Why Think Separately of This Life and the Next

by JQ (musicmillennia)

Summary

...when one is born from the last. (Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi, Look at Love)

It started with a skilled thief and an Olympian.

Notes

I'm in the Coldhouse again, and this is the only way I know to make up for it.

For Scarlet

See the end of the work for more notes.
Not even the temple’s devoted staff were awake at this hour, and Len used it to his advantage. Slipping into the temple with silent steps, he crept up to the altar, satchel in hand.

Every job he pulled, failure or success, he always stopped by the nearest temple dedicated to Hermes both before and after. Tonight, he’d escaped capture by the skin of his teeth, still making off with a sackful of drachma and a few precious jewels. If anything in Len’s life ever paid off in the long run, it was clearly his devotion to Hermes.

He never left much, for fear of being discovered, but Hermes seemed to understand. Len liked to think he would. It was strange, having the closest one had to a friend be a celestial being, yet also oddly comforting.

Placing a few drachma beside the other offerings, Len inclined his head in respect. He whispered a few words of gratitude and asked for guidance on his next job, as always.

“I don’t think even my most trusted followers are as devoted as you, Leon.”

Len started, whirling around to face the newcomer. How had he not heard someone’s step? Fortunately, there didn’t seem to be cause for initial alarm—before Len processed exactly what he said, the young man before him spread his hands in a gesture of peace, kind smile set in place. His robe draped to his knees, and he wore nothing on his feet.

Then the words caught up to Len. Immediately he was on the defensive. “How do you know my name?” And what did he mean by ‘trusted followers’? Len had never seen this youth in his life.

He received a laugh in reply, the musical sound echoing off the temple pillars. “I guess I should’ve introduced myself first. We’ve never actually met, and might I say, those statues are not accurate. As you can see.”

Len’s eyebrows furrowed. His hand twitched towards the knife at his belt, until he was offered a hand to shake.

“You call me Hermes.”

A blink, and suddenly, Len saw. What had been a passable human appearance melted into something indescribably beautiful: hazel green eyes, filled with playful kindness, stared back at him from a flawless face. Brown hair, not blond as so many thought, sat windswept atop his head, as if he had been running at high speeds. His robe now shone a rich red, a gold sash tied at the waist, and yes, he did wear sandals on his feet—and they had wings attached at the heels.

Len didn’t need to see the tall staff in his other hand, caduceus hissing, to know beyond any doubt.

Now, he was a proud man, Len, but he also knew what it was to respect those who deserved it. The moment he fully recognized that Hermes truly stood before him, calling him by name, he fell to one knee.

“It’s an honor—”

“No, no, no,” Hermes interrupted, “stand, please. If I wanted someone kissing the floor I walked on, I would visit the priests instead.”
Len couldn’t help but be amused by this. Obediently, he stood, yet remembered to keep his eyes averted.

“Don’t do that either!” Hermes insisted. Before Len knew what was happening, a warm hand was cupping his chin, forcing him to face the Olympian once again. The kindness remained, now joined by exasperation. “Leon, I’ve watched you for as long as you have spoken to me. The time for formality has passed, don’t you think?”

In all his years, Len never thought he’d hear Hermes himself tell him face to face that he had been watching him. Every whispered word at every altar he’d visited had been heard, even the ones Len would rather sew his mouth shut than repeat in front of another person, let alone—

“When appear now?” he couldn’t help but ask, ignoring with difficulty the pleasant tingling skittering along the skin Hermes touched.

Hermes’ thumb stroked along Len’s jaw. “I will be honest and say I’ve wanted to come to you many times, but I decided it was best to wait until you truly needed me. When even your considerable skills would not be enough.”

A spike of fear pricked Len’s spine. “What do you mean?”

Hermes sighed, the playfulness in him fading into concern. “It’s my job to not only watch over travelers and thieves, but to know their destinations. You, Leon, have your eye on the largest prize you’ve yet to win: a helmet belonging to Hades himself.”

Len swallowed. Hermes was correct, of course; the helm had surfaced in a temple not far from Athens. It would be transported to the great city before the year’s end, and Len planned to take it before it could reach its intended place. Hades was jealous of his possessions. With that helm in Len’s hand, he could bargain with him.

“You wish to bring your sister back.”

There was no judgment on Hermes face. On the contrary, Len saw quiet understanding. He nodded.

Hermes shook his head, “Hades already has plans to retrieve what was lost to him. It is a battle you will lose, and one to which he will not take kindly. If there is anything worth losing in this world, Leon, it is your life.” Len stiffened in surprise. “Nevertheless, I refuse to leave you without hope. Many have done so already, and I have no intention of becoming one of them. I will help you take what belongs in your hands.”

If it were not for the hand still cradling his jaw, Len was certain his mouth would have fallen open. “You…you will help me take the helm?”

