### From There to Here

**Summary**

The tidal wave killed thousands. Iris, Joe, Cisco, Caitlin, his dad, they're all dead and Barry… Barry isn't okay. He’s broken and skewed and barely recognizes himself most days, but at least he still has Harrison. Sure, it’s not the healthiest relationship, but it’s *his* and there’s no way he’s letting Harrison leave him.

(Started as a one shot, that turned into a series of one shots, and then a full fledged fic, because apparently, I have little self control and absolutely no shame.)
Barry’s never considered what would happen if he ever met himself. It’s not like it’s happened before and he wasn’t planning on running through one of the wormholes into an alternate universe, so it’s not something he’s ever had to consider.

He probably should have.

"From there to here, and here to there, funny things are everywhere." -Dr. Seuss-

-Present Day (One Year After the Tidal Wave)-

The fight with Zoom started out bad and got better. That should have been his first clue. Barry was already winded and beaten half unconscious when he landed one blow, it wasn’t even a solid one if he’s completely honest with himself, and Zoom had turned tail and ran. Even as Barry’s inner voice – the one that sounded suspiciously like Joe – said not to follow, he was already off and running.

They weaved through the streets, Zoom always just out of sight and Barry was pushing, he was tapping into the Speedforce, his legs burning, trying, but he already knew he was losing. Ahead of him, Zoom rounded a corner and by the time Cisco’s voice was in his ear, frantically yelling at him stop, he’d already followed and slammed into the wormhole, the word “trap” ringing in his ears.

It knocked the wind out of him, took him by surprise and he came out of it shaken and confused. He was… not in Central City? He turned around in a circle, looking at the buildings around him. No, this was Central City, but he’d been running toward one of the older, business areas, away from the tall, sky scrappers and towards the warehouses.

In his Central City, this area had been revitalized and rebuilt. It was considered historical. Here, everything looked abandoned. Windows were boarded, the streets dark, and a damp smell hung in the air. It took him a second to realize none of the street lamps were even on. Behind him, the wormhole wavered, giving off an eerie kind of light that made the street feel almost haunted.

His ear piece crackled and Barry tapped it. “Can you hear me? Guys, are you there?”

Through the static, he heard a familiar voice say, “Barry?” and the blood in his veins turned to ice. He knew that voice, but that was impossible. Harrison Wells was dead.

“Barry, the coms went out for a second. Are you okay?” Except he wasn’t, not here, because that was Dr. Wells, clear as day and definitely alive.

“Yeah, no, I’m good. What happened?” And that was him. The other him.

“I’m unsure, but there was an energy spike in the occurrence.”

“On it.”
Barry moved first and thought later. He wasn’t sure what was going on, but he needed to figure a few things about before he confronted himself. Central City had always had a bustling night life. Barry was used to bright lights and the thumping of loud music coming from clubs and bars. Here, things were quieter. Not completely silent, but as Barry ran up the side of a building and stopped twenty stories at the top, looking over downtown, there was something missing.

It took him a minute to realize it was people. They were there, but not in the numbers he was used to. He ran down again and through the emptier streets. Buildings that had always been the heart of Central City night life were boarded up, roped off street and scaffolding constructed. All clear signs of rebuilding, but from what?

“I’m here. I don’t see anything.”

Barry ducked into a particularly dark alley. He could see the faint outline of S.T.A.R. Labs not far away, darker than he remembered.

“If it was another metahuman, they may be hiding.”

“Right, I’m gonna look around, keep an ear out for trouble.”

“Be careful, Barry.”

A painful burst in Barry’s chest at the familiar, false warmth in those words made him move. He might not understand what was going on here, but he knew someone who would.

He dodged through the darker Central City, eyeing the increased homeless population with sympathy and curiosity. Jitters was boarded up. The club he’d gone to with Caitlin, black. As he approached S.T.A.R. Labs, he saw the fencing around the facility was mangled. There were sections still up, others pushed down or gone completely, but no lights on in the parking lot. Boards were up over most of the windows on the first few floors, blocking any view he might have had to the inside and once inside, blocking out the light that usually illuminated the exterior halls.

The interior, however, was well lit and easy to navigate, nothing different, no traps or signs of evil. From inside, everything looked the same and if he hadn’t been through the city, he wouldn’t have noticed the difference. At least, not until he stopped in the cortex and saw Harrison Wells sitting at the computers.

Dr. Wells looked up, confusion clear in his pinched brow. “Barry, I thought you…”

His eyes flitted down to Barry’s Flash emblem, then to his screen and back up. “You’re not my Barry.”

Barry’s entire body shuddered with revulsion at the words ‘my Barry,’ but before he could say anything, a red blur streaked into the room, throwing itself into the seat next to Dr. Wells and he found himself staring at… himself.

There was an awkward moment where this new Barry hadn’t noticed anyone else in the room yet. He held up what had to be ten white bags, a grin on his face and eyes on Dr. Wells. “Hey, so, nothing panned out. I’ll let Eddie know we might have another meta on the lose. Picked up food on the way here and hey, that’s me.”

Barry stared at Barry Two and Barry Two cocked his head to the side as he set down the bags. “Huh, I like the white on the emblem. It really makes the Flash symbol pop. Burger?”

Dr. Wells leaned back in his chair and removed his glasses, but didn’t take his eyes off Barry, who
was torn between screaming at this version of himself to get away from the murdering bastard and a sudden realization that he wasn’t entirely certain this version of Dr. Wells actually was Eobard Thawne.

When no one spoke, Barry Two looked between them. “He is real, isn’t he? I’m not hallucinating again? Or is he evil? Should I be fighting right now?”

Dr. Wells stared, calculating. “You are not hallucinating, Barry, and I believe the readings from his suit are interfering with yours, which would indicate they’re running on the same frequency. It would appear, however improbable, that this is you from a not too dissimilar universe. He also has yet to attack either of us.”

“So… not evil?”

“Not as of yet.”

Barry Two relaxed considerably. “Oh, thank god, because I’m starving.”

“For real?!” Barry Two had already unwrapped one burger and shoved it into his mouth. “A you from another universe shows up in S.T.A.R. Labs and you just… eat a burger?”

Around the mouthful, Barry Two managed a muffled, “I’m hungry.”

What the hell? Barry looked around for a voice of reason and it was then that he realized there wasn’t one. In fact, there was no one else in the cortex at all, no Caitlin or Cisco, just the three of them.

“What… where is everyone?”

Barry Two looked around the room and shrugged. “Everyone who?”

“Cisco? Caitlin?”

Dr. Wells’ mouth tightened, but Barry Two didn’t seem to notice. “They’re dead.”

Dead? Barry looked to Dr. Wells for signs of guilt, but the only thing he saw was concern, aimed at Barry Two, who seemed to have forgotten his food. “Are they… where you’re from, are they alive?”

Barry nodded, “Yes. When you say they’re dead, do you mean…”

“Everyone.” Barry Two interrupted. “Caitlin, Cisco, Joe, Iris, Dad, everyone.”

What the hell had he just run into?

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Dr. Wells had insisted Barry Two finish his food before going further. Without Cisco there weren’t any Cisco Bars and Barry Two insisted the ones Dr. Wells made didn’t taste right. He ate one a day,
otherwise he’d drive Central City’s food supply into the ground, but whenever possible, he loaded up on real food.

Dr. Wells sighed. “I’m still not entirely convinced Big Belly Burger counts as real food.”

“That’s because you’re old and grumpy and you like to tell people what to do so they never forget you’re smarter than them.”

“I’m not…” Barry Two leaned over and oh god, he kissed Dr. Wells. Barry looked away quickly, his stomach turning a little. It hadn’t been a deep or passionate kiss, a simply peck, but a kiss none the less and that was wrong. Or maybe not? It depended on who Dr. Wells really was.

“Hm, it appears you’ve made yourself uncomfortable.”

“Huh?” Barry Two pulled back, momentarily confused before remembering Barry was there. “Oh, hey, yeah, sorry, that was… You’re not…?”

“No.” Barry chanced a look back, but the two were still sitting close. Uncomfortably close, practically knee to knee.

“You’re single?” Barry Two shoved another handful of fries in his mouth.

“Kind of? There’s a girl, Patty Spivot…”

“For real?” Did his other self have to raise his eyebrows like it was that much of a surprise? “She’s cute.”

Dr. Wells frowned at his Barry. “You’ve never mentioned her.”

“I so did. She’s the new transfer that’s read all my case reports.”

“Ah, yes. Your groupie. I stand corrected, you’ve never mentioned you thought she was cute.”

Barry Two tossed his sixth wrapper in the trash and stood with a groan. “As much as I’d love to sit here and watch you wallow in your own misguided jealousy…”

“I’m not jealous, Barry.”

“…I think I’ve put off talking to myself long enough.”

Dr. Wells patted Barry Two on the leg, squeezing the thigh before he stood up. Barry did a double take, literally stepping back. He hadn’t realized Dr. Wells wasn’t in his wheelchair. It took every ounce of self control Barry had not to rush Dr. Wells and demand how he was walking. For all he knew this Dr. Wells hadn’t faked his injury after the explosion, or he hadn’t needed to because he wasn’t evil.

As soon as Dr. Wells was gone, Barry relaxed. He didn’t move to get any closer to the other version of himself, but it was easier to breathe and his subconscious was no longer ringing with murderous impulses.

The cortex was even quieter without Dr. Wells there. Whereas Barry had relaxed, Barry Two seemed to close off, tensing under the scrutiny. Barry considered his options before pulling over a chair and sitting on the other side of the table.

“So, what happened here?”
Barry Two looked at his knees instead of meeting Barry’s eyes. “You know Mark Mardon?”

Barry nodded, but didn’t interrupt.

“Joe killed his brother and he wanted revenge. He can control the weather here. Can he do that where you’re from?”

“He tried to drown the city with a tidal wave.”

Barry Two laughed, but it sounded forced, sarcastic. “He didn’t try anything. He, um, kidnapped Joe, got Iris and me to the shore and then… I tried to stop it, but I’d barely started running when the Reverse-Flash showed up. He grabbed me, dragged me out of Central City, beat me half to death, and left me there. By the time I woke up, the water had receded, thousands of people were dead, everyone I cared about was…”

He choked up and rung his hands together. “The city’s been trying to rebuild, but with the meta problem, it’s hard to get funding. Insurance companies don’t want to pay out and not everyone has the time and energy to fight it in court. A lot of people just moved on.”

“And Dr. Wells?”

Barry Two turned to the door behind him and then back, a sad smile on his face. “He’s all I have left. He was here with Cisco and Caitlin when it hit. I think he blames himself for not being able to save them.”

That didn’t make sense. Or maybe it did. “Wasn’t he paralyzed?”

“Right? I’ve told him there wasn’t anything he could have done, but sometimes there’s just no talking sense into the man.”

“But he can walk now?”

“Well, of course, ’cause the… wait, is your Harrison still paralyzed?”

“My Dr. Wells is dead.”

Barry Two faltered, finally making eye contact. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” He didn’t elaborate. Oliver was always telling him to evaluate a situation before jumping into it and that’s what he was doing, gathering all the facts first. If he’d lost almost everyone, he knew how hard he would cling to whatever was left. Convincing Barry Two that Dr. Wells was evil wouldn’t be easy, so Barry had to be sure.

At the dismissal, Barry Two dropped his eyes again. “There was a meta we came across a few months after the tidal wave that could re-grow limbs. Harrison got a sample of its DNA and was able to engineer a serum that repaired the damage to his spine.”

“That’s amazing.” Or just really convenient.

“*He’s* amazing. I don’t know what I’d do without him.”

It was those words more than anything that convinced Barry he was right. He couldn’t jump into this without proof.
His team would be working on a way to get him back and it wouldn’t take long. Barry figured he had a day at most before they stabilized the wormhole enough for him to go back through. Dr. Wells agreed to keep an eye on the readings and let them know when things changed. In the meantime, both Barrys should get some rest.

When Barry hesitated, Barry Two suggested they could have a sex. “There’s a bed in Harrison’s office. Don’t worry, he doesn’t have to join us – wouldn’t be able to keep up, anyway. What? It’s not cheating, more like really creative masturbation.” Dr. Wells looked less than amused and Barry decided rest sounded like a really good idea.

Barry Two huffed, “Spoilsport,” and changed out of his Flash Suit. “I’ll take him back to our place.”

“I’ll join you when I’ve finished up here.”

Barry averted his eyes for the goodbye, but not before he saw tongue and actually, no, that was wrong. It didn’t even matter if Dr. Wells was really Dr. Wells or Eobard Thawne.

When they were done – and it took a lot longer than Barry thought was necessary – Barry Two winked and said, “Keep up.” Before shooting off through S.T.A.R. Labs.

It wasn’t hard. Either Barry Two was holding back or he wasn’t as fast as Barry. It was impossible to tell. The city had gotten even darker in the late hour, which made sense. Without as many people in the city, there wouldn’t be the need for so many twenty-four hour conveniences.

They streaked through the dark city, into the wealthier area and came to a stop at a familiar front door. “This is Dr. Wells’ house.”

“Yeah.” Barry Two fished out a set of keys. He turned the alarm off with the touch of a button and opened the door for Barry. As they stepped in, the lights turns on, the fireplace activated and Barry Two pulled his jacket off, throwing it on the table.

Barry followed his counterpart through the house and into the kitchen. It looked mostly the same, but there were clear signs of… well, himself. Books that he knew were his laid around, a picture of Iris and Joe in a frame on the coffee table next to one of his parents, magazines that he’d subscribed to and forgotten to cancel. When Barry Two put a cup of chocolate milk in front of him and he found himself holding an over sized plastic cup with a worn image of Funshine Bear. He didn’t need to look at the bottom to know Iris’s name would be there, but he did anyway.

“So, you live here?”

“Mhm.” Barry Two pulled another cup out, Good Luck Bear, and behind it Barry could see the entire collection of Carebear cups that Joe had bought Iris when she was little, before Barry moved in with them. They took up most of a shelf, surrounded by expensive looking glass wine flutes. Barry Two poured his own milk and looked at Barry while he took the first drink. “It really bothers you, doesn’t it?”

“What?”

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“Me and Harrison. Like I just thought maybe it was a little weird for you or something, ‘cause it’s different, but it bothers you.”

Barry closed his eyes and sighed. “Yeah, okay, it does. You, I, we were in love with Iris and you went from her to… that.”

“Okay, first of all, rude. He’s a very attractive man.”

“He’s old enough to be our father.”

“I watched them drag Dad’s bloated corpse out of Iron Heights after two days. I pulled Iris’s dead body from the rubble. I wouldn’t have recognized what was left of Joe if it weren’t for his badge. Cisco and Caitlin were washed out with the debris along with… countless others. I helped with the search and rescue, but it was just body after body. The death toll kept rising.” Barry Two’s voice had lost all humor. “I don’t know if you know what that feels like. I don’t know what happened in your timeline, but don’t judge me because I clung onto the only thing I had left.”

“What about Oliver? Felicity? Team Arrow?”

“They helped for the first two weeks, but after that Oliver had to get back to Starling City. They couldn’t stay here and I wasn’t leaving Central City. I had a job and the CCPD lost more than half their officers, I couldn’t leave them like that.”

Barry tried to imagine what that would have felt like, but he couldn’t. He couldn’t even begin to process losing that much, but he knew he wouldn’t have left either. “Did, um, you said Cisco and Caitlin were washed out. You never found the bodies?”

“Nope,” Barry Two suddenly smiled, too big to be entirely honest, “but hey, this way I get to pretend they died a quick and painless death instead of an autopsy report detailing the horrible ways they suffered before the universe decided to put them out of their misery. Chocolate chip cookie?”

Barry’s stomach did a slow roll at the box of cookies Barry Two had pulled out of the cabinet and he shook his head.

Barry Two opened the box, anyway. “So, what about you? I’m assuming everyone is alive where you come from?”

“Almost. Eddie and Ronnie didn’t make it when the singularity opened up over Central City.”

Barry Two stopped, mouth open. “Singularity? For real? A black hole opened up over Central City? How are you even alive?”

Slowly, Barry worked around the details in explaining what had happened in his universe. He was careful that when mentioning Eobard Thawne, he never related him to being Harrison Wells. Cisco and Caitlin’s bodies being missing were a little too much of a coincidence for him. If the same thing that had happened in Barry’s timeline had happened here, if Wells had killed Cisco, he would have killed Caitlin. She’d been about to tell him something over the phone that morning and Wells didn’t leave lose ends. Bodies would have posed a problem. It was difficult to explain a crushed heart as being somehow related to the tidal wave. It was possible, in fact probably, that Wells had killed Cisco and Caitlin, gotten Barry Two out of Central City and then come back to dispose of the bodies.

However, none of his hunches counted as proof of anything. He needed to get back to S.T.A.R. Labs. If Wells was still Eobard, the room would still be there, with Gideon and all the proof he needed.
Barry stared at himself sprawled out across Harrison’s couch. At least he’d finally gotten him out of the Flash suit. It was weird to see it, almost the same, but not quite, on a him that was almost him, if he hadn’t…

The front door opened and Barry stayed where he was, leaning against the wall of the fireplace as Harrison came in, mindful of their sleeping guest as Barry had texted him on the development a few minutes prior. A hand came to rest on his shoulder and he didn’t move away from it; didn’t lean into it, either.

A moment later, the hand squeezed, a silent indication that he should follow and Barry did, not wanting to wake his other self. He’d made so much progress in the last year, hadn’t lashed out in over a month, which, come to think of it, he was overdue for a temper tantrum.

The bedroom was dimly lit, silk sheets and goosefeather comforter half covered in Barry’s Star Wars fleece blanket. Barry threw himself on the bed as soon as the door was closed and locked. He stretched out and groaned. The best thing by far about newer construction was the sound proofing. Barry knew from experience that he could make as much noise as he wanted without disturbing the other him.

He remembered Joe’s house and his old apartment downtown. Every little sound had bled through the walls. He’d hated that then. Missed it now. He missed waking up to the sound of Joe trying to sneak out the front door without waking them.

“You’re pouting.” Barry rolled over and sat up. Harrison was standing in the bathroom door, shirt tail pulled out, cuffs unbuttoned. He didn’t bother responding as Harrison walked over to set his glasses on the bedside table. “Has Mr. Allen attempted to enlighten you as to my true identity?”

Barry rolled his eyes. “Not yet.”

Harrison pressed his hand into Barry’s leg, just over the knee. “Has he said anything?”

“We compared timelines. It looks like the divergence is Mark Mardon. He tried to stop the tidal wave and ended up resetting the timeline, I tried to stop it…”

“And I stopped you, I know. You weren’t ready. Clearly this Barry was making more progress with his speed.”

The hand squeezed his leg and Barry moved away. “He said you crushed Cisco’s heart.”

Harrison’s eyebrows raised in amusement. “You knew I killed them. I never kept that from you.”

“You never told me how.”

“I thought it was poetic, given the situation.”

Barry supposed it was – Cisco had loved Harrison and finding out his surrogate father was the
Reverse-Flash would have crushed his heart, metaphorically speaking, before Harrison crushed it with his fist, literally speaking – that being said, “You hate poetry.”

In response, Harrison reached back into his pocket. “I brought you a gift.”

Great, like today hadn’t already been bad enough. Listening to the other Barry talk about his friends had made the wounds feel fresh and the last thing he needed was another one of Harrison’s little tokens.

The chain that dropped from his hand was expectantly familiar. Harrison didn’t do things by half, if he was going to go out of his way to make a point, it would be an obvious one. Still, as Barry watched it swing between those long, thin fingers, it took him a second to place the pendant hanging at the end of the silver chain. “Patty?! Man, I liked her.”

“That’s the point.”

Of course it was. “Yeah, but I’ve only known her for a month. You couldn’t have gone after someone that really meant something to me?”

“You have someone in mind?”

“I don’t know, Singh?” Since Joe had died, the Captain had taken it on himself to give Barry personal attention, inviting him to family events, checking in on him, indulging his ‘hunches’ and not that Barry wanted Captain Singh dead, but… Patty?

Harrison dropped the necklace on the bed next to Barry’s knee. “I don’t recall you ever referring to Captain Singh as cute.”

Without thinking, Barry picked up the necklace and said, “No, but his fiancé is. Goddamn it!”

He didn’t need to look to see the spark of jealousy that said the next time Harrison felt like giving Barry a token, it was going to be Rob who provided it. Why couldn’t Barry learn to keep his stupid mouth shut? He knew how this worked. At least he had some time. If Harrison had removed Patty, it would be a few weeks or months before he decided to do it again, depending on how cooperative Barry was.

Good thing Barry knew how to be cooperative. Even better, the other him may not have realized it, but he’d given Barry the kind of ammunition he hadn’t had in a long time.

Gripping the necklace, Barry straddled Harrison’s thighs, arms hanging loosely over his shoulders. “You know, you’re not nearly as attractive when you’re jealous.”

The long fingers that had held the necklace, dug into Barry’s hips in warning. “Careful, Barry.”

“Maybe I should take up with Eddie. He’s young, pretty. Get him talking about Iris, he drinks like a fish. I bet I could get him drunk enough to…”

Barry was flat on his back before he could finish, Harrison pressing his wrists into the bed above his head. It took a second for Harrison to get the angry vibrating under control and Barry pressed his hips up against it, the subtle shake of Harrison’s thighs sending a shudder of pleasure from his hardening cock to his spine.

Harrison frowned, grinding the bones of Barry’s wrists together. “I thought you liked Eddie.”

“Oh, I love Eddie.” Harrison’s eyes flashed red again and Barry smiled. “But you won’t kill him.”
“So sure of yourself?”

“So sure of you, Eobard Thawne.” Harrison froze and Barry’s smile widened as he parroted his other self’s words at the man over him. “The Reverse-Flash, his name is Eobard Thawne, yes, like Eddie. They’re related. In my world, Eddie killed himself to save us. It erased Eobard from history, causing a paradox that opened a singularity over Central City. Ronnie died stopping it.”

Barry lifted his head an inch off the bed, his nose nearly touching Harrison’s. “I could fuck Eddie right here in our bed and you won’t kill him. You’d want to, but you can’t.”

“There are other people I can kill.”

“Go ahead. You were going to anyway.”

The silence that followed was electrifying. Pushing Harrison was a gamble. If he didn’t go far enough, Harrison would leave and find someone else to take it out on, if he went too far, he’d take as much of it out on Barry as he could without doing permanent damage before leaving to find someone else. Just enough, though, and…

Harrison pressed down on Barry, his voice vibrating, soft and deep as he spoke. “It looks like someone needs to be reminded of his place.”

Bingo.

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“Wake up.”

Barry breathed in and instantly regretted it, fire spreading through his torso. “Owww.”

“Get up. You’re cooking.”

*What the hell?* “You don’t let me cook. You threatened to cut off my left index finger if I ever touched so much as a spatula in your kitchen.”

“Not you. The other you.”

It took him a second, in part because Barry was still trying to breathe through the pain and when it came back to him, he groaned. “Oh, fuck me.”

Harrison chuckled from the open closet door. “I believe I did that last night, several times, but if you’re so eager, I could certainly make the time.”

Barry shoved his face in his pillow and held up a middle finger in salute. Harrison ruffled his hair affectionately. As the bedroom door opened and closed, there was a faint waft of a familiar smell, but he couldn’t place it.

Normal wear and tear, he would have already healed from, but Harrison knew how to make it last.
He needed food if he wanted to recover, but there wasn’t much in the house. It wouldn’t be a punishment if he recovered too quickly.

He rolled out of the bed stiffly and made his way into the bath, washing away the evening’s activities. It was never without pleasure. Harrison enjoyed the game. He enjoyed bringing Barry to the edge, dragging him down, only to build him back up, all with Barry knowing it wasn’t going to end for hours. That he wasn’t going to get any kind of release until Harrison allowed it, until he thought Barry had learned his lesson.

At first, Barry had tried to play dead. He’d tried pretending to be subdued, but Harrison always seemed to know the difference. It didn’t matter now, though. Now, Barry knew that no matter what else, in the end, Harrison would make it good. Barry hadn’t even known it was possible to feel that much pleasure when you were in that much pain, but Harrison was full of surprises.

The bath helped and after, he dressed in jeans and a t-shirt and went to find Barry. The moment the door opened, the smell hit him again, strong and just as familiar. “What is that smell?”

The other him turned around, holding out a plate with a stack of brown rectangles on it. “Cisco Bar?”

Barry’s stomach did the strangest combination of painful twist and hungry clench. His mouth watered instantly. Cisco Bars. He missed Cisco Bars so much. He missed them almost as much as he missed Cisco himself, except if he had Cisco, Cisco could make Cisco Bars, which would be win-win.

He sat down carefully, cringing as every part of him protested the movement, but then he was eating the bar and oh, god, that was good.

The other Barry gave him a strange look, one that Barry couldn’t place because he was too busy moaning over the rush of calories and flavor that wasn’t those stupid Indian Chinese fusion bars Harrison insisted on making.

“I tried one of Dr. Wells’ bars this morning and figured I’d do you a solid. Cisco taught me how to make these a few months ago, just in case. I wrote the recipe down if you wanted to…”

Barry reached forward and snatched the paper off the counter and stared at it with wide eyes. Harrison had to be exaggerating when he’d said he’d cut off Barry’s left index finger, right? Although, an exact finger was a little specific for an empty threat. For Cisco Bars, though? For Cisco Bars, he might be willing to risk it. Besides, it wasn’t like he needed his left index finger to run.

The other Barry looked around the kitchen, clearly uncomfortable, which was actually kind of funny. Barry had never been in a position to see himself flustered.

“So, was Dr. Wells heading to S.T.A.R. Labs?”

Barry shook his head. “No, he’s got a meeting with Captain Singh this morning.”

“Captain Singh?”

“Harrison is the scientific advisor for the CCPD Anti-Metahuman Task Force. I, on the other hand, have the day off.” Barry took a gulp from the large cup of water his other self set in front of him. “You said your team wouldn’t take long getting you back?”

“We know how to stabilize the wormhole, but it’ll take some time. Do you mind if we go to S.T.A.R. Labs?”
There it was. Barry could see the determination in his own face, which again, not something he’d ever been in a position to do before. Harrison was right. He was ridiculously expressive. He’d have to work on that. For now, better to let this play out the way his other self wanted.

“Yeah, sure. There are clothes in the spare bedroom. Take a shower, get changed and we’ll head over.”

He ate another Cisco Bar, because his accelerated healing was burning through the calories and because, seriously, Cisco Bars, then downed the last of the chocolate milk. It was enough that by the time they were ready to run, he was mostly healed. Usually, it took him days. Harrison’s bars didn’t have the same caloric punch that Cisco’s did. He ate several throughout the day. Barry, on the other hand, would rather take a day off work to heal at less than half his normal speed than choke down more than one.

The run over aggravated some of his wounds, but he focused on watching the other him take in the city. It was different during the day. The devastation that still plagued the city nearly a year later was even more stark. The population had been halved—from the tidal wave, people leaving rather when rebuilding was too expensive, and still more people abandoning their homes when the metahuman problem became more prevalent.

Barry did what he could, but it wasn’t nearly enough.

The other Barry had said the singularity had ripped apart skyscrapers and devastated the city, but it was rebuilding. The other Barry was helping with that, both by fixing up building in his free time and stopping the metahumans from doing more damage. Then again, the other Barry had a team.

Barry didn’t have that. He didn’t have Cisco and Caitlin backing him up. He didn’t have Joe to support him or his dad to make proud. He didn’t have Iris to fight for. He had Harrison Wells, Eobard Thawne, the Reverse-Flash and Harrison had one goal. Fixing up the city didn’t exactly figure into it.

They came to a stop in the cortex, eerily dark and quiet. Barry didn’t go there alone very often. Too many memories.

“You okay?”

He looked over and it took him a second to realize he was holding his side. “Fine, just catching my breath.”

The other Barry didn’t say anything further on it. Instead, he looked around the room, taking the time he hadn’t the night before to actually take it in. Most of the desks had been bolted down, but they’d had to buy new computers, new lab equipment and Harrison hadn’t bothered to replace anything that wasn’t strictly necessary for his purposes. Caitlin’s lab was mostly bare, save the hospital bed and IV rack in case Barry got injured. Well, unintentionally injured, anyway.

When he was done, he turned back to Barry. “I’ve got something you need to see.”

Barry shrugged and followed himself down the hall, into the elevator. It didn’t take long to figure out where they were going.

The room lit up around them. Harrison’s Reverse-Flash suit was on its form, the podium in tact. The room had been sealed from the water that flooded most of the building.

The other Barry stood in the middle of the room, arms crossed over his chest and watched Barry take it in. Or not. He’d seen it before. Gideon and the future was one of the first things Harrison showed

Finally, he looked up and the recrimination was clear. “How long have you known he’s the Reverse-Flash?”

“Not long after. I nearly got myself killed fighting a meta. He didn’t have time to change before jumping in to save me. When did you know I knew?”

“This morning. There aren’t many people that can hurt me and make me stay hurt. So, you knew who he was and you still…”

“I already said, you don’t get to judge.”

The other Barry’s arms dropped to his sides. “Are you insane? He killed our mom. He…”

“Yes.”

“What?”

Barry leaned back against the wall, letting it take some of the weight. Would it kill Harrison to put a chair in there? “After the search and rescue was called off, everyone in the department was required to take a psych eval and grief counseling. I stole a look at the results. Apparently, I’m mentally unstable, but I scored very low on homicidal tendencies and the department was desperate, so I got to keep my job. Lucky me.”

The other him paced the room a few times. “He’s using you. You know that, right?”

“I know.”

Apparently, the other Barry didn’t believe him. “He just wants you to open the wormhole and…”

“I said, I know.” God, was he always this annoying? Seriously, where did he get off talking to… himself that way? “It’s not like he hides anything from me anymore. Well, almost. Thank you for the tip about Eddie, by the way, that’s going to be very useful.”

It explained how Eddie had survived. Barry had figured dumb luck. The detective didn’t even remember the water hitting him, just a big blank until he woke up in the rubble hours later. Harrison must have knocked him out and left him there after the water receded.

“I can help you. We can help you. I’ll get Cisco and Caitlin to…”

“I don’t want your help. I want you to go back to your perfect little world and leave me to mine. I’m fine.” A hand jabbed his ribs, lightning fast, and he double over, clutching at the healing bruises. “Ass!”

“He’s hurting you.”

What was it going to take to get himself off his back? “And I enjoy every minute of it.”

There was something immensely satisfying in watching himself go pale with disgust. “So you’re what, going to let him abuse you until he finishes rebuilding the accelerator and then go back and erase it?”

“I’m not erasing anything.” Anger welled up, rare and dangerous. He didn’t let himself get angry anymore. It didn’t help anything and when he was angry, he did and said stupid things. “He did this. He stopped me and he let everyone else die and he doesn’t get to go back and make it better! He has
to live with it. Here. Now. With me.”

Dr. Wells stepped through the door as he finished, frowning. “That’s not very nice, Barry.”

The anger in Barry Two’s face smoothed out to something else. Not happy, but not scared, despite what he must have known Dr. Wells overheard.

“I brought you cookies, although I’m not entirely sure you deserve them.”

“Cookies!” Barry Two dove forward and took the small, brown bag Harrison held out. “Oo, chocolate chocolate chip with walnuts. You really do love me.”

“On occasion.”

Dr. Wells stepped into the room and Barry stepped back. Barry Two ignored them as he moaned around a mouthful of chocolate. “Mr. Allen, I received word that the readings on the wormhole you came through have stopped shifting. I believe it’s safe for you to return.”

Behind him, a voice said, “That is correct.” Barry jumped back away from it, startled, then realized he’d moved closer to Dr. Wells and couldn’t decide what to do. So far, this Wells seemed only to want him to leave, which was good, except Barry wasn’t sure he should.

Barry Two rolled his eyes, sighing loudly. “Go. Give Cisco a kiss for me.”

“What… we… I do not kiss Cisco.”

“Too bad.” Barry Two grinned. “Maybe our two worlds aren’t as alike as I thought.”

He was joking. He had to be, because Barry and Cisco had never… not that Cisco was unattractive, but Barry was… okay not strictly, there had been a few times in college and one time… but this was Cisco, his best friend. Barry Two leaned into Dr. Wells. “You were right, I do look constipated when I’m confused.”

Okay, seriously, he was done with this. This wasn’t his world, it wasn’t even really his problem. Still, “You’re sure. We really can help…”

“And I said I don’t want your help. I want you to go.”

Barry hesitated one second more, but he could see it wasn’t getting him anywhere. The more he mentioned helping him, the harder Barry Two dug his heels in and why not? That was exactly what Barry had done after the singularity. It just… it didn’t feel like his place. It made him uncomfortable and confused and a lot scared to think he wasn’t as far from that as he would have thought.

Without another word, he ran out of S.T.A.R. Labs and back through the city, past the boarded up buildings, the homeless, the scant people walking around. It felt deserted, empty, wrong. He immediately recognized the smell of mold in the historic district, from building left damp and sitting after the flood.

He braced himself before he hit the wormhole, half expecting to bounce off it, but instead there was the altogether unsettling sensation of being pulled through, tugging at his inside and spit out the other end, breathless and disoriented.

Barry came to an abrupt stop just inside the alleyway, looking out onto the street at the people walking past the open shops, everything alive, bustling, right.
“Barry?”

He turned and standing on either side of the wormhole were Cisco, Caitlin, Jay and Iris, all looking at him expectantly, alive and breathing and thank god! Rushing forward, he hugged Caitlin, hugged Jay, hugged Iris, and what the hell, kissed Cisco, because, seriously, he’d never been so happy to see anyone in his entire life.

Cisco leaned back, eyes wide. “Barry? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, I’m fine, I swear, just, missed you. So much. All of you.” Caitlin and Jay exchanged looks. “You need to destabilized that thing, like immediately.”

Cisco moved first, Jay following to help turn off the stabilizer they’d constructed in the alley while Caitlin and Iris rushed to check on Barry, his heart rate, blood sugar, pupil dilation, while he assured them he was fine. “I’m good, nothing happened, I’m not hurt.”

Across the street, someone pointed at them and Barry lowered his voice. “We’ve been noticed.”

Caitlin nodded, “Right, get to the lab, we’ll meet you there.”

*****

Joe showed up with the rest, alerted to his return by Iris. Not that Barry was complaining. He hugged Joe until the older man managed to choke out that he couldn’t breathe.

They’d grabbed burritos on the way over and while he ate, he explained the other universe in all it’s disturbing detail.

Cisco shook his head. “That’s gross.”

“I know right?!”

“Who the hell would make an Indian Chinese fusion protein bar?”

“Are you for real? There’s a me out there in an abusive, sexual relationship with Harrison Wells because I apparently had a psychotic break when you all died and that’s what you take away from it?”

“Yeah, no, every time you say that I erase it from my mind, because otherwise, I’m gonna have a psychotic break. Is that my t-shirt?”

He looked down and now that Cisco mentioned it, sure enough, that was Cisco’s shirt. Not one of his favorites, but still. “Do you want it?”

“Did he wear it?”

“Maybe?” It had been in the guest closet, but it looked like all of Barry’s clothes were in there.
“Burn it.”

“Fair enough.” Barry stood up. “I’m going to go home, take a shower, and scrub every inch of that universe off me. You guys are going to keep working on a way to keep anything from coming out of there.”

“I’ll drive you.” It was a thinly veiled way for Joe to say he wanted to talk alone, but Barry nodded and Joe picked up his jacket to follow. As soon as they were in the car, he asked, “You want to help him?”

Barry stretched his arms back behind his head, gripping head rest tightly before going limp. “I don’t know. He doesn’t want it.”

“Neither did you.”

No, he hadn’t, but he’d needed it. Barry Two clearly needed it, too, but it was a completely different universe with completely problems. Barry got the feeling that if they locked Wells up, Barry Two would most likely break him out. If they killed Wells, what would that do to him? Barry Two had said he had no one else, but that wasn’t true. He had Eddie, he had Singh, he would make more friends and family – unless he wasn’t willing to.

Then there was the problem parallel universes presented in general. By going back and helping, would they be creating another universe where they didn’t? Would there always be one where there was a crazy him running around sleeping with Wells?

In the end, he came to one very simple conclusion. “We deal with Zoom for now. If we live through that, we’ll consider it.”

*****

Barry rocked the chair back and forth with his foot, staring at the ceiling of S.T.A.R. Labs, waiting. Waiting. Waiting. He was bored. He’d finished the cookies forever ago. He wanted to go out, run, his body tingled to do something, but he was supposed to stay. Sit. Good boy.

The Cisco Bars had given him energy he hadn’t had in forever and he was desperate to use it, but no.

A rush of wind signaled the return of Harrison, clad in his yellow suit, eyes red and body vibrating softly. The hood came down and Barry lolled his head back over the headrest, eyeing Harrison in what he hoped was a lazy fashion. “You took too long.”

“Your leg is vibrating.”

Barry looked down, pressing his hand to his knee to stop the movement. Stupid excess energy. At least he’d finished healing. After his little outburst, he was pretty sure Harrison would have wanted a round two tonight, regardless of whether Barry was healed or not.

“I’ve tuned the wormhole to a rotating frequency that should prevent anyone from coming back
through anytime soon.”

“Anyone like Professor Zoom?”

“Or you.” Harrison ran his hands through Barry’s head, pulled it back by his hair, just enough to hurt. “What you said earlier, it changes nothing. The plan will go forward.”

Barry pulled his head to the side and Harrison let him. “I’m not letting you leave me.”

“You would be getting your family back, Barry. Your friends…”

“Joe used to say, you make your bed, you lie in it. I hope you enjoy your bed, Harrison. I know I do.”

There was an angry flash of red and a little thrill ran up Barry’s spine. He had no doubt Harrison would do everything in his power to change Barry’s mind. In fact, Barry was looking forward to it.
Eddie had known Barry was a little… off. Even if Captain Singh hadn’t pulled him aside and broken every rule in the book by showing him Barry’s psych eval, he would have known. He just never realized exactly how bad it had gotten. For Barry, Eddie was his trump card and Harrison had finally stepped over the line. (Set after Barry-Prime's visit)

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot. Nothing is going to get better. It's not." -Dr. Seuss-

-Present Day (One Year and One Month After the Tidal Wave)-

The chair was extremely uncomfortable and getting worse by the hour. Eddie wasn’t sure how long he’d been tied up down there, but it had to have been days. Dr. Wells was a metahuman, a crazy, evil, metahuman from the future and Eddie had no idea what he’d done to get the attention of said madman, but he knew it had something to do with Barry Allen. Maybe. Probably.

The last thing he remembered was Barry wanting to go out for drinks after work and then talking about Iris and one drink led to five or six until he’d blacked out and woken up in a basement, tied to a chair with Wells ranting about how he shouldn’t touch things that don’t belong to him and honestly, the whole thing was really confusing. At least Wells hadn’t done anything other than torment and starve him. Yet.

Behind him the hatch opened and Eddie tugged at the ropes again. He really didn’t need another lecture on how unimportant he was in the grand scheme of things. If he was so unimportant, why the hell was he there in the first place?

“Eddie? Eddie, are you down there?”

Eddie twisted around as much as he could. It didn’t let him see all the way up the hatch, but he didn’t need to. He recognized Barry’s voice. “Barry, thank god!”

“Finally.” Barry descended the steps slowly and stopped at the bottom, wiping his hands off on his jeans. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you.”

Eddie sighed in relief as Barry jumped down off the platform and started looking around the room, checking the shadows and corners. If anyone could get him out of this, it was Barry, but they had to hurry. “Barry, we need to get out of here. Dr. Wells, he’s a metahuman like you. We need to…”

“I know.”

He knew? It took a second for Eddie to process that and a second longer to realize that Barry had stopped looking around the room and was analyzing the tube thing Dr. Wells had been building. A deep sense of wrong settled in the pit of his stomach.
“You know?”

“You know what he’s making? Has he told you? It looks future…ee? Futuristic. Is it from the future?”

“What? No. I don’t know. Barry, what do you mean, you know he’s a metahuman?”

“Well, I live with the man. It’d be hard not to notice.”

Okay, that made sense, but Barry wasn’t moving to untie him and Eddie decided that how and why didn’t matter right now. “Okay, fine, you knew, but can we get out of here?”

“Nope.” Barry hopped up on the table and held the tube in front of his face, tipping it to the left, to the right, upside down, scrutinizing the contents.

“What do you mean, no?”

“If I take you out of here, he’ll just find you again.” Finally, Barry made eye contact. “Sorry about this, though. It’s my fault you got dragged into it.”

“How is this your fault?”

“What do you remember about the other night?”

“Not much. Alcohol. Lot and lots of alcohol and that’s about it.”

As much as he wanted to yell at Barry to untie him now, he knew that wouldn’t do any good. After the psych evals, Captain Singh had pulled him aside and given him the run down on Barry’s results. It was strictly confidential, just between them, but Captain Singh had wanted someone to back him up, someone who had Barry’s best interests at heart.

The short version was, Barry wasn’t firing on all cylinders – maybe even more so than the psych eval had let on, considering recent events and the fact that he seemed entirely unfazed by finding out his boyfriend had kidnapped Eddie. Fortunately, most of the department already thought he was a little weird, so it was easy enough to smooth over the new quirks. In the long run, though, Captain Singh had said he’d prefer to keep interactions with Barry as much between the three of them as possible – himself, Eddie, and Dr. Wells – the people Barry already knew and trusted. Although, again considering recent events, it might have been better to keep Dr. Wells out of it.

So, yelling and pushing weren’t going to get him anywhere. If Barry got annoyed that someone didn’t understand him, he’d leave, which normally wasn’t that much of a problem, except Eddie was tied to a chair in a basement somewhere and he really, really needed Barry’s help.

Barry sat with his legs swinging back and forth a few times before he set the tube down, jumped off the table, walked over, and knelt on the floor in front of Eddie with his chin on the detective’s knee.

“So, Harrison is the Reverse-Flash…”

“He’s the Reverse-Flash?”

“Don’t interrupt. It’s distracting. He’s from the future and he wants me to help him get back, but I’m not going to, because screw him, he doesn’t get what he wants.” Barry crossed he arms over Eddie’s thighs. “Anyway, he’s almost done with his little particle accelerator and he’s been pressuring me to try and run faster.”

Barry sat up and leaned forward, a wide smile on his face as he dropped his voice to just above a
whisper. “Just between us, I can run a lot faster than he thinks I can.”

There was something in Barry’s voice, his smile, his eyes… oh, god. “Barry, when was the last time you ate?”

“Harrison’s pissed. You’re not listening. Shhhh. He’ll hear you.” Eddie closed his eyes and when he opened them, Barry was sitting again, chin back on Eddie’s knee, looking up at him with an almost glazed over expression. Barry had come to him within a month of the disaster, confessing that he was the Flash, because he needed someone on the inside to cover for him when he had to ditch work. It had been a shock, but at least it gave Eddie something to focus on other than his own lose, especially when Barry kept forgetting to take care of himself. The hypoglycemia in particular, was a problem, because while Barry could come across as almost normal most of the time, he went almost manic if his blood sugar dropped too low and there was something very unsettling about a manic Barry Allen.

“Barry. Barry, you need to eat.”

Barry shook his head and his eyes cleared. “No, look, the problem is, he’s been pressuring me and threatening people, but the one person he can’t threaten is you.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“You’re…” Barry stopped, his eyes shifting up and to the left and Eddie knew that whatever he heard next was going to be a lie. “We have a deal. He can’t touch you. So, anyway, I’ve been teasing him about sleeping with you…”

“Wow!” Seriously? He didn’t understand half of what was going on here, but he understood the part where Barry was openly threatening to cheat on the homicidal maniac with him. “Not cool, Barry!”

Barry gave an apologetic shrug and Eddie made a mental note to try and talk Barry into seeing a psychiatrist after they got out of this. A real one, not the CCPD mandated Grief Counselor he was still going to every other Wednesday that kept trying to prescribe him pills his Flash metabolism burned through in minutes.

“I said I was sorry. Anyway, he was being mean the other day and I told him he’d regret it and he said ‘I highly doubt there’s anything you could do to make me regret eating the last of your Oreos.’”

“This is over Oreos!?”

Barry’s hand was over his mouth in an instant. “Sh! It’s not just the Oreos, it’s the principle of the thing. They were mine. My Oreos. Not his.”

Eddie raised his eyebrows.

“Fine, okay, yes, it’s about the Oreos. I have very few things I put my foot down on, but my cookies are one of them. If it had been the Keebler Fudge Stripes, I would have understood, but Harrison doesn’t even like Oreos.” He dropped the hand, but Eddie just cocked his head to the side and tried not to glare. “So, in an admittedly childish attempt to make him jealous, I took you out, got you drunk, and…”

The pause was significant and it was clear Barry was searching for a delicate way to put it. That was really, really bad. Barry didn’t do delicate very often anymore, not unless he was expecting a negative reaction. “Barry, please tell me we didn’t sleep together?”

“Would that really be so bad?” Barry sat back and gave Eddie his sad eyes, which wasn’t fair, because Barry had grown up with Iris and after the last few months, Eddie was convinced the two of
them had practiced that look together in a mirror.

“I’ve been tied to a chair and starved for days because you had a fight with your boyfriend over Oreo and decided to get even with him by cheating and you used me to do it, because you don’t think he’ll kill me. Apparently, it didn’t occur to you that torture was an option.”

The sad eyes wavered. “Fine, and, no, we didn’t actually get to the good stuff. Harrison showed up and took you before I could even take your pants off. I’ve been trying to find you ever since. So, like I said, sorry about that, but!”

Barry shot up the ladder and back down, holding a backpack. “I brought snacks.”

It took every ounce of self control Eddie had not to yell at Barry to untie him and get him the hell out of there. The manic gleam was still there and yelling would only make it worse. If he could get Barry to eat something, maybe he could talk some sense into him. To that effect, “I’ll eat if you eat.”

“Done!”

*****

Barry sat on the floor next to Eddie with the back of his head resting against Eddie’s thigh and a half eaten bag of chips open at his feet. It had taken four sandwiches, most of a liter of soda, a few bottles of water, and several bags of chips, but Barry had finally come down off the mania and was lazily finishing off the last bag.

A hand popped up in front of Eddie’s face, the sour cream and onion smell making his stomach roll. Eddie had managed half a sandwich and water before he’d had to stop. “I’m good.”

The sound of crunching followed and Eddie decided it was probably as good a time as any to try his luck. At this stage, Barry would be tired and easily suggestible. A fact which had come in handy when convincing the speedster he needed rest or to just go home when he’d been at the precinct for over twenty four hours running samples that didn’t have a rush on them.

“Barry.”

“Mhm?”

“You think maybe you could untie me now?”

“Nope.”

Baby steps. “What if I promised not to leave?”

“You would be lying.” Barry rolled his head to the side to look up at Eddie. “I know you, Eddie Thawne. The second I turned my back, you’d hit me over the head and drag me off with you. You wouldn’t even be doing it to have your way with me. You’d be trying to save me. Can’t let you do that.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because I don’t need saving.” Barry rolled his head back, then gasped and turned around fully, eye wide. “Oh, what if I dyed my hair? Think that would piss him off?”
“Barry, I love you, but I’m not helping you piss off Harrison Wells.”

“A wise decision, Detective Thawne.” Eddie cringed and tried not to be disturbed by the way Barry’s face brightened at Dr. Wells’ voice.

“Hey, baby, look who I found.”

Dr. Wells jumped down the last three steps. “I told you to stop calling me that.”

Barry winked up at Eddie as he stood. Oh, god, this was going to get weird. It always got weird between the two of them. Eddie should have realized something bad was going on long before now, but he’d always been too busy trying to give them their privacy to really look.


Wells shot forward, taking Barry with him until he was pressing the young man into the wall, hand wrapped around his throat. Eddie couldn’t see Wells’ eyes, but he could hear the vibration in his voice. “I said, stop calling me that.”

He could also see Barry grind up against Wells and that was why he never looked. He turned his head away and focused on the table in front of him rather than what was going on in his peripheral. He couldn’t, however, cover his ears.

“Come on, baby.” Eddie wanted nothing more than to tell Barry to shut the hell up. Just run, seriously. He was the Flash, he could get away if he needed to and he really, really needed to. “Do it. You know you want to. You know I want you to.”

“What you want, Barry Allen, is becoming more and more irrelevant.”

“While you, Harrison Wells, won’t be relevant for another hundred and thirty six years.” Barry chuckled and Eddie almost didn’t hear what he said next. “Sucks to be you.”

There was a crash, something hitting the wall, hard enough that Eddie did look over, but they were already gone, up the ladder and out of the room and Eddie couldn’t decide if he was grateful he didn’t have to watch whatever Dr. Wells intended to do to Barry or horrified with himself for not noticing how wrong things were between them. What he did know, was that he wasn’t leaving it alone.

*****

It was hours before anyone returned and when they did, it was Dr. Wells, alone, hair damp and clothes changed. He paused at Eddie and clapped him on the shoulder before moving back to his work table, where he picked up the tube, to the far left of where it had been earlier and sighed. “Did Barry tamper with this?”

“He just looked at it.”

Dr. Wells nodded and set it back down before turning to face Eddie again, hands in his the pockets of his stylish jacket, his lips pursed in thought. “I suppose it would be too much to hope he didn’t enlighten you as to the reason you’re still alive despite Barry’s… indiscretion.”
For a moment, Eddie honestly considered lying, but he doubted it would do him any good. “He said you have a deal.”

Wells visibly relaxed. “You know, despite his little tantrums, he really is a smart boy. You, on the other hand, are not.”

Eddie didn’t bother responding.

“However, you can still be useful. So, I’m going to make you a proposition.”

“I’m not making any kind of deal with you, Wells.”

“Don’t be so quick to dismiss my offer before you’ve heard the terms.” Wells closed the distance between them and leaned in so they were inches apart, his hands clenched tightly around Eddie’s bound forearms. “Barry has gotten very good at curbing my impulses. He knows when I’m on the edge and he knows how to push me over and how to direct where I land, which is usually on him. Now, while he does have a remarkable rate of recovery, taking all of this on himself is wearing him down. I don’t need him worn down.”

Eddie scoffed. “Somehow, I don’t think Barry really cares what you need.”

Wells smirked. “No, he doesn’t, but you do. If this keeps up, I may very well do permanent damage and you don’t want that anymore than I do. So, Detective Thawne, if you promise not to do anything stupid, I’ll let you put him back together when I’m finished.”

Eddie choked a little on the implication that Barry was in bad enough shape to need putting back together. He’d never seen open signs of abuse before, but Wells talked like this had been ongoing and Barry would have told them, wouldn’t he? Or maybe not. Barry healed fast and while Eddie had been assuming his occasional day off was for Flash business maybe it had been something more. As for Barry telling them, there were plenty of times Eddie had questioned his relationship with Dr. Wells when it went public and Barry had always said the same two things. “He’s all I have left” and “I love him.” Of course, Dr. Wells wasn’t the only thing Barry had left, but whether Wells had convinced him of that or Barry had convinced himself, Eddie had no doubt Barry believed it was true.

“Are you listening, Detective?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Now, the ground rules are as follows. Feel free to try and convince Barry to leave me – he won’t – feel free to try and hide him from me – I will always find him and, barring that, he will find me – but don’t bring anyone else into it. My relationship with Barry is to remain untarnished to the public at large. It would be extremely… inconvenient this late in the game to draw the attention of certain people that Barry is quite fond of. He would do anything, let me do anything to him, to keep them from getting hurt. While I don’t need the boy sane, I do need him alive and relatively whole. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“The only other rule – and I think it goes without saying, but I want to be perfectly clear on the matter – this,” he gripped Eddie hard between the legs, “stays in your pants. Barry Allen is mine and I don’t share. If you think you can manage that, I’ll allow Barry to come to you when he needs to lick his wounds. Which is, regretfully, often.”

Eddie only managed a nod this time, but Dr. Wells relinquished his grip and stood, going to the
ladder.

“He’ll be awake soon. Take him with you, clean him up, let him rest. He’ll come home when he’s ready.”

*****

Barry stumbled down mumbling apologies while he untied Eddie’s ropes with fumbling fingers. Eddie couldn’t make out half of what he said, but he got the part where Dr. Wells had hooked Barry up to an IV, which apparently meant Barry had gone too far. All it told Eddie was that Barry had been in worse shape before coming down and that did absolutely nothing to make him feel better.

Between the two of them they somehow made it up the ladder and out of what was apparently a subbasement of the particle accelerator. Eddie’s keys were on a desk and his car in the parking lot. It probably wasn’t all that safe for him to be driving, but Barry could barely stand, let alone run them both back to his loft, so he took it slow and got them there in one piece.

As soon as they were in the front door, Eddie made for the bed and threw himself down on it, taking Barry with him. The speedster curled up around him, snuggling close with a head on his chest. “This is good. Imma sleep for a while, ‘kay?”

He put his hand on the back of Barry’s head and felt the curve of Barry’s mouth as he smiled against Eddie’s chest and asked, “What do you think of blue?”

“What?”

“My hair. How do you think it would look blue, not dark cobalt, but a bright, electric blue?”

Eddie tried to imagine it. “That… no. I’m really not sure electric blue is your color.”

Not to mention there were rules about that kind of thing with the CCPD. Of course, Barry was a behind-the-scenes tech and Captain Singh had a soft spot for him, but still.

Barry sighed happily. “Perfect.”

As Barry’s breathing evened out, Eddie tried to figure out what the hell he’d gotten himself into and, more importantly, how he was going to get them both out.
Chapter Summary

Eddie was a good guy and that was okay, but Barry knows the truth. Being the good guy sucks.

"Step with care and great tact, and remember that life’s a great balancing act." -Dr. Seuss-

-Present Day (One Year, Two Months, and Two Weeks After the Tidal Wave)-

Barry knew exactly what Eddie was thinking, because Eddie was a good guy. Not just because he was a cop that wasn’t on the take, or because he had a spectacular arrest record, but because he wanted to do the right thing and he didn’t do it for a pat on the back – not that he didn’t like being patted on the back. Everyone liked being patted on the back, which was why Barry had agreed to do this in the first place. That and he really did feel bad about getting Eddie kidnapped.

“In our last session, you said that Harrison doesn’t allow you to use his kitchen?”

“Nope.”

“Yet, you live with him.”

Barry frowned at his hands. “I don’t get to use his toothbrush, either. I don’t hear you asking about that.”

“A toothbrush is a personal affect not often shared by couples.”

“Try telling that to Lilly and Marshal.”

Eddie sighed heavily next to him. “Barry, you promised to take this seriously.”

Fine. He slouched down, pulling his legs up to cross them on the sofa and tugged down on the edges of the black beanie that covered the bright blue streaks in his hair. Captain Singh’s orders - dye his hair back or wear a hat. The look of pure annoyance on Harrison’s face was worth it and, besides, the beanie reminded him of Joe.

“Barry?” Dr. Holt’s prodding was gentle, as always, well aware of what and who he was dealing with. The first session hadn’t gone that well.

“No, he doesn’t let me use the kitchen. As he puts it, the cost of his appliances alone are worth more than my annual salary and his insurance doesn’t cover reckless teenagers.”

“And how does that make you feel?”

Barry held out his hand and Eddie pressed another Oreo into his palm, which Barry ate as slowly as possible. He wasn’t even pretending to be thinking about the answer, just enjoying his reward for putting up with that question. Over and over.
How did it make him feel that his family was dead and he was sleeping with the man who was responsible for that?

Not good when you put it that way, but the sex was great, so that was something.

How did it make him feel that he’d been forced into moving in with Harrison?

It hadn’t been forced. He didn’t have anywhere else to go. Joe’s house was trashed, as was most of Central City. At least Harrison had solar panels so they weren’t going to freeze to death in the winter.

How did it make him feel that Harrison cut him off from the rest of his friends?

Harrison hadn’t cut him off from anyone. He’d cut himself off. It was better that way.

How did it make him feel that he wasn’t allowed to use the kitchen because Harrison called him a reckless teenager when he was, in fact, a perfectly capable man in his mid-twenties?

“He’s said worse.”

“Like what?”

For real? Barry picked dirt from under his finger nails and shook his head. Not going there. He wasn’t rehearsing all the hurtful things Harrison called him when they fought, because Barry wasn’t guilt free in that department.

“Let’s take a step back. He doesn’t let you use the kitchen. Does he allow you to keep food there?”

Where had that come from? Or, more importantly, where was it going? “Of course I keep food there. Did you forget the part where I have an accelerated metabolism? If I didn’t have food, I’d pass out. Not much good in bed if I’m unconscious.”

The last jab was meant to make them feel uncomfortable. It worked with Eddie, who turned an amusing shade of pink. Dr. Holt, however, just looked more interested and now Barry was uncomfortable.

“That sounds like you think he’s keeping you around simply for the sex.”

“No, he’s keeping me around because he needs me to complete his diabolical master plan. The sex is a bonus.”

“Hm, and how does that make you feel?”

“Hungry.” He held his hand out and Eddie dropped an Oreo in it obediently.

Dr. Holt’s eyes narrowed. “I’m sorry, are you giving him one of those every time I ask how something makes him feel?”

Eddie stuttered around his answers and came up with. “It was the only way he would agree to come back.”

Barry nodded gravely. “Only took you four sessions to figure it out. And you call yourself observant.”

Dr. Holt tapped his pen on his clipboard. It was a nice pen – thin, gun metal and silver with an intricately etched pattern on the lower half and his name on the top, Dr. Charles Holt. Eddie’s ring tone interrupted the rhythmic tap, and he fished his phone out to look at the display. “It’s the
While Eddie stepped out, Dr. Holt gave Barry his full attention back. “Seeing as you have your reward, are you going to answer my question? Honestly, if you can.”

“What?” Oh, right. How did it make him feel that Harrison only kept him around because he needed him to finish his plan? Barry leaned forward to glance at the half open door and lowered his voice to a whisper so Eddie couldn’t hear, meeting Dr. Holt’s eyes. “Honestly? It makes me feel good. It makes me feel powerful. It makes me feel like I’m in control. It makes me feel needed and wanted and like I could make him do anything if I pretended, just for a second, to even consider doing what he wanted.”

“And yet you take no overt power in your relationship with him.”

“I don’t need to.”

The door opened and Barry sat back, dropping his smile as Eddie came in. “Sorry about that, we have to get back to the precinct. Barry, can I have a minute alone with Dr. Holt?”

Barry shrugged and went outside to watch the shrimp in the fishtank. He’d insisted Eddie sit in on the sessions and he’d signed a consent allowing Dr. Holt to discuss Barry’s progress – or lack thereof – with Eddie as well. Didn’t matter, really, this wasn’t for Barry. This was for Eddie, to make him feel like he was doing something, because Eddie was a good person and he wanted to do the right thing, but sometimes, the right thing was the wrong thing. Eventually, Eddie would get that.

He glanced at the closed door and back at the shrimp, putting a finger to his lips. “Sh.” Then silently crept back across the room to press his ear to the door.

“…alone with him.” That was Dr. Holt, calm and matter of fact.

“That’s easier said than done.” Eddie sounded more agitated. “He’s… insistent and I can’t exactly force him.”

“I’m not suggesting you do. I am, however, telling you that I can only work with what he brings into the session. When you left the room just now? That was the most honest he’s been in five weeks.” Oh, screw him. Barry was honest. He was honestly annoyed at being there in the first place. At least having Eddie there meant he wasn’t suffering alone.

“I’ll talk to him.”

Barry rushed back and leaned in close to the tank, waiting for the door to open before saying, “That’s our secret,” to the tiny shrimp trying to crawl up the side of the tank in front of Barry’s nose.

Eddie didn’t look amused, Dr. Holt did. Good for Dr. Holt.

*****

It was a nice day out, sunny, but cool. Eddie had insisted they be discrete about the whole thing.
Once a week, Eddie took Barry out to what they said was an early lunch. On the way back to the station, they’d grab vendor food, because Barry couldn’t afford to skip a meal. Currently, was six chili cheese dogs in and Barry was licking the traces of chili and cheese off his fingers like he was starving. Or a porn star. Eddie was used to it by now, but the other pedestrians clearly weren’t.

“Barry.”

“Hm?” Barry stopped with his ring finger tucked inside his mouth.

“There are children.”

He pulled the finger out with a pop and sighed. “I’m still hungry.”

“How much do you need to eat, anyway?” When Barry had first told him about being the Flash, he’d glossed over most of the details and Eddie had been too stunned to press.

“Roughly the amount of 850 tacos.”

“What?!”

Barry shoved his hands in his pockets and matching their steps. “That’s what Cisco said. He made me protein bars that supplemented most of it, but he’s gone now.”

“So, you don’t have those anymore?”

“Nope.” Barry eyed a taco vendor as they passed, but didn’t say anything. “I have the recipe, but I ran out and I can’t make any more.”

“Why not?”

Barry tipped his head with raised eyebrows. “Because his appliances cost more than my annual salary and his insurance doesn’t cover reckless teenagers.”

“Oh.” Eddie stopped just outside the CCPD. “Barry, you do realize that you’re more than welcome to use my kitchen?”

There was a second, one small second, where the look on Barry’s face was nothing short of stunned. Like it hadn’t occurred to him, either that Eddie had a kitchen or maybe just that Eddie would be okay with Barry using it.

The second was broken when footsteps behind them were accompanied by the all too familiar voice of Dr. Wells. “Barry, there you are. Captain Singh said you’d gone out to lunch with Detective Thawne. Hello, Eddie.”

Barry rocked on his heels excitedly, but didn’t rush to Dr. Wells’ side. Wells insisted on a certain amount of restraint from Barry when they were in public. It wouldn’t do to be unprofessional in his capacity as scientific advisor.

“You weren’t at any of the usual restaurants. Where did he take you?”

Barry smiled sublimely. “Hotdogs. There’s a vendor down the street that makes the best chili cheese dogs. You should try it.”

“Another time, perhaps.” He turned his attention to Eddie. “For now, I have a matter I’d like to discuss with Mr. Allen. In his lab.”
Eddie nodded. “Of course.”

Barry followed Wells, talking enthusiastically. “We had a picnic in the park. We walked around, found some shade, talked. I got to pet a dog. It was nice. You should take me on a picnic.”

“Detective Thawne is to be commended for his never ending patience.”

“Someone’s cranky.” Barry slipped his hand into Dr. Wells’ jacket pocket and pulled it out again, their fingers laced together as they walked up the steps and into the precinct building.

*****

There were rules. Not written down, but understood. Rules about what set Harrison off, what set Barry off, about certain other universes being off limits for a multitude of reasons, about certain people that were to remain unharmed as long as they kept their pointy objects out of Harrison’s plans, and rules about when Barry was allowed to play hero. The last being arguably the most important rule as far as Harrison was concerned, because he needed Barry and he wasn’t going to let him throw himself into danger if it wasn’t necessary.

It was nice to be needed, but Barry really didn’t like being told what to do. Not unless he was naked or there was cake involved. Or he was naked and there was cake involved. Best make up sex ever.

He shook his head a little. Focus. He needed to concentrate on the task at hand. Harder to do at the end of the day when he was running on fumes. He needed…

The girl behind the counter tapped his shoulder and he gave her a grateful smile as he took two oversized foam cups and headed for the door. He didn’t spend a lot of time alone in the city, really. It made him uncomfortable. He used to have friend to go out with. Iris or Cisco or Joe, occasionally Caitlin. Unfortunately, today there wasn’t anyone. Harrison and Eddie were stuck at the station and something had come up so he couldn’t sit at home binge watching Netflix or running analysis in his lab all night.

He needed to make time to go to Eddie’s. Harrison had been especially focused on Barry the last few days. Not that Barry was complaining. He liked the attention, but he needed to make more Cisco Bars. There was only so much food a person could consume in one day.

He paused on the sidewalk and stared at the bright pink straw sticking out of the giant smoothie in his left hand. Wait. There was a reason he’d gone out. Something he’d needed to do, but he couldn’t without… Two girls walked by and he caught a small snippet of their conversation.

“…it’s another metahuman.”

“Really?”

“Totally. This city has serious issues.”

Right. There was a metahuman doing damage to the lower eastside where they were currently using large anonymous donations to rebuild the hospital and the school. Whoever it was had been stealing copper wiring. When the construction workers found her at the site, she’d shot electricity at them.
From her hands. They weren’t coming back until the situation was handled and, worse, copper wiring was really expensive and a necessary component for the building’s permit.

He’d message the ‘anonymous’ benefactor that morning, when they’d confirmed it was a meta, but all he’d gotten back was, ‘Busy, Scarlet. Take care of it. I’ll owe you.’

Which was all good and well, except it came back to Harrison’s rule about him not getting involved unless it was absolutely necessary, meaning there was a body – preferably multiple ones. In this case, she may have attacked the construction workers, but beyond a few minor electrical burns, she hadn’t actually harmed anyone.

He stopped long enough to finish the drink in his right hand, throw it away, and pulled his phone out, tapping out a quick text while he started on the other.

‘Why can’t you do it again?’

Five minutes later, he got the less than impressive response of, ‘Busy.’

‘Doing what?’

‘Making a withdrawal. Not all of us can run faster than the speed of sound, kid. Go be a hero. Like I said, I’ll owe you.’

Rolling his eyes, he concentrated on sucking down the second smoothie. By the time he finished he was feeling jittery and it might be enough. Probably not. Shit, he was going to crash so hard after this. And Harrison was gonna be pissed.

