a puppy is fairly cute. Or disturbing. Opinions vary.”

Barry cracked up. “Ok, now I know you’re full of it. I cannot imagine Heat Wave and cute in the same sentence.”

“After seeing Firestorm in action? The good doctor has some serious competition.”

Barry collapsed onto the mattress he was laughing so hard. “Footage or it didn’t happen,” he gasped out.

“There’s plenty of it, Scarlet.” Len settled into the mattress next to the giggling speedster. Hips touching, right hand coming to rest on Barry’s chest. Sliding over to trace a pec, teasing around his nipple. That got his attention.

Before Len could blink, Barry had their positions reversed. Mindful of Len’s shoulder—always so careful. Gentle fingers, warm and tentative, tracing his tattoos. Hesitant in an entirely different way than the last time they were in this position. When Barry wasn’t sure if he was allowed to touch. Now that he knew, he was careful. Curious. Like he was trying to memorize every inch of Len’s skin.
Noting the scars, but not dwelling on them. Not asking how he got them, wanting to know the story, imagining some adventure behind each one. Len wasn’t sure how much Barry knew about...how he grew up. Probably had a vague idea, at the very least. Len appreciated that Barry didn’t ask. For whatever reason.

The ink was a different story. Len struggled to keep his breathing even, but gave up when Barry decided that touching wasn’t sufficient, peppering small, light kisses across his skin. Len brought a hand up into Barry’s hair, not tugging or directing, just holding. Needing to touch. To stay grounded.

Couldn’t believe how strongly he was reacting to chaste whispers of contact between Barry’s lips and his skin. Not even anywhere particularly sensitive. Sticking to his shoulders, collarbone, the top of his pecs. He let out a shaky breath he didn’t realize he was holding. Felt Barry smile. Squeezed Len’s hip in response, pressing an open-mouthed kiss to the center of his chest before shifting, leaning over. Len pulled him in for a proper kiss. Deep but without urgency. Sliding his hands—both of them—down Barry’s back to his hips, bringing their bodies together with a moan. Except it sounded more like a yawn.

Quickly followed by another. Len groaned. Barry giggled, foreheads touching.

“At least it wasn’t me this time.” Scarlet ruined his high ground with a yawn of his own.

“Not by much.”

“Hey, still counts.” Barry kissed him once more, stretching out as he did. “Do—” he yawned, “d’you have any plans for tomorrow?”

“Just PT—”

“Can’t you reschedule?” Those puppy dog eyes were dangerous.

“With Dr. Snow.”

Barry’s face fell slightly. “Oh.” Pouting.

“Exactly. Made that mistake once—never again.”

“Yeah, staying on her good side is extremely important.” Barry giggled.

“She is a force to be reckoned with when angry,” Len hummed his agreement. “But I don’t have to see her until 1:30. All yours until then. If you’d like.”

“For real? Yes. Yes. That’s...I like. Very much.” He paused, attempting to imitate Len’s smirk. “We can explore just how useful—”

Holy fuck. Barry’s hands were vibrating. Followed by his whole body. A deliberate buzz this time, stronger than before. Just for a moment. But what a moment.

—my powers can be.” Barry’s voice was a rough promise.

“You make a compelling argument. Guess I’ll stick around”

Barry’s soft laugh quickly transformed into another yawn. “Play your cards right and I might even make breakfast.”

They settled in quickly after that. Exhaustion turning them both pliant. Barry clung tighter than normal, tighter than expected. Not that Len was complaining. The brunette typically relaxed after
drifting off, providing the necessary breathing room.

It only took Barry a minute or two to fall asleep, going boneless against Len and shifting closer. Something Len didn’t think possible. He sighed, breath ruffling Barry’s hair. Arm tightening a fraction as he closed his eyes. Letting go of the remaining tension, tension he carried for nearly a month. Maybe longer, as he joined Barry in sleep.

Iris didn’t even bother knocking on Barry’s door when she arrived with a bag of bagels as a peace offering, letting herself in with her spare key. She tiptoed into the kitchen, making her way around the clothes scattered across the living room with a sigh. The state of Barry’s apartment tended to reflect his mental state, given what happened she actually expected it to be worse than this.

No stacks of dirty dishes in the kitchen—also a good sign. She put the bagels on the table, started some water for coffee and set up the pot. It was after 9:30 and she should not feel guilty about waking Barry. Especially since she brought food. And was making coffee.

Hopping up on the counter to wait, she decided to give him a few more minutes before getting him up. Sending a quick text to let her dad know what was going on, and assuring him that she’d keep him in the loop.

The kettle clicked off and Iris stood, pouring the water and setting a timer on her phone, retrieving plates and mugs for something to do. Coffee was an extremely effective bribe, after all. But enough stalling. Barry needed to get out of his funk and Iris had over a decade’s experience in doing just that.

She squared her shoulders and headed to the bedroom door, nearly tripping over a pair of boots that she hadn’t seen Barry wearing. Maybe they were new. She’d have to compliment him on them, they were loads better than the stuff he usually wore—

“Oh my GOD!”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you Crimson, Liu, DaughterofScotland and all of the amazing people that read, give kudos and review. This thing would NOT be anywhere near as amazing without your encouragement <3.
Barry floated towards awareness, warm and content, for once. Or at least for the first time in a few weeks. Wrapped securely in strong arms, legs intertwined and buzzed hair tickling his cheek. Len. He could totally get used to this.

Except it was still dark out, he hadn’t had any nightmares, and Len was obviously not what woke him, so…oh.

Almost like it was waiting for the perfect moment, his bladder made its presence known, helped along by the muscular thigh hooked over his hips.

He steeled himself for the cold air in his room, gently untangling himself and easing out of bed. That was the idea, anyway, and it was going really well—legs free, carefully settling a pillow under Len’s head—

Nope.

Len rolled in his sleep, grabbing Barry’s arm and pulling, tucking Barry against his chest like a teddy bear. If the speedster hadn’t already been completely enchanted by Len, this would’ve sent him over the edge.

But he still needed to pee. His next escape attempt was similarly thwarted, accompanied by an unhappy grumble. Barry sighed. He could easily use his powers to escape the other man’s grasp, but that would probably wake him….and the surge of adrenaline that accompanied the speed force made going back to sleep impossible for hours. And it wasn’t as much fun as what he had in mind.

Barry squirmed to lay on his back; that way he could press a soft kiss to Len’s temple.

“Hey,” he whispered against smooth skin.

“Hnn,” Len wasn’t too impressed.
Barry tried again. “Len…”

“Mmmm wa’? ‘snot mornin’. Sleep,” he whined petulantly, tightening his hold.

“Need to get up.”

“Hn. Comfy. Stay.” Ok, sleepy Len was beyond adorable—an adjective the speedster knew he’d hate.

“My bladder disagrees. C’mon, lemme up…I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Better be,” this time Len finally loosened his grip and Barry moved quickly, just in case he changed his mind.

The combination of cold air and chilly tile made curling back up under the blankets even more appealing once Barry had gone about his business. Still, he couldn’t help lingering in the doorway for a moment when he returned. Savoring the sight of Len in his bed, sleep smoothing every line in his body.

“Gonna just stand there, Scarlet?” Len asked quietly, eyes still closed.

Barry smiled, “for a couple more seconds, I’m not done admiring you yet.”

That got a reaction; Len’s brow furrowed slightly over sleepy blue eyes. He opened his mouth, paused, then shook his head. “Come back to bed, Barry.”

“What is it with you and ordering me around?” Barry teased, burrowing under the covers. Len wasted no time snuggling close, wrapping himself around the speedster, eliciting contented sighs from both of them.

“Better?”

“Mnhm, much.”

Barry kissed the corner of that softly smiling mouth, quickly falling back to sleep.

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Len didn’t wake slowly; dear old Dad trained it out of him. His mind was always ready to go in an instant. Kept his eyes shut, breathing controlled.

Barry hadn’t stirred. The speedster was nuzzled into his neck, soft exhalations raising goosebumps. Still deeply asleep. Couldn’t resist pulling him a little closer. Marveled at how easily Barry managed to wheedle past Len’s carefully constructed defenses. Specifically those related to touch.

Wasn’t that he didn’t crave physical contact. He did. But a lifetime of experience hardened him. Taught him to be wary. Other than Lisa, initiating casual physical contact without permission caused an immediate—typically violent—reaction. Sex was strictly physical, perfunctory. Filled a need. No touching beyond the strictly necessary. Never dozing off, let alone staying the night.

But here he was. Knew—recognized on an instinctive level—that Barry would never hurt him. Not physically, not out of costume. At least not when in his right mind. Raider did a number on Barry, something that Len would not allow again.

Barry murmured softly as he burrowed even closer.
Len smiled. Couldn’t help it. That or the sense of relief that he was able to get such a good night’s sleep. He had been…concerned. That the fight, the violence resulting from Bivolo’s powers might have…might have made this level of comfort difficult. For either of them.

But those were enough deep thoughts for the time being. Len was looking forward to Barry waking up. Once he did they would continue to make the most of waking up together without pressing commitments elsewhere.

While the hot, insistent press of Barry’s morning wood digging into his hip was tempting—very, very tempting—Len resisted. Scarlet was very much on board before they fell asleep, but it didn’t feel…right. He wanted—god how he wanted—so much more from Barry than a quick fuck. Wanted—needed—Barry to know that, too.

More than that, Len wanted to savor every moment. Draw things out, take Barry apart. Encourage Barry to do the same. Wouldn’t do to take the edge off too early.

He began by tracing the ridge of Barry’s hip with blunt nails. Each pass of his hand covered more satin skin and firm muscle as the younger man began to stir. Perfect.

The door to the apartment opened and closed. Len froze. Closed his eyes, steadied his breathing. He listened to a set of footsteps heading towards the kitchen, accompanied by the crinkling of paper bags. Water running, filling something. Quiet again, then the click of the electric kettle. Footsteps again, growing louder.

Shit.

Forced himself to relax, to wait. Wait for the door to open—

“Oh my God!” The last part came out muffled, but Len knew that voice. It belonged to Miss Iris West. Could be worse. Her father, for example. Or Lisa.

Len opened his eyes to see her, brown eyes as big as saucers, both hands clapped over her mouth. Shocked with the hint of a smile starting to develop.

No, scratch that. Shit-eating grin.

He raised an eyebrow, waiting. Wary.

Barry interrupted the staring contest, noise and light from the hall enough to disturb him. Made him grumble and shift. Nuzzling closer to tuck himself under Len’s chin. Hiding.

Iris giggled, tiptoeing closer to the bed. Good thing she didn’t have a camera on her.

Len gently shook the younger man’s shoulder, “Barry…”

“Five more minutes,” Barry whined, kissing his jaw.

Shivering when those soft lips grazed his skin, Len tensed, resisting the urge to tilt his chin, give Barry more room. Iris had horrible timing; too bad wishing wouldn’t make her go away.

“Scarlet…we have an audience.”

Taking that as her cue, Iris spoke up. “Morning, sleepyheads.”

“G’way, Iris. Not late yet,” he pulled the blanket up higher, holding on tight.
Len wished that he could fully appreciate Barry’s sleepy whines. But he couldn’t. Had no idea how the speedster would react to the situation when he finished waking up.

He continued to study Iris, one hand absently stroking Barry’s lower back. Needing this. Wanting it to last as long as possible.

Iris, however, had a different agenda. “Bartholomew Henry Allen, it is well past time to get up. Don’t make me steal your blankets,” she paused, expression mischievous. “Although I haven’t decided if it’s worth the risk of being scarred for life, I’m all out of eye bleach,” perching on the foot of the bed.

Barry tightened his grip on the quilt. Len could feel his expression change, brow furrowing. “Eye bleach for…wha—” felt his eyes fly open, body going rigid. “Oh god! Iris!” He sat up, wide eyed.

Len allowed him to move. Didn’t want to, but he did. He had to. Covered it by shifting to prop himself up on the pillows so he wouldn’t have to crane his neck.

“So…” Iris’ smirk promised danger, “how long have you two been knocking boots?”

“What? We’re not—knocking boots, are you five?!—It’s not what it looks like!” Barry was gesturing wildly. Full of denials and disapproval.

Fuck that hurt. Len closed his eyes, maintained his blank mask, body rigid. Knew it—that it was too good to be true. Him and Barry. Deluded himself to believing it was possible—could ever be more than a dirty secret. Forced himself to relax, paste on a smirk. Had to. Long enough to get through—

Barry took a deep breath, going still. Turned to face Len properly. “And that didn’t come out right,” he said, complete with downturned brows. Barry relaxed and leaned back, resting against Len’s chest, seeking out a hand under the covers and squeezing. “I meant…I meant we’re not naked. And we haven’t slept together. Not yet, anyway!”

Iris gave him a skeptical look, but didn’t interrupt.

“For real! Not because we didn’t want to—well, I know I wanted to, and Len totally seemed like he was on board, too. Very much on board. It hasn’t been going on that long, not like that, Iris, and I know we said no more secrets—I wasn’t hiding this, I swear! Prolly would’ve told you by the end of the week, and…”

Between the warm weight of the speedster against his chest and the endearing, stumbling ramble, Len felt himself relaxing. Also helped that Iris was smirking at them rather than glaring daggers.

“…don’t give me that look. Ok, we’ve obviously slept together. Since you barged in and woke us up, but just slept. Which kinda sucks. Not that I’m not happy to see you…But we were planning to spend the entire morning having sex. Finally. Hopefully shower together, then have breakfast. And it’s been so hard to—”

“Barry!” Iris exclaimed, eyes wide, “I so did not need to know that.”

Barry froze, covering his mouth with both hands. “Ohmigod did I just say that out loud?” It came out as a muffled squeak as the speedster shyly glanced over his shoulder. Hazel eyes meeting deep blue. Blushing furiously.

“’Fraid so, Scarlet.”

“How is this my life?”
That was enough for Iris, laughing until tears streamed down her face, using the footboard for support.

Not that he was in much better shape; cracking up at the combination of Barry’s heated blush and plaintive expression. Egged on by Iris’ mirth.

Didn’t take long for Barry to join in, too.

By the time the three of them made it into the kitchen, the coffee Iris thoughtfully made was cold. Barry quickly poured it into mugs to nuke, seamlessly moving around Len. The other man was in the process of putting up another pot; washing the press, grinding the beans…

Barry couldn’t help staring while he waited for the microwave to finish. Len was shirtless, wearing a pair of Barry’s sweats low on his hips as he confidently moved around in Barry’s kitchen.

He watched as the thief handed plates and silverware to Iris so she could set the table, loving how his tattoos looked in the soft morning light. Barry could tell he was tense, a little too quiet. If they were alone, he’d ask Len about it, maybe tease a little until he could figure out the cause.

Three things immediately came to mind: Len’s shoulder was bothering him (Barry offered to help with the sling, but Len just made a quip, stole a kiss, and sauntered out of the room); Iris’ presence had him on edge (this was extremely likely, but Barry didn’t think she was the reason, or not the entire reason—Len would’ve left if that was the case); or Barry’s knee-jerk protest was really bothering him.

Barry sincerely hoped it wasn’t the latter. He didn’t mean it like that at all and he wasn’t awake enough at that point to do more than reassure Iris that he and Len weren’t naked under the blanket and pretty much defaulting to when they were growing up together.

Except that wasn’t how Len took it, and now…now there was something missing. Why Iris had to pick that morning to ambush him…Barry sighed. He loved her, but right now he really wished that he and Len were back in his bed, dammit. Ideally exploring Len’s tattoos some more.

He’d never get tired of that, ever. Tasting them, tracing the lines and ridges with his tongue, learning exactly which spots were most sensitive. Hearing Len moan…the taste he got last night was nowhere near enough. Len deserved to be worshiped and—

*beep, beep*

The microwave broke Barry out of his daze. He knew he was blushing as he distributed caffeine, something that Iris’ knowing grin did not help with. At all. Not that Len was helping, either. He simply raised an all-too-knowing eyebrow and smirked. That man really was way too attractive for his own good. Or Barry’s good, anyway.

Not leaning in to kiss that hint of a smirk that teased the corner of Len’s full lips took a lot of willpower, but he doubted the other man would be comfortable with the display. Not with Iris watching. Instead Barry made do with a gentle nudge to his shoulder and what had to be an embarrassingly goofy smile.

One that grew (along with his blush) at the way Len’s gaze immediately zeroed in on his lips. Barry licked them, very slowly. He usually hated being the focus of so much attention, but from Len it made him feel warm. It made him want to tease and flirt and just revel in the feeling of being wanted.
Len wasn’t sure why he stayed. After Iris showed up and changed the plan; after Barry’s declaration and uncomfortable recovery.

Not entirely true, he knew why. Stayed because Barry didn’t ask him to leave—not that he liked admitting that to himself.

Iris’ presence was…different. Changed the dynamic between them, between all three of them.

Barry was nervous, bashful, and excited by turns. Not sure how to handle the situation. How to act. Off balance and torn.

Iris couldn’t decide between mild glares, honest curiosity, and the desire to tease. She and Len interacted at STAR Labs, enough that she was not intimidated or uncomfortable in his presence. Not that she’d ever been intimidated. No surprise that she and Lisa got along like a house on fire. But she was still testing her limits around him.

The larger deviation was her reserved approach towards Barry. She was worried. It was clear from the way she stopped teasing at the slightest hint of discomfort instead of gleefully pushing buttons to see just how red he’d get.

Then there was Len himself. Couldn’t…wasn’t able to open up. Not as much, not the way he could when it was just himself and Barry. Hated that their morning together got hijacked. Had no idea where the lines between he and Barry were redrawn. What was allowed. What would be welcome if they were alone. Needed to know that before he could be comfortable with an audience.

Len had hang ups and he knew it. Walk in on him during a fuck and he’d barely miss a stroke. Iris finding them curled up that morning—getting to see the way Barry pressed closer, sought out his touch—it made him uncomfortable. Vulnerable. Weak. Even if, by now, he was starting to learn better.

Still not comfortable sharing that glimpse of true intimacy. The start of intimacy, what Len hoped was a beginning. Stripped of the pretext fucking provided. Not that he lingered for more than a few minutes post-orgasm.

Barry was a weakness. One that he recognized but was not comfortable acknowledging to himself. Allowing others in on that secret? Unthinkable. Even though he knew that Iris wouldn’t use this particular weakness to her advantage. As a way to force him to comply.

“All set! Good thing I’m used to your appetite, Bear, otherwise there wouldn’t be enough food,” Iris said, taking a seat with a sunny smile.

“More like good thing I didn’t get the chance to work up a real appetite.”

“Yes, Miss West. Your timing was most fortuitous,” Len gave Barry a heated look. The speedster was far too easy to tease.

“True. Barry did say you planned to—”

“That’s not—” Barry sputtered. Good thing he hadn’t managed a sip of coffee yet. “You guys are the worst. That’s totally not what I meant!” But the speedster was grinning when he caught sight of Len and Iris exchanging smirks.
“And Leonard, I told you to call me Iris.”

“Duly noted.”

The rest of the meal passed without incident. Len knew it couldn’t last. Iris was far too curious for that, far too protective of Barry.

“Alright,” she took a sip of coffee, “I let you guys eat in peace. So…spill.”

“Really, Iris?” Barry glanced at him. Hand reaching out under the table—Len caught it, lacing their fingers.

“We’re…figuring stuff out. I guess?” Barry shrugged uncomfortably, “this is all pretty new, and…”

“Okay. That was suitably vague, perhaps you could start with how it happened?” Her tone was softer now, full of genuine interest rather than teasing, “because the last thing I knew you were stewing over what happened with the metahuman transport at Ferris Air.”

The speedster took a deep breath, glancing at Len before dropping his eyes to the tabletop. “Well, I guess…” he bit his lip, “it started when Len ran into me on a really shitty day. Instead of leaving or making it worse…we just…hung out?” he offered with a wince.

“After that…it kinda kept happening. And things…Len is surprisingly fun when he isn’t kidnapping my friends or robbing people,” Barry glanced up, small smile just for Len.

“So I’m learning,” Iris’ smile was more cautious but equally sincere.

Len rolled his eyes in an attempt to mask the sudden warmth in his chest.

“We kept…running into each other and pretty soon…it was just…really comfortable.” Barry reclaimed his hand, shoulders hunched, fingers twisting the hem of his shirt, “to be able to spend time with someone that knows both sides of me…is at least sorta familiar with the stuff going on in Central, but doesn’t push.

“Please don’t take that the wrong way. I…you guys know I love you, that you mean the world to me. But sometimes…sometimes—”

“It’s ok, Bear,” she reached out, one small hand covering his. “I get it. Sometimes you need a break, which doesn’t really happen when you’re surrounded by champion worriers, right?” She waited for Barry to look up before continuing, “I’m…well, it’s good to know that you found someone to help you with everything that’s happened lately. You shouldn’t,” she paused, choosing her words carefully, “keep everything all bottled up.”

“Really? You’re not mad I didn’t tell you?”

“Barry, no. Of course not—it was so good to see you happy again.” Her smile was cautiously encouraging, and she made certain to make eye contact with Len. To include him as well as Barry. Wasn’t unconditional approval, but it was more than he expected. He’d take it.

“Do you…can I ask where you two ‘bumped’ into each other?”

Barry froze, deer-in-headlights. It was time for Len to join the conversation.
He appreciated the speedster respected his wishes, that he hadn’t told Iris they were neighbors. However, someone so curious by nature—by profession—would keep digging until satisfied. Better to just tell her.

“The entryway of the apartment, I live next door.” Barry’s brilliant smile made it worth letting Iris in on the secret. “I trust you will keep my address to yourself.” It wasn’t a suggestion.

Iris nodded, quick mind already hard at work filling in the blanks of Barry’s explanations. “Of course, Len.”

Barry may have finally relaxed, but Len was bracing himself for the inevitable. For Iris to ask when Barry planned to tell the others. Had no idea what he wanted the speedster’s response to be. Because…

Because he was uncomfortable making strong attachments public knowledge. Just created more targets. But Barry could handle himself. Was better prepared than most. Knew that his friends and family would keep the news to themselves.

Secrets…Len had only ever been a dirty secret. He loathed the feeling, the reminder that he was unworthy. A disappointment. Source of shame. Already had enough of that to last a lifetime—refused to volunteer for more. It was why he hadn’t bothered with relationships in over a decade.

Stomach twisting itself in knots at the thought that Barry…not that Len would blame him. Couldn’t—he was no prize, none whatsoever. He was simply convenient. Better to cut his losses. Not sure if he’d even be able to do that much anymore.

The silence stretched longer, grew heavy. Until Iris broke it—knew she would.

“Alright. Thank you both for indulging me,” she began with a smile. “Don’t worry, the interrogation is over for now, and I’ll keep all of this,” she gestured, “to myself. That way you guys can figure things out for yourselves without the rest of us sticking our noses into things.”

Len could breathe again. Shared a sigh of relief and small smile with Barry.

“‘You’re the best, Iris,’” Barry exclaimed…then began falling all over himself. Too adorable for his own good. “Crap. I didn’t mean it like that, Len, I promise. It’s not that I want to keep you—this—whatever’s happening a secret, not at all! It’s just…I’m glad that—we kinda need to sort things out for ourselves first. You don’t mind, do you?”

A smile, uncontrolled and fond, put Barry out of his misery. “Not at all, Scarlet,” warmed by his words—assurances—that Barry wanted the others to know.

“No time limit, I promise. Although you should probably tell Lisa,” Iris’ knowing smirk was familiar. She was right, Lise would know within minutes of seeing them interact. Hell, not even minutes—seconds.

“What will this silence cost us?” Len had to ask.

“Oh, you don’t owe—wait,” her smile was positively dangerous. “I want to be there when you tell Dad. With enough warning to make popcorn, deal?”


Len chuckled, then laughed outright at Barry’s indignation. “She’s beyond chill, Scarlet. You have a
deal, Miss West.” Offered her a hand to shake and got to his feet.

“Excellent, Mr. Snart,” her overly-sweet voice promised retaliation.

“Wait—no! I don’t agree to that,” neither of them took Barry’s protest seriously. His grin made that impossible.

“What if I also make sure he’s unarmed?”

“Ugh, fine—you just enjoy my pain.”

“Yup!”

Barry made quick work of the dishes, intending to hop in the shower while Len went next door to change and prepare for physical therapy with Caitlin. Iris claimed the couch while she waited, thumbing through her phone.

He paused for a second, biting his lip. “What do you think?” he blurted out, trying not to dread the answer.

“He’s hot,” Iris grinned at his immediate blush. “He isn’t easy to read, Bear. But he stayed for breakfast instead of leaving when I crashed your plans. Len didn’t have to do that…or tell me he lives next door,” she offered.

“I guess…”

“Barry,” she sat up, patting the cushion next to her. He plopped down, melting a little when she wrapped an arm around him.

“I know about the cameras, and that you check them so you already know that he and the others are practically living at STAR Labs and have been since they got hurt, right?”

He nodded even though the question was rhetorical.

“When I realized that they were going to stick around, the best I figured we could hope for was constant sniping and limited bloodshed. But that’s not what happened. Len made sure of it. He also made sure that everyone else was taken care of before he let Caitlin touch his shoulder, even though it had to have been killing him.

“It’s obvious that he’s the leader—don’t give me that look, I know you already knew that—but it’s not because they’re afraid of him. Len doesn’t rely on violence to keep the Rogues together…honestly, I’m not entirely sure how he manages to herd all those cats, but he does.”

“Lisa helps.”

“Oh for sure. And they’re—he—is still a criminal, but I’m starting to get why you made that deal with him in the woods and why you asked for his help with the metas.”

“So you don’t think I’m making a huge mistake?”

“No, Bear, I don’t,” her sunny smile made him feel just as warm as it always did. Maybe even more, now that it wasn’t accompanied by the pangs of unrequited love.
“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Now go shower, you smell.”

“Do not,” he laughed and took off.

Barry sat quietly in the passenger seat of what was apparently Lisa’s car, stomach churning. He wasn’t ready for this at all. He had no idea how to face everyone after what he did—both the beatings and his subsequent radio silence—he was just…ashamed. It also didn’t help that he was totally dreading the apologies he owed his friends and the Rogues.

“Scarlet—stop it.”

“Huh?”

“You’re brooding, Barry. Quit it. They are your friends, you know they won’t hold this against you.”

“Maybe they should. Lisa and Hartley and Rory will…I still have no idea why you don’t.”

He heard Len sigh but couldn’t bring himself to look up. “You have done nothing wrong; nothing deserving of blame. Disappearing was not the best way to handle…events. But it is understandable,” Len’s voice was firm.

“Barry, recent…developments aside, you seem to forget that Hartley, Mick, Lisa, and myself are technically your enemies.”

“But—” the speedster fell silent at Len’s raised hand.

“We are, Barry. Certainly while in costume. Doesn’t mean we want to see you dead. Or that you want to put us in the ground—we both know that’s not the case. But it was a fight, Barry. The four of us accepted the risk of injury—serious or otherwise—when we planned the job. Got it?”

Barry finally looked up to meet Len’s intense blue stare, “but I hurt you guys really bad. If you hadn’t been able to get in touch with Cisco and Caitlin I would’ve—you’d be…dead.”

“Fine. If you must play the ‘what if’ game, you are correct. All of us would not have made it. That happens, given our line of work. But Barry, that was. Not. You. Yes, Bivolo’s powers do not…invent the core emotion. They magnify that feeling—an emotion that every person shares—beyond any limit. All that means is that you can get mad. Congrats, you’re human.”

“I—” Barry’s shoulders slumped, “ok, you made your point.”

“Good. Don’t forget it.”

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know, not what you guys were expecting when Iris walked in. To be honest, I wasn't expecting the serious turn, either. But given how new everything is between
Barry and Len right now, having Iris show up brought up a lot of things that the boys hadn't really thought about yet.

Also, feel free to hit me up on tumblr!
Persuading Barry to enter STAR Labs went about as expected. Scarlet dragged his heels, looking like a puppy that wanted affection but expected a kick. It was not an expression Len appreciated. Barry should never look that dejected, know that kind of pain.

But at least he was there, trailing behind Iris. Counted for something—Len had half-expected Barry to dash off. Again.

Len was hoping for a moment alone with Lisa, but it was not to be. As soon as he came into view, Caitlin steered him into the lab space that she and the others turned into a makeshift torture room; Cisco agreed with the title, even if the good doc didn’t.

“Oh good, Len, you’re here early; we’ll do the long session now and a shorter one late this afternoon.”

Peachy.

Barry was kinda hoping to have Len as a buffer when it came to...seeing everyone else again, especially since Iris just came in to drop something off for Lisa (and ok, probably to make sure that he actually went into the building).

Now he didn’t know what to do. There wasn’t a new meta or some other crisis to smooth past the awkward.

He spent a few minutes watching Len and Caitlin as she lead him through the beginning sets of physical therapy. It looked like things were progressing well, at least Barry thought so since she had a small smile and was rolling her eyes in good-natured exasperation at something the thief said. Things really had changed—the most Barry let himself hope for was frosty acceptance and strict professionalism. Not that he’d blame her for that, they had kidnapped her, after all. But there were no signs of any discomfort on her part—no pinched brows or pursed lips.

It was a huge relief, especially since he was starting to hope that Len might want to...stick around. Even after he was fully healed. He...Barry knew the other man had so much more to offer and maybe...maybe if he was really just in it for the challenge...he might find that same rush some other way. The speedster tried to stamp out that tiny kernel of hope because it’d probably just—yeah. Not gonna think about it.
Using the observation window to his benefit, Barry decided it couldn’t hurt to spend another minute or two watching Len warm up. Especially since his shirt was off. Again.

Warmth spread across his face as he watched, remembering how all that skin felt under his hands, his tongue...how he tasted—oh. Oh crap. Face instantly going full tomato when he realized that he might’ve gotten a little too enthusiastic, given the two purple bruises on Len’s collarbone. Maybe—hopefully—Caitlin wouldn’t notice. Oh who was he kidding—she totally noticed and it...yup.

Wide brown eyes flicking from the bruises to Barry’s red face through the window. Crap. Maybe staying here wasn’t the best idea after all; as soon as she looked away the speedster ducked out of the room. He might as well use this time to find the others...that had to be less uncomfortable than waiting around to see what Caitlin intended to do with what she just learned. He hoped.

He stuck his head in Cisco’s workroom, but the engineer was the only one there. His friend had headphones in place as he made adjustments to something he was staring at through a magnifier and Barry decided to leave him to it for now.

Next place he checked was the lounge, after taking a quick detour to grab an energy bar from the treadmill room. Barry was starving, which wasn’t that surprising. Len was right, he hadn’t been eating properly...hadn’t been all that hungry, and his tummy...Ever since he was little, his stomach gave him problems whenever he was really stressed or on edge. It hadn’t been particularly thrilled with him since the singularity and only got worse after...that fight.

Seeing Len, making dinner together, and just...well...everything that happened last night and that morning grounded him. Now his metabolism was kicking his ass for ignoring it and choking down the energy bars was probably a fitting punishment.

Voices and the sound of silverware on plates floated out into the hall. Barry slowed down, forcing himself to put one foot before the other...at least until he got to the doorway.

The speedster hovered just outside the lounge, watching Lisa Snart and Mick Rory eating lunch at the table in the STAR Labs lounge. They were relaxed—had to be, Lisa had her back to the door—chatting quietly about something or other, Barry couldn’t focus enough to figure that part out. He was too stuck on the oddity of the scene before him: Rogues casually eating at the table, three mostly-packed duffle bags on the chaise side of the couch. They looked so normal.

It was...something. Something maybe kinda nice.

“I’ve wondered when you’d show up, Flash,” Rory said.

Busted. The speedster took a deep breath, shoving his hands into his pockets so he wouldn’t fidget and stepped into the lounge, “um, hi.”

Smooth, Barry.

“I...” he looked down, eyes drawn to a scuff mark under the coffee table, “I’m sorry for going off on you...all of you.” At least he managed to keep his voice steady, “it—”

“Don’t sweat it, Flash,” Rory interrupted.

“But—”

“What Mick is trying to say is that there’s nothing to apologize for,” Lisa said, taking a couple steps towards Barry.
“Um...yes? Yes there is,” he waved a hand at her cast and the fading bruises on Rory’s jaw.

“No, cutie, there’s not. Did you conveniently forget the part where we were shooting at you?”

Barry gave her an incredulous look, “No, I know you were. But that’s no excuse for me to—” he cut himself off that time, before he started yelling. “Especially since you weren’t really serious about it.”

“I’m always serious about burning shit, Flash.”

“Fine. Then Lisa and Len weren’t.”

“Really now?”

“Yeah. You kept missing.”

Rory let out a short bark of laughter, “kid’s got ya there, Lise.”

She just rolled her eyes, the lack of argument serving as its own admission.

“Flash, you weren’t in your right mind and still managed to pull your punches enough not t’ kill us,” Rory’s thick arms were crossed, his expression more serious than Barry’d ever seen. “An’ even if we were the type to hold grudges for losing fights we picked, y’made up for it by patching us up.”

“Technically Caitlin did that—” he muttered, earning a glare.

“Yeah, cuz you brought me here.”

Barry took a deep breath, prepared to argue further...well, he was, until he looked up and saw the glares both Rogues directed his way. “I...ok,” he sighed, “did you guys plan this with Len? He basically said the same thing.”

“Nah; can’t say I’m surprised, given how many of his winning speeches I’ve heard,” Rory shared a commiserating glance with Lisa.

“Is...Is Hartley around?”

“No, Piper went home last night.”

“Oh,” so much for Barry’s plan to get all the apologies over at once. Even if no one else seemed to think they’re necessary.

“He’ll be back. He’s workin’ with Martin on somethin’ to do with the comm units.”

“Wait, you’ll call Professor Stein ‘Martin’ but still call me ‘Flash’?”

“Far as I’m concerned you’ll always be Flash, kid,” Rory said, but didn’t offer anything further. Ok then. Barry wasn’t sure how to take that...did the pyro mean they would always be enemies?

He stood there for a few more minutes while Lisa and Rory finished tidying the area, removing all traces of their meal.

“Um...I’m gonna go find Cisco and see what he’s up to,” he turned to go, “I’m...I’m glad you guys are ok,” the speedster finished quietly, making his escape.

Things started to feel more normal over the next couple hours. Cisco had a couple things he needed
help testing on the treadmill, and Barry was happy for the excuse to get rid of some of his excess nerves by running...and using the treadmill was a whole lot more productive than running away.

Letting go and connecting to the speedforce helped ground him while he replayed his earlier conversations with Lisa and Rory, Iris...and Len, trying to get their words to sink in. He got it on an intellectual level—yeah, Raider whammied him, and if...if they hadn’t ‘picked the fight’ the Rogues wouldn’t be around for him to hurt in the first place (and he wouldn’t have gotten whammied). The talks helped, but he still felt pretty damn guilty because...when Barry thought about it (since clearly the others hadn’t), it wasn’t a fair fight.

For all of their intelligence, skill, and cunning, Heat Wave, Golden Glider, and Captain Cold were just regular people. Not metahumans. They were...or really they weren’t as durable as the metas he went up against on a regular basis.

And so far, all of the metas he fought were more resilient than normal people. Hell, Barry wouldn’t be shocked if Hartley could take a punch better than Oliver, despite all of Ollie’s training. The rate of healing didn’t approach his own, but it was still there. They also seemed to heal better, for lack of a better way to put it. Caitlin couldn’t say anything with certainty, since she didn’t exactly have a lot of data to work from yet, but it made sense.

One thing was really bothering him, though.

Len called them enemies on the drive over...did he—was that really how he saw them? Barry hadn’t thought of Len, of Captain Cold, as a true enemy in a long time. Not since the night in the woods, not really. Cold was his nemesis, a thorn in his side who was brilliant and driven and had no intention of following orders.

At least not when it came to leaving Central; as pissed as he was at the time, Barry was pretty glad Len stuck around. He also took steps to keep innocents from becoming collateral damage. Barry...their showdowns were fun and he found himself thinking of the thief as an almost-frenemy. And now he was hoping for so much more—he thought Len was, too.

He...it seemed like—his actions were definitely not those of an enemy. Ever since finding out they were neighbors, Len just...helped. Movies, food, relaxing on the couch. Helping Barry with his nightmares. Those weren’t the actions of an enemy.

And that wasn’t even including the making out—

“...Barry, BARRY!”

“Huh? Sorry, Cisco, what was that?”

“Just trying to let you know we’re done, or I am anyway. Way more than done. Man, you need to go a little easier on that thing until we can tweak it again.”

“Why?” He slowed down in stages, glancing towards the window. Oh. Um, wow—that was a full observation room.

“You hit Mach 2, Scarlet.”

“I—” he tripped, flying backwards into the padding. Dammit. Of course Len would have to see that brilliant display of clumsiness. Barry allowed himself to wallow for a second or five, zipping into the observation room in time to catch the tail end of Caitlin’s reassurance.

“—he heals fast.”
“Yeah, yeah. Laugh it up,” Barry refused to blush.

“Good thing we upgraded from the boxes, though,” Cisco grinned. “Like I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted,” Len smirked and Cisco continued, “you were going a little over Mach 2 and the treadmill isn’t ready to handle that on a regular basis, so watch it.”

Barry nodded. He had no idea he was going that fast and it was a little disconcerting, especially since just a few months ago he didn’t think he’d be able to get anywhere close to that. Wells—Eobard—was right, his connection to the speedforce was growing...too bad he had no idea why.

“Sure. At least we know the compound will hold up,” he looked down at his shoes—regular chucks with Cisco’s latest speedster-resistant coating applied instead of the Flash boots. “They don’t even feel warm.”

“Awesome! Told you we’d get it.”

“Thanks. Hopefully this way I won’t go through so many shoes.”

“You sayin’ they used to smoke?” Rory asked, staring at Barry’s feet. “The boots don’t.”

“Yeah, or just flat out catch fire. Friction and all,” Barry said, taken aback.

“Hn, too bad,” he paused to glare at Len’s disbelieving snort, “that why your suit looks somethin’ out of EL James? Upscale version—leather instead of latex.”

The speedster tilted his head in confusion, “it’s a triopolymer blend, not leather. Why would I want latex? It’s hot and would just end up—”

Laughter interrupted him, which...he didn’t think he said anything funny. A quick glance around confirmed that he was missing something. He didn’t exactly want to ask, but no one was volunteering and Cisco wouldn’t meet his eyes.

“Ok, fine, what am I missing?”

Lisa’s gleeful smirk wasn’t helping, “who wants to do the honors? Cisco? Lenny?” She didn’t pause long enough for either of them to speak up, “Mick is talking about bondage gear, cutie. Fifty Shades ring any bells?”

“My suit does not look like—” Cisco said between giggles.

“You read that crap?” Barry asked, judging his friend so hard.

“Ew, no. Dramatic readings on youtube are where it’s at, man,” Cisco grinned, wiping tears from his eyes. “Felicity’s fault, I swear!”

Yeah, right.

“I have no idea who that is, Cisco, but I know you’re full of it. As for the suit, it most certainly does. It’d be enough to make a girl jealous if she were the type,” Lisa’s tone was playful. “I’m sure Lenny would be happy to explain it to you if you’d like, Barry.”

Oh god, the way she glanced at Len...did she know? How?

“It’s to reduce friction, that’s all,” he insisted, trying not to react to the teasing. Or look at Len. Or squirm at the way they were all staring at him like they could see through the Flash suit.
“Doesn’t mean the rest of us can’t admire the view.” Lisa was pure evil.

“Not much of a view,” he muttered.

Deciding that discretion was the best option, Barry zipped off to change.

Len frowned in Barry’s wake. Doubted anyone was supposed to hear that last remark, but Len had never been just anyone. Did Scarlet actually—but he must, or he would never have said it. Not like that.

Storing that tidbit of information away, he followed Cisco into the main section of the cortex, grabbing a chair when Caitlin joined them.

“Are you three planning to head out today?”

“You did clear us, doc,” Mick reminded her, “an’ Flash is back.”

“I said you could go home a few days ago. Why—”

“Lenny’s a bit obsessed with Jailbait.”

Len glared at his meddling sister, unable to come up with anything better than, “couldn’t drag her away from Cisco.”

“Right,” Caitlin’s expression was skeptical at best, “what’s your excuse, Mick?”

“Your husband and Martin can set themselves on fire. Once I found that out...staying wasn’t so bad.”

“Of course,” she laughed, “they should be back tomorrow.”

“Good,” he replied, voice ever so slightly unsure.

“Did you already forget that you’ve got regular PT with me for the next month or so?”

Interesting. She was more observant than Len thought.

“What time d’you want me here?” Mick asked.

“Tomorrow...How does 11 sound, then Lisa at noon and Len at 1?”

A sudden breeze announced Barry’s arrival, “what’s tomorrow?”

“That’s fine, doc. Just settin’ things up, Flash, nothin’ to worry about.”

“I can’t wait to sleep in my own bed,” Lisa sighed. “Nothing against the quarters you made for us here, but...”

Caitlin smiled, “I understand completely; living out of a suitcase gets old.”

“Wait,” the speedster bit his lip, “you guys are heading home?”

“Not for a few hours,” Len responded, “but it’s past time for us to give back your headquarters.”

“Oh.”
Wrong answer; Barry deflated, shoulders hunched, eyes down. Dammit. Wanted to reach out—stopped himself. Didn’t know if it was allowed, how the other would respond.

Cisco came back with his tablet before things could get too awkward.

“So...I’ve been thinking—and yes, Caitlin, that is dangerous,” he stuck his tongue out at the doctor, “our security sucks.”

“That’s not news, Cisco.”

“Let me finish! I know it’s probably not the best idea ever, and I wasn’t gonna ask until Barry was here to weigh in...but were you guys serious about helping us with an upgrade?”

Len shrugged his good shoulder, eyes on Barry, “might be worthwhile if Scarlet’s on board. I’d hate for your little secret to get out, it’d ruin my leverage.”

“For real?” the way the speedster brightened up was rewarding.

“Why not? Could be fun.” Lisa’s false nonchalance was transparent at best.

“Ronnie and Martin’ll be around?” The trio of scientists nodded. “I’m in.”

“That’s...wow, um, that’d be great. Since you three know how to break in and all,” Barry was grinning now. It was so easy to make the kid happy.

“But...oh. I wouldn’t be able to pay you. Not yet anyway. And we can’t make changes to the place yet, but it couldn’t hurt.”

“Pay us?” Lisa raised an eyebrow, “honey, you’re a civil servant, there’s no way you could afford us.”

Len glared at her. None of them needed the money and now the easy excuse to stick around S.T.A.R. Labs—around Barry—would be off the table. Figured she’d jump at the chance to hang out with Cisco.

The security was a complete joke. Anyone could waltz right in. Quite frankly, he was shocked the public hadn’t figured out the place was The Flash’s headquarters—something’d have to be done soon to prevent that. Designing a system presented a new challenge, a new way to test his skills. He also had a vested interest in the ongoing safety of a certain Scarlet Speedster, not that he’d admit to it.

“Actually Ms. Snart,” Stein interjected, stepping into the cortex, “Barry owns the facility now. He will take full possession of S.T.A.R. Labs and the imposter Harrison Wells’ estate in under a week.”

What?! How had Len missed that information in his...research into his nemesis. At least he wasn’t the only one shocked by Stein’s revelation—Lisa, Mick, and Cisco were stunned as well.

He added this latest piece of the puzzle to what Barry already told him about Wells—Thawne—and just...it didn’t make sense. Why’d the guy leave everything to Barry when he spent so much time trying to kill The Flash? Len was...pleased that the man failed, but he was beginning to see where at least some of the guilt was coming from.

Especially since Barry was looking smaller and more uncomfortable than ever. Eyes fixed on his shoes, shrinking away from all the attention. The need to reassure was stronger now, but Len refused to act on it.
“Yeah...um, there’s that. I have no idea what he was thinking—or what game he’s trying to play. But I can’t make any changes to the place yet.”

Mick beat the rest of them to the obvious question, “why not?”

Barry shrugged, “not really sure...I haven’t wanted to—I dunno. His lawyer’s being really pushy about it but I keep dodging him,” the speedster’s tone conveyed he was done talking about it. Actions said it, too, hightailing it back into the treadmill room.

But it clearly needed to be discussed; Stein mentioned a deadline, indicating that there were outstanding conditions that needed to be satisfied for the whole thing to become official. The thief understood Barry well enough to get why he was avoiding the entire situation, but he was running out of time. There wasn’t much he could do without...privacy. S.T.A.R. Labs wasn’t his domain.

Forcing his hands to unclench when Caitlin stepped forward to follow Scarlet’s retreating back. Good. Her lack of surprise meant she was aware of the situation and...the doctor was surprisingly easy to talk to. Cisco started after his friends; that wouldn’t do.

Len stepped forward to block his path, “think Snow’s got this one, kid.”

Cisco glared at him, attempting to stare him down—not a bad showing—for twenty-three seconds before deflating. “You’re probably right; but only cuz you somehow managed to convince him to come back in the first place.”

Everyone split up after that; Cisco to his workshop, Mick going with Stein to do who knew what—no surprise there. Lisa trailed him into the lounge sprawling out on the couch.

“Well?” Len raised an eyebrow, sitting next to her.

“Oh no, Lenny. You first.”

“Oh no, Lenny. You first.”

“Lise—”

She sighed, “fine. Jerk. Things went smoothly, as promised. Hartley decided to head home a few hours after you left. Mick’s been mellow—something I thought impossible, but here we are.”

“Indeed. Spending time around Firestorm appears to do wonders for his demons. Thoughts?”

“I think,” she sat up to face him, “it’ll depend, but if Hart gets a job offer, he’ll want to take it.”

“Mm. Probably,” Len was actually rooting for the kid, as much as he’d hate to lose Piper. Maybe they could work out a part-time arrangement...

“That’ll depend on Flash, apparently. Did you know?”

“No.”

Lisa gave him a skeptical look, studied his face, “alright. We should do the upgrade,” she raised her chin and crossed her arms. Her determined look.

Interesting, “fail to see the benefit to that.”

“Bullshit.”

Lise knew him so well; met her stare-for-stare until she relented. Refusing to tip his hand first.
“Be that way,” she rolled her eyes, “they aren’t all bad, even if your ‘Scarlet’ is a little too much of a golden boy for my tastes.”

“He’s not ‘my’ anything.”

“Keep telling yourself that, Lenny.”

He crossed his arms—pleased that he’d recovered enough to do so—and waited.

“Anyway, it couldn’t hurt to formally improve ties between the Rogues and S.T.A.R. Labs now that they’re out of the human trafficking business. Doing this will earn us some good will. The Santinis and Darbinyans are flexing their muscle lately, openly testing us and each other. We need to respond.”

No argument there. Would take some planning to ensure he remained within the boundaries of his agreement, though.

But Lisa wasn’t done, “even if the Flash won’t offer his...hands-on assistance,” her smirk had nothing to do with the kid’s fighting skills, “I bet they’d offer intel and support. Shawna’s good, but there’s a limit to her skills and Snow’s the only person with any actual experience treating metas.”

“And Cisco’s here,” Len added with a smirk of his own.

“And Cisco’s here.”

It was something to consider and not just for the points Lisa brought up. However, Len couldn’t ignore the potential complications—not the least of which would be the reaction of his crew. Other metas were willing to follow his lead, but Len knew his victory was not a sure bet if it came down to physical confrontations. Mardon in particular would be a problem.

“Certainly worth pondering,” Len gestured, using their old signal for ‘someone’s watching’.

Doubted anyone was watching the feed live, but…

Lisa nodded, getting to her feet to finish packing.

Wait. The place had to be crawling with cameras. No matter where he went, that subtle itch between Len’s shoulder blades—a skill honed over decades—told him there were cameras covering every inch of the facility. That was inconsistent with the honestly laughable attempt at actual security—why was there so much surveillance? Security at the facility always sucked—made no sense as the secret base of operations. Yes, disaster status made obvious upgrades conspicuous. But the place was huge. It wouldn’t take much effort to establish an inner perimeter and yet the Reverse Flash made no attempt to do so

He’d have to ask Barry about it later. That evening while relaxing on his big leather couch, if he got his way. Or over food—there were more appealing activities he had in mind for the couch.

Barry sat on the treadmill, lingering in the darkened room while he let Caitlin’s words resonate. Maybe if he replayed them enough he’d finally start to believe it. Between her and Len it was getting...well, they made sense. The logical arguments resonated with his scientific side, and it was difficult—Barry was a CSI, he dealt with and relied upon evidence and logic on a daily basis. God, it was so much easier when it didn’t...when he wasn’t the guilty party. Or one of the guilty parties, anyway. Because they were right, Barry hadn’t hurt them by choice and that had to count for
something.

He sighed, staring down at his hands without seeing them. Talking to Caitlin always helped; she was the big sister he never had. The sister he hadn’t allowed Iris to be. Hearing that she didn’t blame him for Eobard’s choices—if anyone deserved the Lab, it was her and Cisco—for nearly getting Ronnie killed...god, for all of it...he really needed that.

Movement—a hand reaching out—Barry flinched away.

“Chill, Flash,” Rory pulled his hand back, palm out, “wasn’t gonna do anything.”

How had he not noticed the pyromaniac sooner? More importantly, why was he sitting down on the treadmill?

“Sorry. You startled me, I didn’t realize anyone…” knew he was still in there, was looking for him, was around…

“Gotta say, you’re taking the ‘brooding hero’ cliché too seriously.”

Barry snorted, “kinda hard not to when you keep reminding me we’re enemies.”

Rory’s look was incredulous, “my gun’s locked in that pretty case Ramon made for it an’ your suit’s away.”

“Then why do you keep calling me ‘Flash’?”

‘s who you are, kid,” his gravely voice surprisingly reassuring. “I don’t know Barry Allen, barely even met him.”

The speedster blinked, “oh.”