Hermes grinned. “No. I will help you reach the Underworld and regain your sister’s life.”

Len’s heart stuttered. “That—”

Hermes pressed a kiss to his forehead. “Wait for me here at sundown in exactly a fortnight.”

“This must be a trick.”

Hermes’ grin widened. “I said I have no intention of leaving you without hope, Leon. And to be honest, I have been waiting nearly a millennium for an opportunity like this. Who better to accompany me than my favorite?”
His—favorite?

At last, Hermes’ hand left Len’s face, leaving the flesh overheated and sensitive to the slightest breeze. “I will be in disguise,” the Olympian continued, “but with this, you will be able to see me.”

He reached for the emblem on his staff. The caduceus obligingly moved so he could remove it. Len’s hands nearly shook as he was handed the gift, a round golden beauty inscribed with wings.

“No one has ever willingly given me something so valuable,” Len murmured, rubbing his thumb across the gleaming surface.

“Well, there is a first time for everything,” laughed Hermes, “Remember, a fortnight.”

With a reverent touch, Len carefully put the emblem into his satchel. “I am never late.”

Hermes looked at him with what could only be called affection. “I know. Until then, Leon.”

As he turned, Len couldn’t resist calling after him, “Len.” Hermes looked over his shoulder, confused. “People I…people like my sister call me Len.”

Hermes beatific face brightened. “Len,” he said, as if the name were something to be cherished.

Suddenly, in a whoosh of air, Hermes was gone, leaving Len short of breath.

He took the emblem back out of his satchel. For a long time, he simply stared at it, wondering if it would disappear. When it did not, he let out a shuddering breath.

"A fortnight."
Chapter Summary

The one place where time has no meaning.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Central City (2015)

What Len knows right now consists of the following:

1. Hospital
2. Pain
3. Lisa
4. lehremisahadelmpers

While Len can't make heads or tails of the last one, nevertheless it keeps replaying in his head. Distorted, echoing, like an audio track stuck on permanent rewind, fast forward, rewind, fast forward. He doesn't understand it, but he understands it. As if he's trying to tell himself something but can't quite remember what it is.

But that's for later. Now, Len needs to know how and why he is in a hospital bed when Shawna is perfectly capable of patching him up after a fight. Although, considering his memory's hazy, perhaps her expertise can only go so far this time.

Lisa's a warm presence at his side. Len reflexively reaches for her, grabs her wrist.

"What am I doing here?" he rasps, forcing his eyes open.

Lisa stares at him like he's grown two heads.

"Lenny," she says gently, letting him know that he's in worse shape than he thought, "you're still out of it. Try to get some rest."

"You didn't answer my question," Len says, more forcefully. "Why a hospital? What happened?"

Unbeknownst to him, all Lisa hears is garbled Ancient Greek.

Greece (roughly 700 b.c.)

The emblem worked as Hermes promised. Where passerby saw an old man, Len saw the beautiful Olympian smiling at him in greeting. Through silent gestures, they convened near the altar.

"Hello again," Hermes murmured, pressing a kiss to Len's forehead.

Len, who was still grossly unused to such open affection, and who hissed, "There are others—"

"No need to worry yourself," Hermes quickly assured him, "as far as anyone here is concerned, we
are two travelers speaking an entirely foreign tongue."

"That is not what I meant," Len drew in a deep breath. There was no sense in risking an Olympian's wrath. "...my lord."

Hermes actually wrinkled his nose. "What did I say about formalities, Len? Or did you forget already?"

As if Len forgot anything of that magnificent encounter. Patience was necessary in his line of work, but the past fortnight took an eternity to pass. Once he experienced the impeccable light surrounding Hermes, he found his every thought was consumed by it. Perhaps an effect Olympians have on all mortals.

"What am I to call you, then?" he asked after a pause.

"Why not simply Hermes?"

Len stared incredulously; Hermes stared back, genuinely confused. As if he could find no difficulty in having Len address him, an Olympian, one he had looked up to as patron, so casually. If Len didn't know Hermes to be an immortal, he would have thought the look to be innocent.

Nevertheless, it was a specific request. Far be it from Len to disobey. "...Hermes," he tried. When lightning failed to strike him dead, he repeated, stronger, "Hermes." The grin he received in return softened him. "As you wish."

"No, no..." the Olympian huffed. "What I wish is for you to call me what you please, yet—I also wish for you to call me by my name."

Len raised an eyebrow. "You are contradicting yourself."

"Am I? I don't think so. Unless you truly want to address me as 'my lord' for the rest of your lifetime?"

...no. No, Len did not want that. "If you don't mind my saying, Hermes, we are straying from the task at hand."

The lovely grin appeared once more. "So we are, Len. Come; we have much to discuss."

Central City (December, 2015)

Len doesn't know what's wrong. Every time he tries to talk to Lisa, her brow creases with worry. More than that, she gives no sign she understands a word he's saying. It's been 583 seconds, and the most progress they've made is Lisa pressing the Call button.