Barry took a deep breath, gripped the handle of his CCPD bag, and ran. He still used his speed daily, he had to. It was a part of him and he wasn’t entirely sure he could live without it or that he’d even want to, but most of the time, it was closely monitored. Harrison watched everything, measuring Barry’s speed, his heart rate, his excursion. He measured him with computers and with their shared connection to the Speedforce, but Harrison wasn’t monitoring him now, this wasn’t supervised practice and he didn’t need to restrain himself.

He blurred into his suit and shot across the city, running into the lower east, looking for the suspect. He’d seen her in security footage and the witness sketches. From the state of her clothes and general comments on her hygiene, he was guessing she was homeless, but then so were a lot of people in Central City, especially on that side of town. The lower east was positively derelict. With the anonymous donations they’d been getting, it was starting to improve, but it still housed the largest number of homeless and a good portion of the city’s metahumans in hiding.

He hid his bag of street clothes and cell phone behind the dumpster of the building where the girl had last been seen. It didn’t take long to find her, huddled on the second floor of the school. It was too dark to see her clearly, but when she saw him, she stood and he recognized the bright pink Hello Kitty pirate t-shirt. Well, that and the sparks of electricity dancing over her body, but the shirt was still adorable – the eye-patch and parrot looked like they had been hand drawn with a sharpie, but they were really well done.

When she didn’t say anything, he held his hands out to his sides, making it clear he was unarmed. “Cute shirt!”

A shot of electricity hit the ground near his feet and he hopped back. “For real? That was a compliment!”

He ran across the room to avoid the next one, but it still hit wide of where he’d been standing. Either
she was a really bad shot, or she was missing on purpose. “I’m not…”

She fired off another one and okay, that was it. “Would you stop it?! I’m nowhere near you! I’m all
the way over here on my side of the room. You’re there, on yours. My side. Your side. My side.
Your side.” He chuckled. “You get what I did there? It’s a Farscape reference, from the crazy guy,
’cause I’m…”

She cocked her head to the side and he frowned.

“Never mind. Look, point is, I’ll stay over here and you stay over there and stop trying to electrocute
me, because not getting electrocuted was kind of on my list of things to do today.”

When she didn’t try it again, he relaxed minutely. “Do you have a name?”

“You’re the Flash.”

Okay, that was a start. She sounded young, but without getting closer, he couldn’t tell. “You want to
tell me what’s going on here?”

“It hurts.”

“What hurts?”

She held her arms away from her body, out and forward. Barry took a tentative few steps forward
until he could see them better. Under the sparking, her forearms were brown. No, not brown, copper.
She’d wrapped the copper wiring around her arms and now that he looked, he could see hints of it
around her mid-drift and up her calves, like she was working on wrapping it around her entire body.
Copper was one of the best conductors of electricity.

“The electricity hurts and the copper makes it better?”

She nodded, looking at him through the messy fall of straight, dark hair.

“Okay, but you can’t keep stealing it, not from here. I can take you somewhere they can help.”

He stepped forward again, but this time the burst caught him in the chest, flinging him back across
the room. He couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t feel his heart beat… Barry slammed his
own fist into his chest. Once. Twice. Couldn’t… air rushed into his lungs and he coughed around it,
his heart thumping wildly, but beating. He pushed up onto his hands and knees, but had to stop. His
chest ached and the room was spinning. Not good. Not good. His body was burning through his
calories to heal him. Worse, if his heart really had stopped, even for a second, Harrison would have
felt it. He would have felt the disconnect with the Speedforce, and that meant…

He could tell her to run, but it wouldn’t do any good.

He was still on his knees when the Reverse-Flash streaked into the room. When he stopped, his hand
was already in her chest. Her eyes were wide, shocked behind her long dark hair and Barry couldn’t
help the swell of anger, because he thought Cisco might have looked like that. Just a little.

Then his arm pulled out of her chest. She fell in a heap on the ground and the red eyes turned to
Barry. Crap. He was in so much trouble.
Eddie finished buttoning his shirt and slid his gun into its holster, buttoning it down. His phone was on the table, unblinking. He tapped it anyway, but there were no messages or missed calls from his shower. He’d texted Barry late the night before, saying they needed to talk. The way Wells had been hovering the last three days had made getting Barry alone impossible, he wasn’t likely to see him over the weekend, and Mondays were always busy in forensics. He needed to talk to Barry before their next appointment on Tuesday, try to get him to agree to do the session alone, with Eddie in the waiting room.

It was going to be a hard sell, but the more time Barry had to think about it, the more likely he’d be to do it. He’d just reached for his jacket when there was a knock on the door. He checked through the peep whole, but could only make out the top of someone’s head. Two someone’s, actually, one with short clipped hair in a black leather jacket, the other in a ball cap, arm draped over the other’s shoulders, leaning heavily again him.

He unclipped his gun, but didn’t draw it. “Who’s there?”

“Delivery for Detective Thawne.”

There was something familiar in the drawl – male, distinct, but he couldn’t place it. He unlatched the door, slid it open, and froze as the man in the leather jacket looked up. Leonard Snart?! He scrambled to pull his gun out, aiming it at the man’s face, but Snart didn’t so much as flinch.

“Relax, Detective. Kid, we’re here.”

The man in the ballcap lifted his head and Eddie only had a moment to register that it was Barry before the speedster leapt forward, wrapping his arms around Eddie’s shoulders.

“Eddie! Sorry, couldn’t call. Wouldn’t make it. Lenny was close. Lenny? Cold!” Barry looked over at Snart, smile too big and eyes too bright. “Thank you.”

Snart nodded distractedly as he stared at Eddie, whose gun was still in his hand, if no longer pointed at Snart’s head. “We good?”

Eddie hesitated, but put the gun in its holster and Barry was off him in the next second, launching himself at the fridge. He had absolutely no idea what was going on, but he did know that Snart had brought Barry to him severely hypoglycemic and clearly injured – if the way he was holding his arm around his midsection while he slumped to the floor next to the fridge with a half gallon of milk in his hand was any indication – but alive.

Snart stopped him from closing the door with a foot. “He’ll be okay?”

“Why do you care?”

“He was doing me a favor.”

What the hell was Barry doing for Captain Cold of all people? “He heals quickly.”

Snart nodded and leaned in so Barry could see him. “I owe you, kid.”
Barry gave a thumb’s up and kept drinking, eyes rolling back into his head with soft moaning noises.

When the door was closed and locked, Eddie went into the kitchen and knelt down. “Are you really okay?”

Barry nodded. “Unsanctioned Flash activities. Metahuman stealing copper from the new school.”

“And you…?”

“It’s taken care of.”

Eddie didn’t miss that Barry’s smile dropped a little at that. It must not have gone the way he wanted it to. “How does Snart fit into that?”

Barry’s smile returned in full affect, with deep dimples and white teeth. “He’s the anonymous donor for the lower east end!” Then it dropped just as quickly. “Oh. I wasn’t supposed to tell anyone that. You won’t tell, right? You’re good. A good friend. Lenny trusts me. You won’t tell.”

Eddie sighed and reached up, tipping the half gallon up until Barry was drinking again. “I won’t, but you owe me a real explanation after work. Come on, let’s get some food in you.”

Barry finished what was left of the milk and quickly ate everything Eddie handed him – several yogurts, half a loaf of French bread, eight Minibells, a mostly full jar of peanut butter, and the entire box of Hostess Twinkies that Eddie hadn’t gotten around to opening yet. The last few Twinkies went down much slower and the bright glint in Barry’s eyes had gone markedly dull, his lids half closed as he licked the cream inside, hollowing each half out before consuming the sponge cake exterior.

When he’d finally finished, Eddie helped him up off the floor and Barry let him, not protesting as he was half carried across the room and put into bed. For the first time, Eddie noticed that the black jeans Barry was wearing were too big, hanging off his hips by a synched in belt and the black shirt wasn’t his, either. For one thing, it smelled clean, freshly washed, but not with his normal detergent. Dr. Wells stocked the expensive stuff, organic with a light scent. This was unmistakably Gain.

“Eddie?”

“Yeah?”

“I really miss Iris.”

He wasn’t sure where that had come from at first, but he followed Barry’s gaze to the picture of Eddie and Iris together on his bedside table. “I miss her, too. Get some sleep.”

“Eddie?”

“Yeah?”

“Tell Harrison I’ll be home tonight.”

The pit of Eddie’s stomach dropped and he sat on the bed. Barry scooted over to put his head on Eddie’s thigh, falling asleep in seconds.
Eddie worked overtime to get his paperwork filed, but it was still after five before he got back. As he opened the door, he was instantly hit by a smell, not bad, but one that he couldn’t place. Barry was sitting on the kitchen counter, a stack of neatly cut brown bars wrapped in cellophane to one side of him and three unwrapped rectangles on the other.

Barry’s smile was normal, sane, no trace of the mania or the following crash and that was good. It meant he’d gotten enough food and rest. He was also sitting without any of the stiffness from the injuries he’d had earlier, so they must have healed. Actually, he looked calmer than Eddie had seen in a long time. His knees were bouncing in time to music coming from Eddie’s open laptop of the kitchen table.

He’d changed into sweats and a S.T.A.R. Labs shirt that was recognizably his own. A quick look around the room and Eddie found Barry’s CCPD bag in a corner, open and over stuffed with what he’d been wearing earlier that morning. Snart hadn’t brought a bag with him, so Barry must have gone out and gotten it after he’d woken up.

As Eddie pulled his jacket off, Barry held out the rectangle he’d just finished wrapping. “Cisco Bars! Thanks for letting me use your kitchen. I made enough to last a few weeks.”

Eddie came over for a closer look as Barry wrapped another one. A quick count said he’d made twenty four. “How many do you need?”

“Depends. On a good day, one and largish regular meals.” Eddie sniffed one experimentally. Hm, if he had to guess there was something chocolate flavored, maybe peanut butter and he was pretty sure there was…

“Sorry about last night.”

What?

“I don’t know what time I came in, but I know it was late. So, thanks.”

“Barry, what do you remember?”

Barry shrugged. “Not much. I was doing a… a thing for someone and then Harrison got mad and I remember…” Barry’s eyes focused hard on the bar he was wrapping, even as his fingers slowed. “…and then he told me to come here, except… except everything is fuzzy after that.”

“Barry, you didn’t make it here last night. Leonard Snart dragged you in this morning. You really don’t remember?”

“Len? Why would I? Oh. I didn’t… did I say anything? Because if I did, I deny it.” Barry stared hard at Eddie, setting the last, finished bar on the plate. It might have been intimidating if Eddie hadn’t known him so well.

“You said he’s the anonymous donor that’s been funding the rebuild in the lower east.”

“Right. So, now I’m denying it.” Barry sped across the room to grab his bag, sped back and dropped the bars in before Eddie could stop him.
“Barry, you can’t just…”

“Sorry, gotta go.”

Eddie somehow managed to put himself between Barry and the door. “Wait, we need to talk.”

Barry frowned. “It’s not my secret, Eddie. I’m not…”

“No, not about that. It’s about your appointment on Tuesday.” The frown deepened, but Barry didn’t precisely look confused or surprised. “I think you should go in alone. I’ll be there, but in the waiting room.”

And the frown melted into a pout. “But I don’t want to. I like it when you’re there.”

“I know, but Dr. Holt wants to talk to you alone. Do it once and if you don’t like it, then I’ll come in next time.”

Barry looked down at the floor and sighed. “I’ll think about it, but I really do have to get home. Now.”

Eddie stepped aside and Barry flashed him a smile before disappearing, leaving Eddie alone in his apartment.

*****

As expected, Barry didn’t make an appearance at Eddie’s that weekend. He didn’t answer his phone, either, and text messages were responded to with one word, usually, ‘later.’ None of that was unusually, but it still made Eddie nervous.

He spent the time alone, working through case files in his loft, trying not to think about how bad Barry had been when he’d come in the night before and what that meant. He’d only been like that one time, the first time Wells had sent him home with Eddie. Barry had slept for hours, woken up, eaten just about everything in the cabinets and passed out again, but there hadn’t been any indication of memory loss. Then again, there hadn’t been a reason to question Barry’s memory of the events. They both knew exactly what had happened.

Then there was Leonard Snart a/k/a Captain Cold. Eddie spent an entire afternoon on that one and found that there was a clear correlation between anonymous donations being made to the slums and high dollar thefts in other states. Obviously, he couldn’t prove anything – Captain Cold wasn’t the only thief in the country, but in connection with what Barry had said, it was too much to be a coincidence.

It was enough to make him want to crawl under a blanket and never come out, but he couldn’t do that. He’d made a promise to Iris and even if she’d been dead at the time, he intended to keep it. Besides, it was more than that now. Barry was his friend, his family here.

He was called in late Sunday afternoon when the body of the metahuman girl was found at the
construction site by local kids. There was a hole in her chest, her heart pulverized in the cavity.

*It’s taken care of.*

Those had been Barry’s words and Eddie had somehow taken it for granted that meant Barry had been the one to take care of it, but that wasn’t what it had meant, because Eddie knew that no matter how damaged Barry was, he wasn’t capable of *that.* If not Barry, though, who? Not Snart, that wasn’t his M.O. and, besides, as much as he disliked the man on a professional level, there had been something genuine in his concern for Barry and Snart had never been outwardly cruel or malicious. As long as no one played the hero, everyone walked out alive and he never hurt women or children.

Eddie helped work the crime scene and got started on his paperwork, going home late Sunday night, his mind still working over the possibilities.

Then Monday came and Barry was… not normal, but better. He came out of his lab a full three times, engaged other officers of his own volition in conversation that followed a clear, logical progression and consisted of the occasional eye contact. When he stole a left over donut midday, he was only mildly inappropriate with the pastry as he walked back up the stairs.

He stopped to see Eddie before he left, eyes skirting around the office as he came to a stop at his desk, hands in his pockets, rocking on his heals with his shoulders hunched in. “So, I just wanted to say thank you again. For letting me use your kitchen.”

Eddie nodded. “Anytime. Look, I tried calling, but did you get a chance to think about the appointment tomorrow?”

Barry’s tentative smile faltered, then came back, crooked and his eyes glinting. “Yeah, sorry, I was… busy.”

“Doing what? Running errands for,” Eddie looked around to make sure none of the other detectives were around and dropped his voice, “Leonard Snart?”

“It’s not like that. Len’s funny’s all. No, I was having sex. All weekend. All. Weekend. Turns out, fully charged, my refractory period is like zero, so, yeah. Like I said, thanks.” And just like that, Eddie regretted it. “But, look, about tomorrow? It’s just the once, right? You’ll be in the waiting room and if I don’t like it…?”

Or maybe not. If getting Barry to agree to more productive therapy meant Eddie had to hear about Barry’s sex life, he’d suffer through the mental images. “Yes, Barry, of course.”

After a minute, Barry nodded. “Okay, so tomorrow, 11:30.”

*****

The arrangement with Dr. Holt was impressive. Barry had to give Eddie credit for that. The doctor normally shut his doors between the hours of eleven and one for lunch. Barry had no idea what Eddie had said to get the man to agree to an 11:30 appointment every Tuesday, but it meant there
were no other patients to see them coming or going. It was also being billed under Eddie’s name so it wouldn’t come back to Barry. Not a fool proof plan, but, again, impressive.

Barry tapped the tank. “They’re agitated.”

They were running a few minutes early and Dr. Holt usually tried to eat his lunch before they arrived, so they’d sat down to wait.

Eddie sighed. “They’re shrimp, Barry. They don’t get agitated.”

“I get agitated.”

“You’re not a shrimp.”

Barry focused back on the tank. “Shows what he knows, huh?”

He chuckled at Eddie’s obvious annoyance. A soft knock on the door indicated that Dr. Holt was ready and Barry stood, then stopped and leaned in, pointing into the tank with a serious frown. “Keep an eye on him for me.”

Eddie sighed again and Barry knew he shouldn’t push him like that, but Eddie really had the best annoyed face – almost as good as Harrison’s.

Going into the office alone made Barry a little nervous. Eddie was his reminder to behave, to watch what he said, because no matter what, at the end of it, Eddie was alive. He had to be. Dr. Holt? Maybe not so much. As impressive as this setup was, Harrison was more impressive. He probably already knew about the therapy and was just waiting to see if…

Or he wasn’t waiting for anything.

Barry stopped just inside the door, momentarily stunned to see Harrison standing on the other side of the room, just out of view of the open door and in front of him, Dr. Holt tied to his chair, gagged with his own tie. Barry glanced back at Eddie, who was focused on the case file he was reading. If Harrison wanted Eddie there, he would have opened the door.

Quietly, Barry closed the door behind him and stepped away from it. “Hi.”

Harrison inclined his head toward the couch and Barry gave Dr. Holt a wave as he sat down, but didn’t say anything. When he was seated, Harrison leaned in behind Dr. Holt. “Now, Doctor, let’s talk. According to your notes, Barry over there is holding back. He isn’t being honest. He’s here strictly to placate Detective Thawne and has no intentions of actively participating in therapy. Barry?”

Barry rolled his eyes. “Of course I’m only here for Eddie.”

“And yet, at the end of your last session, Dr. Holt made a note that you have issues of power and control within our relationship. Would you care to expand on that, Barry?”

Dr. Holt looked remarkably calm considering his position. He was scared, it would be impossible not to be, but he wasn’t crying, he wasn’t struggling, he wasn’t trying to beg.

“Not really. That was a private session.”

Harrison reached up to untie the gag, dropping it in the doctor’s lap before he moved to sit next to Barry, draping an arm over his shoulders casual. “Consider this couple’s therapy. Dr. Holt, if you
would?"

Dr. Holt cleared his throat, his voice hoarse, but he didn’t complain or ask for water. “Barry doesn’t exercise overt power in his relationship with you, neither socially nor sexually.”

Harrison’s fingers threaded through the hair at the back of Barry’s neck, stroking and tugging just enough to send little shocks down Barry’s spine. “Interesting. Overt power. That implies there are other forms of power he does exercise. Barry?”

“I’m aware of my place, Harrison.” The hand tugged his hair harder, just short of painful, which was actually really disappointing.

“I’m not entirely convinced of that, but let’s assume you are. If you’re so aware of your place, as you put it, why have I caught you repeatedly flirting with Candy down in filing?”

Barry raised his eyebrows. He knew Harrison had noticed, he’d made sure of that, but to bring it up now? “Her name is Cindy and I like her.”

“You like her?”

“Is that so hard to believe?”

“I know you, Barry. I’ve known you your entire life. You’re attracted to people with intelligence and common sense, neither of which Candy possesses.”

“Cindy, her name is Cindy, and fine, I’m not interested in her.” He crossed his arms over his chest, glaring. “I’m just giving you another target.”

“Another target? Who would be the other one?”

“Rob? Captain Singh’s fiancé. He’s nice. He listens to me and gives me advice when I ask for it. He doesn’t care that I’m not the same person, ‘cause he barely knew me before anyway and he makes these lemon tarts that I would kill for.”

“Apparently.” Barry frowned at the addition, realizing the implications of what he’d said. He hadn’t meant it that way, but now that Harrison said it… “Barry, I’m not going to kill Rob.”

When Barry didn’t respond, he continued, fingers still scraping rhythmically against the back of his neck. “Despite what you may think, I do in fact like Captain Singh. He’s a very reasonable and easily manipulated man. However, he would never believe that Rob left him of his own volition and if his fiancé were to disappear, he would spare no efforts in finding the killer. I have no interest in becoming the focus of yet another vendetta, Barry. I have my hands full with you.”

Barry flushed a little at the praise and at the hand that Harrison dropped a little lower to encircle the back of his neck.

“Removing Joe and Henry from your life was not a calculated move on my part. I would rather not remove yet another father figure if I can help it.”

It sounded genuine, or, as genuine as Harrison ever sounded. “You mean it? You aren’t going to kill Rob or Captain Singh?”

“As long as they don’t interfere. In fact, I was considering coming with you to their place for dinner tomorrow night.”
“But… you’ve never come with me. You said you’d rather tie me down and rip my toe nails out than accompany me to a family dinner at the Singh household.” Which, of all the things Harrison could do to him when he was tied down, was by far Barry’s least favorite.

The hand squeezed affectionately. “I can suffer one evening.”

“Without killing anyone?”

“I believe I’ve already said that.”

“Oh, forgive me for wanting to make sure my homicidal boyfriend isn’t intending on going on another killing spree. It wouldn’t be the first or even the se…”

Harrison pulled him forward by the grip on his neck, kissing him soundly and Barry melted into it. When they separated, Barry couldn’t keep the smile off his face. Until his little slip up two months ago, it hadn’t occurred to him exactly how much Rob and Captain Singh meant to him. Every time he’d been over for dinner since then, there had been a fist lodged in his chest at the idea of Harrison taking one or both of them.

Now, not only had Harrison added Rob and Captain Singh to the no-kill list, but he was also going to dinner.

Harrison kissed Barry’s forehead before moving to stand behind Dr. Holt again. Really, Barry had to hand it to the doctor, because despite the fact he was sweating profusely and his chest was popping up and down in a way that clearly indicated his distress, he still looked remarkably composed.

Harrison nodded to the door. “Barry, please let Detective Thawne in.”

*****

When Barry opened the door after only fifteen minutes, he didn’t look upset. He was relaxed, smiling, leaning into the doorway as he asked Eddie to come in. That alone told Eddie something was wrong, because Barry didn’t want to be there, they’d established that on day one, and he’d never pretended otherwise. It didn’t look like he was pretending now, either, though, and that was unnerving.

All that aside, he still didn’t expect Dr. Wells to be standing in the room when he entered. One hand automatically reached for his gun before he could stop himself. His fingers closing around where the hilt should have been, but Wells hadn’t moved. He was still standing with one hand resting on Dr. Holt’s shoulder, the other toying with the doctor’s silver and grey pen. It was Barry who dropped on the couch, holding Eddie’s gun in distaste.

He flicked the safety on and held it up. “Not cool, Eddie. That’s my boyfriend. I wouldn’t shoot at your boyfriend.”

“Your boyfriend has your psychiatrist tied to a chair. A position I am uncomfortable familiar with.”
Barry opened his mouth, stopped and closed it, nodding wordlessly.

Eddie caught Dr. Holt’s eyes, but the man didn’t make any move, probably terrified with Dr. Wells standing that close – a feeling that Eddie could very much relate to. “What do you want, Wells?”

“I’m disappointed.” Wells let go of Dr. Holt’s shoulder, slowly walking across the room to stand in front of Eddie, one hand in the pocket of his jacket casually, even if Eddie knew there was nothing casual in what was going on. “You see, Eddie, I thought I made myself very clear when I said not to enlist outside assistance in trying to fruitlessly convince Barry to leave me and, yet, here we are.”

Barry tisked from the couch, finger wagging, but he stopped at Well’s reproachful glare, holding his hands up in mock surrender. “Sorry, didn’t mean to interrupt your evil monologue.”

“As I was saying, I’m disappointed in you. I’d say I thought you were smarter than that, but then I’d be lying. Luckily, for you, regular counseling is a condition for Barry’s continued employment with the CCPD and I happen to think Dr. Holt here is a vast improvement to the grief counselor the department assigned him. Unfortunately, for Dr. Holt, I can’t let this go unchallenged.”

“What…” Eddie looked from Dr. Holt, who hadn’t moved or said anything; to Barry, who was watching Wells with rapt attention; then back at Dr. Wells, who was staring down at him. “I don’t understand. What does that mean?”

“It means that Dr. Holt will continue to see Barry, in an official capacity from here on out, reporting back to the CCPD as required. I’m going to trust that he understands what it means when I tell him to use discretion in those reports.” He turned to Dr. Holt, who nodded once, before giving his attention back to Eddie. “However, you, Detective Thawne, need a reminder that insubordination won’t always end well. Not for you and not for the people you bring into this.”

Eddie had only a moment to register that Wells had moved, before the doctor screamed and Eddie barely managed to stop from doing the same. The pen he’d forgotten Wells had was lodged in Dr. Holt’s hand, pinning it to the chair he was sitting in. The doctor choked off his own scream, but his face was ash white as the pen was ripped out and Wells walked back over the few steps between them so slowly it was painful.

He held the pen out to Eddie. “Take it.”

Eddie wasn’t sure if the lack of tremor in his hand was bravery or shock.

“Barry pushes me because he enjoys the results. You won’t. Don’t try my patience again, Detective Thawne. Barry, we have reservations.”

He walked out and Barry started to follow, but stopped just inside the door. “Hey, sorry about that, he can be a little…”

“Barry!”

“It wouldn’t kill you to be polite!”

“No, but it might kill him.”

Barry’s annoyance melted into laughter as he followed Dr. Wells out. “Where are we going? It better not be one of those fancy restaurants. Their portions are always too small.”

“You’ll survive.”
“Oh! If it’s the place with the chocolate soufflé things I will blow you in my lab after.”

The door to the front of the office shut with a click and it still took Eddie a few seconds to move. He dropped the bloodied pen to the ground, wiping his hand on his pants without thinking. Dr. Holt’s voice dragged him out of his stunned thoughts. “Detective?”

“Doctor!” Eddie rushed forward, eyeing the wound as he worked the knots, trying not to jar the hand. “I’m so sorry, I should never have…”

“Relax, Detective Thawne.”

Eddie’s laugh was strained – relaxing was the last thing he was going to do anytime soon – but Dr. Holt gave him a sympathetic smile, wrapping his tie around the hand to staunch the bleeding.

“You don’t have to keep seeing Barry. That… I’ll talk to Wells and…”

“There’s no need for that.” Dr. Holt moved to his desk and opened the drawer, pulling out his cell phone and keys. “I would, however, appreciate help getting to the nearest clinic.”

“How can you be so calm?”

“You sought me out for my experience working with violent criminals. That was not the first, nor will it be the last time I’m assaulted by a patient or an angry family member. That wasn’t even the first time I’ve been stabbed with a writing utensil.” Dr. Holt handed the keys to Eddie to lock the door behind them. “In fact, I’d say that was a rather productive session, all things considered.”

“It was?”

“Oh, yes. Half an hour alone with Harrison Wells was more than enough time to confirm he is, in fact, a sociopath. I suspected as much, but it’s always good to have first hand knowledge. He’s also very arrogant.”

“Arrogant?”

“He thinks he has Barry under his control.”

“And you don’t?”

“I think Barry is a very emotionally and mentally unstable young man and I suspect that Dr. Wells has about as much control as Barry lets him have. Speaking of which, does there happen to be a file clerk at the CCPD by the name of Cindy?”

Eddie thought for a second. “Uh, maybe? Young, bubbly personality, pretty, not the smartest clerk we have, but she knows her alphabet.”

Dr. Holt nodded. “That would be her. I would strongly suggest she transfer to another city. Immediately.”

“Wait.” Eddie stopped trying to hail a taxi and stepped away from the curb, pulling Dr. Holt along with a guiding arm on his shoulder. “You think Barry would hurt her?”

“No, of course not.” Dr. Holt pressed harder into the open wound, his face pinching in pain. “I need more time to make a full assessment, but as of right now, I don’t think Barry’s a direct threat to anyone other than himself and, potentially, Dr. Wells. That being said, he has a very select group of people he wants to keep safe and anyone outside of that is collateral damage. This Cindy, she’s
collateral.”

But that couldn’t… That was insane, that was… Barry. And Eddie couldn’t help remembering what Wells had said the last time he’d threatened Eddie, about Barry doing anything to keep the people he cared about safe.

“I also have a gaping hole in my hand that needs medical attention and several patients I have to cancel on.”

Eddie shook his head to clear it. “Right, sorry.”

It only took a minute to hail the cab and while Dr. Holt made his calls, politely explaining that a medical emergency was forcing him to reschedule, Eddie wondered how much collateral damage there had been so far.
Today was good

Chapter Summary

Because who the hell donates nearly a million dollars to a very specific charity without at least taking some of the credit?

"Today was good. Today was fun. Tomorrow is another one." - Dr. Seuss-

-Past (Four Months After the Tidal Wave)-

Harrison had great hands. Really great hands. They were strong and callused, rough against Barry’s pale skin with long fingers that stretched along his back, pressing and prodding, testing the recent injuries. “You’re healing at less than half the usual rate.”

“Mm, maybe if a certain someone had warned me there was a car coming…” The fingers dug in and Barry cringed, laughing at Harrison’s irritation.

“You are more than capable of dodging a simple car.” The fingers eased, sliding further down to rub circles into his lower back. “If you paid more attention to your surroundings, no warning would be necessary.”

Harrison brought his hand down lower still, to the edge of Barry’s low slung sweat pants. “You are also capable of running more than three hundred and fifty miles per hours.”

“I’m not living up to my potential, if I would just apply myself – blah, blah, blah.” Barry scrolled down through the headlines on his tablet, pointedly not responding to Harrison’s advance. Harrison hated being ignored. While the older man continued to inspect the healing wounds and lingering bruises – a tad more forcefully than necessary – Barry focused on other things.

Harrison was right about the healing and about paying attention and going faster. Barry had been barely managing for months now. There had been enough supplements to get him through Oliver and Felicity descending on him to make sure he was okay, through the search and rescue, and the beginning of the clean up. He’d run out just in time for Felicity to show up again asking the good Dr. Wells for help with Ray’s suit.

He’d followed her back to Starling to help with their meta, against Harrison’s advice. He’d just really needed to get away from everything – the smell, the bodies, the overwhelming guilt of his own failure. He hadn’t realized how bad he was until he’d nearly gotten himself killed. If it hadn’t been for Harrison running in to save him, he probably would have died. Sometimes, he wished he had.

“What are you reading?

“The news. There was another anonymous donation to the lower east. A quarter of a million to the hospital and another quarter to the school. It says they’ll be able to start drawing up the plans and applying for permits.”

“Hm.” Those long fingers dug into his sore lower back muscles and Barry moaned, arching into the
touch. Behind him, Harrison chuckled. “Restraint, Mr. Allen.”

Barry rolled his eyes, scrolling the third article, hoping to glean something new. “Aren’t you at least a little curious who it is?”

“It doesn’t matter. When this is finished, none of it will.”

Familiar, unwanted anger welled up inside him and Barry stopped, his finger hovering over the screen for a moment longer before he shut the protective case. “I’m gonna be late.”

Harrison didn’t stop him from sliding out of the bed or leaving the room.

Being mad wouldn’t do any good, not for either of them, but Barry didn’t like the reminder that Harrison’s endgame involved leaving him. No more than Harrison liked being reminded of how badly skewed this time line was from his own.

He glanced at the clock on his way to the bathroom and frowned. It was nearly seven fifty. Captain Singh had texted him the night before, saying he needed to meet with him at the precinct first thing in the morning, which was usually eight. He was going to be at least half an hour late.

By the time Barry emerged from the bedroom, showered and dressed, Harrison was waiting at the kitchen table, his own tablet open, S.T.A.R. Labs’ emblem clear in the corner of the screen. More concerning, however, was the protein bar sitting on the other side of the table, next to Barry’s messenger bag.

He scowled at the bar as he picked his bag up and slung it across his shoulders. “No thanks.”

“Barry…”

“I’ll get donuts.”

“Two hundred of them?”

Barry paused, thinking about it, because while he really would prefer eating two hundred donuts to choking down one of those bars, he couldn’t be sure the donut shop would actually have two hundred on hand by the time he made it there. He also wasn’t sure how he would explain carrying sixteen dozen boxes of donuts into his lab.

He scooped up the bar as petulantly as he could manage and stormed out, not bothering to look back to see Harrison’s self-satisfied expression.

*****

He walked while he ate, then ran the rest of the way, coming to a stop in an alleyway a few blocks from the precinct building, where he could get a coffee and bagel from a street cart to finish his walk. Downtown was better than the suburbs. The smell wasn’t as strong, the streets a little more crowded, though still only a ghost of what they used to be. Once upon a time, there had been cafes and shops on every corner. Now, it was a half a mile to the nearest sandwich shop for lunch.
FEMA was organizing the relief and clean up, but while they took care of clearing debris off the streets and public areas, it was up to the city and land owners to take care of the actual rebuilding. It was slow going. Insurance companies were taking a huge hit, making them reluctant to pay out and even when they did, the process for mold remediation, plans, permits, and passing inspections took months.

He was pretty sure the pressure from the Captain himself was the only reason Lucky’s Donuts a block away had gotten up and running so quickly. It was amazing how, even in a wheelchair, the man could be that intimidating.

“Allen, get in my office!”

Speaking of the Captain.

He closed the door behind him, eyes immediately drawn to the breakfast tacos sitting on the Captain’s desk. Barry logged the information for potential blackmail material, because he knew for a fact that was against the Rob’s healthy eating regimen. “Hey, sorry, sir, the, uh, the bus was…”

“Sit down.”

“Yes, sir.” He sat down and stared at his hands, trying to ignore the thick smell of sausage, potato and cheese.

“I’m putting together an Anti Meta-Human Task Force.” Oh, that was… actually, Barry wasn’t sure what that was. Captain Singh had liked the Flash, so Anti Meta-human wasn’t Anti-Him. Anti-Harrison, though? Maybe. “There’ve been another string of attacks and robberies recently that involve meta-humans. I called you in because the Chief wants to bring Harrison Wells in as a scientific adviser.”

“Oh.” That made sense. Harrison knew more about them than anyone else and he was already working with Iron Heights on designing cells capable of holding the more dangerous ones. “I’m really not sure what that has to do with me, though.”

Captain Singh’s fingers tapped his desk a few times before he asked, “Do I look stupid, Mr. Allen?”

Barry hesitated. The correct was no, of course not, but then he’d have to admit that he knew what the Captain was talking about, which he didn’t. “Is that a trick question, sir?”

“I didn’t make Captain by sitting on my ass.”

That could mean a lot of things. Some really bad. It could just mean he knew Barry was the Flash. It could mean he knew Harrison was a meta. Probably not. He wouldn’t be inviting Harrison onto the team if he thought he couldn’t trust him. But what if he was just trying to give Barry a chance to come clean? What if it really was a trick question? What if…

“You and Dr. Wells haven’t exactly been discrete. Just because I chose to look the other way, doesn’t mean I didn’t see anything.” Oh, thank god, this was about his relationship with Harrison. Wait, actually, that sucked, too.

“I, um… don’t know what you’re talking about?” His voice rose helplessly at the end, unable to stay level in the face of such an obvious lie.

“Right.” Captain Singh sighed. “Look, I knew Joe for a very long time. He was a friend and I respected him as an officer and as a person. He loved you. Next to Iris, there was nothing he loved
Barry shrank into himself, eyeing his clenched hands desperately. He knew what was coming and he didn’t want to hear it. If it were anyone else, he’d already be out the door, but he respected the Captain too much to do that – he owed him too much for letting Mardon put him in that chair. Besides, it didn’t change anything. Whatever Singh wanted to say, he could say, it didn’t mean Barry would be listening.

“Just to be clear, Joe wouldn’t approve. We both know that. I don’t know what his beef was with Dr. Wells, but I know he didn’t trust the man. Now me? I don’t have a choice. The Chief wants him in on this and there isn’t anyone out there that knows meta-humans as well as he does. I can’t argue that, unless you give me a reason to.”

Barry looked up, shocked. “I’m sorry, what?”

Captain Singh leaned forward, meeting Barry’s eyes. “Can you give me a reason not to bring him in on this? Anything.”

He’s the Reverse-Flash.

He stopped me.

It’s his fault everyone’s dead.

No, that wasn’t true.

I let him.

I should have seen it coming.

It’s my fault.

“No.”

Barry dropped his head again, but not before he saw the disappointment in Singh’s face. “Okay. Jones will be taking the lead on forensics.”

“But…”

“No, you can help, but everything goes through Jones. Lead forensics has to take the stand if anything goes to trial.” Which, of course, Barry couldn’t do. “In the meantime, assuming Dr. Wells accepts, it means he’ll be spending more time here. I expect you to at least attempt to keep it professional.”

Well, that was no fun. “Right, of course. Yes, sir. If that’s all, I have some samples I need to run.”

“One more thing. Rob wants me to invite you to dinner Saturday.”

Barry froze, unsure what to say to that. Captain Singh had been obvious in his attempts to check in with Barry – stopping by his lab, taking him to lunch, calling him into the office – but this was after work hours. This was at his condo with his fiancé and that was… different. That was personal.

“I’d like it if you came.”

Barry hesitated a moment longer before agreeing. “Okay.”
He’d regretted it almost immediately, but he couldn’t take it back now. Instead, he focused on running his samples and while he waited for those, he looked back over the other reports of anonymous donations. The first two had gone toward housing, then the most recent for the school and hospital. In total, it was nearly a million.

The idea that anyone would anonymously donate that much was… Barry couldn’t think of anyone who would do that. Oliver might have, before he lost everything. Ray had the money to do it, but he was too pragmatic. He would have at least used the publicity to boost good will toward his company.

Whoever it was had to have a good reason for not letting anyone know who they were. Or maybe it was something with the money. Maybe they didn’t want anyone knowing they had enough to throw away a million dollars.

He was still thinking about it when he took a walk for lunch, grabbed a few sandwiches and stopped by the donut shop. Afternoons everything was half off and he shoved two dozen sausage and cheese kolaches and a couple large bottles of orange juice in his messenger bag before heading back to the station.

It would get him through the rest of the afternoon. Or most of it. If he got desperate, there were always bars in his desk drawer. Harrison insisted. Barry refused. Thanks to Harrison, he didn’t have bills to pay, so he put almost everything into keeping himself from passing out in the middle of work.

Harrison texted just after lunch, inquiring as to why the Captain would want to meet with him when there were no active meta-human investigations. Barry responded with a poop emoji and set his phone aside, watching the incredulous responses that came after, invariably devolving into comments about Barry’s maturity and mental state. He was half tempted to run to S.T.A.R. Labs and try to sneak a peak at Harrison’s face, but there was a good chance he’d get caught. He’d just have to settle for the remnants of annoyance that night.

“Allan, did you finish the analysis for the…”

“On my desk.”

Jones walked over and took the file, but stopped just short of walking out. “Hey, uh, no hard feelings on the task force, right? I mean, I didn’t ask for…”

“It’s fine.” It was. Really. Okay, not really, but Barry knew Captain Singh was right. If it came to a trial, it wouldn’t be Barry’s lab results that would be under scrutiny, it would be Barry’s credibility. Even if the defense didn’t subpoena his psych eval, it was too much of a risk.

“If he’d asked me, I would have said you were a better fit.”

Barry focused on his microscope, trying not to pay attention as Jones continued his rant. It wasn’t that Barry didn’t get it. Jones was new. He’d transferred in after the wave, and he was a good ten years older than Barry. He wasn’t a bad forensic tech or even a bad person. He was, however,
annoyingly persistent in his attempts to get Barry to warm up to him, which was probably why he was so intent on making sure Barry didn’t feel slighted.

“You have way more experience with meta-humans and you’ve been working with Dr. Wells for almost a year now, right?”

Unfortunately for Jones, Barry wasn’t interested in making new friends. He made a final notation on his notepad and turned off the microscope. He’d writing the formal report later.

“I’ve never even met him. What’s he…”

He walked past Jones on his way out the door and ignored the stuttered, “We’ll just… talk… later,” as he went down the stairs to find Eddie.

Captain Singh’s door was closed and Barry took the chair next to Eddie’s desk with a happy sigh. “So, what’s up, Detective Thawne?”

Eddie chuckled into his files. “Jones bothering you again?”

Barry stretched out to take one of the candy mints from the bowl on Eddie’s desk and plopped back down. “That’s not fair. I don’t just come down here to escape Jones’ harassment.”

“No, you come down here to steal my candy.”

Barry grinned, rolling the mint around his mouth. “So, who’s Captain Singh talking to?”

“Dr. Wells.” That was quick. “The Captain’s putting together an Anti Meta-Human Task Force. Apparently, I’ll be heading it, starting with outside reports of potential meta-human activity.”

“Outside meta-human activity? Don’t we have enough to deal with here?” Barry grabbed the top folder off the sizeable stack.

“We aren’t outsourcing any of our own officers, but if we recognize the meta-human in question, we can send over a list of known… powers. My job used to be so much simpler.”

The folder he’d taken was a homicide and while it did look suspicious, he highly doubted it was a meta – certainly, not any of the ones they’d dealt with. Eddie sat back and held out the file he’d been looking at. “I don’t suppose you’ve heard of a meta-human that can freeze things?”

Barry flipped through it, scanning the text quickly. Some well off guy down south had his private vault broken into, a million in jewelry was taken, some cash as well, and a famous painting of flowers that Barry didn’t recognize right off, but the report said was worth several hundred thousand. The locking mechanism for the vault had been frozen, causing it to break like glass, which sounded suspiciously like…

It couldn’t be, though. Cisco has disassembled the cold gun when they’d caught Captain Cold. “No, I’ve never seen a meta-human do that.”

He passed the file back, noting the city it was from just as the Captain’s door opened and Harrison walked out with Captain Singh, behind him. “It’s good to have you on board. We’ll need to meet again tomorrow afternoon to discuss a reasonable budget and priorities.”

“Of course, does eleven work for you?”

Barry stayed seated, but slouched down a little, pulling his phone out to snap a quick picture. Eddie
glanced over. “What are you doing?”

“Sh!” He typed out a message to go with it and waited for Harrison to pull his buzzing phone out and look at the display. Pale blue eyes narrowed for a moment, before they slid across the room and instantly found Barry at Eddie’s desk.

“You’ll have to excuse me, Captain. It appears your forensic assistant is feeling particularly juvenile this evening.”

Captain Singh shook Harrison’s hand before going back into his office and Barry waited patiently for Harrison to walk across the room to stand over him, hand tucked into his pants pockets. “Was that really necessary, Mr. Allen?”

In response, he toed off his left shoe and moved his foot forward to brush against the hem of Harrison’s slacks. Nothing too obvious. No, wouldn’t want to be obvious, but apparently obvious enough if Captain Singh had noticed. Who else had noticed? Had Eddie noticed? Probably. Eddie was smart, observant, a good detective, and really, what was the point of keeping it a secret if the Captain already knew? He’d said to keep it professional, not insisted Barry break it off.

Barry smiled up at Harrison’s disapproving frown. “I was just making you aware of the situation, Dr. Wells.”

The situation being that Harrison’s ass looked damn fine in those slacks and he wasn’t the least bit ashamed that his internal voice sounded a lot like Cisco at the moment.

Okay maybe a little ashamed.

Harrison didn’t look particularly amused, but he didn’t move away, either. Eddie had taken renewed interest in his case files.

“Are you coming home tonight or did you have other plans?”

Barry slipped his foot just inside the slacks, tugging playfully. “No, I’ve got something.”

*****

The thing about working with the CCPD was that he had access to all sorts of things he wouldn’t otherwise – specifically, online files and databases. If he were Felicity Smoak, maybe he wouldn’t need that, but he wasn’t. He was Barry Allen and he was running on fumes with the remains of fifteen bacon cheese burgers and ten orders of fries piled next to his desk, just out of view of the door.

They didn’t have the man power to run the department at full capacity through the night. So, he waited until most of the staff had gone home for the day. The officers were cut in number by half, only two detectives would be clocked in, and forensics were on call only. Since Barry was the one on call and since it wasn’t uncommon for him to stay after hours, no one would question him holing up in his lab after five.
He started with basic news searches, because he’d been thinking. Who would donate that much money without looking for any kind of recognition? Someone who wasn’t supposed to have the money in the first place.

It took him hours of combing the database, but he pinned down several suspicious, high dollar robberies within a month of the other donations. On a hunch, he headed back down and thumbed through the files on Eddie’s desk. Two were robberies that he’d singled out as potentially metas. The robberies themselves were nowhere near Central City, but both had M.O.’s similar to the one Eddie had shown him earlier.

He hurried back up, pulling his cell phone out as he went. He wasn’t sure how, but the only other time he’d seen something like that was back when Cold had been trying to get his attention. If it was Cold, he’d have to be hiding out somewhere he could go unnoticed, around people that wouldn’t tell on him. Thieves honor or just fear maybe, but the city was crawling with volunteers and do-gooders. The only place Barry could think of that someone could really hide out in Central City was the lower east, which made sense, because that was where the donations were going.

If he was there, that made finding him easier. That part of town hadn’t done much in the way of rebuilding. The only places that had utilities were the shelters and community centers. In order for Captain Cold to run any kind of operation, let alone one that would allow him the facilities to rebuild and maintain his gun, he’d need electricity, and not a small amount of it, either.

Unfortunately, the CCPD wasn’t plugged into the local power grid and Barry didn’t have the skills necessary to hack into it. Fortunately, he had access to S.T.A.R. Labs’ computers and satellites – assuming Harrison wasn’t there, anyway.

Barry looked at the clock on his phone and bit his lip thoughtfully. Considering the time, if Harrison was there, he was probably with Gideon, logging the day’s activities or checking the creep cam to see what all of the important players were doing. There weren’t as many as there used to be. Captain Singh, Eddie, Barry’s grief counselor, a few other people Barry didn’t know very well. He’d wanted to put one in Felicity and Oliver’s new house, but Barry had pointed out that Oliver was paranoid enough to notice them and Felicity was good enough to track the feed and find out where it was coming from. It had been a hard sell, but Harrison had promised not to involve Team Arrow as long as they didn’t interfere. Putting cameras in Oliver Queen’s house was tantamount to asking them to interfere and that was against the rules.

Barry looked back and up to where he knew the camera in his lab was. If he left now and Harrison was watching him, he’d most likely assume Barry went home and run there first before realizing his mistake and coming back to S.T.A.R. Labs. Barry could get maybe ten minutes to find what he was looking for.

His specialty was forensics, not computers. Felicity could do it with time to spare, Barry wasn’t so sure about his own skills, but… what the hell. Worst case scenario, he’d got caught with his hand in the proverbial cookie jar and he wasn’t even sure why he was hiding it. It wasn’t a particularly dangerous situation. It didn’t fall into the category of something Harrison would disapprove of. He wasn’t trying to save anyone or stop anything bad from happening. He wasn’t putting himself in harm’s way. He was just curious.

A few moments later, Barry had logged out of his work computer and was sliding to a stop in Harrison’s chair in the cortex. He paused, but when there was no sign of Harrison, he immediately went to work. Cisco would have been better at this, but Barry had watched him often enough in the past that he could manage.

Cisco’s log in was still active and Barry used it to gain access to the system. The satellites themselves
couldn’t track energy use, but they could track heat signatures and energy gave off heat. The most obvious sources were the shelters, but Barry knew where those were, so he didn’t worry about them. There were a few minor blips, low heat readings scattered sparsely throughout the area – probably individuals that had found less than legal ways to tap into the power grid.

Then there was the warehouse. It was well within the borders of the lower east, away from the shelters and residential areas. None of the businesses there were operating yet.

“Bingo.”

He half expected to hear Harrison behind him, having snuck up at some point in the last few minutes and decided to wait for the perfect opportunity to announce his presence. Instead, Barry was met with silence. Something about the cortex being that quiet didn’t feel right. He didn’t mean to, but he closed his eyes and he could hear Cisco’s music, Caitlin’s heels clicking against the floor, Joe laughing at their antics. That didn’t make it better, though, it made it worse. So much worse.

He should open his eyes, get out of his head. Leave S.T.A.R. Labs and go home. Staying there wasn’t going to help, but he couldn’t make himself move. He couldn’t quite manage to force his eyes open to silence the voices that were whispering in his head - Cisco talking about the success of his latest toy, Caitlin admonishing him for not taking better care of himself, Joe telling him he’d done a good job.

Reluctantly, he let himself get lost in it. A pretend world where Iris knew he was the Flash and had forgiven him for keeping it a secret, where his dad was alive and proud, where the city was bright and vibrant, where…

“There you are.”

Harrison’s voice jarred Barry out of his fantasy and he blinked open his eyes to the reality of a much starker cortex, only dimly lit in the evening. Harrison was standing in front of him. Standing, not in a wheel chair, no glasses. Not the paralyzed scientist he’d pretended to be, but the Reverse-Flash, a man who’d come back from the future and killed Barry mom, then lied to him to gain his trust, only to…

Anger, sudden and painful, made it difficult to breathe.

Bad bad bad.

Anger made him stupid. Anger made him lash out. It didn’t matter who Harrison had pretended to be or what he’d done in the past. Not anymore. No matter how much Barry may have wanted to avenge his mother, it wouldn’t do any good now. Killing Harrison, arresting him, none of it would make it better. His mother would still be dead, just like everyone else. Just like his dad and Joe and Iris and…

A hand settled on Barry’s shoulder, but he twisted out from under it, up and across the room before he realized he was moving. “Don’t. Don’t touch me.”

He could feel Harrison’s eyes darken. “Barry, look at me.”

Instead of looking up, Barry drove forward into Harrison, pushing the older man back into the wall with an arm across his clavicle. His eyes focused on the protruding bones just below the slender neck. The speedforce was like static between them. It wasn’t fair, maybe, because what Mardon had done, that wasn’t Harrison’s fault. The only thing Harrison was guilty of was not letting Barry die with the rest of them, but even so… Even so, Harrison was the only one who could make it better.

“Barry…”

In the next moment he was the one with his back to the wall, looking into Harrison’s pale blue eyes, no trace of angry red. Knuckles stroked along Barry’s jaw, too soft, too soothing. Those long, thin fingers stretched out to move higher, still too gently, before threading into his hair and gripping, pulling Barry’s head to the side sharply, but not enough to really even sting as Harrison leaned in to whisper in his ear. “What brought this on? You were doing so well today.”

Barry closed his eyes. Why couldn’t Harrison just take the bait? Why did he have to be so damned insightful? “I just… I can hear them. It’s so quiet and I can hear them and I miss them.”

“And?” Stupid, insightful bastard.

“And it’s my fault.”

Harrison’s mouth found his forehead, kissed it in a way that was almost paternal, if it wasn’t for the closeness of his body and the intimate way Barry knew it. “Barry, we’ve been over this. None of this is your fault.”

“I know, but…”

“No. None of this is your fault. You are who you are – who you were meant to be. Yes, if you’d been willing to sacrifice everyone else, you could have saved Iris, but Cisco and Caitlin were already dead and you had no way of knowing your dad would be helping to evacuate the first floor medical unit. No way of knowing that he’d refuse to leave patients behind.”

No, but he should have. He should have known, because that’s what he’d done. He’d known running in front of the tidal wave was a possible death sentence and he’d done it anyway, to save everyone.

“And even if you had known, sacrificing the many to save the few was never an option for you.”

It should have been. It should have. He should have grabbed Iris and run back to S.T.A.R. Labs. He could have gotten her and Cisco and Caitlin in one of the air tight labs and at least tried to get to the prison to make sure his dad was okay before the wave hit. There was no way of really knowing how long Mardon had waited to kill Joe, but Barry could have tried. He should have just done what he could to save the people he cared about. He’d learned that lesson the hard, painful way.

Harrison leaned closer, pressing his body into Barry’s to pin him more tightly as he breathed into his ear. “But if you need me to hurt you to take away the guilt, there’s no need to provoke me. All you have to do is ask.”

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“…today. He had a bad night.”
That was Harrison.

“He’s fine now, but I had to give him something. He won’t be up for another few hours.”

Who was he talking to?

“No, that won’t be necessary. He just needs rest now. I’ll be there for the budget meeting in an hour.”

Budget? Since when did Harrison worry about budgets? Oh, right, Singh and the Anti Meta-Human Task Force. Barry stretched out, not bothering to hide his cringe at the bone deep ache in his arms and lower back. It hadn’t been nearly as rough as it could have been, not even close to what Barry had wanted, but it had helped. He felt... stable. Good. He felt good.

He looked up at Harrison standing next to him, buttoning his shirt while he ended the conversation with the Captain. “Obviously, I haven’t had time to work up anything official, but I have a few ideas.”

Barry reached over and slapped his open hand against Harrison’s ass, then fell limply back onto his stomach on the bed and enjoyed the chastising glance. He pressed a finger to his lips in a hushing gesture and Harrison had the decency to raise his eyebrows in amusement.

“There are some things I need to finish up here before I leave. I’ll see you at eleven, Captain.”

Harrison pocketed the phone and sat on the edge of the bed. “How are you feeling?”

Barry hummed sleepily. “Better.”

“You need rest.”

He nodded into the pillow, letting his eyes slip half closed.

“And you need to eat. There are protein bars on the counter and four gallons of ice cream in the freezer. Try not to give yourself brain freeze.”

Barry pulled his fleece cover up higher, tucking it to his chin. “Love you.”

A hand ran through his hair affectionately before Harrison stood, taking his jacket from the chair on the way out. Barry waited as the sounds of movement inevitably made their way through the house and out the front door, until the automatic lock had engaged and then he waited a few minutes more, fighting the urge to fall asleep in the warm cocoon of Star Wars fleece and pale, silk covered, goose down.

Why did evil have to be so comfortable?

When he was sure Harrison wasn’t coming back, he rolled himself out of bed and stumbled into the kitchen. The protein bars sat ominous and threatening on the counter and he considered skipping them. He would have, but he needed to be on his game if he was going to try and sneak into what was, potentially, a villain’s lair in broad daylight.

Reluctantly, he sat on the counter, washing every bite down with a large glass of thick chocolate milk. He got through one and dug into the freezer – two half gallons of chocolate later he felt ready. Or, at least, ready enough.

Harrison had bought him a new wardrobe, neatly hung in the master closet, but if Barry wasn’t wearing a two hundred dollar Armani sweater to the precinct, he sure as hell wasn’t wearing it to the
slums. Instead, he pilfered the guest closet, which was packed with the clothes he’d managed to salvage from Joe’s house and Cisco’s apartment.

Dressed in thread bare jeans, a dark t-shirt, and a darker hoodie, Barry headed out and got the bus. Running would be faster, but that took energy and he didn’t want to burn calories until he had to, even if it was just after eleven when he finally made it to his destination.

Before stepping off the bus, he pulled the hood up and thrust his hands into his pockets. He’d let the bus take him to within a block of the warehouse. As he walked, he looked around. It was… eerily clean. No discarded blankets, no trash littering the roads, no signs of anyone living on the streets at all, which would have been strange before the tidal wave. Now it was outright creepy.

The warehouse itself was like every other building on the street – boarded up and, by all appearances abandoned, only Barry knew better. Abandoned building didn’t reconnect themselves to the power grid. He slowed down as he walked past, looking for cameras. There weren’t any obvious ones, although thanks to Harrison’s creep cam, he knew they were easy enough to hide, so he ducked around the edge and stopped, waiting. When no one came out, he continued around to the back.

The loading dock was small, only two bay doors and both were padlocked, a large gathering of leaves and dirt suggested they hadn’t been opened in a while. Probably since the owners abandoned it. The steel door next to them, however, was clear, a fine line of dirt arching out where it had been opened recently.

Barry looked around one more time, not just for cameras, but for witnesses, before phasing through the closed door and into a large stock room. It was dimply lit by one bare bulb high on the ceiling. There was a table in the middle of the room and past that an entire wall was made up of flimsy, opaque plastic dividers that separated the stock area from the rest of the warehouse. The other walls were lined with… stuff. Barry walked around the edges slowly, half aware that he should hurry and get moving and half too curious to care. There were paintings, a statue, some vases, boxes taped shut and even a few wooden crates. He recognized some of the items listed as stolen in Eddie’s reports, but there was clearly more here.

Turning his attention to the single table in the middle of the room, Barry crept over and looked down at a set of blue prints spread out over the entire surface. It took him a moment to find the address. First National in Seattle Washington, Clay Street.

Barry traced the pencil marks that were occasionally interrupted by times, all in five minute intervals. Guard route, maybe? The vault was circled several times, make and model number for the locking mechanism etched heavily into the print. Barry leaned in closer still, resting his elbows on the table as he studied the pages, only to freeze as the rustle of plastic told him he’d been caught. There was just a second where he could have run. He almost did, but then, really, what would be the fun in that?

Then the unmistakable sound of the Sub-Zero Gun charging told him it was too late. He kept his head down, while he waited to see what Cold would do. There was an asterisk near the top of the page and a symbol he didn’t recognize. It looked like a detailed view of the roof with indicators of where the cooling vents would be.

“Who the hell are you?”

Barry considered playing coy, but right now, he was just a young man who’d managed to sneak in. That was it. He wasn’t the Flash, he wasn’t a cop. There was no reason to draw attention to himself. So, he looked up, eyed the gun and the little blue lights that said it was ready to fire and told the truth. “I’m Barry.”
Cold’s posture stiffened. He was holding the gun with one hand, finger tense, but off the trigger. “What are you doing here?”

“I was bored.” Which, still the truth, if a little oversimplified.

“So you decided to what? Break in and take a look around?” Cold’s brows suddenly drew in. “Do I know you?”

Inside his head, Barry could hear alarms going off, telling him to run, that Cold had somehow recognized him. He smiled through it, though, because he was pretty sure whatever Cold thought he knew, it wasn’t that Barry was the Flash. “I don’t think so. I know you, though. You’re Captain Cold.”

“Not exactly a secret.”

“No, but you’re planning to rob first National in Seattle.”

“Which makes you a witness.”

“I won’t tell.” Barry tried for an honest smile, but Cold didn’t look impressed. He didn’t look much of anything, actually. His face was set in a mostly unreadable expression while he continued to hold the gun level with Barry’s chest.

Hm. He needed a different angle, sympathy might work. Not for himself, but for Cold and what he was doing. It wouldn’t even be a complete and total lie, really. Barry wasn’t sure exactly how he felt about Cold stealing to fund the rebuild, but he didn’t hate it.

“You’re the anonymous donor, right?”

Cold’s finger wrapped around the trigger. “Kid, you have thirty seconds to give me a reason not to shoot you.”

Okay, that wasn’t good, but then Barry’d dealt with worse. He forced himself to look at Cold instead of the gun and pulled his hood back in the hopes that it would make him look a little less cagey. Not that he wasn’t being cagey, but details. “I’m not…"

Voices interrupted him, multiple ones, loud and coming closer until they stepped through the plastic divider. Shit. He should have thought this through. He’d considered the fact this might be Captain Cold, the Sub-Zero Gun, that he could get caught. He’d considered a lot of things, but he’d never considered that Cold might not be working alone.

Maybe if it had just been Heatwave, Barry could have handled it, but it wasn’t just him. Hartley Rathaway was there, as well. A blond woman he didn’t recognize was holding the Pied Piper with an arm loosely wrapped around his neck and a gleeful smile at his annoyance. Another girl, this one with dark skin and curly hair was standing behind Mick, but he couldn’t see her clearly, just her hair and one side of her face.

Getting away from one person was easy enough, even if that person had a weapon specifically designed to stop him, but Hartley had new gauntlet’s hanging from his belt, he had no doubt Mick had his fire gun on him somewhere, and whoever the girls were, he doubted they were going to sit there and let him get away.

He should run. He should run right now before…

“Barry Allen?!” Hartley pulled away from the blond. “What are you doing here?”
“You know him?” Cold didn’t take his eyes off Barry, who was glaring openly at Hartley.

“He spent time at S.T.A.R. Labs after the explosion.” Don’t say it, don’t say it, because if Hartley knew that… “He also works for the CCPD.”

Barry had barely lifted his foot to run when Cold pressed the trigger. He only just managed to dodge the blast, but instead of going for the door, he’d instinctively moved away from the cold, leaving him on the other side of the room, backed into a corner. When he stopped, he was met with four shocked faces and one smug Hartley, saying. “I knew it!”

“You knew he was the Flash?” Cold did take his eyes off Barry then, just for a second, but before Barry could use the advantage, Cold fired the gun again and this time Barry ended up perched on a crate, his right foot stinging from a glancing hit. He should have eaten more. His body was prioritizing, healing the half frozen foot first and sacrificing speed. He wasn’t going to be fast enough.

“I suspected.” Hartley pushed his glasses up his nose. “When I was plotting revenge on Harrison Wells, I noticed Barry Allen, forensic scientist for the CCPD, spending a lot of time at S.T.A.R. Labs, specifically with Cisco Ramon and Caitlin Snow and especially when there was a meta-human problem. The Flash and him have very similar body types. He also woke up from a coma within a week of the first Flash sighting. It made sense.”

Cold looked up at Barry, who had crouched down, ready to try again as soon as his foot finished healing. Not for the back door, though, they’d be expecting that. Besides, he was feeling anxious, panicked, too many factors and it had been months since he’d played hero. If he wanted to phase through something, he needed to concentrate and he couldn’t concentrate with them watching him and Cold’s gun pointed at him. He could run past them, into the rest of the warehouse and find a way out from there.

He still hadn’t decided what his next move was when he heard Cold say, “Shawna.”

The dark skinned girl behind Mick disappeared and Barry had only a moment to realize it was Shawna Baez, the teleporter, before she reappeared behind him, her arms wrapping tightly around his chest. There was a sense of disorientation, like a really strong head rush and then he was standing in front of Cold, the Sub-Zero Gun an inch away from his chest – so close he could feel the cold coming off it.

He was so, so screwed. He should have thought this through. Stupid, stupid, stupid. What was it Harrison had said?

*I would burn the world.*

Barry hadn’t really been looking for an answer then. He’d just found out who Harrison really was and what he’d done and why and Barry had felt so lost and confused and everything hurt. His body, his mind, his heart. Harrison had explained everything to him – the time travel, the plan to return, why he’d saved Barry from the tidal wave and why everyone being dead didn’t matter. The betrayal was a physical pain and as futile as it was, he’d wanted to hurt Harrison back.

You need me? I needed them. Screw your plan. If you need me so much that you’d let thousands of people die to keep me alive, I’ll just end it now. Where would your precious plan be then?

No. No, Barry, because if you did that, I would burn the world. I’d tear it down and leave ashes in its place and then I’d find a way to start over, because there is always a way. And then… then I would make you regret it.
What would he burn first? Central City or Team Arrow? Would he go for the first available targets or the ones Barry held close? So close he didn’t let them anywhere near him. He should have called Felicity. She’d been worried, leaving him voice messages, asking if he wanted to come stay with them for a while, get out of Central City. He hadn’t been sure what to say, so he’d said nothing and now he was dead and…

The gun lifted and came to rest casually on Cold’s shoulder. “I was sorry to hear about your friends.”

Shawna dropped her grip on him, instantly appearing back behind Mick and Barry wasn’t sure what to make of it, any of it. “That’s… that’s it?”

“You sound disappointed.”

“No, not… I’m not disappointed, just… confused.”

“If it would make you feel better, I could still shoot you.”

Barry stepped back involuntarily, but there was humor in those eyes and Barry didn’t feel threatened, which was strange, because this was Captain Cold. Then again, he was in an intimate relationship with the Reverse-Flash, so there were stranger things.

He looked at the other four nervously and back to Cold. “Aren’t you worried I’ll turn you in?”

Cold shrugged, “You turn me in, I tell them who you are. You all but disappeared after the tidal wave. I’m thinking you’d rather not have your identity exposed.”

“That… yeah actually.”

He moved the weight to his injured foot in a nervous shuffle and flinched, shifting back just as quickly. Damage from the Sub-Zero Gun always took longer to heal. Cold acknowledged the injury with a quick glance down, but said nothing and it was awkward. Painfully awkward to stand there in a silent room with five criminals, three of whom had tried to kill him and one that he’d wrongfully imprisoned.

In the silence, the blond woman moved to stand with Cold and Barry had to stop himself from backing up again. Whoever this was, she was an unknown and she was looking him up and down the way Cisco used to look at a Twizzler at the start of an all-nighter.

Her grin widened at his clear discomfort. “Lenny, aren’t you going to introduce us?”

Barry couldn’t quite stop the bubble of laughter at the nickname, because the way ‘Lenny’ sighed and rolled his eyes made it fit and Barry couldn’t un-see that. “Flash, you know Mick, Hartley, Shawna. Meet my baby sister, Lisa. Lisa, Flash.”

She held out a hand, and he hesitated, half expecting it to be some kind of trick. She didn’t look particularly threatening, but that didn’t mean anything. Finally, he took it, but only for a second before pulling back.

Cold dropped the gun into its holster decisively. “Shawna, take Lisa on a food run. I’m thinking pizza. Barry, you like pizza?”

Barry shrugged, confused and more than a little curious at the sudden change in demeanor.

“Good. We’ll meet in the rec room.” Lisa gave Barry a little wave and a wink before Shawna appeared next to her and they were gone. Presumably to get pizza. Cold turned his attention to Mick
and Hartley. “You two, disappear for ten.”

Hartley’s mouth dropped open. “You can’t be serious. Him? He’s a cop.”

“He’s the Flash and I’m always serious.”

Hartley started to protest further, but Mick grabbed him by the back of his hooded cloak and dragged him through the plastic dividers, leaving Barry alone with Captain Cold, which shouldn’t have been a relief. But it was. Still, there was something he needed to clear up.

“I’m not a cop.” Cold stayed silent. “Hartley said I was a cop. I’m not. I’m a forensic scientist, an assistant forensic scientist.”

Cold nodded. “I remember you. When I was arrested, you were there at the station, watching them bring me in.”

“After I stopped you, I ran back and got changed.” He made a running motion with his fingers and smiled at Cold’s bemused expression. “I earned it. How did you get the gun back? Cisco destroyed it.”

“Rathaway.”

Somewhere Cisco was rolling over in his unmarked grave over the idea of Hartley Rathaway rebuilding his Sub-Zero Gun and never mind that he hated having built the thing in the first place, it was still his.