It made some strange kind of sense, “does that mean...d’you mind if I call you ‘Mick’?”

“Knock yourself out,” Mick smirked, “though I am partial to Heat Wave.”

Barry laughed, “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Barry hung up his phone as soon as Singh finished reminding him that ‘now means fifteen minutes, Allen, not fifty’.

So much for his not-plans to go home with Len...or have Len go home with him. He did enjoy his job, being a CSI, gathering evidence and analyzing it to ensure that more innocent people wouldn’t wind up like his dad but sometimes he wished he had predictable hours.

At least he could take his time grabbing his things from the Lab; the crime scene was only a thirty second run. He changed out of his sweats and into his last clean ‘work’ outfit, making a mental note to restock after he did laundry. Should he say goodbye to everyone? Or just head out...probably just leave. He’d see them again tomorrow if he came around during his lunch break and he really didn’t want to make it a big deal. Caitlin and Cisco were used to him zipping in and out, and the others—

“Careful, Scarlet.”

Great...he nearly ran into Len, because apparently flying into the wall earlier wasn’t bad enough.
“Sorry!” Barry cringed and tried again, “sorry, I was distracted. Just got a call from work and I need my kit and everything...plus not be late. Again,” he rubbed his neck with a self-deprecating smile. “I have to go soon, well, nowish, really. But um...if it doesn’t get super late, could I maybe give you a call when I’m done?”

Oh god, he was rambling and sounded needy and Len and everyone else were probably sick and tired of having to deal with him...or in need of a break anyway, “you know what? Um...never mind. It’s not a big deal and you should—I’m gonna stop talking and leave now, before I dig myself any deeper.”

Barry tapped into the speedforce and dashed away before Len got a chance to do more than open his mouth.

He really needed to get a grip.

Chapter End Notes

You guys are awesome. Seriously, there's no way this story would be well...anywhere...without all of your comments and kudos and suggestions. They're so very appreciated.

We are approaching the start of Season 2 canon! I'll be picking and choosing what gets incorporated, the time between certain events will definitely be stretched out, and do my best not to simply rehash what happens in the show.

(moderation is still on with comments, please let me know if you want yours kept private)
They didn’t linger after Barry left. Did a once-over of the Lab to tidy up and make sure nothing important was forgotten, confirmed the plans for the following day, and headed out.

Lisa insisted on driving. Neither Len or Mick bothered arguing—Len’s bike was in the garage but the state of his shoulder made it...less than ideal, and Mick had no other options.

The drive was comfortably quiet—words weren’t necessary. Len appreciated the respite, more drained by the physical therapy than he was willing to admit. Trying to process the events of the last twenty four hours, focusing on the main points.

Team Flash—he and Cisco were gonna talk about a better name—didn’t mind having his Rogues in the building. Equally remarkable, Mick, Lisa, and Hartley enjoyed spending time there. It was true enjoyment, not an act to con the scientists into a false sense of security. Certainly raised interesting possibilities. All of which included the challenge of balancing his reputation with closer ties to The Flash.

Speaking of, The Flash, Barry Allen, still had a long way to go. Len wasn’t sure why that bothered him so much—seeing the younger man uncertain, downtrodden. Refused to dwell, but ever since finding the kid utterly wrecked in his entryway nearly three months ago, Len couldn’t deny his attachment. Barry mattered—hell, Len even told him as much.

Then there was Cisco’s suggestion—request—that he, Lise, and Mick overhaul and upgrade the security at S.T.A.R. Labs. Barry was on board with the idea; even Caitlin didn’t voice any protest. Had the trio forgotten their groups were at odds not long ago?

Len couldn’t wrap his head around that. He and his Rogues were not serious with their threats towards the scientists. Not really. Len always sought to minimize collateral damage, even before he and Barry reached an accord. Took pride in executing his jobs with precision—something his father never cared about. Len may have gone into the same...line of work, but he was not his father.

True, Caitlin and Cisco were associates of The Flash. But they were support staff. Noncombatants. Cisco’s brother was leverage (and an asshat); seriously injuring any of them was never the plan. Made sure anyone that joined his crew was aware of the rules. Another reason he was pissed at Bivolo.

“Lenny, we’re here.”

So they were.

Instead of dropping him off the way he thought—hoped—she would, Lisa followed him up and into
the apartment. Made herself comfortable on the couch, putting the bag she’d been carrying on the coffee table. Dammit.

So much for his plan to jump in the shower and take a nap. After texting Barry to let the speedster know he was welcome to share Len’s bed, or drop by—whatever that final insecure ramble was headed before he zipped off.

Len set his own bag down by the door with a sigh, bracing himself.

“You’re home now. C’mon, spill,” sometimes he really disliked how easily Lisa read him.

He made a production of settling into the recliner—might as well be comfortable for this. “What do you want to know?”

“He any good?”

“None of your damn business,” Len crossed his arms as best he could with the sling, glaring. Not that it did any good.

“Ahh...haven’t found out yet. Interesting,” Lisa cocked her head to the side, “he was so jumpy, I figured his ‘walking on eggshells’ routine was because he didn’t know how to react after a casual fuck.”

Len’s nostrils flared at Lisa’s insinuation, unsure which part bothered him most...The idea that Barry would sleep around—anyone with eyes could see he wasn’t the casual type—or that Len was only interested in the speedster for a quick fuck.

“Oh,” Lisa’s eyebrows were in her hairline. “It’s like that?”

He glared, time to change the subject entirely. Aware how inconvenient it was having a sibling read him so well. Len didn’t respond, couldn’t. Not that he needed to—Lise had always been able to read him like a book.

“Any progress with Cisco?”

Lisa rolled her eyes at his blatant redirect but humored him, “you’re not allowed to scare him off, Lenny.” Her expression was serious, direct. Knew that look, she wasn’t gonna budge either.

At least this time the subject of her desire was Cisco Ramon. Not Roscoe Dillon or some other lowlife. Wouldn’t have to worry about her safety—physical or otherwise—with the engineer.

“He’s being a perfect gentleman and you know it,” she got up, making a show of unpacking one of Len’s bags, hanging his coat, putting his shoes away...Lisa only straightened up like that to put him at ease. Len knew it; hated that it worked. Braced himself for whatever she planned to say next.

“Do I need to sit The Flash down for a little...heart to heart?”

“I can handle it, Lise.”

“Real answer this time. I see how you look at him,” she perched on the arm of the couch. Close—not touching—eyes focused straight ahead on the black screen of the TV.

Grateful she allowed him a little privacy since she wasn’t gonna let it go. He sighed, fingers tapping a beat on the arm of the recliner, gathering his thoughts.

“It’s...complicated,” he said at last. Barely louder than a whisper, “and it’s...something. Not sure
what’ll come of it. If anything,” tried to create the illusion of distance; knew it was weak but he needed the pretense.

Lisa reached out, resting a delicate hand on his knee, “ok, Lenny.”

He covered her hand with his, squeezing gently. She returned the gesture, waiting for him to look at her before continuing.

“I won’t push...or tease. Not yet, anyway.”

Tension left his shoulders at her reassurance—grateful that he and Lise never needed words to understand each other, not when it came to the important things. Barry...could become important.

“Just be careful, ok? And don’t sell yourself short,” she smiled, “you’re a catch, too.”

Right. Very much doubted that. But...maybe the potential reward—as impossible as it was to consider—was worth the risk of allowing his nemesis to worm his way further into Len’s life.

“See you tomorrow. I’ll be here at 10:45.”

“I do have a car, sis. Meet you at the Labs.”

“Spoilsport,” she said, shrugging into her jacket.

He followed her to the door and locked up behind her. Wouldn’t be surprised if she spent at least an hour in her jacuzzi with wine and a book—one of her favorite ways to relax now that they had access to the finer things in life. Absently wondered if she would remember to keep the damn cast dry.

As much as Lisa drove him crazy, Len appreciated that she insisted on sticking around Central. She...they trusted each other without question. Got it. Good thing, too—had such a hard time putting anything to words. Not the important things. Which, if he was being honest with himself, included what was going on with Barry. It’d make things too real, giving voice to his hopes...learned early on that talking about what mattered was a surefire way to have it all go to shit. Or get taken away. Dear old dad saw to that, would destroy whatever caught Len’s eye as fast as possible.

Hadn’t been under that bastard’s thumb for more than half his life but still couldn’t shake the need to protect, to hide.

——

Len took his time in the shower, reviewing Caitlin’s latest set of instructions and restrictions for his shoulder. Letting the warm water soothe away some of his aches. The doc hadn’t given him a lecture for sleeping without the sling—even told him he didn’t need the chest strap anymore. Time to slowly start restoring mobility. Good thing, since he planned to sleep with his arms wrapped around a certain speedster as often as possible. Knew he wasn’t up for anything too strenuous—assuming Barry was still interested—but that didn’t preclude hands, or mouths, or...

He groaned, right hand tracing his tattoos. Following the same path Barry’s tongue mapped out the night before. Hot water making it easier to imagine the younger man was there with him. Because fuck, after so many interruptions, he needed to take the edge off.

Too bad he didn’t have more to work with as far as Barry’s powers were concerned. Even a short taste of the way he could move—vibrate—Len shifted, leaning against the cool tile. One hand toying
with a nipple. The other tracing his abs, digging into the groove of his hip—imagining even teeth framed by a mischievous grin—before finally wrapping around his cock. Already almost painfully hard. Not surprising, he’d been on edge for what felt like weeks.

Not in the mood to draw things out the way he usually did, that’s for sure. Teasing—ah—the slit with his thumb. Didn’t linger, just a brush between long, firm strokes.

Pinching and twisting his nipple with a gasp, making the water a little hotter, closer to the way Barry’s mouth felt. Scraping with blunt nails, imagining they were teeth. Pressing his thumb just below the head of his cock, toying with his foreskin. So goddamn close.

Imagining Barry Allen—in or out of the Flash suit—wasn’t...an uncommon fantasy. Now, though, now he could add details—the taste of his tongue, feel of his hair, and god the powers. Shit. Merely thinking about those tantalizing vibrations buzzing across smooth skin was enough to push Len over the edge. Biting his bottom lip to muffle what would’ve been an embarrassingly loud moan as he came. Hard.

Eyes still closed, Len slumped against the tile, letting the water—finally beginning to cool, or simply feeling cold against his overheated skin—to wash him clean. Waiting for his breathing to even out before turning off the tap and grabbing a towel. Dried off, scrubbing the cloth over his head on the way to his room, tossing it over the corner of the door.

Rummaging through his dresser for something to lounge around in. Len glanced up, catching a glimpse of—damn. Hadn’t realized Barry marked him, too. Couldn’t help a pleased smirk, running his finger over two vibrant hicckeys on his collarbone. Dark...they’d take a few days to fade.

Good thing Lisa hadn’t seen ‘em. Never would’ve gotten rid of her if she had, at least not without providing...specific details Len had no intention of parting with.

Caitlin must have noticed. He was shirtless for most of the workout; doc said she needed to have access without barriers. That way she could see hints of strain or weakness. Wasn’t too thrilled with the arrangement, but didn’t argue. He couldn’t, since she only insisted after he pushed too far in an early session—hiding pain was automatic.

But she didn’t...didn’t make a big deal about his scars—barely gave them a second glance. Had to know where most of them came from, after the MRI’s. It—he appreciated the gesture. And her discretion.

Did she figure out who made the hicckeys? Know it was Barry? If she did, kept it to herself—or Len was more distracted than he thought, enough to miss any changes in her demeanor.

Len carefully pulled on a zip up hoodie in deference to his shoulder, a worn pair of flannels over black boxer briefs, and the sling. At least this one offered a greater range of motion.

He needed to text Barry. Let him know Len was...home? wanted to see him? thinking about him? Wishing he didn’t heal so goddamn fast—body erasing all the marks Len made before they even woke up.

All of the above.

Not that the younger man had a clue. His offhand comment while in the Flash suit and his little ramble before racing off made his insecurities obvious. But Barry was gorgeous—big eyes, killer smile, incredible body, loyal, and so hopeful. Len wanted to track down whoever convinced the speedster that he was anything other than amazing and ice them. Or punch them in the face.
Len hoped that he gave Barry...that Barry knew he enjoyed the other’s company. Should be a given. He stuck around for breakfast with Iris. Put up with her questions and knowing looks. Shouldn’t need the reassurance; Len never spent the night, never allowed anyone (other than Lisa and Mick) into his apartment.

Grabbed his phone, composing a text as he wandered into the kitchen to throw together some dinner. Tried not to dwell after pressing send—doubted he read Barry wrong, and if the speedster was in the field, it’d probably take a while for him to respond.

Barry managed to make it to the crime scene under Singh’s fifteen minute window...turned out that running away from embarrassing situations helped with the whole ‘being on time’ thing. With any luck, the thief would forget all about Barry’s pathetic display of neediness by the time they saw each other again.

Ok, that was probably too much to hope for. Len remembered everything. Barry sighed and tried to lose himself in the soothing routine of documenting the scene and collecting evidence.

The complete chaos explained why Singh called him in. Dorothy Williams was there—along with the usual team of assistants—to process as efficiently as possible. Technically Barry was only an assistant, but his supervisor, Fisher (who hated her first name), and the rest of the precinct treated him like a full analyst. He didn’t mind working with Dorothy; she let him follow his own routine, unlike some of their other, less evolved colleagues.

The arrival of Joe’s squad car snapped him out of his groove, but his phone vibrated before he got a chance to say hi.

[New message from Frosty] Barry’s pulse jumped, stomach swooping with nerves. He took a deep breath and unlocked the phone—might as well get it over with.

[Frosty]‘Chilling at home, Scarlet’

He couldn’t believe it—trying to smother his sudden grin as he quickly typed a response.

[BA] ‘That an invitation? people might think were dating or something’

[BA] ‘Um...crap. I cant believe i just sent that. Be happy to join you but’"

Len allowed himself a smile, taking a bite of his sandwich and settling deeper into the couch cushions. Judging by the speedy response, Barry was just as interested as he. Except—

‘But…?’

[BA] ‘The scene is a mess...not sure how long this’ll take’

Ah. That sucked.

Len forced himself to consider his options before replying. Determine if it was worth waiting up—worth giving Barry even more access to his life by...admitting how much he enjoyed the other’s company. Attempted to convince himself that he hadn’t already made up his mind, didn’t already
find himself drawn to the younger man like a moth to flame. He grimaced, that sounded wrong—he wasn’t Mick.

‘Call when you’re back and I’ll unlock the door’

[BA] ‘Day pass to phase in? don’t want to keep you up if this takes forever’

Not a bad idea. Len smiled, warmed by the idea that Barry wanted to share his bed even if he was already asleep.

‘hmm...so long as you don’t interpret the day pass as license to invade whenever you have the desire to drop off breakfast’ Len couldn’t resist needling Barry a little.

[BA] ‘Lol, ok. tho i dont remember you sending any of the pastries back :P’

[BA] ‘I’ll text you when we head back to the station, ok?’

‘Sounds good, Barry. See you soon ;)’

[BA] ‘fingers crossed...and we kinda deserve some luck after all the interruptions,’ Barry’s response made him chuckle.

[BA] ‘ack! not that i think this is a booty call...or that i think you think it’s a booty call or anything,’ Scarlet was too adorable sometimes, and probably living up to his nickname. Too bad Len wasn’t nearby to appreciate it.

‘No expectations whatsoever, Scarlet. You can stop blushing.’

[BA]’youre the worst, Len’

‘I try. Go be productive’

[BA]‘Please. Im always efficient, comes with the territory. gonna go anyway, joe’s giving me a dirty look’

‘Don’t get yourself into trouble on my account, we can talk later’

[BA]‘Thanks len be there as soon as I can’

Len got up, suddenly restless. Took the time to unpack, tackling the bag Lisa started first. Clothes, toiletries, bags themselves. Left the case that held his cold gun next to the coffee table, detouring to the kitchen to grab a beer and make another sandwich before returning to the couch.

Case was impressive—biometric lock keyed to his signature alone. Supposedly. Suspected Cisco’s hand would work, but wasn’t worried about the kid taking his gun.

Apparently the engineer made some improvements to the weapon while he was at it. Len wished he could give the changes a test run. Cisco said he tweaked the cold cell to improve efficiency—must’ve meant response time, didn’t use ammo—added finer controls to allow for use without gloves in case of emergencies. Good thing, too. He tried to protect his hands as much as possible.

The kid also brought up a couple ideas he and Hartley were brainstorming. Wasn’t sure how he felt about a possible reverse setting—giving him the option to remove the ice—but could see how it’d come in handy. Certainly help him keep his word to Barry.

The duo wanted to discuss potential methods of execution with Raymond and Stein before making
any changes. A surprising amount of forethought from the mismatched pair—seeing them work had Len more convinced than ever that Cisco was only a lab accident away from becoming a mad scientist.

Put the cold gun back into its case and slid it under the coffee table, finally feeling calm enough to finish eating.

Settling deeper into the cushions, Len sipped his beer and channel surfed until he found something appealing. X-Files marathon fit the bill.

It all felt so surreal. Len unlocked his phone, smiling as he scrolled through his conversation with Barry. A reminder that he wasn’t dreaming. That yesterday, last night, that morning actually happened.

Joe’s approach reminded Barry that he should be working, not texting Len. Mostly because he’d rather actually talk instead of just texting (hopefully in the same bed...or couch, he wasn’t picky...while talking) and the fastest way for that to happen was to finish up at the crime scene.

He didn’t see Eddie, though. Instead a young woman in uniform got out of the passenger’s side, following Joe as the detective made a beeline for Barry. The man had the hint of a smile when he caught the speedster quickly stuffing his phone into his pocket.

Barry held his breath, willing Joe not to comment. A crime scene was really not the place to tell his foster father about, um...how well he and Len were getting along. God he hoped Joe didn’t know.

“I’m impressed, Bear, you beat us here,” Joe said, “this is Officer Patty Spivot, she’s a new transfer.”

Barry rolled his eyes—he wasn’t always late. The newcomer, Patty, stepped around Joe, offering her hand to shake. He reached forward automatically, but stopped and held his hands up, displaying his black nitrile gloves. “Sorry, I’d shake but you probably don’t want this stuff all over your hands.”

“Oh, right,” Patty’s smile was somewhat sheepish but still bright and friendly, “you’re Barry Allen, right?”

He nodded, a little confused.

“Oh, right,” Patty’s smile was somewhat sheepish but still bright and friendly, “you’re Barry Allen, right?”

He nodded, a little confused.

“Wow, it’s so great to meet you. I’m a huge fan.”

“A fan?” of what...there was no way she could possibly know...

“Your reports! They’re amazing—I’ve read them...sometimes. Well, really all the time. I’ve read them all,” she gushed.

“Oh...wow. I don’t think I’ve even read all of them,” Barry couldn’t help grinning himself. It was weird, but really cool. People never really thought he was all that special. Not regular him, anyway.

“Yeah, they’re really detailed, you know? Really paint a picture—almost like you were really there when the crime happened.”

“Um...thank you?” Barry thought that was supposed to be a compliment...even if lately he was at the crime scene when it happened.

“Officer Spivot is interested in getting involved in the task force,” Joe’s expression was less than
thrilled.

Ah.

“The answer is still ‘no’, by the way,” the detective said over his shoulder, stepping away to speak to the first officers on the scene.

Patty split her time between following Joe around and shadowing Barry. He found himself enjoying her company and didn’t mind explaining what he was doing as he collected evidence. She knew quite a bit about forensics already—she had a background in chemistry and biology—and asked some insightful questions. Her company definitely made the time go by faster.

Nearly three hours later Barry and the others were finally on the home stretch. Dorothy motioned for him to give the detectives their preliminary findings while she and the rest of the CSI’s finished up.

He and Patty joined Joe and Singh by the squad car. Oh, this was gonna be fun.

“So...this is a pretty big mess, do you think there was metahuman involvement?” Patty asked before Barry got a chance to speak.

“No, I doubt it. Between the general destruction and shell casings, our findings are leaning towards organized crime,” Barry said.

“Any off the record suppositions on which group, Allen?” Singh’s voice was clipped. Barry didn’t blame him or take it to heart—the last thing Central City needed was a spike in gang or mob violence.

“No, sir, sorry. Nothing’s that distinctive and as far as I know this neighborhood isn’t claimed by any group,” the speedster looked at his notes.

“What about the Rogues? Aren’t they an up and coming gang? This could fit, then. They’re new, not well-established....so wouldn’t it stand to reason that they would be more sloppy than, say, the Santini’s?” Patty faltered when she noticed they were all staring at her, “er...just thinking out loud.”

Barry bit his lip to keep from laughing. Even if he hadn’t been with Len, Lisa, and Mick when the crime was being committed, there was no way, “no. No, this isn’t their handiwork. They—”

“Rely on their guns,” Joe interrupted loudly.

Barry ducked his head to hide his blush, “yeah. Cold, Glider and Heat Wave...their weapons are pretty distinctive. There’s...It isn’t likely that any of the Rogues would do anything without at least one of them present and there’s no trace of their guns, I checked,” knowing the guns were in Cisco’s workroom counted as checking, right?

Patty looked a little disappointed that the case didn’t look like it would involve any metas, a sentiment that Barry kinda shared. Metas tended to work alone, he could take ‘em as The Flash. Gang violence was a hell of a lot less predictable. The city was still being rebuilt from the singularity...they didn’t need any more destruction.

He wondered if Len would be willing to offer any help if Barry asked him. The leader of the Rogues made it a point to stay informed, he’d probably at least have a hunch about who was behind it. Whether he’d actually share that info with Barry was another story entirely.

That reminded him—the speedster sent Len a quick text, letting him know Barry was on his way back to the station. He only needed to log in and secure the evidence before he could head home.
Barry and Dorothy catalogued, filed, refrigerated, and otherwise documented everything they collected. As much as he appreciated the help, her presence also meant he couldn’t use his powers to speed things up. It was almost 10:30 by the time they finished and Barry was looking forward to going home for the first time in ages.

He was practically giddy that he’d (at the very least) be able to fall asleep next to Len...and there’d be no rush in the morning. Singh told him to come in at noon. He flashed home, took a rushed shower, downed two energy bars when his tummy yelled at him for skipping dinner, and got ready for bed, phasing into Len’s apartment before he finished pulling on his t-shirt.

The lights were off, soft glow of the TV and what looked like an X-Files rerun the only source of illumination. Barry smiled at the sight of Len stretched out asleep on the couch. He quietly made his way across the room to kiss Len awake; leaning over, pressing his lips to Len’s forehead, the bridge of his nose— “Oof!”

Len’s eyes snapped open and he smirked, tugging Barry down onto the couch with him.

The speedster shook his head with a laugh, “lemme guess, you were awake the whole time.” It wasn’t a question.

Len’s good hand slid up his back into his still-damp hair, nipping his bottom lip instead of answering.

Barry leaned down for a real kiss, shifting into a more comfortable position and lowering himself onto the other man. It was a deep, lazy kiss. Tongues slowly exploring, tangling together. Len’s hand tilting Barry’s head just a little—just enough, long fingers tugging gently on his hair, sending a jolt of pleasure down his spine.

“Mmmm—ah!” the speedster gasped when Len repeated the action, dropping his forehead to the other’s shoulder, “damn.”

“Indeed,” Len sounded very pleased with himself, “take it you haven’t always been this,” punctuated with another quick pull, “sensitive?”

“No...that totally came with the powers,” he nuzzled Len’s jaw, pressing a soft kiss to his Adam’s apple, “least I think it did.”

“Not sure how it relates to speed.”

“Hmm?” Barry felt the rumble of Len’s voice, but had no idea what he said, quickly turning to mush as those long, nimble fingers switched from pulling his hair to massaging his scalp.

Len’s soft chuckle was soothing, too. “Said I wasn’t sure how a sensitive scalp relates to speed.”

“Me neither. Well...my cells are in a constant state of regeneration...that could be part of it,” Barry lifted his head, trying to catch Len’s eye, “does it matter?”

“Not at all, Scarlet. Just curious.”

“I mean...I guess we could ask Caitlin. But then we’d have to explain why we’re asking...and her reaction to seeing your hickeys...” he ducked his head in an attempt to pretend he wasn’t blushing, “let’s just say that I’m really not in a huge rush to give her the chance to actually talk about my sex life,” now that he finally had one...or was starting to have one. Hopefully. “Oh crap—she didn’t grill
you, did she?"

“Didn’t even react. I didn’t notice your marks ’til I got out of the shower,” Len nudged Barry up for a kiss, nice and slow. His hands wandering down the speedster’s back, over his ass, thighs, as far as Len could reach, “eager, Barry?”

Um...yes. Obviously, but… “wha?”

“Already out of your pants; much appreciated.”

Barry giggled, nipping Len’s chin, “mmhm. This is what I usually sleep in, so…” he trailed off with a shrug.

“No complaints here,” the thief’s hand slid up his back, taking the t-shirt with him, “what do you say we ditch this, too?”

Oh god, he was using that low rumbly voice. Barry was such a goner.

“Sure,” he swallowed, lifting himself up and shifting to straddle Len’s thighs. He tossed the shirt across the room—it landed on the TV.

“What about you? Can the sling come off?”

“Yeah, just have to remember not to do much with it.”

“That’s great! Cait said this would be ok?”

“Didn’t exactly ask her if I was free to debauch you, Scarlet,” Len’s hint of a smile sent a jolt of heat through Barry, “the good doctor said I could increase movement and use so long as I didn’t attempt to carry much weight yet. Now, if you’d like to do the honors, I’d like to have both hands available to...appreciate you properly.”

Len’s eyes were so intense, roaming all over him. Barry gave up even attempting to hide his blush since he was pretty sure it was all the way down to his chest by this point. He didn’t—something about the way Len always looked at him—so intense, so focused...no one else ever looked at him like that. The Flash sometimes, sure. But never plain old Barry Allen, “I...uh, sure.”

“Scarlet…” something about Len’s voice had him looking up, making eye contact. “If you’re not comfortable—"

He swooped down, capturing the other’s lips before Len could finish his sentence. Quickly—by human standards, not Flash ones—undid the sling and dropped it on the coffee table without breaking the kiss.

Len smiled against his lips as soon as his arm was free, both hands settling on Barry’s shoulders. From there they traveled down the speedster’s back, toying with the elastic of his underwear and grabbed Barry’s ass. That was—oh wow,

Len was massaging...fuck, that felt so damn good.

Barry moaned out of the kiss, panting. “Shit, Len—"

“Thought you were gettin’ rid of my shirt too,” but of course the man didn’t stop kneading—Barry took a deep breath, trying to...oh, fuck. Len bucked under him, timing it just right, using his grip to encourage Barry to tilt his hips, grinding their cocks together and sending a wave of vibration
through him.

“Fuck,” Len squeezed his eyes shut, needing a few deep breaths of his own.

“Heh, not so smug now,” Barry took advantage of the lull to unzip Len’s hoodie, “you’re gonna have to sit up for me to get this off....or that works too,” he said. A little too distracted by Len’s abs as he raised his chest far enough for Barry to remove the shirt without aggravating his shoulder.

Len dropped back onto the couch, large hands moving to Barry’s waist, encouraging him to follow suit—not that he really needed the encouragement. Barry was a huge fan of anything that lead to more contact, legs stretching out, too, trapping Len’s strong thighs between his own.

As soon as he was close enough, Len licked into his mouth, hips grinding. Barry could feel his powers dancing just under his skin, then out—whole body blurring.

“Jesus, Scarlet,” Len broke the kiss, fingers digging in, grinding their hips together.

Barry didn’t even try to hide his grin, taking a deep breath and trying to ignore—ohhhh... Took a few tries before he was able to concentrate on just vibrating his hips. Len’s reaction was totally worth it.

The other man didn’t even try to control the loud moan that tore out of him, gripping Barry’s hips so tight there’d definitely be bruises, using the leverage to—grind like teenagers.

“Fuck! Barry—you,” he panted, biting the junction between Barry’s neck and shoulder, sucking.

“Ohhhh, that—” the pressure and heat was enough to break Barry’s tenuous control over his powers, whole body vibrating once more. “God, Len,” even his voice was reverberating.

“Goddamn—Barry, fuck—,” Len swallowed hard, “you gotta stop, Scarlet, or this is gonna end real soon.”

That...didn’t sound half bad. Not for him, anyway. Barry dropped his forehead to Len’s shoulder, taking a few deep, shuddering breaths until he finally got his powers back under control, going still.

“That...doesn’t really matter so much for me,” Barry said, pressing his lips along Len’s neck. Lingering on his pulse, licking—savoring the sensation of Len’s pounding heartbeat.

“How’s—your powers?”

Barry shivered slightly, the rasp and heat in Len’s voice going straight to his cock. “Yeah,” the speedster nodded, “um..I don’t have a refractory period anymore. Not really.”

“That’s...Scarlet,” Len’s voice was quiet, reverent, his fingers softly coming to rest under Barry’s chin, urging him to make eye contact.

“Not like...forever, though. Most I’ve managed was five, but that...”

“Five?! You...are a wonder, Barry.”

Barry ducked, hiding his burning cheeks against Len’s shoulder, “it’s super weird, I know.”

“Barry...your powers make you unique. Not weird or strange or something to be ashamed of.”

“Right,” he chuckled, “I’m unique. Len...I’m just a geek that got hit by lightning. That’s—”

“Remarkable. Special. Almost anyone else would’ve immediately used powers like yours for their
own benefit. Know I would. Instead you spend your time helping people, keeping the city safe. Consider the...vibrating and multiple orgasms a well-deserved reward.”

“You keep the city safe, too,” Barry insisted, “your methods are a bit unorthodox, but—”

“That’s enough of that,” Len interrupted, urging Barry up for another kiss. “Shall we move to the bedroom?”

Barry rolled his eyes, but stole another kiss, “fine, I’ll drop it for now. But I’m right and you know it.”

“Up, you,” Len poked his ribs, encouraging Barry to get up. He kinda had to, given that he was sprawled all over the older man.

“If I must,” Barry heaved a huge (very fake) sigh, “you’re comfy though.”

Len rolled his hips, hot, hard cock lining up with Barry’s, drawing out a moan, “convinced?”

“That’ll do it,” didn’t stop him from rocking against Len one more time before pushing himself to sit between Len’s thighs. “More room would totally come in handy right about now.”

“I’ll say,” Len’s smile sent warmth spreading through his chest. Something about those deep blue eyes—even if Barry could only make out a hint of color around blown pupils—was just so...something. Barry didn’t know how to deal with that. Being the subject of such smoldering attention and...well...admiration.

He got to his feet, automatically grabbing his t-shirt and starting to pull it on—at least until Len reached out and grabbed the hem.

“Leave it off?”

“Um...ok. But I’m not much to look at...”

“You’re not scrawny, you’re trim.” Len pulled Barry down into his lap, arms wrapping around his waist, pulling the speedster in for a long, lingering kiss. He was panting by the time Len pulled back, teeth pulling Barry’s bottom lip before releasing it with a pop.

“Scarlet, you’re built like a runner—shockingly enough,” that lopsided smile was so dangerous, “you’re gorgeous.”

The speedster looked down in an attempt to hide his pleased smile and growing blush. He didn’t necessarily believe Len, but appreciated the effort.

Len studied his face intently but dropped it, pressing another soft kiss to his lips, “you know where my room is—gotta get ready for bed. Won’t take long.”

Barry nodded and stood up, offering Len a hand.

Len accepted the assist, allowing Barry to pull him to his feet...and then used their joined hands to reel him in for another kiss.

“Crashing on the couch may not have been the best idea,” Len sighed.

“You weren’t exactly complaining.”

He laughed softly, “were you expecting me to?” Len arched an eyebrow; Barry just rolled his eyes.
“Shoulda grabbed a heating pad. Snow does not go easy on her patients…”

“Tell me about it,” Barry said, falling silent at Len’s mock-glare.

“As I was saying…”

Barry just smiled, Len was such a dramatic dork sometimes.

“My...lack of foresight means I’m far too creaky to make any significant dent in the list—”

“You made a list?” Barry laughed, “please tell me you didn’t write it down anywhere?”

“Course not. Lisa is insufferable enough as it is.”

“Oh good—”

“May I continue?”

Barry mimed zipping his lips but didn’t try to contain his grin. He never imagined...this. The playfulness, the banter, the teasing...he always thought—not that he spent a lot of time fantasizing about an actual relationship with his nemesis, at least not until he became Len—he thought the other man would be more serious. That he’d want to call all the shots.

And he was kinda leading things so far, but...but at the same time he encouraged Barry...basically gave him just as much control over everything—like...partners. Equals. Something that Barry hadn’t realized was missing from a lot of his previous—the low rumble of Len’s voice interrupted his thoughts.

“Means we’ll have to get...creative,” Len gave him one of those head-to-toe glances he was always giving Barry...that suddenly put a whole different light on a lot of his earlier encounters with the Rogue.

“Cuz I plan on taking you apart completely, Barry.”

It made him feel...warm. Barry gave into the urge to hug the other man, pulling him close and letting go before Len got a chance to react, “lead the way.”

Len took a minute or three to just...stare from the doorway. Drink in the sight of Barry sprawled out on his bed, dark boxer briefs tented, arms folded behind his head. Len—it was—he didn’t get chances like this. Never had, and until this inevitably went south, he was gonna savor every moment he got.

Barry noticed him looking and grinned, blushing even as he stared at Len in return. Could feel those bright hazel eyes taking him in, lingering on his lips, the marks Barry left last night...too bad his own were gone—just have to make some more. Tracing the lines and whorls of his tattoos. Licking his lips—intentionally or not—when his eyes finally made it to the bulge in Len’s pants. Fuck yes.

The hint of Barry’s tongue spurred him into action, quickly stepping out of his flannels on the way to bed. Barry’s all over him as soon as Len settled against the pillows.

Scarlet’s like a live wire—made hanging onto his control one hell of a challenge. Barry was straddling him again, taking advantage of their new location— “Ahh—There’s,” he groaned, “no need to speed through,” he bit his lip, “everything…”
Barry let out a husky giggle, stretching up to slide his nose along Len’s followed by a quick kiss.

“Chill, Len,” that grin was dangerous.

He did— “you did not just say that.”

“Oh, but I did. If you’re allowed to use puns, so’m I.”

It wasn’t easy to kiss with both of them grinning like idiots, but Len thought they gave it a good effort.

“Since you asked so nicely, I suppose I can take my time,” Barry said between kisses, “but given our track record...figured we had enough of ‘almost’.”

“Point,” Len could not stop smiling, let his body go limp, “please, continue.”

Barry nipped his jaw, pressed a kiss below his ear, tongue darting out, flicking his earlobe, “you sure now?” sucked, making Len shiver, “don’t want you feeling left out in the cold.”

Tried to come up with a snarky response, but the best Len could manage was a breathy “never.” He had no idea where Barry hid this confident side. Mischievous he got used to, but this—ah!—Holy...he was vibrating his tongue.

Len threw his right arm over his face in an attempt to stifle—hide—his response. Because...fuck, this was...never imagined in his wildest dreams—

Teeth scraping—Len had to touch. Needed to more than he had to hide. Hand coming to rest on a warm arm, stroking up his shoulder, neck, to tangle in messy brown locks—finally dry. Looking windswept and oh so soft beneath his fingers. Absently stroking—needing the distraction...goddamn.

Len concentrated, had to. Left hand fisting the blanket, right staying open and gentle on Barry’s head. Damn good thing he jacked off in the shower or he’d already be done. Control hadn’t been this tenuous in...forever...but he’d never experienced anything—anyone—like Barry.

And oh... “You are—fuck,” he gasped, “an evil, evil—ah dammit, Scarlet,” the speedster was vibrating his tongue, alternating between long licks, teeth, and teasing circles.

Wicked hazel eyes met his own, hot mouth switching from one nipple to the other. But not before taking the opportunity to blow a steady stream of air over Len’s wet skin.

Had to concentrate on his fingers in Barry’s hair, fanning them out, lightly scratching, massaging his scalp, temples—fighting to keep his eyes open. Because the sight of Barry Allen slithering his way down Len’s body was—fuck—something. A sight he never wanted to forget. Made no effort to direct his actions, didn’t need to, not with Barry.

Spread his legs without thinking about it, letting Barry settle between his thighs. Warm hands stroking up and down Len’s chest, along his sides, tracing each and every dip of his abs. That clever tongue swirling around Len’s belly button, dipping in.

Vibrating.

Dear fucking god, if Barry didn’t hurry up he was gonna cum as soon as he was touched.

The speedster came to a stop at the waistband of Len’s underwear. He held his breath, eyes locked with Barry’s. The other’s hands never still, holding on, stroking the vee of his hips. Staying there for
a moment, almost like he knew Len was busy trying to commit the sight before him to memory.

“So…” Barry began, chin brushing his dick through the soft cotton, making him twitch. Barry grinned, “I haven’t done this in like…way too long. Which isn’t exactly surprising cuz I haven’t had sex with anyone since before my coma—” blushing when his brain caught up with his mouth. Cute.

“And you totally didn’t need to know that…but I haven’t been with a guy since college, so I dunno how good this’ll be…” he trailed off.

Len smiled in response to Barry’s bashful grin, “no matter what you do, Barry, I’m sure I’ll enjoy,” ran his fingers through Barry’s hair once more, urging the other up for a proper kiss. “My dry spell…hasn’t been quite as long as yours…but not by much,” he admitted.

“Good to know,” Barry whispered against his lips.

Tongues lazily exploring, one warm hand sliding down Len’s stomach. Following the trail of hair downward. Stroking his cock over the fabric. Len groaned into Barry’s mouth. Barely able to stop his hips from jerking at the contact. Next pass went under the waistband, thumb hooking, pulling the elastic down. Giving room to—ah—move.

Barry eased out of the kiss, giving in when Len arched up to chase the contact. Quickly made his way back down Len’s body, sliding the boxer briefs down his thighs and off. Scattering kisses along his inner thighs, his hips, then...paused.

Len opened his eyes—not sure when he closed them—wondering what...oh. Right. Len was uncut and Barry was staring.

Nibbling his lower lip with curiosity painted all over his face. He probably hadn’t…

“Problem?” Len asked.

“Huh? Oh! No, not at all. I just haven’t…”

“Seen or been with anyone that hadn’t been circumcised?”

“Yeah,” Barry's voice was quiet even as the younger man pressed a reassuring kiss to Len’s thigh, “so...um...why…?”

“...am I uncut?”

Barry nodded, face a mixture of fascination and reluctance. Probably worried about offending him. Wasn’t possible.

Len shrugged, “not sure, but not complaining.”

“Really?”

“Mhmm—much more sensitive.”

“Oh,” Barry took that as permission—not that he didn’t already have it—and blew a hot breath over his cock, focusing on his head.

“Ah—yeah,” Len swallowed.

“Interesting,” Barry’s face was the picture of concentration as he stared at Len’s dick. “So if I…” the speedster brought a tentative hand up, gently rubbing his thumb along the shaft.
Len bit back a groan.

“Oh! It—you...you glide better.”

“That is one benefit, yes,” he watched, holding his breath, as Barry’s long fingers wrapped around him. Let out a stuttered exhalation at the light strokes, hands clenching.

Even with the short reprieve, Len was very much on edge. Closer than he wanted to be—Barry was carefully exploring, slowly regaining confidence. Len was torn between wanting him to hurry up dammit, and reveling in the attention. Never been with a partner that was so fascinated—should’ve expected it. Barry was a scientist at heart, only natural that he’d want to...conduct tests.

“Is,” Scarlet licked his lips, “is there anything I should...yanno, avoid, or...?”

“No teeth,” he warned. They could work up to that later. He hoped.

“That’s it?’

Len nodded, meeting Barry’s eyes. Taking in the bright flush, the spark of excitement, “yeah. You’re plenty creative, but...let’s work up to vibrations, hmm?”

Barry lowered his head, maintaining eye contact, licked the head of his cock—fuck. Smile was pure evil when he saw Len’s reaction, slid both arms under his thighs, sliding closer. Held his hips steady. Took another more confident lick, tongue laving his head, followed by a long stripe down his shaft.

"Feels different—good different, I promise!”

Len just laughed, fingers of his right hand carding through the brunette’s hair, nails scraping his scalp —pulling a quick tremor from the younger man.

“You sure you wanna play that game?” Barry grinned up at him, sticking out his tongue and letting it blur.

“Ah...no, not yet,” not unless he wanted this to be over embarrassingly fast.

“Didn’t think so.”

Left hand released the bedding, sliding instead to tangle with Barry’s on his hip, lacing their fingers together.

Barry presses a soft kiss to the head of his cock, then flicks gaze back up, holding onto eye contact as he lowered his —ohfuckhot—mouth down. About half way, tongue pressing, teasing, light suction. Careful to keep his teeth covered.

The image alone...fucckkk.

Slid back up, then further down, drawing swirling patterns this time. It was sloppy, but not as unpracticed as Len expected, given the disclaimer. Barry was a quick study, watching his face, breathing, clearly making note of his reactions.

Released him with an obscene pop, “I wanna try something—tell me if it’s not good.”

Nodded, eyes falling shut. Didn’t have the breath to tell Barry that he’d enjoy practically anything the younger man did to him.

Oh holy—”Ahh—damn.”
“Was that a ‘yes more’ damn, or ‘no, stop’?” Barry was officially a little shit.

“Fuck, Scarlet, whatever you want.”

“Hmm... I’m gonna take that as ‘more’,” the speedster was clearly enjoying himself, gaining confidence. And shit—he had every reason to be.

Len practically keened as that subtly vibrating tongue made a broad swipe over the head, followed by a clever—oh so clever—tip sliding under his foreskin—so sensitive—wouldn’t take much but didn’t want this over so fast—also didn’t want to discourage Barry from... improvising.

Holy shit! Len couldn’t control his hips when Barry swallowed almost his whole length and vibrated—the rest was a blur of heat and suction; heat building-the vibrations... Len had no idea how Barry figured out how—“shit, Scarlet—” he panted, “so fucking... Ah...” the vibrations sped up and he was cumming fast. Didn’t even get a chance to warn—

It wasn’t necessary. Barry swallowed, vibrations dying out. Gave his softening cock a lazy lick and crawled up the bed.

Len immediately pulled him into a kiss, breathing too fast to make it any good. Not that Barry seemed to care.

“That’s... one hell of a perk.”

“Good to know,” Barry’s voice was raspy in all the best ways, stretched out along Len’s side. Hips subtly rocking, grinding the other’s hard cock against his hip.

“Couldn’t figure that out yourself?” Len arched an eyebrow, finding that hard to believe.

Barry just shrugged.

Len kissed him again, breathing starting to return to normal, “your turn.”

“Yes... where?”

“Up on the pillows.”

Barry moved to comply, hand darting out to stop Len when he started sliding down the bed. “Wait—your shoulder.”

“Not worried about it.”

But he didn’t let go, “for real, Len. That can’t be... I don’t want you getting hurt because you felt the need to... um—”

“Blow you?” Len smirked at Barry’s quick blush. “It’s not an obligation in any sense of the word. No reason you should be the only one to get a taste,” made a production of licking his lips.

Hazel eyes darkened but the determined expression didn’t budge. “What about—ah!” he broke off with a moan.

The thief smirked, hand busy tracing the outline of Barry’s cock through his underwear, lingering over the impressive wet spot.

“How about... mmmm... how about this,” Barry gave up, reaching down to cover Len’s hand with his own. “Hang on a sec—can’t think with you doing that.”
“Kinda the point,” he said, removing his hand entirely.

Barry actually stuck his tongue out at him, “look,” he took a deep breath, glancing away, “I’m...this is gonna be over really, really fast, ok?”

“And...?” Len didn’t see the problem with that, especially since the speedster could ramp right back up again.

“God, this is embarrassing,” he muttered. Len frowned.

“Hey, don’t be embarrassed,” Len said quietly, “please look at me, Scarlet?” He waited until Barry met his eyes, “didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable. Tell me what you want.”

“It’s not—you didn’t…” Barry sighed and tried again. “I’m not uncomfortable, I promise. A little embarrassed because I’m prolly gonna cum as soon as you touch me,” he smiled a little—much better.

“Oh?”

“Yeah. You look—you’re seriously hot, Len.”

“Somehow I think the view I had was better,” his tone was teasing but he meant every word.

“Ha ha ha. You can lay off the flattery.”

“Not flattery, truth. Back to the point at hand,” toyed with the waistband of the deep red fabric. More burgundy than scarlet, though.

“You’re the worst—you do know that, right?”

Len chuckled but Barry wasn’t finished, “I don’t have to be in until noon, so there won’t be any rush in the morning and—you know, if you wanted to...maybe on the couch? Yeah, that’d work. But right now I really, really need your hand on me before I explode...possibly twice if that’s ok because god I’ve been imagining how your hand would feel...how you’d move...those long fingers of yours—never still—teasing and oh god working me open. Or watching you stretch yourself if you’d rather because shit I can’t stop thinking about you bending me over the kitchen table, or you riding me on the couch, or me riding you—oh god I’m still talking. Why am I still talking? Please—”

Hoollllyyyyy shit. Never in a million years would he have suspected Barry of having such a dirty mouth. Len shook himself, quickly moving to obey. Tugging his underwear down, careful not to apply any pressure to the speedster’s dick—he wanted to be able to watch Barry cum, see what he liked most...

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Turned out Barry wasn’t exaggerating. About how close he was, his refractory period, any of it. Len had no complaints and judging by Barry’s sleepy, sated grin, he wasn’t either.

“One sec,” the speedster blurred into action, taking care of the cleanup, turning off the lamp and getting them both settled under the covers.

Len smiled, warm and content. Barry tucked himself against his good side.

“Your powers are very convenient.”
“Yeah, I like ‘em. They’re good for more than foiling heists.”

He chuckled, pressing a kiss to Barry’s forehead. Barry kissed his chin with a smile, Len could feel it.

“G’night Scarlet.”

Chapter End Notes

AN:
We have Patty! Her lines were adapted from the show, I wanted to introduce her earlier than they did because she’s awesome.

ACK! My first real smut—writing this was nerve-wracking, hope you guys think it’s good and that Len isn’t too shmoopy (in my defense, most of it is in his own head). Redhead is the one that came up with the idea that after 5 back-to-back orgasms Barry would be way too sensitive to continue in her bodyswapped fic.

Please let me know what you think, I love all the comments and messages over on tumblr.
(also any typos)
Who Needs Alarm Clocks?

Chapter Notes

Ok, so this is later than expected...but on the plus side, I have pretty big sections of each of the next couple chapters either written or figured out, given how much of this got moved around.

Thank you Liu and Crimson, you guys rock.

Please enjoy (and feel free to point out typos and grammar issues, will do a more thorough edit in the morning)!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The urge to sneeze was what finally forced Len to acknowledge that it was, in fact, morning. After two attempts to escape the annoyance failed—right arm was trapped, but for some reason that didn’t bother him; left hand succeeded, but only for a few seconds—Len was awake.

First thing he saw was a mop of messy brown hair. Barry. Face tucked alongside his own, Len’s nose buried deep in his hair. Explained the urge to sneeze. But...did he already recognize the younger man as someone safe after just two nights?

Not important. Not when he woke up with Barry in his arms. Naked. Already hard.

Might have resisted the urge yesterday—good thing, too. Iris did not need a show; somehow Len doubted her willingness to look the other way would’ve lasted through walking in to find her not-brother’s cock down Len’s throat.

Speaking of siblings...Len carefully extracted himself from Barry’s grasp—not an easy task—and padded quietly out of the room. Left his phone by the couch last night and he needed to make sure Lisa would not waltz into his apartment that morning.

Spent about fifteen minutes texting back and forth, finally extracting a promise that she wouldn’t drop in on him. In exchange he’d have to endure an interrogation some time soon, and she only agreed after confirming that his ‘company’ was Barry.

Tried to distract himself a little longer—give Barry more time to sleep—by setting up the coffee and coming up with a few options for breakfast. If everything went according to plan, Scarlet should be ravenous by the time Len finally let the speedster out of his bed.

Keeping up with Barry’s appetite wasn’t much of a hardship, not when it meant spending the night together could become a regular thing. He could certainly afford it.

Finally gave in at 9:25, after taking care of a few more things. That was later than normal and gave them plenty of time before Scarlet needed to dash.

The speedster rolled onto his back when Len got up to text his meddling sister. Arms spread like they were reaching, searching for Len. Small frown beginning to mar his otherwise-peaceful face. Morning wood prominent under the thin blanket hiding most of Barry’s body from sight. Took a few minutes to admire the view—who could blame him for not being able to resist?
Damn but having Barry naked and asleep in his bed was...something else indeed. Something Len hoped would be a recurring phenomenon. Because...now that he had a taste? He’d do his best not to fuck it up. Making this work would be extremely complicated.

But now was not the time to dwell—he had a speedster to wake up, after all.

Wanted Barry to enjoy the wakeup call as much as possible and that meant protecting his shoulder. Doubted simply helping support his weight would put any meaningful strain on his arm, but that wouldn’t matter. Not to Barry, anyway. Len didn’t want him to feel anything but good.

Len climbed back into bed, crawling between the speedster’s legs and slowly pulling the blanket out of the way. Wouldn’t be the most comfortable position, but...it’d work. Barry probably wouldn’t last long enough for him to get a crick in his neck. Even if he did...it’d be worth it.

Settled onto his knees, ignoring his own arousal. Len steadied himself with his good arm, using the other hand to skate over Barry’s abs, lightly stroke his cock once, twice before wrapping his fingers around the base and taking just the head into his mouth. Scarlet smelled and tasted divine. Len was gonna enjoy this.

Barry felt himself drifting, content. Body pleasantly heavy and doing his utter best to hang onto the amazing dream he was having. Starring Len, of course. Not that imagining Len was all that unusual lately...oh hell. More than just lately. A few real winners even included that ridiculous parka and a secluded spot in the woods. But this one...this was so realistic Barry wanted to hold onto it for as long as possible.