"What are you doing? Lisa!" he thunders as a nurse comes bearing gifts. Yet, try as he might to pull away, the doctors strapped him to the bed hours ago. "Get away from me," he snarls at the nurse.

But all the nurse does is sigh, "Poor dear," and put the syringe to his IV.

The sedatives work quickly. Len's protests fade, and his eyes roll back.

lehrem|hrem|her|herm—

Greece (roughly 700 b.c.)
Hades would make his move that very night. According to Hermes, he enjoyed wreaking vengeance where he could, giving the two thieves ample time to steal into the Underworld, find Leda, and escape.

"The air is growing cold," said Hermes as they walked the streets, "Persephone will be there. She likes me; should we be delayed somehow, she will distract Hades."

Len couldn't help but be curious. "I never heard a tale involving yourself and Persephone."

Hermes grinned. "You and yours have many stories, Len, most of which are true. But what you don't know could fill oceans. If you must know, Persephone and I used to run through her meadow together as playmates. She would show me flowers, and I would tell her about the world."

For some reason, a pang of jealousy constricts Len's chest. "Were you lovers?" he asked, quieter than he intended. He berated himself for feeling relieved when Hermes threw his head back and laughed.

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed Hermes, "Although, I will say that Demeter gave us many hints about our becoming lovers, all of which we steadfastly ignored." Len hummed. "Besides, my preferences don't exactly fit Persephone's image. Ah, here we are!"

While Len was left to process those words, Hermes crouched next to a rich man's house. Tucked next to a post was a simple brown sack the size of Len's fist. This sack was presented to Len.

"Hephaestus' design. He likes me too."

The jealousy returned full force. Frustrated with himself, Len forced himself to focus on what was inside the sack: a simple gold chain with a small, blank pendant.

"My emblem goes there," explained Hermes, tapping the pendant, "I can mold it to fit. It will become your protection. The Underworld is no place for the living; I'll not risk your mortality being snatched away."

Len shook his head. "Why are you doing this? Clearly you could visit the Underworld at any time, let alone smuggle out a single soul. Yet you choose to help me."

Hermes blinked. "Well...you are my favorite."

"So you say," Len huffed, shoving the warmth blossoming in his chest away, "but you haven't told me why."

There had to be a thief or traveler more worthy of Hermes' time. Someone who did not have Len's dark history, who would not hesitate to return his smiles and his kisses, however chaste they were. None of this translated into Len's wary scowl.

Thankfully, Hermes didn't seem angry at this defiance. Instead, he seemed bewildered. "Why are you my favorite? Because—you are. Len," he touched his shoulder, "I have watched you grow into yourself over the years. While your occupation is questionable, your morals remain sound. You think you deserve none of the prizes you win, nor anything good that may come to you. And that inner strength you carry, despite what has happened to you—Len, you are one of the strongest mortals I have ever seen. What I cannot fathom is why I, out of all of my kind, am the fortunate one to have been picked by you as a favorite instead of the reverse."

...dimly, Len registered that Hermes' touch, while still tingling, was not as intense as before. The pendant now sitting around his neck also allowed them to touch more frequently. Was this part of
The design?

Hermes pressed his lips once more to Len's forehead. "Hold onto me," he murmured.

The hand on Len's shoulder moved to rest on the back of his neck. And then, everything was—

—a blur. Len still can't remember how he'd come to be here, strapped to this uncomfortable hospital bed. It feels like a waking nightmare. Been a long time since he's had one of those.

The sedatives hit him hard and fast. Like the Flash, his mind murmurs, before rolling over and conceding defeat.

Len could swear his brain spat out two names at the same time. Flerashmes.

Fuck, he's so tired...

Underworld

They landed on the edge of the Fields of Asphodel. Len gasped for air, only to find that there was almost none to be had—it was as if every breath had been sucked from his lungs.

Hermes frowned in sympathy. "The dead have no need to breathe," he said, "nor do their keepers. Be still; you can adjust, if given time."

Len coughed and spluttered. How could he get used to this? Was this how death felt? He couldn't breathe—

Warmth trickled across his skin, coming to rest on his shoulder and cheek. "I wouldn't bring you here to die, Len. The more you allow your own fear to influence you, the less you will be able to breathe. Relax. Count with me."

Guide of thieves and travelers. Len could almost laugh; Hermes lived up to his title.

Finally, air heaved into his chest. Not enough to take deep breaths, but the necessary amount to remain conscious of himself. He blinked his eyes open, having not remembered closing them—only to see Hermes' green hazel eyes with barely a finger's breadth between them.