“I wanted your friend Cisco to rebuild it, had the whole thing planned out. We were on our way back when the wave hit. If Lisa hadn’t insisted on stopping for lunch, we would have been here. For the record, that prototype gun he threatened me with that night on the train?”

“Vacuum cleaner.” Barry grinned at the memory as he looked around the room again. “So, this is all you? You, what? Rob from the rich, give to the poor?”

“I’m not Robin Hood, kid. We’re not the good guys.”

“I don’t know. Good or bad, he was still a thief. Why, though? You say you’re not a good guy, then why donate all that money? You could have just kept it.”

“We keep plenty. Besides, I love this city, it’s my home. I’m not letting it die because some meta-human had an anger management problem.”

At the mention of Mardon, Barry felt hot anger rush through him and he turned to face Cold sharply. “What do you know about that?”

Cold was silent for several seconds, meeting Barry’s gaze evenly, but there was something there, something careful in the way he answered. “I know Mark Mardon is no longer an issue. I took care of him.”

That was… an indescribable mix of relieved and happy and jealous all at once. Getting revenge had crossed Barry’s mind more than once, but in his current state, he wasn’t in a position to win against Mardon. At the same time, Barry had known that eventually, he would go after the criminal and when he did nothing would stop him from pulling a Harrison Wells and ripping his still beating heart out of his chest. He didn’t want that. As much as he loved Harrison, needed him, revolved around him, he didn’t want to be him; but if he saw Mardon again, he would. He wouldn’t even regret it.
So, part of him was relieved someone had done it for him, happy it was over with, but jealous that he hadn’t been the one to do it. That he hadn’t at least seen it. After a moment, he took a deep breath and let it go, smiling again. Cold’s shoulders slumped slightly, losing tension Barry hadn’t even realized was there.

Curious.

He went back to looking at the stolen goods and zeroed in on a painting. It was renaissance something, probably an original. He should look it up on the internet later, find out how much it was worth. What would someone pay for a vase of flowers painted by a dead guy?

“How?”

“How?”

“I asked where you’ve been?”

Barry wasn’t sure what that meant, so he went with the obvious. “The CCPD mostly. And home. I spend a lot of time at home. Have you ever seen Doctor Who? I’m on season three.”

Cold tipped his head with raised eyebrows. “After the wave you vanished. There were a few sightings at first, but nothing reliable, then nothing at all. I was convinced you were dead. So, where were you?”

“Oh.” Barry moved away from the painting and back to the table he’d been at when the whole thing started. “I was… around. Things are different. I’m not… I can’t do things like I used to.”

There was an X in one room, marked in white. Entry point, so the other line in pencil had to be the guard’s route.

“Can’t or won’t?”

Barry shrugged. “Does it matter?”

“Yes.”

He shifted uncomfortably. His foot was better. He’d be able to run if he needed. Not that he did, but he really wasn’t sure where this was going. “I don’t know, both? I had a team, now I don’t. It’s complicated.”

“And what if I could help with that?”

How could he…? Oh. He wanted Barry to join them. That was what Hartley had meant. Barry stared down at the table, not really seeing it anymore, but determined to look at anything other than Cold. It was surreal, it was strange and wrong and… oddly, compelling. He’d spent months doing nothing and this was a chance to do something, except…

Except that something was stealing from people and Barry may not be a hero anymore, but he certainly wasn’t a criminal, either. “I can’t.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

He grinned. “Both. I’m not like you. I can’t do that.”

Cold didn’t look angry, just disappointed. “Then what can you do?”
“Not stop you.” He started to walk for the backdoor and paused. “Thank you, for the offer and for, you know, not shooting me… Lenny.”

Without waiting for a response, Barry ran, taking one last look at Cold, whose face was frozen in open annoyance before phasing through the door.

*****

He caught the bus at the same stop it had dropped him off and spent the ride thinking about what Cold had said. He’d wanted Barry to join him. It would have been ludicrous before, but now there was almost a sense of disappointment that he hadn’t agreed. Not that he regretted it. If he’d taken the offer, he would have had to share details of his conditions – mental and physical – he’d have had to hand over all his weaknesses and no matter how non-threatening Cold may have been, Barry wasn’t doing that.

The house was empty, so he went through the cabinets, made a few sandwiches, ate the rest of the pickles, and used the microwave to heat up popcorn. He was half through his third bag when the front door opened.

“I’m in here!”

A moment later Harrison leaned over the back of the couch. “What are you watching?”

“Doctor Who. The Doctor and Martha Jones are trapped in a traffic jam in an underground freeway.”

“Fascinating.” Harrison sat down next to him. “You do realize you’re a time traveler watching a show about a time traveler?”

Barry slapped a hand that tried to sneak into his bag at super speed. “My popcorn. Get your own and I’m not a time traveler yet.”

Harrison leaned back into the couch, pulling Barry with him. “Is this one of Cisco’s?”

Barry nodded and let himself sink against Harrison. A long arm wrapped around his shoulders, fingers digging into the muscles rhythmically, pulling tension out until Barry melted into it.

“You’re doing better today.”

“Hm.”

“We’ll stay in tonight. I’ll get sushi.”

Barry sat up, turning abruptly. “We have Sushi?! Since when do we have Sushi?”

Harrison smiled. “Since I felt generous enough to run to Coast City to get it.”

With a happy sigh, Barry settled back and watched the Doctor leap down from one car to another. He still wanted to know more about Cold – why he was doing this, was it part of some master plan,
did he have more metas working with him? But that could wait.
If karma was a thing – and Len tried not to believe in it, but sometimes the evidence was
insurmountable – he was being punished by the universe at large for one of a multitude
of bad thing he’d done in the past.

"If you never did you should. These things are fun, and fun is good." -Dr. Seuss-

-Past (Four Months and Two Weeks After the Tidal Wave)-

Leonard Snart liked plans. That wasn’t to say he didn’t know how to have a good time, or that he
couldn’t improvise, but when it came to his heists, he preferred to know what was going to happen
and when, to the second, because plans were important. Plans allowed them to get in and out without
being seen, without being identified, without leaving evidence, without anyone getting killed, which
was markedly more important to him as of late. He wasn’t going to shy away from it if it came to
that, but there had been plenty of death recently without him adding needlessly to the body count.

The point was Len had a plan. It was a good plan. It would have been a foolproof one, if it hadn’t
been for the little voice that called out behind him just after his feet hit the carpeted interior of the
office for the Branch Manager of the West Coast Regional Office of First National Bank.

“Pst, Lenny!”

He froze in place, taking a deep, steadying breath. There was only one person that could be, because
the only other person who called him that was outside in the van.

“Lenny, up here!”

He pressed a finger to his ear piece. “Lisa, we have company.”

“You need an extraction?”

He stood up and turned around, momentarily taken aback by the dark figure sitting cross legged on
top of a tall, wide filing cabinet. Barry didn’t look much different than the last time Len had seen him
– dark wash jeans and a dark jacket, hood pulled down to show tousled short brown hair and a bright
smile. What gave Len pause was the foot long subway sandwich he was holding. Well, nearly foot
long, it looked like he’d already started eating it.

Lisa’s coaxing voice pulled him out of his own thoughts. “Lenny?”

Pressing the ear piece again, he answered, “I’ll get back to you on that. Hey, Scarlet.”

Barry smiled. “Hey, Lenny.”

“What are you doing up there?”
“Eating a sandwich.” The smile quirked higher on one side and there was a twinkle of amusement in shadowed green eyes. “Can you believe someone left this in the fridge?”

“No. Why are you here? During my heist?”

“Oh, well, I was bored.” Barry took a bite off the sandwich and chewed happily. “This is really good.”

“Barry, no offense, but I’m on a schedule.”

“I know. I know all about your schedule. Having Shawna drug the guard’s coffee? How did you know he wouldn’t have a bad reaction? He could have a heart condition. He could have died.”

“Did he?”

“No, but he could have.”

“No, he couldn’t, because I don’t take chances. I did my homework, now let me do the job.”

Barry shrugged. “I’m not stopping you.”

Len sighed heavily. He’d have to deal with this – whatever this was – later. Going to the window, he used his flashlight to give the all clear and a moment later Shawna appeared in the center of the room, Hartley clinging to her as the disorientation passed. Len had been there and done that, which was why he hadn’t come in that way.

Before either of them could notice their uninvited guest, Len pointed to the file cabinet. “Ignore him.”

Barry waved back, chewing enthusiastically. Hartley looked between Barry, covered in shadow, and Len, towering over him, incredulous. “What is he doing here?”

“I was bored.”

Len pointed a finger at Barry in warning. In response, Barry wagged his eyebrows, but didn’t say anything. Len noted Shawna’s spooked expression, but she hadn’t ghosting out. Again, something he’d have to deal with later.

“Hartley, computer. Shawna, you’re with me.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Barry hesitate, then move at lightening speed to finish the sandwich before hopping off the cabinet, apparently intent on following Len and Shawna into the next room.

Under normal circumstances, he would have argued, but he was on a schedule. They skulked onto the main floor of the bank and Len led her behind the register. It was quick enough work to use his gun to freeze the smaller, thin walled safes under each station and Shawna kicked them in, shattering the metal with steal toed boots.

She reached in to gather the cash up in a bag she’d taken out of her jacket. Barry rocked on his heels, standing only a few feet away from Len while she worked. “So, how much time do you have?”

Len glanced over, but there wasn’t anything mocking in the kid’s face. “Four minutes thirty seven seconds.”

Shawna looked nervously at them, but kept piling the cash into the bag.
Barry cocked his head to the side, watching without comment. With the safes empty, they went back to office. Hartley was at the computer, fingers moving rapidly over the keyboards. He didn’t look up as he said, “Almost there.”

“Three minutes twenty seconds.”

“You said I’d have ten!”

“You said you needed five.”

Barry stepped up behind Hartley and started to lean over his shoulder, but Len pulled him back by his hood, ignoring the annoyed frown Barry shot him.

“Three minutes.”

“That’s not helping.”

Barry started to make tick-tocking noises with his mouth and Len smacked him upside the back of the head. “Stop that.”

Instead of the expected retort, he got that same mischievous smile the kid had given back at the warehouse when he’d told Len he wouldn’t join him. There was something unsettling about it, not dishonest, but not… right.

“Hartley, two minutes.”

Hartley said something under his breath in another language, too low for Len to pick out.

It wasn’t just the smile, though, there had been Barry’s reaction to Mardon.

“One minute.”

It hadn’t even been Mardon himself, just the mention of his name had lit Barry up with anger. Literally. His eyes had glowed red, his voice had reverberated. Len had never seen anything like it. He wasn’t even sure Barry realized it was happening, not with the way he’d gone back to smiling and talking normally in the next second.

Barry stepped closer to Len, putting himself shoulder to shoulder and dropped his voice to a whisper. “What’s he doing?”

He considered not answering, but if Barry were going to turn them in, he would have done it weeks ago after he found the warehouse. “The branch manager’s been embezzling money into a private account that can only be accessed through this computer. Hartley is moving that money into my personal Swiss Bank Account for redistribution.”

There was a short pause, barely a second, before, “So you’re… taking money from bad people and giving it to the poor. Isn’t that what…”?

“Finish that and I freeze your feet to the floor.” He leveled Barry with a dead stare, but it only seemed to amuse him.

Hartley pushed back from the desk suddenly, standing. “Done!”

Len looked at his watch. “One minute thirteen seconds too late. If this had been a normal job, I would have shot you and left by now.”
“But…”

“I’m not getting caught because you can’t admit your own limits.”

Hartley’s face went red and he glared at Barry. “It’s his fault. He’d not supposed to be here. He…”

“If things go south, I need to know when to pull out. I can work with what you have, but don’t oversell yourself. Shawna, take him and the cash back to Lisa.”

Shawna disappeared with Hartley before he could argue further and Len had no doubt that particular conversation was far from over.

There was no doubting Hartley was a genius, but he was too arrogant. He’d been demanding Len take him on a job for the past two months, so Len had set this up – low stakes and little risk. They’d been careful not to trip the alarms and drugged the guard so they didn’t have to worry about interruptions. Len had even gone in first to secure the office, but everything had been planned like a normal, high stakes job, where time meant something and, as he’d suspected, Hartley had underestimated the time he’d need to accomplish the task.

Of course, Hartley’s point wasn’t without merit. Turning to Barry, Len crossed his arms over his chest. “You said you didn’t want to be part of this.”

“I’m not, I’m just…” Chiming interrupted him and Barry pulled his phone out of his jacket pocket, frowning, “…watching. I have to go.”

Len didn’t bother to say anything, because the Flash was already gone.

*****

When Len had first found out the Flash’s real identity, he’d paid a private investigator with questionable morals a lot of money to do a background check and rundown. Nothing fancy – friends, family, job, address, education, work associates, after work hangouts, and schedule.

What he’d come away with was that Barry Allen was born to Henry and Nora Allen. His father was convicted of murdering his mother when Barry was eleven, at which time, he was adopted by Joe West, a single father to Iris West, both of whom had died in the wave.

Barry had insisted on his father’s innocence throughout the trial and by the regular visits to his father in prison, it appeared he’d believed that up until his father died trying to save patients from the first floor medical wing of the prison hospital. Apparently, heroism must run in the family.

The kid was smart with majors in both physics and chemistry, among other things, and he’d been the youngest forensic assistant the CCPD had ever taken on. Whether Detective West had anything to do with that or not, Barry’s track record said he had more than earned his place within the department.

According to the private investigator, Barry worked at the CCPD, sometimes long hours, then went home with Dr. Harrison Wells – who had been a friend before the tidal wave – and didn’t do much
else in between. In the two weeks he’d had him tailed, he’d spent three nights at S.T.A.R. Labs, also with the good doctor, but otherwise, that was it. Nothing suspicious, nothing to raise eyebrows, nothing, except Len’s own intuition.

He hadn’t had many dealings with the Flash, only the two, but there was something different there now. Len wasn’t sure what it was or what it meant and that alone was enough to make him dig deeper. People liked to say what you don’t know can’t hurt you, but in his experience, Len had found that it’s the things you don’t know that have the potential to do the worst damage.

The real problem was that there wasn’t much to find. He’d paid the same investigator an obscenely large amount of money to do highly illegal things for more information, but after another two weeks, he’d come back with a depressingly small folder of lesser details.

Before the wave, Barry Allen had only a handful of close friends – the Wests, Caitlin Snow, Cisco Ramon, Harrison Wells, and a woman by the name of Felicity Smoak who had visited him during his coma and a few times after. She resided in Starling and they kept up through text and email, but rarely saw each other. He also had a passing acquaintance with Oliver Queen, but they hadn’t kept in touch.

Not surprisingly, Barry had been bullied in school and, as Len had suspected, he’d insisted on his father’s innocence, which hadn’t made him popular at the CCPD. Despite that, all evidence was that Barry had been a relatively happy, well adjusted young man.

The wave had killed the Wests, Cisco, and Caitlin, as well as Barry’s father. His only remaining friend in Central had been Dr. Wells, so it was no surprise that they had moved in together. The investigator also suspected the two of them were in a sexual relationship, but had yet to confirm it. Barry’s communications with Felicity Smoak had dropped down to almost nothing after her visit to Central and his to Starling after the tragedy. There was no indication of a fight between the two; Barry had simply stopped returning her calls.

At work, he occasionally associated with an Eddie Thawne who had been Joe’s partner and Iris’s boyfriend, but never outside of work and Barry rarely spoke with anyone else. Captain Singh, who had worked with Joe for years, seemed to take a special interest, but it was hard to tell if Barry reciprocated or simply put up with it.

The kid was squeaky clean. Frustratingly so. The dirtiest thing Len’s guy could find on him was one cigarette in high school. He hadn’t even managed to identify Barry as the Flash, which led credence to Barry’s claim that he wasn’t doing that anymore.

The PI sipped his coffee on the bench while Len finished looking through the notes. Len closed the file and tapped the folder. “It’s not much.”

“Kid’s private. He doesn’t go out, doesn’t talk to anyone. His phone records are thread bare at best – Dr. Wells, Captain Singh, and Felicity Smoak. The emails he responds to are all work related. All. I can’t access his actual texts without his phone, but the records show he rarely responds to anyone other than Dr. Wells. I’ve included samples of reports he filed from before and after the wave. Read ‘em yourself, but before the wave, there’s a clear enthusiasm in the details and use of adjectives, after, it’s dry, devoid of any personality. I’d be interested to see pre and post of his handwriting, but kids nowadays? All about the keyboard. Texting. I can up surveillance, but, as they say, time is money.”

“Money isn’t the issue, results are.”

“I’ll get your results.” He sat back in the chair. “Who is this kid to you anyway?”
Len tucked the folder in his jacket and stood up. “I don’t pay you to stick your nose in my business. Two weeks.”

“Whatever, it’s your money.” The man chuckled. “Or not. See you in two weeks, Snart.”

*****

Who is this kid to you anyway?

It was a fair question and not one Len was entirely sure he had answer for. He’d had the potential to be a formidable enemy. The Flash had made things interesting, made them fun, but he could also be a powerful ally, assuming Len could figure out what going on with him. The Flash hadn’t been seen in a while. Knowing he was alive meant the reports from survivors saying they’d been pulled out by the Flash and left at the hospital, were probably true. So, what happened between then and now that stopped him?

In Len’s experience, when someone disappeared, there was a reason, but then Barry hadn’t disappeared. Barry Allen was alive and well in Central City, still working for the CCPD. It was the Flash who’d vanished.

He parked his bike behind the warehouse and took advantage of the warm, sunny weather to look over the reports and pictures the PI had included. He was right about the change in the reports. If Barry Allen’s name hadn’t been printed on the bottom, he would have thought they were written by different people. Of course, that in itself shouldn’t be surprising. Tragedy could change people, it was simply a matter of how much.

The pictures were of Barry at lunch with Harrison Wells, sitting at a bar that faced floor-to-ceiling window overlooking the street. The two were close enough that their knees touched and Barry was hunched down slightly over his plate, looking up and over at Wells with a grin. Wells appeared amused, but focused mostly on his food. In the last shot, his hand was under the bar, resting just above Barry’s knee.

Len closed the folder decisively. He needed more intel. His guy was good, but if he didn’t find anything this time around, Len was going to have to do some surveillance of his own.

He wheeled his bike around the side and pulled it in through the door that led into the office. Maybe he should find out more about this Felicity Smoak.

“That’s cheatin’!”

Mick? He stopped in the doorway, listening to laughter.

“It’s not cheating if I’m better than you.” That was Shawna, her voice followed by high pitched screeching that he instantly recognized as that god forsaken game system she’d stolen and insisted on plugging into the television she’d also stolen, which was connected to the surround sound she’d nagged Hartley into installing. After she’d stolen it.
There had been a short, pointed conversation about the kind of things that could draw attention to them before Len was ready and Shawna had called him a kill-joy, but she’d fallen in line and that was all that really mattered. Plus, no matter how much it might physically pain him to admit it, the state of the art game system and sixty inch television it was connected to were good for group morale and downtime.

“Don’t worry about Mick. He’s just a sore loser.” Lisa was in on it too. Why was he not surprised?

“I ain’t no sore loser. Kid’s distractin’ me.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” And that was Barry Allen.

He almost – almost – turned around and walked back out the door. He could take a ride on his bike, come back in a few hours, days… a week.

“Like hell ya don’t.”

Shawna whooped. “Ha! Eat my dust, old man!”

Against his better judgment, Len followed the voices up the stairs and into what had original been the bullpen. They’d sectioned off the back half of the warehouse for their purposes – the bullpen and offices upstairs, the smaller storage room and office down. They’d re-purposed the offices into bedrooms and he’d let the others clear out the bullpen and turn it into a hangout. It was utilitarian, not his style, but it served a purpose.

Shawna had scavenged furniture from the rest of the building, shoving three sofas into the large open area and pushing them together in a U off center of the door. The conference table had been dragged in as well and set up on the other side of the room. It was used for everything from cheating at cards, to cleaning the guns. Currently, Hartley had his gloves and tools laid out over it. However his attention was entirely focused on the sofa, where Barry was… he was… performing fellatio on a Fudgesicle?

Len tilted his head. There was no other way to describe it and from the pile of sticks on the coffee table, he’d been doing it for a while. Mick and Shawna were racing on the PS4, though Mick’s attention kept shifting between the screen and the speedster who was leaning over the back of the left most sofa, propped up on one elbow while the other worked the Fudgesicle between his lips.

“He’s been at it for half an hour.” It was a testament to how distracting it was that Len hadn’t noticed Lisa leaning against the wall next to the door when he’d entered. She grinned. “I know. I almost didn’t hear your bike pull up.”

It took him a moment to come up with an appropriate response and when he did, the only thing that came out was. “Why?”

She shrugged. “It started out innocent. He said he wanted to wait for you to get back and I know you have an interest, so I let him. Shawna was playing Mick on the PS4 and eating a Fudgesicle. She offered one to Barry, he started licking it, and then she won against Mick and Shawna realized he’d been distracted, so she told Barry there were three dozen in the freezer and to help himself. He said it was the least he could do for locking her in the pipeline and honestly? This is the most action Hartley’s seen in months, I didn’t have the heart to break it up.”

Hartley looked over sharply, his hearing aids giving him the advantage over the other occupants in the room. Lisa winked at him and turned to face Len. “So, did he find anything interesting?”

“Nothing.”
“That’s not like him.”

“I know. He’s upping the surveillance.”

“Pricey. Kid’s really gotten under your skin, huh, Lenny?”

“Don’t start.”

“But if I don’t, who will?” She patted his cheek condescendingly. “Barry! Look who’s back?”

When Barry looked up and saw Len, he shoved what was left of his Fudgsicle into his mouth and pulled the bare stick out, tossing it on the pile before coming over to them. “Lenny! You never told me you had a PS4.”

It took concerted effort not to let his eye twitch. “Why? Would that have changed your mind?”

“No, but it would have taken longer to decide.” He grinned at Lisa, who was still standing beside Len, listening. “Thanks for letting me stay.”

“No problem, cutey, anytime.”

Barry watched her walk off until she was at the sofa and out of earshot. “We need to talk.”

“So I’ve heard.” He watched Barry for a few seconds, watched him shifting feet, rubbing a hand on the back of neck before dropping it into his pocket and then pulling it out again to pick at the links of a watch on his other wrist, while his eyes moved, glancing to the side where he could see the others in his periphery. Whatever this was about, he didn’t want them to hear. “Follow me.”

In the downstairs office, Len took a seat on the desk. “Why are you here?”

“You need to call your guy off.” It was said almost too fast to understand and Len wasn’t sure what he’d been expecting, but it wasn’t that.

Len sat back, considering his answer. “I have no idea…”

“Don’t.” Barry rocked on his heels. “Look, just… when you brought Mick into it, way back, I went through pictures and details of all your known associates. I work for the CCPD, I can do that, and I know who he is and I know what he does and you need to call him off before he sees something he’s not supposed to.”

“Is that a threat?” All traces of humor had gone from the kid, leaving a sense of desperation in its place and it made Len uneasy.

“What? No. No, I’d never, but there’s a person, people who would, and you don’t know, so if you have questions, ask, I’ll answer them if I can, but call him off, because I can’t. I can’t. Not right now. Please.”

The last was said quickly, after a moment’s hesitation. It was said like Barry didn’t think it would do any good. The old Len would have told Barry he’d think about it, just to watch the kid sweat and he might have called off his guy, he might not have. Now?

Now, he was going to start with something easy. Len put his hands on the desk with a loud enough slap to get Barry to make eye contact. “You and Dr. Wells, are you together?”

Barry blinked in surprise. “Yes? I mean, we live together and we have sex, if that’s what you’re asking. I’m not really sure how to categorize our… relationship? I don’t know, but yes, we’re
together.”

It was an honest answer, even if it left a strange taste in Len’s mouth. “Why did you come here the first night?”

“I was curious. They’re sending over potential meta-human cases for us to look over, I recognized you M.O. in one of them, but it didn’t make sense. You weren’t supposed to have your gun. Cisco destroyed it. I just… I wanted to know.”

“And how did you find me.”

Barry grinned a little at that, but ducked his head to hide it. “You’re hooked up to the power grid. Not many places around here are. It was worth a shot.”

The kid was relaxing, his shoulders losing some of their hunched in tension as he talked. “How did you know we were pulling the heist that night?”

“I’ve been sneaking back to listen in on your meetings.” He pointed at the ceiling and had the decency to look at least a little guilty. “No one ever looks up. I just wanted to make sure. I mean, so far, the robberies that I know are you haven’t had bodies, but I couldn’t just leave it.”

Len nodded a little, putting it together. “That’s why you showed up.”

With a shrug, Barry looked down at his feet. “I miss it – the whole being a hero thing. I try to keep busy, but there’s a lot of down time and Harrison is busy. It gets lonely.”

Which brought Len to what he really wanted to know, the reason he was willing to pay his guy a small fortune to spy on Barry. “And why can’t you be a hero, Barry? What’s stopping you?”

“What’s stopping you?” Barry looked up again and there was a hint of that same fire Len had seen when he’d mentioned Mardon. Not lightening crackling behind his eyes fire, but maybe the start of it. “This isn’t you. Even before you got the Sub-Zero Gun, you liked to steal with flare. You spent months planning elaborate heists that could only have been you. Now you’re drugging guards and doing jobs that have almost zero chance of being traced back to you and you give away at least half of the money you make from them. No one even knows Captain Cold is in Central City. In fact, no one’s seen or heard from you in months. So, what’s stopping you, Leonard Snart, from being the bad guy?”

It was a fair point and one that Len didn’t have an answer for.

“I look around and all I see is my failure and the potential to fail again and I want to trust you, I think maybe I can if I have… but it’s not that easy. See, I know I’m not the same, but it doesn’t matter, none of it does. The world keeps going, no matter how much it sucks, and I have to keep moving with it. I can’t stop and I’ve had a really bad week and you need to call him off.”

Len stared for a moment longer, taking in the shine of Barry’s eyes – like he was on the edge of crying.

The first two times he’d fought the Flash, he’d been fighting a mostly confident young man who’d been willing to do whatever was necessary to stop him, even if it meant getting himself hurt or killed; now the kid shifted wildly between amused, curious, angry, desperate, playful, and something bordering on flirtatious at the drop of a hat. He’d seen those kinds of mood swings before and, frankly, it worried him, almost as much as Barry following his mention of failure up with a comment on trust. This wasn’t about the tidal wave or Mardon, because Barry had never known Mardon, let alone trusted him. Which left Len wondering, who had betrayed him and how?
Shit, Lisa was right, the kid really was under his skin. “Fine. I’ll call him off.”

“Thank you!” Barry’s face lit up in a wide smile and for one terrifying second, Len was afraid he was about to be hugged. Thankfully, it didn’t come to that. “I’ll leave you alone. I won’t bother you. I’ll…”

“That’s… not necessary.” It was physically painful pushing the words out. Len was used to taking advantage of situations like this, but just thinking about trying to use this against Barry made him feel sick. “As long as Lisa doesn’t mind, you can come by and no more hiding in the rafters. You want to listen in, that’s fine, but don’t interrupt.”

“I can do that.” Barry looked back nervously at the still open door. “You know, I’m not the only one that’s changed. Mick and your sister, I get, but Shawna and Hartley?”

Len raised an eyebrow, but didn’t respond. He hadn’t come back into the city intending to take on strays, it had just happened. Not that Barry was wrong. Five months ago, Len would have said, ‘not my problem,’ and moved on.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs interrupted the silence and Barry pulled his hood back up over his head. “Right, so, I’m gonna go. I have to… there’s a thing.”

Len felt the rush of wind go past him and sighed. Where had he gone wrong? When he’d first decided to take on Shawna and later Hartley, he’d told himself ‘I can use this.’ He’d told himself a teleporter and a genius were good to have around, that they were useful. The truth was they were amateurs. Hartley wasn’t even a proper criminal, just a trust-fund brat with a grudge and an overinflated ego. Having them around, taking them on jobs, it was a risk, but he was doing it, because somewhere along the way, he’d started to want to help them.

This thing with the Flash was no different. He could tell himself having the Flash on his team was an obvious advantage, but it was clear the kid was more than a little off. That made him more of a potential liability, than a potential asset, but Len wasn’t sure he could make himself let it go.

Mick stopped in the doorway, looking around the room. “He gone?”

Len nodded.

“What’d he say?”

“I’m calling my guy off.” Mick chuckled. “It’s not like that.”

“Buddy, it don’t matter what it’s like. You keep the money coming and the police off us and you can tap dance to Fire and Ice on the hood of a Maserati for all I care.”

“That was a dare and I was drunk. This is different. If you have a problem with it…”

Mick held a hand up, cutting him off. “Like I said, it’s your show. Speaking of, Lisa wants you upstairs.”

Of course she did.
What in the name of all that was good and right in the world had he been thinking?

Chapter Notes

After careful consideration, I have made a minor amends to the formatting to make things a little easier to follow. I’m going to be flipping between present day events and random times throughout the past. I either did this as a stylistic choice, or to punish myself, either way, it can be confusing. Ergo, at the beginning of each section there will be a time marker indicating present or a set number of months/weeks after the tidal wave. Now, enjoy.

"Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the things you can think up if you only try." - Dr. Seuss-

-Present Day (One Year and Three Months After the Tidal Wave)-

Barry had been perfectly content with the idea of having Harrison come with him to dinner at Captain Singh’s apartment. More than content, he’d been happy about it, so absolutely delighted that Harrison had finally, finally caved to one of his demands that he hadn’t really thought about what that meant. He hadn’t thought it through when he’d told the Captain they were both coming, or when he’d gotten dressed, Harrison nitpicking Barry’s outfit, insisting that he change because they were not wearing matching sweaters. Which, okay, it wasn’t matching, it was just that Harrison wore a lot of black and he’d bought Barry a lot of black when he’d replaced his wardrobe – also red and absolutely no yellow, but that was another issue.

Then he’d raised his hand to knock on Captain Singh’s door and the realization of what was about to happen came crashing down. He was about to put Harrison in the same room as Rob and the Captain. Not that Harrison had never been alone with Captain Singh, but this was different. This was a social setting and suddenly Barry was remembering all those other dinners he’d been to without Harrison, the ones where the Captain and his fiancé had frequently inquired about Barry’s health and happiness and inferred that they were concerned about both. Not just in general, either, they’d made it very clear that they were asking how Harrison was treating him, if Barry was happy with Harrison, if he trusted Harrison.

Oh god, this was bad. This was a horrible idea. Why in the name of all that was good and holy had he ever teased Harrison about coming with him? What had possessed him to…

“Are you planning to knock anytime in the near future?”

He dropped his hand from the door and turned to Harrison, who was watching with one hand tucked
neatly into the pocket of his slacks, the other holding a bottle of wine, and inquisitively raised eyebrows. Actually, he looked good like that. Really good. Just close enough to annoyed that if Barry pushed a little, he could… no. Not the right time for that.

Careful not to use his speed, Barry lunged forward and shoved Harrison’s hands out of the way, reaching into his pants pockets, front and back, then dug through the jacket as well, just in case.

“What are you doing?”

In lieu of an answer, he tucked his fingers under the waist band and ran them along it, then reached under the belt buckle as well, to make sure nothing sharp or pointy or potentially lethal had been hidden there.

“Barry…”

“I’m checking for weapons.”

“I did promise not to kill anyone. Multiple times.”

“You said nothing about maiming or torture.” Something Eddie was constantly reminding him of, which, come on, man, let it go already. It was one time and Eddie couldn’t shut up about it.

“Barry, I don’t need weapons.” Harrison held his arm up, the hand and forearm vibrating at a deadly frequency.

“Don’t do that!” Barry grabbed it, shoving it down and out of sight. “You should go home. I take it back, I don’t want you here.”

Harrison’s grin was positively evil. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Switching tactics, Barry moved forward to relax against Harrison. “You don’t want to do this. You hate social functions. Go home. I’ll tell them you got caught up with a project, they’ll understand. Then later tonight, you can tie me to your bed with the inhibitor cuffs and pull out my toe nails while you suck me off.”

Harrison’s nails bit into Barry’s arm, his eyes darkening at the thought. Instead of agreeing, though, his smile widened. “As much as I enjoy torturing you, Barry, I try to reserve it for when you’ve truly earned it.”

“Leave and I promise I’ll earn it.”

“I’m staying. We’re going to have a lovely dinner and I’ll still tie you to the bed tonight, only I’ll come up with something far more entertaining than removing toe nails.”

“We’re leaving.”

“Staying.”

“Leaving.”

“Staying.”

“Lea…” Harrison’s finger jabbed the doorbell, officially putting an end to the argument and Barry gasped, mouth open in shock. “You are going to pay for that, Harrison Wells. Mark my words, I will… Captain!”
There was a lengthy pause, the Captain looking between them curiously as he leaned heavily on his cane. “Am I interrupting?”

Barry looked helplessly around for some kind of distraction. Anything to take the focus off what Captain Singh might have overheard before he opened the door. His eyes landed on the wine bottle in Harrison’s hand and he grabbed it, holding it out to the Captain. “Harrison brought alcohol.”

As soon as the Captain had the bottle, Barry gave him a hug and he moved past him into the room. Behind him, he heard Harrison giving details of the wine. Barry didn’t know much about wine, but he did know nothing Harrison drank was ever inexpensive. Rob was at the bar. On seeing Barry, he set his phone down and put his arms out. Barry hurried into them, making it quick, because Harrison’s promises only went so far. When he pulled away, Rob tilted back to get a look at the door. “So, Dr. Wells really came?”

“Yeah, almost can’t quite believe it myself.” The door closed and Barry fought not to look back.

“Are you okay? You look a little pale.”

Barry dodged back from the hand that reached for his forehead, acutely aware that Harrison was probably watching. “No, I’m just… hungry.”

Rob chuckled and pulled a bowl of peanuts out from behind the bar. “Try not to eat the entire bowl. Dinner will be ready soon.”

Usually when Barry ate at the Captain’s, it was casual. They sat around the kitchen while Rob finished dinner, and sometimes didn’t even move to the table in the dining room to eat, opting to stay at the island. Barry didn’t talk much, except to answer their questions, but it was nice watching them together. It reminded him of being home with Joe and Iris, inside jokes and light hearted teasing.

Having Harrison there made it all… different. Barry went into the kitchen with Rob, but didn’t move far enough in that he lost sight of Harrison and Captain Singh in the small foyer. He ended up standing in the doorway, neck craning when they moved into the living room.

“You’re tense.” Barry’s head snapped over to Rob, who smiled. “I’m pretty sure Dr. Wells can handle David.”

“It’s not Captain Singh I’m worried about.”

He realized what he’d said a moment later, but it was too late. The soft scrape of a wooden spoon on the side of the pot paused as Rob asked, “Really? Why’s that?”

“Nothing, not… I didn’t mean that.”

Rob started stirring again, slowly, but Barry knew he wasn’t giving up that quickly and it only took another second to confirm it. “Is something wrong with Dr. Wells?”

“No, just,” he hesitated, because Harrison was always telling him how bad he was at lying. It was kind of a small miracle that he’d managed to keep anything a secret for any length of time. “We had a fight earlier.”

“About what?”

Truth, stick with the mostly truth. “He’s just worried about me. He does that a lot.”

Rob nodded knowingly. “He’s not the only one that worries. What was it this time?”
In the other room, they conversation had moved to the Captain’s progress in therapy. He’d be using the cane to get around for at least the next several months, but the doctors and therapists all agreed it wasn’t permanent. They also agreed he shouldn’t push himself or he could risk a set back.

Secure that nothing diabolical was happening in the living room, he switched focus back to answering Rob’s question. “I work too much. Which is completely hypocritical, it’s not like he’s ever home anyway.”

“Really? I didn’t know David had that much work for him right now.”

Shit! He was getting distracted. “No, not, um… not at the station. He has some pet projects at S.T.A.R. Labs he’s working on.”

Rob pulled a spoon out of the drawer next to the stove, dipping it into the cream sauce and holding it out to Barry to taste. As much as Barry wanted to keep his eyes on Harrison, Rob was a really good cook. He dodged over, took the spoon, and, “Oh god, that is fantastic.”

Rob chuckled, “I’m trying to make healthier versions of David’s favorite foods.”

Barry looked at the spoon dubiously, then licked it again to make sure there wasn’t anything left. “That’s healthy?”

“I never said healthy, I said healthier. I used half and half instead of heavy cream and I’m substituting chicken for eggplant and broccoli. Baby steps.”

“If that’s your idea of healthier, I may have to steal you for myself.”

A hand landed on Barry’s shoulders, stiff but gentle, a familiar warning. “Should I be worried?”

Barry forced a smile to keep from flinching, but it was a near thing. “Of course not, I was just saying that if Rob ever gets tired of his job, there’s a position open as your personal chef.”

“Considering the smell coming from this kitchen, I can’t say I’m not tempted.” Harrison’s thumb moved over the back of Barry’s neck, the nail scratching lightly into his skin.

Rob turned back to stove, a faint blush in his cheeks. “Well, that is very flattering, Dr. Wells. For now, dinner’s ready.”

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Barry was a tense line of anxiety throughout the dinner. Harrison’s hand occasionally moved from his leg to the back of his neck with a light squeeze, but he couldn’t decide if it was a warning or a reassurance. Probably both.

When dessert came, Barry was on his best behavior – well, almost. He hadn’t been kidding about how good the lemon tarts were, but he’d had a Cisco Bar that afternoon – his last one, actually, he needed to make time to go see Eddie – so he managed to keep the moaning mostly under his breath.
There were a few minutes more of polite conversation between Harrison and their hosts, mostly about Rob’s office. A lot of businesses had packed up and left after the flood, but Rob’s company was doing well. Not that he’d intended to leave, either way. He was going to stay wherever Captain Singh was. Honestly, Barry was only half paying attention. Harrison’s hand on his leg was distracting – the way his fingers kept brushing over the inside of Barry’s thigh, close but not close enough.

By the time they left, it had been just over an hour and Barry was on edge. He was full of sugar, energy, and a rush like he’d gotten away with something. As soon as the elevator doors were shut, he pressed Harrison into the wall, grinning into the other man’s face. “I want to run.”

Harrison raised his eyebrows, but he didn’t push Barry away. “We took a car.”

“So?”

“We arrived in a car. We need to be seen leaving in one.”

“Come on. If you catch me, you can have your way with me.”

He said it with a smirk and wagging eyebrows, but Harrison didn’t budge. “I don’t need to catch you to have my way with you.”

Barry stopped, momentarily frozen at the reminder that while Harrison may take control in the bedroom, it was always Barry who instigated. It was always Barry who insulted and insinuated until Harrison got annoyed enough to make him stop. It was always Barry who turned a fight into rough sex. It was always Barry who crawled into Harrison’s bed after he’d been gone for a few days. It was always Barry.

“Fine.” With a sigh, Barry pushed himself away, taking a more casual position next to Harrison. “Spoilsport.”

“Have patience, Mr. Allen, we’ll have cause to celebrate soon enough.”

That sounded much more promising. “Yeah? And what’ll we be celebrating?”

Please don’t say the death of someone semi-important. Please don’t say the death of someone semi-important. Please don’t say the…

“I’ve finished rebuilding the Particle Accelerator. Again. I have to run a few more diagnostic checks, assemble the time machine, but then we can begin preparations for you to travel back and fix all of… this. Of course, your speed is still an issue, but I’m confident that has more to do with a mental block than actual ability.”

He would have preferred the death of someone semi-important.

The doors opened and Barry followed Harrison out, stunned into silence. He said nothing while the valet retrieved the car and while they drove home. Picking a fight with Harrison was dangerous enough without adding a high powered sport’s car into it. Not to say Harrison didn’t notice Barry fuming, of course he did, but neither of them spoke until they were inside the house, safe from innocent pedestrians and prying ear.

“Barry…”

“I’m not doing it.”
Harrison set his fake glasses on the entry table and pinched his nose, frustration clear in his labored sigh. “That’s the other you talking, Barry.”

“It’s not.”

“You can’t let some romanticized version of yourself dictate how you proceed in the future. This future. Your future. He didn’t save his mother, I’m sure he had his reasons, but those don’t matter here and now.”

“It’s not because he said…”

“Here and now, you need to do what is right for you, for your city. There are thousands of people dead, people you can save. Not just your mother or your father or your friends, but half the city. Children, Barry.”

“That’s low. Even for you, that’s low. Besides,” Barry grinned, more wistful than genuine, “it doesn’t work that way anymore. I don’t work that way. You saw to that and this has nothing to do with him or his perfect world. This is about you and me. I’m not letting you leave me. I never agreed to that and I told you from the beginning that I wasn’t doing it. I said…”

“You were upset, my betrayal was still fresh, but I would like to think I’ve earned your trust since then.”

“Trust?!” Harrison took a step forward, which Barry involuntarily mirrored in a step back. This wasn’t the kind of argument that was going to end in happy fun time.

“In the last year I have not lied to you once. I have kept every promise, even when you failed to keep yours.”

Barry shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. None of that matters. It never has. As much as I love you and I need you and I do, I really do, but I can’t trust you. Not with this.”

The silence between them was filled with electric tension. Harrison’s eyes stuttered red, and then closed, just for a second. When they opened again, they were tight at the edges, but crystal blue. He crossed his arms over his chest and stared at Barry, unwavering. “I’m not asking.”

“You can’t make me.”

And it wasn’t like Barry didn’t know that was a stupid thing to say. It sounded like a challenge, which it wasn’t, it really, really wasn’t, because no matter what Harrison did, Barry wasn’t going to cave. Even knowing how stupid he’d just been, how antagonistic, it somehow managed to catch him off-guard when Harrison surged forward, driving him back into a pillar with a hand wrapped around his neck. Not an unfamiliar position for them, but given the conversation they’d been having, there was an odd sense of déjà-vu.

Instead of choking him, however, Harrison relaxed, slowly, by tiny degrees, until his fingers slipped off of Barry’s neck to rest on his collar bone before reaching up and threading through his hair, pulling Barry forward to press their foreheads together. “Not tonight.”

Harrison pushed off and walked across the room to the bar, taking a glass and canter out. Barry watched, a little numb and a lot confused, as Harrison poured himself a drink.

Not tonight?

Did he really think there was something he could do to make Barry change the timeline? He didn’t
know about Len or the Rogues, so they were safe. The absolute worst case scenario would be him going after Team Arrow or the Captain, but all Barry had to do was put himself in the middle until Harrison backed off. Of course, he couldn’t be in two places at once, but he wasn’t doing it. Even if that meant he lost someone else, he wasn’t doing it.

The empty glass hit the counter with a clink and Harrison tilted his head to Barry. “Are you coming?”

He shouldn’t. He should go take a few days, pout at the warehouse until Shawna and Lisa plied him with enough ice cream and candy that he felt almost normal. He should go to Eddie’s and make Cisco Bars. He should just… go, but he couldn’t.

“Yes.”

From his vantage point, he saw the curve of Harrison’s knowing smile and for the first time, Barry doubted himself.

*****

Rob tried to give people the benefit of the doubt. He played devil’s advocate to David’s cynical side and it worked well for them. When David had come to him with concerns about Barry – a lack of eye contact, nervous energy that never seemed to abate, the badly hidden relationship with Dr. Wells, and nights spent at the office rather than home – Rob had listened, but he’d kept an open mind. He’d suggested they have Barry over. He’d met the boy once before, but that had been just after the accident and Rob had been too worried and upset at the time to make any real observations beyond Barry being taller than he’d expected.

Just that first time having him over, getting to know him, was enough for Rob to agree there was something off, something that didn’t quite add up, but even that didn’t mean there was foul play involved. He trusted David’s instincts, but he also knew that his fiancé felt responsible for everything that had happened to the city and especially to the people under his charge. Joe had been a good friend and Barry had started at the department young. It only made sense that David would want to help him and the only way he could do that was if there was something there for him to help Barry with.

Still, David insisted that he didn’t trust Dr. Wells and it was hard for Rob to make a solid argument. He’d only met the man at the station a few times and always in passing, never with Barry around. This latest dinner party was the first time he’d seen them together and the longest he’d ever spent in the same room with Dr. Wells.

It didn’t take long for him to realize David was right. Barry hardly said a word. He smiled, ate, and never once relaxed. Dr. Wells neither said nor did anything inappropriate, but his hand never left Barry for very long. When it wasn’t rested on his shoulder or the back of his neck, it was on the kid’s leg under the table. The few times he did let go, Barry became agitated, nervously looking from his food to Dr. Wells like he expected something to happen.

After they saw Barry and Dr. Wells out, David gave him just long enough to get a glass of wine
before walking with him out to the balcony. It was nice out, warm with a faint breeze. The city was getting bright again. Rob looked out down at the people on the sidewalk fourteen floors below, while David stepped up next to him, setting his cane aside in favor of leaning on railing. “So?”

Rob sighed, drank half the glass and hung his head in resignation. “You’re right. I don’t like it, I don’t understand it, but you’re right. There’s something wrong with Dr. Wells’ relationship with Barry.”

David took the wine from Rob’s hand, sipping it himself. Rob turned his face to his fiancé. “You really think Eddie’s in on it?”

“I know he’s involved. I just can’t figure out how.”

“You could ask him.”

“Can’t risk tipping Dr. Wells off if I’m wrong.”

“So, how do we figure out where Eddie stands?” Because Rob liked Eddie and he didn’t want to imagine him being part of anything that would hurt anyone, let alone Barry. Of course, he would have said the same thing about Dr. Wells until just that evening.

“You leave that to me. All I need from you,” David wrapped an arm around Rob’s waist and rested his chin on his shoulder, “is your unwavering support.”

“That’s all?” Despite the severity of the situation or perhaps because of it, he couldn’t help responding playfully. “And here I thought you kept me around for the soufflés.”

“Well, I do love your soufflés.”

He leaned in, brushing his lips to David’s in a chaste kiss that promised to turn more passionate. Promised, but never delivered, because at that moment a voice spoke from their left, gruff and unexpected in the relative quiet of the night. “Captain David Singh?”

Rob jumped back several feet, fairly certain he was having a mild cardiac arrest from the surprise. When he’d recovered from the initial shock, he saw a figure in the shadows of their neighbor’s balcony, crouched on the railing in green leather with a hood pulled up over his head and a bow in one hand. No. “Is that…?”

David had managed to remain mostly still, minus the hand that had instinctively reached for where his gun should have been. He didn’t take his eyes off the intruder as he confirmed Rob’s suspicion. “The Green Arrow.”

The vigilante nodded. “We need to talk.”
Chapter Summary

As with everything, it has to begin somewhere.

"And will you succeed? Yes you will indeed! (98 and ¾ percent guaranteed.)" -Dr. Seuss-

Past (Zero Days After the Tidal Wave)-

The first time they slept together it was desperation on Barry’s part and weakness on Eobard’s. Weakness wasn’t a word he often used to describe himself and it left a bad taste in his mouth, but there was no denying that was exactly what it had been.

There hadn’t been time to think through all the ramifications of stopping Barry and ostensibly letting the tidal wave hit the city – it might have hit either way, it might not have, there was no way of telling. The immediacy of the threat required an equally immediate reaction.

In his race to secure his ancestor’s survival and grab the Flash and in dragging the boy to safety, he had managed to consider a few things. For instance, this was going to be a major setback to his timetable. He hadn’t had time to seal the particle accelerator properly and the water damage to the circuitry in the pipeline itself was going to take months, if not an entire year to replace, not to mention the damage to the rest of the building, which was, sadly, not airtight. For the first time, Eobard deeply regretted not connected Gideon to the main computer. The AI would, of course, keep the Time Vault sealed, but everything else would be forfeit.

Oh, and his chair. If he could have sighed while dragging Barry outside the city limits, he would have, because the chair was vital to helping build and maintain his speed and it was, most likely, sitting in the middle of Jitters, being swept away with the rest of the city.

After he’d ensured Barry wouldn’t be in a position to make a return trip to Central for several hours, he went back to survey the damage and only then did it truly occur to him what he had lost. A year was the minimal amount of time he would need to recover. Gideon also informed him that the meta-humans in the containment cells had been protected against the initial flooding and, when the power had gone out, the cells’ locks had failed and they’d escaped confinement, which didn’t exactly help his current predicament. Of course, it wouldn’t hurt it either, as long as none of them attempted to seek retribution.

By the time Barry had shown back up, a little worse for the wear and in shock, Eobard had managed to compose himself. He’d disposed of Cisco and Caitlin, left Eddie somewhere he would be found soon, and cobbled together a plausible excuse for his own survival.

Watching Barry work through his emotions had been… uncomfortable. He’d lost so much time already that babysitting Barry and his emotional breakdown was trying his patience. Perhaps if it had been just Barry and himself, he could have slipped away for a few hours at a time, but Ronnie had shown up and then Oliver Queen with his entourage and an eagle eye on Dr. Wells, whom he apparently, didn’t trust. Interesting, but ultimately annoying.
At least Ronnie’d had the good sense to take his grief back to Pittsburg. He’d of course searched the inside of S.T.A.R. Labs where she’d been when the disaster struck and the immediate surrounding area, her apartment, but after seeing the damage for themselves and, considering their current status as ‘wanted by General Eling,’ Dr. Stein had convinced him that hovering around the city when there were news crews and cameras everywhere wasn’t a good idea.

Not that he let his discontent show. No, he was Dr. Harrison Wells. He was Barry’s friend and he’d lost Cisco and Caitlin as well. At the very least, he hadn’t had to fake the affect losing them had on him, even if it had been at his own hand. S.T.A.R. Labs had never felt this empty. Perhaps if he’d realized the tidal wave was coming before… but lamenting past actions would earn him nothing. He had to focus on the future – his future – and getting back to it and to do that, he needed Barry. More importantly, he needed the Flash.

The deception was exhausting, not to mention the rescue efforts. He spent his days with Ms. Smoak on the sidelines, offering moral support and at night, he helped Barry and the Arrow continue working until they were all of them ready to drop from exhaustion. When they had worn themselves out, they slept in offices scattered throughout S.T.A.R. Labs, but only for a handful of hours a night, if that.

After Barry pulled Iris’s body from the rubble, he waited until the others had gone to bed and crawled into Eobard’s cot, seeking comfort from his overwhelming emotions – no doubt misplaced guilt among them.

“She kissed me.” Eobard said nothing. “She said that she couldn’t stop thinking about me, that she didn’t want to and we kissed and it was… God, it was everything I’ve wanted for so long. I loved her so much and I just left her there.”

There was a pause, but it didn’t feel over, so Eobard continued to lay in silence, Barry’s head on his dampening shoulder. “Eddie cried when I told him I found her. He said he’d been thinking about proposing and I can’t tell him that she…”

Barry dissolved into tears, pressing his face into Eobard’s dark sweater to muffle the sobs and Eobard kissed the top of his head and stroked his hair until he fell asleep.

After, Barry continued to share his cot and Eobard let him. It was harmless, nothing more than a young man seeking comfort from a mentor, a friend, the only ‘family’ he had left.

****

Two weeks after the tidal wave, Team Arrow finally left. Eobard was one suspicious, side long glance away from ripping Oliver Queen’s heart out of his chest and feeding it to the well-meaning Felicity Smoak, who wouldn’t stop asking him if he was okay, because apparently, bottling up his emotions wasn’t healthy and he needed to find an outlet for his grief.

Even with their absence, he found it difficult to get work done. Barry steadfastly refused to give up hope. He was running on almost nothing – little sleep, their waning supply of protein bars, pushing himself until he was physically incapable of going further and even then, only stopping as long as it
took to get back on his feet again.

Eobard had tried, just once, to point out that the odds of finding survivors at this late stage were negligible. Dehydration and festering wounds would have killed anyone trapped under the debris. At Barry’s broken expression, he once again remembered Cisco and Caitlin, who would never be found, no matter how hard Barry looked, and Joe, who had been taken by Mardon.

While Eobard had remained uncertain as to how he would get Barry to give up the search for his friends, the matter of Joe was resolved four days later. His body was found by boaters cleaning the bay, handcuffed to a platform in the water. It was charred, rotted, and the birds had been picking at it. Barry, who was no stranger to grisly crime scenes, vomited over the edge of the boat. When they found the badge and confirmed it was Detective West, he had to be given oxygen.

The acting Captain sent Barry home for the day and when Barry asked Eobard to lay with him after they got back to S.T.A.R. Labs, he did so with a consoling smile, trying not to let his internal annoyance bleed through. He still hadn’t had enough time to even properly assess the damage himself. He’d half hoped Barry’s shock would see him bed ridden for at least the rest of the day.

There was fifteen minutes of silence between them before Barry sat up to look down at him. The kiss was unexpected. It took Eobard by surprise, as did the haste with which Barry deepened it when he wasn’t pushed away, the way he straddled Eobard’s hips. There was no hesitation, no moment of doubt. Barry didn’t tell Eobard he didn’t have to do this and he didn’t ask if he was okay with it. Eobard returned the favor by not reminding Barry that this wouldn’t make it better or that he didn’t really want this.

What Barry wanted was reassurance that someone was there, someone who loved him and Eobard could have given that without such a physical display. He could have, but he didn’t, because after so many loses in the last week – time and effort and energy and plans that had been fifteen years in the making – he needed a win and this was as close to one as he was going to get.

As predicted, the next morning, Barry was awkward and embarrassed, but Eobard assured him that these things happened, especially in the wake of tragedy and nothing need come of it.

In that moment, Eobard had meant those words. His intentions might not have fallen under the category of pure, but seducing Barry had never been in the plan. As it was, the betrayal he was going to have to own up to at the conclusion of this would be devastating. Convincing Barry to go along with his plan was always going to be hard, but adding an intimate relationship to that would make things much more difficult than they needed to be.

*****

At three weeks out, the rescue efforts were cut back and geared more toward body recovery and identification. It was clear Barry hadn’t given up, but he insisted he didn’t need Eobard there and at least one of them should be getting sleep.

While it wasn’t an outright lie, the larger truth was that Barry was uncertain about what had happened between them. Other than the short conversation they’d had the next morning, neither of
them had spoken about it. Barry had gone back to sleeping in his own cot in the other office. Eobard didn’t mind. It was easy enough to give the boy his space for the time being.

With Barry gone that day, he worked on the things he had been forced to put off – locating his wheelchair, procuring the power source attached to it, revising his timetable, and logging events with Gideon. Finally getting work done should have been a relief, but the only relief he had was when Barry finally came to him in the early morning hours.

There was nothing sexual in the way Barry curled up around him, but it was certainly more intimate than previous evenings. Instead of positioning himself at an angle so that he could rest only his head on Eobard’s shoulder without intruding on his personal space further, he now pressed the full line of his body against Eobard’s side and relief washed over him, relaxing him for the first time in days.

No matter what else had gone wrong, no matter the setbacks, he still had the Flash. He still had Barry, at his side, at his disposal. If it took another year to rebuild the accelerator, if it took more, it didn’t matter, because the most important, the most vital component to his plan was safely tucked against him. As long as he had that, he could still get back.

****

When Barry ran out of Cisco’s protein bars, Eobard was not initially concerned. They’d had a healthy backup supply, wrapped so the invading waters hadn’t soaked through them. Cisco had been nothing if not prepared and if Barry hadn’t been pushing himself as hard as he had, he might have managed two months. Instead, he’d blown through them in just under four weeks.

Again, it wasn’t a concern, because Eobard had his own supplements and he intended to introduce Barry to them as soon as the need arose. They weren’t as well received as he’d hoped.

“You made these for me?”

Eobard smiled. “I thought perhaps you’d prefer not to die of hypoglycemic shock.”

Barry bit into it enthusiastically, then froze and the look on his face as he stared down at the bar in his hand was the look of someone who had been presented with truly the most offensive thing they had ever put in their mouth.

Eobard’s smile wavered. “You don’t like it.”

“No, no, it’s… it’s fine, just… different.” Barry continued to eat, though swallowing was clearly forced and willed only by a desire not to offend someone he cared about.

It wasn’t ideal, but it would have to do for now. In another month or so, when resources were less scarce, he could make adjustments to find something more palatable to Barry’s less refined tastes.

He was on the verge of saying just that when Ms. Smoak walked back into their lab, followed by Ray Palmer, and everything changed.
“I want to go to Starling.”

“Why?” Eobard stroked Barry’s hair where his head rested in its now routine place on his shoulder. Strange how things could become habit after such a short time. Stranger still that Eobard didn’t mind it, considering he had to be careful not to move his legs the entire night.

There were minutes of silence, punctuated by the warm brush of Barry’s breath on his chest and Eobard waited.

“We’re never going to find them. At least with Dad and Iris and Joe I had closure. They’re dead, I hate it, but I know. Cisco and Caitlin are just… gone, washed away with everything else and I need a few days to… process that, I guess, so I can move on.” Barry lifted onto his elbow. “Does that make sense?”

“As much as anything.”

Barry continued to look at him for several more seconds before dropping down the few inches separating their mouths. Unlike the first kiss, Eobard did expect this one and he reciprocated passively.

It wasn’t a heated kiss, spurred by grief, but it was just as desperate in its own right. There was still a feeling of triumph, a deep seeded fulfillment of having Barry give himself over in that way, in a way Eobard had never really considered, but… but he should put a stop it. He should tell Barry that this wasn’t sustainable, not for either of them in the long run.

“Barry…”

“Don’t. This isn’t… it’s not like that.” Eobard raised an eyebrow and Barry smiled, sad but startlingly bright, given the circumstances. He wasn’t sure whether to be impressed or concerned that the boy’s sense of humor wasn’t entirely dead. “Okay, it’s not just that. I’ve admired you for a long time and getting to know you? You’re not just amazing and brilliant, you’re a good man. You took Cisco in and believed in him when he thought he was nobody. You stood by Caitlin when she lost Ronnie. You helped me, even when I didn’t want to listen to you. You’ve been patient and kind and there for me in ways I can’t even… and it doesn’t have to lead to anything if you don’t want it to, I’d understand, but I really do. Want it to lead to something, I mean.”

He should still say no, but there was determination in Barry’s eyes and Eobard needed time. He needed the Flash. A rejection when Barry was so emotionally tenuous could push him away entirely and Eobard couldn’t risk that.

He restrained the sigh that had built in his chest and pulled Barry down with a hand on the back of his head, into a soft kiss. “You are certainly not without your charms, Mr. Allen.”
The next morning, Barry spoke with the acting Captain and was granted leave. One month and he would take a psych evaluation when he got back, just like everyone else. Barry tried to argue that an entire month wasn’t really necessary, a few days would be fine, but there wasn’t a lot of forensics that could be done at the moment. The criminals in the city were apparently just as overwhelmed as everyone else, leaving his department surprisingly overstaffed for the circumstances. They’d call him if things picked up.

Of course, Eobard had no intentions of letting Barry go to Starling on his own. The boy was woefully undernourished, choking down far fewer protein bars than he needed and while the trip was meant to be non-life-threatening, danger tended to find Barry even when he wasn’t looking for it.

He chose to forego wearing his Reverse-Flash suit while following Barry. It was enough trying to hide his face and presence from Mr. Queen, who was surprisingly vigilant. On at least two occasions in a forty eight hour period, Eobard was almost certain he’d been made.

When Barry rushed out with Mr. Palmer, the Atom of all people, to save Felicity from a highly dangerous meta-human – Deathsomethingorother – he hung back, secure in the knowledge that Barry had faced similarly deadly situations and come out alive, if not unharmed. Then Barry swayed on his feet, the color leaving his face and the meta-human didn’t hesitate to fire plasma at his opponent.

Eobard couldn’t hesitate, either. There wasn’t time to put on his suit, or wait and see if Barry would get his bearings before it was too late. He ran forward, out of cover, grabbed Barry and continued running until they were well outside of the danger zone before stopping again.

It took several seconds for Barry to regain his composure, to look up and see who had grabbed him. With that time, Eobard could have hidden himself and Barry would never have known, but he knew, without a single shadow of a doubt, that if he’d left, Barry would have run back to try and save his friend and Eobard couldn’t have that – not when the boy was clearly running on empty.

Green eyes blinked, unfocused until they came to rest on Eobard, then narrowed with confusion. “Harrison, what… what are you…?”

Barry’s eyes moved up and down, taking in his mentor, standing, and then around at the unfamiliar alleyway, nowhere near the construction zone they’d been in a moment before. The confusion cleared, replaced by the realization and horror he’d been expecting.

“Barry, don’t…” Before he could finish, Barry was up and moving, not fast enough, though, not even close. Eobard grabbed him, pinning him back against the building with jarring force. “…run.”

He adjusted his grip to press a forearm into Barry’s trachea, limiting his air supply and waited while Barry tried and failed to get his feet under him.

“I’m going to let you go and you’re not going to run and do you know why, Barry?” A foot connected weakly with his shin. “Because I’m faster. I’ll get there first and Ray Palmer and Felicity Smoak will be two more people you failed to save.”
It was harsh, perhaps, but necessary. Barry gaped at him, breathless and dizzy, but suddenly limp in Eobard’s hands. With exaggerated slowness, he let Barry go, stopped only an inch away to make sure his threat was being taken seriously before moving back farther.

Barry stared at him, that same expression frozen on his face, a hand pressed to his throat where Eobard’s arm had been moments before and Eobard gave him the time to come to all the obvious realizations.

“Simon Stagg.” Or, perhaps, the not so obvious. Eobard raised an eyebrow and Barry scowled. “Iris said you were the last one to see him before he went missing. She was suspicious and I *defended* you.”

“I think we can both agree you have something of a blind spot for the people you love.”

“God, how could you?! How could you…” Barry’s hand reflexively tightened around his own throat and then dropped, his face going uncharacteristically blank. “Tell me it started with the accelerator. Tell me you got your speed when I got mine. Tell me you killed Stagg to protect me. I’ll believe you. Just… lie to me. Please.”

As tempting as that was – and it was very, very tempting – he knew better. Before he could say that, however, a fist connected with the side of his face and it almost didn’t register that it was Barry before the next one slammed into his stomach.

Barry had already been wavering, but even still, there was a ferocity to the blows that Eobard hadn’t expect. It took him five minutes to bring Barry down and when he finally managed to it wasn’t from the multitude of fists to the solar plexus and temple, or the jabs to his kidneys, but from Eobard getting a grip in the hair on the back of his head and slamming his forehead into the side of the building repeatedly.

That had not gone nearly as well as he’d hoped.

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“Barry…”

“I’m not listening.”

“If you would just…”

“I can’t hear you!”

“This is incredibly childish behavior and I won’t…”

Barry pressed his hands tighter over his ears and hummed. Loudly. This was ridiculous. Eobard wasn’t sure what he’d expected Barry to do when he’d woken up in one of the pipeline’s containment cells, but it certainly hadn’t been *this*.

Really, though, Eobard had brought this on himself. Well, not this precisely, but the sentiment
stood. Reaching for the control panel, he tapped through the screens and ran his finger around the dial, lowering the oxygen in the room until Barry was gasping at the thin air, hands no longer covering his ears, but gripping at his throat and chest.

When he was confident he’d made his point, Eobard dragged his finger back around and Barry slumped to the ground, panting.

“Are you finished?” Green eyes glared daggers, but Barry didn’t say anything and he didn’t move to cover his ears. It was progress. “I was saying, this isn’t how I wanted this to go.”

“Oh, that’s good.” Barry moved to sit up on his knees, hands tight in shaking fists. “Go ahead, how exactly did you think this was going to go? You thought I’d, what? Forgive you? For murdering my mom? For letting everyone I love die? For pretending to care about me? For having sex with me, knowing that you had…”

“I’m not expecting forgiveness, Barry, simply understanding.”

“Nothing you say could ever make me understand why you did any of that. I lost everything because of you.”

“You lost your mother because of me, that’s true. Mardon bears the blame for the rest.”

Barry’s head dropped, but when he looked up, he wasn’t any calmer, or more reasonable. “No, you stopped me. I could have saved them.”

“Or you could have died.”

“Then I should have! I should have died trying to…”

Eobard sucked the air out entirely, cutting Barry off. He gave it a few seconds before turning it on again. “Never say that again. Your death isn’t an option.”

Barry glared at him through the glass, but at least he wasn’t spouting off at the mouth again.

“I do actually care about you, Barry. I know you may find that difficult to believe, but it’s the truth. As for having sex with you, I was only letting you take what you wanted.”

“What I wanted? I didn’t want to have sex with my mother’s murderer!” He reached to cut the air off again, but Barry held out a hand, eyes wide and mouth shut.

“No, you wanted to remind yourself that you aren’t alone, that you’re still loved and I do love you, Barry, in my own way.”

The anger wasn’t surprising. Eobard calculated that it was going to take several days, if not weeks to convince Barry. What was surprising was the shock of lightening he saw in Barry’s eyes, momentarily clouding them red. He shouldn’t be able to do that. The cell was designed to suppress the Speedforce.

Before he could second guess himself, Eobard sucked the oxygen from the room and waited until Barry slumped to the floor, unconscious before allowing it back in. Barry’s back heaved as he sucked in air, but remained unconscious.

Good, he needed time to think.
His plan wasn’t simple, it was, in fact, very complicated, but it hinged on one thing. The Flash. Unfortunately, Barry was stubborn. In the years watching him, Eobard had learned that the boy was stubborn to the point of foregoing self-preservation.