Imagining Len’s hand on his stomach, his hot, perfect mouth descending...wrapping around his cock and—holy shit—his dreams were almost never that vivid. Barry didn’t try to stop his hips from moving, making dream Len chuckle softly—wow, he could feel that!—and pull off with an audible pop.

Audible...cold air, a warm hand—Barry’s eyes flew open just in time to watch Len swallow his cock completely, nose pressing—his throat—“Oh shit, damn—Len!” he arched off the bed, hands balled into fists to keep his hips still...because—damn.

“Fuck, Len. That feels just...” Barry gasped, forcing his eyes open because just the sight of Len kneeling between his legs, blue eyes fixed on Barry’s face full of heat and want and...happiness? Full lips already turning red, wrapped around his cock and—god—it looked like he was savoring every inch, each moment...

Ohhh—he gasped, nails digging into his palms because “dear god,” the thief was humming now, the corners of his lips twitching at Barry’s reaction. But only for a few seconds before sliding up and off.

“Morning, Barry. Sleep well?”

The speedster choked out a laugh, breathless and hard and oh so close...and Len was just kneeling there smirking at him like there was nothing out of the ordinary going on. Like he didn’t just have Barry’s dick in his mouth and actually expected him to be able to come up with some kind of coherent response.

Best he could manage was a groan, reaching out, running (slightly shaky) fingers over Len’s brow,
cheek, the soft fuzz of his hair in an effort to get the other to continue. No luck.

“Len,” he whined. The man’s smirk turned into a smile as he blew air over—ah—“dear god you’re so not helping the whole coherent thought thing right now, you know that, right?"

“Mhm.”

“You suck—very, very well, why did you stop?! Sleep was great and you know it,” he traced Len’s curved bottom lip with his thumb, “can we please get back to waking me up now?”

“Dunno, Scarlet…” Len’s voice was a low, teasing rumble, lightly stroking him now. Which yes, but it wasn’t enough.

Ok, Len was pure evil. Why did Barry ever think that being something with a supervillain was a good plan? Clearly he was evil personified and enjoying himself way too much. It took a while, but Barry finally managed a whimpered “please?”

“Since you asked so nicely…” Len grinned, finally taking pity on him, tongue flicking out and lapping at his head and oh shit that—Barry’s whole body blurred.

“Goddammit, that’s so hot, Barry,” he purred, “you’re so hot,” finally, finally taking Barry back into his mouth.

Barry batted Len’s left hand away when he finally noticed him using it, taking over stroking. Len smirked and used his free hand to full effect, rolling Barry’s balls, stroking below to tap lightly against Barry’s entrance.

“Fuck yes—nnn—shit Len please,” Barry was surprised by the sound of his own voice, had no idea he could sound so...wrecked. And really loud. But he was so far beyond caring—it was a corner apartment anyway—shifting, trying to press into Len’s finger.

Len pulled off, “easy, Scarlet, easy,” nuzzling his hip before sucking two fingers into his mouth and getting them good and wet. “Here’s what we’re gonna do: need your hand just so—” situated Barry’s hand so his first two fingers and thumb were wrapped around the base of his cock, holding himself steady, “while I will comply with your...request.” And oh shit, those long fingers were circling—but Len wasn’t done.

He smirked at Barry, looking...something. Amazing and smug and—Barry gave up trying to figure it out. Coming up with a description was way less important than listening to what Len had to say.

“Once my mouth is on you, I want you to vibrate that hand of yours and I’m gonna suck you dry,” Len punctuated the statement by sliding his index finger in, making Barry moan. “Got it?”

Barry nodded frantically, “yes! That! Let’s do that, c’mon, Len—”

“Go,” Len commanded, mouth sliding down until his lips touched Barry’s now-vibrating fingers. Sucking hard, tongue pressing against him, swirling. Fingers thrusting in and out and—

“Holy—dear god how d’you,” oh he was so close and…”Oh fuck, Len—” arched up off the bed, trying not to but losing that fight. Whole body vibrating, eyes shut tight and…

Len waited for him to finish—making good on his promise to suck Barry dry, but still...damn still going. Gently now, aware just how—making sure not to overstimulate as he worked Barry with soft licks and kisses until he was hard again—not that it took long.
“Come...come up here—” Barry gestured, hand on Len’s head, gently cupping the back of his neck, urging the other up the bed for many, many well-deserved kisses.

He waited until his breathing calmed down, until Len was lying alongside him, propped up on his side, leg possessively thrown over Barry’s thighs, before speaking.

“Good morning,” Barry knew his grin was well past the goofy stage but totally beyond caring. “I could totally get used to this kind of alarm clock.”

Len’s smirk was indulgent and sweet all at the same time. “I’m sure we could come to some...arrangement,” his voice was raspy and all kinds of confident even as something hesitant and unsure flickered over his face for just a moment.

The speedster bit his bottom lip, trying to...dammit. As much as he wanted to reassure...to tell Len that he didn’t exactly do casual...the words wouldn’t come. It was too early for that and he had so much to sort out and...well...the press of Len against him, hard length trapped against Barry’s thigh was a hell of a lot more appealing than talking.

“I’d really like that,” he said quietly.

“Mmm...good,” Len closed the minimal distance between them for another kiss. One that quickly turned deep and...well...possessive, if Barry had to guess. Each of them giving as good as they got until Barry finally forced himself to pull away for air.

“So,” he murmured, breathless, “did you have a plan when you decided to keep going, or can I try something?”

“Nothing that can’t wait for another time, Barry. I’m at your disposal.”

At this rate Barry was never gonna be able to stop smiling. He didn’t exactly have a whole lot of experience to work with, but... “would you, um...d’you mind if I,” he stopped, taking a deep breath and tried to channel some of his confidence from the night before.

Barry rolled onto his side to face Len without dislodging the other man’s leg—hooked around his hips now—which he circled against Len until their cocks lined up, making the other’s breath hitch just enough to be audible.

“Lube?” the speedster vibrated his hand for emphasis.

“Nightstand, my side, top drawer,” Len rattled off, rolling onto his back and starting to reach for it himself.

Barry was faster, of course. Crawling over Len’s body to retrieve the tube and settling astride his thighs, free hand lightly resting on his ink-covered chest.

“Like this ok?” Barry wanted to make sure, because...he didn’t know a whole lot about Len’s past, but...it was hard to forget the way Len, even mostly asleep, didn’t want Barry touching his scars a few weeks ago, or the way he practically snarled back at Saints and Sinners when all the speedster did was touch his forearm.

“Of course.” Yup, it was official. That smile did dangerous things to Barry.

“Good,” he flicked the cap open with a snap, coating his hand and scooting forward, fingers spread wide to wrap around both of them for a few experimental strokes. Eyes glued to Len’s face to catch every reaction.
And...damn. It—even just this was—"god, you feel..." speeding up a little, twisting his wrist as he went, earning a quiet whine from the man beneath him.

"Not mm...made of glass, gorgeous. Thought you were gonna—ah," whatever else Len planned to say dissolved into a loud moan when Barry allowed his hand to pulse with slow vibrations.

Barry bit his lip, focusing on that discomfort to maintain control...because—wow. Len felt amazing against him, under him...powerful thighs flexing when he bucked his hips—usually in response to—ohhhh—the stronger pulses...but fuck...quickly turned irregular.

"Fuck, Len...you look—you’re the gorgeous one, not me. Shit—if you could see yourself like this,” Barry dropped his head, free hand lightly scratching ink-covered flesh, pinching a nipple, rolling it between his fingers until Len reached up, tangling long fingers into Barry’s hair to pull him down for a harsh kiss—all teeth and tongue.

Then—god, Len pulled his hair. And that...“Ahhh! You’re never gonna forget how sensitive I—” he lost all control over his powers, hands, arms, then entire body blurring as he came, Len following moments later.

The room was quiet except for the sound of their breathing, interspersed with lazy kisses scattered across whatever skin they could reach. Len had yet to remove his hand from Barry’s hair, although he switched from pulling to a soothing stroking, flattening motion. It took a couple minutes, but they finally regained enough energy for a lazy kiss.

“How’s your shoulder doing?” Barry asked, pressing a soft kiss to the area in question.

“Perfect, Scarlet. After all, we were careful.”

“Uh huh. You were; I was just along for the ride.”

“Don’t recall any riding going on.”

Barry knew he was blushing...and based on the rumbling chuckle beneath him Len knew it, too.

“You know what I meant.”

“Mmm,” the thief agreed, “got the impression that you...were interested?” It was clear that Len chose the words carefully, lilting voice turning the whole thing into a question.

“I—yeah. Obviously. But...” Barry took a deep breath, Len’s fingers steady over his scalp, through his hair. The motion kept him from getting too nervous while trying to sort out his thoughts.

“It’s...we haven’t exactly been on good terms all that long, and...”

“New for me too,” Len’s voice was barely a whisper.

Barry stretched up for a kiss, making a face he hoped Len didn’t notice when they finally parted. Moving reminded him that they hadn’t cleaned up yet and things were starting to get really sticky—at least that was easy enough to fix.

Barry dashed to the ensuite, waiting for the water to warm up before wiping himself off and zipping in to do the same for Len. In the couple seconds he was gone the other man shifted to lounge against the headboard, pulling Barry into his lap once he was in reach and tossing the (now pretty gross) washcloth into the hamper.

“And for the record, I do like you...it’s—"
“I get it, Scarlet,” Len reassured him with a kiss...which quickly turned into a pretty heated make out session.

Neither of them needed much encouragement, after all. Barry took his time, finally able to study Len’s tattoos in good light. Paying just as much attention to the ink as he did to the scars that littered the other’s torso, trying not to let himself think too hard about what caused most of them.

Or he did until both of their stomachs growled. They laughed and Barry was pretty proud of himself for not blushing like an idiot. Len stole one last kiss that was more like a nip to his lower lip before unceremoniously pushing Barry out of his lap.

“Breakfast?”

“Please, like I ever say no to food.”

Len smirked, eyes still open and warm, “while I...fully appreciate the view, rather not give my neighbors a show.”

Barry had no intention of parading around naked for anyone (ok, Len prolly wouldn’t have a hard time convincing him), but he couldn’t resist snarking back, “seems awfully selfish of you.”

Whoa...Len’s eyes went all heated as he prowled over and licked deep into his mouth, not pulling away until he was breathless and dazed.

“Not sure what you’re trying to convince me of, but I’m sold.”

Len’s smirk reminded him of a satisfied cat as he let the thief back him towards the dresser. Not that he could look away from those deep blue eyes if he wanted to (he so didn’t), feeling trapped in all the best ways possible.

“Much as it pains me, Scarlet, I’m convincing you to put on clothes.”

Barry tried to hide his blush but Len’s finger under his chin made that impossible, drawing him into a kiss instead. Just a chaste press of lips, followed by another—harder and faster—before stepping back and giving Barry a little room to breathe. He rummaged through the drawers, pulling out a pair of sweats and long sleeve shirt and holding them out.

“Thanks,” Barry blurred into the offered garments, pulling the drawstring and tying it to keep the pants from sliding down his slimmer form. The shirt was a deep gunmetal grey and really, really soft and wasn’t too baggy. He’d have to ask Len where he got it. The two of them were about the same height, although Len was broader. Barry kinda liked it, the way they fit together.

Len just shook his head with the hint of a smile, dressing at a normal pace without a hint of self-consciousness before leading the way into the kitchen.

Breakfast was fun. Cooking together took longer than necessary because he and Barry couldn’t seem to stop kissing. Or touching—case in point: Barry was plastered against Len’s back, one hand hooked into a pocket while the other held a nearly-empty coffee cup. Len hadn’t noticed before, but Scarlet had an inch or so on him. Not that it mattered—was just...good to know.

Barry was starving—no big surprise there—and Len was pretty hungry, too. Should have enough to eat once it was done. Barry whipped up a quiche—including fresh pie crust—and just finished
cutting a batch of biscuits—half plain, half gouda—popping them in the oven before attaching himself to Len. Didn’t exactly make chopping easier, but it was just a minor challenge.

At least until he had to move.

“Scarlet,” he said, “gonna have to let me go—need to get the pan and start actually cooking.”

Barry heaved a sigh, “do I have to?” His voice was petulant, but he let Len go. “I’m out of coffee anyway. D’you need more, too?”

“Mhm, thanks,” Len moved to the stove, grabbing one of his cast iron pans, gently heating the metal. Allowing the speedster to swipe some bacon when he delivered Len’s mug.

Especially since it was followed by a bacon-and-coffee flavored kiss.

Finally made it to the table without too many more delays. Len had butter, honey, and jam for the biscuits. Barry quickly procured fresh fruit from...somewhere and they were good to go.

Table was properly set—including real napkins. Len...couldn’t remember the last time he did this—shared a proper meal with anyone other than Lisa...or Barry...and came up empty. “Does this count as a proper ‘morning after’, Scarlet?”

“Well, you did make me do some of the work,” that grin was impossible to resist.

“You offered, doesn’t count,” Len smiled.

Barry giggled, leaning in to meet him halfway for another kiss—Len lost count of how many they shared that morning. As soon as it ended, Len felt vaguely...anxious. Waited for a real answer.

“Len, it’s...you set the bar pretty high. This is—I hadn’t expected,” took a gulp of his coffee. “Ok, right, coherent responses help. I dunno what I expected, not really. Not after actually getting to know you. This is...a really, really great start.”

Len tilted his head, considering the other’s words...and everything Barry left unsaid.

“What...what about you?” Barry fidgeted, biting his lip and fixing bright hazel eyes on Len. Waiting.

“I think...you spoil me, Barry,” Scarlet’s face fell; Len forced himself to continue, “domestic is...not exactly familiar territory. But change can be a good thing.”

The grin was back; Barry could obviously read between the lines, too.

Silence reigned for a while as they focused on eating. So far Barry put away six biscuits—all slathered in butter and honey—half of the quiche—the crust was excellent, as was the filling of bacon, shallots, gruyere, and arugula—and nearly three quarters of the strata Len made. The thief couldn’t help but keep track—even knowing that it went to fuel his powers, the sheer amount was impressive.


Appreciating the shift to marginally lighter topics, Len slowly chewed his bite of his second slice of quiche. “Should get to see it happen sooner or later. If you were...serious about wanting our
assistance with the security?”

Barry nodded; Len tried to convince himself that the younger man’s face didn’t brighten up even more at his question.

“Well then...you’ll be seeing us around. Mick seems to have a sixth sense when it comes to locating Raymond and Stein if they’re in the building. Might even happen later today."

“Ok, that...that’s awesome. I know you prefer to be on the other side of a security system, but this’ll be a huge help. Thanks, Len. And as soon as I can make it official, I will.”

“You’re something else, Barry. How do you see that working out? Mick’s wanted. My records may be...gone, but that doesn’t mean people won’t recognize my name...or me.”

“Leave that to me,” Barry was smug—it was adorable.
Len raised an eyebrow, “aren’t you just full of surprises.”

“That’s what you keep telling me.”

“Never bother lying about the obvious. You keep me sharp.”

Scarlet shook his head with a soft laugh. “Ok Len, whatever. So...um, do I need to worry about Cisco’s safety yet?”

“No from me—as much as it pains me to admit. Lisa can take care of herself.”

“Lemme guess—she threaten you?” Barry grinned, “man, I’d love to know what she used as leverage.”

“No gonna happen.”

“Yeah, I figured. You know...it’s kinda weird. You’ve spent more time with my friends than I have lately.”

Len made a noncommittal sound, not wanting to dwell...or remind the speedster why that was the case.

“I know, I know. I’m...gonna try not to do that whole avoidance thing. It doesn’t really help and...and talking to certain people does.”

“Good to know,” Len tried to hide how Barry’s words affected him. Words were cheap, learned that lesson a long time ago. But something...took a deep breath, letting it out slowly, eyes drawn to the clock out of habit.

11:50.

“Got to be in at noon, right Barry?”

“Yeah, but I’ve still got plenty of—”

“Ten minutes.”

“Oh shit!” The speedster was a blur of color, clearing dishes, cleaning off counters, then a warm weight on Len’s thighs. Lips pressed to his. “I’ll text you? Not sure when I’ll be free, or...um...no pressure or anything. We’ve spent a lot of time together lately and I totally get it if you—”
Len cut off the ramble with a soft kiss, “texts are always appreciated. Not sure what my night’s
gonna look like, either. Doesn’t mean we can’t chat. Now shoo, before you’re really late.”

Another lightning-fast kiss and Barry was gone in a flash of yellow.

Barry was gonna be late...again. But it was so worth it. He never got lazy mornings. Not like this.
No one ever woke him up with a blowjob before, or called him gorgeous, or made him breakfast...

When Len asked about the whole morning after thing, he told the truth. Not that he had a whole hell
of a lot to compare it to, but...Barry was super awkward. He knew that about himself, and accepted it
a long time ago even though he didn’t like it. But with Len...things weren’t awkward at all. The sex
was really damn good, and wow that was awesome and totally not something that happened to Barry
all that often. But the best part was that everything between them was still so comfortable.

He just had to avoid Joe on his way in and Barry’d be set. Mostly because he pulled Len’s shirt back
on after a rushed shower and Joe would know it wasn’t his. Knowing his father...it wouldn’t take
him long to figure out exactly whose shirt it was and that was a conversation that so did not need to
happen at the precinct. Or at all...not until he and Len figured things out.

Barry skidded to a stop in the alley he usually used, really digging Cisco’s new compound—it was
great not having to worry about his shoes catching fire. He jogged the rest of the way into work,
arriving a mere five minutes late.

Captain Singh was in the bullpen, talking to the new officer—Patty?—and only rolled his eyes when
he caught sight of Barry, nodding his head towards the stairs. The speedster tried to tone down his
smile until he was tucked away in the privacy of his own lab where he could allow himself to revel
in the night before.

He pulled open the door, smile falling from his face at the sight of his visitor. Wells’ lawyer.
Fuck.

“Mr. Barry Allen?”

Barry nodded, not that it was really necessary.

“You are a hard man to track down.”

“Yeah, well...I’ve been really busy. Sorry for making you come all the way down here. I was going
to get this taken care of over the weekend.”

“That will be about three days too late,” the lawyer said.

“What do you mean? I thought Wells...gave everything to me,” Barry moved further into the room,
shutting the door behind him. “Whether I want it or not,” he muttered.

“If you fulfill all the conditions Dr. Wells established. Failure to do so puts the property, the entire
estate, into receivership. Other members of the STAR Labs board are eager to sell and there have
already been offers made,” he explained.

“Offers? By who?” Barry tensed. He might not want to own STAR Labs...but that didn’t mean he
wanted it sold to the highest bidder, either.
“I believe the military are the current front-runners, but Mercury Labs and Palmer Tech out of Star City have also expressed their interest.”

Barry paced restlessly, scrubbing a hand over his face, mind racing.

“Mr. Allen?” the attorney spoke after the silence stretched out for too long. “While you are clearly uncomfortable with owning the facility yourself, might I suggest that you accept the bequest and then...do with the estate what you will?”

“Ok...ok, yeah. What do I have to do to satisfy the remaining conditions?”

The man held out a flash drive, “he wanted you to watch this. Once you do, I’ll be notified and we can begin to finalize the necessary paperwork to make the transfer official.”

“That’s it? What’s on it?” Barry accepted the device, eyeing it warily.

“Yes, Mr. Allen, that is all you need to do. The file is for your eyes only, and you have until midnight on Wednesday to go through the contents, but I recommend you not wait until the last minute.”

“Alright...thanks.”

“All part of the service, Mr. Allen,” he handed Barry his business card, “I look forward to making progress with the estate. Have a good afternoon.”

Barry stared at the man’s retreating back before shaking himself, taking a photo of the card and texting it to Felicity. He hoped his friend would have time to check the guy out. He needed to know if the lawyer was reputable before the whole fiasco went much further.

He also created a reminder. He had to watch that damn flash drive...as much as he really, really didn’t want anything more to do with Eobard. But he couldn’t let STAR Labs go. And to do that...he’d watch the thing that evening after work, but...Barry wasn’t exactly sure he’d be able to get through it alone.

Iris came to mind immediately. Except...she’d have so many questions that Barry just didn’t know how to answer. Starting with why the words of a dead man—the dead man that murdered his mother—were so difficult for him to hear. Iris could be very black and white about some things, and explaining all of it...Barry wasn’t so sure he could handle that. He wasn’t keeping secrets, not really, he just did not want to talk about certain things.

Maybe Len? He was kinda out, too. Len wouldn’t ask questions, not if Barry didn’t want him to, but...what they had was too new for that kind of thing. Plus, Len probably had other stuff to do. And Barry didn’t want to be a burden.

Caitlin. As much as Barry hated to ask her to go through it...to go through the experience of looking at the man who nearly killed Ronnie twice, she...got it. The conflicting emotions, and...well, everything that happened with Eobard. Wells. Their evil mentor. Cisco did too, but...Cait wouldn’t push him to talk the way Cisco would.

It didn’t take long for Barry to lose himself in the rhythm of analyzing the evidence he and his co workers collected the night before. In fact, he was so focused that he nearly jumped out of his skin when a woman spoke up right behind him.
“Hi Barry—oh! I didn’t mean to startle you!”

“Hey, that’s ok. You’re Patty, right?”

She nodded with a bright smile, “yup.”

“Great. Is there anything I can help you with?”

“Well…you know Detective West pretty well, do you have any pointers for getting him to agree to let me on the task force?”

Barry shook his head with a laugh, “I’ve been living with him since I was eleven and haven’t had any luck cracking his ‘no’ code. If you figure it out, please let me know.”

“Will do. Um…in the meantime Captain Singh suggested that you, well, that I could help with some of the evidence you collected last night,” she flashed him a nervous smile. “If it’s not too much of an imposition of course. I love forensics and will do my best to stay out of your way. It’s just that…I’d love to help and otherwise I’m at loose ends right now. The Captain doesn’t want to assign me a partner because the results of my detective’s exam will be here in a few days, and Detective West refuses to even consider letting me assist on anything task force related…or even ask about it until the results are in and—”

Barry finally stopped trying to wait for a natural break in the conversation to speak up. Clearly Patty was a fellow nervous rambler and while he preferred to keep to himself…he enjoyed her company the night before. “Sure, that’ll work. Gloves are in the closet by the door.”

“Oh? Is the box on your desk special?”

“Not at all. But having to wear gloves that are too big sucks. This is mostly my lab, but I keep boxes of smaller sizes, just in case,” he smiled when she joined him by the computer, pulling on her own pair of gloves. “Sometimes Fisher comes in here to work when certain detectives are pestering her for results because no one ever checks up here unless they’re looking for me.”

“Why do you have this entire lab to yourself?” Patty asked, then made a face, “ignore me—that was way too personal.”

“I don’t mind,” and the funny thing was…he didn’t. Patty was nice and easy to talk to in ways that Barry usually didn’t find. He never had an easy time making friends, especially at the station. Patty was like a breath of fresh air.

“There’s a much newer lab facility nearby that houses most of the department’s CSI’s. They started the upgrade a few months after I was hired. As the newbie, they moved me up here with Williams during construction. After the new building was finished…I stayed here. Singh liked the idea of having a CSI in the building, and I liked having my own space. The officers already got most of the hazing out of the way, so…” he trailed off with a shrug, “here I am.”

“I’m glad you’re here,” Patty smiled, watching closely as he demonstrated what he’d like her to do with the crime scene photos. “I’m usually the odd one out, too. And yeah…hazing sucks. It was pretty bad at my first job…being a woman in the good old boys’ club. It also didn’t help that I knew a whole lot more about chemistry and forensics than the guy in charge of the lab there…and he got the job before I was born.”

“I hear ya,” Barry commiserated, allowing Patty to take the chair in front of the computer and watched as she processed the first few images. Simple changes only—fixing crops, white and color balancing using the adjustment strips that also doubled as rulers. The strips provided scale and
allowed for color correction without having to worry about some defense attorney claiming that the images were totally photoshopped.

“I’ve been here for a little over four years and even with Joe in the precinct...a lot of the rest still see me as a weak little lab rat that they can bully into getting the results they want,” Barry made a face, “doesn’t help that I look twelve.”

“You do not,” Patty had a nice laugh, “eighteen maybe…”

“Laugh it up,” they shared a smile, “seems like you’ve got a good handle on this. Don’t forget to add your name to the metadata of each photo you work on, and holler if you’ve got any questions.”

“Do I need to keep the gloves on?”

“My keyboard and mouse aren’t exactly evidence, so you’ll probably be safe without them.”

“Just wanted to make sure, Smarty pants.”

“I know—well, I figured. Your diligence is appreciated,” Barry smiled and got back to work.

Time went by quickly. He and Patty chatted a little more, but mostly focused on what they were doing. After a few minor stumbles, Patty quickly gained confidence with Lightroom. She made it through about three quarters of the photos by the time Eddie poked his head into the lab to say goodbye at the end of his shift. Patty was also done at 5:00, she finished the image she was working on and headed out as well, leaving Barry alone in his lab once more.

He had about an hour before the tests he was running would finish (or reach a stable stopping point). Barry used the time to check the images Patty worked on, looking over her edits, adjusting as necessary, and adding additional tags to facilitate searching as the investigation progressed.

The closer he got to finishing, the more Barry could feel the flash drive in his pocket. He was so not looking forward to watching the damn thing. Caitlin replied to his text—she’d be waiting for him at STAR Labs once he finished.

Meanwhile…

After physical therapy, none of them were in a hurry to leave. Instead they gathered in Cisco’s workroom to review the floor plans and get started with the security overhaul.

Even if...things with Barry crumbled, the security needed improving. And it wouldn’t keep him out.

“Hart, Cisco—bring up the plans on the large display.”

Hartley got to work, but Cisco intervened, “what’s the magic word?”

Lisa stepped in before the situation could degenerate any further, “ignore Lenny, cutie. His manners are beyond rusty.” Her smirk was devious, “please show us what we’ve got to work with.”

The engineer blushed and sputtered, as expected, but quickly complied. Trust her to use any opportunity to flirt.

Len studied the plans as they flickered to life, “can you overlay the cameras onto the schematic,” paused, deliberately adding a, “please.”
“Since you asked so nicely…” the sound of rapid typing quickly took over.

Except… “don’t hold out on me, kid. I know there are more cameras than this.”

“Yeah…but they’re not operational.”

“That’s illogical even for you, Ramon. Why have them if they’re not in use?”

“Those are the ones Eobard—fake Wells—used to spy on us. And...uh...About that. Kinda sorta owe you an apology about all that, Hartley.”

Hart merely swiveled to face Cisco, arms crossed expectantly. Silence stretched even longer, until Piper heaved a loud sigh, “well? Still waiting for the actual apology part.”

“God, you’re such a _dick_. Fine. I’m sorry for not listening to your warnings about Wells. And a little for the torture thing; that was totally outta line. But you can’t really blame me for ignoring what you had to say about Wells. What with...everything.”

Hart considered the rambling speech, “alright. Let’s get back to work. Do you have a map of the network you deactivated?”

“No, we...uh...never had time. It wasn’t exactly a priority at that point.”

“How’re you sure you got ‘em all, kid?” Mick spoke up from his slouch against the wall.

“We—Barry really—asked Gideon to turn them all off. It took forever just getting them out of Joe’s’ house, Iris and Eddie’s place, Barry’s lab at CCPD—”

“Do you still have them?” Hartley interrupted.

“Of course,” Cisco looked insulted, “never waste good tech. ‘Specially not when it’s this good.”

“Excellent. You learned _something_ from that trade school after all,” Piper sneered.

“Ok, first, a full ride and accelerated Masters from CalTech is _not_ a trade school degree. Second, could you stop being a huge douche for, like, an hour?! I know it’ll be hard, but you claim to be god’s gift to science so I know you can manage,” Cisco snapped back.

Len...emphasized the request with a menacing glare when Hart’s eyes darted in his direction.

“Can’t you just ask this...Gideon for the locations?” Len asked.

“Gideon’s...gone.”

“D’you really think there’s someone that can disappear so thoroughly that we can’t find them?” Lisa crossed her arms, faking an offended expression.

“Please, you guys don’t have anything on Felicity,” Cisco grinned. Len made a mental note to figure out who he meant and see if she would be willing to offer her expertise if provided with appropriate compensation.

“Back to the point—”

“Guys, look, just...forget I said anything about it, ok? Gideon—I never shoulda brought her up to begin with. Once I figure out how to activate the cameras again....then we can add ‘em to the map.”
“She die?” Mick came over to stand next to Len, studying the schematics closely.

“No, that’s not it at all….Ugh, ok fine, but this is totally on all of you if it bites me in the ass,” Cisco threw up his hands in frustration. “Gideon was...is?...will be? time stuff is so confusing. It’s an AI. Reverse Flash—Eobard—fake Wells—whatever you want to call him brought it with him. Let’s just say that it disappeared when he did and leave it at that, ok?”

Len tilted his head in acknowledgement, “alright. You and Hart get to work bringing the cameras back to life. Lisa, Mick—Let’s go scouting.”

“Sure Boss,” Hartley absently responded, already engrossed in the terminal before him.

“Fine, Cold. But I’m not gonna call you ‘boss’,” Cisco’s grin was a teasing challenge. Kid knew Len presented no real threat to him. Not in his domain of the Lab or at all. He liked the engineer, had no intention of risking Lisa’s wrath or Barry’s...disappointment.

“We’ll see about that.”

He, Lisa and Mick focused their efforts on access points and the floor immediately below the cortex for now, going in different directions without bothering to discuss. Worked together long enough, after all.

Len was enjoying himself more than expected. Turned out, trying to come up with ways to prevent infiltration was nearly as challenging as breaking into a mark in the first place. Moreso for S.T.A.R. Labs—place was a joke.

Elevators on his side had all the necessary wiring to restrict access using biometrics and RFID proximity passes—the measures just were not turned on. Cisco should be able to fix that easily enough, at least the iris scanner.

Already had a few other suggestions in mind, including trapping interlopers between floors and sending a security alert to...whoever. Probably Barry and Cisco...although Raymond and Stein wouldn’t hurt either. That way they’d have footage, the trespasser would be trapped, and approved personnel could redirect to the proper floor. Including the main entrance or some sub-basement level for questioning.

Had no idea what Barry planned to do with the place. If he intended to leave it as-is, simply tightening surveillance and access points would do it. Establish checkpoints on the main floor—one for each elevator and stairwell, nothing too obvious. Backed up by iris scanners or some other type of biometric lock for actual entry to the cortex level.

But keeping the place empty wasn’t the best way to go. Too little cover. Wouldn’t take long for more people to figure out the place was The Flash’s headquarters if it stayed abandoned. Taxes alone would quickly burn through whatever windfall Barry got. Bringing the place back to life would...complicate matters, but provide a hell of a lot more cover for Flash activities.

An actual staff would distract from the constant blasting in and out and give Cisco, Caitlin, and the others a crowd to blend into. It also meant they’d have to come up with a few alternate entrances for Barry and Firestorm—especially Firestorm—to maintain their secrets.

“Len,” Mick’s gruff voice rang out down the hall, “we gotta talk.”
Len raised an eyebrow, gesturing for him to continue.

“You wanna go through with this?”

“Making the place more of a challenge? That’s the plan. Gives us something to do.”

“Right,” Mick scoffed, “an’ it has nothin’ to do with the growing collection of bite marks on your chest?”

Shit. When had Mick—Len opened his mouth to say...something but never got the chance.

The pyromaniac’s smirk grew, “good t’ have confirmation. Was just guessin’ about the marks but I know how you look after a good fuck. No clue how you managed to bag Flash, but this is gonna get messy. Fast.”

“Doubtful,” Len said, crossing his arms and glaring at his partner.

“Bullshit. Don’t know the kid well yet, but someone like him doesn’t do casual anythin’. You don’t either, buddy.”

“Right,” Len made sure his voice practically dripped with sarcasm and scorn. Casual and cheap were all he usually managed and Mick knew it.

“Not when ya know the guy, Snart. I’ve called out your obsession with the kid long enough to know the signs, so don’t bother denying it. You want to keep him.”

“Wouldn’t go that far,” Barry was far too stubborn to ever be ‘kept’, he’d have to want to stay. “But fine, yes. We’re...involved.”

“Huh, thought it’d be harder to get you to fess up.”

Len just shrugged—wasn’t much point denying it to Mick or Lisa. They’d just see through it.

“I am aware that this presents...complications. It’ll be handled.”

“So y’re gonna ignore it. That’ll go real well the next time some outfit decides to take Flash out,” Mick scoffed. “Y’expect me to believe you’ll stay out of it?”

“That depends,” Len glared, “I’ll handle it.”

Mick scoffed but didn’t push further. Knew him well enough to know when to stop.

Chapter End Notes

So we don’t actually know where Cisco went to school. I decided he was more West Coast and went with CalTech. Barry went to Johns Hopkins (since all we know is that he went to school somewhere other than Central. A full ride or close to it would be enough to convince him to go halfway across the country to school).

Feel free to hit me up on tumblr!

Comment moderation is on, let me know if you want your comment private :)
Len ditched the sling as soon as he got in the door of his apartment, tossing it at the kitchen table on his way to change into something more…appropriate. For Saints and Sinners. Day’d been pretty damn good so far, hated having to risk that. But Mick had a point

Needed to show his face after so much downtime. Prove he was still the boss, still running his turf.

Hadn’t set out to become someone that claimed territory, but…Not long after The Flash began making his mark on Central—before kidnapping Snow but after giving Mick his gun—Saints and Sinners went up for sale. So he bought it. The whole building.

Didn’t change anything. Still hadn’t—less than ten people knew the place changed hands and Len intended to keep it that way. Even as he slowly turned the second and third stories into a clubhouse of sorts. For the Rogues. Kept the fourth floor for himself, somewhere he—or Lise, or Mick—could crash. If necessary. Far as anyone else knew it was just storage. Looked like it, too. Unless you came in up the fire escape and maneuvered around a broken table and stack of chairs. The perfect bolt hole.

From there it was inevitable that the surrounding area slowly fall under Rogue protection.

Real estate in the area was cheap. That was why there was a domestic violence shelter and a group home within three blocks of a dive bar. But it was cheap because calling it ‘run down’ was generous.

Should’ve seen it coming—only a matter of time before a fucking batterer tried to force their way into the shelter when he and Mick were around to do something about it.

Len saw what was happening and saw red. Mick kept him from killing the asshole. Even if he deserved it. Never told Mick what happened with his father, but somehow his partner knew anyway.

When lights and sirens came within earshot the director of the shelter hustled them inside and the residents hid them. Without question, without flinching. Even though they were bloody, seething, fresh from a fight. Len knew how hard that was…never forgot, no matter how many years went by.

Word got out after that. Not to fuck with the shelter or its residents. Didn’t take much—scum that went after family were cowards. Few weeks later Baez caught some douchebag hanging around the group home, trying to convince the kids to deal for him. She…handled it. Quite admirably, if Lisa’s account was even slightly accurate. And Len found himself with a neighborhood under his—their—protection.
Refused to collect street taxes. He didn’t need the cash and the Rogues knew he took care of his own; these people had nothing to spare. But they did look the other way, sent CCPD off on wild goose chases more than once, tipping them to undercovers in the area. And feeding them at every opportunity.

Bravermanns did, anyway. Took a month of his and Lisa’s combined efforts for the older couple to at least allow the Rogues to cover cost some of the time. Didn’t want to be responsible for putting one of the best delis in the City out of business, after all.

Len got dressed, minus the sling, and set off to do his rounds for the first time in nearly a month.

Took a lot longer than usual. Mrs. Bravermann insisted on feeding him chicken soup and a knish because “that delightful nurse, Shawna, said you were under the weather, dear.”

Experience taught him it was much easier to allow Mrs. B to mother him than it was to dissuade her. He didn’t have a whole lot of memories of his own mother. Not ones that weren’t tinged by fear. Sometimes found himself imagining his own mother fussing over him like this. Made him feel warm.

Chatted while he ate—got an update, heavily editorialized—about what went on while he was healing and losing himself in Barry’s world of S.T.A.R. Labs and metahumans and whatever else was going on between them. There were two new families in the shelter—both with young children. Mr. B. set up some bunk beds for them, but they hadn’t left the safety of the building yet.

Took forty-three minutes, but Len was finally able to get going. Stuffed to bursting with good food and the latest gossip. Couldn’t help picturing how quickly Mrs. B would take Barry under her wing, provide the speedster with more food than even he could put away. Should make that happen. If they were…if this was…

Len shook his head. Not the time.

But those thoughts wouldn’t go away. It was impossible to stop picturing Barry by his side, greeting everyone with that sunny smile and endearing nervous charm. Wanting to fix all of it—the area, the broken lives—as best he could. Making them feel safe in ways Len hardly understood but felt himself drawn to. Because…because Barry was broken too, just like the rest of them.

Only he found the strength to heal. Had help, of course, but Barry didn’t let what happened to him rule his life. Not the way Len and Lisa and too many others did. Barry never did anything the easy way—a quality Len appreciated more than he ever thought possible

It was close to 11:00 by the time Len parked his car around the corner from S & S. Took a deep breath, shoving his fatigue, the ache in his shoulder out of his mind. An hour. Just an hour, then he could go home.

Alone. To an empty apartment. But he needed sleep—hadn’t gotten much lately…even if the quality of his rest showed a remarkable improvement the past few nights. Between Barry and the PT and all the healing he’d been doing…the exhaustion wasn’t surprising.

Tempted…extremely tempted to text Barry, see if he’d be game to spend another night together. Third in a row…should probably allow Scarlet a night off? He had his own life. Didn’t want to lean too heavily, not yet.

Len could use the space, too, needed to sort his own shit out before he was too far gone on the younger man. Ignored the little voice that told him it was already too late for that.

He had Rogues to lead, after all. Needed to focus.
Squared his shoulders, switched his personal phone to vibrate and stepped into the building.

Checking in with his manager and bartender, Lynette didn’t take long. Business had been steady, they auditioned a few new cooks without much success. Len made a mental note to talk to Mari at the shelter and Mr. and Mrs. B to see if they knew anyone that’d be interested in the job. Wouldn’t be the first time he hired from the area since taking over. The barback, Sam, and her kid were finally able to move out of the shelter and into one of the nearby buildings about a month and a half after Len hired her. First week was a little rocky. Understandably so. But Lynette made sure she knew what she was getting into…and that she was safe there, behind the bar or not. Regulars knew the drill. Brawls were to be kept away from the optics and never involve staff. Drunks tried to pick up employees at their own peril. Between Lynette and the Rogues, anyone that crossed the line quickly found themselves out on their ass—literally.

By the time he and Lynette emerged from the back office, word of his presence spread. Place was packed—Lise and Shawna helping Sam behind the bar, all the Rogues crowded around. Mick in his usual spot by the pool tables. Quick scan of the room revealed most of the regulars and a handful of members from Central’s various factions.

So much for his ‘short’ visit.

Lisa sidled over to him, “I’m a little jealous, Lenny. My welcome back was nowhere near this size.”

He resisted the urge to make a face, settling on a sardonically raised eyebrow. Lisa damn well knew that crowds and being the center of attention weren’t his scene. But they were something he had to deal with since becoming Captain Cold. Founding the Rogues. It was…expected. A necessary inconvenience that came with running a regular crew. One with its own turf.

Played pool and exchanged barbs with Frankie Santini and his kid. Wiped the floor with them and they left without much to show for it. Mendoza’s henchmen and the lone Darbinyan kid—Victor—cleared out soon after. They’d just been there to gather intel.

Didn’t give ‘em much—nowhere near as much as he got out of them. Was tedious, but worth it to know that the majority of the players in Central didn’t know where he’d been laying low. Or that he still wasn’t a hundred percent—damn good thing the injury was to his non-dominant arm.

Len took a sip of his tonic. Lynette knew him well. First two glasses were actual vodka tonics—half strength with so many unfriendly faces—then just tonic. Only Lynette, Lise, and Mick were aware of the swap.

Assholes taken care of, it was time to tackle Rogue business.

Barry could not process what he just heard. There was no way, he had to be imagining it. Judging by the way Caitlin was staring, equally dumbfounded, at the monitor displaying the frozen face of the man that had once been their mentor…she wasn’t in much better shape.

“Did…did he just?” he couldn’t find the words, didn’t dare. Because…god, if this was real, if he wasn’t hallucinating—

“I think so, Barry. Do you…should we watch it again to be sure?” She didn’t have to add ‘just in
case’—Barry heard it loud and clear.

The speedster swallowed hard and nodded.

Caitlin reached out, restarting the message from the beginning. Her fingers returning his death grip while they watched the smug bastard begin summarizing the chaos he caused since arriving in their timeline by saying ‘bummer’.

Barry forced himself to listen. Really listen this time. Not seethe at the man’s arrogance oozing through the computer screen while he had recorded the message—one last way to screw with all of them after his death…

Holy shit. There it was again.

“He…” Caitlin trailed off, squeezing his hand.

“I can’t—“ believe it, but oh god, it had to be real. “I need to call Joe,” he finally choked out, vision swimming, smile slowly spreading across his face. Despite his tears.

“What’s up, Bear?”

“Joe, hey. Um, can you come to the Lab as soon as possible? There’s something…you’re gonna have to see it to believe it. If I tell you about it I’ll jinx it…or it still won’t be enough, or—“

“Son,” Joe broke into his ramble, “is everything ok?”

“Better than…I think—I hope…please just…I need you to take a look at this before I let myself hope—“ he let out a choked laugh, “even if it’s already a little too late for that.”

“Alright Bear. Gimme five minutes to finish up here, then I’ll be on my way.”

“Yeah, yeah that’s great. Thanks.”

As soon as he hung up Caitlin pulled him into a tight, full-bodied hug.

Barry hid his face in her shoulder, laughing and crying all at once. He couldn’t believe it. Couldn’t let himself...not until Joe weighed in. Except it was really, really hard to keep the warmth at bay for the twenty minutes it took for the detective to join them in the Lab.

They watched the whole thing again, although Barry’s eyes were glued to Joe rather than the screen this time. Watching the expressions play over his father’s face—anger, scorn, skepticism, and then...surprise. Surprise and a slow smile. Barry let out the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding.

“This...this might just do it, Bear. Between the confession and the blood samples Cisco found last spring…” he trailed off, squeezing Barry’s shoulder and pulling out his phone.

“Hey Camille, remember how you said we’d need more than the foreign blood spatter to get someone to reconsider Henry Allen’s case? I think we got it.”

Barry couldn’t stay still anymore. He bounced anxiously on the balls of his feet, waiting for Joe to do more than say ‘ok’, ‘yeah’, and ‘sure’.

“Sounds good, Camille, see you in thirty,” Joe signed off.

“What’d she say?” Barry asked, trying without much success to keep a lid on his emotions.
“She couldn’t say too much yet, not until she sees the footage. You know that,” his father was trying to project calm, and doing a way better job than Barry. He might even believe the act, if he hadn’t spent the last fifteen years learning Joe’s tells.

“Ok, ok...got it. But—”

“Bear, don’t ask. Please. I don’t—” Joe cut himself off, but it was easy enough to figure out what he would’ve said. He rubbed a hand over his face, “look—why don’t you copy the file, then get rid of the start of the message on the drive? The DA’s office is gonna need to authenticate the drive for it to be admissible.”

“Yeah, got it,” the speedster flashed to the keyboard, copying, editing and making sure he covered his tracks thoroughly. The file had to appear pristine, but there was no way the DA’s office could hear anything but the confession. It took longer than usual, but Barry was being extra careful. He finally had what they needed to free his dad—he hoped—and he had no idea what he’d do if it fell apart now.

After checking the drive on his laptop, running the protocols that the DA’s investigators would to insure it passed, he handed the device to Joe.

“That should do it,” Barry’s eyes still stung, but he couldn’t stop smiling.

“I’ll let you know what the verdict is asap,” Joe pulled him close for a quick hug before jogging out of the cortex.

Caitlin was smiling, cheeks as wet as his own, wrapped him up as soon as Joe left. Neither of them spoke, they didn’t really need to.

Barry was tempted to reach for his phone, to call Iris, Cisco, his dad, Len, to share the good news...but he held off. Sharing with anyone else would make things too real, and he couldn’t risk that. Not until Joe had an update for their chances...not until there was confirmation that it’d be enough.

“Why don’t you go for a run while we wait?” Caitlin suggested softly, “you’re, um…”

Oh crap. He was vibrating. The speedster smiled ruefully, stepping back. “Sorry about that. Uh, yeah. A run sounds like a good idea. You’ll…”

“Oh of course I’ll stay—and you’ll know the second Joe has news.”

Barry zipped into his suit, grabbing Caitlin for one more lightning-fast hug, heading out into the city.

Running without any goals in mind Barry quickly found himself on the outskirts of Iron Heights. It’d be so easy to phase inside, hug his dad, tell him—but no. Not yet.

He ran a lap around the complex before heading back to Central. Zipping through the streets faster than ever. Covering the entire grid, reveling in his powers, detouring across the bay, heading upriver a ways, throwing up spray beneath his pounding feet. Pivoting to rush back and up the stanchion of the bridge, zipping along the suspension cable.

From there he dashed through the seedier parts of town, absently noting Len’s car parked on a side street. Barry quickly dismissed the idea of trying to find the thief. He was in costume, after all. If the Rogues were actually up to something Caitlin would’ve let him know.

The speedster had no idea how much time elapsed—he was debating a jaunt up to Star City when
Caitlin activated the comms.

“Joe just called, Barry. He’ll be here in ten minutes with a full update.”

Barry’s tummy swooped, full of excited butterflies riding a roller coaster.

“Did he...did it sound like good news or...?”

“I don’t know, sorry. All he said was that he was on his way back, and then hung up,” Barry could hear her purse her lips, “keep going. I’ll give you a two minute warning.”

“Thanks Cait. For...everything.”

“You’re welcome.”

Barry ran.

Times like these really made Barry want to hate his powers. Even running through Central and trying to take his time on the way back, he still beat Joe. Those final few minutes of waiting were endless torture.

By the time Joe finally reached them in the cortex, the speedster was pretty sure Caitlin was super close to strapping him down so he’d stop bouncing around the room.

“So...?”

“She’s pretty sure it’ll be enough, Bear. You’ll have to swear an affidavit about how the recording came into your possession—Wells’ attorney’ll need to do that, too—to establish chain of custody. Once that’s done she’ll bring the video, blood evidence, and Cisco’s analysis to the DA...from there, we’re looking at about a week to get the paperwork all processed, clear his record, restore his medical license, the works. Although the license may take longer.”

“Really? It’s enough?”

“Camille thinks so. You may want to hold off telling your dad until we hear from the DA. Just in case.”

Barry had no idea what to do with himself first. This is—he couldn’t...after so long and...Fuck, but it could still fall apart—he didn’t know what he’d do if that happened, never mind what it’d do to his dad...

He flashed over to Joe, wrapping his foster father up in a full-bodied hug, sobbing into his shoulder. Joe held him back just as tight, gently rocking them back and forth.

“For real? It’ll finally happen? Probably,” Barry tacked on at the end, not wanting to jinx it. Not after so many almosts.

“Son, you know I wouldn’t sugarcoat this for you. Can’t promise it’ll happen yet, but the odds are better than ninety percent...as soon as I know for sure, you’ll know.”

“Thank you,” Barry managed to choke out, finally getting his tears back under control. “Really Joe, thank you so much. For everything.”
“Not necessary kiddo, but you’re welcome.” Joe’s arms tightened, “love you, son.”

“You too,” he sniffed into his father’s shoulder, soaking up a few more minutes’ worth of comfort before finally stepping back and zipping to Caitlin, hugging her so tight she squeaked.

“Ok Barry,” she laughed, “put me down and I think it’s time for us to call it a night.”

“You guys go ahead, I’m gonna do some more rounds of the city...otherwise I’ll never be able to sleep.”

“Allright—just don’t go looking for trouble.”

“Who? Me? I’d never,” Barry pretended to look scandalized at the thought...even though he was composing texts to Len in his head and that’d totally count as trouble in Joe’s book. “See you guys tomorrow.”

Menacing glares from Mick was all it took to empty the bar of everyone except the Rogues. Lynette rolled her eyes, locking up as the last patron scurried out.

“So much for my busy night,” she grumbled good-naturedly, shoving Mick’s shoulder.

“Sorry Lynette, business calls,” Mick gruffed in response, their exchange practically scripted by now.

“I know the drill—but you owe me.”

“What needs fixin’ this time?”

Len cleared his throat pointedly. Wanted to go home some time this century.

“I’ll make you a list,” she threw the pyromaniac a grin, “the bar, your Highness,” favored Len with a florid courtesy, leaving the building whistling.

Took a moment to smirk at Lynette’s retreating back, gathering his thoughts. Len was leaning against the bar facing the room, angled just so, affording him a view of the street.

His Rogues gathered before him, draping, slouching, and otherwise making themselves comfortable. They were all there: Lisa, Mick, and Hartley, of course; Mardon leaned against the nearest pool table, not far from where Baez perched on a corner. Bivolo kept back, clearly nervous, but present.

Went through the usual updates, trouble spots, and skirmishes. More activity than normal, but to be expected. Didn’t take long for people in their...line of work to notice the conspicuous absence of Captain Cold, Heat Wave, and Golden Glider.

Nothing major. Simply...testing. Testing the Rogues and their commitment.

Len was pleased to learn how they handled themselves. Melding his earlier conversations around the neighborhood with the accounts being fed to him by his crew. Getting a more accurate version than he expected.

“Ok Boss, enough old business,” Mardon stood, arms crossed, expression challenging. “What’s the plan?”
“Regarding?” Len raised an eyebrow, less than impressed by Weather Wizard’s posturing.

“Flash Day. You’ve gotta have something up your sleeve to ruin the precious hero’s big day,” Mardon’s smirk oozed confidence.