Now that he could breathe, Len abruptly became aware of the stench of Tartarus, the distant wafting perfumes of Elysium, and the dead breeze of Asphodel. Yet, closer than all of that, were the intoxicating scents of spring and mountain air—Hermes. The pendant protected Len from the side-effects of Hermes' touch, but it seemed none of his other senses were insusceptible.

What would it feel like, he wondered, to taste an Olympian's lips—

Suddenly, Hermes blurred, putting an arm's length between them. "I apologize," he said quickly as the spell shattered, "I—sometimes I forget the...effect my kind can have on mortals. The pendant can only protect you from so much, I'm afraid."

Len shook his head, vigorously trying to clear it. "Of course," he muttered. Louder, he asked, "Do you know where Leda is?"

Hermes seemed grateful for the change of subject. "She was murdered, yes? By your father." Len clenched his fists, but nodded. At least his guide winced and apologized again before continuing, "Hades can be cruel, but he is never unfair to those he ferries. The fate of a spirit depends entirely
on the spirit itself. Persephone was kind enough to do some scouting for me; Leda's spirit was restless, but not impure. In other words, she did not deserve the torture of Tartarus, nor was she fit for settling down in Elysium."

It clicked. Len's head whipped to the Fields before him. "She's here," he whispered, the thought of his little sister so close nearly overwhelming him, "she is in Asphodel."

Hermes nodded. "And the only way she can find her way out is if someone who loves her searches for her."

Len's brow furrowed. Personally he would search for an eternity if it meant finding Leda, but Hermes..."How long will that take?"

"Well, Asphodel is terribly large, and using my speed would risk disrupting the spirits. It would take nearly half a century just to cover its entirety."

He had endured far worse for the sake of his sister. "Alright. Thank you for bringing me here—"

Hermes rounded on him. He looked alarmed. "Why are you about to say goodbye?" he barked.

Len gestured to Asphodel, "As you said, I have half a century's ground to cover. I'm sure you—"

"No, I do not, and no, I will not," Hermes snapped, "leave you down here by yourself. Did you honestly think I brought you here with the intention of abandoning you?" He sounded genuinely hurt by the prospect. For the life of him, Len could not think of an ample way to respond. "Len, no. We leave with Leda together. Time has little meaning here; half a century in Asphodel is half a day on the surface, at most."

Frankly, Len is astounded. "But we will feel that half-century. At least I will. You can't be considering existing down here with—"

"I am not considering. I've already decided."

"You are an Olympian, one with many responsibilities. Half a day's time could be the difference in a traveler's destiny."

Hermes snorted. "You sound like Poseidon. I shall tell you what I tell him: I may be able to run faster than the eye can see, but I am always late. Besides, I would never be able to concentrate if you were down here, lost among these souls." Yet again, Len is perplexed. How can a being of so much importance hold someone like him in such high regard? "Come. We have work to do."

This time, Len allowed himself to be led.

Chapter End Notes

Underworld Pt. 2 is in the next chapter, because it is half past ass o'clock and I really need to go to bed.
Fast Forward, Rewind, Fast Forward

With Hermes' knowledge of the Fields and Leda's preferred wandering locations, it took Len twenty years to find his sister instead of half a century. Before that, it took one week to become better acquainted with Hermes, another to solidify their friendship.

Three months to fall in love. Four to admit to himself what he was feeling. The rest of that year to work up the courage to tell the immortal.

One moment of Hermes—a dignified guardian who could run to the ends of the Earth—gaping at him, and three minutes to kiss Len as if he were starving.

Kissing an Olympian was indescribable. Len's mortal mind could not find any words in the languages he picked up throughout his life that suited the sensation. Hermes' intoxicating scents of spring and mountain air—Olympus—filled his nostrils until he felt drunk on them, every breath correlating with the now familiar, blissful tingles of Hermes' fingers cradling his jaw. A pleased noise escaped their kiss as Len allowed Hermes to pull him closer, reveling in finally being able to feel, to taste, and—and—

When they parted, Hermes stared at Len like he had just found everything he'd been missing. While he gave Len ample time to catch his breath, he pressed more kisses to his face.

Spirits surrounded them, wandering aimlessly and groaning over their fate. But Leon was smiling.

"Len," Hermes breathed, "Len, my Len..."

"...Len...Lenny!"

Finally he can open his eyes without feeling like he had to peel them open. Lisa's standing over him again. She's drumming her fingers on his bed. Nervous. Instinctively, Len feels himself tense for a fight.

His muscles burn all the more when he takes in the dreadfully familiar faces behind his sister.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" he nearly growls. If there is anything he doesn't want his enemies to see, it's him lying vulnerable on a hospital bed.

Cisco and Dr. Snow's eyebrows climb to their hairlines. "Whoa," says Cisco, "you weren't kidding."

About what?

Len turns his scowl to Lisa in a silent demand for an explanation. Worry mounts in his gut when she doesn't even look him in the eye, instead opting to turn to Cisco and say, "I don't know what's going on. He's been like this since he woke up."