His father, for instance. When it would have served him better to back down and keep his opinions to himself, he had fiercely insisted on the man’s innocence. As the Flash, that stubborn persistence had helped his persevere in situations he would have otherwise floundered. It was something Eobard had counted on to keep Barry alive and increase his speed.

In this, however, that same stubborn persistence was a problem. He needed Barry to listen to reason. He needed Barry to continue training to get faster. He needed Barry not to throw himself into danger without thinking, especially now that they were lacking in both technical and medical backup.

For this to work, he was going to need leverage. He got it in the form of a concerned voicemail from Felicity Smoak.

On waking, Barry hadn’t tried to get out. He hadn’t thrown himself at the glass. The readings from the terminals indicated that he hadn’t attempted to access the Speedforce at all, which was good. It meant he likely hadn’t realized what he’d done before he’d been put out.

Eobard waited on the outside of the glass patiently for Barry to get annoyed and look up through thick lashes. “What?”

Those eyes followed his hand as it moved behind him and pulled Barry’s phone from his back pocket. “Felicity called. She’s very worried about you.”

“Don’t.” Barry’s face went pale, his voice shaky. “Dr. Wells, Harrison, you say you care about me? I care about them. They’re my friends. Leave them out of this.”

Eobard rolled the phone in his hand a few times, as if considering, before putting it back in his pocket. “That depends entirely on them. As long as they don’t interfere with my plans, I have no reason to hurt them. However, if they were to come looking and find you secured here in the pipeline because of your own obstinance, they might become suspicious and I can’t have that.”

Barry narrowed his eyes. “What do you want?”

“I want you to listen.”

Slowly, Barry leaned back against the wall of his cell and pulled his legs up, resting his arms on his knees. “Okay.”

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The first step, and arguably the most important one, was getting Barry to see him as something other than the Reverse Flash. He wasn’t going to accomplish that by talking about the present or even their shared past, so he did neither. He talked about the future, his own personal past – romanticized stories of his childhood. Barry, true to his word, listened, but he said nothing. There was a strange expression on his face, not quite blank but otherwise indiscernible.

At the end of the day, Eobard gave Barry his phone and suggested he call Felicity before she got too worried. He didn’t bother warning Barry against saying anything that would alert her, but he did stay and listen. Barry kept his eyes on the floor the whole time and his lie was… passable.

The Reverse-Flash had dragged him from the fight and left him unconscious at S.T.A.R. Labs. Dr. Wells had been too busy patching him up to notice his phone ringing.

“Don’t worry about me. Is Ray alright? You did? But, A.R.G.U.S…. Yeah, you’re probably right. No, I’ll be okay, but, um, I don’t think I can make it back. I’m not… I’m not doing as well as I thought I was. Yeah, I know, you’re always right. I’ll be sure to tell Oliver that next time I see him. No, I’m gonna lay low until I figure it out. Promise. And, Felicity? Thank you.”

He ended the call and stared at the screen, making no offer to return it. After nearly a minute of silence, he spoke without look up. “A.R.G.U.S. has Deathstroke. They’re okay.”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

“I doubt that.”

“You can doubt it all you want, Barry, but in the last fifteen years, I’ve only done what I had to in order to get home. You would have done the same.”

“No, I wouldn’t.” Then Barry laughed, looking up finally. “But you really think that, don’t you? That it’s okay to hurt people, to kill them to get what you want?”

“It’s more complicated than that.”

Barry raised his eyebrows, a smile digging dimples into his cheeks. “Enlighten me, Dr. Wells. How does you getting home make all of this okay?”

There was something… off. The smile appeared to be genuine in its amusement. Like Barry was listening to a joke and waiting for the punch line. For the first time, Eobard considered that he might have miscalculated. Obviously there was no room for regret – keeping the Flash alive took priority over everything – but there was room for concern and he was definitely feeling stirrings of deep, deep concern.

“Later.” He pulled a protein bar from his pocket and tossed it into the cell. Barry’s smile dropped instantly and the look he gave Eobard was dripping in contempt, though he said nothing as Eobard dimmed the lights and made his exit, leaving Barry alone with his phone for the night.

*****
He wasn’t too worried about leaving Barry with his phone. The only person Barry was likely to call for help was the Arrow and Eobard had made it perfectly clear what he would do if they showed up on his doorstep. Still, it was something of a relief when he woke up the next morning without anything deadly aimed at him and Barry asleep in his cell, one hand clutched around the phone. He hadn’t touched the protein bar.

That would have to be remedied and soon, but first, breakfast.

There wasn’t much in Central City to eat, FEMA, Red Cross, and a few of the larger fast food chains were supplying most of the city’s residents. Thankfully, Eobard wasn’t restricted to Central City and with his speed, he was able to get in and out without being seen.

He came back, armed with several dozen cinnamon rolls. The bay door wasn’t even fully up when Barry groaned and rolled over onto his back, sniffing the air hungrily. “Oh, god, please tell me those are for me.”

It wasn’t a question, but Eobard had a point to make. “Eat the bar first.”

Barry blinked at him, his eyes slightly clouded from low blood sugar and heavy sleep, phone still tight in his hand. “For real?”

“Do you have any idea how much you would have to eat in order to sustain yourself without protein bars?”

“Roughly the amount of eight hundred and fifty tacos, but that was without cheese and guac.”

Eobard smiled at the memory. “Yes, well, I’m fresh out of tacos. Eat the bar.”

The standoff lasted a minute and thirty seconds, which was an entire thirty seconds longer than he’d thought it would. In the end, hunger won out. Barry had eaten one bar the previous morning and several large meals between then and now, but it hadn’t been nearly enough. His blood sugar had been bad enough when Eobard whisked him off that he’d been forced to hook him up to twenty nutrient bags before putting him in the cell, but it had been nearly ten hours since then.

Finally, Barry took the bar off the floor and ate it, his eyes narrowed spitefully. As soon as the last bite was swallowed, Eobard passed a box with one dozen rolls through the slot. Barry grabbed it and the moment the first one was in his mouth, he melted into the wall, his eyes rolling back into his head at the blissful rush of candied sugar and sharp cinnamon. There wasn’t anything intentionally sexual in the way Barry looked and sounded as he groaned, but Eobard couldn’t help remembering. He couldn’t help likening it to the way Barry had looked straddled over him, eyes closed against an overwhelming combination of grief, pleasure, and pain, all of which Eobard had caused him, was causing him.

“Oh, yeah, clearly the sex was all me.” He adjusted his focus from the column of Barry’s throat to his eyes, open and staring back with clear contempt.

“As I said, you are not without your charms.”

Barry chuckled around another mouthful. “I’ll remember that next time someone’s trying to kill me. I’ll charm them into dropping their guard.”
Eobard’s chest tightened in unwanted, unwarranted anger that he would have to deal with later. For today, he had other plans.

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“Give me the phone, Barry.”

“No.”

“It’s out of battery. It has *been* out of battery since yesterday. Give me the phone.”

“No!” Barry held it to his chest with an irrational stubbornness.

Eobard’s hand twitched to reach for the controls, suck out the oxygen and retrieve the device when the boy was unconscious and unable to resist. Instead, he put his hands behind his back and stared at Barry with an even gaze. He had no idea why it was so important – Barry wasn’t making calls, there wasn’t any accessible wi-fi, and without the battery it wasn’t as if he could play any of the downloaded games – but the fact remained it was, apparently, important, and in that, Eobard saw opportunity.

“Give me the phone. I will return it to you in the morning fully charged.”

Barry gritted his teeth. “You won’t.”

“I will. If you were going to call for help, you would have done so by now. I see no reason to keep it from you.”

It took another long, arduous five minutes for Barry to move forward and slipped the phone through the opening and into Eobard’s hand. When it was done, Barry stepped back to the other side of the cell and sat down, hands empty for the first time in over two days. He didn’t look up or make threats, or demand promises. He sat, silent and still, waiting for Eobard to leave him alone for the night. It was the closest thing to defeat Eobard had seen on the boy yet.

Rather than offer unwanted words of comfort, he left and returned the next morning with the phone, full charged as he had promised.

Barry immediately turned it on, thumbs moving over the screen while he was still on his knees at the glass, unaware or perhaps unconcerned that Eobard could see the screen. It only took a moment, but when Barry stopped he was in his photo gallery, where pictures and videos took up half the phone’s memory.

Of course, Eobard was appalled at himself for not having thought of it.

Barry sat back against the wall, limp with relief. He didn’t make eye contact, he didn’t say thank you, he did nothing, but when Eobard asked for the phone the next time it ran out of battery, Barry didn’t hesitate.
The shifts in Barry’s mood were wildly disconcerting. He could be laughing one minute, depressed the next, angry in a heart beat and rarely over the things Eobard thought he should be upset about.

Like Cisco and Caitlin. Barry had been in a slump, lying on the floor of the cell, clearly not listening to what Eobard was telling him when he’d interrupted. “What do you think happened to them?”

It was annoying, but it was the most interaction he’d gotten all day, so he indulged. “Who?”

“Cisco and Caitlin. I know what happened to everyone else, more or less, but not them. They were here. Their bodies should have been here, but I couldn’t find them. Why would they have left the building? Did they try to run? Why didn’t they just stay put? Caitlin knew the wave was coming. They could have gotten to one of the labs and waited it out. Why didn’t they do that?”

Eobard could have lied. It would have been easy, but if he did and the truth ever came out, it would do irreparable damage. Better to get it over with now, like ripping off Band-aid.

“I killed them.” Barry rolled his head over, expression disturbingly blank. “Cisco had figured out the display in the Bunker was a trick and he was well on his way to figuring out who I was. I couldn’t let that happen. I wasn’t ready for you to know. Although, all things considered, I suppose I did jump the gun on that one. I heard Caitlin on the phone with you, she knew. I took care of them, saved you, and came back to dispose of the bodies.”

He waited for the fallout, hand poised over the dial that would suck the oxygen from the room if necessary. Instead, Barry asked, “Was it quick?”

He nodded. “And relatively painless.”

Barry stared at him for several more seconds then looked back up at the ceiling with a sigh. “Good.”

However, when Eobard brought several dozen donuts one morning and none of them were chocolate, Barry became completely irrational and had to be put under before he hurt himself or, worse, managed to get out of his cell.

Midway through day sixteen, Barry sat up suddenly and said, “I need a shower.”

Eobard considered several responses to that, but Barry wasn’t waiting. “Come on, Harrison, I can smell myself.”

When Eobard still didn’t move, Barry stood to match his height. “What do you want from me? You want me to forgive you? Fine, you’re forgiven. Hating you won’t bring them back anyway, but I can’t sit here day in and day out. I need to move. Please?”

That was… a start. “I’ll consider it.”
He had to let Barry out. He’d already been in there two and a half weeks and there was only another week and a half before the boy would be expected back at work. At that point, Eobard either had to be prepared to keep Barry captive in the long term or be in a position to trust him. Long term captivity would make increasing Barry’s speed next to impossible.

However, there would have to be rules. “If I let you out, you don’t run.”


Fair point. Childish, but fair. “I’ll rephrase. No running away. No leaving Central City.”

“Where would I go?” Eobard stared silently and Barry caved. “Fine. No leaving Central City.”

“You will refrain from risking your own life. That includes monitoring your blood sugar as well as staying out of potentially dangerous situations.”

“For real? Who died and left you in charge?” Before Eobard could state the obvious, Barry broke into laughter, curling in on himself.

Perhaps things were worse than he’d suspected. A sense of humor was all good and well, but this was bordering on insanity. Which, given the necessity, he could work with, but not if Barry wouldn’t take him seriously.

When Eobard turned to walk away, Barry scrambled up onto his feet, all traces of humor gone. “I’m sorry. No, no, no. I’m sorry. I’ll listen. I’m listening. See? This is me, listening. No leaving Central, no risking my life. What else?”

That was better. Not good, but better. “You will tell no one you’re the Flash. Your friends in Starling are safe as long as they keep their distance, but from now on, this stays between us.”

Barry’s eyes dropped, his brows pulled together, and Eobard crossed his arms over his chest. “Who did you tell?”

There was a second of lip chewing. “Eddie. I had to tell someone in the department. I was wearing myself out doing the night searches and people started to notice when I wasn’t there first thing in the morning. They started asking questions I didn’t know how to answer and I didn’t want to bother you because you were staying up with me and you were just as exhausted, so I told Eddie and he covered for me. But he won’t tell anyone. I trust him. He was Joe’s partner and he won’t tell anyone. He hasn’t. He hasn’t even thought about and he’s tried to help me. He…”

He held up a hand to stop Barry’s rambling and pretended to consider before agreeing. Of all the people Barry could have told, it had to be the one person Eobard couldn’t kill.

Dropping the hand, he nodded. “It is a good idea to have someone on the inside at CCPD and Detective Thawne is as good as anyone, I suppose, but you tell him nothing else. Nothing about me or what I’m really doing.”

“I don’t even know what you’re really doing. I mean, you talk all the time, but you’ve told me nothing.”
“Barry…”

“Fine, yes. Is that all? Can I get out now?”

“As long as you remember your place.” Eobard tapped, swiped and scrolled through the screens, then held his hand over the sensor that would identify him as someone authorized to open the door. “Or you will end up back here.”

The minute the door opened Barry was gone, out of the cell, out of the bay, presumably out of S.T.A.R. Labs, but Eobard wasn’t concerned. Barry would stretch his legs for a while then he’d be back.

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He didn’t see Barry for several days after, but he didn’t need to see him to know he was there, or even what he was doing. Every so often, a bang would issue through S.T.A.R. Labs, originating from the office Barry had been sleeping in. Accompanying the bang would be the appearance of a box.

Of course, Eobard wasn’t above snooping. The first few were curious. DVD’s, CD’s, video games, water damaged, but useable. It wasn’t until the third one showed up and he recognized a familiar, amusing t-shirt that he’d realized they were Cisco’s things. Caitlin’s showed up next, books, mostly, a few pillow and blankets, a picture of her and Ronnie, another of Barry, Cisco and Caitlin together. He hadn’t considered it, but her apartment must have been high enough not to take on water.

On the third night, after he heard the bang of a door opening and closing, he’d decided to finish what he was doing before going to check. When he finally made it into the room, he was surprised to find Barry still there, sitting on top of the desk, a plastic pink cup in his hand.

Eobard stopped in the doorway, slipping his hands into his pockets. “Taking a break?”

Barry held up the cup. There was a yellow cartoon bear with a sun on its stomach smiling back at him. “Funshine Bear. Iris’s favorite.”

He tipped it up to show the bottom and Eobard saw the name ‘Iris’ written there in black marker.

“She always made me use Bedtime Bear, because I never wanted to get up in the morning.” Barry turned the cup over in his hands idly. “There isn’t much left of the house. These were in the dishwasher and there were some plastic bins in the basement that were okay. I don’t know what’s in them.”

He should back away. He should leave Barry to his grief, because comfort wasn’t what Eobard did and even if he did offer it, he doubted Barry would be very receptive. However, when he noticed the slight shake of Barry’s shoulder as he stared down at the plastic cup, he forced himself to step forward and put a hand on the boy’s shoulder.

It was a small gesture and one that he did, in fact, mean. He was well acquainted with what it felt
like to lose everything in the blink of an eye and perhaps it hadn’t affected him as deeply, but then
he’d always known there was a way of getting back eventually. Then again, Eobard had never been
one to lose himself in simple emotions.

Instead of being pushed away, he found himself wrapped in Barry’s long arms, a head buried in his
shoulder. “I’m sorry. I should hate you. I do hate you, but I need you. I don’t want to, but I do.”

Slowly, he put his own arms around Barry and threaded his fingers through the dirty brown hair,
letting Barry soak his shirt with tears until they either dried out or perhaps Barry was simply too
exhausted to continue. Eobard was certainly exhausted just from listening to it. When he started to
move back, the arms around him tightened painfully and there was a soft whisper of, “Don’t leave.”
Into his neck.

“I’m not leaving you, Barry, but I think we could both do with some sleep.”

Barry didn’t move at first, didn’t so much as unclench the fists he’d wrapped in Eobard’s sweater.
“Just for tonight.”

“Of course.”

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It wasn’t one night, but then Eobard had never assumed it would be. He hadn’t pressured Barry or
suggested anything, because he hadn’t needed to. Even in his timeline, the Flash had surrounded
himself with people he cared about, people who cared about him. Eobard had never been able to
understand it, the compulsion for companionship, but he didn’t need to understand it in order to use
it.

During the day, Barry kept his distance and at night, he curled into Eobard’s side like a lost child and
Eobard let him, whispering comfort and stroking his hair until the boy fell asleep. It was enough, at
least for the time being.

Barry’s suit hadn’t left its form since Eobard had dragged him back from Starling. He was, however,
taking his phone, which meant Eobard could at least confirm he was living up to his end of their
agreement and not leaving Central.

The tracker also confirmed that he was spending most of his time in places connected in one way or
another to the people he’d lost – the ruins of the West home, Cisco’s water logged and quickly
molding apartment, the street where Jitters used to be. Another box appeared in the middle of the
night, the name Henry Allen written on it in handwriting that wasn’t Barry’s. After a very short
debate with himself, Eobard looked. It appeared to be his personal affects from the prison.

When Barry didn’t show up that evening or the next day, Eobard wasn’t worried. While Barry may
have sought him out for comfort in times of distress, this was his father, who’d been in prison for
something Eobard had done. He assumed Barry was working off his grief somewhere else, which
was… relieving, but also unnerving.
There was so much to be done. So much time lost.

It didn’t occur to him to worry until he ran a check on Barry’s phone the following morning and found it in Cisco’s lab. He humored himself by checking, but as he’d suspected, Barry wasn’t there. Neither was his spare suit. Its emblem with the tracking device sat on the table beside the useless phone, and next to them was a Stick-It note. At the top the words ‘This isn’t what it looks like’ were crossed out, as was the next line of ‘Be back soon,’ and under that was written ‘Sorry.’

It had been years since he’d felt the level of anger that welled up in that moment. Three rules – stay in Central City, don’t risk your life, don’t tell anyone. They weren’t exactly unreasonable requests and at the very least, he was certain Barry was breaking two of them – he was definitely outside of Central City and, knowing the Flash, he was in all likelihood risking his life while doing it.

With concerted effort, he tapped down on the urge to do violence. It wouldn’t do any good at the moment, better to wait and decide where best to point his rage. At least, through the Speedforce, he was able to confirm Barry was alive; however, he was unable to tell where he was or if he was injured.

There was nothing to do but sit and wait for Barry to make an appearance. That, and plan a fitting punishment. It was so disappointing. Barry was due to start work again on Monday, in less than twenty four hours. Now, Eobard was going to have to contact the acting Captain and try to persuade him to give Barry another few weeks without raising suspicions.

By the time Barry streaked into the room, it was well past midnight and Eobard was almost too tired to be angry. Almost.

Barry dropped into a chair on the other side of the room, sending it spinning and let it continue to spin until it came to a stop on its own, his smile wide. “Harrison!”

Eobard raised an eyebrow and Barry’s smile dropped comically fast. “You got my note.”

He nodded slowly and Barry bit his lip. “Yeah, you got my note. That… I had to. Had to. Oliver needed my help. He needed my help. I had to.”

Of course this would be about Oliver and his cohorts. It appeared that, even without knowing what was going on, they were going to be an issue. More troubling, however, was the way Barry spoke, the way he didn’t stop moving. His knees were jostling up and down, his hands were twisting worriedly around each other, his eyes were everywhere – the floor, the windows, the walls, Eobard, his shoes, his fingernails.

Barry bit his lip again, chewed nervously and looked at Eobard again with large, too bright green eyes. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry, but I had to…”

“You said that.”

Barry nodded, a little too enthusiastic. “I know. I know, but don’t be mad. You can’t be mad. They needed me. I wouldn’t have done it if they didn’t need me. I would have told you, but you might have stopped me. I couldn’t let you stop me. I couldn’t risk it. They’re my friends. I couldn’t just let them die. I had to, but I didn’t get hurt. No one saw me. No one even knows I was there. Except, you know, Oliver and Felicity and a few guards and… but that’s not the point. The point is I’m back now and it’s okay. I’m okay.”

While Barry rambled, Eobard noted the rapid rise and fall of his chest, the sickly pallor of his skin. That coupled with the glassy quality of Barry’s eyes were all symptoms Eobard was very familiar
“Barry, your blood sugar is low.”

Barry stopped talking and stared. Slowly, he started to smile. “I didn’t want to stop until I got back. Didn’t want to worry you.”

“You didn’t want me to find out.”

“Well, no. Obviously.” He laughed, leaning forward. “Hey, you wanna hear a secret?”

“Hm.”

“I think I’m gonna pass out.” Eobard was just confused enough by the whispered confession that when Barry’s eyes rolled back into his head, he didn’t move fast enough to stop the boy from falling out of the chair, hitting the floor with a heavy thump.

This really wouldn’t do.

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He needed to know what Barry had been up to and if it was going to require damage control. All things considered, Eobard was a patient man. He didn’t mind biding his time to get the results he wanted. The last fifteen years were proof enough of that. However, every man, Eobard included, had a breaking point and Barry Allen was teetering dangerously close to his.

He took Barry back to their room and gave him a line and fifteen bags of nutrient rich fluids over the course of three hours, enough for Barry’s vitals to level out and his glucose readings, while not ideal, to no longer be in the range of someone who should have long since slipped into a coma. When he was convinced Barry was out of immediate danger, he began the process of waking him up.

Calling Barry’s name, predictably, had no affect, neither did sending small shocks through him. A larger shock did cause his body to jerk, but that was nothing more than a physical reaction. Reaching down, Eobard ran a thumb over the relaxed, lower lip once before pulling back, striking the side of Barry’s face with the back of his hand.

It was crude, but affective – and more than a little satisfying. The crack resounded through the room and Barry’s eyes popped open, wide and green and alert. He looked around, momentarily confused, until he settled on Eobard standing to the side and he broke into a wide grin. “Hey, Dr. Wells. Harrison.”

There was a slur to his speech that said he wasn’t entirely lucid.

“Barry, do you know where you are?” Barry nodded. “Where are you?”

“S.T.A.R. Labs. Your bed.” The second was said with a wink and a huff of laughter.

“Do you remember how you got here?” Another wordless nod. “How did you get here?”
“I ran.”

Eobard resigning himself to pulling answers from the boy. “From where?”

“Nanda Parbat.”

“What?!” That was in Tibet. At his current average speed it would have taken Barry nearly twelve hours to get there, never mind the trip back and whatever he’d done in the interim.

“It’s in Tibet.”

“I know where it is! What were you doing there?”

Barry smiled wanly. “I was helping Oliver.”

Eobard pinched the bridge of his nose in an effort not to backhand Barry again. “How were you helping Oliver?”

“Was helping…” Barry’s eyes lost focus and he had to blink several times. When he stopped, his face twisted in confusion. He frowned at the arm at his side and the tube stretching from it to the bag of nutrients, currently set to a slow trickle. “Is that an IV? Why do I have an IV?”

“Because you decided to run to Nanda Parbat and back without proper sustenance. Now, Barry,” he reached down and grabbed Barry’s face under the chin, “focus. How were you helping Oliver?”

“I helped Felicity and the others get out of the League’s dungeon while Oliver dealt with Ra’s al Ghul.” Barry pulled his face away from Eobard’s hand and sat up on his elbows. “It was a real dungeon, like stone and steal and in a mountain. We should get you a dungeon. You’re evil. I’m sure you can find someone to put there.”

“At the moment, I’d consider putting you there.” Ra’s al Ghul and the League of Assassins was not something to trifle with and Eobard could only hope that whatever Barry had done to help them escape wouldn’t draw too much attention. He could, of course, deal with it if necessary, but he’d rather not. At least Barry had worn his suit and the chances were his secret identity remained in tact. “Lay down before you hurt yourself.”

Barry complied, looking up through heavy lidded eyes and thick lashes. “You wouldn’t put me in a dungeon.”

“Wouldn’t I?”

“No, because you care about me. ‘S what you said. That you love me.”

There was something imploring about the way he’d said it, questioning and Eobard leaned forward, his mouth inches away from Barry’s cheek. “Which is precisely why I would consider locking you in a dungeon – so that you can no longer pursue fruitless endeavors that may very well get you killed.”

“Not fruitless. They’re alive.”

Which was the problem, but Eobard wasn’t going to get anywhere with Barry in this condition. He had his answers, the rest could wait. “Go to sleep, Barry. We’ll continue this discussion when you wake up.”

Barry nodded, his eyes already closed and Eobard was fairly certain he heard a mumbled, “Thank
you,” as Barry’s breathing evened into sleep.

*****

He hadn’t been lying when he’d said that he would lock Barry away if he had to and while he might not have a dungeon, he did have the pipeline. After a rapid influx of another thirty bags, he carried Barry down to the pod, sealed him in, and waited. It didn’t take long for Barry’s eyes fluttered open. He breathed in deep, looking up at the ceiling blankly.

It was another few minutes before Barry sat up with a groan, putting a hand to his head. “Ow. Why does it feel like a semi ran into the side of my face?”

Interesting. “You don’t remember?”

Barry raised his eyebrows and stretched his jaw experimentally, flinching. “The last thing I remember is trying to get back here before you noticed I was gone. That, and a really stunning sunset. The way the colors reflect off the water in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean is just breathtaking. Seriously, though, did I run into a wall?”

“Something like that.” Barry dropped the hand from his face – it was pale yellow and healing fast, but it would still be a few hours – and relaxed against the wall, for all appearances resigned to his fate. “You don’t seem surprised to be locked up.”

Barry shrugged, “I figured you would. The odds I could run there and back without you finding out were… well, anyway, it’s what you threatened to do and I did break two of your rules. Besides, the room service is pretty good. Do I get donuts again?”

Perhaps he was going about this wrong. Clearly, the idea of the pipeline wasn’t all that concerning. The last time it had taken over two weeks for Barry to crack. Even if Barry caved sooner this time around, it would be too long – Barry was due back at the station in the morning and Eobard didn’t want to bring suspicion down on himself; especially not from his ancestor.

He needed another tactic. The one that immediately came to mind was one that had worked before and he saw no reason why it wouldn’t again.

“It would appear that I’m going to have to lower my expectations.” With an overly resigned sigh, he used the key pad to open the door to the cell. Barry didn’t move, rightfully suspicious. “Leave if you want – there’s no where in the world you can go that I can’t find you. Go to your little friends in Starling and see how long it takes me to rip through them.”

Barry stood, swaying on his feet once before standing firm. “Don’t you dare lay a hand on them! You said…”

“That as long as they kept their nose out of my business, I’d leave them alone and I will, but how long do you think it will take Oliver Queen to figure out something’s wrong with you?”

“There’s nothing…”
“Don’t pretend to be stupid, Barry, it doesn’t suit you.” Barry’s lip curled into a snarl and he dropped his head down, looking at the floor. “You know as well I do that it won’t take them a day to figure out you’re hiding something and what then? How long after that before Felicity wears you down or you slip up and then they’ll try to protect you or they’ll try to stop me and I’ll have no other choice.”

Red lightning flashed across Barry’s eyes as he looked up and ran, shoving Eobard back and out of the bay, into the wall of the corridor. “You don’t touch them!”

“That is entirely up to you.”

The silence stretched between them, Barry’s face twisted in an unfamiliar expression of confusion and anger. “But… why? Why does it matter what I do? Where I go? Why do you care if I get hurt or if I don’t let my friends die? What… I don’t understand.”

It probably was about time to tell Barry the entire truth, but first. Eobard lifted his arms, shoving them up between their bodies and used his forearms to push Barry’s hands to the sides, breaking his grip on Eobard’s sweater then reversed their position, twisting around so it was Barry against the wall with Eobard pressing into him.

“There, that’s better.” Barry met his gaze evenly. “I told you I’m from the future, that I’m stuck, that I’m looking for a way back. What I haven’t told you is that you are how I get there.”

“You?”

“You don’t know it yet, but you can travel through time. Your speed, the Flash’s speed, is the key. If you go fast enough, we can open a wormhole, you can go back into the past, save your mother, change everything, and I can go home.”

The intensity of Barry’s stare faltered, his voice dropped to a breathy whisper. “Everything?”

“One little thing can change so much. Ripples in a pond, Barry. You can go back and save your mother, have your family back, your friends. All you have to do,” Eobard leaned in, pushing against Barry harder, “is not get yourself killed in the mean time.”

Barry was limp under him, held up almost entirely by Eobard’s grip. “How do I…?”

“The particle accelerator.”

“What?”

“When I’ve finished repairing it, we’ll use it and your speed to open the wormhole.”

“No, not… How do I know it’s any better?” Eobard froze, too stunned by the question to form a proper reply. “How do I know everyone is even still alive? For all I know the tidal wave still hits and I still lose everyone, only this time I won’t even have you.”

Of all the responses Eobard had imagined, the idea that Barry would dismiss the possibility of a better future was not one of them. “I assure you, that isn’t the case.”

“You assure me?” Barry outright laughed, tears gathering in the corners of his eyes, before he returned to glaring. “Good to know I have the assurance of someone who has done nothing but lie to me since we first met.”

“I haven’t lied to you in over a month.”
“Oh, well, that’s okay then.”

He pushed against Eobard and Eobard pushed back, gripping Barry’s wrists to pin his hands to the wall on either side of his head, holding them tight enough that the bones ground together, just shy of breaking. “The truth is, Barry, I don’t need you to believe me. I need you to…”

“You need me? I needed them. Screw your plan. If you need me so much that you’d let thousands of people die to keep me alive, I’ll just end it now. Where would your precious plan be then?”

While he was reasonably certain Barry didn’t mean it, that it was nothing more than words said in anger with no real intent, they still sent a chill through him.

“No. No, Barry, because if you did that, I would burn the world. I’d tear it down and leave ashes in its place and then I’d find a way to start over, because there is always a way. And then… then I would make you regret it.”

Barry bucked up, fought violently against the restraint with Eobard pressing into him to keep him in place. There was a scream, wordless and hurt. It was getting harder to hold Barry still, if he kept thrashing around, Eobard was going to lose his grip… and then Barry’s mouth crashed against his, lips at first, followed by teeth, biting into Eobard’s lip until he tasted his own blood and the salt of Barry’s tears. It was less of a kiss and more of an attack, but it let loose something primal. An urge to have what he’d been unable to before, to be an active participant, to pin Barry under him and show him exactly what he was capable of, what they were both capable of.

He took Barry’s face in his hands, taking control of the kiss and deepened it until he had to pull back to breathe. As soon as their lips parted, Barry used Eobard’s distraction against him, shoving him to put Eobard’s against the opposite wall.

Barry snarled, “I won’t let them die.”

Eobard shoved back, hard and Barry cried out as he hit the wall, stunned just long enough for Eobard to insinuate his leg between Barry’s. “I won’t let you die.”

He wrapped his hand around Barry’s throat, squeezing just hard enough to make breathing difficult, but not impossible as he rubbed his thigh up, vibrating his body against Barry’s. Even then, he still expected Barry to push him away, to run and hide for a day or, at the very least, to tell him to stop. Instead, he pulled Eobard closer, kissed him with teeth while digging nails into his shoulders.

When Barry finally broke off, there was blood on his mouth and lightening in his eyes and Eobard smiled.

*****

“You suck.”

Eobard stroked a hand through Barry’s hair, tugging. “Very well, I’ve been told.”
“I think you broke a rib.” Barry shifted against him and groaned. “God, I have work in an hour and I’m not even sure I can walk.”

“You can walk.”

“Maybe, but you still suck.”

“I didn’t hear you complaining when you came so hard you blacked out.”

“No offense to your sexual prowess, but the broken rib may have been a contributing factor to my passing out.”

“I highly doubt it’s broken.” Eobard probed the injury and Barry cursed loudly. Hm, there was no tail tell shift of bone under his hand, but it may very well be cracked. He hadn’t intended it to be quite so rough, but Barry hadn’t exactly been a docile partner and it was by far the most satisfied he’d been in years. “You’ll heal.”

Barry sat up, cringing as he picked his sweat pants up off the floor. “I need to look for an apartment.”

A strange sense of possessiveness darkened his otherwise pleasant mood. Somewhere in the last two months, he’d become accustomed to having Barry with him; if not in his bed, then within these walls, where Eobard could be certain he was safe and, for lack of a better term, under thumb. The idea of Barry having a place to go that was outside of Eobard was… intolerable. As unstable as he was, who knew what he would say or do without supervision.

He waited until Barry had pulled on his pants, swearing under his breath, to continue the conversation. “Where would you look?”

Barry glanced at him over his shoulder, cautious, but not hostile. “I don’t know. The ones that have power are way out of my price range, but as long as there’s running water, I’ll be fine.”

“What about a refrigerator for food? You will need to eat.”

“I’ll figure something out.”

Eobard sat up and Barry’s shoulders tensed as he laid a hand on them. “You could always stay with me.”

The tension bled out as Barry’s eyes widened in shock. “With you?”

“My house has solar panels, so power isn’t an issue and it was far enough outside the city that there’s no water damage to speak of. Not to mention, a bed would certainly be more comfortable than a cot.”

“No.” Barry jerked away from him, stumbling a little on his way to the desk where his shirt was. “I’m not moving in with you and this – whatever this is – is never happening again.”

Oh, and Eobard could let it go. He could say, ‘of course’ knowing that eventually Barry would seek him out for comfort that Eobard would take full advantage of. He could, but he really wasn’t in the mood.

Barry had barely managed to turn his sweatshirt out before Eobard sped off the cot, into his own pants, and came to a stop in front of Barry, a hand wrapped around the back of Barry’s neck. When Barry pulled back, he tightened the grip. “Harrison, I don’t want…”
Eobard dropped his mouth to Barry’s neck, brushing teeth against the pressure point and felt the shudder that vibrated through Barry. “Think about it, Barry. Do you even remember what you said?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Nanda Parbat.” Barry shoved back with wide eyes. “You told me exactly where you’d been, and what you’d done, and you don’t even remember doing it.”

He took a step forward and Barry followed it with a step back, until his thighs hit the desk and Eobard had him boxed in. “What happens the next time you do something stupid? And don’t bother saying you’ll be careful, we both know better.”

“I don’t…”

“What if you run into someone? Detective Thawne, perhaps? Don’t think I haven’t noticed the missed calls. Forty two in the last three weeks? He’s worried about you, Barry. You should get back to him before he decides to come here and check on you. What if…” Eobard reached up and brushed Barry’s sweat damp hair from his brow. “What if he stops by your apartment and you say something – something you don’t even remember saying – and then he comes after me and I end up having to… take care of him.”

Barry’s breath caught in his throat and his jaw clenched. “Is that a threat? I move in with you or you’ll kill Eddie?”

If only.

“Oh, no, Barry, I’m not threatening you. I’m manipulating you. You don’t have to move in with me. I won’t retaliate if you choose to get your own place. I’m simply making you aware of the risks.” He cupped Barry’s cheek as the confusion in those bright green eyes slowly gave way to anger. “I care about you, Barry. I wouldn’t want you to lose anyone else because of your own carelessness.”

Barry’s face shuddered, closed off for a moment, and then lit up. Eobard let Barry get in a few blows - a fist to the side of his face, a foot in his stomach with enough force to knock him across the room – before taking the advantage. He had the benefit of a clear head, full caloric charge, and years of experience. Even so, getting the boy back under him was harder than expected. It was nothing like fighting the Flash in his time. It was unhinged. Barry wasn’t fighting just to win, he was fighting to do damage, to hurt Eobard with teeth and nail and a knee that came dangerous close to his groin.

Eventually, he managed to maneuver Barry to the ground, wrists pinned above his head, and Eobard stretched out between his legs, using his whole body to hold Barry down. Barry wiggle, squirmed, struggled to get out from under him, but what little energy he’d had at the start was waning, so Eobard held tight, letting Barry burn himself out until he was limp and panting.

When Barry had finally been reduced to glaring, Eobard relaxed his grip minutely. “Are you done?”

The surge forward was unexpected enough that it nearly worked. Thankfully, Eobard managed to hang on.

Barry glared up at him. “You lose.”

“I what?”
“You couldn’t beat me in your time, so you had to come back and try to kill me as a child and then… then you couldn’t even do that. And maybe I don’t win either, but no matter what, you. Still. Lose.”

He saw red. He didn’t even realize he had a hand around the boy’s throat until Barry’s eyes were rolling back into his head and his lips had turned a startling shade of purple. Eobard let go instantly, standing up to get distance between them, because the urge strike out again was nearly overwhelming.

The air rushed into Barry’s lungs. His body surging up as he choked on the influx, dissolving into fits of coughing.

That was close, too close. Eobard hadn’t felt that kind of unbridled rage in a long time. He was breathless with it. Barry didn’t move from where he’d been left on the floor, one hand clutching at his own bruised throat.

When Eobard was relatively certain he had himself under control, he knelt down, not touching Barry, but setting himself close enough that there was no way for Barry to miss what he was saying. “I know you’re upset, you have every right to be, but don’t let that cloud your judgment. My threat stands regardless of whether you take your own life, or provoke me into doing it for you. Tell me you understand.”

“I understand.” The words were barely audible, a rough whisper, but it was enough.

He stood up and went to the desk, pulling two protein bars from the drawer and tossed them on the ground beside of Barry’s prone body. “Eat and take a shower. I’ll drive you to the station.”

*****

It was impossible to tell whether Barry’s silence was spurred by anger, submission, or if he was simply pouting, but whichever it was, he didn’t say a single word either before or during the drive. Not that Eobard was feeling particularly conservative himself.

He shouldn’t have lost his temper. Barry was young and impetuous, hurt and betrayed. He’d lashed out. His only real fault was that he’d managed to stumble across one of the few things that could enrage Eobard. Even knowing that, however, it was still hard to put the anger aside and move past it. His inability to beat the Flash was an open wound that refused to heal – that it was Barry bringing it up had only made it worse.

Still, he couldn’t let it fester. While he was fairly certain that at this point Barry would stay with him regardless of what Eobard did or did not do, he couldn’t take the risk. He’d have to swallow a small portion of his pride and find a way to apologize that would come across as genuine. It couldn’t be an outright lie, there had to be truth in it – if not the whole truth, then at least part of it.

He parked and pulled his glasses off, rubbing his eyes in an effort to steel himself for what he needed to say. “I owe you an apology. I shouldn’t have done that.”

Barry’s voice was dripping with disdain as he spoke to the window. “Shouldn’t have what?
Threatened to kill Eddie if I didn’t move in with you or threaten to literally destroy the world if I pissed you off enough.”

“Neither. I shouldn’t have lost my temper.” Barry still wasn’t looking at him, which was childish, but expected. “When I came here, I hated you. I hated every version of you, in every possible future. It was all consuming and then I failed to kill you and I was stuck here and I had to wait. I had to watch you grow up. I had to create you and take you under my wing and work with you and my feelings changed. Immensely. More than I ever thought possible.”

“You said that your feelings for me stemmed from the things I’ve done – for Cisco, for Caitlin, for you – and regardless of who I really am or where I came from, it was still me who did those things and I did them because I wanted to. I want to help you. I want to give you back what you lost. I promise you, Barry, if you save your mother, there will be no tidal wave. You will have her and your father. Iris and Joe will be alive. Cisco and Caitlin will be alive.”

Barry stared out the window at the doors of the precinct for several silent seconds before he sat up straight. “I’m late.”

Eobard stopped him with a hand on his shoulder as he reached for the door handle. “Barry, wait. My offer of a place to live still stands and, if it makes the decision any easier, I have wifi through S.T.A.R. Labs satellites. A small misuse of company resources, perhaps, but it does mean that you will have reliable, fast internet from home, a luxury I’m not sure you’ll find anywhere else in the city.”

Barry turned to him, his face set in the same carefully blank expression it had worn for the last hour, then slowly, he broke into a smile. “That is a much better manipulation tactic than threatening to kill people. For real. I might actually consider it.”

He was out of the car before Eobard could say anything, running across the street to the precinct and leaving Eobard rushing to get into his wheelchair and out of the van. He was going to have to do something about that and soon. This particular ruse had outlived its usefulness the moment Barry discovered who he really was.

By the time he made it inside and up the elevator, Barry was already standing at the front desk nervously hunched in front of Eddie and someone in a wheelchair that Eobard didn’t recognize, though he was fairly certain he knew him from somewhere.

Barry turned at the ring of the elevator and his shoulders instantly lost their tension when he saw Eobard moving toward them. “Harrison! Look who’s here!”

It took him a moment to put a name of the face. Captain David Singh. Last he’d heard the Captain had been moved to Coast City in the wake of the disaster. The original diagnosis had been dire, but, wheelchair aside, he looked well. He certainly didn’t look like someone who had suffered a potentially fatal head injury.

“Captain Singh, what a pleasant surprise. Here for a visit?”

“No, actually, I’ve been reinstated.”

That was… surprising. Though, not unwelcome. The acting Captain had been a bull of a man who clearly had not been cut out for the job. Eobard had been of the opinion that he was probably going to have to cull the ranks, so to speak, until a suitable replacement was found. While he didn’t have many dealings with the Captain himself in this timeline, Singh had, at the very least, been competent and willing to work with the Flash when necessary. It suggested a malleability that could come in
handy.

“If you ask the doctors it’s a miracle, if you ask Rob, it’s my never ending stream of dumb luck, but, either way, I’m not in nearly as bad a shape as I could be. Once the swelling went down, there was no permanent brain damage and the spinal injury has actually healed almost completely. The physical therapists say I should be walking within the year, though we’re taking it slow. In the meantime, someone has to clean up the mess Reggie made of the department.”

Barry chuckled into his hand, eyes downcast as Eddie nodded gravely. “I’ve been trying to get in touch with Barry for the last two weeks, ever since Singh got back, but he hasn’t been returning my calls.”

That certainly explained the volume of missed calls. Eobard raised his eyebrows at Barry who shrugged. “Sorry, I just… I needed some time.”

Captain Singh put a hand on Barry’s arm and Eobard didn’t want to feel jealous, but he almost couldn’t help it, especially when Barry leaned into it. “Are you okay? All joking aside, if you’re not ready to come back…”

Barry looked up at that, eyes wide and a little desperate. “No, no, I’m good. I’m ready. More than ready.”

There was a significant pause. The Captain kept a hand on Barry’s arm, staring up at him like he was trying to read Barry’s expression. Whatever he saw must have satisfied his curiosity, because he nodded. “Okay, good, ‘cause there’s a new guy up there and I’m half afraid he’s gonna throw himself out a window if someone doesn’t dig him out of the paperwork soon. Come by my office later.”

With Barry’s agreement, the Captain moved forward to shake Eobard’s hand. “Good to see you again, Dr. Wells.”

“Likewise.”

When Captain Singh was through the doors and out of earshot, Eddie looked around nervously, at the other officers passing by and at Eobard sitting not too far off, before turning his attention to Barry. “Barry, that, um… that wasn’t the only reason I was calling.”

“How?”

“I was really worried. I know you said you had it handled, but, maybe next time pick up the phone and let me know you haven’t run off to save the city from some unknown threat and gotten yourself killed?”

Barry rubbed his neck sheepishly. “Yeah, sorry about that. Like I said, I needed some time, so…”

“Or, maybe, you could move in with me?”

Barry froze, his downcast expression purely shock and if Eobard hadn’t had years of practice, he knew his would have been similar. It shouldn’t have been. It was an obvious move given Eddie’s nature. Perhaps it was simply the timing, so soon after Eobard’s own offer.

Eddie fumbled to continue. “Not, you know, like that. But it would be easier to keep an eye on you. My loft got power last week and it’s just down the street and I know it isn’t very private, but I’m not exactly looking to bring a lot of girls over and we can get you your own bed. Not as a permanent thing, but for a while, until…”
“I’m moving in with Harrison.”

Eobard just managed not to raise his eyebrows at the blurted statement.

“You’re what?”

“Yeah, it’s just… back when I first…” Barry dropped his voice to a whisper, “became the Flash, it was hard to be in an apartment. Too many neighbors and it can get loud when I’m running in and out. Harrison has a house just outside of town, so it’s private and…”

With sidelong, almost nervous glance at Eobard, Barry continued, voice still low. “He’s the closest thing to family I have left, so… and I appreciate the offer, I really do, but I’m moving in with Harrison.”

Eddie put a hand on Barry’s shoulder and the instant, uncomfortable tension that created was satisfying. “I understand, but if you need someone to talk to, I’m here.”

“Thanks.” Barry waited until Eddie was back at his desk to turned around, looking down at Eobard for nearly a full minute, before he closed the distance between them, bending down to brace his hands on the arms of Eobard’s wheelchair, their faces inches apart. “I want my own room.”

“Of course.” He had more than enough rooms for Barry to have one, though there was no doubt in his mind that Barry would find his way into Eobard’s bed by the end of the week.

Barry’s eye narrowed suspiciously, but he didn’t say anything to the obvious placation. “See you after work. Don’t bother picking me up. I can get home on my own.”

He turned abruptly to go up the stairs, not waited for a reply.

There was something different about Barry now, something less stable and far more volatile. Eobard couldn’t say whether he was pleased with the change, or simply the outcome, because while it certainly wasn’t ideal, it also wasn’t without its benefits. All that really mattered, however, was that his plan remained largely unaffected. He could still use Barry to get home; it was just going to take a little longer.
You’re in pretty good shape

Chapter Summary

Barry’s stalling, but Harrison can be patient. For a while, anyway.

Chapter Notes

The last two chapters are likely to be the angriest ones I do for this series. I think. I’m like ninety percent sure. Eighty. You know what? A solid seventy five. Yeah, we’ll go with that.

"You’re in pretty good shape for the shape you are in." - Dr. Seuss-

Past (Two Months After the Tidal Wave)-

Barry wasn’t sure what he expected Harrison to do when he arrived at his house and he didn’t want to find out.

He worked a double shift, blaming it on backed up paperwork. He met with Captain Singh and spent fifteen minutes assuring him that he was okay to work and getting his appointment set for his evaluation and an appointment for the mandatory grief counseling. He wouldn’t have to start until next week, so he had until then to get himself together.

Several detectives stopped by to make sure he was holding up okay and he did his best to smile through it. He’d never had a lot of friends in the department, not that they’d disliked him, but he’d been seen as a little strange and a lot obsessed with proving his father’s innocence. It had never bothered Barry before. He’d gotten used to it long before coming to the CCPD. Now it seemed the tidal wave had washed all that away and everyone in the precinct – or what was left of everyone – was determined to welcome him back.

He hated it. They meant well, but every time someone asked how he was doing, he found himself thinking about what that person had lost – Detective Carter’s wife and daughter, Officer Grant’s mother. There wasn’t anyone in the department that hadn’t lost someone or something important to them. Worse, was the end of the day when he thought about the people who hadn’t stopped by – people who had always been nice to him, even if only because he was Joe’s son – and remembered that they were among the dead and missing.

He’d known, logically, that half the department was gone, but the rescue and clean up efforts in the first month had made it difficult for him to get a good grasp of what that really meant. They were all out in the city, different areas, different shifts on an around the clock schedule. It had been so much easier to put it in the back of his mind and keep moving.

Now they were back in the station, empty desks everywhere, or new faces sitting where someone
else was supposed to be and it was... too much, he tried not to look, tried not to do the math or put names to the growing list of people he had failed. It didn’t work.

And the new guy, CSI Jones? Barry thought maybe he might have likes Jones in another life, one that sucked maybe a little less, because Jones was nice. Jones tried so hard. In just the first day, he brought Barry the left over donuts when he forgot to eat lunch, offered to get him a coffee, and asked his opinion on a few things he’d been struggling with. He was older than Barry, but he didn’t treat Barry with anything other than respect.

It would have been great, except all Barry really wanted was to be left alone and between Jones and the other officers, he felt suffocated. Jones finally left at six, which was a relief, but another shift started and a new wave of well wishers made their way up to the forensic lab. At least they were only coming one at a time, whether it was by design or coincidence.

Barry considered leaving after the fourth one popped up and asked him how it was going, but leaving meant going home and he wasn’t ready for that. He wasn’t ready to give Harrison that yet, despite what he’d said. He would, eventually, because he couldn’t go back to S.T.A.R. Labs again. Too many memories, too much regret. Everywhere he looked, he could see Cisco and Caitlin, Iris and Joe, milling around, talking and laughing and working, but they weren’t really there and they never would be again.

Nothing was ever going to be like it was.

He poured himself into work, fell asleep at his desk at around three and woke up to light coming in at seven. His whole body hurt, his head was fuzzy, his stomach ached. It took him a few minutes to get up, stretch, and then he went to the bathroom to wash his face and rinse out his mouth. There were a few surprised looks as he stumbled to the elevators and made his way to the street, attacking the vendors for as many breakfast tacos and pastries as he could without looking suspicious.

By the time the morning shift arrived, he was recharged and working. If anyone noticed he was wearing the same clothes, they didn’t say anything, but it wasn’t like he had a vast wardrobe, anyway. The dress code at the CCPD was the least of their priorities and Barry was good in jeans and a faded grey t-shirt. His S.T.A.R. Labs sweatshirt was hanging on the chair in the corner in case he got cold.

He didn’t have much left in the way of clothes. There had been a few outfits he’d left at S.T.A.R. Labs, just in case. He’d have to look through Cisco’s things. The pants wouldn’t fit, but there were bound to be some t-shirts he could wear. He frowned to himself as he realized that meant going back to S.T.A.R. Labs and, actually, he’d be fine. If anyone complained about the smell, there had to be some febreeze or air freshener somewhere around the precinct.

Jones bothered him a little less, although that could be due to the fact that Barry could feel his patience thinning with every person that walked through the door. Or didn’t. By noon, his head felt thick and his body was weighty. He was just about to take a break, maybe curl up under one of the tables in the back that wasn’t visible from the door, when Eddie walked in, carrying with him the smell of fatty meats and greasy fries.

“Oh, my god, lunch. I forgot to eat lunch.”

Eddie chuckled and sat down, handing Barry three bags while he opened his one. “I thought you might.”

They ate in silence for ten minutes, Barry tearing through the five burgers Eddie had brought him and sucking the fruit flavored slushy greedily. He was going to need to put snacks in his office.
“So, uh, Barry, there’s a rumor going around that you…” Eddie stopped to sip his own soda, probably gearing himself for whatever he wanted to say. “Some of the guys think you slept here last night.”

Barry shrugged. “There’s a lot to catch up on.”

“Yeah, I guess.” That didn’t sound good. “Or maybe you don’t want to go home?”

And just like that, he wasn’t hungry anymore.

“Not to pry, it’s just, you didn’t look that happy about it yesterday.”

Barry swallowed what was in his mouth and put the burger down. “Of course I’m not happy, Eddie. Are you?”

Eddie closed his eyes for a second and shook his head. “No.”

“Right, and neither am I, but it’s not about Harrison, okay? It’s about… everything else and I didn’t go home because there’s a lot to do.”

Eddie sat there for a long moment, silent and Barry was just about to start eating again when he spoke. “I notice you’re calling him Harrison, now.”

Shit. “Yeah, well.” Except there wasn’t anything he could say to that.

“Barry, are you… I mean, just so we’re clear. Are you in a relationship with Dr. Wells?”

Barry cringed at the word relationship. It wasn’t a relationship. What he had with Harrison was a sick, twisted thing that had curled up inside him and made him want to claw his own skin off, but it wasn’t a relationship. Not that he could tell Eddie that.

“That, um… it’s hard to explain.”

“Not really. Barry, either you’re sleeping with him, or you’re not.”

Well, that was straightforward enough. “Okay, yes, I’m… have. I have slept with him.”

He chanced a look up and there it was, the look of disappointment. He thought he’d dodged that bullet with Joe’s death. It was the one good thing to come out of all the death and carnage – he was never going to have to see that look on Joe’s face when he found out Barry’d had sex with the man who killed his mother, both before and after he found out about it. Not that Eddie knew that, specifically, but apparently, there was enough to be disappointed in without all the minor details.

“Are you going to continue sleeping with him?”

“No. I don’t know. It’s hard to explain.” Eddie started to talk, but Barry held his hand up. “I don’t want to explain it. I don’t need to. He… he’s the only thing I have left, Eddie.”

“He’s not…”

“You should go. I have work to do.” Barry took the bag of uneaten food and shoved it in his desk drawer for later.

Eddie hesitated for a moment, then picked up his own bag and stood. “Okay, but, if you want to talk, I’m here.”
Barry didn’t bother to respond, because he didn’t have words. The idea of talking to Eddie, really talking to him, made Barry want to throw his burger up. What would he say?

*Sorry your girlfriend is dead because I failed to protect her?*

*Sorry I left Iris on a beach alone when there was a tidal wave heading for the city?*

*Sorry I kissed her? Sorry she kissed me? Sorry I’m not sorry that happened, because it was the best feeling in a long time and I’d do it over again if I could? If I could, she’d be with me and not you, but you can’t ever know that, because I won’t ruin your memory of her.*

No, he wasn’t saying any of that, because Iris didn’t deserve it and neither did Eddie. Eddie deserved to keep his memories of Iris as they were and Barry would keep his. There wasn’t anything to talk about.

*****

Felicity had started calling again, then texting. She’d been doing that every few days. Barry ignored the calls and answered the texts with abbreviated responses.

*How are you?* -Good.

*How’s being back at work.* -Fine.

*Have you found a place?* -I’m busy. Call you later.

He wouldn’t, but it bought him a few days of silence. Not that he didn’t want to talk to her, he did, he *desperately* did, but if Harrison was telling truth and he really had said all those things and couldn’t remember… that was scary. He’d had no intentions of telling Harrison anything about Nanda Parbat, let alone Oliver. The idea that he’d unknowingly put them at risk like that, was terrifying.

If he kept brushing her off, eventually, she’d stop trying. Or, probably not. Felicity had the tenacity of a honey badger.

He chuckled to himself and tried not to imagine Oliver as the helpless snake, climbing a tree to escape the relentless pursuits of the honey badger in heels, Felicity Smoak. She’d catch him, too. Then he started picturing what Badger Felicity would do to Snake Oliver and nope. So not going there.

Somewhere in there, he ate the left over burger and fries. Eddie didn’t venture back up to the lab, but other Detectives and Officers did. Jones did. Frequently. Barry was going to have to find a way to set some boundaries.

*“Is that your fourth or fifth burger?”*

A *lot* of boundaries. The Berlin Wall of boundaries. “I have a fast metabolism. Did you need something?”
“Right.” A folder was set down next to him. “You forgot the initial the third page.”

Barry flipped open the folder and scrawled his initial over the blank line at the bottom, then slid it back over. “That it?”

“Yeah, it’s almost five.”

Barry nodded his understanding and Jones hesitated, but finally left. He should leave, too, go to Harrison’s, try and get some sleep, except the longer he sat there, the less he felt like leaving.

He raided to vending machine, ate all the chocolate cookies, animal crackers, and Funions, poured himself into his work, consciously choosing not to use his speed, because if he finished everything, he wouldn’t have an excuse to stay. Sometime around four, he put his head down and lifted it again at eight, when Jones came in and woke him up.

Fumbled through apologies, he dodged Jones questions and went to take a shower in the locker room. There wasn’t anything he could do about his clothes, but he snuck deodorant from a random locker, trying really hard not to think about how gross that actually was.

Being later in the morning, it was a little harder to stock up from street vendors. They only had so much stock and there were enough people around that he got a few weird looks ordering eight breakfast tacos.

His phone buzzed on the way up the steps, just once and he waited until he was safely tucked away in his lab to check the message. Harrison.

He set it down, tried to ignore it, but couldn’t stop himself from looking after the first taco was finished.

*I’ll assume you aren’t dead as I haven’t received notice from the department of your unfortunate demise.*

Barry rolled his eyes and had started to set the phone back down when it buzzed again.

*Are you coming home tonight?* He typed no, stopped himself and erased it, replacing it with the much more ambiguous: I don’t know.

Halfway through his third taco, he got his response. *People will get suspicious.*

It wasn’t a threat. Not really, but it still felt like one. He sent back: I’ll think about it.

Harrison didn’t reply. That was good. That’s what Barry wanted, to be left alone. So why wasn’t he happy about it? Why did it suddenly feel like something was missing?

*****

By the end of his third day back, he had a pretty good grasp on which officers had made it through the disaster and which ones… hadn’t. Some of the detectives who came by had given him specific
names – people who died, people who left the city, people who left the force entirely. He considered asking after the ones he didn’t know about, but it didn’t matter, really. If they were dead, they were dead; if they’d sustained a permanent disability as a result of injuries and been forced to quit, that was almost as bad; if they’d lost everything and simply couldn’t continue working there, that was worse.

He tried to focus on his work instead, but even that was becoming difficult. The clock was ticking closer to ten and he kept losing focus. He wasn’t tired, that wasn’t it, but his head felt light and the words and numbers kept blurring. Getting up and moving around the room helped some. Or not really, but it was better than sitting at the desk, waiting to see if he was going to faint.

Oh. He’d forgotten to eat lunch again. That was a problem. The street vendors had closed down by now, he’d have to run if he wanted to eat and he needed calories if he wanted to run. There was still food in the vending machine downstairs. He could probably eat enough to make a trip to the nearest open Big Belly Burger, except he wasn’t sure he had anymore change.

He’d just started digging through a rarely used drawer when Eddie came in holding a plastic bag and the smell was… it was heavenly. “Please say those are for me?”

Eddie held the bag out and Barry didn’t hesitate to grab it, pulling out the first thing he touched. Wraps, looked like six of them and they smelled divine.

He bit into it and sat down heavily in his chair, sighing happily. It was cold, some kind of Philly cheese steak, but it was the best thing he’d had in days. “This is so good. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Eddie smiled hesitantly, not moving from the doorway. “Look, I’m sorry about the other day. We’re all coping with this the best way we can and if Harrison Wells helps you cope, then… I get it. It’s disturbing, but I get it.”

Barry grinned through the mouth full and shoved another fourth of the wrap in his mouth while Eddie looked outside to make sure the hallway was clear. “I’m just worried about you. I mean, you may be the Flash, but you still need sleep. You’re still human.”

Swallowing, Barry held up a finger. “Meta-human and I don’t actually need as much sleep as I used to, not as long as I eat. Except… except I forgot to eat. I forgot, because I’m busy. I’m busy because Jones is… he’s unorganized.”

Eddie’s cautious smile turned into a concerned frown. “I’m sorry, what?”

“No, because Jones needs a better filing system. I’ve been wading through this crap for three days, Eddie.” He held up three fingers, just in case it wasn’t clear. “Three days and I’m not even halfway through it. I’m like a quarter in and I’d do it faster, but people keep coming up to check on me and I don’t want to risk them seeing anything. Do you want to see something?”

Eddie looked out the door again, into the empty hallway and then shrugged. “Uh, sure?”

Barry quickly finished the wrap he’d starts and grabbed a vial of blood that had been sitting next to the centrifuge, waiting for its turn. “Watch this.”

He spun his hand at super speed, separating the blood in seconds. “See?”

Eddie quickly pulled the door to the lab shut. “Barry, you can’t do that here.”

“Whatever. S’cool, though, right?” He set the blood down and went back to the wraps.

“That… isn’t the point. You have to be more careful. What if someone saw?” Barry rolled his eyes
and kept eating. Eddie was being paranoid. No one was there. It was late. “Barry, are you feeling okay?”

He shrugged again, happily eating. Eddie paused, then locked the door to the lab and came over to Barry, laying a hand on his forehead. Barry grinned as he realized what Eddie was thinking. “I’m not sick. I don’t get sick. Perks of being the Flash. I heal super fast, too. Wanna see?”

He started to reach for a pen, but Eddie stopped his hand. “No, no I don’t need to see that, Barry, I trust you. Is there… where’s your phone?”

Barry pulled open his drawer and handed his phone over while he ate. Watching intently as Eddie scrolled through his contacts and shot Barry another concerned glance before putting the phone to his ear.

“No, sorry, Barry’s not… good. This is Detective Thawne at the precinct, is this Harrison Wells?”

Oh, he’d called Harrison. Bastard. Barry would have grabbed the phone away, but the damage was already done.

“I don’t really know how to… Barry said you know about his… condition.” Condition? What condition? “About him being the, uh, the…” The Flash. He was referring to Barry’s meta-human capabilities. Barry couldn’t decide if he was offended by that or amused. Might as well go with amused.

Eddie’s shoulders sagged in relief. “Yes, that. I’m sorry to call so late, but Barry’s acting a little… off. No, no, he hasn’t done anything wrong, just… it’s hard to explain. Oh, you are? Okay, no, that’s good. We’ll be in Barry’s lab. Do you know where that is? See you soon.”

He hung up the phone and set it down, eyeing Barry, who had sped through the bag of food and was finishing the last wrap. Barry chewed slowly, going over the conversation in his head. Harrison was coming. Could be here in seconds, could be minutes, could be now. He looked at the door, then back at Eddie when no one knocked. Hm, it sounded like he’d said he was on his way, but he’d have to make the wait time believable. Five minutes minimum.

Eddie was looking around the room. He glanced at the chair, then Barry, then the door, clearly trying to decide if he should sit. Poor Eddie. Barry really shouldn’t have brought him in on this, but he’d been desperate and half starved and exhausted and even if just looking at Eddie ate him up with guilt, he still trusted Joe’s partner more than anyone else on the force. Well, barring Singh, but he hadn’t been there, because Barry had let him get hurt. Somehow, finding out the Captain was better didn’t help. He still couldn’t shake seeing Singh on the hospital gurney, emergency staff hovering over his unconscious body, or the look on Rob’s face as they waited for an update.

“Barry?” He looked up, not realizing he’d looked down in the first place. Eddie was watching him with brows drawn together, clearly concerned. “You, um, you look sad.”

He was sad. He was sad a lot, but that was okay. Everyone was sad.

“Barry?”

“Do you miss them?”

Eddie nodded. “Of course. Every day.”

“I miss them too.” Barry sighed. “I keep waiting for it to get better, but it doesn’t. Being sad doesn’t help.”
Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Eddie staring at him, studying his expression, his body language, being the good detective, before he offered, “Are you saying that being here helps? Is that why you won’t go home, because it’s easier if you keep yourself busy?”

No, that wasn’t what he was saying. Although, good for Eddie, because that was a far better excuse for staying than Barry would have been able to come up with on his own. Lying and subterfuge were never his strong suit.

A knock on the door interrupted whatever he might have said in response and Eddie hesitated for a moment before moving to answer it. It was Harrison, of course, in his wheelchair, looking both concerned and disappointed. “Barry, Eddie tells me you aren’t feeling well.”

Barry nodded, trying for serious, but ended up chuckling. “I forgot to eat lunch.”

Harrison frowned and turned to Eddie. “I apologize, Detective Thawne. Barry’s abilities as the Flash don’t come without a cost. He needs to consume roughly ten thousand calories a day or he becomes hypoglycemic.”

“I have a cousin who’s diabetic. That doesn’t look like hypoglycemia.”

“You’ll understand, of course, that the circumstances surrounding Barry’s physiology are somewhat unique. As much I would like to explain it to you, now is not the time. I need to get Barry home before he does something to expose himself.” Barry chuckled at the choice of words and Harrison shook his head. “Not like that, Mr. Allen.”

Barry grinned and sat back in his chair, considering all the ways he could annoy Harrison by ‘exposing himself.’ Not that he would. Maybe.

Harrison ignored him, instead, eyeing the empty plastic bag on the desk. “How much has he eaten?”

Eddie looked between them, confused and uncomfortable. “Six wraps.”

“Then I should get him home before he crashes.”

“Crashes?”

“Detective Thawne, I promise we will have this discussion, at length, on a later date. Barry, the van is downstairs.”

It might be. It probably was. Harrison had to keep up appearances with the wheelchair. Barry followed Harrison into the elevator, doing his best to appear subdued, normal. He wasn’t really sure what counted as normal, anyway. He stood on the sidewalk, rocking on his heels while he waited for Harrison go through the arduous process of getting his wheelchair into the driver’s side of the van and securing it into place.

As soon as Barry slid into the passenger seat, something fell in his lap. He scowled at the protein bar, but when he turned the ire on Harrison, intending to tell him where he could stick it, Harrison’s glower was enough to quell his own minor rebellion. He did, however, take a moment to ask, “So, exactly how much trouble am I in?”

Harrison continued to glower and he probably should have shut up, but to be fair, he was well past the point where making good decisions was an option. “Are we talking grounded? The silent treatment? …Spanking?”

He said the last one with wagged eyebrows, but Harrison didn’t seem the slightest bit amused. “Eat.”
“Just trying to make polite conversation.”

“Allow me to elaborate. Shut up and eat.”

“You’re in a mood.” But he bit into the bar before Harrison could chastise, shuddered when the taste hit his tongue, chewed for a long time, until he was able to force himself to swallow.

It took the entire trip back to the house to eat it. The closer they got, the harder it was to swallow. Part of it was lethargy. Part of it was… something else. The wraps, the bar, were lead in his stomach.

They sat in the driveway for several minutes, Barry feeling more and more like a child. Like when his dad had first gone to prison and he used to sneak off to try and visit him, only to have Joe drag him back home.

Finally, Harrison took off his unnecessary glasses and set them on the dashboard, turning to look at Barry with something less than utter contempt. “Was I not clear when I laid out the ground rules for your freedom? I did expressly tell you to monitor your blood sugar.”

“I know.” He slumped a little further down in the seat.

“What were you thinking?”

“I had it under control.”

“Amazing as it may seem, I find that I lack faith in your ability to control anything at the moment.”