“Planning to give it a miss,” Len made a production of inspecting his nails.

“What? Less than a month away and you’ve gone soft, Snart?” He hissed, stalking closer. Nearly invading Len’s space, “or are the rumors true and you’re working with The Flash now, Cold?”

The air seemed to leave the room. Lisa and Mick tensed at his back, ready for action. Baez shrunk, leaning closer to Hartley, who flexed his gloves. Bivolo stiffened, eyes darting between Len and Mardon. Torn.

Damn good thing they cleared the bar for this meeting.

“No.” The thief tilted his head to the side. Studying Mardon like he would a moderately dim...associate...that thought he had a clever idea.

“Bullshit! You, your sister, and Rory have been living at his base all goddamn month. The Families may have bought whatever line you fed them about a fucking ‘leadership retreat’ or whatever, but not me.”

“Your...shadow didn’t tell you?” Len asked with a nod to Bivolo, standing off to the side but still closer to Mardon than the rest of them. Time to see which way Raider’s loyalty was leaning.

Mardon followed Len’s nod with a confused glance, further reinforced by a shake of Bivolo’s head and the subtle, placating raise of his hands. Interesting.

“Thought not,” Len shouldered past Mardon. The meta’s powers flared to life, making the air in the bar thick with pressure and electricity. So very different from the charge that surrounded Barry.

“I can’t fucking believe you, Snart. I thought you lived to get that red asshole off the streets and out of your way.”

“Correct so far...” to a certain extent. Exact degree and his preferred methods for distracting the Scarlet Speedster may be...changing. Dramatically.

“What better way to prove he’s no hero than crash the damn party?” There was now a miniature storm cloud hovering just over Mardon’s shoulder, static building even further.

Caught sight of yellow lightning out of the corner of his eye—must be a reflection.

“Power down, Weather Wizard,” Len kept his tone even. “Think about the bigger picture,” even though he was facing Mardon, the last statement was directed to all the Rogues.

“Ah,” Hart murmured. Entirely for effect—Piper rarely needed things spelled out for him. Baez and Bivolo looked puzzled. Mardon still looked angry, but he was wary now, too.

Forty-two seconds of silence followed, until Mardon shifted his weight, cloud shrinking but not dissipating.

“Silence is deafening.” Len drawled. Mick snorted softly, something he pointedly ignored. Exercise wasn’t for his benefit.

“So’re you gonna tell us or just stand there looking smug?” Mardon demanded.
Smugness won. Entire point was to make Mardon squirm—why cut that short?

“You cannot come up with any reasons why a show of force would be a bad idea?” He leaned a hip against the bar, deceptively casual, “early afternoon, news crews...nothing comes to mind?”

Hartley was the only one of the new recruits to meet his eyes.

“Piper, start us off.”

“For you? With pleasure, Cold,” the scientist got up with a teasing smile. “Enlightening the masses is such a chore, but I shall persevere.

“The eyes of the entire city—perhaps the entire region—will be on that...display,” the kid wrinkled his nose at the thought.

“So? That was my point, Rathaway—show everyone what we can do.”

“By embarrassing The Flash and the CCPD on camera? You cannot possibly be that simple, Mardon,” his tone was scathing.

“I’m not a moron, Piper,” Mardon’s hands balled into fists, storm cloud seething once more, “why shouldn’t the city know about us? Fear us? We could have ‘em falling all over themselves to—”

“Ohhhh,” Baez’ expression cleared, catching on.

“Making our little group the focus of every law enforcement agency in the region, including The Flash. Maybe ARGUS. Our faces plastered everywhere. That kind of notoriety makes it difficult to get groceries, never mind pulling jobs. That may sound like fun to you, Sparky, but it gets tedious. Fast.”

“They can bring it. I can take whatever they throw at me. We all can,” the clouds were darker now, nearly black, with white lightning dancing between them and Mardon’s hands.

“You’re welcome to go on your...little rampage,” Len waved a dismissive hand, “if you wish. On your own. Rogues don’t need that kind of heat.”

Storm grew larger, louder. Mick’s hand dropped to the heat gun. Len spared a moment’s regret for bringing a 9mm instead of his cold gun, but the situation wasn’t beyond his control. Yet.

“Right,” Mardon scoffed, “you expect me to believe you’d kick me out? You need me.”

“I would and we don’t. You want to be in charge, Weather Wizard?” Len spread his arms wide, calling the other’s bluff, “be my guest.”

Lightning crackled brighter, electricity strong enough to taste.

Hartley, Baez, and Bivolo moved to Len’s side of the room, spreading out beside Lisa and Mick.

“I protect my own, Mardon. You insist on credit, on recognition? That’s on you. Don’t expect us to clean up after your ego.”

If anything the meta’s expression became even more challenging. Putting up one last fight before folding, unless Len missed his guess. “You said you own this city, Cold, but you’re just a minor player. Too damn scared to back up that big mouth of yours.”

Lisa and Mick drew their weapons, bristling at Mardon’s tone. Baez tensed, preparing to bamf out of
the way if things escalated any further. Low hum of Hart’s gloves was more sensation than sound. His Rogues were ready.

Len stayed silent, merely raising an eyebrow when Mardon finally got a clue. Shoulders drooping minutely, powers dispersing visibly as the lightning died down.

“Really?” Mardon was incredulous, “you’re all willing to hide when we could rule like kings?”

“For a hot second, maybe,” Hartley said. “Then we would have the undivided attention of law enforcement, The Flash, and everyone looking to make a name for themselves. What good is freedom when you’re too busy watching your back to enjoy it? You’ve been on the run before, Mardon, I shouldn't have to explain this concept to you.”

Unsurprisingly, Piper’s dulcet tones failed to help. Time to step in before the shit show went any further.

“Mardon, it’s simple. A certain amount of ...anonymity makes life more enjoyable. Have no desire to go the extra mile and upset the balance between me and The Flash. None of us are in a hurry to get stuck in that pipeline of his.”

Hart raised an eyebrow at the mention of the cells below the Lab, but kept his mouth shut for once. Looked like he knew about the changes...perhaps Cisco filled him in on the new plan for unruly metas.

“In or out—choice is yours.”

“Out.”

Len stared pointedly at the door until the meta left the bar. Lisa locked up after him, watching until Mardon’s back was no longer visible.

“Thanks for trying, Cold,” Shawna broke the silence. “Sorry he kinda went off the rails.”

“You made a valid argument for bringin’ him in, Baez. Not your fault he’s all ego, no sense,” Mick replied.

“Better to find out now than in the middle of a job,” Len picked up where his friend left off. “Before there were any casualties. He would’ve been an asset if he could be trusted to toe the line,” he finished with a pointed look at Bivolo.

“So what is the plan for Flash Day, then? You can’t possibly want to sit it out,” Hartley said.

“Waste a perfect distraction? Doubtful. Lise, Hart, and...Roy—assuming you’re still not interested, Shawna?” She nodded, “will hit the federal reserve truck moving about five million in cash to Central City Bank and Trust. Lise, if you would like to do the honors?”

She smiled sweetly and stepped forward, spreading maps onto the pool table. Outlining what she had in mind.

Len’s phone vibrated. Had to be Barry, everyone else with that number was in the room. He could check it—everyone’s focus was on Lisa. Extremely tempting...especially when it buzzed a second, then a third time in rapid succession.

But he didn’t allow himself to indulge. Not yet. Not when the mere hint of communication was enough to remind Len how late it was, how much he wanted to curl up with the speedster and go to
sleep.

Never let his personal life interfere with business before, wasn’t about to start now. Len put his hand in his pocket, holding the phone—as much of a concession as he was willing to make. He was blatantly ignoring that getting involved with Barry at all violated his mandate to begin with.

Mick nudged him, “text from lover boy?”

“Have no idea what you mean.”

“Riiight...so what’re we gonna do while the others rob the truck?”

“Later.”

Mick raised both eyebrows at that, “interesting. Better have a good reason for it, buddy.”

“Don’t I always?”

Chapter End Notes

So it's up! About a week later than intended (sorry Horchatita, though totally not a lie that I had it with me at the Met). As always, comments are LOVED and CHERISHED, and PLEASE let me know if you spot typos :D
Thank you for your help, Crimson! Sorry this took so long, guys--RL happened, sadly, eating up my writing time. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Didn’t take long to hammer out the details of the heist, including snags and contingencies. Thankfully. It’d been a long day.

Len wasn’t a big fan of such quick scores—only had a few days until the plan went into motion. But it was simple enough for such a big payday. The Reserve never gave much lead time—just their shit luck that Central’d be occupied and his Rogues had the expertise to pull it off.

Called it a night after the third run-through. Lisa had it under control. An olive branch after the earlier fiasco at STAGG—this’d be pure profit. Besides, she was the one to insist Bivolo get another shot. Len figured he’d let her handle the test drive…and the fall out. If it came to that. Man seemed properly cowed, especially after Mardon’s little temper tantrum.

Len was the last one out, double-checking and keeping his eyes open during the short walk back to his car. As soon as he was in he’d let himself check his phone—dammit. Mick. Didn’t bother trying to suppress a sigh when he saw the pyromaniac on his bike, ready and waiting for Len to pull out.

“Mick—“

“I’ve decided it’s ‘later’."

“You’ve gotta be kidding me. This can wait."

“Nah, rather do it tonight…keep your speech to a minimum.”

Len shook his head, yanking the driver’s door open, “fine.”

Already wasted enough time dealing with Mardon. He had no desire to deal with Mick’s stubbornness, too. Not over this. Could’ve let him check his goddamn texts, though.

Took the more direct route back. Streets were quiet at this time of night and if anyone bothered to follow them, it’d be obvious. He pulled into his space in under fifteen minutes, getting out in time to see Mick coast his bike behind Len’s. The two roadsters filled what should’ve been his neighbor’s space, if Barry had a car.

He and Mick quietly trudged up the stairs, almost to his place when a sudden gust of wind solidified into Barry. The younger man skidded to a stop a few feet away, door to his apartment already open.

“Len, hi! I thought maybe you already—“ he cut himself off when he noticed Mick. Who looked surprised for all of six seconds before his expression became slyly amused.
“Hey, Mick. Um…d’you guys want to come in?”

Len raised an eyebrow, taking a moment to get a good look at Barry. Windswept—no real surprise—tired, but…happy. No, elated. Huge grin, every movement he made exaggerated like he couldn’t contain himself. Didn’t square with the nerves—he kept shifting his weight, fidgeting with his sleeve, key ring…

“Yes, Flash. Y’got any beer?”

“I don’t think so. Cisco probably finished it the last time he was over. I can’t get drunk and it’s not exactly the best tasting, so without the side benefits,” he shrugged.

“Sucks, kid. Finally legal and ya can’t even enjoy it,” Mick teased.

“I’m not—gah! What is it with you Rogues? I’m twenty-six, dammit,” Barry griped, leading Mick through the door before Len got a chance to weigh in on the idea.

Not that he was…averse to spending more time with Barry. Quite the opposite. But he had things to discuss and he did not need Mick speculating on their sex life.

Len knew what Mick was up to. Not that he made any effort to be subtle. The pyromaniac was nosy as shit, almost as bad as Lisa, and he knew Len. Already worked out that the thing between himself and Barry was more than just sex and he wanted to figure out what made the younger man so special. He’d nudge and prod, make sure Scarlet knew what he was getting into. That he’d stick around after they pulled their next job. Mick was protective in his own way. Much as it grated, Len was…warmed by the effort.

He wasn’t worried; Barry could handle Mick. It’d be good practice for Lisa’s inquisition.

Barry ditched his shoes, coat, and messenger bag in their typical spots before making a beeline for the kitchen. Something Len suspected was routine ever since he woke up with powers. The speedster really was a bottomless pit.

Len unlaced his boots, leaving them neatly beside Barry’s converse without really thinking about it and joined the others in the kitchen.

Sure enough, Barry had his nose buried in the fridge, Mick observing from his perch on the kitchen table—ignoring Len’s scowl. His eyes taking it all in—the layout, the growing pile of sandwiches on the counter. Pointedly staring at the…lack of space between Len and their host.

Aware—almost as aware as he was—of the way Barry began to gravitate closer to Len, how he kept catching himself. Third time it happened, Mick gave a subtle nod of approval. Len rolled his eyes at the big brother routine.

“So,” Mick broke the silence, watching the blur of Barry’s hands as he worked. “Gotta say, not what I expected, Flash. The location does make a few things clearer.”

“Should I ask where you thought I’d live?” Barry asked with a smile, taking a bite of the top sandwich on the pile. “Oh! Mmfft—“ he swallowed, looking a little sheepish. “Sorry…are you guys hungry? There’s still enough for a few more of these if you want.”

They declined.

After a moment’s consideration, Len began gathering what he’d need to make hot chocolate. Refusing to be anything but pleased with the way he and Barry easily moved around each other in
“What brings you to the building, Mick?”

“Plans for your special day, Flash,” Mick said.

Barry scowled, “ugh. For the record, I had absolutely nothing to do with that. I’m not even going.”

“Why not? Don’t always like your work, but ya deserve some kind of credit, kid.”

Len winced. Not that he didn’t agree with Mick—he did. Barry, on the other hand…

“No, I don’t. The whole fucking mess was my fault and,” he sighed, “it wasn’t—I didn’t do it alone. Closing the singularity was a huge group effort…mostly Ronnie and Professor Stein. I just…kept it from getting worse. Than it already was, anyway.” His shoulders drooped, “and there’s no way…They’re the heroes, not me. But even as Firestorm they couldn’t go up there because Eiling still has it out for them. Me too, but he’s still convinced he can manipulate me without having to resort to torture. Yet.”

There went Scarlet’s good mood. Len was tempted to kick Mick out, would have if he thought it’d work.

“Should still go, Barry. Think of it as…representing your team. You know what they contribute, even if the rest of the city doesn’t.”

“Snart’s right, kid. S’not safe for them to go up there with ya, but that doesn’t mean you should ditch all together.”

Barry rubbed the back of his neck, looking uncomfortable. But at least he was considering what they had to say. “It just…it doesn’t feel right. Everyone thinks it’s just me out there, but it’s not. Without Cisco and Caitlin and…I prolly never would’ve made it long enough to get the suit. I don’t…I want them to know that I know how much—that the credit I get really goes to them. They should—”

“Scarlet,” he wished Mick wasn’t around for this, “have you spoken to them about it? Doubt they mind your alter ego’s the only name attached.”

“For real? But it’s not,” he slumped against the counter, “yeah…ok. I’ll talk to them,” Barry gave them both a shy smile. “Thanks. I think,” he took the last bite, polishing off his stack of sandwiches.

Len returned the expression with a small smile of his own. Made sure their fingers brushed when he handed Barry a mug of chocolate.

“Anytime, Flash,” Mick said, coming over to retrieve the third mug with a slight frown. “No marshmallows?”

“He’s out, Mick.”

His friend heaved a sigh, making a production out of tasting the drink and rendering his verdict: “not bad; spicy,” taking another sip.

Barry laughed, “yeah, I don’t think marshmallows would really go. It’s called Mayan…something. A friend in Toronto sent it to me.”

“Not proper cocoa without mini marshmallows, Scarlet.”

The younger man bumped his shoulder, “and you two call me ‘kid’.”
“Wanna make somethin’ of it?”

“Nah,” Barry shook his head, “but now I’m really curious. What exactly are you two planning for that day? Or have we entered the Twilight Zone where two of my…nemeses talk me into going to some stupid thing named after me for my own good?”

Len chuckled, “I’m appalled you think we have ulterior motives. Positively wounded.”

Barry stuck his tongue out in response. Len wanted to—but not with an audience.

“Yeah, Flash. What he said,” Mick rumbled, “an’ I still say this’d be better with marshmallows.”

“I promise I’ll keep a batch in the pantry for you from now on.”

“Ya know how to make ‘em from scratch?”

“Oh yeah. Way better than anything that comes out of a bag.”

“I’ve a hard time imagining you in the kitchen. No patience.”

“Haven’t gotten any complaints yet,” Barry said with a smirk. “Nice try, by the way, but you’ll have to do better than that if you want to distract me.”

The slow smile spreading across Mick’s face needed to be stopped. Whatever he was about to say would not be helpful. At all.

“Mick and I plan to be in the crowd, Scarlet.”

“We do?”

“For real?”

“Indeed. To…observe. Precaution only.”

Mick sniffed, “yeah. Regular ol’ recon.”

“Wait. If you know there’s gonna be trouble—“

“Nothin’ for certain, kid. Barely even rumors.”

Len relaxed slightly. Damn good thing Mick got the hint—not that his silence would last forever. He’d pay Len back for the discretion the moment they were alone.

“Alright. Would you...if you hear anything more concrete maybe give me a hint? I don’t want anyone getting hurt and it’s not like there’s anything worth stealing—wait.” Barry’s eyes narrowed, darting between him and Mick, “lemme guess, asking what the rest of the Rogues’ll be doing while you two laugh at me up on stage counts as ‘business’,” he actually made air quotes.

“Got ‘im trained already, Len? That was fast.”

“How would he—“ Barry cut himself off, slowly turning red. “I have no idea what you’re talking about, Mick,” he said, even though his face told another story. So did his pitiful attempt to hide behind his mug.

“Course not. Dunno what I was thinkin’,” Mick’s attempt at innocence was even less convincing than Scarlet’s.
“Right…” Barry shook his head, opening his mouth to say something but thinking better of it. Looking carefully at Mick before turning to face Len. He sighed, an odd smile on his face. One Len couldn’t read.

“He knows.” It was a statement, not a question.

Len nodded once, chin down, head tilted enough to keep the others in view.

“You an’ Snart ain’t subtle. He tries t’ play things cool, but he can’t pull somethin’ like this over on me.”

“What? How is that even—it’s just been a couple days,” Barry’s shoulders slumped. “So much for having time to—does everyone know?” His voice was quiet. Pleading. Apprehensive.

“Been a lot longer than days, kid—“

“Mick…”

“Chill. I’m not gonna say anything.”

“Thanks,” Barry heaved a sigh. Len tensed—even though he tried not to…read too far into it. How relieved the speedster was that Mick would keep his mouth shut.

But Scarlet picked up on his change in demeanor anyway. Either that or Mick’s sudden glare.

“It’s not that we—that I—want to keep things a secret…kinda suck at secrets like this anyway. But…we’ve…I guess I need—one people start finding out they’re gonna offer up all sorts of opinions and…” he shrugged.

“Got it, I’ll keep it to myself,” Mick shrugged. “Ya might wanna work on bein’ less obvious.”

Barry relaxed, shoulder bumping his own—when had the younger man gotten so close—with a shy smile. Like he’d been waiting for some sort of permission to touch. Scarlet derived so much comfort from casual touch.

Not as physical as he’d been that morning. Unsurprising—Barry wasn’t entirely comfortable around Mick. Didn’t want to push. The thief was beginning to realize that, for as physically demonstrative as Barry was, he was equally skilled at picking up on the signals of others…tempering himself to their comfort levels. Len...was not big on touch.

Most people wouldn’t pay any attention to the fact that Len and Barry were touching. Mick wasn’t most people. Despite his nearly flawless ‘dumb muscle’ routine, the pyromaniac wasn’t stupid. More impulsive and less analytical, certainly. However, very little went unnoticed. The fact that Len made no attempt to maintain a buffer between himself and Barry…his friend picked up on that instantly. Eyes speculative, expression carefully blank.

Barry took a gulp of his chocolate, wincing slightly at the temperature and cleared his throat.

“Thanks.”

Mick nodded, eyes still focused on the point of contact between himself and the speedster, who shifted subtly. Leaning into Len just a bit more, brows furrowed.

“What a sec…What did you mean, ‘it’s been more than days’? Because,” bit his lip, focusing on the counter top, “uh...it really is that new. Unless you count right before the whole,” he waved his free hand, “mess.”
“You gotta be…” Mick chuckled, “oh, kid, he’s been—”

“Mick.”

Barry glanced up, looking between them—at Mick’s evil grin and Len’s warning glare.

“Y’always ruin my fun, Snart,” Mick grumbled, playful fire simmering beneath the surface. Asshole could look as smug as he wanted. Len would give him that much…as long as he kept his damn mouth shut.

“…Right,” Scarlet had a small, pleased smile of his own. Didn’t press for details. Thankfully.

They finished their drink in silence. Did his best to ignore Mick’s amused stares and knowing looks. Focused instead on the warmth radiating off Barry, his solid presence. How relaxed he was…considering.

Somehow he missed the two of them coming to some sort of truce. Obviously still new, but it’d been enough for Barry to invite the pyromaniac into his apartment. Enough to allow him to drop his guard, to be comfortable maintaining his connection with Len. Not to bother with pretense or denials. It…boded well. One less hurdle. Mick had been his partner for more than half his life. Knowing his partner and Scarlet could get along, that the pyro had no issues with Len getting…involved was reassuring. To say the least.

Mick drained his mug, walking over to rinse it in the sink. “’Bout time I called it a night. Thanks for the drink Flash,” nodded to them both.

Len took a couple steps, intending to follow him out of habit more than any desire to leave.

Mick stopped suddenly, shaking his head. “Don’t bother.”

He raised an eyebrow. Mick smirked.

“Yer not foolin’ anyone. We know you wanna stay.”

“That would be—I mean, not if you’d rather not, but…” Barry trailed off with a hopeful smile.

Len blinked, torn. Wanted to stay—spend as much time as he could with the younger man. But decades of having to hide what mattered, knowing he could only depend on himself made that…difficult to acknowledge with Mick there.

Turned out it didn’t matter. While he was occupied Mick quickly grabbed his things. Allowed Barry to walk him out.

Not before making one last point before leaving, calling out an amused, “night Snowflake, Flash,” as the door closed behind him.

Len rolled his eyes at the nickname. Mick only used it in private, as a way to give him shit. Whenever he went too deep into his own head to see reality, Mick’d spend the next hour, day, week calling him ‘snowflake’.

Whole thing was Lisa’s fault. First time she joined them on a job, things got…heated. She shut them down before any punches were thrown, glared Mick down, told him Len was ‘unique’ and that his plans were ‘fragile, but always things of beauty’.

Mick’d paused at that—mid-rant—and snapped back ‘cold bastard’s no fucking snowflake,’ paused,
and nearly fell over laughing. Lisa joined in seconds later, as soon as she saw Len’s disgust at the very idea. So of course it became a nickname that stuck, much to his chagrin.

Traitors laughed even harder when they heard the codename Cisco came up with for him. Asshats.

By the time Barry came back into the kitchen he was almost done washing the pot—mugs already in the dishwasher.

“Snowflake?” he grinned, “no wonder you like Captain Cold so much better.”

Len snorted but said nothing.

“If…” his smile faltered, “you know you don’t have to stay, right? If you’d rather not—“ he shrugged, eyes hopeful.

“Thought you had some sort of news?” Len asked, shutting off the water and stifling a yawn.

“Oh, yeah! It’s not really final or anything but I really want to tell someone and,” Barry’s demeanor shifted yet again, nearly too fast to follow. Shoulders slumping, closing in on himself, rubbing his arm. “If it…isn’t enough and ends up not working after all…you won’t keep bringing it up.”

Interesting. “Want to talk out here, or…?”

“In bed? It’s been a really long day.”

It only took a couple minutes for them to settle in for the night. Maybe not quite as fast as they did yesterday or the day before, which wasn’t a huge surprise. He and Len were both tired and the likelihood of any action beyond a few sleepy kisses was pretty much nonexistent.

Somehow Barry ended up in bed first, unable to stop grinning. Once Mick left it didn’t take long for the happiness and nerves to come back, the ones that came from their best chance of getting his dad out of Iron Heights yet.

But it was more than that—a warmth that came from…well…the sound of the sink turning off, followed by a light switch. Soft footsteps getting louder, and the quiet rustle of clothes being shed, the clink of a belt buckle…knowing Len was there, too. That in a matter of moments he’d join Barry in his bed, that the other man wanted to stay. Just to hear Barry’s news and fall asleep together and wake up together. It was something he’d never really had before, not from any of his previous relationships…not that there were a whole lot to choose from, but still. He didn’t really let himself imagine Len would be interested—no one else had been, after all. Except…

The mattress shifted. Barry opened his eyes to watch, getting lost in the way the soft glow of his lamp highlighted the way Len’s muscles moved, softening the angles of his face and making his deep blue eyes warmer, deeper than he’d ever seen them. It kinda took him by surprise. Especially when he reached over Barry to turn off the lamp, settling onto his back with his right arm out in an obvious invitation that the speedster didn’t even bother trying to resist.

Len’s arm wrapped around his waist immediately, encouraging him to snuggle closer.

“Didn’t get a chance to read your texts,” the other man began, his voice a quiet rumble under Barry’s cheek.
“Yeah, I—that’s ok. They don’t really say much,” he shifted a little, warm and content. “I’m not really sure where to start.”

“Beginning might help.”

Barry huffed out a laugh, nudging Len’s chin with his forehead.

“In the interest of time, however, go for the cliff notes,” cool fingers traced the crest of his hip.

“Mmm,” he hummed in agreement, gathering his thoughts.

Which must’ve been taking a while, because Len spoke again, hand still tracing soothing patterns along his side. “If you’d rather not, or prefer to wait I won’t mind. You know you don’t…owe me, right?”

“I know,” he said, “I want to. Just trying to figure out the best way to put it, but…meh.” He shrugged slightly, as much as he could when he was tucked into Len’s side and held close.

“So, uh…here goes. I know you don’t…that I haven’t told you all the details yet, but to make really long story short…Reverse Flash—Eobard Thawne—who pretended to be Harrison Wells, is the person that killed my mom. I was there—I saw it,” he laughed without humor, “twice now. But no one believed me when I told them it wasn’t my dad. No one but Iris. Not until Joe saw me use my powers for the first time.”

Len nodded against him. He was already familiar with at least some of the details and the speedster was really glad that he didn’t interrupt with any questions. Even though, knowing Len the way he was starting to…he’d want more information sooner rather than later.

“It’s…why I became a CSI. Getting my dad out, proving I wasn’t crazy, or lying, or some traumatized kid that made up a story because I couldn’t handle the truth. That’s pretty much why I haven’t left Central, aside from going to college. But I’m getting sidetracked.

“Once I got my powers, once Joe finally believed me…it felt like it was only a matter of time before we got Dad out. Especially once we figured out Wells’ secret. But none of our plans to get him to confess worked! And the physical evidence Cisco and Joe found wasn’t enough and then,” he took a deep breath and Len covered his fist with his left hand—when had Barry gotten so tense?—stroking gently his hand relaxed and he laced their fingers together. He squeezed. Len squeezed back.

“He was…gone. Dead or alive, I’m honestly not sure, but it doesn’t matter. He’s gone and without him…without a confession,” Barry sighed. “You were there when…You know the bastard left everything to me—Stein brought it up, but yeah. STAR Labs is most of it, but not everything. He left me his house, his money, his patents—all of it.” He forced himself to breathe and tried to stay relaxed.

“I didn’t know why he’d do something like that—still don’t. Maybe he thought of all those…that he could somehow…that giving me all of that would somehow make us even. Or make up for killing my mom and ensuring that my dad wouldn’t…that he’d be stuck in prison forever.

“So I…ignored it. Well, tried to. Beyond making sure that Cisco and Caitlin are still getting paid. I hadn’t…I don’t want it! I don’t deserve it. They do. But I couldn’t give it to them—believe me, I tried. There was some final condition, apparently.”

Len’s arms tightened for a few seconds. It was a tiny hug, at least that’s how Barry chose to interpret it…maybe to let him know he was listening, or that he got it…or to keep going so he’d finish soon and they could both go to sleep.
“His lawyer cornered me as soon as I got to work today—yesterday now, wow it’s late—and gave me a thumb drive. I had to look at the files on it to satisfy the conditions of inheritance…otherwise STAR Labs would go up for sale. And I got the impression that they already had a few people interested, maybe even a buyer lined up. I couldn’t…let that happen.

“So a few hours ago I watched it. With Caitlin. He…it was a video. He said a whole lot of shit at first, but then…” he trailed off. It was still so hard to believe. So hard not to get his hopes up, even though he knew, he knew that he shouldn’t.

“Scarlet?” Len prompted.

“He made a full confession. With…details and everything. All of the holdback info, he worked that in and…and Joe and the ADA think that it might be enough. It and the blood Joe and Cisco found at my old house. She’s taking to the DA tomorrow and Joe promised he’d let me know as soon as he hears one way or the other. Not that he’d be released right away, there’s still a lot to be done, but…fuck, this is the only shot we’ve got and I just…it’s so hard to believe.”

Len tilted his head, urging him to make eye contact. “Barry, that’s…”

“I know—it’s…” he laughed a little, stealing a quick kiss, “that’s how I’ve been feeling for hours now. It took ages, tearing around the city just so I could stand still. It’s so hard not to just tell everyone—tell Dad—but…that wouldn’t be fair. To get his hopes up if this doesn’t work after all. It would…I couldn’t do that to him. And if everyone knows and then it falls through…”

“They’ll keep apologizing. Walking on eggshells and reminding you. Doesn’t help.”

Barry nodded, “yeah, exactly. You…won’t.”

“Mhm.”

They shared one more kiss, a soft press of lips, before Barry settled into Len’s side again, tangling their legs together and using his good shoulder as a pillow.

It didn’t take long for his eyelids to droop, exhaustion finally taking over now that he was warm and secure in Len’s arms. His voice, deeper than usual and already rough with sleep, was the last thing Barry remembered.

“G’night, Scarlet.”

The next few days were a total blur. There was work. And then there were endless phone calls and paperwork and arrangements…Barry’s head was spinning. He barely had a chance to breathe, let alone find time to see Len. Because seeing one another for a few seconds in the halls of STAR Labs totally didn’t count.

At least meta activity was still down, because he was barely able to juggle being himself at the moment, never mind being The Flash, too.

Thankfully, he had ninety days to work everything out before the change in ownership over STAR Labs became a matter of public record…giving him three months to figure out what to do with it. Because he had no intentions of quitting his day job, and even if he was…Barry was in no way qualified to run a research facility.
He was able to talk to Singh. The Captain wasn’t terribly thrilled, but he did give Barry the week and a half leading up to Thanksgiving off as long as he agreed to be on call in case of a major emergency. That was totally fair, given the amount of time he needed and complete lack of notice.

Once he got his request approved he sent Felicity and Wells’ attorney the details so they could get as much done during that time as possible. The hacker got back to him immediately; she must’ve already had everything ready to go because she sent Barry her travel itinerary and hotel confirmation for the entire time, including the holiday weekend. He hated imposing, not that she actually waited for him to ask, but it was a huge relief to know that she’d be there to help. She had experience with this kind of thing, after all.

It wouldn’t be easy, but Barry kinda wanted to get the place up and running again. The facility was supposed to do good and instead some jackass from the future basically did the exact opposite. It would be difficult to hide the Flash stuff, but he couldn’t leave the place empty. The particle accelerator was out for obvious reasons, but they didn’t need it to make up for some of the damage Eobard caused.

Besides, the Rogues already started upgrading the security under Cisco’s watchful gaze—when he wasn’t bickering with Hartley—and it’d be a shame to waste their expertise.

Barry checked the time on his phone. He had an hour before the dumb Flash Day thing was supposed to start. As much as he still really didn’t want to go, he promised Caitlin and Ronnie and Cisco (and Iris and Joe) that he’d be there. Because even though he was the last member of his team that deserved any sort of reward, he’d go up and accept it for all of them anyway. He had just enough time to grab lunch at normal speed (for once) and make it.

He saved the newly-created Al Rothstein file and was just ducking under the strap of his messenger bag when Joe burst through the door, phone to his ear.

“Uh huh, gotcha. Thanks Camille. I’ll keep an eye out for your text,” he hung up, huge grin splitting his face.

“Is…?” Barry refused to guess, not when it came to this.

“Yes, son. It’s enough. The DA—Ooof!”

The speedster flashed over to his foster father, crashing into him and holding tight.

“For real?” Barry managed to ask Joe’s shoulder, eyes stinging.

“Yes, son. It’s enough. The DA—Ooof!”

The speedster flashed over to his foster father, crashing into him and holding tight.

“For real?” Barry managed to ask Joe’s shoulder, eyes stinging.

“Yup, his freedom is a done deal. I promise,” Joe squeezed tighter, choking up a little himself. “But the timeline is still TBA. One week, maybe less, for them to process his release, clear his record and get everything done properly.”

“That’s…” his stomach fell a little. He knew it wouldn’t be immediate, but…

“I know, Bear, I know,” Joe stroked his hair, rubbed soothing circles into his back. “It isn’t fair. An’ if Wells were here it’d be over a lot faster, but…”

“Yeah, I know,” he sighed heavily. “Can I tell him now? Or should I wait for them to figure out a definite release date?”

“Your call, Bear. Just don’t forget you promised Iris—“

Barry laughed a little, stepping back and wiping his eyes, “lemme guess, she made you promise to
“Can’t believe you convinced me t’ go along with this, Snart,” Mick groused.

“Telling me you don’t want to roast Mardon if he shows, hmm?”

“Coulda burned the truck. That’d be a sure bet.”

“Next time, Mick.”

“Gonna hold you to that, buddy.”

Len rolled his eyes, adjusting his baseball hat and giving his partner a pointed look. Reminding him to…loom a bit less. Mick scoffed but complied, hand patting his gun. At least he stowed the damn thing in a backpack. Len left the cold gun at the Lab. Didn’t mean he was unarmed—trusty glock a cool weight against the small of his back. Planned not to need it, but he hadn’t gotten where he was by being sloppy.

“’Scuse me—Oh!” Iris began, polite smile quickly turning into a proper grin. “I didn’t expect to see you two here, of all places,” even if her teasing tone said otherwise.

Mick snickered, “Flash’s getting an award—you think he’d let me skip it?” The asshole winked, fucking winked at the reporter. So much for staying quiet.

“Ohh,” she wormed her way between them, “guess I’m not the only one that knows after all, Lenny,” her grin reminded her way too much of Lisa. It was…less than comforting.

“Pretty damn obvious. If y’ know what ta look for.”

“Thank you! That’s what I told Bear the other day,” Iris waved her hands for emphasis, leaning a little closer to Mick. “I’m so glad you know—now I have someone to talk to about this.”

“Uh…” Mick blinked, taken aback by the force of nature otherwise known as Iris West.

Caitlin, Raymond, and Stein were approaching quickly—Len needed this over. “Rather you didn’t,” he said, voice tight.

“I was mostly teasing. But really, why are you guys here and not…wherever Lisa and Hartley disappeared off to?”

Len considered Iris, formulating his response. He could see why she was Barry’s best friend. She was fierce and fearless and confident in ways Barry would never be…ways that he needed. She grounded him and in turn he encouraged and inspired her.

Decided to go with a…version of the truth. Choosing to forego that a large part of why he was there had to do with Barry getting some much-deserved recognition. “There may be…trouble. Given how many people are here, the media…” he shrugged. “Wanted to be here to see if anyone would be stupid enough to let their ego convince them into making a play.”

“Okay…” Iris considered his words, nodding to the S.T.A.R. Labs crew when they reached them. “I’m guessing you have someone in particular in mind.”
“Perhaps.”

Exchanged greetings with the rest of the group—all of whom noticed Lisa’s absence. Even if they didn’t point it out. Stein introduced the fourth member of their group as his wife Clarissa and they made surprisingly easy conversation while they waited for the Mayor to take the stage.

West was over by the police barricade with Cisco, Thawne, and a young woman in uniform. He’d noticed them immediately but made no comment beyond a raised eyebrow. No one else seemed to recognize him or Mick—aider by their companions. Mick quickly drew Stein and his wife into a discussion while he, Caitlin and Raymond—he may have to start calling the man Ronald if things continued as they were—discussed some of the changes they’d already made to the security system and potential strategies to hide the obvious signs of The Flash and Firestorm’s comings and goings.

Lapsed into silence when the Mayor began speaking, waiting a little anxiously to see if Barry would show up after all.

Len paid far more attention to Iris than the windbag on stage, watching her shift and look around. Trying to spot Scarlet.

“He better not have flaked out on me,” she said, barely audible over the chants of ‘Flash!’ from the crowd. “Of all the times to run late—“

“Thought he was incapable of being on time,” Len smirked. “How that’s possible given his powers…”

“I know, right?” she laughed, then cheered along with the rest of the crowd at the gust of wind and yellow lightning that announced Barry’s arrival.

Len stared. Not that he was the only one doing so—most of the crowd was fixated on the lithe figure in red triopolymer. Didn’t get to see Barry as The Flash much. Not when he could just…admire. The speedster radiated strength and confidence, movements deliberate and sure in ways that he wasn’t with the suit off. Or the cowl down. They’d have to work on that.

Looked like Mardon wasn’t there—would’ve made his move by now. Mick nudged him but whatever he intended to say was lost in the sound of crumpling metal and screaming as a squad car was thrown onto the stage. Only Barry’s speed kept the Mayor from being flattened.

Len, Mick and Raymond moved automatically, covering the others. Finding somewhere to take refuge.

So much for uneventful.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, so the end feels a little rushed, but I don't want to get too far into the action just yet. As I mentioned before, we're basically skirting canon—I'll bring in what I want to (potentially out of order) and ignore some other stuff. But I couldn't get rid of the image of the Rogues at Flash Day simply to troll Barry, so here they are. Or some of them, anyway.

Hopefully the next update won't take as long, but I've learned better than to make
promises :D
Charging in

Chapter Notes

Ok, so this is kinda an interlude chapter that sticks pretty close to season 2 canon...I did my best to avoid simply re-writing the episode in fic form, but there are certain lines taken directly because I loved them and/or failed to come up with anything better.

Hope you guys enjoy! (also, title suggestions would be much appreciated)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was chaos. Made it easier for Len and Mick to get the entire group to safety. New meta was fixated on Barry, limiting the threat to the crowd. Cops were a different story, there’d be at least a few headed to the ER before the fight ended. But their attention was fixed on the action, too intent to notice himself or Mick. Even though his partner’s weapon was drawn and powered up.

“Mick!”

“Yeah, not the time—got that, buddy,” he growled, grip on the weapon never wavering.

Once the others were crammed into Iris’ car, Len hesitated. Old instincts kicking in, ones that screamed how wrong it was to leave one of his own behind.

Didn’t have his gun, though. Lack of results from the standard police-issue handguns on the man that tossed Barry through the windshield of a nearby cruiser meant he’d be of little use. Not that he intended to announce his presence to the world. Captain Cold rushing to The Flash’s aid would not go unnoticed.

Crowd cleared out from the fight’s immediate vicinity, making it far too easy to read fear in West and Thawne’s posture. Cisco’s frustration directed at his latest invention from where he crouched behind a squad car. The uniform he’d been talking to earlier was providing cover.

Fuck. He needed—

“Snart, we gotta go!”

Absently waved his hand in acknowledgement but didn’t budge.

“Dammit, Len,” Mick grabbed his shoulder and threw him into the back of their car, slamming the door. “Y’know we can’t help like this—need more intel.”

Foot slammed on the gas, tearing out behind Iris’ bright blue sedan, making eye contact with him through the rear-view mirror, “Kid’s tough—he’ll be ok.”

Len sat up, forcing his hands to unclench long enough to buckle in.

“Seat belt.”

Pyromaniac grumbled but complied, “wanna wait for ‘em at the Lab or go back to the bar as planned?”
He hesitated. Knew he *should* follow through. Head to S & S to hear about Lisa’s score. At least the shit show increased their likelihood of success from eighty-five to ninety percent.

“Lab,” he answered, grabbing his phone to notify Lisa of the switch.

Wasn’t until his friend’s knowing chuckle broke his concentration that Len realized they were heading to the Lab all along.

“Don’t.”

“Wasn’t gonna say a word.”

‘*Change in plans, regrouping at S.T.A.R.*’

[Sis] ‘Want us to join?’

‘*Your call.*’

[Sis]…

[Sis] ‘everything ok?’

‘Peachy’

[Sis] ‘be there in 30.’

[Sis] ‘Roy knows, fyi. Details later’

Len raised an eyebrow. Interesting but not ominous—Lise would’ve told him if it was.

‘*Understood. Will wait before letting others know.*’

[Sis] ‘K lenny. See you once we finish cleanup’

He locked the phone, tucking it back into his pocket. “Lise and Hart will meet us in forty-five minutes,” she said thirty but never had his grasp of punctuality. “Sounded like the job went off without a hitch.”

“Good. Could use the funds.”


“Huh. Maybe that we’re helpin’ Flash. Again.”

“If that’s a problem for you—“

“Wouldn’t be here if it was. What’re we doin, Len?”

Tilted his head, waiting for his friend to elaborate.

“Gettin’ tangled up with heroes. Flash can’t be too bothered by thefts yet, but how long’s that gonna last?”

“I,” he paused, “…am not certain. Needs to be discussed in greater detail.”

“Might have to fill him in on the other stuff sooner than ya’d like. T’ get him on board.”
Resisted the urge to make a face. If he did that Scarlet will never let him hear the end of it.

“Don’t drag me down with ya when it happens,” Mick teased.

“Thought we were partners, Mick.”

“Not with this, buddy. I’m not dealin’ with your jealous ass when the kid starts getting all smiley and shit with me cuz he mistakenly thinks I’m a good guy.”

“Tough.”

“Whoa. Did someone call a meeting and forget to tell me?” Barry grinned, stepping into the cortex to join pretty much everybody. Joe was still stuck at the station doing paperwork, but the rest of them were all there. Sitting on tables (Lisa, Iris, and Hartley), chairs (Cisco, Ronnie, Dr. Stein, and Clarissa), lounging against the wall (Eddie and Mick), pretending not to pace (Caitlin), and leaning against the rail looking distinctly unimpressed (Len).

“You’d be late anyway,” Iris teased.

“I so—“ he cut himself off at the collective eye roll.

“Sure you want to finish that sentence, Barry?” Len drawled.

The speedster chose to ignore that, rubbing his hands together, “what’ve we got so far?”

“Oh no—first you’re getting checked,” Caitlin demanded, dragging him into the med suite before he had a chance to protest that he was fine, dammit. Not that it would do any good. Not with the looks Iris and Len were sending his way.

“Caitlin I’m fine. I swear. He didn’t break anything and all the bruising is mostly gone.”

“You’ll have to excuse me for not believing you, Barry. We both know you’d ignore any injury short of losing a limb. Humor me,” she pushed him onto the cot, “and lose the shirt.”

Barry complied, easily hiding the twinge in his shoulder when he pulled the fabric over his head.

Caitlin poked and prodded him for the next fifteen minutes or so, until she was satisfied that he was in one piece.

“Told you I was fine,” he grumbled, pulling on his STAR Labs sweatshirt.

“Excuse me for wanting an informed opinion,” Caitlin shot back, smiling in spite of herself. They went through the same song and dance on an almost daily basis—it was comforting.

It looked like Cisco used the time well—practically his entire workshop was spread across one of the tables, disassembled Boot hooked up to his tablet. He was walking Lisa through the different components.

Len’s gaze immediately zeroed in on him, eyebrow raised. “What’s the verdict, doc?”

“He managed not to damage himself too badly, and he heals fast.”

“You guys do realize I’m standing right here, right?”
“Sorry Bear, I think we all know better than to trust your opinion whenever safety is involved,” Eddie said with his usual kind smile, the traitor.

“Right,” Iris stood up, drawing everyone’s attention. “What can you tell us about this meta, Bear?”

“He’s strong,” he rubbed his shoulder absently, “really strong. Especially when supersized. Um… probably bulletproof, but I’m not sure if that’s him or the suit he had on. I was a little distracted.”

“I think it was him. His arms were bare—I know one of my rounds hit his shoulder, but it had no effect,” Eddie said. “Mick, Len, what about you?”

“Hmmm,” Len paused for effect, pretending he needed to search his memory. Barry knew better—very little escaped Len’s notice. “Aside from the trick with the propane tanks nothing seemed to phase the man. Any idea how he managed to grow?”

“Not yet. Once we figure that out I’ll be able to modify the Boot to block it. Assuming the source is external,” the engineer spun around to face them, twirling a screwdriver in his hand. “Please tell me some of the blood on my suit is his.”

“Sorry man, pretty sure I did all the bleeding.”

“And you were planning to clean that…when, exactly?” Cisco gave him a look.

“I’m going, I’m going,” Barry rolled his eyes, bumping Len’s right shoulder for laughing at him on the way to get the necessary supplies. His boyfriend—were they boyfriends? that sounded weird in a good way, but not quite right—pretended to be grievously injured because he’s a huge dork that thrived on drama.

He took swabs of the stains, running them for DNA on the off chance that some of it wasn’t his own and settling into his routine while waiting for results. It required focus, which was how he missed the thief coming over to perch on the edge of the table—within reach, but not so close that anyone would really notice.

“Lost custody again, hmm?” he asked, breaking the companionable silence.

“Huh?”

Len nodded to the suit.

“Oh, yeah. Guess so. He didn’t even give me a hearing this time,” Barry grinned.

“Unsporting of him.”

“I heard that,” Cisco said, “if you had any idea how long it takes to properly repair and maintain my work of art compared to how fast Barry can wreck it, you wouldn’t take his side. I haven’t forgotten that at least some of the damage was your fault, either.” He brandished a pair of pliers in Len’s direction.

“Consider it incentive to improve your design. Can’t tell me The Flash hasn’t benefited from upgrades driven by our…encounters.”

“So not the point and you know it, Cold.”

Barry snickered at his friend’s indignant expression. “Speaking of upgrades,” he interjected before the playful argument gained any more steam, “how’s the Boot going?”
“It’s fixed, but, I mean…until we know more about this dude’s powers it makes no sense to make any specific changes.”

He was almost finished cleaning the suit when Dr. Stein, Iris, and Hartley came back into the room.

“We may have a lead on that, Cisco. Care to assist in confirming our hypothesis?”

“Not that your input is necessary,” Hartley muttered.

“Miss West brought us the critical piece of information, Mr. Rathaway. There is much to be said for encouraging as many different perspectives as possible. Iris, if you will do the honors?”

Iris blinked, but quickly shook off her surprise at the offer. “Sure,” she took a few steps forward so she could face the entire group. “Linda called about twenty minutes ago from Central General. They had major problems with their radiology department and were transferring patients and re-routing incoming ambulances with people injured in the rally,” her voice softened,” which was not your fault, Bear. Don’t even start.”

The speedster frowned but stayed quiet.

“Len, when do you estimate that the meta began to grow?”

“14:13.40, give or take a few seconds.”

“According to Linda, all the machines were dead by 2:15.”

“So this guy, what? Draws power from radiation?” Cisco looked thoughtful.

“It is strongly suggestive, if anecdotal,” Hartley said.

“Cisco, could you pull up a—“

“Already on it. There’s radiation everywhere, at various levels, so instead…this guy’s gotta be somewhere that’s dark but shouldn’t be…Bingo! Take a look at this,” Cisco pointed to the monitor and they all crowded around his terminal.

“It’s a three-block dead zone around a nuclear waste processing center. The place should be green and glowing from that level of rads, but instead…nada.”

“That’s where you’ll find your…Atom Smasher!” Stein exclaimed, drawing everyone’s attention.

“Because he absorbs atomic power and he, well…smashes.” The scientist looked sheepish at his outburst.

“C’mere,” Cisco pulled the professor into a hug. “That’s a great name. Welcome to the team.”

Barry laughed, clapping him on the back as he zipped into his suit. Time to go see how Atom Smasher liked being ambushed.

“Dude, uh… what’re you doing?” Cisco scrambled for the coms before Len realized Barry was gone.

Thirty-four seconds of silence before Iris grabbed the mic.
“Bear, just because we know where he is doesn’t mean we have any idea how to stop him.”

“I’ll be fine, Iris, don’t worry about it.”

“Yeah, because that’s possible,” she muttered but didn’t engage the mic.

“To be fair, he does have a point. And ya gotta admit we’ve got a kick-ass track record,” Cisco defended.

“Fail to see what’s changed since this afternoon,” Len pointed out.

“Yeah. May have worked out what he needs t’make his powers work, but that’s not much help,” Mick said.

“What do you mean?”

“Based on your conjecture, radiation helps fuel his powers,” Len raised an eyebrow, waiting for acknowledgement.

“Correct, Leonard,” the prof looked pensive, but still failed to grasp the obvious.

“Why’d Flash run off to face him when he’s gotta be close to full strength in a location he can refuel? Makes no sense,” Mick said.

“Oh…”

“One has to approach these things logically. Wouldn’t set up to fight The Flash in a wide open space, after all. Much too easy for Scarlet to use his speed, nowhere for us to take cover,” Len folded his arms.

“Shit,” Cisco ran both hands through his hair. “Barry—come back, man. Cold and Heat Wave have a point.”

“We do this all the time, Cisco. It makes more sense to get him while we know where he is, before he gets a chance to hurt anyone else.”

Len stepped forward. Wasn’t gonna let Cisco run the show if Scarlet insisted on being an idiot. “Flash, never allow your opponent to choose the location for a fight without scoping it out first,” he snapped.

“Chill, Len. It’s gonna be cramped inside—bigger won’t be better.”

“Could’ve sworn you brought us in for our expertise, Red. Why bother if you refuse to listen when I offer it” he ground out, glaring at the microphone.

“Ohhh, it’s like that,” Lisa chuckled.

Spared a moment to glare at her, not that it did any good. His sister merely glanced at the commiserating looks Iris and Mick were sharing at his expense before dissolving into giggles.

Turned back to the monitors, effectively blocking Lisa. Made it obvious as possible that he wasn’t gonna play her game until his idiotic…speedster was back at the Lab. Preferably in one piece.

“Um…what’s like what?” Cisco asked, confused.

“Ramon, there must be decent security at a facility like this. Please tell me you have the necessary
equipment to hack into it,” Hart could tone the snark down, but Len was glad at least one person was focused on the mission. Not his personal life.