"Lisa," Len murmurs in warning.

But if anything, that just makes it worse. Lisa finally meets his eyes; she's never looked so anxious, not since Lewis found out he could smash a bottle on her big brother's head and get away with it.

"Lenny," she says, "pleads, "my name is not Leda!"
When Len saw his sister at last, he and Hermes' love had settled into a continuous, low-level comfort. He never had anyone on whom he could depend after Leda's murder, at least, no one corporeal. It was still a strange feeling; nevertheless, Len found himself believing he would grow used to this. Being—happy with his lot, not just content.

When he saw Leda wandering aimlessly ahead of him, this feeling only increased. It was as if the Fates had finally decided to tie Len's strings into proper knots. He called out her name, already running.

She turned. A gasp left her pale lips—she certainly looked dead, as well as older, but for once Len was sure everything would be alright. When they embraced at last, she felt cold against him. That was alright; he enjoyed cold.

"Len?" she whispered, her voice a low, unused rasp, "How are you—did you—?"

"No," Len murmured, stroking her hair, "no, Leda, I didn't die. I have so much to tell you."

Barry's been having a pretty good day, all things considered: for once, he'd arrived at the precinct on time; he was able to catch up on his reports; nobody's been murdered yet; now he's enjoying his favorite sandwich—turkey, lettuce, and mayo with crushed potato chips—and watching some stupid videos on YouTube just because he can.

It all comes crashing down when Joe bursts into his lab saying, "Barry, you're not gonna believe what just happened," at the same time Cisco texts him CC General get down here!

Barry's already on his feet. "Joe, I'm sorry, but can it wait? Cisco just told me—"

"Let me guess," Joe interrupts; Barry doesn't like the somber knowing on his face. His thoughts whirl immediately to Iris, but—"he's heard about Snart."

Barry's mind screeches to a halt. "Wait, Snart? He's in the hospital?"

Joe holds up a disc. "You need to see somethin'."

"What—"

"Barry, this can't wait. Before you get down there and they tell you, I think you're gonna want to see for yourself."

Joe looks serious about this. Besides, it's not like Barry can't be at Central City General in less than five seconds. "Okay, sure, yeah. What is it?"

"This is footage taken from a traffic camera across from the museum downtown."

Barry nods, "They opened a new exhibit on Ancient Greece."

"Yeah. Apparently Snart had his eye on a few priceless artifacts, one of them being a necklace. This is where it gets crazy."

His son snorts. "We live in Central City, Joe; I'm pretty sure it can't be that crazy."

"You wanna bet?" Joe loads the disc into Barry's computer. "Take a look."

Crossing his arms, Barry watches. He watches, and his face slackens. Joe was right; he wouldn't have believed it if he didn't just see it. "But that's...how does that happen?"
"I'm guessing that's what Caitlin and Cisco are down there for."

"Joe—I mean, we've seen some pretty impossible things, but nobody just starts bleeding from the eyes for no reason!"

"Maybe a meta-human's got a grudge?"

Barry blows out a harsh breath through his mouth. "I don't know. I'm gonna go look. Maybe if Caitlin runs a few tests, we can be sure, but..."

Joe's eyebrows rise. "But?"

He shakes his head. "Nothing—just a weird feeling."

"That doesn't sound like nothing."

Barry hums. He's gone a split second later.

As soon as Hermes put them on solid ground, Len drew in a deep breath and so did Leda. Not only that, her cheeks flushed with color, her hair regained vibrancy, and she was smiling. Full of life.

"She is restored," Hermes announced, not without a little pride, "Welcome back to the land of the living, Leda."

Leda surprised them both by wrapping her arms around them. "Thank you," she said.

Hermes gave her a brief squeeze before stepping back. Leda's body and spirit were once again living, and without a pendant like Len's, prolonged touch from him would burn her up from the inside. Len took the opportunity to snatch his sister into another full embrace. He looked so happy.

"Hermes."

...ah.

"Hermes, what have you done?"

Well, at least they didn't sound angry. Just exasperated.

"Hermes?" that was Len.

"I'm sorry," he replied, "Apollo is calling me. I'm afraid I have to leave you."

Len's expression faltered. "Of course. Thank you once again for what you've done. I will never forget this."

Hermes rolled his eyes. Did it cause Len physical pain to not be so stiff all the time?

Gently, he pulled Len close and kissed him. "Oh, Hermes. You cannot be serious."

Len sank against him. Most likely he didn't realize he was trembling; he always did. Hermes had warned him the pendant could only do so much. Still, it gave them this.

"Hermes. Come to me. Now."

He wasn't a dog. And Len's lips, though rough and dry, were absolutely perfect—"HERMES."
Hermes groaned, forcing them to part. "Apollo is getting impatient," he said, relishing in how red Len's lips became. He turned to leave, not trusting himself to look over his shoulder.