Barry flushed in embarrassment and a little anger, but mostly embarrassment. Harrison wasn’t wrong. “Eddie was watching out, no one was gonna see.”

Harrison grabbed Barry’s chin, not hard, but firmly. “I’m not concerned about what someone might have seen, Barry. I’m more worried about what you might have said. To Eddie.” The hand softened, thumb stroking along his jaw. “You are barely coping with your loses as they stand. What if you’d let something slip and I’d had to take care of him? How would you cope with that?”

Barry paled, remembering that he had, actually, let something slip. He didn’t think it was important but…

Harrison sighed, “What did you say?”

“I just… Eddie knows we’re sleeping together. Have. He knows we have slept together. I didn’t tell him, he figured it out.”

“How, exactly, did he figure it out?”

“He’s a good detective?”

A smile tugged at Harrison’s mouth. “I very much doubt that. Luckily for you, I’m not concerned about Detective Thawne knowing we’re sleeping together.”

“Have been. Past tense.”

“Of course.” The hand patted his cheek condescendingly then opened the door to the car. “What I am concerned about, is you spending so much time at work. Would you care to explain why you haven’t been here in the past three days, since you agreed to move in?”

Barry waited until Harrison had opened his door to roll his head to the side, staring at the person he’d
once trusted. A fellow scientist. Part of Team Flash. Family, in a way. Lover at the end, before Barry figured out the truth. “My mouth tastes like mismatched colors look.”

“That’s fascinating.” He let Harrison pull him out of the car and, oh, his legs were not working right. “There’s chocolate milk in the fridge if you could at least attempt to support yourself.”

“For chocolate milk, I would do a lot of things.” Barry winked and shot off, phasing through the door only to crash into a pillar he’d forgotten was there with jarring force, stumbled back up and kept moving, into the kitchen where, as promised, a half gallon of premixed chocolate milk sat in the fridge, untouched.

He was already a third of the way through by the time Harrison made it there, the house lighting up in his wake. He came to a stop in the kitchen, leaning against counter to tower over Barry, who had sat on the floor to drink the milk, because his legs were about to give out anyway.

“Better?”

Barry set the carton down on the ground between his knees and took long heavy breathes. That was better. That was good. That was… he blinked, looking up at Harrison and then around and, oh, he was in Harrison’s kitchen. He was in his house. It looked exactly like he’d remembered. Stark, modern, clean. Nothing personal, nothing to say who the person was that lived there. It might as well be vacant, staged for show.

He looked down at the jug on the floor. “I thought, if I came here it was admitting it.”

“Admitting what?”

“I kept telling myself, I should go home and then I’d realize what I was really saying was that I should come here. That this is home and I don’t… I don’t want this to be home. I want my home back. I want my family and my friends back.” He broke off when he couldn’t stop the tears from falling and pulled his legs up to bury his face in his knees.

Harrison sighed and moved to sit beside him. He cupped a hand on the back of Barry’s neck to pull him in and Barry hated himself for giving into it, but his chest was tight and he was exhausted and aching and he let himself be pulled until his face was pressed into Harrison’s shoulder and he let himself cry there, because at least with Harrison’s fingers carding through his hair and Harrison’s breath on his cheek and Harrison’s smell suffocating him, he wasn’t alone.

*****

Later. It was later. Much later. Minutes. Hours. It was impossible to tell, but Barry had stopped crying. He’d wrapped himself up in Harrison’s arms and smell and let himself sink into it until he couldn’t feel anything else.

It was okay. Harrison said so. He stroked Barry’s hair like he had at the lab on that tiny cot that wasn’t really big enough for both of them and told Barry that it was okay. He was there. He wasn’t going anywhere. It would take more than a tidal wave to get rid of him. It was okay. And Barry held Harrison tighter, breathed him in until his chest hurt and he had to breathe out again.
It was okay.
Chapter Summary

Barry knows better than to get angry. When he gets angry, he does stupid things – stupid, stupid, reckless things like setting Harrison back another few months or throwing himself through a breach into another world full of well-meaning do-gooders. (Set between Season Two, Episodes 14 & 15)

Chapter Notes

Since this has actually become a fic, rather than a one shot, I've changed the summary. As I'm crap with summaries, if anyone has any suggestions, I'm open to them.

"Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is youer than you." - Dr. Seuss-

-Present (One Year, Three Months and Two weeks After the Tidal Wave)-

Earth-Prime

They’d been back from Earth-2 for two days now. It was a rare moment of downtime and they’d taken advantage of it, congregating in the cortex for a lunch of Big Belly Burger, something both worlds had in common. Well, everyone except Harry, who was in Cisco’s work room doing something. Honestly, Barry just wasn’t in the mood. This wasn’t necessarily a pity party, but it was a close thing. Jessie missed home, Caitlin was mourning Jay, Cisco was tense and on edge for reasons he didn’t feel like sharing, Barry felt guilty for leaving Earth-2 and the masked man in the hands of Zoom, and no one wanted to be alone at the moment, not even Caitlin.

They had to push forward eventually, but Barry kind of figured they’d earned a few days to process and heal. A week, at most, to come to terms with everything that had happened before Jessie tried to make this home, before Caitlin tried to come out of her silent shock, before he had to push Cisco into talking about what was bothering him, and before Barry had to start trying to get faster. To get back there. One week. It didn’t feel like he was asking for much.

Then the metahuman alarm went off and something barreled into his chest, sending Barry flying back out of his chair and across the room.

His first thought was Zoom. Zoom had found a way to open a breach and either he was being attacked by Zoom or Zoom had found another speedster to send after him, or… wait, was he being hugged?

He looked down, confused and found himself staring at a head of mostly brown hair, streaked through with ice blue. Bellow that was the Flash suit, but darker than his, dingier and less well taken
care of. There was faint mumbling, indistinct words that he couldn’t make out coming from the person currently pressed into his chest.

“Uh, hey?”

“Barry!” The head popped up and Barry knew, he knew who it was, because that particular gleam on his own face was unmistakable. It was his less than sane doppelganger, grinning up at him happily with a split lip.

He’d put that other Earth – collectively agreed to as Earth-3 so Harry would stop complaining and, to be fair, they had met Jay first – on hold for now, because while another Eobard Thawne wearing another Harrison Wells’ face, running around another Earth doing unspeakable things to another Barry’s person was disturbing, there were more pressing, immediate threats to deal with. Threats like Zoom and Zoom’s meta-human henchmen and Jessie being held captive somewhere and Harry betraying them, only not, and Kendra Saunders and Vandal Savage and now Jay’s death and… and…

It was a lot. For all of them, it was a lot. He’d intended to get there eventually. Apparently, the universe had decided that eventually was now.

From the other side of the room, Cisco stood up to get a better look at what was going on. “Bro, not to interrupt, but should I be calling for backup, or…”

“Cisco!” The blur shot off Barry and Cisco was embraced before he could defend himself, with arms wrapped around his shoulders and Barry-3’s face practically buried in his hair. “Missed you. So much, missed you. You look the same. Except the shirt. I like the shirt. It’s new. Cisco. Cisco? Caitlin!”

Caitlin had her arms half up, but was unable to stop the onslaught of overenthusiastic Barry-3, who picked her up and spun her around before hugging her as well. “Caitlin! Missed you, too. Sorry about Ronnie. You look good.”

Cisco and Caitlin both looked at Barry, who was trying to get up off the floor. He nodded at the computer to Cisco’s left that had been set to monitor the one breach they’d left open, because as far as they could tell, Zoom didn’t have a grip there. Cisco glanced over, his eyes widening as it clicked.

Barry-3 let go of Caitlin suddenly and moved the few feet over to Jessie, grabbing onto her for a second before pushing her back to arms length, frowning. “I don’t know you.”

Jessie shook her head, wide eyed. “No. Who are you?”

“I’m Barry.”

“Barry who?”

A slow grin spread over Barry-3’s face. “Who’s on first.”

“What?”

“What’s on second.”

“Huh?”

Barry-3 giggled as Cisco took Jessie by the shoulders and pulled her back. “That would be Buckets
a’ Crazy Barry from and an Earth that sucks even more than yours.”

Jessie looked vaguely offended, but before he could defend the statement, Cisco was pushed back several steps with the force of another hug. “Yeah, okay, that’s…” He awkwardly patted Barry-3 on the back addressing Barry. “This you is a lot more tactile.”


“Ookay, that is enough of that.” Cisco stopped patting and pushed Barry-3’s shoulders, gently, then a little more insistently. “Barry, little help here.”

Barry came around the desk, entirely unsure what to do. Barry-3 hadn’t been this bad a few months ago. He hadn’t been good, but he hadn’t been running around hugging people and talking in fragmented sentences. He also hadn’t had blue hair and Barry wasn’t sure why that bothered him, but it did.

“Barry, hey, how are you?”

Barry-3 cocked his head to the side, eyebrows raised.

“Right, sorry, stupid question. Why are you here? Is it… Dr. Wells? Is he here? Did he…?”

“No!” Barry-3 shook his head frantically. “No, no, he’s not coming. He can’t. He promised. It’s off limits. He promised he wouldn’t…”

“Okay, okay, I believe you. He’s not here, but then why are you here? Did something happen?”

“Yes. No. Eddie said run, I ran. I wasn’t thinking. Shouldn’t be here.” Barry-3 looked down at the floor, then back up at Barry. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I just need a day, need to sleep, need food before I…”

He hit the floor with a startling thud. No one moved at first, momentarily stunned by the abruptness of his collapse. Caitlin was the first to react, dropping down at his side to press two fingers to his neck.

“His pulse is thready. Help me get him to the bed.”

*****

Barry was having a really good dream. Not, like, the best dream ever, because that one involved a beach and Harrison and a sudden, inexplicable ability to get at least moderately buzzed on Mai Tai’s, but, still, a really good dream.

In the dream, his eyes were closed, but he knew where he was by feel and smell. He was in Caitlin’s medical lab off the cortex, the one that was always sterile and smelled like the chemicals she used when she was running samples. The bed he was in had a stiff mattress with a protective plastic cover under soft cotton sheets. The air around him was cool without being outright cold.
The best part of the dream was Caitlin. Her small, delicate hands working softly to check his IV line, adjust the clamp on his finger that took his pulse and the band around his arm to check his blood pressure. She pulled the sheets back and gently ran those same hands over his torso and when they pulled back he heard the familiar tap of her fingers making notes on her tablet.

Then it got better. “Hey, Caitlin, how’s patient zero?”

Cisco, his voice barely above a whisper because he didn’t want to wake Barry.

“Still asleep, but his heart rate is up, so it shouldn’t be long now.”

“How about our other patient?”

She huffed. “Asleep. He insisted on staying the night in case he woke up. I think I lost him around three.”

There was a pause. The room wasn’t quiet, too many machines working for that. The cuff tightened on his arm, hissing softly as it inflated.

Cisco broke the semi-silence. “It’s weird, though, right? Tell me I’m not the only one that thinks it’s a little freaky.”

Caitlin sighed. “You’re definitely not the only one.”

“So, is he… I mean, he looks better, but is he…?”

“I finally got his blood pressure and heart rate normalized late last night. The exterior and muscular bruises have healed. The broken bones are at about ninety percent, but his third and fourth left vertebrosternals are still mending.” Her hand touched his side, so softly he barely felt it. “His kidneys are still bruised, but functioning properly. There was a small rupture to his spleen, but that seems to have healed itself quickly enough.”

Dreams of S.T.A.R. Labs before were usually memories of things that had happened, but he couldn’t place this one.

“If he rests? He should be good in another few hours at most, but you know Barry.”

Cisco’s laugh was forced. “And that’s normal Barry.”

Wait, what?

Somewhere to his right there was a grunt, followed by a pained groan that sounded… familiar?

“Hey, man, what are you doing here?” Him? That sounded like himself.

Cisco chuckled. “Dude, it’s like nine in the morning.”

“For real? Last thing I remember it was only two thirty.” Definitely him, but that didn’t make sense. What kind of dream was this?

“Totally, but check it, I brought donuts and coffee. Figured you’d need a little pick-me-up and, pause for affect, I also brought you a change of clothes.”

“You are my favorite person in the world right now.”

He opened his eyes and immediately closed them against the overhead light, reaching a hand up to
cover his eyes without thinking and the movement caused a flare up of pain that had him clutching his side instead, turning over on the bed. Not a dream. This wasn’t a dream. Dreams didn’t hurt this much. He was in S.T.A.R. Labs and that was another him talking to a Cisco and Caitlin who were alive and that meant…

He opened his eyes again and everything was so… bright. And loud. No boarded up windows, all lights on, instruments everywhere, beeping and ticking. Barry sat up, still holding his side and looked around until he found them, standing together near the door – Cisco, Caitlin, and himself. He was in the other universe. “What am I doing here?”

They exchanged glances before the other Barry stepped forward, taking the lead. “I was hoping you could tell us? You came barreling in here yesterday, rambling about Eddie telling you to run and then you passed out. Caitlin patched you up, but you were in really bad shape. What happened?”

What had happened? He closed his eyes and tried to work through it. He remembered…

Harrison had said he’d finished running diagnostics on the accelerator, his time machine was ready, he just needed Barry to run and Barry had refused, as usual. They’d starting fighting, first with words, and then…

Oh, then Harrison had started to say things about the people Barry had lost. He’d said if Joe had been smarter, he wouldn’t have gone after Mardon on his own and then Barry wouldn’t be alone and Barry had gotten angry. Really, really angry. He’d said it was too bad Harrison wasn’t smarter or he would have been able to stop the tidal wave himself and then maybe Barry would have something to fight for.

Then, because Barry had been angry and he did stupid, stupid things when he was angry, he’d driven his fist through a panel and obliterated one of the four primary circuit boards for the accelerator, sending a shock through it that may very well have fried some of the minor ones as well.

They’d fought. The kind of fighting they didn’t normally indulge in anymore, the kind that did real damage. Harrison hadn’t been thinking clearly and neither had Barry. They both just wanted to hurt the other, but Barry was holding back. Harrison wasn’t. To make it worse, he’d run out of Cisco Bars the week before and not managed to sneak back to Eddie’s to make more yet. One of Harrison’s bars that morning wasn’t nearly enough. He’d already been feeling the effects of low blood sugar before they’d started in on each other.

Then…

Then?

His eyes opened wide as he remembered Eddie running into the cortex and getting between the two of them. Harrison had stopped, at least having the presence of mind not to kill his own ancestor. He had a fuzzy recollection of Eddie telling him to run and hide, which didn’t make sense, because there wasn’t anywhere in the world he could hide from Harrison. Not in his world, anyway. Everything after that was missing, but somehow he must have made the connection that he’d have to leave his world to hide, so he’d come here.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be here. I wasn’t thinking.”

He pulled the IV out and ripped off the pressure cuff, pushing the covers away. He had to get back, make sure Eddie was okay, make sure Harrison didn’t accidentally erase himself from history. Stupid, stupid, stupid.
“Wow, there.” His feet had barely touched the floor, though, when familiar, long gone hands were pushing him back. Cisco, with concerned eyes and a careful smile. “Yeah, that’s not happening, man.”

Caitlin stepped forward as well. “You nearly died and we’re worried that you’re not ready to… get back in there.”

When he opened his mouth to argue, his other self spoke up. “You’re not going anywhere until you tell us what happened.”

He glared at the other Barry, who had his arms folded stubbornly over his chest. “I picked a fight I couldn’t win. My fault. I know better. Eddie interrupted. I have to get back before Harrison does something to hurt him.”

“That was yesterday. Anything that happened was over a long time ago.”

“No.” He should have realized. They’d said he showed up yesterday and it was light out. What had they said when they’d though he was sleep? Nine? That was seventeen hours. Harrison would be worried by now. “No. No, I have to get back.”

This time, he didn’t bother being slow, he used the Speedforce to launch himself at the door. Shirtless and barefoot wasn’t the best way to get around the city, but he was desperate and, hey, at least he had sweatpants on, so he wouldn’t be racing through the streets of Central City in broad daylight completely naked.

Or at all, because the other him was in the way before he made it halfway across the room. “You have to let me go!”

“Like I said, you’re not going anywhere. I made a mistake walking out last time and I’m not doing that again. You need my help, whether you want it or not.”

Oh, screw this. He reached for the Speedforce again, felt it crackle through him… then nothing.

*****

Cisco stared, wide eyed. “What the hell, Caitlin?!”

“Oh god!” Caitlin dropped the bedpan she’d hit Barry-3 over the back of the head with and fell to her knees, checking his skull under his hair. “I’m sorry! I’m so sorry, I just thought… a possible skull fracture was better than letting him run back to Thawne?”

Barry shrugged at Cisco who was giving Caitlin an incredulous look. “You’re right, but, we can’t just knock him out every time he wakes up. So…”

He didn’t want to say it, but thankfully, he didn’t have to. Cisco said it for him. “Pipeline?”

He nodded and between the two of them, they carried the unconscious Barry-3 through the halls of S.T.A.R. Labs and secured him in the same cell they’d designed for Eobard Thawne. Then Barry
grabbed one of the boxes of donuts and two coffees. He slipped the entire box through the door as well as one coffee and sat back to wait.

A minute later, Barry-3 inhaled deeply and sat up, rubbing the back of his head while he glared at Barry through the glass and grabbed the food. Neither of them said anything as five of the donuts were practically inhaled and the entire cup of coffee was empty. Finally, Barry-3 broke the silence. “This doesn’t make us even.”

Barry didn’t bother explaining he hadn’t been trying to settle any score with food. “Caitlin feels bad about that, by way.”

“That was Caitlin?” Barry-3 gave a thumb up to the side, where the camera was looking down at him. “Respect. They’re listening right? They were always listening.” He sighed.

Barry wasn’t sure what he’d expected, but it wasn’t for Barry-3 to be this… calm. Of course, when they’d been on the other Earth he’d seemed pretty normal at first. A little inappropriately involved with his food, but considering the way he was licking the icing off the donuts before he ate them, that hadn’t changed.

A tongue dragged across the chocolate topping as Barry-3 grinned. “So, you wanna talk? Let’s talk.”

“Okay.” Barry sat up a little more fully and crossed his legs, trying not to be disturbed by the borderline lewd display, but then he was pretty sure that was exactly what Barry-3 was going for. “What’s with the hair?”

“For real? That’s what you’re gonna lead with?” Barry-3 smiled fondly. “It was a fit of rebellion. I made Cisco Bars in his kitchen, he cut off my left index finger, I dyed my hair blue. It started out bright, kind of an electric, but faded out. I think this shade actually pisses him off more. Not sure why. Funny story, did you know that if you get the limb reattached quickly enough, it’ll mend itself back together? Nerve, bone, and everything. No stitches necessary, not even a scar – like it never happened.”

Really didn’t sound funny. “Is that why he beat you half to death? Because of your hair?”

Barry-3 laughed, a little too loud. “You really don’t know anything. For the hair, he gets kinky in bed. No, what he did yesterday was a little more…. like I said, I knew better. My bad. Now let me go home so I can make it up to him.”

“We’re not letting you go anywhere, not until we know you’re safe.”


“It would be more convincing if you hadn’t literally run into my arms yesterday with multiple internal injuries and then collapsed on the floor from hypoglycemic shock.”

“Dear God, was I always this nosy? Seriously, I don’t even remember yesterday, but if I’d realized you were gonna lock me in the pipeline and make me talk about my relationship, I would have just found a secluded section of road and let myself die.”

“You don’t mean that.” The donut hit the glass, followed quickly by Barry-3, who bounced off it and into the other wall. “It won’t work. Cisco made that cell to contain the Reverse-Flash. You can’t phase through it.”
“Let me out!” He hit the wall again, then again. The glass shook, but remained firm.

He wanted to stay and wait it out, but watching himself like that felt… wrong.

In the cortex the video feed was still running, but the sound had been turned off. Barry-3 was alternating between running into the glass and beating on it, yelling and shouting. Cisco, Caitlin, and Jessie looked about as uncomfortable as he felt. Harry looked… curious. Or maybe interested was a better word.

Joe was there, too, pale and clearly upset. “Barry, what the hell was that?”

“No, you texted me saying something came up at S.T.A.R. Labs, cover for you, and you’d explain later. Guess what time it is?”

“Later?” Joe nodded and Barry sighed. He gave him the rundown of the last seventeen hours, from the moment Barry-3 came running in, to the discussion in the pipeline that Joe had apparently only heard the tail end of.

“So, what are you planning to do about this? You know you can’t just keep him locked up in there indefinitely. We’ve tried that, it didn’t work. That’s why we have a prison specifically designed to hold them, Barry.”

“Yeah, but he’s not a criminal, Joe.”

“I’m not saying that. What I am saying is that you can’t keep him down there against his will. If he’s as unstable as you say, solitary confinement is only going to make it worse.”

“I know that! But he’ll run right back to Thawne.”

“And that would be his decision.” Joe put his hand on Barry’s shoulder. “Barry, we have enough to deal with here, you can’t take on the problems of a third Earth.”

He looked around the room at the others, who were pointedly not getting involved in the conversation, then rubbed a hand down his face, already feeling exhausted and worn out. “I know. I do, but I can’t let him go back when I don’t know what he’s going back to. He won’t even tell me what the fight was about.”

A knock on the side of the wall startled them and they all turned in unison to the door where Eddie Thawne stood, his hand still raised. “I think I can help with that.”

*****

The city was alive.

That was the first thing Eddie thought when Wells dropped him on the other side of the wormhole and left.
There were cars and people everywhere and Eddie self-consciously pulled the hood of his jacket over his head as he stepped out of the alleyway into the street. Wells had warned him that the Eddie Thawne of this world was very publicly dead. He needed to keep his head down and get to S.T.A.R. Labs as quickly as possible, but it was just…

There were so many people. He’d forgotten how full Central City had been. How loud.

He walked half the way then took a cab the rest, because he’d been up all night and he was exhausted. Mama Chaos, the Chinese restaurant he’d eaten at the night he met Iris was still there and Iris herself was somewhere in this throng of people. Would she still work at Picture News? He wanted to look for her, just to see her alive and healthy, see her smile, but couldn’t risk her seeing him. He was there for Barry, to make sure Barry was okay.

S.T.A.R. Labs looked as bright as ever. The chain link fence around the parking lot stood firm, but it didn’t take him long to find a hole. The building on the other side of the parking lot was intact. No boards on the windows, no hazard tape.

In fact, with the exception of the blown out tower, it looked well maintained. He half expected to be stopped by security or, at the very least, to hear alarms go off when he entered through the garage, but there wasn’t anything. The building appeared to be primarily empty and just as accessible here as it was in his world. Actually, more so, because in his world, it was a hazard zone and no one was eager to cross that threshold.

As he walked through the pristine halls, he tried to remember the things that Barry had said, things Eddie had thought were just manic ramblings.

A world where everyone was alive. The tidal wave never happened. Barry had stopped it and Iris and Joe and Caitlin and Cisco were happy and saving the city as part of Team Flash. It had sounded too much like a dream. It still didn’t feel real, despite seeing the city, until he heard Joe’s voice from down the hall. “And that would be his decision. Barry, we have enough to deal with here, you can’t take on the problems of a third Earth.”

Barry? He stopped a few feet from the door and listened. “I know. I do, but I can’t let him go back when I don’t know what he’s going back to. He won’t even tell me what the fight was about.”

That was Barry, but not the Barry he knew now, one he remembered – one that didn’t ramble and go off in tangents and get distracted halfway through what he was saying because of something someone said down the hall – usually food related. This sounded like the Barry from before, the one that wanted to help and Eddie needed that now more than ever. He pulled his hood down and stepped around the corner, knocking against the glass wall as he did so. “I think I can help with that.”

*****

Barry looked exactly the same, minus the blue streaks and exaggerated facial expressions. Joe was… Joe was a sight for sore eyes. In his slacks and button up, badge hanging off his belt. He hadn’t known Caitlin or Cisco very well, but he knew them from the stories Barry told on his good
days.

It had taken a few minutes for everyone to get over the shock of seeing dead people. Eddie might have known what he was going to see when he walked into the room, but he really hadn’t been ready for it and the others, once they’d settled down, confided in him that in their world, he had become a part of the team before his death, which had apparently been at his own hands because he was Harrison Wells’, or rather, Eobard Thawne’s ancestor, and by killing himself, he’d erased Eobard from history. Of course, he’d also created a paradox that opened a singularity that could have swallowed the world if Barry and someone named Firestorm hadn’t stopped it.

“Oh.” Cisco pulled a chair over to him and Eddie sat down with a grateful nod. “That… actually explains a lot.”

Barry and Joe exchanged looks. “It does?”

“Well, they kept saying they had a deal about not killing me, but that just… it didn’t make any sense.”

Joe sat down across from him. “What do you mean?”

Eddie stared at his hands rather than the room full people that were supposed to be dead. God, it was surreal. Good surreal, but surreal. “After I found out what was going on, I took Barry to see a psychiatrist. He didn’t want to go, but I convinced him and, by convinced him, I mean I brought a bag of Oreos.” He paused, giving Barry a chance to interrupt at the mention of food, but, of course, he didn’t, because this Barry wasn’t like his Barry.

“Anyway, I thought we were making progress, but Wells found out. He came into one of the session and physically injured Dr. Holt. He said it was to remind me that when he told me not to involve anyone else, that included professionals.”

“The thing is, Barry wasn’t surprised, he wasn’t even upset, he just sat there like it was the most normal thing in the world, so I started digging and it became clear that every so often, someone connected to Barry – either directly or indirectly – disappears; a forensic scientist that was bothering him, the guy that ran the food truck he always went to, the barista that gave him her number, Officer Spivot. There’s never a body, they just vanish and it’s not that uncommon right now for people to pack up and leave Central without saying anything, but it feels like too much of a coincidence. When I asked Barry, he didn’t deny it. He just said ‘Harrison likes to make a point.’ I started wondering why not me? If he wanted to hurt Barry, why not go after me? And especially now, with the accelerator being finished…”

“He’s finished it?” Barry stood straighter, focused and engaged. It was strange having him this close and this… sane.

“That’s what the fight was about. Dr. Wells is ready to go home, but Barry won’t do it.” Eddie looked down again. “I don’t understand what’s going on between them and I know it’s a lot to ask, but if I take him back, Wells will eventually kill him and Barry won’t stop him. I can’t let that happen. Barry may not be willing to ask for help, but I am.”

He dug into the pocket of his jacket, taking out a protein bar sealed inside an evidence bag and handed it to Cisco. “This is one of the bars that he makes for Barry.”

Cisco opened the bag and sniffed it, then held it out a foot away from his face with a cringe.

“I know Barry has an accelerated metabolism and medication doesn’t have any lasting affect, but I
thought with Dr. Wells, being from the future and a speedster, might know something I don’t. Barry’s been making Cisco Bars at my place and when he’s eating those, he’s… not normal, but better. When he runs out and has to live on these for a few days before he can get back to my place, he gets worse. A lot worse. I thought there might be something to that.”

Caitlin took the offending bar from Cisco’s carefully pinched fingers. “I’ll look into it.”

“Thank you. Wells said I have until six to get Barry back before he comes looking for us.”

As she walked over to her lab, Cisco pulled Barry aside, his voice low and hushed. Barry’s eyes widened in alarm and he turned to Eddie before taking Cisco by the arm and walking him farther away.

Joe put a hand on his knee. “Hey, don’t worry. They’ll figure it out.”

“It’s really good to hear you say that.” Since the disaster, he’d felt so lost. His new partner was a rookie, always looking to him for answers and Eddie just didn’t have any.

Barry called out from across the room. “Joe, come here!”

Joe patted his leg and went over, leaving Eddie alone. Next to him on the monitor, his Barry was sitting in the small cell leaning against the glass. While Eddie watched, Barry clenched his fist, slamming it against the glass partition half heartedly before going back to sitting with his arms crossed over the tops of his knees, petulant frown on his face.

Eddie didn’t begrudge this other Barry and Joe talking behind his back. He understood. This wasn’t his world and they weren’t his team. As nice as it was to see Joe again and as refreshing as this Barry was, it wasn’t his Barry. His Barry was hurt and confused and he thought he was alone.

“Joe, I’d like to talk to Barry. My Barry.”

****

Barry wanted to go home. He was going home. It was a matter of time. He needed to play along, except Barry wasn’t good at playing along anymore. Maybe he never had been. Things got muddled, confused. If he wanted to get back to Harrison, he had to convince them to open the cell or find a way to get through it himself. He elbowed the glass he was leaning against, let the pain jar his arm and rattle his shoulder. Screw them and their good intentions.

Behind him, the door opened and he sighed. Was it going to be Barry again, or would they send someone else to try and talk sense into him? Cisco or Caitlin, or, worse, Joe. He didn’t want to see Joe. It had hurt enough losing him the first time and this was temporary. He needed to get home.

“Barry?”

“Eddie?!” He whipped around, crouched on the balls of his feet, confused. Eddie was dead here, Barry had said, but if this wasn’t their Eddie, then that meant… “No. No, no, no, you can’t be here.
You have to go back.”

“Barry…”

“No! You don’t understand. You have to go back now! You can’t be here.” Eddie flinched and Barry sucked in air, trying to think of a reason that wasn’t the reason. Couldn’t tell Eddie that reason, or it would give Eddie ideas. If the other Eddie had done it, this Eddie would, too. They were too much of the same person.

“Eddie.” He licked his lips, relaxed onto his knees to make himself smaller. “Eddie, I don’t like this. I don’t want to be here. I want to go home, Eddie. Take me home.”

Eddie’s face tightened, which was never a good sign. It meant he was trying to do the right thing and that rarely lined up with what Barry wanted. “I can’t do that.”


“I know you haven’t, but they’re going to help me find a way to help you.”

“I don’t want their help!” Calm. No one listened to him when he wasn’t calm. Eddie never listened to him. Right, because Eddie didn’t think Barry knew what he wanted, or he didn’t think Barry wanted what was best for himself, but what did Eddie want? “I want your help. You can help me, just take me home. Me and you. Now.”

For a moment, one fleeting moment, it looked like he was wavering, but then he shook his head and Barry wanted to scream. He wanted to cry. If something happened and the breach collapsed with Eddie on this side of it, Harrison would be erased. He’d be gone.

“You can’t. Eddie, you can’t…” Except that short of telling Eddie the truth, Barry wasn’t sure there was anything he could say to convince him. In fact, even the truth would only make Eddie more convinced that staying was the right decision. Eddie had been so intent on finding a way to save Barry the last few months and Barry had let him do what he wanted, because it didn’t really matter. He liked Dr. Holt and, sure, some of what he’d said made sense, but it didn’t matter.

Eddie sighed and took a Cisco Bar out of his pocket. “Just for now. Barry and I are going out for food. Any requests? Tito’s is still open here.”

“Tito’s!” Damn. That had come across way too excited. He tried, but couldn’t manage to look as pissed off as he had a moment ago, because… Tito’s. Tito’s where he’d had lunch with Joe at least once a week. “Oh… Fine. I want tacos, a lot of them.”

Eddie nodded, pleased with himself and that was good. Barry needed to let Eddie think he was getting somewhere. For now.

He watched Eddie leave and waited until the door had closed before sitting back down in the center of the cell to wait. He was good at waiting.
It was nice out, so Eddie and Barry walked to Tito’s. They talked about football, mostly, comparing who won which games. Surprisingly, the tidal wave wiping out Central City had somehow affected the Superbowl. Go figure.

While they waited for the food, Eddie had a beer to calm his nerves and asked questions about what was going on in a Central City that wasn’t consumed with rebuilding. Barry tried his best to downplay Zoom – it wasn’t too hard, now that all the breaches were closed – and gave him a heads up on the Wells that was actually Wells lurking in Cisco’s lab.

Eddie stared at the beer in his hand, finished it and set the empty bottle down. “So, let me get this straight, there’s another Wells here?”

“Yes and no. He’s the real deal. No future Thawne, Reverse-Flash, evil-speedster. We call him Harry. And there’s his daughter. They’re from another Earth, completely different. It’s crazy, look,” Barry pulled his phone out, careful to make sure he hadn’t missed any texts while he showed Eddie the pictures Cisco and him had taken while they were there.

Eddie stared, wide eyed at Barry’s phone. “How many worlds are there?”

Barry put his phone away. “Infinite. We call it the Multiverse.”

The bartender set the to-go bags down and they each grabbed one, making their way out as they talked. Eddie held the door and Barry slipped past him. “So, how’s the rebuild?”

“It’s… slow.” Eddie sighed. “Most of the city has power, which is good, but a lot of the buildings outside of downtown are still condemned – mold and structural issues. Not that it stops people from living in them. It’ll be years before the city fully recovers and even then, it might never be what it was.”

That was more depressing than Barry had wanted to hear, but better than he’d feared. He started to say just that when his phone vibrated in his back pocket and he glanced at the text. Iris was there, waiting for him.

“So, Barry, what are we really doing?”

“What?!” Barry cringed as he frantically put his phone away and his voice hit the falsetto it always did when he was caught doing something he wasn’t supposed to and like every other time, he ran with it. Mostly, because it was seriously embarrassing. “No, we’re just two friends, out grabbing tacos, talking about… sports and… stuff.”

“This may be a different universe, but you’re still Barry Allen.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means that you still do that thing where you can’t look me in the eye when you’re hiding something. I don’t suppose this has anything to do with what Cisco was saying that you didn’t want me to hear?”

Barry sighed and stopped on the sidewalk. He knew they’d been obvious back at S.T.A.R. Labs, but he’d been hoping to avoid this conversation until… actually, until now. If he was going through with this, he needed to give Eddie a heads up before they got back and they were only a few blocks away. “Look, Joe thinks I shouldn’t be doing this, but the truth is you can’t stay here.”
“I know.”

“You know?”

“Before he sent me through, Dr. Wells warned me not to even think about hanging around, that you wouldn’t let me.”

“It’s not like that.” Barry started walking again, letting Eddie fall into step beside him. “You’re genetically identical to our Eddie. You’re the same person. If the breach collapses and you’re on this side, the Eobard Thawne there may cease to exist. However, it’s equally possible that the one our Eddie died saving us from could come back. There’s really no way to know for certain, but…”

“You can’t take that chance.”

“I’m sorry.” He wanted to let Eddie stay, but Cisco was right. The risk was too high. “We’re going to do everything we can to help you and him before you leave, but for now, there’s something else I need to talk to you about. It’s Iris.”

“Iris?”

“From what your Barry told me, you didn’t exactly get a chance to say goodbye and if you don’t want to now, I’d understand, but I know she would never speak to me again if I didn’t at least give you the option of seeing her.”

He watched the weight of that settle on Eddie. He could see Iris again, but it would be to say goodbye, or he could walk away and not have to reopen that wound. “She’s here?”

“She wouldn’t have stayed away, even if I’d asked. So, I texted her to stop by on her lunch break and I’d fill her in, but I didn’t tell her about you and I won’t, if you don’t want me to.”

Eddie hesitated. “Aren’t you two…?”

“No, no that… that never happened. Eddie, Iris chose you. Before you died, we found an article from the future that said she was going to marry me, but she chose you. So, no, I’m not with Iris and if I ask her, I know she would give anything to spend even another minute with you, but that’s up to you.”

*****

“Joe said you refused to talk to him.” Barry sat, half hunched on the floor in front of the window, watching Barry-3 work through his thirty tacos. ‘Refused to talk’ was the nice way of putting it. The more honest way was to say he’d shoved his hands over his ears and yelled the lyrics to the song that never ends until Joe left. They’d all agreed it was better if they didn’t try that again.

“He’s not my Joe.” He didn’t know what to say to that, so he didn’t say anything. “Where’s Eddie?”

“With Iris.”
Barry-3’s eyes narrowed. “Shouldn’t let him do that. He’ll want to stay and he can’t. I won’t let him.”

“I know.” Barry took a drink of his soda. “You’re worried you’ll lose your Dr. Wells? We’re worried ours’ll come back.”

Barry-3 grinned, dark and twisted. “Then you really shouldn’t let him see her. He loves her. He won’t want to leave.”

“He will. He understands why we can’t risk it.”

“You told him?” Barry-3 stopped smiling, eyes narrowing to a glare. “You had no right!”

It was weird seeing that expression on his own face. He’d spent most of his life being blindingly optimistic – he’d believed the best in people and he’d believed that if he worked hard enough, he’d eventually get his dad out of prison. Joe had said that’s what he admired about him, what he loved. That confrontation with Wells in the pipeline had been the first time he’d felt real hate. Oh, he’d thought he hated before, but when he faced a man he’d trusted, someone he’d believed in, and known, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the same man had killed his mother and taken his father from him? That was real hate. That same hate was directed at him now, from his own face.

“Really? He had no right to know why he isn’t dead along with everyone else? Along with Patty?” The anger in his mirrored face faltered. “Yeah, I know about that. When did he kill her?”

“The night you were there. It was my fault. I knew better. Harrison doesn’t like competition.”

Barry-3 sighed. “I liked her, too. She was funny.”

“You told Eddie that he was making a point. What point was that?”

“That I’m not you. All your stories about what it would have been like if he hadn’t saved me. Harrison can be very… insecure when it comes to my loyalty. He thinks he has to buy it with reminders and tokens. Fear. But I haven’t been afraid of him in a very long time.” Barry-3’s grin came back, spreading slowly. “You are, though. You beat him, but you’re afraid to bring him back; afraid he’ll take away everything and everyone and then you’ll be just. Like. Me.”

It almost worked. Barry almost rose to the bait. Almost. “Maybe I am. It’s not such a bad thing to be afraid of. I mean, for real, have you seen yourself lately? Hair like that, you could be Captain Cold’s sidekick.”

There was a moment of surprised shock on Barry-3’s face, but then it was gone, replaced with rolled eyes and an annoyed huff as he turned his back to continue eating in silence, which was definitely an improvement.

Barry waited until the tacos were done, the soda finished and the trash passed through the door before heading back to the cortex. Cisco was nowhere to be seen, and Caitlin was alone in the lab, still running tests. He’d barely made it through the door, before she was coming at him, needle in hand. “Barry, just the speedster I needed to see.”

Backing away, he eyed the needle warily. “Yeah, good to see you too, not so much the needle.”

“Don’t be a baby.” She took his arm and moved him into the lab. “I need a sample of your blood to run some tests on the components of the protein bar.”

“Did you find something?”
“Not yet.” She drew two vials of blood, pressing cotton against the already healing wound. “There. All done.”

“Where are the others?”

“Eddie and Iris went for a walk and Cisco is in his lab with Harry and Jessie.”

“Right, um, you need any help?”

“No, you should go into work before they call again. Oh!” She grabbed a cup off the counter, holding it out. “Fill this with urine.”


****

He tried to focus on work, but it was hard. He couldn’t help thinking about the other Patty and what Eddie had said. She wasn’t the only one who had gone missing and Barry-3 had said he knew better, which meant he’d known something like that might happen.

It was mind numbing. He didn’t doubt losing everyone like that would have been devastating, but he’d like to think he was strong enough to get through it. That he would still be himself at the other end. Or maybe it was more complicated than that. When he’d been in their world, Barry-3 had admitted to finding out Thawne was the Reverse-Flash shortly after the wave. What could Thawne have done without the need for restraint?

Or had he done anything? Barry said the psych eval had him listed as mentally unstable. How soon after the wave had they done the evaluation? Which brought it back to himself and his own weaknesses. As hard as it was to wrap his head around, Barry knew exactly how much everyone meant to him and the truth was, they gave him strength. When he faltered, they picked him up and when he doubted himself, they gave him the courage to try. Without them, faced with all of that devastation, maybe that had been enough.

The more he thought about it, the more he really hoped Caitlin found something in those bars, because otherwise…

His phone rang, startling him from his thoughts and he had to scramble to find it under the scattered papers he’d been working on. It was nearly five, he hadn’t realized it was getting so late. “Hey, Caitlin, tell me you’ve got good news.”

“That depends on your definition of good news. Eddie and Iris are on their way. Can you meet us here?”

“I’ll be right there.”

He took a few seconds to close the last of his files, using his Flash speed to rush over. Eddie and Iris hadn’t arrived yet, so they used the time to discuss what she had, or more pointedly, hadn’t found, and what that meant. There were still a few concerns Caitlin had, but when Eddie and Iris finally walked in, holding hands so tightly their knuckles were white, the team had a good idea of what
Eddie needed to do next and who he was going to need to help him do it.

Caitlin immediately sat Eddie down, stopping his questions with her own. “You said he’s worse on Dr. Wells’ protein bars. How is he worse?”

“Oh, uh,” Eddie looked back at Iris for reassurance before answering. “He’s moody? Um, he has manic episodes…”

“Manic episodes?”

“I guess I don’t really know if manic is the right word – that’s what Dr. Wells calls them. It’s hard to describe, but he has trouble focusing or putting his thoughts together. His emotions are all over the place, he rambles, and he can’t stop moving. It’s like he knows he’s about to drop any minute, so he just keeps pushing harder and harder, faster and faster, until he does actually drop or until someone gets food into him.”

That explained what had happened when he’d first arrived.

“And then what? When he eats after one of these manic episodes, what is he like?”

“Tired, suggestible. He’ll say things he’s not supposed to, answer questions he normally wouldn’t and if it’s bad enough, he doesn’t remember everything that happened.”

“What’s he like when he hasn’t been eating them? When he’s had Cisco Bars?”

“Normal. Or, well, mostly normal. He’s still fixated on Dr. Wells and easily distracted, but you can have a conversation with him. You can reason with him, even if he doesn’t necessarily agree with you. Why, did you find something?”

“Yes and no.” Caitlin sighed. “There’s nothing in the bars themselves that would affect him mentally. The bars are perfectly normal. Actually, they aren’t bad…”

Cisco gasped dramatically, holding a hand to his chest, and Caitlin sent him a reprimanding frown before turning back to Eddie. “Barry needs to eat a lot to maintain his blood sugar, as I’m sure you’ve noticed – more specifically, he needs approximately ten thousand calories a day. These bars only have about twenty five hundred, which would be fine, if he actually ate more than one a day. I don’t think Wells is poisoning or medicating him, but I do think he’s using Barry’s hypoglycemia and the manic episodes to exacerbate his condition and make him more pliable, or, as you put it, suggestible.”

Eddie sat back in the chair, his hand still wrapped in Iris’s as he took it in. “So, if I get him away from Wells and manage his blood sugar, he’ll go back to normal?”

“Not exactly. Low blood sugar doesn’t drive our Barry into manic episodes. Whatever happened to your Barry did very real and possibly lasting psychological damage. I don’t think he’s ever going to be the Barry that you remember from before, but if you can get his blood sugar stable and get him away from Wells and with a lot of therapy, you may be able to do something about his fixation.”

Eddie hung his head with a sigh, taking a moment to collect his thoughts, before nodding in resignation. “All right, but how do I do that? I can’t force Barry to leave and I’ve tried talking him into coming away with me. He won’t.”

Barry pulled a chair over and sat down. “In our timeline, we were able to stop the Reverse-Flash long enough to get him into a confinement cell, like the one we have Barry in now.”
“How am I supposed to do that? I’m not even close to a match for him and Barry’s not helping me
lock Wells up.”

“No, but we may know people who can. What do you know about the Arrow, or possible the Green
Arrow?”

“The Green Arrow? That’s the Star City vigilante. I’ve heard of him. Wait, do you know who he
is?”

There was a deep sense of relief at knowing Oliver really was alive. After finding out Thawne had
been picking people off, Barry had been afraid that his doppelganger had lied about that. “I do and
so does your Barry. They’ve worked together before. I don’t know what kind of affect this has had
on his timeline, but as long as he’s still alive, he’ll want to help.”

Eddie looked more than a little lost, but determined. “How do I find him?”

Barry took a piece of paper he’d prepared and handed it over. “You’re going to go see Star City’s
Captain Lance and give him this. He’ll get it to Oliver Queen.”

“Oliver Queen? The Oliver Queen? As, in running for mayor of Star City, Oliver Queen?”

Cisco chuckled, “Good to know some things never change. Yeah, that Oliver Queen.”

“Why?”

Barry handed the paper over. “Because he’s the Green Arrow.”

“Oliver Queen is The Green Arrow?!” Eddie sat back more fully in his chair. “I did wonder who
would be reckless enough to run for mayor of Star City right now. Obviously, the answer is the
Green Arrow.” Eddie shook his head. “Okay, but what about Barry? If he so much as suspects I’m
trying to get in touch with outside help, he’ll go straight to Wells.”

Cisco put a hand on Eddie’s shoulder in sympathy. “Yeah, about that; I’m sorry, man, but you’re
gonna have to pull a dick move.”

*****

“Hey, Barry.”

Barry was lying on the floor of his cells, legs stretched out to touch his toes against the glass. He
lifted up onto his elbows at the sound of Eddie’s voice and smiled. “Eddie! Ready to take me home
yet?”

“Almost.” Barry’s face lit up and Eddie hated himself for what he was about to do, hated how much
this was going to hurt Barry, but he also knew he had to do it. “I want you to understand that I’m
doing this because I love you, Barry.”

“Doing what?”
Eddie ignored the question in favor of the speech he’d come up with to get himself through this. “When I started looking after you, it was because of Iris. I knew Iris would have wanted me to, so I did, but it’s more than that now. You’re like a brother to me, Barry, and I can’t watch him hurt you anymore.”

The light bled out of Barry’s face as his head cocked suspiciously. “Eddie, what are you talking about?”

“Dr. Wells is manipulating you…”

Barry dropped back down with a groan. “Not this again. I know! It’s our thing. He manipulates me. I fight back. Sex ensues. He manipulates me again and the cycle continues. I know.”

Eddie pushed forward. “Your team here, they’ve come up with a way for me to help you.”

“They aren’t my team. My team is dead. They’ve been dead for over a year. Those are ghosts.” Barry got to his feet, glaring up at the cameras. “Nosy, irritating, self-righteous ghosts.” He turned back to Eddie, smiling darkly. “Eddie, take me home.”

“I will, soon. We have a plan that might work. When I get back, I’m going to go to Star City…”

Barry’s entire body tensed. “No.”

“…and get in touch with Oliver Queen, the Green Arrow…”

“You can’t do that!”

“…and we’re going to stop Dr. Wells.”

“I won’t let you!” Barry’s slammed his fists against the glass and left them there, desperate anger driving the red sparks behind his eyes. “I won’t let you kill him. I won’t let you take him away from me!”

“We’re not going to kill him.” Barry’s expression didn’t change, but the lightning stopped stuttering across his vision. Eddie wasn’t sure whether that was a good sign or not. He hoped it was. “We… I want to lock him up in one of the containment cells. In this world, they were able to stop him; we can do it, too. I just need your help.”

It was unnerving to go from the Barry in the cortex to the one here. If it wasn’t for the hair, they could, physically, be the same person, but it would only take someone a moment to know they weren’t. His Barry’s face didn’t move the same. Eddie hadn’t realized how different it was until he’d had the original in front of him.

Barry pressed his forehead against the glass, his voice soft, but determined. “Don’t do this, Eddie. He’ll know. He’ll find out and I can’t stop him. He’ll go after Oliver and Felicity and Diggle and I have been trying to keep him away from them. I’ve worked so hard to keep them from figuring out what he’s doing and you’re ruining it! He’s going to take them away and it’ll be your fault!”

The lightning was back, along with an absolute rage Eddie hadn’t realized Barry was capable of.

*It would be extremely... inconvenient this late in the game to draw the attention of certain people that Barry is quite fond of. He would do anything, let me do anything to him, to keep them from getting hurt.*

Wells had been talking about the Arrow. Barry had been protecting Oliver and his team. That was
the Barry that Eddie knew, the Barry that would do anything to protect the people he loved. Any doubts Eddie had about going through with this were washed away. Some part of his Barry was still in there and if he had any chance of getting him back, he had to do this.

When he spoke again, it was with renewed determination. “Either you help me or I will kill myself.”

The color drained from Barry’s face so fast Eddie was afraid he might actually faint. He did fall away from the glass, backing up to the other side of the cell, shaking softly – not vibrating, just shaking. “No. No, you can’t do that. Eddie, you can’t… you…”

“I’m sorry, but, like I said, I can’t sit back and watch him hurt you. One way or the other, Barry, it stops now. So, if I open this door, are you going to come back with me and help or should I go ahead and put a bullet in my chest?”

“But the singularity! The other me said when you killed yourself it opened a black hole. You can’t risk…”

“Cisco thinks that was because their Barry had already caused a tear by opening the wormhole in the first place, making it… I don’t really understand what they said, but it should be fine.”

The truth was, that no matter what the odds were, no matter the science, Eddie had no intentions of killing himself. He couldn’t put Barry through that, but he needed Barry to believe he would. So, he watched him closely, the shifting body language, the changing facial expressions.

Something that almost sounded like a laugh came out of Barry’s mouth. “I don’t really have a choice, do I?”

Eddie shook his head. “Not really.” He started to reach for the keypad to open the door, but stopped. “If we get back and you try to stop me, or lock me up somewhere, I will find a way to end it.”

Barry looked to the side, refusing to meet Eddie’s eyes. “Always the hero, Detective Thawne.”

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He followed Eddie sullenly through the well-lit halls of S.T.A.R. Labs. Half way there, he crossed his arms over his chest, then dropped them to the pockets of the grey sweatpants, because it felt too much like sulking. Actually, no, sulking was exactly what he should be doing.

Ever since he’d learned Eddie was Harrison’s ancestor, he’d be terrified the detective would somehow find out. It was hard for him to remember what he should and shouldn’t say sometimes. The afternoon Eddie told him Len had dropped him off and he couldn’t remember what had happened, he’d been sick with the idea that he might have let something slip without meaning to, something way more important than Len’s secret, because when it came down to it, Eddie wouldn’t turn Len in if Barry asked him not to and Barry knew that, but as sure as he knew that, he also knew that if it became clear that Eddie’s tactics for saving him weren’t working, he’d get desperate. Desperate people did stupid things, things like shooting themselves in the heart to stop the bad guy.
It was just… In one day these people had ruined everything! Eddie knew he was Harrison’s ancestor, he knew killing himself would erase Harrison, and they’d convinced Eddie to get Oliver involved. The whole point of all but cutting them out of his life was to keep them away and… damnit, it wasn’t fair!

He glared as they entered the cortex, looking around for the source of his indignation – his other self. It didn’t take long to find him, standing at the computers with Caitlin and another girl he didn’t recognize.

Focusing his glare on the other Barry, he seethed, “I hope you’re happy.”

To his annoyance, his other self smiled back at him, a touch bitter, but not entirely dishonest. “Kind of, yeah.”

Of course, he was, because he was as obsessed with saving people as Eddie. Barry stormed around the computers and across the room, taking a seat in a chair as far from the rest of them as he could.

Eddie looked around the room as well, seemingly confused. “Where’s Cisco?”

Caitlin answered, her smile a little strained as she kept a cautious eye on Barry. “He had to… make some adjustments. He’ll be back.”

Nodding, Eddie went over to Iris and Barry tried not to watch as they held hands. There was a strange sort of resentment bubbling inside him, but this wasn’t his Iris. He couldn’t let himself get sucked in by this, any of it. Not Iris or Caitlin or Cisco, or even himself. He couldn’t let himself remember what caring this much felt like, because he was going home and if he had his way, they were never coming back here again.

“So,” he splayed out in the seat, doing his best to look nonchalant. “What’s the plan?”

After a second of awkward silence, Eddie spoke. “I’m going to Star City to get in touch with Oliver. You’re going to… um… you’ll be…”

As Eddie fumbled, Barry’s frown deepened. There were only so many things that made Eddie blush like that. “Going to what?”

The other Barry took pity. “You’re going to distract Wells.”

“Distract?” Barry’s eyebrows went up and his frown melted into a wicked grin. “You mean sleep with him, right? You want me to have vicious, nasty sex with Harrison for a few days so he won’t notice Eddie’s gone? Kinky.”

Caitlin held her finger up. “Uh, no, distract, not…”

There was an interesting hand gesture that was probably supposed to allude to sex, though Barry couldn’t see how. Not that it mattered. He shrugged. “I’ve done worse for less. Then what? Eddie says you want to lock him in the pipeline. How’s that gonna work?”

“With these.” Caitlin took an arrow off the desk. It had a small glowing ball of something blue illuminating near the tip. “Nanites, developed by Ray Palmer. They emit a high frequency pulse that interrupts the Speedforce. It doesn’t last long, only a few minutes, but that should be enough. Cisco’s putting together the files so Felicity can make more.”

“And how exactly are you going to get those into him? I mean, call me pessimistic, but I don’t think he’s just going to stand there while Oliver shoots him. Oh, maybe I could tell him it’s a role play
fantasy.”

The other Barry leveling him with an annoyed stare. “You’re not helping. Literally, dude, no one is using you to seduce anyone, let alone your abusive… Wells.”

“Right, we’re calling it a distraction.”

“You don’t have to sleep with him to distract him. Pretend to go along with his scheme. Tell him you need to train to increase your speed. That’ll get all of his focus on you and everyone keeps their clothes on.”

“Well, clearly, you’ve never heard of positive reinforcement.” And there was that perfect blend of uncomfortable disgust. Good, they all deserved to be uncomfortable.

Beside the other him, the young girl he’d glanced over earlier leaned in and whispered to Caitlin, “It’s like watching one of those reality shows you have. I feel like I need popcorn and a comfy chair.”

Okay, almost everyone was uncomfortable. He’d mostly ignored her earlier. She was young, possibly not even eighteen, but pretty and clearly un-phased by the situation. It was strangely appealing, actually; refreshing, after an entire day locked in that stupid cell, listening to the bleeding hearts trying to save him. Been there, done that, bored now.

She squeaked in surprise when he appeared beside her, but didn’t step away and she certainly didn’t look scared. Not that Barry actually intended to do her any harm, but still… interesting. He grinned down at her. “Hey, what’s your name?”

She barely her suppressed her laugh. “Yeah, no, that… no. Not happening.”

“Oh, no, it’s not like that.”

“It’s not?”

“No. For real. I’m just gonna stand here, maybe flirt with you a little, make them all really nervous. Besides, I’m taken.”

“I heard. Word is you’re arm candy to an egocentric speedster.”

Arm candy?! That was a new one. He’d been called a lot of things, but never arm candy. That was borderline insulting. And did she just refer to Harrison as egocentric? Barry dropped an arm over her shoulder, leaning in a little too close. “I like you.”

“I’m Jessie.”

There was something familiar about her, not anything obvious, but a nagging tug in the back of his mind. It was a little in her smile, but not just that. Maybe her eyes?

Before he could really focus in on it, Cisco’s voice interrupted his thoughts, desperate in its pitch. “No, you can’t go in there. Harry, you need to get back to the lab.”

_Harry?

“What I need, Ramon, is for you to get out of my way. You asked for my opinion and for that, I need the data.”

That sounded like Harrison.
“I’ll bring you the data. We agreed you would stay…”

“You agreed. I never agreed to anything.”

It couldn’t be Harrison. He’d promised. He swore he wouldn’t cross the breach. That was why he’d sent Eddie instead, which still pissed Barry off, but at least it hadn’t gone against the nature of their agreement. Harrison stayed on their side, where they belonged. Where Cisco and Caitlin and Iris were already dead and the damage was already done and Harrison had promised.

Except it was Harrison, marching around the corner with Cisco behind him like he had every right to be there.

Barry barely made it three steps when the other him got in his way, holding him back with hands on his shoulders. Eddie scrambled to help while Cisco put himself in front of Harrison, like he was protecting him. Anger seared through him and Barry surged forward, managing another step, but Eddie was right in front of him and he couldn’t risk hurting Eddie.

“Get out of my way, Eddie!”

“No, Barry, that’s not him.”

“You promised!” He dodged left of Eddie, only to have the other Barry move with him. “You said you’d stay away! They’re off limits!”

Cisco stepped back, forcing Harrison with him. “Not to say I told you so, but I freaking told you so!”

With a burst of lightning, he shoved the other Barry out of the way and shot across the room, only to come up short when he heard Jessie yell, “Dad!”

Dad?

He was inches away from Cisco’s wide eyes and heaving chest, ready to push him out of the way as well or maybe go around him. He wouldn’t hurt Cisco, he’d never hurt any of them, but Harrison wasn’t supposed to be there, he wasn’t allowed, he…

Barry frowned at the face of the man staring back at him. The impassive expression was wrong. The worry lines around the eyes were wrong. Barry had spent countless hours staring at those lines. It took him a second to put it together and when he did, he stepped back – mostly for Cisco’s sake, because he looked like he was one short breath away from a heart attack. Further away, the differences were more pronounced. Harrison maintained a carefully casual stance, designed to make him appear unassuming, to put others around him at ease. This man didn’t. He was stiff and confrontational.

Barry shook his head, confused. “You’re not him.”

This man, whoever he was, didn’t smile, he didn’t feign niceties. He pursed his lips tight and moved out from behind Cisco, giving the younger scientist a scolding look for even attempting to shield him.

“But… How?” He was speaking to Cisco, but he could hardly take his eyes off this Harrison, so similar and so different. “Barry said your Harrison is dead.”

“Yeah, but that’s not our Wells. He’s from another Earth and he’s the real Harrison Wells, not Eobard Thawne. We call him Harry.”
Another Earth? If there were two, it stood to reason there would be more.

Slowly, he made a circle around Harry, noting every minor difference with growing fascination. Harrison wore tailored suits and slacks. He wore fitted sweaters and top of the line running shoes and styled his hair with select products that maintained the soft, natural appearance. Harry had on baggy cargo pants, scuffed boots, and a long sleeve hooded t-shirt. His hair was dark with product and not so much styled as pushed up and around haphazardly. The clothes, the hair, the posture, the facial expression, everything was wrong, because this wasn’t his Harrison, this was Harry.

Barry reached up and tentatively touched the stiff hair, giggling softly as it bounced back up into the unfortunate position. He traced a hand over one side of Harry’s face, tight with annoyance, no hint of humor or mirth behind the glare. The shoulders tensed under his touch – not aroused tension that threatened to spring into action, but uncomfortable tension meant to warn people off.

When his hands went lower, checking the tone of the muscle under the t-shirt, Harry shoved them away, not playfully, but abrupt and demanding. “That’s enough.”

“He’s so abrasive.”

Barry bit his lower lip, chewing it thoughtfully. He shouldn’t. He really shouldn’t, but then again, when was he going to get another chance like this? Two people with the same genetic makeup, the same DNA, but from different worlds and, really, when he looked at it that way, he was almost doing it for science. Yeah, because Harrison was really going to buy that if he ever found out.

Still…

Without giving himself the chance to think his way out of it, Barry grabbed Harry’s face and held him still while he mashed their mouths together. Harry was too unresponsive for it to be a real comparison. He was, however, shocked enough that his mouth relaxed just enough for Barry to get his tongue in. It tasted different. Kissing Harrison tasted like spice and mineral water. Harry was cheap take out and soda.

Barry pulled back, the room still stunned into silence and licked his lower lip. Salt and grease. “That is so weird.”

At his words, everyone burst into action at once, Eddie, Barry, and Cisco pulled him back – not roughly, but insistent and Barry didn’t fight it, just grinned at Harry, who was waving off Jessie’s concern. “I’m fine. Jessie, I’m okay. Really.”

“But he… he…”

“Kissed me? I’ll survive.”

Now that he knew, he saw the similarities. Especially now. The glare she was sending him was impressive. Actually, it rivaled the glare Harrison reserved for when Barry had done something exceptionally distasteful in public. If Barry hadn’t spent the last year being on the receiving end of that glare, he might have been cowed. As it was, he winked back and she huffed, turning her attention back to her father.

Oh, that was a disconcerting thought. Harrison Wells as a father.

They moved Barry back to his chair on the other side of the room and Cisco and Barry joined Harry, Jessie, and Caitlin at the computers, whispering conspiratorially. Occasionally, Harry glanced up at him. Eddie and Iris stayed by his side, in case he tried anything. Not that he was going to. He just wanted this over so he could go home.
His stomach complained loudly at the sentiment and he looked down at it with contempt. Okay, that, and maybe a few pizzas.

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“That’s not right.” Barry followed Cisco’s gaze to where Barry-3 was finishing up the second of three large pizza’s they’d ordered at his request. Eddie and Iris were next to him, Caitlin was checking his vitals. “That’s not how you eat a pizza. That’s just… wrong.”

Barry couldn’t exactly disagree. Barry-3 looked like he was coming down off an intense orgasm, which was better than he’d looked when he started, which had been like he was having one. Caitlin came back, cheeks pink. “His blood sugar was getting low.”

“But,” Cisco took her tablet, “he’s had more than enough calories. How the hell was his blood sugar low?”

“My guess? He burned through them during his little outburst in the containment cell earlier.”

Harrison laced his fingers behind his head and leaned back in his chair. “If he’s able to access more of the Speedforce, this could be the answer we need.”

Cisco shook his head. “Except we don’t know if he’s accessing more. We don’t know anything and we don’t have enough time to run tests. Besides, check it.” He motioned to the screen where the footage of Eddie’s interaction was paused on Barry-3’s face, eyes red. “Look at his body language. He’s not even really trying to get out of the cell, he’s just standing there; and earlier, when he was trying to get out, there was no Speedforce activity detected. Guys, I don’t think he knows he’s doing it.”

All eyes shifted to the other side of the room where Barry-3 was trying to hand feed a slice of pizza to a resistant Eddie while Iris laughed behind her hand. Caitlin hesitantly asked, “We could… I mean, should we tell him?”

It was a good question. The only other time they’d seen red eyes like that was on the Reverse-Flash. That didn’t necessarily mean anything, but it might. Eventually, Barry shook his head. “We can’t, not while Thawne still has any kind of hold over him. We’ll tell Eddie and he can decide what to do once they have the Reverse-Flash locked up.”

Cisco frowned at the footage. “Has it occurred to anyone else that Thawne might not be the only one that needs to be locked up?”

Barry and Caitlin gave him matching reproachful stares and he put his hands up defensively. “I’m just saying, he’s got the crazy eyes. It wouldn’t hurt to be prepared.”

Which was a valid point, but one they didn’t have time to explore. They only had ten minutes left on Thawne’s ultimatum and, considering how violently Barry-3 had reacted when he’d thought the
other speedster had come through, none of them wanted to find out what the fall out would look like if he actually did.

“We have to leave this up to them, but we’ll make sure they have everything they need. Are we ready?”

At everyone’s nod, they sent Harry over to sit with Barry-3 while they talked to Eddie. There was some protest, but Harry clearly made Eddie uncomfortable and Barry-3 was still fascinated with him. The minute he sat down, Barry-3 started trying to touch his hair again. Harry swatted the hand away, only to have it reach up again, clearly undeterred. After the fourth attempt, Barry shook his head and focused on the task at hand.

Cisco handed Eddie a jump drive. “This has the specs for converting the anti-proton cavity for a speedster. Felicity’ll know what to do with it. And tell her no cutting corners. Copper wires mean copper wires, unless she wants it to short out and release an evil, vindictive, murdering speedster on Central City and the world.”

“Right.” Eddie took the drive, holding it in his fist protectively before slipping into the pocket of his jeans.

“Also, have her make two.”

“Two?”

Cisco glanced meaningfully at Barry-3, who was still giggling at Harry’s wrathful stare. “Yeah, and make the second one stronger.”

“I don’t understand.”

Barry put a hand on Eddie’s shoulder. “Look, I’m not exactly sure what it means, but what he did in the cell – the whole glowing eyes thing – that shouldn’t have been possible. That cell isn’t just designed to keep a speedster in, it prevents us from accessing the Speedforce.”

“Speedforce?” Oh, they really were keeping Eddie in the dark. That didn’t make this easier.

“That’s what we call the source of our speed. I can’t really explain it, not right now, but the point is, we locked the Reverse-Flash in there and he couldn’t use it, your Barry could. Now, we won’t know how or why until we run some test, which, obviously, we don’t have time for right now. Once you have Wells locked up, bring Barry back and we’ll figure it out.”

“About that, I have a favor to ask.” Eddie looked at the ground, then straightened, squaring his shoulders as if bracing himself and Barry got a sinking feeling he knew what Eddie was about to say. “Iris says you can close the breaches. When we go back through, I need you to close ours.”

Barry started to shake his head, but Eddie cut him off. “The truth is, Barry, there’s a good chance this is going to get worse before it gets better. If it even gets better. If Wells figures out what I’m up to, if he thinks I’ve reneged on my end of his deal, he will go for blood and I won’t bring that here. Knowing there’s a world where Iris is alive and has a chance to be happy, that… that’s everything. I can do this if I know she’s safe here, even if I can’t be with her.”

As much as Barry wanted to argue with him, it made sense. “We can figure something out, Eddie. We’ll find a way to make the breach inaccessible temporarily, but if we close it, I can’t guarantee…”

“No, this is our fight. Barry’s and mine, but he’s not alone in it and now,” Eddie smiled sadly, “thanks to you, neither am I.”
“Eddie!” They looked back to Barry-3, who had apparently finished pestering Harry and was standing with his arms crossed over his chest, a petulant frown on his face. “It’s time to go home.”

“Oh, wait, one more thing!” Cisco dug into his pants and pulled out a folded note card. “This one has the recipe for the original bars, as well as a few variations we’ve come up with in the last year. Don’t let him run out. Ever.”

“Thank you.” Eddie put the note card in his pocket as well and made his way back to Iris, pulling her aside for their goodbye.