“Excellent idea, Hartley,” Stein said.

Cisco muttered to himself, fingers flying over the keyboard. Focusing on his task instead of taking Hart’s bait.

“We’re in…oh, that’s not good—Cait!”

“On it,” the doctor started prepping supplies in the med suite.

‘Not good’ was a major understatement. Didn’t have sound, but it wasn’t necessary. Recognized the routine—Barry giving up the element of surprise in favor of making some offer. Atom Smasher was already in giant form by the time Barry closed in.

What followed was quick and dirty.

“We gotta teach that kid how to throw a punch,” Mick remarked absently, getting noises of agreement from the entire crowd. West wanted to go after him—not that there was a point. Building was too far away…fight wouldn’t last long enough.

“The alarms!” Stein exclaimed.

“What about ‘em?” Mick rumbled.

“We already tapped into the security system, correct?”

“Yeah…”

“Triggering the alarms may provide enough of a distraction for Barry to escape.”

It better. Hulking meta had Barry by the throat, lifting him like a rag doll and slamming him into the wall repeatedly. Accelerated healing or not, he wouldn’t last much longer.

It was enough.

Released the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. Louder than he would’ve liked, but managed to contain any further reactions.

“He’s almost back,” Cisco was following the tracker in the suit, “Get ready, Cait.”

Barry stumbled to a stop, passing out on the concrete floor. Shit.

Len was in motion, joined by West, picking the speedster up between the two of them. Iris moved in to immobilize and support his head and neck on the short journey to the cot.

Didn’t take long for Len to feel useless. Caitlin and Cisco moved around the cot with precision. Had a routine for patching up the injured speedster—unsurprising given his lack of self-preservation. Ronald—no, Ronnie; only tolerated Stein’s use of his full name, given his ongoing presence it made little sense to maintain distance with a more formal mode of address—stood out of the way. Assisting the other two with whatever they needed.
Rest of the group waited in the cortex. West was beating himself up, gaze fixed on Barry’s limp form through the glass with Iris by his side. Mick’s familiar muttering wasn’t enough of a distraction, going on about the speedster’s complete lack of fighting skills. Agreed wholeheartedly that they needed to change that, fast. Lise and the others were reviewing the surveillance footage of the fight. Expanding what they knew of Atom Smasher’s powers. Was a discussion he should be contributing to, except...later.

Len stepped out, pacing the halls. In search of someplace quiet. Needed to think without all the...distractions. Picked an empty workroom; not the most comfortable option, but it only had a few cameras and no microphones. Most privacy he’d get without leaving the building.

Closed the door behind him and slid down the nearby wall to sit on the floor, legs outstretched. Feeling grounded as he went through a set of breathing exercises. Becoming centered, focused. Logic once again taking precedence over emotions.

Heard footsteps approaching. Soft, careful but not too quiet.

“Not a good time, Lise.”

“I’m starting to get the impression that there won’t ever be a good time. Your boy is an elite-level trouble magnet.” Slid down the wall to sit next to him, not quite touching.

Tilted his head, acknowledging her point, except…”don’t call him that,” he said. Best he could come up with after twenty-six seconds of silence.

“You can’t lie to me, Lenny. Given the circumstances I won’t demand details just yet,” her tone was fond.

Len huffed.

“Fine. We are…involved. Happy?”


Held out for a few minutes, but knew she wouldn’t budge until he gave her something.

“Status remains undetermined.”

“Meaning?” serious now, she shifted closer but made no move to face him.

“Haven’t discussed it yet.”

“In other words, he wants to keep the whole thing a huge secret?” she tensed, voice sharpening.

“No,” shook his head, “made that much clear—“

“Good. You deserve more than that—don’t argue.”

“Mick and Iris already know. Attempting secrecy now would be pointless.”

“Yeah, I noticed those two sharing a look while you were arguing with the kid. Made it pretty obvious that you two finally managed to do more than flirt. Which, about damn time Lenny. You’ve been after him since the diamond heist.”

“Have not,” he glared, indignant.
“Oh, Lenny,” patted his knee, “keep telling yourself that if you must. But I would like to point out that you kidnapped Caitlin because you thought he was ignoring you.”

Refused to dignify that with a response.

“What’s the deal, then?” Lisa prodded.

Len sighed, giving up. “Not a secret, Lise. Simply…quiet. Until this…thing between us is more established.”

“Basically he doesn’t want West finding out yet,” she easily filled in the blanks. “Not a bad idea—I prefer you without bullet wounds.”

Barry couldn’t take his eyes off the gates of Iron Heights, bouncing on the balls of his feet. He hated waiting, but today was the day. Any minute now his dad would appear and step out from behind that chain link fence for good.

He couldn’t wait.

Joe was hosting a party for the non-Rogue members of the team at his house, firing up the grill when he left to make the drive. Caitlin and Ronnie were picking up the cake, the Steins were in charge of beverages, and Iris put herself in charge of assigning side dishes. It was a little disappointing that his dad wouldn’t get to meet the Rogues for a few days, but he didn’t really blame Joe for not inviting them. Even if Len and the others were pretty helpful in the final take down of Atom Smasher.

Len and Cisco bonded over a shared love of all things nerd as soon as his…as Len jokingly suggested creating a ‘Flash Signal’ to act as a lure. At least Barry was pretty sure he was just joking...sometimes it was hard to tell. Not that it really mattered in the long run. Not when he couldn’t stop smiling over the two of them arguing some obscure point about Star Trek for three hours straight.

Hartley’s suggestions were key to the Boot 2.0—even Cisco admitted he would’ve taken a week or more to get there without his help. They fitted it onto the meta after overloading his system at the nuclear plant. Caitlin and Martin’s careful calculations made sure they didn’t kill him in the process, and he was on his way to the meta wing at the prison after his arraignment on Monday.

Mick cornered him as soon as Caitlin took the neck brace off, calling his fighting skills ‘worse than pitiful,’ something he was determined to correct immediately. Because ‘losing to a superhero is one thing, going down against someone that can’t even throw a punch? I’ve got a reputation to maintain, kid.’ He was making progress, even if the pyro was far from satisfied.

Sometimes being a speedster really, really sucked. A quick glance at his phone, lying on the dash of the Jeep he borrowed from Len, told him that it hadn’t even been two minutes since the last time he looked.

Still had a few minutes to go.

He shoved his hands into the pockets of his jacket to resist the urge to text anyone. Mostly because he had no idea what to say…even standing right there he had a hard time believing what was about to happen.

The sound of metal on metal and the rattle of the fence somehow still managed to surprise him. This
was it.

He stared for a couple more seconds, watching his dad step forward as the gate began to close behind him. That was what finally snapped Barry out of it, barely remembering to jog at regular speed. He crossed the distance in four strides, arms automatically wrapping around his dad for the first time in way too long.

Neither of them knew what to say…and Barry knew if he tried he’d probably start crying. It was real. He—they—did it. Finally. His dad was free, his name cleared. Iris’ article was almost done—chronicling the case, the wrongful conviction…pretty much all of it. She wanted to give his dad a chance to read it over before taking it to her editor. Getting the story out would be way more effective than any court transcript, after all.

They finally managed to let go of each other.

“Let’s get out of here,” Barry jerked his head towards the SUV behind him.

“Race ya,” his dad laughed—laughed! It sounded the way he remembered it growing up, not the forced attempts he’d made over the last fourteen years.

“You will lose,” he grinned, taking the bag off his dad’s shoulder and leading the way.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to hit me up on tumblr!
Breaking and Entering

Chapter Notes

Ugh, sorry this took so long. What WAS supposed to just be Chapter 17 is now Chapters 17-19. On the plus side, I have a lot of the next few chapters worked out already...but I'm not gonna make any promises about updates since I just started a new internship.

MANY thanks to Crimson and Liu for their continued help!

Hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Len was almost back in the cortex. Upgrades Cisco designed and installed were...better. Still far from adequate. Breezing through the test run would make his point more effectively than attempting to argue with the engineer. More fun, too.

Cisco estimated it’d take Len forty-five minutes to infiltrate; twelve minutes and seventeen seconds passed since the test began and he had less than five hundred feet to go. The practical demonstration should be enough for the kid to let him, Lise, and Mick do their thing without insisting he knew better. Being a tech genius didn’t make him an expert in security, and he had to know that they wouldn’t give up trade secrets so easily.

Hard to argue with proof of concept. Simple surveillance and basic countermeasures might look sophisticated compared to stock home systems but they wouldn’t cut it with an outfit like S.T.A.R. Labs.

Approaching on near-silent feet, his internal checklist was interrupted by the sound of low voices belonging to Barry and West in the hall. They sounded...off. Henry Allen was released the day before; Len expected to hear excitement and joy. When Barry asked to borrow one of his cars, the speedster had been so happy he almost vibrated.

Instead, now Barry was terse. Sounded disappointed. West was frustrated. Len slowed to a stop out of sight but within range to eavesdrop properly.

“—everything go ok?”

“Yeah, we spent the morning getting gear, setting up a phone, and stuff before I dropped him off at the train station.”

“You know that wasn’t what I meant, Bear.”

“I’m,” a heavy sigh. Len didn’t have to see the younger man to know he was rubbing the back of his neck. “I’m ok, I guess.”

Right.

“Uh huh,” West didn’t buy the line any more than Len did.
“I just...why couldn’t he...never mind. It’s just...every time I win, it feels like I still wind up losing.”

The sound of fabric against fabric, hands on shoulders, voices too low to distinguish words.

“Thanks, Joe,” more rustles, “I’m gonna—”

“Yeah. Don’t you forget it, son.”

“I’ll try,” could tell the speedster was smiling now. “Time for me to…”

“Go for it. I’ll be there in a sec.”

Len moved once he heard steps turn the corner, in time to catch the detective throwing an abortive punch towards the wall, his back to the thief.

“Can’t believe he couldn’t stick around for two goddamn days.” A pause, and then, “I know you’re there, Snart.”

Of course he did. Wasn’t the first time Len had to acknowledge West was good at his job. Wouldn’t be the last, either.

“Suppose there’s no point even tryin’ t’ get you to feel guilty about listening in.”

“Hallway isn’t exactly a private place, Detective.”

The other man huffed out a short laugh, “point.” Ran a hand over his face, “how much did you hear?”

Tilted his head, considering his response. “Enough.”

West nodded, eyes narrowing, “alright. You plannin’ t’ stick around?”

Len raised an eyebrow.

“Don’t play dumb, Snart. Are you in this for the long haul or is it just a way to pass the time until a better offer comes along?”

“Don’t see how that’s any of your concern—”

“That’s bullshit and we both know it,” West said, before his demeanor shifted from that of cop to concerned father. “An’ I’m not expecting you to share any details.”

“Oh?”

“But if this is just messin’ around until you get bored, don’t. Leave him alone. The last thing he needs is for another person he starts relying on t’ walk out on him. Better do it now—you owe him that much.”

“Sounds like you’re making assumptions without any evidence, Detective.”

“Try me.”

Len crossed his arms, facing the other man directly. Obviously had strong suspicions—West met him stare for stare. Resisted the urge to shift his weight and maintained eye contact, “gonna pass.”

“Figured you would,” West sounded amused. Threw him for a loop—expected anger, threats of
bodily harm or incarceration. Not this somewhat...emotional appeal.

But West was still waiting for him to provide something more. An assurance. Truth was, Len had no intention of throwing Barry away when he was done with him. Didn’t want to be done with him at all. The detective’s insinuation that he was just toying with the speedster irked him, like getting bored was even possible.

Wasn’t sure why it bothered him so much—Lisa wasn’t the only Snart with a reputation for honey-potting. His file must’ve included a reference or two to his more lucrative con jobs. Before The Flash made them all disappear.

“If this was all about me getting one over on The Flash, Lisa wouldn’t be taking her time with Ramon.”

West rolled his eyes but seemed to recognize that he wasn’t getting anything else out of Len on the subject.

“Fine. We,” he gestured between them, “don’t have any agreements. Backstab—”

“Empty threats, Detective? Thought we got past those. Or did you forget that Barry’s identity goes public if I wind up behind bars?”

“You just got done sayin’ we were past empty threats, now who’s bluffing, Snart,” West chuckled. “Gonna have to try harder next time.” And with that he turned on his heel and strode into the cortex without giving Len time to respond.

The thief blinked, shook himself. Wasn’t the time to dwell on the exchange. Not when he couldn’t push beyond the conclusion that the detective just gave him some kind of conditional approval to date his son. Which was impossible.

“Cisco, we only saw Lenny twice. I told you relying so heavily on raw surveillance wasn’t enough. And Cutie, those locks? I could pick those in my sleep before my fourteenth birthday,” Lisa said.

“These are upgrades!”

Len didn’t bother hiding his amusement. Took him nineteen minutes and forty-two seconds to get to the cortex, even with the eavesdropping and the...interesting conversation with West. Could enter the discussion, but far be it for him to interrupt his shameless baby sister getting her flirt on.

“Yeah, from something anyone could get past with a credit card. All these need are lockpicks...or a paperclip and a bobby pin, sweetie. That’s not really what I’d consider an improvement.”

“Ugh, fine. You guys made your point. But c’mon! You can’t really blame me for wanting some details beyond a general idea of what you’re gonna change,” Cisco complained, showing considerable fortitude in the face of Lise’s exaggerated pout.

Barry watched quietly too, arm wrapped around himself, other hand toying with the key to Central.

“Guys? Back me up on this. It just feels wrong to let seasoned criminals have free rein to design and install the system,” Cisco said, pleading face fixed on Barry. Tacking on a “no offense,” at the end. Len smirked, “none taken.”
“Speak fer yourself, buddy,” Mick glowered at the kid with so little sincerity that Cisco merely grinned at the pyromaniac in response.

“Hate t’ break it to you, man, but it’s not that weird. Major corporations do it all the time—put up challenges for hackers and safecrackers...even uh, ‘retired’ cat burglars,” Barry said, waving the hand holding the Key towards Len. “Hell, even the FBI does it from time to time.”

“Et tu, Barry?” The engineer mimed removing a knife from his back.

The speedster shrugged, managing a smile at Cisco’s antics. “It was your idea. Why bother bringing it up if you aren't gonna let them do their thing?”

“You weren’t supposed to remember that part,” he wrinkled his nose. “But ok. I know when I’m beat,” Cisco held up his hands in surrender. “That doesn’t mean—wait, we can change things now, right?”

“Yup,” Barry confirmed. “I checked with FEMA to be on the safe side. We can upgrade security before they inspect the facility without any issues. And yes, before anyone asks, I do have that in writing.”

The speedster was subdued—forcing smiles that should’ve been reflex. Only took a few minutes for Barry to drift from West’s side to Len’s. Didn’t seem like a conscious decision on his part. Judging by the brief flicker of surprise that crossed his face when their shoulders bumped. Sparing Len a smile—small but real—before focusing on Cisco.

“Awesome,” Cisco rubbed his hands together, “I guess that means you guys can take over. However—you give me and Barry full access, and if you’re doin’ something that’ll make our lives harder, like putting in key pads and whatnot—you let us know ahead of time. Got it?”

“Hmmm,” Len pretended to consider the conditions, making Cisco sweat a little. “Seems fair. In accordance with your terms, I would suggest you get to work on proximity passes.”

“I’m not one to stifle creativity, Cisco,” Len smirked and shifted his weight forward. Trying not to draw attention to the way he and Barry were standing a little too close to one another to be casual. Definitely ignored West’s pointed look and small smile.

“However—” he began.

“Don’t worry, Cold, I’ll make a master pass the boring way, too,” the engineer rolled his eyes, “I’m not an idiot.”

He snorted but otherwise allowed that comment to pass. Lise was already generating a list of the necessary components for him and Mick to look over.

“Once you’re done figuring out what you’re gonna need, plus whatever else would be nice to have, please let me know. I’ll place the orders once we figure out what we’ve already got lying around,” Barry said. “Actually...wait a sec. Cisco—you started doing an inventory ages ago, right?”

“Yeah gimme a sec and I’ll put it up on the server for you.”

“Thanks. I’ll get going on that while you work on the wishlist,” Barry rubbed his hands together, looking relieved that he finally had something to do.
“Should have it ready for you in ten minutes, cutie,” Lisa said, smile widening at the faint blush that colored Barry’s cheeks at the endearment.

Len resisted the urge to shake his head at his sister’s antics.

“Hey Len, uh…” Barry glanced around, lowering his voice to a whisper. “Could I maybe come over tonight? Or you could come over instead, if that’s better...if you don’t have plans or anything.”

“Either is fine with me,” Len nodded. Ignoring the sudden warmth in his chest at the relieved look on Barry’s face.

Scarlet hardly needed to ask, Len enjoyed his company. Still, both had issues with boundaries. It was...thoughtful of Barry to take that into consideration. Not that it would’ve been possible to say no. Not with him looking so dejected, despite his ‘everything’s fine’ act.

Barry wasn’t fooling anyone, but they allowed him the pretext.

Sound of deliberate footsteps on concrete wasn’t uncommon. Not with the growth in Team Flash to include both halves of Firestorm, and the increasing presence of the Rogues. But…

Something felt off. He, Lise, and Mick were almost done with their list when Len felt it, stiffening. Mick raised an eyebrow and all three of them moved hands towards their weapons in unison.

Damn good thing, too.

The moment the intruder crossed the threshold into the cortex he was looking down the barrel of the heat and cold guns. And West’s service weapon.

“Who the hell are you and what are you doing here?!” Barry demanded. He stepped forward to place himself between the stranger and the rest of them. Somehow he managed it without crossing any of their line of fire. Impressive.

“You don’t know me, but I know you. Barry Allen,” the man took a few steps closer. He and Mick powered up.

“You don’t know me, but I know you. Barry Allen,” the man took a few steps closer.

He and Mick powered up.

“Don’t take one more step,” West cocked his gun, “I believe he asked you a question.”

“I know all—” glanced around,” most of you. Cisco Ramon, Caitlin snow, Joe and Iris West,” nodded to each of them. “My name is Jay Garrick, and your world is in danger.”

West clicked on the safety and put up his gun at that response. Didn’t holster it, though. Len followed suit, motioning to Mick to do the same. Didn’t power down just yet.

Subtle movement in the corner of his eye caught Len’s attention. Lise had her gun trained on the man—Garrick’s—chest under the table. The do-gooders were willing to accept a line like that at face value, but a lifetime of experience taught Len otherwise.

Quick glance at Barry told him that at least the speedster was similarly unimpressed.

“You just waltz in here and expect me—” Lisa coughed quietly “—expect us to take you at your word?” Barry scoffed, not allowing Lisa’s interruption interfere with his concentration.

May not be in the suit, but his posture, the set of his jaw, made it clear that Barry was The Flash, superhero. Not Barry Allen, brilliantly awkward CSI.
Len couldn’t stop himself from acknowledging how hot that was.

Barry really didn’t need this crap today. All he wanted to do was go home and maybe, hopefully, curl up with Len. And try not to think about his dad leaving. Instead he had a whole new crisis to deal with in the form of Jay Garrick.

He felt a little better after the initial interrogation—it was really nice to have more than just Joe as backup. During all of the face-offs with Eobard, Barry had to be aware and ready to get his friends out of harm’s way at the slightest flicker of movement. Having the Rogues in all their dangerous competence on his side was a huge help.

Caitlin took the lead after he and Joe finished the first round of questions, to see if there was any chance that Garrick was telling the truth. About being a speedster from another version of Earth.

Which...if someone spouted something like this to Barry before the accelerator exploded...he would’ve smiled, nodded, and moved on. Even his pursuit of the impossible had its limits. Now though—he wasn’t willing to dismiss the idea just yet, even if Mick and Lisa clearly had. Len was harder to read, but between his narrowed eyes and that thoughtful head-tilt, the speedster figured he was withholding judgement until they had more information.

That made sense. Barry told him a lot more about the whole mess with Eobard and time travel and the singularity than Lisa and Mick were aware of—unless Len told them, which Barry seriously doubted. And if time travel was possible...then maybe inter-dimensional travel was, too.

It also might help explain Atom Smasher, and how he could be the literal double of a murder victim. Down to the fingerprints—even identical twins had different fingerprints. Oh, and also powers. Painful ones. But aside from the mutations that explained his powers, the two men were completely identical.

“In case you weren’t quite convinced that your ‘upgrades’ are still far from ok…” Lisa nudged Cisco, bringing Barry out of his thoughts.

“Yeah, I think your brother already made that point. Thanks for rubbing it in.”

“Not completely,” Len finally turned the cold gun off and put it down on the table.

Barry blinked. He wasn’t wearing his leg holster. Huh...he’d gotten so used to seeing Len at home that he wasn’t sure if the lack of gear was a recent change or not. Maybe the thief was comfortable at the Lab. Barry hoped so.

“What do you mean?” Barry asked.

“Neglected to consider how obvious your lightning is, Scarlet.”

“Ohh! Good point,” Cisco looked thoughtful. “Especially since the plan is to get this place up and running again. Right, Barry?”

He nodded.

“Hmmmm...that’ll deflect suspicion about the ties between The Flash and STAR Labs. But it makes our job a lot more complicated,” Len said.
"Thought you already knew that, Cold."

Len shook his head.

Barry frowned, "sorry, I thought I already mentioned it to you. Things’ve been kinda nuts lately."

"Wouldn’t have wasted time letting Cisco play with the doors if I’d been aware."

"Harsh, man," Cisco pouted up at Len, who merely tilted his head, face impassive.

"Ugh, fine, I bow to your superior knowledge of breaking and entering, oh wise Captain Cold."

Barry and Lisa snickered.

"C’mon Lenny—let’s finish this list."

That wasn’t really something he could help with. Barry felt even less significant than usual...between Garrick—who was now shirtless and built and pretty much everything a hero should look like, and the security discussion that he should be paying attention to, even if he didn’t have a lot to contribute...but he couldn’t focus.

He kept replaying that conversation over and over again. Where...god, he was so happy and rambling on about all the different options they had now. His dad could stay with Joe, or at his apartment and Iris and Cait were looking into getting his medical license restored...and he was going to have his life back. Be a family again. Until it all came crashing down in under thirty seconds.

It just didn’t make any sense. He didn’t...his dad was wrong.

"—inventory. What do you think, Barry?" Len asked.

"Huh? Sorry...uh what was the question?"

"Lisa and Cold were offering to complete the inventory for us. I’m not so on board with that plan,"

Cisco said.

"Yeah, I think I’m gonna have to side with Cisco on this one, Len."

"I thought you trusted us, cutie," Lisa batted her eyelashes at him with an outrageous pout.

Barry snickered, "Right, but the point of the inventory is to find out what we actually have on hand...not what we have left after you two help yourselves to all the useful stuff. Besides, I can speed through it all and be done in an hour or two."

"Faster isn’t always better, Scarlet."

"You would say that. I guess you can help if you want—yanno, take notes or something while I go through everything?" Len wouldn’t be able to pocket too many things if he was around...he hoped.

"Just say when."

Barry smiled, nudging Len’s shoulder with his own, “will do.”

“If you two’re done flirting, how d’you plan ta keep the cortex levels off-limits?” Mick’s voice cut through the room—Barry was not blushing. Nope.

“Got that one worked out already,” Cisco grinned around a twizzler. “Task Force HQ.”
“Wait, Cisco…how is surrounding Flash stuff with cops an improvement?” Lisa asked. “They may not be talented enough to catch us, but I doubt they’d overlook something *this* obvious,” she waved her hand to indicate the Flash suit in its alcove.

“Nah, not this floor. Access here will be Department heads and Task Force leaders only—AKA us. Plus Joe and Eddie. I’ll move my non-Flash related stuff to a lab space on the fifth floor and spend time there if anyone from CCPD is around. We can link their prox passes to an alert system, and I can totally get downstairs before they make it up five floors through whatever checkpoints you guys put in.”

“What if you’re on the coms?”

“Obviously then I’m napping. Or went home. Or had a snack craving.”

“They’d buy that. And uhhh…if Singh demands a pass?” Barry asked.

“It’ll mysteriously ‘break’ instead of letting him in.”

“Awesome.”

“That’ll only work a few times,” Len warned, “then what?”

“Well…we can shift things into the time vault if we absolutely have to,” Cisco said. “There’s already a panel that comes down in front of the suit to hide it…if the light’s off the treadmill room looks like storage. Plus, medical stuff is medical stuff. We do cutting edge research, it wouldn’t be weird that Cait has access to the best.”

“What about us?” Lisa asked.

“That’s…gonna take a little longer to work out. For now you’ll have to hide. Which, I know, lame. I swear we’ve nearly got a solution. Technically CCPD has nothing on Cold, and Lisa you’ve never had a record. Heat Wave…not so much. But a clean file doesn’t make people blind, so….yeah,” the engineer shrugged.

“Give us a couple weeks,” Barry joined the conversation, eyes still focused on Garrick, ready to catch the smallest slip. “Everything should be sorted out by Thanksgiving. You just won’t be able to be at the Lab while the FEMA inspectors are here.”

“I’ll hold ya to that, Flash,” Mick.

“I won’t forget.”

Chapter End Notes

Come hit me up on [tumblr](https://tumblr.com)!
By the time they finished up at the Lab Barry’s mood hadn’t gotten any better, and his tummy was reminding him that he hadn’t eaten very much since Joe’s party. Last night. If dinner didn’t happen soon...well, he hated passing out. And his blood-sugar related headache sucked.

It also totally didn’t help that Lisa, Iris, and Caitlin were basically drooling over Jay Garrick. Caitlin needed him to take off his shirt to run some tests and...yeah. Barry tried not to let it bug him—the guy wasn’t hard to look at. But still. There was just...he didn’t want them to stare at him instead, not really. Except...he kinda did. Just a little. Just once. No one ever had.

At least Len wasn’t impressed. He didn’t think so, anyway...but the thief was a good enough actor to cover if he was checking Garrick out. Either way, Barry was relieved that the day was almost over. Finally.

Garrick was locked into one of the newly-renovated cells in the pipeline for the night. Caitlin, Cisco, and the others would continue running tests in the morning; Ronnie and Professor Stein already volunteered to keep an eye on things while Barry was at work...so Mick wouldn’t be far away, either and he wouldn’t be so worried about having the guy loose in the Lab.

Turned out Len wasn’t joking—the pyromaniac really did follow both halves of Firestorm around whenever he had the opportunity. Not that the scientists seemed to mind. It was definitely weird, but the good kind of weird. Visual proof that things weren’t just different between him and Len, they were changing between Team Flash and the Rogues as a whole.

He was a little surprised that nobody had a problem with stowing Garrick in the pipeline until they checked out his story. Especially since Cisco and Caitlin were ready to believe the whole alternative universe Flash thing. The Rogues, however, encouraged his skepticism and weren’t shy about showing it...which was kinda ironic. Given that they were only in the Lab at all because Barry and his friends were willing to give them yet another second chance. But the Rogues had always been an exception.

Barry accepted Mick’s offer to help escort Garrick down to the basement, even though he could’ve managed on his own. It was just...Mick did intimidating a whole lot better than he ever could between the scars and the muscles. He practically frog marched their so-called guest to the elevator, expression set in a dark scowl after Barry wouldn’t let him burn the guy. Or rough him up ‘a little’. He didn’t think it was a serious offer, but better safe than sorry. Garrick followed along easily enough so Barry never had to find out.

He followed Len into the garage, tossing him the keys to the Jeep and climbing into the passenger’s seat. His...whatever he and Len were...got in without comment, not surprised that he’d rather drive
than use his speed. He *did* wait for Barry to buckle in before starting the engine.

They were silent for most of the ride back to their building, but it wasn’t as comfortable as usual. He really *wanted* to talk about it—talking with Len usually helped—but he had no idea how to start.

Len had to be pretty curious by now. It was the first time either of them asked to come over like that...and he prolly noticed that his dad wasn’t at STAR Labs with them, not to mention—

“Any thoughts about dinner?”

“Huh?” Barry glanced out the window to see their apartment building growing closer. “Oh. Yeah, food would be good. I don’t, you know me, I’ll eat pretty much anything,” he forced a small laugh, but Len waited—obviously looking for a better answer than that. “Uh...takeout? I don’t really feel like cooking. Unless you want to? I don’t mind helping.”

“Takeout’s fine with me. Less cleanup,” Len pulled into the parking lot, taking the space that technically went with Barry’s unit. Not that he needed it...the landlord gave it to somebody else and of course that somebody ended up being Len. Hell, if he was the kind of guy that paid attention to cars he probably would’ve suspected his neighbor’s identity a lot sooner.

“Gonna tell me what’s on your mind, Scarlet?”

“It’s nothing,” Barry slammed the door, heading towards the building. “Really. It’s fine.”

“Riiight,” both look and tone were skeptical. Len crossed his arms and blocked the entrance.

“Yeah, ok. It’s really, really not. But can we maybe go inside first?”

“Course. Your place or mine?”

“Up to you,” he shrugged, adding “your couch is more comfy.”

Len huffed a laugh and held the door for him, “my place it is.”

He bumped shoulders instead of thanking the thief out loud and walked into the building. Biting his lip to keep from blurting out the chaos in his head, Barry tried to come up with something...anything.

“Good thing we didn’t take the pipeline apart,” at least he made it into the stairwell before blurting that out. Even if it wasn’t what he meant to say.

“Garrick isn’t going anywhere.”

“Yeah, but it—I didn’t want to use it like this again, you know? Locking someone up for as long as it takes.”

“Hmm,” Len agreed, “didn’t have much of a choice, Barry. He knows too much to wander around.”

“Don’t you think that’s a little hypocritical, Captain Cold?” Barry couldn’t help asking.

“Our situation was different—mutually assured destruction kept both of us in line. Until we figure out his angle...pipeline’s the best place for him.”

“I guess...wait. ‘Was’?”

“You gonna make me say it, Scarlet?”
“Yup. Definitely need to hear this from you,” Barry said, already smiling.

“If I must,” Len nudged him out of the stairway and into the hall. “Your identity is...safe. With me and the Rogues. As I suspect my freedom is with you.”

“Pretty much. You’ve got complete access to the Lab at this point,” he shrugged “as long as you don’t kill anyone—minus the self-defense clause—somehow Central will manage to survive.”

“Permission to steal, Flash. What would Detective West say?”

He made a face, “ugh, Len, you’re evil! Well...more chaotic neutral if we’re talking actual alignments. Just yanno...keep the frequency of your heists pretty low, continue to leave very little forensic evidence, and target stuff that’s insured. As long as you’re not too obvious about it and resist the urge to call me out on a regional news channel, I couldn’t lock you up even if I wanted to. But lay off the museums—The Flash will definitely stop you from robbing those.”

“Duly noted.”

All Barry wanted to do was kiss the infuriatingly attractive smirk off the cocky thief’s face. His cocky thief...he hoped..

“Chaotic neutral, huh? Letting your nerd show, Scarlet, but—”

“Oh please, don’t even try,” he leaned against the wall between their doors. “You got the reference, so as a fellow uber nerd you don’t get to give me crap about it.”

“Don’t recall agreeing to those terms. But I’ll let you off the hook. For now.”

Barry giggled, “thanks. Very generous of you.”

“Already have plenty of material,” Len opened his door, waving Barry inside.

“Oh joy.”

“Decide what you want yet?”

“Huh? Oh, food. Thai ok?” he asked, stepping out of his shoes.

Len already had his phone out, “same order as last time?”

“Sure. Thanks.”

With the door locked behind them Len hung up his jacket and took off his boots, placing them neatly next to the untidy pile of Barry’s converse.

“Got about forty-five minutes. Make yourself comfortable, Barry.”

The speedster made his way towards the couch. Except he didn’t plop down right away—jeans weren’t all that comfy. He could always phase next door but, “would...uh, could I borrow some sweat pants or something?”

Len tilted his head. The speedster could go through the wall to grab his own; made the request something...more. Took a moment to consider mentioning that fact but thought better of it, “suppose so.”

“Thanks.”
Ducked into his room, shedding his own dark jeans in favor of a pair of loose sweats. Chose to leave the sweater on for now, at least until the food arrived. He...preferred to be covered. Given how off-balance Barry was, how aware the younger man was with the comfort of others and the way he needed touch to ground himself—

Tried one hundred and two seconds to consider his options. The idea that Barry’d rather wear Len’s clothes than his own was one hell of a boost. Len never denied his possessive tendencies.

What Barry would be comfortable in, what he might hang onto to wear again later...selecting a pair of worn grey flannels and a soft long-sleeved Henley in deep green that’d be big on the younger man, but not as baggy as the stuff he usually wore. Had a feeling the shirt was gonna look much better on Scarlet than it ever had on him.

“This what you had in mind?” Len asked, returning to the living room.

Scarlet took the offered garments, whirling into them in the blink of an eye. No sign of his own clothes when he stilled. Len was right about the shirt—definitely looked better on Barry. Soft fabric stretched just enough to hint at the muscles beneath but not enough to make the speedster self-conscious. And the color brought out the green in his hazel eyes.

“These are great, thanks,” Barry flopped onto the couch looking...worn.

Rather than joining him immediately, the thief detoured into the kitchen to grab two bottles of beer—a pretty damn good local microbrew—and one of the Cisco-made energy bars from the brand new box in his pantry.

“You know this—”

“Don’t care. Sometime alcohol’s necessary, whether it works or not,” Len interrupted, tossing the energy bar into Barry’s lap and handing him one of the bottles.

Haven’t gotten through a quarter of the bottle before Barry had settled in, head pillowed on Len’s thigh...except he wasn’t sprawled out the way he normally would be. Certainly had the room to. Instead he was curled into a ball and radiating tension. Tension that didn’t budge, despite Len’s fingers in his hair, massaging his scalp.

Was about to prod...knew that the speedster needed to talk about it, get some of it out or he wasn’t gonna be able to eat. Had no idea—Len wasn’t good at this stuff. When it counted, he was all about actions, not words. Barry, though...he needed both.

Len opened his mouth to say...something vaguely encouraging when Barry finally began to speak.

“He left, Len. My dad...he’s gone. He only spent one night...like he couldn’t stand to be around me,” Barry whispered, eyes closed. “I don’t...god. All I’ve wanted since I was eleven was to be with him without a pane of glass between us. That finally happens and...he can’t get away fast enough.”

Fuck. Suspected as much, but...Len was not the person that Barry should be talking to about this. Families—fathers in particular—less he thought about Lewis, the better. But.

Barry ‘s eyes were fixed on his. Pleading—hoping—that he had some kind of explanation for the actions of a man he hadn’t met beyond a few short encounters in Iron Heights nearly a decade ago.

“Scarlet—Barry—I don’t have the best...track record when it comes to fathers. Mine was for shit,”
he took a deep breath, fingers going still in his thick brown hair. “Prison is all about being told. Where to be, when to eat, when to sleep, when to bathe. No privacy. Can’t ever relax, not completely. No choices.

“I was never in for long after the...first time. But that didn’t matter. Adjusting isn’t easy. Your father had fifteen years of it. It’s gonna take time.”

“But I can help with that—all of us can. Iris and Cait are working to get his medical license restored, and he’s got the settlement from the state of Missouri. Not to mention what Thawne left me,” he waved a hand. “Joe has a room for him, or he could’ve stayed at my place while looking for a house or apartment of his own. Or for both of us—not that I want to move, I like living next to you,” Barry opened his eyes and they shared a subdued smile, “but...he’s my dad.”

“Must’ve given you some explanation...” Len trailed off, resuming his hair-stroking.

The speedster let out a humorless laugh, “yeah. Honestly, I’m not sure...I kinda wish he hadn’t said goodbye? That sounds horrible. But...he told me I don’t need him. That he’d just drag me down...that Central City needs The Flash and The Flash doesn’t need him.”

Shit, low blow. Played right into the speedster’s guilt complex—man clearly knew his son.

“But what about me? I...how could he think that I don’t need him because I’ve ‘already got a family’?” Barry whispered.

After getting used to West’s interactions with his kids Len hoped—assumed—that Allen would be similar. Supportive. Not manipulative and selfish. That...hit too close to home.

“He didn’t mean it that way, not really. He probably...doesn’t want you putting your life on hold while he figures his out,” Len responded, choosing his words carefully. Had a lot of practice telling people what they wanted to hear, but this was different. This time he gave a damn.

Hard as it was for him to wrap his head around, he hoped that what he said held some truth. Barry cared with his whole heart; he deserved a hell of a lot more than this. Spent a decade and a half in limbo. Missing, wanting...willing to give up so much to stay in Central so that he and his dad...that their relationship would be as strong as possible. If Len allowed himself to think about it much more it’d seriously piss him off.

“Medicine, technology—everything advanced in the last fifteen years, Barry. You know that. As much as you want to, as he wants to...things won’t be the way they were before...or like he was never locked away. He was.”

They were quiet for a few minutes, still except for Len’s fingers in Barry’s hair.

“I know it’ll be...that it’s not the same. Really. I get it,” Barry sighed, finally relaxed enough to stretch out. “He’s wrong. I—if he needed space he could’ve just said so. Right? I know I’ve got Joe and Iris, Cisco, Caitlin...You. But that doesn’t mean I don’t need him, too.”

Len hummed in agreement, a little shocked that Barry included him in his list of important people.

The buzzer was harsh in the comfortable silence, making them both jump. Len stood to retrieve their food, but not before Barry stole a quick kiss, also getting to his feet.

“Go ahead and pick something,” Len said, setting three large bags of takeout on the coffee table on his way to the kitchen.
“Mind if we watch a show instead?”

“Fine with me, Scarlet. Netflix is ready to go—take your pick,” he called, before adding “no Law & Order.”

“Gimme a little more credit. Why would I want to watch something that’s basically work?”

Snagged two more beers from the fridge, pleased to hear a smile in the speedster’s voice.

“Please tell me your Netflix history is lying to me.”

“About?” Len grabbed some plates and silverware in his other hand, heading back into the living room. No cleanup was nice, but...he grew up eating out of flimsy takeout containers or off shitty paper plates. Having a nice kitchen with matching dishes was a luxury. Real plates made him feel settled. Deliberate. Unhurried.

It meant they could take their time and left proof that the meal actually happened in the form of dishes to wash and put away. It was one of the first things he bought—not stole—for Lisa. Real plates that they kept hidden in his bedroom. Took Lewis almost two years to ruin them...two years of grilled cheese, canned tomato soup, greasy fast food, and the occasional fresh vegetable. Wasn’t much, but...proper families had real dishes and he tried so damn hard to give Lise as much ‘normal’ as he could.

Once he was on his own and...established he enjoyed the freedom to choose what and how to eat—disposable meals were for heist-planning and run-down safehouses. Any time he wanted to enjoy the food or the company, the ritual of cleaning up was a reminder that it happened, that he could have the little, normal things. That it was safe—he was safe—enough that leaving evidence of his existence wouldn’t mean a beating.

Not that Barry knew any of it...but he did always make use of the plates provided. Even if it’d be easier for him to inhale food directly from the containers.

Set everything down next to the calorie bar Scarlet still hadn’t eaten, putting it on the dish he passed the younger man, rolling his eyes at the disgusted face.

“Ugh, fine. At least now I won’t have to taste it for long,” Barry ate the thing at superspeed and washed it down with what was left of his bottle of beer. “Wait...since when do you have a stash of these?”

Ignored that, redirecting to the issue at hand while filling his plate, “what’s wrong with my viewing history?”

“It says you haven’t seen Parks and Recreation. How is that even possible?”

“The Office sucked. Why would I want to subject myself to a slightly different version?”

“Yeah, ok, that’s fair. That show had some funny moments, but mostly it tried and missed. Parks and Rec is different, I promise.”

Len shrugged. Didn’t really care what they watched—Lise’s ‘mandatory’ Real Housewives marathons saw to that. After that, he could suffer through a few episodes of anything if it’d help, “you’ve got the remote—go for it.”

“Thanks. I promise you’ll like it,” Barry sat down, plate full. “Probably.”
“We shall see,” Len joined him, opening his beer as the show began.

Took a few episodes, but Len found himself enjoying the antics of the Pawnee Parks and Recreation department. Wasn’t gonna tell Barry, but...he didn’t need to. Not after the speedster caught him chuckling the fourth time, anyway.

Finished eating by the end of episode three and took a few minutes to clean up. Barry zipped around collecting trash and putting empty bottles into the recycling container while Len rinsed everything else off and put it all in the dishwasher. Whole thing was so easy and domestic…

It wasn’t the first time they’d done this, hopefully wouldn’t be the last. But the wonder still hadn’t worn off. That Scarlet was here and knew his way around Len’s home...that he felt comfortable enough to pitch in without asking...that they knew each other well enough that this was starting to feel like a routine.

When they settled back onto the couch Barry curled into his side immediately. Smiled when Len’s arm automatically wrapped around his waist to hold him close.

A smile that lasted through the end of season one. By then Scarlet’s yawns turned into deep, snuffling breaths that indicated he was on the edge of sleep… and Len wasn’t too far behind.

“C’mon, Scarlet—up.”

Barry blinked at the screen, then up at Len, “we could start season two?”

“You spent most of the last episode sleeping—think it’s time to go to bed, don’t you?”

“Mmmm, I guess. Couch is comfy, too…”

He huffed out a laugh at Barry’s whining, “not that comfortable.”

“Yeah, ok,” Barry sighed, pushing himself up until he was sitting on the edge of the sofa. “Your bed does have a lot more space. And blankets. Blankets are good,” fixed his big, earnest green eyes on Len.

The speedster was so adorable when he was more than half asleep.

“Yes, yes they are. Up—I’ll let you have the bathroom first.”

“Kay.”

Len spent a few minutes putting the living room back in order—folding the throw, putting it and the pillows back on the recliner—while Barry got ready for bed. The Flash-themed toothbrush elicited a sleepy grin when Barry saw it waiting for him in the ensuite.

Performed his own nightly routine once he heard the water turn off, listening to the sound of fabric rustling as the speedster settled into Len’s bed, catching the soft glow of the lamp on his night stand in the corner of his eye. He was still trying to wrap his head around it all—that Barry sought him out after his dad skipped out on him. It didn’t—Iris’d be much better at this.
But Barry chose him. Len’d do his best not to let him down too much.

Flicked off the bathroom light, shedding his sweatpants and sweater, tossing them in the hamper on his way to bed. Turned off the lamp, sliding under the blankets.

Barry was on him before his head hit the pillow. Arms and legs wrapped tight, trapping his own arms against his chest, his legs trapped between Barry’s. Len froze. Fought his instincts to lash out, to kick and fight until he was free—knew the speedster wasn’t a threat, that he just...needed the contact, but it didn’t do much good. He was tense, rigid, breath coming in short, quick bursts. Not good.

Spent thirty-seven seconds trying to get his breathing under control. No joy.

“Barry,” he croaked, “need you to loosen up.”

No response. No movement at all, minus Barry’s forehead pressing into his shoulder even harder. Could feel the edges of panic seeping in—

“Let. Go,” Len ground out between clenched teeth, twisting away as soon as Barry released him and fell out of bed in his rush to give Len more space.

“Len! Oh god, I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean—”

Eyes adjusted to the dim light, Len could see the other poised to bolt. Ready to phase through the wall and away. Wasn’t gonna let that happen, not before he had his say. Grabbed Barry’s wrist, slowly reeling him back into bed.

“Barry—it’s ok, Scarlet. I don't...I know you like contact, that it helps. I...do not. Under normal circumstances. But we’re...it’s different.”

He shifted closer, almost leaning against Len before realizing what he was doing and jerking away.

Len leaned forward to click on the lamp on the nightstand—needed to see Barry’s face for this. “What’s going on, Scarlet?”

Barry shrugged. Turning to face him, foot tucked under his leg, gaze fixed on a loose thread in the cuff of the flannels.

Decided to wait him out, making a conscious effort to keep his expression open and encouraging. Closing most of the distance between them but not touching.

“I. Nothing...the stuff with my dad,” fidgeted, still wouldn’t look up.

Len tapped his foot against Barry’s knee, a nudge that he didn’t buy it. Left it there to establish a point of contact between them. More often than not, touch helped ground the speedster. Not this time—if anything, he tensed even more. But he stayed put; held out for another fifty-nine seconds before heaving a huge sigh. Releasing the tension with it, he curled in on himself.

“It’s just...this can’t be what you had in mind when I asked to come over...spending the whole time dealing with me being super clingy,” shrugged. “Especially since you don’t really like to be touched so much. Let me...I can make it up to you. Tell me what you’d like and at least...at least this way you’d get something out of it, too?”

Shit. Had he...was it something he did? That Barry felt the need to pay him back for providing comfort? Len swallowed, making sure the sick feeling in the pit of his stomach didn’t make it to his
face. Shifted back to lean against the headboard, catching Barry’s attention and finally, finally he looked up. Made eye contact and slowly raised his arm, a clear invitation.

Barry hesitated for a fraction of a second before darting forward, pressing himself to Len’s side, snuggling into the protective circle of his arm.

“That’s not,” Len paused, starting over. “Barry, that’s not how this,” he waved a hand to indicate the two of them, “works. Told you no expectations before and I meant it. If I didn’t want to be here— alright, it’s my place.”

Barry let out a short, startled laugh.

“If I didn’t want you to be here, you’d know. Same thing goes for…” he trailed off. “If I’m not on board, you’d know. Wasn’t expecting...it was a little sudden, a little too tight. Asking you to loosen up doesn’t mean I want you to leave.”

“What is this, Len? What...what are we?” Barry asked, barely audible. “Dating?”

“No,” arm tightened around Barry to keep him in place, making a point to hold his hand. “We are...together. Need to go on an actual date for your term to apply.”

“Yeah we have—what about movie nights?”

“Don’t count.”

“What? Why not?” Barry looked like he was going for indignant, but he was finally smiling.

“One typically goes out for a first date.”

“I guess. But you did buy dinner most times.”

“Free tomorrow night?” Len asked.

“So far...”

“Could fix that. There’s a nice Italian place between here and Keystone—small, private, amazing food—I think you’d enjoy. If you’re free and...want to join me there?” Len winced—didn’t mean to turn that into a question. Not that he was worried that Barry would turn him down, but...better safe than sorry.

“I’d like that,” Barry’s smile was shy.

It—he—was beautiful. So much better than Len deserved.

“Good.” Len nodded. Took a careful look at Barry’s face to make sure he was on the same page about...all of it. Shifted to turn the light off, shrouding them in darkness once again. Heard more than saw Barry move, the sound of fabric hitting the floor. His guess confirmed by the feeling of warm skin pressed against his own as Barry settled in against his side, head pillowed on Len’s shoulder.

But not before Barry covered his face with kisses—lips feather-light against his skin. Len reached up, tangling his hand in the other’s hair long enough to draw him into a proper kiss. All soft lips, warm mouths, and slick tongues. Deep but unhurried not leading anywhere. Len poured his concern, his caution, his adoration into his movements. Wanting—needing—Barry to know that this was enough—that he’d be...all he wanted was what the speedster freely offered. He was a thief, yes, but when someone mattered...he drew a line. Didn’t—would never—push or pressure.
Once they parted and got settled Barry spoke, his lips brushing Len’s shoulder. “So, um...does this mean we’re boyfriends or not until the actual date?”

Wrinkled his nose at the term. It sounded...trivial. Wasn’t enough for them—for The Flash and Captain Cold—even if they hadn’t been together very long. It felt like...more. Len wanted this to be more. “Partners.”

“Really?” Barry propped himself up and Len basked in his radiant smile. “Wait. You call Mick your partner, too. Are—well, were—you guys...?”

Len huffed out a laugh, “no. Mick’s interests lie in fire...with women a distant second. But we’ve had each other’s backs for over twenty years. He earned it.”

“Oh. Makes sense,” slid his—fucking freezing—feet under Len’s calves to warm up. He didn’t yelp, but it was a close thing. “We’re really going on a date tomorrow?”

“Mhm,” Len rolled onto his side, nudging Scarlet to follow his lead. Back pressed to Len’s chest as little spoon.”Pick you up at 7:30?”

“Sounds good.”

“I’ll call at 6. You won’t remember.”

“Will too.”

“Mhm, sure,” ducked his head to press his lips to the back of Barry’s neck. “Whatever you say.”

“Aren’t we gonna work on that inventory tomorrow anyway? Seems kinda silly for you t’ call me if we’re both at the Lab.”

“You’re assuming you won’t get a call from work, or...distracted by Cisco and Hart. Or get sucked into some fire-related test with Mick and Firestorm.”

“Oh,” held out for a few more seconds before giving in, “yeah ok, prolly better if you remind me.”

Len smirked but stayed quiet, nosing into Barry’s soft hair. The younger man sighed happily, squirming in an attempt to get closer and tugging the blankets up to cover his bare shoulder. “G’night.”

“Night Barry, sleep well”

“I will.” fingers find Len’s and squeeze, “thanks. For...all of it.”

“Don’t thank me, Scarlet. Partners.”

Chapter End Notes

Come hit me up on tumblr!
The Date

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Between managing to sleep in for once and convincing each other not to get out of bed yet, a leisurely breakfast just wasn’t gonna happen. Not if they wanted to get most of the inventory done today. And Barry’s stomach was letting him know he’d have to down an energy bar from Len’s stash to make it through a shower.

“’S your fault,” Barry grumbled between bites.

“Pretty sure you started it, Scarlet.”

He chose to ignore that, “for real though, where’d you get these?”

The other man gave him a lopsided smile and shrugged...which wasn’t fair at all. It was super distracting and made Barry want to kiss him a hell of a lot more than he wanted answers.

“Ok yeah, dumb question. You got ’em from the Lab,” Barry continued once he could finally able to think about more than food, earning an amused chuckle. “So I should’v asked if you stole ’em or asked Cisco for a box.”

“Barry…” Len tilted his head to one side, smile growing into a smirk.

“See, that’s totally not a real answer. Guess I’ll have to ask Cisco myself—oooh, or Lisa. Yup, Lisa,” Barry nodded.