Len made him do so anyway. "Wait! Your pendant!"

Hermes grinned. "It was never mine, Len. Should you ever need me, just touch it. Wherever I am, I will come."

Barry arrives at Central City General as fast as his legs can carry him. After that, it's just a matter of showing his badge to the receptionist. He doesn't take the elevator. Too slow. Only for someone like him are the stairs the best way to go.

The officer on duty nods him in.

Snart greets him with a cool expression and a dry, "And here comes the police to interrogate me. I must say, I've never had the pleasure of being questioned by such a pretty face."

Why is he—? Oh, Lisa's here. Right. And she looks really worried. Although, replaying the footage in his head, Barry can't say he blames her.

"What happened, Snart?" Barry demands, "I saw the footage."

If he hadn't known any better, he'd say Snart looks almost relieved. It's gone in a flash, replaced by an irritating smirk. "I'm just full of surprises. Have to keep you on your toes, after all."

Barry's eyes narrow. "You have no idea what happened, do you?" he asks flatly.

Cisco whispers, "Barry—?" but Snart interrupts, "Memory's a little fuzzy, I'll admit. I do recall taking a rather interesting piece of jewelry. Think the museum'll miss it?"

"Snart..." Barry huffs, "you started bleeding from the eyes. Out of nowhere." Snart raises an unimpressed eyebrow. "You don't believe me. I didn't either. I've got it right he—what is that?"

Snart's eyebrows furrow. "Excuse me?"

Barry can't believe what he's seeing. Tucked underneath Snart's hospital gown—which is definitely an image to save for a rainy day—is a rusty gold chain. He reaches forward and tugs on it.

And there it is: a priceless round pendant made of solid gold with wings engraved on it. Barry gets a weird pang of déjà vu, but that's probably because it was advertised by the museum weeks before the exhibit opened.

"You've gotta be kidding me, Snart," he says, "you're wearing it? How did you get past—never mind. I'll give it to the officer outside."

Snart slaps his hand away. "It's not yours," he snaps, with a vehemence that surprises Barry.

"And it's not yours either," Barry replies slowly. (Why did that feel wrong?) "That's why you stole it. Look, I'll see if we can get you transferred to STAR Labs. Caitlin can run a few tests, see if—"

"I am not giving this back."

Barry stares at him in disbelief. "Are you serious right now?"

Snart's smirk returns, but it's hardened. "As a heart attack," he answers, "Finder's keepers."
"Yeah, which means the museum gets to keep it. Don't make me strap your other hand down."

"Is that a promise?"

Is he flirting with him? Barry rolls his eyes, "Are you always this difficult?"

Snart leans forward until their faces are inches apart. "You should know," he murmurs, "Flash."

Cisco finally bursts, "Okay, for real, what is going on?!"

Barry straightens. His cheeks are definitely burning, but he ignores it. "That's what I'd like to know."

Snart holds the pendant up, studying it while he replies, "I already told you I don't remember anything after I stepped out of the museum."

"Okay...then what happened after you woke up?"

"I asked Lisa why she risked bringing me to a hospital. She had me sedated," Snart adds with a disapproving glance in his sister's direction.

Barry's eyebrows furrow. He turns to Lisa, "Why did you have him sedated?"

To his further surprise, Lisa's eyes are wide and disbelieving. She says, "How are you doing that?"

Barry, confused, looks briefly at his friends. Oddly enough, they looked just as bewildered as Lisa. "Doing what?"

Caitlin steps forward. She's got her Doctor Face on, which usually means something bad. "Barry," she says quietly. She's...concerned? "You weren't speaking English just now."

"Yeah, neither was Snart," Cisco adds.

Barry's heart starts to pound—quite a feat, considering. "What?" he looks back at Snart, but the man seems just as in the dark as he is. "Yes I was. Snart was too."

"No, Barry," Caitlin says, "you weren't."

Barry looks between her, Cisco, and Lisa. "But—"

Snart tilts his head. "Don't look at me, Allen. You're the first one talking sense here."

Is that a compliment? First flirting, now compliments. What's next, a kiss?

Okay, don't think about that.

...damn it, now he's thinking about it. Why is he thinking about it?

Barry scrubs a hand down his face. "Okay, um—look, we should get to STAR Labs. Whatever caused Len to start bleeding like that has to have a cause. Maybe it affected the language centers in his brain." Doesn't explain why they think he's not speaking English, but baby steps.

Cisco's even more confused. "Len?"

"What?"

"You just called Snart Len."
Did he...? Snart definitely looks as caught off guard as Barry feels. "I—" he has nothing to say to that. "I didn't...maybe I need to get checked out," he finishes in a mumble.

"Well, now that we're all up to speed," Snart says, throwing off the blanket and standing—because of course handcuffs can't hold him—"why don't we all mosey on down to your little hideout? I confess I'm curious about this incident myself."