Barry wasn’t sure if his doppelganger’s open glare was because of Eddie or Iris, or maybe both of them. He patted Cisco on the shoulder and went over for a final word with himself. “Hey.”

“What now?” Barry-3’s voice was dripping with disdain. “You got what you wanted, the least you can do is leave me alone.”

“I know you aren’t happy with… well, any of this, but they just want to help.”

“I don’t want their help. I keep saying that and no one will listen to me.”

“They didn’t listen to me, either, and I’m glad they didn’t.” Barry-3 rolled his eyes, glancing at Eddie apprehensively, like he was afraid the detective was going to change his mind about leaving. “Look, Thawne doesn’t love you.”

Barry-3’s eyes flashed momentarily as he grit his teeth. “It’s Harrison and you don’t know anything.”

“I know him and I know you, or, at least, who you used to be. Even if he does love you, it doesn’t matter. The one thing Harry and ‘Harrison’ have in common is that when they want something, they will do anything to get it.” The anger faltered. Good, at least he was listening. “For Harry, it was his daughter. Zoom had her and he would do anything to get her back. He killed a man – not a good man, but a person – and then he tried to steal my speed. The difference is, Harry has a conscience, and he couldn’t go through with it. Harrison doesn’t and you know that. So, even if he loves you, which I doubt, you aren’t what he wants. What he wants is to go home and he will do anything to make that happen. You will never be enough, not as long as that’s between you.”

For one second, he thought maybe he’d gotten through to him. Barry-3’s stubborn annoyance faltered, replaced by something forlorn and hurt, but then… then he was wrapped in a hug, Barry-3 mumbling, “Thank you, thank you, thank you!” in his ear and Barry got the feeling he’d said something very wrong.

Before he could ask, Barry-3 ran to Caitlin, hugging her just as enthusiastically. Harry dropped back in his chair, shaking his head. “Congratulations, Mr. Allen, on being the only person capable of making that worse.”

“What’d I do?!”

Cisco went around the desk the long way to avoid going past Barry-3, still latched onto Caitlin. “What was that about?”

“I have no idea.”

Barry-3 suddenly appeared in front of them again, eyes on the bag Cisco was holding out in front of him for protection. With a cautious smile, Barry-3 took the bag, opened it and pulled out his Flash suit. Cisco nervously stepped closer to his Barry, putting them practically hip to hip. “So, yeah, uh,
I patched it up for you, cleaned it, and repaired the emblem. I don’t know what you did to fry it like that, but those things are not easy to…”

He stopped as Barry-3 blurred into his suit and squeezed Cisco in a tight hug. “Thank you, it’s perfect, thank you!” Then a smaller, barely audible. “I’m sorry.”

Cisco tensed, even as Barry-3 held tighter.

“He said you remember the other timeline, that you remember Harrison killing you, so you’re still kind of my Cisco, even if you’re not, so I’m sorry.”

After a second, Cisco gave in and hugged him back. “It’s okay, man. It wasn’t your fault. Hell, I’m sorry. I should have figured it out sooner – I worked with the man for years and I never suspected anything – but please let them help you.”

“I will.” Barry-3 pulled back reluctantly with a sad, but somewhat mischievous smile. “I’ve got a plan.”

And he was off again, pulled Iris into an embrace that threatened to suffocate her, then Jessie, a hand just low enough on her back to make Harry narrow his eyes murderously.

Cisco leaned into Barry. “Should I be worried?”

“Probably.”

Eddie kissed Iris one last time before stepping back, as ready as he was ever going to be. He leveled Barry with a questioning look and Barry nodded somberly.

Before anyone could say anything else, Barry-3 took Eddie and ran. Barry gave them a few seconds head start before taking the reactor they’d prepared, just in case. It felt wrong closing it, but he understood how Eddie felt. If their positions were reversed, he’d be asking the same thing. So, he’d close the breach, but, just like with Earth-2, that didn’t mean he was abandoning it. If he could find his way back to one, he could find his way to the other.

*****

Iris wasn’t in the cortex when he got back. She was probably getting some much needed space. He’d track her down later to make sure she was okay. Harry had disappeared again, as well, but Jessie had stayed behind with Cisco and Caitlin.

Cisco leveled him with a suspicious frown, arms crossed over his chest. “Okay, spill it. What’d you do?”

Barry pulled his cowl off. “I didn’t do anything.”

“No, man, because one minute he’s pissed, then you said something to him, and suddenly he’s bouncing off the walls excited again and he has a ‘plan.’” Cisco made sure to emphasize his cynicism with air quotes. “What’d you say?”

Reluctantly, Barry filled them in on his speech, not that it was a long one, as far as speeches went.
“And then I told him that he would never be enough for Thawne, not as long as that was between them.”

Cisco dropped his chin to his chest, groaning and Caitlin admonished him with a, “Barry!” Jessie actually choked on her soda and it was ridiculous. He hadn’t said anything wrong. “Would someone please tell me what I said that was so bad?”

Caitlin shook her head, took Jessie’s arm and led her, still coughing, out of the room. Barry turned to Cisco, who finally took pity on him. “You basically just told crazy Barry that if he can convince evil Wells he’s never getting back home, he’s got a shot.”

“What?! No! That’s… I didn’t…” Except… You will never be enough, not as long as that’s between you. Except he kind of had. “Oh god. I didn’t mean… that wasn’t… I was just trying to help!”

“I know.” Cisco stood up and patted his back consolingly. “Come on, I’m in serious need of some bro time. Wrath of Kahn?”

Barry sighed out a, “Yeah.”

He could only hope Harry was wrong and he hadn’t actually made it worse.

*****

Eddie was never going to get used to traveling by speedster. One second he was standing in the cortex, surrounded by friends, the next he was trying not to vomit in an alley with Wells only a few feet away in slacks and a dark sweater, face set in an impatient frown. Barry left Eddie leaning against the wall and threw himself at Wells, wrapping his arms around the older man’s shoulders in a tight embrace.

While Wells maintained eye contact with Eddie, his arm snaked loosely around Barry’s waist in a gesture that was as possessive as it was casual. “Two minutes. I was beginning to think you weren’t going to make it.”

There were a lot of things Eddie wanted say to that, but hey both already knew exactly how insecure Wells really was, or he wouldn’t have felt the need to send anyone, let alone Eddie. Words weren’t really necessary.

Behind him, the singularity shuddered and closed in on itself, disappearing. Wells sighed at the empty space. “Well, that’s disappointing. Although, not entirely unexpected.”

Before Eddie could ask what, exactly, was disappointing about it, Barry took Wells’ face in his hands and kissed him, not unlike he’d done with Harry, but with more tongue and Wells was much more receptive. He tightened his hold on Barry’s waist, moving his hand to press into the small of Barry’s back and pull them closer together and Eddie dropped his gaze to the ground rather than watch.
It took Barry a good two minutes to pull away, breathless and flushed. “I’m sorry. Sorry I ran off, sorry I hurt you, hurt the accelerator, set you back. I didn’t mean to, I got mad, but I’m better now. All better.”

He stepped back a few feet, arms held out from his side. “Look! Cisco cleaned my suit. His suit?” He glanced at the empty space where the singularity had been. “My suit now. He cleaned it and he fixed the emblem. See? Shiny.”

Wells turned to Eddie with raised eyebrows. “How much did they feed him?”

Eddie shrugged. “Enough?”

“Lots! I had nutrient bags and donuts and a Cisco Bar and Tito’s and double bacon cheese burgers with fries and a milk shake and two large supreme pizzas!”

“Wonderful. It’s good to know you’ve returned to me with your insanity remarkably unaffected.”

“Don’t be mean.” Barry giggled once before his face fell into an almost somber frown. “’Cause I’ll do it.”

Wells’ demeanor changed instantly, from mildly amused to deadly serious in a moment. “You’ll do what, exactly?”

Barry worried his lower lips with his teeth. “You promise? Promise I get them back? Promise they’re alive?”

“Promise, Harrison. Promise me that it’s better.”

Eddie gripped the wall of the alley as the last of the nausea faded and watched, waiting to see what Wells would do, if he would buy it. He had to. The pitch of Barry’s voice, the unwavering eye contact – if Eddie didn’t know better, he’d believe it.

Wells stayed perfect still, assessing Barry as he spoke. “I promise. Barry, your mother and father, Iris and Joe, Cisco and Caitlin will be alive there.”

“But not you.”

Wells tilted his head in concession. “No, I’ll be where I belong, in my own time.”

“Will I remember you? This? Anything?”

After a moment’s hesitation, Wells conceded that as well. “Regrettably, yes. There have been cases of memory erasure, but in all likelihood your memories of this timeline will remain intact.”

Barry chewed his lip harder. “How long will it take you to fix the accelerator?”

“For the third time?” Barry grinned sheepishly, nodding. “A month, two if the parts are on back order. Though, I suppose, given the urgency, I could just run to get them.”

Barry licked the blood from his torn mouth. “No, no, no. No running. Two months. You give me two months and I’ll give you back your future.”

There was a pause, long and drawn out and Eddie had to fight not to hold his breath until finally, Wells moved forward, pulling Barry into a hug that was nearly paternal in its gentleness. Eddie
stayed where he was, unwilling to break the softness of the moment.

When Wells pulled away from Barry, he kissed his forehead, smiling fondly. “You won’t regret this, Barry.”

The smile Barry gave him in return was as sad as it was bright.

Wells kept a hand pressed to Barry’s face as he shifted his gaze just enough to catch Eddie’s eyes and Eddie tried to remember to breathe. “Detective Thawne, while I’m sure you had some very interesting conversations with that Earth’s counterparts, do try to refrain from doing anything… ill-advised. It would be a fruitless endeavor on your part and I have better things to do with my time than deal with your attempts at bravado."

It took everything Eddie had not to slip his hand down to his pocket and curl his fist protectively around the USB drive.

“As for you, Barry, if this is going to work, you’ll need to go faster. Training starts now. Let’s see, what shall it be? I know.” He leaned over to breath into Barry’s ear, so low that Eddie almost missed it. In fact, he really wished he had. “If you can beat me home, you get to name the game. Anything you want, I will do to you. Anything.”

Barry shuddered as Wells stepped back. “One second head start. Now, run, Barry.”

No one gave Eddie another thought. Barry flashed off, Wells following behind him. Eddie slumped against the wall, breathing deep and uneven. He’d bought it. Wells had bought it. He’d believed Barry wanted to help him. He hadn’t even searched Eddie or found the…

Eddie froze as he patted his pocket where the drive should have been and felt nothing. No, no, not good. Had they fallen out? He would have noticed if Wells had searched him. Wouldn’t he? He was just started to feel the tight clutch of panic, when Barry came skidding to a stop in front of him, hand up and the folded letter firmly clutched in his fingers. “Looking for something?”

As Eddie took it, Barry pulled the USB drive out from under the waistband of his suit. “I took them while we were running. Just in case. You need a better hiding place.”

“I didn’t exactly have a lot of options. You should hurry before he suspects anything.”

“I already told you. I’m a lot faster than he thinks I am. Besides,” Barry winked, “it’s no fun if I win.”

Then he was gone again and Eddie gave himself a minute, one minute to pull himself together before he started off for a bus that could take him to his car at the station. If he hurried, he could be in Star City by morning.
Len knows there’s something going on with the Flash, but since Barry refuses to give him a straight answer – or any answer, for that matter – he’ll just have to find them for himself.

"It’s better to know how to learn than to know." - Dr. Seuss-

-Past (Eleven Months After the Tidal Wave)-

Star City was dirty. It was big and noisy and crowded and there were plenty of dark, dingy corners that could easily be hidden in. Mick would love it. Len was on the fence. It had its merits, but it wasn’t home. Unfortunately, home was lacking in what he needed at the moment and that was answers. Despite Barry’s insistence that he’d answer any questions he could, it turned out the definition of ‘could’ translated more closely to ‘if I feel like it.’

Len was fair. After calling off his PI, he’d given the kid six months to sort it out and tell him the truth. Six months of Barry Allen flashing in and out of his heists whenever he felt like it because he was “bored.” Six months of waking up to find the pantry empty of food – including his ice cream sandwiches – and all six foot two of the Flash sprawled unceremoniously on the couch. Six months having him stay for up to three days on the strength of, “Harrison and I had a disagreement.”

When pressed on what the disagreement was about, however, he was usually met with absurd explanations such as, “He said Do-si-dos are better than Thin Mints and I mean, who says that? I could see Caramel Delights or even Shortbreads – you know, if you don’t like chocolate – but Do-si-dos? Not that I can hate on a Do-si-dos – who doesn’t love oatmeal and peanut butter– but there’s a line, a very distinct line. One side has Thin Mints and the other has every other cookie ever made.”

Mick, who had been sitting a few feet from Barry and Shawna, lighter flicking on and off distractedly, grunted at the rant. “I prefer Samoas.”

Barry turned to Mick with a look of absolute shock and appall. “You, sir, are a heathen.”

Mick hummed at the open flame. “Thanks.”

The worst part was Len couldn’t be sure that wasn’t what the fight had been about. He’d certainly been on the receiving end of some fairly ridiculous arguments with his former nemesis. The one on the definition of a donut stood out in his mind.

“No, it’s called an Apple Fritter. A fritter. Not a donut. A fritter. Fritters are like donuts, but they’re not. There are very distinct differences. That’s why they’re called Apple Fritters, instead of Apple Donuts. You don’t tell someone you’re bringing donuts and then show up with a box of Apple Fritters. It’s rude.”

Len held out a hand to the make-shift kitchen, where three boxes that were not Apple Fritters sat.
“There are other donuts, Barry. Shawna didn’t just bring back Fritters.”

Barry seethed angrily, voice vibrating dangerously. “It’s not a donut.”

Then, of course, there had been the epic battle between Barry and Hartley over whether the color indigo was purple or blue, that started with an episode of Sesame Street at five in the morning and ended with Hartley blowing out several windows with his gauntlets, Mick lighting the coffee table on fire, and Len freezing Barry’s feet to the floor, because he was unimpressed by the argument that, “I’m not gonna to hurt him! I just want to hang him off a high rise until he admits Indigo is not purple. Come on, Lenny, I’ll catch him before he hits the ground.”

Although, it was good to know that Lisa was handy at keeping all the unstable elements in Len’s life at bay and not just Mick. When Barry had finally managed to get his legs out of the ice, she’d swooped in and ten minutes later, the whole episode might as well never have happened as far as Barry was concerned.

What it came down to was that Barry clearly wasn’t stable. There were better days and worse days, but on no occasion was he willing to give Len a straight answer and so Len was forced to search elsewhere. He’d considered attempting to tail Barry again, but didn’t want to tip the kid off and have to see that desperate, begging, pleading song and dance again.

When did he get so soft?

Outside of him and Dr. Wells, however, there weren’t many people left in Barry’s life that he talked to. Being a detective and in Central City, Eddie Thawne was less than ideal. Likewise, Captain Singh and his fiancé were a definite no. Which left the mysterious Felicity Smoak, whose calls often went unreturned, but nevertheless continued to try and reach out to Barry, nearly daily from the updated cell phone records he’d managed to acquire. Before the tidal wave, they’d spoke regularly, so if nothing else, she may be able to provide some insight.

Felicity was the CEO of Palmer Tech and girlfriend to Oliver Queen, a former billionaire playboy. Until recently, they’d lived in a nice house off the coast before picking up and moving back to the city – presumably so that Felicity could take a more active roll in her company.

He’d tailed her for a few days and her routine was suspicious at best. She went to work, attended meetings, met her boyfriend for lunch and sometimes disappeared for entire nights. He had no idea how she did it or where she went. She was smart, but she was by no means stealthy. Not in those shoes.

It was on the fourth night, as he sat on his bike across the street from her loft, waiting to see if she’d leave again, that he realized he was going to have to move on her. He’d gotten everything he could just by watching; they needed a sit down, a meeting. His face wasn’t well known in Star City, so he could bump into her at the café where she got coffee every morning. Or he could just kidnap her. His mood perked up a little at the thought. It had been a while since he’d done a kidnapping. She was too high profile to break Hartley and Shawna in on it. He’d ask Lisa, but she’d been a particularly obtuse brand of annoying lately. Mick, though? Mick and him could use something to bond over.

His phone buzzed in his back pocket and Len considered ignoring it, especially when he looked at the display and saw Lisa’s cell, but he didn’t have anything better to do and it could be an emergency.

He answered with a gruff, “What?”
“Hey, Lenny, how’s Operation Busy Body?”

“Stop calling it that.” Her laugh was soft, a little too quiet, like she was trying not to bother someone. “Is this business, or do you just enjoy tormenting me in your spare time?”

“Why can’t it be both?”

“Lisa.”

“Lenny.” When he didn’t respond, she gave in. “You have a visitor.”

“Barry.” He’d been overdue for a visit. They saw him once a month on average and the last visit had been just over five weeks ago.

“He got here sometime in the last few hours. I was out getting drinks with Shawna and Mick and decided to call it an early night. Hartley didn’t hear him come in.”

That was great. He left for a few days to do minor reconnaissance and they put Hartley in charge of the warehouse while they went out and got drunk. Not that Hartley was completely incompetent, but he had a tendency to lock himself in his room and work on projects for hours. A bomb wouldn’t be able to get his attention, let alone a police raid or a break-in and certainly not the Flash.

He was going to have to up Hartley’s training, teach him the importance of being aware of his surroundings, plan a few sneak attacks in the kid’s room while he was working on things that weren’t dangerous enough to explode if his hand slipped. He’d deal with that later, though. At the moment, he had an unconscious Speedster in his warehouse and he was seven hours away on a surveillance mission that wasn’t going nearly as well as he’d like.

“Is he hurt?”

“Not that I can tell, but he never is.” Not that they ever saw, was closer to the truth. Lisa’s elongated sigh of relief was a clear sign that she’d stripped off her heels and sat down. “Do you want me to ask him what loverboy did this time or are you on your way?”

“I’ll be there by morning. I need to regroup and…” He trailed off as the door to Felicity’s apartment building opened and she stepped out, alone and headed the opposite direction of where he knew her car was parked. “On second thought, go ahead and ask. See what you can get without me there. And stock the pantry.”

“Shawna and Mick are making a food run on the way back. You want anything? Those little ice cream sandwiches you love?”

“He’ll eat ‘em before I got there.”

Lisa muffled her laughter. “Then you’d better floor it, Lenny.”

He hung up on her and dropped the phone in his pocket. Felicity had her purse and overcoat on. At eleven in the evening, it was suspiciously late and the streets were empty, but it was the first time she’d been out at night without company since he’d started following her. He could wait, probably should, but… What the hell.

Len got off the bike and made sure his Cold gun was secure before heading off after her. He probably wouldn’t need it. She didn’t look dangerous and she didn’t seem like the type to put up much of a fight, especially considering that all he wanted was a little background information on a friend. Of course, Barry didn’t look dangerous or particularly stubborn until something pissed him
off and then he was a raging ball of unstable lightening. Better safe than sorry.

He set a steady pace behind her, far back enough not to draw attention to himself. She didn’t look relaxed, but she didn’t look nervous, either. Her heels were clicking at a steady rhythm, fast and even. Two blocks down and the street lights were further apart, leaving the sidewalk darker for longer stretches. There were no moving cars, no potential witnesses that he could see. He picked up his own steps, intending to get behind her as they passed one of the frequent alleyways. If he could get her in one, they wouldn’t be interrupted while he explained what he was doing there. Hopefully, she’d listen. If not, he’d head back, get Mick, and try Plan B.

He stopped short as a dark figure stepped out of the alley between him and Felicity, arms extended and a bow pulled tight, the arrow aimed at Len’s chest. Len forced himself to look past the arrow itself and at the man clothed in green leather, hood pulled up and a dark mask obscuring his eyes. The Star City vigilante.

“What are you doing in my city?”

Slowly, Len raised his hands in a show of surrender. “I’m not here to cause trouble, just passing through.”

“Why are you following Felicity Smoak?”

Behind the Green Arrow, Felicity had stopped walking. Her arms were crossed over her chest expectantly. Not a hint of nervousness or shock anywhere in her expression or body language. It had been a trap and she’d been the bait. He doubted this was her first time. When she saw him looking at her, she narrowed her eyes. “What he said. Why are you following me?”

His first instinct was to lie, but there wasn’t much of a point. For once in his life, he wasn’t actually doing anything illegal. Yet. “We have a mutual friend, so to speak.”

The Green Arrow’s frown deepened. “I find that hard to believe.”

Len raised his eyes eyebrows, looking the vigilante over openly. “I find it hard to believe you aren’t cold without sleeves.”

“I don’t get cold.”

“I’ll take that as a challenge.”

“It wasn’t.”

“I’m Captain Cold?”

“You’re a thief and a murderer.”

“And what does that make you?”

“Not…”

“Boys! Can we fight over who the bigger man is later?” Her eyes went comically wide. “Metaphorically! Obviously. Not who has the bigger…”

“Felicity.”

“Right, sorry.” She stepped up, putting herself next to the Green Arrow. “Let’s just focus on the task at hand, shall we? What friend?”
While Felicity obviously knew and trusted the vigilante, Len didn’t. He never trusted anyone he didn’t have something on and when it came to the Green Arrow, he didn’t even have a name.

Still, there had been rumors of the Flash working with the Arrow before the wave and, more to the point, there was still an arrow aimed at his chest. “Barry Allen.”

“Barry?” The bow dropped, less tightly drawn and aimed at the ground.

Felicity set a hand on the Green Arrow’s shoulder and Len noted that the vigilante didn’t shrug it off or even appear to notice. “What about Barry? Is he okay?”

“Can we take this somewhere a little more… private?”

Felicity and the vigilante exchanged looks. After a silent moment, Felicity nodded and the Green Arrow tucked his bow away in its quiver. “Go with Felicity to the loft. I’ll meet you there.”

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“Nice place.”

They’d parted ways in the alley, Felicity walking Len in through the front door while the Green Arrow presumably found an alternate route. When the door opened, he was already there, standing in the middle of the loft, arms crossed over his chest and a threatening scowl firmly in place. Len pointedly ignored him as he looked around the apartment.

“A little modern for my taste.”

“You were saying something about Barry?” On entering, Felicity had immediately moved to stand with the Green Arrow by the sofas, practically elbow to elbow – well, her elbow to his hip, he had at least six inches on her.

Len looked at the two of them together, trademark smirk frozen in place as it clicked. The height, the stature, the familiarity they had with each other, the way they’d looked to one another for approval before inviting him there, the loft not yours, – it all fit.

He made a show of relaxing in their personal space, taking his riding gloves off as he spoke. “I did a background check on you, Felicity. Your boyfriend, too. I like to know who I’m dealing with. You’re an intelligent woman, attractive, and sensible. He’s a former playboy who spent his time drinking, womanizing, and wasting his family’s money until there wasn’t anything left to waste.”

The vigilante tensed defensively. “What are you getting at, Cold?”

He shrugged, “If she wanted a boy toy, she could have done better.”

“I am not…”

Len smirked as the Green Arrow – Oliver Queen – cut himself off a moment too late with a flinch, dropping his head to stare at the floor. Felicity patted him on the back in sympathy. “It’s okay.
Secret identities really aren’t your… thing.”

Oliver looked at her with narrowed eyes, though they weren’t angry. “That’s not helping.”

She continued to pat his back. With a resigned sigh, Oliver pulled his hood down and took off the small black mask covering his eyes. “So, you know who I am. What now?”

“Like I said, I like to know who I’m dealing with.” Oliver stared him down and Len met his glare unwaveringly. “I’ll assume you both know Barry’s the Flash?”

Felicity’s brows drew together, not in confusion, but clear concern. “He told you?”

He shrugged, “More or less. I’m here because there’s something wrong with him.”

Oliver and Felicity exchanged glances again before Oliver asked, “Wrong how?”

“Short temper, erratic behavior, secretive. We’ve had a few meta attacks in the city, but he refuses to help.”

Oliver’s frown deepened. “Who’s handling them?”

“I am.”

Felicity raised her eyebrows in surprise. “You? But… you’re a criminal.”

“We’re not here to talk about me.” The last thing he needed was to have his already dubious reputation sullied further. “We’re here to talk about Barry.”

Oliver shook his head. “No offense, Cold, but you’re asking us to give you information on a close friend of ours you’ve tried to kill. How do we know we can trust you?”

Put it like that… “You don’t.”

Oliver shifted uncomfortably, leaning against the back of the sofa. “Tell us everything.”

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“Survivor’s Guilt?” Lisa kicked her feet up onto Len’s desk. “You drove twelve hundred miles round trip to get Survivor’s Guilt? I could have told you that.”

“I know.” She’d already been waiting in his office when he’d gotten back. Mick had stayed upstairs watching the kids, making sure they weren’t interrupted. “They think he needs a push.”

“Who’s they? I thought you were going after that Felicity Smoak chick?”

“The Green Arrow doesn’t appreciate people stalking his girlfriend.”

“Girlfriend? I thought she was with…” Lisa’s eyebrows raised in understanding. “Oh.”
“Yeah.”

“Huh, okay, then. Now what? You know it’s not just Survivor’s Guilt.”

He did. He knew a lot of things. More than the Green Arrow. Not that he didn’t appreciate the vigilante’s position. If someone had told him the Flash was a mentally unstable mess, he probably would have assumed the same thing – that the kid was suffering under the weight of his own guilty conscience and no small amount of PTSD – but seeing was believing and Len had been watching Barry for months. It wasn’t that simple.

Although, that didn’t mean Queen was wrong about everything. It was Barry that had brought the meta-human attacks to Len’s attention. Whatever was holding Barry back, he still cared enough to want to help. A push might be exactly what he needed. Of course, it could also make it worse.

For now? “I’ll think about it. Did he say what the fight was about?”

“Dr. Wells is under the misguided belief that Peter Capaldi is the best Doctor Who they’ve had since the series reboot in 2005, which is, apparently, an insult to every other Doctor Who and an attack on Barry as a person.”

Len nodded. “Capaldi’s a good actor. Not really Doctor material, though. I liked Eccleston and Tennant, but no one can replace Baker.”

“Oh, careful there, big brother, your geek is showing.” Laughter echoed down the stairs and Lisa looked back over her shoulder.

“What are they doing?” Please don’t say Cards Against Humanity. That never ended well.

“Barry’s trying to convince Hartley to design a sound frequency that’ll disintegrate clothing without harming the person wearing it. So far, Hartley hasn’t agreed, but Barry has some very convincing arguments.”

“Such as?”

“There are several issues of GQ magazine up there. Wouldn’t you know it? Hartley has a type and Barry nailed it.”

Len didn’t want to know, he really didn’t want to know. Barry Allen was a manic ball of sunshine with a hair trigger and the ability to turn Len’s den of silent, sullen criminals into a rowdy group of overgrown children. Not even Mick was immune. Len was fairly certain he’d seen him crack half a smile the other day.

“You should go upstairs. Barry’s waiting.” Lisa got to her feet and moved to stand behind the chair, hands on the frame. “He didn’t eat your ice cream sandwiches, by the way. Ate just about everything else, even Mick’s jerky, but not those. Be sure to tell him thank you.”

*****
It took three and a half months for another meta-human to pop up. As luck would have it, he was out of town doing reconnaissance with Lisa and the kiddies. Mick had hung back and he could have passed it on to him, but Oliver’s words had been scratching at the back of his mind.

Barry needed a push. He needed a nudge. He needed Len to step back and make him be a hero again. And as much as every instinct Len had said that wasn’t a good idea, as much as it pained him to admit it, even internally, Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak knew Barry better than he did. At least, they knew who Barry had been.

Fine.

He texted Barry back, called it a favor and ignored the sick feeling in his gut that said he was doing the wrong thing.

*****

They wrapped up surveillance and were heading back when Mick called.

“Buddy, you need to get back here. Now.”

“What’s wrong?”

“The kid’s hurt.”

“How bad?”

“Bad.” There was a pause. “I don’t wanna move him.”

“Where is he?”

“Back door.”

“We’re five minutes out.”

*****

Bad was an understatement. Barry was barely breathing, his body laid out in front of the backdoor of the warehouse. Mick was crouched beside him, tense and scowling.

Len dropped down to one knee and pressed fingers to Barry’s neck, feeling the weak pulse. “You found him like this?”
“Heard somethin’ hit the door. When I came to check, he was here.” Mick’s hands clenched. “I thought he was dead.”

He probably would have been if it wasn’t for his meta-human healing. Len rubbed a hand over his face and took a deep breath. They needed to take this inside before someone saw. “Help me get him upstairs.”

Barry was deceptively thin, but apparently there was more than skin and bones under that suit. It took both Len and Mick working together to get him into the rec room without aggravating whatever injuries he had – internal and external. Despite their efforts, Barry was still groaning, eyes fluttering as he struggled for consciousness while Len pulled open the top of the shirt.

Jesus Christ. The kid’s abdomen was a rainbow of color, the entire left rib cage black and purple, the bruising spreading up to Barry’s shoulder and down his arm. The arm itself was pulled awkwardly away from the shoulder, bone jutting out above it, clearly dislocated.

“Len?” Barry’s hoarse whisper cut through his thoughts.

He put a hand on Barry’s forehead. “Don’t move.”

Barry stared up at him with glassy eyes for several seconds before he sucked in breath and tried to force himself up with his good arm.

“I said don’t move.”

“Have to… I have to go.” Barry fell back with a cringe and a pained cry. “Can’t be here. Len, I can’t be here.”

“Barry…”

“Eddie. I need Eddie. I’m supposed to be with Eddie. Take me to Eddie. Len, please. I’m supposed to be with Eddie.”

That shouldn’t hurt, but it did. It wasn’t like Barry had ever come to him for help before, so he shouldn’t be surprised that Barry didn’t want it this time. Of course, want it or not, he was getting it. “I’m not taking you anywhere until I know you’re okay.”

Barry hesitated, looking around the room at the other Rogues with wide, shining eyes before he nodded and focused back on Len. “My shoulder, you need to reset it and I need… food. I need food to heal. Food and sleep, but food first, then take me to Eddie. Promise?”

As much as Len wanted to tell Barry exactly where he could stick that particular request, he was suddenly remembering all those times Barry had eaten everything in the kitchen and passed out, unresponsive for hours before he’d woken up. How many of those times had Barry been injured and they hadn’t known?

He couldn’t think about that now. “Lisa, get a cold pack ready. Shawna, juice. Mick, hold him down. Barry?”

Barry nodded tersely, lips tight.

“Tell me when it’s in.”

Mick leaned in to press his forearm over Barry’s chest, pinning his upper body while Len took Barry’s arm and gently straightened it, pulling until he heard a soft click and Barry patted the couch.
with his other arm, breathlessly repeating. “It’sinit’sinit’sinit’sin.”

Len laid the arm back down on the sofa and Mick and him worked together to peel the top of the suit off. Lisa swooped in with the cold pack, laying it on the swollen socket. A moment later, Shawna popped back into the room, holding three half gallons of orange juice and Len and Mick moved out of the way so she and Lisa could help Barry sit up.

His face was dangerously pale as Shawna tipped the juice up to his mouth and swatted his shaking hands away when he tried to take hold the jug himself. It didn’t take him long to down the first half gallon. Should have made him sick, actually, but Barry just sat back, panting with a strange, unfocused look in his eyes.

The room was oppressively silent.

They should be doing something. Finding out who hurt Barry. Len doubted it was the girl. From the footage and eye witness accounts, she was a teenager, hiding in the construction sites and she’d only attacked when she was provoked or threatened. If she had better control over those powers of hers, Len wouldn’t have minded her on his team.

He stopped himself right there, because if he wasn’t careful, the warehouse would turn into Leonard Snart’s Home for Wayward Meta-humans and Lisa would never let him live that down. Besides, there were more important things to worry about at the moment.

Stepping back, he turned to Hartley. “There were cameras at the construction site. Take Mick. I don’t care what you have to do, get the footage.”

Hartley nodded and turned on his heels, heading for the stairs. Mick hesitated, but Len leveled him with a stare. “I need to know who did this.”

Reluctantly, Mick followed Hartley down the stairs.

When he looked back, Barry was staring at him.

Shawna started to put a second jug of orange juice to his mouth, but Barry pushed it away. “No. No, I need to get to Eddie. You have to take me to Eddie now. Len, you promised.”

“Actually…”

“No, no, no. Please. If I’m not there, he’ll look for me.”

“Who?”

Barry shook his head, sharp and fast, then flinched at the sudden movement. “I can’t. I can’t tell you. I can’t. There are rules. I’m not supposed to be here. Please, Len. I need Eddie. I’m supposed to be with Eddie. Please, Len, please. He can’t find me here. I won’t let him.”

Len closed his eyes against the anger welling up inside him. Eddie had to be Detective Thawne. Barry had been spending a lot of time with him recently and as much as Len wanted somewhere to place the blame, he didn’t think Eddie could have done this.

“Lenny?” Len opened his eyes and Barry’s face was twisted in desperation. “Please? I barely made it here. I can’t run all the way there. I would. I would, but I can’t and I need your help. I need you to take me to Eddie before he realizes I’m not there.”

*Shit.* “Did Detective Thawne do this to you?”

Len sighed in resignation. “Lisa, help me get him cleaned up and changed. Shawna, get more juice, he’s finishing it on the way.”

The bright smile he got from Barry and the breathy, “Thank you,” didn’t make him feel any better. He was going to take Barry to Detective Thawne and make sure he was okay, then Len needed to review that security footage, after that… after that he was taking another trip to Star City.
If things start happening

Chapter Summary

He didn’t need help. He was a twenty-six year old man and he was perfectly capable of making his own decisions. He could take care of himself and if he wanted to sleep with a homicidal sociopath that was his business. So, why did everyone insist on trying to help him?

Chapter Notes

Confused, scared, concerned about Barry's psychological and moral well-being? So am I, and I know where this is going.

"If things start happening, don’t worry, don’t stew, just go right along and you’ll start happening too." -Dr. Seuss-

-Present Day (One Year and Four Months)-

Barry was a beautiful boy; a young man, really; taller than Eobard by inches, lean and tightly muscled, his skin smooth and pale. Every bruise reflected back darkly, every scratch and flush showed vivid red.

Eobard lay on his side, propped up on one elbow and looked down at the map work of color along Barry’s back – courtesy of hitting the pavement at just over six hundred miles an hours. Faster, but not fast enough. The bone deep bruising that should have taken days to reach that level of lividity were, only hours later, a striking array of purple, green and yellow, spotting blood red in the center.

He ran a hand over the deeper scratches, guaranteed to scar before they healed completely. Although, with Barry’s caloric intake increased, for not nearly as long as Eobard would like. He preferred them to last days, a week if he could manage it. His mark gouged, however temporarily, into his nemesis. His creation. His… not lover, that was far too kind a word for what they were to each other. He wasn’t entirely sure there was a suitable word for it.

That wasn’t to say some part of him didn’t care for Barry. He cared for him far more than he would like to admit. In a fashion, he may even love him. There were days that he caught himself wondering what the rush was. Days when he considered staying just a little longer, enjoying this victory, however flawed it was, for a few more years. Then reality set in, and he remembered that the longer he stayed, the longer he kept this up, the more damage he did to the timeline and the more difficult it would be to find his way home.

Barry’s obsession with him was an all consuming illness. Eobard had absolutely no illusions about that and despite what he’d told Barry, changing the timeline that drastically would have more consequences than just saving his mother. Ripples went in all directions and there was really no
telling what or who would be affected. Eobard could use the wormhole to get to his timeline, regardless of what Barry did. Where Barry ended up was far less certain.

It was almost, almost regrettable, but he’d known how this was going to end from the moment Barry crawled into his bed. When he continued to do so, however reluctantly, until it became something more pressing, something Barry needed, something Eobard himself craved.

He settled his hand at the base of Barry’s spine, thumb dragging over a series of five small, deep cuts at the back of Barry’s hip. Eobard’s finger nails digging in and holding on, moving Barry when the young man had tried to say he couldn’t keep going – he could, Eobard was as aware of Barry’s limits as he was of his own.

“You’re being creepy again.” Eobard dug his thumb into one of the marks, not maliciously, but enough to earn a sharp, seething breathe in from Barry, half asleep, eyes not even open. “What is it with you watching people when they don’t know it? Is it a fetish? Are you a voyeur?”

Barry’s eyes did open then, faintly glassy from only just having woken up and bright in the dim light of the bedroom.

Eobard softened the touch to something more soothing. “Perhaps in some respects. Though I’ve never been particularly fond of watching people do things I’d rather do myself.”

To emphasize the point, he moved his hand lower and Barry chuckled into his absurd Star Wars themed pillow, a pilfered artifact from Cisco’s apartment, along with the thin fleece blanket of a similar theme. When Eobard dropped his head down and pressed his lips to the back of Barry’s neck, teeth grazing suggestively over already sensitive skin, Barry started to roll over, stopped himself with a cringe, and settled back onto his stomach. “What were you thinking about? Before I woke up.”

Eobard responded by nipping at Barry’s neck. “I was thinking that it will be very hard to let this go.”

“You don’t have to.” Barry’s breath hitched when the teeth scarped more firmly. “No, not… I mean, we were enemies before, so either I live a really long time, or you travel in time to pick fights with me on a fairly regular basis, right?”

Eobard hummed, “Spoilers, Mr. Allen.”

Barry pushed up onto his elbows, shoving Eobard away in his haste. “Did you just quote Doctor Who?”

He hadn’t meant to, but he had, hadn’t he? That was… unfortunate. He started to refute it, if only because Barry’s enthusiasm when Eobard slipped and quoted television shows bordered on childlike and that was hardly the tone he’d been trying to set for the evening. However, his argument was interrupted by the telltale buzz of an incoming text message from Barry’s phone on the bedside table.

Barry’s face screwed up in annoyance, but rather than ignore it, he sat up and grabbed the device, thumbing on the screen. The annoyance deepened as he responded. It buzzed again a moment later and Barry’s mouth tugged in an abortive smile as he tapped furiously back.

“Barry…”

“Hold on.”

Oh, the pitfalls of sleeping with the younger generation. Sadly, the infatuation with technology would only worsen over the years, as it grew and became even more interactive and immediate in its gratification.
Barry huffed at the next buzz and shook his head, responding one last time before putting it face down on the dresser. “Now, where were we?”

The phone buzzed twice in quick succession and Eobard caught Barry’s hand reaching for it. “I was about to teach you that it’s rude to get distracted when I’m trying to seduce you.”

*****

It was two hours before Barry made it out of bed. Thankfully, with his bars on hand, he didn’t have to take the bus. Unfortunately, he was still stiff and at least a little bruised. He was pretty sure he’d broken multiple bones when he’d hit the ground that afternoon.

Ever since the incident with the copper stealing meta six weeks ago, he hadn’t gone to the warehouse injured. Len was too curious. Barry didn’t want to give him a reason to start digging again. Unfortunately, Len hadn’t taken ‘I’m busy’ for an answer, so Barry had agreed to come as soon as he could.

When Harrison had finished with him, he’d pretended to sleep until the other speedster had slipped out of bed and headed off to work on his particle accelerator. He thought he was so sneaky. Maybe he was, but with Barry fully charged, he wasn’t sleeping anywhere near as heavily as he used to. It was fun to play the part, though, and it kept Harrison off his guard.

Despite the progress in the rest of the city, the east end was still primarily dark. Most of the residential streets had electricity, but the repairs hadn’t extended to the warehouses and without street lamps it was nearly black this late at night. It was a good thing Barry had been there so many times he didn’t need light to get around.

Inside, Len wasn’t in his office and he wasn’t in the store room, but Barry could hear voices upstairs. Len didn’t usually hang out in the rec room, but if he wasn’t downstairs…

Never mind, if Len wasn’t there, he’d wait for him with the others.

He sped up the steps and through room, making observations as he went. Shawna was on the couch, looking annoyed and bored. Lisa was standing behind her, mouth open as she spoke to Mick, who stood a few feet away with his heat gun hanging off his belt. She looked almost angry.

Had something happened? He should have come sooner. Len never actually asked him to come to warehouse. He should have realized that meant something could be wrong. Still, it didn’t look like anyone was hurt. If Len had been injured, Lisa wouldn’t leave his side.

He dropped on the couch next to Shawna, grinning as she startled. “Hey!”

She smacked his arm and he rubbed the spot, incredulously. “What’d I do?”

“Scarlet.”

He looked up and finally found Len, to the left of the door, arms crossed over his chest and his face
set in a careful, neutral expression. Okay, that wasn’t good. He was definitely upset at something Barry had done, Barry just had no idea what that something was. Oh, well, when in doubt, feign ignorance. “Sorry it took so long. Everything okay?”

Behind him, Lisa walked off and made her way into the back where the bedrooms were, but Barry couldn’t bring himself to look away from Len, who was staring at him with unnerving intensity. Okay, this was weird. It was beyond weird. Not that Len never did his serious stare, he just never did it when anyone else was around. It wasn’t just Len, either, Shawna and Mick were both glaring at him like he’d committed some kind of crime and he hadn’t. At least, he didn’t think he had.

Barry took a moment to think it through and, nope, no crimes. Well, technically, he was aiding and abetting Harrison, who had killed people and that was a crime, but Len couldn’t know about that.

Then the universe decided to betray him and Barry stared in shock as Lisa walked in, Eddie behind her and behind him, Oliver in his Arrow gear.

“No!” He stood up, but Shawna had a hand on him and he knew if he tried to move, she’d teleport him back to the couch just as quickly. “You can’t be here! You’re not… You can’t! You said Oliver. We agreed you’d get Oliver. You can’t involve them. That wasn’t the plan!”

Eddie stayed back with Oliver, near the kitchen table. Lisa came back to the couch, putting herself in front of Barry. “Relax, Barry, we were already involved.”

“What?”

Len hadn’t moved from the door, but his voice cut across the room like a shot. “Sit down, Barry.”

Barry hesitated, but, really, the damage was already done, wasn’t it? He sat with a huff, Shawna sitting with him, her hand still resting like a warning on his shoulder. Lisa took the other side, boxing him in between the two of them while Len and Mick stared him down from their respective positions and Oliver just looked at him with disapproval. He felt like an eight year old being put in time out. Actually, that probably wasn’t that far off from the truth.

Oliver spoke next, his voice soft and coaxing. “Barry, Eddie’s been telling us some… disturbing things.”

Stupid Eddie.

“He says Harrison Wells is the Reverse-Flash.”

Barry licked his lips and focused on the ground, trying to come up with explanations, excuses, lies. Except they wouldn’t believe him, not when he’d been so evasive. They’d take Eddie’s word over his, or they’d start tailing Harrison to find the truth out for themselves, which was just as bad.

Reluctantly, he nodded.

“And you really are in a relationship with him?”

Barry picked at his trim of his running shoes as he admitted the truth with a short, “Yes.”

“Is it,” Oliver paused like he was searching for the right words and that couldn’t be good. “Barry, is he forcing you?”

“No.”
“Is he blackmailing you?”

“No!”

“Then explain it to me. Because I find it difficult to believe you would willingly sleep with the man who killed your mother.”

He chanced a look up and it wasn’t pity, or even anger he saw around him, it was concern. Well, concern and Len’s alarming stare that wasn’t helped when the man spoke. “He’s hurting you.”

And suddenly, Barry was very aware of the half healed scratch marks along his back, the bruising on his thighs and around his wrists. Shit. Shit shit shit. No point lying about that, either. They wouldn’t take his word for it and he was a thin shirt and hoodie away from the truth.

Of course, he could always bend that truth just a little. “We all have our kinks, Lenny. I like being roughed up a little. It’s not like I don’t heal fast enough.”

Len didn’t so much as twitch. “Like the time I found you half dead at my back door?”

“That…” Of course Eddie would have told them that was Harrison. “That was different.”

“How?”

“I knew better.”

Len’s expression did change then, becoming tighter, a small, subtle step closer to anger. He held up a hand, putting up one finger. “That’s strike one.”

“What?!” Now there was a strike system?

Oliver cleared his throat. “I think what Snart is trying to say is that we don’t believe you enjoy having your spleen ruptured, Barry.”

Oh, that was it! The only way they knew any details about anything Harrison had done was if Eddie had told them. He looked up, glaring at the silent detective. “Traitor.”

“It wasn’t…”

“No, I agreed to help you lock Harrison up. I never said anything about telling them the details of my relationship.” Shawna’s hand clenched on his shoulder in warning and he gave her an incredulous, sidelong stare. Just because Eddie was a traitorous little tattle tale, didn’t mean Barry was going to hurt him. Run him three states over and leave him in the safe part of a small town, sure, but he wouldn’t hurt him.

“Barry, it wasn’t me.” Wasn’t Eddie? But then who else…? “It was Caitlin – the other Caitlin. She included copies of her medical reports and x-rays in case you tried to talk them out of it.”

The worst part was she wasn’t wrong. Thanks to the other him, he’d realized having Harrison locked up for a little while could work to his benefit, but only for a little while, only as long as it took to convince Harrison to give up on that other future. A few months at worst. After that, Barry had a series of arguments set up to convince Oliver and Felicity to let him go – Harrison had turned over a new leaf since the tidal wave, he’d seen the error of his ways and was trying to make it up to Barry, he’d even been working with the CCPD, and the Reverse-Flash hadn’t been seen in over a year, so it’s not like he was terrorizing the city.
Of course, all of those were useless now, because they were all looking at Barry like he was some kind of victim and all they’d see when they looked at Harrison was a monster. Not that they were entirely wrong, but it was going to make things a lot more difficult.

As if sensing the source of his annoyance, Oliver spoke up. “Would you have tried to talk us out of it?”

“No.” He paused and glanced around the room at the array of disbelieving faces. “Not… right away.”

“Why?”

“Because, it…” He was a twenty-seven year old man. Why was it so hard to convince people that he was capable of making his own decisions? He’d gotten himself into this and if he wanted out, he’d get out. “I can handle Harrison. I have it completely under control.”

Len spoke again, with a terse, “Strike two.”

“But…”

Lisa patted Barry’s leg just above his knee. “Don’t. You’ll only make it worse.”

He would have argued with her, but since he had no idea what Len was talking about, he decided to take her advice and shut up.

Oliver shook his head, clearly concerned, but he didn’t push the issue and he didn’t move to intervene or offer his own comfort. That was probably a good idea. Barry wasn’t entirely sure he wanted Oliver’s sympathy at the moment.

“All right, so, now that we’ve established… that, let’s move on to the other reason we’re here. Felicity and Hartley are going over the data Eddie brought back and Hartley thinks he can convert one of the pods if he has six hours alone at S.T.A.R. Labs. Our biggest problem are the cameras.”

No, their biggest problem was there was already a cell designed for a speedster, but if Barry told them that, he’d have to tell them why. Instead, he rolled his eyes with a sigh. “Don’t worry about the cameras.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Oliver exchange a skeptical look with Len. “No offense, Barry, but I’ll need more than that. How are you taking care of the cameras?”

“They’re linked to an A.I. he brought with him from the future. Apparently, I created it. He doesn’t know I know, but it does whatever I say and I’ve tested that theory. Trust me. If Gideon wasn’t covering, there’s an easily impressed volunteer with a kink for forensics that would have been way past dead by now.” He chuckled to himself and chanced a looked up, but Oliver didn’t seem all the impressed and Eddie just looked like he was about to be sick. “Whatever. The point is, the cameras aren’t a problem. He’ll be at Iron Heights working on the meta-human wing all day next Thursday. There are guards with him around the clock, so he can’t speed through it. It should take him most of the day.”

Oliver nodded his understanding. “Okay, Hartley and Felicity…”

Barry interjected quickly. “Just Hartley.”

He knew for a fact Hartley could get the job done without Felicity’s help. He was pretty sure Oliver only wanted her there to snoop around and Barry wasn’t letting that happen. She was too good with
computers. He’d never been able to bring himself to ask, but he was fairly certain Harrison kept archives and logs and if he did, she’d find them and… no, just no.

For what it was worth, Len seemed to agree, though Barry was sure he had his own reasons. When Oliver tried to argue, Len stepped over him with unwavering eye contact. “Barry’s right. Hartley’s good, but he’s easily distracted. It’s better if he goes in alone.”

Oliver folded his arms over his chest, straightening defensively. “He should have backup.”

Len dropped his hand to the hilt of his cold gun. “He doesn’t need backup and, if he did, it would be one of us, not your computer analyst.”

Barry watched the back and forth curiously. There was something going on between them. They were both leaders, so there was bound to be some friction, but Oliver wasn’t exactly a stranger to working with criminals and Len was practically a vigilante himself, no matter how vehemently he refused to acknowledge it. This was something more than a simple power play. If that was all it was, Len would be undermining Oliver’s authority with horrible puns and snide remarks, not outright refusals and vague threats with the Sub-Zero Gun.

He’d have to get to that later. Raising his hand, he waved it to get their attention. “Guys, not to rain on your whole alpha male stand off thing, but that wasn’t a suggestion. Only Hartley or I’m not helping. If this goes south and Harrison finds out, he has no idea Hartley’s connected to me and he almost, kind of likes him, so I could maybe, possibly work something out to keep him alive. Solid thirty percent chance Hartley walks away. If it’s Felicity, though? There’s nothing I can say or do to change Harrison’s mind and he knows she works with you, so your entire plan goes,” he held his hand up in a fist and popped it open with an under-exaggerated, “poof.”

Oliver exchanged a look with Eddie and when Eddie nodded, his shoulders slumped. “Fine.”

If Barry had been expecting Len to look happy that Oliver had caved, he would have been disappointed. Okay, maybe he was a little disappointed and maybe Barry could have been a little more cooperative from the onset. Maybe if he hadn’t been so sarcastic and generally negative about the whole thing when Eddie got back from Star City a week ago, they wouldn’t be treating him like a hostile prisoner, but it was frustrating. It was frustrating being treated like a child that didn’t know what was best for itself. He knew exactly what he was doing, he just didn’t care. No, that wasn’t right. He cared, sometimes, just not the way Eddie wanted him to.

He sat back quietly while Oliver and Len started working through their plan, or, more accurately, posturing for leadership of their mish-mashed band of would-be do-gooders. When Barry had worked with Oliver, he’d mostly deferred to him. Oliver was older with more experience and Barry had relied on that. He still did. However, Len had just as much experience as Oliver, if not more, and he wasn’t about to step in line behind anyone.

Watching someone question Oliver’s every decision was more than a little amusing. Who was Firestorm? Why should they trust him? How was he going to help bring down a Speedster? The size of Ray Palmer’s tech didn’t change the fact he was an overgrown boy scout. They needed to keep the team small, lean, fewer targets, more spread out.

“You, me, Mick, and this Firestorm – happy birthday, Mick.” Mick grunted his appreciation with momentarily raised eyebrows and that may have been the most pleased Barry had ever seen the pyromaniac. “But we don’t need a tiny moving target no one can see, not unless that suit of his can withstand absolute zero and Mick’s heat.”

Oliver sighed, long and laborious and nodded. “Fine, we’ll keep Ray on the sidelines, but I want him
there in case we need him.”

“Fine by me.” As if Oliver had been asking Len’s permission.

So far in the last five minutes, he’d counted six ‘fines’ between them, which meant nothing was actually fine. It also meant Barry was once again mournful of his inability to get drunk, because watching them plan something like this would make a really great drinking game.

Actually… he tapped Lisa and held up six fingers, grinning as he mouthed, ‘Fine.’

She stifled a chuckle and smacked his leg playfully, shaking her head. Oliver cleared his throat and Barry dropped his hand to his lap. “Sorry.”

Oliver pinched the bridge of his nose. “Before we move on, is there anything you want to add, Barry?”

He considered his answer carefully, because really, there was a lot he could add. Most of it wasn’t relevant. Not that it mattered. They weren’t actually interested in getting his input. At best, Oliver was just trying to decide whether Barry was going to cooperate. After a heavy handed internal debate that lasted all of three seconds, he went with, “Do you think we could work in conjugal visits?”

The room went still.

“Just saying, you’re locking my boyfriend up indefinitely. The least you could do is provide access.”

Len’s expression finally broke from neutral to a barely smothered anger, stiff and sneering. “That’s strike three, Scarlet. Go take a time out.”

“Good one, that’s funny.” Except Len looked extremely serious and when Barry didn’t move, he aimed a pointed finger at the hallway that led into the bedrooms. “Wait, for real? What the hell, Len? You can’t put me in time out!”

“The hell I can’t.” The cold gun lit up in Len’s hand and Barry tried to stand only to find himself back on the couch, Shawna’s hand gripping the back of his shirt like a vice. Barry turned to her sharply and she dropped her hand, backing up several inches. He looked around the rest of the room and was caught slightly off guard by the apparent call to arms. Mick’s heat gun was out, a finger on the trigger; Oliver had a hand extended over his shoulder to grip his bow; and Eddie was standing, tense and ready to intervene if necessary.

What? Why would they…? He’d never hurt them. Not any of them. He wouldn’t even betray their stupid plan and not just because it benefited him. He may be morally ambiguous at times, but not about them. Not even Mick, who, quite frankly, scared him a little. Or a lot.

Soft hands took his face and pulled him around to Lisa, smiling sweetly at him. “Barry, baby, why don’t you just calm down, come with me to my room, and show me on the cupcake what you’d do to me if Lenny wouldn’t kill you for it.”

Why was she…? Wait a minute. “You have cupcakes?”

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“Oh, my god, these are so good.”

Lisa leaned back against her desk, smiling. “I know. You have Shawna to thank for that. They opened a new bakery downtown and she brought back three dozen in case you showed up.”

Barry looked at the half eaten cupcake with a frown. “She’s scared of me.”

“Hm?”

“Shawna, she’s scared of me. I wouldn’t hurt her, though. I tried…” He licked across the icing, sucking the flavor off his tongue while he tried to put it into words. “I know we screwed up with the pipeline. She didn’t belong there. Not even Tony, really. He was a creep and a bully, but still. It’s just Harrison said it was for the best. He said the police couldn’t hold them and… we all just listened to him. You know?”

Lisa grabbed one of the eleven cupcakes still in the box and sat back on her bed. “Not really, but it’s not about the pipeline.”

“It’s not?”

“No. She was mad about that at first, but like it or not, being there may actually have saved her life.”

“But I wouldn’t do it again. She knows that, right?” Because he’d never actually said that. He’d never sat down and told her he was sorry or that he regretted it or that he would never, ever do it again. If he had any other choice, he wouldn’t be doing it to Harrison, either. It was just hard to find the words sometimes, or they came out wrong, so he hadn’t tried. He should have.

“Yeah, she knows.”

“Then what? Why is she afraid of me?”

Lisa took her time eating the cupcake and wiping her hands off before she answered. Barry would have pushed, but he was too busy doing the same thing and the next cupcake he grabbed was dark chocolate. When they’d made it half through the box – okay, when Barry had made it half through the box, Lisa leaned back on her hands.

“No one thinks you want to hurt anyone, Barry. We’re just worried you’ll get mad enough not to realize what you’re doing until you’ve already done it.”

“I would never…”

“Indigo.”

Barry felt an immediate swell of annoyance. “Isn’t purple. Hartley’s deaf, not color blind. If Sesame Street can get it right, so can he.”

Lisa raised her perfectly shaped eyebrows and Barry closed his eyes, biting his lip. Okay. Okay, maybe he got mad and did some really stupid things, but it wasn’t… it didn’t mean he’d hurt them.

He chanced a look at her. “Are you? Scared of me?”

“No, of course not and neither is Mick.” Which wasn’t much of a comfort – Barry wasn’t sure there
was anything that scared Mick.

“What about Len?” He almost didn’t want to know, except he kind of needed to hear it, one way or
the other.

Lisa reached over and put a hand on his leg, making sure she had his full, undivided attention. “You
wish, cutie. He’s cautious and protective, of you as much as any of his Rogues.”

“Really?”

“Promise.”

*****

They didn’t sit in silence, because Lisa liked to fill space with words. She told him everything that
had happened in Star City and with Oliver – at least, as far as she knew. She hadn’t been there, but
she’d pestered Len into telling her.

He listened intently, somewhere between impressed and horrified at the lengths Len had gone to. It
wasn’t like he didn’t know Len was worried, but going all the way to Star City, facing down the
Green Arrow, not to mention Felicity? That was… it was something. Barry just wasn’t sure what.
More than he expected, maybe, definitely more than he deserved.

By the time the door opened and Len stood in the entrance, glaring across the room at him, Barry’s
defiance was mostly quelled. With the influx of sugar, he was tired, slumped down in the chair with
his legs splayed out across the floor. He needed to get home soon, put in a few hours of sleep before
Harrison got back.

Lisa patted Len’s arm as she slipped out to leave them alone, but she didn’t say anything about
taking it easy on Barry, so apparently, even Lisa wasn’t on his side, cupcake bribery aside.

When Lisa was out of sight, Len crossed his arms over his chest. “Well?”

Barry rolled his eyes. “What? I’m not apologizing, if that’s what you’re…”

“I don’t want an apology.” Len stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. “I want an
explanation.”

“For what?” Why did everyone have to be so cryptic and confusing? What was there to explain?
“Eddie told you everything. I didn’t want this. I didn’t want his help, I didn’t want Oliver involved,
and I don’t want you…”

He stopped himself, choking it off before he could say what he was thinking out loud.

Len didn’t back down at Barry’s sharp tone, which at least meant Lisa had been telling the truth. He
wasn’t afraid of Barry. He was, however, still angry. “For why you didn’t think you could trust me.”

“I do.”
Barry sat up, giving Len eye contact, which Barry generally tried to avoid. He didn’t like what he saw most of the time, but with Len it was easier. Len didn’t flinch away, he didn’t do pity, and for all that he might be confused by how Barry acted, he was never put off by it. Even when Barry had admitted to sleeping with his mother’s killer earlier, there hadn’t been any disgust there, not like with Eddie or Oliver. Not that he blamed them. Disgust was a perfectly normal response, but it was nice not to feel judged.

“I trust you, Len, that’s why I never told you.” Barry stood, moving forward in a blink to stand in front of Len, who blinked in surprise, but didn’t move back. “Why did you go to Star City?”

“Felicity Smoak.”

“Don’t pretend to be stupid, Lenny, it doesn’t suit you.” Barry froze, the feeling of Harrison’s words in his mouth like ash. “I’m sorry, that wasn’t… I didn’t mean that.”

At least Len didn’t look offended or any angrier. “I wanted answers and you weren’t giving them. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because you couldn’t have done anything about it and I didn’t want you to.”

He started to move past Len, only to be stopped by a hand on his arm. “Are you with us?”

Barry leaned in, grinning. “I’m with you.”

He poked Len’s nose and took just a moment to enjoy the incredulous expression that twisted over the older man’s expression before running.

*****

When Eobard came home in the early hours before dawn, he found Barry more or less where he’d left him – sprawled over their bed, taking up more than his share of space as well as Eobard’s pillow. Despite appearances, however, traces of the speedforce clung to him, a feeling of static power that said he’d been out recently.

Eobard took the time to strip out of his own clothes and have a shower before sliding into the bed. Barry made no pretense of sleep, immediately moving to rest his head on Eobard’s chest with a slurred. “Morning.”

“You were out.”

Barry nodded. “Couldn’t sleep. Figured I might as well go for a run. ‘M getting faster.”

“You are.” Eobard allowed himself to slip his hand under Barry, pulling him closer and received a happy sigh for his efforts.

There was a moment silence between them, punctuated with Barry shifting against him until he’d slotted that familiar place. His place. Eobard will never be sure how he allowed Barry Allen, of all people, to find a place with him.
“Harrison?”

“Hm.”

“Tell me about the future. Mine. When we finish this.”

It was the first time Barry had asked that. Traditionally, talk of the future Eobard wanted to get back to was paramount to asking for a fight. Not that Eobard never brought it up. An angry Barry could be quite enticing, but Barry had never asked him to and the boy didn’t feel tense at the moment. He wasn’t strung tight and ready to spring, he was relaxed and at ease.

Eobard dropped his head, breathing in Barry’s smell, taking in the soft scent of coconut shampoo and the faded smell of sweat from the evening’s run. “You’re part of something called the Justice League. You’re friends include The Green Arrow, Superman, Wonder Woman, and an obnoxious fighter pilot that goes by the title of the Green Lantern.”

“What about Iris? I marry her, right?”

“You do. The two of you have twins.” He left out the darker part that he’d played in their lives, it wasn’t necessary and it wasn’t what Barry was asking for.

“And Cisco?”

“He’s in the Justice League as well. His abilities as the Vibe are… extraordinary.”

“Caitlin?”

“She has powers of her own, formidable ones.”

“Is she part of the Justice League, too?”

Eobard had promised Barry the truth, but where Caitlin was concerned, that truth was unkind. After a short pause, he lied. “Yes.”

Barry tensed against him and he was almost afraid Barry had somehow sensed it, but the boy simply dissolved into a yawn, relaxing again immediately after. “I’m tired. Can’t sleep when you leave.”

Eobard kissed the top of Barry’s head. “Get some rest. You still have a few hours before work.”

“Love you.”

Soon. In six weeks, he’d be going home.
You’re on your own

Chapter Summary

The hardest thing to do is let go.

Chapter Notes

FYI, peoples, the next chapter is already done, it just needs editing. So, I’m down to writing the epilogue. My goal is to have this thing posted before the first episode of season three starts. *fingers enthusiastically crossed* Encouragement is appreciated. Just saying.

"You’re on your own. And you know what you know. And you are the one who’ll decide where to go." -Dr. Seuss-

-Past (Two Months and Three Weeks After the Tidal Wave)-

The sound of footsteps coming down the hall was almost as distracting as the smell of food that they brought with them. He tapped his phone on the desk and noted the time. Twelve fifteen meant that would be Harrison, bringing lunch. It had been nine days since he’d made his ‘miraculous’ recovery and Barry almost missed the sound of the wheelchair.

The science behind that recovery had been haphazard, dubious at best and involving a small sample from an otherwise missing metahuman, making it impossible to recreate, but as Harrison had pointed out, timing was everything. The world’s focus was still on the tragedy. His accelerator explosion paled in comparison. Harrison Wells was yesterday’s news and since he was something of a recluse, he didn’t need to worry about other scientists sniffing around too often. Dr. McGee had been one of the few to try, but Harrison had so far managed to evade her scrutiny.

Barry shook his head. No, he needed to focus. He was almost there. He could feel the answer tugging at the corners of his mind.

The toxin was a derivative of bufotenine, but a very specific one. 5-methoxy-N, N-dimethyltryptamine. In its pure form it was an extremely potent psychedelic and caused vivid hallucinations. It was found in a wide variety of plants, but the lab results of this particular blend didn’t match any known plant species.

“Barry?”

“Hold on.”

Oh god, that was pizza. He hadn’t pizza in ages. Well, not real pizza. There had been the super cheap cardboard ones that had come in with Redcross and Fema and the frozen store bought ones
after that were barely a step above that. This smelled like real pizza, with actual tomatoes and was that sausage?

No. Focus.

Not a plant. It wasn’t synthetic, which left… Barry’s eyes lit up.

“Barry.”

“Not yet.”

The door to his lab closed and the lock clicked into place. A moment later, a hand reached up to cup the back of his neck, but he swatted it away, focused on his screen.

He moved back through the search engine, changing the parameters from plant to animal, altered the filter on the DNA, and…

“Yes!” He raised his hands in triumph.

Harrison leaned in, the side of his face brushing against Barry’s ear. “California River Toad? I hate to disappoint you, Barry, but with your metabolism, even toad licking isn’t going to have very much of an affect on you.”

Barry turned his head, raising an eyebrow. “Are you saying you’ve tried?”

“I was young. I wanted to know if there was anything that could be used against me, so I tested various drugs – psychotropics, sedatives, stimulants – bufotenine, in high enough doses, can cause mild dizziness, but the amount found on a toad won’t make a dent.”

With an exaggerated roll of his eyes, Barry pushed his chair over to the other table, where the file lay open. “I guess I’ll just check toad licking off my list of things to do this weekend.”

He looked up in time to see Harrison smiling in amusement and Barry faltered. Just a little, a tiny moment of weakness where he caught himself thinking, ‘He looks handsome when he smiles,’ but he shook it off and turned back to the folder, noting his findings before closing it.

Harrison had insisted on a standing lunch date until he could trust Barry to eat regular meals on his own. Not that Barry was complaining. Well, he had at first. At first, he’d thrown a fit – broke half the glasses in the kitchen, most of the plate. Then Harrison had broken Barry’s wrist in return and really, it was just lunch. Barry was overreacting and Harrison was right. If he kept drowning himself in his work and forgetting to eat, he was going to do or say something he shouldn’t.

Besides, it wasn’t as bad as he’d thought it would be. After a few weeks back, Barry had managed to run off most of his co-workers. On some days, Harrison was a welcome break to the almost deafening silence in his lab.

Setting the folder aside, he eyed the four white and red boxes on the counter hungrily. “So, pizza?”

“A small Italian restaurant re-opened not far from the house. If I remember correctly, the food was passable.”

“Does it have a buffet?”

Harrison’s expression blanked and Barry couldn’t help laughing – the man could survive on Big Belly Burger for a month, but the very idea of a buffet offended him on an almost moral level. After
an amusing minute of silence, Harrison responded with, “No, it does not.”

“You know, as a speedster, I’d think you’d appreciate buffets a little more. All you can eat? With our metabolism?”