“Thought you were gonna run along and shower so we could feed you properly.”

He rolled his eyes, balling up the wrapper and tossing it into the garbage, “I’m going, I’m going.”

“Tick, tock.”

Of course, the impatient act didn’t stop Len from pulling him in for another kiss. Muffling his startled “oof,” with warm lips, cool hands sliding down his sides and under the hem of his—technically Len’s—shirt to rub small circles along the crest of his hips. Barry didn’t bother trying to keep his reactions under control. Too much effort. Plus, that meant splitting his focus; taking attention away from what he was doing, what Len was doing to him...attention put to much better use in the form of sharp nips, feeling the soft fuzz of Len’s hair under his fingers and the slow slide of their bodies against each other.

Barry finally drew back when the press of their hips picked up speed and the need to breathe couldn’t be ignored. “You said something about breakfast,” he said, panting a little. “We should maybe get started on that.”

“Mmm. Unless you changed your mind about spending the day in bed?” Len’s voice was deeper than usual with a rough edge that sent a shiver down his back.

“That’s really, really tempting. But,” Barry grinned, eyes lingering on the light flush across his chest and the promising bulge in his pants, “subsisting on calorie bars sucks...and we’d probably wind up not going out tonight. I may be fast but I don’t put out until at least after the first date,” he teased, pointedly ignoring the fact that he already knew how the other tasted...what he looked like when he
“Point,” Len stepped back with a smirk. After grabbing a handful of the speedsters ass with a firm squeeze.

Barry did not jump or squeak. At all. Instead he tapped into the speedforce, phasing back into his apartment to get ready for the day...ideally before super hypoglycemia really kicked his ass.

After a quick shower, Barry wound up taking way too much time standing in front of his closet figuring out what to wear. He usually functioned on autopilot, everything divided into stuff for work or comfy things for lounging around—assuming that he got around to putting his clean clothes away. It made life easier, one less thing to deal with when he was already running late.

Today he was off, which usually meant a sweatshirt and jeans. Jeans were still good, but Len always looked...No sweatshirt. But he didn’t want to go with any of his usual work things because he wanted to aim a little higher than ‘adorable nerd.’

He paused at the familiar texture of the dark grey sweater he kept ‘forgetting’ to return to Len. Len, who always looked too damn good. Barry knew he didn’t exactly measure up, but decent was doable. Hopefully without wearing something he might want later.

Barry bit his lip, rifling through hangers and trying not to get too caught up on the idea that Len...that they were actually going on an official date. Otherwise he’d be late for breakfast. Well, later than he was already.

It took a few more minutes, but he finally went with a black vee neck sweater that he thought was too tight even though Iris swore it fit perfectly and a pair of jeans. He flashed into them, shrugging into a coat and stuffing his feet into his usual red chucks on the way out the door, in such a rush that he almost forgot his bag. Hopefully Len didn’t have to wait too long.

“Very nice, Scarlet.”

Barry grinned, completely failing at the whole not blushing thing as Len looked him over, “thanks. Uh...Jitters?” he asked, glancing over and...wow.

Len was leaning against the wall wearing a deep grey Henley and dark jeans under a black trench coat. He looked like he just stepped off the cover of a magazine, not out of his apartment, and way out of Barry’s league.

“Got everything?” he asked, stepping forward.

“Yeah,” Barry nodded, shouldering his messenger bag. “Besides, it’s not like I can’t rush home if I did leave something behind.”

The thief smirked but said nothing as they started down the hall. Barry wasn’t sure how it happened, but before they made it to the stairs Len’s hand settled at the small of his back, spreading warmth through Barry’s coat and sweater on the walk out of the building.

The reality of walking into Jitters—located a few blocks from the precinct—at Len’s side didn’t hit
him until they got out of the car. Barry wasn’t ashamed of being seen with the other man—he looked amazing. But that was kinda the problem. Unlike himself, Len wasn’t the kind of guy that blended into the background—even without the parka. While his records were gone, Felicity’s program did nothing to erase CCPD’s memory of Leonard Snart and he didn’t want an arrest to interrupt their plans.

So, yeah. Barry was a little worried about walking in with Len at his side—the shop was popular with everyone, including everyone in his precinct. Thankfully it was late enough that they should be between major coffee runs...he hoped.

Turned out he needn’t have worried.

Pulling a pair of dark-framed glasses from the inside pocket of his coat the thief shifted as soon as he put them on. It was weird, the way his shoulders dropped a bit, seeming to loosen up. His walk changed, too. Losing some of the confident swagger that Barry admired until he seamlessly fit into the mixed crowd of students and young professionals that frequented the cafe.

The final piece of the transformation was the way Len’s controlled expression—not hard, not around Barry, not anymore—more of what Cisco called a smugly-amused resting bitch face—fell away. The man standing next to him in line, so close their shoulders touched, retained Len’s smooth, confident movements without the usual edge. Helped along by a softer, more open expression. He wasn’t really relaxed, though. There was still a little tension around the corners of his eyes, a rigidity to his jaw that Barry wouldn’t have noticed if he hadn’t spent so much time with Len when he was truly at ease.

It was weird, but a good weird. It meant they could do stuff in public without Barry having to worry about someone recognizing Len as Captain Cold. And he wanted...if, if they were really doing this, Barry kinda wanted to be able to tell people.

Not all the details, of course. But the basics, especially since he knew that he was pretty bad at hiding things like this—that he finally maybe had someone that he...yeah. Barry shook his head, not ready to let that thought continue. It was too early for that. And the odd hour meant it was almost their turn to order.

Len urged Barry towards the counter with a light nudge and a quiet “you’re staring.”

“Can you blame me?” the speedster muttered, flashing him a shy smile. Cheeks a shade darker than they’d been outside.

Attempts to turn his short chuckle into a scoff with limited success, directing his pleased smile towards the ground. Of course Barry noticed anyway, fingers darting out to squeeze his hand faster than he could follow. Already stepping forward to order by the time Len’s brain caught up.

“Good morning and welcome to Jitters. My name is Kendra, what can I get you this morning?”

“Oh, um...hi,” Barry blinked, thrown by the greeting. “Sorry,” shifted his weight towards Len. “I’m here a lot, haven’t gotten the whole spiel since Iris started working here during college.”

The barista, Kendra, laughed a little. Her smile shifted from polite to genuine, “I just started.”

“That explains it. Are you new to Central?”
“Yup, moved here last month. It’s been nice so far, if a little overwhelming. I haven’t lived anywhere this big before,” tucked her hair behind her ear.

Len stood straighter, eyes narrowed. Didn’t miss the way she smiled a little brighter at Barry’s welcoming grin. The way her gaze took in his face—bright hazel eyes, cheekbones, that smile—lingered on his shoulders, dip of his collarbone. How the soft knit of the sweater fit him properly, stretching just enough to hint at the lithe muscles beneath.

He moved closer, arm wrapping around Scarlet’s waist. Met the young woman’s startled look with a glare, not that Barry noticed. Not beyond leaning into him a little more while offering to show Kendra around, should she be so inclined.

The gesture was enough to get her back on track, politely refusing Barry’s offered number, “that’s ok. I still have so much left to unpack and stuff—that’ll keep me busy for at least a week or two...maybe after that? If you’re here that often I’m sure we’ll see each other again. Now, what can I get for you two?”

Finally a return to professionalism.

“I’ll have a large mocha, and…” glanced at him over his shoulder, “think we should bring enough for the others?”

Len pursed his lips, “we know who’s gonna be there?”

“Oh, good point...it’s gotten a lot harder to predict now,” there was that sunny smile. Len basked.

“Mmm,” he hummed his agreement, “well?”

“Brownies. That way we won’t completely ignore them.”

“They worth it?” Len tilted his head.

“Oh yeah. Iris is obsessed with them.”

“Do you mean Iris West?” Kendra asked.

“Yeah. She’s my best friend.”

“She came in during my training the other day,” she paused, one eyebrow raised, “that must make you Barry, right?”

“Oh! Sorry. I can’t believe I didn’t—” ducked his head, “yeah, I’m Barry. This is Len.”

“Charmed.”

Barry nudged him. Len ignored it, expression chilly.

“Alright, so one large mocha,” Kendra wrote his name on a cup, “some brownies…”

“Seven of them, please.”

“Ok. And for you, Len, right?”

Nodded. “Have a Flash, large. Iced.” Swiped his AmEx.

Barry bit his lip, eyes alight with mirth. Pulling him towards the pickup area. “You think you’re so
funny,” shook his head, laughter in his voice killing any attempt at sarcasm.

“Mmhm. Evidence suggests you agree with me.”

“Nope. Not at all. Just humoring you,” the speedster looked so damn pleased with himself.

“Cold, Barry.”

He gave up, giggling. Warm gaze fixed on Len even as he accepted the bag of brownies from Kendra with a murmured, “thanks.”

The scrutiny meant he didn’t miss the way Len’s eyes narrowed when her hand lingered, making contact with Barry’s on the hand off. His expression turning puzzled.

Took a breath, tamping down his possessive tendencies—not something he wanted to discuss in public—summoned a small smile. One that grew when Barry took a half-step closer. Too close than could be mistaken for a strictly friendly connection between them.

“Barry, Len? Your drinks are ready.”

“Thanks Lauren.”

“You’re welcome. Say hi to Iris for me.”

He laughed, “I will, even though you’ll probably see her soon enough.”

“True,” her smile turned mischievous as she glanced between the two of them, obvious questions getting ready to tumble out.

Len raised an eyebrow, waiting. Scarlet, on the other hand, wasn’t gonna stick around. Grabbed their order and his hand, saying goodbye before the interrogation could begin.

Once they were out the door Barry’s grip on his hand loosened, but the thief didn’t let go. Wanted to make sure the staff at Jitters—one member in particular—knew Barry Allen was his.

The man in question looked startled for a couple seconds before smiling, face flushed from more than the chilly November air.

“So, I’m not complaining, but what brought this on?”

“She was flirting with you. Wasn’t professional,” he replied, voice tight.

Barry laughed, shaking his head, “for real, Len? She was just doing her job. Yanno...customer service? And, uh...we were clearly there together,” bumped their shoulders.

Len grumbled under his breath but let it go. For now. Scarlet being oblivious wasn’t new; contented himself by lacing their fingers together for the remainder of the walk to the car.

Barry gave Len directions to the storage room as soon as they reached STAR Labs, along with his mocha and the brownies before taking off for the cortex. He grabbed one of the extra tablets and an energy bar, pausing for a second and adding a pad of paper and some pencils to his messenger bag, just in case Len preferred doing this the old fashioned way.
While he would’ve preferred to spend his day off relaxing, the store room really did need to get organized. By someone other than Cisco, who got sidetracked with almost every piece of tech he uncovered. Although calling it a room was misleading. It was more like the entire contents of four aisles of Home Depot’s worth of stuff a hell of a lot more sensitive than plywood and storage bins. Speaking of storage bins...they could prolly use a few more of those.

“Well...shit.”

“Yeah, it’s a little out of hand,” Barry’s smile was sheepish.

Len scoffed but otherwise stayed silent. Lips pursed as he took it all in—Barry could practically see the plans formulating in his mind. That was the main reason he didn’t object to the master thief’s offer to help, because he’d figure out how to organize stuff, not just tidy it all up. Barry kept his lab and kitchen in meticulous order; beyond that, well...organized chaos existed for a reason.

He sipped his mocha, washing down the last bite of brownie, happy to watch Len plot, with what was probably a goofy look on his face. Especially since the other pushed up his sleeves, exposing the ink on his forearms.

Len noticed him looking with a warm smirk and lingering glance of his own.

Barry hopped up on the table, swinging his legs and nibbling on another brownie in an attempt at patience while the thief strategized. He grabbed the tablet, powering it up and logging onto the server to retrieve the inventory spreadsheet and the wish list Len emailed him the other day.

“What’ve you got in mind?” he asked, rubbing the back of his neck at Len’s raised eyebrow and knowing head-tilt. Ok, so patience wasn’t exactly Barry’s strong suit, something that only got worse since he became The Flash.

“Many, many things, Barry,” his voice a low rumble that had Barry ducking his head in an attempt to hide his sudden blush. “For now, however...start with the list, cross-reference with Cisco’s inventory. Ideally reorganize so the components we need will be readily accessible. Then go from there.”

“’kay,” Barry bounced on the balls of his feet.

“Not so fast. Gotta make space around here first—makes no sense to scatter the necessary components all over the place.”

“Alright,” Barry heaved an exaggerated sigh.

His Rogue laughed and got started.

They spent the next hour or so clearing off the shelves near the door. Len was precise and demanding—no real surprise there—only allowing Barry to move things once they’d been documented and he came up with a temporary spot to store them.

On the bright side, they were able to cross one item off the wish list.

“Did we get to the part where I get to run?” he asked, perched on the table once more.

“No quite,” Len drawled.

Barry finished off the last brownie, waiting. But instead of another box to sort or move, Len walked
over, stepping between his legs and sliding a hand into his hair, pulling him into a kiss.

It started slowly, mouths closed and his hands latched onto the front of Len’s shirt, but it didn’t stay that way for long. Fingers tugging his hair, making him gasp, press closer nip at Len’s tongue, making what could’ve been an embarrassingly needy sound when Len pulled a little harder.

He didn’t even remember hooking his legs around the other’s hips, prolly wouldn’t have noticed if not for the deep, sexy chuckle he could almost taste, covered as it was by chocolate and coffee.

Len’s hands made their way to his thighs as the thief eased out of the kiss with one last nip to Barry’s lower lip, soothed by a swipe of his tongue. Extracting himself and stepping away to grab the tablet, saying...something.

Barry was a little dazed...maybe more than a little, because wow. “Sorry, what was that?” he asked, sliding off the table.

“Alright. Now you may go.”

The speedster shook his head, knowing he looked a little goofy, smile growing even more at the satisfied warmth in Len’s eyes. His expression really similar to the one Barry woke up to, in the other’s bed and wrapped up in Len’s arms like Barry was a teddy bear.

That look followed him all morning as Barry, with a lot of help from Len, began imposing order on their supplies. He still missed his dad, but the sharp pain of his departure receded into a dull ache, pushed into the background by Len’s solid presence and teasing.

And he had their date to look forward to.

Even if the meal itself sucked—not something Barry was too worried about, given Len’s foodie tendencies—the company would be great. And who knew what they’d do after.

It seemed kinda dumb to follow his usual pattern, not that Barry dated very much, but he quickly figured out that casual hookups weren’t for him. One of the many benefits of college.

For him, attraction was more about building an emotional connection. Which Barry realized was something they started doing months ago. Ever since finding out they were neighbors. It was weird, but the way everything developed between the two of them was...it was just so easy. And it shouldn’t be—they’d been—still were?—nemeses while in costume.

Ok, maybe he was low-key hoping to get laid. Or not so low-key. Because Len’s seriously hot and unexpectedly sweet and...as amazing as everything’s been so far with hands and mouths—Len gave one hell of a blowjob—Barry craved a deeper connection. Really wanted to feel as much of the other man as possible, be as close as possible. Like he belonged.

They managed to locate about a third of the stuff for the security system already. Now that they made what Len deemed ‘an appropriate amount of space for proper organization,’ he called out three or four related items for the speedster to locate and retrieve while he managed the spreadsheet and kept everything in order.

Barry managed to stifle a laugh while he waited for the next set of instructions, watching Len carefully adjust his most recent delivery—5,000 feet of fiber optic cable—until their orientation met his exacting standards. It also wasn’t easy to resist the urge to figure out just what it’d take to get the other to lose that laser focus, a look way more suited to coming up with nefarious plots than, well...this. Unless of course Len was standing there planning a heist.
He wasn’t an idiot—he knew Len wasn’t gonna give up being Captain Cold—leading the Rogues and executing the occasional theft, but swiping things from the Lab wouldn’t really be a challenge. Especially since all he’d have to do was ask...but then again, he did steal a box of energy bars. So Barry couldn’t call himself an expert on what Captain Cold deemed worthy of his attention.

Barry wasn’t entirely okay with the stealing, but...it wasn’t as though he didn’t know who Len was way before going on a date was even a possibility. Expecting the other to change wasn’t reasonable or realistic—certainly not for Barry’s sake. If Len made that choice for himself it’d be awesome, but until that happened—if it ever did—as long as Len stuck to their agreement he’d deal with it.

Was nearly 2:30 when Barry’s cell phone cut through the comfortable quiet in the storage room—finally starting to resemble something other than a hoarder’s basement.

He materialized with a gust of wind making a face at the caller ID and picking up. “Captain Singh, hi,” ran his free hand through his hair, smearing dust on his forehead.

Len smirked.

“Uh huh...yeah. I guess so. If you really—yeah. I know, overtime. You wouldn’t have called if—sure. That’ll, oh. I uh—” glanced towards Len, smiling. “Have plans tonight, so I won’t be able to stay past 6...Actually 6. Yes sir. I do plan to set an alarm. ‘Kay. See you in about ten minutes.”

Barry sighed, stuffing his phone into his pocket, “sorry. Singh needs me to give Patty a hand running some tests. There was a huge accident Downtown that every other CSI in the precinct is processing now...they’ll be there for most of the night, and this stuff needs to get properly recorded, logged and stored this afternoon. Patty’s great but she’s new and technically a detective, not a CSI, even though she’s got degrees in forensics and chemistry. I’ll have Cisco come down and help finish up the last what—ten—things we haven’t found yet?”

“Barry,” he cut in when the speedster finally paused to breathe, “that’s fine. While I do not have a day job, I am familiar with the concept of overtime. Go ahead and send Cisco down if he’s not busy. And I’ll text you at 6.”

Scarlet’s smile was relieved. “Thanks. I’ll, ah, see you tonight?”

“Plan on it.”

He’d never get tired of seeing that sunny grin on Barry’s face, watching him toss things into his bag.

“Oh! You didn’t tell me where we’re going.”

“You’re right, I didn't,” Len smirked. “See you at 7:30, Scarlet.”

“Ok, but how am I supposed to know what to wear?”

“Thought you mastered dressing yourself by now, Barry”

“What? That’s not what I—” his pout was adorable. Good thing Len was immune.

“It’s a surprise.”

“Ugh, fine. So if I look like an idiot it’ll be all your fault.”
“Barry, you never look like an idiot.”

“Yeah, right. Might need to get your eyes checked,” took off too fast for him to respond.

Pulled out his phone—he needed to call Nona, set things up right. Going out for something other than business or with someone other than Lise or Mick wasn’t something he did too often. Last time he went out on a real date was nearly ten years ago. Was the last time he let himself believe he wasn’t too...broken for any shred of ‘normal’. Since then he made do with quick, anonymous fucks whenever the itch became too much. Never thought he’d do something like this again—not for real, not unless it was part of a con.

But he was. Barry proving to be the never-ending exception. Was all new, this thing between them, but it didn’t feel that way. The connection felt solid in ways Len taught himself he didn’t need before his first stint in juvie. But with Barry...he didn’t have to understand Len’s ties to the Rogues, all his hang-ups, everything else—to respect them.

That was why he wanted to take Barry to Dominic’s. Small Italian place between Central and Keystone. Had a reputation for excellent food. Where tables had to be earned, and the menu varied almost daily. Was out of the way, quiet, and neutral. Kind of establishment where top brass and the leaders of different criminal organizations ate side by side.

No scores were settled there, no business discussed, no arrests made. Nona ran the place with an iron ladle and the steely resolve of someone that’d seen it all and didn’t give a damn about anyone’s ego but her own. After the Outfit tore itself apart, costing her most of her family, she set up shop outside Central.

Personally handling the Outfit’s infighting was enough to back up her golden rule—never hesitated to...handle the few dumb enough to ignore it. It was a safe choice; doubted they’d encounter anyone Scarlet worked with, and his table was secluded. It’d keep Barry obscured from everyone but the staff, and they were always discrete. Also helped that Nona doted on him ever since helping out with some unpleasantness ages ago, rating them a table. Something Lise or Mick took advantage of at least once a week.

"Pronto."

"Ciao, Nona, come stai?"

"Ah, Leonardo! Bene, bene e tu?"

"Sto bene," he switched to English, “mind if I come by tonight? Around 8:15 with a...guest?"

"Veramente? Someone special?"

"Perhaps. Ah, was also curious about the menu, if we could make our own?"

"Maybe. If you call your lovely sister and tell her she’ll have to come another time."

Closed his eyes, sighing. So much for not giving Lisa the chance to weigh in until after the date happened. Long after. “You drive a hard bargain.”

“Something for something, Leonardo.”

“Mmm. Was hoping for some of your osso bucco, tiramisu...rigatoni buttera, e carciofi bruschetta.”

“Si, si. Vino?”
“That nebbiolo I had last time?”

“I can do that for you. Tartuffi with the osso bucco?”

“That’d be perfect. And my date as quite the appetite, if—”

“No trouble at all, you know that. Now go. And I expect a proper introduction to your young…?”

“Man.”

“To your young man. Ciao,” she hung up.

Len sent off a quick text to Lisa—he did not need her third-wheeling—right as Cisco stepped through the door. Worked quietly for a while, only interrupted by text notifications from Lise, demanding to know why she was getting bumped.

‘Taking Barry tonight’

[Sis] ‘ur what?! Daymnmmm, gettin p serious’

He ignored her. Tense until he was sure she wouldn’t call. Or ask Cisco to play messenger. Didn’t consider that Cisco had some questions of his own.

“Look man, I gotta ask. You’re planning to stick around for a while, right? Cuz if you’re not…” Cisco sighed. “If you’re not, going on a date. It just…it isn’t fair. To Barry or to you. Because even though I don’t know you super well yet it’s pretty damn obvious that neither of you are messing around.” Cisco paused, shifting until he could face Len directly. “I mean, you made nice with Joe.”

Stayed quiet, eyes narrowed. Staring Cisco down. Instead of losing his nerve, however, the engineer squared his shoulders. Stood a little taller.

“Gonna take the death glare and silence as a ‘yes’ to the big question. And that my opinion might just matter to you…a little. Otherwise you would’ve lied. But you didn’t because you don’t want whatever bullshit line you would’ve fed me to make its way back to Barry. Which…good.” nodded firmly.

“Your point, Cisco?”

“My point is that you’re growing on me. Like a fungus,” Cisco tried not to smile without any success, “and we’ll probably still be on opposite sides from time to time. I mean, you are Captain Cold, after all. But…when you’re not out stealing stuff and flirting with Barry in costume, having you, Lisa, Heat Wave, and even Hartley around wouldn’t be the worst thing to happen.”

“Setting a low bar.”

“Dude, the last guy we worked with killed Barry’s mother, then manipulated everything like a puppet master for the next fifteen plus years so he could create The Flash.”

Len blinked. Wasn’t new information, but putting it so succinctly…

“Anyway…figure out if this is something you want—a place here at STAR Labs as a weird, non-traditional day job. Soon. Because if it’s not…if you don’t want to really be a part of Barry’s life and let him be a part of yours, you need to tell him. Lisa, too. Because I really, really like her and I’m pretty sure it’s mutual, but we’re both…she doesn’t want to start anything if this is just a temporary truce.”
“I mean...she’d probably try to stay even if you and Rory leave. But it’d hurt her not to be able to share stuff, and…”

“Meddle. The word you’re looking for is ‘meddle’.”

“Yeah, that too.”

Len considered the engineer’s words, impressed with the kid’s ability to deliver such an effective speech. Was...interesting to hear concerns about the growing closeness between himself and Barry from a non-parent figure. Kid obviously knew his friend well.

Had a damn good handle on Len, too. Wasn’t sure he liked the idea that yet another person caught glimpses of who he really was behind the personas, but. But he’d have to get used to it—Cisco and Caitlin were annoyingly intuitive.

And there were worse places to spend his time than STAR Labs.

“Can’t predict the future, kid,” Len said.

“I’m not asking you to, man. Shit happens. And I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I’m glad you wanna stick around,” Cisco shook his head. “One more thing, Cold. Len. Don’t let Barry push you away. He does that sometimes, and he’ll think it’s for the best, but…” shrugged.

“Already noticed that habit of his.”

“With his powers it’s super annoying.”

Len hummed in agreement, checking off the last items on the list.

“What kind of a day job?” Couldn’t resist asking on their way out.

“The most ironic of all—head of security.”

Threw back his head and laughed.

[Frosty] ‘Still at work?’

Barry smiled a little—more than a little—at Len’s message, putting the last rack of samples into the fridge and locking it before responding

‘Heading out right now. Gonna tell me where were going yet?’

[Frosty] ‘It’s a surprise.’

He sighed, biting his lip. He liked the idea of Len whisking him off somewhere, but...he didn’t want to—it’d be great to know what to expect. But Len wanted to do this for them—for him—and he didn’t want to ruin it.

But he needed to get going, taking a quick detour to pick up what he’d need for breakfast and zipping through his apartment to take care of the clutter. And maybe also thoroughly cleaning his bathroom and putting fresh sheets on his bed. Just in case.

Of course now Barry was at a loss, staring into his closet and hoping something would just...jump
out at him before he showered.

Screw it. He grabbed his phone and hit speed dial.

“What’s up, Bear?”

“Iris! Thank god you answered...help? Please?”

Laughing was NOT helpful.

“Iris…” he whined.

“What exactly do you need help with?”

“So I’m maybe sorta going on a date with Len tonight and he won’t tell me where we’re going and I have no idea what to wear —”

“Whoa, slow down a little and try again,” she sounded way too entertained.

“Um...I’m going out tonight for dinner. With Len. And he’s being a jerk and won’t tell me where we’re going, so I dunno what to wear and I just...I don’t—I wanna look good for once. He’s so, and I’m—yeah. Adorable nerd isn’t gonna cut it.”

“Allright. First of all wow. I’m impressed—”

“Wait. Why?”

“No reason.”

“Rude.”

She laughed at him again, the familiar sound washing over him. “Fine, have it your way. I’m impressed because I thought it’d take a few more weeks for you two to climb out of bed long enough to go anywhere, never mind on a date.”

“Iris, that’s—” he tried not to choke, face burning. “We haven’t...you’re horrible, I hate you. Why did I call you in the first place?” Barry lamented.

“Because you’re a glutton for punishment, know I love you, and am much better at picking out clothes?”

He decided to respond maturely. By blowing a raspberry into the receiver.

“Ok, ok,” her grin was audible, “have you showered yet?”

“No.”

“Go do that. I’ll call lover boy and see if he’ll give me more of a hint. Call me back once you’re out—wait.”

“Yeah?”

“Clean up your apartment first, Bear. Dirty clothes, dishes, change the sheets—the works.”

“Oh my god, Iris!” The speedster covered his face with his free hand, “kinda already did that.”

There was a momentary pause, followed by more laughter, “nice. Planning to serve him breakfast,
too?”

“...maybe.”

“And…?”

“The potato thing.”

“With all the cheese and bacon? Good choice. Plenty of protein.”

His face was on fire, “you are the literal worst.”

“No, the worst would be asking you about your supply of condoms and remind you to make sure they’re not expired. Because safe sex is the best sex.”

Barry groaned. He really needed to stop trying to win with Iris...it never, ever worked.

Thankfully, she took pity on him, “go shower. And you definitely owe me a batch of those sticky buns for my help,” she hung up.

The shower didn’t take very long, especially since he was a little nervous and kept speeding up. Barry did spend a couple minutes under the hot water, closing his eyes and letting the heat sink into his muscles and work out a little tension before grabbing towels.

Barry dried himself off, rubbing a towel through his hair, carefully laying out four different potential outfits before calling Iris back. Hopefully one of them would work.

“All set?” she asked, picking up on the first ring.


“One sec,” she hung up, immediately calling back on Skype. “Ok, so he told me where you’re going.”

“Awesome, and?”

“Sorry, Bear, he really wants it to be a surprise. But you’ll love it!”

He sighed, “got it.”

“Show me what you’ve got,” her smile was warm.

“Yeah, ok,” he swapped to the other camera, showing her what he’d picked out.

“Hmm, even though those jeans make your ass look amazing, it’s a little fancier than that.”

“Oh...does that mean a suit, or?”

“Nope. Oooh, go back to that sweater,” she commanded.

“Which one?” Barry moved the phone back over the burgundy one.

“No, the dark grey one—or is it black? That’ll look amazing with those tailored grey slacks you wore to Eddie’s birthday.”
“Uh—”

“Go ahead, put me down and get dressed.”

The speedster did as he was told, pulling on a black undershirt before the sweater and retrieving the—thankfully clean—pants. He took a deep breath, rubbing a little gel on his hands and through his hair, showing Iris his reflection in the mirror.

“Oh Bear, you look amazing. When’d you get that sweater?”

He blushed, “a few weeks ago?” There was no way he was gonna tell her it actually belonged to Len. “This’ll really be ok?”

“More than, I promise. Just don’t wear your ratty sneakers.”

“Hey!”

“Calling it like I see it.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he took a deep breath and checked the time. “Len’ll be here in a few minutes. Wish me luck?”

“You’re not gonna need it, Bear. Have a great time.”

“Thanks,” he smiled and ended the call.

He could do this.

____________________________

Len knocked on Barry’s door the moment his phone hit 7:30. He was not nervous. Knew he looked damn good, knew Scarlet would enjoy the meal. Hoped Nona wouldn’t interrogate him...or tell too many of the embarrassing stories she collected over the years.

Door opened almost immediately, revealing a shy smile.

“Right on time,” he watched Barry lock the door behind him, black pea coat folded over his arm. “You look even better than this morning.”

“You, too,” Barry blushed, shrugging into his coat. Covering the dark grey sweater—oh.

Eyes narrowed. No, covering Len’s dark grey sweater. The one he left behind months ago. That was—he hadn’t…

His chest felt warm, tight. Did Scarlet realize? Have any idea what seeing Barry in his clothes for their date meant?

What it did to him?

“Shall we?” voice rougher than intended. Cleared his throat, tilting his head towards the stairs.

“Yeah.”

The drive to Dominic’s was a comfortable quiet, occasionally broken by small talk. Could feel Barry stealing glances the entire time, smiling. Ducking his head whenever Len caught him. Traffic was
light, he pulled into the parking lot behind the unassuming building with nine minutes to spare.

“Are you gonna tell me where we are?”

“Dominic’s.”

“For real? that’s—Len! Thank you. I’ve always wanted to come here, Mom and Dad went a few times with some of the Hospital Board. It’s impossible to get in—how’d you—do I want to ask how you got us a reservation?” his grin lit up the car.

“Got a table, Scarlet,” Len smirked and got out. Opened Barry’s door, hand settling at the small of his back as they walked in.

Nona pounced as soon as they stepped inside, motioning for the maître d’ to take their coats.

“Leonardo, buona sera,” Nona pulled him down to kiss his cheek. “And this must be your young man,” she whirlèd to Barry, giving him the same treatment. Smiling at the dazed look on his face, “he’s quite pretty.”

Barry turned red, ducking his head with a faint, “thank you, ma’am.”

“No, no—call me Nona, please. For Leonardo to bring you—you are special. Your name, dear?”

“Sorry, it’s Barry. Barry Allen, ma’am. Nona.”

“Tieni questo,” she smiled nudging Len’s side.

“We’ll see,” gave her a small smile.

“Allora, your table—follow me,” she latched onto Barry’s arm, leading the speedster through the dining area.

Len followed, relieved that Nona took to Barry so quickly. She read people better than anyone else and she...knew him. Would be able to tell if they were doomed to fail.

Felt eyes boring into his back, an uncomfortable itch between his shoulders. Familiar sensation, although not one he expected to feel here. Scanned the room, glancing towards the source, eyes meeting the disapproving glare of David Singh. Captain of the CCPD and boss of one Barry Allen.

Chapter End Notes

All of the Italian should have hover-text translations except for allora, which is an Italian filler word that sounds a whole lot better than 'um'. Nona is a hybrid of my grandmother and one of my professors, including the way they’d code switch between Italian and English.

THANK YOU prettypurpleflower for the assist with the Italian. Mine is rustier than I thought :D
Len froze. His feet kept pace with Barry, hand maintaining contact with his lower back, but his thoughts came to a screeching halt. Eyes locked to the disapproving glare, the waves of anger coming from Singh.

Aware...so aware of Barry’s warmth through his sweater. Their proximity. The location...there was no recovery. No way to pretend the cop somehow got it wrong. David Singh was too damn good at what he did to accept whatever bullshit they could come up with.

Len braced himself for the inevitable. For the captain to get up, to stalk over and demand to know what the fuck they were doing. To remind Barry of everything he stood to lose.

It didn’t come. They were past Singh’s table now and Len could feel the eyes on his back, the disdainful glare. Didn’t usually bother him anymore, the looks. Hadn’t for decades. Except...except this time the meaning conveyed was something Len already knew. That he was less. Unworthy.

Should regret the entire thing—Barry, the date, deigning to breathe the same air as the Scarlet Speedster.

But he kept going, kept walking. Barry hadn’t noticed—captivated by whatever story Nona was in the middle of. A few more steps and they’d be out of sight. Maybe there wouldn’t be a scene after all. Maybe he’d get a taste of what he and Barry could’ve been...get the evening, at least.

Took a deep breath, grounding himself on the exhale. Tried to force the tension from his shoulders. He would make the best of it, he always did. Even though it’d all go to shit soon enough.

If the captain didn’t confront them there...Barry’d hear about it as soon as he got to work. Probably get a pink slip. Tomorrow morning. Clean slate or not, Len was who he was—someone an employee of the CCPD shouldn’t speak to outside an interrogation room, never mind date.

Barry would—should—do what he had to. Len knew how much being a CSI meant to the younger man. Even though his dad was finally cleared, even though he didn’t need the work—could spend his days running STAR Labs—he took pride in finding the answers. Making sure the right people, the responsible parties, were the ones that went to trial. And Len...got it.

Maybe if someone like Barry had been on the force when Len was a kid Lewis would’ve gone away for good the first time his ‘lessons’ resulted in a trip to the ER.

For the kid he used to be...for everyone in the shelter, for everybody hassled by cops looking for the easy way out...Barry gave his all to help. Len couldn’t—wouldn’t—want him to give that up.

Tuned back into the conversation taking place around him—needed to get his head in the game. Nona was telling Barry all about the first time she met Lisa.

“She really can’t boil water?” Barry asked, grinning, shoulder bumping his own.
“She can make coffee,” he shrugged, “and toast. That’s about it,” discussion bringing out a genuine smile.

“Not everyone picks things up the way you do, Leonardo. At least she listens, unlike someone else I know. She’s a good helper.”

They’d reached his table, tucked away in the corner near the kitchen and hidden from most of the dining area. Len couldn’t remember appreciating that more than he did tonight, pulling out Barry’s chair before sliding into his own against the wall. Their placement had an added benefit of putting the speedster’s back to the room, lowering the odds that he’d spot his boss.

If this was gonna be it—his last chance rather than an official beginning—Len would make the most of it. Enjoy himself, enjoy Barry. Commit it all to memory...something to hold onto. And a reminder that it wouldn’t work...on the off chance he ever got this lucky again.

A foot nudged his own, eyes flicked up to meet Barry’s, downturned brows asking a silent question.

Len waited for their server to withdraw after filling their water glasses before answering, summoning a small smile. Forcing himself not to dwell, “everything ok, Scarlet?”

“I should be the one asking you that. You got pretty quiet all of a sudden.”

“No complaints,” he shrugged.

“Just nerves then, huh?” Barry grinned. “Glad I’m not the only one.”

Len chuckled, “mhm. Iris might’ve let that slip already.”

“Yeah, well,” he toyed with the stem of his empty wine glass. “I don’t really do this much, and my wardrobe is mostly uh...more about function?”

“No reason you can’t try for both,” was the answer Len settled on, not entirely convinced Barry was looking for a response.

“No, everyone can pull off the whole...effortlessly walked off the cover of a magazine thing, Len,” the speedster ducked his head. “This...this is ok, right?”

“You’re perfect,” Len said. Voice rougher than he wanted—and not just because the way the soft knit of his sweater showed off what the other normally hid under too many layers.

“Whew. Iris helped. Which you already know since she called you. This place is amazing, and Nona’s really sweet—did she teach you Italian? Are you fluent?—don’t worry, I told Caitlin and Cisco that I’m taking tonight off and not to call unless Central is literally in the process of being destroyed. Godzilla style. I managed to make a dent in the stuff I needed to do tomorrow morning, so I don’t have to go in until noon and—” he cut himself off with a blush. “I’m totally rambling, aren’t I?” took a large gulp of water.

Huffed a soft laugh, “a bit.” Not that he minded. Barry’s tendency to ramble when excited or nervous was adorable.

“In case I forgot to say so when we got here, you’re totally allowed to plan surprises for future dates, by the way. But...uh, did someone forget to give us menus?”

Nona appeared as if summoned, bottle of wine in hand. Her niece hovered nearby carrying the bruschetta. Len was pleased to note that she took the comment about portions to heart—the platter
easily held twice the usual amount, even for Mick.

“Leonardo arranged everything this afternoon, dear.”

Barry already rated an endearment. Len’s stomach flipped. The only other person he had ever brought like this...Nona stayed formal, icy the entire time. Turned out she’d been right, the guy was an asshole. Only interested in Len for the boost it gave his reputation. Had Lise and Mick convinced, but hadn’t snowed Nona.

Barry didn’t think he’d ever stop smiling. He never thought anyone would go to this much trouble for him.

“Tonight you start with bruschetta—carciofi e aglio, roasted of course, with fresh pressed olive oil and parmigiano,” Nona said, expertly opening the bottle in her hand while the waitress placed the food on the table.

“Am I allowed to ask for a hint?”

“Nope. Gonna have to wait and see,” Len told him.

Nona’s smile was mischievous, “you tell me if he chose wrong—no dessert for him.”

Barry laughed at Len’s mock-wounded expression. “I’m sure I’ll love whatever you made for us, this looks delicious.”

“After you,” Len inclined his head.

The speedster didn’t need to be told twice, taking a slice of the warm, crisp bread and digging in.

Oh wow. Delicious didn’t do Nona enough credit. Barry closed his eyes, savoring the flavors and textures, the crunchy bread, creamy roasted garlic, the richness of the artichoke, and the salty tang of aged parm to set it all off. He may or may not have moaned just a little.

Len’s amused smirk greeted him and he felt his cheeks heat up—ok, make that definitely moaned—his own portion still untouched, “so far so good?”

“See for yourself.”

They ate in silence for a few minutes before Barry realized Len hadn’t answered his earlier question. “It might’ve gotten lost in the whole...rambling thing, but are you fluent?”

“Hmm?”

“The Italian. I didn’t know you could speak another language; where did you learn?”

Len chewed thoughtfully, “figured you already knew.”

“Unlike someone else at this table, I don’t keep files on people.”

“Said you had my Interpol records,” Len tilted his head.

“I may have spent a few years in Europe, mostly Italy. Easiest way to blend in once the tourists thin out is to speak the language.” Len shrugged in that effortless way of his, “didn’t take long—reading was easy, cadence took some getting used to—two months, tops.”

“Hartley must love that.”

“He doesn’t know.”

“Oh,” Barry blinked. “What was Italy like? I’ve never—my mom traveled a lot, she loved Europe, the UK...she made them into bedtime stories. It’s been on my list of things to do, but aside from a quick run to Nanda Parbat that totally doesn’t count I’ve never been outside the United States.”

“Not all that different from here; drifted around the continent for a bit before I got to Florence. The museums, food, layout...suited my needs. Predictable crowds of tourists, high turnover from college kids made finding a place less of a challenge than it would’ve been somewhere else. That and their national aversion to following through on the red tape,” he shrugged one shoulder. “Opened a bank account and everything.

“When they finally tightened up security, I came back to Central. Needed to fence my spoils anyway.”

“Don’t tell me things like that,” Barry rolled his eyes, trying not to laugh at Len’s self-satisfied expression. “Please tell me you didn’t steal anything from the Uffizi, at least.”

“Course not. You have any idea how impossible it would be to sell any of those pieces?” The thief looked affronted at the very thought.

“I...guess that makes sense. What did you go after? Cuz I just can’t picture you tending bar for drunk tourists.”

“Stuck to modern and contemporary pieces. And certain pieces of jewelry that needed...liberation,” Len stole the last piece of bruschetta out from under his outstretched hand with a smug smile. “Too slow, Scarlet.”

Barry laughed. He really couldn’t’ help it—even though he knew Len would just take it as encouragement. Which it kinda was, “go ahead.”

“Hmm?”

“I know you’re dying to tell me all about the loot you got away with. Don’t let me stop you,” Barry gestured with his half-empty water glass.

Len arched an eyebrow, slowly chewing the last of his bread before speaking. “Well, since you asked so nicely, Barry…” He leaned forward to rest his elbows on the table, hands steepled in front of him.

“My biggest score was gold. An elaborate job—five person team and some hired help, delicate timing, some interesting math...but we made off with a safe filled to the brim with bullion. Had to evade pursuers on the water and made it, only to be stabbed in the back by a teammate during a stop-over in Switzerland.”

That...sounded familiar. “Lemme guess, the gold was stamped with a Balanchine dancer.”

The corner of Len’s mouth twitched into a fleeting smile.
“Who played Donald Sutherland in this little scenario?” Barry couldn’t resist asking.

“Mick.”

Barry cracked up, “oh man. I cannot see Mick as a safe cracker. Not unless the objective is to melt the door off,” and the whole not dead part, too.

They lapsed into silence while the servers did their thing, dishing up two heaping bowls of pasta before placing the platter in the center of the table. Wine was poured, water topped off, and pleasantries exchanged with efficiency.

As soon as they left Barry gave Len his best pleading expression.

The thief held out for a couple seconds, “not willing to wait until bedtime for your story?”

“We could wait if you want, but I had something else in mind for bed.”

“You make a compelling argument.”

“Thought you’d like it,” Barry grinned.

“Indeed.”

The story took a while—lasting through two helpings of pasta and most of his glass of wine. Barry didn’t mind, even though he was pretty sure Len exaggerated everything more than a little. He was torn between enjoying the story, rolling his eyes at the other’s theatrics, and listening to the little voice in the back of his head that sounded a lot like Joe reminding him that stealing was wrong, no matter how much fun it was to hear about the details after the fact. He decided to feel guilty about it later. No one got hurt, and he could watch Len light up, becoming more and more animated, for days.

Len wound down, finishing his own serving—just one—and pouring them both more wine. “Nanda Parbat, Barry? Hadn’t heard of it.”

“Really? That—well, I guess it isn’t a huge surprise, and kinda a relief. Not that I thought you’d be mixed up with them, but still. It’s not the kind of place you’d want to go on vacation, despite the hot tub. It’s…” Barry glanced round, leaning in close, “it may be the headquarters for the League of Assassins.”

Both Len’s eyebrows shot up, “heard the rumors, but hadn’t given it much thought until the mess in Starling last spring. How’d you get mixed up with them?”

“Uh…” oh shit. “Doing a favor for some friends that may or may not have been set up by another friend to...get in good with the League.” Oliver was gonna kill him.

“Why on Earth—”

“I...Let’s just say I couldn’t leave everybody over there. It was actually kinda fun—zipping through the base and knocking everyone out. Of course I could’ve done without having my secret identity outed to yet another supervillain,” he rolled his eyes, still not quite ready to forgive Felicity for that.

“Another one, should I be jealous?” Len raised an eyebrow.

“Of Malcolm Merlyn?” Barry laughed. “Somehow I doubt you want to be in charge of a shadowy group of killers. You’d have to give up the parka for good.”
Len turned *that* particular tidbit of information over in his mind while Barry polished off the last of the rigatoni. Suspected that ties existed between Team Flash and the Star City Vigilante—whatever name he was going by this week. He’d be an idiot not to. Hadn’t given much thought to the extent of that connection—clearly something he’d have to pursue. Later.

Same with reacting to the news that the nutjob responsible for trying to level Starling was apparently the leader of the League of Assassins. And happened to know his partner’s identity. Both of them.

Life around The Flash was always a rush, that’s for sure.

The door to the kitchen swung open, revealing Nona and their osso bucco. “Enjoying the meal so far?”

“Yes, everything’s wonderful. Thank you,” Barry smiled, “Len’s dessert is safe.”

“Thanks, Barry,” he drawled.

“You’re welcome,” that cheeky grin was too much to resist. Didn't have to, he was safe here. Mostly. Leaned across the table to kiss that smiling mouth, holding the contact a bit longer than strictly appropriate for a public setting.


Len rolled his eyes, used to her scolding after hearing it for so long. Barry, though...his laugh was forced, harsh. Eyes tense, a shift from the genuine mirth they held just moments ago.

Unaware of her gaff, Nona refilled their wine glasses with the last of the bottle and withdrew without opening another. She knew his position on alcohol and driving. On alcohol in general—in public settings. Not that he wanted to get more than mildly intoxicated tonight.

“She didn’t mean anything by that...means she likes you,” he said quietly after fifty-one seconds of tense silence.

Barry sighed, setting down his fork. “Yeah, I kinda figured. It’s just...I’m not an idiot,” he made a face, gaze fixed on his plate. “People don’t have to keep pointing it out. Since the lightning I managed to bulk up a little, but no matter what I try, what I’ve ever tried...this is pretty much it,” he waved a hand. “It’s not—and then stuff with Jay this morning. Cisco let him borrow my sweatshirt after Caitlin ran some tests and he...it fits him,” he frowned, brows drawn together. Looking miserable and frustrated.

Len stiffened. If *anyone* was gonna go around in Barry’s clothes it’d be him. Not some asshole stalker. Considered his response carefully—didn’t want to make Barry more uncomfortable...knew he’d have to *show* Barry how perfect he was from head to toe. A task he’d enjoy as soon as he got the opportunity, but for now…

“You’re welcome to raid my closet more often. My clothes suit you.”

The speedster blushed but looked up, beginnings of a smile tugging at his lips, “it’s comfy. I meant to give it back, but kinda kept forgetting. If you want...you probably won’t find anything you like, but
maybe...maybe tomorrow morning you’ll end up in something of mine?” His voice was tentative but so achingly hopeful over such a small gesture. “Your other shirt is in the wash, and this…” he trailed off with a shrug.

Felt warmth spread through him at the thought, the way Barry deliberately chose to wear something of his tonight. The way he wanted Len to make a similar choice. Wanted the people they knew to see the swap, know what it meant. A subtle gesture that they were close...that Barry wanted him.

“That could be arranged.”

“I’d like that,” Barry’s smile returned full force.

The rest of the meal flew by, full of heated glances and less than subtle flirting. Something that escalated once dessert was served.

Barry took a forkful of tiramisu and moaned, eyes falling shut, “this is perfect. Any chance you’d share the recipe?”

“Family secret, dear,” Nona smiled.

His face fell a little but he nodded, clearly expecting that answer.

“Maybe we could come up with an arrangement, hmm? Leonardo said the same thing about my pasta. After a few months of begging—”

Len scoffed. He did not beg.

“I let him help me in the kitchen. Made sure he deserved to know and taught him the right way.”

“Would you..? I mean, my schedule can get pretty crazy, but I’d love that. If you wouldn’t mind having me in your kitchen.”

“He cooks?” She turned to Len.

Nodded, “and bakes. Made those croissants you liked so much.”

“You call me and we’ll set it up.”

“Thank you! I will,” Barry entered her number into his phone before she withdrew.

He took another bite of the dessert, humming in appreciation. The sound combined with the sight of his lips wrapped around the fork made it too easy for Len to remember how those lips felt wrapped around his fingers, his cock…Len shifted in his seat, waiting for Barry to open his eyes. Two could play at that game.

Took a small bite, carefully licking each tine clean, maintaining eye contact. Smirking at the blush that spread across Barry’s cheeks, down his neck, below the collar of his shirt.

“Len,” he whined.

“You started it.”

“What are you—I didn’t...oh my god, that wasn’t on purpose,” he sputtered.

Len repeated his actions, loved how Barry couldn’t seem to tear his eyes away from his tongue.
“Really?” Barry cleared his throat. “We’re in public,” he hissed.

“And?” Len purred.

“You’re the worst,” took a deep breath, squared his shoulders. “But...two can play this game.”

“Really think you can keep up, Scarlet?”

“Oh, it’s on now.”

And so it was. Each of them trying to outdo the other, keeping score in the form of shifting posture, deep breaths, averted gazes. Neither of them crossed the line, made physical contact.

Len was proud of his self-control, enjoying the build, the anticipation...already calculating how long it’d take to drive home. Which routes would have the least traffic, whose apartment they’d end up in.

The goodbyes they exchanged were hurried but genuine, Barry turning even redder under Nona’s knowing gaze and sly comments as Len rushed them out the door.

“Mmmf—” Len cut off whatever the speedster planned to say with a deep kiss. Pushed Barry against the door with a little more force than he intended, momentum helped along by Barry himself.

“Ow, Len—” Barry gasped, turning his head, “doorknob.”

“Apologies,” stepped back just enough to give him the necessary space to move.

Barry nipped his bottom lip, then moved. Pushing off the door, one hand leaving his hip long enough to hit the deadbolt and throw his keys into the bowl nearby.

Made it a few more steps into Barry’s apartment—past the coat hooks—hands undoing the other’s belt.

“Yes, that,” Barry murmured against his lips. “Just—one sec, lemme…” toed off his shoes, helped Len slide his pants off and stepped out of the crumpled heap. His own hands made short work of the buttons on Len’s shirt and he stepped back, drawing Len away from the wall.

Len shrugged off the garment. Reveled in firm hands, warmer than his own, sliding along his back and down. Thumbs coming to rest in the groove of his hips.

“I believe you mentioned something about a hot beverage,” Len spoke into the skin of Barry’s neck between nips and kisses that drew quiet, pleading sounds from the speedster.

“Huh?”