Barry reaches to snatch his wrist. "We still have t—" mehrloprwanveoss. "To..."

Len stares at him with wide eyes. At the same moment, another rush of lehremisahadelimpers cuts through his thoughts like a shock.

And then, both echoes right themselves.


Athens, Jerusalem, Edinburgh, Brighton, Paris, Central City, Suffolk, and now, Central City again.

It's jumbled, and it doesn't make any sense. But it's there.
Chapter Summary

People—and Olympians—have Words.

Chapter Notes

I don't want to make this a long one tbh. This is just a set-up for how Len and Barry came to be what they are. As for their other lives, well—I'm thinking about making a few one-shots about those. Nothing too big, you know.

Barry grabs Len's face, because he can't not be touching him, not now, not when it's all there.

"Len," he breathes, tasting the bitterness of the Underworld as surely as the sterile air of Central City General, "Len, my Len."

Len can't seem to take a deep breath. "C'est impossible," he whispers, and now Barry can hear the difference in language. He almost laughs; what had they been speaking before? Probably one of the old ones—Ancient Greek, most likely.

"C'est possible, mon coeur," he replies, touching their foreheads. "You found your pendant. That's why you started bleeding—you were trying to remember too many things at once. On your own. You overloaded your brain, you moron."

"Call me a moron again, Scarlet," smirks Len, "see what happens."

Scarlet. It's not just a stupid nickname—Barry's last name was Scarlet in their first life in Central City. Theodore Scarlet. He thought it sounded like a poorly named character from a novel until it turned out to be a passable stage name. Go figure.

Somehow, Len always manages to remember the little things first. Barry guesses it's only fair, considering his own name changes every single time while Len remains Len. Different variations—Leon, Levi, Leopold, Léonce, Leo, Lenny, so on and so forth—but every time he says he prefers "Len."


Len snatches him forward and bites his tongue. Levi's little joke, because he always told David to watch his tongue; it irritated David, but Barry's laughing.

"Okay, I'm gonna say it: what the fuck?"

Apollo was awaiting him near an amphitheater. People were pooling in, but none of them so much
as glanced in his or Hermes' direction. Apollo tapped his foot, albeit in a catchy rhythm. Still, he looked far from pleased.

Not angry, but certainly not pleased.

"Enjoying your lyre,* dear brother?" asked Hermes, big smile already in place.

Apollo raised his eyebrow. "Here I thought it was only Zeus who made bad decisions," he said. When thunder rolled over their heads, he called, "Sorry, my lord!" though he hardly sounded repentant. Once the skies were clear again, he strode up to Hermes with a scolding glare. "Do you have any idea what you're doing?" Hermes opened his mouth, but Apollo threw up a hand and muttered, "Never mind, don't answer that."

"Apollo," Hermes sighed, "this is hardly the first—"

"No, but this is the first time you openly defied Hades for a mortal you claim to love."

"Claim? I do love him. You know me, brother; I never just claim anything."

Apollo's face softened. Putting a hand on Hermes' shoulder, he said, "And that is what worries me. Clearly you are devoted to this man—"

"—Leon—"

"—fine, Leon. But as always you are running into this blindly. What has Artemis told you about approaching new ground?"

Hermes sighed. In monotone, he recited, "Take in my surroundings before I rush into things."

"You should listen to her sometime. There is no place in this world you have not run across, Hermes, but you are still blind to so many things. Do you honestly think Hades will not find out about your stealing a soul from his domain? What he may do to your Leon and that soul?" Hermes' fists clenched. "Exactly. You are my friend as well as of my line, Hermes. I don't want to see you hurt."

Hermes' face loosened into a smile. "Should Hades find out, I'm sure Persephone—"

Apollo hung his head. "The one time you overestimate a woman—Hermes, how can you be the one who visits the Underworld so much yet know nothing about what goes on there?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Persephone no longer has the influence you think over her husband. That is why I worry for you; he is fixated on someone else."

Hermes blinked owlishly. "What? Who?"

Shaking his head, Apollo pulled him into an embrace.

"You," he murmured.

Cisco's the first to speak. "So let me get this straight," he says, rubbing his temples, "you and Leonard Snart—Captain Cold, your nemesis—are soulmates who have this thousands-year-old romance that started in Ancient Greece, where...Barry was Hermes? Like, the Olympian, guide of travelers and thieves?"
Barry grins, "How do you think I got my speed, Cisco? The particle accelerator didn't do all the work, you know."

"The lightning is new," Len concedes.

"Well, I said it didn't do all the work. It did some." Len snorts quietly.

Caitlin bites her lip. "The pendant is emitting energy signatures I've never seen before."

Len hums, absently fingering said necklace, "Hermes gave it to me for protection. Apparently Hephaestus liked him."