“Eating is more than simply shoving mass quantities of mediocre food down your throat. Someday soon, Mr. Allen, I’m going to work on refining your palate.”

“My palate’s just fine, Dr. Wells.”

They sat together at the table, the corner and four boxes of pizza between them. Barry did his best to ignore Harrison as he dug in. Ignored the way Harrison watched him eat, a content almost-smile gracing his lips when Barry’s eyes roll into his head with a moaned, “So good.”

Somewhere between pizza one and two, Barry relaxed enough that his leg swung out a little too far, his knee brushing against Harrison’s and he nearly, nearly pulled away, but just managed to stop himself. Harrison rewarded him by pulling his own leg back, content to let Barry have the space, as long as Harrison was the one giving it.

It was a tenuous peace, but it was something.

Of course, Barry had fought it. He’d pulled and pushed and fought and denied and hated himself, but it hadn’t gotten him anywhere. No, that wasn’t right. It had gotten him somewhere. It had gotten him into Harrison’s bed. Every single time. The more he fought it, the harder it was to fight. If he pushed, Harrison pushed back. If he fought, Harrison fought harder. If he pulled away… if he pulled away, Harrison let him and that was almost worse. It was like pulling a rubber band tight and then letting go. Barry found himself right back where he’d started and hating himself for it.

In the first two weeks after moving in, he’d slept in the guest room once. Once. Oh, he’d start in the guest room, but it was too quiet, too cold, too alone. After a few hours of staring at the ceiling, listening to the silence, he’d reluctantly make his way into Harrison’s room and Harrison was always awake, waiting and he always welcomed Barry under the covers with a knowing smile.

Then he’d woken up one morning to find his toothbrush in Harrison’s master bathroom and he’d lost all semblance of control. He’d agreed to move into Harrison’s house, not his bedroom. It didn’t matter that he’d only slept in the guest room once. That didn’t mean his toothbrush belonged anywhere near Harrison’s. It didn’t mean anything and how dare Harrison assume it did. How dare he move Barry’s toothbrush into the master bathroom like it belonged there. Like Barry belonged there.

In retrospect, he may have overreacted.

He’d had the entire next day alone on the couch to think about it. Harrison had called in for him, he’d been too busy being only half conscious to hear the full conversation, but as far as he could tell, Singh hadn’t been suspicious.

In the hours spent alone, before Harrison got home, he’d made up his mind. He wasn’t going to fight Harrison anymore. Not that he wasn’t angry, not that he didn’t want to, but it wasn’t getting him anywhere. If anything, it was making it worse. So, he was going to shut up and do what Harrison wanted. He was going to smile and play along until he could clear his head, until he had some kind of grip on himself and his own emotions. Despite his resolution, though, he found it was a lot easier said than done.

Harrison finished his own large pizza and sat back to watch Barry work on his second. “So, are you...”
going to tell me what that was really about?”

“Hm?”

“California River Toads?”

He shoved most of an entire slice in his mouth and grabbed the folder, passing it over for Harrison to look at. It wasn’t much. A young woman was in a coma. Her blood samples contained large amounts of a highly concentrated toxin. Of course, that wasn’t the interesting thing. He reached over to tap the paper, drawing attention to a line lower down on the page.

Harrison’s mouth thinned as he continued to read the line where Jones had penned his findings before passing it off to Barry earlier that morning. “Toxin source… unidentifiable.”

Barry swallowed. “Usually, the organic markers can be used to identify it, but they weren’t coming up on any of the known databases. So, I separated the most prominent molecular structure out and that particular blend is only found in…”

“The California River Toad.”

“Right, and what you have left?”

“Human.”

“Meta-human.”

With a sigh, Harrison set the folder down. “You can’t know that, Barry.”

“I can and I do. That concentration of that toxin isn’t found in anything in nature and there’s no other reason for human organic material to be mixed in like that.”

“It could be synthetic.”

“It’s not synthetic.” He closed the lid on the second box, several slices remaining uneaten and ignored Harrison’s disapproving frown. “You know I’m right.”

Barry couldn’t manage to suppress his grin in the face of Harrison’s annoyance. Harrison took his glasses off, setting them aside carefully. “Let’s assume you’re correct…”

“I am. You know I am. Come on, Harrison.” Barry knocked his knee against Harrison’s under the table. “Say it.”

Harrison’s sigh was long and suffering. “The bigger question is what you intend to do about it?”

Barry’s humor faltered, because he hadn’t thought that was a question at all. “Stop them?”

“No risking your life, Barry, and that includes playing hero.”

“You can’t be serious.” Except Harrison’s very serious expression said otherwise. “I can’t just sit here while people get hurt.”

“That’s exactly what you’ll do. Perhaps you’ve forgotten, so allow me to remind you. You have a chance to fix this, but you can’t do that if you’re dead.”

The words left Barry feeling suddenly cold, anger bubbling just bellow the surface. He stared at the table, taking deep breathes until his eye stopped twitching with the effort to hold in the urge to shove
Harrison away from him.

When he finally looked up, he was smiling again. “Of course, Harrison.”

Harrison stared at him, still frowning, but nodded as he stood. “I’ll be working late tonight.”

****

He didn’t want to be alone, didn’t want to think about what alone meant, so he went to S.T.A.R. Labs after work. Harrison was in the pipeline, tools beside him, screwdriver in his mouth. Barry went to the landing above him and laid out, head tipped back over the edge so he could watch Harrison work. They’d been there for hours. Hours and hours. It was almost midnight and all Barry wanted to do was sleep.

“When can we go to bed?” Harrison didn’t answer right away and Barry decided to do his best impression of an annoying five-year-old. “Harrison!”

Harrison pulled the screwdriver out of his mouth and looked up. “What?!”

“I want to go to bed.”

“Then go.”

Barry sighed and moved so he head rested fully on the landing. He could leave, but the house was too quiet and he couldn’t sleep there. There was the cot in Harrison’s office. It wasn’t quiet there—S.T.A.R. Labs was always buzzing just under the surface—it but it reminded him of... other times. Better times. Well, not better, but kinder, softer.

Staring up at the ceiling, he closed his eyes and let himself drift. Not to sleep, there were too many thoughts running around in his head. Too many emotions piled up on top of each other, all vying for his attention. He opened his eyes again and sat up, swinging his feet over the edge of the landing. “Do we have anything to eat?”

“There are protein bars in my desk.”

“Do we have anything that doesn’t taste like it came out of a camel’s...” the screwdriver hit the landing dangerously close to his leg and with enough force to leave a dent as Barry scrambled back and onto his feet. “Fine!”

He stomped off through the open bay door, but stopped just on the other side and slumped back against the wall, letting himself slide down to rest his head on his knees. He didn’t even know why he was so tired. He’d slept fine the night before, but it was just... it was exhausting. Holding it in. Pretending. Everything.

A hand landed on his shoulder and he looked up to see Harrison standing over him, not smiling, but no longer angry at being distracted. Resigned. He looked resigned. “Come on, I’ll tuck you in.”

Barry let himself be led down the hall to the office and the cot. The whole room smelled like them.
Not just Harrison, but him too. Or maybe he was just imagining it. Maybe he wanted it to. It was getting hard to think. Everything was fogged over and upside down and he wanted to sleep, but he didn’t want to be alone.

There was one way to make Harrison stay.

When Harrison pushed at him, intending to lay him down, Barry held on and pulled Harrison to him, kissing him like he had before. Like it meant something more.

He half expected Harrison to stop him, to pull back and leave. This wasn’t Barry angry and violent. This was Barry exhausted and desperate.

When Harrison didn’t stop him, when he took control, pushed Barry down onto the makeshift bed and followed him there, Barry couldn’t decide if he was relieved at his success or if he hated himself for it.

*****

There had been another attack. Two people this time.

Someone held up a convenience store and the cashier, as well as someone just outside the door were found unconscious minutes later. Barry had to rely on Eddie, who wasn’t assigned to the case and didn’t have the same pull or connections Joe’d had. He was able to get Barry a grainy picture of the perp leaving, but couldn’t get his hands on the actual footage. The techs weren’t even sure it could be used for facial recognition.

When the hospital sent over the blood samples, Barry rushed them to satisfy his own curiosity. Same toxin, same genetic markers, except this time one of the victims had died. The cashier had been an older man with high blood pressure. He’d had a seizure on the way to the hospital and gone into cardiac arrest.

The bystander and the original victim weren’t any better off. Life support and emergency intervention were keeping them alive, but the odds of them ever waking up were low. Even if they did, the seizures were causing extensive brain damage.

Barry looked at the reports on the latest two victims and he thought… he thought he should be sad. Upset or concerned. He should be a lot of things, but what he was, most of all, was excited. This was a meta-human. It had to be. And if it was a meta-human that was something he could fight, something that wasn’t Harrison. It was a chance to do some good, to remind himself of who he was.

He was the Flash and he was… going to have to find a way to keep Harrison from finding out what he was up to. It was like being a teenager all over again, with an overprotective dad breathing down his neck, except this wasn’t going to end in a stern lecture if he got caught. He wasn’t actually sure what Harrison would do if he found out Barry had snuck out and taken down a meta-human on his own, but then, he wasn’t planning on him finding out.
Harrison was working late again. He worked late a lot, which was good, because it meant it would be hours before he wouldn’t notice if Barry was missing, if he did at all.

Despite having little evidence and fewer clues, Barry wasn’t letting another night go by without trying to stop whoever it was hurting people and as much as he wanted to say it was because he was a hero, the truth was, it gave him purpose for the first time in months.

He wasn’t expecting much. The only thing he really had to go on was a fuzzy image of a man, half his face obscured by a hat, but whoever it was had attacked two nights in a row, so there was a good chance he’d do it again. Or maybe that meant he wouldn’t need to. It was impossible to tell without more information and he needed his team for that. He needed Cisco’s hacking and Caitlin bio-engineering and Joe’s detective brain and access to… to everything. Without that, he was just an off-duty CSI standing in the middle of Central City looking for someone who might not even be there.

Still, doing something was better than doing nothing and if the only thing he could do at the moment was patrol the streets looking for anyone or anything suspicious, that’s what he was going to do. First thing first, though, he needed to sneak into S.T.A.R. Labs and get one of his suits. He’d have to leave the emblem and its GPS behind, just in case, but it would be a good idea to have something on hand that wasn’t going to potentially burst into flames if he needed to use his speed.

He took one last look around the alley he’d ducked into after leaving the precinct. When he was sure no one was watching, he ran to S.T.A.R. Labs and stopped just outside, by the entrance they’d always left unlocked so he could get in and out in a hurry. Taking out his phone, Barry considered his words carefully, before tapping out a short message. ‘Going home.’

Three agonizing minutes later, Harrison finally messaged back. ‘I’m working.’

He grinned and gave Harrison an ‘I know.’

Harrison didn’t respond. He probably assumed Barry was sulking at the house, which he would have been. If he hadn’t had something else to focus on, Barry would have been curled up in the solitude of Harrison’s too-quiet house, trying to pretend last night hadn’t happened.

Yeah, nothing like selling himself for half a night’s sleep to send him into a shame spiral.

No, not selling, giving. There was a difference. No one had offered anything in exchange for something else. Barry had used sex because he’d known it would work, but that wasn’t the same. Of course, it also wasn’t any better, it was almost…

No, for real, he couldn’t do this. He had to focus on the task at hand, the grip of his hand around the duffel bag, the feel of the speedforce inside him as he ran, pushing through doors, hallways, up the stairs, around a corner… and face first into an arm that had suddenly appeared in front of him.

Pain exploded in his face, blinding in its intensity as Barry fell flat on his back. With a groan, he rolled onto his side. Blood poured from his nose onto the floor. Somewhere above him, he could hear Harrison talking.
“I’ve been thinking about it all day and I can’t decide.” There was a rustle of fabric and the voice was closer. “Help me out here, Barry. Did you really believe I was stupid enough to fall for your little act, or did you just think you were that good at lying?”

Barry took his hand away from his face long enough to throw a middle finger up and Harrison chuckled once before grabbing Barry by the hair and slamming his face into the floor. Shit, that hurt.

“Cute, but ultimately unproductive. Come on, Barry, I need an answer. Which was it?”

He breathed through the pain and forced his eyes open. He couldn’t see out of the right one and the left only gave him a blurry impression of Harrison crouched down beside him, but he did his best to glare. “A little bit of both, really.”

Harrison sighed heavily and, after a moment, moved his grip to Barry’s arm, pulling him up to his feet before shoving him back down in a chair, harder than necessary. “Tilt your head back.”

He did as he was told and a rag was pressed against his face, just under his nose. The blood flow was slowing to a trickle and while his right eye was still getting nothing, the left was clearing up so that he could at least see where Harrison was. Barry swatted at the hands attempting to examine him.

“Barry, hold still, I’m trying to see how much damage there is.”

“You clotheslined me at three hundred miles an hour. It’s bad.”

There was a rush of wind and the rag was replaced with an ice pack. “You were barely going two fifty and if it’s any consolation, I think you may have fractured my forearm.”

“You fractured your forearm, with my face.” He swatted at Harrison’s hands again as they made another go at assessing the damage. “You could have just stood next to the suit with the lights dimmed like a normal villain.”

Harrison chuckled at the nasally complaint. “It hardly would have had the same affect. Hm, I think you may have shattered your right eye socket as well.”

“Again, you shattered my right eye socket.”

“Which wouldn’t have happened if you hadn’t been going against my very explicit instructions not to play hero.”

Rather than respond, Barry busied himself examining the floor. A minute later something fell into his lap and Barry’s annoyance slipped away at the sight of a large bag of iced animal crackers. Yes! He hadn’t had those since he was a kid. He ripped into the package and sat back, letting the high sugared cookies do their thing.

By the time he was three fourths of the way through the bag, his nose was a dull ache. He still couldn’t see out of his right eye, though, which was annoying, but if he really had shattered the socket, it was going to take longer to heal. Hopefully, the animal crackers would get the job done before he had to go to work in the morning.

As he stared down at the bag in his lap, an idea popped into his head and he held the next animal up, examining its shape carefully – elephant, no good. While he dug for what he wanted, Harrison sighed. “What were you thinking?”

“People are dying.” Barry frowned at the next animal. Bear. He couldn’t have eaten all of them.
“People die all the time, Barry. You can’t save them all.”

He pulled out a promising cookie and finally! Holding up the pink, roughly gorilla shaped cookie, he danced it in front of his face. “I mock you with my monkey pants. Always wanted to do that.”

Harrison’s eye actually twitched.  “Barry.”

“Harrison.” He ate the cookie.

They stared off, Barry grinning, Harrison frowning in disapproval. It was Barry who broke the eye contact, swiveling the chair around until the room was spinning. He threw the last few cookies into his mouth all at the same time, then licked his fingers clean, making sure to get his tongue between each one and under his finger nails, noting that Harrison watched him closely, eyes darkening with intent.

It was tempting. More than it should be, but the clock said it was only eight. If he hurried, he still might be able to find the meta. He’d have to leave the suit, but oh well. He’d manage.

Barry stood, stretching his arms out of his head. “So, I guess I’ll just head home then.”

“I don’t think so.” In the next instant, he was on the floor, hand cuffed to the leg of the bolted down work table with Harrison kneeling over him. “You can play the whipped puppy all you want, Barry, but you forget, I’ve been fighting you for longer than you’ve been alive. I know what defeat looks like in those pretty green eyes of yours and this isn’t it. This is you desperately clinging onto who you used to be. This is you still trying to make your friends proud, trying to be the Flash, but your friends, your family, they’re dead, Barry, and the only way you’re getting them back is if you do exactly what I say.”

Barry kicked out, but Harrison easily knocked the foot away.

“That’s it. You don’t have to pretend to be something your not. I don’t need your submission, I just need you. Alive.”

Anger flashed hot through him and Barry threw his foot out again, fast enough that it caught Harrison in the sternum and shoved him several feet away. For a second, Harrison’s anger matched his own, but he reigned it in quickly, transforming the angry sneer into a smile. “Those cuffs are designed for speedsters. You won’t be able to phase through them, don’t waste your energy trying. I have work to do.”

“Wait, for real?” He couldn’t seriously be leaving Barry on the floor of the lab, handcuffed to a table for the night.

Harrison didn’t say anything as he walked away, closing and locking the door behind him.

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Harrison had taught him phasing during the immediate aftermath of the tidal wave. He’d postulated
it as a theory – a safer way for Barry to get in and out of half fallen, unstable structures – then he’d walked Barry through it. If Barry had been thinking more clearly, he might have noticed that Harrison had been a little too knowledgeable about the speedforce. The way he’d described it? Barry should have realized only another speedster could have done that.

For the first half hour after Harrison left, Barry did try phasing. Screw Harrison and his advice, Barry put everything he had into vibrating his hand through the cuffs. It didn’t work. They weren’t regular, police issued cuffs. They were future tech, made of a different metal, thicker with a blue pad lit up in the middle.

When that failed, he fished around the table for anything useful, but it was all scrap paper and flimsy plastic odds and ends, nothing he could use to pick or pry at them. He twisted around on his back, kicking at them and the table itself, trying to dislodge something, but all that accomplished was bruising his wrist.

Nothing. Hm, he could always try breaking his thumb, but if that didn’t work, he wasn’t sure he could set it himself again before it healed wrong, Harrison would have to re-break it in the morning and he wasn’t quite that desperate yet.

Eventually, he laid out on the floor, looking up at the ceiling. The hum inside the walls of S.T.A.R. Labs must have lulled him to sleep, because when he opened his eyes again, it was to Harrison leaning over him and a box of cinnamon rolls just out of reach.

Bastard. “Those for me?”

“Let’s hear the magic word.” Harrison used his free hand to pull a protein bar out of his back pocket and no. Not when there was a perfectly good source of calories five feet away.

“Screw you, give me the food.”

“Barry…”

“I will blow you. Like, for real. Harrison, give me the damn cinnamon rolls.”

Honestly, he didn’t think Harrison would do it, but then the cuff was gone and Barry dove the five feet, grabbing the box happily. He still had no idea where Harrison was getting them – probably somewhere out of town, the cheater.

The first rush of sugar in the morning always hit him hard and Barry sighed into it, let it wash all thought out of his head. It was especially good, considering his dinner had consisted of a bag of animal cookies and his body had to use most of that on repairing the damage to his face.

Speaking of. “You have a mirror?”

Harrison pulled Barry’s phone out of his pocket. Oo, even better. Barry held it up, front facing camera on and stared at himself in despair. The swelling had gone down, but a circle of green covered his eyes and spread of over the bridge of his nose, fading into yellow across his cheek bones.

There was no way he was hiding that. He poked it and sighed. At least it looked worse than it felt. A little tender, maybe, but not painful. Barry put the phone down and grabbed another roll with a scathing. “You suck.”

“Not at the moment. You, on the other hand…”
Damnit, he really needed to be more careful. That was the third time he’d walked into that one. He knew better than that. Still…

Barry moved onto his third roll and he shouldn’t be considering it. He really shouldn’t, except… except he kind of was. The last time they’d done that Harrison had still been pretending to be paralyzed. It had been gentle and coaxing, the fingers in his hair resting against his head without urgency, words of encouragement and praise in his ears. This time would be different. It would be…

His eyes drifted to the clock and he wiped the icing off his lower lip with his thumb, sucking it off before grinning at Harrison. “Not now. I’m late for work.”

*****

Barry couldn’t focus. He was distracted. Not by thoughts of Harrison. No. Not thinking about that. That was… No. He was thinking about the meta-human. There hadn’t been any more attacks while he’d been handcuffed to Cisco’s work station, but the female victim from the other night had died of complications. That was two dead bodies and one still in a coma and the security footage was apparently too obscured to run facial recognition.

He should call Felicity. Felicity could probably find a way to clean it up, make it clearer, and her systems were a lot faster. She could hack facial recognition and get back to him in a matter of hours.

Barry pulled his phone out and stared at his contact information. If he called her, though, he was opening the line of communication again. If he called her, he had to hear her voice and he really, really wanted to hear it. Not just in a message, but really hear her. He missed her. Missed Oliver and even Diggle and it ached, but if he called… if he called it might give Felicity the idea that he was reaching out and he wasn’t, even if he kind of was. Why did it have to be so complicated?

A knock on the open door interrupted his thoughts and Eddie’s voice cutting through the otherwise silent room. “Barry?”

Barry waved his hand over the top of the screen he was hunched behind. “Here.”

“Hey, I was just… Barry, why are you wearing sunglasses?”

Oh, right, that. Barry pulled them off, setting them aside. He’d eaten the godforsaken bar after getting to work, but even with that and three hours, it still looked like someone had taken a highlighter to his face. “Yeah, sorry. Ran into a… door this morning.”

Eddie stared at him for several seconds. “A door? Really?”

“No.” Barry set the phone down. “Did you need something?”

“I was checking on the status of Detective Carter’s file?”

“Done.”
It had been done for hours, but he hadn’t felt like going downstairs. He’d been waiting for either Jones or the detective in question to pick it up. Instead, Eddie had shown up and not that it wasn’t welcome, but now that he thought about it, he hadn’t seen anyone in his office other than Harrison, Captain Sign, and Eddie for the last week.

Hm.

Eddie picked up the file and looked down at Barry, hesitantly. “So, about that eye?”

Barry missed Joe. Joe would have just accepted that his injuries were Flash related without asking for details. Or maybe not. Joe was pretty protective. “I went running last night and didn’t look where I was going.”

“And?”

“And I ran into a lamp post at over two hundred miles an hour. Not my finest moment. I broke my nose and shattered my eye socket.”

“Wow, I guess you weren’t kidding when you said you heal fast.” Eddie tapped the file on his hand a few times and Barry did his best not to sigh, because it was clear there was more he wanted to say. “Do you want to maybe go get lunch?”

That couldn’t be good. “Can’t. I’m meeting up with Harrison.”

“Right.” There was something in Eddie’s tone, something disapproving, but Barry tried to focus on the paper work on his desk rather than Eddie still shuffling next to him. “What about, I don’t know, drinks after work?”

“I’m…” He stopped himself just short of saying he was busy, because actually, that was perfect. With a smile, Barry looked up at Eddie. “You know what? Sure thing.”

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Harrison wasn’t pleased, but then Barry hadn’t thought he would be. Apparently, it was perfectly fine for Barry to sulk at home alone or fall asleep, bored on the catwalk of the accelerator, or spend all night running lab work, but heaven forbid he actually go out with someone.

Not that he even wanted to go out, but the point was, Harrison couldn’t lock him away until he had a use for him. It didn’t work that way. Barry was a person and, more importantly, “I’m the Flash and I’m not just going to sit back and watch people get hurt because he doesn’t want me to play hero.”

“He who?”

Barry rolled his eyes and took another drink of his soda. “Harrison. Pay attention.”

Eddie nodded, then gulped sickly and drank the last of the whiskey in his glass. “Okay, but why?”

“Why what?”
“Why doesn’t he want you to…” Eddie made a whooshing motion with his hand that looked more like flying than running.

“Because he doesn’t want me to get killed, which would be really sweet if he wasn’t doing it for his own selfish purposes.”

“What purposes?”

“Not the point. I have been struck by lightening, filled my lungs with poisonous gas, been shot with a sub-zero gun, punched by a highschool bully with the strength of steel, had my powers sucked out of me by an electrified meta-human, had them shocked back into me with twenty thousand kilo-amps of electricity…”

“Jesus Christ, Barry!”

“…been shot in the back with arrows, had my internal organs partially liquefied by deadly soundwaves, and, let’s not forget, had the ever loving shit beaten out of me by the Reverse-Flash.”

“The who?”

“Again, not the point. I think I can handle one meta-human with the ability to make people, pardon my phrasing, trip balls.”

“Well, they… I mean, one’s in a coma, and two of them are dead, so…”

“Yeah, but they aren’t me.”

“I am so confused.” Eddie tapped the bar and the bartender came over, refilling his tumber while he stared down at it, eyebrows drawn together tight.

“I know.” Barry patted him on the shoulder and watched Eddie tip the glass back.

He hadn’t meant for this to happen. When Eddie had suggested they get drinks after work, Barry had figured one hour, a few beers and he’d piss off Harrison enough to get his attention and never mind that he shouldn’t even want Harrison’s attention. Then Eddie had started talking about Joe, which led into Iris, and the moment Iris was mentioned, Eddie moved onto whiskey and Barry probably should have stopped him, but he didn’t and now Eddie was closing in on too much and the bartender was looking at them funny.

Huh. Maybe he shouldn’t have decided to unload in a public bar. And maybe he should have eaten more than a bowl of pretzels for dinner.

Still, it was good to talk to someone, especially when that someone was drunk enough not to have an entirely clear memory of their conversation in the morning. Not that he wasn’t being careful about what he said, but just to be able to say ‘he doesn’t own me’ without Harrison there to contradict him was so freeing.

“Barry.”

“Hm.”

“What did you mean by they aren’t you?”

“Oh, right, so, my accelerated metabolism burns through everything super fast, not just calories. Alcohol, pain meds, even those sleep aides the grief counselor prescribed me.”
Eddie stared at him silently for a few seconds, before saying, “Barry, man, that… half the time I can’t sleep without those.”

“Yeah?” Barry reached back and dug into his bag for his bottle. “Here, take mine.”

“Barry, you can’t just…” Eddie picked up the bottle and held it up, no doubt attempting to tell Barry off for trying to hand out prescription pills, which was illegal and it would be a valid point, except Barry was too busy using the bartender’s momentary distraction to reach behind the counter at super speed and refill his pretzel bowl and, oh, there were peanuts.

“Uh, Barry? These aren’t sleep aides.”

Barry stopped, mouth full of salty peanuts and slurred, “Wha ‘s it?”

“They’re anti… depressants.” Oh, they so weren’t. Anti something, but that pause was significant. He’d have to look it up later. “Were you even listening to the doctor when he prescribed these?”

“Not really. I just figured it was the same stuff he was giving everyone else. Doesn’t matter, anyway. Like I said, I metabolize everything too fast. Caitlin was working on it, but…” But she was dead and Harrison didn’t give a rat’s ass if Barry was able to get wasted with his friends. Not that he had any left.

Barry swallowed another handful of peanuts and stared at the bowl of pretzels numbly. This was pointless. Going out with Eddie like this, trying to make Harrison, what? Jealous? What good would that do? It wasn’t like Barry had any intention of sleeping with Eddie. It was just a petty indulgence on his part, really. He should go home before it got too late.

Taking the glass from Eddie, Barry put an arm under him to help him stand. “Come on, let’s get you home.”

As they stood, Barry bumped into someone and turned, “Hey, sorry about that, I… oh!”

He stopped just short of blurting out, ‘It’s you!’ because standing there in a long sleeved shirt with gloves on and a flustered frown was the guy from the security footage of the convenience store robbery. Well, probably. The footage had been really blurry and black and white and not the best angle, but still. Pretty sure.

The man kept walked, heading to the back door and Barry turned to the bartender, simultaneously slipping a hand into Eddie’s jacket pocket and hoping the detective was too inebriated to notice. “Hey, could you call him an Uber?”

The bartender stared at him silently and it took Barry a second to realize Uber wasn’t really a thing in Central at the moment. “Fine, just give him some water and don’t let him leave until he’s sobered up a little. Eddie, I’ll see you Monday.”

Eddie made some fumbled protests, but Barry was too busy throwing down enough cash on the bar to more than cover their drinks, as well as a decent tip. Harrison not letting him pay rent may make him feel like a high priced rent boy, but at least it gave him the money to pick up the tab.

By the time he turned around, the back door was already closing. He barely managed not to use the speedforce as he made his way through the dense crowd. It was still early, just after nine, but this was one of only three legally operating bars in the city and it was Friday night.

Outside, the alley was oppressively dark.
A single bulb over the door illuminated the entry way, but everything else was shadowed so heavily it was nearly black. He almost couldn’t make out the dumpster across the alley. The door behind him closed with a loud clang as Barry stepped away from it, squinting into the dark, trying to make out shapes.

The bar’s exit was at the far end. He didn’t think the guy could have made it to the street before Barry got there, but…

“I’m sorry.”

The words were so soft that for a moment, Barry thought he’d imagined it. Then a hand wrapped around his forearm. He jumped back with an undignified shriek, pulling his arm away from the loose grip and stumbled back several feet.

He leaned on the wall for support, a hand over his chest to keep his heart from hammering out of his ribcage. “That was not okay! For real! I just about had a… I had a… heart atta… attack. What…?”

Barry swayed, the world spinning around him. His arm was tingling where it had been touched and he felt… not breathless, but kind of? His chest was tight. He leaned more heavily into the wall to keep himself standing as someone stepped out of the shadow.

“Like I said, I’m sorry, but Sarah needs me.”

There was a strange ringing in his ears and why couldn’t he catch his breath? More importantly, why were the walls melting? Like water colors.

“You should sit down.”

“He’s right, bro.”

Barry’s head whipped to the side, looked for the source of the second voice, but there wasn’t anyone there. It had sounded like… but it couldn’t be.

He blinked a few times to clear his head, only it just made everything worse. A hand touched his shoulder and Barry jerked away, skidding several feet on instinct before tripping over his own feet and landing on his hands and knees, the broken concrete shredding his palms. He turned around just as quickly, trying to face his attacker. If there was an attacker. The ringing was turning into a roar, like the ocean moving inside his head and he couldn’t get enough air into his lungs.

“What…” He felt like he was suffocating. “What did you…?”

The guy in front of him knelt down. At least, he thought it was a guy. His voice was a little high and it was too dark to really tell. Also, his face had morphed into something like a toad, so…

A hand reached out to touch him again and Barry smacked his hand away before it could get too close. Or, he tried to. He missed by an embarrassingly wide margin. Not good. Really, really not good.

“Yeah, not good is an understatement. Man, this is epically bad.” Barry looked around again, but there still wasn’t anyone else in the alley, just him and the toad faced man. The voice sounded like it was coming from his coms, right in his ear, cutting through the roar in his head. Oh, crap. He was hallucinating.

“Hey, calm down. I’m just gonna help you lean back so you won’t hit your head, okay? Then I’ll go
get help.”

“He’s gonna leave. Barry, you can’t let him leave.”

“How do I stop him?” Damnit, now he was talking to the hallucination.

“Dude, handcuffs.” Oh, right, he’d lifted Eddie’s handcuffs on his way out.

“You still there?” A gloved hand tapped at his face and Barry jerked away, nearly falling over in the process. “Stay right here, just don’t move.”

He needed something to attach the cuff to. Couldn’t be himself, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to phase out of them again if he needed to, not like this. Toad-face…

“That’s a horrible name. What’d I say about you and Caitlin naming things?”

“Shut up shut up shut up!” He spotted an open drain pipe to his right. It was metal, rusted, but also, better than nothing.

Toad-face hesitated and Barry took the opportunity to grab his wrist and slap the cuffs on, then yank the wrist to the side and attached the other end to the open drain pipe, before scrambling back and away. He stopped after a few feet, just out of reach. Toad-face yanked at the cuff unsuccessfully and he’d done it. He’d caught the meta-human.

“Yes, my man!”

Barry slumped back against the wall and smiled. He could do this. He could still be the Flash. You know, once he stopped hearing dead people and he could breathe and the tingling was moving up into his shoulder now, that couldn’t be good.

Toad-face stopped pulling at his restraint and turned to glare at Barry. “Give me the key.”

Barry shook his head, “Nope.”

“You… look, you need a doctor, okay? My skin secretes a toxic chemical…”

“Five-methoxy-N, N-dimethyltryptamine – more specifically, the strain found in the California River Toad.” Skin secretion, that meant he must have dosed Barry when he’d touched him coming out the door.

Toad-face blinked back at him, stunned, “Yeah, that’s right and if you don’t get to a hospital soon, you’ll die. So, can I have the key?”

“Can’t, I don’t have it.” His smile dropped. He didn’t have the key. That… complicated things. Although, not nearly as much as how he was supposed to get Toad-face…

“Still hate that name.”

“Stop it, I’m trying to think.”

“My bad, bro.”

…from there to S.T.A.R. Labs? Or should he take him back to the pipeline at all? This hadn’t exactly gone smoothly. The last thing he needed right now was to hear how many ways Harrison could say ‘I told you so.’ Not to mention the vague threats to people Barry cared about that might suddenly become not so vague. So, yeah, he should probably…
“Um, Barry?”

“Sh.”

…let the police handle this. He could knock him out and drop him off at the station, but without his suit, Barry couldn’t stop to talk and he didn’t want to risk anyone touching the meta-human and getting hurt.

“No, seriously, Barry, look.”

“Not now!”

He’d text Eddie, but he just finished getting him stupid drunk and…

“Barry!”

“What?!”

He looked to the right where the voice in his head had been coming from and it should have been a shock when he saw Cisco kneeling next to him, wearing the same clothes he’d had on the last time Barry had seen him, hair tucked behind his ears and a hand held out, finger pointed at the meta-human cuffed to the drain pipe. It should have, but then Barry looked at the Toad-face and a fully formed hallucination was the least of his concerns.

A few feet away the meta-human had dislocated his thumb. His hand was slick with something wet that probably wasn’t water and with a little tugging and twisting, he pulled it free of the cuff with only a slight winch. As Barry watched, he popped it back in effortlessly.

Well… shit.

Toad-face looked over at him warily, “You okay?”

Barry nodded, not sure what he should do. He could try and handcuff him again, maybe tighter this time?

“How are you okay?”

“I’m the… speedster. I’m a speedster.” He’d almost said the Flash. He couldn’t think with Cisco standing there and his head ringing. At least he could breathe and the tingling had started to fade.

“Speedster? Like the Flash?”

“Yes.” Then, because it felt important, “You look like a toad.”

Toad-face raised his eyebrows. “Yeah? I’ve been called worse. So, I heard you and your friend talking in there. You really a cop?”

“CSI.”

Toad-face licked his lips nervously, his tongue long and thin, flicking down to nearly touch the ground.

“That’s messed up.”

Barry could only nod, momentarily at a loss. That had to be part of the hallucination right?
The man shifted slightly and Barry sat up onto the balls of his feet, ready to run if necessary. Instead of running, the meta-human sat down and looked Barry in the eyes. “Okay, look. The thing is, I can’t go to jail.”

Barry tilted his head to the side. “You’ve killed people.”

“It was an accident?”

“That doesn’t make it okay.”

“Just… hear me out.”

Cisco leaned closer, whispering, “Is he really trying to talk his way out of murder?”

Barry cut Cisco a meaningful glance, because at this point, he was just stalling. He needed to give his body as much time as he could to clear out the toxins and if that meant letting the meta-human talk, then he’d let him talk.

Toad-face took the silence as a go-ahead. “After the particle accelerator exploded and this happened to me, I quit my job at the zoo, I moved to the middle of nowhere and did tech support from home. I didn’t want to hurt anyone. I was terrified just going to the grocery store once a week. But then the wave hit and I couldn’t get in touch with my cousin Sarah. We weren’t close, but she’s the only family I have. I tried, but her cell was dead and she wasn’t responding to emails and I just… I had to know.”

Sarah Tabet had been the first victim, the one still in a coma.

“She wasn’t supposed to see me, but she did and she hugged me before I could stop her, I… The hospital says there’s no brain activity and they’re over booked as it is. They can’t keep her on life support against the doctor’s advice unless I can pay out of pocket. I’m trying to get her transferred, but it takes time. The convenience store was just to get enough cash to keep her alive until then. No one was supposed to get hurt, but I ran into the woman on the way out and the store owner used the distraction to jump me and…”

It wasn’t like Barry couldn’t sympathize, because what if it had been him and he couldn’t reach Iris? What if it had been her in a coma and he’d needed the money to keep her alive? Would he have done the same thing?

“If I go to jail, I can’t pay for her medical expenses. She’ll be taken off life support. I can’t let that happen.”

As much as Barry wanted to help, he couldn’t. This wasn’t just robbery they were talking about, it was manslaughter. He couldn’t let that go.

Barry shook his head, but before he could say anything, the back door of the bar was pushed half open. “Barry, are you back here?”

Eddie?! Barry automatically looked past Toad-face to the door. Almost immediately, a gloved hand touched his face. He was too surprised to move away as the meta-human pressed their mouths together. It wasn’t a kiss, per say, but it was… weird. Just the press of lips on Barry’s and a tongue brushed along the inside of Barry’s mouth almost clinically before he pulled away.

Barry licked his lips, confused. “Why’d you do that?”

Toad-face met Barry’s question with the same apologetic frown he’d worn when Barry had first seen
him standing just outside the door. “It’s more potent in my saliva.”

It took a second to register, another for him to realize what it meant, but by then it was too late.

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At first, Barry thought he was dreaming, and as far as dreams went, this one sucked. For one thing, he hurt. His muscles were stiff and sore, his head ached, and he was cold. Whatever he was lying on was stiff and uncomfortable. It felt like a table. He forced his stiff fingers to spread out and felt smooth metal. Either he was at S.T.A.R. Labs or he was in the morgue.

Somewhere to his left, he heard Harrison’s voice say. “I know you’re awake, don’t bother pretending otherwise.”

Right, S.T.A.R. Labs it was. He almost would have preferred the morgue. At least the mortician wouldn’t be pissed at him.

Barry opened his eyes cautiously and stared up at the ceiling of Caitlin’s lab. The windows were closed, skylights shuttered. Only a handful of lights were on, set low to keep the room dim. It smelled a little like dust and the faint odor of mold spores because Harrison didn’t have the time or inclination to really clean anything that wasn’t critical to the actual accelerator itself.

The last thing he remembered was the meta-human kissing him. Well, not kissing him, dosing him by shoving a tongue in Barry’s mouth, then… nothing.

He rolled his head to the side slowly. Harrison was sitting in a chair next to the bed, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees, a pen tapping against his open palm. Something he only did when he was so angry he needed to do something with his hands to keep from killing someone and at this point, that someone was Barry.

More troubling, though, was Cisco slouched in a chair on the other side of the room, waving a Twizzler. “Someone’s in trouble.”

Harrison stopped tapping the pen and sighed, drawing Barry’s attention back to him. “What were you thinking?”

“Pe…” Barry broke off, swallowing around the raw pain in his throat. He must not have been out for very long. Either that, or Harrison hadn’t given him enough IV to facilitate any real healing. “People were dying.”

“And that isn’t your problem right now. Your problem is your inability to follow simple instructions. What exactly do I have to do to get you to take this seriously, Barry?” Harrison reached over and handed Barry a bottle of water and Barry tried very hard to keep his eyes on Harrison and not look over at Cisco, who had rolled his eyes and was using his hand as a puppet to mock Harrison.

Barry drank the water and then drank some more, until he was sure he wasn’t going to laugh. “I
know, okay, it didn’t go… well, at all, but I’m fine.”

“No, Barry, you’re not fine. You were dead.”

“I what?” There was no way he’d heard that right.

“Dead. You had a seizure, went into shock, and your heart stopped beating.” Harrison’s hand moved suddenly and Barry flinched, but didn’t pull away as it came to rest on Barry’s chest. “I felt you being ripped from the speedforce. It took me two minutes to get you back. Do you know what two minutes can feel like to a speedster, Barry? It can feel like an eternity.”

Barry swallowed the apology sitting at the back of his throat. He shouldn’t have to apologize for being who he was and Harrison was just upset because Barry dying would have dire affects on his plans to get home, but… but he wanted to. He felt guilty for worrying Harrison, even more than he did over what Harrison would have done if he had died and Barry didn’t want to think about what that meant.

Harrison’s hand was gentle on his chest, but tight with the anger Barry could see in his eyes. Screw it, better safe than sorry and the apology didn’t have to really mean anything. Or, at least, Harrison didn’t have to know that it did. Barry had barely opened his mouth when Cisco sat up in the chair, pointing a finger at him in warning. “Bro, don’t you dare. If anyone should be apologizing, it’s him. None of that would have happened if he’d helped you instead of forcing you to go it alone.”

Barry glanced over before he could stop himself and Harrison followed his gaze. When he saw nothing, he looked back at Barry, his hand leaving Barry’s chest. “What are you looking at?”

He could lie, but there wasn’t really a point. “Cisco.”

“Cisco? You’re hallucinating?” Barry nodded mutely and tried not to flinch when Harrison’s hands tightened into fists. Instead of lashing, out, though, he took a deep breath, relaxed and stood up. “Go home. Get some rest.”

“What?” His legs were still weak, but Barry managed to get them under him and stumble across the room after Harrison’s retreating back. “Harrison, where are you…”

He’d barely touched the older man’s shoulder when a hand suddenly latched onto his throat and he found himself pressed into the wall, unable to breath. Harrison’s eyes were red, his body blurring as it vibrated. The hand tightened, its vibrations feeling like they were shredding his throat until Barry’s vision started to cloud.

Then he was on the floor with Harrison standing over him. “Go home, Barry.”

*****

It took him an hour to get back to the house.

He didn’t feel like testing Harrison’s patience further by doing anything reckless like trying to run
home on empty. The only food in S.T.A.R. Labs was Harrison’s bars. He could have put in an IV, but that would mean staying at the Labs until he’s cycled through enough bags and… no.

Barry had often thought S.T.A.R. Labs felt like a small ghost town. Now, with Cisco there, but not, it was worse. Especially considering he wouldn’t. Stop. Talking. And Barry tried not to engage his hallucination, but it was Cisco and, to be fair, he made some good points.

“Bro, seriously, do you ever clean this lab? Are those cookie crumbs?! Were you eating cookies at my work station?”

“You ate candy in here all the time.”

“Yeah, candy doesn’t leave crumbs and, man, what did you do to my suit?!”

“I thought it was our suit!”

“Not until you learn to treat it with respect.”

There was something like a small grocery store near the bus stop and he loaded up on every Oreo they had, six baloney Lunchables, and a half gallon of chocolate milk, all the while trying not to giggle, because Cisco was trailing behind him, mimicking Caitlin as he complained about the lack of healthy food in Barry’s selection.

“Really, Barry, when I said ten thousand calories, I didn’t mean ten thousand empty calories. You cannot subsist on sugar and dairy alone. You have to maintain a proper dietary balance.”

“Thirty six fifty.”

“At least get a banana.”

“Sh!” Barry swiped his card with a flinch, addressing the cashier apologetically. “Not you. Sorry. Long night.”

The guy nodded, a little skeptical, but not really concerned.

The bus ride was worse. Cisco seemed intent on cheering him up, which included singing a wide variety of Weird Al songs and more than once Barry broke into fits of laughter that had other the other bus patrons glancing nervously in his direction.

As soon as they were safely inside Harrison’s home, Barry turned to glare at Cisco. “Not cool.”

“What?” He trailed behind Barry, following him into the kitchen. “I’m not doing anything you don’t want me to do.”

“Really? I want you to get me fired? Because that’s what’ll happen if someone recognizes me and tells Singh they saw me talking to myself.”

“Barry, man, you know I love you, but I’m a construct of your imagination. Everything I do is something you, at the very least subconsciously want me to do.”

That was… shit. His hallucination was making more sense than he was.

Barry grabbed a glass out of the cabinet with his free hand and went to sit on the sofa, tearing into his bag of Oreos while Cisco walked around the living room, looking at everything. He was ripping open the first Lunchable when Cisco threw himself down on the couch. “You gonna put something on?”
Barry shrugged, “Harrison doesn’t have cable. He’s not here much, so I think the television’s mostly for decoration.”

“What about you?”

“What about me?”

“You live here. Where’s your stuff?”

Barry blinked at Cisco and shoved a two tier stack of crackers, baloney and cheese in his mouth to buy himself some time, but Cisco, or his subconscious, or whatever had already made its point and didn’t push the issue. It was right, though, there wasn’t really anything of Barry’s there. He’d brought over an armful of clothes at the beginning and his toothbrush, but it had stopped there. Everything else was either at work or S.T.A.R. Labs, packed down in boxes or strewn around the office no one used.

There was something comforting about having one foot out the door, even if the rest of him was in Harrison’s bed.

The silence, for once, was comfortable and Barry let himself sink into it. He let the food and company wash away his anxiety and guilt. If he closed his eyes, he could almost be in Cisco’s apartment, chilling after a mission.

“You should get some sleep.”

He hummed at the figment of his imagination and set the last, half empty bag of Oreos down on the coffee table. Normally, he would have stumbled into Harrison’s bed, sunk into the sheets, and let himself pretend he wasn’t alone. With Cisco there, that felt wrong. So, he curled up against the side of the couch and pulled his jacket up higher on his shoulder.

Sleep was good. He’d deal with everything else later.

*****

He woke hours later to sunlight coming in through the large windows and the smell of eggs and bacon dragging him into consciousness. The smell was coming from a white bag on the coffee table. More ominous was the protein bar next to it, but Barry ignored that as he sat up and opened the bag, moaning happily at the foil wrapped breakfast tacos.

On the other side of the house, he heard the shower turn on. Barry stared at the protein bar, considering whether he should eat it or throw it out and pretend he had. Harrison would know, though. He always did.

“Don’t poke the bear.”

Nervously, he glanced to his left and, sure enough, Cisco was sitting on the couch beside him, grinning.
Shit. “You’re still here?”

“Looks like.” Not that it wasn’t welcome, but it did create a certain amount of concern. “You really should eat that, though.”

With a sigh, Barry forced it down and then went for the burritos, wondering what he should do with the day. He had the next two days off. On call, as always, but that rarely happened. Usually, he’d spend the day following Harrison around, maybe go by the Precinct if he got bored enough. With Cisco there, he wasn’t sure either of those were an option. He couldn’t go to precinct if he was hallucinating and he wasn’t following Harrison around with Cisco there.

“We could go to the movies.”

“I’m not taking my hallucination to the movies.”

“Come on. You know you want to.”

Yeah, maybe he did, but he wasn’t going to. The shower cut off and Barry got up to throw away the trash before Harrison could say anything. He’d just finished washing his hands when Harrison came out of the bedroom, shirtless with his dark jeans hanging low on his hips. He looked good. Glasses off, hair damp and rumpled, abdomen slick with water, tight and toned, a faint trail of hair leading down to the buttons and bellow that…

“Good God, man, control yourself!”

Barry blinked out of his daze, his stomach tight with a strange mix of guilt and arousal. Harrison smiled in amusement, but didn’t comment. Instead, he picked something up off the counter and held it out for Barry. It was his phone.

“You left this at the lab last night. Eddie was… persistent.” The blue light was flashing in the corner. Barry unlocked it and gawked at the thirty missed calls. “I told him you showed up at S.T.A.R. Labs in shock, but that you were stable and sleeping it off. He insisted that I have you call him when you woke up.”

It was already ten. He slid between the counter and Harrison, so close he could smell his aftershave and feel his body heat and… no, don’t think about it.

As soon as he was a safe distance away and Harrison was busy making his morning coffee in the kitchen, Barry pressed the call back. Cisco hadn’t moved from the couch, but he was watching intently, which didn’t help.

“Barry, is that you?” Great, Eddie sounded so worried he was just short of desperate.

“Yeah, it’s me. Sorry about last night, I…”

“What happened?”

“I, uh…” he glanced at Harrison, but decided against asking. “I don’t really remember.”

“Let me refresh your memory then. I came outside and you were on the ground convulsing. The suspect ran off and I tried to chase him, but he was gone by the time I hit the street. When I got back, you weren’t breathing. I went in to get help and by the time I came back out you were gone.”

“Right, um, Harrison says I showed up at S.T.A.R. Labs. I guess I woke up and ran there.”
“You guess?”

“I don’t know!” He slipped out the door to the patio to give himself the illusion of privacy. “Harrison says I was barely conscious, so I don’t remember, but I’m fine now.”

“Liar, liar, pants on fire.”

He jumped a little, because Cisco had moved from the couch to stand next to him, leaning against the glass wall with raised eyebrows of judgment.

“Shut up.”

“What?”

“Not you. Look, I really don’t have time for this, can I…”

“We found the meta-human, Barry.”

“You did?!” That wasn’t good. What if someone had touched him? “Is everyone okay?”

“Not really, because he’s dead.”

“What do you mean, he’s dead?!”

“I mean, someone ripped his heart out. Literally. There’s a hole in the man’s chest as big as a fist and his rib cage was pulverized from front to back. Do you have idea what could have done that?”

The police hadn’t released the security footage yet and there hadn’t been a rush on the report Barry was working up, so he hadn’t turned it in yet. He’d wanted to give himself time to be the Flash. The only other person besides him that knew who or what they were looking for was… Harrison. With enough speed, Barry could punch through almost anything, which meant Harrison could too and Harrison had been angry. He’d been mad, but he’d left without so much as raising a hand to Barry.

“I have to go.”

“Barry, wait…”

“I’ll come by the station later.” He hung up and stared down at the phone. Why would Harrison do that?

“You know why.”

He refused to look at Cisco, because yeah, he did. This meta-human wasn’t a threat to them. At least, not until Barry had gone after him and gotten himself nearly killed. Harrison couldn’t have cared less until Barry tried to intervene.

Shoving the phone in his back pocket, he stormed into the house where Harrison was waiting beside the bar and demanded, “Why?”

Harrison finished his sip of coffee, seemingly unconcerned. “You’ll have to give me more than that, Barry.”

“Why did you kill him? If you were worried I’d go after him again, you could have just dropped him off at the station or put him in the pipeline. You didn’t have to kill him!”

“I’ll assume you’re referring to the meta-human from last night?”
“You know I am.”

Harrison set the mug down gently on the counter, giving Barry his full attention. “I wasn’t worried you’d go after him. If that had been my concern, I would have simply locked you in the pipeline and been done with it.”

“Then why…?”

“I was angry.”

“You were angry? You killed him because you were mad at him?”

“I was mad at you, but you were hardly in a position to bare the brunt of that, so I found someone else to take it out on.” Before Barry could process that, Harrison moved forward into his space, crowding him against the edge of the counter. “Although I can admit a certain amount of… resentment towards him.”

“For what?”

Harrison’s hand moved up to cup the side of Barry’s face. “For hurting you.”

“You hurt me all the time.”

“I know.” Harrison’s hand slid up into his hair and gripped just hard enough to hurt. “I know, but I’m allowed. He’s not.”

And it was so messed up that Barry’s chest ached at that. Not in a painful way like he wanted to push Harrison away, but in a way that made him want to pull the man closer. “You don’t own me. I’m not yours. You don’t get to say…”

“I do.”

His head was yanked to the side by the grip on his hair and damnit, he was getting hard. Stupid Pavlovian response. It had only been a month since this whole messed up thing started and already, parts of him were beginning to associate Harrison’s anger with an inevitable downslide into sex, to link pain with the promise of pleasure. That wasn’t okay, but then none of this was okay.

Harrison leaned in to put his mouth by Barry’s ear. “I’ve owned you since the moment you were struck by lightening and became the Flash. You are my creation, my way home, mine, and I will kill anyone who threatens that. I will rip the heart out of anyone stupid enough to lay a hand on you.”

Barry pulled his head out of Harrison’s grip, some of his own hair coming out with it. He intended to shove Harrison away. He intended to punch the possessive sneer off his face, but before he even realized what he was doing he’d already pulled Harrison to him and was kissing him, open mouthed and desperate. Harrison kissed back, his hands moving to grip Barry’s ass and pull their hips together. Barry moaned into Harrison’s mouth. His own hands dropped and pushed between them for access to the buckle of Harrison’s pants.

“Woah!”

Cisco. The arousal pooled low in Barry’s stomach turned sick.

“For real? Keep it in your pants, bro!”

With a pained whimper, Barry ducked out from under Harrison and stumbled away. He was so hard
it hurt, but he leaned against the edge of the couch and breathed deep until the throbbing ache between his legs settled down.

“Barry?”

He shook his head against the concern the Harrison’s voice. That’s not what he needed, not what he wanted. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I can’t.”

“Why?”

“I can’t with…” He hesitated, not even really sure why, but Cisco being there felt private. It felt like something Harrison didn’t need to know. Except, he did. Hallucinating was never a good thing. If something was wrong with him and Barry didn’t tell him, Harrison would get angry again, maybe even angry enough to kill someone else. “I can’t with Cisco watching.”

“You’re still hallucinating?” Harrison hadn’t moved closer, which was good, because right at that moment, Barry didn’t trust himself. Barry nodded shakily and Harrison did move then, heading toward the bedroom. “Get dressed. We’re going to S.T.A.R. Labs to run tests.”

*****

Seven hours, six vials of blood, three urine samples, a CAT Scan, a PET, an MRI, and an EEG later, Barry was eating his thirteenth bacon cheese burger, waiting for Harrison to finish going over the results. Cisco had been there the entire time, but he’d been pretty chill now that Barry and Harrison weren’t about to rip each other’s clothes off.

Harrison sat back in his chair, hands clasped in his lap. “There’s no trace of the toxin left in your system.”

“Good!” Barry opened his mouth to put the last of his burger in, but caught Harrison’s narrowed eyes. “Not good?”

“No, Barry, that’s not good.”

Barry shrugged and kept going on his burger. Cisco had found a bag of jelly beans and was happily sitting on the desk next to Barry, eating them. It was strange, but he was getting used to it. At the very least, Harrison couldn’t kill an imaginary Cisco, so, bonus.

When Barry seemed unconcerned, Harrison continued. “It means the source of your hallucination isn’t chemical.”

“So, what then? It’s all in my head?”

“Precisely.”

While Barry thought about that, Cisco glared at Harrison. “Okay, but then why just Cisco? Why not everyone?”
“I’m hardly a licensed psychologist, Barry, however, I would assume that’s because Cisco’s safe. While you and Caitlin were friends, you weren’t close. Joe and your father would no doubt be deeply disappointed in you and you’ve told me yourself how heavily the guilt of abandoning Iris on that shore weighs on you. Cisco was your best friend, kind hearted and forgiving by nature. As I said, safe.”

The imaginary Cisco threw a jelly bean at Harrison’s head and Barry couldn’t stop the laugh that bubbled up. When Harrison frowned, Barry dropped his head. “Sorry, he, um, he threw a jelly bean at you.”

“Tell him it was mango.”

“He says it was mango flavored.”

Sighing, Harrison stood from his chair. “I trust you realize this is a very serious problem? If the CCPD finds out you’re hallucinating, you will lose your job.”

“Thank you, Captain Obvious.”

Barry chuckled. “I know.”

“Barry, if you lose your job, there are certain people who would be very concerned. They would come looking for you, to make sure you were okay and when they found out you weren’t, I highly doubt they would leave it alone. Do you understand?”

Barry’s mouth went dry at the implication.

“You can continue to live in the past, Barry, and risk the few friends you have left, or you can move forward into the future. A future, I might add, that can change that past. I’ll be in the accelerator if you need me.”

“Jerk.”

Cisco threw another jelly bean, but Barry wasn’t paying much attention. He was thinking about what Harrison had said. Not that the future could be changed, because Barry had no intention of changing anything, but about Oliver and Felicity. They’d insist on Barry coming back with them. They’d drag him if they had to and Harrison wouldn’t let that happen. He’d stop them by any means necessary.

Barry couldn’t let that happen.

His phone buzzed with a text message from Eddie, asking where he was. Considering what Harrison had just said, he shouldn’t, but the only other option was staying there and doing nothing.

Right, precinct it was.

*****
Saturday’s were busy downtown. Clean up and construction slowed to a stop, but other relief efforts were ramped up over the weekend and most of it centered in and around downtown – clothes, blankets, books, centers for the safe, legal entertainment of the city’s youth.

With so many people around, it made using his speed next to impossible. The Flash was presumed dead and he’d rather keep it that way. At least for now. So, he stopped at the edge of a mostly abandoned neighborhood just outside of the city center and walked the rest of the way.

The Precinct building wasn’t empty, but it was a close thing. Most of the officers were out on patrol or helping with crowd control. There were a handful of detectives actually in the building and it was easy enough to avoid eye contact with the few he passed on his way up the stairs to his lab. As soon as he was safe inside, door shut against unwanted visitors, he texted Eddie that he was there.

Two minutes later, he door opened and Eddie poked his head in, confused. “I didn’t think you were here.”

Barry shrugged with a smile and ignored Cisco looking in his microscope on the other side of the room. “I thought I should finish those report so they can close the case.”

Eddie looked down the hall before he stepped in and closed the door behind him. “I wanted to talk to you about what you said last night.”

“What I said?”

“How Dr. Wells?” Barry held in a curse as he realized Eddie was talking about the conversation they’d had at the bar. Damnit, he’d thought Eddie had been too inebriated to really remember that. “Barry, I know it’s not really any of my business…”

“You’re right it’s not.

“It just didn’t sound… healthy and your eye…”

“I hit a lamp post, Eddie. It happens.”

“Barry, are you sure you’re okay?” Eddie started to reach out, but stopped just short of touching Barry’s shoulder. It wasn’t the first time he’d done that in the last few weeks. Just like the way nearly everyone had stopped approaching him about anything.

Barry forced a smile and decided to ignore the obvious implications of that question. “I’m fine. Harrison checked me this morning. No more toxins, I’m all clean. You should go. I have work to do.”

Eddie hesitated, but backed down. “Call me tomorrow? And don’t stay too late, you can finish the reports up Monday, there’s no rush.”

“Something’s up with him.”

He nodded and waited until Eddie had left to let him smile drop. Cisco was right, something was up. Eddie was acting strange and while Barry was well aware that he’d been avoiding people and all social interactions with them, he’d never been the most outgoing person at work before this. He’d always been considered a little weird, but that had never stopped officers from coming up if they needed to check on something.

Now, when something had been sitting on his desk for a little too long, it was Eddie or the Captain who came up to ask about it, not the detective leading the case. Not to mention the other week, after
Jones had been by Barry’s lab three times in under an hour and Barry was quietly considering how best to get away with a homicide, he’d overheard Captain Singh call Jones into his office and Barry hadn’t seen the other CSI for two days after.

Of course, he couldn’t just come out and ask. If Eddie and Captain Singh were up to something, they wouldn’t just tell him.

“They might.” Barry glared at his hallucination. No, this required a more… stealthy approach.

*****

He kept himself busy in his lab until shift change, first by finishing up the reports so they could be turned in first thing Monday, and then by digging through the departments computer and finding out what he could on the meta-human Harrison had killed.

Cody Brandt had been twenty three, no priors. His closest living relatives were his cousin in the hospital and a great-aunt, currently retired and living in Brazil. They hadn’t been able to get in touch with her. His parents had died when he was a teenager, but there was no mention of how. He’d graduated from a local high school and gotten a job at the zoo taking care of the reptiles while he went to the community college for animal care.

According to his facebook, he loved animals, but especially reptiles and amphibians. The night of the accelerator explosion, he’d been cleaning cages at the zoo. After that, his online activity slowed to a crawl, mostly spurred by messages from his cousin Sarah, asking how he was doing about once a month. Then the tidal wave happened and she’d stopped messaging him entirely.

There wasn’t much information on her. She’d been nineteen and a freshman in college. She’d had a job at a small boutique, but after the wave, she’d become heavily involved in the volunteer relief efforts. Most, if not all of her friends had been local. Her facebook had gone inactive, but that wasn’t unusual. Dealing with the day to day of life after a major disaster made social media feel less important.

She’d had a prepaid cell-phone that had gone inactive, but she’d most likely lost it in the wave and hadn’t had the money to get a new one. While Barry’d had the benefit of job security with law enforcement, not everyone was that fortunate.

She probably hadn’t even realized her cousin was looking for her and now she was going to die in a hospital alone, because Barry had stuck his nose in it. It wasn’t just Cody’s death he was responsible for; it was her’s as well.

As soon as he was sure Captain Singh was gone and most of the detectives were either too busy closing out their computers, or opening them up to notice, he used his speed to slip through the Captain’s office door. It was dark, but there was enough sunlight coming through the half closed windows that he could see without turning on a light.

Personnel files were stored two ways, both digitally on Captain Singh’s computer and by hardcopy in a cabinet at the back of the office. While Barry was a decent hacker, he preferred to leave that
kind of thing to Felicity when at all possible. Thankfully, he didn’t need a key to access the cabinet.

Phasing through the front panel of the top drawer to the filing cabinet, he felt around for the inside of the latch and twisted until it popped open. It was louder than he would have liked, but no one came looking, so he was relatively certain it had gone unnoticed.

It didn’t take him long to find his file. Inside were the usual forms, employment intake information, occasional write up – mostly for tardiness – no complaints, which was interesting, but no very helpful. At the very back, though, was his psych evaluation.

His curiosity outweighed his moral dilemma and he flashed through it, his stomach sinking as he did so. Numbly, he read through it again, slower. Cisco had gone uncharacteristically silent and Barry tried not to think about what that meant.

A lot of it was observational notes. Barry avoided eye contact, answered questions evasively, seemed to be in a constant state of movement, from shifting positions on his chair to picking at the beds of his nails to the point they bled. He didn’t remember doing that. Other notes depicted inappropriate responses to emotional stimuli, whether it was increased anxiety or dark humor. The Rorschach test had been a complete mess of results, putting Barry’s subconscious all over the board.

The end analysis was that he was mentally and emotional unstable. ‘Possible psychotic break’ was underlines multiple times, however next to it was penned ‘no indication of homicidal tendencies.’ On the next page, the recommendation for continued employment was contingent on continuing psychiatric care and yearly re-evaluation.

He read through it a third time and then took pictures before returning it to the file and flashing back up to his lab to think. He shouldn’t be surprised. Not really. He should have known something was wrong with him, but he hadn’t felt different. He’d been emotional, but that was understandable, given the circumstance, wasn’t it?

Or was it?

Because when Barry said he was emotional, what he was really saying was that he felt overwhelmed by pain and grief and guilt and to cope with that he was antagonizing a dangerous sociopath who was, at least potentially, responsible for the deaths of thousands and was directly responsible for murdering Barry’s mom and two of his closest friends, until that sociopath was more than willing to rip him apart. Worse, when Barry finally succeeded in making Harrison angry, he used it to get sex.

“Barry, man, don’t do that to yourself.”

Barry covered his ears against Cisco’s voice, because Cisco had been one of Harrison’s victims. Cisco shouldn’t be offering him comfort or trying to make him feel better. Cisco should be yelling at him. He should be condemning Barry for finding comfort in the very person who’d murdered him. He should hate him for it.

“I could never hate you.”

“Shut up!”

He wanted to believe that. He wanted to so much it hurt worse than anything Harrison could do him, but that wasn’t really Cisco. It was a made up version of him that Barry’s psyche was clinging to, because he was desperate for someone to tell him it was okay. It wasn’t, though. None of this was okay.

“Barry…”
“Go away!” When silence fell over the room, Barry pulled his feet onto his chair to wrap his arms around his legs.

He wasn’t behaving like a sane, rational person and Harrison was right. He was going to do or say something to get the people he cared about killed. He couldn’t do that. He couldn’t keep going like he was, pretending everything was okay until it blew up in his face – until someone got hurt and next time that someone could be Oliver or Felicity or Eddie. He owed it to Iris to at least keep Eddie safe.

To keep Eddie safe, though, he had to stop pretending. He had to stop living in the past and move forward into the future. Even if that future wasn’t the one he’d been planning on. Even if it included Harrison.

“You sure about that?”

Barry looked over, a little surprised Cisco was still there. It would be easier if he wasn’t. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m sure.”

“I don’t like it.”

“I don’t have a choice.”

“You do. Barry, Oliver’s the Arrow. He can hold his own against the Reverse-Flash and you know some part of you has to believe that or I wouldn’t be saying it.”

Maybe, maybe not. Barry wasn’t willing to take that risk. Besides, if he went to Oliver, what if… what if Oliver did go after Harrison? What if he succeeded and somehow killed him and as much as Barry may hate himself for it, the idea of losing Harrison on top of everything else was just as gut wrenching as the idea of losing anyone else. He just… couldn’t. Not now.

If he kept an eye on Harrison, though, if he kept him close, maybe he could make sure Harrison didn’t hurt anyone else. Barry could take it if it came down to that and despite what Harrison said about losing his temper and killing him, Barry was fairly certain that would never happen. At least, certain enough. He wasn’t under any delusion that Harrison loved him, at least not the way most people were capable of love, but he did care, even if for his own reasons.

First thing first. “You need to go.”

“I don’t want to. Which means, you don’t want me to.”

“Maybe, but I can’t move on with you here.”

“Yeah, except I can’t exactly get up and walk out the door. I’m in your head. This is all up to you.”

Right. Saying it wasn’t enough, he needed to do something to convince himself. Luckily, he had a few ideas.
Eobard knew something wasn’t right the moment he walked in the door to his home. It wasn’t obvious right away, but it felt wrong. Different. It took a few moments to really see differences, in part because they were so very unexpected.

The first thing he noticed was the television, playing a movie or television program he didn’t recognize. Underneath it was an open box of DVD’s. Barry was on the couch, asleep, an unfamiliar blanket that appeared to be in the theme of Star Wars wrapped around him. On closer inspection, there were a handful of framed pictures set around the room, all of Barry’s family and friends.

Without waking Barry, Eobard made his way through the house, noting a small stack of cheap plastic Carebear cups on the counter of his kitchen. His own bedroom appeared untouched, however the closet inside the guest room was filled with shirts that had clearly belonged to Cisco. Several opened boxes containing books and magazines were on the floor.

A quick look confirmed that Barry had brought all of his things from S.T.A.R. Labs.

When he exited the room, Barry was sitting up on the couch and was pausing the television. He stretched, a tired smile on his face as he watched Eobard pour a glass of whiskey. “You’re home.”

“You brought your things over.” Harrison took a sip.