Len’s smile grew at the distracted question, pleased with his progress so far. “Hot cocoa, wasn’t it? With marshmallows. Rather rude to make the offer and fail to follow through, Barry.”

Barry groaned, dropping his head onto Len’s bare shoulder, bridge of his nose catching the edge of an old scar—a souvenir from when he and Mick met. “Are you...you can’t be serious right now,” drew back to search his face.

Len merely tilted his head, smiling.
“For real?”
“I’m always serious about mini marshmallows, Scarlet.”
“Evil.”
“Try my best.”
Barry rolled his eyes, flushed but grinning. “Alright. But you’re helping.”
“Lead on,” Len gestured, earning a giggle.
He did just that, taking Len’s hand, fingers entwining along the way. Even if it was just a couple steps.
Made a show of grabbing the appropriate pot and whisk while Barry gathered the rest of the supplies.
Once Barry began heating the milk Len moved, pressing himself against the other’s back. Lips finding soft skin behind his ears, along the back of his neck. Getting started on the plan to show Barry how exceptional he really was.
Quickly elicited a shiver and slow, stuttering exhale from the speedster as he tilted his head to the side, giving Len more access, more skin to worship.
Took full advantage. Nosing behind Barry’s ear, tongue flicking out to capture his earlobe, making Barry melt against him, became pliant. Whisk faltering in its previously steady motion.
Len smiled, running his nose along the back of Barry’s neck right above the collar of his sweater, gave the other side of his neck the same treatment. Hands slowly sliding up Barry’s stomach, tracing along his muscles on their journey upward, bringing the sweater along with them. Almost to his nipples, feeling the other’s breathing pick up under his fingers, where they pressed together.
Barry whined low in his throat, free hand coming up to catch his wrist, “Len,” damn. He sounded wrecked already.
“Hmm?”
“Get the mugs.”
He chuckled lowly, withdrawing his hands only after making a complete, rough circle over both nipples.
“Ah—damn,” Barry took a deep breath. “That, you’re—you were the one that insisted I make this. Getting scalded really isn’t on my list of things to do tonight.”
“That mean you want me to stop?” he asked, closing the cabinet.
“Hell no,” the immediate response was satisfying. “But,” glanced over his shoulder, “tone it down a little? This is almost ready.”
Took a moment to admire the man before him, gaze lingering on those long legs, the tent in his boxer briefs—red, of course. Beginnings of a bite mark behind his jaw, the heat in those wide hazel eyes…
“Think I can manage that much,” closed the distance between them with two short steps, placing the mugs on the counter and stealing a kiss before Barry turned back to the stove.
His free hand found Len’s pulling until his arm was wrapped around his waist and leaned against Len’s chest.

Smiled, glad Barry couldn’t see. Positive the burst of warmth from the gesture showed on his face. Other hand found its way to Barry’s hip, fingers absently tracing the elastic of his waistband. Hooking his chin over Barry’s shoulder to watch the play of muscles in his forearm while he stirred.

“It’s ready,” Barry’s quiet voice broke the comfortable silence. He waited for Len to hold the mugs while he poured, topping them off with heaps of mini marshmallows before heading into the living room.

Len pulled Barry down into his lap, chuckling at the startled yelp and stealing a marshmallow.

Barry scowled at him, but instead of retaliating the way he expected, Barry swooped in for a deep kiss, tongue darting past his lips to reclaim the treat.

But it didn’t end there. Tongues explored, picking up espresso, chocolate, and sugar that nearly overpowered everything else. By the time they finally drew back, Barry’d shifted to straddle Len’s thighs, grinding their hips together with a smirk of his own.

Didn’t last long—Len took that as an invitation to palm the speedster’s ass, fingers running along the curve towards the center.

“Shit, mmm” Barry took a couple large gulps from his mug, reaching out to put the now-empty ceramic on the coffee table.

Len followed his lead, taking one more mouthful before Barry took the mug and drained the rest. Smirked at that, now-free hand tangling in Barry’s hair, pulling.

Next thing he knew they were both on their feet and he was no longer wearing his shoes or pants. Shook his head in slight disbelief, “eager much?”

“Yes.”

He laughed, pulling Barry close. Stumbling a few steps towards the bedroom, pressing the other against the wall, nipping his way along Barry’s jawline to his ear, tugging on the lobe. Flicked it with his tongue before letting go, mouth closing over the mark he made earlier. Sucking.

Barry’s gasp quickly transformed into a moan, arching, grinding their hips together.

Leaned back to admire his handiwork, taking the opportunity to drag his sweater off.

Once free, Barry pushed off the wall, dragging Len the few remaining feet into his bedroom. The speedster walked backwards until he reached the mattress, flopping down and bringing Len with him.

Caught himself, but Barry wasn’t having it. Rolling his eyes and pulling Len the rest of the way down. Hands roaming his back and sides without lingering on his scars, shoving at the band of his underwear along the way.

Len groaned, muffling the sound against Barry’s shoulder, grinding down against him. They were both hard, cocks lined up, separated by flimsy cotton. It’d be so easy, but—he had a plan. One he intended to follow through on. Knew Barry would have trouble accepting anything Len could say about his body, but...Len always preferred actions to words.
Lifted himself up to hover over Barry’s prone form, ignoring the whine of protest. Len began by pressing kisses along his furrowed brow, tip of his nose. Getting distracted by that hungry mouth. Hand coming up to card through unruly hair, swallowing Barry’s gasp. Refusing to give in just yet. Nipped his chin, lapping at the sweat gathered in the hollow of his throat…

Damn, Barry was so responsive. The way he arched up off the bed, hands scrabbling for purchase. Grabbing his shoulders, rubbing the short fuzz of Len’s hair like he was torn between trying to direct his actions and just...hanging on for the ride.

Len shifted his weight, needed to move if he was gonna continue his mission. Barry, however, wasn’t having it. Those long, impossibly powerful legs came up to wrap around Len’s hips, holding him in place. He huffed out a laugh.

“Len,” Barry gasped, stretching out to fumble with the drawer of his nightstand.

Len pulled him back, catching one of Barry’s nipples between his teeth.


Hummed thoughtfully, sucking. The combination drew a short, buzzing vibration from the speedster. Made Len’s lips tingle.

The vibration must’ve reminded Barry of his...unique advantage. Totally wrecked, visible lightning sparked in his eyes the moment before Len found himself flat on his back. Caught a glimpse of his boxer briefs decorating the ceiling fan, staring up at Barry’s stomach while he stretched out to rummage through the drawer.

“I wasn’t finished.”

“You were taking way too long.”

“Patience is a virtue.”

Barry stuck out his tongue and sat back, straddling Len’s hips and dropping the lube and a condom beside them. “Totally overrated.”

Len rolled them over again, Barry’s laugh completely ruining his attempt at indignation.

“I’ll make it worth your while,” Len murmured. Punctuated with a roll of his hips.

“You keep thi—mmmm...Len, that’s—fuck yes, do that—god. You keep this up much longer and I’m gonna—” he broke off, panting.

“And?” Len asked, hands coming to rest on Barry’s chest.

“And I want you inside me when I come.”

Fuck, that—yes. Yes. Len moaned, meeting Barry halfway for a filthy kiss. Tongues, teeth, suction —

“Yes—Barry, that—” gathered what was left of his self-control. “You’re sure? How…?”

“Yes, god yes. I’ve wanted—I’m sure,” Barry nodded emphatically, pulled him in for another kiss. “And, ah...like we are now?” Tilted his head, catching Len’s lower lip between his teeth.

“Think that can be arranged. Gonna have to let me move, though,” Squeezed the muscular thigh.
hooked around his hips.

“So demanding,” Barry giggled, legs dropping to the bed.

“Merely following your directions, Scarlet.” Len shifted to kneel between Barry’s outstretched legs, hands sliding down, catching his ankles. Urging him to shift, bend, give him more room to work.

“I guess that’s—ahhh—ok, then,” Barry managed. Moving beneath Len’s hands, hips rocking when he reached the junction between hip and thigh. Let out a long moan. “Still with the teasing?”

“Not teasing. Following through,” flipped open the cap on the lube to emphasize his point.

“Follow through faster,” Barry grumbled. Squirmed. Cock already leaking without being touched.

“Certain things shouldn’t be rushed,” circled Barry’s entrance with slick fingers to emphasize his point. Held out a heartbeat longer before breaching. Sliding his index finger in to the second knuckle. Pulled back when Barry rocked his hips, pressed down—so needy. Waited until the other stilled, then thrust forward, deeper. Again and again, twisting his wrist, crooking his finger to increase the stretch.

“C’mon Len. You’ve mmmmade your point. Please.”

Len smirked. It was heady, seeing Barry like this. Knowing it was because of him. That he wanted this, wanted Len...second finger joined the first. Moving more steadily now...picking up the pace. A pulse of vibration tore through him when Len scissored his fingers, drew a strangled moan from the man laid out beneath him. Flushed, hair damp with sweat. Pupils blown, hazel barely visible.

Watched those eyes fall closed, drank in the sounds wrenched from bitten lips when he added a third finger. Spreading them, twisting. Feeling Barry’s body shifting around him.

“Len,” Barry squirmed.

“Shhh,” pressed a kiss to Barry’s left knee, “gotta make sure you’re ready. You’re so damn tight—”

“Y’won’t hurt me. Lenny, please been thinking about this, about you fucking me for so nnn long, and—”

“Alright, Scarlet, ok,” silenced Barry with a kiss, withdrawing his fingers, quickly opened and rolled on the condom, slicking himself up. Needing a moment...Barry wasn’t the only one on edge.

Stroked himself once more before wrapping both hands around Barry’s hips, pulling him to the edge of the bed so he could get to his feet.

“Ready?” leaned over, pressing Barry’s knees towards his shoulders, lining them up. Waited for an enthusiastic nod and—oh fuckkk.

Tight was an understatement. Len fought to keep his eyes open, fixed on Barry’s face. Looking for any signs of discomfort as he slowly thrust forward. Fingers digging into Barry’s hips enough to leave bruises. Had to, cuz if Barry rushed this...god.

Lost track of how long it took...knew he didn’t have to bottom out on the first thrust, but fuck he wanted to. Wanted to get as deep into that tight heat as physically possible because Barry felt amazing.

It was sweet torture. Pressing the rest of the way, the final inch, and stopping. Had to, otherwise he’d
come right there and then. This—Len needed to savor this, take his time, make it last. Commit every last detail to memory since he probably wouldn’t get another shot. Not once Singh weighed in.

Took deep, shaky breaths, getting mind and body back under control. Allowed himself to focus on the way Barry’s hips flexed under his hands where Len held him still, the needy sounds he made…

“Impatient, Barry? Maybe if you ask nicely…” couldn’t resist the urge to tease.

Barry let out what sounded like a cross between a moan and a laugh, “dammit Len, just —ahhh— fuck me already.”

He begged beautifully, and even though Len adjusted enough that he could move without coming, he held back. Dragged it out a little longer.

“Mmmm—you’re so fucking stubborn.”

“Pot, kettle,” Len smirked.

“Fuck, please,” Barry arched, “please Len—ooohh—harder, fuck—”

Len began to move, gradually building speed. Using his hold on Barry to change the angle, circling his hips...Eyes fixed on the speedster’s face because he’d never seen someone so “gorgeous, Scarlet.”

Barry’s face was flushed, sweat-damp hair sticking to his forehead, pupils blown, hazel swallowed up completely, dazed and hooded. Red lips parted, panting harder with each thrust.

Until Len found his prostate. Entire body vibrating for an instant, back arched high off the bed. A litany of obscene demands and moans filling the room, perfect counterpoint to the sound of skin on skin.

“Fuck yes Lenny, right. There,” Barry wrapped both hands around his own knees, hitching his legs even higher—and god, it’s all Len can do to hang onto his control.

“Barry, do you know how you—nnnn—look? Folded up like this just for me, demanding more of my cock—Fuck, Scarlet…”

 Couldn’t last much longer, not with the way Barry looked, felt all around him. Those deceptively strong arms wrapping around him, blunt nails digging into his back. Len leaned forward, bending them enough to suck a bright purple bruise onto that long neck, the other bucking beneath him, trying to find traction to meet Len’s thrusts.

Craned his neck to kiss away tears of pleasure gathering at the corners of Barry’s eyes.

And then he vibrated. Took one hand off Barry’s hip and managed to wrap it around his cock trapped between them, and—fuck. Two rough strokes later and Barry’s gone, coming hard and taking Len with him.

Vibrating, awash in heat—Barry’s teeth digging into his shoulder, hard.

He fell forward, barely managing to catch himself. Forehead resting on Barry’s heaving chest as they fought to get their breathing under control.

Len summoned what little coordination he had left, holding onto the base of the condom when he pulled out, tying it off. Pressed slack lips to Barry’s chest and stood. Forced himself to move on
unsteady legs, heading for the ensuite.

Tossed the condom in the trash and turned on the tap, grabbing a washcloth and wiping himself with warm water.

Barry was propped up on his elbows when Len came back into the bedroom, dazed but happy, dazed grin lighting up the room. He looked divine—seated on the edge of the bed, feet on the floor, muscles of his legs, chest, and arms highlighted by the soft glow from the lamp, hair a mess. Stomach striped with come that Len carefully washed away before tossing the washcloth into the hamper.

“Thanks,” Barry hummed, voice an intimate whisper. “That was...mmm...” voice steeped in contentment.

Len huffed out a laugh, allowing Barry to draw him down for a lazy kiss. Refused to listen to the voice reminding him it wouldn’t last. Wasn’t gonna let it ruin them just yet. He had tonight.

“Barry—slide up.”

“Hmm?” his eyes were closed. “Comfy. Don’t wanna move.”

“What about the blankets?”

“Oh,” Barry sighed, then shivered, sweat drying in the cool air. He grumbled and blurred, taking Len with him.

Blinked at the shift, lying down under the sheets, head on a pillow. Barry wrapped around his right side.

“Forgot the light, Scarlet.”

“Mmmf—you get it.”

Len chuckled, stretching to do just that. Smiled at Barry’s muffled noise of protest at the movement and soaking up the happy murmurs Barry made as they got settled in the dark.

“G’night Len,” Barry spoke into the hollow of his throat.

“Sleep well, Scarlet,” pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think, and I always appreciate typo help <3
To quote Star Wars...

Chapter Notes

Chapter title is...a work in progress. Thank you for your assistance, Aunt Crimson! I'd love to hear what you guys think (and also let me know about any spelling issues or other typos <3)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“C’mon Bear, we’ve got a new case,” Joe stuck his head into Barry’s lab, snapping him out of his daydream.

“Oh, uh—sure. Where are we heading?”

“Iron Heights,” the detective called, already halfway down the stairs.

Barry blinked, “why us?”

“Dunno. Singh didn’t say.”

“Wait—the captain?” he barely managed to muffle a groan.

“Yeah. Overseeing it personally.”

Awesome. The captain had been grumpier than normal this past week, glaring at every opportunity. Barry had no idea why—not that he was dumb enough to ask. He hadn’t even been late this week! Well ok, five minutes tops. For him that was practically early.

It’d normally bother him, but lately nothing could ruin his good mood.

“Better get that smile under control by the time we get there.”

Barry ducked his head, feeling his face heat up, “I’ll try.”

“Gonna have t’do better than that,” Joe glanced over at him, suddenly thoughtful. “S good seeing you happy, though. Any connection to the date you didn’t go on about a month ago?”

“Wha—we didn’t—” he shifted in the passenger’s seat, wondering what—ohhhhh. When Len made fresh pasta. “Maybe? And that wasn’t a date.”

“Uh huh,” Joe chuckled.

Please don’t follow up...sometimes having a detective for a father really sucked. But after a couple minutes without any more questions, Barry relaxed. And when Joe turned on the radio to its usual classic rock, he didn’t bother trying to hide his sigh of relief.

He was pretty sure Joe knew something was going on between him and Len, and it wasn’t that Barry wanted to keep everything a secret, but...But when it came down to it, Barry really wanted him to...well, approve. And the likelihood of his cop father being ok with his foster son dating a notorious criminal, one that just so happened to be the nemesis of said son’s alter ego...yeah,
approval wasn’t too likely. At least not yet.

Joe had changed his mind about Oliver after their team up, and while that wasn’t quite the same thing it still gave him hope. Especially since Joe didn’t seem too angry that the Rogues were spending so much time at the Lab anymore. He even agreed—under duress—that having such accomplished thieves helping with the security upgrade wasn’t a horrible idea. As long as they kept a close eye on the Rogues while they were at it.

That Joe hadn’t spent every waking moment insisting that Len was gonna stab him in he back was a good start, but somehow Barry doubted that’d last if his father knew the whole truth just yet.

Just thinking about Len and dating made the speedster feel light and warm. He’d never been in a relationship like this before. In the week since their amazing date (and easily the best sex he’d ever had, not that he had a lot to compare it to) they...everything still worked.

He’d been a little nervous, though. Len was a little more...forced wasn’t the right word, but...almost like he was trying too hard to give Barry his space while simultaneously wanting to stay close. Barry couldn’t help worrying that the reason Len was on edge was because everything felt so serious between them since the date. But that didn’t fit either.

They’d spent three nights together in the week since then and Len initiated twice—once when they ran into each other in the hall, and again after hanging out at STAR Labs and giving Barry a ride home. Nothing really happened beyond making out and falling asleep, but it was domestic and comfortable and...not the kind of thing someone would offer if they didn’t want...serious.

It reached the point where Barry was gonna ask Len about it directly. That evening. For real. Or he was, until Len texted him about an hour ago.

[Frosty] ‘Gonna be out of town a few days, Scarlet.

‘I dont wanna know do i?’

[Frosty] ‘Probably not.’

‘Ok...’

‘Be safe.’

[Frosty] ‘Always. See you Sunday.’

Yeah, not really the most reassuring conversation ever. But he...that Len told him anything at all had to mean he didn’t want him to worry about the sudden absence, right? And that his weirdness was just Len focusing on whatever thing he was off attending to. With Lisa. It didn’t take a CSI to figure out that whatever the Snart siblings were up to somehow related to a heist, although Barry was pretty confident that it was still in the planning phase.

For one thing, Mick stayed behind. Barry had been getting a steady stream of texts from Cisco about the ongoing experiments involving the pyromaniac and both halves of FIRESTORM. That they were keeping top secret, even after one of their early tests got the trio banned from the main workspace after they filled the cortex with thick black smoke. Their new spot was, well, the accelerator. It was well ventilated and fireproof, and what Professor Stein deemed an ‘acceptable work space’ until they could properly retrofit a wing on the main floor.

While Barry was really tempted to see what Len and Lisa were up—it’d be pretty easy with his powers—he wasn’t gonna do it. As odd as other people would find it, he really did trust Len. Even
though he wasn’t what most people would call an upstanding citizen, the thief had his own moral code and Barry knew he wouldn’t cross the line. He wasn’t thrilled at the reminder that his Len, the dork that sometimes hogged the covers rather than using Barry as his own personal blanket, and Leonard Snart, criminal mastermind and supervillain, were the same person. And he knew that, knew all about Snart and Cold before he ever got to meet Len.

Maybe it was a good thing Len’s schedule involved doing something Rogueish so soon after their date. It’d be a good way to make sure he could handle...that he would be able to live up to his promise not to hold it against the other.

They finally made it through the security checkpoints, which took practically forever despite Barry being on first name basis with most of the guards involved. He stayed close to Joe as they made their way through the prison, trying to ignore the running commentary from the prisoners as they passed.

“Where are we going?”

“Meta wing,” Joe’s answer was curt.

“For real? I thought Atom Smasher was the only one in there so far?”

“Far as I know.”

That...couldn’t be good. They rounded the corner to see Captain Singh pacing the corridor, Patty and Eddie hovering near the M.E.

“West, Allen, so glad you could join us.”

“Yes sir. I’ll go ahead and get—”

“The M.E. wanted you to take a look at the body. Spivot, help Allen. West, Thawne—”

Barry tuned the captain out, sparing a quick smile for Patty and asking her to begin taking photographs and marking evidence for collection as he made his way towards Dr. MacMillan—Mac.

“Hey Mac, what did you want me to—”

“Grab your camera, Allen,” she interrupted, “we’ve got a weird one.”

“Yeah, I got that impression,” he pulled out his camera, resting his kit on top of the nearby gurney.

Atom Smasher was dead.

He and Lisa made good time to their campsite. It was a secluded clearing three miles from the outer perimeter of the Army base. Shielded by trees and a rocky outcrop, providing cover for the Jeep and perfect for shielding their fire and dissipating the smoke.

“Trust you to find a scenic spot, Lenny,” Lisa teased, grabbing the cooler from the trunk.

“Merely the closest sheltered area to the weak spot.”
“Whatever you need to tell yourself.”

Len snorted, unloading the tent and ARGUS-grade baffles Mick managed to get his hands on a while ago. “We’ve got thirty minutes to set up.”

“I’m not the one slacking off,” she rolled her eyes.

They worked in silence. Setting up their tent, disguising their presence, double-checking the tech Hart assembled and reviewing their intended route. Most of the trees already dropped their leaves, leaving them a little more exposed than he’d like. But, November was hunting season—perfect cover in the extremely unlikely event they were spotted.

Cell phones were off—both personal and burners—until they were headed back to Central. Mick knew their timeline. After much internal debate Len decided to tell Barry they’d be gone. While it meant giving The Flash a minor heads up that he had a heist in the works, Barry should respect their...separation of personal and business enough not to come looking for him.

“Gotta go,” he shouldered his pack.

“Waiting for you, Jerk.”

Len couldn’t help smiling, “Train wreck.”

They made good time, getting in position as the sun went down. Lisa set up the directional microphone while he attached the night vision filters to the spotting scopes. They’d done this dance more times than even he could count. It was comforting, the familiar rush of surveillance, counting the seconds, knowing Lise was just as meticulous. In her own way. Capable of tuning into over a dozen different conversations happening at once, bouncing between them without missing a beat.

“Doesn’t look like they’ve made much progress since the last time we were out here,” she murmured, voice pitched low out of habit rather than necessity.

“Mmhmm. Still pays to be sure.”

“I wasn’t complaining.”

Len scoffed but let it go, mentally reviewing everything they needed to accomplish to stay on schedule. It’d be tight but doable with just the two of them. A third person would be ideal, but he didn’t press Mick when the pyro decided to stay in Central.

His friend didn’t have the...temperament for prolonged stakeouts. Not when they were still a few months away from pulling the job. He preferred action. Something they couldn’t risk in proximity to a ‘decommissioned’ Army base buzzing with activity.

“Hey Lenny…”

Shit. He knew that tone.

“We had a deal. My reservation in exchange for details...I do believe it’s time for you to spill.”

Refused to react. Eyes pressed to the scope, he made note of the time, size, direction, route, and speed of the patrol in his sights.

Lisa nudged him as soon as he finished writing.

“You’re mistaken, Sis.”
“Nope.”

He stayed silent, more than willing to wait her out. Didn’t need her to tell him that it wasn’t gonna last. Was a little surprised he and Barry were still...together a week after Singh saw them at Dominic’s. But they were. Barry hadn’t said anything and he sure as hell wasn’t gonna ask.

Len was fixated on his task, so intent on not answering that he didn’t realize Lisa moved until a warm hand rested over his own.

“Lenny...I’m not looking for the details of what must’ve been amazing sex,” she said.

“Good. I have no intention of sharing.” At all.

Lise sighed but kept going, “you’ve made some pretty big changes lately. I...want to make sure you’re not doing it for The Flash.”

He clenched his jaw, “tired of Cisco already?”

“Nuh uh. You don’t get to change the subject. I want—Lenny…” she let out a deep breath and fell silent.

Knew she was staring at him. Could feel it—no way to get out of this. Short of a little super speed of his own. Len’s free hand balled into a fist, short nails digging into his palm. Eyes closed, he filled his lungs—in through his nose, out through his mouth. Was not a conversation he wanted to have, ever. But unless he wanted to spend the next month the subject of accusing stares and uncomfortable silence, he was gonna have to tell her something.

Len spun to face her, eyebrow raised. Didn’t mean he was gonna make it easy.

“We don’t...but after Gavin, I just...have to ask.”

He let out a short, humorless laugh. Knowing, even though she couldn’t say it. Didn’t have an answer for her, not an honest one. Wasn’t the best judge of what was...reasonable behavior in a relationship.

She waited, letting him gather his thoughts.

“Think so,” knew she wanted something more concrete, but it was the best he could offer. Hadn’t had the best model for healthy. He and Lise muddled through. Mick joined them later on, but it took a while—years—to get close. But that was different. And the few times he tried for something like this—most notably with Gavin—went to shit. “Best I can offer you, Sis.”

She studied him for forty-three seconds before softening. “Alright. Just...promise me you won’t let him call the shots. You get a say, too.”

He hummed noncommittally and they lapsed into silence. Lise’s expression said she’d let it go... for now.

Focus returned to the job until it was time to head back. He watched. Lise listened. Reached camp as the sun rose, signs of their movement covered by the natural increase in animal activity at dawn.

Despite Lisa digging into his personal life, the night had been a productive one. Managed to identify four more locations for camera traps and listening posts—they’d rest a few hours before installing the tech.
Hartley outdid himself, producing twenty units for them to monitor activity at the base from the comforts of Central. Each was equipped with audio, motion-triggered photography, and solar panels to keep the batteries charged. Provide the necessary juice to transmit data in short irregular bursts. Best part was they all resembled game cameras in various stages of repair. Given the number of hunters in the area it would be highly unlikely that anyone at the base would think twice about their presence, assuming they were discovered at all.

Plan was to install three along each side of the installation, within audio pickup range of the patrol routes. The rest would be placed around areas of weakness—places where the forest reached the perimeter fence, areas patrols regularly skipped, near blind spots in external surveillance cameras.

The more they watched the more obvious it became that personnel were relying on the remote location and decommissioned status of the facility. Didn’t have the setup necessary to detect nearby transmissions, hadn’t bothered to upgrade existing cameras...it was sloppy. But not unexpected. Requisition too much in the way of funding or materials and someone was bound to get curious. Want to know more about the nature of the research being conducted inside.

From what Len gathered on the commanding officer, he was not the type that played well with others. Or believed in adhering to established international conventions regarding human rights...fixated on metas and arrogant enough to think he’d get away with it.

Perfect target.

They were almost done processing the scene at Iron Heights, only to find pretty much nothing to explain Atom Smasher’s death.

He and Patty searched the entire cell and found no sharp objects, no inexplicable fingerprints or foreign substances, and then there was the wound itself.

Barry really, really didn’t like where all the evidence was pointing.

Mac called him over because, well...it was weird. While they wouldn’t know for sure until the autopsy, Atom Smasher’s heart appeared to be crushed. Like someone reached inside his chest and —Except he thought Cisco’s dampeners should prevent metas from using their powers.

But that couldn’t be possible, right? The killer’d have to be able to vibrate their hand to do that...as far as he knew that was a talent limited to speedsters. And he sure as hell didn’t do it.

Barry’s stomach clenched, nauseated. Was it possible that the Reverse Flash was back already?! Except with Eddie’s sacrifice (and subsequent vasectomy) he should be dead.

“Barry,” Joe pulled him aside, “please tell me this isn’t what it looks like.”

“I really, really wish I could, but,” he shrugged, “it looks exactly like what Cisco remembered from the alternate timeline.”

“Damn.”

Damn indeed.

Barry packed up his kit in silence while Patty finished loading their evidence into boxes to carry out of the prison. She looked pretty queasy too, not that he blamed her, but she didn’t let it affect her
barry sighed, shrugging out of his coat and bag before making a beeline for his couch without bothering with the lights. He was drained, trying to fight off a headache, and debating if it was worth leaving yet another voicemail for his dad. It was stupid, he knew that, but...if Atom Smasher had been killed by a speedster—he just wanted to make sure his dad was ok. A hug would be even better.

But he promised himself that he wouldn’t be a pain in the ass...that he’d let his dad sort things out on his own. Since that’s apparently what he needed.

He was really tempted to zip over to Joe’s for a hug, but he didn’t want—he just wanted the reassurance, not a really long conversation rehashing the singularity.

It really sucked that Len was out of town.

The sound of his door opening and heels on hardwood startled Barry out of the doze he managed to fall into. Only one other person had keys—“Iris!”

“I see you’re alive after all,” she was carrying a big bag of takeout that smelled wonderful. Especially since he hadn’t gotten around to eating lunch.

“Did I forget we made plans?” he ran his hands through his hair, trying to wake up.

“Nope. It’s just been way too long since our last movie night.” Iris smiled at him. She took the book off the coffee table before depositing the food. “Huh, Seeing through Paintings...when’d you get this?”

“I don’t…” he trailed off, trying to figure out how—Len. Len must’ve brought it over the other night when he camped out on the couch while Barry did his rounds, “remember.”

“Uh huh,” Iris grinned at him over her shoulder over her shoulder on the way into the kitchen. Probably to raid his fridge.

Barry pushed himself up and followed her. He gathered plates, silverware, and a glass of water, smiling when Iris made a face at the complete lack of beer in his fridge. “Ok but for the record, last week doesn’t qualify as ‘way too long.”’
Her smirk was positively evil, “not with me, Bear.”

Huh. “You sure?”

“Positive. And speaking of Len...”

“Um, I don’t think we were?”

“You have been avoiding me,” she nudged him onto the couch, plopping down next to him. “Spill.”

Barry looked down, concentrating on spooning rice and butter chicken onto his plate before Iris snarfed it all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh no, I did not play fashion advisor and messenger without good reason. Dominic’s Barry? C’mon,” she nudged him. “Did you get to enjoy messing up your nice clean sheets?”

“Oh my god, Iris—” he was whining. And blushing.

“You totally did!” she cackled.

“We are so not talking about this.”

“I share with you. Besides, I’m not asking for like, details—there are some things you just can’t unsee or hear, like the two of you in bed the other morning—but at least give me the PG-13 version.”

“I can’t believe you.” Except he really, really could. And totally should’ve expected Iris to corner him sooner or later. Now that he thought about it, it was impressive that she held off this long. He sighed, “what do you want to know.”

Iris dove right in, basically interviewing him on the entire night. No detail was too small—she wanted to know what Len wore, what the restaurant was like...the takeout was long gone before Barry finished sharing the stories Nona told him about Len and Lisa.

“Sounds like she really looks out for them,” her voice was thoughtful.

Barry nodded, “yeah. It was...refreshing’s the wrong word, but I guess nice? To know that they’ve got more than each other and Heat Wave to lean on. Or had, anyway—now there’s us and the Rogues.”

They never did get around to actually watching something. By the time they finished cleaning up (after Iris’ interrogation), it was late and they both had work in the morning. As soon as he put the last plate in the dishwasher she wrapped him up in a tight hug, forehead resting against his sternum.

“I’m really happy for you, Bear.”

He returned the hug, resting his cheek against her hair and taking a deep breath. He’d been in love with Iris for longer than he could remember, but...it didn’t hurt anymore. He still loved her with all his heart, but he wasn’t in love with her anymore. He hadn’t been since before the singularity...probably since Eddie showed him the ring and he had to accept that not only were Iris and Eddie serious, but Eddie was...he knew how amazing, how precious Iris was and would never take that for granted. And it hurt at first, letting go. But now—

“Thanks,” he whispered. “I...everything just feels right, you know?”

Barry wasn’t in love with Len, not yet. But he could be...was already so close...And as much as he
loved Iris, was constantly amazed by her strength, Len was...different. Their relationship wasn’t overshadowed by years of expectations and fantasies of a white picket fence and 2.5 children, and that was exciting in a whole new way.

It was Sunday evening, right on schedule, as Len eased the Jeep out of the woods and onto county route 137.

Everything went smoothly—he and Lise got all twenty of their camera trap listening posts installed. Identified the presence of a private security firm, presumably hired to carry out the necessary renovations to the facility. Judging by the materials moving in and out, the goal was to make the changes as fast as possible. They would have to break into the firm’s offices back in Central to get their hands on the updated blueprints.

Lise’s expertise with the directional microphone revealed a significant weakness in the defenses. Northwest corner’s motion sensors were constantly triggered by animals in the area. She overheard three separate patrols grumble about it, and the boss’s refusal to allow them to adjust the sensitivity...or cut back the trees where they encroached on the fence. By the time they were ready to pull off the heist, security would be so used to alerts from that section that their entry would be overlooked.

He glanced over at Lisa, noting her tired eyes, tousled hair, and small smile. Phones were back on—probably texting Cisco. Decided not to call her on it. Especially since he’d be doing the same with his own member of Team Flash if he wasn’t the one behind the wheel. Shook his head a little; still couldn’t quite wrap his head around the two of them getting involved with real life superheros.

Another twenty five miles and they’d be back on main roads, have traffic to blend in with. Didn’t think they had a tail. It’d be pretty damn obvious if there was another car on the road. He rounded another curve on the winding road, caught movement in the corner of his eye. Probably a deer—

CRASH. Metal on metal, rolling, explosion—airbags—Lisa? Where was—

The SUV rolled over once, twice, three times as he tried to hang on, stay conscious.

Last thing he saw was the tree trunk. Hitting it, the door crumpling like paper.

Chapter End Notes

In the words of the amazing Aunt Crimson, bear with me...
Bad Feelings Abound

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to the wonderful Crimson for her assistance, and to RedHead (aka coldtomyflash) for listening to me babble/headcanon about the way this is gonna unfold.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Barry wasn’t pacing or fidgeting more than usual. He just wasn’t…and even if he was, it had nothing to do with being worried. Nope, not at all.

It wasn’t a huge deal that Len hadn’t texted yet. Doing…Rogue stuff wasn’t an exact science, no matter how much the thief prided himself on having everything timed down to the second. Even though he told Barry to expect him some time last night. And he was maybe hoping that meant that Len would be open to coming over. Or having Barry over…he wasn’t picky.

Ok, so he was a little worried.

At least there was plenty to do at STAR Labs. He really should be resting before the night shift he volunteered to cover, but after a few hours of tossing, turning, and staring at the ceiling Barry gave up. He needed to keep busy. Otherwise he wouldn’t be able to ignore the urge to find out why he wasn’t enjoying a lazy morning in bed, maybe even discovering a way to get Len to let go of his frustrating self-control. Especially since the other was already so good at turning Barry into a needy mess...returning the favor was only fair.

But Len still wasn’t back and he would not break the man’s trust by going looking for him. Besides, Mick was probably at the Labs by now. Barry could deal with the embarrassment of asking him when they (he) could start worrying. Assuming Len hadn’t already given his partner in crime a heads up.

Barry quickly got dressed and made his way to the Labs, taking the scenic route that involved spending a little more time than strictly necessary in the warehouse district and swinging by a certain dive bar on the off chance that he’d see a familiar Jeep.

Skidding to a halt in the cortex, Barry exchanged distracted greetings with both halves of FIRESTORM and a nod with Mick before focusing on the ongoing argument between Cisco and Hartley. That both Ronnie and Professor Stein kept getting pulled into. A quick glance at the whiteboards covered in calculations taking up more than half of the room and the amused smirk on the pyromaniac’s face told him that whatever the fight was about, it’d been going on for a while. At least long enough for him to make popcorn.

As all four scientists continued to talk over each other, Barry made his way over to the food, stealing a handful for himself. Something that managed to earn him both an approving nod and a glare from the man at the same time.

“How long—”

“Have they been goin’ at it? Nearly two hours,” Mick glanced at him. “Shouldn’t you do your hero thing an’ break it up, Flash?”
Barry snorted, “and have them all turn on me? No thanks.”

“So ya do have some self-preservation after all.”

The speedster chose to ignore that, “what’re they arguing about anyway?”

“Near as I can follow Piper and Ramon don’t agree on the frequencies for the RFID passes. Then me ‘n Ronnie ‘n Martin came in with some questions about my gun. That’s where it started. No clue what part of that they’re fighting over now. Pretty sure they changed topics completely.”

“Gotcha.” Barry hopped up onto the table, letting their voices wash over him and playing with his phone.

A heavy hand landed on his knee, “stop it, kid.”

“Huh?” he looked up in confusion.

“Your leg was buzzing. Not sure the table can take it.”

“Oh, sorry.” He checked his phone again on the off chance he missed a notification. He hadn’t.

“Flash, relax. IF they ain’t back by tomorrow you can go do your thing.”

“I have no idea what you mean?” That wasn’t supposed to be a question.

“Sure ya don’t.” Mick bumped shoulders with a chuckle. “Sometimes even Snart runs late.”

“Yeah, but...this is a Rogue thing, right? I thought—we keep that stuff separate. You’re probably gonna hear from them before me.”

Mick chuckled.

“What?” Barry huffed.

“Kid, he told you he was going and when t’ expect him back. Pretty safe bet he’s gonna let you know the second he’s back in Central.”

“Oh.” Barry stared at the cap of a marker that rolled under Cisco’s station in an—admittedly pitiful—attempt to hide his blush.

“Uh huh. An’ since he’s with Lisa, I’d stake my share on your number bein’ the first one he dials. Delicate Snowflake that he is.”

Barry giggled at the nickname; there was a story behind it that he was dying to hear, but he wanted to get Len’s version first. It was a relief to know that Mick wasn’t too worked up over the schedule change. There was no denying that the arsonist was a hell of a lot more familiar with his best friend and partner’s habits than Barry was. They’d only recently become...another sort of partners. Maybe—hopefully—they’d be on more equal footing someday, though.

This fond teasing wasn’t something he expected from the otherwise gruff man, and he was at a loss as to how to respond. It was tempting, a little too tempting, to ask Mick a few more questions...especially about what made him think that Len considered Barry a higher priority than his Rogues. But he had no clue how to ask without sounding pathetically high school, and he came to the Lab to get something done, not to watch mad scientists duke it out. For real though, all of them were just a lab accident shy from becoming evil overlords.
“Ok,” he clapped, cutting through the near brawl between Hartley and Cisco over an eraser. “As fascinating as I’m sure this is...we’ve got actual things to do around here. FEMA inspectors will be here in about a week and they’re gonna want to see a few of the lab spaces fixed up as examples. Plus, I know we’ve got to put better locks on the storage closets...especially chemical storage. The more they see now the less obnoxious it’ll be getting all our hazmat permits renewed next summer,” he hopped off the table.

Hartley glared, but at least the rest of them looked a little chagrined.

“Right,” Cisco spun in his chair, fingers flying over the keyboard. “We’ve got what we need to upgrade the non-chemical storage spots. Not like supply closets, but for sure the room we got organized.”

“Y’mean the mini-warehouse Snart fixed up,” Mick corrected.

“Whatever,” the engineer waved a hand. “Lemme get the schematics…”

“I believe this is my cue to leave, lunch with Clarissa. We shall continue this discussion at a later date, gentlemen,” Professor Stein nodded to all of them and left.

Thankfully it didn’t take them much longer to get started. Hartley, Mick, and Barry got to work down on the lower level while Cisco directed their actions and ran diagnostics on the installation as each new component came online. Or at least that was what he was supposed to be doing. Somehow the critiquing part seemed to take up the majority of his attention.

It was fun, working with the Rogues. Letting their snark and banter push away his lingering feelings of unease and giving him something productive to do before zipping off to the precinct.

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Len came to; kept his eyes shut while he took stock. One hell of a headache, probably caused by more than hitting the dashboard during the crash—a conclusion supported by what felt like a lump on his right temple. No way he got that in the collision.

It was dark, wherever he was—not the Jeep. A sharp, concentrated pain on the right side of his neck—a Taser burn?—and too many cuts and bruises to bother counting. Nothing broken; ribs bruised or cracked from the combined force of airbag and seatbelt.

Oh, and his wrists and ankles were bound with heavy-duty zip ties. Merely confirmed what he’d already suspected. Being run off the road was no accident.

Stayed limp as he took note of his surroundings. Somewhere dark with a concrete floor, dry rather than musty. Two male voices, audible but severely muffled. Had to be coming from another room. Hair on the back of his neck stood up the longer he listened. That voice. One he hoped—did everything in his power—to never hear again.

Thought the bastard was still locked up. The sentence was twenty-five to life and there was no way in hell his former colleagues at CCPD would let him get parole. Not after feeding the Families intel that got two undercovers killed.

Footsteps got louder, the dull thud of heavy boots echoing enough to suggest a large space, mostly empty. Likely an abandoned warehouse. Wasn’t ready—he needed more time. Had to figure out a plan.
After three seconds of indecision, Len chose to sacrifice the element of surprise. He was still bound, didn’t have the time to fix that; this was a threat he refused to face lying down. If that voice...couldn’t allow himself to be seriously injured too soon. Not before he found Lise.

The metallic sound of a key in a lock drew all his attention.

“Son. Been a long time.”

Not nearly long enough. Len stayed quiet, narrowed eyes taking in the changes more than eight years in Iron Heights carved into dear old dad. Older, fatter, somehow crueler. Lines etched by survival—by rage—emphasized the cold calculation and spite. All the lessons. Forced himself not to tense, to shrink back, ball his hands into fists—old habits he long since put behind him—needed to stay impassive. Blank. Make his father show his cards first.

“Got a job for you.”

“Not interested,” Len responded even though he knew it wouldn’t matter. Old man expected an answer.

“I had a feeling you might need a little...incentive. My son’s always been stubborn,” he told the wiry man by his side. Took three steps closer to loom over Len where he sat on the floor. “I’m sure you’re wondering how your sister is after that crash. If something happened to that pretty face of hers; only thing she’s got going,” he scoffed.

Len’s nails dug into the palms of his hands. If he harmed one hair on her head Len would rip the bastard limb from limb. He let Lise down once—making a break for it and leaving her behind. He wouldn’t let it happen again.

“I got my sights set on some diamonds, a little walking around money to get out of town. Rutenberg here,” jabbed his thumb over his shoulder, “can handle the vault door. But I’m gonna need that showy ice gun of yours to get past the secondary system.”

“Cold gun,” he corrected with a sneer, “still haven’t heard a reason to get involved. There’s always another way in.”

“You’re my son. Family loyalty not enough for you anymore?” Bastard was smiling. That did not bode well.

“I owe you nothing.”

“See this handy little device?” he asked, showing Len what looked like a fancy garage door opener. “It’s connected to a bomb I fitted your sister with at the accident site. You’ll do your part, follow my lead, and she gets to keep her head.”

Nostrils flaring, Len bristled. No. The old man did not get to play this game with them again. Didn’t get to torture Lisa, use her as leverage—no more than means to an end. She—they—were supposed to be free from him. Worked most his life to make that happen, except...fuck.

Until he figured out Lewis’ angle he’d have to play along, bide his time. Until he knew Lisa was safe.

He’d toe the line...for now.
It was awesome when single shifts turned into doubles. Really. And maybe if Barry kept telling himself that he’d eventually believe it.

Probably not.

At least Singh gave him an hour to get breakfast—aka caffeine—once they got all the evidence back to the lab. It meant he was running late to meet up with Iris, Cisco, and Caitlin at Jitters, but, well...that wasn’t too unusual and this time he had a valid excuse.

He got in line before scouring the cafe for his friends, beyond relieved when he noticed they claimed a table and enough chairs for all of them.

“Excuse me—oh!”

Barry’s reflexes kicked in fast enough to avoid disaster, stepping out of the way of a customer precariously balancing a muffin and two coffees while texting, but causing him to bump into the person standing in line behind him.

“Sorry, I—”

“Barry, hi.” Patty smiled up at him. “I didn’t know you were headed this way, too. We could’ve walked over together.

“Hey! Yeah, sorry. I ran out before the Captain could change his mind about the break,” Barry returned her smile, rubbing the back of his neck.

She laughed, “good call. He can get pretty cranky sometimes. So The Flash, huh?”

“Wha?” he nearly tripped on air.

“The new drink, The Flash,” she nodded towards the sign hanging over the counter. “I think I’m going to need one to survive today.”

“Right, the drink. I’ll probably have to double up after last night.”

They placed their orders, waiting side by side for the baristas to call their names. Barry grabbed his and headed towards the others.

“Looks like you’ve got a full table,” Patty said.

He hadn’t realized she was following him until she spoke. He quickly looked around for another chair without success. The cafe was more popular than ever since reopening and every available seat was either filled or obviously saved. “Sorry,” he hadn’t meant to exclude her.

“That’s ok. I think i’ll take this outside, soak up some actual sunlight for a change. But, um…” she tucked her hair behind her ear, “maybe my people could call your people? Instead of running into each other like this, I mean.”

“Yeah,” Barry grinned, “that’d be awesome. I’m gonna—” he tilted his head towards the chair currently home to Iris’ bag of holding and Cisco’s coat.

“Of course. See you back at work.”

“Yup,” it was such a great change to have someone to talk to at the precinct. He was looking forward to having her in his lab on a semi-regular basis.
“My man,” Cisco waggled his eyebrows.

“Don’t even,” Barry snorted, snagging the chair as soon as Iris moved her purse. “Caffeine,” he cradled the warm ceramic in his hands, taking a moment to enjoy being still.

“Sustenance of the gods,” Caitlin said.

“Here, here,” Iris chimed in, clinking her mug against the doctor’s.

“Oh Barry, here. I got your message,” Cisco slid two calorie bars across the table.

“Thanks. I need to stash another few boxes at work. Totally didn’t realize I was out.”

“No prob,” he leaned back in his chair, bumping into the person squeezing through the crowded space behind him. “Ack, sorry!”

“You can bump into me any time, Cisco,” the words were a familiar tease, but Barry couldn’t quite place the voice.

“Lisa? What happened?”

Barry turned around at his friend’s alarmed tone, and...yeah. Lisa definitely looked like she’d gone a couple rounds with Girder and lost. He hadn’t ever seen her like this—even mid-fight she was impeccably dressed and bursting with confidence.

Right now...if someone didn’t look too closely she’d fit in with the post-workout crowd grabbing their morning fix on the way home from the gym. She was dressed in sweats, hair pulled back into a messy ponytail, keeping her head down to hide...was that dirt on her right cheekbone or a bruise?

Lisa made a beeline for the engineer, practically collapsing next to him as soon as he scooted over on the chair.

“Are you ok?” Iris asked, frowning.

“Why didn’t you call us?” Caitlin scolded, snagging Barry’s mocha and pressing it into her hands.

Barry wasn’t sure how to react...except by passing her the rest of his cranberry-orange muffin. He was a little afraid that no matter what he wanted to say to her he’d end up blurting out something about Len instead. And...well. Someone as wanted and high profile as Captain Cold probably shouldn’t be expected to just stroll into Jitters looking...noticeably rough around the edges with practically a quarter of the precinct waiting in line for their caffeine fix after a long night.

She took a small sip, hands wrapped around the warm ceramic, gaze fixed on...something interesting on the tabletop. Or nothing at all. Probably the latter. She took a deep breath, leaning towards Cisco until his friend got the hint and wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

That wasn’t good. Barry bit his bottom lip to keep all the questions racing through his mind from tumbling out. Because something was seriously wrong for Lisa to practically demand physical comfort. Barry didn’t think she was quite as touch averse as Len—way more likely to accept a hand on the back, shoulder, or arm—as long as she knew who reached out.

But Len told him—ok, not told exactly, but Barry was a CSI. He knew how to analyze clues to get answers and no matter how much he really, really wanted to ignore that part of his mind sometimes. Len and Lisa weren’t used to...they didn’t like physical contact, never mind comforting gestures. And needing them...practically asking for comfort in public was...yeah. Something was really
wrong.

“Long story. I—not here,” he’d never heard Lisa so subdued. “Definitely been better, and I didn’t call because the bastards took our phones,” she tried to force a smile.

“Can you give us the short version?” Barry asked. He needed something to go on because super speed gave him the advantage of imagining fifteen times as many horrible scenarios as someone without his powers.

“Someone took Lenny.”

He must’ve heard wrong...Barry dimly watched Iris reach out to squeeze Lisa’s hand.

“We were on our way back from...Rogue business and some asshole ran us into a ditch. I think the crash, it knocked me out when my head hit the dash. When I woke up it was dark and I was still strapped in, hanging sideways in the van—Lenny’s always such a mother hen about seatbelts,” she shook her head and managed a tiny smile. “And he was gone. Must’ve been knocked out, too, because I found drag marks leading to another set of tire tracks. It took a while to hike out to the interstate...hitched a ride from a trucker and came straight here.

“I know it’s a lot to ask, but help me find him? He’s the only jerk brother I’ve got,” her smile wavered but held.

It hurt all over again because she thought she had to ask, that there was even the tiniest chance that he—that they—wouldn’t demand to be included.

“Of course we’ll help,” Cisco pulled her into a proper half-hug. “We’re...in a weird way you guys are part of the team now. And even if we weren’t...c’mon, you Rogues aren’t exactly evil supervillains—I know that doesn’t make sense since by definition supervillains are evil but...you’re totally not.

“Don’t worry, with all the tech we’ve got at the Labs we’ll find him in no time,” Cisco drained the last of his coffee and got to his feet. “Me an’ Barry will get started while Cait checks you out.”

Barry nodded, mind racing. First he needed to grab his kit and check out that crash site. It wasn’t that he doubted Lisa’s account, or that she wasn’t observant...but she didn’t have his training and even the smallest detail could help them figure out what happened.

Len had to be ok. He had to. Right?

“Hey Barry, heading back to work already?” Patty caught up to him at the cup return spot, hand catching his elbow.

Shit. Right, he was still technically at work because the single shift he was scheduled for last night turned into a double. He had an entire lab full of samples to take care of, at least two (if not three) reports to get filed for some of the bigger assholes he had to put up with. The ones that thought Joe pulled strings to get him hired, and that he got special treatment because obviously graduating with two Master’s degrees—chemistry and forensics—plus a B.S. in Bio at twenty two meant absolutely nothing.

Dammit. A quick glance told him that his friends were already gone, on their way to STAR Labs, which...good. But that didn’t change the way Patty fell into step beside him, nudging his feet towards the precinct.