Barry swats him, "Do I need to remind you that we were all related?"

"Which means incest was a common thing. Your argument means nothing to me."

"Excuse me, how many centuries have you known me?"

Lisa interrupts, hands up, "This is...this is just too weird. I need some air." They all watch her leave in silence.

Len frowns, expression grim. "I'll talk to her," he says.

Before he can leave, Barry reflexively catches his sleeve. The fear mounting in him is irrational, and he knows it—Len is Captain Cold in this life, and before that, he'd been a thief, a knight, even a damn mob boss; he can take care of himself should anything happen, which is highly unlikely. Still, the last time they were in Central City had—not ended well, regardless of their past. And now that they're finally together again, really together—

Len peers at him. His face hardens with understanding. "Five minutes at most," he promises, squaring his shoulders and tightening in his jaw the way Lenny and Sir Levi always did before entering a battle he knew he was going to win. Only this wasn't a large-scale field, or a gun fight; this was talking to his sister just a few steps away. "Three hundred seconds."

Barry swallows. Forces himself to let go. "Right, yeah...sorry."

Len raises an eyebrow, but still gives Barry's shoulder a brief squeeze. "Three hundred seconds," he repeats. Then he turns on his heel and leaves.

Cisco points after him, "So...that was your, like, boyfriend and stuff."

Barry smiles at him and Caitlin, "I'm still me, you know. Still Barry Allen, the Flash. You're still my friends. I'm just...a little more, that's all."

"Yeah, Hermes."

"Yes—yeah, but I'm obviously not anymore, am I? I got my speed back, but I can't sense things like I used to. Like, if someone was getting on a plane right now, I wouldn't know who they were or where they were headed, much less if they needed my help. Which I wouldn't be able to give, by the way, because I can't fly anymore."

"You could fly? Bro!"

"I know, right? My sandals had these awesome wings on them! It's how I got up to Olympus and out of the Underworld so many times."
Caitlin watches this exchange carefully. She seems to find what she's looking for. Without hesitating, she approaches Barry and wraps him in a hug. Barry grins and returns it with his usual enthusiasm.

"Just a little more, huh?" she murmurs.

"Yeah," Barry says, "just a little more."

Once they've separated, Caitlin asks a little louder, "...so, were you always with the police after Greece?"

Barry laughs, "Well, that's actually a funny story..."

Lisa doesn't go far, which confirms Len's hunch about her specifically asking to talk to him alone. Without looking over her shoulder, she walks into the nearest doorway, which leads into a smaller lab riddled with equipment and beakers. Lisa turns on her heel when she's almost dead center.

Her arms are crossed. She looks wary. On the defensive. She should never have to feel that way around Len; he's made a point of that since they were kids. He opens his mouth to comment on it, but she beats him to the punch.

"Give it to me straight, Lenny—or, whatever your name is. Is my brother still in there?"

...Len wishes he could say this is the first run-through he's had with his sibling about this. In a scant four lifetimes he didn't have a brother or sister, but those ended with his early suicide, each and every one. Because for every Len, there was a parent like Lewis. No sibling to care for meant no purpose for him, at least in his mind. And every time he remembers himself, all of his selves, his sibling, or, in a couple cases, siblings, confront him just like this.

He remembers all of them well, from their names, their voices, faces, to their little ticks and quirks. He remembers protecting them, looking out for them. Feels their loss like an ever-present ache in his chest at this moment, even when Leonard Snart's only sister stands before him. And he knows that, and he loves her just as fiercely, it's—well. Hard to explain, loving the one sibling you've got while missing the others you technically never had with your current life.

None of them are the same though, and he doesn't treat them like they're just another number. Len is capable of many horrific things, but never that.

So he copies her stance to show her how wrong it looks directed at her family, lifts his chin, and tells her as firmly as he can: "My name is Leonard Michael Snart. I was born on December twenty-first, nineteen seventy-eight. My mother was Sierra Baxter, and my father was a sterling role model who deserved what he got in the end. Yes, I used to be other people, and yes, that will now affect me, but Leonard Snart is who I am. You are my sister, Lisa Jacqueline Snart, and the day I am not your brother is the day you have my full permission to aim that gun of yours at me and make a priceless gold statue."

They stare at each other for sixty-five seconds.

Then Lisa says, "When were you going to tell me you were dating the Flash?"

Len smirks. "I don't have to tell you everything, sis."

"Jerk."
"Train wreck."

She flicks his ear on the way out. He tugs at her hair. They'll be alright.

Chapter End Notes

C'est impossible = it's impossible/not possible
mon coeur = my heart (because why not have a cheesy reunion, am I right?)
*In exchange for the lyre Hermes gave him, Apollo gave him the caduceus.

Léonce is actually a name. See Kate Chopin's The Awakening

End Notes

Thank you for reading (Scarlet pls forgive)

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