Barry’s smile faltered. “I moved in. Cisco’s gone.”

“You’re no longer hallucinating?”

“Nope. No more living in the past.”

That was interesting, but at the moment, it appeared to be a positive development. Eobard drank the rest of his whiskey and set the empty glass down, only to have Barry appear next to him, speedforce rippling around him at the short burst.

“I still have a lot left to do. I wasn’t sure where to put everything, but that can wait.” He grinned wickedly, a look entirely unbecoming of the Barry Allen that Eobard knew. “So, now what? Dinner and a movie? I’m not much of a cook, but I can make spaghetti.”

“You will do no such thing.” Eobard took Barry’s hand in his and held it up, pressing one finger into the knuckle and the other to the first joint of Barry’s pointer finger until it bent back at a slightly unnatural angle. “In fact, if you ever touch so much as a spatula in this kitchen, I will cut off your left index finger.”

Barry chuckled, only to cringe when Eobard increased the pressure, stopping just shy of breaking anything. “Wait, for real? Why? It’s not like you ever use it.”

“Regardless of whether I use them or not, the cost of my appliances alone are worth more than your annual salary and my insurance doesn’t cover reckless teenagers.”

“I’m not…”

The bone cracked and Barry fell to his knees, holding his hand to his chest. It took him a few minutes to pant through the pain, but Eobard knelt down and waited patiently until Barry looked up.

“Have I made myself clear?”

Barry grit his teeth and nodded, a familiar glint of lust and anger behind the pain in his eyes. There
was no defiance, however, none of the guilt Eobard had come to expect. Definitely an improvement. He’d have to introduce Barry to Gideon, solidify the idea that the past could be changed.

Not now, though. Now, he could think of much better things to do with Barry.
Chapter Summary

Just because he knew it was coming, doesn't mean he was ready for it.

"With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, you’re too smart to go down any not-so-good street." - Dr. Seuss-

-Present Day (One Year, Four Months and Two Weeks)-

Barry tapped his pen on his desk, frowning down at the half finished report in front of him. He should have been done an hour ago, but he was distracted. He was distracted because Oliver had implied the attack on Harrison would be happening soon, but had refused to elaborate.

Maybe instead of sulking, pouting, and being generally sarcastic, he should have realized it was hopeless and pretended to happily comply with their little plan, but he’d been too upset to really think it through and as a result, they wouldn’t tell him anything.

He’d asked Len, but all he’d gotten was absolute silence and that dead-eyed stare until he’d been uncomfortable enough to just leave.

Lisa’d brushed him off.

Mick had hit him upside the back of the head for his efforts.

Felicity had stumbled over excuses that quickly turned into innuendos and then apologies and he loved her too much to keep pestering after that.

The threat Eddie had made on the other Earth still haunted him enough that he wasn’t even willing to even ask. “Either you help me or I will kill myself.” He couldn’t give Eddie a reason to think he wasn’t going along with it.

At least Oliver had been honest enough to tell him they didn’t trust him not to change his mind and double cross them and, really, he’d be lying if he said the thought hadn’t crossed his mind. If he thought, for even a second, that Harrison wouldn’t kill every single one of them, he would, but he knew better and he wasn’t going to risk that.

It was frustrating, but in the end, it didn’t really matter. Barry didn’t need the details. He stuck close to them or to Harrison so that when they decided to strike, he’d be there. Not to stop them, but to make sure no one got hurt in the process. Not them and not Harrison. After that, Barry had his own plans.

“Barry.”

He looked up, a little surprised to see Oliver standing in the door to his lab, wearing a white t-shirt, leather jacket, and jeans. He was supposed to be laying low, not coming to visit Barry at the precinct. Not that there weren’t fail-safes. Gideon was under strict instructions to cover up any footage Barry’s
friends happen to show up in if at all possible. If not... well, Barry would deal with it. Or at least try. So far so good. However the precinct was heavily covered in Harrison’s little devices and that would make it harder.

Too late now. He forced a smile. “Hey, what’s up?”

“I need you to come with me.”

Barry considered saying no, but it was after five already and Harrison would be stuck at Iron Heights for another few hours. He grabbed his jacket as he followed Oliver outside where his bike was parked at the curb. “So, where to?”

Oliver started the engine and held out the passenger helmet. “Get on.”

Barry hesitated, but it was probably better to play along. If things went south, he could always make a run for it.

It didn’t take long for him to figure out where they were headed, but he let himself relax against Oliver and enjoy the ride. It was warm out, but the sun was starting to set and the wind felt good.

Despite Len’s offer to let Team Arrow use the warehouse, Oliver had insisted they find their own temporary headquarters. He’d made some good arguments – if they were compromised it was better not to have everyone at the same location, the warehouse was halfway across town, and there wasn’t exactly a shortage of abandoned buildings in the greater Central City area.

The truth was they were both Alpha males fighting over the same territory and Barry was apparently part of that territory, so he’d backed off and let them do whatever it was they were going to do, regardless of how he felt about it. At least the rest of the team got along. Well, mostly. Mick was on the fence. He stood by Len in the power struggle, but he didn’t seem to hate Felicity or Ray. Of course, he didn’t seem to like them, either, but that was Mick.

The motorcycle slowed to a stop and Barry opened his eyes, expecting to see the abandoned storage units that had been the base of Team Arrow’s operations for the last two weeks. Instead, he found himself staring at the side entrance of S.T.A.R. Labs. The entire exterior of the lab was dark. Harrison didn’t see the need to waste their power on lighting doors they never used. He also didn’t bother turning on what he considered unnecessary security measures, which meant most of the doors were unlocked, this one included.

He pulled his helmet off and frowned. “What are we doing here?”

“Felicity found something.”

Shit. Felicity wasn’t allowed to be in S.T.A.R. Labs. He’d made it very clear that he didn’t want her anywhere near there. What if Harrison got finished early? What if there were safeguards in place that Barry didn’t know about? It was too risky.

“We shouldn’t be here.”

Oliver opened the door. “It’s okay.”

“What if he catches you?”

“He won’t.”

Barry gritted his teeth in annoyance as he stormed past him, stopping long enough to glare with
narrowed eyes, just in case Oliver didn’t get that he was pissed about this. He followed wordlessly through the dark halls, illuminated only by the cell phone Oliver held in one hand.

There was no sound coming from the cortex, but he wasn’t surprised to see everyone there, spread out through the room. Lisa and Shawna were hovering by the medical bay. Eddie was beside Caitlin’s old lab. Mick and Ray had set themselves by another door at the back while Ronnie and Dr. Stein stood together by the side exit. Len was by the door they’d entered from, which left Felicity and Hartley, who were both at the computers, an empty chair between them.

He didn’t wait to be told to sit down. It was obvious what they wanted and he needed to get this over with. He needed to let them say whatever it was they needed to say so they’d leave before Harrison got back.

“So, what did you find? The blueprint for his master plan? His questionable porn collection? His autographed copy of Fifty Shades of Grey? His diary?”

Hartley raised an eyebrow. “He keeps a diary?”

“It’s more of an activity log, really, but it has its moments.”

Before Hartley could ask, Oliver cut him off. “That’s not why we’re here.”

Barry dropped his head back and to the left so he could see Oliver guarding the entry doors with Len. “Then why are we here?”

There was a whoosh of air to his right at the same time something closed around his wrist and even with his speed, he barely caught a glimpse of Shawna as she disappeared, back on the other side of the room. He looked down and god dammit! It was the spare set of cuffs Harrison kept at S.T.A.R. Labs, the ones Barry couldn’t phase out of, linking his wrist to the arm of the chair.

Instinctively, he tried to pull his hand through them, but they didn’t budge. He twisted in the chair, seething at Oliver and Len, who were slowly lowering their weapons.

Barry dropped his voice to a threatening rumble. “Let me go.”

When it became obvious Barry wasn’t able to get out, Len relaxed and shook his head. “Not happening, Scarlet.”

“But…”

Oliver cut him off. “We’re taking Wells down tonight and we need to make sure you’re out of the way.”

No. No, no, no, it wasn’t supposed to happen like this. He was supposed to be helping them. He’d promised. He’d meant it even. Desperately, he looked around the room, hoping for some sign of weakness among the faces around him, but everyone had the same determined expression.

He stood, pulling at the chair. If he had to take it with him he would, but he wasn’t letting them face Harrison alone. He wasn’t losing anyone tonight, not if he had any say in it. Except the chair didn’t budge and a closer look confirmed that it had been bolted to the floor.

With a frustrated scream, he yanked at the cuff, ripping at the skin of his wrist until it bled. Then he froze, because what if they were going back on their promise? What if they’d decided to kill Harrison instead and that’s why they were restraining him.
Turning back to Len and Oliver, he took a shaky breath, trying for calm over the panic. “Don’t do
this. Oliver, Len, please don’t do this. I’ll help lock him up, but don’t… You don’t have to kill him. I
want to help. Let me help!”

He could see the others shifting uncomfortably. Ronnie and Dr. Stein looked especially taken aback,
but then he’d only seen them one other time since they’d made it into town and he’d been on his best
behavior that day, doing a passable impression of pre-wave Barry. But he couldn’t think about that.
He had to focus on Oliver and Len. They were the leaders here, it was up to them.

“Please?”

Len shook his head once. “Not happening.”

Felicity stood to touch his shoulder. “No one’s killing anyone. We don’t do that anymore,
remember? We just don’t think it’s a good idea for you to get in the middle of it, okay?”

No, it wasn’t okay. It wasn’t okay at all. But they weren’t going to listen to him.

Barry slumped down into the chair and Felicity gave him a smile that was probably meant to be
reassuring. Under normal circumstances, it might have been, but Barry wasn’t really in the mood to
be reassured.

After a moment the rest of the room regrouped, pulling together at the far end of the room to go over
the plan in hushed tones. Barry caught some of it. Len, Oliver, Mick, and Firestorm were going out
to face Harrison, as previously agreed. Ray, Shawna, and Hartley would be on the roof, ready to
jump in if necessary. If they failed and it looked like the Reverse Flash was going to win, it was up to
Shawna and Eddie to make sure Barry, Lisa, and Felicity got to the safe house.

Idly, he wondered where that was. It couldn’t be anywhere Harrison would think to look. Not Star
City, not Eddie’s apartment, maybe the warehouse, but he doubted Oliver would trust the Rogue’s
security enough to risk Felicity. It would be somewhere new that they’d set up, maybe somewhere
with a cell to keep Barry from running.

“Hey.”

He lolled his head to the side, giving Hartley his best dead stare. “What?”

“You okay?”

“Not unless you have the key.” Barry rattled the cuff against the chair.

“He really got into your head, didn’t he?”

“I’m not the only one, or have you forgotten your little vengeance spree? I haven’t. Nothing quite
like the feeling of your inside liquefying while you’re still conscious. It’s a singularly unique
experience.”

Hartley stiffened defensively and backed down, going back to the computers. Past transgressions
were usually off the board, but Barry didn’t feel like playing nice.

Out of the corner of his eye, Len looked over at them, but didn’t move to intervene.

Barry sighed, swallowing the urge to apologize. It wasn’t Hartley’s fault, really, it was just strange
having the cortex so full of life after so long. The other Earth had been different. It had felt like a
dream – everything perfect and pristine, filled with all of his friends and family. It hadn’t felt real,
because it couldn’t be. Those people were dead and that place, as it was, was gone.

This was his home with people that were alive and he didn’t like it. It felt wrong. The cortex was too noisy and every nerve and neuron he had was screaming ‘danger.’ They shouldn’t be there, but they were and he was cuffed to a chair, so there was nothing he could do about it.

Oliver broke away from the group and came over to put a hand on Felicity’s shoulder. “We’re ready.”

She squeezed his hand, holding on a little longer before letting go. He nodded to the others and the group left, filing out of the main door and into the hall.

As soon as they were gone, Felicity took her phone out and Barry turned to her. “What are you doing?”

“I’m letting Wells know that we have you and that if he wants you back, he’ll meet Oliver in front of S.T.A.R. Labs.”

“Shouldn’t you be trying to take him by surprise?”

Eddie took the seat Hartley had been in, shaking his head. “He’s a speedster. If we try to sneak up on him and he hears us, he’ll react faster than we can. Hartley says he likes to grandstand. If we set it up like a showdown, he’ll take the time to make an entrance, monologue maybe. It’ll start the fight off on even footing.”

On the monitors, Oliver, Len, Mick, and a fully formed Firestorm stepped out of the doors and put themselves front and center. As soon as they were in place, Felicity took a deep breath and hit send on her phone.

That was it. It was up to Harrison to respond to the threat. Not that Barry had any doubt he would it was just a matter of waiting.

Unfortunately, Barry hated waiting. In the five minutes between Felicity sending the message and Harrison showing up, his brain ran through every worst case scenario at lightening speed. He hadn’t felt this helpless in over a year, not since he’d given up trying to fight a battle he couldn’t win, since he’d stopped fighting himself. He tugged at the cuffs in annoyance, more to give himself something to do than a real attempt at escape, but Eddie still looked at him, concerned and nervous.

Hm. Interesting. He raised his eyebrows at Eddie, wiggling them suggestively and Eddie turned away, face a pale pink.

He considered prodding a little more – he was bored, angry, nervous, and Eddie had earned it, putting him in this position – but he was interrupted by an unfamiliar alarm sounding through the cortex. Felicity immediately hit the coms with, “Incoming” and a moment later, Harrison appeared on the monitors, coming to a stop several feet from the waiting group, red lightening on the heals of his running shows, his hair wind blown, and his suit unwrinkled.

As he took in what was waiting for him, a grin slowly spread over his face. “Oliver Queen, you I expected. Ronnie, Dr. Stein, always a pleasure. However, I must admit, I never saw Captain Cold and Heatwave coming.”

Barry could see Len’s hand moving on the trigger of the Sub-Zero gun, ready to fire at a moment’s notice, even if the rest of him was perfectly still. “And here Barry talks about how smart you are.”

“Really?” Harrison’s grin widened. “So, that’s where he’s been running off to. I’ll have to remember
to tell him how disappointed I am when I’m done disposing of you. Is your sister here? What did they call her in my time? Ah, yes, Golden Glider. I find it hard to believe she isn’t here somewhere. And the lovely Felicity Smoak. I’m going to enjoy ripping her nosy little heart out and shoving it in Barry’s face.”

Barry couldn’t help the desperate whimper that made its way from the back of his throat, or his redoubled efforts to pull his hand out of the cuffs. Maybe he could cut it off at the wrist? It wasn’t like he couldn’t reattach it, but there wasn’t anything around he could use. Lisa put a staying hand on his shoulder and Barry tensed under it without pulling away.

On the screen, Oliver took one of the specially designed arrows out of his quiver and pulled it tight on his bow, aiming it at Harrison. “We’re done talking.”

“Good.” Harrison held up his fist, ring aimed out and a moment later he was clad in his Reverse-Flash suit.

Barry watched helplessly, eyes moving over the monitors at a frantic pace as everyone burst into action all at once. Len fired at the ground, covering it in ice the moment Harrison took a step. It forced him to come to an abrupt stop, eyes glowing.

Len pulled back and on the other screen, Barry could see Oliver moving into a better position as Firestorm threw fireballs at Harrison’s feet, keeping his focus away from the archer.

The other him hadn’t given Barry all that much detail on how the battle between him and his Reverse-Flash had gone. When Barry had asked, he’d simply said Oliver and Firestorm had helped. The plans he’d sent back with Eddie had been much more detailed, giving them a slight upper hand, but that wasn’t going to be enough, not without Barry there helping.

He twisted his hand in the cuff, agitated. He was supposed to be helping.

As soon as Harrison’s back was turned, Oliver took the shot. It lodged itself in Harrison’s thigh, but he barely spared it a glance, before using his arms to create a wind tunnel that threw Firestorm through the air.

Felicity hit the mic immediately. “Firestorm’s airborne.”

On the other monitor, Ray shot off in his suit to fly after Firestorm, leaving Shawna behind with Hartley. Not good. Not good.

As he disappeared from the cameras into the distance, Harrison pulled the arrow from his leg and held it up. He studied it with a frown as his body stopped vibrating and the red in his eyes dulled out to a natural blue.

Oliver stood straighter. “The arrows are loaded with nanites. They cancel out your speed.”

Harrison sneered. “I don’t need my speed.”

The mask obscured his face, but Barry knew that tone. Harrison was pissed that Oliver had made the shot – that someone had gotten one up on him. A pissed Harrison was a dangerous Harrison, with or without the speedforce.

He looked up at Lisa, who still had a hand on his shoulder, but she was fixated on the monitor where Oliver and Harrison had started fighting. Even at a normal speed, it was difficult to follow. Len and Mick had pulled back to stand side by side, guns at the ready. They couldn’t interfere without hitting Oliver, but it didn’t look like they needed to.
Oliver was getting the upper hand, slowly, but surely. Barry had known Oliver was a skilled fighter, but he hadn’t thought…

Harrison flipped over, landing hard on his back, clearly winded and Barry froze, half hoping, half fearing it was over. He didn’t want Harrison locked up. He didn’t want to hurt him like that, but he didn’t want to lose everyone else, either, and this way he wasn’t losing anyone. Not really. Eventually, Harrison would come around and then it would be different. It would be okay.

Oliver’s guard dropped, just a little, Len and Mick relaxed their grip, not lowering their weapons, but waiting. The three of them looked at each other, a silent question of whether that was it, but the moment their eyes were off him, Harrison started shaking. No. No, he was vibrating. He was throwing the nanites off.

Felicity noticed, as well, but she’d barely managed to yell, “Oliver!” Before Harrison was up, wrapping a hand around Oliver’s neck as he ran the short distance between them and the Rogues. He let go of Oliver at the last moment, throwing him into Mick at full speed. They tumbled over each other to the ground, stunned while Harrison continued forward. He ducked under the beginning blast from the Sub-Zero gun and knocked the weapon out of Len’s hand. It skidded across the parking lot, coming to a stop somewhere in the dark.

Lisa’s hand on Barry’s shoulder tightened. Her nails bit into his skin through his shirt as they watched Harrison’s hand close around Len’s throat and drive him back into the wall, his head hitting the metal with a sickening crack. Through Len’s com, they heard the deep, vibrating voice of the Reverse-Flash. “Where’s Barry?”

Len smiled, teeth stained red. “Safe.”

Harrison’s free hand rose, vibrating dangerously as it rested over Len’s chest. “Tell me where he is.” Barry’s throat close. His heart was beating too fast, even for him. Harrison was going to win. It was the tidal wave all over again. Everyone he loved, everyone he cared about was in the same place at the same time and disaster was coming. Shawna could maybe get some of them away, but maybe not, and Barry was handcuffed to a chair, unable to do anything again and it wasn’t fair. Not again. Not again. Not again.

His body vibrated at a frantic speed, instinctively pulling from that deep place Barry didn’t quite understand, the place that let him keep going when he didn’t actually have anything left in him. There had to be something he could say or do, something to make them let him go, because if they didn’t… if they didn’t…

Barry took a deep breath and yanked at the cuff, ready to beg if he had to, only to feel his hand pull free, phasing through the cuff.

Holy shit. That shouldn’t be possible. That wasn’t…

Lisa’s eyes went wide, Eddie cursed, Felicity froze, and Barry… Barry ran.

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There wasn’t time to think. He was faster than Harrison knew, but he wasn’t faster than Harrison. At least, he didn’t think he was. He might be. Harrison implied it was possible. Here and now, though, Barry couldn’t be sure. What he was sure of, though, was that if he hesitated for even a moment, he’d be too late.

As it was, he barreled into Harrison, knocking him back just before the vibrating hand of death entered Len’s chest cavity. It was a sloppy hit, too much force with not enough aim. They slammed into the ground hard, Barry flipping over Harrison’s head and skidding to a stop several feet away and owe. He’d forgotten to put on his suit.

His entire left side, from just under his arm to his hip, was on fire and both elbows had cracked against the pavement on landing. He didn’t think he’d broken anything and a quick look confirmed that while his side had been shredded, it wasn’t as bad as it could have been. Of course, that didn’t mean it didn’t hurt, but he’d deal with that later.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Harrison starting to get up. Barry pushed past the pain to stumble to his feet to put himself between Harrison and the others.

Harrison took his time. He let Barry get his feet under him, and then looked him up and down appraisingly. “There you are. I was beginning to worry.”

“They’re mine. You don’t touch them.”

“Our agreement, Barry, was for Team Arrow, not the Rogues, and it was entirely dependent on them not interfering with my plans. I believe abducting you and attempting to kill me counts as interference.”

Barry didn’t dare take his eyes off Harrison, but he could hear movement behind him, slow and with a lot of grunting and groaning, but movement. He needed to buy them time to get a head start. It wouldn’t be much, but it was the best he could do for now. Crouching half down, Barry let the lightning roll over him to make sure Harrison knew he was coming. When Harrison smiled, Barry took a moment to half turn his head, still not taking his eyes off Harrison, but enough to let them know he was talking to them. “Get out of here!”

Harrison hit him in the chest and Barry slid back on the balls of his feet, then launched himself forward into the fight. He managed to block most of the more devastating blows aimed at his face and sternum. His arms ached from the force of the punches, but he’d had worse. So much worse. Harrison was barely even trying and that was bad. Bad bad bad, because it meant he was toying with Barry.

A fist landed against his shoulder, knocking his off kilter and then and kick into his rib cage threw him back. He wasn’t sure what he’d hit at first, only that it was hard and knocked the air out of his lungs.

He rolled onto his hands and knees and coughed into the ground, forcing air into his lungs. Harrison was definitely playing. A kick like that should have done more damage.

It took him a second to clear his vision and when he did, Harrison was kneeling over him, staring down with contempt. Past that, he could see Len standing, gripping the wall for support, his gun somewhere else in the dark parking lot. Mick and Oliver were getting to their feet as well, steadier
than Len and they still had their weapons, but they needed more time. He should have put on his suit so he could communicate with Felicity and tell her to get Shawna to help extract them faster.

More time.

He dove forward, knocking Harrison to the ground.

It was hard to tell exact time. Minutes felt like seconds, especially when he was fighting Harrison. It took all of his focus to maintain a careful balance between winning and losing. Fight, but not too hard. Defend himself, but not too well. He had to keep Harrison interested, but he didn’t want to hurt him.

When Barry went down again, Harrison’s foot followed, slamming into his ribs with enough force to make him see white. He blinked it away and looked across the parking lot, hoping he’d bought them enough time, only to see them still there. Len had managed to retrieve his gun and was braced with his back against the wall, ready to fire. Mick stood firm, face set in an angry frown that said he wanted to kill someone. Oliver’s head was tilted to the right, listening to something Felicity must have been saying in his ear. Firestorm was next to him. Ray must have gone back up to the roof, or was miniaturized somewhere nearby.

What did they think they were doing? The nanites didn’t work. They needed to run, regroup, live to fight another day, but they weren’t. They were standing there like they were preparing to give it another try.

“You can do better than that.”

He looked up at Harrison, who was standing over him, hood pulled down so Barry could see his face, his expression, the amusement and annoyance twisted together.

Barry licked the blood off his lip and returned Harrison’s smile with one of his own. “But I don’t want to. Performance anxiety. Not used to having an audience. Now, if you wanna take this somewhere more private…”

The boot connected with Barry’s ribs again. “Get up!”

The smile widened. “Make me.”

Harrison reached down and grabbed Barry by the throat, pulling him up to his feet and then higher, until his toes barely touched the floor. “I’m disappointed, Barry. I thought I made it very clear what would happen if you brought your friends into this.”

The humor left at the mention of his failure. “I tried.”

“Clearly not hard enough.”

“Please.”

“Don’t worry. When I’m done cleaning up your mess, we’ll get back to what’s important and before you know it, you’ll be back home, with your real family and your real friends.”

Your mess. Like it was Barry’s fault this was happening. Like he hadn’t begged and pleaded and lied and done everything he could possibly do to keep them away. He’d tried. He’d tried so hard.

It was like the wave all over again and it wasn’t his fault. It hadn’t been his fault then, either. He hadn’t really needed the other him to confirm what he already knew. If Harrison hadn’t stopped him,
he could have saved them, but they were gone now and there was no getting them back. Even if he
did what Harrison wanted and reset the timeline by saving his mother, they wouldn’t be his friends
and his family. They would be different and he would be different and nothing would be the same.

Barry closed his eyes against the long buried anger swelling to the surface, but it was too late. It was
a physical thing crawling over him, over his skin. It hurt, like burning, but worse. It made him see
red.

This was all Harrison’s fault. All of it. If he hadn’t stopped Barry, he’d still have his friends and
family. He’d still have his home and he wouldn’t be stuck with this twisted wrong version of the
world, of himself, and it was all. Harrison’s. Fault.

Barry moved without thinking, striking out to slam the heel of his hand into the bridge of Harrison’s
nose with a satisfying crunch.

“It’s your fault!”

His kicked out, catching Harrison’s knee then again, getting him in the chest and throwing him onto
his back. He didn’t give Harrison a chance to react before jumping on him, straddling his waist with
fists already flying at lightning speed, catching the other speedster off guard.

“You did this!”

“It’s your fault!” He threw punches, one after the other. Some distant part of him realized he was
using the speedforce, realized that Harrison had stopped fighting back. “It’s your fault!”

From somewhere very far away, past the roar of blood and anger and speed in his ears, he heard
someone yell, “Kid!” but he was too far gone to care. A hand touched his shoulder and Barry turned,
swinging his fist at the source of the contact without thinking. The moment it connected, he froze.

Shit. That wasn’t Harrison. Harrison was on the ground under him. So, who had…?

Oh, god. Mick was laid out several feet away, blood pouring out of his nose. He hadn’t meant…
he’d just… and he’d been so angry.

Len knelt down beside Mick, asking if he was okay. Mick nodded and lifted his hand to press it over
his face.

Oliver moved a step forward, then hesitated and Barry hated that. He hadn’t meant to hurt Mick,
he’d just reacted. He hadn’t meant to. He could hear Lisa’s words in his ears, ‘We’re just worried
you’ll get mad enough not to realize what you’re doing until you’ve already done it.’

The front door of S.T.A.R. Labs opened and Lisa came running to her brother and Mick. Felicity
and Eddie close behind her. Eddie hung back, but Felicity didn’t.

She took a moment to check on Oliver then moved over to Barry, not touching him, but standing
close to. “Barry?”

He blinked, turning his head to look at her and she visibly relaxed. Slowly, she put a hand on his
shoulder and he felt… tired. He was really tired and confused. And hungry.

“Barry, it’s over. Let’s get you inside, okay?” He looked down at Harrison, unconscious under him
and frowned. There was another arrow in Harrison’s leg. When had that happened?

Felicity knelt down next to him and gently touched his arm to get his attention. “Don’t worry.
They’ll take care of him.”

“Don’t hurt him.” He wasn’t sure why he’d needed to say that, except take care of sounded like something out of a movie, just before they dragged the guy off and shot him in the head.

Felicity shook her head. “They’ll just take him to the pipeline, Barry. He’ll be fine. You can see for yourself after we finish looking you over.”

He still hesitated, but she tugged on his arm and he was really tired. Reluctantly, he stood to let her lead him into S.T.A.R. Labs, trying not to look at the others as they passed.

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“Next person touches me, loses a hand.”

“Mick…”

“I ain’t kiddin’, Len.”

“But…” Shawna stopped with her hand hovering dangerously close to Mick’s face. “It could be broken.”

“No could be. It is.”

“Then let me…” His narrowed eyes and she backed down with a sigh. “Fine.”

Barry watched her storm off through the window of the medical bay. It should have been funny, but he wasn’t really in the mood to laugh. Felicity had led him inside and made him sit on the bed before going to check on Oliver again. Shawna had popped her head in shortly after, asked if he was okay and when he’d said yes, she’d left without another word.

He looked down at the melted rubber on the bottom of his shoes, the torn out knees of his jeans, blood soaked into the frayed edges. His knees were already scabbing over, sealing in the little rocks and debris that had dug into the wounds. Absently, he picked at it, tearing off the scab to dig the dirt out with his finger nails.

Thankfully, everyone was more or less okay. Len had taken the worst of it. He’d needed two stitches on the back of his head and he’d bitten his tongue. His voice was gravelly, but there wasn’t any permanent damage.

Firestorm was fine, thanks to Ray catching him before he could hit the ground. Oliver had been a little bruised from his collision with Mick and might have a mild concussion, but nothing he wouldn’t recover from. Mick had his broken nose. All told, they’ve gotten off lucky.

Barry hissed as he ripped another large chunk of scab off and dug out a small pebble that felt larger than it was.

“What’re you doin’?”
Mick standing in the doorway, nose swollen and red. The cortex was empty. He stared down at his bloody fingers and reopened wound and shrugged. “It scabbed over before I could clean it out.”

Mick silently went to the sink and soaked a rag in water, then grabbed a chair and pulled it across the floor, sitting in it next to the cot. He pulled Barry’s leg across his knee.

Barry raised an eyebrow, cocking his head to the side curiously as Mick took the wet rag and pressed it to the scab. After a minute, he rubbed the cloth gently over the scab, pulling it off less painfully than Barry would have expected.

“You don’t have to do that. I can get one of the others if you…”

“Shut up.” Barry snapped his mouth shut and Mick sighed deep, ending it with something like a growl. “I was EMT certified, part of bein’ a firefighter.”

“Oh.” Barry didn’t say anything for a while. He watched, fascinated, as Mick use gauze and tweezers to clean one knee before moving onto the other. Mick always looked like he was one wrong word away from started a fight and his hands were rough and callused, but he was surprisingly gentle. It barely hurt at all.

When he’d finished with the knees, he had Barry hold up his arm so he could get to his elbow and Barry finally broke the silence, reluctant, but determined. “I’m sorry.”

Mick glanced up from his work for a moment. “For what?”

“Hitting you?”

That got him a grunt of laughter. “Kid, I had worse in juvvie.”

Barry frowned. “You’re not mad?”

Mick shrugged and dabbed the cleaned elbow with antiseptic, moving onto the next one. “Knew gettin’ between you two was a bad idea. This ain’t nearly as bad as I thought it’d be.”

“Then why do it?” Because that didn’t make sense. Mick may have been the brawn to Len’s brains, but he wasn’t stupid.

“Cause you never wouda forgiven yourself if you’d killed him.” Barry went cold at the thought. It hadn’t occurred to him, but… but he would have. In that moment he’d been so angry, if Mick hadn’t stopped him…

Barry swallowed down rising bile. “Thank you.”

Mick shrugged. “Just promise you ever decide you really do want to waste that sorry sack of shit, you let me watch.”

*****
When the last of the bandages had been stuck on – with protest, because Barry insisted infection wasn’t possible and with his healing rate, it would be fine in the next ten minutes, while Mick insisted he would drag Barry’s ass to Lisa and that Felicity Smoak chick and let them handle him – he went to change into the clean clothes he left in the office, the one he shared with Harrison.

It looked exactly like it always did. The collection of Funko Pop figures he’d been buying to irritate Harrison were lined at the front of the desk, turned to stare with soulless black eyes at the cot they slept in when they were both too tired or horny or hurt to try and make it home for the night.

With a sigh, Barry flicked Dumbledore in the head, knocking him over onto his back and picked up Vader, taking it with him. He found Hartley, Felicity, and Ray in Cisco’s old lab, looking over one of his computers. Len was standing by the door, quietly listening.

He stopped in front of Len, just out of sight of the others and held Vader up. “Come to the dark side.”

Len raised his eyebrow. “I did. They lied about the cookies.”

“Maybe you’re going to the wrong dark side.”

Len smirked. “That an offer, Scarlet.”

“I’m just saying my dark side has cookies.”

“That’s what they all say.”

It wasn’t much, but the light banter was enough to let him know Len wasn’t mad. “What are they doing?”

“Your boyfriend’s awake. They’re making sure the cell’s holding up.”

Harrison was okay. Barry let out a breath and the tension he hadn’t realized he was holding melted. “Can I see him?”

Len seemed to consider it for a moment before looking over his shoulder. “Hartley, we good?”

Hartley held a thumb up, not looking over from his animated conversation with the other scientists. Barry couldn’t remember the last time he’d seen Hartley that enthusiastic. Maybe never.

Len turned back to Barry. “Bay 52 and don’t try anything, we revoked your access to the cells.”

Barry wanted to feel hurt by that, but in truth, he was relieved, because he couldn’t say he wouldn’t be tempted. He wanted to think he was stronger than that, but he knew enough to never underestimate Harrison’s ability to manipulate people.

He made an ‘x’ over his heart and smiled as he backed down the hall. “Cross my heart and hope to die.”

*****
Eobard leaned his back against the cell wall, glaring at the empty bay and its open door, mocking him.

He’d woken there some time ago, ten or twenty minutes perhaps, to find himself stripped of his Reverse-Flash costume. They’d left him in his black slacks and dark t-shirt, but had not given him the dignity of shoes or socks.

He should have seen this coming.

He’d known Barry still harbored a great deal of anger toward him. It surfaced occasionally, when Barry’s incessant ‘I won’t let you leave me’ turned to ‘you have to live with this,’ but he’d thought he had enough control over the boy to keep it from becoming a problem. He should have realized that threatening his only remaining friends would bring it out, but Eobard had been angry himself – at Barry for failing to keep his friends in check, at the Rogues and Team Arrow for thinking they could interfere with his plans.

There had been so many setbacks. He should have been home a year ago, but there had been the tidal wave and then he’d been forced to accept a position on the Anti-Metahuman Task Force, limiting the time he had to work on the accelerator. What little time he did have was often interrupted. Barry was… demanding was putting it nicely. The boy’s entire reason for living seemed to be to distract Eobard was getting work done and he was unfortunately good at causing those distractions.

It was the primary reason he hadn’t looked too far into where Barry was going when he disappeared. He’d assumed somewhere quiet to pull himself together and seeing as Barry had always come back to him saner, calmer, and more focused Eobard had taken the reprieve and been glad for it.

He usually wasn’t so negligent. It was unbecoming of a man of his intellect. He hadn’t spent sixteen painstaking years planning this only to have it ruined by Oliver Queen and Leonard Snart.

No, they weren’t ruined, not entirely. This was merely another setback and while infuriating, the fact remained that as long as Barry was still alive and his accelerator was functioning, he could make it work.

Of course, he’d have to convince Barry to let him out of this godforsaken cell, but that shouldn’t prove too difficult.

As if on cue, he felt the lightning in the air a moment before the yellow streak of Barry Allen flashed into the room, coming to a halt at the door. He had one of those ridiculous, top heavy figures in his hand and a grin on his face.

“Harrison!”

“Barry.”

Barry toyed with the dark dome head of the figure, his smile faltering only slightly. “You’re okay.”

“Of course.”

Barry bit his lip and nodded, more to himself then Eobard. “Good, that’s… good.”

“Open the door, Barry.”
Barry shook his head, still holding the figure tightly in both hands. “Can’t.”

“Barry, I’m not angry with you.” A small lie, but a necessary one. “You’re afraid of what changing the timeline will mean, I understand that and I understand that you don’t feel you can trust me at the moment. Open the door so we can talk about this. I’m sure we can reach an… understanding.”

Barry raised his eyebrows and cocked his head to the side in clear disbelief. “For real?”

They both knew the only understand that was going to be reached was at the end of the literal whip Eobard intended to beat Barry into submission with. It had, perhaps, been too much to hope that Barry would fall for that again.

Eobard walked forward to stand less than a foot away from the glass, eyes narrowed. “Open the door, Barry.”

Barry tensed, but didn’t move. “I said I can’t.”

“Open the door!”

“I can’t.” Barry stormed to the control panel and pressed his palm to the pad. The buzz of the rejected print was audible, even from that far away. “I don’t have access. They don’t trust me.”

“Then you’ll gain their trust.”

Barry rocked on his heels and looked at the ceiling for a moment before shaking his head. “Nope, I’m not doing that either.”

“Barry…”

“Remember when you had me locked in here, after I found out who you really were? Remember what you said you wanted.”

Eobard’s eye twitched, but he forced himself not to lash out. “I wanted you to listen.”

“Exactly! So, now it’s your turn. Your turn to listen to me. Your future is as dead as my past.”

“Your past can be changed.”

“No, it can’t. Not like that. The other me told me. He said the universe replaces one disaster with another, sometimes worse one. So how do I know it’s better? How do I know that if I go back, if I save my mother and avert the tidal wave, it doesn’t make things worse?”

Cold dread filled the pit of Eobard’s stomach. “I told you…”

“Uh uh.” Barry interrupted with a scowl. “Do you know how I know you’re lying, Harrison? Your mouth is moving.”

Barry took a deep breath and stepped away from the glass, setting the Darth Vader figure on the ground, facing Eobard, who found himself at an uncharacteristic loss for words.

“It won’t be so bad. You’ll see. I can’t give you your future back, Harrison. I won’t. But I can make you a new one. Whatever you want, I’ll do it. Well, almost. I won’t let you hurt my friends, but anything else. I’ll challenge you when you want me to, defy you when you need it, and if you ask me to, I’ll stand with you.”

When Eobard still failed to speak, Barry smiled with a renewed smile, too wide to be honest. “I’ll
bring back dinner, yeah? Thai food, or big belly burger? Oh, I know! That place that does the chocolate malts you like.”

“Be right back.” Barry’s eyes twinkled in amusement. “Don’t go anywhere.”

With a wink, Barry shot off into S.T.A.R. Labs, leaving Eobard alone in the pipeline.
Sometimes the questions

Chapter Summary

Not without hope.

Chapter Notes

I’ve made some minor formatting edits to the chapter titles to make them easier to browse. Thank you so much for everyone who stuck with this. I'm now going to sit at my desk in utter shock until it sinks in that it's done.

Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple. -Dr.Seuss-

-Present (One Year and Six Months)-

“He could be anyone, Harrison. He could be me. All he has to do is touch you and he becomes you. I don’t even think he needs to touch you more than once, because when Eddie tried to haul him in, the guy turned into a little girl and started screaming ‘stranger danger’ and ‘bad touch.’ It was hilarious. Some old lady beat him with her purse and a teenager maced him. I would have helped, but I couldn’t breathe I was laughing so hard. The guy got away, though. That was disappointing. I’ll do better next time. Cheese fries?”

“No.”

“Harrison, we talked about this.”

“No, thank you.”

“That’s better. Oh, and then, this morning, Captain Singh called me into his office and gave me a stern lecture about letting my Flash activities affect getting into work on time. I didn’t even know he knew. Apparently, Oliver told him. I mean, for real, why doesn’t he just take out a billboard? Do you know his name?”

“The Green Arrow?”

“No, the meta-human, the one who can turn into anyone. Did you have someone like him in your history books? Did he have a name?” There was a long pause. “Harrison!”

There was a sigh. “Everyman.”

“Really? That… I’m somehow disappointed. I feel like Cisco could have done better. Eddie went on a date last night. She was cute, really sweet. Nothing like Iris, though, but that’s okay. Which reminds me, who does he marry? Like who’s your great great great whatever grandmother? I’ll introduce them. I mean, he’ll be suspicious, but if there’s alcohol and maybe a roofie involved, I
Eddie stepped out from behind the wall and interrupted. “Barry, you should do another sweep of the city.”

Barry didn’t move from where he was seated with his back to the glass door of Eobard Thawne’s cell, legs up and one arm draped over them, the other digging into the container that held the offered chili-cheese fries.

“I did a sweep two hours ago.”

“And there’s a dangerous meta-human on the loose.”

Barry scoffed, “He’s hardly dangerous. He’s killed like what, one person so far? Harrison has killed way more than that.”

“Barry.”

“Fine.” Barry rolled his eyes and tipped his head back to look at Eobard. “Be back.”

Eddie watched Barry leave, waiting until he was out of the bay and somewhere down the hallway before turning to Eobard. “You need anything?”

Eobard’s smile didn’t quite reach his eyes. “I could tell you, you know? Who the future Mrs. Thawne will be.”

“I don’t want to know. Even if I do meet her, I don’t plan on having children.”

“And yet I’m still here.”

“You’re still here because it would kill what little there is left of Barry if you weren’t. Now, do you need anything?”

Eobard shrugged, still smiling. “I’m fine. Barry takes very good care of me.”

Eddie ignored the jab and instead put his hand on the panel, closing the bay doors and sending Eobard back into the pipeline for the night. Barry did take good care of Eobard and that was half the problem. When he wasn’t at work, he was at S.T.A.R. Labs and when he was there, he was with Eobard. Hours upon hours, talking, eating, sleeping, watching movies, playing games. They’d eventually started closing the bay door at night so that Barry would at least sleep somewhere else.

When somewhere else had been the cot in Eobard’s office, they’d suggested he go home for the night. Barry had then locked himself in the office and sulked for days, refusing to talk to anyone, snapping at his co-workers and eventually they’d all agreed it was better to let this thing run its course.

Its course, however, was taking longer than Eddie would have liked. Dr. Holt assured him that this wasn’t going to happen over night and he needed to be patient, but there were days that it almost felt like things were getting worse rather than better and… Eddie stopped in the hallway just outside the cortex and gave himself a moment to pull his thoughts together before walking in.

Barry had once called S.T.A.R. Labs a shell of its former self, a ghost town. It wasn’t a ghost town anymore. Oliver and Len had managed to come to an agreement, whereby Oliver and his team couldn’t stay, but Len and the Rogues could. Someone needed to watch over the pipeline and make sure Eobard Thawne didn’t escape or, worse, Barry didn’t find a way to let him out. Eddie could
help, but he had a job with long hours and, on occasion, he needed to sleep.

At first, it had just been shifts, taken two at a time and while Barry had been dubious of Len and the Rogues helping out at S.T.A.R. Labs, he’d perked up the first time a meta-human popped up and Hartley had suggested they could help Barry apprehend her.

That had been a little over six weeks ago. Since then, the Rogues had all but moved in. Actually, Eddie would be surprised if there was anything left at the warehouse. Shawna was apparently the best move-in buddy ever. No heavy lifting required. She could teleport everything into the truck, then teleport the truck itself.

Mick had refused to let her touch his tools, insisting on carrying them himself and Barry had huddled next to Eddie, saying Mick just liked to show off his muscles. Not that Eddie was disagreeing – mostly because he wasn’t exactly sure how delicate a blow torch was, really – but he wasn’t agreeing, either.

“Detective Pretty Boy!” Speaking of Mick Rory. Eventually, Eddie was going to come up with a suitable retaliation against Barry for telling the Rogues about that nickname.

“You sent Barry out on another patrol?”

He turned to face Mick, doing his best not to look as embarrassed as he felt. “He was asking Eobard about my future wife. He mentioned roofies. I thought it was better to get him out for the night.”

Mick nodded. “Good. Don’t want him gettin’ ideas.”

“Right.” Eddie looked over into the cortex and saw Hartley at the monitors, the new kid, Axel Walker, perched on the desk next to him with a large smile and a deck of cards in his hand, no doubt annoying the young scientist with card tricks. Lisa and Shawna had said they were going out earlier and they’d dragged a flustered Ray with them. When he’d said that he wanted to get away from Star City for a while, Eddie highly doubted the man was prepared for the force of nature that was Lisa Snart and Shawna Beaz.

What he didn’t see, what he hadn’t seen for a few days now, was their fearless leader.

“Where’s Snart?”

Mick shrugged, “He had business.”

“Business? Is he robbing something or planning to rob… you know what, never mind, I don’t want to know. You should tell me.” Mick raised his eyebrows. “No, you’re right. The less I know the better. When is he coming back?”

“Tomorrow.”

That was good. Barry was generally better when Snart was around. Eddie wasn’t sure what or why or how, but Dr. Holt seemed to think it wasn’t entirely unhealthy at the moment and Eddie was willing to take what he could get.

*****
It had taken some time to track down Len’s latest target and when he had, it had led him to Coast City, home of bright skies, clean beaches, loud parties, and a thriving underbelly of illegal street racers. Len wasn’t a fan of the sport, in particular – there were too many factors he couldn’t control – but he could see the appeal.

There was a certain amount of adrenaline that came with the race itself and, of course, the money if you won. It was also an expensive sport to play, which was why it had gone out of fashion in Central after the wave. People didn’t have the money for fancy cars with souped-up engines. If they had money to spare and they were looking for illegal fun, they generally went with narcotics and raves. Trespassing was also a favorite and required no monetary investment, the same went for vandalism.

Len’s favorite was the current increase in graffiti art. The abandoned warehouses in the lower east were beginning to look like an art museum. At the very least it was colorful and it showed an upswing in the moral of the people living in the city.

After several days following his target, he was confident that the private investigator had been right. Despite the illegal street racing, Wally West was a good kid. He was young, smart. He’d turned in an application for college with an essay on increasing automobile speed that had been impressive to say the least, however, he’d backed out when his mother passed away and he’d been left with her medical bills.

Since Len had shown up, he hadn’t lost a race and word around the gang was he rarely did. Some hinted that the few he had lost were for show more than anything. Len would bet money that if Wally let anyone actually look under the hood, there would be some very interesting upgrades to the engine.

That being said, he was running with a very bad crowd. Street races were the tamest of the crimes this particular gang engaged in and while Wally wasn’t technically one of them, it was obvious the leader, José Martinez, had an eye on him and that wasn’t good. As young and impressionable as he was, as deeply in debt, it wouldn’t take much and it wouldn’t have to be illegal, not at first.

Really, if Len thought about it, he was doing the kid a favor.

****

It was well after midnight before Wally finally made it back to his apartment. Well, apartment was putting it nicely. It was a run down efficiency over a garage that a friend of a friend of a friend was letting him shack up in for what was probably an exorbitant amount, but with a job that paid under the table, a load of debt, and zero references, he couldn’t really be picky.

Still, not a bad night. He sat in the car and counted out his take for the night. After gas and the gang’s cut, he’d walked away with three hundred. Not bad. He was going to need new tires soon, though.
The races wore them out quickly and having less than perfect tread was a good way to get himself killed.

Stuffing the money in his back pocket, Wally got out and locked the car, shutting the garage door behind him and padlocking it. Being allowed to use the garage for his car had cost an extra thirty a month, but it was better than parking it on the street.

Eventually, once he’d paid off the medical bills and saved enough, he was going to reapply for college, maybe here, maybe somewhere else.

He unlocked the door to his apartment slipped inside. There was only one window and he’d covered that with a black sheet, folded several times to cut out the light. It was effective in keeping the light out when he was trying to sleep, but had the adverse affect of making the room pitch black until he’d managed to flip the light switch… and find a strange man standing on the other end of the room, leaning against the wall, one of Wally’s racing magazines open in his hands.

Wally jumped back, accidentally slamming the door shut in the process. “Jesus Christ!”

The man looked up with a smirk. “Close. Name’s Leonard Snart.”

Wally blinked, trying to process what the hell was happening, because there was a complete stranger in his room, with some kind of weird looking, bulky gun strapped to his thigh. This wasn’t good, this couldn’t be good. Maybe it had something to do with José? A rival gang or someone he’d pissed off.

“Relax, kid. I’m just here to talk.”

“Look, if this is about José…”

“It’s not.” The magazine hit the bed and Snart crossed his arms over his chest. “It’s about your brother.”

His what? “I don’t have a brother.” His mother had told him about his dad and sister before she’d died, that her biggest regret had been never going back to try and make amends, never getting to know her daughter, but she hadn’t said anything about a brother.

Snart nodded his head to the left, in concession. “Technically, no. Legally, you do.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Your father adopted Barry when he was eleven. Legally, Barry was his son, which makes him your brother.”

Wally looked around his room, more than a little dumbfounded. Even if he did have a little brother, it should have been abundantly clear by his current living situation that he wasn’t in a position to help anyone. “Okay, but what’s that got to do with me? I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I don’t exactly have a lot going for me. If this kid needs help, I can’t really…”

“He doesn’t need that kind of help and he’s twenty seven.”

Wally blinked, utterly confused. What the hell could a twenty-seven-year-old not-really-brother need from him?

“As much as I’d like to stay and chat, don’t really have the time. I need you to come with me, but I’m willing to compensate you for your time.”
“Compensate? As in…?”

“Cash. Five hundred and all you have to do is come with me to Central City for one day, say hi to your big brother.”

Wally stammered a little, because that wasn’t exactly an insignificant amount of money, but this was a complete stranger. No matter how much he needed the money, it wasn’t worth the risk. “I have work tomorrow.”

“Your next shift is Wednesday.”

“How do you know that?” Snart just smirked again and damnit. Fine, maybe he was going about this the wrong way. Clearly, the guy wanted him to come badly enough that he’d already broken several laws. Somehow Wally didn’t think kidnapping was off the board. So, if he was going one way or the other, “Make it a fifteen hundred and you have a deal.”

“Done.”

Holy shit. For Snart to agree to that without even trying to bring it down? What the hell he was getting himself into.

*****

“Hey, I brought coffee and it isn’t Big Belly Burger, because they re-opened Jitters.”

Harrison set his book aside and Barry slid the paper bag and cup through the thin opening.

“I got one of every pastry they had, just in case, well, two.” He held up his own bag and sat with his legs crossed. “How’d you sleep?”

“Fine. Hartley came by earlier. He stood in the doorway for several minutes and left without saying anything.”

“Oh.” Barry looked down at the over-sized chocolate filled croissant in his hands.

“Barry, do you know what it was about?”

Barry took a small bite out of the pastry to give himself time to pull his thoughts together. “The night you… that I… the night we fought, I wasn’t supposed to be there. They used your handcuffs to keep me out of it and I… I phased through them. He’s trying to figure out how I did that. We’ve run tests, but I haven’t been able to do it again.”

He dug his finger into the chocolate. “Len said sometimes my eyes glow red.”

“I’ve noticed.”

“You never told me.”
“I didn’t want to worry you.”

“Liar.” Barry looked up, making eye contact as he sucked the chocolate off his finger until Harrison shifted. “Do you know why?”

“I have theories.”

“Enlighten me.” He reapplyed the chocolate and sucked it back into his mouth.

“I’ve said the speedforce connects us, however, my connection is vastly different from yours. It’s possible that when you were trying to help with search and rescue, despite having exhausted your own personal resources, you inadvertently tapped into mine and have been subsequently done so whenever you’re… agitated”

It had to be more complicated than that. Eddie had said it happened when Barry was in the other universe as well. It was possible that with the breach open, they’d been connected. Whatever the case, he was sure Harrison knew.

“Go on.” Barry went in for more chocolate and Harrison eyed Barry with hunger that had little to do with actual food.

“I wouldn’t want to bore you with the details.”

“I don’t mind. I’m sure I can find a way to keep myself entertained while you… talk.”

The hard tap of boots on the floor of the bay interrupted them. “Okay, and you’re done here.”

Barry stood up quickly, glad his shirt hung low enough to cover how tight his pants were against his groin. “Not cool, Lisa. I’m busy.”

Lisa crossed her arms over her chest. “No, you’re late for work. Go.”

“But…”

“Now!”

*****

Stupid Lisa. So what if Barry wanted to spend a little longer with Harrison? What did it matter to them? Besides, he was just trying to help. Hartley wasn’t getting anywhere with his tests and he kept saying he wanted to ask Harrison, but chickening out at the last minute. Not that Barry blamed him – Harrison had pretty much destroyed his life. Besides, Mondays were busy, it wasn’t like the Captain would even notice if he was…

“Allen, get in here!”

Damn.
Barry stopped with one foot on the stairs and hung his head for a moment, before turning back around and marching through the station to Captain Singh, who was standing in his doorway with a disappointed frown.

“Hey, Captain.”

“You’re late.”

“Yeah.” He could apologize, but Joe had always said don’t apologize unless you mean it.

At his silence, the Captain sighed. “Come in, there’s something we need to talk about.”

Barry slipped past him, worried and unsure of what he’d find. When he saw who was there, he broke into a grin. “Dr. McGee! What are you doing here?”

She returned his smile with one of her own and stood to shake his hand. “Mr. Allen, I’m glad to see you’re doing well.”

“That’s a matter of opinion.” She laughed softly and Barry relaxed in the face of her humor. “It’s good to see you, too.”

Captain Singh sat, the cane leaning against his desk beside him. “Dr. McGee will be taking Dr. Wells’ place on the task force. I thought it would be a good idea if the two of you collaborated.”

“I’m not sure what I could…”

“She knows you’re the Flash.”

Barry looked over at Dr. McGee, who nodded and there was an indignant annoyance in the pit of Barry’s stomach. “For real? It’s called a secret identity.”

Dr. McGee put a hand over his on the arm of the chair. “Relax, Mr. Allen, I already knew.”

“You did?”

“I’m a scientist, Mr. Allen. Be reasonable.”

He wanted to argue that he was, but then maybe not. Dr. McGee was Harrison level genius. If anyone was going to figure it out on their own, it would be her. He sank back in the chair, resigned.

“Call me Barry.”

“Barry, then. I look forward to working with you.”

Captain Singh pulled his chair up. “Since you’ll all be working together, I thought you could show Dr. McGee to S.T.A.R. Labs and introduce her to everyone there.”

Barry could already see Len’s disapproving face. “Definitely.”

*****
“So, that’s West’s kid?”

Len nodded. His body ached from an entire night driving with no sleep, but he’d wanted to make it back a few hours before lunch. Barry always showed up around then and this way, Wally had a chance to settle in.

They’d gotten in just after nine. When he’d been sure Wally was coming, he’d texted Eddie to meet them at S.T.A.R. Labs. The detective had been thrown off, but more than happy to talk to Wally about his late father. The two had an awkward start, but it looked like they were doing okay now.

So far, so good.

Mick huffed out a grunt. “He take after his old man?”

“He ain’t lookin’ to be a cop. I found him street racing in Coast City.”

“Adrenaline junkie?”

“Speed junkie.”

There was a brief moment of silence before Mick broke out in guttural laughter loud enough to draw the attention of Eddie and Wally, who were on the other side of the cortex, talking in hushed tones. It took several seconds for Mick to get himself under control and when he finally had, he patted Len’s shoulder. “Thanks, buddy, I needed that.”

“Don’t mention it.”

The words had barely left his mouth when a rush of air and flying paperwork signaled the arrival of the resident speedster, bringing with him a woman Len knew by name only. She was a little shaken from traveling my speedforce, but otherwise okay.

“Lenny, you’re back!” Barry flashed the short distance between them and his gaze shifted to where Wally was standing with Eddie, eyes wide and mouth half open. “New recruit?”

“You first.” Len looked past him at the woman and then back.

“Oh, right! Dr. McGee, Leonard Snart, aka Captain Cold, and his partner, Mick Rory, also known as Heatwave. Len, Mick, this is Dr. Tina McGee from Mercury Labs. She’s the new science advisor for the task force and the Captain thought we should all work together.”

“And you thought you’d just bring her over for a surprise visit?”

“Well, you’ve been gone.”

“I have a phone.”

Barry opened his mouth, no doubt to say something that was going to annoy Len, but Dr. McGee stepped forward, still a little flustered, but standing firm. “Mr. Snart, a pleasure. It’s my understanding we have you to thank for the rebuilds in the lower east?”

Len took the hand she offered and nodded tightly.

“Well, on behalf of the community, thank you.”
He managed a smile, but it was uncomfortable. Barry looked between them briefly and rolled his eyes. “Okay, now, your turn. Who’s the new recruit?”

“He’s not a recruit. He’s Wally West.”

Barry’s smile faltered and he looked at Wally, who was still staring openly. “West? As in…?”

“He’s Detective West’s son.”

“But, Joe never said…”

Wally finally found his voice. “He didn’t know. Mom had a drug problem. She cleaned herself up after she left, when she found out she was pregnant with me, but she never got the courage up to go back. At least, not until it was too late. Are you the Flash?”

Barry blinked a few times, clearly dumbfounded. “What? No. Yes. I mean, yes, I’m the Flash. You’re really Joe’s son?”

“Yeah and, I guess, that makes us brothers? Kind of? The guy with the weird gun that broke into my apartment said Joe adopted you, so…”

“He broke into your apartment?!” Barry turned on Len. “You broke into his apartment?”

“I like to make an entrance. Besides, it wasn’t that difficult. Kid lives in a shack over a garage in the run down part of Coast City. I’ve had harder times breaking flashlights out of plastic casing.”

“Oh, no, that’s not… no.” Barry flashed over to Wally and took his hands. Wally, to his credit, didn’t pull away, though that may have had more to do with shock. “You can live with me. I have a house. It’s huge and empty and too quiet, but it’s really secure and Len won’t break in or I’ll break him.”

Len coughed into his hand and Barry ignored him.

Wally half glancing at Eddie for support he wasn’t going to receive. “I don’t know, I have a job.”

“Where? Can you transfer?”

“It’s not like that. It’s just answering phones at a small mechanic shop, but they let me use the garage to fix my cars, so it helps.”

“Mick loves cars, or, well, he likes taking them apart. He uses the parking garage to work on them. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind letting you use his tools.” Mick growled and Barry back tracked. “We’ll set you up with your own tools, but the point is, there’s a garage you can use and I’m sure we can find you a job. You won’t need to pay rent or anything. My boyfriend is loaded, so…”

“Wait, you live with your boyfriend?” Wally glanced at Len, because he hadn’t said anything about that, but Len was content to let this play out until it looked like it was about to crash and burn.

Barry shook his head. “Not anymore. He’s locked in our secret prison in the pipeline. He killed a lot of people.”

And there was the crash and burn he’d been waiting for. “Barry.”

“Right, sorry. I’m getting ahead of myself. The point is, no I don’t live with my boyfriend, but I do have a house and I’d really like it if you’d at least consider the offer.” Barry let go of Wally’s hands, as if suddenly realizing he was holding them and stepped back. “Please?”
Wally still looked less convinced than Len would have liked. He’d been banking on mutual loneliness and Wally’s love of speed, coupled with Barry being the Flash, but it looked like he might need a little more of a push.

Before he could say anything, Dr. McGee cut in. “If it’s not too forward, I’m sure I could find him something at Mercury Labs. It wouldn’t be much, I’m afraid – a place in the mail room or an assistant to begin with, but it pays above minimum wage and there are medical benefits as well as college assistance, if you’re interested.”

“Mercury Labs?” Wally’s eyebrows shot up and Len could see him giving in, even if he wasn’t saying as much. “That’s… are you sure?”

“Quite. I only met Detective West once and it wasn’t under the best of circumstances, but whatever I may have thought of his methods at the time, he was doing what he thought was best for his case and for his son, Barry.” Len didn’t miss the sad smile Barry tried to hide, or the way he dropped his gaze and his shoulders slumped. There was a story behind that. He’d have to remember to ask about it later. “It would be my honor to help you in his place.”

Barry held up a finger. “Before you make up your mind, let me introduce you to the rest of the team. Len, where’s the rest of the team?”

“The shooting range. Lisa wanted to try out her new gun.”

“Hartley finished it?”

“Apparently.” He said he’d gotten the idea from what Eobard calling Lisa Golden Glider. Len still wasn’t sure he liked it, but when it came to Lisa, he had very little say in the matter. “It’s… unique.”

Barry lowered his voice conspiratorially. “Lisa’s his baby sister. He’s very protective of her, which isn’t really a problem unless he figures out she has a crush oooooooon… crap.”

Len frowned. “Who?”

“No one. Ever. She’ll die a virgin. She’s thinking about becoming a nun.” Len managed to maintain his frown, but it was close. The image of Lisa in a nun’s habit was nearly enough to break him. Barry winked. “Hey, Wally, let me show Dr. McGee around and then I’ll take you to meet the others.”

“Nonsense.” Dr. McGee cut in with a shake of her head. “Mr. Snart and Mr. Rory can show me around. You boys go on ahead.”

Barry hesitated for only a moment before nodding and then he was gone, Wally with him and papers shuffling around on the floor in the wave of his speed.

Len sighed heavily. “Mick, make sure she doesn’t gold him.”

Mick didn’t argue, because they both knew that was a very real and distinct possibility and it wouldn’t be because Lisa was mad, it would be because Barry was willing to try anything once. In fact, most of the time, he insisted on it.

Eddie followed after Mick – when it came to Barry pulling stupid stunts, the more people on hand with a level head, the better.

Dr. McGee turned to Len as soon as they were alone. “That was very decent of you, Mr. Snart.”
He ignored the obvious implications of the statement. “Hartley hasn’t run enough tests. I’m not sure we could un-gold him effectively.”

She smiled softly. “I was speaking of young Mr. West.”

And of course, she wasn’t going to let him get away with it. Two could play at that game. “The same could be said about you.”

Dr. McGee nodded. “That it could. However, we all have our reputations to protect.”

Len really considered her for the first time. He liked to know the major players in his city, so he knew some of her story. He knew she was a scientist and a business woman and while she always managed to keep her company afloat, even after the tidal wave, there had never been even a hint of anything unethical coming out of Mercury Labs. It was something she openly prided herself on.

While Barry may be the Flash, a hero, the Rogues were far from that. Despite his more recent altruistic activities, Len was still Captain Cold. He was still a known criminal, wanted for a multitude of things, murder and grand theft among them.

By agreeing to work with them, she was indeed putting her reputation on the line and Len found that, despite himself, he respected that.

She raised an eyebrow at his silence. “Do we have an understanding?”

“We do. What would you like to see first, where we make the weapons or our secret prison?”

“Very amusing, Mr. Snart. The lab will be fine.”

He looked forward to seeing her face when she realized he wasn’t lying.

*****

“Harrison, guess what?”

“You’ve decided to do away with the ridiculous blue in your hair?”

“What? No. That’s staying. The other me said I looked like Captain Cold’s sidekick, which is really funny now, ’cause I kind of am. But I’m not. Anyway, I have a Wally.”

There was silence on Harrison’s end.

“Joe had a son he didn’t know about and Len brought him to Central. His mom died a few months ago and he doesn’t have any other family, so I’m letting him stay with us. Well, me, at your house. That’s why I missed dinner last night. Sorry about that, but I had to help him get his stuff from Coast City and I made spaghetti like Joe used to. And yes, I used your kitchen. You can cut off my finger later.”

“I intend to do more than that.”
“Love it when you talk dirty. Tell me more.”

Harrison’s eye twitched.

“So, there’s Wally and Dr. McGee, who’s taken your place on the task force, and, we have a new Rogue, too, Axel Walker. Hartley picked him up at a bar. Not like that, they just bonded over drinks and horrible parent stories. Apparently, Axel’s dad was the Trickster, only he didn’t know it. They pen-palled and there was this whole plan to break him out, but then the tidal wave hit and killed Jessie James. When his will got out, it names Axel as his heir and there was a DNA test that confirmed it and Axel can’t decide if he’s pissed James never told him, or proud the Trickster is his dad. Not that it matters, because he’s dead.”

“The Trickster isn’t dead.”

Barry froze. “He’s what?”

“Not dead.”

“But… how? He was being kept in isolation in the basement. The warden said they didn’t get down there before the wave hit the prison.”

“They didn’t. However, his body was never found. The warden covered it up.”

Barry frowned. That wasn’t good. Of course, if he was alive, he hadn’t made any move since then, so that was okay. Maybe. It could also be very bad. A year and a half was a long time to plan something. If he was planning something. Barry thought back to what he knew of previous cases involving the Trickster. He was definitely planning something, but, Barry had a team now and he could stop him. Or, at the very least, he’d have fun trying.

“Oh well. Axel isn’t a meta-human, but he’s crazy good with explosives, better than Mick even, and Mick loves a good explosion. I think that’s why they get along. Like, Axel can be really annoying sometimes, but just when I think Mick’s gonna punch him in the face, Axel brings up accelerants and you can physically see the calm wash over Mick. I can’t decide if Axel’s just lucky or a genius. Either way, Len likes him, so he’s staying.”

“Anyway, I have to go to work and I promised to take Wally to get some clothes on my lunch break. Dr. McGee got him a job at Mercury Labs, so he’ll need something more than jeans and a t-shirt. I’ll see you at dinner? We’ll watch a movie. Love you!”

*****

Eddie waited until Barry had disappeared in a trail of lightning to enter the bay. Eobard was sitting on the floor, coffee in hand. He looked up at Eddie with perfect calm. “Tell Mr. Snart I commend his efforts. It’s a truly inspired move, but it won’t last. Eventually, Barry will get tired of his new toy and when he does, he’ll come back here. To me.”

Eddie stared him down, considering his next words carefully. “Maybe. In fact you’re probably right. We all know we’re fighting an uphill battle and the odds are against us, but there’s something you should know. If you ever do manage to get out of there, the entire team has my permission to put me down if I can’t do it myself and I fully intend to do it myself. I won’t let you sink your claws back into him Eobard Thawne. I would rather die.”
He closed the door before Eobard could respond. Ever since he’d found out what happened to the other him, he’d felt like there was a ticking time bomb out there with his name on it. Although, at least that time bomb could do some good.

The team had agreed to meet in the cortex and that’s where he found them, crowded around the computers and a clearly annoyed Hartley. Axel was showing Shawna one of his card tricks; Lisa was using Hartley’s lap as a footrest while she talked to Mick; Ray and Dr. McGee were discussing the scientific implications of shapeshifting; and Barry was explaining the newest threat to Wally with animated hand gestures and a wide smile.

Snart was standing a few feet away, watching with a thoughtful expression. He nodded at Eddie when he saw him and Eddie nodded back, a silent confirmation that everything had gone well.

It wasn’t perfect. In fact, it was far from that, but for the first time in over a year, it wasn’t without hope.

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