A trend that continued all the way up to his lab since Joe and Singh wanted her to get started on the
evidence from last night—with supervision—while he handled those reports and took a look at the write ups for two cases going to trial the following Monday.

Normally he liked Patty. She was good at her job, and pretty much the only other person at work that appreciated and understood the science. Sure Joe, Eddie, the Captain, and most of the rest of the detectives appreciated his work—at least to the extent that what he did helped their investigations—but that wasn’t the same thing. And it wasn’t until becoming The Flash, meeting Caitlin and Cisco, that he realized how much it sucked...how lonely he was.

But right now he just wanted to speed through all this crap and find Len before he had too much time to think about how strong, intelligent, and resourceful his boyfriend—partner—was and just how hard it would be to kidnap him at all, let alone with Lisa there for him to protect. The kind of shape he must be in for him not to have figured out how to at least contact someone, anyone—yeah, no. Not allowed to think about that until the end of his shift in...nearly six hours. Or until Patty got called away so he could zip through it all and go, whichever happened first.

Definitely, definitely hoping for the latter option.

And figure out some way to let Joe or Eddie know that he had an emergency and needed to run, dammit.

He also needed to get a grip. The Speed Force acted up when he was anxious, like the lightning was barely contained beneath his skin and it kept spilling out. Good thing Patty was across the room with her back to him while she worked. Otherwise he’d be trying to come up with some plausible explanation for having three reports completed already. Well, nearly completed. Effing printer was slow.

Barry glanced at the lock screen on his phone. Only fifteen minutes went by. Ugh. There was no way he’d be able to help Patty label, prep, and store the samples without giving things away. He was starting to think of her as a friend, but there was no way...he didn’t know her well enough to even think about trusting her with his secret.

Just...five and a half hours. He could do this.

Len hadn’t resorted to the literal interpretation of the phrase ‘bite your tongue’ in over twenty years. Forgot how annoying it was, how much the metallic tang of his own blood turned his stomach when the bleeding had nothing to do with the rush of a proper challenge. Or backing Mick up in a bar fight.

Still couldn’t wrap his head around the situation. How had he not heard the bastard got out? It sure as fuck wasn’t through official channels, and Len thought he was familiar with anyone competent—or insane—enough to engineer a breakout from Iron Heights. More to the point, couldn’t believe Lewis had the pull to get it done...the ruthlessness to implant thermite—

It was probably a bluff. Most logical conclusion, especially since the old man knew, knew, Len wouldn’t risk Lisa’s life one way or the other. Until he worked out if it was true, how it could be triggered he’d...go along.

Even if every last one of his instincts was screaming at him. Plan was sloppy, rushed, without a clear exit strategy. The target had cameras, a security post, and roving patrols...thus far Lewis hadn’t bothered to look into any of that.
No surprise there. Dumb son of a bitch never cared about how much evidence, how many bodies he left in his wake. Len was a crook, made no apologies or excuses for his chosen career. But he took great pride in doing everything to ensure he wasn’t...that he was better.

Agreed to toe the line—not that he had any other choice—but that didn’t mean he’d stoop to this level of incompetence. He steeled himself, locking away his disgust, self-loathing, and hatred. He had a job to do.

“Plans,” he demanded, stepping further into the former manager’s office in the abandoned warehouse.

“With that gun of yours, son, we’re not gonna need ‘em.”

Len resisted the urge to punch the bastard, “going in blind wastes too much time. Surely even you have heard about the city’s resident superhero. Can’t risk giving The Flash any advantage.”

Shit. The Flash. Len hadn’t even thought—they’d need to keep this quiet, subtle. Under S.T.A.R. Labs radar. He’d be burning that bridge, because...no. Couldn’t let Barry get involved. He was always so eager to help, would want to get right in the middle and Len could not allow that to happen. Lisa was his focus. Scarlet...he’d be a distraction Len could not afford. He was already stretched to the breaking point—no way his old man wouldn’t pick up on the speedster as a focus of concern.

Giving him even more leverage.

Barry didn’t know, was too trusting, too willing to believe in a better nature. No way he’d recognize the danger until far, far too late. Len took a deep breath, locking away the part of himself that started to give a damn, that wanted to reach out to the growing team of misfits at S.T.A.R. Labs. It was weakness and Leonard Snart was not weak.

“Guards can’t hit alarms if they’re frozen solid,” dear old dad chuckled. Found the prospect of killing funny, “me an’ you are gonna get ‘em in a few hours, son. Gotta make sure you haven’t forgotten all my lessons.”

Chapter End Notes

Dun dun DUNNNN...

Please let me know what you think, and typo picking is ALWAYS appreciated.

Ok, so (here’s the Earth) I just want to take the time to say that anything spouted by Lewis is NOT something I agree with as a person. He will get worse as all of this unfolds and I will reiterate this note at the top of those chapters, that (at the very least) there will be allusions to domestic violence and child abuse, plus homophobic language/slurs. The abuse won't get graphic, certainly no more detailed than what we have in the show, but there will be more than one mention of it. Please do not hesitate to reach out either here (comments are moderated and I do not post ones people ask me not to) or on tumblr if you feel I have overlooked major tags as future chapters go up.

We are once again brushing up against canon, and I will do my best to make sure that any scenes that follow the show (like Lisa bumping into the team at Jitters) will
(hopefully) do not turn into a rehash. That doesn't mean that certain lines or the gist of conversations won't be here (like Patty and Barry being adorkable, or earlier with Martin coining Atom Smasher's codename), but I will do my best to twist and expand upon canon to keep you guys interested.
Work was finally—finally—over and Cisco had all available satellites scanning the state for any hint of the cold gun’s signature. All they had to do was hope that Len had the gun with him, and that he was still in the state.

“Does Lenny know you can do this?” Lisa asked.

“Uh...probably? I mean, he never asked and I didn’t specifically tell him, but you guys didn’t give me a chance to install a tracker when you made me rebuild it. It’s been months since then, he had to know we’d figure something out,” Cisco said.

Mick snorted but otherwise stayed quiet, slouched against the wall nearby.

“Ha, got it. He’s in Central—the gun was used at the corner of Fifth and Hoyt about eight minutes ago, Barry.”

“Hopefully he’ll still be there,” Barry muttered, zipping into his suit. And that Len was the person wielding the gun. If not...nope. Not thinking about that. Or why Len was in the city and hadn’t gotten in touch with anyone yet.

Barry ran.

Of course, it turned out that the building at the intersection of Fifth and Hoyt was occupied by seven different firms spread across thirty stories. Awesome. It wouldn’t take long for him to search the entire building, but...there. Wheeler-Nicholson Design Company. Blueprints were a more likely target than financial or legal records.

Barry flashed through the floors indicated on the directory until he reached file storage, skidding to a stop just outside the glow of the cold cell.

“Len,” he whisper-shouted. Just because he didn’t see anyone else didn’t mean they were alone.

“Barry,” Len called back, footsteps stuttering for a moment on his way to another section of vertical files. He picked the lock effortlessly and Barry couldn’t help but admire his skill and efficiency.

He took a couple steps closer, “What’s going on? Are you ok?”

Those long fingers snagged a file before Len spun on his heel to face him. “Peachy,” the thief bit out, deftly rolling and stowing the plans in his parka. He stepped around Barry to another cabinet.

Yeah, right.

Barry used his speed to get in front of Len, back pressed against cold metal. Taking a moment to study the man before him...not that he got much. “Len, talk to me.”
The thief closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His masks dropped as he let it out, deflating. Relief, anger, frustration...Barry wanted to reach out—to touch—but he wasn’t so sure Len would accept the gesture.

“Lisa said you were attacked,” he murmured, not wanting to shatter the moment.

A head tilt of acknowledgement.

The sharp clang of a drawer slamming shut echoed through the room, destroying the tentative connection between them. Len’s walls were back up so fast it made his head spin; any trace of warmth was gone. Len was Cold.

Barry would’ve taken a step back if he could. It was all kinds of wrong, seeing Len like this. His fixed smirk didn’t hold any actual amusement and his eyes were empty.

It hurt, being shut out so completely.

Heavy footsteps got louder and Len pulled away even more, taking a couple giant steps back and drawing his gun.

What the—was there somebody behind him? The speedster knew he wasn’t the most observant person ever—Oliver’s training exercises made that abundantly clear—but the cold gun was aimed at him, centered on the emblem on his chest.

Len fired. It hurt, way more than he remembered. If it wasn’t for the ice gluing him to the floor, covering him all the way up his chest he’d be on the ground. He was too confused—too hurt—why?! He couldn’t—it wasn’t—

“What’s taking so long?” a gruff voice demanded without bothering to keep quiet.

Barry couldn’t do anything but stare at Len, mind spinning, stunned, hurt, freezing. This wasn’t happening, that was the only explanation for his partner icing him into a sitting duck. And for the way Len almost flinched at the sound.

He was hallucinating, or dreaming. Because Len just didn’t do scared.

“I got held up,” Len said, grabbing another roll of plans off the top of the cabinet and tucking it away.

“Always an excuse with...” the newcomer trailed off as he came around the corner, taking in Len’s cold smirk, gun raised like he would happily turn him into a Flash-themed snowman. Iceman. “Well. Didn’t think you had it in you, Son.”

Son?! No, there was no way—

“Thanks, Dad.”

Oh. Oh shit. The shiver that went down his spine had absolutely nothing to do with the ice surrounding him. Barry didn’t know anything for sure, nothing more than Joe’s off hand comment the first time The Flash and Captain Cold crossed paths. And Len’s reaction to Barry touching his scars. He thought—

“Barry? Talk to me, man,” Cisco’s voice over the comms snapped him back into reality.

Both Len and...Snart were gone.
“Your vitals, what’s going—”

“Yeah, uh. Len iced me to the floor. Gonna—not so sure I can get out of here…” his teeth were chattering, cold sapping his speed faster than ever before. Of course, Len never managed to coat him this much during any of their fights.

“Gotcha covered, man. Thermothreading for the win.”

Suddenly warmth spread through the suit, emanating from the symbol on his chest.

“Keep it on too long and the wiring will fry itself, but it should be able to handle warming you up.”

It took less than a minute for most of the ice to melt. Barry tapped into his powers, breaking through the last of the ice on his boots and taking off for STAR Labs. He didn’t stop until he traded his suit for a pair of sweats and one of Caitlin’s fuzzy blankets.

“We’ve got a problem.”

“No shit, Flash. What’d ya do t’ make Len ice you?”

“Nothing.”

Mick’s glare intensified.

“I swear! Look, just—” Barry ran both hands through his hair. “Can you guys pull up Snart Sr.’s CCPD file, please?”

The sound of ceramic shattering against tile nearly made him jump out of his skin.

Lisa stood in the doorway that separated Cisco’s workroom from the cortex, sock-covered feet and oversized sweats covered in coffee and her face white as a sheet. “No. He—”

“He’s in Iron Heights,” Mick ground out, stalking towards Barry.

The speedster took an involuntary step back, “I’m not so sure. The guy looked old enough...Len called him ‘dad’.”

Cisco was still typing away so Barry zipped into the lounge to get a dustpan and some dish towels to clean up the mess. Really. He just didn’t want the coffee to stain the concrete. It had nothing to do with being a valid excuse to put some space between himself and the pyromaniac.

By the time he walked back into the cortex Lewis Snart’s file was up on the main display.

“Yeah, no. He’s definitely not in Iron Heights anymore—I saw that guy less than five minutes ago.”

Mick swore and Lisa shrank even further, leaning against the door frame.

“Your brother has his weapon...why would he stay?” Caitlin asked, stepping around her desk.

“Yeah, or...I dunno, let Barry flash him outta there instead of shooting him,” Cisco added. He grabbed the cleaning supplies from Barry and got to work.

“Lenny would never,” Lisa glared at all of them—mostly Barry—fiercely.

Barry raised his hands in a placating gesture, not really sure what else to do...or what he did wrong.
“The only way he’d ever—” Lisa shook her head and let out a humorless laugh. “He froze you to the floor so you’d stay away and stop looking for him. Lenny did it to…”

“To protect you, Barry,” Caitlin finished the thought. “But why would your father threaten The Flash?”

“Ya don’t get it, Doc,” Mick paced the room to Lisa’s side.

“It’s me,” Lisa said. “I was always his Plan B, a way to make Lenny do whatever he wanted,” she pulled the collar of her shirt aside. Barry’s eyes widened at the sight of the long, jagged scar that went from her collarbone towards her right shoulder, disappearing under her shirt. It was old and faded, but...that almost made it worse.

“I didn’t get this being a criminal, I got it for being a daughter,” she tugged the shirt back into place. “If Lenny’d been any slower, my father would’ve broken my collarbone. I was six.

“That man might be my blood, but he’s not family. The only reason Len stayed...the only reason he ever went along with whatever our father was involved in was to keep me safe. Even though I can take care of myself,” she finished with a small smile, a ghost of her usual confidence.

“Not the point, Goldie,” Mick elbowed her gently. “Flash, we’re gonna crash here,” it wasn’t a question.

“Of course. Lemme…” Barry waved a hand towards the lounge and took off.

It didn’t take long to find a couple futons to wedge into the lounge next to the couch. Blankets and pillows took a bit more effort—they didn’t have enough at the Lab and soft stuff like that had a habit of bursting into flames at pretty much any speed.

Barry grabbed two of the friction-resistant duffle bags Cisco whipped up for regular clothes and headed for his apartment. He stuffed them with pillows and blankets—including the ones off his bed—and headed back.

Even with the detour they were settled in for their sleepover in under an hour...not that anyone was ready to call it a night just yet. Mick flat out refused, dragging a rolly chair in from the cortex and insisting that he’d keep watch.

“Dude, we’re good. I locked down the floor,” Cisco told the pyromaniac. “We’re safe. Even if somebody manages to get in the alarms will wake us all up with plenty of time to spare. C’mon, it’s not like The Flash needs long to get ready.”

“Whatever you say, kid,” Mick nodded along but didn’t budge from his spot in the corner.

Barry sighed. If he was so dead set on keeping watch—he took a step towards Mick’s post. It was only fair...if Mick was gonna stay up, Barry was gonna make sure the pyro would wake him up in a couple hours to take over.

“You’re not going to change his mind about this, you know,” Lisa said, hand on his arm.

“He shouldn’t have to do it all himself.”

She sighed but didn’t let go. “Barry...Mick wants to do this, to keep watch over us. That’s what Lenny would’ve asked him to do if he was here—make sure we’re safe while my idiot brother sticks his neck out. They’ve been partners a long time...whenever there’s a major problem Mick goes to ground...makes sure to cover what matters. This way Lenny can focus everything on finding all the
angles and coming up with a plan to get out of the mess.

“Dealing with our father is a special kind of shitty situation.”

Barry deflated, “Alright, I guess. But just for tonight.”

Mick snorted but otherwise ignored them.

The speedster tried to settle in, but wasn’t having much success. And he knew it wasn’t the couch—it was super comfy and he napped on it all the time. But not tonight.

The lounge was calming...a soft glow from the exit light, quiet whirs from the fridge, and deep, measured breaths from Cisco and Lisa. Every so often the chair would creak as Mick shifted his weight.

Barry sighed and sat up.

“Ain’t yer fault, Flash,” Mick’s voice was barely a whisper.

He ran a hand over his face, “kinda feels like it is.”

Mick stayed quiet, shadowed eyes fixed on his face, waiting him out.

“I should’ve—Len said they’d be back Sunday night. When—I should’ve looked for them.”

“When, kid? At the second after midnight? Wouldn’t have mattered, Lewis already had ‘im by then.”

“Would’ve found Lisa,” he mumbled.

“How? Ya had no idea where to look. Me an’ Hart never woulda told you. Cisco could’ve pinged their cells all he wanted—the phones with those numbers attached are probably back at Len’s apartment,” Mick’s tone was matter-of-fact.

“They were in-state. With my powers—”

“Still woulda taken a couple hours, Flash. Assuming you found ‘em at all.”

“I—maybe,” Barry slumped forward, elbows propped up on his knees.

“An’ what if everything was fine? Your lightning trail ain’t exactly subtle. Coulda blown their cover, ruined all that planning. Woulda broken the rules you an’ Snart set out.”

“But his dad—”

“I know, kid. I know.”

Barry flopped back onto the cushions. “I hate this...not being able to do anything.”

“You an’ me both, Flash. C’mon kid, try ta get some sleep. Gonna need your beauty rest to get Len outta this one.”

“Yes, sir,” he huffed out a quiet laugh and complied, pulling the blanket up to his chin.

“Mick?” he asked once he got settled.

“Yeah, kid?”
“Why didn’t Len let me whisk him out of there?”

“That’s the big question for you geniuses ta solve in the morning.”

Barry raced through Central, patrolling the streets and keeping an eye out for Len’s bike. After the scene he spent all day processing there was no way he was gonna let Len shut him out.

The victim’s name was David Rutenberg, known associate of Lewis Snart. And his head was gone, literally. Blown off with thermite; judging by the size and directionality of the blast it wasn’t self-inflicted. Rutenberg was linked to explosives in the past, it wasn’t that unusual for stuff to backfire during assembly. But if that’s what had happened Barry would’ve seen evidence of the explosion—burns at the very least—on his hands, arms, and jacket.

None of that was present. Combined with the volatile nature of thermite, that meant that the source of the blast was small and had either been attached to his neck or the back of his head. Or implanted there.

As much as he hated the delay, Barry took a good half hour to fill the others in on what he found out—Rutenberg’s cause of death and his suspicions about the person responsible. Lewis.

It wasn’t Len. There was no way he’d *ever* do something like that to anybody. Period. And his colleagues continuing to bring that theory up all day didn’t help.

He ran as soon as they found the bomb in Lisa’s neck, a bag with normal clothes slung over his shoulder. So far he checked the docks, train depot, and the industrial area near Keystone without any sign of his partner. He had to be somewhere—hopefully without Lewis.

Barry had to find him, had to let him know they knew what happened, that they were on top of it. That Team Science would figure it out—they always did. He could hear Caitlin, Cisco, and Hartley running test after test through his comms, not that he was really *listening*.

If Len still refused to go back to the Lab—

He skidded to a stop in the alley alongside Len’s bike. An alley that happened to be behind a familiar dive bar. Barry couldn’t help smiling a little—he really should’ve checked *Saints and Sinners* first. Within moments he was in normal clothes, bag full of the Flash suit tucked behind the kickstand.

Len was going to get help whether he liked it or not.

*Saints* was...familiar. Even this early, even this empty. The itch between Len’s shoulder blades finally went away.

Lynette brought over a beer, quickly followed by a cheeseburger and fries he didn’t remember ordering. “You look like shit, Boss.”

“Thanks,” he managed, corner of his lips quirking up in a hint of his usual smirk.

She stayed put for another forty-two seconds, waiting.

Bit back a sigh, “some water’d be great, Lynne.” Earned him a raised eyebrow, but thankfully she
delivered the glass without further commentary. Set it down on a napkin next to the untouched bottle.

The thought of drinking, even beer—no. Couldn’t do it. With the old man around the smell was enough to put him on edge. Got in the habit of making bottles and cans disappear as soon as they were empty. Less chance he’d get...creative with them that way.

Forced himself to take a bite of the burger. He knew his body needed some fuel, but...But eating with the constant reminder of what could happen to Lisa playing on a loop every time he closed his eyes didn’t make it easy.

Fuck.

Len never liked the man, Rutenberg. Was his father’s go-to tech guy; barely competent. Fond of violence and the barely legal—had to drag him away from Lisa more than once. But he still couldn’t quite wrap his head around how the guy went out. All so dear old Dad could prove a point. That he was a bastard, didn’t give a damn about anybody but himself.

The loud crack of pool balls breaking made Len jump.

Shit.

Len took a couple deep breaths—inhale for four, hold for four, exhale for four. Couldn’t afford to break now.

His bar wasn’t the best spot to duck into when he wanted to stay off the radar—this was his neighborhood. Didn’t want to drag them into it, risk anybody else. But Len had to get out, needed to go somewhere that wouldn’t add. Didn’t wind him even tighter.

Had to get out. Out of the warehouse, away as soon as the bastard made it clear he could. Was allowed to. Wouldn’t put Lise in more danger as long as he was back by morning. At Saints...he didn’t have to be on high alert, could let his guard down here, on his own turf. Just a little. Enough to choke down some food, take the sharp edge off his headache.

Odds of running into Lise or Mick this early were low. There were other places in Central that felt more like home, had a greater pull...but he couldn’t—odds were he was being watched. It wouldn’t do to tip his hand.

The job wasn’t done.

He heard the door open and close but didn’t bother to look up. Lynnette hadn’t budged from her spot behind the bar—whoever came in wasn’t a threat. Or a regular. Not someone he’d have to acknowledge.

Footsteps—a familiar cadence—were quick to prove him wrong. Quick in so many other ways, too. Quick to forgive and so damn trusting.

“Thawed out already, Barry?” Len drawled.

Scarlet ignored the quip, sliding into the booth across from him and stealing a fry. “We need to talk.”

“Got nothing to say,” he snapped. Eyes darted up and to the side, avoiding eye contact. Had to keep Barry at arm’s length. Len doubted he’d have the strength to stay away once he saw the blend of concern, kindness, and determination that had to be splashed across the other’s face. Wouldn’t be able to keep cold if he saw the warmth in those hazel eyes.
It’d break him. Len would spill his guts. When he told Barry they were partners, he meant it. Anything, anything else and he’d let the speedster worm his way in. Not now. His old man was the exception, always had been. No way Len could deal with another variable, another person he gave a damn about in danger.

Barry had to leave.

“What’s going on?”

Len tensed, tried to cover it by dipping a fry in ketchup. “Things are...complicated with family,” he took a bite, finally meeting Barry’s eyes, “as you know from your parents.”

The speedster winced a little but pushed past it, leaning forward and resting his elbows on the table. “Everybody’s already working to help Lisa. Let me help you.”

Shit. “Now I’m all warm and fuzzy inside,” he managed to keep his tone biting, but the small smile told him Barry didn’t buy it. “Don’t waste your time saving people that don’t wanna be saved. Run along now, done your good deed for the day.”

“For real, Len?” he shook his head. “I know what you’re trying to do...there’s no way it’s gonna work. You’re not gonna get me to storm off.”

Leaned forward to mirror Barry’s posture, glaring. The other held out for an impressive eighty-six seconds before breaking, running a hand through his hair.

“Look, we know, ok?”

“Doubtful.”

Barry snorted, “I processed Rutenberg’s scene—we know about the thermite. Lisa’s at the lab...Caitlin, Cisco, and Hartley are already working on it. I promise they’ll be able to get the bomb out soon. She’s safe,” he looked away, bit his lip. “Well, as safe as possible, given the circumstances. Mick’s watching over her like a hawk and you know Cisco’s not gonna let anything happen to her.”

That...helped. Loosened some of the knots he was tied in. But Barry wasn’t done with his little speech yet.

“I know you’re worried, but...we’re on top of it. You don’t have to do this alone. Let me watch your back.”

“Not gonna happen, kid. I can take care of myself.”

“Yeah, well...part of taking care of yourself is knowing when to let somebody else in,” Barry snapped. “You said we were partners.”

Len closed his eyes, nails digging into his palm. Barry kept going before he could respond.

“I can take care of myself and you know it. I’m worried about you—we all are. I get that you’re doing this for Lisa, I do. I’ve been there—with Dad, with Iris and Joe and everybody last year and ok, maybe it’s not exactly the same as this because I haven’t...the threat wasn’t...it didn’t come from someone that’s supposed to love and support us no matter what—although Wellsobard kinda falls into that category. But Lisa is safe, as safe as we can make her—she seriously had to threaten Mick with her gun to get him to back off so she could take a shower—”

“Did it ever occur to you,” Len cut into Barry’s ramble, voice hard, “that I don’t want my old man
anywhere near you?"

“What makes you think I don’t feel the same way,” he snapped, “dammit, Len. I know, ok? What he’s done to you. And I don’t—I can’t”—Barry squeezed his eyes shut and took a deep breath. “I’m not gonna give him a chance to do it again.”

Shit. He needed a drink—something stronger than beer.

As soon as that thought registered Len’s stomach heaved. No. He was not—would not—a warm hand covered his.

“Hey. Len, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you think about it…”

“You didn’t,” he sighed. Caught Lynnette’s quick stride as she rounded the bar, a glance told him she was headed over to toss Scarlet out for causing trouble.

For half a second he considered letting her.

Instead he caught her eye and shook his head.

The silence stretched from seconds into minutes, Barry’s hand covering his.

Had a feeling Barry was going to out-stubborn him this time. “You’re not gonna back down, are you?”

“Nope,” the other sounded entirely too pleased with himself and snatched a fry off the plate.

Len couldn’t stop a small smile in response to Barry’s sunny grin. It was impossible not to, not when he was already in this deep. Didn’t want his bastard of a father anywhere near Barry, knew if anyone could snuff out—no way he’d let that happen. Before…if they were still nemeses he would’ve gotten his way but now...

“Fine, Scarlet. But I make the plan and you are going to follow it. Understood?”

“I can do that.”

Len huffed out a laugh, “since when?”

“Always, obviously.”

Squared his shoulders and got serious, “I mean it. This…ain’t gonna be easy.”

“I know, Len. But it doesn’t matter, not as long as we—as you make it out safe. That’s why I can’t let this go.”

The warmth spreading through him was...something else. Foreign. But it did the trick, soothing his head, quieting his stomach. No one had ever said that to him before. Knew Lisa felt it, or something similar. But they didn’t talk about it, never had, and Mick wasn’t one for sentiment.

Squeezed Barry’s hand before sitting back and nodding to Lynnette. This was gonna take a while, “hungry?”

“I suppose I could eat.”

“Excellent. You’re paying.”
Plan B

Chapter Notes

...or something. Did I mention I hate chapter titles? If you guys have alternate suggestions, PLEASE share them <3

MANY thanks to all of you for being so patient, and to Crimson and Redhead for idea-bouncing, and Crimson for betaing.

This chapter contains Lewis Snart and therefore includes references to/implications about child abuse. It also includes attempted sexual assault in the form of a verbal altercation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Barry wrapped his arms around Len’s waist more tightly, pressing himself closer as the motorcycle wove through Central. Every second brought them closer to wherever it was that Lewis chose as his base of operations.

He was pretty sure Len chose the long way, and not just as a way to ensure that they weren’t being followed. Not with the way Barry felt tension building in the other the longer they rode.

It took some doing, but the speedster managed to suppress a sigh. Len’s reactions made him hate Lewis even more than he already did ever since seeing Len’s scars all those weeks ago. He tried his best to ignore the feeling—‘furious’ wasn’t exactly the best frame of mind to have walking into... wherever they’d be meeting. Especially since the stakes were so high.

Once he and his friends had figured out what Lewis did, who he was using as leverage, Barry had promised himself—and Lisa—that he wouldn’t screw this up. That he’d find Len and do what he had to in order to keep the other safe and buy the necessary time for Cisco and Hartley to get the bomb out of Lisa’s neck. He’d follow Len’s lead and avoid any ‘dumb heroics’ that’d put their lives in even more danger. He got it.

...Mick forcing him to repeat the phrase for a good five minutes was totally unnecessary.

But keeping it all in mind didn’t really help. Barry ached. He hated that Len was in this situation in the first place, but knowing that his father was the cause of it all made it so much worse.

The bike coasting to a stop in the alley brought Barry’s attention to his surroundings. Len cut the engine and dropped his feet to the ground but made no move to engage the kickstand. He slowly pushed himself upright, shifting his weight to lean against Barry, who held the thief more tightly and waited.

“Last chance to change your mind. You should take it. Run and never look back,” his voice was quiet and flat.

“Not gonna happen,” Barry said quietly. He felt the other tense up even further, which was so not his goal. He leaned forward to rest his forehead against Len’s back.

“I promise I won’t... if it all goes too far sideways I’ll use my powers and get us out of there. You
said the heist’ll be tomorrow night, right? That’s more than enough time for Cisco and Hartley to figure it all out and make sure Lisa will be safe. Until then I’m not—you’re in charge. I’ll keep my head down and follow your lead.”

“Good. Run through it all again.”

Barry managed not to roll his eyes even though Len wouldn’t be able to see the expression. It wasn’t like he could possibly forget everything they just talked about so quickly, and the little show of exasperation would only make Len think he wasn’t taking it seriously—he was. The whole exchange was just so...Len.

Repetition was one of the thief’s coping mechanisms, along with honing his internal clock with scary precision, and use of a sharp ‘Mick!’ to remind himself and the pyro of their surroundings. Going over his plans, hearing them aloud, helped Len identify potential weak spots or think of even more creative and meticulous ways to reach his goal. It didn’t matter that the treasure he set his sights on this time had nothing to do with a pay day.

“I’m Sam. Hacking got me kicked out of three different universities—changing transcripts, messing with exams, and ‘improving’ ongoing research data. You and I met when we both set our sights on the same bearer bonds that mysteriously went missing from the headquarters of Chicago Federal Bank a few years ago,” Barry recited, breaking character to add, “definitely not the ones some ‘mystery’ investor redeemed in Central last year.”

“Oh course not. Keep going,” there was a hint of smugness teasing along the edges of Len’s response.

“You were gonna ice me out until I pointed out that the alarms were disabled and the security cameras looped courtesy of my tech. Getting rid of me wouldn’t be easy—I’m pretty stubborn—and by the time you managed it my programs would’ve self-destructed, leaving your exit caught on camera. Not to mention setting off the alarms and getting the guard’s attention. A fifty-fifty split seemed fair to me, but you managed to talk me down to thirty-five percent since your partner was our getaway driver. I got the slightly bigger share for managing to beat you at your own game.

“After that you brought me in on a handful of commissioned ‘acquisitions’ in the Midwest, mostly here in Missouri, but there were two other jobs in Chicago,” Barry finished.


“I won’t mention Mick or Lisa or the Rogues or The Flash unless he does, and even if he does I play dumb.”

“And when he starts in on me?”

“I’ll stay out of it,” Barry said, hating the idea but trying to sound unaffected.

“Mnhm. Know it won’t be easy for you, Scarlet,” Len said.

He sighed heavily, nodding even though Len wouldn’t see the gesture. That was an understatement—he knew Len wanted a promise of some sort, but Barry couldn’t bring himself to lie about something so important. He’d do his best, though.

“I know,” Len said, almost like he heard Barry’s thoughts on the matter. But he chose not to call Barry out on it, bringing the bike back to life. The sound of the engine almost drowning out his quiet “thanks.”
All too soon they were pulling up next to the loading dock of a warehouse in desperate need of a new coat of paint unless the owners actually wanted it to turn into a huge pile of rust. Barry climbed off the bike when Len nudged him, watching the other maneuver the bike until it was mostly hidden by the structure itself.

“Toss me the bag,” Len said.

Barry shrugged the strap off his shoulder and complied, watching him wedge the bag containing the Flash suit into the overhang itself.

“It’ll be safe there for now. Once the old man passes out you’ll be able to bring it inside.”

Len didn’t wait for Barry to react, quickly heading through the door and into the dim interior of the warehouse. The speedster took a deep breath and let it out slowly before following Len into the gloom.

“About damn—who’s this?” Lewis demanded, drawing himself to loom over Len when they got close.

They were almost the same height, Barry noticed. But where Len exuded grace and confidence to give him a larger than life presence, his father relied on bulk and an aura of menace. Barry decided the only reason the man succeeded in looking intimidating was the way Len shrank in on himself as soon as Lewis opened his mouth.

If he hadn’t already loathed the man on principle, the first impression would’ve been more than enough to sway Barry’s opinion. Rather than wait for Len to make introductions, Barry took a few steps forward and extended his hand, “Lenny said you needed a tech guy. I’m Sam.”

Lewis seemed to accept the story he and Len—mostly Len—came up with. It had taken some improv, though, and he may have taken some credit for helping Len steal the Kandaq Dynasty diamond from the museum. It was even technically true—even if the help Barry gave had more to do with running interference and making sure no civilians got hurt when someone derailed a train.

He did his best to avoid Len’s eye when he went off script. He had a feeling that seeing Len’s reaction would’ve made it really hard to keep a straight face...or his complete lack of reaction to something that normally would’ve earned Barry at least a smirk.

Lewis waved him towards the blueprint-covered table in a cleared section of the warehouse and began outlining a plan even Barry recognized as pretty pathetic. He hadn’t bothered with much beyond the basics—finding out where the vault was, its make, the fact that a security presence existed, and a way out. But that was it. No idea how much of the building was covered by the cameras, how long it took CCPD to respond...not even how frequently guards patrolled the floors. The whole thing basically hinged on the cold gun.

Even if they somehow managed to get in and out without running into any guards, there’d be so much evidence left behind that even the laziest of his colleagues at the CCPD would be able to follow it straight to Len.

Len’s thoughts on the matter were pretty obvious, despite doing his best to avoid angering the man. He carefully offered alternatives—a route to the safe that building security overlooked, outlining
patrol schedules and routes for the guards, and a number of other blind spots they could easily use to their advantage. But each time he tried Lewis cut him off and shut him down.

The worst part was that Barry couldn’t really do anything about it, not even with his powers. The way Lewis wouldn’t listen, didn’t even let Len finish a sentence—not even to avoid needless confrontations or casualties...he nudged Len’s shoulder with his own more than once, wanting Len to know he wasn’t alone, that Barry trusted his insights and valued his judgment.

Barry wasn’t sure how long it took for Lewis to get tired of listening to his own voice, but it happened eventually. Len was in motion as soon as he did, heading for the door.

“C’mon Sam, time to get those uniforms and ID’s,” Len called over his shoulder. “You wanna boost the van?”

“Not so fast,” Lewis interrupted. “Last I checked that’s not a two-man job, son. Run along. Me and Sam are going to get to know each other.”

Barry stopped in his tracks, skin crawling. Len’s shoulders tightened but he kept going without comment.

Well, shit.

He wanted to spend as little time with Lewis as possible, and as much as he hated the idea of Len having to be around the man, Len had been just as adamant that he hated the idea of Barry getting involved, and that he’d do his best not to leave Barry alone with his father. He’d kept repeating it while they ate.

Normally Barry would’ve rolled his eyes and reminded his boyfriend that he could take care of himself, but Barry had a feeling that Len was making the promise to himself instead of questioning Barry’s skills.

Either way, the speedster wasn’t too worried for his own safety, not with his powers. Barry could easily shrug off whatever Lewis used to knock Lisa and Len out. Even if the man had another bomb on hand, he’d never get a chance to implant it.

Besides, Barry had enough experience dealing with bullies and other obnoxious assholes to know how to keep his distance. He could totally hold his own in a fight without his speed, thanks to all the sparring Mick insisted on. And ok, Oliver would totally still be able to kick his ass, but there was no way Lewis had his friend’s skill or discipline. But other than poking around the warehouse, there wasn’t a whole lot else for him to do other than wait.

Barry’s luck ran out after about half an hour. He got a little too into examining the blueprints for ways to minimize risks to the guards since Cisco wouldn’t be in his ear to give him directions until he put the Flash suit on. On the plus side, there were plenty of offices and closets for them to duck into if they came across a patrol, or if the guards needed to take a little...nap.

At least he wasn’t cornered, although Lewis tried his best to pin him against the table.

“So Sam, tell me again: how’d you get into the game?” Lewis practically whispered into his ear.

“It’s like I told you before—hacking for fun turned into hacking for profit and it grew from there. Why should I settle for a consulting fee if I’ve got the skills for a full share,” he said, stepping
sideways so he could turn to face the other man without having to touch him.

“Not what I meant, pipsqueak,” Lewis looked him up and down slowly, toying with his belt buckle, making sure he had Barry’s attention before undoing it. “I saw how my son reacted to you. You one of his whores? Thought I beat it out of him. Must be a good lay for him to bother remembering your name.” A cruel sneer twisted his mouth, “skinny twink like you must get off on it, bending over for the boss. He ain’t the boss here, I am,” Lewis drew a gun and jammed it into Barry’s ribs. “You want in you gotta earn it. On your knees.”

“I don’t fucking think so,” Barry spat, holding his ground.

“Gonna need to prove you’re worth keeping around, kid. If you were any good at stealing, I’d know.”

“Yeah, right. The only people you hear about are the ones sloppy enough to get caught, or careless enough to leave a body count,” he glared and stood taller. “The reason Len keeps me in mind for his crews is cuz I’m neither,” the venom in his voice was enough to force Lewis to take a half-step back. “I’m good and careful. You don’t want me involved? Fine. Good luck getting past the Draycon without me.

“You’re just some washed up dirty cop that got pinched. I don’t owe you anything,” Barry finished, crossing his arms for emphasis.

Lewis didn’t lose the sneer, but Barry could tell he was backing down. It figured—bullies had a habit of giving up at the first sign of resistance.

“I don’t answer to some snot-nosed brat like you, Sam,” he rallied, surging forward to grab the front of Barry’s shirt and used the leverage to shove his back into the table. “Get in my face again...”

Len stormed into the room, door slamming behind him. He flung a sack onto the table—probably the uniforms—narrowed blue eyes fixed on his father, “Problem, gentlemen?”

“Not your concern, son. Just making sure Sam learns his lesson,” he shoved Barry once more for good measure and let go, turning to face the interruption.

Barry could tell the moment Len spotted the asshole’s unbuckled belt—he...shut down, eyes going dead and jaw so tight Barry was worried he was going to crack a molar. Barry wasted no time—forcing Lewis to stumble as he shouldered past, making sure he made the last move.

No matter how much he wanted to head over to Len, Barry knew he couldn’t—not without giving Lewis even more leverage. He had to keep walking deeper into the building and hope the bastard left. Once they were alone he’d be able to reassure.

The crap Lewis spewed hadn’t bothered him, not really. Ok, that was a lie. He was furious with the man and his disgusting...everything. But he’d heard worse from some of his less evolved co-workers until one of them slipped up in front of Captain Singh. But that look on Len’s face—gone in an instant, of course—god.

He knew Len was already blaming himself.

Len risked a glance at Barry’s retreating form—just a second—before returning his full attention to the miserable excuse for a human being in front of him. Staring him down.
He wouldn’t flinch, wouldn’t look away first. Refused to show any sign of weakness.

Seconds ticked by—one hundred and forty-six of them—before Lewis ended their standoff. Got his coat, snagged the keys to the beat up sedan he made Len steal a couple days ago and slammed the door on his way out in a pathetic attempt at making a point.

Waited to hear the engine turn over and the sound of the car to fade into the distance before allowing himself to move.

Len hated this—the whole damn thing. Hadn’t wanted—Barry never should’ve had to deal with his old man...never should’ve known how he and Lise—what they put up with until they were able to make a run for it. It took every fucking thing he had in him not to beat the shit out of his father when he saw—when he realized what the bastard must’ve demanded. What he thought he could do…

Fucking hypocrite.

Took every opportunity to teach him ‘lessons’, kick and hit and punch and cut the gay out of him long before Len had the hormones to give a thought to preferences. But of course that didn’t stop the asshole from trying to make Barry—Because he could; based on nothing. An assumption.

“Hey.”

He jumped at the sound of Barry’s quiet voice.

“D’you think I can go grab some supplies and stuff for us or not yet?”

He swallowed, forced himself to meet Barry’s eyes—owed him that much—only to be completely blown away by the warmth in his hazel eyes. Managed a short nod, not trusting his voice.

“’K. I’ll be back in a flash,” Barry wagged his eyebrows at the pun, “text me if you’ve got any specific requests.”

He watched the yellow lightning dissipate, then scanned his surroundings for a tight spot. Somewhere more secure, somewhere to...hide. Didn’t help much with his father, not even when he was little, but it soothed some of his anxiety.

Hopefully it’d be enough for him to get himself sorted without an audience...not that Barry’d be gone long. Lewis, on the other hand, probably wouldn’t stumble in until the following morning. If they were lucky. If they weren’t...a short bender still lasted an average of five hours.

Len sat heavily on a stack of palettes, head bowed, hands hanging between his knees. His eyes were open, but his focus wasn’t outward. Shit like this was why he wanted to keep Barry as far away as possible. Why Len didn’t want him involved.

If only...if only he hadn’t gone to Saint’s, hadn’t let the speedster talk him around. Kept a closer eye on his surroundings so the bastard hadn’t been able to grab them in the first place. Fuck. He should’ve known. Should’ve heard the asshole was free. If he knew...he and Mick would’ve gone hunting and that’d be that.

Instead…

Shuffling footsteps—Barry’s footsteps—drew Len’s attention, eyes coming into focus as the other stamped out his smoking shoes.

He was at a loss—what was there to say to someone—his partner—after what that man tried to do.
A tiny part of him was surprised Barry came back.

But here he was, carefully lowering a pair of duffle bags to the concrete floor and closing the distance between them. Sitting close, but not too close.

Not close enough.

Figured. Len didn’t—couldn’t—blame him.

“Hey,” Barry finally spoke, scooting a little closer. “You ok?”

Len scoffed, “should be asking you that, Scarlet.”

“I’m fine. Pissed off at Lewis, but fine,” Barry waved a dismissive hand.

Len sighed. Tried to come up with something—anything—to say but kept coming up blank. Hadn’t even realized he moved until a lean arm wrapped around his waist and he gave into the urge to lean into Barry. Drawing comfort from his warmth—much more than he deserved—and twisting around until he could drop his head to Barry’s shoulder.

“Well...now you’ve met dear old dad,” he drawled with a self-deprecating smile.

Barry snorted, lips brushing against Len’s forehead. “Could’ve been worse—at least he didn’t shoot me.”

He knew Barry wasn’t joking—knew it wasn’t funny—but a short bark of laughter escaped anyway. Leaned back enough to look Barry over. The other seemed ok. Really ok, not putting on an act, but he still had to know, needed to ask, “he didn’t…?”

“No. I didn’t give him the chance,” Barry’s expression was serious, managing to pick up on everything Len wasn’t able to put into words.

“Good,” the thief felt his shoulders loosen up, enough to sag into Barry a tiny bit more. Letting himself relax as some of the tension he’d been carrying around since he woke up in the warehouse dissolved. He wasn’t alone...didn’t have to shoulder it all himself. Exhaustion seeped in, feeling the weariness all the way into his bones.

“Ok,” Barry gently nudged Len until he sat up. “Time for you to get some sleep.”

“Is it now?” He managed a smirk.

“Yup,” the other’s tone was decisive. “There’s a couple camping mats in the bag. Blankets and pillows, too. Somehow I doubt you’ve slept much since…” he trailed off. “I’ll keep watch.”

Glanced down and away, oh so tempted. He knew he needed some rest—otherwise he’d be useless. Except... “what about you?”

“I’ll wake you up in six hours if you insist, but I’ll be fine without a whole lot...I can stretch time when I sleep, so no big deal.”

“You say like it’s nothing,” Len huffed out a laugh, nudging the speedster.

Barry rolled his eyes and nudged back, getting up and extending a hand. “C’mon Len, up. Is this a good spot?”

Len turned the question over in his mind. Didn’t want to back them into a corner, but somewhere
more sheltered meant they’d be harder to sneak up on...easier for one of them to cover.

“I take it you’re gonna insist?” It was more statement than question, and he wasn’t expecting an answer. Just wanted—needed—to keep the banter going. Pretend it was a normal job as he gave the area a closer look. The aisle next to the office would do. Solid wall on one side, forklift rusting behind and tall stacks of pallets to make up the other side. Wouldn’t take much time for them to move another stack over in order to partially block the way in and serve as a perch for Barry to keep an eye on things. “This way.”

Barry followed Len as the thief strode through the warehouse, one bag in each hand. He figured they were heading for the office and it threw him when Len kept going past the room like it wasn’t even there. The dusty aisle he stopped in front of didn’t look anywhere near as appealing.

“Here?” Barry’s question echoed his confusion.

“Mhm. Plenty of cover and more than one way out. Go grab my gun off the table and hang onto it. Dear old dad won’t bother you that way,” Len replied, voice matter of fact. Like it was something he’d had a lot of practice relating when it came to Lewis.

The thought that Len had so much practice needing protection from his father made Barry’s heart hurt. It also made him want to punch things.

He put down the bag with the camping supplies and took off before Len could see any of that in his expression, taking a minor detour to the building they were targeting to hide his Flash suit. There wasn’t anything Barry could do to take away the scars that asshole etched into Len so far, but he’d do his damndest to make sure the bastard wouldn’t get the chance to inflict any more.

It took less than a heartbeat for him to tuck the suit away—the amount of dust in the hiding spot made him confident it wouldn’t be found.

The added jaunt didn’t take long, but it did give Barry enough time to pull himself back together. He skidded to a stop on the concrete floor next to Len, depositing the cold gun on top of a tall stack of crates and helping him move them until about half of the opening was covered. The end result was an almost-room—one easy way in and a bunch of other options to get out if someone was determined enough. Rather than waiting around or slowing down, Barry used the last of his momentum to inflate the camp mattress and pillow. He did have to slow down in order to make the bed since singed blankets kinda sucked.

Len, however, had other ideas. He took the bag from Barry’s unresisting grasp, selecting his own bedding and making the bed.

Once everything was settled Barry stood there. He knew what he wanted to do, he wanted to hug Len. Like, a lot. And not just because he thought the other could really, really use one—he needed the physical contact too.

Since Lewis pointed it out, the speedster realized just how much he and Len usually touched. It was something he hadn’t realized he missed while Len and Lisa were gone, but now that it’d been called to his attention it was so hard not to reach out. Especially since they were alone. The fact that said touching also tended to help Len relax was just an added bonus.

The only problem was that he had no idea how Len would react to the gesture...or how to approach him to ask.
“Do you mind if I…?” Barry trailed off, rubbing the back of his neck.

“What, Scarlet?”

“Can I...can I hug you?”

Len looked startled at that, blinking. He quickly recovered, opening his arms for Barry who practically flashed into them and latched on tight.

“I was so worried,” Barry breathed into his shoulder. “When you took off, and then nothing and you were over a day late, and god—when Lisa came and found us in Jitters…” he sighed and squeezed tighter, arms still nowhere near as tight as the hold Len had on him. Len almost collapsed into Barry and the speedster could feel him shaking.

“Hey, it’ll work out. Cisco’s nearly there, Len, I promise.” Barry rubbed his back in soothing circles. “Why didn’t you let me help from the start?” he asked quietly...even though he was pretty sure he knew the answer.

Len shook his head against Barry’s shoulder. “Later. I can’t...later, Scarlet.”

Barry hated how unsure Len sounded, “it’s gonna be ok. Sleep now?”

Len took a deep, shaking breath and nodded. He seemed really reluctant to let Barry go.

“I’ll be right up there. No way he’ll get past me.”

Len nodded curtly, arm darting out to and grabbing him, pulling him into a desperate kiss. Licking into his mouth, mapping the contours, devouring him. The kiss ended just as suddenly as it began, leaving Barry a little dazed when he pulled back and turned on his heel.

Len quickly shrugged out of his leather coat and toed off his boots, settling under the blankets. “Six hours, don’t forget.”

“I won’t. G’night Len.”

He pulled up the blanket and gave into the urge to tuck Len in, Then he scrambled up onto his perch to keep watch.

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So far Lewis’s sloppy plan had gone about how Barry expected—pretty badly. At least they got the van parked without any trouble, but as soon as they entered the building it became obvious that Lewis had nothing to do with Len’s success as a thief.

For real, though. They barely made it into the building before it all started to go sideways with malfunctioning key cards. Had he known that whoever was asked to make them had the hacking skills of, well, Joe, Barry would’ve taken the five minutes to make some himself. Even better, the bastard was ready to start shooting—going for his gun in full view of the camera pointed at the entrance and the street until Barry stepped it. Puppy dog eyes and some mutual griping about technology and shitty bosses got them in without any bloodshed, but it was a close thing.

Their disguises as the cleaning crew worked well—as long as they looked like they knew where they were going the guards they passed on the way up to the floor with the vault ignored them. But that’s where their luck ended.
There were two guards patrolling the floor...which they should've expected. Had expected, really. Lewis just hadn’t cared.

Given the way he already had his gun in hand, the lack of caring hadn’t changed. Barry needed to do something, but with Lewis’s attention fixed on the guards there was no way he’d miss Barry using his powers.

“I told you we should’ve gone the other way,” Len growled.

Lewis rounded on him, “this way’s faster. Time for plan B—I’ve got it all figured, son. You never did bother with alternatives.”

“I don’t need ‘em because I do my research.”

Barry tuned them out, taking advantage of Lewis’s distraction to zip the guards into a nearby storage closet where he gently knocked them out and stole the batteries from their phones and radios. “They’re gone now, must’ve turned,” he interrupted the argument.

“Must have,” Len drawled, eyes fixed on Barry.

“All worried about nothing, son. Since when do you give a damn about getting your hands dirty, anyway?” Lewis didn’t bother to wait for an answer, leading the way to the vault door. “Show me what you got, Sam.”

“Oh course,” Barry stepped up to the door, situating himself in front of the keypad. “Uh, you guys might wanna keep an eye on things in case the guards come back, this won’t take long,” he hoped.

Barry waited for Lewis to stop staring at him before getting started, using his speed to punch through all the possible combinations on the number pad until he hit the right one. That was the problem with Draycon’s systems—no shut down or cool off period, no matter how many times you entered the wrong code. It wasn’t long before the keypad flashed green and he felt the lock mechanism disengage.

“Told you Draycon was my jam,” Barry spun around with a grin.

“Nice job, Sam,” Lewis stepped forward to open the door. It swung open silently and he stepped into the doorway, turning to face them, “always good to go out on a high note.”

Barry didn’t even have time to wonder when Lewis grabbed the gun, eyes going wide at the sound of two shots being fired in rapid succession.

Chapter End Notes

...Aren't you guys glad this wasn't the cliffhanger I left you with since mid-September?

*ducks*

As always, Comments and grammar/typo picking are treasured.
Also, feel free to hit me up on tumblr.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!